



Essex Fire Authority

Report to the Constituent Authorities of the meeting on 7 October 2015

1. Independent Cultural Review of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service

The Authority has considered its formal response to the findings and the recommendations made within the report of the Independent Cultural Review of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service conducted by Irene Lucas, which had been received by the Authority at its last meeting on 2 September 2015.

One of the principal recommendations made in the report concerned the appointment of an external Expert Advisory Panel to provide strategic advice to the organisation for the next 24 months. Ms Lucas had made subsequent recommendations in relation to the structure and make-up of the Panel, and the Authority also considered its formal response to these.

The Authority agreed to accept in full the 35 recommendations contained within the Independent Cultural Review report. The Acting Chief Fire Officer was instructed to produce an Implementation Plan for future consideration by the Authority, and to report progress to every meeting of the Authority for a minimum of 24 months.

The recommendations made by Irene Lucas for the core membership of the Expert Advisory Panel were accepted, and appropriate authority was delegated to certain groups of members and individual officers to facilitate the following:

- The appointment (upon the advice of the Expert Advisory Panel Chairman) of further appropriate experts in their field, together with appropriate logistical support for the Panel;
- The negotiation of contractual terms with the core members of the Expert Advisory Panel, and any expert advisors and logistical support, as deemed appropriate;
- The provision of governance, oversight and scrutiny to the delivery of the work programme required to improve the culture within ECFRS; and
- The discharge of executive powers with respect to two of the Review report's recommendations, relating to a review of the organisation's hierarchical structure and the taking of disciplinary action.

Finally, the Authority set aside a budget of up to £400,000 over the next 24 months to fund the processes required to support the implementation of the report's recommendations.

In agreeing these actions, the Authority emphasised the need for all Members to take responsibility for implementing the Review's recommendations.

2. Results of First Stage Integrated Risk Management Plan Consultation

The Authority has considered the response to the first of a two-stage consultation exercise seeking views from staff, the public and partner organisations on the future role and priorities of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service. The views expressed will influence the development of an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), Service Strategy and Change Programme for the Authority for the period 2016 – 2021, and support a service redesign to enable the Authority to meet the challenges it faces in the years ahead.

In the light of the views expressed during the consultation, it was agreed that the following specific proposals to deliver activities should be included in the IRMP:

- a. Delivery of safety messages to every school child in Essex;
- b. Ensure there is a working smoke alarm in 100% of households;
- c. Working with partner agencies in meeting the social needs of the vulnerable members of our communities;
- d. Supporting the installation of systems such as sprinklers for the protection of buildings and occupants; and
- e. Working with drivers and riders to reduce the number of people killed or injured on the roads.

The following actions were also agreed:

- a. To include specific proposals within the IRMP for investment in new technology to support the response to fire and other emergencies;
- b. To adopt in the IRMP the proposed response standards for all incidents and potentially life-threatening incidents and use these to develop proposals for the next stage of the consultation;
- c. To bring forward proposals for changes which result in a reduction in operational resources; and
- d. To use the options criteria proposed within the consultation to decide on proposals for the future.

The second stage of the consultation will take place later in 2015, with the outcome to be considered at an extraordinary meeting of the Authority in January 2016.

3. Enabling Closer Working Between the Emergency Services

The Authority has agreed its response to the consultation by the Government on proposals to enable closer working between emergency services, and to allow for Police and Crime Commissioners to take over responsibility for the fire and rescue service in certain circumstances.

The Authority is firmly committed to the principle of collaboration, and our response to the consultation began by detailing the range of joint activities which is already being undertaken with Essex Police and the East of England Ambulance Service, and identifying a number of potential areas of future joint working between Police and Fire. We then provided a specific, detailed response to each of the 16 consultation questions, commenting on how certain proposals may work if implemented, and expressing our reservations where appropriate. Our response to the penultimate consultation question, seeking views and comments that were not covered by the other questions, is set out below:

“The Fire Authority does not support the one sided approach to changing responsibility set out in the consultation document. The arrangements presented may well be appropriate where there is local agreement that the delivery of the fire and rescue service would improve if responsibility transferred to the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Essex Fire Authority does not believe that this is the case in all areas and that where such a doubt exists the process should be equitable to all parties, and that fire and rescue authorities should have the opportunity to defend the present structure and propose alternative ways of delivering the expected benefits outlined.

In addition, the Authority believes that there should be a review process to ensure that the benefits claimed in the business case put forward by Police and Crime Commissioners are delivered in accordance with clear and reasonable timescales.”

In authorising the Finance Director and Treasurer to submit the consultation response on its behalf, the Authority also requested that the views of stakeholders on the possibility of a merged service be sought as part of the next stage of consultation on the Integrated Risk Management Plan (item 2 above refers).

Councillor Anthony Hedley
Chairman