

REPORT TO: East Lothian Council

MEETING DATE: 22 October 2013

BY: Chief Executive

SUBJECT: Proposed Closure of the Scottish Fire Service College
in Gullane

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has recently carried out and completed a review of its property requirements in relation to support functions including national training facilities. This report provides Council with comments on the outcome of the review and makes recommendations on how the Council should respond.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Council is asked to:

- note that the Chief Executive and Council Leader are meeting with the Chair of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Board and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Chief Officer to press for re-consideration of the decision to close and dispose of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service training centre at Gullane and for full consultation with the Council and community on the future of the facility
- note that Council officials will engage with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to explore possible options for the use of the Gullane training centre site should the Service pursue its proposal to dispose of the buildings and the site.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) has carried out a review of property functions in relation to support functions including:

- national training facilities
- control rooms
- vehicle and equipment workshops
- ICT Data Centres
- office accommodation

- national headquarters

3.2 This part of the review that is directly relevant to East Lothian is the review of national training facilities since Gullane is home to one of the two current national training facilities used by the SFRS.

3.3 The Review included a detailed Training and Employee Development: National and Specialist Training Facilities Business Case with options for appraisal which is summarised in the report:

“The training objectives concern quality of and access to training, and removal of duplication created by merging eight fire services into one. In scope for this strategic intent options appraisal are the national level training facilities at Gullane and Clydesmill (Cambuslang, South Lanarkshire)

“A single national training facility with no regional centres scores highest among the business case options, at 7.6/10. A ‘do minimum’ option of continuing with both Gullane and Clydesmill scores 3.6. Clydesmill is a recently purpose-built centre of excellence in an accessible location within the Glasgow conurbation, while Gullane is located on the east coast and would require major investment to reach Clydesmill’s standard (conservatively more than £10m), at which point SFRS would have two national training centres. The options in scope therefore are to continue with both sites, or to close Gullane and use Clydesmill as the national training centre.

“Investing in Clydesmill would require an accommodation block for trainees. A variant on this could lead to the SFRS hiring hotel accommodation instead. Hiring accommodation would remove the need for capital expenditure and increase revenue costs; appraisal of these financial variables, the accommodation options available and the trainee experience would be required to inform a final decision.”

3.4 The outcome of the review and its recommendations were reported to the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Board on 26 September 2013. At this meeting the Board agreed the Property Estate – Strategic Intent report’s recommendations including the proposal to establish a single national training centre at Cambuslang (Clydesmill) with the commensurate closure and disposal of the Scottish Fire Services College at Gullane, along with the associated houses. The report suggests that the four houses associated with the Gullane training centre will be disposed this year and that the centre itself could close by 2016 or 2017.

3.5 The decision to close and dispose of the Scottish Fire Services College at Gullane obviously has major implications for Gullane and East Lothian including loss of local jobs, reduction in footfall in local businesses and potentially mothballing of a significant site in Gullane. The Centre currently employs 40 staff. Sixteen of these staff are uniformed staff and 14 are admin and support staff employed by the SFRS. These staff have job security through a no compulsory redundancy policy. However, it is very likely that new jobs offered to these staff will be outwith East Lothian. The remaining 14 staff are cleaning and catering contract staff, most of whom live in or near Gullane.

3.6 The Council was not consulted as part of the review and has not yet has formal discussions with SFRS as to the process and timetable they intend to follow in closing and disposing of the Gullane training centre. A timeline of how the Council was informed of the outcome of the review and SFRS's intention to close and dispose of the Gullane training centre is detailed below:

- Friday, 20th September – Chief Executive received advance notice from the Society of Chief Executives that the Property Estate – Statement of Intent would be considered by the SFRS Board on 26th September; also informed that Local Senior Officers had been asked to make direct contact with those Chief Executives where properties in their area are contained within the proposals to discuss the recommendations
- Saturday, 21st – Monday, 23rd September – problems with the SFRS email system meant that various emails from Peter Heath, Local Senior Officer to the Chief Executive and ward councillors, Day, Goodfellow and Berry were not received. This meant that the Chief Executive and local councillors did not receive the communication from the LSO including their 'advance' copy of the report. Note that the LSO did not receive a briefing document with details of the review and its recommendations until Monday, 23rd September
- Wednesday, 25th September – Chief Executive and ward councillors re-sent copies of the correspondence originally sent on 22nd September and a copy of the report they should have received on 23rd September
- Wednesday, 25th September – telephone conversations and emails between the Chief Executive and LSO to clarify details on the proposal to close and dispose of the Gullane training centre. Chief Executive requests an urgent meeting between herself and the Council Leader and the Chair of the SFRS Board and the Chief Officer
- Monday, 30th September – the issue was raised and discussed at the East Lothian Partnership meeting at which the Chief Executive, the Council Leader, Leader of the Opposition, the LSO, a SFRS Board member and an Assistant Chief Officer were present. Concern was raised at the lack of engagement by SFRS with the Council and other stakeholders, including the local community prior to the decision being taken to close and dispose of the Gullane training centre. The intention of the Chief Executive and Council Leader to meet as soon as possible with the Chair of the SFRS Board and the Chief Officer was noted. The East Lothian Partnership agreed that the development of a Joint Asset Plan is a key priority for the Partnership as it would assist in ensuring that future decisions about partners' strategic assets in East Lothian should be set in the context of an overall plan for public assets.

3.7 The lack of engagement by SFRS with the Council and other stakeholders prior to the decision being made to close and dispose of the Gullane facility is very disappointing and goes against the grain of good partnership working that should lie at the centre of Community planning. The Chief Executive and Council Leader will use the meeting they are having with the Chair of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Board and the SFRS Chief Officer to re-enforce this message and to press for re-consideration of the decision and for full consultation with the Council and community on the future of the facility.

- 3.8 As noted above (paragraph 3.5) the closure of the Gullane training centre could have negative economic effects on the village and the surrounding area. However, the disposal of the site by SFRS could provide opportunities in relation to possible alternative uses for the buildings and the site that could create alternative jobs and generate economic activity. Council officials will need to initiate early discussions with SFRS about their plans for disposal of the buildings and the site and possible alternative uses that meet align with planning guidance and meet the community needs for the area

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The decision of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Board to close and dispose of the Gullane training centre could have negative impacts on the village and surrounding area. The report's recommendations seek to ensure that, should the SFRS carry out its decision to dispose of the training centre that it engages with the Council to minimise any potential negative impacts and to maximise any potential opportunities arising from the disposal of the site.

5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 This report is not applicable to the well being of equalities groups and an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – none
6.2 Personnel – none
6.3 Other – none

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 Property Estate – Strategic Intent; report to Scottish Fire and Rescue Board, 26th September 2013:
http://www.firescotland.gov.uk/media/442222/26th_september_2013.pdf

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