

EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Report of a meeting of the East Sussex Fire Authority held at Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters at 10.30 hours on Thursday 9 June 2005.

Members present: Councillors Dyason, Fitch, Freeman, Gadd, Mrs. Healy, Howson, Kemble, Lock, Morgan, Murphy (Chairman), Paskins, Pennington, Scott, Skilton, Sparks, Theobald, Thomas and Wilson

1. MODERNISATION ISSUES

1.1 Regional Management Board Issues

1.1.1 The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive reported that the Regional Management Board had met on 26 January and 13 April 2005, and that the Chairman of East Sussex Fire Authority is now chairing the Board with effect from 1 April 2005.

1.1.2 The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive informed Members that staff have incurred considerable extra work on the Regional Management Board and FiReControl Project but the Authority had not been awarded any money from the New Burdens Fund in 2004/05. A separate bid had been submitted for New Burdens Funding for 2005/06.

1.2 Regional Control Centres

1.2.1 The contracts for the Regional Control Centres are being let in two stages – accommodation and infrastructure services. The tendering process for the accommodation contracts is now at preferred bidder stage. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) has received a number of outline proposals for the infrastructure services contract. Under the present Project Plan, the South East Regional Control Centre is scheduled to go live in the third quarter 2007. It is likely that an announcement on the RCC location will be made before the next Fire Authority meeting in September.

1.2.2 The Fire Authority has agreed broad principles to be followed in supporting the Regional Management Board with regard to Fire Authorities in the South East establishing appropriate retention policies in order to determine appropriate payments to Control Staff affected by the creation of Regional Control Rooms within the context of the options available and best suited to its needs.

1.2.3 The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive has been informed that staff transferring to the new RCCs will almost certainly be covered by TUPE regulations and the body with responsibility for the RCC will have to administer staff redeployment and remuneration packages if that is the case – he is awaiting explicit advice on how TUPE will apply.

1.2.4 It was noted that the new Minister is intending to review all the projects in his portfolio. The Vice-Chairman and Deputy Chief Fire Officer will attend a briefing for Fire Authorities on 1 July 2005. Although Members are not in favour of RCCs, as they had not yet seen a compelling business case, it is accepted that the Authority should strive to achieve the best outcome. The Treasurer reminded Members that they have a responsibility to both staff and council taxpayers on finance and governance matters.

2. **COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT UPDATE**

- 2.1 The Chairman and Councillor Mrs Healy updated Members on the progress of the CPA inspection. The final decision is expected on 16 June 2005, following the 'moderation' of the results.

3. **IMPROVEMENT MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE FIRE AUTHORITY**

- 3.1 The ODPM has issued Fire Service Circular 13-2005 on Improvement Planning Guidance for FRAs that set out the way forward on issues arising from the Comprehensive performance Assessment process including the need to bring together improvement/action plans and integrate them with the organisation's mainstream business arrangements. The Fire Authority has considered the realignment of the relevant Panels and has adapted their terms of reference to manage future arrangements more easily in line with the issues raised by the CPA review.

4. **GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS FOR NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR FINANCING FIREFIGHTER PENSIONS**

- 4.1 The ODPM has issued Fire Service Circular 04-2005 containing a consultation paper on Government proposals for new arrangements for financing firefighter pensions. At present, each Fire and Rescue Authority is responsible for paying the pensions of its former employees on a pay-as-you-go basis. Employees' contributions are paid into Fire and Rescue Authorities' operating accounts from which pensions awards are made. Authorities receive funding from Central Government as part of general Formula Grant to support payments of pensions. The current system is volatile as a result of significant fluctuations in the number of firefighters retiring in any given year, has a lack of transparency expenditure on pension payments obscuring the actual level of resources available for service delivery, and there is uncertainty about how the rising burdens of pensions expenditure is to be financed in the future.
- 4.2 There are a number of issues to address but it is considered, at this stage, that East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service might benefit in the early years, but long term, there could be a net loss. (A copy of the detailed response to the consultation paper is available on request from the Clerk to the Fire Authority).

5. **COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY AND THE COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS**

- 5.1 The Fire Authority approved a new Community Safety Strategy and a new Community Safety Strategy for Vulnerable People.
- 5.2 Members discussed ways in which they could influence the local Planning Authorities within East Sussex and Brighton & Hove City Council to insist on the installation of sprinklers in new build premises and how best they could encourage the installation of sprinklers in existing schools. Members noted, with regret, the Fire Authority's limited powers in this respect and were advised to campaign to seek to have Buildings Regulations amended.

COUNCILLOR MIKE MURPHY
CHAIRMAN OF EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY
10 June 2005