

EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of the POLICY & RESOURCES PANEL held at County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes at 11:30 hours on Thursday, 24 May 2018.

Members Present: Councillors Barnes, Elford, Peltzer Dunn, Scott and Tutt.

In attendance:

D Whittaker (Chief Fire Officer), M O'Brien (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), M Andrews (Assistant Chief Fire Officer), L Woodley (Deputy Monitoring Officer), D Savage (Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer), L Ridley (Assistant Director Planning & Improvement) and A Blanshard (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

87 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

87.1 It was noted that, in relation to matters on the agenda, no participating Member had any interest to declare under the Fire Authority's Code of Conduct for Members.

88 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

88.1 Apologies had been received from Councillors Dowling and O'Quinn.

89 NOTIFICATION OF ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT AND PROPOSES TO TAKE AT THE END OF THE AGENDA/CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

89.1 The Chairman informed Members that there would be an urgent Group Leaders Meeting immediately after the conclusion of the Panel Meeting.

90 MINUTES OF THE POLICY & RESOURCES PANEL MEETING HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2018

90.1 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting of the Policy & Resources Panel held on 18 January 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (*Copy in Minute Book*)

91 CALLOVER

91.1 Members reserved the following items for debate:

92 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Provisional Outturn 2017/18

93 Occupational Health Collaboration Project

92 REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2017/18

92.1 The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Director Resources/Treasurer (ADR/T) containing information on the provisional outturn for the 2017/18 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme. (*Copy in minute book*)

- 92.2 Members were informed that the report was on an exception basis and addressed those areas where there were clear issues or risks, the ADR/T explained that as these figures were provisional, there was a chance that they would change as the year end processes continued. The reason for the figures being provisional was due to the statutory deadline being brought forward to the end of May.
- 92.3 The Panel were advised that the revenue budget was provisionally forecast to underspend by £196,000 or 0.4% of the Net Revenue Budget, which had been previously reported as £454,000 underspent. There had been a range of variances across the budget, the ADR/T explained that the most material were:
- an overspend of 1.6% within the Safer Communities Directorate as a result of an overspend on operational staff within the Boroughs due to running over budgeted establishment through the use of overtime and fixed term contracts being used to cover sickness absence, secondments and light duties. The Panel were informed that there was significant work underway to address this issue, including an Officer Review, improved management of sickness absence and more robust monitoring of operational establishment.
 - a 2.1% underspend within Resources/Treasurer which included the costs awarded to the Authority following a successful Business Safety prosecution.
- 92.4 The ADR/T told Members that the overall Capital Programme was provisionally forecast to be £61,000 underspent, related to Newhaven Fire Station and Service HQ relocation as both schemes came in under budget. The 2017/18 Capital Programme is provisionally forecast to be £1,887,000. The ADR/T explained that although the Programme was reviewed as part of the budget report in February there had been further slippage on appliance, ancillary vehicles and cars and vans whilst the Fleet Strategy was under review, this meant that technically this was a phasing issue rather than a true underspend.
- 92.5 The Panel were reminded that the Authority maintained Earmarked and General Reserves in order to assist in managing spending plans across the financial year and making provision for financial risks. The forecast outturn was expected to be £23.387m, 35% higher than planned resulting from Capital Programme slippage, Emergency Services Mobile Communication Project grant received earlier than required and of a greater value than expected and higher capital receipts from the sale of the old Eastbourne HQ.
- 92.6 Members requested an explanation of plans to reduce the held reserves, as they should be less than 5% and we may have to in future explain our reasons for them. The ADR/T explained that there would be interest from central government regarding levels of reserves. He explained that the Authority held reserves which was prudent, Members were reminded that there was a detailed policy regarding this that had been approved by the Authority in February. There was no formula for calculating reserve levels, it was important to be aware of the risks faced and how they would be managed, there was a pattern across local government using reserves to guard against unexpected changes in funding, in accordance with the Medium Term Financial Plan almost all of the Services existing reserves will have been spent in a years' time.

92.7 The ADR/T then explained that there was £2.6m in the Capital Programme for Preston Circus, work on this project had been paused in order to complete a phase of the Estate Strategy, including creation of a design guide, awaiting sign-off, which would enable the production of 'blue-prints' for all types of Fire Station. Members were informed that an Estates Strategy Steering group had been created and Councillor Peltzer Dunn was representing Members on this group. The group was beginning to stand up governance arrangements around Preston Circus, a detailed project plan was anticipated with work potentially starting in summer 2019.

92.8 Members thanked the ADR/T for his helpful and interesting contribution and they agreed that it was important to get the Preston Circus project right. They then requested an update on the whether the ADR/T had been able to improve the return on investments. The ADR/T explained that the Authority continued to prioritise security and liquidity but was already being less risk adverse whilst ensuring the Authority had an appropriate level of liquid resources available.

92.9 **RESOLVED** – That the panel:

- i) noted the provisional 2017/18 revenue budget outturn;
- ii) noted the provisional 2017/18 capital programme outturn;
- iii) noted the use of reserves during the year;
- iv) noted the capital programme slippage;
- v) noted the current year investments; and
- vi) approved the transfer of the revenue underspend into the improvement and efficiency reserve.

93 OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH COLLABORATION PROJECT

93.1 The Panel considered the report of the Assistant Director Human Resources and Organisational Development (ADHR&OD) which requested ratification of the adoption of a new partnership model for the provision of Occupational Health and Wellbeing services to East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service. (*Copy in minute book*)

93.2 The ADHR&OD informed the Panel that the new model offered a different approach to occupational health. She explained that the Service had used an outsourced model for the provision of occupational health services, this had experienced a number of challenges and notice had been given to the provider, with the contract ending on 30 June 2018.

93.3 The Panel were informed that the Service were working towards a partnership service with Surrey & Sussex Police and Surrey Fire & Rescue Service. This new partnership model would offer the Service additional resilience. Surrey & Sussex Police had been part of a fully collaborated occupational health service since July 2016 and Surrey FRS had joined the collaboration in August 2017.

93.4 The ADHR&OD explained that the collaborated service would, in addition to being a collaboration providing greater resilience, support ESFRS strategies including

attendance management, wellbeing and engagement. The new model would provide ESFRS with a tailored service that was better able to respond to the Services requirements by providing greater resilience in doctor and nurse time.

93.5 Members were pleased with the new model, and the improved service that would be achieved. They asked whether there might be scope to further increase the collaboration. The ADHR&OD explained that there would be an additional member very soon and that other organisations had expressed interest in joining.

93.6 Members were interested to see whether in the future the new service would assist with a reduction in the levels of sickness. Officers explained that they were aware that Members had concerns over the levels of sickness and were hopeful the new model would encourage a reduction, but could not make any guarantees. The collaboration model had constructed a well thought out and structured service that should improve Occupational Health at ESFRS. The Senior Leadership team believed that it was in the best interests of staff to provide an exceptional service to them

93.7 **RESOLVED** – That the panel:

- i) Noted that the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) had approved funding of £264K in year one, and £248K per annum thereafter. The current budget was circa £213K per annum;
- ii) Ratified a partnership model with Surrey & Sussex Police and Surrey Fire & Rescue Service for the provision of Occupational Health and Wellbeing services to further support and improve staff wellbeing; and
- iii) Considered the need for progress reports on the implementation of the new model to be presented to the Scrutiny & Audit Panel periodically.

The meeting concluded at 12.35 hours.

Signed

Chairman

Dated this day of 2018