



**ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY
MINUTES OF THE POLICY & STRATEGY COMMITTEE
HELD ON
WEDNESDAY 5 NOVEMBER 2014 AT 10:00 HOURS**

Present:

Councillor J Chandler
Councillor A Holland
Councillor C Kent
Councillor P Oxley

Councillor A Hedley (Chairman)
Councillor J Jowers
Councillor J Moyies
Councillor J Deakin (Observer)

The following Officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Acting Chief Fire Officer, Adam Eckley
Finance Director and Treasurer, Mike Clayton
Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Paul Hill
Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Dave Bill
Director of HR & OD, Lindsey Stafford-Scott
Service Solicitor, Roy Carter
Clerk and Monitoring Officer, Philip Thomson

Head of Corporate Communications & Media, Christine Connor

Minute Secretary, Linda Boar

50. WELCOME, APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTION NOTICES

Apologies were received from Councillors Naylor and Newton. Apologies were also received from the Chief Fire Officer.

51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Jowers declared that he was a member of the Police and Crime panel. The Chairman advised Members that should a declaration of interest occur during the meeting they should declare such an interest at the appropriate time.

52. MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of 30 September 2014.

MATTERS ARISING

There were not any matters arising and with one small amendment suggested by the Acting Chief Fire Officer.

Resolved:

It was resolved that;

1. The minutes be confirmed and signed as a correct record by the Chairman subject to the above amendment.

53. BUDGET REVIEW – SEPTEMBER 2014

The Finance Director and Treasurer (FD&T) presented paper EFA/092/14 which reports on the expenditure against budget as at 30 September 2014, and identifies major variances to the budget for the year. The FD&T explained how the retained pay overspend seen in the paper has arisen particularly sighting the Thoby Lane incident. The FD&T asked for Members to consider how to settle this overspend by either performing a virement or use earmarked reserves for retained pay costs which is what this reserve was set aside to cover. A discussion ensued on whether underspent funds on wholetime pay should be used to alleviate the overspend. The data provided within the report was questioned by Members particularly in relation to why a higher number of fire fighters was required at Chelmsford fire station with Service managers responding that this increased staffing at that fire station was due to a greater number of appliances being stationed at that site. The FD&T spoke then about the forecast for the year as published has now been changed but was correct at time of writing the report. This forecast now takes into account the costs of resilience during the strike period over the most recent weekend; an up-to-date report will be provided to Members in due course. The capital budget which was affected by the purchase of new appliances and some uncertainty surrounding the final works of the contractor involved with the extension at Service Headquarters.

Councillor Oxley stated that he felt that the underspend should be taken from the wholetime budget with the Chairman adding that there was the likelihood that further strike action was expected.

Councillor Moyies asked that Members are provided with the figure which the strikes are costing the Authority with the FD&T stating that the shorter periods of strike action had cost the Authority in the region of £10k net this was because the resilience crews were required to be on duty before and after the strike started and concluded. Councillor Moyies then went on to ask if it would be prudent to have a specific budget to pay for strike costs but after some debate the FD&T offered that it was felt that these costs were better managed within the overall budget and reserves as necessary with the consensus being that it would not be correct to run the Authority incorporating the plan to expect strike action. The FD&T confirmed that reserves would provide a lengthy period of providing robust resilience against striking fire fighters and provided further detail on the way expenditure is managed in this case.

Councillor Oxley requested that the net costs associated with strike periods be included in this paper in the future which the FD&T agreed to do. The Councillor gave his support for not budgeting for strike periods but to find the funds for this expenditure from the general budget or reserves.

Councillor Kent requested further information on agency services and an explanation on which services from Essex County Council (ECC) are included, Service managers provided this detail.

Councillor Moyies asked for some clarity in relation to planned for changes occurring at Chelmsford fire station with ACFO Operations providing detail.

Councillor Moyies then went on to ask for detail concerning training costs moving into consultancy with the FD&T offering that this movement is under the delegation of officers to approve these transfers up to an agreed limit, anything under that figure would not be reported herewith.

Councillor Moyies finally asked about asset protection and the large underspend with the FD&T responding that it was anticipated expenditure and unless the expenditure was approved within the timescales laid down the expenditure could not be made and an indicative figure was used, in reality the expenditure was £0.4m less than anticipated.

Resolved:

It was resolved that Members;

1. Note the review of income and expenditure against the budget;
2. Note the actual position with capital expenditure;
3. Agreed that the overspend on pay for retained firefighters be offset by a virement from the wholetime fire fighters' budget; and
4. Agree to reduce the Capital Expenditure Budget for 2014/15 to £11,389k.

54. WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME PROGRESS REPORT

The Director for Human Resources and Organisational Development (D,HR&OD) presented paper EFA/093/14 which she explained was an update report and included some background information for new Members of the Authority. The report provides Members of the Authority with an update on the work undertaken by the Workforce Transformation Programme over the last 18 months from April 2013 to October 2014 and provides a forward view of planned work and deliverables for project closure in March 2015.

Councillor Moyies said that he considered the paper outlined an excellent piece of work but worried that it was too academic and that the timing of closure was too soon. The Councillor also felt that with reduction in numbers the extensive training now underway would be a waste of resources. The D,HR&OD responded by saying that the investment was agreed to help the Service through the change journey and was considered a worthwhile investment. In addition the D,HR&OD highlighted that the introduction of the appraisal system was well overdue and an essential activity; what has been instilled thus far are merely building blocks for the further improvement in the future. It was highlighted that the situation in the Service is really challenging to deliver but is achievable with the Acting Chief Fire Officer (A/CFO) stating that this work commenced prior to the current D,HR&OD joining the Authority, the context has changed and current influences have had to be adopted. The D,HR&OD stated that the primary focus is what people feel and the benefits realisation plan will maximise on what has been seen so far and will soon make it business as usual.

Resolved:

It was resolved that Members note the content of the report.

55. VEHICLE PROCUREMENT – CLOSURE REPORT

The FD&T presented paper EFA/094/14 which provides confirmation of the contract award for the supply of 42 pumping appliances over a four year period approved by the Committee in 2013. The vehicles will meet a common specification agreed by all the Authorities in the East of

England. The inclusion of larger committed volumes of pumping appliances has ensured that the Authority achieve the maximum savings possible from the procurement process, and provides certainty of production volumes for suppliers.

The Chairman stated that it was good to see investment such as this for high quality equipment.

Councillor Oxley said that this was a good news story particularly in terms of savings achieved but sad to note the lack of support for this project from other fire and rescue services. The Chairman explained the problems of joint procurement projects with the FD&T stating that there was a supported funding bid for Kent Fire & Rescue Service offering the creation of a team which would offer additional funding to achieve a joint procurement coalition; however a great number of other Authorities refused to participate.

Councillor Chandler questioned what the Authority does with the appliances which are replaced; Members were advised that the appliances which are outgoing from this Authority are a valuable commodity and through the Authority's trading company disposals are arranged generally to Fire & Rescue Services in Ireland and eastern Europe; the trading company has recently disposed of seventeen Kent Fire & Rescue Service appliances.

Resolved:

It was resolved that Members note the content of the report.

**56. UNITED KINGDOM RESCUE ORGANISATION NATIONAL CHALLENGE 2014
(UKRO-NC) EVENT CLOSURE REPORT**

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Safer and Resilient Communities (ACFO, SRC) presented paper EFA/095/14 highlighting the purpose of the paper was to provide Members of the EFA with details of the impact on Essex County Fire & Rescue Service as a result of the cancellation of the UKRO-NC 2014 (planned for 15 - 17 August at the University of Essex, Colchester). The report also recommended Members agree to host the same event in 2016. The ACFO, SRC shared with Members his sadness at having to cancel the event but is extremely happy that it could potentially be hosted in the county in 2016. The ACFO, SRC provided Members with the costs associated with the cancelled event which amounted to £15k, however he also provided Members with the benefits that were associated, they included the excellent liaison with volunteers many of whom had continued their links with the Authority. If the event went ahead much benefit would have been realised by Colchester town and the University of Essex.

The Chairman reiterated his thanks to the whole team who had worked on the project and particularly sighted the support given by the Ford Motor Company who had continued to support the Authority in a variety of ways.

A discussion ensued on the arguments of agreeing now to host the event in 2016 with the A/CFO speaking of his passionate support for this international event but highlighting the reputational risks involved should the event need to be cancelled for a second time because of ongoing industrial action. The Chairman also pledged his passionate support for the events and warned Members against letting the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) dictate to the Authority saying that should the event in 2016, if agreed, be cancelled because of industrial action by the FBU it would reflect badly on that organisation rather than the Authority.

Councillor Jowers asked for clarification on whether the FBU had actually taken action to wreck the event this year with the A/CFO confirming that the FBU did target its Members country wide to withdraw from taking part at the event.

The D,HR&OD advised that there is potential that not only will there be national industrial action but there could also be local issues outstanding with the FBU and the disruptive potential on that action is unknown at present.

Councillor Oxley stated he will not see the Authority run by unions and the event in 2016 should go ahead.

Councillor Moyies asked about the potential costs associated with cancelling the future event if it was agreed to run it at this meeting with the ACFO, SRC responding by advising it was difficult to judge potential costs at present. The potential losses for other fire & rescue services (FRS) would be the cost of accommodation and travel.

Councillor Holland raised the question of what the effect would be if only Essex personnel refused to take part, with ACFO, SRC responding by saying that the event could have taken place in this manner this year and is dependent upon other FRS continuing to take part.

Councillor Oxley proposed that arrangement for the event in 2016 been launched with the Chairman seconding this proposal, all others present were in agreement.

Resolved:

It was resolved that Members;

1. Note the content of the report.
2. Agreed that Essex County Fire & Rescue Service (ECFRS) act as Host County for the UKRO-NC in 2016.

57. ANY OTHER PART I BUSINESS

The Chairman had not been informed of any other business from Members or Officers.

58. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

That the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting during consideration of minutes 48 and 49 on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

59. CONFIDENTIAL

This part of the minute has been removed for the purposes of retaining confidentiality.

60. ANY OTHER PART II BUSINESS

This part of the minute has been removed for the purposes of retaining confidentiality.

(Meeting closed – 11:50am)

Signed.....
Chairman, 14 January 2015