

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



Held on Thursday 28 November 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
Councillor Mohammed Rasib
*Councillor Rebecca Rye
*Councillor Alan Ward, Vice Chairman
**present*

In Attendance: Conor Byrne (Senior Accountant, SA)
Andy Fry (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)
Michael Griffiths (Group Manager, Performance Review, GMPR)
Becci Jefferies (Head of HR, HHR)
Caroline Redzikowska (Director, Corporate Services, DCS)
Carolyn Rowe (Committee Manager)
Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)

Action

195. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Dar, Cllr McCracken and Cllr Rasib, (Cllr Ward chaired the meeting).

196. 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.

197. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2013

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2013 be approved for signing by the Chairman.

The Chairman noted the actions from the last meeting had been discharged.

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

Resolved:

That it be noted that the Management Committee had requested that the following item be considered by the Audit and Governance Committee.

199. ROYAL BERKSHIRE PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2014/15

DCS introduced the draft pay policy statement and advised that it had been drafted incorporating the comments made by the Management Committee last year, and that the Committee's comment were invited. It would then be taken to Management Committee and to the full Fire Authority for decision on 19 February 2014. She advised that since the statement had been drafted the LGA had issued guidance. Hard copies were available to Members of the Committee. DCS advised that she was confident that the draft statement included all the information identified in the LGA model, albeit in a different format. The statement could be reformatted if Members wished.

Responses to Member questions included:

- the living wage had been included as it had been one of the Member Comments last year. RBFA was above this as well as the minimum wage;
- it was not considered that the current dispute would impact on the draft statement;
- the pay multiple comparison table had been problematic, and had limited or no benefit, given the disparities in how Authorities reported the information.

Member comments included:

- the issue of personnel retiring and then coming back to work, which was a cost to the taxpayer, albeit not RBFA;
- whether the redundancy multiplier of two remained appropriate, and whether, if made redundant when eligible for immediate payment of pension, this redundancy payment was still made;

Members agreed that it was sensible to consider these matters as part of the review of the HR Strategy which would be informed by the Members Planning Workshop on 29 January 2014, and it was noted there may be age discrimination issues

With regard to whether there was best practice from other authorities or the LGA that could be adopted, the DCS confirmed that other authorities had been looked at. There had been a range of different approaches identified.

DCS requested that any comments to be incorporated be sent to either HHR or herself in order to incorporate in the report to Management Committee on 3 February 2014.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

200. STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE

The CFO introduced the report and outlined this new requirement placed on Fire Authority Members. The Statement links to the framework by which members hold the CFO to account.

RBFA was now responsible for defining its standards and assessing whether these and the National Framework were being met – essentially a gap analysis. There was no longer a national inspection, but an Operational Assessment (Op A) would be undertaken through peer review.

It was proposed that the Statement of Assurance should go to the Fire Authority this time on 19 February 2014 - it could perhaps be Audit and Governance in future - and be jointly signed by the Chairman of the Fire Authority and the Chairman of Audit and Governance.

In response to Members the CFO advised that the gap analysis for finance and for governance were fairly well addressed and would largely be transposed. Whilst, because of time, the Op A would be done by officers for 2013/14, in future others may wish to contribute.

Regarding the Op A Peer Challenge, this would focus on issues that the FA had asked them to look at. It would depend on self awareness or otherwise the Statement of Assurance may be signed when there were gaps.

Regarding a deep dive, the CFO confirmed that the self assessment for the Peer Review February 2014 had been undertaken and submitted, and whilst he had not yet confirmed the level of member involvement in that, in future it would be important that they were involved.

The Chairman commented that it was difficult to be sure about the benchmarking and risks if it was a self assessment, and if would be up to the Fire Authority to be sure that the benchmarks were right.

Resolved:

- a) that the proposed approach to producing Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Statement of Assurance for 2012/13 be agreed; and
- b) that it be agreed that the 2012/13 Statement be jointly signed by the Chairman of Audit and Governance and the Chairman of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, once it has been agreed following consideration at the February 2014 meeting of the Fire Authority.

201. INTERIM REPORT ON GOVERNANCE INCLUDING MEMBER ATTENDANCE, ALLOWANCES AND EXPENSES.

The DCS introduced the item and reminded the Committee when the last annual report had been received; the Committee had requested that it be brought twice a year in future. She stated that there had been a number of extra or altered meetings, and it was recognised that this affected member attendance.

Overall, attendance had improved in recent years. Where Members were unable to attend, it was requested that notification was in good time, and that where possible a substitute was found.

The Chairman queried whether the part year picture was of value. Members commented that it had been thought the Chairman might write to those with low

attendance.

It was noted that the Unitary Authorities determined who was nominated to sit on the

Fire Authority and that attendance was sent to each UA annually.

Members agreed it would be useful to send the attendance spreadsheet to all Members of the Fire Authority.

CM

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

202. PROGRESS TOWARDS THE CHARTER FOR MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

The DCS introduced the report which updated the Committee on progress towards attainment of the Charter for Member Development.

The assessment date had been confirmed as Tuesday 17 December 2013. DCS advised that officers were reasonably confident that the requirements could be fulfilled, and advised that Nick Oxborough, GM Performance Review had confirmed that 14 members were signed up with two or three more expressing interest.

Cllr Cumpsty said he was interested, and requested that a further email be sent to him to sign up.

GMPR

Member asked that recognition of the work undertaken by GMPR be conveyed.

ACFO/DCS

Resolved

That the report be noted.

203. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

SM Performance Review Michael Griffiths introduced the report and referred to the key aspects. He highlighted the percentage increase in secondary fires during the dry summer compared with the previous wet year.

SMPR confirmed that the campaigns on Health and Safety would continue. If available, data from the last dry summer for comparison would be included next time.

SMPR

It was confirmed that whilst RBFRS did not sell fire alarms, free alarms were provided to the high risk groups.

Members thanked the team responsible for the good and timely information provided to Members regarding incidents in their area, and were pleased to see displays on the Fire Service at different venues across the County.

ACFO

Resolved:

That the report be noted

204. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 12 March 2014 at 6.30pm in the Strategic Command Centre at BHQ.

205. 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.

206. PART II MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2013

Resolved:

That the part II minutes of the meeting held on the 12 September 2013 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The meeting finished at 8.05pm