

## MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S AUDIT COMMITTEE



Held on Monday 26 March 2009

Strategic Command Centre, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue  
Service Headquarters, 103 Dee Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire,  
RG30 4FS

**Those present:** Councillor Adrian Edwards (Member, Fire Authority)  
Councillor Mrs Kathy Newbound (Member, Fire Authority)  
Councillor Miss Emma Webster (Member, Fire Authority)

**In attendance:** Conor Byrne (Senior Accountant)  
Deborah Cripps (RSM Bentley Jennison)  
Lynda Kenyon (Committee Manager)  
Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer)  
Alison Taylor (Audit Commission)  
Andrew Vallance (Authority Treasurer)  
Graham West (Audit Commission) (*part meeting*)

In the absence of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, the Committee Manager, under Standing Order 15a), invited those Members present to choose a person to preside, and **Councillor Miss Emma Webster took the Chair for this meeting.**

### Action

#### 01.01.09 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Phillip Bicknell (Member, Fire Authority) (*Vice-Chairman*), Councillor Shafiq Chaudhry (Member, Fire Authority) and Councillor Iain McCracken (Member, Fire Authority) (*Chairman*).

#### 01.02.09 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The following Personal Interests were declared in respect to Agenda Item 6 (Process undertaken to secure the contract for Professional Property Services) and Agenda Item 10 (Appendix to 'Process undertaken to secure the contract for Professional Property Services' (Award of Professional Property Services Contract (2008-2012))):

- i) Councillor Miss Emma Webster - worked in a professional capacity with a number of the contract tenderers.
- ii) Councillor Adrian Edwards - his son works for Babcock Infrastructure Services.

There were no further Declarations of Interests made.

#### 01.03.09 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 SEPTEMBER 2008

The Minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2008 were received and **Approved** as a correct record for signing by Councillor Miss Emma Webster, as Chairman designate.

**It was agreed to consider Agenda Item 4 later in the Agenda as Graham West (Audit Commission) had yet to arrive at the meeting.**

#### **01.05.09 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT**

The Audit Committee was advised of the progress with the Internal Audit Plan for 2008/09, and Deborah Cripps (RSM Bentley Jennison) took Members through the report. She advised that the annual Internal Audit report for 2008/09 would be presented to the next meeting.

RSM Bentley  
Jennison  
Agenda  
28.05.09

**The Audit Committee Noted** the progress made against the internal Audit Plan for 2008/09.

#### **01.06.09 PROCESS UNDERTAKEN TO SECURE THE CONTRACT FOR PROFESSIONAL PROPERTY SERVICES**

The Audit Committee was advised of the process undertaken to secure the Professional Property Services. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer was pleased to advise that, to date, the service being provided by Babcock Infrastructure Services was very good.

**The Audit Committee Noted** the process undertaken, and Councillor Miss Emma Webster felt that the detail within the presented report to the Fire Authority at its meeting on 25 June 2008 was good, and she conveyed her thanks to the Officers.

**Graham West (Audit Commission) joined the meeting during the next item.**

#### **01.07.09 ACTION PLAN ARISING FROM THE PROCUREMENT DOCTOR HEALTH CHECK REPORT**

The Audit Committee was advised of the Action Plan arising from the Procurement Doctor Health Check Report, and the following salient updates relating to the suggested improvement and key recommendations were provided by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer:

- i) **“Develop a procurement website to use as an outward facing procurement tool”** - further work was being conducted electronically.
- ii) **“Share out work with FireBuy and other Fire Authorities”** - the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service was actively engaged with other South East Fire and Rescue Services which was now realising benefits.
- iii) **“Consider the use of 3<sup>rd</sup> sector partnerships”** - these were being considered where necessary, however there were limited opportunities.
- iv) **“Involve FireBuy in addressing issues with the current Fire Services Act which currently discourages collaboration, particularly shared services”** - the Fire Authority’s current Standing Orders were somewhat limited in relation to Framework Agreements.
- v) **“Document the reasons for not developing a future “e procurement” approach”** - work was in hand, however further development was still required.

- vi) **“Adopt a more corporate approach, via the procurement team to the management and collection of data”** - to be taken forward once the Procurement Review had been completed and the outcomes implemented. Officers were currently considering the initial draft report, as prepared by First Procurement Associates, a copy of the final report to be presented to a future meeting, if required.
- vii) **“Continue to develop the sustainable Procurement Policy”** - to be taken forward once the Procurement Review had been completed.
- viii) **“Revise the Procurement Policy”** - this had been drafted, but was awaiting the completion of the Procurement Review.
- ix) **“Continue to develop a central contracts register”** - this had been produced and continues to be populated.
- x) **“Continue to develop the NVQ procurement centre”** - confirmation awaited from Edexcel before Procurement Standard Award could be realised.
- xi) **“Implement a Procurement Card”** - implementation was imminent.

Councillor Adrian Edwards, in noting the complexities of procurement, reiterated the need for simple use of language in reports. Councillor Mrs Kathy Newbound felt the report was clear and concise. **The Audit Committee Supported** Councillor Miss Emma Webster’s suggestion that, once the Procurement Review had been completed and the outcomes were being implemented, an update report be provided on the progress made to the suggested improvements and key recommendations within the Procurement Doctor Health Check Report (the timeframe for this should be approximately 6 months, subject to the outcomes of the Review).

**The Audit Committee Noted** the report.

**Agenda Item 4 (Annual Audit and Inspection Letter) was taken next.**

#### **01.04.09 ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER**

The Audit Committee received the Audit Commission’s Annual Audit and Inspection Letter (2007/08). Graham West (Audit Commission), in noting Phil Sharman’s (Audit Commission) apologies for not being able to attend the meeting, took Members through the salient points within the report which provided an overall summary of the Audit Commission’s assessment of the Authority. He introduced Alison Taylor (Audit Commission) who referred Members to the Direction of Travel review.

Councillor Mrs Kathy Newbound pointed out an error within the report, that being on page 8, paragraph 29, 3<sup>rd</sup> sentence, the reference to “Wokingham” should read “Windsor”. Graham West apologised for the error and agreed to make the correction.

Referring to the current economic climate, Members recognised the need for Unitary Authorities to liaise closely with the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority regarding any issues identified as a result of council tax collection rates.

**Agenda  
22.09.09**  
(subject to  
appointment  
of Proc. Mgr)

**Graham  
West**

Councillor Miss Emma Webster noted that progress had been made during 2008/09, particularly in areas such as equality and diversity, and she hoped that this would be reflected in subsequent Annual Audit reports. Councillor Mrs Kathy Newbound also noted the work being undertaken to improve these targets, and Alison Taylor recognised that the national targets were challenging. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer referred to the recent Fire Minister's response to the Fire Authority's proposed equality and diversity recruitment stretch targets.

In response to Councillor Adrian Edwards regarding the Audit Commission's assessment of the progress on the equality standard and on workforce equality and diversity of improving as being poor, Alison Taylor stated that the Audit Commission had considered the progress made during 2007/08, but that it had been recognised that work was being conducted to improve this. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported that the Service was currently working extremely hard to achieve the Equality Standard Level 3. Referring to the manner by which other targets were assessed, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer indicated that there were differences in how individual Fire and Rescue Services measured and promulgated their performance, which could lead to incorrect judgements being made, especially if comparisons are made; the Response Standards to operational incidents being one example where the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service had set challenging new targets, whereas other Fire and Rescue Services still use old standards.

Councillor Miss Emma felt that the presented Annual Audit and Inspection Letter had been well written which enabled a clear understanding for all readers.

**The Audit Committee Noted** the positive comments made in the report, and **Noted** the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter.

Councillor Miss Emma Webster conveyed her thanks to Graham West and Alison Taylor.

#### **01.08.09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**The Audit Committee Noted** that its next meeting would take place on Thursday 28 May 2009 at 6pm in the Strategic Command Centre, Headquarters, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service.

#### **01.09.09 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING**

**The Audit Committee 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, and is exempt information if, and so long as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information:

- Appendix to 'Process undertaken to secure the contract for Professional Property Services' (Award of Professional Property Services Contract (2008-2012) (Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3).

**01.10.09 APPENDIX TO 'PROCESS UNDERTAKEN TO SECURE THE CONTRACT FOR PROFESSIONAL PROPERTY SERVICES' (AWARD OF PROFESSIONAL PROPERTY SERVICES CONTRACT (2008-2012))**

The **Audit Committee Noted** the Appendix to 'Process undertaken to secure the contract for Professional Property Services' (Award of Professional Property Services Contract (2008-2012)).