

ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service



ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUTHORITY HELD ON WEDNESDAY 11 FEBRUARY 2009 AT 10:00 HOURS

Present:

Councillor B Archibald	Councillor D W Morris
Councillor S Barker	Councillor R Pearson
Councillor K Bobbin	Councillor C Riley
Councillor L J Double	Councillor J Roberts
Councillor C W Finn	Councillor T C Smith-Hughes
Councillor I A D Gale	Councillor J Spencer
Councillor I Harrison	Councillor R Walters
Councillor A M Hedley (Chairman)	Councillor P Wexham
Councillor A E Holland (Vice-Chairman)	Councillor D White
Councillor E Johnson	Councillor J Young
Councillor L Lee	

The following Officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Chief Fire Officer David Johnson
Deputy Chief Fire Officer Mark Jones
Finance Director & Treasurer Mike Clayton
Director of HR & Workforce Planning, Richard Hopper
Assistant Chief Fire Officer Adam Eckley
Assistant Chief Fire Officer Gordon Hunter
Clerk & Deputy Monitoring Officer, Richard Curtis

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTION NOTICES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Howard, MacPherson, Reeves and Webster.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by Members in respect of items included on the agenda.

Councillor Bobbin subsequently declared an interest in item 14, he is a member of the Animal Welfare League.

3. MINUTES

The Authority received the minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2008.

Resolved:

That the minutes be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. POLICY & STRATEGY COMMITTEE – MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 JANUARY 2009

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy & Strategy Committee held on 14 January 2009 were received.

5. CHALLENGE & INNOVATION COMMITTEE – MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 JANUARY 2009

The minutes of the meeting of the Challenge & Innovation Committee held on 14 January 2009 were received.

6. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman advised Members of the following items:

2 February 2009 – National Fire Sprinkler Network Seminar

The Chairman regretted that he had been unable to attend due to ill health; an Officer had attended the event.

2 February 2009 – Meeting of the National Olympic Security Oversight Group

This meeting was cancelled due to bad weather conditions.

6 February 2009 – LGA Fire Forum

The Vice-Chairman had attended the above and minutes would be available in the Members' Room at Kelvedon Park and at <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/1624840>.

FireBreak Pass Outs

The Chairman advised that he had attended five FireBreak pass outs. He congratulated Officers on their work with young people.

23 January 2009 – Opening of Linx Youth Engagement Centre

The Chairman advised the opening of the new academy which had also been attended by Angela Smith, the MP for Basildon and formerly the Fire Minister; Mrs Smith continued to take an interest in the Fire Service. The Chairman referred to the hard work and dedication of Stn O Trevillion who had initiated the project and won community support for the scheme; he recommended Authority Members visit the centre.

Chief Fire Officer's meeting with FBU

The Chairman had been invited to attend a meeting with the Chief Fire Officer and FBU members regarding the implementation of IRMP intentions. The Chairman referred to the joint communications Members had received from himself and the Chief Fire Officer regarding discussions with the FBU; he was happy to answer any Fire Authority Members' requests for additional information.

Further the Chief Fire Officer advised that the Service had held 14 meetings with the FBU and had been receptive to suggestions. The Chief Fire Officer that he would continue to keep Members informed of progress on how the FBU intended to work with the Authority to deliver.

Flood Calls – County Wide Flooding 10-11 February 2009

The Chairman advised Members that during the previous day the Service had answered 275 flood related calls and asked the Chief Fire Officer for the latest update. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the number of calls had since risen to 340; flexi officers had prioritised incidents for the 100 appliances around the county;

five people had been rescued and up to 40 people had been assisted. Control had received two flood warnings that morning. There had been no reported injuries and the crews and Control had done an excellent job in demanding circumstances.

Councillor Double sent thanks and congratulations to the crews who had worked tirelessly for people in need.

Councillor Barker asked if there had been any lessons learned from the bad weather flooding. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Service had implemented the planning drawn up should the Thames barrier be closed, and would review the exercise.

7. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICE HEADQUARTERS & SERVICE TRAINING CENTRE – KELVEDON PARK

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/020/09 presented the Policy & Strategy Committee's recommendation for the further development of Kelvedon Park.

Councillor Johnson was of the view that option 5 of the Business case seemed to resolve all issues except that of carbonaceous fire training. ACFO Eckley advised that it would be possible to move the carbonaceous fire training from Wethersfield Training Centre to Kelvedon Park but that proximity to the A12 required design solutions at a price that had been judged cost prohibitive. Councillor Johnson referred to the secondary site access, he asked if there was an issue with the property's neighbours. Councillor Double commented that one of the site's neighbours was up for sale affording an opportunity to buy it and route an access back to the nearest roundabout; he was of the view that this would offer a quicker opportunity to make secondary access available than an access point at the back of the site. Councillor Lee agreed that travelling back to the roundabout enabled access to other routes via Kelvedon village. ACFO Eckley confirmed that a road back to the roundabout would be one of the alternatives considered in option 5. The Chairman agreed Councillor Barker's request that the Authority, not the Policy & Strategy Committee would be asked to agree location of the secondary access.

Councillor Lee said that from day one the Authority had intended to fully develop the Kelvedon Park site and that there was no need to deviate from its original decision. As the timeline advanced the economic situation might change and the secondary access had always been programmed.

Councillor Double asked if there had been any consideration of moving Braintree fire station to Kelvedon Park since in his view it was more accessible, further he said that during the current financial crisis the Government had put more money into the country's infrastructure for the purpose of employment and he suggested that the Authority apply to Go East for funding which may be supported by Government offers.

Councillor Roberts asked if any difficulties were foreseen on planning consents. ACFO Eckley advised that extant planning was available for almost the entirety of option 5 (excepting the training building).

Councillor Smith-Hughes reaffirmed the original cross party vision of the Authority; he said that it had been envisaged in a different financial climate and with the prospect of a regional FiReControl, but it was important to keep the vision, he was happy to approve the recommendation.

Resolved:

That Members approved Option 5 (Page 7 – EFA/001/09) – ‘Vacate Hutton and fully develop the site by extending the ‘glass’ building, seeking building regulation approval for a stand-alone building and constructing new operational training facilities’ – as the Fire Authority’s preferred option for the further development of Kelvedon Park.

8. TREASURER’S REPORT ON THE BUDGET 2009-10

The Authority received the Finance Director & Treasurer’s report EFA/021/09 which provided a review on the budget 2009-10.

Resolved:

That Members noted the report and would have regard to it in approving the budget for 2009/10.

9. BUDGET 2009-10

The Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Director and Treasurer’s report EFA/022/09 provided an update on the revenue and capital budget position for the Authority in the current financial year; reported the financial information on the formula grant settlement; made recommendations on the revenue and capital budget, and on the Council Tax and precept requirements for 2009/10.

Councillor Morris said that £64.62 (the Band D Council Tax) represented remarkable value to the householder.

Councillor Barker and Councillor Smith-Hughes requested that in future the Authority receive analysis of the support staff budget. Councillor Smith-Hughes was of the view that it was a good budget, good value for money; inclusive of implications for the future and the medium term, and forecasting for pensions; it was manageable for now and that any requirement for capital finance for projects would come to the Authority for approval. Councillor Smith-Hughes fully supported the budget.

Councillor Lee referred to frontline staff numbers; he expressed concern that managed vacancies could lead to increased overtime costs. The Chief Fire Officer said that there would be no reliance on overtime to crew appliances. He advised Members that the establishment level was the notional number of firefighter posts calculated to fully crew all appliances alongside maximum demands on personnel due to annual leave, sickness etc., that it was an old fashioned business model; and that the decision of the Authority to cease primary crewing of Aerial Ladder Platforms would increase the availability of appliances. Speaking from his professional perspective the Chief Fire Officer had a commitment to ensure public safety; to reduce risk to firefighters by ensuring that they were available to undertake hot firefighter training at required intervals, and to fulfil his direction from the Authority to reduce costs to the taxpayer. The Chief Fire Officer had placed discussion of crewing systems on the programme for the Members’ Business meeting scheduled for April 2009. Councillor Double shared Councillor Lee’s sentiments, but although he did not want to see a reduction in firefighters he did want to see firefighters

employed in different ways. Councillor Double was of the view that when whole-time crews were not at full complement they could be mixed with retained staff and was of the opinion that two crewing systems turning out to an incident on two different appliances was defending the indefensible; in the 21st century the Authority should be showing that the way it organised was the most efficient way it could. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the establishment figure had been calculated at a ratio of 1.4 to every firefighter post because the FBU had previously disbarred firefighters from overtime working, many firefighters wanted to earn extra money by working overtime and it had since been re-introduced by the Grey Book. The Chairman referred to an upcoming CFOA seminar about 'Flexible Working in the UK Fire and Rescue Service' Authority Members were invited to attend.

Councillor Barker asked about the borrowing rate. The Finance Director & Treasurer advised that currently the rate was 4.5%, the PWLB rate was 4% for borrowing of 17 years or so, with short term borrowing at 2.5%. Councillor Barker asked how often the rate was reviewed and the penalties considered for early repayment. The Finance Director & Treasurer advised that an exercise would be carried out in March with plans to take advantage of current low rates for short term borrowing for the Authority's capital expenditure.

Resolved:

That the revenue and capital budgets for 2009/10 be approved:

	2008/09	2009/10
Net Expenditure	£70,666k	£73,096k
Increase from 2008/09		£2,430k
Precept	£39,560k	£41,285k
Band D Council Tax	£62.28	£64.62
Increase from 2008/09		3.76%

1. A net expenditure budget of £73.096m;
2. A precept of £41.285m;
3. A Band D council tax of £64.62 (an increase of £2.34, 3.76%)
4. The bands of Council Tax are shown in the following table.

Band	2008/09 £	2009/10 £
A	£41.52	£43.08
B	£48.44	£50.26
C	£55.36	£57.44
D	£62.28	£64.62
E	£76.12	£78.98
F	£89.96	£93.34
G	£103.80	£107.70
H	£124.56	£129.24

5. Capital expenditure budget (net) of £10.968m in 2009/10.

10. PRUDENTIAL FRAMEWORK FOR CAPITAL FINANCE AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/023/09 provided an update on 2008/09 and proposed prudential indicators and treasury management strategy for 2009/10.

Councillor Smith-Hughes referred to the Authority's investment in the money market in accordance with a strict lending list; he suggested that the Authority had a responsibility to appraise the criteria for inclusion on the list.

Resolved:

That the:

1. treasury management position for 2008/09 be noted;
2. performance against the prudential indicators for 2008/09 be noted;
3. treasury management strategy for 2009/10 be approved;
4. 2009/10 prudential indicators outlined in Annex A be approved; and
5. calculation of the minimum revenue provision using the Capital Financing Requirement Method (4%) for the balance of the capital financing requirement as at 31 March 2009 and for Government Supported borrowing in 2009/10 and the Depreciation Method for the balance of assets purchased in 2009/10

11. ESSEX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE DISCIPLINE CASES 2008

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/024/09 reported on formal discipline cases held in 2008.

At the enquiry of Councillor Lee, the Director of Workforce Development confirmed that the dismissal of an employee on the grounds of failure to comply with proof of eligibility to work in the UK, had been as a result of the Service's verification process. He advised Councillor Barker that disciplinary action had been taken against a range of staff encompassing support and uniformed staff.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

12. ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE COMMITMENT – THE NOTTINGHAM DECLARATION

The Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/025/09 detailed the Challenge & Innovation Committee's recommendation that the Authority commit to signing the Nottingham Declaration.

The Vice-Chairman advised Members of the work being carried out by the Challenge & Innovation Environment Task & Finish Group. During a visit to Battersea fire station Members had found it beneficial to hear of some of London Fire Brigade's experiences in its work to increase environmental performance.

Councillor Young was pleased to see that her suggestion to sign up to the Nottingham Declaration had been followed up and suggested that the Authority publicise its positive agreement. Councillor Walters endorsed signing the agreement; he said that it sent out the right message.

Resolved:

That Members committed to signing the Nottingham Declaration and to include this within the annual revision of the Environmental Strategy and Action Plan.

13. PROPERTY STANDARDS FOR ESSEX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/026/09 summarised the work undertaken by the Challenge & Innovation Property Standards Task & Finish Group. Members were asked to consider the Challenge & Innovation Committee's recommendations in relation to the further development of property related standards for ECFRS' property portfolio.

Councillor Double, Chairman of the Challenge & Innovation Committee said that the report demonstrated Members' involvement in the activities of the Fire Authority and was pleased to see Members' comments incorporated in the report. Councillor Double thanked ECFRS Officers particularly SDO Paul Hill and his manager ACFO Eckley for their helpful support to the Committee.

Councillor Riley was pleased to have visited different stations; it had opened his eyes to the diversity of properties.

Councillor Archibald sought reassurance that before expenditure realistic assessments were made of properties for their future in the Fire Authority portfolio. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that fire stations needed to be sited where operationally required.

Councillor Lee commended the report. Councillor Harrison said that he had been very impressed by the resource centre he had recently visited at Corringham.

The Chairman thanked the Challenge & Innovation Committee for the report.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Acknowledged the excellent work completed by the Property Standards TFG.
2. Approved that the current property related standard should continue to be used as the basis for future Property Asset Management plans.
3. Approved that the development of community facilities on ECFRS sites should be supported for shared service delivery with other local government organisations, Parish Councils and the co-location of Ambulance staff and Police Community Support Officers, where appropriate, subject to the following:
 - a. That this must be based upon an identified community need in the area.
 - b. That there must be a clear understanding of future ECFRS objectives before entering into any such partnership.

4. Approved that, in circumstances where ECFRS continues to manage residential property within its portfolio, existing standards for residential property should be utilised, e.g. Decent Homes Standard and Eco Homes Standards.
5. Approved that the principle of utilising a Joint Venture Company approach to the development of individual sites and/or the property portfolio more widely is supported subject to reassurances that this activity was not deemed to be Ultra Vires.
6. Approved that there should be a more explicit link between the Property Asset Management plan and future IRMP's especially where there is evidence of fire stations that are no longer 'fit for purpose' due to their location.

14. LARGE ANIMAL RESCUE CAPABILITY FOR ECFRS

Members received Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/027/09 which set out the recommendations of the Challenge & Innovation Committee for the establishment of a specialist capability for large animal rescue.

Councillor Young asked if the Service was looking to a service agreement with the NHS in order that a new off road vehicle could be utilised for the safe movement of bariatric people. ACFO Hunter advised that the Service had a Memorandum of Understanding with the NHS reference bariatric patients.

Councillor Archibald said that he had reservations, he was of the view that animal rescue was not a function of a Fire & Rescue Service and that if animals were in a bad situation it was up to the owners to look after them; he was also of the opinion that the care of large persons was not something to be lodged with the Fire Authority but the NHS. He was not satisfied that the report had looked at the full implications. The Chief Fire Officer said that he could not guarantee never to ask staff to rescue animals, for example large animals could be a factor in the rescue work required at an RTC incident; and it was known that people often reacted emotively and perhaps inappropriately to animals in danger which then put them at risk and that the Service was legally bound to provide training and equipment for safe systems of work. Councillor Walters agreed that owners would put themselves in severe danger to save an animal and that providing the service prevented further threat to life, he was of the view that the Service should have proper equipment to carry out animal rescue.

Councillor Morris said that he did not have a problem with the Fire & Rescue Service saving animals but queried whether drivers' insurance companies should be charged for animals rescued during transit.

Councillor Barker asked where the capability would be located, ACFO Eckley advised that animal rescues had been mapped over the years and it would be sited to best suit requirement.

Councillor Double was of the view that the capability procured for large animal rescue would make a positive contribution; the 80 or large animal rescues carried out each year put firefighters at risk using Moffat Mounties perhaps on uneven rural land and operating slings. Councillor Double advised Members of the additional capabilities of the vehicle which included wide water wading and cutting equipment. He said that the expectations placed on the Service were greater than ever and that this piece of kit would make Essex a more modern Fire & Rescue Service.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Acknowledge the excellent work completed by the Large Animal Rescue TFG
2. Approve that, given the nature of the risks associated with this activity and the reality that not providing the service is an unrealistic option, it should support the establishment of a specialist capability for large animal rescue for utilisation by Essex County Fire & Rescue Service.
3. Note that further analysis is required of the specialist training requirements for staff undertaking large animal rescue.
4. Note that further analysis is required of the specialist equipment requirements for staff undertaking large animal rescue.

15. OPERATIONAL INCIDENTS REPORT APRIL TO DECEMBER 2008

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/028/09 provided Members with information on the number and type of operational incidents the Service had attended April to December 2008. The report included briefings of three notable incidents.

Councillor Riley, Lead Member Safer Communities, was pleased that when compared to the previous year the figures showed a reduction in RTCs, hoax calls and deliberate fires; the reduction he felt could be attributed to the Service's numerous community safety initiatives. Councillor Riley encouraged Members to seek the support of partners and increase funding. Councillor Smith-Hughes agreed that the information contained in the report demonstrated the importance of preventative work.

When referring to the incidents summarised in the report the Authority noted that although a smoke detector had activated in a property occupied by elderly residents they had not escaped the fire; at its committee meeting in December 2008 the Authority had agreed its stance that certain property types should have fixed protection sprinkler systems installed.

Councillor Young asked if the Service had publicised information about the risk of unswept chimneys, ACFO Hunter advised that Safer Communities themed its community safety messages month by month and that having chimneys swept appeared in its schedule.

The Chairman referred to the account of a fire in a timber reclamation yard, he had been concerned that the accumulation of recycling during the economic downturn increased potential for large fires. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Service was working with site owners to reduce fire risk.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

16. MINUTES OF REGIONAL MANAGEMENT BOARD (RMB) MEETING – MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 JANUARY 2009

The minutes were not available and this item was withdrawn.

17. REPORT TO CONSTITUENT AUTHORITIES

That the following items comprise the report to the Constituent Authorities:

- 1 Budget 2009-10
- 2 Operational Incident of Notable Interest – Fire in a Timber Reclamation Yard

Signed
Chairman, 22 April 2009

