



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
POLICY AND STRATEGY COMMITTEE
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 2008 AT 10:00 HOURS**

Present: Councillor B Archibald
Councillor K Bobbin
Councillor A M Hedley
Councillor Mrs A E Holland
Councillor D W Morris
Councillor R A Pearson
Councillor T C Smith-Hughes
Councillor S M Walsh (Chairman)
Councillor Mrs E Webster

55. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lee.

56. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

57. MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting held on 23 January 2008.

Resolved:

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

58. ANTI FRAUD POLICY

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/030/08 referred to the Anti-Fraud Policy. Following a review by the internal audit function a number of recommendations had been made to strengthen the policy and bring it into line with current best practice. The amendments reflected the recommendations and brought in references to the 2006 Fraud Act and to specifically include theft.

The audit report had recommended that the Authority should consider if there should be a reference to a "no-blame" culture whereby no action would be taken against individuals reporting a fraud. This proposal had been considered by Officers and it was felt that it might restrict the response by the Authority in some circumstances. Members were advised that staff were periodically reminded of the Whistle Blowing Policy and it was planned that it should be publicised again alongside publication of the Anti Fraud Policy.

Resolved:

That Members of the Policy & Strategy Committee approved policy attached to report EFA/030/08.

59. FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Members considered Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/031/08. From April 2008, the Authority would end the contract with Essex County Council for the provision of financial management services and the implementation of a new finance and purchasing system in partnership with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority. As part of this change, it had been appropriate to review the financial regulations; the annex to the report identified the significant changes.

With regard to the value of land that the Chief Fire Officer would have authority to declare surplus to the Authority's requirements, Members were assured that the Service sought to maximise values prior to decision.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Approved the adoption of the revised Financial Regulations;
2. Agreed the specific amendments to the financial limits; and
3. Agreed the amendments to the Treasury Management Strategy.

60. REVIEW OF FORECAST OUTTURN 2007/08

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/032/08 was received; it provided summary information on the management accounts for the 11 months to 29 February 2008 and reviewed the forecast outturn for the year to 31 March 2008. Members were reassured to note that with five days to the end of the financial year figures were on track.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

61. VEHICLE PROCUREMENT – DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

Report EFA/036/08 by the Chief Fire Officer informed Members of various developments relating to the procurement of replacement vehicles for the Service as provided for within the capital programme of the Authority budget 2008/09. Members agreed sequential replacement of vehicles at best value.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Noted the contents of the report.
2. Approved the delegation of authority to the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer for the award of contract for the replacement of up to five Aerial Ladder Platforms once the outcome of the Firebuy mini competition exercise has been confirmed.

3. Approved the delegation of authority to the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer for the award of contract for the replacement of 15 pumping appliances once the outcome of the Firebuy mini competition exercise has been confirmed.

62. CLG – REQUIREMENTS FOR FUNDING LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY AND THE FIRE GATEWAY

The Committee considered Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/033/08; it referred to a letter from the CLG requesting collaborative funding of centrally managed Fire and Rescue projects and a proposed response. Members agreed the Chief Fire Officer's response that would request further information regarding the reasoning behind the CLG's request for a shift in funding.

Resolved:

That Members agreed the Chief Fire Officer's response to the CLG (contained in Appendix 1 of report EFA/033/08).

63. THREE YEAR FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/034/08 presented Members with an outline medium term financial plan covering the period 2009/10 to 2011/12 informing them of the longer-term financial issues of the Authority and to aid future decision making on priorities.

Members drew attention to the regeneration of towns could provide an opportunity to locate fire stations to best advantage. The Chief Fire Officer advised that a countywide review had been agreed by the Authority as part of the 2008/11 Integrated Risk Management Plan.

The Committee was mindful of the requirement for further efficiency savings; the Chief Fire Officer acknowledged a very challenging future.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

64. COST VERSUS PERFORMANCE

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/035/08 presented comparative performance data for 2006/07. The report included both data provided by the Audit Commission and performance data for the Authority measured against the four key priorities identified in the Authority's Corporate Strategy. To assess value for money for comparative purposes, this information was presented in the context of the Authority's Best Value family group.

Members were pleased to note that the Authority was giving value for money, performing better at a similar cost when compared with its statistical neighbours.

Resolved:

That Members noted the comparative performance data.

65. RAYLEIGH WEIR – CONSTRUCTION CONTRACT

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/041/08 was received, its purpose to inform Members of the progress of the construction project for Rayleigh Weir Community Fire Station.

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It had been anticipated that the final construction cost and agreed draft construction programme would be reported to Members at the meeting, the detail was still outstanding, but Members were advised that the contract and fees were inside the envelope of gross capital costs set out in report EFA/019/07.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

The meeting ended at 10:45 hours.