



## Minutes of the meeting of the Essex Fire Policy & Strategy Committee, held on Wednesday, 21 June 2017

### Present:

Councillor A Holland Vice-Chairman (Chairman at the meeting)  
Councillor D Blackwell  
Councillor J Chandler  
Councillor A Erskine  
Councillor C Kent  
Councillor M McEwen  
Councillor A Wood

The following Officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

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

### 1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A Hedley (Chairman), B Aspinell and A Sheldon.

Apologies were also noted from Mark Stagg, Director of Transformation.

### 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 15 March 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Vice-Chairman.

In response to a question from Councillor Kent regarding the Fleet Workshop Project, the Committee was advised that property meetings with Essex Police were ongoing and a report on the joint approach would be submitted for consideration by the Policy and Strategy Committee at its July meeting.

#### **4 2016/17 Accounts and Governance Statement**

The Committee considered report EFA/069/17 by the Acting Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Director and Treasurer which stated that, under The Accounts and Audit Regulations, 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. In addition, the Authority was required to publish unaudited accounts by 30 June. The report provided a review of the key governance arrangements and a summary of the key issues from the accounts for 2016/17.

The following points arose from consideration of the report:

- Members noted the intention to bring forward the audited accounts to the July Committee meeting so that the Authority was fully compliant with the new statutory auditing timetable a year in advance. The Finance Director and Treasurer paid tribute to Glenn McGuinness, Deputy Director of Finance, and his team for the achievement of those deadlines a year early.
- The Committee acknowledged the significant savings made from the use of £1.6m of past capital receipts (usable reserves) for Service changes, rather than the total amended budgeted sum of £3.8m.
- The Governance Statement had been reviewed by the Audit, Governance and Review Committee in April. The Committee had also reviewed the effectiveness of the arrangements for Internal Audit and the reviews carried out in the past year. Disappointment was expressed regarding the four areas where the Authority had failed to achieve Reasonable Assurance outcomes. The Finance Director and Treasurer reported that an early review of the HR function had been scheduled in 2017/18 to ensure that progress was on track. Further improvement was required in the areas of Risk Assurance and Business Continuity and work was already underway to embed compliance and ensure officers were documenting their plans.
- A key focus for 2017/18 would be the preparation for the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation in May 2018. Initial work was underway and a sub-group of the Service Leadership established to lead the work required to achieve compliance.
- The Committee commented on the provision relating to the repayment of the pension liability debt to the Government, and noted that the Authority was still waiting to be invoiced by the Home Office. Members were reassured that the Authority had sufficient provision to pay when requested to do so.

- The Committee commended the Finance Director and Treasurer for the user-friendly style of the report.

**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 has signed and dated the Accounts for 2016/17;
5. That the Vice-Chairman (acting on behalf of the Chairman) of the Authority and the Acting Chief Fire Officer be authorised to sign the Annual Governance Statement.

**5 Budget Review May 2017**

The Committee considered report EFA/070/17 by the Finance Director and Treasurer which reviewed expenditure against budget as at 31 May 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 employment costs were marginally under budget as a result of whole time fire-fighter headcount being lower than budget, and the rate of leavers being higher than expected.
- The Finance Director and Treasurer explained the background to the proposed changes to the support staff headcount numbers, and the approach to provide greater clarity in roles for budget monitoring by separating the roles between service delivery, temporary project and support staff.
- Members noted that the conditions of service are different in the Grey and Green Books, but that these did not prevent staff from moving into different roles for career development.
- The Committee noted that the Authority did not pay pension contributions for agency staff.
- The overall turnover of On-call firefighters was a concern and retention levels had worsened. The Committee questioned whether the Authority had sufficient numbers to be able to cope with the demand on its services. In response, the Director of Protection, Prevention and Response commented that some locations were challenging for recruitment, but a new approach had worked well in Clacton. Unfortunately there had been no successful female candidates. A new flexible, lower

level of commitment was needed to open up the recruitment. A more flexible use of full time staff to support On-call firefighters during the day shifts was being introduced. It may be necessary to recruit whole-time firefighters in the future if the critical minimum target is reached. Members acknowledged that staff change jobs which could affect their availability to continue as On-call firefighters if employers were unwilling to release them.

- The Committee noted that Essex firefighters and their specialist resources had been on stand-by to help with the Grenfell Tower fire, but that they had not been called upon.

**Resolved:**

1. That the position on the Authority's income and expenditure at 31 May 2017 compared to the budget approved by Members be noted;
2. That the capital expenditure spend against budget for the period to 31 May 2017 be noted;
3. That the amendment to the support staff headcount numbers to reflect the additional posts in community safety and other departmental changes be approved; and
4. That the approach to be adopted to provide greater clarity in roles for budget monitoring going forward be noted.

**6 Date of Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Wednesday 26 July 2017, at 10.00 am.

The Chairman indicated that the Committee Officer had been asked to explore the possibility of rescheduling the July meeting which now clashed with a Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee Induction day, and involved three Policy and Strategy Committee Members. The Committee indicated its support to move the start time to 9.30 am on 26 July, rather than to try to change the date. The Committee Officer undertook to email the Members out of meeting to confirm the new arrangements once finalised.

The Vice-Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, warmly congratulated the Acting Chief Fire Officer, Adam Eckley, on his recognition in the Queen's Birthday honours list 2017. In response, the Acting Chief Fire Officer indicated that he felt very honoured and privileged, and gave thanks to his team for helping to transform the Service's culture in a challenging period.

Signed.....  
(Chairman)

Date.....