

EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Report of a meeting of the East Sussex Fire Authority held at County Hall, St. Anne's Crescent, Lewes BN7 1UE at 10:30 hours on Thursday, 13 February 2020.

Present: Councillors Galley (Chairman), Lambert (Vice-Chair), Barnes, Dowling, Ebel, Evans, Hamilton, O'Keeffe, Osborne, Peltzer Dunn, Powell, Pragnell, Scott, Sheppard, Smith, Taylor, Theobald and Tutt

The agenda and non-confidential reports can be read on the East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service's website at <http://www.esfrs.org/about-us/east-sussex-fire-authority/fire-authority-meetings/>. A brief synopsis and the decisions relating to key items is set out below.

1 URGENT ITEMS AND CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

- 1.1 The Authority were updated on the position of East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service with regards to the current outbreak of Coronavirus. The local and National responses were being led by Public Health England (PHE) and the NHS. ESFRS were working with the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) as required under the Civil Contingencies Act. All updated information regarding the virus was shared with all agencies and, where required, with ESFRS staff both for general good hygiene and specialist information for emergency services first responders.
- 1.2 The clear perspective of ESFRS was that at this stage the Coronavirus outbreak was an issue to be aware of but not a crisis. Through the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) there had been opportunities to influence processes and raise issues with PHE - in particular with regards to the creation of containment centres.
- 1.3 Members asked for clarification that there was engagement with District and Borough Councils. The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) confirmed that each authority was represented on the LRF and that officers would be responsible for providing feedback to their authorities with the information provided by PHE and NHS leads. All local authorities would be dealing with the outbreak under their own local business continuity processes and any locally relevant issues that Members might have should be raised with them directly.

2 FIRE AUTHORITY SERVICE PLANNING PROCESSES FOR 2020/21 & BEYOND - REVENUE BUDGET 2020/21 & CAPITAL STRATEGY 2020/21 - 2024/25

- 2.1 The Authority received a report presenting the Fire Authority's Revenue Budget 2020/21, Capital Strategy 2020/21–2024/25 and Medium Term Finance Plan for 2020/21–2024/25 for approval. It presented a broadly positive picture and included figures as anticipated from the delayed Local Government Finance Settlement. This delay did not stop Members agreeing the budget on the basis of the figures contained within the Report.

- 2.2 The report presented a balanced budget for the forthcoming year with a net budget increase of 1.2%, which comprised various pressures and new commitments of £0.863m and savings of £0.396m. with the core funding remaining roughly constant to the previous year. The proposed 1.99% increase to Council Tax along with a growth in the council taxbase of 0.63% would provide ESFRS with an additional income of £716,000.
- 2.3 There remained significant uncertainty for fire funding beyond this financial year. For 2021/22 and beyond there were significant risks as a result of proposals to change the Business Rates Retention regime, the Fairer Funding Review and a Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) following the outcome of the recent Parliamentary Election. This uncertainty meant that the Medium Term Finance Plan forecasted overall central support in three scenarios providing best case, mid case and worse case savings relating to Settlement Funding Assessment. Officers would continue to focus on driving efficiencies through various activities set out in the Efficiency Strategy, although a key element would be the outcomes of the work on the Operational Response Review and Integrated Risk Management Plan.
- 2.4 The Treasurer to the Fire Authority was satisfied that the budget was both robust and transparent and that the allocation of resources within it were necessary and appropriate.
- 2.5 The Authority approved an increase in council tax of 1.99% and thus approved the budget proposals set out in the Report and the net budget requirement of £39.737m for 2020/21; the council tax requirement of £27.931m; and the council tax and precepts as set out in Appendix F.
- 2.6 They also approved the capital programme for the next five years, the capital budget of £5.992m for 2020/21 and the plans to use capital grant, capital receipts and revenue contributions to finance capital expenditure; the change in the minimum level of General Reserves to 5% of the net revenue budget; the fees and charges set out in Appendix C to the report; and that the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chairman and Treasurer, be authorised to make any adjustments to the presentation of the budget to reflect the final Local Government Finance Settlement.

3 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2020/21

- 3.1 The Authority considered a report seeking Member approval of the treasury management strategy, policy statement and the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement 2020/21. The Authority resolved to approve the treasury management strategy and policy statement for 2020/21 (and adopt for the remainder of (2019/20); determined that for 2020/21 the Authorised Limit for borrowing should be £14.785m; adopted the prudential indicators as set out in Appendix 2 to the Report; and approved the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Statement for 2020/21.

4 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2020/21

- 4.1 The Authority considered a report presenting Members with the Pay Policy Statement for 2020/21. Members were reminded that the Localism Act 2011 imposed a duty on relevant local authorities to prepare a pay policy statement for each financial year, which must be approved by 31 March 2020. The statement must include policies on remuneration of chief officers and lowest paid employees.
- 4.2 Members also asked for confirmation that ESFRS pay scales were based on National Pay awards, and therefore it was not possible to have flexibility locally on them. The Assistant Director People Services confirmed that ESFRS pay was based on nationally agreed pay scales, adding that there were some local agreements including policies on pay protection which had been consulted on and agreed locally. The Authority resolved to approve the Pay Policy Statement.

5 FIREFIGHTER PENSION SCHEMES

- 5.1 The Authority considered the Report of the Pensions Advisor (PA) informing Members that, following recommendations in the Pension Regulator's Governance and Administration survey 2017 and the Scheme Advisory Board's survey of local boards, the Authority's Firefighters' Pension Scheme Local Pension Board had updated its Terms of Reference. These updates included frequency of meetings, reporting requirements and length of term for members.
- 5.2 Members thanked the PA for her extensive work for ESFRS and supported the proposals made in the report. There were questions of how the Sargeant case might impact the finances and service provision of ESFRS. Extensive work was being undertaken to evaluate the risks posed by the decision on this national case and an update was anticipated from Government on the potential impacts. The case had been added to the Corporate Risk Register ensuring it was monitored but until more information was provided the impact remained unknown. There were also ongoing Government negotiations and proposed remedies were out to consultation, ending in spring 2020. Members were reassured and reminded that this was a national pension scheme and that the financial implications were expected to be national and therefore not borne by ESFRS, but until the remedies were known it was impossible to work out the cost.
- 5.3 The Chair of the Pension Board added that the intention was now to meet a minimum of four times per annum, all Board Members had undertaken specific training and reassured the Authority that the Board was paying close scrutiny to the Sargeant case and would keep monitoring it and report back to the Authority as required. The Authority resolved to note and approve the updated Pension Board Terms of Reference (TOR); the new Breaches of Law Policy and Guidance; and the new Pension Board Training Policy.

6 HEALTH, SAFETY & WELL-BEING STRATEGY 2020-2023

- 6.1 The Authority considered the revised Health, Safety & Well-being Strategy for 2020-2023. The Authority had an existing Health, Safety & Well-being Strategy which had been refreshed to incorporate the new Health & Safety Management System. The Strategy continued to develop the strategic direction for the health and safety of ESFRS employees and their mental well-being, the updates had taken into account the responses to the regional health & safety audit and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services inspection.
- 6.2 The report presented the Authority with the overarching strategy and therefore did not include all the procedural detail on how the aims would be achieved. Wellbeing was of strategic importance to the organisation and the Service's approach to mental health was multi-layered and complex with the Wellbeing Champions being one solution amongst many. The move, in 2018, to the new Occupational Health provider meant that there was now a collaborative board considering well-being across ESFRS, Surrey FRS and Sussex & Surrey Police. This approach was not all incident related, as ESFRS was very much on top of this provision, but related more to all staff and when life was feeling a bit too much. The ethos was that ESFRS might not be able to fix its staff, but would actively support, identify and signpost them to the help they needed as quickly as possible.
- 6.3 ESFRS had put itself through the Mind Healthy Workplace assessment and provided comprehensive signposting to all staff on the website. Members agreed that ESFRS was, and should continue to be, a good employer and supportive of all staff. The Authority resolved to support the revised Health, Safety & Wellbeing Strategy for 2020-2023 and to adopt it as a formal Fire Authority Strategy.

7 FUTURE PROVISION OF OFFSHORE MARITIME RESPONSE TEAM

- 7.1 The Authority received a report outlining proposals to remove ESFRS's off shore capability in order to better facilitate the statutory responsibility for ship alongside firefighting resilience. Members had been briefed on this matter some months ago and subsequently a detailed risk review had been undertaken to consider this provision. ESFRS did not have a statutory duty to provide its current offshore maritime firefighting capacity and had not been called upon to provide such assistance for over 14 years. The Service had a responsibility to use its resources to address any significant community risk that it identified as part of its integrated risk management plan (IRMP) and as a coastal fire service with a statutory responsibility to provide resilience to a ship alongside incident should one occur at one of our ports.
- 7.2 ESFRS currently spent approximately £50,000 each year to provide its current Fire & Rescue Maritime Response team, based at Newhaven. The review and report proposed that the offshore capability be removed and that the provision be redirected to provide a more refined and robust response to ship alongside fires. The Authority resolved to support Option 2 in Section 13 of the Report, and withdraw the offshore maritime firefighting team in order to reinforce the Statutory ship alongside firefighting resilience.

