

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, 4 December 2025.

Councillors Evans (Chair), Lambert (Vice-Chair), Asaduzzaman, Dowling, Geary, Goddard, Hill, Lunn, Maples, Marlow-Eastwood, 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. 2026/27 to 2030/31 Strategic Service Planning and Medium Term Financial Plan

- 1.1 The Fire Authority considered a report providing an update on the Authority's financial planning position in advance of the receipt of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement (LGFS) for 2026/27 and the submission of budget proposals and a refreshed Medium Term Finance Plan (MTFP) to the Authority at its meeting on 12 February 2026. The Authority would be presented with a balanced budget for 2026/27 for approval, and officers were looking ahead for the next two years. The LGFS would be announced on 17 or 18 December, Officers were working on the capital programme and contract inflation, and the figures for the billing authorities' council tax bases were yet to be provided. Financial sustainability proposals submitted by function heads had helped to provide options to balance next year's budget and potentially the following two years, however, some role-based options proposed for 2027/28 and 2028/29 were assessed as potentially having more significant impact and needed to be reviewed to fully assess their impact on the Community and Enabling offers.
- 1.2 The Senior Leadership Board (SLB) had agreed to increase the pay inflation from 2% to 3% for 2026/27, but it was possible that this would still not be enough to meet the pay claims that would be submitted. There was a risk that if both Grey and Green Book pay claims were higher than this, there would be a considerable impact on the budget, and it would lead to the need for additional savings.
- 1.3 Government proposals were underpinned by modelling assuming that a £5 precept flexibility for Council Tax would be granted for the period of the multi-year settlement and that all standalone Fire Authorities would take this maximum increase. Whilst this flexibility was welcomed it continued to mean that the burden of funding essential emergency services was increasingly being borne by local council taxpayers. The Fair Funding Review 2.0 (FFR) had refreshed the methodology for distributing the fixed pot of funding between local authorities using a Relative Needs Formula (RNF). Whilst many RNFs had been reviewed the data underpinning the Fire & Rescue RNF had simply been updated to reflect current data, suggesting that the Government grant for standalone Fire & Rescue Authorities could reduce by more than 4% over the next four years. After the publication of this agenda, a new funding floor had been set at "cash plus GDP deflator," updated modelling had been produced by Local Government Futures (LGF) and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) each reflecting differences to those figures published in the report. Due to significant variation between them Officers had gone back to both organisations with queries, but it was worth noting that both sets of modelling produced figures that were more favourable.

- 1.4 The Authority thanked Officers for a comprehensive report and for the work undertaken to ensure that they could be in such a favourable budgetary position so early in the setting process. There was a discussion about whether any of the financial sustainability proposals would result in redundancies, particularly of frontline staff. It was confirmed that no current proposals required redundancies within frontline services, and that any proposals that required consultation would be brought back before Members. Financial sustainability for the Fire Authority was essential, particularly in view of the likely changes presented by the Government's programme of Devolution, this was why so much attention had been paid to the preparation of the Community Risk Management Plan, why the Finance team had considered every area of the Service's budget and why proposals relating to enabling staff were being considered through the Future Foundations programme, this final point would ensure any proposed changes to resourcing were robustly considered and would not have a detrimental impact on delivery or resilience.
- 1.5 Overall Members were satisfied and were grateful that the financial position was not as severe as had been anticipated but were glad that a cautious approach would continue to be taken. There was a general consensus from Members and Officers alike that there remained a need for Government to review fire funding as well as an increasing urgency for them to review the statutory functions of Fire & Rescue Services more widely. More money would be needed for dealing with flooding, wildfires and the effects of Climate Change, the risks associated with contaminants, and a nationwide need to upgrade facilities. The Authority were reminded that there had been no capital funding for fire for over ten years and that the requirements on Fire & Rescue Services, as well as the specific role of Firefighters, over that time had changed markedly. The NFCC were taking a more robust approach with Government, and the CFO/CE would continue to support them and advise Members of any progress made. The Authority would continue to lobby Government directly and through local MPs pushing for increased funding and for a wider review of the role of Fire & Rescue Services. The Authority agreed to the recommendations of the report in full.

COUNCILLOR AMANDA EVANS
CHAIR OF EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

4 December 2025