



Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Fire Policy & Strategy Committee, held on Wednesday, 02 August 2017

Present:

Councillor A Hedley Chairman
Councillor A Holland Vice-Chairman
Councillor B Aspinell
Councillor D Blackwell
Councillor J Chandler
Councillor A Erskine
Councillor M McEwen
Councillor A Sheldon

The following Officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Adam Eckley Chief Fire Officer
Mike Clayton Finance Director and Treasurer
Mark Stagg Director of Transformation
Shirley Jarlett Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Fiona Lancaster Committee Officer (Essex County Council)

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C Kent and A Wood.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, took the opportunity to warmly congratulate Adam Eckley on his appointment as Chief Fire Officer and wished him well in his new role.

2 Declarations of Interest

The Chairman reminded Members to declare any specific interests as appropriate throughout the meeting.

3 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 June 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairman.

4 **Budget Review June 2017**

The Committee received report EFA/095/17 by the Finance Director and Treasurer which reviewed expenditure against budget as at 30 June 2017 and identified major variances to the budget for the period.

The following points arose from the Committee's consideration of the report:

- The Committee noted that the £609k underspend on budget was mainly as a result of firefighter costs being lower than budget. A recruitment plan was being drawn up as whole-time firefighter numbers were close to the critical minimum requirement.
- On-call firefighter costs were under budget due to activity levels and lower numbers. Recent recruitment campaigns were bringing in new candidates.
- In response to a question regarding the level of support cost variance at 27%, the Finance Director and Treasurer reported that the overspend on temporary and agency support staff was being addressed. It was envisaged that the numbers would be brought back in line with budget before the end of the year.
- Total capital expenditure to 30 June 2017 was £2.9m, with the largest item included being £2.2m for new appliances. There was uncertainty regarding the Service workshops, but no plans to include anything else at this stage.
- Some concern was expressed that under the new joint governance arrangements the Commissioner could have the power to close Fire Stations and to reverse decisions made by the Authority regarding employment issues. The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that in March 2017 the Authority had signed a dispute resolution agreement with the Fire Brigades Union which included a commitment regarding firefighter numbers.

Resolved:

1. That the position on income and expenditure at 30 June 2017 compared to the revised budget approved by the EFA on 15 February 2017 be noted;
2. That the capital expenditure spend against budget for the period to 30 June 2017 be noted.

5 **2016/17 Accounts**

The Committee considered report EFA/096/17 by the Finance Director and Treasurer which stated that, under The Accounts and Audit Regulations, the Fire Authority was required to approve the Statement of Accounts and publish them by 30 September. The report provided a summary of the key issues from the audit of accounts for 2016/17.

The following points arose from consideration of the report:

- Members **noted** apologies from the External Auditors who were unable to attend on the new meeting date which had been arranged at short notice. The meeting scheduled for 26 July had not taken place as it was inquorate.
- The Finance Director and Treasurer paid tribute to Glenn McGuinness, Deputy Director of Finance, and his team for enabling the Authority to be fully compliant with the new statutory auditing timetable a year in advance.
- Members **noted** that the External Auditors had issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounts.
- Members acknowledged the summary of audit adjusted differences identified as part of the External Auditors review, and the small wording change made to the Annual Governance Statement since this was approved in June.
- The Committee expressed its thanks for the comprehensive set of reports.

Resolved:

1. That the Auditors Report be noted;
2. That, following the review at the meeting, the unadjusted audit errors be agreed;
3. That the Statement of Accounts be agreed;
4. That the amended Governance Statement be agreed;
5. That the letter of Representation be agreed, and that the Chairman of the Authority be authorised to sign the letter on the Committee's behalf.

6 Fleet Workshops

The Committee considered report EFA/097/17 by the Finance Director and Treasurer which sought approval to re-start the agreed project to build replacement Fleet workshops. Three preferred options for the siting of the workshops would be evaluated in conjunction with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The following points arose from the Committee's consideration of the report:

- The Finance Director and Treasurer reported that there was an increasing risk with the structure of the current Fire Service workshops and new buildings were required.
- Members **noted** that the Service had previously explored the possibility of outsourcing the workshop function. At that time, the findings had indicated

that there would be no commercial value to do so.

- The Chief Fire Officer reassured Members that there was no commitment to any of the options at this stage.
- Members commented on the different type of vehicles used by the Fire Service compared to those used by the Police and on some of the planning and access issues which could be faced with the potential development of workshops at Kelvedon Park.
- Cost-sharing arrangements would be considered as part of the development of a detailed business case for the project.

Resolved that Members:

1. Agreed to re-start the project to build a replacement fleet workshop;
2. Agreed that the options to include co-location with the Police or a joint Police and Fire workshop should be considered in addition to the proposal to build a workshop at Kelvedon Park; and
3. Noted that details of the Options and their evaluation will initially be considered by the Emergency Services Collaboration Board.

7 Date of Next Meeting

It was **noted** that a meeting of the Committee had been scheduled to take place on Wednesday 11 October 2017, at 10.00 am. However, this was *provisional* and subject to the date of the implementation of new joint governance arrangements for Police and Fire and Rescue which was expected to be 1 October 2017.

The Chairman thanked Members for their support and contribution to the work of the Authority.

Signed.....
(Chairman)

Date.....

