



Essex Fire Authority

Report to the Constituent Authorities of the meetings on 11 February & 15 April 2015

1. Budget for 2015-16

The Fire Authority has agreed its budget for 2015-16, including a decision to accept the Government's Council Tax freeze grant for a further year. In reaching their decision, Members considered options for the revenue and capital budgets for the Authority for 2015/16 and received information on the budget and business planning process. They also received information on the formula grant settlement, share of national non-domestic rates, council tax base and collection account for 2015/16.

During their consideration of the budget, Members agreed to establish a task and finish group to consider policies relating to investment and reserves, with a view to maximising the return to the Authority. The Group will hold its first meeting after the General Election on 7 May.

The Authority resolved as follows:

1. That the budget for 2015/16 be agreed, as set out below:

| | 2014/15 Budget | 2015/16 Council Tax Freeze Budget |
|------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Net Expenditure | £73,271k | £71,827k |
| Decrease from 2014/15 | | -£1,444k |
| Precept | £38,954k | £39,758k |
| Band D Council Tax | £66.42 | £66.42 |
| Increase from 2014/15 | | 0.00% |

1. A net expenditure budget of £71.827m;

2. A precept of £39.758m;
3. A Band D council tax of £66.42 (the same since 2010/11);
4. The bands of Council Tax are shown in the following table.

| Council Tax Band | 2015/16 No Increase |
|------------------|---------------------|
| A | £44.28 |
| B | £51.66 |
| C | £59.04 |
| D | £66.42 |
| E | £81.18 |
| F | £95.94 |
| G | £110.70 |
| H | £132.84 |

5. Capital expenditure budget of £8.175m in 2015/16.

2. Charging

The Fire Authority has reviewed its arrangements for charging for the provision of specific services, and agreed to a 2% increase with effect from 1 April 2015.

Section 19 of the Fire and Rescue Act 2004 makes provision for charging, provided that the amount of the charge is set by the Authority and that the income from charges does not exceed the costs incurred. The Fire and Rescue Services (England) Order 2004 (SI 2135/2004) provides the details of the activities that may be charged for.

One area where charges have not been raised to date is for the value of the Fire Service brand for the trading activities of the Fire Authority through EFA (Trading). This is an area that has been the subject of controversy and has led to a formal complaint about the use of state aid to the European Commission. As an interim measure a charge for the value of the fire service brand is proposed with effect from 1 April 2015. This will, in effect, provide a small dividend from the trading company to the Authority from pre-tax profits. The rate of charge is proposed to be 5% where training is provided by uniformed officers and 2% for all other trading activities.

As part of the response to the state aid claim it is expected that there will be an independent assessment of the charges that should be made to fire authority trading companies for the use of the Fire Service brand. Authority has been delegated to the Finance Director & Treasurer to implement any alternative charge proposed by the independent assessor.

One area where the Authority does not charge is for rescuing animals. This area was debated at length by the Authority in February 2009 when a decision was made to invest in a large animal rescue unit. At that time the Service carried out around 200 animal rescues a year and it was believed that there would be a greater risk to animal owners and other members of the public if

charges were made as this may mean that owners would not seek assistance from the fire service. This will continue to be our approach.

Section 10 of the Localism Act 2011 amends the 2004 act to allow the Authority to charge for the attendance in response to automatic fire alarms (AFAs) where there is no fire and there are persistent false alarms. There are no proposals for the Authority to consider charging at this time because it is not the Authority's policy to respond to such incidents unless specific risks are present, or the AFA call is supported by a confirmation of a fire. The option to charge for such calls will be considered as part of any future review of the policy on attendance at AFAs.

Our charges from 1 April 2015 are as set out below:

| Charges from 1 April 2015 | | |  | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------|-------|
| Essex Fire Authority | | | SI 2135/2004 Reference | 2015 Charge | VAT | GROSS |
| | | | | £ | £ | £ |
| 1 - NON EMERGENCY SERVICES | | | | | | |
| CHEMICAL /HAZARDOUS INCIDENTS | (COMMERCIAL) | 3 | 406.00 | 81.20 | 487.20 | |
| SUBSEQUENT RECOVERY OF COSTS INCURRED WILL BE DETERMINED BY THE NATURE AND DURATION OF THE INCIDENT | | | | | | |
| EFFECTING AN ENTRY INTO PREMISES OR LIFTS | (COMMERCIAL) | 5,6 | 213.00 | 42.60 | 255.60 | |
| EFFECTING AN ENTRY INTO PREMISES OR LIFTS | (DOMESTIC) | 5,6 | 69.00 | 13.80 | 82.80 | |
| REMOVE/MAKE SAFE TV AERIAL | (COMMERCIAL) | 10 | 354.00 | 70.80 | 424.80 | |
| REMOVE/MAKE SAFE TV AERIAL | (DOMESTIC) | 10 | 69.00 | 13.80 | 82.80 | |
| HIRING OR PROVISION OF EQUIPMENT, VEHICLES OR PREMISES (eg THERMAL IMAGE CAMERA & OPERATOR) | PER DAY OR PART DAY | 1 | 213.00 | 42.60 | 255.60 | |
| 2 - ANIMAL RESCUE | | | | | | |
| PROVISION OF FIREFIGHTERS FOR ANIMAL RESCUE | FIRST HOUR | 7 | 213.00 | 42.60 | 255.60 | |
| | SECOND AND SUBSEQUENT HOURS OR PART THEREOF | | 134.00 | 26.80 | 160.80 | |
| Charges may be waived at the discretion of the Officer in Charge of the Incident | | | | | | |

3. New Control Facility – Go Live

The Authority received an update on the status of the new Control Facility, the change over from the old to new systems and the impact of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) dispute on the change.

It was originally the Service's intention to leave the Emergency Fire Control Mobilising facility (Control) at Hutton until it moved to a Regional facility as part of a national programme. The failure of this programme led to the Fire Authority's decision to move from Hutton to Kelvedon Park. A DCLG grant was successfully bid for and has provided funds for a replacement of the mobilising systems for the Service. In line with the Service's commitment to collaboration, an agreement was reached to host a Control solution for Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS).

The change from the old system to the new is not a simple upgrade but a move to the new generation of integrated data-led intelligent systems (rather than the older system's reliance on voice traffic). Information will be provided to crews via

mobile data terminals in the appliances. When fully commissioned, the system will improve the Service's ability to optimise its use of resources and maximise the use of risk information.

Before going live the system went through extensive testing. The infinite variety of circumstance and environment that we deal with means that as complete as these tests might be they will never include every conceivable scenario, so in addition to this, well established resilience arrangements, which have been developed over a number of years, remained in place.

Go-live

The Service intended to move from the old system to the new and from Hutton to Kelvedon Park on 15 January 2015, but moved the date forward one day as a result of the FBU strike action from 09:00 on 14 January 2015. This decision was only made once the system had passed appropriate tests.

The FBU strike was called between 09:00 on 14 January 2015 to 18:00 on 16 January 2015, though some officers did not return to work until 09:00 on 17 January. The Service resilience arrangements were once again very strong with the Service responding to just fewer than 80 calls, the majority of which were false alarms.

We understand that the changes associated with the new system have been challenging and stressful for the Service's Control staff. We chose not to go-live with all the functionality of the new system immediately so as to allow the Service to deal with any issues with the system and Control Operators to become familiar with the changes before they adopted a new and truly dynamic mobilising methodology and before they relied on data messages rather than verbal ones.

It is apparent from our experience with the new mobilising system that it requires a very different approach to mobilising. Control Staff have done well adjusting and recognise the change is significant and not easy, and are responding positively.

The Service responds to a huge range of operational incidents, which occur in numerous scenarios in countless locations (private addresses, roadways, business premises to name a few). When you include the need to identify and allocate the most appropriate resources, the challenge in making this as accurate as possible from the start is clear. The development of the configuration of the system is dynamic and as our staff develop the system through rules and action plans, the closest and most appropriate resource will be mobilised; rather than relying on Parish boundary lines, which formed the basis of previous attendances.

There have been challenges during the first few weeks of operation, and further testing is underway to investigate issues relating to the interaction of the new system with the existing network. A decision was taken to revert to use of the former system for the time being, and the robust resilience arrangements in place meant that this could be achieved with minimal disruption. Work is ongoing with

the system supplier and we are confident that the outstanding issues will be resolved.

4. Sprinkler Scheme Update

In 2014 Essex Fire Authority supported a three-year programme (£250k per year) of match funding for the installation of sprinklers in buildings that accommodate vulnerable members of our communities. Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) has been actively promoting the use of sprinklers, hosting events to promote their benefits and dispel the myths that often inappropriately affect decisions on whether to install or not.

The Fire Authority has received a report on the Scheme's progress during its first year of operation, noting that it has been a great success. Two projects (at Parkside Tower, Chelmsford and Mornington House, Southend) have been completed, with a further two (at Brooke House and Bokingham Green, Basildon) due to begin imminently. These four projects accounted for £160K of the fund for the year. Bids for a further eight projects (one in Southend and seven in Basildon) have been received that will account for the remaining £90K, and may be deferred to qualify for funding in 2015-16. The sprinkler funding used and committed means that ECFRS will have assisted in the provision of sprinkler systems in 196 premises that are home to vulnerable persons and/or in premises that constitute a significant risk to fire-fighters.

Feedback from property managers and occupiers had been positive.

The Fire Authority is delighted that, following a nomination by South Essex Homes, ECFRS has received a commendation from the National Fire Sprinkler Network in recognition of the Fire Authority's generous financial backing for sprinklers and sprinkler protection, and as a token of the high regard in which the work of ECFRS personnel are held.