

PART I MINUTES

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MINUTES MONDAY 23 JANUARY 2006

HELD AT BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS COMMENCING AT 6.30PM AND CONCLUDED
AT 8.00PM

Present: James E R Mole (Vice-Chairman),
Christine Borgars, Dr Paul Bryant, Barrie J S Patman

(Councillor James Mole in the Chair)

2.01/06 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.

2.02/06 MINUTES: 10 JANUARY 2006

The Minutes of the last meeting held on Tuesday 10 January 2006, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

2.03/06 COLLABORATION WITH HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL FOR A REACTIVE AND TERM MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

The Executive Committee's approval was sought (Agenda item 4 - not reproduced) to authorise the Procurement and Facilities Manager (PFM) to work with Hampshire County Council as the lead Authority for the building work stream of the South East Centre of Excellence (SECE) in a number of areas as highlighted in the report.

The report was supported by a Presentation from David Corcoran, Head of Procurement and Rebecca Thompson, Procurement Manager, Hampshire County Council who provided Members with a brief overview of the background, benefits and future of the proposed scheme. (Note: A copy of the slides used in the Presentation is available on request from the Committee Manager on (0118) 932 2288 or E-Mail at kenyonl@rbfrs.co.uk). Following the Presentation Members were given the opportunity to ask questions or seek points of clarification. The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee, thanked David and Rebecca for their Presentation.

Members were advised by Pat Arthur the Procurement and Facilities Manager (PFM) that:

1. Currently, the RBFRS engineering and building maintenance services are provided under two separate contacts with Mitie Property Services and are due to expire on 31 March 2006. Because of ongoing problems with the current contracts the PFM has sought alternative arrangements through collaboration with other public sector authorities.
2. Hampshire County Council is acting as the lead Authority for the building work stream of the SECE. Nine Regional Centres of Excellence were established in 2004 to support the delivery of the National Procurement Strategy and the Gershon

Efficiency Review. The SCEC is hosted by Kent County Council and comprises some seventy-four local authorities, nine Fire and five Police Authorities.

3. The National Procurement Strategy, published in 2003, sets out how public sector authorities can improve the delivery and cost effectiveness of high quality services through more effective, prudent and innovative procurement practices. The Strategy also illustrates the scope for potential cost savings through more efficient procurement practices and partnership working, to release resources to the frontline. The Gershon Efficiency Review also highlighted the need to improve procurement practices and promote collaborative procurement in order to deliver efficiency savings.
4. The work being undertaken with Hampshire County Council to develop maintenance arrangements will be a demonstration project within the building workstream of the Centre of Excellence. The aim is to establish templates for the procurement and delivery of maintenance work, which can be applied by other authorities within the South East region. At the SECE Conference held on 14 October 2005, a significant number of Authorities expressed an interest in sharing knowledge and experience on maintenance arrangements.

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer (CMO) expressed reservations on whether the proposed contracts were in accordance with the Authorities Standing Orders Relating to Contracts. Large contracts required several tenders to be obtained and those contracts with a value exceeding of £150,000 or more also had to go through the OJEU Regulations as well as the Fire Authority's own Contract Standing Orders. She was of the opinion that because of the value of the contract [it is likely to be in excess of £100,000 per annum] in this particular instance the proposed Contract may not meet the requirements of the Fire Authority's own Contract Standing Orders or the OJEU Regulations. The CMO felt that on the information available, it did not seem to be appropriate for these contracts to be awarded to a single tenderer. She indicated that significantly more and detailed financial information would be required to justify permitting a single action tender in this instance or before the Committee could fully and reasonably consider if the collaboration with Hampshire County Council should be formalised.

Both the CMO and Authority Treasurer considered that there was insufficient information before the Committee to either explain or justify a single action tender for this contract or for the Committee to make an informed decision as to whether the contract should be awarded in partnership with Hampshire County Council. They advised the Committee that a full and detailed report should be presented to a future Executive Committee that explained the full financial and legal implications relating to this contract.

In response to a question from the Chairman the PFM confirmed that a report setting out recommendations and associated funding implications will be presented to the Executive Committee at its meeting on Monday 13 March 2006 for further consideration.

RESOLVED: That,

- 1 In line with the National Procurement Strategy, the PFM be authorised to work in partnership with Hampshire County Council to explore further the possibility of procuring a Reactive Maintenance Contract and Term Management Contract for the provision of planned mechanical and electrical maintenance services and for the provision of reactive building maintenance work.**
- 2 That the PFM to prepare a full detailed report setting out recommendations and associated funding implications for presentation to the Executive Committee at its meeting on Monday 13 March 2006 for further consideration in particular explaining all of the legal requirements for such contracts and confirming or otherwise if such requirements have been complied with.**

2.04/06 BUDGET 2006/2007

The Executive Committee received a copy (Agenda item 4 – not reproduced) of the latest Budget figures and were requested to give further consideration to the Authority's Budget requirements for 2006/2007 and consider any amendments it wishes to make at this stage of the process.

Members were advised that the following Appendices were presented (not reproduced) in support of the report prepared by the Authority Treasurer:

Appendix A:	Provisional Grant and Council Tax Figures for 2006/2007
Appendix B:	Medium Term Financial Plan 2006/2007 to 2008/2009
Appendix C:	Revenue Bids
Appendix D:	Revenue Savings
Appendix E:	Capital Bids

With the approval of the Chairman the Authority Treasurer tabled a revised Appendix A (not reproduced), which showed the effect of council tax increases of between 3.5% and 4.25% as requested by Members at the last meeting. In addition two options showing the savings required in respect of a 3.9% and 3.8% council tax increase was also presented in the revised information. It was noted that the further savings discussed with Members after the last meeting have been added to Appendix D, increasing the total savings from £15,000 to £132,000.

In accordance with Members wishes expressed at the last meeting, half the Information Officer post has been re-categorised as an unavoidable revenue bid, the vehicle maintenance bid has been reduced by £30,000 and some of the other bids have been trimmed. The overall effect reduces unavoidable revenue bids from £356,000 to £313,500, as shown in Appendix C (not reproduced).

A revised Medium Term Financial Plan 2006/2007 to 2008/2009, showing the effect of 3.9% and 3.8% tax increases was also presented for Members information (not reproduced).

Members were advised that in order to present a balanced budget, the following actions are necessary in respect of the following Council Tax rises:

5%	Possible to fund £37,000 of essential bids
4.5%	Additional savings of £36,000 required
4%	Additional savings of £109,000 required
3.5%	Additional savings of £182,000 required

In addition the biggest financial risk facing the Authority over the next few years is the Regional Control Project. Most of the costs are still unknown, but it is likely that significant additional charges will be incurred, without full Governmental financial support. It may therefore be necessary to retain all existing reserves to ameliorate this difficult situation.

On the invitation of the Chairman the Authority Treasurer then took Members through the various Appendices circulated with the Agenda and the revised copies tabled at the meeting and the following is a bullet point summary of the comments made and where necessary decisions reached:

- The Authority Treasurer advised that in the revised Appendix A, tabled at the meeting, the Collection Fund Deficit having shown a £44,000 deficit for last year is showing an £18,000 surplus for the 2006/2006 financial year.

- The Chief Fire Officer reflected on the implications of reducing the proposed Council Tax increase. If members were minded to agree an increase of 4.25% it would only be possible to fund a bare minimum of essential bids. If the base line is set too low this may have a significant effect on what the Authority is able to do in future years in terms of the many important issues coming forward. Whilst understanding Members views there is the need for RBFRS to be ready to face the future.
- In response to a question the Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the savings identified under Option 1 would relate to Support Services whereas those under Option 2 would affect front line services.

In thanking Members and Officers for their contribution to the debate the Chairman proposed a Band D Council Tax increase of 3.85%. The proposal having been seconded by Councillor Christine Borgars was put to the vote and carried by four votes for to none against with no abstentions.

RESOLVED: That the Fire Authority's budgetary requirements for 2006/2006 based on a Band D Council Tax increase of 3.85% be endorsed and referred to the Fire Authority at its meeting on Wednesday 8 February 2006 with a recommendation that it be approved.

2.05/06 INSPECTION REFORM – THE FUTURE OF LOCAL SERVICES INSPECTION

The Executive Committee was informed (Agenda item 6 – not reproduced) of the implications to the Fire Authority of the Consultation Paper "Inspection Reform – The Future of Local Services Inspection" produced by the ODPM and approval was sought to the Chief Fire Officer's response.

A summary of the Consultation Paper together with the Chief Fire Officer's response was presented in Appendices 1 and 2 respectively (not reproduced). It was noted that the Authority's response only related to those areas, which have an effect on Fire and Rescue Services.

In noting the Authority's response Members were advised that a summary of the responses received would be published by 1 June 2006 and a copy available on the ODPM's Web-site at www.local.odpm.gov.uk

RESOLVED: That the Chief Fire Officer's response to the Consultation Paper produced by the ODPM as set out in Appendix 2 be approved.

2.06/06 RESPONSE TO ODPM CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME

The Executive Committee was requested (Agenda item 7 – not reproduced) to determine the Authority's response to the ODPM's consultation exercise regarding proposed changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

Members were reminded that RBFRS staff views on the proposed changes to the LGPS were presented in a report to the Executive Committee at its meeting held on 5 December 2005 and since that time the ODPM have initiated a formal consultation exercise in relation to the proposed changes and the Fire Authority have been invited to respond.

A brief explanation of the proposed changes was set out in paragraph 2 of the report whilst a full summary was presented as Appendix 3 (not reproduced).

Membership of the LGPS is open to both Non-Uniformed and Control personnel in RBFRS and comments on the proposed changes have been invited from members of the internal

Non-Uniformed Personnel Joint Consultative Committee, Unison and the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU). The response received from the Unison Workplace Contact on behalf of RBFRS BHQ Unison members was presented as Appendix 4 (not reproduced) and incorporated the views of the FBU. A summary of the staff concerns, which revolve around three main issues, was set out in paragraph 3 of the report.

It was noted that the proposals for amending the LGPS are an interim measure to address immediate issues and that a further more fundamental longer-term review of the LGPS will be initiated by the ODPM during the summer of 2006 with the objective of having a "new look" LGPS in place for April 2008.

On the invitation of the Chairman, Christopher Glenn in his capacity as BHQ Unison Workplace Representative reflected on the implications of the proposed changes and the significant impact on the pensions of RBFRS employees.

In response to a question the Director of Human Resources (DHR) confirmed that the number of Non-Uniformed and Control personnel affected in RBFRS was 110 and 30 respectively and that the proposed changes have not as yet been costed.

In supporting the issues of concern raised in the report and the letter from Unison Members agreed that the DHR be authorised to draft the Authority's response based on the comments set out in the report and Appendix 4 and forward a copy to the Party Leaders (Councillors Borgars, Mole and Patman) for comment and approval.

RESOLVED: That the Director of Human Resources be authorised to Draft the Fire Authority's response to the ODPM Consultation paper based on the comments set out in the report and the letter from the BHQ Unison Representative and forward a copy of the Draft letter to the three Party Leaders for comment and approval.

2.07/06 CREWING LEVEL MONITORING

The Executive Committee was advised (Agenda item 8 – not reproduced) of the Wholtime crewing levels, based on full shifts, for the third rolling quarter year from 1 October 20 31 December 2005.

During this period the crewing level fell below 60 on 100 occasions out of a possible 184 shifts requiring one or more special appliances to be switch crewed. When comparing the figures the figures for the same period last year the crewing level fell below 60 on 122 occasions, which in percentage terms relates to 66.3% as against 55% for 2005.

During this quarter front line wholtime pumping appliances have been optimally crewed on 98.4% of incidents attended. A total of 1731 incidents, of varying nature, have been mobilised to during the last quarter and on 28 occasions appliances have been mobilised with less than five personnel.

It was noted that in addition to December being a very busy period for Annual Leave, October 2005 was a particularly poor month for crewing due to eleven personnel being on sick leave and fifteen on light duties. Personnel availability has been reduced due to a number of factors as outlined in paragraph 7 of the report, which includes the amount of extra training involved with New Dimensions burdens, Positive Pressure Ventilation implementation and the new career progression training.

Whilst a number of compulsory transfers were made during October, which improved crewing levels towards the end of the month, the high levels of sickness and light duties continue to have a significant impact.

In response to a question the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) in confirming that there had been a slight improvement during the last quarter expressed the hope that the next quarter should show further improvement as recruits have recently joined RBFRS and more are expected at Easter.

The DCFO also reported that in accordance with the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004, RBFRS are currently consulting on a review of the Optimisation of Crewing Policy.

NOTED

2.08/06 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the next Executive Committee meeting is scheduled to take place on Monday 13 March 2006 at Brigade Headquarters commencing at 6.30pm.

2.09/06 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
11	Part II Minutes – Tuesday 10 January 2006	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 Tuesday 10 January 2006)

2.10/06 PART II MINUTES: 10 JANUARY 2006

The Part II Minutes of the last meeting held on Tuesday 10 January 2006, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.