

# ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY



## MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND STRATEGY COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 17 MARCH 2010 AT 10:00 HOURS

### Present:

Councillor K Bentley  
Councillor R Callender  
Councillor I Harrison  
Councillor A M Hedley (Chairman)  
Councillor Mrs A E Holland (Vice-Chairman)  
Councillor D W Morris  
Councillor T C Smith-Hughes  
Councillor A Turrell  
Councillor E Webster

The following Officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Chief Fire Officer D Johnson  
Deputy Chief Fire Officer A Eckley  
Finance Director & Treasurer M Clayton  
Director of HR & Workforce Planning, R Hopper  
Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Stewart Thomson  
Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer, R Curtis  
Senior Divisional Officer, P Hill  
Minute Taker, T Adams

### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Pearson.

### 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 13 January 2010.

### Resolved:

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

### 4. FINANCIAL AND PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/031/10 asked Members to approve the adoption of the revised Financial & Procurement Regulations.

Councillor Smith-Hughes advised Members that the Authority had reviewed the financial limits some years earlier, they remained appropriate and there was no need to change them.

**Resolved:**

That Members approved the adoption of the revised Financial and Procurement Regulations.

**5. REVIEW OF FORECAST OUTTURN 2009/10**

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/032/10 reported on the management accounts for the ten months to 31 January 2010 and the outturn position for the year.

Councillor Smith-Hughes said that he was very happy with the recommendations, that the Service was making economies; he added that he anticipated there would be difficult budget settlements over the next few years. Councillor Smith-Hughes said that the contribution to reserves now looked likely to increase from £1.1m to £1.9m largely because of the reduction in spending on staffing. Councillor Smith-Hughes said that since the number of firefighters was reducing faster than forecast it was important to recruit another squad, he added that the ongoing industrial action had not had an adverse effect which proved that the Service did not require those resources. The Chief Fire Officer advised that formerly the number of firefighters would decrease by a fixed number before recruitment of a full squad so there was a lag between the first and last person leaving before appointment of new recruits; that now as firefighters left the Service others were brought in. The Chief Fire Officer advised the passing out of a squad in the previous month and he confirmed that another squad was planned to pass out in July/August 2010, he said that firefighter numbers were monitored on a regular basis.

Councillor Smith-Hughes asked if the Authority should be potentially concerned about the downward trend in the numbers of retained firefighters and he enquired as to the take up of the extra hour's training activity. The Chief Fire Officer advised that there were no significant concerns at the moment regarding the number of retained firefighters, although it would be preferable to remain at 100% the numbers fluctuated, he added that retained firefighters were talented people with experience and as such often transferred to whole-time status. Referring to the additional training available to retained staff the Chief Fire Officer advised that in his view and supported by the Director of Workforce and Development it would not be beneficial to assign the additional hours equitably to all retained staff, it would be preferred if Commanders allocated additional training to those who demonstrated the highest developmental need. The Chief Fire Officer added that at the end of a 12 month period of BA training the Service would review uptake against outcomes. Councillor Smith-Hughes said that it had been some time before February 2010 that a recruit squad had been employed. The Chairman advised Members that Essex had trained recruits from North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service alongside the latest squad, he said that Officers from that Service had spoken very highly of the training. The Vice-Chairman enquired about retained training, the Director of Workforce & Development advised that the training mirrored whole-time but over a more protracted period, this was because retained staff could not generally give the same time commitment because of their core employments.

**Resolved:**

That Members:

1. Agreed to carry forward £60k of expenditure on Breathing Apparatus into 2010/11 and
2. Agreed to increase the capital expenditure budget to £14,060k

## 6. SPEED OF RESPONSE

Report EFA/033/10 by the Chief Fire Officer set out proposals for a revised methodology for recording and reporting of operational speeds of response.

The Chairman was of the view that the subject was not always understood by the public but nevertheless an emotive issue, having looked at the details of the proposals he was happy with the recommendations.

Councillor Bentley asked if the Authority had been setting targets too high, he felt that anyone looking at the current performance data could infer that the Fire Service in Essex was failing. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the concept used to set targets had been based on data which the Audit Commission's data cleansing had later revealed as flawed. The Chairman said that the Authority should always set gold standard targets. Councillor Smith-Hughes agreed with Councillor Bentley, he said that although the report contained explanation as to why the current standards were unattainable some parts of the report taken in isolation could imply that management information would be discarded. Councillor Smith-Hughes enquired about other fire services, he said that there was a need for comparison - was traffic worsening everywhere and how long was it taking for calls to get through, was it a case that all Services' performance had worsened. SDO Hill advised Members that for the purpose of future planning there was a requirement to take control of the reporting standard, he said that it impacted on many other items, in referring to benchmarking against other Services, SDO Hill said that he could not guarantee that they were keeping the same data. Councillor Bentley reiterated that in his view the Authority should set high targets but that they should be achievable and realistic.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed the Service would still report attendance times against performance targets.

The Chairman referred to the Equality Bill introduced by Harriet Harman, Leader of the House of Commons and Minister for Women & Equality, he said that enactment of the Bill would require Chief Fire Officers to target resources to areas of socio-economic disadvantage, it was a serious subject to look at in terms of risk profiling. The Chairman said that in terms of rationalisation Rayleigh Weir was a first class station that had replaced two others.

The Chief Fire Officer advised the Committee of a document published by the CLG 'Review of Fire & Rescue Response Times – Fire Research Series 1/2009' which contained the information that there had been a 14% increase in traffic levels, and a 3% decrease in the number of pumps over a ten year period, he said there had been no association between fewer pumps and response times, which had been more than offset by community safety activity, the Chief Fire Officer said that he was of the view that the answer was not to have to move fire stations to deprived areas but to increase levels of community safety activities to reduce incidents in the first instance.

### **Resolved:**

That Members:

1. Approved a change to the Service's attendance standards and approved the performance measures:
  - a) Call to alert, and
  - b) Alert to mobilise

*(as described in Table 1 of report EFA/033/10)*
2. Approved priority groups against which performance will be measured.

*(as highlighted in blue in appendix 2 of report EFA/033/10)*

## **7. PROPERTY ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN - PROGRESS REPORT AND REVISED ACTION PLAN**

The Committee received Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/034/10 which presented the second annual review of the Property Asset Management Plan, the progress report 2009/10 and revised action plan 2010/11.

In response to Councillor Smith-Hughes' enquiry DCFO Eckley confirmed that the maintenance budget for 2010/11 would be similar to 2009/10 and had been provided for in the capital budget. Councillor Smith-Hughes referred to the target date of item 1b in the table on page 18 of the Property Asset Management Plan, DCFO Eckley advised that this item was still subject to the influence of the Property Asset Management Group.

Councillor Morris enquired if construction of the Rayleigh Weir fire station would provide the blue print for any new builds, DCFO Eckley said that there was potential provided the land of the new build would be of similar size, he added that historically the County Council had built retained stations to a similar design. The Chairman said that the private/public partnership of Rayleigh Weir Community Fire Station had been a success, it would be good to reproduce that model, he added that the Fire Service was embedded in the community and the public held a lot of affection for it.

### **Resolved:**

That Members noted the contents of the report.

## **8. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME – PROGRESS REPORT 9**

Members received Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/035/10 which provided an update on the progress of the Information Technology Transformation Programme.

Councillor Smith-Hughes said that the programme was very much on track, that success implied the elimination of risk with longer term financial paybacks, he asked for a reminder on how the benefits (not all financial) would be reported back to the Authority. DCFO Eckley advised that as the IT Transformation Programme closed down the financial benefits would be reported against the plan, he said that programme leads were aware of the responsibility to deliver benefits. DCFO Eckley said he anticipated that at the next meeting he would advise the closure of the core infrastructure programme.

### **Resolved:**

That Members noted the contents of the report.

## **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### **Chairman's Charity Dinner**

The Chairman advised Members of the Chairman's Charity Dinner on 4 June 2010 at Stock Brook Manor for Down Syndrome extra 21, tickets were available at £35 with £10 of the ticket price going straight to the very worthy cause.

**9. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

That the public (including the Press) be excluded from the meeting during consideration of minute no. 21 on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in paragraph 4 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

**10. PERSONAL IMPACT OF PENSION REGULATION CHANGES**

No uniformed members of ECFRS' Senior Management Board were present for this item.

The Monitoring Officer and Clerk's report EFA/036/10 referred to a drafting anomaly in the recently introduced changes to the pension scheme.

**Resolved:**

That Members confirmed that the current incumbent of the post referred to in report EFA/036/10 would be allowed to retire on completion of thirty years service if he chose to do so notwithstanding that he would not then have attained the age of 55 and to amend his contract of employment accordingly.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 19 May 2010

Signed .....  
Chairman.....19 May 2010