



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
POLICY AND STRATEGY COMMITTEE
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 23 JANUARY 2008 AT 10:00 HOURS**

Present:

Councillor K Bobbin
Councillor Mrs A E Holland
Councillor D W Morris
Councillor R A Pearson
Councillor T C Smith-Hughes
Councillor S M Walsh (Chairman)

44. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Archibald.

45. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

46. MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2007.

Resolved:

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

47. QUARTER 3 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

The Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/001/08 reported on the management accounts for the nine months to 31 December 2008 and provided a forecast outturn for the year to 31 March 2008 and sought Member's views on the reduction of the transfer to reserves.

The report identified an overspend for employment costs which had been offset by savings in other areas resulting in an underspend of £37k in December and included £53k of higher costs attributable to the allowance for continued professional development introduced in 2007. It also identified other variances on pensions costs and an increase in the depreciation charge which was offset by a credit on the asset management account.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Agreed that the transfer to Reserves should be reduced by £53k to offset the higher costs of the introduction of an allowance for continued professional development;

2. Agreed to defer a decision on whether the transfer to reserves should be reduced to partially offset the higher costs of the Pensions costs to a future meeting subject to the provision of further financial information by the Treasurer to lead members.
3. Agreed a reduction in the overall capital budget by £2.2m to £15.759m.
4. Members noted the contents of the report.

48. BUDGET 2008-09

Chief Fire Officers report (EFA/0002/08) provided an initial outline on the revenue and capital budget positions for the Authority in the current financial year and reported the latest information on the formula grant settlement for 2008/09 and sought Member's approval on the proposed level of Council Tax and precept requirements for 2008/09 be approved for submission to the full Authority meeting on 13 February 2008.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Approved the revenue and capital budgets for 2008/09 for submission to the full Authority meeting on 13 February 2008;
2. Confirmed the transfer of £1.2m from the earmarked reserve for capital expenditure to the Capital finance Used account.

49. PEOPLE STRATEGY

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/003/08 presented the People Strategy for 2008. Councillor Walsh thanked the Director of Workforce Development for all his work on the report.

Members noted that the paper provides high level strategic direction for the Workforce Development Directorate and sets the people strategy for the Service. The Director of Workforce Development advised that the People Strategy will be revised annually to reflect revisions.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Accepted the strategy for the forthcoming year.

50. PROPERTY ASSET MANAGEMENT POLICY, STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/004/08 presented the draft Property Asset Management Policy, Strategy & Action Plan. The committee agreed to adopt the following Property Asset Management Policy statement:

'The principal aim of Essex Fire Authority is to 'save and protect lives, property and the environment'. The Essex Fire Authority is committed to ensuring that the property portfolio is appropriate and fit for purpose'

Members noted that Item 1i on page 14 of the report should be altered following consultation through the IRMP process: three geographical area reviews would be undertaken in the next year December 2008.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that the Property Asset Management Policy, Strategy and Action Plan is subject to continuous review and will be presented to Committee Annually.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Approved the adoption of the Property Asset Management Policy statement by Essex Fire Authority.
2. Agreed that the Property Asset Management Strategy and Action Plan contributes towards meeting the Property Asset Management Policy objectives.
3. Agreed to form a central sub-committee to review acceptable property standards to be maintained by EFA. RCA and OGC guidance will be sought during the review.

51. ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY RESPONSE TO CLG "EQUALITY & DIVERSITY STRATEGY 2008-18" CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/005/08 presented a response to the CLG consultation document 'Fire & Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy; 2010'. Members thanked the Director of Workforce Development for his work on the response.

Councillor Walsh advised that there were national concerns over the CLG consultation document.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Agreed that the response to the CLG document provided an appropriate Authority response.

52. ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY RESPONSE TO CLG "A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE" CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/006/08 presented a response to the CLG consultation document 'A Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service'. Members thanked the Director of Workforce Development for his work on the response.

Members were advised that SMB were considering a request from CLG to contribute funding to the maintenance of the Centre of Excellence and Firebuy for the forthcoming financial year. A report would be presented to the Policy and Strategy Committee in March

Councillor Holland advised that a number of Authorities are agreeable to paying the contribution.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Agreed that the response to the CLG document provided an appropriate Authority response.

53. EFA RESPONSE TO THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK 2008-11 CONSULTATION

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/007/08 presented a response to the Government's consultation on a new National Fire and Rescue Framework for 2008-2011.

Members noted that proposed responses are included for each chapter and also for the general introductory section of the document.

Resolved:

That Members:

2. Agreed that the response to the Government's consultation provided an appropriate Authority response and agreed for its submission accompanied by a letter from the Chairman.

54. ANY OTHER PART 1 BUSINESS

Members received a report from the Chief Fire Officer EFA/015/08 which was considered as a matter of urgency by the Chairman. Following the tragic deaths of four fire fighters in November 2007, Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority were issued with an Improvement Notice.

The report provided assurance to Members in respect of arrangements in place within Essex County Fire and Rescue Service pertaining to those issues identified in both the improvement Notice issued to Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority and subsequent published information from the Health and Safety Executive and Warwickshire Police.

Resolved:

That Members:

3. Noted the contents of the report.

The meeting ended at 11:30 hours.

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Signed by Chairman
Councillor S M Walsh