



Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Fire Policy & Strategy Committee, held on Wednesday, 11 January 2017

Present:

Councillor A Holland Vice-Chairman
Councillor B Aspinell
Councillor A Bayley
Councillor A Erskine
Councillor C Guglielmi
Councillor C Kent
Councillor M McEwen
Councillor A Naylor

The following Officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Adam Eckley Acting Chief Fire Officer and Acting Chief Executive
Dave Bill Director of Protection, Prevention and Response
Mike Clayton Finance Director and Treasurer
Mark Stagg Director of Transformation
Shirley Jarlett Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Sophie Campion Committee Officer (Essex County Council)

Charles Garbett, Treasurer, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner was also in attendance

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor A Hedley, Chairman, Councillor J Chandler and the substitute was Councillor M McEwen and Councillor M Danvers.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillor C Guglielmi declared an interest in agenda item 4 - Draft Budget and Council Tax Proposal as set out below (minute 4 below refers).

Type of Interest
Code

Nature of Interest
Director of EFA (Trading) Ltd

3 Minutes (part I)

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Matters arising from the minutes:

- Page 6, minute 3 - On the issue of the Fire Authority considering how it meets its statutory obligations under the Fire Service Act and the costs involved relating to cross-border charging, this issue would be picked up under agenda item 5 (minute 5 refers).
- Page 8, minute 5 - On the issue of some Members feeling that they did not possess the relevant background experience to complete a detailed review of the risks within the Corporate Risk Register, it was explained that the register would also be considered by the Audit, Governance and Review Committee, then by the lead Member on this issue, Councillor Ann Holland and then by the full Essex Fire Authority. It was **Agreed** that following the Election in May training on this issue could be provided to Members if the need was identified.

4 Draft Budget and Council Tax Proposal

The Committee considered report (EFA/001/17) by the Finance Director & Treasurer, which provided the draft revenue and capital budgets for the Authority for 2017/18, information on the budget and business planning process and information on the formula grant settlement, share of national non-domestic rates, council taxbase and collection account for 2017/18.

The budget had been prepared showing figures for a Council Tax increase of 1.99%, following the decision by the Fire Authority in June 2016 to support Option 2 of the service change options.

The efficiency plan, approved by the Authority in September 2016 for the period to 2019/20 had been submitted to Government and accepted and so there was now certainty around Government funding levels up to 2019/20.

The following points arose from consideration of the report:

- It was **Agreed** that a table of which authorities participate in the pooling arrangements relating to national non-domestic rates would be circulated to the Committee. It was confirmed that it was in the interests of the Fire Authority to be in the pool.
- It was confirmed that the agreed plan for service changes was based on an annual increase in Council Tax of 2%.
- As at 13 March 2017 there was £17.0m of useable reserves, some of which was ear-marked. It was confirmed that there was enough to see the Authority through until 2020.

- There had been some early success in recruitment of on-call firefighters which had brought forward planned expenditure with an additional £0.7m of spend in 2017/18.
- It was explained that potential savings from collaboration work with the police had not been included within the budget for 2017/18 as their delivery was outside of the direct control of officers. In response to a question regarding looking at the detail of the potential collaboration work, it was noted that there was a workshop scheduled for 20th January 2017 to discuss the draft initial local business case for joint Police and Fire governance.
- The budget for chief officers in 2017/18 was decreasing to 2, the Chief and Director of Protection, Prevention and Response. Councillor Aspinell expressed his reservation regarding budgeting for only two chief officers whilst the situation with the Chief Fire Officer remained unresolved. It was clarified that this reflects the position of the structure going forward.
- The investment in solar panels on stations was expected to bring in £70K from feed in tariffs in 2017/18. It was **Agreed** that details of the reductions in electricity bills relating to the solar panels would be circulated to the Committee.
- It was confirmed that the replacement of the service workshops was currently paused, but there was provision for this within the budget. Clarification was awaited for utilising space at Kelvedon Park to accommodate Essex Police and the potential for development of a joint workshop facility with the Police.

Resolved:

Members agreed the budget to be submitted to the Fire Authority on 15 February 2017:

	2016/17 Budget	2017/18 Budget
Net Expenditure	£71,304k	£70,113k
Decrease from 2016/17		-£1,191k
Precept	£41,224k	£42,807k
Band D Council Tax Increase from 2016/17	£67.68	£69.03 1.99%

1. A net expenditure budget of £70.113m;
2. A precept of £42.807m;
3. A Band D council tax of £69.03 (an increase of £1.35 or 1.99%);
4. The bands of Council Tax are shown in the following table.

Council Tax Band	2016/17	2017/18 with 1.99% Increase
A	£45.12	£46.02
B	£52.64	£53.69
C	£60.16	£61.36
D	£67.68	£69.03
E	£82.72	£84.37
F	£97.76	£99.71
G	£112.80	£115.05
H	£135.36	£138.06

5. Capital expenditure budget of £11.890m in 2017/18.

5 Budget Review

The Committee considered report (EFA/002/17) by the Finance Director and Treasurer, which reported on the expenditure against budget as at 30 November 2016 and identified and commented on major budget variations. In addition the report included key indicators that act as lead indicators for expenditure across the Authority.

The following points arose from consideration of the report:

- There was an under-spend across pay except for on-call firefighters which had increased in cost.
- In response to a question regarding the capital spend for asset protection, it was explained that there was usually around £2million for major works to ensure that the assets were fit for purpose. There was capital budget for building new workshops and a number of options were being considered, although it was clarified that it was not expected that a large capital project would be fully funded in advance, but would be charged through capital expenditure over the life of the asset.
- It was **Agreed** that appendix with a breakdown of cross-border charges would be circulated to the Committee with a further report on the operational aspects to be brought to a future meeting by the Director for Prevention, Protection and Response
- It was explained that due to the nature of the vehicle maintenance, the height needed to lift the vehicles and access to equipment, the workshop would need to be a permanent site rather than a mobile option.
- It was **Agreed** that the Director for Prevention, Protection and Response would confirm the number of people at the Urban Search and Rescue Station (USAR) [*POST MEETING NOTE: This was confirmed as two watches of 8*]
- The current recruitment process underway in Clacton was not shown within these figures, but once recruitment had been completed and training had started it would be shown on payroll.

Resolved:

1. That the position on the Authority's income and expenditure at 30 November 2016 compared to the updated budget be noted; and
2. That the capital expenditure spend against budget for the period to 30 November 2016 be noted.

6 Office Accommodation at Kelvedon Park

The Committee considered report (EFA/003/17) seeking approval for the Authority to allow the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to occupy office accommodation at Kelvedon Park.

The proposal set out the opportunity for the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to relocate to the Kelvedon Park site, on a cost-sharing basis. A figure had not yet been agreed.

The following points arose from consideration of the report:

- Members expressed concern regarding fully delegating authority to agree the charges of this proposal without any further Member input.
- The Committee were concerned regarding the lack of detail in the report around the implications of this proposal on issues such as parking at the site and the potentially heightened security risk and any disability access implications to separate areas of the building. In response it was confirmed that there was confidence that the OPCC could comfortably be accommodated within the site and that considering the events that had taken place on the site in the past, this scale of change was not large. It was recognized that the overall security risk would increase due to the PCC being at higher risk, however the security arrangements were being reviewed in light of that.
- Mr Garbett, OPCC, informed the Committee that the PCC was very much looking forward to moving to the site. He also highlighted to the Committee that there were some timing constraints for the move relating to the notice period required and lead in times for contractual agreements if delegation was given.
- The Committee were minded to agree the recommendations if a further recommendation was added to ensure that the Chairman was involved in all aspects of the recommendations.

Resolved:

1. That the potential for alternative uses for the Kelvedon Park site be noted;
2. That the Committee agreed that the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner may occupy office accommodation at Kelvedon Park;
3. That the Committee agreed that the charges for the provision of the office accommodation and use of facilities will be on a cost sharing basis; and
4. That approval be delegated to the Finance Director & Treasurer to agree the charges with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.
5. That the Chairman of the Fire Authority be involved in all aspects of these

recommendations

7 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Wednesday 15 March 2017 at 10.00am.

8 Urgent Business

With the agreement of the Chairman an item of urgent business was brought before the Committee relating to the review of the Essex Fire Authority's Constitution.

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer advised that to date very few Members had expressed an interest in being part of a working group to review the Authority's Constitution and encouraged Members to come forward.

During the discussion concern was expressed about whether this was a good use of Member's time due to the business case being put forward for the Police and Crime Commissioner to replace the Fire Authority's role in the governance of the Fire and Rescue Service in Essex. However the Clerk and Monitoring Officer advised that the current Constitution was not fit for purpose and did need to be reviewed in the interim. It was also pointed out that it was recommendation within the Lucas Review to over-haul the Constitution.

The Committee considered that this review would be best undertaken by the Audit, Governance and Review Committee.

It was **Agreed** that:

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer ask the Audit, Governance and Review Committee to undertake the review of the Authority's Constitution.

9 Exclusion of the Press and Public Resolved:

That having reached the view that, in each case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption (and discussing the matter in private) outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information, the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

[Charles Garbett, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, left the meeting at this point].

10 Minutes (part II)

The confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11 Urgent Exempt Business

With the agreement of the Chairman an item of urgent exempt business was brought before the Committee relating to an update on the situation regarding the Chief Fire Officer.

There being no further urgent exempt business, the meeting closed at 11.36am.

Signed.....
(Chairman)

Date.....