

### 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 13 December 2012.

**Present:** Councillors Carden, Duncan, Fawthrop, Healy, Heaps, Howson, Kenward, Livings (Chairman), Ost, Pidgeon, Powell, Pragnell, Rufus, Scott, Sparks, Theobald, Thomas and Tidy.

#### 1. REVIEW OF SERVICE PROVISION WITHIN THE HASTINGS BOROUGH

- 1.1 Members of the Fire Authority considered a report that apprised them of the consultation responses to the proposal approved by the Fire Authority following the IRMP Review of service provision within the Hastings Borough and for the Fire Authority to determine the way forward.
- 1.2 Following a review of the Service provision within the Hastings Borough, the findings had been presented to the IRMP Forum, the Policy & Resources Panel and then the Fire Authority at its meeting in September. At this meeting, the Fire Authority had agreed to consult with local communities and stakeholders impacted by the following proposal to:
  - Relocate the Wholetime appliance from The Ridge Community Fire Station to Bohemia Road Community Fire Station; and
  - Maintain the Retained pumping appliance and Landrover at The Ridge on the Retained Duty System (RDS) with its existing establishment.
- 1.3 Members were advised that the 12 week period of consultation and engagement commenced with staff, representative bodies, communities, business organisations and local authorities in the Hastings Borough as well as adjacent areas affected by the proposal had ended on 7 December 2012.
- 1.4 The consultation and engagement process included the collection of opinions from staff, partners, stakeholders and the public using the following methods:
  - Publication of the review and all supporting documents on the Service web site
  - An online questionnaire
  - A Service Brief entry inviting staff to view and consult on the review
  - Emails/letters to over 200 local councillors, businesses, stakeholders and community groups inviting them to view and consult on the review online\*
  - A follow up e-mail/letter to stakeholders advising them of the stakeholder forum arrangements
  - Presentations to all Hastings watches (plus Bexhill & Battle) conducted by the Community Risk Management Team
  - Staff focus groups conducted by Opinion Research Services (ORS)
  - A public focus group conducted by ORS
  - A public forum conducted by ORS
  - A stakeholder forum conducted by ORS

- A public meeting conducted by ESFRS
  - Participation in public meetings held in Ore, Pett, Icklesham and Fairlight.
- \*The following areas were included in the address list:

All Hastings wards - Ashdown, Baird, Braybrooke, Castle, Central St Leonards, Conquest, Gensing, Hollington, Maze Hill, Old Hastings, Ore, Silverhill, St Helens, Tressell, West St Leonards, Wishing Tree.

All Parish/District Councils in or adjacent to the station grounds – Fairlight, Pett, Guestling, Icklesham, Westfield, Brede, Sedlescombe, Crowhurst, Battle.

Also included were the East Sussex Federation of Small Businesses and Hastings & Area Chamber of Commerce.

- 1.5 Members were advised that the consultation had been managed by two different streams, those managed by Opinion Research Services (ORS) which included Public Focus Groups; Public Forum; Stakeholder Forum and local Staff Focus Groups and processes managed in-house which included staff meetings; online surveys, the public meeting and stakeholder emails/letters.
- 1.6 The in-house processes allowed anyone to attend and present their opinions whereas those carried out by ORS sought to get statistically representative, informed and independently verified outcomes.
- 1.7 Councillor Thomas, on behalf of the Conservative Group, wished to express his Group's thanks to the Officers who were involved in putting the report together. He felt the report, produced at the Fire Authority's request, was comprehensive and detailed and provided Members with helpful information.
- 1.8 Councillor Thomas also thanked the members of public, the firefighters and the trade unions who had taken the time to write to him and his colleagues over this matter. He wished to pass on his assurance that they had read all of the letters and petitions.
- 1.9 He gave assurances that the Fire Authority took its responsibilities seriously and that he and his colleagues had not predetermined any decision as some reports had suggested. He noted that some facts had been presented incorrectly to the public and that those responsible had behaved in an irresponsible manner.
- 1.10 Councillor Thomas noted that although he had listened to the views expressed by local communities, local businesses and members of the public, challenging times were ahead and that difficult decisions would need to be made to balance the resources of the Service across the whole of East Sussex and the City of Brighton & Hove, and to the 800,000 people who live in the Service area.
- 1.11 Councillor Thomas noted the proposed Bexhill Link Road and the changes that would bring. He advised that the Conservatives' view was that there should be no changes until the construction was completed and further analysis could be

undertaken on the impact upon operational services, if any, of the new road infrastructure.

- 1.12 Councillor Thomas put the following Motion to the Fire Authority, which was seconded by Councillor Fawthrop:

“That this Authority continues to maintain a fire station at The Ridge and, in addition, continues to maintain a wholetime appliance at The Ridge and does not relocate an appliance to Bohemia Road and that the appliance at The Ridge is maintained on a 24/7 basis.

The Fire Authority requests the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive to undertake community safety activities in the rural communities near to The Ridge to provide further reassurances to the public, that safety is our primary concern, and to report back to the Fire Authority.”

- 1.13 Councillor Sparks wished to thank the public, staff and stakeholders for their invaluable contribution to the consultation process. He felt the report was sound and comprehensive and wanted to acknowledge the amount of time it would have taken to compile.
- 1.14 Councillor Sparks acknowledged that the proposals would have ensured that the Service would still have met its Service Standards and that, although the review was not financially driven, the Authority did have a responsibility to the County as a whole to manage its finances responsibly. Councillor Sparks wished to hear the Officers’ view on the Motion before he voted on it.
- 1.15 Councillor Rufus acknowledged this was the first of many difficult decisions that lay ahead and through the consultation process, it was clear that the public were becoming aware of the unpalatable nature of the decisions that had to be made.
- 1.16 Councillor Scott also acknowledged the financially challenging environment with the savage cuts to budgets. He felt it was right that the Fire Authority should review its business, however he would not support any cuts to frontline services. During the consultation, the questionnaires, letters, petitions, meetings, marches and social media had made it quite clear to the Authority that the proposal was not acceptable. He suggested that he had serious concerns over attendance times, particularly in the rural areas and referred to letters that he had received from residents, businesses and the local hospital.
- 1.17 The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive reminded Members that operational Service Standards were set by the Fire Authority and East Sussex currently had one set of the best attendance times for Shire Counties in the Country. Members were also reminded that the IRMP process was to ensure that the Service provided the most appropriate cover and was not a financial saving exercise.
- 1.18 The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive went on to add that, over the next 6 years, the Fire Authority would have to accept that there would be cuts to services including fewer firefighters, fewer appliances and fewer stations. He was disappointed by other local Authorities’ responses to the consultation as they were only too aware of the current financial situation and whilst they have a variety of

services to cut, East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service only has one as a single purpose fire and rescue service.

1.19 Councillors discussed the consultation processes and responses and unanimously agreed that:

- the Fire Authority continues to maintain a fire station at The Ridge and, in addition, continues to maintain a wholetime appliance at The Ridge and does not relocate an appliance to Bohemia Road. The appliance at The Ridge is maintained on a 24/7 basis; and
- the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive be asked to undertake community safety activities in the rural communities near The Ridge, to provide further reassurances to the public that safety is our primary concern, and to report back to the Fire Authority.

2. **SUSSEX CONTROL CENTRE – AGREEMENT BETWEEN WEST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL AND EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY PURSUANT TO SECTION 16 OF THE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES ACT 2004**

2.1 The Fire Authority considered a report regarding an agreement pursuant to Section 16 of the Fire & Rescue Service Act 2004 between East Sussex Fire Authority and West Sussex County Council.

2.2 At the Policy & Resources Panel held on 24 May 2012, it had been agreed that a Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004, Section 16 Agreement be developed in order to bring about the decision for East Sussex Fire Authority to discharge the call handling and mobilisation function on behalf of West Sussex County Council.

2.3 The main agreement was 31 pages with 31 clauses and had 7 schedules attached. The agreement would take effect from 1 May 2013 and continue for 7 years from the date that the Sussex Control Centre goes live. Both officers of East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service and West Sussex County Council had attended many meetings and many discussions to ensure, with the help of employment, property and contracts lawyers, that the interests of both parties were protected as far as were reasonably practicable.

2.4 **RESOLVED** – That the Fire Authority delegates resolution of the unresolved pensions' clauses to the Treasurer and Monitoring Officer and subject to West Sussex County Council affixing the seal, authorise the Monitoring Officer, after consultation with the Chairman, to affix the common seal.

**COUNCILLOR JOHN LIVINGS**  
**CHAIRMAN OF EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY**  
14 December 2012

