

MINUTES OF THE ARTS AND INFORMATION COMMITTEE HELD ON 8TH JANUARY, 2019

Present: Councillor Mrs J Bell (Chair) and R Arthur, E Bell, Mrs K Brace, S P Colborn, S Cudlip, D Cummings, Mrs V Cummings, Mrs S Forster, Ms R M Gratton, G N Hepworth, Mrs L Kennedy, D McKenna, K Shaw, T Shepherd, B Taylor, R Whitehead.

Apologies: Councillors Mrs B E Allen, Mrs G Bleasdale, Mrs S Pratt, Miss L Willis

Officers: Mrs D Rickaby (Town Clerk) P Fletcher (Deputy Town Clerk).

Prior to commencement of the meeting the Chair advised members of this Committee and members of the public that in line with the amendment to 'the public bodies (admission to meetings) act 1960', which came into force in August, 2014, parts of this meeting may be recorded by photographic, video and audio means.

1. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded prior to the start of the meeting of the need to disclose any interests prejudicial or personal, in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

2. PRESENTATION

Councillor Mrs J A Bell declared an interest and took no further part in the voting thereon.

The Chair welcomed Mr Stuart Errington, Chief of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority to the meeting who wished to discuss the Fire Services Integrated Risk Management Plan Consultation for 2018-19 (IRMP). The IRMP is a statutory duty of the Fire Authorities and they have to produce this document and have a three year plan. The current plan runs until 2021 but the action plan has been updated due to some changes in legislation due to a court case in South Yorkshire and this will impact on Seaham in particular.

Mr Errington stated that he had hard copies of the consultation which he would give out to Members at the end of the presentation and Members could complete these and he would take them back with him or these could also be completed on-line via Social Media.

Mr Errington stated that financially throughout this period of austerity from when the budget cuts started in 2011-12 there has been a 58% cut in funding from Government which is a huge cut. This equates to £7.8m in cash terms. The Fire Service are aware of their funding up to 2019-2020 and there will be a 0.5m deficit and this will rise to 0.75m by 2020-21. The Fire Service had assumed that from 2021-22 that the Government cuts would stop but the information from the Home

Office is that isn't necessarily the case and there is likely to be a 5% cut year on year throughout the next funding period.

There is also a year on year 2-3% pay increase but the Fire Service Union currently have a 17% increase lodged and whether some of that will be funded or not is not known at present. There is also a problem with the funding of the Firefighters Pension Scheme and as from 2019-20 that will put £107m deficit nationally on to the Fire Services as the employers contributions will rise. The Treasury have stated that they will fund 90% of that amount in 2019-20 but they haven't stated anything for 2020-21 and going forward. The Fire Service are therefore nervous that the £735k in 2021-22 may look significantly worse and the total assumptions could be £2.85m which is a worst case scenario and there would be some changes to be made if this becomes a reality and the budget would need to be balanced.

Mr Errington discussed emergency response and stated that 75% of the overall funding as a Fire and Rescue Service goes towards emergency response which includes fire stations, fire appliances and the crews for the appliances and approximately 80% of the 75% is for the crew staff funding. This is a big implication so people can see why changes are needed to be made and this will impact on staff and the numbers of Firefighters which the Fire Service can have available to respond to emergency incidents.

The Fire Service have Standard guarantees for members of the public that they will get an appliance to any house fire in 8 minutes 70% of the time across anywhere in Durham and Darlington and 90% of the time there will be a fire appliance there in 11 minutes. The Fire Service have the same standards for non-domestic properties such as factories or businesses and there is a slightly slower response time for road traffic incidents due to the network of roads especially on the west side of Durham as it would be impossible to hit the 8-11 minutes response time. The Fire Service have been clear throughout austerity that the standards of response time would be left the same as previously so that they can benchmark any changes against where they were prior to austerity.

Mr Errington stated that in 2010-11 the Fire Service started to look at an Emergency Response Review as part of an overall service transformation plan and the main priority has been to protect front line services as much as possible and the Fire Service have got to this point without reducing the number of Fire Stations or fire appliances which are available in County Durham and Darlington. However, this doesn't mean that there haven't been a significant amount of changes made and the Fire Service have worked closely with Trade Unions and the staff to allow the changes to be made. There has always been a point where the Fire Service couldn't guarantee the changes and unfortunately the Fire Services are about to have to face further changes. In 2017-18 the Fire Service re-ran the Emergency Response Review and came up with a series of options with the Fire Authority and a few of the options have been implemented as trials. No changes were made for the day crews at Seaham or Newton Aycliffe. A significant amount of data is looked at on the review such as how many times the appliances are called out, is it life risk, whether it is property fires or road traffic collisions and when are the high demand times. Staffing is also done on risk as well as how many dwellings are in the area and how many future houses are planned in the area and what is the general population, deprivation and a whole series of other levels of risk. There is also a

level of professional experience that is taken into account. However, the financial perspective has to be included when trying to balance the budget deficit.

Mr Errington stated that earlier last year there was a High Court judgement based upon a challenge that the Fire Brigades Union took in South Yorkshire against the Fire Authority and Fire and Rescue Service. They have a system in place known as Close Proximity Crewing. South Yorkshire introduced this in 2011 on the back of a local dispute and industrial action. This was then imposed on various stations and staff were moved from those stations where they didn't want to work that system and it ended up in employment tribunals and a long history of court cases that went to the High Court earlier last year. The High Court judgement has had an impact across the whole of the Fire and Rescue Service in the UK. The judgement stated that the shift systems do not comply with the Working Time Directive. The Service can't get a local agreement in place to put that shift system in place as it currently stands. The service have had to reflect on this as it doesn't match a Health and Safety Regulation and to try and find an alternative. The demand data throws up some interesting information such as Durham's 3 year average, Durham is the quietest station and yet it has the most resources ie 3 appliances. Seaham has 2 appliances 1 for day crew and one for on-call. Generally the busiest stations have the most resources. When looking at Newton Aycliffe and Seaham it didn't particularly warrant the resources but following the ruling in South Yorkshire the Fire Authority now have to look at the data in Seaham and Newton Aycliffe in a different way.

The Service went back through the Emergency Response options data and looked at all of the risks and looked to see what they could do that was different and they have come up with three options. One is around collaboration with the regional Fire and Rescue Service partners, another is about implementing an option which has been running with Bishop Auckland as a trial. The crew could be changed back to whole time which is what it was prior to 2012 or something similar, could just go to day crewing which is compliant with the Working Time Directive which is also agreeable with staffs terms and conditions and can be implemented without any issues or the third option. Mr Errington stated that if money wasn't a problem then his preferred option would be number 1 which would be putting the crews back to whole time working which guarantees the response model and standards and if money wasn't an option that is what would be happening but that option costs £600k per year on top of the deficit which is already built into the medium term financial plan and also on top of the nervous position of further cuts continuing, pension increases and pay increases. Mr Errington stated that they can take a fire appliance on a night time from a multi-hub station and move them to the day crew and plus stations. If they were going to take a pump they would take it from Peterlee Fire Station and put it into Seaham and the pump from Durham would go to Newton Aycliffe. There are no savings and this would be cost neutral and this would keep the response standards for the two stations. Peterlee is the second busiest station and this wouldn't meet the risk and demand and calls in Peterlee are increasing rather than decreasing. The response times in Seaham will be better but in Peterlee it will be worse.

Option 2 is the easiest option to implement to change day crew and plus to day crew only. The station will be manned 12 hours during the day and 12 hours on the night would be reliant solely on on-call firefighters. The main saving would be £350k from the pensionable allowance which staff who work that system receive.

For Seaham if they worked 9-9 they would hit 83% of accidental dwelling fires within that period, 80% of road traffic collisions and 82% on non-domestic properties. This clearly isn't as good as a whole time option.

Option 3 is whether they still put Seaham and Newton Aycliffe to day crewing. This could be moved to Spennymoor and has the biggest saving although savings aren't the primary driver. This would improve the services overall response standards but it will reduce the response standards in Seaham and Newton Aycliffe.

Mr Errington stated that Seaham's appliance also covers the Murton area and it takes 10 minutes & 3 seconds to get there and Peterlee's 1st takes 10 minutes & 6 seconds to get to Murton. This would be the same on 9-9 and outside of 9-9 Peterlee's 1st and 2nd crews would be 10 minutes 6 seconds and Seaham's RDS would take 13 minutes and this would be standard to have 3 appliances for a house fire. The delay would be in the third appliance getting to the scene. In terms of response standards it increases and Mr Errington asked why moving an appliance from Durham to Spennymoor has such a big impact.

The reason the preferred option is 3 is because the Fire Service get the biggest overall impact on service response standards and the biggest financial savings of £450k. This is not a done deal and is a genuine consultation. There is a lot of ongoing work with the staff at Seaham station and they have their own working group and there is a similar working group at Newton Aycliffe. The FBU are looking at this from a different angle as well. There are options on the table which are maintaining the response standards in Seaham and Newton Aycliffe. The Fire Authority are due to sit down on the 22nd February to go through all of the consultations and to work out what they are going to do and that is why members of the public's views are taken into consideration.

The Chair then opened the meeting up to Members questions.

1. A Member stated that Mr Errington had explained why he preferred option 3 due to it saving £450k but option 1 was a straight line and there was no up and downs so why isn't that the preferred option and that was £600k?

Mr Errington stated that it was a cost of £600k and not a saving.

2. A Member questioned how many people are going to lose their jobs?

Mr Errington stated that under Option 3 5 firefighters will lose their jobs which will be done through natural wastage and there are a number of staff in temporary roles who will revert back to normal posts. There will be 5 less firefighters in County Durham and Darlington but there will be no redundancies.

3. A Member stated that it seemed that Seaham would be worse off with the chosen option and it didn't sit well with her?

Mr Errington agreed that there would be a worsening of the response standard. At the moment there is an immediate response pretty much 24/7 from Seaham and Newton Aycliffe and both of the stations will worsen if option 3 is introduced.

4. A Member stated that not knowing the full protocols but you stated that you send 3 vehicles to a house fire, how often do you get 3 there at the same time?

Mr Errington stated that the example used was Murton. The first appliance from Seaham will go up to Murton and 2 appliances from Peterlee will go. The first two appliances from Peterlee will go and the third appliance after 9pm will be the RDS appliance from Seaham which is where the delay will be. Having 3 appliances within 13 minutes is still a good response time into Murton. If you look at Consett it would be a struggle to hit 13 minutes with 3 appliances because of Consett's geographical location. It is not a significant worsening on what is happening now but it is a worsening.

5. A Member asked why they are keeping Wheatley Hill Station?

Mr Errington stated that Wheatley Hill is a part time fire station and is in the top 10% of the busiest part time stations in the country. The savings from taking out Wheatley Hill would be in the region of £160k so overall the benefit of having Wheatley Hill due to the number of calls it receives which is 250 calls per year which is busier than some of the 2 pump RDS stations. They have more primary fires than Seaham and it is about balancing and mobilising in those areas. If Wheatley Hill had been a day crew or whole time crew then it would have been a more preferred option.

6. A Member stated that going back to the £600k loss it contradicts what it says in the documents as it states it makes £350k efficiency savings which contradicts what you are saying in your presentation?

Mr Errington stated that this was option 2. Option 1 when the whole time is put in it will cost £600k. Mr Errington stated that the table on the consultation document is incorrect and they will change the document before it goes out to anyone else.

7. A Member asked if Wheatley Hill is a part time station is it manned all of the time and wondered why it was a part time station when it has one of the highest call rates?

Mr Errington stated that there are staff there to do it and generally it is tried to keep it to 24/7. The firefighters have other jobs and there are times when it isn't available. Mr Errington stated that it is one of the highest rates of all of the part time stations. It has 100 calls less than Spennymoor which is day crewing and generally a crew can go out with 4 people on an appliance but

they prefer to have 5. At Seaham the appliance always turns out with 5 crew members. Peterlee because it is a 2 pump station has 4 and 4 on the pumps so it is slightly more complex but generally on a 1 pump station there are 5 crew.

8. A Member stated that it was fought to keep Wheatley Hill station in 2005-06 when it was on the agenda to close it then. One of the peculiarities of Wheatley Hill is that it is the back-up pump that covers Peterlee area and can attend incidents with Peterlee station. The Member stated that he was more aware of the presentation than other Members and felt that he was comfortable with the way things are going at the moment.

Mr Errington stated that the difference between here and South Yorkshire is that there is a good relationship with the Fire Brigades Union and they are working really close with them to try and find a solution to this. This was never on the Fire Brigades Union local agenda and wasn't on the Fire Services agenda and in essence are both dealing with the consequences of a decision taken in South Yorkshire.

9. A Member stated that he was looking at option 2 where it says 12 hour day and 12 hour night and questioned whether the 12 hour night would be using the close proximity crew part time crew or would the building on Princess Road still remain open?

Princess Road would still be open.

10. A Member questioned whether there has been a rise in false alarms throughout the County?

Mr Errington stated that they are seeing an increase in incidents across the service area but it is very sporadic. Five years ago Durham was busier than Peterlee. Due to the deprivation in and around Easington and Peterlee they are seeing call volumes in Peterlee and Wheatley Hill stations going up. Mr Errington stated that when new houses are being developed in areas there is no rise in risk. Mr Errington referred to Consett where he was stationed 20 years ago and since then there have been new developments of between 6k-7k new houses and the call rates have reduced. This is due to new houses having smoke alarms and the people who are moving into these houses are more risk aware.

There is an increase in false alarms in Durham 950 calls are false alarms. There is going to be a further 5000 students in Durham so there will be a rise in false alarms in student accommodation. The accommodation is being built to the south of Durham on the old golf course site. If the Spennymoor pump goes to whole time there will be a quick attendance. The Fire Service are discussing charging student accommodation for false calls when there are 3 or more call outs. They will receive a letter informing them of this after the first call and a warning letter following a second call out. Companies are making a lot of money from student accommodation and they are not particularly investing money into their fire systems which is unfair to the Fire Service.

11. A Member stated that Mr Errington had stated that the service are very nervous going forward from 2021-22 due to the projected continuation of austerity and since government have stated the end of austerity what information do you have that this will be an ongoing problem with yourselves and other public services?

Mr Errington stated that he was involved with another body the National Fire Chiefs Council and they are working very closely with the Home Office Finance team to put forward what the Home Offices position is for the comprehensive spending review. The Treasury have asked all government departments to put forward their bids for what money they need for the next comprehensive spending review period. The Home Offices view is that they need some real evidence to prove that the cuts as the Home Office are not a protected department like the NHS and Armed Forces are that and to plan for a 5% cut into fire. The Police have been allowed to put the Council Tax up to cover the extra policing that is required but the Fire Service do not have that flexibility and are tied by the same constraints as the Local Authorities. This year fire have put their precept up by 3%, next year they expect that will drop back to 2% and then 2% going forward. If there was a flexibility around the precept Mr Errington stated that he would be giving a presentation tonight around why they had put the precept up but at this moment in time they do not have the flexibility to increase the precept. The information they have received from the Home Office is that the cuts are going to continue. Unfortunately they will not know until this time next year and the funding will start in the April after that so there is no long term predictions on funding but they still have to plan ahead and look at options that they will have to implement if the funding is as bad as is thought. The provisional settlement for this year was dead on what the fire service expected they would get.

12. A Member stated that another Members clarification was extremely helpful and he now understands how strategically important the Wheatley Hill station is but knowing how closely the villages are in that particular area he wondered what the consequences would be in relation to the attendance times if indeed Wheatley Hill were to close and the service needed to get to Thornley and such areas which he was sure would have already been assessed?

Mr Errington stated that when they do the Emergency Response review they look at every single appliance in every station and look at the potential options which can be looked at. Last year 8 options were presented to the Fire Authority for consideration for them to prioritise that came from a list of 62 overall options. The service pretty much understand every connotation. There is not the cost benefit analysis at Wheatley Hill. The saving of £160k does not warrant it when you start looking at that level of calls and also the knock on impact on response times. What they are finding is Peterlee's call volume has increased but if they had been decreasing Peterlee could have taken more of Wheatley Hill's calls. As Peterlee's calls are increasing it has an impact on Wheatley Hill as well as Wheatley Hills calls are increasing. There is a significant increase in organised crime in the Peterlee area such as car fires which had almost disappeared years ago but is now almost back to the level it once was. There is a specific problem in Easington linked to organised crime such as drugs and money lending.

13. A Member questioned as a percentage of all of the call outs received how many are actually suspicious and how many are proven that it was deliberate?

Mr Errington stated that at the moment 50% of calls are deliberate (arson). The North East is in the highest quartile especially County Durham & Darlington, Sunderland and Cleveland in particular are the highest in the country in terms of deliberate fires.

Not as many as the Fire Service would like are proven to be deliberate which coincides with the reduction in Police. Work has been done as to why it is such high numbers in areas of deprivation such as Easington and it is thought this is due to there being less County Council resources, less Police resources and potentially less Fire and Rescue Service resources and there are other knock on impacts such as the roll out of Universal Credit which are hitting those areas the hardest. If the funding cuts continue within the Local Authority and the pressures on social reform continue this will just get worse.

Mr Errington stated that five years ago he would have been presenting on the success of Prevention Activity and they have done some very good work driving down the number of accidental dwelling fires. The increases from arson are outstripping all of those reductions that have been made over the last 10 years and it just seems that this is going to get worse as the funding is being cut and cut.

Mr Errington stated that he loved the comment about austerity being ended but from his perspective it doesn't feel like that is the case.

14. A Member questioned whether there had been any impact on going into schools to discuss arson and prevention from talking to schoolchildren and trying to make them understand the realities of what they are actually doing?

Mr Errington stated yes but the problems in Easington are not schoolchildren. A lot of this is linked to organised crime, some is from opportunity if there is rubbish left in back yards and if cars are left they will burn them out. Yes there is an impact on some things but there is no impact if some ones car is burnt out as a punishment or if they want to claim off the insurance for third party fire and theft if they have to pay back a money lender. There are really complex social problems in these areas and the Fire Service can do their bit by educating children but there is not a lot that can be done about the drug wars that are going on around the Easington area.

15. A Member asked how RDS recruitment was at the moment and has Seaham got the full quota?

Mr Errington stated that Seaham do not yet have the full quota but they are running a big campaign at the moment across all of the RDS areas and they are linking in with the national campaign. This week is national 'On-Call' week and there are lots of things on social media trying to recruit. Seaham is reasonably well staffed at the moment but they will be looking to see if they can increase the numbers. There is currently 12 but they are looking to get this back to 14. It is difficult to recruit people into these roles as it is a huge

commitment for not a large financial benefit and as the number of calls have come down they get less money to do it.

The big shame is medical emergency response calls as part of a national trial Seaham did 900 medical emergency calls which made them the third highest in the area but this funding has ceased.

The Chair thanked Mr Errington for his presentation and distributed the consultation documents for Members to complete.

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 20TH NOVEMBER, 2018

RECOMMENDED the Minutes of this meeting, a copy of which had been previously printed and circulated to each Member, be approved and signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

4. CONFERENCE APPOINTMENTS

RECOMMENDED that the Committee note the information.

5. CONFERENCES, COURSES AND SEMINARS

a) NEREO HALF DAY WORKSHOPS

RECOMMENDED that if any Members wish to attend these courses they should contact the Town Clerk for further details.

b) EVALUATION FORM

RECOMMENDED that Members accept the reports.

6. DESTINATION SEAHAM

RECOMMENDED that the Committee note the information.

7. PRESS OPPORTUNITIES

RECOMMENDED the Council note that there were no press opportunities from this meeting.