

Environmental & Community Services Select Committee

18 September 2014 – At a meeting of the Select Committee held at 10.30 am at County Hall, Chichester.

Present:

Mrs Brunsdon	Mr M Jones	Mr S Oakley
Mr Circus	Mrs Phillips	Mr Tyler (Chairman)
Dr Dennis	Mr J Rogers (Vice Chairman)	
Mr G Jones	Mr R Oakley	

In attendance by invitation:

- Mr Barnard (Cabinet Member for Residents' Services)
- Mr Montyn (Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport)
- Mr Rae (Deputy Cabinet Member for Residents' Service – Fire and Rescue Service)

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Mr Barrett-Miles
- Mr Whittington
- Mrs Field (Cabinet Member for Community Wellbeing (and Deputy Leader))

Declarations of Interest

82. Mr G Jones declared a prejudicial interest in respect of item 5 (West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service - Future Fire & Rescue Phase) as a member of the Executive Task & Finish Group that helped develop the proposals in the consultation document and a personal interest in item 3 (Part I Minutes of the joint meeting of the Environmental & Community Services Select Committee and the Performance & Finance Select Committee held on 4 July) and 12 (Part II minutes of the joint meeting of the Environmental & Community Services Select Committee and the Performance & Finance Select Committee held on 4 July) as having a family member employed by the waste company in relation to the Waste Strategy and the Materials Resource Management Contract item.

Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 July 2014

83. Resolved – That the minutes of the Environmental & Community Services Select Committee meeting held on 11 July 2014 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

Part I minutes of the joint meeting of the Environmental & Community Services Select Committee and the Performance & Finance Select Committee held on 4 July

84. Resolved – That the Part I minutes of the joint meeting of the Environmental & Community Services Select Committee and the Performance & Finance Select Committee held on 4 July be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service – Future Fire & Rescue Phase Two

85. The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director Communities, Public Protection and Chief Fire Officer, and a presentation by Opinion Research Services (copies appended to the signed minutes). The report was introduced by Lee Neale, Director of Public Protection and Deputy Chief Fire Officer who told the Committee the following: -

- It had been made clear in the consultation document that there would be a smaller budget for the West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (WSFRS), but that it would deliver the best service possible within that budget
- The consultation aimed to get a broad range of detailed feedback from the public

86. Dale Hall of Opinion Research Services highlighted the following points in his presentation: -

- 56% of respondents agreed that the proposals were explained clearly – this view was echoed by the forums that took place
- Forums consisted of people chosen at random, but were not well attended
- Staff forums were also not well attended
- It was normal for more opponents of a proposal to comment than supporters
- The responses suggested no widespread controversy over the proposals and a lot of support for the key principles
- The proposals were generally accepted, apart from by those those directly affected
- Two alternative proposals were suggested

87. Tristan Ashby, Retained Firefighters Union (RFU), made the following points: -

- Proposal 2 – The RFU did not agree with the reduction in staff at Littlehampton as the number of call-outs and level of risk had not reduced
- Proposal 3 - The RFU thought that the savings that would be made by removing the second fire engines from Midhurst, Petworth and Storrington would be less than claimed and be so small that it didn't make sense
- Proposal 8 – If all other proposals were agreed, there would be too many full time firefighters – the RFU questioned why they would be kept on with no other role than to fill gaps when more cost effective retained firefighters would lose their jobs
- The RFU queried why WSFRS had spent money on consultants to run the consultation
- Sir Ken Knight's report published in 2013 promoted the use of retained firefighters, but WSFRS was reducing the numbers of retained firefighters it employed
- The RFU acknowledged that the recruitment page for retained firefighters on the WSFRS website had improved, but felt that more needed to be done to encourage people to become retained firefighters
- The RFU felt that reducing staff and appliances would reduce the resilience of the service

88. Francis Bishop, Fire Brigades Union (FBU), made the following points: -

- Proposal 2 – introducing the new crewing model at Chichester would mean that instead of there being seven firefighters from which to achieve a crew of five, there would only be five from which to achieve a crew of five – this would mean that around 40% of the time (mainly at night) only a crew of four would be achieved
- Best practice said that a crew of five was needed for fires where entry was required to save either buildings or lives - this would not always be possible under this crewing model, but not committing to going in would not be an option

89. Lee Neale summed-up for WSFRS: -

- The two alternative proposals submitted via the consultation were rejected as outlined in the report
- Key challenges were also addressed in the report
- WSFRS already used a four-person crew on some appliances – 24 out of 28 other fire & rescue services who responded also operated four-person crews (and some three) – an FBU report from 2004 stated that a four-person crew was the minimum needed to be safe
- The proposals weren't about full time firefighters versus retained firefighters – the percentage of retained firefighters would increase under the proposals

90. Summary of responses to Members' questions and comments: -

- The outcomes of the proposals would be continually monitored and changes made if they were not working
- No proposals would be put forward if WSFRS thought that firefighters' lives would be endangered by them
- The FBU and RFU thought that the proposals, if implemented, could damage morale
- The proposals were a package and had to be implemented together – a phased approach was not an option
- Appliances were always moved between stations to provide cover when necessary
- Employing retained firefighters was challenging because some employers did not want to release their staff for firefighting duties, and the lack of operational experience made it hard to retain them (the new arrangements might allow retained firefighters to get more operational experience)
- There was no need to keep the retained firefighters at Crawley as there was no other work for them to do, and keeping them on would skew the review process
- WSFRS would have preferred a greater response to the consultation to get more views – an interview had been given to a local radio station to try to get more responses
- People who attended the forums asked a lot of questions before coming to their views
- The Safer Crawley Partnership figures on increased fires in Crawley were disputed by WSFRS which said they had only gone up by six in 2013/14 and were down by three this financial year
- Management and administrative roles would be reviewed if the proposed changes were implemented as requirements would change

91. Resolved – That the Committee agrees that if the proposals are adopted by the Cabinet Member, the Committee requests that it formally assesses their impact 12 months following their implementation

Review of the Rights of Way Inspection Cycle

92. The Committee considered a report by the Director of Residents' Services and Head of Transport Commissioning (copy appended to the signed minutes). The report was introduced by Andy Ekinsmyth, Transport Commissioning manager, who highlighted the following points: -

- The Rights of Way (RoW) network in the county was generally good, and the current nine-month inspection cycle was more frequent than required
- A fifteen-month cycle would allow for seasonal variations to be covered – a summer vegetation clearance programme would still take place
- As many inspections were carried out by volunteers, Access Rangers would have more time to deal with landowners
- Consultees were in favour of the proposed change

93. Summary of responses to Members' questions and comments: -

- RoW users could report problems via the contact centre or online – those presenting health & safety concerns would be dealt with first, others might wait for the report from the next inspection
- Access Forums were against a hierarchical inspection system, preferring all RoW to be treated equally, not inspecting the most popular routes more often
- Setting a standard for RoW would be difficult as they had different surfaces e.g. hard surfaces and fields
- If a RoW was open and accessible it was deemed 'good'
- There was concern that less frequent inspections would lead to some damage becoming irreparable e.g. ruts caused by cycles – the service was confident that this would not be the case
- The service used high numbers of volunteers and looked to encourage more

94. The following amendment to the recommendation was proposed by Mrs Brunsdon and seconded by Mr Circus: -

95. The Committee does not support the recommendation to implement a fifteen month inspection cycle of the Rights of Way network from April 2015, and would like to see the retention of the nine month inspection cycle, as it feels that the fifteen month inspection cycle would be a retrograde step for a service that is considered excellent by users across the county

96. The proposal failed.

97. Resolved – That the Committee supports the proposal to implement a fifteen-month inspection cycle of the Rights of Way network from April 2015

Business Planning Group Report

98. The Committee considered a report by the Chairman of the Business Planning Group (copy appended to the signed minutes).

99. Resolved – That the Committee endorses the contents of the report and particularly the revised Work Programme.

Requests for Call-in

100. There had been one request for call-in to the Select Committee within its constitutional remit since the date of the last meeting. The request concerned the Station Square Bognor Regis - Footway decision HT09 (14/15) published on the Electronic Decision Database on 16 September 2014 and in the Members' Information Service on 17 September 2014. The request would be forwarded to the Business Planning Group when finalised. The Business Planning Group would decide whether or not to accept the request. If accepted, the Committee would have to meet to consider the call-in within 18 working days of publication of the proposed decision, unless an extension was agreed by the Chairman and by the relevant Cabinet Member.

Forward Plan of Key Decisions

101. The Committee considered extracts from the Forward Plans for September to December and October to January and learnt that: -

- The proposed transport related Local Authority Trading Company would look at all aspects of the Council's transport services - scoping work would be done before a decision was made to go ahead and this would be brought to the Committee for scrutiny

102. Resolved – That the Committee notes the Forward Plans.

Date of Next Meeting

103. The next scheduled meeting of the Environmental & Community Services Select Committee will be on 19 November 2014 at 10.30 at County Hall, Chichester. If a call-in meeting is required, this will be within 18 working days of publication of the proposed decision, unless an extension is agreed by the Chairman and by the relevant Cabinet Member.

The meeting ended at 13.05

Chairman.