

DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

31 March 2009

Present:-

Councillors B. Hughes (Chairman), Button, Cann, Clatworthy, Dyke, Foggin, Fry, Gordon, Hannon, Healey, S. Hughes, Leaves, Lewis, Manning, Mochnacz, Mrs. Nicholson, Mrs. Parsons, Tully, Viney, Wallace and Yeomans

Apologies:-

Councillors Parker, Shadrick and Way

DSFRA/84. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Authority held on 16 February 2009 be signed as a correct record.

DSFRA/85. Declarations of Interest

Members of the Authority were asked to consider whether they had any **personal/personal and prejudicial interests** in items as set out on the agenda for this meeting and to declare any such interests at this time.

No interests were declared.

DSFRA/86. Questions and Petitions from the Public

In accordance with Standing Orders, the Authority received the following question from Mr. Rob Newby (Exeter City Councillor):

“I am pleased that a large amount of money has been given to the Fire Authority for the refurbishment of Stations throughout Devon & Somerset. Therefore, my question is if money is to be spent on Topsham to undertake refurbishment works why is part of this work the requirement to install, at a ludicrous amount of money totalling £26K, a disabled access toilet and shower when there is already a disabled toilet attached to the Fire Station and no-one used the old shower that was installed some years ago, which would precipitate the removal of a community functioning bar when in my view a proportional part of the money would be better spent on renewing the breathing apparatus cleaning and assembly area, which breaches health & safety regulations?”

The Chairman of the Authority, Councillor Bernard Hughes, provided the following answer:

“On behalf of the Authority I would firstly like to thank Councillor Newby for his question. It is clear that there is a considerable amount of public interest in this issue – from Councillor Newby, retained firefighters at Topsham and by residents of the community that the Station serves.

Dealing briefly at this point with the issues raised in Councillor Newby’s question, the proposed works at Topsham Fire Station cover a range of improvements which would allow safe access to the building for community use whilst also improving Fire & Rescue Service operational facilities, such as:

- a new room for new computer and communications equipment;
- improved showering facilities; and
- improvements to the lecture room.

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended), the provision of disabled toilet facilities is a legal requirement where buildings are intended for community use and this represents only a small part of the proposed works. The toilet facilities (including the disabled toilet) would have a dual use function by including showers, would provide suitable facilities for female firefighters and would provide improved facilities in general for firefighters. In a recent inspection at another Devon & Somerset station, the Health and Safety Executive has been specifically critical of the lack of showers and firefighters have cited a number of situations where showers are a necessary requirement of the modern fire and rescue service role.

We agree that the area for Breathing Apparatus cleaning and servicing is in need of upgrading and it is hoped to achieve this at some future point, being mindful of the overall constraints of the Topsham station site.

Elsewhere on the agenda for today's meeting is a comprehensive report addressing all of the issues as raised by Councillor Newby in his question and inviting this Authority to explore these in the context of its wider statutory duties, obligations and funding considerations. It would, therefore, seem most appropriate for the issues as raised by Councillor Newby to be considered in more depth alongside that item when it is reached in the agenda and of course Councillor Newby is more than welcome to stay for the meeting to observe the debate on this issue."

(SEE ALSO MINUTE DSFRA/88 BELOW)

DSFRA/87. Annual Audit and Inspection Letter

The Authority considered the Audit Commission 2007/08 Annual Audit and Inspection Letter for the Authority as presented by Martin Green and Steve Brown of the Audit Commission. The Authority had secured an unqualified opinion on its accounts for that financial year and a score of 3 ("performing well") for its Use of Resources Assessment. The Letter indicated that the Authority was improving well and delivered good results to its communities, working well with partnerships and delivering a much improved and consistent operational performance. The Authority recognised, however, the need to enhance its contribution to strategic partnerships and to develop its approach to environmental sustainability issues.

The representatives also advised the Authority on the requirements of the forthcoming Comprehensive Area Assessment (the replacement for Comprehensive Performance Assessment) which would feature both an Organisation Assessment (comprising a more demanding Use of Resources assessment and managing performance [direction of travel] assessment) together with an Area Assessment that would focus on quality of life issues and partnership working for the benefit of the community. The overall thrust of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment would be to focus on the delivery of beneficial outcomes to the community.

RESOLVED that the contents of the Letter be noted.

DSFRA/88. Asset Management Planning and Community Access to Fire and Rescue Service Premises

The Authority considered a report of the Head of Physical Assets (DSFRA/09/7) addressing, as requested by the last meeting of the Authority (Minute DSFRA/75 refers):

- the current methodology used for Asset Management Planning in the context of available funding, the Authority's Financial Regulations and criteria used for prioritising new build, major refurbishment, minor improvement and planned maintenance work;
- issues relating to community access to fire and rescue stations;
- issues relating to licensed bars on fire and rescue stations;
- work proposed for Topsham fire and rescue station; and
- the current position in relation to Brixham fire and rescue station.

In considering this matter Councillor Foggin presented the Authority with a 300 signature petition as follows:

"The Fire Service is planning to spend £26,000 on disabled toilet facilities at Topsham Fire Station. This plan includes removing the bar used by off-duty fire fighters for community fundraising.

We, the undersigned, strongly object to the unnecessary loss of this morale boosting bar for our local firefighters and the needless waste of public money on another disabled facility at this sight"

The Chief Fire Officer commented that, prior to combination, the former Somerset Fire and Rescue Service had removed all bars at its stations on the basis that they were seen as neither compatible with core service functionality nor appropriate in terms of drink driving and alcohol consumption generally. The facility at Topsham was the last of its kind at former Devon Fire and Rescue premises and research conducted of other fire and rescue services indicated that, of the 40 services who responded, 35 (87.5%) had a "no alcohol on stations" policy with several more being in the process of removing bars. The Chief Fire Officer outlined the extent of the proposed works at Topsham station, which were a combination of community access and dignity at work improvements, and commented that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) had, following a visit to a different fire station, expressed concern at the lack of appropriate showering facilities for use by firefighters following a return from an operational call.

Following a debate on this issue Councillor Stuart Hughes **MOVED** (seconded: Councillor Foggin):

"that the bar at Topsham Fire Station be retained but that no other licensed bars be permitted on fire and rescue service premises".

The Motion was put to the vote and declared **LOST** by 16 votes against the Motion to 4 in favour.

Councillor Cann then **MOVED** (seconded: Councillor Parsons):

"that the bar at Topsham Fire Station be closed and that a policy be adopted of no permanently licensed bars on any Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service premises."

The Motion was put to the vote and declared **CARRIED** by 15 votes in favour, none against and with 3 abstentions.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the current methodology for prioritising work on buildings as set out in Section 2 of report DSFRA/09/7 be endorsed and that future asset management plans be developed in conjunction with the Capital Programme Working Party and reported to the Resources Committee (and/or full Authority) as part of the budget setting process;
- (b) that, consequent to (a) above, the Terms of Reference of the Capital Programme Working Party be amended -

FROM:

“To oversee schemes currently being progressed as part of the Major Capital Programme and make recommendations as appropriate to the Resources Committee and/or full Authority”

TO:

“To oversee the development of the Authority’s asset management plans making recommendations as appropriate to the Resources Committee and/or full Authority”;

- (c) that the current methodology for community engagement and access to fire stations as set out in Section 3 of the report be endorsed and further consideration given by the Capital Programme Working Party as to which of the Service’s fire stations should be designated as ‘community fire stations’.
- (d) that the bar at Topsham Fire Station be closed and that a policy be adopted of no permanently licensed bars on any Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service premises;
- (e) that in the light of the HSEs recent inspection, the minor works programme be reconsidered;
- (f) that it be noted that the rebuilding of Brixham station will be considered along with all other identified priorities as part of the 2010 -15 asset management planning process.

(SEE ALSO MINUTE DSFRA/86 ABOVE).

DSFRA/89. Treasury Management Policy

The Authority considered a report of the Treasurer to the Authority (DSFRA/09/8) on proposed revisions to the Authority’s Treasury Management Policy. The Authority had, at its inception, adopted – in accordance with the Chartered Institution of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice for Treasury Management in Public Services – a Code featuring:

- A Treasury Management Policy Statement stating the policies and objectives of the Authority’s treasury management activities; and
- suitable Treasury Management Practices (TMPs) setting out the manner in which the Authority will seek to achieve its policies and objectives and prescribe how it will manage and control those activities.

The report proposed amendments to two Treasury Management Practices (TMP 1 and TMP 4), as contained within the Authority's approved overall Policy, to reflect recent changes relating to revised credit ratings attached to UK banks which were now financially backed by the government.

RESOLVED that the revisions to the Devon and Somerset FRA Treasury Management Policy document, as outlined in report DSFRA/09/8, be approved.

DSFRA/90. Enhanced Accessibility to Authority Meetings

The Authority considered a report of the Clerk to the Authority (DSFRA/09/9) on public accessibility to Authority meetings. A previous report to the Authority meeting on 31 July 2008 had identified that the Authority was fully compliant with its legal obligations for accessibility. Access to the meeting rooms at Somerset House for persons with disabilities was facilitated by the lift in East Devon House (utilising the upper floor link connecting Somerset House via the new Main Reception building) and the meeting rooms were equipped with a hearing induction loop. Additionally, subsequent to submission of the earlier report, a full Public Address (PA) system featuring wireless radio microphones had been installed.

Following consideration of the earlier report the Authority had resolved (Minute DSFRA/34 refers) that options in relation to webcasting meetings be explored. The report now before the Authority detailed options based on the provision of the following:

- 1 x static camera providing a whole room overview;
- 2 x dome cameras with automatic tracking configured to focus on the person speaking at any one time; and
- provision of associated equipment to facilitate webcasting (e.g. camera switching software and equipment [PC]; dedicated server for streaming/webcasting video and audio via the intranet and internet).

Options included outright purchase and leasing, with costs ranging from £9,200 to £14,200 and it was suggested that likely take-up of a web-casting facility might be one of the factors for the Authority to consider in determining this issue given that, historically and to date, there had been little or no public or press attendance at the majority of Authority or Committee meetings.

During a debate on this issue, Members weighed the benefits of providing a webcasting facility against the cost of installation. Several views were expressed as to there being only a small benefit for public access to meetings and resources would have to be diverted from investment in other premises related improvements.

Following the debate on this issue, Councillor Button **MOVED** (seconder: Councillor Viney):

“that the Authority does not proceed with the procurement of web-casting facilities at the present time”

The motion was put to the vote and declared **CARRIED**.

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Authority does not proceed with the procurement of web-casting facilities at the present time;
- (b) that, subject to (a) above, the report be noted.

DSFRA/91. Chairman's Announcements

The Authority received for information a schedule of activities undertaken by the Chairman on behalf of the Authority since its last meeting.

The Chairman also reported on forthcoming attendance, on Thursday 2 April 2009, at a meeting with both the Fire Minister and Shadow Fire Minister in London.

DSFRA/92. Chief Fire Officer's Announcements

The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that, immediately following the conclusion of the formal meeting, a seminar would be held to discuss the implications for the Authority of the contents of the Audit Commission report "Rising to the Challenge" and the approach the Authority might wish to adopt in addressing these implications.

The meeting started at 10.00hours and finished at 12.47hours.