

MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE



Held on Thursday 15 December 2011

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

Those present: Councillor Ricky Duveen (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor John Lenton (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor Iain McCracken, Chairman (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor Alan Ward (Member, Fire Authority).

In Attendance: Conor Byrne (Senior Accountant)
Steve Connors (Haines Watts)
Nick Oxborough (Group Manager, Performance Review)
Caroline Redzikowska (Clerk and Monitoring Officer) (*Part Meeting*)
Fayth Rowe (Committee Officer)
Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer)
Bernadette Thompson (Audit Commission)
Andrew Vallance (Authority Treasurer)
Graham West (Audit Commission)

Action

110. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs Diana Coad (Member, Fire Authority).

111. 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 no Declarations of Interest received from Officers.

112. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2011

Resolved:

- a) That the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2011 be approved for signing by the Chairman.

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

Resolved:

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

At the request of the Clerk and Monitoring Officer, the Chairman agreed for Agenda Item 6 (Contract Standing Orders and Financial Procedure Rules) to be considered next.

114. CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS AND FINANCIAL PROCEDURE RULES

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer informed the Committee of the work undertaken to revise and update the Fire Authority's Contract Standing Orders and Financial Procedure Rules and sought the Committee's guidance.

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer took the Committee through the revised Contract Standing Orders and Financial Procedure Rules with the salient points being:

- the existing Standing Orders (SO) selection criteria do not detail whether the tender was the lowest bid accepted
- Proposal to raise financial limits
- Proposal to revise the waiver of SO in the selection criteria
- Proposal to tighten processes in Audit in terms of a simplified form detailing the contract, Project Lead, Head of Service, estimate budget and life of contract.

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer reported that subject to the Committee's recommendations to the Management Committee she was seeking Fire Authority approval of the revised Contract Standing Orders and Financial Procedures by February 2012 or alternatively April 2012.

In response to a question from Councillor John Lenton regarding the SO, the Clerk and Monitoring Officer explained that the revised SO allowed the tender to be accepted in accordance with the selection criteria even if it was not the lowest bid.

In response to a question from Councillor Ricky Duveen, the Clerk and Monitoring Officer advised that contracts under £10,000 the Scheme of Delegation delegated power to relevant Officers to let contracts. The Committee was also advised that the Contract seal was signed by the Clerk and Monitoring Officer.

On discussing the authorisation of Contracts, the Clerk and Monitoring Officer suggested for the introduction of written authorisation detailing the signature of the Lead Officer and Director authorising the project to proceed.

The Chairman requested for the authorisation of Contracts to be made more comprehensible in the document.

In response to a query from Councillor Alan Ward, the Clerk and Monitoring Officer advised that a list of authorised Tenders were available. She went on further to advise that Contractors submit a PQQ where their financial credibility was checked.

In response to a question from Councillor Ricky Duveen, the Authority Treasurer reported it was necessary for all tenders to be opened at the same time in the presence of the Director (Resources), Senior Accountant, Procurement Facilities Manager or nominated representative and advised on average, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFPS) received approximately one tender each week.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted ;
- b) That further explanatory notes be provided on the authorisation of contracts; and

- c) That further comments Members of the Committee wish to make be given to the Clerk and Monitoring Officer no later than mid January 2012 for inclusion into the document.

CMO

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer retired during the early considerations of the next item.

115. PROCUREMENT DEPARTMENT FUNCTIONS, PERFORMANCE AND PROCESSES UNDERTAKEN - UNDERTAKEN

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer informed the Committee of the functions, performance and processes undertaken by the Procurement Department. The Committee was provided with a brief history pre 1998 when the Fire Authority was supported by Berkshire County Council leading up to present day functions of the Procurement Department.

The Committee was presented with a list of contracts let to date and was advised that all contracts went through the Procurement and Facilities Manager and Clerk and Monitoring Officer for authorisation and for the Seal to be signed.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported of the many functions of the Procurement Manager one of which was to update the Procurement Handbook and to review the contracts register every three months.

The Committee was advised that all contracts were kept in a Fire safe and contracts were examined regularly under the performance clause.

Resolved:

- a) That the Procurement Handbook and Contracts Register be presented to the Committee at the next meeting.

**Agenda
14.03.12**

116. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee was informed of the progress of the internal audit plan for 2011/12. Steve Connors, Haines Watts representative advised that Core Financials Systems (CFS) of the Authority would be examined in January 2012 and good practices had been used in the Internal Control Framework.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be Noted .

117. ANNUAL AUDIT AND INSPECTION LETTER

The Committee received the Audit Commission's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter. Graham West, Audit Commission introduced Bernadette Thompson, Principal District Auditor to the Committee and advised that she would be taking over the role of her predecessor Phil Sharman.

The Committee was informed of the recent change to the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) which was necessary for Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service to implement.

On discussing the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter Graham West reported that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service demonstrated evidence of sound financial governance and that the Fire Authority was well placed to respond to financial challenges.

In answer to a question from Councillor Ricky Duveen, Graham West advised that in recognition of the financial pressures that public bodies were facing the Audit Commission refunded Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service £4,512 and £1,121 respectively to subsidise the 'one-off' element of the cost of transition to IFRS. The amount paid for 2010/11 totalled £76,492.

The Authority Treasurer thanked the Senior Accountant for the smooth transition of the IFRS.

Resolved:

- a) That Audit Commission's Annual Audit and Inspection Letter be noted.

118. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee was provided with an overview of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service's (RBFRS) quarterly performance.

The Group Manager (Performance Review) took the Committee through the Performance Scorecard and explained why three out of five Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service core strategy indicated amber;

- People – Ensuring the diversity of our Workforce is representative of the community – difficult to fulfil this strategy due to the recruitment freeze now indicating red on the scorecard.
- Response – challenging response targets to dwelling fires – in 10% of target
- Prevention – There was a slight increase in Fire casualties. Education to continue through Community Safety. Home Risk Fire Assessments (HRFAs) policy targeted to high risk groups.

The Committee was advised that since September 2011 Community Safety devised a targeted approach to categorise people at risk to 4 risk levels.

In answer to a question from the Chairman, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that the Brigade had access to language service which provided a translation service.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that the number of HRFAs made would be monitored until the end of March 2012 and new smarter measure target would be implemented. He reported that the previous target set by central government was 8 HRFAs per Watch per month. Government funding had since ceased.

In answer to a question from Councillor John Lenton, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that to date, Watches had not been able to access all people at risk due to the challenges of engaging with hard to reach groups. He reassured the Committee that the Brigade continually monitored their performance and always examined ways to improve targets on accessing categorised at risk groups.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer reported that the smoke detectors installed from HRFAs had a 10 year life.

Resolved:

- a) That the report be noted.
- b) That further information to be provided at the next meeting to examine Community safety processes and procedures when an installed smoke detector is nearing the end of its 10 year life.

119. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Wednesday 14 March 2012 at 6.30pm in the Strategic Command Centre, Headquarters, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service.