

ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND STRATEGY COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 14 JANUARY 2009 AT 10:00 HOURS

Present: Councillor B Archibald
Councillor I Harrison
Councillor A M Hedley (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs A E Holland (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor L M Lee
Councillor D W Morris
Councillor R A Pearson
Councillor T C Smith-Hughes

The following Officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Chief Fire Officer D Johnson
Deputy Chief Fire Officer M Jones
Finance Director & Treasurer M Clayton
Director of HR & Workforce Planning, R Hopper
Assistant Chief Fire Officer A Eckley
Assistant Chief Fire Officer G Hunter
Assistant Chief Fire Officer S Thomson
Senior Divisional Officer P Bowers
Clerk & Deputy Monitoring Officer, Richard Curtis

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bobbin and Webster.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

3. MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2008.

Resolved:

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

4. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICE HEADQUARTERS AND SERVICE TRAINING CENTRE- KELVEDON PARK

Members considered report EFA/001/09 by the Chief Fire Officer which presented options from the business case for the further development of the Authority's Headquarters at Kelvedon Park. Councillor Morris was of the view that the options should be considered with regards to what would be best for the Fire Authority in the longer term rather than the short

term; that facilities were currently spread over a number of sites and that he favoured the Kelvedon Park site for all.

Councillor Lee referred to the perilous state of the current economy, he asked what should happen to Control if it did not progress to a regional site. ACFO Eckley advised that the auditorium proposed in option 5 could be used as an interim Control facility or alternatively option 5 presented an opportunity for a more permanent building which would have the capability to accommodate Control. In response to Councillor Lee's enquiry ACFO Eckley confirmed that a new access road was included in options 2d, 4 and 5.

Councillor Smith-Hughes was of the view that what was important was that this project was not just seen as a new Service Headquarters but Training facilities, Control and so on and thus had wider benefits. Councillor Smith-Hughes said it was important that the Authority had taken stock because of the economic situation and that it was important to progress the Kelvedon Park scheme despite possible external pressures, to go ahead and use the Lead Members ensuring their higher level involvement.

Councillor Smith-Hughes further stated that he had been worried about affordability but that it had shown quite well, on page 9 of the report, that the proposal did not reflect a significant burden. He had been concerned that development would have required significant cuts but that it did not seem to be the situation; he further said that it was important to be aware of the financial constraints required in order to achieve your aim and that this would be beneficial.

With reference to the Investment Decision Gateways proposed in the report Councillor Smith-Hughes proposed assurance that "gateways would make decisions in principle, financial decisions would be taken to the Fire Authority for overall agreement and decision". Councillor Smith-Hughes was of the view that the project would require significant efficiencies but the Authority did not want to go beyond efficiencies into cuts. It was made clear that separation had to be made between changes that could impact on the Service and the decision to develop Kelvedon Park. Whilst they may occur simultaneously one may not be the driver for the other and whilst to some this may appear to be the case it should not prevent sensible business decisions being made.

The Finance Director & Treasurer referred to the Revenue Implications contained on page 10 of the report. The principal sensitivity was that of interest rates. The baseline figures used an interest rate of 4%. At the time of writing the report this was the same as PWB rate for 17 year loans with lower rates for shorter term loans. The Finance Director & Treasurer said that the Authority would have to find savings for option 5 but that if it was not impossible, that it may have to cease doing some things in order for the new headquarters to be developed but in the longer term development would bring about more savings.

The Vice-Chairman said that the Authority should remain faithful to its original decision, be bold and go for option 5. The Vice-Chairman favoured the contingency for a temporary Control Room and the phased development project could always be slowed down in further years.

Councillor Archibald said that he would like to continue with the scheme as it had been started; however according to financial commentators there was every indication that the recession had not yet hit the bottom of the dip, he was of the opinion that the funding of the project should be in stages, the Authority would not want to finish up with a situation that in order to finance the project it could be criticised for cutting into basic provision. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer agreed that the recession was not yet at the bottom of the dip and that timing was critical, however commercial property prices would bounce and the construction of the Crossrail terminal at Shenfield would have an effect on the value of the Hutton site, he was of the view development should be in chunks and reap the benefit of any future property bounce. Councillor Archibald said that house builders were sitting on large land banks and

speculated whether a house builder would be prepared to purchase the Hutton site with a long term view.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the project would progress with a careful eye on the economy. He advised Members that the budget for service delivery was distinct from that required for Kelvedon Park development; changes that the Service may make should be seen as good business decisions.

Councillor Lee was of the view that the report had contained a representation of the worst case scenario but shown that it was achievable. Councillor Smith-Hughes affirmed support of option 5 with the proviso that the Authority needed to make efficiency savings.

The Committee was of the view that the minutes should reflect that a great deal of thought had been given to the item and that when reported to the Fire Authority those who had not been present at that day's meeting should give the matter the same level of deliberation.

Members thanked ACFO Eckley for his report and presentation.

On the proposal of Councillor Lee seconded by Councillor Morris it was Resolved that Members determined option 5 contained in report EFA/001/09 be recommended to the Fire Authority.

It was further Resolved that Members:

1. Endorsed the vision statement for the Fire Authority's headquarters and Service Training Centre;
2. Agreed the success measures for the further development of Kelvedon Park should this be the preferred option of the Fire Authority, and;
3. Agreed that Lead Members become the Fire Authority's representatives on the Programme Board for the further development of Kelvedon Park should this be the preferred option of the Fire Authority.

5. 2009 PEOPLE STRATEGY

Report EFA/002/09 by the Chief Fire Officer provided Members with the People Strategy 2009.

The Director of Workforce & Development thanked Councillor Roberts of the Challenge & Innovation Committee in his absence for identifying a typographical error in the Strategy, he advised that paragraph 2.1.7 should read as follows, "*Success will be achieved by working closely with partners and challenging established practice to promote race, gender and disability **equality**.....*"

Councillor Smith-Hughes endorsed the Strategy but queried whether population diversity, from a population of 1.6m could be mirrored in a workforce of under 1,000, he suggested that paragraph 2.1.7 could be revised as follows: "*.....to create a diverse workforce that **better** reflects the social demographics of the Essex population*". The Director of Workforce & Development confirmed that the Service was required to reflect the community but not mathematically replicate it.

It was agreed that photographs contained in the Strategy should also feature support staff.

The Chairman advised that he had recently circulated to Lead Members a letter from Sadiq Khan MP regarding an additional capital grant of £2m in total to Fire and Rescue Authorities provided as an incentive to achieve recruitment targets for females in operational roles and minority ethnic staff; it was anticipated that ECFRS would receive approximately £40k of the funding.

Resolved:

That Members agreed the Strategy:

6. BUDGET 2009-10

The Chief Fire Officer and The Finance Director & Treasurer's report EFA/003/09 provided for 2009-10, an initial view on the revenue and capital budgets, the latest information on the formula grant settlement and a proposed level of Council Tax and precept requirements in the light of the latest data on the tax base.

It was confirmed that the Authority had received extra grant funding from Government for capital expenditure; £2m had now been made available for premises improvement.

The Finance Director & Treasurer advised that the figures referred to in the Council Tax Base table on page 22 were forecasted by Government; the Service had receive indications from district councils of a 0.6% growth in tax base.

Councillor Smith-Hughes referred to a typographical error on page 23 of the report, the opening paragraph is revised as follows, "*The potential funding gap of £234k*".

Councillor Smith-Hughes was of the opinion that the report achieved the right sort of balance with a programme of efficiency savings that would protect and enhance the Service. He asked that in future all staff numbers could be included in establishment figures relayed to the Authority not just wholetime firefighters.

The Chief Fire Officer responded to Councillor Smith-Hughes' request regarding staff numbers; he advised that the establishment figures for whole-time uniformed staff had been based on a ratio of 1.4 persons for every job in order to allow a degree of flexibility to cover sickness, holidays etc., the ratio had been introduced at a time when Firefighters were disbarred from working overtime by the Fire Brigade's Union. The Chief Fire Officer was of the view that the Service should now look at the workforce as a whole. Councillor Lee was concerned that in 2004 the establishment had been increased in order to counter overtime costs, he suggested that the situation was reversing and could return to large increases in overtime payments. The Chief Fire Officer advised the Committee that 1.4 persons for every post assumed that all demands on the Service would be at maximum all the time; that it was sensible in terms of a modern business process for postings not necessarily to be filled at a ratio of 1.4. The Chief Fire Officer did not want the workforce fully on overtime but equally the current system was old fashioned, and to change it could be to the Authority's benefit.

Resolved:

That Members approved the revenue and capital budgets for 2009-10 for submission to the full Authority meeting on 11 February 2009:

	2008/09	2009/10
Net Expenditure	£70,666k	£73,060k
Increase from 2008/09		£2,394k
Precept	£39,560k	£41,304k
Band D Council Tax	£62.28	£64.62
Increase from 2008/09		3.76%

- A net expenditure budget of £73.06m;
- A precept of £41.304m;
- A Band D council tax of £64.62 (an increase of £2.34, 3.76%)
- 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

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

7. STRATEGY FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/004/09 sought Members' approval for the proposed Safer Communities Policy Statement and presented the Service's Delivery Strategy.

The Chairman advised Members of his attendance at FireBreak Pass Out parades and of the upcoming opening of the Barstable school.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer referred to the Service's work with young people and the support received from the Authority; he advised that the Service continued to endeavour to reach other vulnerable groups such as the elderly.

Councillor Smith-Hughes enquired about statistics related to avoidable fatalities, the Chief Fire Officer advised that no standard definition of an avoidable fatality was available. The Chief Fire Officer suggested that a report be brought to a future Authority meeting in order that the criteria of an avoidable/unavoidable death could be considered.

Councillor Pearson had high praise for Firefighters who had attended at a recent fatal incident in Great Wakering and worked closely with the public thereafter.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Agreed to adopt the proposed policy
2. Noted the Service's delivery strategy

8. MUTUAL AID AGREEMENT – ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY AND STANSTED AIRPORT LIMITED

The Committee received report EFA/005/09 by the Chief Fire Officer which sought Members' approval for a Mutual Aid Agreement between the Authority and Stansted Airport Limited. At the meeting Members noted the amended paragraph 'Use of Resources', as follows:

"The Service's recommendation supports the Authority's corporate strategy in that by working more closely with Stansted Airport Limited the Service is fulfilling its objective to Work More Effectively with Partners. The outcome of the mutual aid agreement also contributes to the Service's intention to Improving the Way We work by responding to emergencies speedily and effectively."

Resolved:

That Members approved the Mutual Aid Agreement.

9. DEPUTY DIRECTOR – WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/006/09 proposed the alignment of the Workforce Development Structure with other directorates in order to establish a consistent organisational structure.

At the meeting Members noted a revision to the opening sentence of the Financial Implications paragraph, *"The Service has been maintaining a budgeted resource of 6 Area Managers"*

Resolved:

That Members agreed to:

1. Reduce the uniformed establishment of ECFRS by one Group Manager (GM) post.
2. Increase the uniformed establishment of ECFRS by one Area Manager (AM) post.

10. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY – STRATEGIC BUSINESS REQUIREMENTS

Report EFA/007/09 by the Chief Fire Officer contained a presentation of the Strategic Business Requirements for Information Technology (IT); Members were asked to approve the document as the basis for the development of the IT Strategy.

Councillor Lee was of the view that it was good to see the report as previously IT had been an area where the Authority had not scored well when assessed by the Audit Commission.

ACFO Eckley confirmed that the Strategy would be brought to Members in March 09. Councillor Smith-Hughes requested that the Committee received monitoring reports regarding delivery of the Strategy alongside reports monitoring the IT Transformation programme.

Resolved:

That Members approved the Strategic Business Requirements as the basis for the development of the required IT Strategy.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REPORT AND REVISED ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

Members received the Environmental Performance Report and the Revised Environmental Strategy and Action Plan in report EFA/008/09.

The Vice-Chairman and Environmental Champion advised the Committee of the large amount of work required to produce the report. Councillor Smith-Hughes welcomed the report and congratulated all involved.

The Vice-Chairman referred to a recent visit to a London Fire Brigade station arranged on behalf of the Challenge & Innovation Task & Finish Group, the visit was undertaken by herself and Councillor Reeves. The Vice-Chairman had been interested to learn from London Fire Brigade that only large wind turbines performed and double glazing was not cost effective.

Councillor Smith-Hughes referred to appendix 3 of the Performance Report, it was noted that in general electricity consumption at fire stations had fallen in 2008 when compared to 2007, however Chelmsford Fire Station had shown an increase in electricity consumption during summer 2008; it was acknowledged that this may have been due to the use of power tools during extensive renovation work. The Vice-Chairman advised that London Fire Brigade had organised a competition to reduce energy consumption with a prize to a charity chosen by the winning station.

Councillor Lee suggested that in the development of Kelvedon Park general waste could be reduced by the installation of an anaerobic digestion plant and that flat roofs on the extensions could collect water for the lavatory system; he was of the opinion that wind turbines were not very efficient although the wind turbine at Lexden was considered fairly efficient.

Councillor Archibald's point of view was that he would not support tokenism; he said that the construction of a wind turbine had implications for the environment and that the Authority could not afford to spend money on environmental schemes just to say that it had done it so, he had doubts about capital expenditure on ground heat pumps, wind turbines etc. ACFO Eckley advised Members that Officers examined the full life costs of environmental schemes, he added that the data collected from the ten sites featured in the report was monitored and actions taken locally.

Resolved:

That Members noted the Environmental Performance Report and the revised Environmental Strategy and Action Plan.

12. MONITORING IT TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME – PROGRESS REPORT 3

The Committee received Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/010/09 which provided an update on the progress of the Information Technology Transformation Programme.

Councillor Smith-Hughes enquired if Officers were confident of delivery. ACFO Eckley affirmed that he was confident, he advised that Hedra had experienced resource conflict and as a result had brought in more resources; activity was therefore spread over a longer period but had invoked financial penalty. Councillor Smith-Hughes was pleased that the programme was working well and closely monitored with real benefits to users to be rolled out as quickly as possible. ACFO Eckley advised Members of an anticipated £6m of benefits by 2011 with Hedra to identify extra benefits thereafter at a cost of £1 to the Authority for every £40 of benefit received. Councillor Smith-Hughes stressed that benefits should be tangible. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer reassured Members of a good and professional contract with the consultants.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

The meeting ended at 11:50 hours.

Signed

Chairman

25 March 2009