

ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY POLICY & STRATEGY COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE 2015 AT 10:00AM

Present:

Councillor A Hedley	Chairman
Councillor B Aspinell	
Councillor J Chandler	
Councillor A Erskine	
Councillor A Holland	Vice-Chairman
Councillor J Jowers	
Councillor C Kent	
Councillor Lady P Newton	
Councillor P Oxley	

Councillor A Bayley also attended.

The following Officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Dave Bill	Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Operations
Roy Carter	Service Solicitor
Glenn McGuinness	Deputy Director of Finance
Lindsey Stafford-Scott	Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development
Shirley Jarlett	Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Judith Dignum	Secretary to the Committee
Fiona Lancaster	Committee Officer (Essex County Council)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor A Naylor, Mr A Eckley (Acting Chief Fire Officer) and Mr M Clayton (Finance Director and Treasurer).

1. Membership

The membership of the Committee, as agreed at the Annual Meeting of Essex Fire Authority on 10 June 2015, was noted.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor A Holland declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 (2014/15 Accounts and Governance Statement) in that she is a director of EFA (Trading) Ltd (minute 4 below refers).

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Arising from consideration of minute 6 (Programme 2020), and in response to a question by Councillor Kent, the Chairman confirmed that there would be an opportunity at a forthcoming meeting of Essex Fire Authority for representatives from all appropriate Trades Unions to address Members regarding proposals for the future design of the Service. Standing orders would be suspended to allow this to take place. The Chairman informed the Committee that he held regular meetings with Trades Unions and shared the content of such meetings with Members, where it was appropriate to do so.

4. 2014/15 Accounts and Governance Statement

Councillor A Holland declared a personal interest in this item (minute 2 above refers).

The Committee considered report EFA/054/15 by the Acting Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Director and Treasurer which stated that, under The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011, the Fire Authority was required to approve an Annual Governance Statement, which may be included in the statement of accounts and published by 30 June. The report provided a review of the key governance arrangements and a summary of the key issues from the accounts for 2014/15.

The following points arose from consideration of the report:

- It was noted that the current position with regard to the weakness in assurance around risk management, together with details of the plan to address this, would be reported to the July meeting of the Audit, Governance and Review Committee.
- The Committee noted that identified weaknesses in assurance relating to HR Transactional Processing were being addressed through the ongoing SAP (HR information system) Development Project.
- The Deputy Director of Finance undertook to provide information to Cllr Jowers outside the meeting as to why there had been nine internal audit reviews carried out in 2014/15 compared with 14 in 2011/12. He commented that a less favourable review outcome, while disappointing, could indicate effectiveness in identifying areas where improvement was needed.
- The Committee considered the need for increased income generation and how this may be achieved. The Service Solicitor advised that Fire and Rescue Services had powers to raise income under the Localism Act 2011.

In Essex, this was undertaken through EFA (Trading) Ltd. It was agreed that income generation should form one of the issues for consideration at the next Members' awayday in the autumn.

- It was noted that responsibility for valuing the Service's assets rested with the Fire Authority's appointed property advisers, Lambert Smith Hampton.
- Members noted that the Hutton site appeared on the Balance Sheet as a surplus asset. The plans for the future disposal of the site, and the need for timely realisation of the associated capital receipt, were considered. Responsibility for approving any disposal lay with the full Fire Authority.

Resolved:

1. That, following the review at the meeting, the Annual Governance Statement be agreed.
2. That the Review of Accounting Policies be agreed.
3. That the use of estimates in the accounts be agreed.
4. That it be noted that the Finance Director and Treasurer will sign and date the Accounts for 2014/15 by 30 June 2015.
5. That the Chairman of the Authority and the Acting Chief Fire Officer be authorised to sign the Annual Governance Statement.
6. That the subject of income generation be included on the agenda for the next Members' awayday in autumn 2015.

5. Budget Review May 2015

The Committee considered report EFA/055/15 by the Finance Director and Treasurer which reviewed expenditure against budget as at 31 May 2015 and identified major variances to the budget for the period.

The following information was provided in response to Members' questions and concerns:

- The Deputy Director of Finance advised that work was in hand to address the overspend on casual and temporary staff.
- The Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Operations advised that the high numbers of whole-time fire-fighter retirements and leavers were not expected to impact unduly on remaining staff, even at times of extra training and peak holiday times. This could be explained largely by a reduction in the number of incidents as a result of effective prevention and protection work.

The Committee gave detailed consideration to issues relating to mixed crewing and greater flexibility for fire-fighters to undertake additional shifts. The need to adhere to the established industrial relations framework in seeking to progress these and similar issues was acknowledged.

Resolved:

That the review of income and expenditure against the budget, together with the actual position with regard to capital expenditure, be noted.

6. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Wednesday 23 September at 10.00am.

7. Urgent Business

Update on Control Mobilising System

The Chairman agreed to consideration of this item as a matter of urgency on the grounds that there was a need to update the Committee on the latest developments with regard to the new control mobilising system.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Operations gave an update on the latest position with regard to difficulties in implementing the new control mobilising system, commenting on the options and proposals for moving forward with the supplier. Members gave detailed consideration to the issue, noting that the Chairman had asked to attend a meeting with the supplier's directors. The Committee wished to place on record that the current difficulties were in no way the fault of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service staff, who had performed excellently throughout.

The meeting closed at 11.10am.

Chairman
23 September 2015