

MINUTES
POLICE, FIRE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR ESSEX AND
ESSEX COUNTY FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE
EXTRAORDINARY STRATEGIC BOARD

17 February 2022

Via Microsoft Teams

Present:

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Roger Hirst (RH) | Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (Chair) |
| Jane Gardner (JG) | Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner |
| Pippa Brent-Isherwood (PBI) | CEO and Monitoring Officer, PFCC's office |
| Karl Edwards (KE) | Director of Corporate Services, ECFRS |
| Neil Cross (NC) | Chief Finance Officer, ECFRS |
| Jo Thornicroft (JT) | Head of Performance and Scrutiny (Fire), PFCC's office |
| Christine Butler | Minutes, PFCC's office |

1 Breathing Apparatus Training Refurbishment Project Phases 1 and 2

- 1.1 KE thanked everyone for joining the meeting at short notice and gave a summary overview. RH added that calling this extraordinary meeting also keeps the process in line with the scope of Strategic Board and that it is helpful to run through and have a chance to review.
- 1.2 The Breathing Apparatus Training Refurbishment Project Phases 1 and 2 Decision Report has come forward ahead of the next scheduled ordinary meeting of the Strategic Board due to the training department having built all of this year's training delivery around the delivery of the breathing apparatus refurbishments.
- 1.3 If this decision report is approved today, it would allow the successful contractors to begin work within the next 2-3 weeks. The contractors can then deliver phase 1 and 2 of the BA chambers upgrade works in good time for the Training Department to deliver its training plan.
- 1.4 The workstream should have been completed at an earlier date and this is the second time this has gone out to tender. The consultant who had been employed to lead on this programme left the Service which resulted in time delays. The contractors who had tendered for the work originally then reported that, due to external factors, costs had increased and their timeframes had changed etc.
- 1.5 The works required re-tendering and the Service is now in a position to appoint a supplier. This has all been done through an ECC Framework of reputable construction companies who are pre-vetted.
- 1.6 NC has carried out some financial analysis of those companies that tendered to ensure that contracting companies are in a reputable place. In consultation with ECC a decision was made to exclude one of the tenderers. Therefore, the second most economically advantageous bid is recommended as the supplier for both Phase 1 and 2 of the programme.

- 1.7 KE has included financial tables for both phases, which show a £55,000 increase from the original tender. The new total for both phases totals £961,000. This does not include Phase 3. Phase 3 has not been included at this time as this level of refurbishment requires planning permission. The planning permission has been applied for and KE expects to bring the decision relating to phase 3 to the Board in a couple of months once it has been re-tendered. This will include Clacton, Harlow and Saffron Waldon which have expected budget costs of approx. £500,000. If the £500,000 projected costs are added to the costs for phases 1 and 2, it would bring the total cost to approximately £1.4m
- 1.8 The original decision sheet for the funding of training improvements included not only the BA chambers but also the working from heights structure and the Wethersfield Training Room. In the original decision sheet, the total approved was £1.9m. There are some additional works to take place and it envisaged that the £1.9m will be utilised. The full phase 3 projected costs have not yet been received nor for the working from heights training platform.
- 1.9 Under Point 6 of the BA chambers decision report, it shows how the delivery of this workstream maps across to all the priorities in the Fire & Rescue Plan apart from improving safety on our roads.
- 1.10 The risk of not going forward with this refurbishment programme is that the existing chambers would have to continue to be utilised as they are at present. The chambers are currently subject to constant hard use during training by the Service and external FRs. The existing chambers were refurbished and upgraded 10 years ago, but they need refurbishment and reconfiguration to provide new and more challenging internal layouts for such training as thermal imaging.
- 1.11 RH asked what he was being asked to approve. KE confirmed that it is to award the contract for Phases 1 and 2 of the BA chambers works which is a total cost of £961,000. Phase 3 information has been included for awareness, but the Service is not yet in a position to progress this. RH requested that what is being asked is made clearer within the report. KE said that the funds had already been approved by RH on a previous decision sheet. The decision sheet today is regarding ECFRS being able to utilise the funding that has already been approved to award the contract to the supplier.

Action 12/22

KE to make clear in the decision sheet what RH is being asked to approve for transparency to the Panel.

- 1.12 RH asked for clarification that this does not re-provide the Hot Fire Training at Wethersfield. KE responded that it did not. The Hot Fire training is still needed but the BA chambers refurbishment does not contribute to this issue and is an independent project.
- 1.13 RH noted that the report talks of Orsett Training Centre replacing Wethersfield and asked if further provision is needed if Wethersfield is a separate project to this. KE advised that the classroom has only just been replaced at Wethersfield, but it is looking as though something else may need to be put in place as Wethersfield may be lost completely. RH asked for clarification as to whether the Service had lost any money in this regard or whether there would be a return on an existing investment in the intervening period. KE has been liaising with an external property consultant to deliver the full business case for the re-location of Hot Fire Training from Wethersfield to Kelvedon Park. This will be looked at in different phases due to the actual risks of having or not having Hot Fire Training Facilities, which will be Phase 1. There is a business case for moving other training facilities (i.e., Urban Search and Rescue) from Lexden to Kelvedon Park which all depend on planning, space and feasibility. Orsett is a fallback plan if training facilities cannot be relocated to Kelvedon Park. KE and the consultant are to produce a project brief which would give permission to move onto a Feasibility Study and Outline Business Case. Once the Business Case is approved the

relocation project would take approximately 9 months, to it being completed within 12 months. This a separate project from the BA Chambers.

- 1.14 The key benefit of the BA Chambers programme is that with the refurbishments being undertaken the crews can continue their training more regularly without having to travel to an external location. It will also ensure that the BA Chambers are kept within current Health and Safety legislation and operational guidance
- 1.15 NC commented on the due diligence undertaken. The bidders were financially vetted. The second company had a better credit score and has got all the relevant accreditations to be on the framework and ECC could provide up to date references.
- 1.16 JG thanked KE and NC and said that this is an important part of reflecting the PFCC's and DPFC's commitment to operational training of staff. JG suggested that Phase 3 be sharper and that this is a good communications opportunity for RH, RHy and operational staff to boost the investment and commitment in providing better training facilities. KE will ensure that a good news story comes from this. It is a big investment in not only the BA Chambers but also in our people. BA is one of the most critical activities that firefighters carry out and, due to that environment, they need the best training and the best facilities,
- 1.17 JT asked regarding the operational impact of having 6 out of 10 facilities out of action. KE confirmed that the Training Department has built its plan working to that scenario. Originally the Decision Report was going to be taken through the March Strategic Board as the preferred route, however it was recognised that delaying the approval by four weeks would mean four weeks less time for the contractors to start which would unsynchronise the training plans.
- 1.18 RH reiterated the importance of having minutes of this discussion. It must clearly be a matter of public record that this was discussed and decided.

2. Publication of Papers

- 2.1 RH asked if this Decision Sheet would be suitable for publication as it is or if a redacted version would be needed. PBI said that a reacted version could be published which could be marked "official but subject to redaction". RH would like it to be published and also the reason why the cheapest supplier was not chosen to be redacted.

Action 13/22

KE will change the decision sheet to provide a redacted version and resubmit. PBI or Darren Horsman will look at this prior to publication.

- 2.2 RH confirmed that the Decision Sheet would be approved on the basis that the request for a redacted version (Action 13/22) was actioned, along with the action confirming what RH was being asked to approve (Action 12/22)