

EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of the POLICY & RESOURCES PANEL held at County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes at 10:00 hours on Thursday, 17 January 2019.

Members Present: Councillors Barnes, Elford, Scott and Tutt.

In attendance:

D Whittaker (Chief Fire Officer), M O'Brien (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), M Andrews (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), L Woodley (Deputy Monitoring Officer), D Savage (Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer), L Ridley (Assistant Director Planning & Improvement), M Matthews (Assistant Director Safer Communities), W Tricker (Finance Manager), N Cusack (Group Manager), A Blanshard (Senior Democratic Service Officer) and E Simpkin (Democratic Services Officer).

116 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

116.1 It was noted that, in relation to matters on the agenda, no participating Member had any interest to declare under the Fire Authority's Code of Conduct for Members.

117 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

117.1 Apologies had been received from Councillors Dowling, O'Quinn and Theobald.

118 NOTIFICATION OF ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND PROPOSES TO TAKE AT THE END OF THE AGENDA/CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

118.1 There were none.

119 MINUTES OF THE POLICY & RESOURCES PANEL MEETING HELD ON 1 NOVEMBER 2018

119.1 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy & Resources Panel held on 1 November 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (*Copy in Minute Book*)

120 CALLOVER

120.1 Members reserved the following items for debate:

122 Fire Authority Service Planning processes for 2019/20 and beyond – Revenue Budget 2019/20 and Capital Strategy 2019/20 to 2023/24

124 Safer Communities Strategy 2018–21

128 Lewes Fire Station – Proposals for Re-provisioning

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

121 REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING 2018/19

121.1 The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer (ADR/T) on issues arising from the monitoring of the 2018/19 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme as at 30 November 2018. (*Copy in Minute Book*)

121.2 **RESOLVED:** That the Panel notes:

- (i) the risks to and the projected Revenue Budget overspend;
- (ii) the risks to and the projected underspend in the current year's Capital Programme;
- (iii) the use of reserves;
- (iv) the shortfall in savings taken in 2018/19; and
- (v) the current year investments.

122 FIRE AUTHORITY SERVICE PLANNING PROCESSES FOR 2019/20 AND BEYOND – REVENUE BUDGET 2019/20 AND CAPITAL STRATEGY 2019/20 TO 2023/24

122.1 The Panel received a report from the ADR/T which presented the Fire Authority's draft Revenue Budget 2019/20, Capital Strategy 2019/20 – 2023/24 and Medium Term Finance Plan for 2019/20 – 2023/24 for initial consideration prior to its formal consideration by the Fire Authority at its meeting on 14 February 2019. (*Copy in Minute Book*)

122.2 The ADR/T highlighted that although based on the latest available information, the budget was still draft, pending the final Local Government Finance Settlement and council tax and business rate collection fund figures. The report presented proposals for a balanced revenue budget for 2019/20, however, there remained several uncertainties for funding in 2020/21 beyond which would require the Authority to remain flexible in its approach to financial planning. A Star Chamber budget setting process had been undertaken by the Senior Leadership Team in order to identify savings and contain budgetary pressures.

122.4 The ADR/T drew the Panel's attention to factors which had the potential to impact on the Authority's ability to deliver its budget plans beyond 2019/20 which included the outcome of Brexit, the uncertainty over future Government funding levels (including the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Fairer Funding review and proposals for the further localisation of business rates), the outcome of the ongoing national pay negotiations, changes to employer's pension contributions, the Government's relaxation of the 1% pay cap and the financial impact of the withdrawal of the West Sussex County Council from the Sussex Control Centre.

122.5 The Panel noted its support for the 2019/20 budget proposals, recognising the elements of risk and uncertainty, in particular those factors external to East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (ESFRS). Given the uncertainty, the Panel suggested that it would be useful for it to consider future medium term modeling, especially in the

area of staffing provision. Whilst supporting the proposed 2.94% increase in council tax, the Panel acknowledged the cumulative burden that people may be feeling over council tax increases.

122.6 The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) offered assurance with regards to progress being made on the implementation of an efficiency strategy, for example, the new Procurement Strategy had delivered savings for Protective Personal Equipment, fuel and fleet. The CFO also stressed the importance of considering new income strands and alternative funding sources in collaboration with partner agencies such as bids to local development funds, Section 106 agreement funds and Community Infrastructure Levy funds. The CFO welcomed the Panel's involvement in a more detailed look at future budgetary and resource proposals and encouraged Members, as a collective, to be aware of alternative funding sources which may be of interest to ESFRS.

122.7 The Panel asked for clarification on the public consultation which had been carried out on the proposals and noted that public consultation on the Integrated Risk Management Plan 2017-2020 (as reported to the Fire Authority on 8 December 2018) had informed the budget strategy. Statutory consultation on the budget proposals had been undertaken with local authority chief executives, business groups and staff representative bodies. Public consultation would always be carried out on specific or material service proposals.

122.8 **RESOLVED:** That the Panel:

1. Notes that:

- (a) the multi-year settlement as set out in the Local Government Finance Settlement is only provisional at this stage and may be subject to change; and
- (b) the final council tax and business rate bases and the collection fund positions are still awaited and that final budget proposals may change once this information is received;

2. Recommends that the Fire Authority, subject to any changes as a result of recommendation 1, approves:

- (a) an increase in council tax of 2.94% and thus approves:
 - (i) the budget proposals set out in this Report and the net budget requirement of £39.003m for 2019/20;
 - (ii) the council tax requirement of £27.198m; and
 - (iii) the council tax and precepts as set out in Appendix F.
- (b) the capital programme for the next five years and the capital budget of £6.728m for 2019/20 and the plans to use capital grant, capital receipts and revenue contributions to finance capital expenditure;
- (c) the reduction in the minimum level of General Reserves to 6% of the net revenue budget;

- (d) the fees and charges set out in Appendix C; and
- (e) that the Chief Fire Officer, after consultation with the Chairman and Treasurer, be authorised to make any adjustments to the presentation of the budget to reflect the final Local Government Finance Settlement.

123 EAST SUSSEX FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE ESTATES STRATEGY 2018 - 2025

- 123.1 The Panel received a report from the ADR/T on the Authority's new Estates Strategy for comment prior to its consideration by the Fire Authority. (*Copy in Minute Book*)
- 123.2 **RESOLVED:** That the Panel noted the Estates Strategy prior to its submission to the Fire Authority in February for approval.

124 SAFER COMMUNITIES STRATEGY 2018-21

- 124.1 The Panel received a report from the Assistant Director Safer Communities (ADSC) introducing the revised Safer Communities Strategy 2018-21 which supported the delivery of both Community and Business Safety. The report proposed the adoption of the revised Strategy which now covered both Community and Business Safety. (*Copy in Minute Book*)
- 124.2 The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) introduced the report, explaining that the amendment to the strategy to include business safety would further ensure community safety and the best use of resources by bringing together prevention and protection into one strategy.
- 124.3 The ADSC gave a presentation the strategy and its implementation (see agenda pages 171 – 177). The Panel noted that the Strategy would enable the delivery of statutory duties through a blended approach of community engagement, inspection and enforcement, allowing the service to be both reactive and proactive in its approach. Frontline staff would deliver proactive audits and local engagement activities based on an annual assessment of risk and clear outcomes would be monitored through monthly returns.
- 124.4 The Panel commended the Strategy, welcoming in particular the business safety inspection regime and looked forward to seeing the outcomes of its implementation.
- 124.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Panel approves:
1. the revisions to the current Community Safety Strategy and the strategic approach to prevention and protection provision being more closely aligned around an annual assessment of risk that drives locally based resources with critical support being provided by centrally based specialist teams; and
 2. the adoption of the Safer Communities Strategy 2018-21.

125 LEWES FIRE STATION – PROPOSALS FOR RE-PROVISIONING

- 125.1 The Panel considered a report from the ADR/T on the latest proposals to relocate Lewes Fire Station as part of the Lewes North Street Quarter Redevelopment Scheme. (*Copy in Minute Book*)
- 125.2 The report had, with agreement by the Chairman, been circulated as a supplementary to the original agenda as a matter of urgency in accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 as an agreement to the proposed relocation was required by Lewes District Council (LDC) by March 2019.
- 125.3 The ADR/T introduced the report, explaining that proposals to relocate the station were part of the ongoing North Street Quarter development project. Lewes Fire Station was the last site in the redevelopment area requiring vacant possession. In 2016 an agreement in principle had been made between ESFRS and LDC for the Springman House site as the preferred relocation site (see appendix B of the report). The site offered the potential to consider a collaborative approach with both Sussex Police and South East Coast Ambulance Service (SECAmb). However, whilst Springman House remained the preferred option, more recently LDC had developed a series of options to include a hotel as part of any redevelopment of the site in order to ensure the broader financial sustainability of the development. This had raised some concerns regarding the site's ability to fulfil operational requirements. Following discussions with all partners, officers now felt that whilst it included some compromises (namely for ESFRS, the lack of public frontage and agreement to relocate provision for talent and occupational health elsewhere in Lewes) the proposal as set out in appendix E to the report, offered an operationally effective solution. Officers were now seeking approval of the scheme in principle in order to continue work towards more detailed agreements. Heads of Terms, disposal of site and detailed financial implications would be put to the full Fire Authority for final approval.
- 125.4 The Panel discussed the financial implications of the plans and noted that it was expected that some costs would be incurred for project management and the fitting out of the station, for example. The ADR/T assured the Panel that whilst the full financial implications were not yet known, officers would seek to achieve the best outcome reasonably achievable for the Authority. The broader benefits of the project included reduced running costs, improved provision for training, contaminant separation and flood defences. The Panel welcomed assurances that the scheme would not compromise operational integrity, training facilities or safety in terms of access and egress from the site and looked forward to receiving more detailed financial considerations and agreements.
- 125.5 **RESOLVED:** That the Panel agrees:
1. the proposed scheme design noting the compromises that have been made by the Service;
 2. that further discussions take place with Lewes District Council to develop Heads of Terms; and

