

FIRE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of the FIRE AUTHORITY held at Council Chamber, County Hall, East Sussex County Council, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes at 10.00 am on Thursday, 9 January 2020.

Present: Councillors Galley (Chairman), Barnes, Dowling, Ebel, Evans, Hamilton, O'Keeffe, Peltzer Dunn, Powell, Pragnell, Scott, Sheppard, Taylor and Tutt and Wares

Also present: D Whittaker (Chief Fire Officer), M O'Brien (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), M Andrews (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), A Ghebre-Ghiorghis (Monitoring Officer), L Woodley (Deputy Monitoring Officer), D Savage (Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer), L Ridley (Assistant Director Planning & Improvement), H Scott-Youldon (Assistant Director People Services), R Fowler (Assistant Director Operational Support & Resilience), M Matthews (Assistant Director Safer Communities), K Pearce (ITG Manager), E Curtis (Communications & Marketing Manager), C Sharp (Project Manager), C Porter (Project Co-ordinator), Z Hiley (Democratic Services Officer), E Simpkin (Democratic Services Officer), S Neill (Group Manager), J Oliver (Finance)

Press & Public: M Shaw (Reporter), H Oxburgh (Local Democracy Reporter), F De Luc (Reporter), H Shapcott (Mott MacDonald), P Sutherland (Mott MacDonald), S Norton (ESFRS), S Ivatt (ESFRS), M Hunter (ESFRS), S Oakman (ESFRS)

50 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

51 Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Councillors Carolyn Lambert, Sarah Osborne, Andy Smith and Carol Theobald.

The Chairman welcomed Councillors Bowdler, Field, Swansborough and Wares who were attending as substitutes.

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

The Chairman advised that Members had been made aware of the deeply sad and untimely passing of Chris "Casper" Mephram who passed away at his home on Monday morning. Casper was well known within the East Sussex Fire & Rescue family and was a well-loved firefighter at White Watch, Bohemia Road, Hastings. The Fire Authority wished to record their heartfelt thoughts for Casper and to his wife Sarah and two daughters Esmae and Connie at this very sad time. A Minutes Silence was held as a mark of respect.

The Fire Authority welcomed its new Member, Councillor Ruth O'Keeffe. Councillor O'Keeffe joined following the resignation of Councillor Earl-

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Williams. On behalf of the Fire Authority, the Chairman extended thanks to Councillor Earl-Williams for her work on the Fire Authority.

53 To consider any public questions

The following questions were received from Members of the Public. All questioners would receive a written response to their question/s.

The questions and responses are included in these minutes as a matter of public record.

Public Question from Neal Martin of East Sussex Fire Control:

“How many times has Surrey Control been crewed below minimum crewing of 6 since West Sussex changed over?”

Response:

This information is not held by East Sussex, but we have spoken to Surrey about the matter. They acknowledge that within December, the first month of joint operations with WSFRS, crewing at their control room has been lower than optimum on some occasions. This is primarily a result of the need to train new operators that transferred from ESFRS to Surrey on their Capita Vision system and some short term sickness. Surrey are also actively recruiting for more control room operators at present. They are confident this will not be an issue going forwards.

Public Questions from Sue Ivatt on behalf of East Sussex Fire Control:

“If East decide to go to Surrey who will carry out the 450 (approx.) admin jobs we currently do now, as it has been confirmed by Surrey/West staff that admin jobs are not being carried out?”

Response:

The ESFRS crewing model proposed for the Surrey partnership option involves us retaining a small in-house team to manage administrative jobs in future. The scope of services performed by Surrey on behalf of WSFRS is a matter for them.

“We were informed that Surrey mobilising system can vary attendances for each service, this is not happening with West calls?”

Response:

This depends on the way in which Surrey and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Services have chosen to configure their mobilising systems, which we are not party to. As confirmed previously, the Surrey Capita Vision system does have the capability to apply different PDAs to differing geographic areas. If the FRA choose this solution, our aim remains to work with Surrey and West Sussex

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FRS in partnership to develop common and best practice Ways of Working across all three services over time.

“Are you aware of the amount of mobilisation failures that have occurred with West Sussex?”

Response:

Not directly. However we are in regular dialogue with West Sussex and Surrey and they are working through some technical and operational issues that have occurred in the first few weeks since their go-live – frankly much as ESFRS had a series of issues to work through following go-live of 4i in March 2018. In fact, similar to our experience, they have confirmed that some of these issues are not directly the mobilising system, but other weakness in WSFRS IT infrastructure (e.g. Station end equipment). Surrey and West Sussex have agreed to share all relevant learning from their experience to help minimise any similar occurrences if we moved to the Surrey model.

“Are you aware of the amount of Hazard reports that have been submitted by Haywards Heath alone?”

Response:

Not directly. However we have spoken to West Sussex about this matter and they have acknowledged receipt of a series of hazard reports from their Haywards Heath station in recent weeks. Most we understand relate to the same issue of mobile data terminals for Haywards Heath appliances not connecting properly, and the station is using the hazard reporting route to highlight each occurrence. They are working to resolve the issue, and as per Question 4 Surrey and West Sussex have agreed to share all relevant learning from their experience to help minimise any similar occurrences if we moved to Surrey.

“Are you aware mobilisation failure of a persons reported call, where 5 people were led to safety?”

Response:

Not specifically. Please see the answer provided to Question 4 above about mobilisation failures.

“Are you aware of wrong attendances being sent, i.e. Haywards Heath, Burgess Hill sent to an RTC in Eastbourne, Worthing being sent to a Fire Alarm call in Brighton? Local knowledge is very important, this will not happen if East go to Surrey.”

Response:

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Yes we are aware of these – they took place within the first couple of days of transfer of West Sussex control to Surrey. The Fire Alarm incident was a result of an AFA company incorrectly assuming that fire control for all of Sussex had transferred to Surrey. A degree of local knowledge would inherently be maintained via the transfer of existing ESFC staff to Surrey under TUPE should the recommended option be adopted, and that local knowledge will grow with time across all Surrey control staff. It is important to recognise that local knowledge resides in operational crews at local stations.

“Are you aware that the Surrey control has run at below minimum crewing for 2 services on a number of occasions?”

Response:

Please see the response to Question 1 about crewing levels at Surrey control. If we outsource to Surrey, call management and mobilisation times would form part of our service level agreement and Surrey would be responsible for crewing appropriately to meet these performance criteria.

Public Questions from Sean Fisk, Crew Manager B Watch on behalf of East Sussex Fire Control:

“Other than Lewes HQ have any other East Sussex sites been considered to hold a control room? For example Preston Circus FS, Hove FS or Training Centre at Maresfield (where 4i is already set up!)”

Response:

Yes. A standalone option on an ESFRS site other than Lewes HQ (e.g. Preston Circus) is in effect a duplicate/ alternative of the new Option 5 evaluated in the supplementary report to the Fire Authority - other than it would be on a different site. It therefore would not provide the potential inter-agency collaboration benefits afforded by co-locating with Sussex Police at Lewes HQ and also incur the additional costs of managing a site. The reasons for not recommending a standalone option are:

- It carries very significant risks – in particular a delay as we would need a new mobilising system which could not be delivered until mid-2023 due to procurement timescales.
- It is unaffordable - it is more than third more expensive than the Surrey partnering option (nearly £3.5m extra) and would not provide public tax payers best value and we already need to find savings elsewhere in our Medium Term Financial Plan.
- There is much greater opportunity to achieve important operational and collaboration benefits with other options.

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“Although we have been advised that current fire control can remain at Haywards Heath until May 2021, what is the likelihood of this date being brought forward, similar to West Sussex early departure?”

Response:

It is very unlikely that the date would be brought forward due to the volume of work required to transition to the new solution and the fact that the decision on which option to pursue is already 3 months later than first planned. The target date to implement the new solution remains April 2021 (not May), although the current lease for Haywards Heath that we have agreed with WSFRS would allow us to stay until September 2021 if that became necessary.

“If another joint control room in Surrey FRS is chosen what redeployment opportunities will be available for affected control room personnel?”

Response:

All personnel will contractually have full employment rights. Opportunities for re-deployment within ESFRS will be explored in full as part of the individual consultation process we will undertake, some of which may obviously necessitate retraining.

“What considerations have been made regarding transporting East Sussex staff to Surrey during extreme weather conditions, for example snow, ice or flooding?”

Response:

This will form part of Surrey FRS future business continuity plans. We will ensure that we are satisfied with these plans as part of any agreement to partner with Surrey.

“East Sussex promotes wellbeing for staff, but over time with the extra travelling staff will not feel valued, motivated, focused or even ‘well rested’ especially between night shifts.”

Response:

All partners involved are committed to the wellbeing of staff and all employers have a statutory duty in this respect under Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work Act. The distance from Haywards Heath to Surrey’s control room at Salfords is deemed to be reasonable in terms of staff relocation. We do value all our people and believe that there are some benefits associated with being part of a larger team.

“Having waited for almost 4 years for a new mobilising system would it not be better to further invest in the system to improve its performance (current

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57 Exclusion of the Press & Public

RESOLVED: That Agenda Items No. 35 and 36 be exempt under paragraph 3 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 following grounds: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

60 Project 21 Future Mobilising - Supplementary Report - Post Meeting Release

Members (17 in attendance during this section of the meeting) came to their decision after a series of votes on the following proposed motions:

Councillor Scott proposed the following motion –

“That the preferred option be Option 5 the stand alone ‘in-house’ control room at Lewes HQ utilising its own independently procured and maintained set of mobilising systems.

That ESFRS officers be instructed through the budgetary process to identify the required funding including the use of reserves to achieve the above Option 5.

Finally that the Chairman/Vice Chair and senior ESFRS officers continue to lobby the new government to secure adequate funding for ESFRS in the future.”

Votes: For - 5 Against - 12

Therefore the motion was not carried.

Councillor Barnes proposed a motion to consider the recommendations as set out in the ‘Project 21 Future Mobilising – Supplementary Report’.

Councillor Tutt proposed and Councillor Swansborough seconded an amendment to the above motion, to firstly re-consider the hybrid option with North West Fire Control Ltd (NWFC) – a co-located local control room with Sussex Police, and partner with NWFC for systems & fall-back.

Votes: For – 3 Against – 14

The amendment to the motion was therefore not carried.

The original motion to consider recommendations i, ii and iii as set out in the ‘Project 21 Future Mobilising – Supplementary Report’ was put forward to Members and was voted on as follows:

Votes: For – 9 Against – 5 Abstain – 3

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The motion was thereby carried and it was therefore -

RESOLVED: That the Authority:

- i. considered the Final Due Diligence Report from Mott MacDonald and the associated report by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer as previously presented to the Fire Authority, in parallel with the supplementary information provided in this report;
- ii. noted the recommendation from the Senior Leadership Team to the Fire Authority that Option 1 – partner with Surrey Fire & Rescue Service – remains the preferred option; and
- iii. approved that Option 1 – partner with Surrey Fire & Rescue Service be implemented by Project 21.

The meeting concluded at 12.30 pm

Signed

Chairman

Dated this

day of

2020