

Approved on 9.05.13

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



Held on Thursday 14 March 2013 at 6.30pm

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

**Committee Members:** Councillor Diana Coad  
Councillor Andrew Cumpsty  
\*Councillor Haqeeq Dar  
\*Councillor John Lenton  
\*Councillor Iain McCracken, Chairman (*from 6.35pm*)  
Councillor Mohammed Rasib  
\*Councillor Rebecca Rye  
\*Councillor Alan Ward, Vice Chairman  
*\*present*

**In Attendance:** Olaf Baars (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)  
Conor Byrne (Senior Accountant, SA)  
Nick Oxborough (Group Manager, Performance Review, GMPR)  
Caroline Redzikowska (Director, Corporate Services, DCS)  
Carolyn Rowe (Committee Manager)  
Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)  
Andrew Vallance (Director Resources, DR)

**Action**

### 180. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Diana Coad, Cllr Andrew Cumpsty and Cllr Mohammed Rasib. The vice Chairman chaired the first three items until the Chairman arrived.

### 181. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct, the DCS confirmed that a dispensation had been granted for the Item on Members Allowances.

Cllr Ward wished to declare an interest for this item, as the report specified the Budget Working Party which he chaired.

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Officers.

### 182. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2012

#### **Resolved:**

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2012 be approved for signing by the Chairman.

It was noted that the actions from the last meeting had been discharged.

(The Chairman arrived and took the chair at this point)

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

**Resolved:**

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

**184. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT**

DR advised that Yasmeen Mahmood (Haines Watts) had apologised but she was unexpectedly unable to attend, and that the Conor Byrne (SA) would introduce the report.

SA outlined the report and the two latest audits to be completed on Change and Configuration Management and Communications (Internet, Intranet and Emails). Both had been classed as satisfactory with low recommendations. There had been a delay in the IT Audits due to lack of capacity, but it had been agreed the work would be completed by the end of March 2013 and reported on at the May meeting.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**185. DRAFT AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE ANNUAL REPORT**

The arrangements for the annual report to the Fire Authority were considered. It was suggested that the ACFO, DR and DCS draft a report and send to the Chairman. Members agreed that they were happy for the Chairman to finalise the report and that it would be circulated to Members of the Committee prior to inclusion in the Fire Authority papers.

DR,  
ACFO  
DCS

**Resolved:**

That a draft report be agreed by the Chairman, and circulated to Members of the Committee prior to reporting to the Fire Authority.

**186. SCHEME OF ALLOWANCES**

The DCS introduced the item and reminded the Committee that a dispensation had been granted enabling it to be considered.

DCS referred to the results of the desktop survey requested by the Fire Authority on 28 June 2012 and shown in appendices 1-3, and that at that meeting the Fire Authority had not been minded to undertake a major review. She advised that the research had identified that a number of FAs were undertaking reviews.

Cllr Ward said he would propose 2.2 , and stated that the cost was ludicrously low, RBFA spent about £80,000, and when compared with the responsibility of members and the sums paid to non executive directors in private companies the sums involved were derisory. Cllr Ward added that he also would propose using the same independent assessor as last time. He added that with regard to the argument of the current economic pressure, there was never a good time. He declared a particular interest with regard to mention of the Budget Working Party.

Cllr Lenton stated that there was never a good time, and that by review we mean

increase. He said that this was an exceptionally bad time. He queried the six member champions, and their role and SRA, and was advised the SRA £900 per annum.

Cllr Ward stated that when he became a champion he may have been sceptical, but that he could see the value of member involvement in Health and Safety for example.

Cllr Dar asked about the timeframe, and was advised that the aim would be to bring it for implementation to the June Fire Authority.

The Chairman commented that he agreed that anything done should be independent.

Cllr Rye stated that she thought it was not a good time albeit she appreciated that some members put a lot of work in, and the scheme should reflect that.

DCS advised that it used to be pay as you go, but this was no longer permissible.

Cllr Rye asked whether there could be a mechanism – for example “three strikes and you’re out”.

The DCS advised that in Councils including UAs if a member did not attend for 6 months they were automatically no longer a member, but the legislation did not include FAs. She advised that member attendance was brought to the FA annually, and that it would also be brought to Audit and Governance Committee (A&GC) in May. She advised that the information for their representative members was also sent to the six UAs.

The Chairman asked that Member attendance be reported to the A&GC six monthly and members agreed the Chairman could then write to an individual member if required.

Cllr Lenton said that it was right to expect FA members to perform and he had no sympathy for members who did not attend. He asked about the working parties identified in the report.

DCS advised that the purpose of the paper was to raise questions for members to determine, but that an independent resource may look at that.

Cllr Ward commented that attendance in itself did not show the contribution of a Member who may be involved in telephone calls for example.

Cllr Rye asked what the budget impact would be, and how much the Independent Assessor would be. DR advised that the budget impact would be minimal. DCS advised that the external advisor used last time would not be cheap – possibly £5,000--£10,000, and that an alternative option, if he were available and willing, might be the appointed Independent person, Professor Guy.

The Chairman stated that the Independent Assessor previously used was very good, and Cllr Ward agreed.

Cllr Lenton stated that his work might cost more than any rise, and that he would oppose any general increase. The working parties and champions should be reviewed, but that there was no case otherwise for a general increase.

DCS advised that this could form part of a brief – to limit the extent of the review.

The Chairman stated that he would prefer there to be one review to pick up both SRAs identified as well as allowances generally. He asked about the resolution of

the Standards Committee.

DCS confirmed this had been their view – they had accepted the principle but wished to adjust the multiplier, and a letter had been written pressing for national allowances, but that no response had been received. However, members may wish to make the same point.

Cllr Lenton commented that the argument against that would be the increase of localism.

Cllr Rye stated that she personally would prefer it to be the same across the board. Cllr Ward said that comparisons nationally showed that some councils had much higher allowances.

Cllr Ward moved 2.2 to include an independent external reviewer, and stated that it was important that it was done properly rather than saving a small amount, and he asked that it should include all the points in the report under 3.13.

This was seconded by the Chairman, and with 4 votes for and one abstention it was

**Resolved:**

That the Audit and Governance Committee

- a) Note the report; and
- b) In light of the survey data RECOMMEND that the Fire Authority authorise a full review of the current Scheme of Allowances and further consider use of an external/independent resource to conduct/participate in the review.

**187. FUEL MANAGEMENT AUDIT**

The DCFO introduced the report which updated the Committee on progress since it was considered at the meeting on 13 December 2012. As requested, Management Committee had received a report on 28 January 2013, and had asked that it be included in the Audit Plan for 2013/14. Since the interim arrangements were put in place, a follow up check had showed that all bar one Station had complied, and that the safeguard to catch non-compliance had worked, and when reminded, they too had complied.

The new policy was in the process of publication and would be put on TROVE.

*(Cllr Ward left the room briefly)*

In answer to Member questions it was confirmed that the Group Managers were now in charge of compliance.

The Chairman asked Members when they wished to monitor this.

The DCFO confirmed that it would be part of the 2013/14 Internal Audit Plan.

DR/SA

*(Cllr Ward returned)*

Cllr Ward asked whether, as the Engineering Manger was involved, it would make sense for the Committee to meet them?

The DCFO agreed that he would be happy to invite the Head of Transport and Engineering to the next meeting to present an update report for Members.

DCFO

**Resolved**

That the report be noted.

## **188. THAMES VALLEY FIRE CONTROL SERVICE (TVFCS) PROGRAMME UPDATE**

The DCFO introduced the report and referred Members to the key aspects.

- the Invitation to Tender (ITT) was expected to go out on 15 March 2013.
- the Call Concentrator System (ICCS) was not yet switched over, it was being trained on.
- the SAN H (which provided radio capability to interface with Control rooms) was probably the most expensive item and had been bought on an equal basis between five FAs to include Warwickshire and Northamptonshire, in addition to TVCFS partners, and confirmed that the 20 ports were in excess of future requirements.

With regard to TUPE, DCFO confirmed that the preferred pragmatic solution had been agreed, and in answer to Members, advised that this affected approximately 60 people across the three Brigades. It had been confirmed that RBFRS would be the employer of Control room staff.

The inclusion of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes FA (BMKFA) resulted in a reapportionment of costs, and this has now been agreed and was currently being signed off by each Partner.

DCFO advised that the FBU had given a blanket withdrawal from Programme involvement, and are still being sent the information and invited. In answer to Members, he stated that he believed that it was because this was being seen as a wider, national issue, and that a national position was being prepared.

### **Resolved:**

That the report be noted

## **189. PROGRESS TOWARDS THE CHARTER FOR MEMBER DEVELOPMENT**

The Group Manager Performance Review (GMPR) introduced the report and confirmed that the Management Committee (MC) had agreed the Action Plan, and would receive the policy and draft job specifications at their next meeting on 25 March 2013. He advised that South East Employers (SEE) had advised that the assessment should take place by December 2013 albeit there would be tolerance of a couple of months. GMPR stated that he was aiming for November 2013. SEE were not seeking 100% engagement, and would accept 60% - so 15 or 16 Members. The needs and action plan work would commence in June 2013.

In response to the Chairman, GMPR confirmed that responsibility sat with MC, with six monthly reports back to A&GC.

### **Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

## **190. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The GMPR introduced the report and advised that unfortunately the number of fire fatalities although still low, had increased, and an additional fatality since the data was prepared meant that there were now six, one below the worst year of seven.

There had been a small year on year increase in sickness, and the year on year showed amber.

The Chairman requested that future reports show both percentage and figure in order to assess the significance.

GMPR

GMPR stated that using MOSAIC, correlation showed there to be a wide range of socio economic and demographic groups. Lifestyle and disability provided a clearer link, for example hoarding, as in the most recent fatality.

DCFO stated that Social Services and Meals on Wheels had both been identified as contacts.

GMPR advised that partnership working was very valuable but even RBFRS, as a positive uniformed service, cannot always get in the door. He stated that it reinforced the case for domestic sprinklers.

Cllr Lenton asked whether it was too early but he would like to see the report on the Datchet fire as he wanted to feed it in to RBWM. The DCFO advised it was too early but that RBFRS was contributing to the Coroner's report, and would be looking at it when published.

DCFO

GMPR drew attention to the Emergency Fire calls where a significant reduction was projected for the year's outturn figure. This excluded false alarms, but the DCFO confirmed that those had approximately halved to 2,000, and that malicious calls had reduced from approximately 1000 to 100.

GMPR advised that the wet weather and the strong price of scrap metal had contributed to the positive figures, and therefore it would be unlikely that the significant percentage decrease would be maintained.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**191. UPDATE ON PROGRESS TO ACHIEVE INTERNAL AUDIT ACTION PLANS**

GMPR introduced the report which had been requested by the Committee. The actions from the Internal Audit report for computer back up and recovery were delayed due to work on the Control programme and staff absence, and it had been agreed that the actions would be completed by September 2013.

Cllr Lenton asked about security, and the GMPR advised that the system was backed up every night and tapes were stored off site.

The DCFO advised that there was back up on site, off site and externally overseas.

The SA advised that Haines Watts (Internal Auditors) were undertaking an audit on security during March.

Cllr Rye stated that she would like to understand what preventative work such as passwords was in place.

The ACFO stated that some inroads had been made to increase levels of password security.

The DCFO advised that the other issue for Control was compliance with ISO27001.

The Chairman received confirmation that Fuel Management would be added to the action plans.

DR

**Resolved**

That the report be noted.

**192. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Members noted the date had been amended from Tuesday 14 May to **Thursday 9 May 2013** at 6.30pm in the Strategic Command Centre at BHQ. Cllr Alan Ward gave his apologies as he will be abroad.

CM

**193. 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 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.

**194. NEW INTERNAL AUDIT CONTRACT**

The SA outlined the report and advised the Committee of the outcome of the procurement process to appoint new Internal Auditors.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendation in the report be agreed.

The meeting finished at 8.10 pm