

# Essex Fire Authority

## Report to the Constituent Authorities

### 4 September 2013

#### 1. FUNDING FOR SPRINKLERS

Members of the Essex Fire Authority support the budget allocation of £250,000 in each of the next 3 years (commencing 2013/14) for a 'Sprinkler Fund' to encourage the retro-fitting of sprinklers in order to protect vulnerable members of the community, fire fighters and community assets.

#### 2. OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT AND PEER CHALLENGE

In support of its on-going ethos of continuous improvement the Authority requested a Peer Challenge Team (PCT) to visit Essex to conduct an independent assessment of the Service, which took place between 20 and 23 May 2013. Prior to the Peer Assessment the Service provided the PCT with a 'Self-Assessment' which provided an overview of the Service's current position and corporate documentation.

The Operational Assessment and Peer Challenge process is designed to form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement nationally within the Fire and Rescue Service, and provide Elected Members and Service Senior Management with information that allows them to challenge their service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.

During their visit to Essex, the Peer Team analysed the seven key assessment areas identified in the national peer assessment framework, which are:

- Community Risk Management;
- Prevention;
- Protection;
- Response;
- Health & Safety;
- Training & Development; and
- Call Management & Incident Support

The PCT was led by Chief Fire Officer Peter Dartford from Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service and consisted of further experienced and trained Members and Officers who have specific skills in the following three key themes which the Service had identified for the PCT to focus on, these were;

- Community Risk Management;
- Incident Command Systems; and
- Operational Risk Information

The PCT met with a broad cross-section of Members, Operational Personnel, Support Staff and external partner agencies. During their visit a range of on-site activities included interviews, focus groups; and visits to Service Control and three fire stations. In total the team met with over 170 personnel.

Overall the report described the Service's performance as good. There was further acknowledgement of the strong political leadership of the Fire Authority, the on-going work on relationship building with the Fire Brigades Union, and the Service's effective financial foundation in facing increasing pressures on budgets. Other aspects of note where the Service's strength in emergency planning and it's strong working relationships with other blue light responders, with the report summarising;

*'Overall ECFRS is a well organised Fire and Rescue Service that is benefiting from skilled and dedicated staff and sound relations with Members. It is self-aware and its own assessment of its strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities in the areas the peer challenge team was asked to examine is sound'.*

On a more cautionary note, the report also expressed a need for the Service to build effective relationships throughout the organisation, including the Authority, workforce and representative bodies in order to best move forward in a positive manner.

The report recognises a number of areas in which the Service is currently performing strongly, whilst also identifying a number of areas which will help drive improvements within the Authority. Some of the areas which were identified as needing further exploration have already been addressed, or form part of on-going programmes/projects.

### **3. COMMUNITY BUILDER PILOT**

Two Officers have been nominated as Community Builders based on their skill set and involvement and connections with communities they either live and or work in. One will be concentrating on the Rochford District as well as the Southend Wards, Milton, Kursaal and Victoria. The other will be concentrating on the St Andrews Ward in Colchester and the Golf Green Ward in Tendring.

Their focus is to reduce demand on public services by enabling the local community to help themselves. This of course includes demands placed on this Fire Service.

Part of their role is to help map and develop local assets, the Community Connectors (who are our volunteers) can then work to support the Community Builder in their efforts to 'unlock' local capacity; facilitating community's local solutions to solve local problems.

Community Builders, alongside Community Connectors are regarded as facilitators, helping 'join the dots' in a community to forge new connections, which are essential when trying to create stronger and more resilient communities.

The Community Builders have attended a two day training event in July, and received some light touch mentoring which is provided by the ABCD Institute, resourced by the Strengthening Communities Project.

## **The aims of the pilot for Essex County Fire and Rescue Service are:**

- Increased individual activity and community resilience;
- Connecting with communities;
- Innovation in tackling local problems; and
- Increased investment in the community.

## **Outcomes for Essex County Fire and Rescue Service**

- A reduction of risk to the community;
- Proactive alignment of requirements for specific initiatives to avoid duplication of work;
- An increase in quality and awareness of services provided;
- A decrease in community need for the Fire Service
- An improved understanding of the role of the public sector (by the partners, the community and individuals) and how they all link together; and
- An improved relationship between the Fire Service and the community.

## **These will be achieved by:**

- A concentration of an Officer in a limited area;
- A drive to ensure local service providers know each other;
- Involvement with community groups and individuals;
- Links to parish councils and local Government;
- Sharing data and information;
- Identifying common issues between the partnerships;
- A design of bespoke products to deliver shared messages across a number of agendas; and
- Use of current partnerships/stakeholders.

This pilot will run for one year and has four distinct parts; whilst the parts have a direction the work of the Officers will be led predominantly by risk and environment.

### Months 1 – 2

Map the risk that impacts on the community e.g. vulnerable people, geographical, work, travel, industry, at home.

### Months 3 – 4

Build relationships and map the work delivered by the public sector, groups and individuals within the community (people, work plans and programmes, effort, activity etc.), identifying existing community assets as well as identifying the work where duplication exists.

### Month 5

Complete and analyse the public sector effort as well as the community asset effort and describe the 'As Is' situation and the desired 'To Be' in terms of a journey; including a

coherent action plan which will encompass the asset based community development approach.

### Months 6-12

Deliver against the agreed action plan using identified Community Connectors who will support the Community Builders in the delivery of the plan. During the delivery period the impact of the new delivery models will be evaluated and a report will be written up to feed back into the Whole Essex Community Budget project.

**Councillor Anthony Hedley**  
**Chairman**