

AGENDA ITEM 3: PART I MINUTES
ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES MONDAY 5 DECEMBER 2005
HELD AT BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS COMMENCING AT 6.30PM AND CONCLUDED AT 8.27PM

Present:

Terry Mills (Chairman), James E R Mole (Vice-Chairman),
Christine Borgars, Jeff C G Brooks, Dr Paul Bryant,
Barrie J S Patman

7.01/05 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.

7.02/05 MINUTES: 26 SEPTEMBER 2005

The Minutes of the last meeting held on Monday 26 September 2005, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

7.03/05 AUDIT COMMISSION – ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER TO MEMBERS

The Committee was informed (Agenda item 4 – not reproduced) of the receipt of the Audit Commission's Annual letter to members in respect of the 2004/2005 Audit. It was noted that the Audit Commission had completed the Audit of Accounts for 2004/2005 as approved by the Executive Committee at its meeting in July 2005.

Each year the Audit Commission produces an Annual letter to Members based on the previous year's Audit and a copy was presented as Appendix 1 (not reproduced).

The Authority Treasurer introduced Mick West, District Auditor, who was attending the meeting to present the Audit Letter and answer any questions. In taking members through the Audit Letter, Mr West wished to place on record his thanks to all those Officers in the RBFRS who had helped him in the completion of the Audit. He also made special reference to the Key Messages set out on page 4 of the Audit Letter (not reproduced), which referred to the Authority's overall assessment following the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). The Audit Commission have recommended that the Authority continues to monitor progress on the improvement priorities arising from the CPA review and continue to report this to Elected Members. It was also noted that for the first time the Audit Commission would, this year, be publishing all its Audit Letters on their Web-Site. Following the presentation of the Annual Audit Letter Members were given the opportunity to ask questions.

Councillor Borgars suggested that the Authority's strengths as indicated in paragraph 2 of page 4 should have been bullet pointed to thereby highlighting what the Authority had achieved. Mr West confirmed that the document would be amended as suggested before final publication.

The Chairman thanked Mr West for attending the meeting. In noting the positive comments made in the Audit Letter the Committee was advised that an unqualified audit opinion would be issued on the annual accounts for 2004/2005.

NOTED

7.04/05 ELECTED MEMBERS PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The Executive Committee's views were sought (Agenda item 5 – not reproduced) on the appropriate Fire Authority representation on the newly formed Management Board of the Wokingham Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and were also asked to review current policy regarding Elected Member participation in LSPs).

It was reported that the Fire Authority had successfully participated in the LSP's in all six Berkshire Unitary Authorities and whilst the pattern of the Authority's representation is currently mixed, as detailed in paragraph 2 of the report (not reproduced), it is nevertheless considered important that the Authority is represented.

All six LSPs have now established Management Boards with the Fire Authority being represented on five, the only exception being West Berkshire. Wokingham LSP, in setting up its Management Board, agreed that the Fire Authority should be a member and as such the Committee were invited to determine whether it should be represented by an Authority Member or RBFRS Officer. Members supported the suggestion that the Authority be represented at Officer level, which is in line with the other four LSP Management Boards on the grounds that an Officer would have the experience and professional knowledge of the Fire Service and could provide the Authority with relevant feedback.

Councillor Brooks expressed his disappointment that the Authority is not represented on West Berkshire Council's LSP Management Board and together with Councillor Bryant confirmed their intention to try and get this situation rectified. The Chief Fire Officer indicated that he and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer would be meeting with the recently appointed acting Chief Executive of West Berkshire on 5 January 2006 and would be raising the matter of Fire Authority membership on the LSP Management Board.

Members were also asked to determine future policy regarding the participation of Fire Authority Members in the Berkshire LSPs. In considering the various options Members were of the opinion that the existing Member participation should remain unchanged for the time being and that when a vacancy occurs it would then be an appropriate time to review the Elected Member representation.

RESOLVED: That:

1. The Chief Fire Officer be requested to appoint an appropriate RBFRS Officer to the newly formed Management Board of the Wokingham Local Strategic Partnership.
2. The existing Member participation on the Berkshire LSPs remains unchanged for the time being and that when a vacancy occurs the Authority's Member representation be reviewed.

7.05/05 STAFF VIEWS ON PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME

The Executive Committee was advised (Agenda item 6 – not reproduced) of the concerns of the Non-Uniformed staff, raised at the Non-Uniformed Personnel Joint Consultative Committee meeting held on 6 October 2005, regarding the Local Government Employers proposed changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LPGS) and were requested to determine whether and if so how the Authority wish to respond to these concerns.

The proposals for the changes to the LGPS had been submitted to the Stakeholder Liaison Grup of the Tripartite Committee on 22 September 2005 and the focus for the staff's concern is the proposal to revoke the '85 year rule' and standardise retirement age at 65 from 1 April 2006 without transitional protection.

The Director of Human Resources reported that no agreement has yet been reached as a result of the Tripartite Committee meeting held on 21 November 2005. The Deputy Prime Minister has however indicated that the '85 year rule' will be abolished but as yet no detail of how it will be implemented has been released.

Whilst acknowledging the concerns being expressed by Non-Uniformed staff Members were reluctant to give an opinion at this time until further details are known. As other equally important issues could be involved it was agreed that it would be prudent to wait until the Fire Authority is consulted formally, which would enable its participation in a more integrated way.

In the event that no such formal consultation is received then the Fire Authority review its position and if necessary ask the Government to consider its position on the formal consultation process.

RESOLVED: That:

1. As other equally important issues could be involved, any official response from the Fire Authority be deferred until such time as the formal consultation is received.
2. In the event that no such consultation is received then the Fire Authority review its position and if necessary ask the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to reconsider its position on the formal consultation process.

7.06/05 ARSON REDUCTION OFFICER'S POST – PART FUNDING

The Executive Committee's approval was sought (Agenda item 7 – not reproduced) to part fund, together with Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Services, a Police Officer dedicated to Arson Reduction in the Thames Valley area.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer, in response to a question, confirmed that the Authority's contribution of £12,000 could be met from within the existing approved Support Services Budget. He also reported that Buckinghamshire had already signed up to this initiative and it is very likely that Oxfordshire will also ratify its involvement.

The Arson reduction Officer will work across the whole of the Thames Valley area in order to raise the profile of arson and deliberate fire setting within the Thames Valley Police thus improving the clear-up rate for these crimes. Adopting best practice from similar initiatives, it has been decided that the Officer will not work out of Police premises but between the three Fire Authorities as their work plan dictates.

In noting the focus of the post holder as set out in the report (not reproduced), Members were advised that a project plan for this initiative has been agreed and its implementation is awaiting formal approval by the three Fire Authorities.

In supporting the proposal and the proviso that the post be reviewed in two years Members suggested that after twelve months the post also be reviewed as part of the ongoing RBFRS performance monitoring process and that it also be included in the Authority's PSA targets.

RESOLVED: That:

1. The sum of £12,000, from within the approved Support Services Budget, be allocated to part fund a Police Officer, employed by Thames Valley Police, but completely dedicated to Arson Reduction with the proviso that the post be reviewed between the three Fire Authorities after 2 years.
2. After twelve months the post be reviewed as part of the ongoing RBFRS performance monitoring process and that it also be included in the Authority's PSA targets.

7.07/05 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – FUTURE STRUCTURE

The Executive Committee were requested to consider (Agenda item 8 – not reproduced) the future structure of the Fire Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) and make recommendations to the Fire Authority at its meeting on Wednesday 14 December 2005.

In speaking to the report the Chief Fire Officer drew Members attention to Appendix 2 (not reproduced) which set out the background to the establishment of the OSC together with proposals for its future structure and work programme. Having considered the proposals set out in Appendix 2 the Executive Committee made the following comments:

- Whilst supporting the suggestion that the Committee membership be increased to nine, Members felt that the status-quo should be retained (i.e. six Members) for the remainder of the ensuing year and the situation reviewed prior to the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority in June 2006.
- With regard to the appointment of substitutes it was suggested and agreed that the Committee Administrator/Committee Manager be authorised to approach any Member of the Fire Authority regardless of their Political Party to act as a substitute, with the exception of Executive Committee Members.
- The Committee should meet every four months (i.e three times a year) with the proviso that additional meetings may be arranged on other occasions as deemed necessary.
- If the decision to increase the membership to nine at the Annual Meeting then the Fire Authority Chairman be authorised to seek volunteers from amongst Authority Members who are willing to be appointed as Members but more importantly support the work of the OSC.

As the report is only seeking approval to the adoption of a programme of how the Committee will work Members were advised that the existing Terms of Reference and Scheme of Delegation for the OSC remain unchanged.

RESOLVED: That the following proposals be endorsed and referred to the Fire Authority at its meeting on Wednesday 14 December 2005 with a recommendation that it be approved:

1. The interim future structure (as amended), for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as set out in Appendix 1 be approved and implemented for the remainder of the ensuing year with the proviso that the structure be reviewed and a report, recommending any changes, be presented to the Annual Fire Authority Meeting in June 2006 for consideration and approval.
2. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee's existing Terms of Reference and Scheme of Delegation for the OSC remain unchanged.

7.08/05 EXTENSION OF THE LANDSCAPING CONTRACT DUE FOR REVIEW IN SEPTEMBER 2005

The Executive Committee's approval was sought (Agenda item 9 – not reproduced) to a proposal to extend the contract for the provision of the Interim Landscaping Contract with Holford Landscapes to December 2006.

Members were reminded that in January 2005 approval was given to award the interim landscaping contract to Holford Landscapes for a period of six months commencing on 1 March 2005, with the proviso that the Procurement and Facilities Manager (PFM) takes reasonable steps to re-let the contract within six months or refer the matter back to this Committee for further consideration.

As the PFM had sort without success to collaborate with other public sector Agencies and Fire Brigades through the Regional Centre of Excellence and as Holford Landscapes had provided a very professional service during the period of the contract, approval was sought to extend the contract to December 2006 at an estimated cost of £13,200, which could be met from within the approved Budget.

RESOLVED: That the Contract with Holford Landscapes be extended until 31 December 2006.

7.09/05 EXTENSION TO CONTRACT FOR THE REMOVAL OF ASBESTOS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANS OF AUTHORITY PREMISES

The Executive Committee's approval was sought (Agenda item 10 – not reproduced) to extend the contract with Slough Thermal to undertake the removal or environmental cleaning of asbestos residue from Authority premises.

In November 2004, approval was given to award a contract to Slough Thermal for a period of one year and in order to allow this work to continue the Procurement and Facilities Officer (PFM) is seeking Members approval to extend the contract for a further eighteen months for the removal, and/or environmental cleans of asbestos in all Authority premises, at an estimated cost of between £2 and £10,000 depending on the amount of work involved. The cost can be met from within the approved Budget.

Members were advised that the PFM is currently in discussions via the Regional Centre of Excellence with Hampshire County Council for a Term Maintenance Contract, which will include the provision for asbestos removal and environmental cleans. It is hoped that the contract will be in place by 1 April 2007.

RESOLVED: That the Contract with Slough Thermal be extended until April 2007.

7.10/05 SINGLE TENDER ACTION – CRISIS COMMANDER

The Executive Committee's approval was sought (Agenda item 11 – not reproduced) to the award of a contract under single tender action to use Secure IT Environments Consultancy and Software for the renting of Crisis Commander for a period of twenty-four months.

Members were advised that the risk to the Fire Authority to provide adequate Business Continuity had been assessed by the RBFRS Risk Management Group, at its meeting on 14 November 2006, and deemed to be a very high risk until such time as a Business Continuity Manager had been appointed and a system in place that documented all procedures.

Having appointed a Business Continuity Manager he took part in an in depth evaluation of Crisis Commander in October 2005 which identified that this was the only software solution that provided an Internet based system for development and access of business continuity procedures.

Following the evaluation, Secure IT Environments were asked to quote for developments to Crisis Commander to allow RBFRS to link to Trove documents rather than loading them to Crisis Commander. As Trove will now be located offsite this would increase the organisations resilience.

Funding of £25,000 for the provision of business continuity software in the 2005/2005 approved Budget and it is proposed to allocate £10,000 to develop Crisis Commander with the software and storage being rented for a period of twenty-four months at £800 per month.

Members queried the total funding which as reported appeared to be in excess of the approved Budget in the sum of £2,000. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) was of the opinion that the system could be provided within the approved Budget of £27,000. In supporting the provision of Crisis Commander, Members asked the ACFO to check the total Budget and if there was no adverse change to the identified Budget to proceed and award the Contract as indicated.

RESOLVED: That subject to there being no adverse change to the identified Budget then in accordance with the Authority's Standing Orders Relating to Contracts Numbers 10(e) and (f) the Contract be awarded to Secure IT Environments Consultancy and Software by single tender action.

7.11/05 CREWING LEVEL MONITORING

The Executive Committee received a report (Agenda item 12 – not reproduced) on the current crewing levels for Wholetime appliances, which showed that RBFRS had achieved a 92% success rate towards providing five and four firefighters on the first and second pumping appliance respectively in the first six months from April 1 to 30 September 2005. This had been in part due to the fact that crewing for special appliances is adjusted to allow for front line appliances to be crewed at this level.

Members were advised that in order to fully crew at recommended levels all wholetime pumping appliances and all wholetime crewed special appliances the minimum number of wholetime staff required on each shift is sixty.

Should the crewing level fall below this figure the current Optimisation of Crewing Policy requires that the special appliances be subsequently switch crewed with a pumping appliance until all special appliances are switch crewed. The purpose of this policy is to maintain the crewing of pumping appliances at the desired five riders.

In noting the wholetime crewing levels as set out in paragraphs 4 to 7 of the report (not reproduced) for the period 1 April to 30 September 2005, supported by diametrical graphs for the same period, Members were advised that August and September were particularly poor months for crewing due to twelve personnel being on sick leave, thirteen on light duties and the fact that this time of the year is the busiest period for annual leave.

In response to a question the Senior Divisional Officer (Service Delivery) confirmed that RBFRS are continuing to review alternative methods of improving crewing levels, which includes detailed discussions with the Fire Brigades' Union. Should the situation deteriorate for any reason then the Party Leaders would be advised and a report presented to the next Executive Committee.

In noting the remainder of the report Members asked that a further report on the crewing level figures for October, November and December 2005 be presented to the Executive Committee at its meeting on 23 January 2006.

The report should also include details of those occasions when appliances are sent out fully crewed and those when they are not.

NOTED

7.12/05 ODPM CONSULTATION ON FIREFIGHTERS SELECTION TESTS AND ASSESSMENT AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRES

The Executive Committee was informed (Agenda item 13 – not reproduced) of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service response to a recent ODPM consultation exercise in relation to new nationally developed arrangements for the recruitment of firefighters and the progression of operational and control staff within the Fire and Rescue Service.

The development by the ODPM of new firefighter selection tests and assessment and development centres are important milestones in the implementation of IPDS with significant resource implications for Fire and Rescue Services who are responsible for their implementation. Now that the development of the processes is largely complete, the ODPM has undertaken a consultation exercise in relation to the implementation and future management of the fire-fighter selection and assessment and development centre processes. RBFRS has contributed to the COFA SE Human Resources and Development Group response to the consultation exercise. In addition RBFRS has also submitted an individual response, a copy of which was presented as Appendix 1 (not reproduced). As the closing date for the consultation exercise was 2 December 2005, and a meeting of the Executive Committee was not scheduled to take place before that date, the Fire Authority Chairman had been consulted on and approved the RBRFS response.

NOTED

7.13/05 REPORT FROM FIRE AUTHORITY CHAIRMAN ON REGIONAL MANAGEMENT BOARD AWAYDAY

The Executive Committee received a report from Councillor Terry Mills on his attendance at the Regional Management Boards Awayday held on 30 November 2005 and the following is a brief bullet point summary of the comments made:

- The Chairman was of the opinion that Members are now accepting the Regional Management Board (RMB) as a concept. The RMB is in reality a continuation of the former Chiefs and Chairs meetings with the membership being very similar.
- Attempts are being made to encourage all Fire Authorities in the South East Region to become involved in a Collaboration Tendering exercise at an estimated cost of £15,000 over two years. The Chairman confirmed that he is not prepared to commit Royal Berkshire to this initiative until further detailed information has been provided.
- The HR Partnership will not provide a solution to the outstanding issues in Year 1 but hopes to bring forward proposals on how to deal with the issues in Year II.

- Although the proposal will run as six Fire Authorities have already signed up, the Chairman will not commit Royal Berkshire as he did not have a mandate to do so.

In conclusion the Chairman confirmed that as and when further information is received it was intention to ensure that all Fire Authority Members are kept fully informed via an E-Mail Briefing Note.

The following other issues as explained by the Chief Fire Officer, had also been raised:

- Capacity Building Fund – a collective regional bid was being prepared as it was felt that this would be more likely to succeed in attracting funding.
- The RMB's submission to Select Committee of House of Commons established to look as the Fire Service Modernisation, which will include the provision of Regional Control Rooms.
- A report seeking the Authority's approval to its response will be presented to the Fire Authority at its meeting in February 2006.

NOTED

7.14/05 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that an additional meeting of the Executive Committee is scheduled take place on Tuesday 10 January 2006 at the conclusion of the IRMP Working Party and the next ordinary meeting is scheduled for Monday 23 January 2006 at Brigade Headquarters commencing at 6.30pm.

7.15/05 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 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act as indicated:

Agenda item	Paragraph
17 Part II Minutes – Monday 26 September 2005	1
18 Internal Redecoration of Station 16 Bracknell	7 & 8
19 Employment Tribunal Applications Update	1

Note: The following is a summary of the items considered in the Part II Agenda of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Executive Committee meeting held on Monday 5 December 2005)

7.16/05 PART II MINUTES: 26 SEPTEMBER 2005

The Part II Minutes of the last meeting held on Monday 26 September 2005, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

7.17/05 INTERNAL REDECORATION OF STATION 16 BRACKNELL – STANDING ORDER 18

The Executive Committee approved the award of a contract under Standing Order 18 to undertake internal redecoration at Station 16, Bracknell.

7.18/05 EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNAL APPLICATIONS UPDATE

The Executive Committee was informed of the latest position in Employment Tribunal Applications involving the Fire Authority.

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