

## **EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY**

**Minutes of the meeting of the SCRUTINY & AUDIT PANEL held at East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters, 20 Upperton Road, Eastbourne, at 10:00 hours on Thursday 19 September 2013.**

**Members Present:** Councillors Barnes, Buchanan, Carden, Galley, Rufus (Chair), Theobald and Wincott.

N.B. Councillor Barnes attended the meeting in place of Councillor Taylor, having been nominated by the Deputy Monitoring Officer in consultation with the relevant Group spokesperson.

**Also present:**

Mr. G. Walsh (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), Mr. G. Ferrand (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), Mr. D. Savage (Treasurer), Ms. L. Woodley (Deputy Monitoring Officer), Mrs. R. Coates and Ms. H. Champion (Ernst & Young Auditors), Ross Sutton (Senior Audit Manager, ESCC) and Mrs. S. Klein (Clerk).

852. **DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

852.1 It was noted that, in relation to matters on the agenda, no participating Member had any disclosable pecuniary interest under Section 30 of the Localism Act 2011.

853. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

853.1 Apologies were received from Councillors Lambert and Taylor.

854. **ANY OTHER NON-EXEMPT ITEMS CONSIDERED URGENT BY THE CHAIR/ CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

854.1 The Chair welcomed Rose Coates and Hannah Champion from Ernst & Young Auditors, and Ross Sutton, Senior Audit Manager, East Sussex County Council.

855. **TO CONSIDER PUBLIC QUESTIONS OR PETITIONS, IF ANY**

855.1 There were none.

856. **NON-CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE LAST SCRUTINY AND AUDIT PANEL MEETING HELD ON 11 JULY 2013**

856.1 **RESOLVED** – That the non-confidential minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel held on 11 July 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair. (Copy in Minute Book).

857. **CALLOVER**

857.1 Members reserved the following items for debate:

- 858. External Auditor's Results Report (ISA 260) and Statement of Accounts 2012/13
- 859. Statement of Operational Assurance
- 860. Review of Fatal Fires in 2012/13
- 862. 2013/14 – 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter performance results
- 863. Key Task Areas and Corporate Projects 2013/14 – 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter Outturn Results

857.2 **RESOLVED** – That all other reports be resolved in accordance with the recommendations as detailed below.

858. **EXTERNAL AUDITOR'S RESULTS REPORT (ISA 260) AND STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2012/13**

858.1 Members considered a report of the Treasurer that presented the results of the External Auditor's Results Report (ISA 260) and reported an unqualified opinion on the Authority's 2012/13 Statement of Accounts. (Copy in Minute Book).

858.2 The Treasurer welcomed Rose Coates and Hannah Champion to the meeting, and explained that this was Rose's last meeting before her retirement. Hannah would then be promoted to Assistant Manager and would lead on the Authority's audit for the next year. The Treasurer also welcomed Ross Sutton from ESCC and Warren Tricker, ESFRS Strategic Finance Manager, who had also played a large part in producing the accounts; he also extended his thanks to Paul King, the Audit Director, who was unable to be present. This had been the first year that Ernst & Young had produced the Accounts, and the Treasurer thanked all concerned for such a smooth process.

858.3 As a result of the audit, Ernst & Young expected to issue an unqualified opinion and had not identified any material issues to be reported to Members. The ISA 260 had stated that the Authority continued to provide high quality working papers and financial statements, and officers dealt promptly with any queries, which contributed to an efficient audit process. Members were pleased to note that Ernst & Young had made no recommendations for improvement as a result of its audit of the accounts, and raised no specific issues which require a response in the Letter of Representation.

858.4 Mrs. Coates thanked the Treasurer and both finance teams, for their work. She then went through the Annual Governance Report, which Members had to consider before authorising the Treasurer to sign the formal letter of representation to the External Auditor.

858.5 Members noted that the External Auditor had confirmed that the Fire Authority has in place proper arrangements for securing value for money and Mrs. Coates expected to issue the Audit Certificate at the same time as the Audit Report, circa 24<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

- 858.6 The Treasurer explained to Members about the different Reserves held by the Fire Authority. He had previously produced a comparison of Reserves held by different CFAs, which had shown East Sussex Fire Authority about average in the amount of money held in Reserves; he would re-circulate this to Members.
- 858.7 The Chair thanked Mrs. Coates for her work on behalf of the Fire Authority and wished her good luck in her retirement.
- 858.8 **RESOLVED** – That
- (i) the External Auditor's Audit Report (ISA 260) be noted;
  - (ii) the Treasurer be authorised to sign the formal letter of representation to the External Auditor; and
  - (iii) the Statement of Accounts be approved for publication.
859. **ANNUAL STATEMENT OF OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE**
- 859.1 Members considered a report of the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive that presented the Statement of Operational Assurance for approval. (Copy in Minute Book).
- 859.2 A revised copy of the Statement was circulated, which contained an additional paragraph at 5.3.1 – Mutual Aid:  
*Under a section 16 Agreement with West Sussex County Council, East Sussex Fire Authority provides a mobilising function in order for West Sussex County Council to discharge their functions under the Fire & Rescue Services Act. This is carried out by East Sussex Fire & Rescue staff using West Sussex property and equipment at present located in Chichester. This arrangement will change in future.*
- The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) explained that this was an interim procedure which would change in the future.
- 859.3 Members were informed that, in line with Section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 which provides the statutory authority for the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, FRAs must have regard to the Framework in carrying out their functions and, in line with this, FRAs must provide assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and publish an Annual Statement of Assurance.
- 859.4 In May 2013 the Department for Communities and Local Government issued light touch guidance as to what should be contained in Fire Authorities' Operational Assurance Statements. ESFRS's first annual Statement of Operational Assurance had taken note of the guidance and was considered by Members.
- 859.5 Councillor Theobald asked about the National Resilience New Dimensions assets which were now owned by ESFRS and was assured that these were utilised as part of the Service's normal response. She also asked whether the Service could now charge for call-outs to false alarms; the DCFO explained that, although the Localism Act allowed for this to be considered, there were still discussions taking place nationally about the mechanism for doing this. The DCFO also assured Councillor Theobald that Members would be involved in the next peer review, due to take place in January 2014, and explained that Station Inspections were part of an annual programme of improvement.

- 859.6 Councillor Barnes felt that para 5.5 of the Statement – Rule 43 – would raise more questions with the public than it answered. He also suggested that the percentages shown in para 7.7 and the Summary Table would be more meaningful if they included actual figures and showed the scale of the number of premises. The DCFO was pleased to receive this feedback and would amend the Statement to reflect these comments. There was no deadline for the signing of the Statement, and Members were content for the CFO&CE and Chair of the Panel to be authorised to sign it at a later date.
- 859.7 Councillor Galley questioned how useful this Statement would be to ESFRS and how much the public would engage with it – he suggested telling the DCLG if it was felt to be unnecessary bureaucracy! He had found the Summary Table very impressive, especially in showing how well the Fire Authority had responded during the last ten years regarding staffing methods, etc. The DCFO thought that the Statement would be of some use to the public, and might generate some Freedom of Information Act questions. It had taken some time to deliver, the information having previously been included in the Best Value Performance Plans, but would be easier to update in future years. The Service was required to publish the Statement on its web-site, but not to distribute it more widely to libraries, etc, nor to request feedback from the public, although we could ask for comments via the web-site if we wished to.
- 859.8 The Treasurer informed Members of the overlap with the Annual Governance Statement (within the Statement of Accounts) and suggested looking to combine the two Statements into one document in future years.
- 859.9 **RESOLVED** – That
- (i) the Panel’s comments be noted and incorporated into the Statement of Operational Assurance; and
  - (ii) the Chair and Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive be authorised to sign the revised Statement of Operational Assurance on behalf of the Fire Authority.
860. **FATAL FIRE REVIEW 2012-13**
- 860.1 Members considered a report of the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive which informed them of details of fatal fires in East Sussex during 2012/13. (Copy in Minute Book).
- 860.2 There had been four dwelling fires resulting in fatalities across East Sussex and the City of Brighton & Hove during the financial year 2012/13, three of the fatalities were deemed to be as the result of accidental fires. Members noted that this was a significant reduction on the twelve fatalities reported in 2011/12; greater collaboration with partners in both identifying the risks and identifying those susceptible to fire, then providing prevention interventions, had contributed to this reduction.

- 860.3 Councillor Wincott noted that three of the fatalities were attended by crews from Retained Duty stations, and asked whether the longer response times might have affected the outcomes. The DCFO advised Councillor Wincott that this had been considered in the previous Fatal Fire Review reported to the Fire Authority but, as new Members had not seen this detail, he would forward this to Councillor Wincott; however, it was not considered that this would have had any effect on the outcomes.
- 860.4 Councillor Rufus asked how accidental deaths and non-accidental deaths in dwellings were recorded and the DCFO explained that all were reported so that a full picture could be obtained. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer also explained that it was necessary to await the Coroner's report for some incidents to be classified either as accidental or deliberate.
- 860.5 Councillor Barnes suggested that, as a number of deaths were caused by fires caused by cigarettes, a press release highlighting this risk would be useful. Councillor Rufus also pointed out the problems around heavy drinking. The DCFO explained that Members had requested this report following an increase in fire deaths in 2011/12. ESFRS was now working with Adult Social Care in ESCC and B&HCC on their alcohol and smoking cessation programmes, and with the NHS to target vulnerable persons on their release from hospital. A number of campaigns were run by ESFRS throughout the year, e.g. for the Older People's Forums.
- 860.6 Councillor Theobald asked whether dementia was considered as a causation when reviewing fatal fires and the DCFO explained that this was being considered nationally through CFOA, along with wider mental health issues, and ESFRS would be responding to consultation in due course. He also reminded Members of the Service's 'Who Cares?' campaign.
- 860.7 Councillor Wincott was concerned that cutting back on the Firesetters' Scheme could lead to a spike in deliberate fires, but the DCFO assured him that there were no plans to cut back on this scheme.
- 860.8 **RESOLVED** – That the report be noted and it be noted that:
- (i) all future fire deaths and fires involving serious injuries continue be fully profiled to provide a wider data pool to enable the better targeting of vulnerable groups; and
  - (ii) the Community Risk Management Team continues to engage in partnership activity that reduces the risk to vulnerable people in the community.
861. **2012/13 REVIEW OF PROGRESS WITH PARTNERSHIPS**
- 861.1 Members considered a report of the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive that advised them of the outcome of the review of partnerships completed for 2012/13 and other changes affecting partnerships. (Copy in Minute Book).
- 861.2 **RESOLVED** – That the report be noted.

862. **2013/14 – 1<sup>ST</sup> QUARTER PERFORMANCE RESULTS**

- 862.1 Members considered a report of the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive that presented the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter performance indicator results for 2013/14. (Copy in Minute Book).
- 862.2 In terms of the overall performance for 2013/14, of the Fire Authority's priority areas, 2 were on target and 2 were within 10% of achieving their targets. The results for the two remaining priority areas were not available at the time of the report as one was an annual indicator and the other was not available due to the installation of a new software product.
- 862.3 The DCFO explained how the targets were compared year on year and Members noted that strategic performance indicator targets continued to expect performance improvement across the entire Service. However, Members accepted that, in many areas, both the rate and scope of future improvement was slowing, and some targets for 2013/14 and the future trends reflect this position.
- 862.4 Councillor Wincott asked that consideration be given to how targets are illustrated, as he is colour blind and unable to distinguish the colour red. The DCFO advised that this would be addressed in future reports to Members of the Fire Authority.
- 862.5 **RESOLVED** – That the
- (i) 2013/14 performance results for Quarter 1 available to date, as set out in the report and complementary separate Appendix A to the report, be noted; and
  - (ii) information included within the exceptions report set out as Appendix B to the report, be noted.

863. **2013/14 KEY TASK AREAS AND CORPORATE PROJECTS – 1<sup>ST</sup> QUARTER OUTTURN RESULTS**

- 863.1 Members considered a report of the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive that presented the 2013/14 1<sup>st</sup> quarter outturn results on Corporate Key Task Areas and Projects. (Copy in Minute Book).
- 863.2 Since September 2011, the Corporate Management Team had reported progress on Key Task Areas and Corporate Projects through the Interplan system. Accordingly, Members considered the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter results for 2013/14 at a strategic summary level and the DCFO encouraged feedback on the new format.
- 863.3 Members noted that currently there were 22 projects (10 KTAs and 12 Corporate Projects). Of the 10 KTAs, 7 were progressing on or close to schedule and 3 were behind schedule, including KTA 7 (Develop a Community Interest Company), which had not started. The DCFO explained that this was in place but was currently dormant due to staffing capacity.
- 863.4 Of the 12 Corporate Projects, 9 were progressing on or close to schedule and 3 were behind schedule.

- 863.5 Councillor Barnes had two concerns about the Corporate Risk Management (CRM) and Service Delivery Directorates, which were both showing red – less than 70% of activity target achieved. He also queried 1.1.4.35 – Delivery of SCC key data from Data Warehouse to SCC, and 1.1.4.2 – HMG Security Policy Progression. 1.1.4.2 was showing red even though it was 60% complete of its 90% target.
- 863.6 The DCFO would take on board these comments as feedback on the new reporting mechanism, and explained that the CRM was showing as red because the consultation had been changed to December and, therefore, the target date had also been changed. The ACFO explained that 1.1.4.2 would be completed by the end of March 2014, and the end date should have been shown sooner than that – he would amend this accordingly.
- 863.7 **RESOLVED** – That the corporate progress made during the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2013/14 and within the context of all the other organisational work priorities being undertaken be noted.
864. **CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE STANDARD**
- 864.1 Members considered a report of the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive that presented the outcome of the recent assessment by the appointed Customer Service Excellence Assessor. (Copy in Minute Book).
- 864.2 **RESOLVED** – That the Panel note the successful outcome of the recent assessment for the Customer Service Excellence Standard.
865. **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**
- 865.1 **RESOLVED** – That item number 866 be exempt under paragraphs 1, 3 and 4 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 and, accordingly, was not open for public inspection on the grounds that it included information relating to any individual, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information), and information relating to any consultation or negotiations, or contemplated consultation or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.

## PART 2

866. **CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE LAST SCRUTINY AND AUDIT PANEL MEETING HELD ON 11 JULY 2013**
- 866.1 **RESOLVED** – That the confidential minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny & Audit Panel held on 11 July 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair. (Copy in Minute Book).

The meeting concluded at 11:30 hours.

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of

2013