

## **EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY**

**Minutes of the meeting of the East Sussex Fire Authority held at East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters, 20 Upperton Road, Eastbourne, at 10.30 hours on Thursday 17 January 2013.**

**Present:** Councillors Carden, Duncan, Fawthrop, Healy, Heaps, Howson, Kenward, Livings (Chairman), Ost, Pidgeon, Powell, Rufus, Scott, Sparks, Theobald, Thomas, Tidy and Waite.

### **Also present:**

Mr. D. Prichard (Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive), Mr. G. Walsh (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), Mr. G. Ferrand (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), Mrs. D. Williams (Assistant Chief Officer – Corporate Services), Mrs. C. Rolph (Assistant Chief Officer – People & Organisational Development), Mr. A. Ghebre-Ghiorghis (Monitoring Officer), Mr. D. Savage (Treasurer), Mr. R. Charman (Director of Financial Services) and Mrs. S. Klein (Clerk).

### **686. DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS**

- 686.1 a. 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.
- b. It was noted that, in relation to matters on the agenda, Councillor Scott declared a personal interest as his brother-in-law worked for East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service. Councillor Thomas declared a non-pecuniary interest as Chairman of LGA SIG (Coastal Special Interest Group).

### **687. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

- 687.1 There were none.

### **688. URGENT ITEMS AND CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS**

- 688.1 There were none.

### **689. TO CONSIDER PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS, IF ANY**

- 689.1 There were none.

### **690. NON-CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2012**

- 690.1 **RESOLVED** – That the non-confidential Minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2012 be approved and signed by the Chairman. (Copy in Minute Book).

691. **CALLOVER**

691.1 Members reserved the following items for debate:

693. Fire Authority Service Planning processes for 2013/14 and beyond – draft Revenue Budget 2013/14 and Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2017/18

694. Fire Safety Education Programme in Primary Schools 2011/12 performance survey

692. **NOTE OF THE POLICY & RESOURCES PANEL MEETING HELD ON 10 JANUARY 2013**

692.1 The Fire Authority considered a report of the Clerk that reported on the Policy & Resources Panel meeting held on 10 January 2013, with regard to those issues of greater significance or requiring a decision from the Fire Authority. (Copy in Minute Book).

692.2 **RESOLVED** – That the report be noted.

693. **FIRE AUTHORITY SERVICE PLANNING PROCESSES FOR 2013/14 AND BEYOND – DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET 2013/14 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2013/14 TO 2017/18**

693.1 The Fire Authority considered a joint report of the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive and the Treasurer that presented the draft 2013/14 Fire Authority Service Planning issues for their formal consideration. (Copy in Minute Book).

693.2 Members considered the draft detailed Service Planning document and noted that the approved Revenue Budget and Capital Programme would be incorporated into final versions of the 2013/14 Medium Term Plan and the 2013/14 Annual Plan, once the Fire Authority had approved them in February 2013, for subsequent publication. The Fire Authority noted the requirement to set its precept for 2013/14 at its meeting on 7 February 2013.

693.3 The Treasurer advised the Fire Authority on the key implications of all the issues set out in the report, including the need to await the remaining outstanding information before any final decisions could be taken on the precept at the February 2013 meeting – these included:

- i) the economic outlook and national funding changes;
- ii) a summary of the agreed budget strategy and service priorities for the Fire Authority;
- iii) the details of the draft committed Revenue Budget of £38.932m which is a net reduction £1.610m (-2.74%) on the 2012/13 base budget of £40.030m, a significant proportion of the net savings being achieved through the outcome of the Facing the Challenge proposals £1.325m;
- iv) the implications of the Medium Term Plan which, based upon current presumptions, would result in net expenditure reductions of 1.44% to 2014/15, and subsequent increases of 0.38% to 2015/16, 1.79% to 2016/17 and 1.62% to 2017/18;

- v) the implications of the changes arising from the Local Government Finance Settlement consultation information which set out the implications for ESFRS in both 2013/14 and 2014/15 on the proposed figures for Revenue Support Grant, Business Rates Retention, Council Tax Freeze and Transitional Support Grant amounts with the resultant implications upon the council tax requirements for either Option A – accepting the CT Freeze Grant or Option B – rejecting it in favour of an increase up to the 2% threshold. Option A would result in a balanced budget and Option B would result in additional base budget flexibility of £0.183m in 2013/14 with the latter option helping to close the strategic resourcing gap in future years;
- vi) a summary of the latest spending projections against DCLG grant for the Sussex Control Centre;
- vii) a summary of the schemes included in the draft Capital Programme 2013/14 to 2017/18 (base year 2012/13); outcomes of the 2013/14 fire capital grant distributions; overall costs over the period along with available capital resourcing and how such resourcing could be applied to meet the phasing of schemes in the Capital Programme;
- viii) a summary of available reserves and balances and a new Reserves Policy for the Authority which sets out to explain the differences in the types of reserves held, the reasons for them and levels achieved, and proposes a minimum level of General Reserves set at 8% of Net Budget Requirement;
- ix) a summary of the overall financial implications placed upon the Fire Authority if all of the detailed proposals set out are approved but dependent upon information still outstanding at this stage. A revised version of Appendix C was tabled at the meeting and showed the latest version of the MTFP which indicated that the level of savings required should the Fire Authority decide to accept the Council Tax Freeze Grant in 2013/14 and then raise Council Tax by 2% in subsequent years would be £2.9m by 2017/18 or, should the Authority decide to reject it in favour of a council tax increase of up to 2%, in which case the savings required would be £2.4m by 2017/18.

693.4 Finally, the Treasurer reminded Members of the information still outstanding; the fact that Government Grant figures may yet change after the consultation period ends; the current presumptions made on future council tax increases in the Medium Term projections; the range of risks the Fire Authority remains exposed to, especially as a result of the localisation of council tax support and business rates retention; and the need to set a Balanced Budget for 2013/14 as well as considering the medium term resourcing gap faced by the Fire Authority; and the uncertainty about funding after 2014/15 until the results of the next Comprehensive Spending review (CSR13) are known.

693.5 The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive advised Members that council tax setting was a matter for them to decide upon at their meeting on 7 February 2013. He gave Members a summary of some of the other FRAs' likely council tax policy proposals they were progressing in the light of the recent advice given by Brandon Lewis, MP on the Government guidance for FRAs on council tax increases (up to 2% or £5 for lower quartile Fire & Rescue Authorities).

- 693.6 The Fire Authority noted that the current year's budget is expected to underspend. It was agreed that any final underspend at outturn should be returned to Balances to assist the Authority in managing the financial risks that it will face and the changes to the way it delivers its services that will be necessary in the medium term.
- 693.7 The Fire Authority noted that the draft estimates for 2013/14 included provision for pay awards, restricted to 1% in 2013/14 and 2% thereafter, and for an increase in other costs to take account of inflation to estimated 2013/14 outturn prices at 2.5%. The Fire Authority noted that the Government was considering ways by which FRAs could introduce other fees and charges subject to local consultation and this included being able to charge for false alarm calls from persistent offenders and proposals. CFOA were leading a detailed review of applying those charges on a national basis and details would be brought before the Fire Authority once the direction was known. The proposed increase in charges for special services was an average of 2.5%.
- 693.8 Councillor Tidy asked whether there was any scope to raise more revenue through fees and charges. The Treasurer explained about the legal constraints and that any short term measures would not produce any significant income. The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive added that the Service would have to set itself up as a trading company, should it wish to pursue this further, but it would have to be careful not to open itself to challenges from the private sector. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that ESFRS could not charge for services which it had a legal duty to provide, and could only cover its costs for other, discretionary services.
- 693.9 The Fire Authority noted the Government's new Business Rates Retention scheme, and the discussions taking place with the district and borough councils in East Sussex about the viability of pooling business rates, which could offer the opportunity to increase funding allocations.
- 693.10 Members also noted the Government's introduction of the localisation of Council Tax support which could impact on Council Tax collection rates, increasing the risk of a deficit in future years.
- 693.11 The Treasurer advised that the latest budget modelling had been done based on two scenarios: the acceptance of the latest offer by the Government of a one year Council tax freeze grant for 2013/14, based on current information available and best estimates; or rejecting the Council Tax Freeze Grant in 2013/14 and increasing Council Tax by up to 2%.
- 693.12 Councillor Sparks understood that deficit reduction policies would need to be in place until as late as 2022, rather than the suggested 2018, and also noted the risks associated with inflation rising to 4%, rather than the 2.5% originally planned for. He also drew Members' attention to the results of the recent public consultation exercise which indicated that 92% of residents thought that the Service should reject the Government's freeze grant and increase Council Tax by 2%, to help fund fire and rescue services in future years.

- 693.13 Councillor Thomas thanked the Treasurer for a very helpful summary of the situation and Councillor Scott suggested that Members and officers needed to 'think outside the box', and look again at a possible merger with West Sussex, Surrey or Kent; and more partnership and collaborative working.
- 693.14 Councillor Rufus was pleased that Members were now focussing on the longer term, and also looking at balances and reserves, and suggested that Members should not be thinking about forthcoming elections when deciding on the council tax at the February meeting.
- 693.15 The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive reminded Members of the partnership work currently being undertaken and stated that, although ESFRS may wish to merge with another Fire & Rescue Service, there did not, currently, seem to be a neighbouring Service wishing to explore a merger. Should a potential partner be identified, there would still be a run-in time of at least two years, making it even more essential to identify and deliver medium and long-term savings, rather than speculate on assumptions of other models arising in the medium term.
- 693.16 Councillor Scott suggested setting up staff commissioning groups, not just representative bodies, to discuss their ideas for making savings and the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive confirmed that these were already in place, with over 100 members of staff already having been consulted. Councillor Carden was concerned that the new Brighton & Hove City Plan, which included plans for a further 12,000 houses, should be taken into account.
- 693.17 **RESOLVED** – That:
- a) the projected expenditure for 2012/13 (Section 2.1) be noted;
  - b) the continued Revenue Budget consultations taking place (Section 2.2.3) be noted;
  - c) the committed budget for 2013/14 of **£38.932m** including provision for pay awards of 1% in 2013/14, price increases of typically 2.5% and net inescapable commitments (Sections 4.2.5, 4.2.7 and 4.2.8) be approved;
  - d) the fees and charges as set out in section 4.2.6 and in Appendix B be approved;
  - e) the absence of Service Investment proposals in the 2013/14 Revenue Budget and reasons for their absence as highlighted in Section 4.2.10 be noted;
  - f) the amended Capital Programme for 2012/13 totalling **£4.050m** and the Capital Programme for 2013/14 totalling **£4.150m**, as set out in Section 5 be approved, and it be noted that there are no related revenue consequences;
  - g) the Reserves and Balances Policy set out in Appendix F and the proposed level of reserves summarised in Table 15 be approved;
  - h) determining whether or not to accept the Council Tax Freeze Grant be deferred until the February 2013 precept setting meeting as detailed budget and resourcing information still needs to be confirmed (covered in Section 7 and Tables 16 and 17);
  - i) the format of the Fire Authority's council tax information will be finalised after the decisions made at the Fire Authority meeting on 7 February 2013 be noted; and
  - j) the detailed recommendations for setting the precept will be included in the final Revenue Budget report to be presented to the Fire Authority at its 7 February 2013 meeting, using the Local Government Finance Settlement and final tax base figures yet to be published be noted.

694. **FIRE SAFETY EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS 2011/12 PERFORMANCE SURVEY**

- 694.1 The Fire Authority considered a report of the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive that informed them of the Service's performance on the Fire Safety Education in primary schools from the results of the ORS survey. (Copy in Minute Book).
- 694.2 This was the third complete academic year that the Education Team had delivered its revised Primary School programme, targeted at Year 2 and Year 5 pupils, with further increased interactive teaching, an emphasis on learning outcomes, and collaborative work with the Sussex Police Education Team which was helping to deliver road safety education. A total of 128 completed questionnaires had been returned to ORS and Members noted the extremely positive overall results of the survey, with all respondents stating they were satisfied with the visit, and 86% saying they were 'very satisfied'. All respondents felt that the information was communicated well to the year groups involved in the visit.
- 694.3 Members noted the areas for the Team to develop and improve, including continuing to ensure that every session is as interactive and engaging as possible and can be adapted to the needs of the pupils in the class at the point of delivery and be fully inclusive; and developing and promoting more activities for follow-on work that teachers can deliver, hence reinforcing the Service's safety messages beyond the time in the classroom and enabling pupils to 'remember what they have been taught'. The work of the Team would be reviewed during 2013/14 as part of the IRMP review of prevention and protection services.
- 694.4 Councillor Ost had attended a session for Key Stage 1 pupils at the primary school where he is Chair of Governors and was very impressed with the Team's work. Councillor Heaps had attended a Safe Drive Stay Alive session which was incredibly well presented and she stressed how important it was to find funding to be able to continue to deliver a wide range of community safety initiatives.
- 694.5 Councillor Scott proposed that the Service discuss potential government grants with Hastings Borough Council who had bid for, which he thought would be appropriate for funding similar areas of work. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that he would be meeting with HBC officers during the next week, and would discuss it with them then.
- 694.6 **RESOLVED** – That the Service's performance and plans for further improvement, as set out in the report, be noted.



695. **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC.**

695.1 **RESOLVED** – That the following items be exempt under the paragraphs indicated of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 and accordingly are not open for public inspection on the grounds that they include information relating to any individual, information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person, information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations 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, and information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings:

696. Paragraphs 1, 3, 4 and 5

697. Paragraphs 1, 3, and 4

698. Paragraphs 3 and 4

The meeting concluded at 12:16 hours.

Signed

Chairman

Dated this            day of

2013.

