

		AGENDA ITEM 5
		SSC/21/10
Committee:	Safer and Stronger Communities Policy & Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	10 December 2010	
TRANSFER OF ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COUNTY EMERGENCY PLANNING OFFICER TO THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE ESSEX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE (Minute 58/October 2010)		
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At its last meeting (Minute 58/October 2010) the Committee noted a proposal for Members to receive an overview of the transfer of role and responsibilities of the County Emergency Planning Officer to the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.

In July 2010 the Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste approved a decision (Ref: FP/214/06/10) for the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive for Essex County Fire and Rescue Service to assume the role and responsibilities of the County Emergency Planning Officer on an interim basis under a Memorandum of Understanding; and to develop options for future joint working arrangements. This transfer of role and responsibilities falls within the Committee's remit from several angles: Community safety, relations with the Fire Authority, and partnership working. As it is an important new initiative that is in line with the Council's policy of developing shared services with partner agencies, it is considered important for the Committee to be familiar with the current and future operational implications particularly as the information will be relevant to other scrutiny reviews that are referred to in its Forward Look.

On 18 November 2010 the Committee was given the opportunity to visit the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters at Kelvedon. Councillors J Deakin, M Fisher, M Garnett, R Howard, E Johnson, and C Pond took part in the visit with the aim of learning about the new arrangements, the advantages and disadvantages associated with the new working arrangements, and the potential for future joint working.

Also in attendance on the day were Councillors A Hedley, as the Chairman of the Fire Authority, and Councillor T Sargent, as Deputy to Cabinet Member for Environment and Waste.

David Johnson, Chief Fire Officer and County Emergency Planning Officer, and Rosanna Briggs, Deputy County Emergency Planning Officer, gave a powerpoint presentation and answered Members' questions accordingly. The presentation ranged from a profile of the services covered, the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, the management and co-ordination of emergency planning in Essex (including broader national co-ordination issues), practical implementation, and future issues.

Prior to the visit a briefing paper was commissioned from the aforementioned Officers to provide the Committee with some background on the principles behind the merger of the Emergency Planning and Fire Services, which is reproduced at the Appendix to this report.

Members who took part in the visit were provided with an interesting and informative insight into the wide range of work that is covered by Emergency Planning Services, that centre upon people and the environment.

Briefing Note for the Safer and Stronger Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee on the principles behind the merger of the Emergency Planning and the Fire Service



Prepared by the Chief Fire Officer and County Emergency Planning Officer

Background

As a principal local authority, Essex County Council (ECC) meets its statutory duties for emergency planning through the work of its Emergency Planning (EP) and Business Continuity Management Service. The head of this Service, the County Emergency Planning Officer (CEPO) reports to the Director of Environment, Sustainability and Highways at the County Council and then onwards to the relevant Cabinet Member – Portfolio Holder for Emergency Planning.

Following some recent changes within the structure of the County Council's Emergency Planning and Business Continuity Management Service, a number of informal discussions took place between ECC and the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) to explore options for a more integrated approach to emergency planning. The focus has been to consider whether there are existing synergies between the County's emergency planning function and ECFRS, and whether economies of scale could be achieved through closer collaborative working whilst maintaining the effective delivery of an emergency planning function.

These discussions proved to be very positive to the point where a formal proposal was considered by the Essex Fire Authority (EFA) and ECC. During these discussions, as part of the wider efficiency savings being delivered by the County Council, a number of staff within the emergency planning team decided to take advantage of the voluntary redundancy scheme being offered, one of whom included the then CEPO.

The initial agreement at a strategic level was for the separation of the emergency planning and business continuity functions, and for ECFRS to take over responsibility for delivering the emergency planning element on behalf of County Council for an interim period. Business Continuity Management still remains in-house within the County Council, but it has moved under the remit of the Finance Directorate.

The EFA, at its meeting of the 9th June 2010, provided approval for the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) to take over the interim role of CEPO, on the understanding that this was to be achieved through the development of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the County Council and ECFRS. The SLA was to set out clear expectations, responsibilities,

service delivery objectives, outcomes, protocol of joint working and budget arrangements, whilst development of the full business case and longer-term business model is undertaken, prior to final agreement with ECC and approval by the EFA.

Interim Arrangements

During this interim period and following an ECC Cabinet Member Action, responsibility for emergency planning was transferred to the CFO in early August. This provided the ideal opportunity for ECFRS and ECC EP function to work more closely together, with the CFO taking over responsibility for emergency planning and exploring the potential for full integration of both services.

It was agreed that during this period separate governance arrangements were to be maintained for each of the functions. On fire service matters there was no change and the CFO continued to report direct to the Fire Authority, however on matters associated with emergency planning the CFO/CEPO was to report to the relevant portfolio holder within the County Council.

In the longer-term a number of options have been considered as to the most preferred and most effective way forward to ensure that the emergency planning service continues to be delivered effectively on behalf of ECC.

Future

Joint working between ECC and the ECFRS is subject to review and a decision on the future of emergency planning is due to be taken early in the New Year.

Direction

Developments in the EU resilience framework and the Conservative party's Green paper on national security provide a clear indication of the future direction of the wider emergency preparedness and resilience role.

Combining emergency planning and the fire and rescue service joins together the separate elements of the National Integrated Emergency Management model into a single function and is more representative of the approach set out in the Civil Contingencies Act guidance. On this basis it has been proposed to ECC that the name of the function is changed to more adequately reflect this modern approach, it has been recommended that the department should be re-titled Civil Protection and Emergency Management and this has been agreed.

The new title reflects the 'end-to-end' assessment of, and recovery from emergencies whilst combining the roles of the EP function and ECFRS seamlessly. This is an innovative step and leads the way in terms of a modern, comprehensive approach to emergency planning. It is also felt that this will provide an ideal opportunity for increased media coverage, marketing the new approach and direction.

Structure

The Deputy County Emergency Planning Officers have invested considerable time discussing future roles and responsibilities with EP staff. They have also been liaising with senior fire service staff accessing how ECFRS delivers its resilience and emergency planning and as a consequence we will be proposing structural changes that will focus more on the Integrated Emergency Management model. Underpinning this will be quality assurance framework.

The decision to create a powerful partnership operation to mastermind the County's response to emergencies or disasters and to deal with the effective recovery from any such incident is an innovative move that will ensure the delivery of a more efficient, joined up and pro-active service to our communities while reducing cost to our tax payers at a time when there is serious focus on doing all we can to provide value for money.

ECC and ECFRS both have diverse and independent expertise in this area and that combined will ensure we are able to do the best we can in terms of planning for major emergencies or disasters in the County.