

ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY POLICY & STRATEGY COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH 2015 AT 10:00AM

Present:

Councillor A Hedley	Chairman
Councillor J Chandler	
Councillor A Holland	Vice-Chairman
Councillor J Jowers	
Councillor C Kent	
Councillor J Moyies	
Councillor A Naylor	
Councillor P Oxley	
Councillor A Turrell	

Councillor C Seagers also attended.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Lady P Newton.

The following Officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Adam Eckley	Acting Chief Fire Officer
Dave Bill	Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Operations
Mike Clayton	Finance Director and Treasurer
Lindsey Stafford-Scott	Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development
Roy Carter	Service Solicitor
Shirley Jarlett	Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Christine Connor	Head of Corporate Communications and Media
Judith Dignum	Secretary to the Committee

1. Opening Remarks

The Chairman congratulated Councillor Ann Naylor on her successful completion of the 'Hot Fire' course.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor J Jowers declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 (Programme 2020) in that he is the Chairman of the Essex Police and Crime Panel (minute 6 below refers).

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Budget Review – January 2015

The Committee considered report EFA/028/15 by the Finance Director and Treasurer which reported on expenditure against budget as at 31 January 2015 and identified major variances to the budget for the period. In addition, the report considered the year end position for reserves and the potential carry-forward of budget provision for expenditure from 2014/15 into 2015/16.

In introducing the report, the Finance Director and Treasurer advised that approval was being sought to carry forward £2,103k of capital expenditure, rather than £1,765k as stated in the report.

Members gave detailed consideration to the issue of training. The Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that the underspending had arisen due to efficiencies in delivery, and more development opportunities were available now than there had been before. An organisation-wide training needs assessment had been conducted and the current training programme had been designed to respond to the needs identified, although the results of the staff survey (available on the intranet, and to be the subject of a report to the next Essex Fire Authority meeting) showed that views on training varied across the Service. Members expressed concern about the difficulties associated with providing training to retained fire fighters, and were informed that work was in hand to attempt to address this by introducing more flexible provision.

The Chairman advised any Members who became aware of potential training needs during their visits to Fire Stations to liaise with the Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development. He also informed Members that a major programme of training on new systems was due to commence shortly and asked them to bear in mind that it would take a while to reach everyone.

The following additional points arose from consideration of the report:

- It was agreed to circulate a full list of the various reserves to all members of Essex Fire Authority.
- The Committee noted that the budget for home fire safety/sprinkler systems was £250k/year for three years.

- The Director for Human Resources and Organisational Development advised that the underspending on the Workforce Transformation Programme had occurred as a result of savings having been achieved earlier than anticipated. The sum being carried forward into 2015/16 was required to meet costs associated with the delivery of the strategy, and provision would be made for this as 'business as usual' in budgets for subsequent years. Staff employed to work specifically on the transformation project were on fixed-term contracts which would expire at the end of the following year.
- It was noted that the £0.4m of forecast underspend being carried forward into 2015/16 and allocated to the Cultural Review represented an estimate of the amount which would be required for this project. Detailed cost information was not available at this stage.

Resolved:

1. That the review of income and expenditure against the budget be noted.
2. That the actual position with regard to capital expenditure be noted.
3. That the reduction in the level of the two earmarked reserves be agreed.
4. That the budget provision for £2,103k of capital expenditure to be carried forward into 2015/16 be agreed
5. That £147k of revenue underspending on the Workforce Transformation Programme be carried forward into 2015/16
6. That the remaining underspend in 2014/15 be carried forward to 2015/16 and used to provide a budget for the costs of the Cultural Review.
7. That a full list of reserves be sent to all members of Essex Fire Authority.

5. Review of Finance Policies

The Committee considered report EFA/029/15 by the Finance Director and Treasurer which sought approval for amendments to the Authority's Financial and Procurement Regulations and the Anti-Fraud Policy. The policies were included with the report as appendices.

In introducing the report, the Finance Director and Treasurer explained that the policies had been amended for reasons of simplification and to ensure that they reflected the current organisation structure, best practice and external guidance. He highlighted the most significant changes being proposed.

Resolved:

That the amended Financial & Procurement Regulations and Anti-Fraud Policy, attached to report EFA/029/15 as Appendices 1 and 2 respectively, be approved.

6. Programme 2020

Councillor J Jowers declared a personal interest in this item (minute 2 above refers).

The Committee considered report EFA/030/15 by the Acting Chief Fire Officer which provided an overview of the programme of work to design a Fire and Rescue Service for Essex, Southend and Thurrock that can improve community safety, meet future strategic challenges, provide value for money and remain fit for purpose in 2020 and beyond.

In introducing the report, the Acting Chief Fire Officer advised that it was planned to deliver a new Service Strategy, incorporating all the options for change agreed by Essex Fire Authority following a comprehensive consultation strategy, from April 2016.

The following issues arose from Members' consideration of the report:

- It was agreed that the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Lead Members of the Authority should be invited to attend meetings of the 2020 Programme Board and should receive all associated agendas and reports.
- Due to potential uncertainties around Essex Fire Authority membership following the Parliamentary and Local Authority elections on 7 May, it was agreed that the proposed extraordinary meeting of the Authority on 11 May should not proceed. Instead, the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan would be submitted to the Annual Meeting of the Authority on 10 June, with a view to its approval for public consultation. To reflect the impact that this delay would have on the preparation of the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), it was also agreed that a new, later, date should be identified for the extraordinary meeting of the Authority originally proposed for 14 October. The purpose of this meeting would be to approve the IRMP for public consultation.
- The Committee was keen to ensure that the views of staff and trades unions regarding the future design of the Service were heard and taken into account from the outset. The Acting Chief Fire Officer commented on the existing plans in place to achieve this, stating that he would welcome suggestions from staff and unions. Members gave detailed consideration to other potential options to promote engagement, including an opportunity for representatives from all appropriate Trades Unions to attend and speak at a Fire Authority meeting.

Resolved:

1. That the report, amended as appropriate to take account of actions agreed at this meeting, be submitted to the next meeting of Essex Fire Authority on 15 April 2015.

2. That the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan be submitted to the meeting of Essex Fire Authority on 10 June 2015, with a view to its approval for public consultation.
3. That a suitable date be identified in autumn 2015 for an extraordinary meeting of Essex Fire Authority to consider and approve for consultation proposals for future changes to the design of the Fire and Rescue Service.
4. That the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Lead Members of the Authority be invited to attend meetings of the 2020 Programme Board and receive all associated agendas and reports.
5. That arrangements be made for representatives from all appropriate Trades Unions to attend and speak at a future meeting of Essex Fire Authority.

7. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Wednesday 24 June at 10.00am.

8. Presentation to Linda Boar, PA to the Chairman and Members of Essex Fire Authority

The Chairman made a presentation to Linda Boar in view of her forthcoming retirement from her role as PA to the Chairman and Members. On behalf of all the members of the Authority he thanked her for her help and support over many years. Councillor Ann Holland, Vice-Chairman and a long-standing member of the Authority, echoed the Chairman's remarks and made a personal presentation to Linda, wishing her every happiness for her retirement. Linda responded with thanks.

The meeting closed at 10.55am.

Chairman
24 June 2015