

Consultation:

Ofwat: Charges Scheme Rules for 2016-17 and Future Developments.

Introduction

The East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service (ESFRS) provides the Fire Fighting and primary rescue service in the county of East Sussex and The City of Brighton & Hove. In compliance with the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 our aim is to make our area a safer place for residents, visitors and businesses. We will always respond to fires and other emergencies, but the above mentioned Act confers a core duty of Fire Safety and ESFRS has implemented a much stronger emphasis now on fire prevention and community safety.

Response

ESFRS has in the past encountered issues around Water Companies repairing fire hydrants to an acceptable standard and in an acceptable timeframe. There are impacts of this on the provision of water for firefighting in order to save life and property and hence a risk that needs to be managed appropriately. It has been found that this risk can fall secondary to other priorities.

Additionally, ESFRS has experienced cost increase that are significantly higher than inflation and often not on an annual basis. This impacts on public sector budgetary planning and the economic restraints currently in place on the Fire Service.

Finally, research has found that Water Company fire hydrant repair costs are inconsistent. There is also a lack of any transparency as to how costs are calculated or how above inflation increases are justified.

These responses therefore relate to consultation questions Q4 to Q6. To avoid recurrence of the issues described above, ESFRS proposes that Board assurance statements state that companies will comply with their legal obligations in relation to fire hydrants installed on their water mains and will deliver a service that is in accordance with local Memorandum of Understanding agreements to which they have signed. Costs will be clear and transparent and subject to annual review. Where costs are intended at higher than inflation, companies will consult fully with their Fire Authority partners and justification will be provided. In the event of dispute, a referral process should be implemented for resolution through appropriate bodies. This might include the LGA, Ofwat or Water UK.

DT Yates
Hydrant & Water Manager