



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE POLICY AND STRATEGY COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2008 AT 10:00 HOURS

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

82. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor B Archibald and Councillor E Webster.

83. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

84. MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2008.

Resolved:

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

85. QUARTER 1 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

Report EFA/107/08 by the Finance Director & Treasurer reported on the Quarter 1 Management Accounts 2008/09.

Members noted the underspend related to firefighters on the retained duty system, resultant from the continued impact of improved management controls introduced in 07/08. The Finance Director & Treasurer advised that overspend amongst support staff primarily related to the increased use of temporary staff prior to the move to Kelvedon Park and that restrictions in June and July 08 on the employment of temporary staff had produced a saving against budget. The report proposed a virement for Kelvedon Park rates from the property maintenance budget.

With reference to the heading 'Other Employee Costs' in Appendix 1 to the report Members were advised that this item referred to Occupational Health and HR support costs.

It was agreed that subsequent budget profiling reports to the Committee would include explanations of significant underspend and overspend variances in order to provide assurance to Members that budgets were on track.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Noted the report; and
2. Agreed a budget virement of £116k between property maintenance and rates.

86. ESSEX FIRE AUTHORITY – ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REPORT FROM THE AUDIT COMMISSION

Report EFA/108/08 by the Finance Director & Treasurer contained the Audit Commission's report on the draft annual governance 2007/08 accounts. The Chairman introduced Mr Paul King; a representative of the Auditors who had been invited to attend the meeting.

The Committee referred to the number of risks identified within the report; Mr King, was of the view that in the nature of audit process a number of identified risks appeared significant, however subject to a review of the adjustments and amendments since proposed by the Authority he was confident that the Audit Commission would be in a position to give an unqualified audit conclusion.

Resolved:

That Members noted the report.

87. 2007-08 ACCOUNTS WITH AUDITOR'S REPORT

The Finance Director & Treasurer's report EFA/109/08 advised the Committee that since the 2007/08 accounts had been approved at the meeting of 25 June 08 the Auditors had completed their review and a number of changes had been made.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Noted that there were changes to the 2007/08 Statement of Accounts
2. Approved the amended Governance Statement
3. Authorised the Chairman to sign the Letter of Representation to the Audit Commission
4. Authorised the Finance Director and Treasurer to sign the Accounts after consultation with Lead Members.

88. REVISED TARGET SETTING PROCESS

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/111/08 presented revised corporate targets for 2008-09 and the coming three years. Members were pleased to note that targets were progressed year on year.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Noted the changes made to Corporate Targets for 2008-09 and the coming three years.
2. Supported the inclusion of the new National Indicator suite.
3. Approved the content and the direction of the revised targets.

89. ANNUAL EFFICIENCY STATEMENTS

The Committee received report EFA/112/08 by the Finance Director & Treasurer; it provided a copy of the backward looking efficiency statement for the year to March 2008 and the forward looking statement for 2008/09. Members were pleased to note efficiency savings in excess of the original projections for the year. The Finance Director & Treasurer confirmed that the Authority was on track to make projected savings of £0.8m for 2008/09.

In relation to efficiency savings Members discussed the possible effect of FiReControl project ambiguities. It was agreed that a report would be brought to the Fire Authority meeting in December 08.

Resolved:

That Members noted the return.

90. SHARED SERVICES

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/113/08 informed Members regarding the progress in the area of 'Shared Services' across ECFRS.

Members were advised that in accordance with central Government's agenda, primarily services were being shared between Authorities and that to date commercial opportunities had not been explored. Some Members expressed a slight reservation that although partnership working was commendable the Authority did not want to be in a position where resources were overstretched.

It was agreed that Members would be updated regarding the shared services that had been made use of.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

91. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME

Members received report EFA/114/08 by the Chief Fire Officer; it provided Members with Progress Report 1 of the Information Technology Transformation Programme.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

92. ANY OTHER PART I BUSINESS

EFA (T) Ltd

The Chairman advised that he had received a letter from the Chairman of EFA (T) Ltd, he advised that a report would be brought to the next meeting.

Large Animal Rescue Capability – Report in the Daily Mail

The Chairman advised that the Daily Mail had reported an item that would be considered by the Challenge & Innovation Committee that afternoon. The newspaper report had referred to the outcome of a Challenge & Innovation Task & Finish Group report which had identified a requirement to source equipment to assist the Service to rescue large animals; the Daily Mail had emphasised the capability of the equipment costing £200k to rescue bariatric people.

Fire Station Open Day – Harlow

Councillor Lee advised that he had recently attended a very successful Open Day at Harlow Fire Station

World Firefighter Games 2008 – Essex Young Firefighters Team

The Chairman advised that he was pleased to have presented awards to the Young Firefighters who had participated in the World Firefighter Games 2008. The Chairman thanked Officers and all those involved in training the Services' young adults.

93. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Resolved:

That the public (including the Press) be excluded from the meeting during consideration of minute no. 95 on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:

VEHICLE PROCUREMENT – DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY (Paragraph 3)

94. VEHICLE PROCUREMENT – DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/110/08 informed Members regarding the outcomes of the recently completed Firebuy mini competition exercise for pumping appliances. Members were pleased to note the savings achieved by the procurement exercise.

Members were also asked to consider the earlier delegation granted to the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer for the award of contract for the procurement of up to 15 pumping appliances to instead the authorise the award of a contract for the procurement of up to 23 appliances over the three financial years 2007-10.

Resolved:

That Members:

- 1. Noted the contents of the report
- 2. Noted that any proposals resulting from the IRMP relating to the introduction of small pumping appliances would be presented to the Policy and Strategy committee.
- 3. Approved the delegation of authority to the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer for the award of contract for the replacement of up to a maximum of 23 pumping appliances.

The meeting ended at 11:10 hours.

Signed

Chairman

12 November 2008