

## EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

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**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, 4 September 2025.**

Councillors Evans (Chair), Lambert (Vice-Chair), Asaduzzaman, Azad, Dowling, Hill, Hollidge Maples, Marlow-Eastwood, O'Quinn, Osborne, Redstone, Scott, Shing, Theobald and Ungar

*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. REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET 2025/26 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2025/26 TO 2029/30 MONITORING AT MONTH 4 (END JULY)**

- 1.1 The Fire Authority received a report presenting the findings of month 4 monitoring undertaken on the Revenue and Capital Budget 2025/26 – 2029/30. The report set out a forecast net revenue underspend to the sum of £174,000 resulting from a combination of underspends and pressures across the Service as set out in the report. Due to the overall underspend position, there was no requirement to draw down £512,000 from the General Reserve as had been planned. Staffing and overtime forecasts were reviewed as part of the budget monitoring process, but it remained difficult to predict with certainty overtime and on-call costs and further movement could occur through the year.
- 1.2 The current year Capital Budget had been approved at £9,553,000 and was updated to £10,912,000 including slippage brought forward from 2024/25. Officers had reviewed the capital plans for 2025/26 and report slippage of 23% on delivery of projects. The Authority's reserves showed an opening balance of £11,578,000. The forecast net drawdown was £4,740,000 an increase of £1,116,000 compared to the planned drawdown of £3,624,000 resulting in an estimated closing balance of £6,838,000. Work was ongoing to review likely drawdown of reserves (including grants brought forward) for the rest of the current year on both Revenue and Capital projects. The Authority currently had cash investments of £22,700,000, with borrowing at £9,015,00 with loans subject to fixed interest rates. Loans totalling £525,000 were due to be repaid during the year. Additional borrowing of £5,685,000 was expected to fund the capital programme, although if the cashflow position allowed then long-term borrowing would be avoided.
- 1.3 Members were satisfied with increased loans to other Local Authorities but remained keen to see increased use of ESG investments. There had been a change to the Treasury Management approach in part as the overall level of balances reduced to move away from larger deposits with financial institutions and a focus more on smaller loans to Local Authorities where the returns were more favourable. Opportunities for ESG products were regularly reviewed but, where those products met our requirements, they either required larger sums to be invested or did not have comparable rates to non ESG products. The Authority agreed the recommendations of the report in full.

**2. 2026/27 TO 2030/31 STRATEGIC SERVICE PLANNING AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN**

- 2.1 The Authority were given an update on the financial planning position in advance of the start of the Service Planning and Budget Setting process for 2026/27 onwards. The report set out the financial context and explained that the fundamental aim of the process was to deliver the Authority's purpose and commitments, the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and its associated targets and priorities with the estimate of available financial resources for 2026/27 to 2030/31. The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), announced in spring 2025, set out revenue funding allocations for each Government Department for the next three years, there had been no mention of Fire precept limits, but modelling suggested up to £5 would continue to be permitted. The Fairer Funding Review 2.0 planned for multi-year settlements, grant simplification, and less competitive bidding, and proposed changes to the Settlement Funding Assessment. Modelling suggested the Government grant for standalone Fire & Rescue Authorities (FRA) would reduce by more than 4% over the next three years, equating to a loss of £102m nationally.
- 2.2 Nationally the sector remained reliant on significant one-off funding for investment in protection services and payment of employer's pension contributions, there had been no confirmation from Government that these would continue, but the working assumption was that they would, on a cash flat basis. The Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement was expected in December 2025, modelling from the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) indicated that our Settlement Funding Assessment would reduce by in excess of 3% per year, a total loss of 9.9% or £1.6m over the three-year period. This was a material and unacceptable reduction in funding, the equivalent of twenty-five wholetime firefighter roles. The budget gap would be dependent on the level of precept set by the Authority with savings required by 2028/29 of between £3.157m (£5) and £4.587m (3%). The Authority would need to continue to identify unavoidable pressures, growth bids, and savings sufficient to balance the budget in 2026/27 and beyond, but it was clear that efficiencies, low impact savings, and reprioritisation of capital investment plans alone would be insufficient. Savings on the scale of the modelling would inevitably mean that the Authority will have to consider reducing its community offer and the impact this would have on the CRMP 2025-30.
- 2.3 Members appreciated the extensive and robust lobbying of Government, direct to local MPs and Ministers and responses to national consultations and remained keen to support this. The NFCC had strengthened its language with articles and publications being more pointed than previously with regards to the reduction in funding of the Fire Sector. A plan was needed to support the delivery of services against the reduction of funding, the CRMP 2025-30 would be presented for approval in February 2026 and would set out an approach to the Service's ways of working which would allow the offer to be maintained, but it was important to consider better ways our services could be delivered. The Fire Authority agreed the recommendations of the report in full.

### **3. COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (CRMP) 2025-30**

- 3.1 The Fire Authority considered a report seeking approval to commence a public consultation on the draft Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2025-30. The CRMP is the key planning document describing how the Service plans keep residents, and those who work in or travel through the area, safe over the next five years. It describes the main risks to our communities and how the Service proposes to use available resources efficiently to reduce or mitigate those risks. The draft CRMP contains proposals which ensure continuous improvement in how the Service delivers across East Sussex and Brighton & Hove.
- 3.2 An effort had been made to make the document more reader friendly, the content was as simple as possible, and a new layout had been introduced. The draft document linked Service priorities to proposed activities and set out the community offer, including the implications of any changes. The Authority were reminded that the CRMP was how the Service identified risk and vulnerabilities in our communities and set out how we would use our services to support them. There were changes being seen in our built environment, heritage data, health information, and all of these meant that we needed to adapt our services to address them, some changes meant that there were challenges to our workload. The CRMP had been designed to be a live document and that meant that the Authority was better able to revisit it in the event of significant changes to funding or other risks.
- 3.3 Members thanked Officers for a very comprehensive document and felt that the layout made it clear and engaging for the public. There was a real hope that that there would be a strong level of response to the consultation. The Authority agreed to the recommendations of the report in full.

### **4. COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (CRMP) 2025-30 - CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION PLAN**

- 4.1 The Fire Authority considered a report presenting the Consultation and Communication Plan for the forthcoming Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2025-30 for approval. The consultation and communications plan had been shaped in accordance with national requirements and guided by the Gunning principles (four legal tests for public consultation), the ESFRS Communications, Engagement & Consultation Strategy 2024-27, the NFCC CRMP Strategic Framework and the Fire Standards Board guidance on CRMP. The consultation would be undertaken by an independent consultation service provider Opinion Research Services (ORS) and consisted of the following areas:
- online open questionnaire
  - online stakeholder forum
  - direct emailing of businesses, community groups, parish councils, landlords and recent service users
  - staff information events and communications; and
  - communications through social media, press and publicity.

The consultation would be open for 8 weeks, from 5 September 2025, after which the results would be evaluated by ORS and used to refine the draft CRMP. Once updated the final draft would return before the Fire Authority at its meeting on 12 February 2026 for consideration and approval.

- 4.2 Members thanked officers for their work on both plans and were keen to support the consultation process to ensure a high response rate, offers were made to attend events, share links and include details of the consultation in their own communications to residents. The Fire Authority approved the consultation and communication plan including the proposed 8-week consultation period.

**COUNCILLOR AMANDA EVANS**  
**CHAIR OF EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY**

4 September 2025