

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



Held on Wednesday 10th December 2014 at 6.30pm

Brigade Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot,
Reading, Berkshire RG31 7DS

Members: * Councillor Frank Abe
(* present) Councillor Debs Absolom
* Councillor John Lenton
* Councillor Iain McCracken (Chairman)
Councillor Eileen McElligott
Councillor Ishrat Shah
Councillor Alan Ward
Councillor Richard Willis

In Attendance: Conor Byrne (Senior Accountant, SA)
SM Eddie Cardoso (FBU Representative)
Trevor Ferguson (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
Andy Fry (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)
Maria Grindley (External Auditor, Ernst & Young)
David Guest (External Auditor, Ernst & Young)
Dan Harris (Baker Tilly)
Paul Maynard (Area Manager, Response, AMR)
Nick Oxborough (Group Manager, Performance Review, GMPR)
Linda Pye (Clerk)
Caroline Redzikowska (Director Corporate Services, DCS)
Nikki Richards (Interim Head of Strategic Planning and Programme
Management, IHSPPM)
Fayth Rowe (Committee Officer, CO)
Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)
Andrew Vallance (Director of Resources, DR)

Action

243. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting had been received from Councillors Debs Absolom, Eileen McElligott and Alan Ward. Apologies were also noted for the Chairs of the other Fire Authority Committees.

244. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct there were no declarations of interest received from Members.

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Officers.

245. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 OCTOBER 2014

RESOLVED that:

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd October 2014 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

246. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTERS PROPERLY REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE FOR DECISION

None referred.

247. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

Andrew Vallance (Director of Resources, DR) informed the Committee of the progress to date with the Internal Audit Plan for 2014/15.

The Internal Audit Plan had been approved by the Audit & Governance Committee on 12th March 2014 and the latest progress report was attached at Appendix A with the Fuel Management Audit Report attached at Appendix B. An audit of Fuel Management had been undertaken as part of the approved internal audit periodic plan for 2014/15.

A number of recommendations had been set out in the Action Plan and specific comments had been made as follows:

1.2a – Recommendation: The Service should ensure that all cardholders acknowledged receipt of their card on a form which incorporated terms of use, to which the cardholder would agree to abide by and was signed by the cardholder. It was noted that a policy document outlining the terms and conditions would be issued immediately for all users to acknowledge and sign. The auditor confirmed that during the review of this area one card out of a sample of ten could not be accounted for. Councillor Iain McCracken thought that cardholders should be aware of the terms and conditions prior to signing for the card. The ACFO stated that in the past the terms and conditions of use might have been explained verbally rather than written down. This audit was about formalising policies and would tighten up the process.

1.2b – Recommendation: The Service should ensure that all cardholders, irrespective of department or location, submit an FB124a Monthly Fuel Card Return. The auditor stated that for the same sample of ten fuel cards in only two cases had monthly card returns been submitted to the Transport Department in accordance with policy requirements. This recommendation had already been implemented.

1.2c – Recommendation: The Service should ensure the timely submission by cardholders of receipts for purchases using fuel cards and entry of details in Firewatch and that the relevant line managers were informed of instances of non-compliance, which were identified by the Fleet Administrators from reconciliation of the Allstar invoices. From a sample of ten Allstar invoice transactions, it was noted that four purchases had not been supported by fuel receipts and seven purchases had not been recorded within the Firewatch system. A reminder had been issued to all users stating the requirement to enter all fuel purchases on to Firewatch and to forward fuel card receipts to the Transport Office each week. This would be time consuming and additional resources would be required. Councillor Iain McCracken queried whether this practice had been widespread or limited to a few individuals. The auditor responded that the samples had been picked at random and therefore did not relate to a recurring incident from specific individuals.

1.4 – Recommendation: The Service should require Stations to regularly report the security of the VECTEC override key and a list of personnel with access to the Station safe. This could be achieved by recording this on the monthly FB121 or FB124, or by forwarding a photocopied safe master list to the Transport Department as part of the monthly return. The override key was kept in the safe and the watch Managers had access to it. The Fleet Administration Officer monitored the use of the override keys when used and required reasons for the use. Confirmation of the key's location would be added to the fuel card monthly return. The ACFO confirmed that the keys for each vehicle would have a black fob which plugged into the fuel pump. An override key was located in the safe in each Station in case others needed to access it. In response to a query the ACFO would check whether the key was the same for each vehicle.

ACFO

1.6 – Recommendation: The Service should ensure that all vehicle logbooks correctly recorded all vehicle mileage, were signed by a Supervising Officer, and were returned to the Transport Department on the first day of each month as per policy requirements. It was confirmed that a reminder would be issued immediately and the Transport Department would chase those departments which did not comply. The auditor confirmed that from a sample of 20 vehicle log books, in three cases the log book had not been returned to the Transport Department as per policy requirements. Of the 17 log books which had been found, five had not been counter-signed by a Supervising Officer and one contained a discrepancy of 135 miles between the closing odometer reading for July 2014 and the opening reading for August 2014.

A further five low priority issues had been found and details of those recommendations were set out in the 'Findings and Recommendations' in Section 3 of the report.

Councillor Iain McCracken asked for assurance that all actions would be completed by the end of December. The ACFO confirmed that some had already been completed and although the others were scheduled for completion by the end of December this might slip due to the industrial dispute. However, the ACFO confirmed that he would update the Action Sheet with new achievement dates should that be the case and he would circulate the amended document to the Committee.

ACFO

Councillor Iain McCracken stated that the Fuel Management Review had been a longstanding agenda item and it was good to see it being brought to a conclusion. He thanked Officers for all the work undertaken in the background on this issue.

RESOLVED that:

The report be noted.

**248. ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY – PAY POLICY STATEMENT
2015/16**

Caroline Redzikowska (Director, Corporate Services, DCS) sought the Committee's views on the draft Pay Policy Statement for 2015/16 prepared for the Fire Authority to meet its obligation under Section 38(1) of the Localism Act 2011 and to recommend the draft statement to the Fire authority subject to the inclusion of any amendments arising at that meeting.

At its meeting on 25th March 2013, the Management Committee had resolved that

the Audit and Governance Committee should review the Pay Policy Statement for 2014/15 prior to it being taken to the Management Committee and the same approach for the 2015/16 policy had therefore been adopted.

Sections 38 to 43 of the Localism Act 2011 required that relevant authorities in England prepared a Pay Policy Statement for each financial year. Pay Policy Statements had to be approved by a meeting of the Full Fire Authority and subsequently published. A draft Pay Policy Statement for the RBFA for the forthcoming year 2015/16 had been drafted and attached as Appendix 1 which took into account guidance issued by the DCLG and Local Government in February 2012 and Supplementary Guidance in February 2013. The draft statement also took into account the recently published Local Government Transparency Code 2014.

The DCS confirmed that the Pay Policy Statement would be amended to incorporate final pay figures as at the end of the financial year prior to the statement being published. The Committee was invited to make any further amendments considered appropriate prior to it being considered by the Full Fire Authority on 23rd February 2015. The DCS highlighted two further amendments required on pages 15 and 17.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) The draft Pay Policy Statement be agreed;
- (b) The amended Pay Policy Statement to be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval.

249. GOVERNANCE REPORT

Caroline Redzikowska (Director, Corporate Services, DCS) introduced the report which sought approval of the new format of the Constitution and revised content that had been set out in the appendix to the report.

A number of parts of the existing constitution (known as the Members Handbook) had been updated and recodified in recent times and this report was the next element in this work in setting out the Fire Constitution more clearly and in a more easily used format. The format proposed was similar to that generally adopted in local authorities and indeed the attached Constitution had been adapted from one used in one of the Berkshire authorities.

Where a part of the Constitution had already been approved by this Committee and the Fire Authority, they had not been set out in full in the Appendix as they had not been changed since approval other than to amend any numbering or referencing to other sections.

Each part of the Constitution now had a version control record on the front page which would assist the Fire Authority in referencing and updating each section as required.

The only section which had not been included was the Scheme of Delegation. The DCS confirmed that she would try to get this to the Fire Authority meeting but that if not she would have to leave it to the CFO/DCFO to finish off.

This was a living document and would need to be monitored and updated to reflect any changes from within the Fire Authority as and when required.

Councillor Iain McCracken noted that the template was similar to that used by local authorities and he also stated that any amendments made to the local authority's Constitution would be taken through the Audit & Governance Committee before going on to Council for ratification. He assumed that the same process would be followed at the Fire Authority. The DCS confirmed that that would be the case for substantial amendments but that for minor amendments delegated authority was being sought.

Councillor Iain McCracken felt that the fact that this was a replacement for the Members Handbook had been underplayed and that fact needed to be more prominent. The old Handbook had served the Fire Authority well but this was more akin to a local authority document. He queried who had had sight of the draft Constitution. The DCS confirmed that only those Members on the Audit & Governance Committee. The CFO stated that a proof reading exercise would be necessary and he could pass it on to a Monitoring Officer in another Fire Authority to undertake that task. Councillor McCracken suggested that it should also be circulated to the Chairs of the other Fire Authority Committees with a request that all comments should be brought back to Officers by the first week of January 2015. If a huge response was received it might be necessary to slip the report to the February Fire Authority meeting.

In response to a query from Councillor Frank Abe the Chairman confirmed that he would rather have this important living document in place prior to the elections.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) The new format of the Fire Authority's Constitution be agreed;
- (b) The new and revised sections of the Fire Authority's Constitution be agreed;
- (c) The amended/new Constitution be circulated to the Chairs of the other Fire Authority Committees with a request that any further amendments be forwarded to Officers by the first week of January 2015;
- (d) The amended/new Constitution be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval.

250. STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE FOR 2013/14

Trevor Ferguson (DCFO) provided the Committee with a Statement of Assurance for the Financial Year 2013/14 for sign off. The DCFO explained that this was the second such Statement that had been prepared and would be published in accordance with the requirement set out in the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (July 2012). Once the document was approved it would be published on the Authority's website to ensure it was accessible to the community, Government, local authorities and other partners and so that they could use it to assess the RBFA's overall performance.

It was noted that the following summary judgements had been made:

Financial – requirements were fully met and the evidence was set out in Appendix B.

Governance – requirements were substantially met and the evidence and areas for improvement and steps taken to address them were set out in Appendix C.

Operational - requirements were substantially met and the evidence and areas for improvement and steps taken to address them were set out in Appendix D.

National Framework - requirements were substantially met and the evidence was set out in Appendix E.

The DCFO reported that a Local Government Peer Review Challenge had taken place in February 2014 and this had provided RBFRS with a critical friend assessment of how the organisation was working.

Councillor Iain McCracken felt that this was a good result and he was happy to move it forward to the Fire Authority.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) The summary judgements for each of the four key areas of Finance, Governance, Operations and delivering the National Framework be agreed.
- (b) The RBFA Statement of Assurance for 2013/14 be agreed.

251. DRAFT STRUCTURE OF THE CORPORATE PLAN

Trevor Ferguson, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), provided the Committee with a draft outline structure for the new Corporate Plan that would cover the period 2015 to 2019. The DCFO explained that a new plan was needed to take the Fire Authority's new policy direction forward. The intention was to align the plan to the same time line as the next Comprehensive Spending Review for 2015 to 2019.

It was envisaged that the new plan would effectively be a suite of strategies, policies and plans which would cover the breadth of the organisation and would become a framework to inform decision making for the four year period. The plan would be drafted based on the best information and knowledge available at the time of preparation but would be subject to an annual refresh to ensure that it remained fit for purpose.

The proposal was for the plan to comprise ten sections but that this could be amended to reflect discussions and the evolution of the document.

The DCFO gave a short presentation on the Corporate Plan where he asked the Committee to provide a sense check to ensure that the direction was right and to provide feedback on areas included in the Plan. The Committee were also asked to indicate any areas which they felt had not been covered. The Plan was linked to the Fire Authorities six strategic commitments and in order to build something different going forward a blueprint would be required. As the Fire Authority had worked with staff to bring the revised policy direction to life three key themes had emerged. They were service delivery; service support and culture and were expanded on in more detail in the section entitled Strategic Narrative. This would assist in joining up the strategic commitments and the vision to something that was tangible for staff. The Plan would set out the main strategies which would influence the use of resources i.e. money, assets and people. Consideration would also be given as to what could be learnt from previous projects. It was hoped that the Fire Authority could move from construction through to finished product by the end of the plan period in 2019. The DCFO confirmed that he would be happy to have individual discussions with Members should that be required or to provide a workshop.

Councillor Iain McCracken asked for the timeline for when this would be taken to the Fire Authority for approval. The DCFO confirmed that it was hoped that a draft would be produced in February 2015 with the final sign off in April 2015. Some of the supporting documents would be produced between now and April and the Plan would form the baseline position which would drive planning forward. Councillor McCracken confirmed that he had hoped to obtain endorsement from the Chairs of the other Fire Authority Committees that evening but as they were absent from the meeting it would be useful if a workshop could be set up as soon as possible.

The CFO confirmed that 2015/16 had been designated as a planning year as the Fire Authority had a balanced budget. This gave the Fire Authority a year to determine how savings could be achieved in 2016/17 and formed part of ensuring that the scaffolding was in place. Buy in would be required by Members and a workshop would be an ideal opportunity to consolidate ideas. The second phase of the staff engagement exercise would also take place in January 2015 and once all ideas had been fed in a framework would be developed. Councillor McCracken made reference to the forthcoming elections in May 2015, the outcome of which was not discernible, and he felt that it would be useful to say something in the Plan that although the Plan had been developed by the current Members of the Fire Authority any changes could be dealt with should that be necessary. The CFO confirmed that the Commitments section made reference to the need to review and revise the document and therefore a comment could be made in that section that the Plan reflected the current circumstances.

Councillor John Lenton asked if there were any economies of scale which could be gained from working with other local authorities or fire authorities particularly with a move towards smaller stations. The DCFO confirmed that work would be undertaken with other local authorities as part of the IRMP process. The Capital Asset Management Strategy would provide the baseline for the risk picture and the Fire Authority would need to ensure that capital asset management matched the risk profile. The CFO advised that the current strategy was about the condition of buildings but that going forward it would need to look at whether the stations were located in the right place and whether they were too big or too small. It was queried whether consideration had been given to extending beyond current boundaries. The CFO stated that the strategy would set out the principles which could include multi-agency working and would run in parallel with the Plan rather than in sequence. It was noted that the Police and other blue light organisations would also be looking to make considerable savings over the next few years and therefore some opportunities might arise from that.

The DCFO confirmed that he would contact the Chairs of the other Fire Authority Committees by phone to update them and to offer them one to one sessions if required.

DCFO

RESOLVED that:

- Following the discussion of the different elements of the draft structure the draft structure for the new Corporate Plan 2015-19 be agreed;
- The DCFO would contact the Chairs of the other Fire Authority Committees to update them and to offer them one to one sessions if required.

252. ANTI FRAUD AND CORRUPTION POLICY

Andrew Vallance, Director of Resources (DR), sought Members' approval of the updated Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy.

The Fire Authority had approved the Annual Governance Statement 2013/14 at its meeting on 22nd September 2014. The Statement had identified actions that needed to be taken in 2014/15 in order to improve governance and limit risk. One of those actions was to review the Authority's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy.

The DR confirmed that the revised Policy would be published on the internet and an item would be included in the Fire Authority newsletter.

Councillor Frank Abe was surprised that this was an issue in the Fire Authority and he queried how widespread fraud was within the organisation. The DR responded that fraud was not widespread. However, he referred to an attempted fraud incident at West Berkshire Council a while ago where a letter had been forged saying that the bank account details for a major supplier had been changed. A similar situation had occurred at the Fire Authority but as the DR had been aware of the incident at West Berkshire he was able to avert an attempted incident of fraud. The main areas where fraud could occur were in relation to creditor and employee frauds.

Councillor Iain McCracken stated that he would welcome tracked changes within these documents in future in order that it was clear what changes had been made.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) Following the review the Authority's new Anti-Fraud and Corruption policy be agreed;
- (b) Responsibility be delegated to the Director of Resources to make minor amendments to the Fraud Response Plan to ensure consistency with other policies such as the Authority's Disciplinary Policy.

253. CONSULTATION ON GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEME 2015

Andrew Vallance, Director of Resources (DR), informed the Committee about the authority's response to the Government's consultation on governance arrangements for the new firefighters' pension scheme.

The DCLG was introducing a new firefighters' pension scheme from April 2015 and it had recently undertaken a consultation exercise on the draft regulations relating to the governance arrangements of the scheme. As the timetable for introducing the new scheme was very tight, the consultation period had only been for six weeks, closing on 21st November 2014. Due to tight timescales Officers had not been able to bring a proposed response to a meeting of this Committee prior to the deadline but a draft response had been circulated to the Chairman.

The proposed governance arrangements were very similar to those of other public sector pension schemes, especially the Local Government Pension Scheme. Each Fire Authority would be required to establish a Pension Board by 1st April 2015. This board would be a non-decision making body which would consist of an equal number of employer and employee representatives and its role would be to scrutinise the Authority's pension administration and decisions to ensure effective and efficient governance and management of the scheme. There would be a national Scheme Advisory Board which would provide advice to scheme managers

and local pension boards in relation to the administration and management of the scheme. It was proposed by the DCLG that this board would be funded by fire authorities.

In relation to the Local Pension Board it did not need to meet by 1st April 2015 but the terms of reference should be in place and the board's constitution should also be determined by that deadline. This Board would need to consist of highly trained members who would be able to track the nuances of the Pension Scheme. It was therefore proposed that a report would be taken to the February 2015 meeting of the Fire Authority to set up the Local Pension Board once the final regulations and any other guidance had been received.

Members stated that it would be preferable if a Local Pension Board could be set up which covered other authorities.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the consultation and response be noted
- (b) A report be submitted to the Fire Authority in February 2015 to establish a Local Pension Board.

254. REPAYMENT OF PENSION TOP-UP GRANT

Andrew Vallance, Director of Resources (DR), informed the Committee that the Authority had over claimed pension top-up grant from the Department of Communities and Local Government.

New arrangements for funding firefighter pensions had come into force on 1st April 2006 and from this date onwards, pensions relating to members of the 1992 and 2006 Firefighter Pension Schemes were to be paid from a separate ring-fenced Pension Account which was part funded by DCLG. However, injury awards or any other payments made to retired firefighters or dependents who were not members of the pension schemes would continue to be paid out of the Fire Authority's Revenue Account on the basis that they were compensatory payments.

On 11th July 2014 the DCLG had sent an e-mail to all Fire and Rescue Services requesting confirmation that injury payments were being accounted for correctly. The RBFRS had confirmed that injury payments were correctly being paid out of the Revenue Account. DCLG had sent a further e-mail stating that external auditors would be looking at this issue as part of the audit of the 2013/14 Financial Statements. The Fire Authority's auditors had raised no issues in this regard as returns had been audited to verify that the correct accounting processes were in place and no issues had ever been raised.

By October 2014 it had become clear that an increasing number of Fire Authorities had uncovered problems and by the end of the month at least 20 authorities had notified DCLG of issues with their Pensions Account and nationally a substantial sum was likely to be returned to DCLG as a result of authorities over claiming pension top up grant.

RBFRS had therefore decided to undertake a full review of all pensions paid since 2006 to ascertain whether any injury pensions had been incorrectly posted to the Pensions Account. That review had highlighted that there were eight individuals whose payments had been incorrectly posted to the Pensions Account rather than the Revenue Account. These individuals had retired between 1964 and 1991 and

at the time of retirement the compensatory element of the payment had not been split out from the eligible pension element. The compensatory amounts incorrectly posted to the Pension Account since 2006 amounted to £275,000 and this would need to be repaid to DCLG. The Authority Treasurer would be attending a meeting on 19th December 2014 with the DCLG and the affected Fire Authorities to discuss the next steps including the possibility of spreading this payment over a number of years. One Fire Authority (Essex) had a liability of around £15m.

Councillor Iain McCracken asked how the DCLG would know that the amount of £275k was correct. The DR stated that they would be relying on honesty but that if a Fire Authority had not submitted an amount then an audit might take place. The auditors confirmed that they would be monitoring Conor Byrne's work to ensure that it was robust and they would keep the Fire Authority informed via progress reports. Assurance of the process would be required and therefore it would be necessary to ensure that every case had been considered.

RESOLVED that:

The report and financial implications be noted

255. HIGH RISE AUDIT

Paul Maynard, Area Manager Response (AMR), informed the Committee of the outcome of the High Rise Audit.

As part of the RBFRS Internal Audit programme, the Performance Review Department had undertaken a follow up audit on RBFRS High Rise operational risk information and procedures. This audit had taken place in August 2014, the purpose of which was to ensure that the actions identified from a previous internal audit which had been undertaken in August 2012 had been implemented. The follow up audit had identified three areas where actions were required. It was noted that all areas were now complaint.

It was the opinion of the auditor that two actions were required to ensure that the process of collecting and disseminating high rise risk information was as robust as possible:

- Priority should be given to getting the risk critical premises information received from Surrey urgently assessed and as determined entered into the RBFRS risk information systems as there was a health and safety requirement to make this information available to operational crews;
- As part of the induction process for new FSO staff that the level 3 and 4 NVQ qualification that they were required to take should include task led assignments based on the FB212 process for all types of premises. The assignments should also include knowledge and understanding of operational hazard awareness.

Councillor John Lenton referred to the issue of the risk critical information received from Surrey and it was worrying that there did not appear to be any compatibility or standardisation with the system used in RBFRS. The ACFO confirmed that work had been undertaken across the South East which stretched from Hampshire to Kent to try and standardise a form and he confirmed that this work needed to be reinvigorated. It was suggested that the Fire Authority should engage with the Fire Commission in relation to the commonality of data held which could link in with the

ESN Programme.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the results of the High Rise follow up audit be noted;
- (b) The ACFO to engage with the Fire Commission in relation to the commonality of data held which could link in with the ESN Programme.

256. MEMBER ATTENDANCE AND MEMBER ALLOWANCES AND EXPENSES 2014/15 SIX MONTHLY

Caroline Redzikowska, Director Corporate Services (DCS), provided Members with the biannual update on Member attendance, allowances and expenses and included all meetings up to 28th November 2014.

Where there had been date changes or additional meetings, these had been marked up, as it was recognised that these might be less easy to attend at short notice.

The DCS summarised that attendance had been good, no meetings had been inquorate and all business had been able to be conducted. Generally Members had arranged for substitutes when required and had given apologies for absence in good time in order that it could be included on the agenda list when dispatched. Members did not seem to be as good at arranging substitutes and the DCS suggested that the Chairman (Councillor Iain McCracken) write to the Chairman of the Fire Authority and to the Group Leaders reminding them of the need to supply substitutes for meetings if Members were unable to attend.

Appendix B of the report set out the allowances and expenses claimed for the Municipal Year to date.

RESOLVED that:

The report be noted.

257. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT (2014/15) QUARTER 2 (JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2014)

Trevor Ferguson, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), provided the Committee with an overview of the Authority's performance for the second quarter (July to September) for the 2014/15 financial year.

The report was split into three sections which reflected the performance against targets set in the 2014/15 Action Plan, the progress of the 15 priority projects, the Corporate Risk Register and an update on progress of internal audits.

RBFRS used 34 measures at a corporate level to manage the performance of the service against the aims and objectives detailed in the Corporate Plan and Action Plan for 2014/15. The report had been reviewed by the Strategic Performance Board to ensure issues and corrective actions were discussed and managed by Heads of Service and a summary of the corrective actions were listed as part of the Executive Summary at the front of the report. The report had also been reviewed and discussed at Corporate Management Team to ensure any strategic issues were addressed.

IM

The DCFO confirmed that he was asking Members to note performance and the corrective actions proposed. He felt that considerable progress and significant improvements had been made.

Councillor Iain McCracken referred to ID5 in Section 1 – Fire Victims Deaths – Dwelling Fire Accidental. It seemed odd that a target should be set for this. The DCFO stated that it was an aspiration to have a zero fire death target. Councillor McCracken agreed this was a laudable aspiration. The DCFO confirmed that in the past the Fire Authority had concentrated on outputs but that it was now looking at achieving more of a focused target.

Councillor Iain McCracken queried whether anything could be done to reduce the number of hoax calls received. The DCFO confirmed that a prevention strategy was being worked on which included a number of media campaigns. Councillor McCracken suggested that members might consider having an article in their local authority publications. In response to a query around the total number of calls received it was confirmed that the authority received around 7,500 calls per annum. The figure of 45 malicious/hoax calls was the number of calls received in one quarter. Councillor Frank Abe queried the use of the word 'malicious' and suggested that the word 'hoax' should be used in future.

The Chairman thanked Officers for the detailed report which enabled Members to focus their minds.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the performance and any corrective actions against the 2014/15 targets be noted;
- (b) the progress made on the 15 priority projects be noted;
- (c) the Corporate Risk Register and the current position with regard to internal audits be noted.

258. EMERGENCY SERVICES MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMME

Paul Southern, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) and Paul Maynard, Area Manager Response (AMR), provided the Committee with an update on the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP).

The ACFO asked for guidance as to whether this should continue to be reported to Audit & Governance Committee going forward or whether it should go to Management Committee. Councillor Iain McCracken referred to a recent Fire Commission meeting which he had attended and stated that in relation to ESMCP variations had been put in place (core and ancillary). He suggested that following this meeting it should go into Management Committee until it had been established for a while and then return to the A&GC agenda.

The AMR gave an update on progress with the ESMCP which was a national Government-led programme designed to provide effective operational communications system for all emergency services and responders.

Page 2 of the report highlighted the scale of the work involved and showed that the Fire Service was only a small part of this programme. The timescales and key milestones were set out in the report. The tender and technology evaluation was due to take place in November/December 2014 but this had been delayed slightly

due to the fact that some tender groups had wanted to come back in.

To simplify the implementation and roll-out, the national programme had been sub-divided into regional transition groups based on multi-agency wide geographical areas which were planned around Ambulance Trusts. RBFRS had been included within the South Central transition group. In order to deliver the transition it was proposed that a Project Delivery Board should be established. The Project Board would report progress to CMT at regular intervals to ensure effective delivery of the project and appropriate Authority Committee meetings. Additionally, the Project Manager would report progress to the South Central Transition Group. The Fire Authority would also explore how it could work collaboratively with other Fire Authorities as well as other emergency services in order to minimise the impact on RBFRS and to deliver greater efficiencies by working effectively together.

A draft Initial Transition Plan had been developed which indicated the areas which needed to be considered and the number of days work involved. Transition for this area was due in 2018.

The risks identified were all around the central core programme and it was expected that appropriate programme governance and controls would manage, control and reduce the risks as far as possible. It was also confirmed that the programme had been included on the Risk Register.

The AMR confirmed that he would be attending a meeting in January 2015 with the South Central Transition Group.

Councillor Iain McCracken asked what would happen if this programme was not in place on time. The AMR confirmed that the DCLG had made a commitment that they would force a way to ensure that all services complied. The Fire Authority had a transition period of a year to implement the new ways of working. Councillor McCracken retracted his earlier decision for this to be reported into Management Committee. Given that there was a transition period of a year he would like to see it continued to be included on the Audit & Governance Committee agenda. The AMR confirmed that he could ask a member of the Programme Board or a regional representative to attend a meeting to give a presentation. This was agreed.

AMR

The CFO confirmed that this was something that Officers would be keeping a close eye on as there was a financial risk which was why it would be included on the Risk Register. He confirmed that other Members could also be invited to the next meeting for an update and therefore it should be the first item on the agenda.

CO

Councillor Iain McCracken confirmed that he would also raise this issue at the next meeting of the Thames Valley Crime Panel.

IM

RESOLVED THAT:

- (a) the report be noted;
- (b) Other Members of the Fire Authority to be invited to the next meeting of the Audit & Governance Committee to receive an update on the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme.

259. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 30th March 2014 at 6.30pm, Brigade Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire RG31 7DS

260. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that:

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the public be excluded from the meeting for the following Agenda Items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in the paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4 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.

261. EXTENSION OF INTERNAL AUDIT CONTRACT

The Committee considered this exempt report.

RESOLVED that:

The Committee agreed the recommendations as set out in the exempt report.

262. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Iain McCracken noted that Caroline Redzikowska would be leaving the Fire Authority on 18th December 2014 and he thanked her for all the hard work undertaken during her time with the Fire Authority and wished her well for the future.

Councillor Iain McCracken wished all members of the Audit & Governance Committee a Merry Christmas.

The meeting concluded at 8.20pm