

## 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, 7 December 2017.**

Present: Councillors Barnes (Chairman), Deane, Dowling, Earl, Elford, Galley, Lambert, Morris, O'Quinn, Osborne, Penn, Scott, Sheppard, Smith, Taylor, Theobald (Vice-Chairman) and Tutt.

N.B. Apologies were received from Councillor Peltzer Dunn

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 GOVERNANCE REVIEW PROPOSAL**

- 1.1 The report set out the options and scope for an independent review of the governance arrangements of East Sussex Fire Authority.
- 1.2 The overarching purpose of the review would be to explore the application and effectiveness of the Authority's current governance practice, structures and procedures. It would also provide an opportunity to assess if existing Authority and Panel structures remained fit for purpose and whether governance arrangements were well designed and properly executed.
- 1.3 It was proposed that the review be conducted by a 3<sup>rd</sup> party external organisation in order to provide capacity, expertise and independence. The suggested key lines of enquiry for the review, which had been considered and refined by the Member Reference Group and the Scrutiny & Audit Panel, were included in the Report.
- 1.4 If the Authority agreed to the appointment of a 3<sup>rd</sup> party external organisation to conduct the review, then there would be an unfunded cost associated with this appointment. Initial indications were that the likely cost would be circa £20/25K. It was recommended that this be drawn from the Improvement & Efficiency Reserve.
- 1.5 Members asked for confirmation of the timescale and the anticipated start date. They were advised that if agreed work would commence immediately to turn the scope into a tender document, this would be circulated to Members with final approval given by the Scrutiny and Audit Panel. The Tender document would then be published. It was anticipated that the appointment of an external partner would be quick and that the initial report could be presented to the Scrutiny and Audit Panel in May 2018. The report would then be presented to the Fire Authority at its AGM in June 2018.

- 1.6 Members resolved to approve the broad scope of the proposed review and directed officers to progress on the basis of the proposed way forward detailed in the Report.

## **2 FIRE REFORM AND INSPECTION OF FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES**

- 2.1 Members were provided with an update on the Government's reform agenda for Fire and Rescue Services, specifically in relation to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services' (HMICFRS) inspection regime and to outline the progress made by ESFRS.
- 2.2 Following the announcement by the Home Office that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary was to be expanded to take on the role of Inspectorate of Fire and Rescue Services in England, it was anticipated that the inspections would be based on those used for Police Forces. They would consider how efficient and effective Fire & Rescue Services (FRS) are, highlighting good practice and identifying areas for improvement.
- 2.3 The inspection methodology is to be piloted in three FRSs between January and April 2018. Inspections of remaining FRS would then take place before the end of 2019. Members were informed that East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service is undertaking preparations in advance of inspection, including liaising with West Sussex and Surrey FRS to identify potential areas of collaboration.
- 2.4 Members resolved to note the update on the HMICFRS inspection regime.

## **3 TEMPORARY PROMOTIONS AND PENSIONABLE PAY**

- 3.1 Members considered a report seeking approval for the continued application of scheme rules relating to temporary promotions and pensionable pay, including a request that Members endorse the continued treatment of temporary and acting up as pensionable pay.
- 3.2 Members queried the financial implications that might arise following a legal challenge to Cheshire FRA regarding the payment of pensionable pay. The Treasurer gave Members some context and background to the complexities of the Firefighter Pension Schemes, a national scheme that is administered locally. The HO (formerly DCLG) Fire Pensions Team no longer give guidance on the application of the Scheme, and this was the case following the Norman v. Cheshire judgement.
- 3.3 However, a sector group was established and suggested actions that FRAs should take. The Authority also took its own legal advice. An approach was then agreed through the Authority and financial provision made to cover both the ongoing revenue cost (£95,000) of additional employer's contributions, but also the retrospective cost going back six years for those allowances now determined to be pensionable (£540,000). These figures have since been revised down as better information has been received. As part of the arrangement, affected firefighters were also required to pay their employee's contributions.

- 3.4 Members asked whether temporary promotions were being used instead of permanent career progression. It was agreed that the matter of temporary promotions did need to be addressed. The two current interim Principal Officers in post meant that there was a pyramid effect of back-filling substantive posts. The process of appointing permanent staff to Principal Officer roles was underway and once complete this would see some reduction to acting-up staff.
- 3.5 Members resolved to endorse that East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service continued to treat temporary and acting up as pensionable pay and that a report detailing the number of temporary and acting up positions be produced by Human Resources and presented to a future Scrutiny and Audit Panel.

#### **4 AUTUMN BUDGET STATEMENT UPDATE**

- 4.1 Members received a report summarising the main items of interest to the Authority within the Chancellor's Autumn Budget Statement. At this stage there was limited direct impact upon the Fire Authority.
- 4.2 Members resolved to note the contents of this report.

#### **5 FIREWATCH PROJECT**

- 5.1 Members considered a report detailing the progress of the FireWatch Project and seeking approval for the provision of additional funding required to complete its implementation.
- 5.2 Members were given a brief overview and progress update of the FireWatch project which is progressing well and meeting requirements of both our HR and IT Strategies. The introduction of FireWatch is essential for enabling the Authority's People Strategy and would introduce further options for systems integration.
- 5.3 FireWatch, which is used by a third of fire services nationally, is an Integrated Management System bespoke to our requirements as a fire service. The system is modular, based on business requirements, and can be installed to suit the service's needs. Amongst other uses, the system allowed retained availability to be managed using one procedure. It could be accessed online and by mobile phone and could be viewed on display screens at all Fire Stations as well as at the Sussex Control Centre. As FireWatch was used by both East and West Sussex it would be integrated with 4i when the new system at the Sussex Control Centre was live and would allow officers to see live availability across both services.
- 5.4 Members resolved to note the progress of the FireWatch project and the benefits already delivered. They approved additional funding of £456,000 from the improvement and efficiency reserve to complete its implementation. Additionally they noted that the release of funding for the self-service and Retained Duty System pay modules was dependent on the delivery of a clearer benefits realisation plan that identified cashable and non-cashable efficiencies. It was agreed that periodic reports on project delivery would be made to the scrutiny and audit panel.

## **6 REVIEW OF ATTENDANCE STANDARDS CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 Members considered a report seeking approval for the proposed Attendance Standards Review consultation. Consultation proposals were outlined and it was clarified to Members that they were being asked to agree to public consultation on the monitoring and reporting of response figures, not to changes in response times.
- 6.2 The draft consultation had been presented to Members at their Seminar on 17 November 2017 and following suggestions from the group changes had been made which were reflected in the paper before the Fire Authority. The consultation methods to be used included online forums, online surveys, stakeholder panels, community roadshows and paper questionnaires. Response rates to ESFRS consultations were usually high, but officers were increasing the consultation methods to ensure the best response possible.
- 6.3 Members were reassured that ESFRS was doing its utmost to ensure that the hard to reach groups across the County would be contacted. The consultation database contained over 500 local organisations, Members agreed to pass on the details of any groups they knew so they might be added to the database if missing.
- 6.4 Following a discussion on the final option for the target times to be consulted on, Members resolved to agree that the consultation be conducted on the targets detailed at paragraph 5.1 of the report, subject to review by the Scrutiny and Audit Panel if regularly exceeded. They approved the draft plan for consultation, approved the proposed 8 week consultation period and the consultation and communications plan.

## **7 GRENFELL TOWER INCIDENT RESPONSE AND IMPACT**

- 7.1 Members considered a report summarising the ESFRS response to the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in London and the longer term impact and proposed plans to manage any risk associated with the potential outcome of the inquiries associated with the fire.
- 7.2 In the days immediately following the fire, ESFRS acted quickly to provide public reassurance, conducting joint inspections on blocks of high rise flats and NHS premises. These inspections found that whilst a number had been renovated, including the application of cladding, none were identified as having Aluminium Composite Material (ACM) in the panels.
- 7.3 Members were informed that it was anticipated the requirements of fire safety might change and that it was essential ESFRS took a proactive approach to managing the risks with existing resources and that we look to shape the way we deliver services in the future. With current resources, ESFRS can respond effectively.

- 7.4 Members were reminded of the sprinkler match funding project that the Service was involved in and informed of its progress to date. Sprinklers were the most effective way to ensure that fires are suppressed or even extinguished before fire crews can arrive. An investigation by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) indicated that sprinklers operate on 94% of occasions and that they then extinguish or contain the fire on 99% of occasions. Following Grenfell, the importance of this project was emphasised, Members had already committed £400,000 to match fund sprinkler initiatives and a further £200,000 was sought to be able to support more schemes.
- 7.5 Members resolved to note the report, approving the review of Business Fire Safety and alignment with Safer Communities subject to final costs. The also approved the evaluation of a new risk based inspection tool to better identify premises of high risk. An additional £200,000 funding from reserves to support the Sprinkler Match Funding project was approved and Members requested that a letter be sent to central government urging the mandatory requirement of sprinklers in future developments.

**COUNCILLOR JOHN BARNES**  
**CHAIRMAN OF EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY**

7 December 2017