

FIRE BRIGADES UNION (Surrey)

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Firefighters raise concerns about (Fire) Service budget.

Surrey Fire Brigades' Union representatives attended the Safer and Stronger Communities Select Committee meeting on Friday [12th March] as part of the consultation process on behalf of Fire Fighter members. The agenda for the meeting covered The Fire Service Public Safety Plan [scrutiny performance], Contingency arrangements proposals and a draft report of a Public Value Report of the Surrey Fire & Rescue Service.

With the County Council setting its budget allocations earlier this year FBU officials were very concerned about the proposed Public Value Reviews that the Authority implemented with the potential for more cuts in the delivery of services. The draft PVR report had previously been shared with senior members of the Surrey FBU and contained some radical measures for the service managers to consider. We [the FBU] took the opportunity of sharing our concerns with members of the scrutiny committee, as part of the first stage considerations made by the elected members' processes.

Paul Greenwood Brigade Chair (FBU Surrey) said: "We addressed the committee and were able to enter into a dialogue about the contents of the draft PVR, whilst accepting decisions have yet to be made; we are keen that any proposals for change are deferred unless they are supported by robust evidence at the time they are made". "Our communities must be satisfied that any proposals undergo appropriate consultation with informed stakeholders including the professionals who provide the services, and full consideration to any contrary evidence that may be offered by external or/and internal stakeholders and genuinely deliberation, therefore we welcome the commitment of the Councillors to keep channels for continued discussion open".

The Fire Brigades' Union (FBU) has always supported the principle that Fire Authorities (FA) should:

- Challenge themselves and their Chief Fire Officer (CFO) to improve efficiency as well as performance;
- Lead their community by taking hard decisions affecting staff levels and deployment in the interests of efficiency;
- Ensure that they have the right information to justify those decisions;

It is certainly true that the FA has a responsibility (on behalf of the public who elect them) to ensure that their Fire & Rescue Service (FRS) provides value for money. But the FRA also have a responsibility (on behalf of the public who elect them) to ensure that their FRS provides the type and level of fire and rescue service that the community demands.

However any reductions to the quality of services in Surrey must be made on fully evaluated on a risk assessed decision not on any cost cutting exercises which could threaten human life and significant damage to properties.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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