

Essex Fire Authority

Report to the Constituent Authorities 8 December 2010

1. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS

The Authority determined that detailed budget plans should include provision for a Council Tax freeze in 2011/12

ECFRS TRANSFORMATION – FUNCTIONAL AND DEPARTMENTAL REVIEWS

We were presented with a summary of the work commissioned by the Strategic Management Board to review its functions and departments in support of delivering necessary savings required by the Comprehensive Spending Review.

2. FIRE COVER REVIEW 2010

The future funding constraints for the Fire Service over the next few years mean that Fire and Rescue Services will have to deliver their service with significantly less money. It is for these reasons that in July of this year ECFRS commissioned ORH Ltd to work alongside the Service Management team to conduct a Strategic Review of Fire Cover across Essex. The intensity and detail that the Service Management Team required meant that the review took four months of complex analysis and many thousands of modelling runs. The outcome of the review is the most comprehensive strategic analysis of fire cover that ECFRS has ever undertaken and arguably the most comprehensive analysis that has ever been undertaken by any UK Fire and Rescue Service.

A number of options proposed various changes to the way ECFRS delivers its operational response, in order to reduce the cost of this part of its service delivery, while at the same time maintaining operational effectiveness.

All the proposed options would deliver significant savings, however to achieve the savings each of the options also had significant impact issues which ranged to a lesser or greater extent around, significant reduction in the number of fire stations and/or fire appliances. It was also clear when reviewing the detail of each option that the biggest savings to be made are from changing the way that fire appliances are crewed; predominantly from Wholetime and Day Crewing to Retained. However, an effective balance needs to be maintained between the number of Wholetime and Retained crews in order to ensure, not only the effective delivery of operational

response, but also the delivery of our Protection and Prevention statutory duties, training needs and also the operational assurance needs in respect of availability of personnel (retained recruitment and 24/7 availability of retained personnel are the key risks here).

It was therefore reasonable to conclude that the way forward is to develop a hybrid option that uses the comprehensive information from the review and in conjunction with the professional expertise of Service Management to deliver a strategy that will achieve sound operational service delivery, safe communities, minimal (if any) redundancies and political and public acceptance.

3. APPRAISAL REVIEW OF THE FACILITIES PROVIDED TO TRADES UNION OFFICIALS

We received a report which detailed the outcome of an external review into the financial and resource-based implications of supporting Fire Brigades Union facilities arrangements within the workplace (preliminary assessment of the support arrangements currently in place for UNISON, the Retained Fire-fighters Union and the Fire Officers Association were considered reasonable and had no adverse impact on resources).

Audit findings detailed the resource and productivity impact upon the Authority - in the current financial year it equated to a value of £452K with a cumulative value of £934K for the financial years 08/09 and 09/10.

The Authority agreed: the action plan developed and designed to address the recommendations contained within the audit report; that Trades Union (TU) facilities should be based on the annual equivalent of 1.5 Full Time Employees; that TU facilities barring those related to disciplinary matter are subject to riders; and the introduction of a minimum administration charge of 3% for the maintenance of check-off arrangements, to be reviewed annually.

Councillor Anthony Hedley
Chairman