

County Council

14 December 2018

Item 6(a) Notice of Motion from Mr Jones on Fire and Rescue Service Funding – vote 1

This Council notes the existing, and increasing, gap in the funding provided per person from the Government towards West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (WSFRS), in comparison to the per person funding in all of those Fire and Rescue Services immediately surrounding it. Not only are many of these surrounding authorities receiving much higher sums to protect their communities, but with further Government cuts in 2019/20, the gap is set to become far worse, and even more unfair, for West Sussex. Moreover, the local government Settlement Funding Assessment for fire authorities shows West Sussex having the biggest funding cut in England, between 2016/17 and 2019/20, of 45%. The English average is a 15% cut.

This Council also notes that despite assurances by the previous Chief Fire Officer that there would always be a minimum of 30 fire appliances and crews available, out of 35 across the county at any one time, that in practice, between 7am and 7pm, there are rarely more than 15 available, sometimes as few as 10, and that firefighters are having to work hard to keep such numbers and maintain the resilience of the Service.

This council further notes that WSFRS has already had very deep cuts made to it in recent years, with £2.5 million and £1.6 million in 2012 and 2014 respectively, making it according to the FBU the second worst hit fire authority in the proportion of its overall number of firefighters lost in the whole of Great Britain, with a reduction of 37% of its firefighters, during that time.

The Council is aware that the Chief Fire Officer is due to take decisions in December which will result in a reduction of preventative measures which have proved to be a vital tool in reducing risk and saving lives through initiatives such as the Safe Drive to Stay Alive safety awareness campaign and the Firebreak scheme. It is understood that cuts are also proposed which will reduce the availability of the technical response unit who deliver specialist rescue services, and reducing the staff complement for the Resilience and Emergencies Team (RET) in the region of 50%.

The Council is also aware the forthcoming HMI inspection of WSFRS began in November with preliminary feedback expected to be provided in December but its final report is not due to be published until May 2019.

This Council believes in the context of the circumstances outlined above, and also because it is impossible to predict what issues or extra demands the HMI inspection may reveal which will require action, it would be inappropriate at this time to come forward with any measures which would result in a reduction in funding and the delivery of services by the West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service.

The Council therefore resolves:

- (1) To call on the Cabinet Member for Safer, Stronger Communities to instruct

the Chief Fire Officer not to take any decisions that will result in a reduction in staffing or services provided by WSFRS, as the service has taken as much as it can bear without further compromising public and firefighter safety, further threatening the availability of crews and appliances at the county's fire stations and increasing the likelihood of road traffic accidents; and

- (2) To request the Leader and the Cabinet Member for Safer, Stronger Communities jointly write to the relevant Government Minister, questioning the inequalities in funding for WSFRS and calling for it to be raised so that it is in line with the funding that other neighbouring fire authorities receive, per person.