

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

Wednesday 17 April 2013

PRESENT:

Councillor Mrs Nelder, in the Chair.
Councillors Nicholson and Tuffin.

Also in attendance: Councillor Mary Aspinnall, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, Lee Howell, Chief Fire Officer, Councillor George Gribble, Vice-Chairman, Pete Smith, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service), Bob Walker, Chair (Fire Brigade Union), Chris Ziajka, Fire-fighter (Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service), Bill Grantham, Fire Safety Manager (Plymouth Community Homes), Scott Senior, Civil Protection Manager, Councillor Peter Smith, Deputy Leader, Councillor Gordon, appointed representative to the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service as an outside body, Giles Perritt, Lead Officer and Ross Johnston, Democratic Support Officer.

The meeting started at 4.00 pm and finished at 6.50 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

147. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

148. **CHAIR'S URGENT BUSINESS**

The Chair advised that there were currently insufficient members present for the meeting to be quorate. However, the group were not making any decisions today and it was hoped that one of the late arriving members would be present during agenda item 3.

149. **DEVON AND SOMERSET FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE DRAFT PLAN 2013/14 TO 2014/15**

The Task and Finish Group met in order to scrutinise the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Draft Plan 2013/14 to 2014/15 and, in particular, to safeguard the community by ensuring that the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service's budget reductions to the city were minimal.

As part of the evidence gathering process, members heard from officers from the Devon and Somerset Fire Authority, Plymouth City Council and Plymouth Community Homes, union representatives and councillors.

The full report and recommendations are attached as an appendix to these minutes.

(Councillor Nicholson joined the meeting at 4:45pm).

150. **EXEMPT BUSINESS**

There were no items of exempt business.

Appendix (Pages 3 - 8)

The Findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board Task and Finish Group to review the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Draft Plan 2013/14 to 2014/15.

**DEVON AND SOMERSET FIRE AND
RESCUE SERVICE DRAFT PLAN 2013/14 TO
2014/15**

Findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board Task and
Finish Group



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I. INTRODUCTION

In early January 2013, as part of the budget scrutiny process, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board received an update from the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Authority on its Draft Plan 2013/14 to 2014/15 and were informed that –

‘The Government Grant had been reduced by 10.3 per cent in 2013 and a further 7.3 per cent in 2014 which represented a cut of £5.5 million. Members of the Authority would be considering the options at its meeting on 18 January 2013. A full public consultation would be undertaken prior to any decisions being made. A complete review of how services were delivered would be undertaken with a view to minimising the impact of any changes on public safety’.

The Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service presented its Draft Plan 2013/14 to 2014/15 and provided a further update to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board at its meeting on 30 January 2013. Members discussed this issue at some length and it was apparent that –

‘whilst members acknowledged the need for change in the current economic climate, they had concerns at what those changes would mean for Plymouth, particularly given that it was a hazard rich city. It was therefore agreed that an Overview and Scrutiny Management Board task and finish group is set up to look at the draft plan in more detail and this will take place prior to closure of the consultation period in April in order that a formal response to the proposals can be submitted’.

Subsequently, a Project Initiation Document (PID) was drafted and submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board’s meeting on 13 March 2013, where it was agreed that a task and finish group be established.

This report summarises the findings of the task and finish group review and makes a number of proposals for the Deputy Leader of Plymouth City Council to consider in responding to the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Service’s consultation on its Draft Plan.

2. SCRUTINY APPROACH

2.1 Task and Finish Group Objectives

The Task and Finish Group was asked to:

‘Safeguard the community by ensuring that the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service’s budget reductions to the city are minimal’.

2.2 Task and Finish Group Membership

The Task and Finish Group had cross party membership comprising the following Councillors –

- Councillor Nelder (Chair)
- Councillor Nicholson
- Councillor Tuffin
- Councillor Aspinall (present but not officially involved)

Councillor Aspinall was invited to participate in the discussion at the discretion of the Chair.

For the purposes of the review, the Task and Finish Group was supported by -

- Giles Perritt, Head of Policy, Performance and Partnerships
- Ross Johnston, Democratic Support Officer

2.3 Task and Finish Group Methodology

The Task and Finish Group convened on 17 April 2013 to consider evidence, hear from witnesses and review background information.

Witnesses invited:

- Lee Howell, Chief Fire Officer (Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority)
- Pete Smith, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority)
- Councillor Gribble, Councillor Devon County Council (Vice Chair of the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority)
- Bob Walker, Chair (Fire Brigade Union)
- Chris Ziajka, Fire Fighter (Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority)
- Bill Grantham, Fire Safety Manager (Plymouth Community Homes)
- Scott Senior, Civil Protection Officer (Plymouth City Council)
- Councillor Peter Smith, Deputy Leader (Plymouth City Council)
- Councillor Gordon, Councillor Plymouth City Council (Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service's Resource Committee)

In order to assist with its deliberations, the task and finish group were provided with the following background material and documentation:

- Project Initiation Document
- Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Draft Plan 2013/14 to 2014/15

3. FINDINGS

In reviewing the evidence and analysing all of the data provided, the group was of the opinion that:

- (a) the DSFRS did not adequately recognise the urbanised nature of Plymouth when preparing its Draft Plan;
- (b) the Draft Plan undervalued the importance of the Fire and Rescue Service within Plymouth, in particular through its lack of attention to Plymouth's Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) sites, Greenergy and Valero Limited, and other major hazardous sites such as the Defence Munitions at Ernesettle and the Radiation (Emergency Preparedness and Public Information) Regulations 2001 (REPPPIR) site at Devonport Dockyard;
- (c) the Draft Plan failed to adequately identify the needs of the city's Fire and Rescue Service in dealing with other COMAH sites situated just outside of the city's boundaries, such as Calor Gas at Lee Mill and Thankes Tanks at Torpoint;
- (d) the Draft Plan's proposals inadequately dealt with Plymouth's requirements from a Fire and Rescue Service perspective, particularly with regards to the following:

- i. Proposal 1: Introduction of Light Rescue Pumps (LRPs);
This was considered to be detrimental to the Fire and Rescue Service's ability to deal with emergencies in Plymouth due to the reduction in fire fighters attending an emergency on the LRPs.
 - ii. Proposal 6: Dual crew the aerial appliance in Plymouth;
Moving from Weston-Mill based 'whole-time' fire fighters to become 'on call' fire fighters at Crownhill will have a negative knock-on effect for response times across the city and may result in the use of the aerial appliance being reduced.
 - iii. Proposal 7: Crew three fire engines in Plymouth as 'on call';
The East of the city, Plympton and Plymstock, will be severely impacted by the loss of 'whole-time' fire fighter crews to 'on-call' crews and this could have serious consequences for vulnerable persons living within this area;
- (e) Fire and Rescue Service response times were concerning, although it was acknowledged that initial response times would remain the same; the response times of back-up appliances could significantly change which was alarming;
 - (f) the prevention work of the DSFRS was encouraging, however this work should not be detrimental to the service's ability in dealing with any major emergencies;
 - (g) the DSFRS's consultation exercise was insufficient and did not effectively engage with partners or the citizens of Plymouth and to ensure that a more cohesive approach was adopted in consulting on and drafting future plans a more formal relationship should be established between the DSFRS and partner organisations.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board's Task and Finish Group reviewed the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Draft Plan 2013/14 to 2014/15. Following analysis and a review of the evidence provided, members recommend to the Deputy Leader of Plymouth City Council the following proposals:

- I. That the Deputy Leader of Plymouth City Council in his response to the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service's (DSFRS) consultation rejects the DSFRS Draft Plan 2013/14 to 2014/15 for the following reasons:
 - a. Proposal 1: Introduction of Light Pumps – this is not a suitable appliance for the needs of Plymouth as an urban environment, and the reduction of fire fighters crewing these appliances could impact on the Fire and Rescue Service's ability to adequately deal with emergencies within the city;
 - b. Proposal 6: Dual crew the aerial appliance in Plymouth with 'on call' fire fighters – this proposal reduces the back-up response times to many of the city's areas and this is considered to put the West of the city at risk, particularly due to the risk posed by the Dockyard and Defence Munitions sites;
 - c. Proposal 7: Crew three fire engines in Plymouth as 'on call' rather than

‘whole-time’ – this proposal to remove ‘whole-time’ fire fighters to ‘on call’ fire fighters significantly puts at risk people living in the East of the city, particularly in the areas of Plympton and Plymstock, as well as detrimentally affecting the response times of any call-outs to Greenergy, Valero Limited, Cattedown, or the Calor Gas site, Lee Mill;

- d. the DSFRS’s requirement to achieve total savings of £11m by 2017 is acknowledged as being a difficult and untenable scenario, however, the proposed reduction of only £1.5m in back-office savings is inadequate, particularly given the extreme changes proposed to the front-line services in Plymouth;
 - e. alternative measures to achieve the total savings of £11m by 2017 have not been appropriately considered and it is suggested that the DSFRS’s Draft Plan is re-designed to consider rationalising its property assets within Plymouth rather than reduce the level of ‘whole-time’ fire fighters.
2. That the Deputy Leader of Plymouth City Council highlights the importance of a ‘whole-time’ operational Fire and Rescue Service for Plymouth and proposes that the DSFRS participates in an Integrated Planning Group to review and examine the impacts of the DSFRS Draft Plan 2013/14 to 2014/15 on Plymouth, prior to the Plan’s implementation date of July 2013.