

ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY POLICY AND STRATEGY COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 4 NOVEMBER 2015 AT 10:00 AM

Present:

Councillor A Hedley	Chairman
Councillor J Chandler	
Councillor A Erskine	
Councillor A Holland	Vice-Chairman
Councillor J Jowers	
Councillor C Kent	
Councillor A Naylor	

The following Officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Dave Bill	Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Operations
Mike Clayton	Finance Director and Treasurer
Paul Hill	Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Safer and Resilient Communities
Lindsey Stafford-Scott	Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development
Judith Dignum	Committee Services Manager (Essex County Council)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors B Aspinell, Lady P Newton and P Oxley, and also from Adam Eckley, Acting Chief Fire Officer.

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor A Holland declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 (Commercial Report) in that she is a Director of EFA (Trading) Ltd (minute 7 below refers).

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Budget Review - September 2015

The Committee considered report EFA/093/15 by the Finance Director and Treasurer which reviewed expenditure against budget as at 30 September 2015 and identified major variances to the budget for the period. The report also reviewed the forecast outturn for 2015/16.

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

- Support was expressed for the virement of £301k of planned spend on thermal imaging cameras to be brought forward to the current year, due to the benefits that the equipment would bring to firefighters.
- The current situation with regard to the implementation of mixed crewing was noted. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Operations advised that he was due to meet later in the week with a member of the Expert Advisory Panel (Natasha Edmunds) to discuss how this could be progressed, bearing in mind the Cultural Review recommendation regarding the need for a sensitive approach. He undertook to update the Chairman on progress following the meeting. The FBU's opposition at a national level to the introduction of mixed crewing, due to the potential loss of whole-time firefighter posts, was noted.
- It was difficult to assess whether other Fire and Rescue services had implemented mixed crewing as the term was defined differently across services.
- It was noted that the overspend on casual and temporary support staff could be met from within existing budgets. Numbers of such staff were expected to reduce in due course, as some posts had been retained to cover roles unfilled pending the outcome of the planned staffing review. However, Members acknowledged that numbers may increase initially due to the work associated with service transformation. In the long term, it was possible that the ratio of support staff to operational staff may increase.
- Savings had been achieved by the installation of Solar Panels, but these had not been as high as anticipated.
- The Assistant Chief Fire Officer – Operations provided an update on the control project, which was proposed to go live early next year. He advised of the commitment to a review after 12 months (January 2016), although the nature of this would be limited to the shift pattern due to the incomplete implementation of the new system. The process for agreeing the remit and conduct of the review was currently under consideration, and engagement from the trades unions would be sought. Changes to the process for providing regular project updates were noted, and it was agreed that Fire Authority members should be included in the circulation of the weekly bulletin to staff.

- The proposed launch of a new staff e-newsletter was noted.

Resolved:

1. That the review of income and expenditure against the budget, as set out in report EFA/093/15, be noted;
2. That the forecast position for 2015/16 be noted;
3. That the virement of £301k of planned spend on thermal imaging cameras be brought forward to the current year;
4. That the actual position with regard to capital expenditure be noted.

4. Insurance Pooling

The Committee considered report EFA/094/15 by the Finance Director and Treasurer which provided an update on the establishment of pooling arrangements to provide cover for losses previously covered by insurance. Members were advised that the Authority is a member of the Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company Ltd (FRIC) which provides discretionary cover for these losses. The new arrangement had commenced on 1 November.

The following points arose from consideration of the report:

- Following a procurement process, Regis Mutual Management Ltd had been appointed as the manager of the insurance pool. The sum which would have formed the insurance premium under the previous arrangement would be invested by Regis until required to meet claims. The mutual was British-based and regulated.
- When the establishment of the Pool had first been agreed in January 2014, the intention had been for it to become operational with effect from 1 November that year if possible. The timescale was subsequently amended, with a revised implementation date of 1 November 2015.
- The first £500k of each motor claim would be met by the pooling company, with claims above that amount being met by the underlying insurer. The relatively low level of retention by the pooling company reflected the fact that, due to the type of claims concerned, the cost of underlying insurance for claims above £500k was almost identical to that for claims above £1 million.

Resolved:

That the current position regarding the arrangements for insurance pooling, as set out in report EFA/094/15, be noted.

5. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Wednesday 13 January 2016 at 11.00 am or on the rising of the extraordinary meeting of Essex Fire Authority also to be held that morning, whichever is the later.

6. Exclusion of the press and public

Resolved:

That, having reached the view that 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 item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information, as specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

7. Commercial Report

(Exempt under paragraph 3 – information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

The Committee considered report EFA/095/15 by the Finance Director and Treasurer which concerned the ending of a teaming agreement with a commercial partner, entered into in November 2015.

Resolved:

1. That the ending of the commercial agreement, as set out in report EFA/095/15, be noted.
2. That the lessons learned be noted.
3. That the development of potential future collaboration opportunities be supported.

The meeting closed at 10.40 am.

Chairman
13 January 2016