

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 8 AUGUST 2017

Recommendations from the Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 July 2017:-

Members received a report which provided them with information on a Consultation on the Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC) Proposal to Collaborate Officially with Herts Fire and Rescue.

The proposal from the PCC was to bring the governance of police and fire services within the same organisation.

Councillor L Chesterman declared a non-pecuniary interest in this item as she had been in attendance at the County Council meeting at which it was discussed. She advised that all 78 County Councillors had voted against the proposal.

Members noted that the consultation period was short and was to take place partly over the school holiday period. Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council was not a statutory consultee but had the option to respond if desired.

Members raised the following points:

- There did not appear to be any financial savings
- There was not provision for scrutiny of the Fire Service
- Would the Ambulance Service be the next to be taken into the control of the PCC?
- The PCC could make a recommendation to the Secretary of State to go ahead with the proposal even if the responses to the consultation were not in favour
- It was understandable that the County Council would be against the proposal as it was a service that they provided which they would not want to lose

It was noted that the consultation would end on 14 August and any decision by the PCC would be submitted to the Secretary of State by 21 August.

Members were advised that Hatfield Town Council had discussed the proposal and had voted to respond to the consultation stating that they did not support it.

A Member expressed concern that the Committee was being asked to comment on what was ultimately a big decision and he did not feel that he was in a position to comment without the full facts. He suggested that a recommendation should be made to Cabinet that the Council would not give a response to the consultation.

Other Members felt that it was important for the Council to respond to the consultation with the following comments:

- They had no faith in the business case
- There was already a lot of joint working
- The proposal appeared to be more about making cuts
- There would be a transparency issue
- The Fire Brigade Union was against the proposal.

After further discussion, it was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED:

- (1) To recommend to Cabinet that a response to the consultation should be submitted which opposed the proposal.
- (2) To make comment in the response regarding the short consultation period and the fact that it was taking place during the holiday period.
- (3) That delegated authority be given to Officers to prepare the wording of the response and to circulate it to members of this Committee prior to its submission to Cabinet.

Proposed Response to the Police and Crime Commissioner Consultation on Fire Service Governance

Members of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council's Cabinet oppose this proposal and have the following comments to make:

Members are concerned about the very short timeframe which has been provided for consultation on what is considered to be a significant issue with potentially far reaching implications for the residents of Hertfordshire and the workforces of the constabulary and fire service.

Members also wish to raise a concern that the consultation has taken place during the Summer Holiday period.

The Local Business Case does not provide sufficient detail for members to feel confident that they have all the necessary information to determine whether this is an appropriate way forward for these critical services.

This is a highly complex issue and in particular, the current financial and management arrangements have not been explained in sufficient detail to determine whether the key desired outcomes are achievable.

The current arrangement, whereby back office support is provided by Herts County Council, will already provide efficiencies and it is not clear whether it will be possible to achieve further efficiencies in this area under the proposed arrangement.

Members note the very strong and positive public reputation of the Fire Service and raised a concern that this could potentially be damaged or diminished as a result of the proposed change in governance arrangements.

Members note that the current governance of the Fire Service provides a high level of transparency and accountability via Herts County Council and the 78 elected members. The proposal will reduce the level of accountability and the ability to appropriately scrutinise the service.

Members note that there are already strong collaborative arrangements between the Constabulary and the Fire Service, as well as strong links between the Fire Service and other front line services within Herts County Council and services provided by the District Councils, such as public health.

Members have been advised that the Fire Brigade Union is against the proposal and there is a general feel that this proposal is being made in order to achieve cuts to the Fire Service.