

Summary Report to Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee 15th October 2015

At the Council meeting in May 2015, Council agreed to make it a requirement that the Council nominee(s) to four specific outside bodies shall submit summary reports to the Policy & Resources Scrutiny Committee. The specific bodies identified were: -

- Essex Fire Authority
- Southend University Hospital - NHS Foundation Trust
- Essex Police and Crime Panel
- Kent & Essex Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority

In your response, please indicate which Group / Body this report relates to.

Notes:-

- *Where there is more than one nominee, a joint report shall be submitted.*
- *Council has agreed that updates shall be submitted to every other ordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.*

Name of Group / Body:- Essex Fire Authority

Update on Key Issues

I have written about this on my blog, here :-

<https://warelane.wordpress.com/2015/06/10/my-first-essex-fire-authority-meeting/>

<https://warelane.wordpress.com/2015/07/16/essex-fire-authority-audit-governance-review-committee/>

And the highlights :-

We had a presentation on the Integrated Risk Management Plan – Consultation Document. Because of the cuts there is some bad medicine coming, and decisions over where the axe should fall. There is some disagreement over where this should be and there appears to be some creative tension between those that run the EFA and those that work in the organisation. Oddly the presentation was interspersed with snaps from the Eckley Family Album, and Cllr Carlo Guglielmi took exception to my quip that I felt underprepared having not brought photos of me over the last thirty years. Does this mean he wants to see my photograph collection? Anyway, the A/CFO (Acting Chief Fire Officer) made many mentions of fire disaster inquiries and that none had stated that a faster response would have saved lives. I asked, therefore, whether they had recommended slower responses. (I fear that reductions in crew numbers may result in this.)

I also asked whether staff had been involved in constructing the public consultation questions, and received the response that the unions had not offered any suggestions.

We had reports on performance, trade union facility time, and employee absenteeism.

Amongst the items discussed at yesterday's Essex Fire Authority Audit, Governance & Review Committee was the Annual Governance Review. This one of a number of audit documents, which despite the good and hard work of those at the EFA, showed that there are some causes for concern.

On page four of the document, under a section entitled 'Effectiveness', is the following table.

This is described thus: The table below compares the audit results for the last five years:

	<i>Limited Assurance or No Assurance</i>	<i>Reasonable Assurance</i>	<i>Substantial Assurance</i>
<i>2010/11</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>2011/12</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>2012/13</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>2013/14</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>2014/15</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>3</i>

The Essex Fire Authority is not a body to play political games with. However, because of the critically important job that it does I think it must be properly scrutinised.

The internal controls appear to be robust, but when three follow-up items have not been passed, and therefore have to go forward for another year, then this is an area for concern.

I asked of the auditor at one point: "I work in the automotive industry. To use a motoring analogy, would you drive a car with this level of assurance?" That I got no answer to this spoke volumes. The EFA has got to do better.

Person Making response:

Councillor Julian Ware-Lane (Labour, Milton)

Date