

## 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, 13 June 2024.**

Councillors Evans (Chair), Lambert (Vice-Chair), Galley, Asaduzzaman, Azad, Dowling, Geary, Goddard, Hill, Maples, Marlow-Eastwood, Nann, 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 ELECTION OF CHAIRPERSON**

- 1.1 Members resolved to appoint Councillor Amanda Evans as Chair of the Fire Authority for the year 2024/25.

### **2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRPERSON**

- 2.1 Members resolved to appoint Councillor Carolyn Lambert as Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority for the year 2024/25.

### **3 URGENT ITEMS AND CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS**

- 3.1 Following changes to the Outside Body appointments at Brighton & Hove City Council, the Chair welcomed Cllr Raphael Hill and Cllr Jackie O'Quinn as members of the Fire Authority. There would also be a change to the Outside Body appointments from East Sussex County Council on the 25 June 2024 and the Fire Authority would be welcoming back Cllr Peter Pragnell.
- 3.2 The Chair asked that the Fire Authority formally record its thanks to Cllr Trevor Muten and Cllr Pete West. The Fire Authority thanked them all for their dedicated service during their time as Members. The Authority was grateful for their contributions to the Fire Authority's work and wished them well in the future.
- 3.3 The Chair thanked Cllr Roy Galley for his dedicated service to the Fire Authority during his time as Chairman. The Authority had benefitted greatly from his knowledge, engagement and service during his tenure as Chairman. Several Members spoke, agreeing that Cllr Galley was well respected and had been a decent, welcoming Chairman who encouraged and assisted colleagues and officers alike. Cllr Galley thanked the Fire Authority and Officers, it had been a privilege to serve on the Fire Authority, appointed in 2013 and as Chairman from 2019. He praised the Service, particularly the positive attitude of the Firefighters, the hardworking support staff, the professionalism of the Principal Officers and the co-operative approach of the Fire Authority Members.

**4 POLITICAL REPRESENTATION ON THE PANELS OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY**

4.1 The Authority received a report seeking to secure political balance on its Panels in accordance with the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 and agree to the resultant Membership to the Panels of the Fire Authority.

4.2 The Fire Authority was required to keep under review the allocation of seats on Committees and other bodies to ensure, so far as practicable, that they reflected the political groups on the Authority. The rules governing this representation were outlined in the report. There remained four political groups on the Fire Authority and the political make-up was:

Conservatives	7
Labour	5
Liberal Democrat	3
Green	2
Independent	1

4.3 The Panels are the Authority's committees set up in accordance with Standing Order 41 and their terms of reference are shown in the Constitution. The size of each Panel is not constituted and could be agreed by the Fire Authority. To ensure each Panel was representative of the overall membership of the Fire Authority it was agreed that the size of each Panel remain at 7 members.

4.4 After the publication of the agenda, the Conservative Group of East Sussex County Council, following approval from their Monitoring Officer, had opted to offer one of their six places on the Fire Authority to Councillor Azad who had recently left the group to become an Independent Member. The Conservative Group on the Fire Authority had, opted to nominate Cllr Azad to hold two of their panel seats.

4.5 The Authority agreed appointments to each Lead Member Role. The Membership of each panel was confirmed at the meeting. The Authority confirmed the Panel arrangements, political representation and membership of each panel at the meeting. They agreed that the political balance provisions shall not apply to the membership of the Principal Officer Appointments Panel. The Authority agreed the appointment of Cllr Paul Redstone as Chairperson of the Policy & Resources Panel in accordance with Standing Order 41.13 and that the remaining Panels would appoint a Chairperson at their first meeting under Standing Order 41.14.

**5 FIRE AUTHORITY AND PANEL MEETINGS 2024/25 AND 2025/26**

5.1 The Fire Authority received and noted the dates of meetings of the Fire Authority and Panels through until its annual meeting in June 2026.

**6 TREASURY MANAGEMENT – STEWARDSHIP REPORT 2023/24**

6.1 The Fire Authority received the Annual Treasury Management Stewardship Report, a requirement of the Fire Authority's reporting procedures, informing Members of Treasury Management performance and compliance with Prudential Indicators for 2023/24. The Authority had complied with its approved Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators for the year.

- 6.2 The Bank of England Base Rate increased on three occasions during 2023/24, from 4.25% to 5.25%. The average rate of interest received through Treasury Management activity was 4.99%, reflecting the Authority's continuing prioritisation of security and liquidity over yield. No new borrowing had been undertaken and three loans totalling £0.400m had been repaid during the year, with total loan debt outstanding being £9.417m as at 31 March 2024 and the average interest rate was 4.50%.
- 6.3 Decisions on investment had been taken in the context of the prevailing economic climate, the approved capital programme and the requirement to fund it over the medium term. No investment in longer duration funds was made. Opportunities were being explored to secure investment returns within the acceptable risk parameters set out in the Authority's agreed Strategy. Investments had been made in Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) funds that met the policy criteria for security and liquidity and offered comparable or better returns than similar non-ESG funds.
- 6.4 Members urged that more ESG investments be made where possible, it was good to see that some had been outperforming non-ESG funds and reassuring that there were more that the Authority were considering for future investment. There was a brief discussion regarding the divestment, during which the Monitoring Officer reminded those present that as the meeting was taking place within the pre-election period and all contributions must relate to the business of the Fire Authority and Members should be careful not to make anything that could be considered a political statement. By way of a response, to the matter in general, it was confirmed that the Fire Authority had no approved position on divestment, and that the current Medium Term Finance Plan meant that the amount of reserves available for investment would be reducing significantly over the next few years. The Authority agreed to note the Treasury Management performance for 2023/24.

## **7 COMMUNICATIONS, ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION STRATEGY 2024-27**

- 7.1 The Fire Authority considered a report presenting the Communications, Engagement & Consultation Strategy for approval. The Strategy had been developed in support of the Purpose and Commitments, Integrated/Community Risk Management Plans and other Fire Authority Strategies. It had been reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team, other senior officers and team leaders and had input from Fire Authority Members and the Equality & Inclusion lead. The deliverables within the strategy took into consideration findings from the HMICFRS and the National Fire Standards on communications & engagement.
- 7.2 The Authority thanked officers for their work developing the strategy. Members sought reassurance on the effectiveness of the Service's communication with hard to reach groups, households & communities and how that would be improved. There were various means of communicating with the public, including the website, social media, face-2-face, and each were under constant evaluation and improvement. Every communication campaign was evaluated to ensure that it was improved, this allowed the team to focus on different channels and methods, the results of this were used to create the annual impact report which was presented to members. The ESFRS website had a full translation service, at the click of a button users could select any one of 150 languages.

- 7.3 Members were keen to know more about the Service's social media reach and the training that was specific for them. The Service was looking at ensuring the ESFRS online presence was valuable, informative & engaging. It was a growth area and one of the key methods for getting messages to harder to reach communities. Members were reminded that their input and ideas were always welcome on ways to increase how important information and safety messages reached all our communities. The Fire Authority approved the Communications, Engagement and Consultation Strategy 2024-27.

## **8 MAYFIELD OPTIONS APPRAISAL**

- 8.1 The Fire Authority the outcomes of the Mayfield Options Appraisal requested by the Authority at its meeting on 8 February 2024, which, if agreed, would be subject to formal public consultation. Members had asked the Senior Leadership Team to present options for achieving permanent savings to balance the 2025/26 budget at the earliest opportunity, and it was for this reason that the options presented had been developed. The Fire Authority had also made it clear that any of the options considered would need to assess the impact on both community risk and staff to inform their decision making and the report set these impacts out. The Authority were being asked to choose which options would be subjected to a formal consultation process with staff, stakeholders and the public. Members were not being asked to take a decision at this meeting, this would be taken, following a full public consultation, at their meeting on 5 December 2024.
- 8.2 Members were reminded that the continuing one-year funding settlements made financial forecasting challenging, and greater emphasis needed to be placed on the efficient and effective management of risk and resources. At the time of the request for an Options Appraisal the savings requirement for 2025/26 was anticipated to be £2.211m (mid-range) and it was considered essential to act urgently to identify savings options in order to balance the budget. The Service engaged sector specialists Operational Research in Health Ltd (ORH) to ensure the review was robust and independent. ORH modelling suggested that for any of the four options, the Service's current attendance standards would continue to be met. Their analysis also showed that Mayfield had the lowest activity on its station ground, with 103 incidents over a two year period, with the Mayfield appliance itself being the first responding to 6 incidents in that same period, a level of activity that had remained consistent over the last decade.
- 8.3 To inform the Options Appraisal a 14 week programme of pre-engagement activities had been undertaken with the local community, which had helped shape the development of the options and feedback received had been considered by SLT and informally by Members via seminars and briefing sessions. This feedback was also being used to guide the Consultation process.
- 8.4 The four options were set out at paragraph 1.6 of the report, it was noted that the costs referred to were based on the 2024/25 budget and were being provided to assist with the consultation, they would be revisited before the final decision was made. The Options Appraisal provided detailed information relating to risk, financial and staff implications for each of the four options. It provided information on local demographics, the previous analyses undertaken relating to Mayfield and surrounding rural communities, and detailed a number of wider social, economic and cross-directorate impact assessments. Full details of all this information would be provided to the public, staff and stakeholders as part of the 12 week consultation period.

- 8.5 The Authority thanked officers for their hard work on producing the requested Options Appraisal, acknowledging it had been a difficult task. There was a lengthy discussion on all the options presented. Members asked for clarification on any potential impact on attendance times if Mayfield were removed, in that instance the “fire grounds” of surrounding stations would expand. The work undertaken by ORH had concluded that the Service’s rural attendance standard of 15 minutes would still be achievable, and this locally set target remained more ambitious than the old National Standard for rural areas which was set at 20 minutes. Members were reminded that it was not the case, as perhaps was believed, that the appliances at a Fire Station went only to their local areas. ESFRS operated under dynamic mobilising, meaning that the appliance that was physically nearest at the time of an incident attended not necessarily that from the most local fire station; 93% of attendances in Mayfield were currently being attended by other fire appliances rather than the Mayfield based fire appliance.
- 8.6 There was a discussion about ensuring attendance and incident information used to inform the consultation was as accurate as possible, Members were assured that this was always a focus and the data used in the Options Appraisal had been very carefully analysed and subject to external and independent scrutiny. Continuing to do this would be an essential part of the process with any suggested data inaccuracies being fully explored and reported back on as demonstrated in the most recent IRMP process.
- 8.7 Members raised some concerns regarding the proposals relating to redeployment of staff and how that might work in reality, particularly as they held on-call contracts. Under the current system it was possible for several of the on-call stations in the area to be off the run at the same time. The intention was to look at a “hub” approach in order to improve the number of on-call appliances on the run, with staff joining a “flexible resource pool” and conversations on these ideas with staff at Mayfield had already started and would be furthered dependent on the decision of the Fire Authority in December. The Authority was reminded that the pool approach allowed staff in the logistics team to forecast any staffing issues and move people around to address them. Problems recruiting and retaining on-call staff was a national issue.
- 8.8 The matters discussed at the meeting were exactly what the consultation was designed to explore through the varying options and input from residents, stakeholders and staff would be essential to ensure that locally based ideas were fed in so the Fire Authority could fully consider them as part of their decision making. Cllr Osborne proposed, seconded by Cllr Shing, that with regards recommendation ii) in the report, the Fire Authority should agree to take all four options out to public consultation. A recorded vote was held:  
For – 15 votes  
Against – 2 votes  
(*one Member had already left the meeting*)
- 8.9 The Fire Authority instructed Officers to proceed to full consultation on all four options contained within the Options Appraisal document at Appendix 1 to the report; and noted that the consultation responses and the Service’s position on them would be presented to the Fire Authority at its meeting on 5 December 2024.

**9 MAYFIELD OPTIONS APPRAISAL – CONSULTATION & COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

- 9.1 The Fire Authority considered the communication and consultation plan for the Mayfield Options Appraisal, the Service had a robust process for consultation and communication developed through its Community Risk Management Planning (CRMP) arrangements. These provided stakeholders, the public and staff with clear and relevant information as to how they can get involved in the decision-making arrangements of the Fire Authority. These arrangements were set out in the Communication, Engagement and Consultation Strategy, and followed the Gunning principles which were the founding legal principles applicable to public consultation in the UK.
- 9.2 The Service had sought guidance from the Consultation Institute in respect to its consultation arrangements and has engaged an external consultation specialist to develop the material. The consultation period for the Mayfield Options Appraisal had been set at twelve weeks based on advice received, this was longer than the usual eight weeks as the period fell over the summer months thereby maximising the opportunity for people to respond. As a result of the announcement of the UK Parliamentary General Election the Service intends to start the consultation on Friday, 5 July, closing on Friday, 27 September 2024. The results would be considered by the Fire Authority at its meeting on 5 December 2024
- 9.3 The consultation plan consisted of an online questionnaire, three public focus groups, an online stakeholder forum and a communication plan which set out how communities and groups would be engaged with. Members asked whether any resident in the UK could respond to the online questionnaire, in the past there had been responses from across the country, but there was a section to request postcodes to allow for primacy to be given to responses from the Service area. Members asked if there was the option for hard copy questionnaire responses to be made and if so how would people who were not online know about them. There would be hard copies, the process for responses was comprehensive and well-rehearsed particularly for advertising how to get involved, this included access to community noticeboards, through Parish Councils, and Fire Authority Members would each be issued with a pack containing leaflets and information as to how hard-copy materials could be requested. The Fire Authority approved the consultation and communication plan for the Mayfield Options Appraisal.

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

13 June 2024