



**Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority**

**Decision Report**

**Report reference number:** 029-23

**Government security classification:** Official-Sensitive

**Title of report:** ECFRS Training Centre – Stage 2 Report

**Area of county / stakeholders affected:** Service-wide

**Report by:** Karl Edwards, Director of Corporate Services

**Date of report:** 16<sup>th</sup> June 2023

**Enquiries to:**

Karl Edwards, Director of Corporate Services (karl.edwards@essex-fire.gov.uk)

## **1. Purpose of the report**

The purpose of the report is to provide the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) with Stage Two of the Royal Institute of British Architects' (RIBA's) outputs into the feasibility of transferring ECFRS training facilities based at Wethersfield and Witham Training Centre to the Headquarters site, Kelvedon Park.

In addition, the report sets out the need now to progress to RIBA stage 3 and highlights to the PFCC the deliverables, cost and timescales of this next stage.

The report highlights an increase in projected overall build cost as a result of the stage two findings and sets out how the funding gap will be managed by the service.

## **Recommendations**

That the PFCC:

- Accepts the outputs of the Stage 2 report (appendices A to D) which provides analysis of the current outline design specification and the current proposed associated costs of full project delivery.
- Approves the release of the remaining funding from the previously agreed estimated costs of **£550k** (please see decision report 032-22 – Appendix E) that has been funded from

the Innovation and Transformation Earmarked Reserve of which to date **£248,231** has been invested into progressing the Stage 2 design and associated land surveys.



- Approves an additional **£97,095** to supplement the next course of funding to progress RIBA Stage 3 which is further detailed design and specification works and the continuation to move through to planning application submission. This additional sum is because of the estimated cost of the project increasing.

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[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

These fees:

- Assume a project value of £14m
- Allow for the five-storey fire house option to be developed and costed ahead of any final decisions regarding scope and client requirements to take forward to RIBA stage 3 design.
- Allow for gym provision to be incorporated into the new facilities.
- Assume that existing classrooms within the east wing would be used without any adaptations.
- Allow for BREEAM from RIBA Stage 2 to planning submission, to ensure we capture early credits.

A Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) certified rating reflects the performance achieved by a project and its stakeholders, as measured against the BREEAM standard and its benchmarks. The rating enables comparability between projects and provides assurance of the performance, quality, and value of the asset. The BREEAM ratings range from Acceptable (in-use scheme only) to Pass, Good, Very Good, Excellent and Outstanding and are reflected in a series of stars on the BREEAM certificate.

BREEAM rating	% score
Outstanding 	≥85
Excellent 	≥70
Very good 	≥55
Good 	≥45
Pass 	≥30
Unclassified 	<30

- Approves the approach being taken by ECFRS to cover the £4m shortfall in funding existing between the £10m allocated within our capital strategy and the current total costs identified by Pick Everard at Stage 2, being through the full development of the Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP).

## 2. Benefits of the proposal

The identified benefits at this stage of the proposal are:

- ✓ Reducing the risk of the service of not having an adequate, fit for purpose training facility to deliver carbonaceous fire training to both current firefighters and new recruits.
- ✓ Enhancing and improving the utilisation of the ECFRS Headquarters site through

- increased utilisation of existing workspace.
- ✓ Improved relationships and connectivity between operational and non-operational staff which will further improve the culture and break down barriers between staff.
- ✓ Improved use of the external environment to facilitate both training facilities and some of the facilities currently located at Lexden, Colchester.
- ✓ With the above in mind, the proposal will assist the delivery of the Joint Fleet Workshops strategic collaboration with Essex Police. Throughout all aspects of this programme, engagement has taken place with Essex Police to understand and ensure that a new facility can be collaborative in purpose. It has been identified by Essex Police that there would be a requirement to have access to the new classroom / training room and equally it will be able to further facilitate joint exercising in line with JESIP principles and multi-agency working.
- ✓ It would enable more central access to carbonaceous BA training for crews across Essex, which will reduce travel time to and from fire stations.
- ✓ Whilst the ECFRS Training Strategy promotes and encourages localised training, a modern and innovative central training centre will enhance the response to larger scale training needs and the training of new recruits.
- ✓ It may allow opportunities for other regional fire and rescue services to utilise our facilities.

### 3. Background and proposal

ECFRS was formally advised by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) on 6th October 2021 that it is planning for closure of the site to be completed by the end of 2025. It was however confirmed by the MOD that ECFRS could remain on site until the end of 2025, subject to confirmation of remaining as an independent tenant and therefore responsible for taking over utilities, access and security to the ECFRS Training Facility area. For further confirmation please see below diagram. Recent developments on the Wethersfield site have potential to extend the 2025 timeline beyond this period which would allow for greater contingency and resilience to our planning. However, this has not been formally confirmed and ECFRS is therefore maintaining the delivery programme to the 2025 deadline.



The facilities currently provided at the Wethersfield location are:

- ✓ Carbonaceous Fire Training
- ✓ Incident Command Verification
- ✓ Fire Investigation
- ✓ Road Traffic Collision (RTC)

- ✓ Heavy Duty Rescue Pump (HRP)
- ✓ Emergency Response Driver Training
- ✓ Waste Fire Training
- ✓ Petrochemical Training
- ✓ Fire Bike Road Safety Training

Whilst ECFRS leases a defined boundary area from the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO), given the location and size of the current surrounding environment ECFRS is permitted to use surrounding aspects of the airfield to deliver some of the above training activities such as Incident Command Training and Heavy-Duty Rescue Pump Training, as and when required. The loss of this training site presents a high strategic risk to ECFRS in being able to fulfil the training of our people against a number of core competencies (as recorded on the service's Strategic Risk Register). It has therefore been necessary for ECFRS to explore alternative options to maintain delivery of training both in the immediate term and longer-term readiness to vacate Wethersfield by 2025. Following the notification that ECFRS is required to vacate Wethersfield by the end of 2025, the following actions have been initiated:

1. Ensure that ECFRS is able to:
  - Continue to access to the Wethersfield site via a new access road
  - Explore the requirements necessary to maintain utilities (water supply and electricity) to the training site
  - Maintain adequate security
2. Explore the feasibility to relocate the current Wethersfield training facilities to the ECFRS Headquarters site, Kelvedon Park, subject to planning, ascertaining outline costs, layout, and options to re-purpose some of the existing Headquarters building for the purpose of providing training facilities.
3. During the feasibility study into point 2, examine other inter-linking strategic opportunities to accommodate ECFRS functions located at the Lexden, Colchester site:
  - Breathing Apparatus Technical Support
  - Stores / Logistics
  - Urban Search and Rescue (USAR)
4. Whilst exploring the opportunity relating to points 2 and 3, review land availability for future potential development through accessing and communicating with the current owner of adjacent land.
5. Review business continuity arrangements for the delivery of Carbonaceous Fire Training and the associated financial implications of accommodating a transition period from Wethersfield to a suitable alternative location.

Following approval of decision report 032-22, the agreed funds of **£248,231** have been invested into the provision of further design works (Stage 2). This incorporated: -

- Detailed options analysis of the provision of the technical aspects of the live fire training function.
- Further site layout design work options

- A number of surveys (listed below) that have positively assisted ECFRS in further de-risking the project and gaining a greater understanding of requirements as the project progresses into RIBA stage 3.
  - Building elevations
  - Topographical and utilities
  - CCTV for drainage assessment
  - Ecological and sustainability – Flora and fauna
  - Bio-diversity – wildlife
  - Geo-environmental – soils, land structure etc
  - Building Surveyor fees of existent structures

The diagram below provides context to each of the RIBA stages and the associated activities carried out at Stage Two.



### Stage Outcome

- ✓ Architectural Concept approved by the client and aligned to the Project Brief. The brief remains “live” during Stage 2 and is derogated in response to the Architectural Concept.

### Core Tasks

- ✓ Prepare Architectural Concept incorporating strategic engineering requirements and aligned to the cost plan
- ✓ Project strategies and Outline Specification
- ✓ Agree project brief derogations
- ✓ Undertake design reviews with the client and project stakeholders
- ✓ Prepare stage design programme.

### Core Statutory Processes

- ✓ Obtain pre-application planning advice
- ✓ Agree route to Building Regulations compliance option.
- ✓ Prepare to commence outline planning application

### Procurement Route

- ✓ Begin to review options for contractor procurement / appointment.

### Information Exchanges

- ✓ Signed off Stage Report
- ✓ Project strategies
- ✓ Updated Outline Specification
- ✓ Updated cost plan
- ✓ Commence planning application

## 4. Alternative options considered and rejected

ECFRS has considered a number of alternative options which have included:

- Outsourcing all breathing apparatus (BA) training to an external provider. This option has been discounted on the basis of costs (as outlined in section 6 to be £4.3m over three years) with the additional complexity of an external provider not instructing on use with our BA equipment / procedures and having to travel to an alternate location outside of Essex to undertake the training.
- ECFRS explored other land opportunities in and around Essex to establish whether there were any other suitable alternative locations. This search identified that there was not currently any suitable land available that met the requirements of ECFRS within the proximity required. This would also involve ECFRS having to purchase additional land which would significantly increase the total costs of the project on top of existing build costs.
- ECFRS explored the opportunity to utilise and undertake training at other Fire and Rescue Service training facilities, for example Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. This was discounted on the grounds of being inefficient having to send crews out of the county to attend training events. Equally other services identified that their own training schedule meant that they were in permanent use and that there was little opportunity to expand their training programme to accommodate other services.

ECFRS has therefore progressed the option to relocate the facilities at both Wethersfield and Witham Training Centre to Kelvedon Park as the most cost effective and viable option. This option will allow ECFRS to make continued best use of the current Kelvedon Park facility. It will assist in closer departmental working with operational staff and corporate staff working closer together. The PFCCFRA already owns the land that has been identified making greater economical reasoning and value for money. The site is also centrally located within Essex, therefore providing greater efficiency of crew travelling times to and from the site.

The option to do nothing and maintain the status quo would result in ECFRS no longer being able to deliver Carbonaceous Live Fire Training in BA to our frontline firefighters through an “in service” facility and therefore outsourcing to a private provider. The logistics of this would be inefficient due to having to travel outside of Essex to receive the required training, and loss of continuity of training between in-service instructors and those providing private external tuition. The requirement to then provide a conversion course over to the technical nature of the BA equipment used by ECFRS would also present high annual costs, amounting to a total cost of £4.3m for a three-year term.

As we progress further into the project, each stage is designed to further de-risk the programme and establish the opportunity to move further forwards.

✔ The first key factor of this was to undertake a feasibility study to ascertain if ECFRS would be able to fit the required functions into the current available footprint.

✔ The second major element was the undertaking of a number of key surveys to determine the viability of the high-level proposed design and structure.

✔ The third major factor will be progressing the plans further into a more detailed design and specification that will incorporate more technical aspects and allow ECFRS to progress to planning application phase.

It should be noted that there is still a risk that planning permission could not be granted, however it is likely that this would be identified during the pre-planning application stage.

## 5. Strategic priorities

One of the ECFRS Estates Strategy key deliverables identifies that there is a requirement to relocate the current training facilities based at Wethersfield to an alternative location.

Given the timeframes in which to assess, design, review and cost options, it was agreed that the most pragmatic approach in the first instance was to explore the feasibility of being able to site the Wethersfield training facilities at ECFRS Headquarters. There are a number of benefits to this option, which include re-purposing of the current site to ensure that we maximise the space and usage of the facilities as they are currently underutilised post the pandemic. There is also a good rationale for improving the connectivity and relationships between operational and non-operational staff making the site a first-class location fit for present and future fire service training requirements that incorporates a modern and innovative workspace. This opportunity will also enhance the service's delivery of range of operational and leadership training that is fit for a modern and progressive fire and rescue service.

The new facility will incorporate all the best practice around firefighters' health and wellbeing, including improved contamination management for firefighters. There will also be an emphasis on renewable energy sources, such as solar panels and air source heat pumps providing heating, and electric vehicle charging facilities which will further assist the service to reduce its carbon footprint in line with Net Zero by 2050.

Importantly, it provides a number of supportive key benefits to the delivery of the priorities within the Fire and Rescue Plan as outlined in the table below.

<b>FIRE AND RESCUE PLAN PRIORITIES</b>	
<b>Prevention, Protection and Response</b>	The new training facility will ensure that we have fully trained, operationally competent staff across a diverse skill set that is aligned to successful delivery of the ECFRS Prevention, Protection and Response Strategies.
<b>Improve Safety on our Roads</b>	The plans include areas to deliver our Fire Bike courses, and other road safety training to members of the public and the facility will be jointly utilised with Essex Police, helping joint working on reduction of fatalities (Vision Zero).
<b>Help the Vulnerable to Stay Safe</b>	It will be possible for the community to access Fire HQ allowing the facility to be used for information and safety training.
<b>Promote a Positive Culture in our Workplace</b>	The new training facility is being designed to be accessible and inclusive and will be used by all colleagues. The training delivery at the service training Centre (STC) Witham to new on-call and wholtime firefighters will be moved to the new venue.
<b>Develop and Broaden the Roles and Range of Activities undertaken by the Service</b>	The facility will enable the delivery of all training required within our Protection, Prevention and Response responsibilities and allow the most efficient and effective utilisation of both the instructors' time and the time available to firefighters to complete essential training whilst also remaining available.
<b>Be Transparent, Open and Accessible</b>	Full consultation will be undertaken with all stakeholders and representative bodies.
<b>Collaborate with our Partners</b>	We will extend our Headquarters to allow for further interoperability and multi-agency exercising and training opportunities. We have specifically engaged with Essex Police which has indicated that it would wish to make use of the classroom and lecture room facilities and increased access and continuation of out of hours use for search, firearms and dog teams.

<b>Make Best Use of Our Resources</b>	We will continue to develop our existing estate in a progressive and forward-thinking manner to ensure that we have a fit for purpose Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) that may release funding to be re-invested into new key strategic priorities.
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## 6. Operational implications

ECFRS has a legal responsibility as part of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and Civil Contingencies Act 2004 to provide assurance that all firefighters are competent in the nine core operational areas of:

1. Driving
2. Command and Control
3. Breathing Apparatus
4. Hazardous Materials
5. Working at Height
6. Water Rescue
7. Fire Service Pumps
8. Extrication and Rescue
9. Casualty Care

There is also a requirement for ECFRS to align to the Breathing Apparatus (BA) training specification that reflects prevailing standards as specified in National Operational Guidance (NOG). The specification requires fire and rescue services to deliver practical application of all BA training elements and operational colleagues to understand and demonstrate all of the learning outcomes which include:

- Navigating in a limited visibility environment
- Dealing with compartment fire behaviour
- Fire and thermal radiation
- Flashover
- Backdraught
- Fire gas ignition

The specification has been developed using the Fire and Rescue Service Health, Safety and Welfare Framework and the principles of the Health & Safety Guidance 65 (HSG 65) Successful Health and Safety Management.

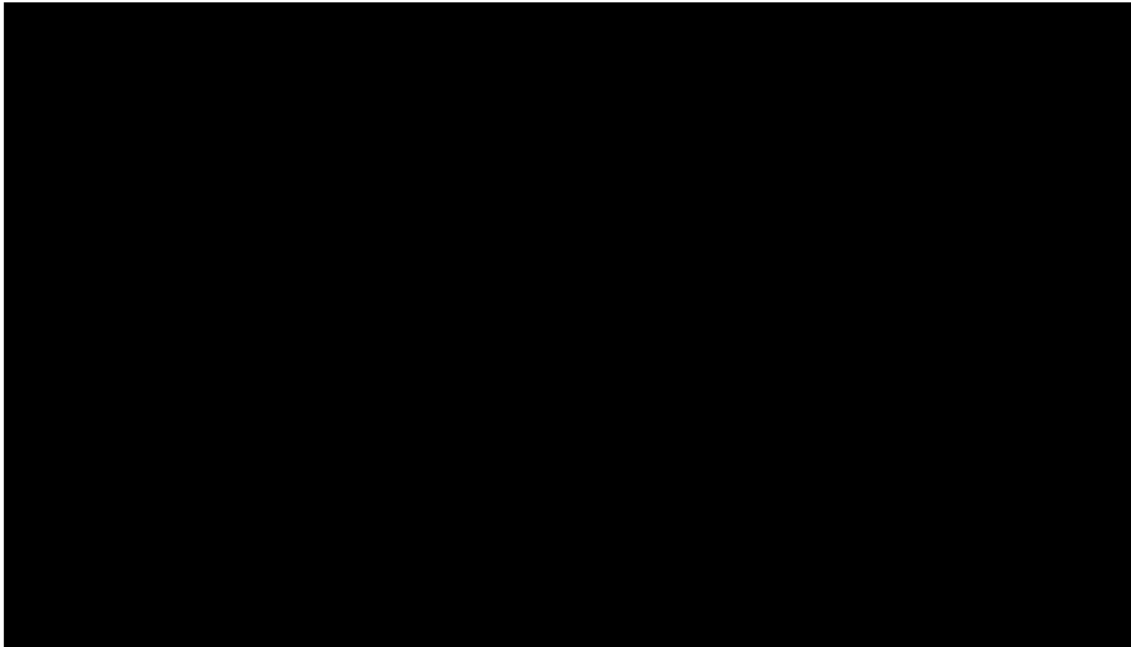
As we are aware of the current risk that may present itself at the end of 2025, we have investigated alternative business continuity arrangements of outsourcing BA training to a provider which, over a three-year term, has indicated a cost of £4.3m. In conjunction with these costs and the external training, there would be an impact that those trained externally would need to have a brief conversion course due to the difference in BA sets being utilised. It is acknowledged that, if the plans are approved to progress to full business case and a new centre is delivered by 2025, this still remains an ambitious timescale to the point of having a fully usable building that all staff and trainers have been familiarised with.

## 7. Financial implications

The early feasibility options that took into account outline specifications and requirements indicated an estimated project cost of £11m. With the progression to stage 2, which has now evaluated the outputs of the surveys and moved further forwards into the design specification



(particularly the live fire) design, the outline costs have increased to £14m. The comparison table below provides the areas where costs have increased. These are predominantly in the provision of the live-fire / cold smoke facility, an increase in required external works following the land surveys and an increase in the need to comply with sustainability provision of renewable energy sources.



The next stage of financial investment required to progress the design works through to completion of RIBA stage 3, which will move the plans through to submission of a planning application, is outlined in the table below. It is recognised that this would come to a total spend of **£647,095** which is an increase of **£97,095** from the original predicted cost of **£550k**. It should be noted however that there will still be gateway points during the progression of RIBA Stage 3 to assess continued feasibility of spend and therefore any potential early risks or issues would be identified prior to the full sum of **£398,864.79** being committed.

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[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

In terms of the additional funding requirements from the originally projected £11m, creating a £3m gap, it is envisaged that this will potentially be funded through the financial outputs indicated in the service's Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP). It should be noted that the SAMP is part of the service's strategic project planning process and is due to be presented at the next Programme Management Board (PMB) as an initial proof of concept for onward development. The overall outputs of the SAMP are due for completion by November 2023, when the service will be more informed about future potential opportunities that will assist in leveraging capital receipt re-investment.

The current Witham Training Centre (WTC) will form part of the overall SAMP as it is recognised that the current training functions undertaken at this location will no longer be required as they will be undertaken at the new training facility. This in turn will present an opportunity to review current site requirements and potential opportunities for redevelopment. Discussions with the East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust (EEAST) are also underway to ensure that any joint opportunities are explored given that both organisations' sites are next door to one another.

It is recognised that the costs have escalated between the stage one evaluation and the current site analysis and ECFRS is cognisant that these costs do not continue to rise past that of the £14m now identified as this would then become financially unviable. ECFRS will be clear in the procurement of contractors that we will need to remain within this cost envelope and that this cannot continue to escalate. ECFRS has allocated £10m within our capital strategy which equates to a £4m gap in our financials and it is anticipated that this shortfall will be identified through the Strategic Asset Management Plan.

## **8. Legal implications**

The main legal considerations at this point within the feasibility of the project have been identified as:

- Ensuring compliance against the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- Potential alterations to a current public right of way that traverses the site and will require an application for diversions.
- Legal requirements of entering an agreed planning application / approval process.
- It is acknowledged that, if approval is provided to progress to a full business case (FBC), there will be legal implications that will need to be assured. For example, contractor arrangements against delivery standards, costs, and timelines etc.

## **9. Staffing implications**

It is envisaged that, with the development of a new, modern training facility, the service will be able to deliver against the required training programme in a more efficient and effective manner. The new facilities by virtue of the proposed location will mean that staff will have less travel time and therefore more training time.

The facility being located at the Service Headquarters will also lend itself to improving collaboration and staff engagement opportunities. The development will also enable the delivery of community engagement.

Whilst the Headquarters site is also the location of our Fire Control, there are currently no further operational resources that operate from this location. Providing the ability for operational and support staff to connect on a more frequent basis will open avenues to improve ways of working by breaking down barriers and providing a more personable workspace to interact.

Equally, with the assessment of workspace post the pandemic, it is essential that we ensure we are optimising our opportunity to utilise our estate in the most effective way. A recent occupancy survey identified the opportunity to repurpose a section of the current headquarters building for the purposes of training.

## **10. Equality and Diversity implications**

The actions being taken will not have a disproportionate impact on individuals with protected characteristics (as defined within the Equality Act 2010), when compared to all other individuals and will not disadvantage people with protected characteristics.

Race	N	Religion or belief	N
Sex	N	Gender reassignment	N
Age	N	Pregnancy & maternity	N
Disability	N	Marriage and Civil Partnership	N
Sexual orientation	N		

The Core Code of Ethics Fire Standard has been fully considered and incorporated into the proposals outlined in this paper.

## 11. Risks

- The main risk of this project is not having an adequate, fit for purpose training facility to deliver carbonaceous fire training to both current firefighters and new recruits.
- Current engagement with the Defence Infrastructure Organisations (DIO) has resulted in a preliminary agreement that we will be able to remain on site until the end of 2025. However, there is a notable risk that this date may be brought forward if the sale of the land and Ministry of Justice (MOJ) planning permission is granted sooner and ECFRS is asked to vacate before 2025.
- In line with the above risks, there is a further risk that we may have to outsource this element of training to a private provider / the Fire Service College in order to remain compliant. The costs and logistical challenges have been identified within the operational implications of this report (section 7).
- It should be acknowledged that it is likely that a carbonaceous filtration system will be required to ensure compliance with environmental factors and due to the proximity to a major road / other building. The costs of this have been factored into the report but are an estimation. Further work is required to ensure the most appropriate filtration system is reviewed which could impact on increased costs.
- At this stage of the project, the outline cost envelope requirement has been identified as between £13m and £14m. Whilst a proportion of these costs has been identified, there remains a current funding gap which may be cost prohibitive to the delivery of a new facility at the ECFRS HQ site and is dependent on the outputs of the SAMP.
- This project will require planning applications to Braintree District Council (BDC) and there is a risk that these planning applications may not be approved.

## 12. Governance Boards

The strategic plans and early findings were presented at Strategic Board on 29<sup>h</sup> September 2022 and approval to progress to Stage 2 was provided (see attached decision report 032-22). It was agreed at the Strategic Board that, whilst approval had been provided, a gateway approval would be required on completion of the updated design works and undertaking of surveys. A further decision report would be required to progress through the gateway and release further funding to allow the commencement of Stage 3 and progress through to further design and technical design work and the submission of a planning application.

Prior to progressing through to Commissioner approval, this paper has received scrutiny and input from members of the Service Leadership Team via the SLT Strategic Decision Meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

This decision report was considered at the Strategic Board in June 2023.

### 13. Background papers

- [REDACTED]
- Appendix E - Decision report 032-22

**Decision Process**

**Step 1A - Chief Fire Officer Comments**

(The Chief Fire Officer is asked in their capacity as the Head of Paid Service to comment on the proposal.)

I support the recommendation.

Sign: .....  .....

Date:.....15.06.23.....

**Step 1B – Consultation with representative bodies**

(The Chief Fire Officer is to set out the consultation that has been undertaken with the representative bodies)

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**Step 2 - Statutory Officer Review**

The report will be reviewed by the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority’s (“the Commissioner’s”) Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer prior to review and sign off by the Commissioner or their Deputy.

Monitoring Officer Sign: 

Print: P. Brent-Isherwood

Date: 29 June 2023

Chief Finance Officer Sign: .....  .....

Print: .....Neil Cross.....

Date: . . . . 15.06.23 . . . . .

**Step 3 - Publication**

Is the report for publication?      **YES**

If 'NO', please give reasons for non-publication (Where relevant, cite the security classification of the document(s). State 'none' if applicable)

Subject to redaction, as set out below

If the report is not for publication, the Monitoring Officer will decide if and how the public can be informed of the decision.

**Step 4 - Redaction**

If the report is for publication, is redaction required:

- 1      Of Decision Sheet                      **YES**
- 2      Of Appendix                              **YES**

If 'YES', please provide details of required redaction:

Redact commercially sensitive data in the decision report and appendices

Date redaction carried out: ...28/07/2023.....

If redaction is required, the Chief Finance Officer or the Monitoring Officer are to sign off that redaction has been completed.

Sign:  ..... Print: Neil Cross .....

Date signed: 28.7.23 .....

**Step 5 - Decision by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner or Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner**

I agree the recommendations to this report:

Sign:  ..... (PFCC)

Print: ..Roger.Hirst..... Date signed: 04/07/2023 .....