

POLICY & RESOURCES PANEL

Minutes of the meeting of the POLICY & RESOURCES PANEL held at County Hall, East Sussex County Council, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes BN7 1UE at 11.30 am on Thursday, 31 October 2019.

Present: Councillors Peltzer Dunn (Chairman), Galley, Tutt, Hamilton (In place of Scott) and Powell

Also present:

Mark Andrews (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), Mark O'Brien (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), Warren Tricker (Finance Manager), Dawn Whittaker (Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive) and Liz Woodley (Deputy Monitoring Officer)

9 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Powell declared an interest in relation to item 17 insofar that she was employed by Sussex Police. Councillor Tutt also declared a personal interest in item 17 as a Member of East Sussex County Council which had been considered in the Options Appraisal.

10 Apologies for Absence/Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Pragnell. Apologies were also received from Councillor Scott. Councillor Hamilton was attending as his substitute.

11 Notification of items which the Chairman considers urgent and proposes to take at the end of the agenda/Chairman's business items

There were none.

12 Minutes of the last Policy & Resources meeting held on 25 July 2019

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy & Resources Panel held on 25 July 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

13 Callover

Members reserved the following items for debate:

14. Revenue Budget & Capital Programme Monitoring 2019/20
15. Treasury Management – Half Year Review 2019/20
16. Fuel Tank & Pump Replacement Project
17. Estates Strategy Delivery Model Review

14 Revenue Budget & Capital Programme Monitoring 2019/20

Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Policy & Resources Panel

The Panel received a report from the Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer (ADR/T) on issues arising from the monitoring of the 2019/20 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme as at 30 September 2019.

The Finance Manager introduced the report, highlighting the current challenges which were primarily around the delivery of the ambitious Capital Programme. Slippage had occurred for a number of valid reasons; projects involving Police collaboration had been delayed as they reconsidered resource requirements following the announcement of additional funding for frontline police and extended staff consultation and estates staff resourcing had impacted on timescales of some projects. High risk areas continued to be monitored.

The Panel sought reassurance that monitoring was taking place across the whole budget and queried errors in the budget for telephony (paragraph 2.2.1 of the report) and payroll miscoding (paragraph 2.5 of the report). The Finance Manager confirmed that all areas of the budget were monitored through statistical analysis and by individual budget holders, however, resources were focused on high risk areas and those larger budgets. With regards to errors with the telephony budget, this had been caused by some confusion over contract end/start dates. Information Technology Governance had carried out a full review and were confident that there were no further issues. Payroll errors related specifically to firefighter pay and issues with how the system handled employer pension contributions. These were being resolved by the Payroll Manager.

The Panel asked about fleet management and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) confirmed that a comprehensive vehicle replacement strategy was in place. This was currently based on an appliance having a 14 year life cycle, however, with advances in technology and engineering it was thought that lifecycles would increase. Pressure had been placed on the fleet following losses at the Marlie Farm incident in 2006. Four appliances had recently been received and were currently at Service Training Centre undergoing acceptance testing. Better workforce engagement had resulted an improved receipt process and feedback on the new foam system tests and improved contamination control had been positive.

Discussion was had over the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report. The ACFO commented that although the report was still being considered, having only been published on 30 October, an early 'lessons learnt' around protection, fire safety and operational response had been undertaken. Attendance had been reviewed and an inspection regime carried out. Operationally the Service continued to support the 'stay put' policy, however, buildings needed to meet appropriate standards. It was recognised that compartmentalisation could fail and that crews needed to be aware of the potential of rapid spread, the importance of asking 'what if?' when attending certain incidents and adjusting swiftly to an evacuation strategy when appropriate.

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The Panel welcomed the number of apprenticeships being taken up and noted that with regards to Sussex Control Centre, any changes to the planning assumptions and timeline would impact on the budget figures set out in the report.

RESOLVED: That the Panel:

1) notes:

- (i) the risks to and the projected Revenue Budget underspend,
- (ii) the risks to and the projected underspend in the Capital Programme,
- (iii) the use of reserve,
- (iv) the monitoring of savings taken in 2019/20, and
- (v) the current year investments,
- (vi) the increase in the scheme budget for BA and Radio Equipment Scheme by £115,000 to £437,000 funded from underspends in the Fleet Capital Programme and £10,000 from Marauding Tactical Firearms Attack grant.

2) approves:

- (vii) the variation the Capital Programme by £25,000 for improvements to the Combined Aerial Rescue Pump (CARP).
- (viii) the drawdown of up to £160,000 from General Balances to fund the in-year consequences of decisions taken by the Principal Officers Appointment Panel regarding the Principal Officer's terms and conditions review and the role and remuneration of the Treasurer.
- (ix) an increase in the capital scheme for the Animal Rescue Vehicle from £200,000 to £322,000.

15 Treasury Management - Half Year Review 2019/20

The Panel received the treasury management half yearly report, a requirement of the Fire Authority's reporting procedures. The report covered the treasury activity for the first six months of the 2019/2020 and included an update on the first half year Prudential Indicators which related to treasury activity.

The Finance Manager introduced the report, highlighting the continued strategy in low risk secure investments and the unexpected increase to the Public Works Loan Board interest rate for all new loans.

Members queried whether any benchmarking against other local authorities had been carried out. The Finance Manager was not aware of any direct bench marking, however, the Fire Authority employed the same advisor as East Sussex County Council. The Finance Manager undertook to look into this further and report back to the Panel.

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RESOLVED: That the Panel notes:

1. the treasury management performance for the first half year of 2019/20.
2. that a further report on Treasury Management opportunities will be brought to the Authority in December.

16 Fuel Tank & Pump Replacement Project

The Panel considered a report from the ADR/T which sought approval of the full business case for the Fuel Tank and Pump Replacement Project. The project formed part of the blue light integrated transport function (ITF) to improve efficiency and effectiveness of operations across the Partnership. The proposed programme would deliver refuelling capability and also ensure safer, more resilient facilities that would meet environmental compliance.

The Panel asked about the alternative options and whether consideration had been given to the future of alternative fuels such as the installation of electric charging points. The CFO highlighted that the project benefited from £270,000 of funding from the ITF Partnership Fund and although there were alternative options, this would be stepping back from previous ITF decisions. With regards to the use of electric vehicles, this was being considered at a national level. The weight of fire appliances was currently a challenge and advances needed to be made in engineering technology for this to become viable. The draft Fleet Strategy did consider environmental factors and opportunities to utilise the benefits of national projects with regards to 'white fleet' vehicles would be considered as appropriate.

RESOLVED: That the Panel:

1. approves the revised business case for the East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service sites covered by the ITF fuel tank project, and;
2. notes the requirement to vary the existing Fuel Tanks scheme under the capital programme, increasing its gross capital cost to £400,000, against partner contributions / grant funding of £270,000 resulting in a net cost of £130,000, against existing £220,000 budget.

17 Estates Strategy Delivery Model Review

The Panel received a report from the ADR/T which outlined the challenges faced with regards to the delivery of the Estates Strategy and proposed a revised delivery model which looked to partner with Surrey and Sussex Police to bridge the necessary skill, resilience and agility gaps which existed currently.

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The Interim Estates Manager introduced the report highlighting that the proposals aimed to create a shift towards a more proactive approach to estates and facilities management and help to deliver the ambitious programme set out in the Estates Strategy. It was noted that ESFRS had been successfully working with Sussex Police in an informal partnership arrangement and that proposals sought to formalise arrangements.

The ACFO added that he recognised the positive impact of the secondment of the Interim Estates Manager from Sussex Police. The Chairman welcomed the move from a reactive to a proactive approach. The CFO echoed this sentiment and the importance of the partnership in terms of service delivery and providing ESFRS with the opportunity to access resources which were required on an ad-hoc basis.

The Finance Manager drew the Panel's attention to advice from the Procurement Manager that the usual tendering processes would not apply on this occasion as the arrangement was a public sector collaboration which was governed solely by considerations relating public interests and therefore the Hamburg exemption applied.

RESOLVED: That the Panel:

1. approves that ESFRS enter into formal agreement with Sussex Police & Surrey Police to agree collaboration of the Estates and Facilities services.
2. delegates authority for the AD Resources / Treasurer in consultation with the Deputy Monitoring Officer & the Chair of the Estates Strategy Delivery Board to put in place the necessary arrangements to establish the collaboration.
3. notes that, in accordance with East Sussex Fire Authority Contract Standing Orders (CSOs) 7.2, the Treasurer, after consultation with the Monitoring Officer, Procurement Manager and the relevant Member, has approved a waiver of CSO13.7-13.8 with regard to the provision of Estates & Facilities Management Services by Surrey & Sussex Police.

The meeting concluded at 12.16 pm

Signed

Chairman

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Dated this

day of

2019