

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



Held on Monday 28 September 2009

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

Those present: Councillor Chris Bowring (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor John Lenton (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor Iain McCracken (Member, Fire Authority) (*Chairman*)
Councillor Mrs Kathy Newbound (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor Alan Ward (Member, Fire Authority) (*part meeting*)

In Attendance: Conor Byrne (Senior Accountant)
Iain Cox (Chief Fire Officer) (*part meeting*)
Deborah Cripps (RSM Bentley Jennison) (*part meeting*)
Lynda Kenyon (Committee Manager)
Anna Lancefield (RSM Bentley Jennison) (*part meeting*)
Nicholas Oxborough (Group Manager, Performance Review)
Phil Sharman (Audit Commission) (*part meeting*)
Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer)
Andrew Vallance (Authority Treasurer)
Graham West (Audit Commission) (*part meeting*)

5. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Raja Zarait (Member, Fire Authority). The Chairman conveyed Councillor Alan Ward's apologies as he would be slightly late to the meeting.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Councillors and Officers relating to items to be considered at the meeting, in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct.

7. MINUTES OF THE AUDIT AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 24 JUNE 2009

Resolved:

- a) That the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Performance Review Committee meeting held on 24 June 2009 be Approved for signing by the Chairman, subject to the following amendment:
 - Item 3a) Resolution - correct the misspelling of Councillor Chris Bowring's name.

Agenda Item 6 (Response to Consultation on "Strengthening Local Democracy" (July 2009)) was taken next.

Councillor Alan Ward arrived at the meeting during the early considerations of the next item.

Action

Committee
Manager

8. RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON “STRENGTHENING LOCAL DEMOCRACY” (JULY 2009)

The Committee considered the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service’s Officers’ provisional responses to the 26 questions the Consultation posed. The Chief Fire Officer reported the following amendments to the presented report:

- i) References within the presented report to “27” questions should read “26”.
- ii) Response to Question 16 should read “Not placed to comment”.

The following amendments and comments were **Agreed**:

- a) Question 10 response - to include the words “cost effective” after the word “legal”, and that “cost effective” be incorporated at other comparable response references, including the Chief Fire Officer’s foreword to the full response.
- b) Question 15 response - to include the following text - “Additionally, we acknowledge that, as a public sector body, we have a role in championing and demonstrating environmentally friendly activities in our organisational, as well as operational, performance. We believe this should not be a mandatory target as different bodies will have differing issues, costs and resources.”

The Chairman asked the Committee that, should they consider any further suggested amendments, they advise the Chief Fire Officer by 1 October 2009.

Resolved:

- a) That the response to the consultation document entitled “Strengthening Local Democracy” be agreed, subject to the above detailed amendments.

The Chief Fire Officer retired from the meeting.

Agenda Item 4 (External Audit - 2008/09 Annual Governance Report) was taken next.

9. EXTERNAL AUDIT - 2008/09 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REPORT

The Authority Treasurer introduced Phil Sharman and Graham West from the Audit Commission.

The Committee was advised of the Audit Commission’s draft Governance Report in respect of the 2008/09 Audit (*copy available from the Committee Manager*), and the Committee considered the matters raised in the report prior to approving the financial statements.

Phil Sharman provided an overview of the findings from the 2008/09 audit which was substantially complete, the key issues arising from his audit of the financial statements and the results of the work undertaken to assess the Fire Authority’s arrangements to secure Value for Money in the use of resources. He also referred to the Value for Money criteria as detailed at Appendix 4 of the presented report.

Phil Sharman referred specifically to the unadjusted misstatement resulting from the issue of late guidance after the balance sheet date, that being the Circular issued by the Communities and Local Government (CLG) on 7 September 2009 in respect to an updated Firefighters’ Pension Scheme Circular. He confirmed that the detailed figure in respect to the additional pension lump sum paid to

CFO

Members

firefighters was now known to be £371k, which, he believed, was within the limit of tolerable risk. He stated that management did not propose to amend the 2008/09 accounts but to process the adjustment in 2009/10.

In respect to the internal control environment and the reclaim of VAT recorded as debtors, the Authority Treasurer confirmed that duplicate claims had been submitted and that he expected the matter to be rectified shortly.

The Committee concurred with the 3 Recommendations (R1, R2 and R3) within the Financial Statements, as detailed in the presented report. In respect to Recommendation 3, the Authority Treasurer confirmed that the Clerk and Monitoring Officer would be further considering the legal ownership of the related properties.

Resolved:

- a) That the letter of representation be approved, to enable the District Auditor to issue his opinion and Value for Money conclusions, as referred to in Appendix 3 of the presented Governance Report, and that the reasons for not adjusting the misstatement be included within the letter of representation.

10. INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09

The Committee was provided with the draft Internal Audit Annual Report for year ended 31 March 2009 which detailed the Internal Audit Assurance Map for 2008/09, the Internal Audit Opinions and Recommendations for 2008/09, and an overall Assurance Opinion on the work undertaken (*copy available from the Committee Manager*).

Deborah Cripps (RSM Bentley Jennison) drew the Committee's attention to the Internal Audit Assurance Statement and the Auditor's opinion, including the basis of this opinion, in respect to the adequacy and effectiveness of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service's arrangements.

In response to a request from Councillor John Lenton, which was supported by the Committee, the Internal Auditors agreed to include within their final report some benchmarking comparisons and supporting narrative in respect to the breakdown of the risk assurance levels for 2007/08 and 2008/9.

The Chairman felt that future consideration might wish to be given to the frequency of risk reporting to the Committee.

Resolved:

- a) That the Internal Audit Annual Report 2008/09 be Accepted, subject to the adjustments as detailed above.

The representatives from the Audit Commission and RSM Bentley Jennison retired from the meeting and the Chairman conveyed his thanks to them for their presentations.

11. PERFORMANCE DATA - UPDATE REPORT ON THE NUMBER OF FATALITIES IN DWELLINGS

The Committee received a more detailed report following the initial report presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2009 on the increased number of fatalities suffered within Berkshire up to January 2009. The Group Manager (Performance Review) confirmed that to the period ending

RSM
Bentley
Jennison

August 2009, there had been no further fire deaths resulting from accidental dwelling fires. Councillor John Lenton felt that it would also be useful to receive data relating to the number of serious casualties within dwelling fires.

Resolved:

- a) That the Performance Data report be Noted.
- b) That the Group Manager (Performance Review) (GM(P&R)) continue to provide performance data reports at each meeting, to include a random selection of Performance Indicators and an overview of performance through the balanced scorecard system.

GM(P&R)
Standing
Agenda
Item

12. PROCUREMENT DOCTOR PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee was advised of the progress made against the Procurement Doctor Report, and to the actions taken by Officers to progress the recommendations as contained within the health check report.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer was pleased to report that the recently appointed Procurement Support Officer had commenced in post on 28 September 2009. In response to Councillor Alan Ward, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the post was a one-year fixed contract, and although it was not expected to recoup the costs of this post within the short term, efficiency savings were expected to be realised in the medium to long term, which included the procurement work being undertaken by the South East region.

Resolved:

- a) That the Procurement Doctor progress report be Noted.

13. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its Work Programme for 2009/10, having regard to the information contained within the presented report and the recommendations agreed by the Fire Authority.

Resolved:

- a) That the presented Work Programme be reviewed further at the next meeting, and that each area of work be identified in terms of risk priority, and reported by way of, for example, a 'traffic light' reporting column within the report.

**ACFO /
CMO**
Agenda
14.12.09

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 14 December 2009 at 6.30pm in the Strategic Command Centre, Headquarters, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service.