

AGENDA ITEM 3: PART I MINUTES

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES MONDAY 18 JULY 2005

**HELD AT BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS COMMENCING AT 6.30PM AND CONCLUDED
AT 8.36PM**

**Present: Christine Borgars, Dr Paul Bryant, James E R Mole,
Terry Mills, Barrie J S Patman**

Apologies: Jeff C G Brooks

5.01/05 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor Terry Mills be elected Chairman of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Executive Committee for the ensuing year.

5.02/05 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor James E R Mole be elected Vice-Chairman of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Executive Committee for the ensuing year.

5.03/05 MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

It was reported (Agenda item 4 – not reproduced) that following the agreed changes to the allocation of Executive Committee places between Political Groups at the Annual Meeting of the Fire Authority held on Wednesday 29 June 2005, Dr Paul Bryant has been appointed as a member of the Committee in place of Mike Adams. The Chairman welcomed Dr Bryant to the meeting.

NOTED

5.04/05 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.

5.05/05 PROPOSED CHANGE OF DATE FOR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING IN NOVEMBER 2005

Having considered a proposal (Agenda item 6 – not reproduced) to change the date of the Executive Committee, Fire Authority Agenda Briefing and Fire Liaison Group meeting scheduled to take place on Monday 28 November 2005 it was **RESOLVED: That the date of the Fire Authority Agenda Briefing, Fire Liaison Group and Executive Committee meetings be changed from Monday 28 November to Monday 5 December 2005 at Brigade Headquarters commencing at 4.30pm, 5.30pm and 6.30pm respectively.**

5.06/05 MINUTES: 16 MAY 2005

The Minutes of the last meeting held on Monday 16 May 2005, having been previously circulated, were received and approved as a correct record.

5.07/09 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL ASSURANCE REPORT 2004/2005

The Executive Committee received a summary (Agenda item 12 – not reproduced) of the outcome of the internal audit activity during the last year, which highlighted any matters of particular concern and rendered an overall Assurance Opinion on the work undertaken.

Having spoken to the report the Authority Treasurer introduced Paul Harrington, Chief Auditor, Reading Borough Council who had carried out the Internal Audit and produced the annual Internal Audit Assurance Report 2004/2005, a copy of which was presented as Appendix A (not reproduced).

In speaking to the report Mr Harrington drew Members attention to the following minor amendments:

Page 4 – Recommended Action: In 2.1 delete “Council’s” and insert “Fire Authority” and in 2.2 delete “paragraph 4.15 - 4.38” and insert “paragraph 4.20 – 4.38”

In noting the Fundamental Systems/Non Fundamental Systems undertaken in the Audit as summarised in paragraph 3 of the report (not reproduced), Members were advised that Reading Internal Audit were able to give a full or satisfactory assurance was given on all the audits, except Contracts, which had received only a limited assurance.

As far as Contracts were concerned Members attention was drawn to paragraph 4.22, which suggested that given the weaknesses identified in the audit review it is essential that RBFRS reviews current purchasing strategies and procedures as a matter of priority together with the need to mandate procedures around some current practice to ensure consistency of treatment across projects. The Clerk and Monitoring Officer advised that the Authority does apply with the statutory requirements and only minor rewording of the procedures will be required. In addition the Authority’s Standing Orders Relating to Contracts will be reviewed and updated.

Mr Harrington reported that, to date, Reading Audit had issued seven reports, which contained seventeen recommendations and a profile of these recommendations together with details of the follow-up of previous recommendations is set out in paragraphs 4.38 and 4.39 of the report respectively (not reproduced). In response to a request the Authority Treasurer agreed to produce a summary list of the seventeen recommendations and circulate to Executive Committee Members and other Members if required.

RESOLVED: That the following be noted:

- 1 The Chief Internal Auditor has provided an assurance that the Fire Authority’s systems of Internal Control both operational and financial are adequate.**
- 2 The qualifications to the Assurance opinion, together with the reasons for the qualification as set out in paragraphs 4.20 to 4.38.**
- 3 The seventeen recommendations, as profiled in paragraph 4.38 of the report and the steps being taken by Management to deal with each specific issue identified at Audit.**

5.08/05 PRESENTATION ON REVIEW OF FIRE AUTHORITY’S BUILDING MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME

The Committee received a Presentation from Pat Arthur, Procurement and Facilities Manager (PFM), which provided a brief overview of the improvements that have been

carried out to Brigade premises during the period April 2003 to March 2005. (*Note: A copy of the slides used in the Presentation are available on request from the Committee Administrator (0118) 932 2288 or by E-Mail at wellerd@rbfrs.co.uk.*)

During the Presentation the following issues were highlighted:

- The identification of asbestos in premises is ongoing and when found it is either encapsulated or removed. The situation is constantly monitored and a further survey is to be undertaken during this financial year.
- Whilst RBFRS are not undertaking improvements at all Stations the essential work required under the health and safety regulations is being carried out.
- Dormitories are being redecorated and new shower/washing facilities provided at the majority of Stations on a rolling programme.
- Sprinklers are not being installed in existing buildings but are more likely to be installed in new buildings. Whilst RBFRS buildings are not considered to be high risk the PFM confirmed that she is working very closely with the Community Safety Team on the subject of fire safety in all Brigade premises.

The Chairman thanked Pat Arthur for her Presentation.

NOTED

5.09/05 CONTRACTS TO PROVIDE NVQ SERVICES TO THAMES VALLEY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

The Committee's approval was sought (Agenda item 9 – not reproduced) to the Authority entering into contracts with Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Services to provide National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) support services to their franchise NVQ Assessment Centres.

Members were reminded that RBFRS has a successful NVQ Assessment Centre, which consistently achieves outstanding external verifier quality assurance reports. As part of the Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Service collaboration project and in order to reduce unit costs by sharing infrastructure costs over a wider candidate base, RBFRS has offered NVQ support services to Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes FRS since January 2003. Oxfordshire FRS has also requested franchise satellite status to the RBFRS Assessment Centre and a formal contract is therefore required.

The charges included in the proposed contracts cover the additional costs incurred by RBFRS in providing NVQ support services and contribute to the costs of maintaining the RBFRS NVQ infrastructure. From January 2004 to date, the net effect on the RBFRS training Budget has provided an income stream of approximately £32,000.

Formal Fire Authority approval is therefore required to enter into a new Contract with Oxfordshire FRS and renew the existing Contract with Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes FRS.

RESOLVED: That the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service enters into a new Contract with Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and renews its existing Contract with Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service to provide NVQ support services to their franchise NVQ Assessment Centres.

5.10/05 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee's approval was sought (Agenda item 10 – not reproduced) to the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2005 and the Statement of Internal

Control included within the Accounts. Members were reminded that it is a statutory requirement to secure approval to the Accounts before 31 July 2005.

The Statement of Accounts, a copy of which had been circulated on 14 July 2005 (not reproduced), had been drawn up in accordance with Part III of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003.

In noting the External Audit Process as set out in paragraph 4 of the report (not reproduced), Members were advised that the Revenue Budget was underspent by £243,000, accounted for by underspends on non-pension items and fire-fighters pensions in the sum of £143,000 and £100,000 respectively.

It was therefore recommended that the underspend is used to increase the pensions provision by £195,000, as required by the Auditor with the balance being used to set up an earmarked reserve to fund unbudgeted but essential expenditure on drill tower winches and discipline training in 2005/2006 in the sum of £23,000 and £25,000 respectively.

Having received Member approval the Statement of Accounts 2004/2005 was signed off by the Chairman, who in doing so wished to place on record his thanks to Andrew Vallance (AT) and his Team for all their hard work in producing the Statement.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1 The Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2005 be approved.**
- 2 The Statement of Internal Control included with the Accounts be approved.**
- 3 The sum of £195,000 be transferred to the Pensions Fund and £48,000 be used to establish an Earmarked Reserve.**

5.11/05 SINGLE TENDER ACTION – PENSIONS ADMINISTRATION CONTRACT

The Committee's approval was sought (Agenda item 11 – not reproduced) to extend the pensions administration contract with Liberata for a further eighteen months under single tender action.

In compliance with the Authority's Standing Orders Relating to Contracts the reason for single tender action is to maintain continuity together with the fact that Liberata are the only Company able to provide the services required by RBFRS.

Members were reminded that at its meeting in March 2005 approval had been given to extend Liberata's contract for administering the firefighters' pension scheme for six months to 30 September 2005 to allow the Authority Treasurer to continue negotiations with both Liberata and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead. Unfortunately the Royal Borough have been unable to make a firm offer to the Authority.

It is therefore recommended that the Authority Treasurer be authorised to enter into a Contract with Liberata, under single tender action, to retain the pensions contract for a further eighteen months, at a cost of £23,562 per annum.

It is hoped that sufficient progress can be made regionally on procurement collaboration to enable a full tendering exercise for payroll and pensions administration services to take place before this extension expires.

RESOLVED: That, in accordance with the Fire Authority's Standing Orders Relating to Contracts, the Authority Treasurer be authorised to extend the pensions administration Contract with Liberata for a further eighteen months, until 31 March 2007, under single tender action.

5.12/05 JOINT SECRETARIES JOINT CONCILIATION VISIT – 28 JUNE 2005

The Committee was informed (Agenda item 13 – not reproduced) of the outcome of the National Joint Council for Local Authorities Fire and Rescue Services (NJC) Joint Secretaries Conciliation visit to RBFRS on 28 June 2005.

Members were advised that the purpose of the visit was an attempt to try and conciliate a resolution to Training Bond and Co-responder disputes with the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU), which have been ongoing since 2003. It was noted however that the Joint Secretaries had not progressed the disputes, due presumably to their preoccupation with the national Fire Service pay dispute, which was not finally resolved until August 2004.

On the invitation of the Chairman the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) and Director of Human Resources (DHR) reported the outcomes of the conciliation visit as follows:

Training Bond: The FBU have withdrawn the dispute following agreement by the CFO to establish a Joint Recruitment and Retention Working Group, which has to have its inaugural meeting by Friday 9 September and produce a report by 16 December 2005 unless an extension of time is mutually agreed.

Co-responders: The FBU are to provide RBFRS Management with a written statement of their concerns by Friday 8 July and that the subsequent discussions would be concluded by 23 September 2005. If at that point the FBU's concerns have been met by Management, the FBU will withdraw their dispute.

In response to a question the DCFO was of the opinion that he could see no reason, subject to a satisfactory outcome of the discussions, why Co-responders will not be introduced in other parts of the County.

In response to a further question the DHR confirmed that Training Bonds will continue to be included in the Contracts of Employment of newly appointed Trainee Fire-Fighters but in the case of the four outstanding Bonds, RBFRS will not seek to actively recover the money until such time as the Working Group has completed its work and reported. Any changes in RBFRS Policy required as a result of the Working Group's deliberations on the Training Bond and discussions relating to Co-responders will require Member approval.

The Joint Secretaries are responsible for ensuring that the agreements made on 28 June 2005 are complied with and further reports on the outcomes of the actions agreed will be presented to future Fire Authority meetings as required.

NOTED

5.13/05 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED: That the date of the next meeting be changed from Tuesday 20 to Monday 19 September 2005 in the Strategic Command Centre, Brigade Headquarters commencing at 6.30pm.

5.14/05 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

16	Part II Minutes – Monday 16 May 2005	1, 7 & 8
17	Award of New Cleaning Contract	7 & 8
18	Single Tender Action – New Lifting Beams/Winch Equipment	7 & 8
19	Waiver – Standing Order 18 – Provision of Facilities at Training Centre	7 & 8
20	Retention Payments for Fire Control Staff	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 18 July 2005)

5.15/05 PART II MINUTES: 16 MAY 2005

The Part II Minutes of the last meeting held on Monday 16 May 2005, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

5.16/05 PART II MINUTES – REQUEST FOR AN ADDITIONAL RESOLUTION BY CLERK AND MONITORING OFFICER REGARDING THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE DISCIPLINARY, APPEALS AND GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE (DAG)

With the approval of the Chairman and in response to a request from the Clerk and Monitoring Officer on the grounds of urgency, it was agreed that if an Appeal is lodged against DAG's decision at its meeting on Thursday 14 July 2005 on the Grievance raised by Ms Ann Neylan resulting in the need to convene another meeting of DAG then its three Members be appointed from amongst the six Members of the Executive Committee.

5.17/05 AWARD OF NEW CLEANING CONTRACT

The Committee agreed to the award of a new cleaning contract for a period of three years.

5.18/05 SINGLE TENDER ACTION – INSTALLATION OF NEW LIFTING BEAMS AND WINCH EQUIPMENT TO DRILL TOWERS AT NEWBURY AND WINDSOR

With the approval of the Committee this item was withdrawn pending further investigation.

5.19/05 WAIVER UNDER STANDING ORDER 18 – PROVISION OF ACCESSIBLE WC AND FEMALE WASHROOM AT TRAINING CENTRE

The Committee approved the award of a contract to undertake the installation of an accessible WC and female washroom facilities at the Training Centre.

5.20/05 RETENTION PAYMENTS FOR FIRE CONTROL STAFF

The Committee agreed to reiterate its decision made at the meeting in May 2005 and authorised the DHR to advise those involved and FBU of Committee's reasons for its decision.

Signed:.....

**Councillor Terry Mills
Chairman**

Date: 19 September 2005