

# ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY



## MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND STRATEGY COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 25 MARCH 2009 AT 10:00 HOURS

**Present:** Councillor B Archibald  
Councillor K Bobbin  
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  
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  
Director of HR & Workforce Planning, R Hopper  
Assistant Chief Fire Officer S Thomson  
Senior Divisional Officer P Hill  
Clerk & Deputy Monitoring Officer, Richard Curtis

### 13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Harrison.

### 14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

### 15. MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2009.

#### **Resolved:**

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

### 16. FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Members were advised that Chief Fire Officers report EFA/030/09 had been withdrawn and would be submitted to the next meeting of the Authority following receipt of legal advice.

## **17. REVIEW OF FORECAST OUTTURN**

The Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/031/09 provided summary information on the management accounts for the ten months to 31 January 2009 and reviewed the forecast outturn for the year to 31 March 2009.

The Vice-Chairman referred to the roll out of new uniform and enquired whether the old one would be donated to charity, the Finance Director & Treasurer advised that the Service was exploring disposal and would report back.

Councillor Archibald referred to the additional costs incurred by the contractor during construction of Rayleigh Weir's roof. The Finance Director & Treasurer confirmed that the Authority, Architect and contractor were in negotiation where costs should be borne; it was not anticipated that the Authority would be asked to pay the additional amount.

Councillor Morris enquired if John Dennis had given a reason for the delay in delivery of appliances. ACFO Eckley advised that the Authority had been disappointed to be informed of the delay in February about slippage from March; he was investigating reasons for the delay through FiReBuy. The Finance Director & Treasurer was of the view that it highlighted one of the reasons why it was important in the long term to retain at least two UK based body builders and thus ensure a competitive market. Councillor Smith-Hughes was of the view that it was unacceptable that the delay had occurred and that the Authority had been informed at such a late stage. The Chairman asked when delayed appliances were expected, the Finance Director & Treasurer advised that deliveries were expected in April, May and June, some would be as much as three months late.

Councillor Smith-Hughes queried the requirement to increase the minimum revenue provision even though the Authority had spent less in the current year. The Finance Director & Treasurer advised that the full impact of the change in the minimum revenue provision rules had not been allowed for. Councillor Smith-Hughes accepted that it was not additional monies.

Councillor Smith-Hughes said that it was encouraging to see that there was more money than had been thought with an 850k underspend; that with a £600k minimum revenue provision one could argue that the Authority was approximately £1m better off. The Finance Director & Treasurer referred to Members' agreement to fund the IT Transformation programme from reserves; on the basis that this requirement would be minimised. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the underspend had been a result of the robust stance that managers had taken in relation to budgets.

### **Resolved:**

That Members agreed to the

1. Virement of £110k of training costs from 2008/09 into 2009/10;
2. Virement of £145k uniform costs from 2008/09 into 2009/10; and
3. Reduction in the capital budget by £2,000k and for the transfer of £1,090k of budget provision from vehicles to buildings (Rayleigh Weir)

## **18. IT EFFECTIVENESS BLUEPRINT 2009-13**

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/032/09 presented Members with the IT Effectiveness Blueprint for approval.

Councillor Smith-Hughes said that it was a useful document. The Committee discussed how the Authority would monitor implementation of the blueprint. The Chief Fire Officer gave his assurance to report on a regular basis until completion.

Councillor Lee said that it was pleasing to see that the Authority would be beyond where it should be with all Service personnel trained in IT; that it was good news.

**Resolved:**

That Members:

1. Noted the content of the IT Effectiveness Blueprint, as a statement of where ECFRS aspire to be in June 2013 and December 2009.
2. Approved the document as basis for monitoring the progress of the ECFRS and the IT Transformation programme towards achieving these aspirations.

## **19. MONITORING IT TRANSFORMATION PROGRESS – PROGRESS REPORT 4**

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/033/09 provided Members with an update on the progress of the IT Transformation programme.

The Chairman reminded Members of the concerns previously expressed by the Audit Commission regarding IT.

**Resolved:**

That Members noted the contents of the report.

## **20. PROPERTY ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN – PROGRESS REPORT AND REVISED ACTION PLAN**

The Committee received Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/034/09; it presented the first annual review of the Property Asset management Plan and a revised Property Asset Management Plan for 2009/10.

Councillor Lee enquired if there was a priority list of stations requiring refurbishment. SDO Hill advised that the report's prioritisation would be used to inform decision. Councillor Lee was of the view that some stations did not need to be at the top of the list and could provide a large capital return if sold to pay for refurbishment of others. The Chairman referred to a geographical review of station locations which would identify if a station was where it should be and also advised that part of the agenda of the upcoming IRMP would look at disposition of resources.

Councillor Bobbin asked about financial factors given the current economic situation. The Chairman referred to his attendance at the recent LGA Fire Conference; he said that during two presentations, given by the LSE and Sadiq Khan MP, the message had been clear that the government settlement would be tight, in effect a potential negative increase. The Chief Fire Officer advised of a potential that the comprehensive spending review would be brought forward by a year and that this could lead to a decrease in what had originally been planned. A -2% grant would equate to -4.6% reduction to the Authority; it would affect future plans. The Chief Fire Officer advised the Committee that he would be informed by Member support and guidance in relation to a sliding scale of efficiencies to be discussed at the business planning event scheduled for 27 April 09.

**Resolved:**

That Members noted the contents of the report.

## **21. POTENTIAL FOR REDUNDANCY**

Report EFA/035/09 notified Members of a potential support staff redundancy situation arising from the restructure of the IT Department.

**Resolved:**

That Members endorsed the position.

**22. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Chairman advised that he would be looking to arrange an additional meeting of the Policy & Strategy Committee sometime between the Local Government Elections and September 09.

Signed .....