
Notice of Motion: Fire and Rescue Service Funding

- 1** The Chairman of the County Council referred the notice of motion on Fire and Rescue Funding, submitted to the County Council on 19 October 2018, to the Cabinet Member for Safer, Stronger Communities for consideration. The motion called on the Cabinet to not put forward further proposals for cuts to the West Sussex Fire Service and requested that the Leader and the Cabinet Member for Safer, Stronger Communities jointly write to the relevant Government Minister to question inequalities in funding as set out in the motion.
- 2** The Cabinet Member met Mr Jones on 31 October 2018 to discuss the motion. The position in relation to funding comparisons with neighbouring authorities has been provided in a briefing for members. It must be noted that funding arrangements differ between county authorities such as West Sussex and Surrey and stand-alone Fire Authorities such as those of the county's other neighbours.
- 3** The Cabinet Member confirms that there are no current plans for changes or savings related to the number of fire engines/fire stations in West Sussex. All changes to Fire and Rescue are managed through a risk assessment process which fully considers any risks to public and firefighter safety of any proposal. Proposals will also include public consultation when appropriate. The Cabinet Member also confirms that the forthcoming Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection of the West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service is underway but that, aside from some preliminary feedback expected during December, is not due to formally publish its conclusions until its final report is produced which is expected in May 2019. The Cabinet Member is not, therefore, prepared, at this time, to write to the relevant Government Minister.
- 4** The Cabinet Member will consider the needs of the service and the actions required to maintain or enhance performance in light of the inspection report and the inspection process. Members will be involved in those considerations both through scrutiny and more broadly.
- 5** The Cabinet Member therefore:
 - rejects the premise for the motion and considers the requests made in the motion to be either premature or unnecessary in order to maintain the quality and integrity of the service. The Cabinet Member is keen to work with all members to protect and nurture the work of West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service.
 - confirms that emergency response fire engines and statutory services are not affected by current plans for savings or service reductions but work is ongoing to assess where and whether it may be possible to make further reductions in costs as part of the County Council's budget planning process. As part of this assessment non-statutory prevention work is being considered for change through the operational work of the Director of Operations and Chief Fire Officer.
 - confirms that the County Council is fully responsible for the management of the Service, the assessment of service need, and for risk management in

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- service and budget planning. This will be informed by the HMICFRS process with any proposals arising being subject to member engagement and scrutiny.
- suggests a need to wait for the outcomes of the HMICFRS inspection in order to be better informed on any further action to take which could include writing to the relevant Government Minister should such a step be considered helpful.
 - welcomes discussion and debate on any proposed service changes and savings, emphasising the need for the County Council members to work together to protect and maintain the excellent standard of service that West Sussex Fire and Rescue provides and invites scrutiny of any decision making at the Environment, Communities and Fire Select Committee.
- 6** Mr Jones confirmed that he still wishes to debate the motion at County Council on 14 December 2018. With the Chairman's agreement, Mr Jones has revised the wording of his motion to reflect that the decision maker for possible service changes would be the Chief Fire Officer rather than the Cabinet Member, as set out on the agenda.
- 7** The Cabinet Member is unable to support the motion for the reasons set out above, and due to the need to address the issues set out in the motion at the appropriate time, in light of the HMICFRS inspection currently underway. The Cabinet Member's decision on this matter was published via the Executive Decision Database on 23 November 2018.

Debbie Kennard

Cabinet Member for Safer, Stronger Communities

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Background Papers

None