

ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND STRATEGY COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 22 JULY 2009 AT 10:00 HOURS

Present:

Councillor R Callender
Councillor I Harrison
Councillor A M Hedley (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs A E Holland (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor D W Morris
Councillor R A Pearson
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 M Jones
Finance Director & Treasurer M Clayton
Assistant Chief Fire Officer A Eckley

23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bentley.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

25. WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Callender and Councillor Turrell to the Committee.

26. POTENTIAL FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION

The Chairman referred to a recent meeting with Lord Hanningfield, the Chief Fire Officer and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer regarding the potential for industrial action. The Chief Fire Officer advised that he had explained the facts surrounding the FBU ballot; the meeting had been very positive.

The Chief Fire Officer advised the Committee that the FBU ballot had been less than clear about the proposed forms of industrial action, although it had not been strike action. The result of the ballot would be known on or near 31 July 09. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the FBU was bound by national agreement framework and that therefore it must give ECFRS seven days notice of any intended action. The Chief Fire Officer advised that if the outcome of the ballot was in favour of industrial action the public would not see any change in the service provided, it would be business as usual.

27. MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2009.

Resolved:

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

28. PRUDENTIAL FRAMEWORK FOR CAPITAL FINANCE AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT- OUTTURN 2008/09 AND UPDATED 2009/10 INDICATORS

In accordance with the requirements of the Prudential Code the Finance Director & Treasurer's report EFA/071/09 reported on the Authority's performance in 2008/09 and asked Members to approve updated indicators for 2009/10.

Councillor Smith-Hughes' view was that the report was a clear elucidation of the potential impact of the capital programme on the council tax. He said that it was important to note that individual projects would be placed before the Authority for decision about their affordability, that there would be significant pressures on the revenue budget and that Members would look carefully at expenditure when projects came forward.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Noted the treasury management outturn position for 2008/09;
2. Noted the performance against the prudential indicators for 2008/09;
3. Approved the updated 2009/10 prudential indicators outlined in Annex A of report EFA/071/09

29. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) STRATEGY

Report EFA/072/09 by the Chief Fire Officer sought the Committee's approval for the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Strategy for 2009-14. The Chairman thanked ACFO Eckley and his team for the work in bringing the report to the Committee, in his view it was amongst the best of reports in terms of strategy and a good way forward.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Noted the contents of the draft ICT Strategy (attached as Appendix C to report EFA/072/09), which described Essex Fire Authority's proposed strategy and plan for meeting its Strategic Business Requirements for ICT over the next five years.
2. Noted the contents of the report, which summarised the background to the ICT Strategy, the overall costs and benefits of implementing the strategy, the changes required to ICT capital and revenue budgets and the governance arrangements that would be used to oversee its implementation.
3. Approved the following:
 - a. The ICT Strategy;
 - b. The delivery of the ICT Strategy based upon Option 3;
 - c. The changes required to capital and revenue budgets;
 - d. Any changes required to the threshold for Authority approval of ICT projects.
 - e. The reporting framework for monitoring the delivery of the ICT Strategy.

30. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICE WORKSHOPS- LEXDEN

Members considered Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/073/09 which presented options for the further development of the Authority's Workshops at Lexden.

Councillor Smith-Hughes said that it was a comprehensive report and it was prudent to look at the options, it was a significant amount of expenditure. He was happy to support the review. Lead Members would be the Authority's representatives on the programme board but the Committee or the full Authority would make decisions. Councillor Smith-Hughes referred to the opportunities for intra and inter Service collaborative working, he said that it was encouraging that the Service had engaged in discussions with other organisations. The Chairman said that he hoped for more than the 'Do Minimal' option, that it was an important piece of work to get on with. He assured Members that proposals would be brought back to the Committee for decision.

Resolved:

That Members agreed:

1. That in the light of the ongoing opportunities for Intra and Inter Service collaboration (pages 10 and 11 of report EFA/073/09 refer) Members supported a review of the options outlined for the further development of Service Workshops for the purpose of determining which option to recommend to the Fire Authority at some future date.
2. The success measures for the further development of Service Workshops (page 11 of report EFA/073/09 referred).
3. That Lead Members become the Fire Authority's representatives on the Programme Board for the further development of Service Workshops, using if appropriate, the existing Kelvedon Park Development Programme Board as the mechanism to achieve this.

31. CONSULTATION ON FREEDOMS AND FLEXIBILITIES – TRADING POWERS

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/074/09 provided a draft response to the consultation by the Department of Communities and Local Government on the Authority's powers to trade and other freedoms and flexibilities. The Finance Director & Treasurer advised the Committee that he understood that EFA (T) Ltd had no wish to respond to the consultation.

Resolved:

That Members agreed the response contained in annex 2 of report EFA/074/09.

32. RE-EMPLOYMENT OF FIREFIGHTERS

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/075/09 sought the Committee's approval regarding the treatment of firefighters who have reached a minimum of 30 years service.

Councillor Smith-Hughes clarified that the report referred to personnel who voluntarily retired after 30 years service. Councillor Callender enquired if there was a compulsory leaving age for uniformed personnel. The Chief Fire Officer advised that it was age 55 for firefighters.

Resolved:

That Members agreed not to permit members of the FPS (1992) who reach the minimum pension age with sufficient years of service to retire, draw his/her pension and any commuted lump sum, and be re-employed immediately into the role of an operational firefighter.

33. POSITIVE CREWING REQUIREMENTS AND STRATEGIC CREWING RESERVE

Members considered Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/076/09 regarding the principle of a Positive Crewing Requirement and Strategic Crewing Reserve.

The Chairman was of the view that the move was long overdue and needed to be made; it would retain the popular 2-2-4 shift system.

Councillor Smith-Hughes said that other Fire Authorities were looking to change shift systems, but that on exploration Essex had identified little financial benefit. However the current resourcing model was out of date with a lot of capacity that could be better used and some change was required. Councillor Smith-Hughes approved the change in principle; he said that the Authority would make the decision when more detail was available.

The Vice-Chairman said that many companies used a bank system and that to change was a move forward.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that importantly the 2-2-4 shift system was exceptionally family friendly and that there would be no cashable efficiency were the shift system to change, that when discussing the potential change with station personnel they had been receptive to the principle.

Resolved:

That:

1. Members agreed to introduce the principle of a Positive Crewing Requirement and Strategic Crewing Reserve
2. A full report on the outcomes of this report would be brought to the next Fire Authority

34. INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (IRMP)

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/077/09 asked Members to review progress against the 2009-12 IRMP. Councillor Smith-Hughes said that it was useful to have a brief update on the intentions and he was comfortable with the position.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Agreed to maintain the 2009-12 IRMP and associated action plan as the current plan with no new plan produced for the period 2010-13
2. Reviewed progress against the agreed IRMP intentions for 2009-12
3. Supported a further review of the IRMP in 2010 for the period 2011-14 with a view to including a new action plan of business intentions.

35. DATA, MANAGEMENT, POLICY, STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/078/09 appraised Members of the progress made against the Data Management Policy, Strategy and Action Plan 2008-11.

Councillor Pearson said that a lot of work had gone into Data Management and the future looked good.

In response to Councillor Smith-Hughes enquiry SDO Fleming advised that the assessment and reporting referred to in paragraph 2 of page 2 related to Comprehensive Area Assessment.

Resolved:

That Members noted:

1. the revised policy document for Essex Fire Authority.
2. the action plan developed to help deliver the data policy objectives.
3. the progress made against Data Management within ECFRS.

36. PARTNERSHIP, POLICY, STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN

The Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/079/09 updated the Committee on progress against the partnership governance arrangements within the Service. The partnership register was published on the internet and intranet and was an outfacing dynamic document.

Councillor Smith-Hughes was happy with the partnership arrangements. He enquired if the database could be interrogated, e.g. to look at CDRPs generically. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that there was a singular approach to directly analyse the efficacy of partnerships. It was acknowledged that some CDRPs were more successful than others, the Chairman said that the Authority was dependent on the enthusiasm of the partner. The Vice-Chairman and Councillor Smith-Hughes highlighted the importance of Community Command Liaison Members being made aware of CDRP meeting dates.

Resolved:

That Members noted:

1. the updated governance arrangements for partnership working in ECFRS.
2. the extent of partnership working within ECFRS.

37. MONITORING IT TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

Report EFA/080/09 by the Chief Fire Officer provided Members with an update on the progress of the Information Technology Transformation programme. ACFO Eckley advised that Members would receive progress reports regarding the financial benefits of the programme.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

38. PROPERTY PERFORMANCE REPORT

Report EFA/081/09 by the Chief Fire Officer presented the first annual Property Performance Report. The Chairman advised that on visiting Weeley Fire Station, personnel had said how much they appreciated the internal upgrade. Councillor Smith-Hughes said that it was very reassuring to have the report information.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

39. HELICOPTOR FEASIBILITY STUDY

The Chief Fire Officer thanked the Vice-Chairman and DO Ashley for their work in producing report EFA/082/09. The report informed Members of the findings from the feasibility study.

The Vice-Chairman said that she had learned a lot about helicopters during the composition of the feasibility report, that there was a way forward and other brigades were looking at Essex regarding emergency and flood rescue, in the future there could be different ways of doing things.

Councillor Smith-Hughes noted that development of the helicopter project would not be on a wave of frontline cuts and was partly related to Essex's positioning.

The Committee was advised that Sir Ken Knight, the Government's Chief Fire & Rescue Adviser was keen for Essex to continue its project. The Chief Fire Officer advised that he was scheduled to meet with Sir Ken Knight, Eurocopter and other chief officers in September 2009, and that a decision was anticipated in summer 2010 regarding the national project. The Chief Fire Officer advised Members of the annual USAR cost in Essex at £940k, he said that USAR may receive one call per month, a helicopter in mainstream daily use would maximise the USAR capability.

Councillor Pearson said that he supported the project, he asked the Chief Fire Officer for greater detail of the helicopter role at fires. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the predominant use of a helicopter would be to respond to RTCs, chemical incidents and other non-fire emergencies, that the major benefit of a helicopter would be its speedy response to specialist rescue.

Councillor Callender said that the Thames gateway was a reason to have a helicopter capability, he then enquired about its potential for offshore rescue if required in Essex shipping lanes. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the Government had an established scheme for marine rescue. Councillor Callender asked if there would be a role for the helicopter to run alongside the Marine Incident Response Group, the Chief Fire Officer advised that the FBU disbarred its members from going offshore.

Councillor Webster said that she had observed an increase in the use of the air ambulance, that it could be seen responding on an almost daily occurrence. The use of a helicopter during the 2012 Olympics could build a path to the eventual acquirement of helicopter capability; Councillor Webster was in favour of the project subject to the stipulations contained in the report.

The Committee were of the opinion that the resolutions were the next small step along a very long journey to full helicopter capacity, predicated on external funding

Resolved:

That Members supported the following:

1. The availability of external funding sources such as Government grant and sponsorship be explored as a means of developing the helicopter project;
2. Contingency planning arrangements within Operation Gian incorporate the availability of a helicopter as part of the operational response to RTCs and other emergencies across the County in the event of a substantial loss of members of the workforce;
3. Due to the ability of a helicopter to provide wide area operational cover with minimal crewing and equipment resources, ECFRS looks to incorporate a helicopter response into the pre-planned operational response to the 2012 Olympic Games;
4. ECFRS meet with the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) over the next year to secure what form of Air Operators' Certificate (AOC) the FRS could operate under, what easements were required, how the risks would be mitigated to a level compliant with the standards of the Safety Regulatory Group; or whether the FRS will be classified as "State" aircraft;

5. The Service seeking to secure funding for the cost of the consultations with the CAA, necessary to secure the details of an FRSAOC, and the commissioning of a consultant necessary for the production of an operations manual from external sources, such as Olympic funding, CLG, CFOA, (estimated costs circa £50,000).

40. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 23 September 2009

Signed