

EXETER STRATEGIC BOARD

Thursday 19 September 2019

Present:-

Councillor Philip Bialyk (Chair)

Councillors Ghusain, Sutton, Hannaford, Leadbetter, Asvachin, Prowse and Aves

Also Present

Democratic Services Officer (MD)

26

APOLOGIES

These were received from Councillors Ackland, Atkinson, Pierce, Whitton and Williams.

27

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 JUNE 2019

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2019 be taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct.

28

DEVON AND SOMERSET FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE - SAFER TOGETHER PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEMBER DISCUSSION

The Chair explained the consultation and the importance of responding as part of the Member roles on the Exeter Strategic Board. He confirmed that officials from both the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority (DSFRA) and the Fire Brigade Union had been invited to attend the meeting but, there had been no representatives to attend. The consultation ended on 22 September 2019, and the obligation was on the Exeter Strategic Board Members to determine their own conclusion and provide a response to the consultation.

County Councillor Hannaford explained that this would be the only opportunity for formal response to be provided from Exeter City Council and that Devon County Council had not made a formal response. He confirmed that both he and County Councillor Prowse would abstain from voting at this meeting, regarding the decision to respond, to avoid any form of predetermination.

Members commented on the way information had been presented from the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority, notably, that not all the work undertaken, including flood response and dispatches as third responder, had been included in the information presented. Members discussed the issue of the Topsham station being designated as a low impact station, despite the service area it covered. It was felt that a further consultation process was necessary with more information provided. It was noted that the statistical information for the Topsham station, was inaccurate, and that a sign was placed at the station site, detailing the actual information, which had been left out of the consultation information. Members further commented on the lack of consideration for the proposed housing developments in the Exeter area in the consultation and that there was no mention of the issues relating to the pay and conditions of fire station staff.

It was considered that the information provided needed to be accurate and a true reflection of the situation, with alternative solutions provided. Additional information

including information on callouts for life threatening injuries caused by incidents such as car accidents and data on injury's, job losses and impacts from toxins and smoke released into the air, should also be included in the consultation information. In its current form, Members could not support the consultation and agreed to write to the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority. Based on the comments made by Members, the Chair moved that a written be made on behalf of the Exeter Strategic Board.

Members voted unanimously, in support of the proposal, with the exception of County Councillors Hannaford and Prowse, who abstained from voting, to write to the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority (DSFRA) consultation. A copy of the letter is appended to the minutes.

RESOLVED that the Exeter Strategic Board calls upon Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority (DSFRA) members to reject in full the options proposed.

29 **FEEDBACK FROM MEMBER REPRESENTATION ON MULTI AGENCY GROUPS**

Community Safety Partnership – Executive Group

The Board noted the minutes of the meeting held on 3 July 2019.

The Chair would request feedback from the Community Safety Partnership and requested discussion topics be submitted to him ahead of the next meeting.

30 **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The following dates of future Board meetings were noted, all commencing at 5.30pm in the Civic Centre.

Thursday 14 November 2019
Thursday 30 January 2020
Thursday 18 June 2020
Thursday 17 September 2020

(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.09 pm)

Chair

Dear Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service

EXETER STRATEGIC BOARD

Communications & Engagement
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service
Service Headquarters
The Knowle
Clyst St George
Exeter
EX3 0NW

Please ask for: Howard Bassett
Direct Dial: 01392 265107
Email: howard.bassett@exeter.gov.uk
Our ref:
Your ref:
Date: 20 September 2019

safertogetherprogramme@dsfire.gov.uk

DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY CONSULTATION

The Exeter Strategic Board, in considering the current options for change consultation initiated by the Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority (DSFRA), believes, that the options do not provide suitable and sufficient assessment or information to be able to justify the changes proposed:

- Consultation data used to justify the changes is insufficient as it focuses on 'preventable' deaths, while failing to consider injuries, or building, environmental and economic damage arising from fires and the other emergency incidents firefighters attend.
- The data is further flawed because it allocates numbers of incidents only to the fire station initially responding to a call, whereas fires and other emergencies may require multiple appliances from different areas, and/or repeated crew attendances.
- The data makes an unproven and unacceptable assumption that if proposed changes were made, all appliance assets would suddenly be available 100% of the time (compared to the current figure of 80% availability). This will simply not be the case unless a more reliable on-call firefighter system is implemented in advance of any changes, and in the absence of this, risk would likely increase even further.
- Serious life threatening and life changing injuries caused by incidents such as car accidents dealt with by the fire services were also not recorded and should be. The consultation does not give any positive information about how closures in areas would be improved for example by the provision of a new fire station that would give better cover than two stations being proposed for closure.

The Exeter Strategic Board was concerned that no information had been provided on how much of the savings realised by the proposed changes would be re-invested in the front-line service, or how the on-call system would be improved so availability could be increased from the current 80% to the projected 100%.

Exeter Strategic Board is calling on the Government to amend its attitude to local authority financing, and empower them to deliver the services and investment that citizens are entitled to expect, but nevertheless notes that the DSFRA currently holds record levels (over £38m) of reserves built up during the last ten years of Government-imposed cuts. Exeter Strategic Board also notes comments from senior fire officers:-

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.devonlive.com/news/devon-news/closing-fire-stations-proposals-not-3027694.amp>)

That these proposals were not forced on the Service by Government austerity cuts (notwithstanding these have been severe, amounting to a cut of almost 50% of Central Government funding since 2010).

Exeter Strategic Board is deeply concerned that reduced capacity and resilience from permanently losing fire appliance cover at Budleigh Salterton, Crediton, Exmouth and Topsham would mean the loss of adequate response for the needs of an increasing population and development in the Exeter area (e.g. 20,000 new homes to be built by 2040).

For all the above reasons, Exeter Strategic Board calls upon the Devon and Somerset Fire Authority (DSFRA) to reject in full all of the options proposed, and for any future proposals for change to include more comprehensive, detailed, specific and meaningful information as an integral part of the consultation process.

The Exeter Strategic Board was also disappointed in the lack of attendance from the Devon and Somerset Fire Authority and refusal to engage with a major stakeholder. The decision has resulted in the Exeter Strategic Board, being unable to examine the detail of any of their proposals. The Exeter Strategic Board notes but cannot support the overall cover loss within Exeter.

The Options proposed do not provide sufficient detail for the improvements claimed, particularly information on how the on-call system would be improved, how extra prevention and protection will be achieved, or how much would actually be re-invested into the service. It fails to recognise the excellent work Firefighters already do to prevent injuries, building damage and environmental damage, and to respond to all types of incidents.

The Exeter Strategic Board feels that the data given in the consultation is flawed and has an unachievable expectation, in that there is an assumption made that after the cuts, all assets will be available at all times, giving the false impression that the risk of fire deaths will reduce if the proposals are agreed, whereas statistically it is likely that the risk would increase. The revised attendance times make no reference to properties that may be disadvantaged by the proposed changes.

It should also be noted that if the proposals were to be adopted, around 1/3 of the residents of Devon and Somerset would see a slower response from the Fire and Rescue service. As such the Exeter Strategic Board calls upon DSFRS authority members to reject in full the options proposed.

Yours sincerely



Councillor Philip Bialyk
Chair of Exeter Strategic Board and Leader of Exeter City Council