

Report to Cabinet - 3 September 2019

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Board met on 20 August 2019 to consider the consultation documents produced by Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue on the proposed options for future service delivery and to form a recommendation to Cabinet as the Council's official response to the consultation known as 'Safer Together'.
2. The Board heard oral representations from the following: Lee Howell (Chief Fire Officer), Glenn Askew (Deputy Chief Fire Officer), Chris Balcombe (Fire Brigade Union Representative), Tara Harris (Assistant Director of Community Services) and Rosemary Martin (Devon Landlords Association). Written representation in support of the consultation was also received from Adel Jones (Director of Transformation and Partnerships, Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust).
3. Lee Howell and Glenn Askew outlined the proposed six options and the rationale behind the Fire Authority's proposals. These included that the Fire and Rescue was originally designed more than 50 years ago and since then the make-up of communities and the way in which people live their life had changed significantly. The Board was advised that the distribution of stations and resources across the two counties had not changed since the 1940's. It was noted that the geography of Devon and Somerset was changing with the increase in large housing developments in some towns. Moreover, lifestyle changes, such as the introduction of the smoking ban, the oven chip and the mass installation of smoke detectors, had greatly contributed to the reduction in the number of fire deaths and casualties. The Board was advised that prevention work was increasingly a key focus for the Fire and Rescue Service and the representatives explained the different types of preventative technology which could be used and installed in residential and business properties. Mr Howell stated that there was a need to save money but that the proposals were motivated by a desire to reallocate resources more efficiently to take into account the present day context.
4. The Fire and Rescue Representatives confirmed that the proposals would save over £8m, and that 20% of the total revenue savings across the region would come from changes to provision at Paignton Fire Station, which would include the ending of whole-time crewed cover at night. The requirement to make savings was due to a significant reduction in central grant funding from national government which had impacted upon the service as they, like local authorities, do not have the protection of protected funding. They had assessed that increasing the precept in Council Tax was not a realistic option, and therefore significant structural change was needed. The submitted papers showed the demand for, and availability of, fire engines from May 2016 to April 2019 inclusive, the emergency response standards and the revenue/capital savings each of the six options would generate together with prevention and protection proceeds.
5. The Fire Brigade Union Representative, Chris Balcombe, outlined the concerns the Union had highlighted with the consultation. He stated that the statistics provided in the

consultation information only included firefighters' attendance at Road Traffic Collisions and fires in domestic dwellings. It did not include all the rescue work firefighters undertake, including fires on commercial property and open ground, medical support incidents, farm incidents and flood rescues. In particular Mr Balcombe referred to peoples' lifestyle choices and the difficulties the Fire and Rescue Service face in engaging with communities in deprived areas in their preventative work. This had particular relevance to Torbay where there were a high number of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) with a large proportion of transient or short-term rentals. The Union had also voiced concerns over the proposals with regard to the absence of detail behind many of its assumptions. Essential elements such as pay, and other terms and conditions were not available, which made it difficult to assess the effect of these proposals on the recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters.

6. The Assistant Director of Community Services, Tara Harris, praised the partnership work the Council carries out with the Fire and Rescue Service and highlighted to the Board that one in four people living in Torbay were over the age of 65, a group which is deemed as high risk. Mrs Harris explained that Torbay has a significant number of large care homes and that Torbay is a popular visitor location. Therefore during peak season the number of people in the bay is significantly higher. Mrs Harris explained that Torbay also had a high number of privately rented accommodation and prevention work with this sector is of utmost importance. Mrs Harris referred to a number of recent fires in Torbay and stated that there didn't appear to be a pattern surrounding their circumstances. The Board was further advised that the support provided by the Council after a fire can have an impact on services for a significant period of time.
7. Rosemary Martin from the Devon Landlords' Association outlined the difficulties landlords' encounter, which begins with the condition of older properties at purchase as frequently these properties are not compliant with Fire Regulations. She gave examples of the difficulties caused by some tenants who experienced health issues which posed greater fire risk to themselves and neighbours, especially in the context of HMOs. She underlined landlords' concerns with slower response times should any of the proposed options be implemented.
8. The Board reflected and debated the information provided to them, both in writing and orally. The six options in the Safer Together proposals were discussed, with the Board reaching consensus that all of the options were likely to mean a significant deterioration in the quality of service residents in Torbay were likely to receive. The Board formed the following recommendation (in paragraph 9) to the Cabinet. On being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried unanimously.
9. The Board recommends that:

The Leader of the Council responds to the consultation before the closing date of 22 September 2019.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board recommends to Cabinet that the 6 options as proposed by the Devon and Somerset Fire Authority in their consultation document Safer Together be rejected. That members of the Fire Authority representing Torbay

be instructed to vote against these options and support any option to maintain the status quo of fire cover in the bay and open discussions with the Fire Service to explore improved resilience in a more clear and concise way.

This Council having considered the current consultation being run by Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service feels that:-

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.

This Council 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 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 one third of the residents of Devon and Somerset, over 600000 people, will see a slower response from the Fire and Rescue service at certain times of the day.

The Overview and Scrutiny Board fully supports the work the Fire and Rescue Service undertake in their prevention work within Torbay and urges the Fire and Rescue Service to undertake more enforcement action with businesses who are non-compliant with the appropriate fire regulations and to work with Community Services to achieve this.

As such this Council calls upon Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service Authority members to reject in full the options proposed.