

ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY POLICY AND STRATEGY COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 13 JANUARY 2016 AT 12.45 PM

Present:

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

Councillor A Bayley also attended.

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
Paul Hill	Assistant Chief Fire Officer - Safer and Resilient Communities
Lindsey Stafford-Scott	Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development
Shirley Jarlett	Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Fiona Lancaster	Committee Officer (Essex County Council)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J Chandler, Lady P Newton, and P Oxley.

1. Declarations of Interest

Councillor A Holland declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 (Draft Budget for 2016-17) in that she is a Director of EFA (Trading) Ltd (minute 4 below refers).

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Budget Review - November 2015

The Committee considered report EFA/003/16 by the Finance Director and Treasurer which reviewed expenditure against budget as at 30 November 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:

- The Committee noted the overspend with on-call firefighter costs as a result of industrial action between June and September 2015 and the impact of additional resilience payments.
- Members acknowledged that the rate of firefighter leavers had slowed significantly and it was more difficult to predict future headcount numbers.
- The Committee was reassured that the numbers of available watch based firefighters would be increased within the next month due to the introduction of Heavy Duty Rescue Pumps. The introduction of mixed crewing, in addition to looking at increased retained resources, would help the Authority to achieve its target levels.
- The Authority's total forecast for 2015-16 showed an expected overspend of £92k. With the use of agreed reserves to fund specific expenditure in 2015-16, the Authority was confident that the forecast overspend could be eliminated.
- Members noted that capital expenditure remained on target.

Resolved:

1. That the review of income and expenditure against the budget, as set out in report EFA/003/16, be noted;
2. That the forecast position for 2015/16 be noted;
3. That the actual position with regard to capital expenditure be noted.

4. Draft Budget for 2016-17

The Committee considered report EFA/004/16 by the Finance Director and Treasurer which provided the Committee with:

- The options for the revenue and capital budgets for the Authority for 2016/17;
- Information on the budget and business planning process; and
- Information on the formula grant settlement, share of national non-domestic rates, council taxbase and collection account for 2016/17.

The Committee was reminded that following its consideration of the 2016/17 budget planning assumptions in September 2015, the budget had been prepared showing figures for a Council Tax increase of 1.9%.

The following points arose from consideration of the report:

- The Committee noted the provisional local government finance settlement figures for 2016/17 which indicated a loss of £2m to the Authority. Account was also taken of the indicative reduction in government funding levels for future years up to and including 2019/20, and the future requirement to produce an efficiency plan.
- The potential gain of £120k in additional business rates as a result of pooling arrangements with Essex County Council and eight of the Essex district authorities.
- Members indicated their general support of the option for an increase in Council Tax, having taken into account the impact of the reduction of government funding and the cumulative effect of Council Tax being frozen over a number of years.
- The Committee considered the potential negative effect on public support for the emergency services arising from an increase in Council Tax.
- The Committee noted the strong taxbase position of the Authority and the improved arrangements with Billing Authorities which had led to early figures being available to all precepting authorities.
- Members discussed the possibility and benefits of increasing the number of Firebreak courses if more resources were available, and increased collaboration with Essex Police.
- The Committee noted that while the options regarding the sale of the Hutton site were being evaluated, the property had been leased to Brentwood Borough Council to use for short-term car parking.
- Some Members expressed the view that the number of earmarked reserves could need to be increased after the outcome of the Programme 2020 is known.
- The Acting Chief Fire Officer indicated that having invested in front line services meant that the Authority was in a strong position to face future challenges.

Resolved:

That the budget be agreed for submission to the full Fire Authority as set out below:

	2015/16 Budget	2016/17 Budget
Net Expenditure	£71,827k	£71,452k
Decrease from 2015/16		-£375k
Precept	£39,758k	£41,224k
Band D Council Tax	£66.42	£67.68
Increase from 2015/16		1.90%

1. A net expenditure budget of £71.452m;
2. A precept of £41.224m;
3. A Band D council tax of £67.68 (an increase of 1.9%);
4. The bands of Council Tax are shown in the following table.

Council Tax Band	2015/16	2016/17 with 1.9% Increase
A	£44.28	£45.12
B	£51.66	£52.64
C	£59.04	£60.16
D	£66.42	£67.68
E	£81.18	£82.72
F	£95.94	£97.76
G	£110.70	£112.80
H	£132.84	£135.36

5. Capital expenditure budget of £7.823m in 2016/17.

5. Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would take place on Wednesday 16 March 2016 at 10.00 am.

The meeting closed at 1.30 pm.

Chairman
16 March 2016