



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
POLICY AND STRATEGY COMMITTEE
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12 NOVEMBER 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
Councillor E Webster

The following Officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Chief Fire Officer David Johnson
Finance Director & Treasurer Mike Clayton
Director of HR & Workforce Planning, Richard Hopper
Assistant Chief Fire Officer Adam Eckley
Assistant Chief Fire Officer Gordon Hunter
Clerk & Deputy Monitoring Officer, Richard Curtis

95. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor B Archibald

96. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

97. MINUTES

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2008.

Resolved:

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

98. QUARTER 2 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS 2008/09

Report EFA/132/08 by the Finance Director & Treasurer reported on the Quarter 2 Management Accounts for the six months to 30 September 2008 and the outturn position for the year. It also provided an interim report on the achievement of efficiency gains in 2008/09.

Members referred to the increase in final costs of the hook lift for foam, welfare and environmental pods. Officers advised that final design specification had been confirmed

following the Buncefield fire and after the capital budget had been set. Members asked if bulk foam tankers would be taken out of service; Officers updated Members regarding the efficiencies of the Pod capability for foam delivery and the opportunity it provided to extend the range of welfare facilities available to firefighters at incidents.

The Committee asked about the effect should the local government pay settlement be increased following referral (in October 2008) to arbitration. The Finance Director & Treasurer advised that any outcome would bring about an adjustment in respect of the support staff budget.

The Committee was of the view that the report's proposed virement was sensible, and that the report had flagged up key challenges which Members would be pleased to have regard to ahead of budget setting in the next couple of months.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Noted the report;
2. Agreed budget virements to increase the budgets for Telephones (+£150k) and Fuel (+£128k) with an offsetting reduction in the budget for Interest on Long Term Loans; and
3. Agreed to reduce the Capital Expenditure budget from £11,850k to £9,865k.

99. EFA TRADING LTD LOAN

Report EFA/126/08 by the Chief Fire Officer detailed the options relating to the repayment of the loan made to EFA (Trading) Ltd when it was established in 2005. Members agreed that the most appropriate way forward would be to approve option 2 contained in the report.

Resolved:

That Members:

1. Noted the report; and
2. Approved option 2 that the loan is to be made permanent with interest chargeable at the average PWLB interest rate with effect from 1 April 2009.

100. CONSULTATION ON NATIONAL PROCUREMENT STRATEGY

The Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/127/08 set out the issues raised in the consultation on the National Procurement Strategy and proposed a response of behalf of the Authority. Members agreed that the consultation response was a good document; it was agreed that on balance Firebuy had contributed to significant procurement achievements; however the main thrust of the response was that Authorities call for the replacement of Firebuy.

Resolved:

That Members agreed the response to the consultation contained in report EFA/127/08.

101. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME – PROGRESS REPORT 2

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/128/08 provided Members with an update on the progress of the Information Technology Transformation Programme. Members were pleased that the project seemed to be going well although it was noted that activities related to programme management had not been delivered due to the sickness absence of the principal consultant; Officers advised that in accordance with agreed terms, fees for this workstream had been withheld pending completion.

Resolved:

That Members noted the contents of the report.

102. INITIAL TEST OF POTENTIAL & APPOINTMENTS AND PROMOTIONS

The Committee received report EFA/129/08 by the Chief Fire Officer; it highlighted the significant changes that ECFRS had made to its Appointments and Promotion processes in the previous year and in particular the results of the recent Initial Test of Potential (IToP) trial that the Service undertook in September 2008.

Members asked if other Fire & Rescue Services had encountered similar problems with the IToP and about the representative bodies' response to the departure from the national model, Officers advised that very few other Services had complied in totality with the national model and that the representative bodies had been supportive of the changes. Additionally Members were advised that the Service sought advice from Counsel and Risk Consultants, robust and defensible evidence supported deviation from the national process.

The Vice-Chairman advised that in HR regionally there was a lot of interest in what the Service was doing.

Resolved:

That Members noted the changes applied to a selection and appointments system trial within ECF&RS.

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

Chief Fire Officer's report EFA/130/08 provided the final Audit Commission report on the 2007/08 accounts.

The Chief Fire Officer expressed disappointment with the outcome of the Auditor's Value for money conclusion which had not reflected the work produced to evidence the Authority's position. Members acknowledged that the Auditor had to form a judgement on what was evident at a particular moment in time; if raised at an earlier stage and time had allowed further information could have been made available. Mr King of the Audit Commission confirmed that the assessment related to arrangements for the year ended 31 March 2008; since then further arrangements were being put in place and the most recent updates would be reflected in the assessment for 2008/09. In respect of the issue of timing the Audit Commission would work with the Chief Fire Officer, and the Finance Director & Treasurer to achieve a smoother audit process all round. Mr King advised that the Value for Money Conclusion was an element of the Use of Resources Assessment, an overall assessment that would be reported separately to the Authority.

Resolved:

That Members noted that an action plan to address the issues will be monitored by the Audit & Review sub-committee of the Challenge and Innovation Committee.

104. ANY OTHER PART I BUSINESS

Exercise Trackside

Councillor Pearson advised the Committee of how much he had enjoyed Exercise Trackside which had simulated a crash between a car and a commuter train on a level crossing. He said that it had been a very cold day with many people involved – a successful exercise.

Meeting with FBU Representatives

The Chairman advised that he had had a recent “get to know” meeting with three FBU representatives. During the meeting the Chairman had advised the FBU of his priority for the safety of people in Essex. He had further advised the FBU that the Authority had no pre-determined position on IRMP consultation proposals.

The Vice-Chairman was aware of a march to Westminster planned by 150 Essex Firefighters; the Chief Fire Officer referred to speculation and conjecture relating to IRMP proposals, the Chief Fire Officer stated that from his personal and professional perspective the speculation was untrue; there were no plans to make Essex Firefighters less safe.

105. 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:

POTENTIAL REDUNDANCY SITUATION (Paragraph 1)

106. POTENTIAL REDUNDANCY SITUATION

Chief Fire Officer’s report EFA/131/08 notified Members that a potential departmental restructure had the potential to place one support staff post at risk of potential redundancy.

Resolved:

That Members endorsed the position.

The meeting ended at 11:25 hours.

Signed

Chairman

14 January 2009