

**AGENDA ITEM 3: MINUTES**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE HELD AT BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS ON TUESDAY 3 AUGUST 2004 COMMENCING AT 6.30PM AND CONCLUDED AT 9.01PM**

**Present: M Adams, Christine Borgars, J C G Brooks, T Mills,  
B J S Patman**

**5.01/04 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN 2004/2005**

**RESOLVED: That Councillor T Mills be elected Chairman of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Executive Committee for the ensuing year.**

**5.02/04 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN 2004/2005**

**RESOLVED: That Councillor J C G Brooks be elected Vice-Chairman of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Executive Committee for the ensuing year.**

**5.03/04 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Having been reminded that in accordance with the Fire Authority's Code of Conduct, Members are required to declare interests, which are Personal or Personal and Prejudicial, where appropriate, it was noted that on this occasion there were no such declarations to be made.

**5.04/04 MEMBERSHIP OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY**

The Committee was advised (Agenda item 5) that the final Fire Authority nominations have been received from the Unitary Authorities as follows:

Reading Borough Council:	Councillor Fred Pugh (Con)
Slough Borough Council:	Councillor David Macisaac (Ind)
Wokingham District Council:	Councillor David Ball (Con)

**NOTED**

**5.05/04 MINUTES: 1 JUNE 2004**

The Minutes of the last meeting held on Tuesday 1 June 2004, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**5.06/04 BRIEFING ON THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES ACT 2004  
AND THE RECENTLY PUBLISHED 'FIRE AND RESCUE  
SERVICE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK'**

The Executive Committee received a report (Agenda item 7 – not reproduced) on the introduction of the Fire Services Act 2004 and the final version of the National Framework for the Fire and Rescue Service, published by the ODPM in July 2004 having carried out a consultation exercise on the Draft document in December 2003.

The framework sets out the Governments expectations for the service together with the identification of key issues within the framework, which are to be progressed through a Regional Management Board as summarised in paragraphs 1 and 3 of the report (not reproduced) respectively. The Framework is also explicit when it addresses the issue of Regional Controls as set out in paragraph 4 of the report (not reproduced).

In noting the remainder of the report Members were advised that a copy of the Framework is available on the ODPM Web-Site. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that whilst the responsible Government Minister has quite wide-ranging powers he would still be subject to judicial review if he goes beyond those powers.

In response to a question from Councillor Mills who enquired as to whether there was any thing left for the Fire Authority to actually do, the Chief Fire Officer indicated that in addition to Fire Authorities being able to set their own local targets, negotiations might be required with the Auditors on some issues. Further details on the key provisions and targets of the National Framework were presented in Appendix A (not reproduced).

The Chief Fire Officer in advising that Control Room personnel would be excluded in the overall targets under the category of operational staff also drew Members attention to the fact that in addition a number of targets relating to the percentage of female fire-fighters and recruits from amongst the ethnic minority communities could be difficult to achieve. Despite the Brigade undertaking many positive recruitment initiatives the number of women and ethnic minority recruits materialising from these are not as good as had been anticipated.

It is apparent that the performance of the Fire and Rescue Authority will be measured by how it achieves the targets and outcomes laid down in the National Framework document, and will form the basis of much of the work of the service. It is therefore essential that all Authority Members are provided with information and receive training on the expectations of the Framework to allow them to fulfil their functions in the governance of the organisation.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that further information would be presented to future meetings of both the Executive Committee and Fire Authority as detailed work develops.

**NOTED**

## **5.07/04 FIRE CONTROL PROJECT – REPORT FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

The Executive Committee was advised (Agenda item 8 – not reproduced) of the outcome of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's (OSC) deliberations at its meeting on Wednesday 21 July 2004 on the regional Fire Control Rooms being proposed under the FiReControl Project.

The OSC having discussed the matter in great depth tasked the Chief Fire Officer to present a report to the Executive on the options available to Members to have an input and to influence the way in which the Fire Authority Chairman, in his capacity as RMB representative, is steered to make comment and ask questions at Management Board level. Councillor Mills reported that he had already accepted an invitation from the OSC to attend their next meeting in September to reflect on his attendance at and interpretation of RMB meetings.

The key issues of concern raised by the OSC was summarised in paragraph 2 of the report (not reproduced). As it would not be possible in the time available for the Executive Committee to review in detail the implications of the FiReControl Project on the Authority, Members were asked to consider the following options:

- To task an Officer of the Authority to identify the key FiReControl issues to the Authority and its Committees.
- To task that Officer to prepare a position statement for confirmation by the Fire Authority regarding the FiReControl Project.

The Chief Fire Officer indicated that as he accompanies the Chairman to the RMB he appeared to be the most appropriate person to fill that role and as such volunteered to become the Authority's responsible Officer referred to above.

Members requested guidance on whether it would be prudent if they shared the concerns being expressed they should issue a statement similar to that circulated by the CFO of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service. The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members of the content and subjects covered in the letter from Hampshire. He also confirmed that all RMB had received a letter from Nick Raynsford MP seeking their commitment to making the FiReControl Project a success. It was suggested that this Authority could focus down on those issues of concern and then prepare and release a similar statement to that circulated by Hampshire.

Councillor Patman expressed reservations as to the role of the OSC in this particular context and indicated that he would have preferred them to put forward what points/issues in their opinion were not being met, for example, concentrating on those issues which are specific to this Authority and joining in with the other Fire Authorities on the other equally important issues.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that one of the main areas of concern is that the ODPM whilst talking to RMB's is not pushing the information down to Fire Authority level so the consultation process is not getting through and is therefore bypassing what is considered to be the most important level of consultation, i.e. the Fire Authorities themselves.

It was therefore agreed that the Chief Fire Officer be asked to craft a form of words based on the six areas of concern expressed by the OSC and summarised in the report, circulate to all Executive Committee Members for comment and then to all other Fire Authority Members seeking comment within ten days.

The Chief Fire Officer also drew Members attention to the time-frame that is based on the Project time scale and indicated that it may be necessary to contact Executive Committee Members between meetings to seek comments on urgent issues that may arise.

**RESOLVED: That the:**

- 1. Chief Fire Officer be appointed as the officer responsible for identifying the FiReControl issues to the Authority and its Committees and also to prepare a position statement regarding the FiReControl Project for presentation to and confirmation by the Fire Authority at a future meeting.**
- 2. Chief Fire Officer be asked to craft a form of words based on the six areas of concern expressed by the OSC and summarised in the report, circulate to all Executive Committee Members for comment and then to all other Fire Authority Members seeking comment within ten days.**
- 3. Chief Fire Officer arranges for a copy of the Minutes from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, when approved, to be circulated to all other Fire Authority Members for information.**

**5.08/04 UPDATE ON NEW UNIFORM PROVISION**

The Executive Committee was informed (Agenda item 9 – not reproduced) of the progress of the national Integrated Clothing Project together with details of the interim changes to the ‘duty-rig’ uniform and was requested to confirm that Authority’s commitment in principle.

The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority are leading a consortium of Authorities in putting together an ‘Integrated Clothing Project’ (ICP) and this Authority has already resolved to participate in the ICP to procure its clothing. However no financial commitment nee, or indeed could, be made until the full business case has been produced and the quality, quantity and costs of each item could be assessed.

As the project is not expected to deliver until 2005/2006 at the earliest, it is unlikely that sufficient information will be available for the Authority to integrate it into its budgetary process for 2005/2006. It is therefore prudent to maintain our existing clothing procurement until that time.

The present manufacturers of the work shirts currently worn by operational personnel are to cease production on that item and research has shown that the shirt trialled recently is cheaper than the existing shirt. The intention is therefore to replace the

existing pale blue shirt with the Brigade navy style through the appropriate tendering process.

In response to a question the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Officers white shirt will continue for the time being but will eventually change to the navy style subject to the availability of resources.

In noting the interim arrangements for the working uniform it was **RESOLVED: That the Authority maintains its commitment in principle to the national PFI bid for the Integrated Clothing Project**

#### **5.09/04 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The Executive Committee's approval was sought (Agenda item 10 – not reproduced) to the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2004 and the Statement of Internal Control included within the Accounts. An urgent decision was required as it is a statutory requirement to secure approval of the Accounts before 31 August 2004 and the Fire Authority is not scheduled to meet again until October 2004.

The Statement of Accounts have been drawn up in accordance with Part III of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003. Although a copy of the document had been circulated with the Agenda the Authority Treasurer tabled an amended version, which included a revised page 20 showing revenue account apportionments together with pages 36-39, movements in reserves and cash flow. Member's attention was drawn to paragraph 4 of the report (not reproduced), which summarised the External Audit process culminating in the District Auditors Management Letter to Members usually presented to the Fire Authority in December.

**RESOLVED: That the:**

- 1. Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2004 be approved.**
- 2. Statement of Control included within the Accounts be approved.**

#### **5.10/04 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL ASSURANCE REPORTS – 2002/2003 AND 2003/2004**

The Executive Committee received a summary (Agenda item 11 – not reproduced) of the outcome of the internal audit activity during the last two years, which highlighted any matters of particular concern and rendered an overall Assurance Opinion on the work undertaken.

Having briefly spoken to the report the Authority Treasurer introduced Paul Harrington, Chief Auditor, Reading Borough Council who had carried out the Audit and produced the annual Internal Audit Assurance reports 2002/2003 and 2003/2004, copies of which were presented as Appendices A and B respectively (not reproduced).

In speaking to the reports Mr Harrington advised that by presenting both reports at the same time it had been possible to make direct comparisons between the two reports.

In noting the activities undertaken in both Audits as set out in paragraphs 3 and 6 of the report (not reproduced), Members were advised that in respect of 2002/2003 Reading Audit were able to offer a full or satisfactory assurance on all the fundamental systems and in respect of the diesel use, utility bills and computer audits. On staff cars and the contract for vehicle maintenance and repair they were only able to offer limited assurance as outlined in the report (Appendix A).

For 2003/3004 (Appendix B) a full or satisfactory assurance was given on all the Audits, with the exception of contracts, which was not completed and therefore carried forwards to 2004/2005.

In reporting that the recommendation made last year will be followed up Mr Harrington confirmed that he had no recommendations or matters of concern to bring to Members attention. In noting the contents of the report Members suggested that the Auditor look at procurement next year.

**RESOLVED: That the contents of the Annual Assurance Reports and the steps being taken by Management to deal with each specific issues identified at Audit be Noted.**

#### **5.11/04            AUDIT COMMISSION – VERIFICATION REPORT PHASE 2**

The Executive Committee was advised (Agenda item 12 – not reproduced) of the expected outcome of the Audit Commissions second report on the local verification of the Fire Service pay and conditions agreement.

In addition to the seven previous categories in the phased audit of the Fire Authorities progress towards the ‘Modernisation Agenda’ the Audit Commission had added an eighth category entitled ‘Financial Diagnostic’. The overall assessment category had also been expanded to include a new ‘Amber Plus’ category, which denotes ‘reasonable progress’.

Although the official report is not due until 30 July 2004, early indications are that the Authority is rated as ‘Amber Plus’ and that marked improvement has been noted in all areas apart from the modernisation agenda which remains at Amber. If confirmed it would mean that there are no sub-categories rated as red when previously there had been three.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that, once it is received, he would circulate a copy of the final Audit Commission report to all Fire Authority Members and also compile a full report for presentation to the Authority meeting in October 2004.

**NOTED**

**5.12/04 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on Tuesday 21 September 2004 in the Strategic Command Centre, Brigade Headquarters, commencing at 7.30pm. (*Attention is drawn to the time of the meeting*).

**5.13/04 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 items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part I of Schedule 12A of the said Act indicated:

	<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>Paragraph</b>
15	Part II Minutes: 1 June 2004	1, 7 & 8
16	Employment Tribunal Application Update	1
17	Learning Skills Council Funding	7 & 8
18	Pay Settlement Update	1

*(Note: The following is a summary of the items considered in the Part II Agenda of the Fire Authority's Executive Committee meeting held on Tuesday 3 August 2004)*

**5.14/04 PART II MINUTES: 1 JUNE 2004**

The Part II Minutes of the last meeting held on Tuesday 1 June 2004 were received and approved as a correct record.

**5.15/04 EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNAL APPLICATIONS UPDATE**

The Executive Committee received a detailed update of the current position in the Employment Tribunals involving the Fire Authority.

**5.16/04 LEARNING SKILLS COUNCIL FUNDING**

The Committee approved the entering into a contract in order to access Learning and Skills Council funding for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) and other learning and development activities.

**5.17/04 PAY SETTLEMENT UPDATE**

The Committee was advised of recent developments in the pay settlement process and approved a future course of action.

**Signed:**.....  
**Councillor Terry Mills**  
**Chairman**

**Date: 21 September 2004**