

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



Held on Wednesday 12 September 2012

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

Committee Members: Councillor Diana Coad (Cllr Emma Webster substituting)
Councillor Andrew Cumpsty
*Councillor Haqeeq Dar
*Councillor John Lenton (part of meeting)
*Councillor Iain McCracken, Chairman
*Councillor Mohammed Rasib
Councillor Rebecca Rye
Councillor Alan Ward
**present*

In Attendance: Gene Ashe (Area Manager, Prevention & Protection AM (P&P))
Jon Ball (Information Systems Manager)
Conor Byrne (Senior Accountant)
Steve Connors (Haines Watts) (part of meeting)
Kate Handy (Audit Commission) (part of meeting)
Yasmeen Mahmood (Haines Watts) (part of meeting)
Nick Oxborough (Group Manager, Performance Review)
Caroline Redzikowska (Director, Corporate Services, DCS)
Fayth Rowe (Committee Officer)
Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)
Andrew Vallance (Director Resources, DR)
Graham West (Audit Commission) (part of meeting)

Action

153. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Diana Coad (Cllr Emma Webster substituting), Cllr Andrew Cumpsty, Cllr Rebecca Rye and Cllr Alan Ward.

154. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Councillors relating to items to be considered at the meeting, in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct.

There were Declarations of Interest received from the Assistant Chief Fire Officer in relation to Item 5, Principal Officer Rota Scheme and Mileage.

155. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 AUGUST 2012

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 August 2012 be approved for signing by the Chairman.

The Chairman noted the actions from the last meeting had been discharged, subject to the debrief paper on the Members induction day. ACFO reported an induction day debrief was held recently and advised it would be completed by the next Audit and Governance Committee meeting.

ACFO

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

Resolved:

- a) That no matters had been properly referred to the Committee for a decision.

157. PRINCIPAL OFFICER ROTA SCHEME AND MILEAGE

DCS introduced the report and advised the Committee they were due to receive a report on Fuel Cards including Station usage and Principal Officer rota at this meeting. She advised the Station report was currently part of an Internal Audit report which to date was in draft form. She informed the Committee the report on Station usage would be presented at a future Audit and Governance Committee meeting and took Members through the Principal Officer Rota Scheme and Mileage report.

DCS stated the report solely looked at Principal Officer Fuel usage and in referring to the table within the report which detailed Principal Officer Fuel Card expenditure from periods April 2010-March 2011 and April 2011- March 2012 she advised the incomplete table presented to the Committee at the last Audit and Governance Committee meeting was now complete.

Members were advised that a Review of Car User Scheme and Allowances for Principal Officers Working Party had been set up by the Management Committee and reported that the Working Party's recommendations were related to today's report.

DCS explained the difficulty she faced in preparing the draft Principal Officer rota, because there was no written version to refer to and Principal Officers worked through methods of custom and practice which had minor differences of understanding.

DCS stated it was not a requirement to conduct a People Impact Assessment (PIA) as Principal Officers were in agreement of the draft rota. She advised of her intention to present the draft rota at the next available opportunity to the Management Committee. She further added that she had received a letter from HRMC which detailed they were looking into the taxation of mileage and reiterated that a report including HRMC implications would be presented to a future Management Committee meeting.

The Committee were advised there was nothing the Fire Authority could do in relation to HRMC. DCS felt that it was prudent to provide Principal Officers and uniformed Officers the opportunity to consider their own tax position when the information became available.

In answer to a question from Councillor Mohammed Rasib, DCS advised the draft Principal Officer rota was adopted by Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer and reported the report would become a final document subject to sign off by the Management Committee.

She also advised the draft Principal Officer rota appended to the report was not what the Management Committee agreed following the recommendations from the Review of Car User Scheme and Allowances for Principal Officers Working Party and reported the Management Committee would be presented with the revised draft rota to consider the variation.

The Chairman suggested that a survey be conducted to examine the views of officers on the HRMC tax implications and for the results to be presented back to Audit and Governance Committee in due course.

DCS

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted

158. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

DR introduced Yasmeen Mahmood (Haines Watts) who took the Committee through the report. The Committee were advised reviews had been completed on the following;

- Dee Road (Station 3)
- Whitley Wood (Station 20)
- Maidenhead Station 19)
- Petty cash

Reviews would be made on fuel management and fraud and corruption and would be presented at the next Audit and Governance Committee in December 2012.

Haines
Watts

In response to a question from the Chairman, Yasmeen Mahmood advised that the Fire Stations were randomly chosen in conjunction with DR and the Senior Accountant.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted.

Councillor John Lenton arrived at the beginning of the next item.

159. REVIEW OF INTERNAL AUDIT REPORTS

Through the Chairman, Yasmeen Mahmood introduced the report and in referring to the Absence Management follow up report advised the follow up review was at the

request of the Audit & Governance Committee on 1 August 2012.

Resolved:

a) That the report be noted.

(Yasmeen Mehmood, Steve Connors and Jon Ball left the meeting)

160. ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER AND FINAL ACCOUNTS

The DR introduced Kate Handy and Graham West from the Audit Commission. DR reported £ ½ million pounds underspend and advised that the Budget Working Party (BWP) would use it to smooth the budget this year. He further reported that the BWP had made a recommendation to the Fire Authority to ear mark the underspend.

In response to the Chairman, DR provided a brief update on the localisation of council tax benefits. He consulted with 5 unitary's and advised the impact was low. He reported that the Government planned to reduce support for council tax benefits by 10%, although the Unitary Authorities have calculated that the real cut was closer to 14%. DR also advised of changes to council tax allowances on empty homes.

DR informed the Committee to date that he had not received any form of consultation from Slough Borough Council. In response to a request made by Councillor Emma Webster, Councillor Mohammed Rasib advised he would address the issue of consultation on the localisation of council tax benefits at the next Slough Borough Council meeting.

Through the Chairman, Kate Handy (Audit Commission) took the Committee through the Annual Governance Report. She advised the report was in draft form and would become a complete final document based on Fire Authority approval at the forthcoming Fire Authority meeting on 26 September 2012. She outlined the salient points in the report;

- Audit Commission gave an unqualified conclusion on value for money
- Some presentational issues made and adjustments agreed by management
- No material adjustments – Audit Commission did not identify any risks
- Treatment for top-up grant. Audit Commission disagreed with CIPFA guidance

Members were advised that CIPFA was reviewing their guidance for next year due to the Audit Commission challenge on CIPFA interpretation of the accounting treatment of the top-up grant. The Audit Commission advised they were not asking the Fire Authority to make any changes to the accounting of the top-up grant this year and it did not impact on the general fund reserves.

Members were further advised that the Fire Authority's financial governance was effective and maintained a good track record of financial management. The Audit Commission recognised the Fire Authority's financial position remained constrained. It was also reported the Fire Authority had a good record of responding to efficiency savings.

In response to the Chairman relating to the fee, Kate Handy advised the Audit Commission refunded 8% during the year. The fee for 2012/13 was a 40% reduction from 2011/12 fees and a fixed fee was secured for the next five years.

On behalf of the Audit and Governance Committee, the Chairman thanked the Audit Commission for their presentation of the audit and requested for a press release to promote the news of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's 14th unqualified audit report received from the Audit Commission.

Councillor Emma Webster suggested for RBFRS to send a press release detailing the news of the 14th unqualified audit opinion received from the Audit Commission.

ACFO

In referring to her Audit Letter, Kate Handy concluded the letter was written on the assumption the Fire Authority adopted the accounts at its meeting on 26 September 2012.

The Chairman took the opportunity to thank RBFRS Officers for their role in achieving unqualified accounts.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted
(Kate Handy and Graham West left the meeting)

161. LINKING PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT TO CORPORATE PLANNING

DCS presented the report and advised it was a comprehensive report which described the process of linking individual PDIs to the Corporate Plan. She directed the Committee to the proposed timetable within the report which indicated the time of year uniformed and non-uniformed staff reviews would be held to assist the organisation to achieve its targets.

The Chairman welcomed the report and advised that it bridged the gap with the report presented at the last Audit and Governance Committee on 1 August 2012.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted

162. SMOKE DETECTOR UPDATE

AM (P&P) introduced the report and advised that the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) suffered from defective smoke detectors, which resulted in the receipt of £8,000 as recompense. He outlined the replacement cost covered by Sprue Safety and reported there was no liability to the service.

In answer to questions received from Members, AM (P&P) advised of the following:

- Occupiers would liaise directly with Sprue Safety
- Smoke detectors had been installed for people with sensory needs during the last two years. To date, no problems had been found on sensory detectors.
- The cause of the failure of smoke detectors was due to moisture and heat

and a sudden drop in temperature. Changes to the temperature at night also added to the failure of detectors. AM (P&P) advised some batteries within the smoke detectors supplied by Dicon were sub standard.

- RBFRS was working with Slough, Reading, Wokingham Borough Council and West Berkshire Council who have signed up to hard wired smoke detectors. He further advised council owned and new buildings would be installed with hard wired smoke detectors and older buildings would be installed with battery fitted devices.

The Chairman asked whether defective junction boxes were a common problem to household fires. AM (P&P) reported of the partnership work between the Electrical Safety Council and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA). He advised RBFRS were working on 12 campaigns a year which included a campaign on raising the awareness of electrical safety.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted.

163. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FORUM

ACFO took the Committee through the report and advised that Opinion Research Services (ORS) was a nationally recognised organisation to obtain unbiased opinion and comments from members of the public on community engagement activity. ORS was awarded with the National Fire Service contract and the Committee was advised that procurement processes were not required.

ORS have been used by RBFRS during Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) processes and provide a breakdown of ethnicity and background of people that participate in the consultation.

In her capacity as Chairman of the IRMP Working Party, Councillor Emma Webster advised of her support of ORS and the high levels of response received from consultations.

The Committee were advised ORS would be used on Saturday 15 September 2012 and was also used recently to consult with members of the public on the Thames Valley Control project.

In response to the Chairman's request for a summary report to be presented at a future A&GC on ORS findings from the recent IRMP consultation, ACFO advised that the findings would first go to the IRMP Working Party, which was a confidential meeting. He advised that ORS findings would become public when they were presented to the Management Committee and reported that following the Management Committee the findings would be presented to A&GC Members.

ACFO

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted

164. FORWARD PLAN FOR AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

ACFO advised proposed items for the forward plan were tabled at the last meeting

held on 1 August 2012 and reported he had reattached those items contained within the report. In taking the Committee through the report the following proposals were agreed for a performance review and update on the following;

- Review actions following internal audits in years 2010/11 and 2011/12. The Committee specifically requested a performance review on 2011/12 medium Audit findings on Procurement, Absence Management –follow up and Data Backup and Recovery
- Quarterly progress report on objectives specified in the 2012/13 Corporate Plan
- Review of consumption of energy, outlined under Use of Resources in the 2012/13 Corporate Plan
- Review the outcome of Discipline, Appeals and Grievance Committee (DAG) hearings in relation to findings

DCS reported A&GC Terms of Reference was included as an appendix to the report as this Committee would in future examine Standards matters. The Chairman, Councillor Iain McCracken and Vice-Chairman, Councillor Alan Ward had been contacted for a date to examine the Terms of Reference.

The Chairman suggested A&GC Members may wish to inform the Committee Team of additional items / reports for consideration in 2012/13 in advance of the next meeting on 13 December 2012.

A&GC
Members

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That the items as identified be considered at A&GC meetings during the course of the year.

Forward
Plan

165. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

GM Performance Review introduced the report. In referring to 2.4 % of sickness absence compared to 2.1% from May – August 2011, GM Performance Review advised a report would be presented to the Committee in December 2012.

GM
Performance
Review

The Committee was advised that the Managing Organisational risk outlined in the scorecard as amber would reduce as the risk was primarily increased leading up to and during the London 2012 Olympics.

GM Performance Review reported the decrease of performance in the time taken to attend Road Traffic Collusions (RTC) was due to an increase of RTC's attended during the first four months of the year compared to the same period the previous year. RBFRS performance measures contribute to how the fire service worked with South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) in its performance to enable casualties to receive professional medical treatment within the 'Golden hour' of the incident taken place.

The Committee was advised that a wholetime fire engine was deployed to RTC following the IRMP 2012/13 Action Plan. He added the inclusion of a wholetime fire engine reversed the decrease in performance. In examining the chart which

identified RTC's attended in 11 minutes by Unitary Authority area, Members were informed of the impacts which determined the performance measure, such as

- Control – multiple calls from multiple addresses
- Increase in traffic conditions
- Location and distance of Fire Station to incident

ACFO advised RBFRS examined repetitive modelling which looked at the location of fire engines and determined where best to place them as key standby points during the day. In answer to the Chairman, ACFO advised the Fire Authority set the 11 minute performance target in 2005 and reported the 11 minute performance measure was regularly considered by the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Working Party.

Councillor Emma Webster stated other brigades set themselves a wider performance target to attend RTCs. GM Performance Review reported RTCs were critical work to Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) and advised of RBFRS Prevention department campaign work on educating drivers.

In answer to Councillor Emma Webster, the number of RTCs attended in West Berkshire in 2012/13 was less than 60%. ACFO stated RBFRS placed no restriction on Retained Duty System (RDS) appliances from Hungerford or Lamborn Fire Stations to attend a RTC based on availability. Under the IRMP 2013/14 Action Plan proposal, a 2nd wholtime pump be based at Newbury Fire Station and advised this could be a roving pump at A34/M4 junction, based on risk need.

Members discussed the location of where RTCs took place in the county and the role that Control rooms played in obtaining the location of the RTC. The use of mobile phone technology was also discussed and the benefits of navigation applications to assist Control staff to identify the exact location of the RTC. In answer to a suggestion from the Chairman, ACFO advised he would encourage the benefits of navigation applications during campaigns.

GM Performance Review highlighted the reduction of the number of deliberate fires in 2012/13 compared to performance against the 2011/12 year. He advised the 10 year decline of deliberate fires was part of the National Public Service Agreement. The Committee was advised of the partnership work with Thames Valley Police to secure convictions and the success of the RBFRS Community Safety Strategy on deliberate fires. In addition, the Committee were informed that dry weather conditions had an impact on deliberate fires.

The Chairman thanked GM Performance Review for providing a comprehensive report.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted.

166. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- **Thursday 13 December 2012 at 6.30pm** in the Strategic Command Centre, Headquarters, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Part II Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 1 August 2012 were subsumed into Part I.

167. PART II MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 AUGUST 2012

Resolved:

- a) That the Part II Minutes of the meeting held on 1 August 2012 be approved for signing by the Chairman.

Meeting closed at 8.10 pm