



Essex Fire Authority

Report to the Constituent Authorities of the meetings on 17 February & 13 April 2016

The items reported below are the main issues considered by Essex Fire Authority at its scheduled meetings on 17 February and 13 April 2016. Full details of all the matters considered, together with the minutes of the meetings, can be viewed on the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service website, www.essex-fire.gov.uk.

1. Budget 2016/17

The Authority has agreed its revenue and capital budgets for 2016/17, allowing for an increase in Council Tax of 1.9%. In reaching their decision, Members considered the options for the revenue and capital budget for the Authority and received information on the budget and business planning process. They also noted information on the formula grant settlement, share of national non-domestic rates, council tax base and collection account for 2016/17.

The Authority noted that, in due course, it would be asked to consider whether it wished to accept the Government's offer to provide central funding allocations for each year of the Spending Review period (up to and including 2019/20). The timescale for this would depend upon the receipt of guidance concerning the Government's requirements in relation to the efficiency plan to be published by all authorities opting to accept the offer.

The authority resolved as follows:

	2015/16 Budget	2016/17 Budget
Net Expenditure	£71,827k	£71,304k
Decrease from 2015/16		-£523k
Precept	£39,758k	£41,224k
Band D Council Tax	£66.42	£67.68
Increase from 2015/16		1.90%

- A net expenditure budget of £71.304m;
- A precept of £41.224m;
- A Band D council tax of £67.68 (an increase of £1.26 or 1.9%)
- 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

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

2. Charging

The Authority has reviewed and approved its arrangements for charging for the provision of specific services, allowing for an increase of 1% with effect from 1 April 2016. The Authority is satisfied that its arrangements are broadly in line with those adopted by other authorities, and it currently has no plans to change its approach with regard to the activities for which it does not charge, in particular rescuing animals, and attendance in response to automatic fire alarms where there is no fire, or persistent false alarms.

3. Funding for Sprinklers – Final Report

In 2013, the Authority supported a three-year programme (£250k per year) of match funding for the installation of sprinklers in high-risk premises. Approximately 500 homes of residents that are among the most vulnerable in the community have now been supported by the Authority, and firefighters protected from significant risk at incidents in high risk buildings where they may be asked to enter to save lives.

The Authority was pleased to acknowledge the success of the Funding for Sprinklers scheme, and the work done to promote the use of the systems to protect vulnerable residents. It was noted that support for the continuation of the scheme was being sought as part of the public consultation on Options for Change 2016-2020.

4. Appointment of the Clerk and Monitoring Officer

Following the retirement of Philip Thomson, the Authority has agreed to appoint Shirley Jarlett of Essex Legal Services (the legal trading entity of Essex County Council), as its Clerk and Monitoring Officer. Mrs Jarlett was formerly the Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer. The Authority has also agreed to appoint Roy Carter, the Service Solicitor, as Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer.

In agreeing these appointments, the Authority wished to place on record its sincere thanks to Philip Thomson for his significant contribution as Clerk and

Monitoring Officer to the work of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service over a considerable number of years.

5. Make Some Noise Employee Engagement Survey Results 2015

The Authority has received a report and presentation on the results of the annual Make Some Noise Employee Engagement Survey 2015, the second such survey to be conducted.

Members noted that 616 employees completed the survey compared to 731 the previous year, which equates to 41% of the workforce.

The overall engagement score was 63%, calculated based on the results of questions relating to pride, endeavour, advocacy and care. This was a slight decrease from last year's results, and remains 15 points lower than the external benchmark, although just seven points lower than other fire and rescue services.

The Authority received information on the survey results, which had been analysed by People Insight (the independent survey provider) and delivered to Service Managers, representative bodies and Your Voice Employee Forum via face to face presentations in February 2016. The survey reports had also been published in full in accord with a promise to share the results with employees in an open and transparent way. Employees had already engaged well and were keen to get involved in shaping future local actions as a result of the findings, and would continue to have the opportunity to be involved with the Your Voice Employee Forum.

Members received historical comparison information, showing where results indicated improvement or decline in different areas, compared to the previous year.

The Authority noted the top five results, where the highest positive score had been achieved, together with the bottom five results. Members were disappointed at the negative result around member engagement with staff, but noted that this may not reflect recent efforts to begin to address this, through the Independent Review Action Plan (IRAP).

With regard to next steps, as the issues identified by People Insight for further action were already included within the IRAP, these would now be prioritised as part of that programme of work. Progress towards delivery of the IRAP, and therefore also with regard to the actions arising from the survey, would continue to be monitored via the Strategic Delivery Board, Strategic Management Board, Expert Advisory Panel and by the Authority itself. The full survey would be repeated in November 2016, as well as a short, focused (pulse) survey to coincide with the six month review of the actions taken as a result of the Independent Cultural Review. The intention was for the survey to run for at least three annual cycles, with consideration to be given at that stage as to whether it can move to a biannual cycle.

6. RDS Development Project - Update

The Authority has been updated on progress with regard to the Programme 2020 Retained Duty System (RDS) Development Project.

The aim of the Project is to assist the Service in recruiting and retaining more on-call firefighters, ensuring competence and safety, delivering a more flexible on-call service whilst ensuring increased efficiency, availability and ensuring equality in terms and conditions of employment.

The Authority noted action to date on a number of issues, including the launch of a range of new recruitment support materials in December 2015. This has resulted in an increase in numbers of expressions of interest, although this had not yet translated into increased applications.

Members noted the planned next steps within the Project, which include:

- A strategy for employer/business engagement
- Development of a new availability model for on-call firefighters
- Work on improved on-call employee reward and recognition
- Development of improved training and development opportunities
- Continued work on recruitment.

It was noted that the name of the Project would now change to reflect current terminology, referring to 'on-call fire fighters' instead of the 'Retained Duty System'.

The Authority was pleased to note the positive progress being made by the Project, in particular given the increased reliance being placed upon the on-call system as part of the future service delivery model.

7. Trade Union Facility Time 2015-16 and the joint Negotiation Consultation Arrangements

The Authority has received an annual update on the use of Trade Union Facility time. Members received a range of information on this issue (falling within the categories set out below), noting that it would now be published in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015:

- The total number (absolute number and full time equivalent) of staff who are union representatives (e.g. general, learning and health and safety representatives);
- The total number (absolute number and full time equivalent) of union representatives who devote at least 50 per cent of their time to union duties;
- The names of all trade unions represented in the local authority;

- A basic estimate of spending on unions (calculated as the number of full time equivalent days spent on union duties by authority staff that spent the majority of their time on union duties multiplied by the average salary); and
- A basic estimate of spending on unions as a percentage of the total pay bill (calculated as the number of full time equivalent days spent on union duties by authority staff that spent the majority of their time on union duties multiplied by the average salary divided by the total pay bill).

The Authority also received information on the joint negotiation and consultation arrangements currently in place for all Trade Unions, noting that a review of these was due to take place, facilitated by Linda Dickens (a member of the Expert Advisory Panel). The review would be part of a holistic approach looking at the inter-connections between different areas of work being undertaken as part of the Independent Review Action Plan, keeping in mind the broader aim of challenging the culture of Industrial Relations, as well as the culture more generally.

8. Progress Report on the delivery of the work programme required to improve the culture within the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service

The Authority has continued to receive regular progress updates on work to implement the recommendations arising from the Independent Cultural Review. These have included reports by the Chairman of the Expert Advisory Panel.

**Councillor Anthony Hedley
Chairman**