

21 OCTOBER 2003

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

HELD IN THE DESBOROUGH SUITE, ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD, TOWN HALL, ST IVES ROAD, MAIDENHEAD, BERKSHIRE ON TUESDAY OCTOBER 21 2003 COMMENCING AT 6.30PM AND CONCLUDED AT 9.18PM

Present: M Adams, Mrs C Bateson, Christine Borgars, Mrs P Bray, J C G Brooks, Dr P Bryant, Tom Crisp, G S Findlay, John P Green, J S Grewal, D Howes, Mrs V Howes, Owen E Jeffery, J E R Mole, B J S Patman, A J Ross, D J Smith, D Swindells, R Webb, Simon Werner, P Weston, D J Wilson

Apologies: C Maskell, T Mills, Peter North

3.01/03 PART I MINUTES: 25 JUNE 2003

The Part I Minutes of the last meeting held on Wednesday 25 June 2003, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

Minute 2.02/03: Election of Vice Chairman 2004/2005
In Resolution insert "Vice" before "Chairman"

3.02/02 PART I MINUTES OF SUB GROUPS

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 6 – not reproduced) of the Urgency Committee, Fire Liaison Group, Integrated Risk Management Plan Working Party and Structure Review Working Party meetings that had taken place since the last meeting in June 2003. Members were advised that copies of the Part I Minutes were available on request from the Committee Administrator (0118) 932 2288.

NOTED

3.03/03 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman had nothing to report.

3.04/03 PETITIONS AND QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

The Authority noted that no Petitions or Questions had been received from the Public under Standing Orders 8 and 9.

3.05/03 QUESTIONS FROM FIRE AUTHORITY MEMBERS

The Authority noted that no questions had been received from Fire Authority Members under Standing Order 10.

3.06/03 NOTICES OF MOTION

The Authority noted that no Notices of Motion had been received from Members under Standing Order 12.

3.07/03 ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Authority was requested (Agenda item 8 – not reproduced) to appoint a representative of the Conservative Group on the Standards Committee in place of Councillor D J Wilson.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Mrs C Bateson be appointed as the Conservative Group's representative on the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Standards Committee.

3.08/03 PRESENTATION ON THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD'S LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

The Authority received a presentation from Therese Lawlor on the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead's Local Strategic Partnership established in March 2002. Following the presentation Members were given the opportunity to ask questions. The Chairman on behalf of Members thanked Therese for attending the meeting and for the very full and informative presentation.

3.09/03 MEMBERS ALLOWANCES – RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Authority was requested (Agenda item 10 – not reproduced) to consider the recommendations of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Standards Committee on a scheme of Allowances for Fire Authority Members based on a report prepared by Mr Clive Williams, the former Clerk and Monitoring Officer and considered by the Standards Committee at its meeting on Tuesday 30 September 2003.

The Chairman welcomed Mr Williams to the meeting who in taking Members through the report confirmed that in addition to considering the draft scheme of allowances the Committee also discussed the length of time in office, Committee's Terms of Reference and reporting to the Fire Authority.

Consideration was therefore given to the recommendations of the Standards Committee as set out in paragraph 5 of the report and the following is a summary of the comments made:

Length of Time in Office

Recommendations 1, 2 and 3 approved.

Scheme of Allowances for Members

In supporting recommendation 1, some discussion took place on whether the recommendation regarding the payment of Special Responsibility Allowances should include a reference to "Leaders of the Labour Group". Having discussed the matter in some detail the following amendment was proposed, seconded and agreed:

- ◆ In recommendation 2 delete reference to "Leaders of the Labour Group" and insert new recommendation 3 as follows:
"The Leaders of any bona-fide political party with not less than three Members, unless appointed as Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Authority, be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1500.

In addition amendments to recommendations 3, 4 and 5 were also proposed, seconded and agreed together with other minor textural amendments.

Committee Reporting to the Authority Recommendation approved.

The Vice-Chairman reminded Members that if the Authority decides to adopt the Executive Committee structure it would be necessary to review the method of allowances and any changes reflected in the approved scheme. In view of this it was agreed that the approved scheme of allowances be reviewed on an annual basis and also in the event of the Authority adopting a new Committee Structure.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1. The term of office of existing Members of the Standards Committee be extended to three years, with the option to extend membership for a further term of three years.**
- 2. Having served two terms of office, a Member should vacate the Standards Committee for at least a year before being eligible for further appointment.**

3. Having regard to the fact that the Committee would meet infrequently, Authority Standing Order 5A on attendance be varied in the case of the Standards Committee to provide that any Member of the Committee missing two consecutive meetings should be asked to give an explanation and that failure to attend three consecutive meetings without the agreement of the Committee, would lead to that Member ceasing to be a member of the Committee.
4. A basic allowance of £400 be paid to each Member of the Fire Authority.
5. The following Special Responsibility Allowances be paid, in addition to the Basic Allowance, to the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Fire Authority as follows:

Fire Authority Chairman	£6000
Fire Authority Vice-Chairman	£3000

6. The Leaders of any bona-fide political party with not less than three members, unless appointed as Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Authority, be paid a Special Responsibility Allowance of £1500.
7. The Authority pays Travel and Subsistence at the approved rate with effect from 1 April 2004.
8. The Authority pays a Childcare or Carer Allowance at the approved rate of £6 an hour with effect from 1 April 2004.
9. In accordance with the regulations, the Members Basic Allowance and the Special Responsibility Allowances referred to in Resolutions 4, 5 and 6 above be effective from 1 May 2003.
10. The Authority strictly conforms to Standing Order 5A relating to attendance and that a report be made to the next meeting of the Standards Committee on attendance levels.
11. The Chairman of the Standards Committee be given the right to address the Fire Authority in person, should he so wish.
12. The approved Scheme of Allowances for Fire Authority Members be reviewed on an annual basis and also in the event of the Authority adopting the new Committee Structure.

3.10/03 STRATEGIC INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN AND YEAR ONE ACTION PLAN, WORKING FOR A SAFER BERKSHIRE

The Authority's approval was sought (Agenda item 11 – not reproduced) to the Strategic Integrated Management Plan (IRMP) and Year One Action Plan as recommended by the IRMP Working Party.

Having received a summary from Mr Des Tidbury, Assistant Chief Fire Officer on the background to the development of the IRMP Strategic Plan and Year One Action Plan, Members were advised that the Authority is required to commence the consultation process on both documents by 31 October 2003 at the latest. The IRMP and Action Plan needs to be formally adopted by 31 March 2004 and in order to achieve this a report on the outcome of the consultation process will be presented to the IRMP Working Party at its meeting on Tuesday 24 February 2004 for consideration and recommendation to the Fire Authority meeting scheduled to take place on Wednesday 17 March 2004.

Consideration was therefore given to the IRMP and Year One Action Plan, a copy of which had been circulated with the Agenda. Having suggested various minor amendments to the text and highlighted a few typographical errors Members supported the approval of both documents for the purposes of consultation.

The Chairman in acknowledging Members support, wished to place on record his thanks to Mr Tidbury and his Team for all their hard work in producing both documents and also wished to acknowledge the significant input received from both the Fire Brigades' Union and IRMP Working Party.

RESOLVED: That the Strategic Integrated Risk Management Plan and Year One Action Plan, as amended, be approved in readiness to commence consultation on 31 October 2003.

3.11/03 REPORT ON POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE WHITE PAPER 'OUR FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE'

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 12 – not reproduced) of the potential implications of the recently published White Paper on the Fire Service, but more especially regarding its proposals on governance and regional working and were requested to consider and approve a future course of action.

In speaking to the report, the Chief Fire Officer drew Members attention to the diagram set out under paragraph 2 of the report (not reproduced) and advised that the ODPM has now acknowledged that many of the arrows shown in the diagram should in fact be two-way.

The White Paper outlines a new institutional structure for the Fire Service and whilst details of how these structures are constituted and will interact have yet to be finalised they could currently be summarised as set out in paragraph 3 of the report (not reproduced).

The White Paper specifically requires that local Fire Authorities must establish “robust regional management arrangements” which includes the establishment of Regional Management Boards who will be responsible for delivering and managing six specific areas or themes in accordance with national policies. Such arrangement has to be in place 1 April 2004 and should meet the objectives of the National Framework, which has yet to be developed.

The issues presented to the Authority by the White Paper are complicated by the fact that much of the paper’s intended actions will come about with the publication of a new Fire Services Act which may be some twelve to eighteen months away. In the interim one of the few specific requirements is, as already mentioned, to establish robust regional management arrangements by 1 April 2004.

The ODPM have announced that the Local Government Association (LGA) is to take the lead in establishing the form and remit of Regional Management Boards. A meeting chaired by the LGA on 5 September 2003 did consider the issues posed and have started some further work to provide details to fill the many gaps. It is probable that Regional Management Boards will be Committees under Section 102 of the Local Government Act, as being established as true “boards” would require a statutory basis. Detailed work is ongoing and it would appear that the ODPM now wish to hear from Fire Authorities as to what regional or sub-regional arrangements they believe would work best for them. It is understood that the LGA will be producing some guidance but this has not yet been received.

A Regional Management Boards authority will be limited to the six themes and its competence will be only as granted to it by its constituent Fire Authorities. The Audit Commission must eventually, verify the benefits of such collaborative work. The alternative would be the establishment of a board for the whole of the South East region, encompassing nine Brigades, who would be geographically vast and would entail detailed discussion between the authorities concerned.

Given these options it is recommended that the Authority commences work at Member and Officer level to ascertain the implications, financial and otherwise, of establishing a Regional Management Board for the Thames Valley area (i.e. Royal Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire). A report on the outcome of the additional work together with recommendations for progressing this issue would be presented to the Fire Authority at its meeting on Wednesday 17 December 2003 for consideration and determination.

In response to a question the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that he would be pushing for a Thames Valley Regional Management Board. This is supported by the Chief Fire Officers of Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire who are likely to be recommending a similar course of action to their Authorities.

RESOLVED: That work at Member and Officer level be commended to ascertain the implications, financial and otherwise, of establishing a

Regional Management Board for the Thames Valley area (Royal Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire) and that a report on the outcome of the additional work together with recommendations for progressing this issue be presented to the Fire Authority at its meeting on Wednesday 17 December 2003 for consideration and determination.

3.12/03 IT AND COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2004 – INFORMATION AGE GOVERNMENT STRATEGY

The Authority's approval was sought (Agenda item 13 – not reproduced) to the updated IT and Communications Strategy including the IEG Strategy. The report and Appendix 1 (not reproduced), which contained the first four sections of the IT and Communications Strategy and IEG Statement, was supported by a visual presentation from Mr Jonathan Ball the Brigades Information Systems Manager which provided Members with a detailed summary of the actual Strategy and IEG which must be produced as part of the E-Government targets. The public sector is mandated to produce this Strategy, which should lead by example, facilitate standards and infrastructure. Following the presentation Members were given the opportunity to ask questions or seek points of clarification on the Strategy.

Members were advised that the Strategy had been considered by the Brigade Management Team at its meeting in September 2003 when it was agreed that it be endorsed and referred to the Fire Authority with a recommendation that it be approved.

In response to a specific question Mr Ball confirmed that work is progressing on a Members programme to give greater access to E-Mail, Intranet but more especially the Blackberry PDA, an example of which was produced at the meeting and is currently being used by Principle Officers. The Brigades Information Systems Steering Group will consider a report on the outcome of the further investigations and progress reports will be presented to future Fire Authority meetings.

RESOLVED: That the IT and Communications Strategy 2004 be approved and adopted.

3.13/03 2004/2005 BUDGET – IMPLICATIONS OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2003

The Authority was informed (Agenda item 14 – not reproduced) of the implications of the Local Government Act 2003.

The Local Government Bill, which received Royal Assent on 18 September 2003, contains many significant changes to the financial arrangements for Combined Fire Authorities. In summary the Authority will:

- ◆ Become a Precepting Authority in its own right from April 2004 and will receive revenue support grant direct, set its own Council Tax, appear separately on council tax bills, be subject to the capping regime for the first time, produce its own council tax leaflet and consult residents and businesses on the level of Council Tax.
- ◆ Be required to set up reserves in its first year, which will be essential, as the Authority will no longer be able to produce a supplementary estimate during the year. As the Unitary Authorities are not obliged to hand over a share of their reserves to the Fire Authority, there may well be a budget demand of at least £500,000 to set up adequate reserves.
- ◆ The Basic and Supplementary Credit Approvals have been abolished and replaced by a new regime where all local authorities are free to determine their own borrowing levels providing they can afford to service the resulting debt. In order to calculate how much debt the Authority will be able to afford to repay, there is now a new requirement for Authorities to agree a robust three-year Budget Plan each year.

The first meeting of the Budget Working Party is scheduled to take place on Monday 27 October 2003 and a report on the preliminary Budget figures will be presented to the Authority meeting in December 2003.

As the Authority will now be required to set its Budget by 28 February each year, rather than the preceding December, an additional Fire Authority meeting has already been arranged for Wednesday 11 February 2004 to set the 2004/2005 Budget and Council Tax.

The Authority Treasurer advised Members that he would be meeting with the District Auditor on Monday 27 October to discuss the implications of setting up a Reserve Account.

NOTED

3.14/03 2003/2004 BUDGET MONITORING

The Authority was informed (Agenda item 15 – not reproduced) of the Revenue and Capital Expenditure against Budgets up to 31 August 2003 as presented in Appendices A and B respectively (not reproduced).

NOTED

3.15/03 REPEAL OF SECTION 19 OF THE FIRE SERVICES ACT 1947

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 16 – not reproduced) that the Chief Fire Officer has been informed by the ODPM that, having received Royal Assent on 18 September 2003, Section 121 of the Act repeals Sections 19(3) to (6) and 19(8) of the Fire Services Act 1947 and paragraph (a) of Section 7(2) of Services Act 1959 in respect of England and Wales.

The effect of these changes is to remove the requirement on a Fire Authority to provide information on its establishment scheme by closing a Fire Station or reducing and/or moving the number of fire appliances or fire-fighting posts. It also removes the Secretary of State's power in relation to the making of establishment schemes, and powers to order local public enquiries for the purposes of functions under Section 19.

Prior to the adoption of the Integrated Risk Management Plan for Berkshire, any proposals to amend Fire Cover will be decided by the Fire Authority taking into account normal consultation arrangements and advice of the ODPM. Establishment changes, which are not directly related to the provision of Fire Cover, will be dealt with in accordance with the existing arrangements including where appropriate, the Scheme of Delegation to Officers.

NOTED

3.016/03 EXTRICATION COMPETITION 2003 UPDATE

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 17 – not reproduced) of the Brigade's involvement and results achieved in the vehicle extrication competitions held during 2003 involving the British National Competition and the International World Extrication Challenge in Dallas during August and the World Rescue Challenge in Ottawa in October 2003.

The success of the Team has led to support being received from some national sponsors such as O2, Airwave and W L Gore together with a feature in the August edition of Top Gear Magazine. Despite the Team's success in attracting sponsorship they nevertheless gratefully acknowledge and recognise the financial assistance granted by the Authority, without which it would not be possible to compete in overseas competitions.

The Brigade will be hosting the UKRO National Extrications Challenge during August 2004 in Reading and progress reports will be presented to future Fire Authority meetings. The 2004 World Rescue Challenge is being held in Plymouth UK in June and the Slough Team have qualified to compete. The next International World Extrication Challenge is not being held until 2005.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members, wish to place on record his sincere congratulations to the Teams for their achievements in all competitions.

NOTED

3.17/03 FIRES, INCIDENTS AND ISSUES OF INTEREST

The Authority received a report (Agenda item 18 – not reproduced) which summarised some of the notable incidents attended, together with letters of appreciation received, by the Brigade during the period 3 June and 15 September 2003. In response to a request the Chief Fire Officer agreed to

advise Councillor D J Wilson, in his capacity as Chairman of Maidenhead CAB, and Authority Members from Slough on the outcome of the investigation into the fire at the CAB Offices in Slough

NOTED

3.18/03 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Members were advised that the next Fire Authority meeting is scheduled to take place on **Wednesday 17 December 2003 in the Council Chamber, Reading Borough Council, Civic Centre, Reading commencing at 6.30pm.**

NOTED

3.19/03 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part I of Schedule 12A of the said Act indicated:

	Agenda Item Paragraph	
21	Part II Minutes: Wednesday 25 June 2003	1,7 & 8
22	Appeals to Employment Appeals Tribunals	1

(Note: The following is a summary of the items considered in the Part II Agenda of the Fire Authority meeting held on Tuesday 21 October 2003).

3.20/03 PART II MINUTES: 25 JUNE 2003

The Part II Minutes of the last meeting held on Wednesday 25 June 2003 were received and approved as a correct record.

3.21/03 APPEALS TO EMPLOYMENT APPEALS TRIBUNALS

Members were advised of the current position of appeals to Employment Appeals Tribunals involving the Fire Authority.

Note: At the conclusion of the meeting and at the request of the Chairman, the Clerk and Monitoring Officer advised Members of the reasons why the report on the recommendations of the Structure Review Working Party on possible changes to the Fire Authority's Committee structure had not been presented in accordance with the Working Party's decision at its last meeting.