

**PART I MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE
AUTHORITY'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**



Held on Monday 25 September 2006

Strategic Command Centre, Brigade Headquarters
103 Dee Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 4FS

Those present: Councillor Mike Adams (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor Mrs Christine Bateson (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor Jeff Brooks (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor Paul Bryant (Member, Fire Authority) (*Chairman*)
Councillor James Mole (Member, Fire Authority) (*part meeting*)
Councillor Angus Ross (Member, Fire Authority)

In attendance: Pat Arthur (Procurement and Facilities Manager)
Olaf Baars (Deputy Chief Fire Officer)
Iain Cox (Chief Fire Officer)
George Cross (Senior Divisional Officer, Support Services)
John Daly (Facilities Officer)
Rosemary Lansdowne (Clerk and Monitoring Officer)
Kevin Parker (Audit Manager, Reading Borough Council) (*Items 06.04.06 and 06.05.06*)
Russell Reeve (Audit Manager, Audit Commission) (*Items 06.04.06 and 06.05.06*)
Des Tidbury (Assistant Chief Fire Officer)
Andrew Vallance (Authority Treasurer)
David Wallace (Director of Human Resources)
Mick West (Relationship Manager and District Auditor, Audit Commission) (*Items 06.04.06 and 06.05.06*)

In audience: Christopher Glenn (UNISON)
Andy Mancey (Fire Brigades Union)
Paul Southern (Senior Divisional Officer, Service Delivery)
Nicole Targett (Corporate Communications Manager)

06.01.06 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received. Councillor James Mole had conveyed his apologies that he would arrive late to the meeting.

06.02.06 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

06.03.06 PART I MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 17 JULY 2006

The Part I Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 17 July 2006 were **Agreed** as a correct record for signing by the Chairman.

Action

With the agreement of the Chairman, Agenda items 8 and 9 were taken next.

06.04.06 EXTERNAL AUDIT - 2005/06 GOVERNANCE REPORT

Mick West spoke to the report. The external auditors were currently working to an agreed plan with the Treasurer on the use of resources audit, which would be reported later in the financial year. In the meantime, the Audit code requires a report of Governance for the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFPS) for 2005/06.

The result is two key messages:

1. There is an unqualified opinion of the accounts.
2. There is an unqualified Value for Money conclusion.

This is a good result as unqualified accounts are not always given to Authorities. Qualified accounts do occur, though not often, in Authorities.

The Value for Money assessment is new so, at this stage, the result could be seen as a 'best guess' with some advance conclusions. It is felt most Authorities will receive an unqualified conclusion, as the RBFPS has received.

In terms of financial opinion, the Professional Standards require audit to bring accounting weaknesses to the Authority. There is a positive 'nothing to report' statement.

The Authority Treasurer agreed to circulate the signed copy of the report.

AV

Mick West stated that the Value for Money audit was unqualified.

Future years value for money assessments would be based on the Use of Resources audits and will draw on many aspects. The focus will be on complete performance and financial management. There are 12 criteria for adequate arrangements and the audit answer is, yes there are adequate arrangements for all 12 criteria in the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.

Councillor Jeff Brooks stated the report was worthy of note and a commendable result.

The Chairman suggested there were harder audit tests to come, to which Mick West replied that use of resources will look harder but the current arrangements were adequate.

The Chairman confirmed the wording of the report. Mick West responded that in the draft report presented, for timeliness, the term 'would be expected' was used for the expected result but that the result was now signed off.

The Chairman **Noted** the positive comments and unqualified statements of the audit, for the 2005/06 accounts.

06.05.06 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL ASSURANCE 2005/2006

The Chairman, having confirmed that the report was no longer 'in confidence', enabled Kevin Parker to speak to the report. He noted that any recommendations were middle or low ranking risks regarding compliance, with no high risk recommendations. He confirmed there were no internal control weaknesses. In noting that, for contract audit, there was not a full assurance but adequate arrangements were in place, and he understood the extenuating circumstances of a raft of initiatives from Central Government, especially regarding procurement. To assist, he intends to meet in future with the Treasurer and Clerk to the Authority.

AV

Finally, Mick West drew the attention of the group to the new internal auditing standards that required an understanding of the documentation. This would result in an increase in time to conduct an audit from 40 days to 80 days.

In response to a question, the Authority Treasurer confirmed that the RBFRS is in budget and coping.

Councillor Mike Adams, referring to sections 6.3 and 6.4 of the report, enquired if measures to remedy were being put in place. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) responded that there was nothing nationally or regionally which could be given to the Clerk and Monitoring Officer to put in place for Standing Orders. The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) confirmed this, and noted that FireBuy might delay the write up of the Orders. In addition, the Authority Treasurer expected the national picture to become clearer over the next year.

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer confirmed the current financial arrangements were lawful.

Pat Arthur noted progress in the region towards appropriate documentation, to which the Chairman suggested we were, therefore, no better or worse than other Fire Authorities. Pat Arthur confirmed this was her opinion of the situation. In response to an enquiry from the Chairman regarding section 5.1 of the report, the Chief Fire Officer accepted the reporting delays but noted the extensive workload and limited capacity available.

The Executive Committee **Noted** the report.

06.06.06 FIRE AUTHORITY REPRESENTATION ON LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS (LSP)

The Director of Human Resources introduced the report, and, in response to questions, confirmed that the Fire Authority's representative on the Wokingham LSP attended four full LSP meetings a year and, in addition to that, meetings of the LSP Management Group of which there were approximately 10 per annum. Councillor Jeff Brooks expressed a concern that LSPs were "talking shops". The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that LSPs, including Wokingham LSP, provided good opportunities for partnership working on community safety issues and had provided significant additional funding for community safety work through pump-priming and reward grants in connection with Local Area Agreements.

The Executive Committee **Resolved** that, in future, the Fire Authority be represented on the Wokingham Local Strategic Partnership by a Senior Manager.

06.07.06 EMPLOYEE RELATIONS TRAINING FOR MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Director of Human Resources advised the Committee of the existing agreement to provide training for Members of the Executive Committee to equip them to effectively perform their role as lead negotiators at Stage 3 of the RBFRS Negotiation procedure which had not yet been delivered, and the recent initiative by the Fire Service National Employers and Department of Communities and Local Government to promote and contribute to the funding of this training.

The Executive Committee **Agreed** that arrangements should be made for them to receive one days training in their employee relation duties to be delivered in January 2007.

DW

Councillor James Mole joined the meeting at 19.15 hours.

06.08.06 CONSULTATIONS ON OPTIONS FOR A 'NEW LOOK' LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME (LGPS)

The Director of Human Resources advised the Executive Committee of the Department of Communities and Local Government's consultation exercise in relation to the development of the "New Look" Local Government Pension Scheme which it planned to introduce from April 2007.

In response to questions from Members, the Authority Treasurer indicated that the Fire Authority had already made employer contributions of approximately 18% in part because the Berkshire Service Scheme considered the RBFRS to be a "small employer". He also drew attention to the anticipated future loss of Control staff which would have a significant impact on the RBFRS as far as the LGPS was concerned.

The Chairman invited Christopher Glenn, the RBFRS UNISON representative, to address the Committee. Christopher Glenn advised the Committee of the Local Government Trade Union's views on the options being considered in the consultation exercise as set out in the document circulated in the Agenda.

The Executive Committee then considered the draft consultation response set out in the report, and **Agreed** the suggestions made in respect of consultation questions C1, C2, C3, C4 C5 and C6.

The Executive Committee **Resolved** that the Director of Human Resources be authorised to submit a consultation response on behalf of the Fire Authority in accordance with the Committee's views set out above.

DW

06.09.06 LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME - EMPLOYER DISCRETIONS - STATEMENT OF POLICY

The Director of Human Resources advised the Committee of the need for the Fire Authority to review its policy on the use of the Employer discretions included in the Local Government Pension Regulations and to make decisions in respect of the new discretions contained in Regulations 32, 35 and 121.

Having considered the draft statement of policy on Employers Discretions attached to the report, the Executive Committee **Resolved** that the previously agreed policy in respect of Regulations 31, 52, 67, 7, 8 and 18(6) and (7) should continue.

In respect of the new employer discretions, the Executive Committee **Resolved** as follows:

- Regulations 32: Re-employed and re-joining deferred members - to adopt this Regulation.
- Regulation 35: Requirements as to time of payment - to consider the adoption of Regulation 35 on a case-by-case basis, giving special attention to Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and financial considerations.
- Regulation 121: Inward transfer of pension rights - to continue to allow transfer of relevant pension rights held elsewhere within the 12-month period.

06.10.06 ALTERNATIVE RISK TRANSFER - ESTABLISHMENT OF A MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY

The Authority Treasurer spoke to his report and noted that lack of competition was limiting Value for Money in the insurance sector. This was partly because Fire Authorities were deemed to be at the same risk as Local Authorities and the benchmarking evidence shows this is not the case. In noting that FireBuy was now involved and that at least 10 Fire Authorities need to sign up, the Authority Treasurer estimated some 15% saving in premiums, as noted by the Charles Taylor Consulting report. The set up costs to be approximately £10,000 cash and £95,000 guarantee, dependent on the number of signed up Authorities, but the Authority Treasurer expected possible improvements to savings after 5 years.

In response to questions, the Authority Treasurer stated that it would be a new company working to Company rules, so any excessive risk, shown by track record, from other Fire Authorities would be noted by other members of the Board and appropriate risk management measures insisted upon; that catastrophic risk and high volumes of claims would be re-insured; and that about £4,500 had been spent so far with FireBuy paying for the benchmarking and feasibility studies.

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that Insurance Companies might attempt to delay progress by legal challenge.

The Executive Committee **Resolved** to agree, in principle, to the proposed mutual insurance company.

06.11.06 2006/07 BUDGET MONITORING

The Authority Treasurer, in speaking to the report, noted key items and responded to questions:

- The under-spend was largely related to pensions.
- The reserves now held due to the change in pension arrangements might help in future.

Councillor Jeff Brooks noted the under-spend and that we were now setting precepts but asked that care be taken with any carry forward of the under-spend. In response to a question from the Chairman, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer noted the Community Safety discretionary income part of the under-spend and that this was earmarked for community safety projects over 3 years.

The Executive Committee **Noted** the report.

06.12.06 UPDATE ON STAFF RETENTION

The Director of Human Resources introduced this report which followed the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's consideration of the issue of staff retention when it met on 10 July 2006.

The Executive Committee **Agreed** to note the report and requested that, in future, it receives regular periodic reports on staff retention, including details of the numbers of staff leaving the Fire Authority's employment.

DW

06.13.06 AMBULANCE SHARING FIRE SERVICE FACILITIES UPDATE

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced the report and reminded the Committee of the previous resolutions and that the current report was presented as it varied the previous agreement. £4,000 had been offered by the South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) but that we would ensure appropriate costs were recovered for the SCAS use of the facilities.

Paul Southern introduced the consultation and mentioned that the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) was not generally supportive as the FBU would question why we should support another failing Authority. However, supported by the Chief Fire Officer, Langley Fire Station crews seemed accepting of the principle of sharing facilities and had commenced some self-help work to improve facilities for the SCAS crews.

Councillor Angus Ross spoke to support the report and noted that it must be supported to assist drive down of the Fire Authority cost.

The Executive Committee **Noted** the report.

06.14.06 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Executive Committee **Noted** that the next meeting will take place on **Monday 27 November 2006 at 6.30pm (Meeting Room 3, Brigade Headquarters).**

06.15.06 DATE OF 2007 MEETINGS

The Executive Committee **Agreed** the dates of the 2007 meetings, as follows, which would all commence at 6.30pm and be held in the Strategic Command Centre at Brigade Headquarters:

- Monday 15 January 2007
- Monday 19 March 2007
- Monday 21 May 2007
- Monday 16 July 2007
- Monday 17 September 2007
- Monday 19 November 2007

06.16.06 EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC

The Executive Committee **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, and is exempt information if, and so long as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information:

- Part II Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 17 July 2006 (*Paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4*)
- Term and Reactive Maintenance Contracts - 3-month progress update (*Paragraph 3*)
- Mobile Air Conditioners for Brigade Headquarters main building offices (*Paragraph 3*)
- Air conditioning equipment for Brigade Headquarters IT Equipment Room and Control Building (*Paragraph 3*)
- Replacement and refurbishment of appliance bay doors (*Paragraph 3*)
- Upgrade of the Firehouse Control System (*Paragraph 3*)
- Interim arrangement for Legionella Testing (*Paragraph 3*)
- Drainage system at Slough Fire station (*Paragraph 3*)
- Payroll and Pensions Administration Contract (*Paragraph 3*)
- Procurement of services to support the implementation of a Finance and Asset Management System (*Paragraph 3*)
- Planning Application/Appeal for Dee Road (*Paragraph 3*)
- Proposed early retirement (Fire Safety Staff Member) (*Paragraphs 1 and 2*)

Note: The following is a summary of the items considered in the Part II Agenda of the Executive Committee's meeting held on Monday 25 September 2006:

06.17.06 PART II MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 JULY 2006

The Part II Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 17 July 2006 were **Agreed** as a correct record for signing by the Chairman.

06.18.06 TERM AND REACTIVE MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS - 3 MONTH PROGRESS UPDATE

It was **Agreed** that a further report on the award of the 5-year Engineering Maintenance Contract would be brought back to the Executive Committee in November 2006.

**06.19.06 MOBILE AIR CONDITIONERS FOR BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS
MAIN BUILDING OFFICES**

The Executive Committee **Agreed** the recommendation presented.

**06.20.06 AIR CONDITIONING EQUIPMENT FOR BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS
IT EQUIPMENT ROOM AND CONTROL BUILDING**

The Committee **Agreed** the recommendation presented.

**06.21.06 REPLACEMENT AND REFURBISHMENT OF APPLIANCE BAY
DOORS**

The Executive Committee **Agreed** the recommendation presented.

06.22.06 UPGRADE OF THE FIREHOUSE CONTROL SYSTEM

The Executive Committee **Agreed** the recommendation presented, subject to specific conditions.

06.23.06 INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS FOR LEGIONELLA TESTING

The Executive Committee **Agreed** the recommendation presented.

06.24.06 DRAINAGE SYSTEM AT SLOUGH FIRE STATION

The Executive Committee **Agreed** the recommendation presented.

06.25.06 PAYROLL AND PENSIONS ADMINISTRATION CONTRACT

The Executive Committee **Agreed** the recommendation presented.

**06.26.06 PROCUREMENT OF SERVICES TO SUPPORT THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF A FINANCE AND ASSET MANAGEMENT
SYSTEM**

The Executive Committee **Agreed** the recommendation presented.

06.27.06 DEE ROAD PLANNING APPLICATION

The Executive **Resolved** that a Special meeting of the Executive Committee be called if required.

06.28.06 PROPOSED EARLY RETIREMENT (FIRE SAFETY STAFF MEMBER)

The Executive Committee **Agreed** the recommendation presented.

06.29.06 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Having approached the Chairman under Any Other Business, the Chief Fire Officer provided an update in respect to the National Mutual Aid agreement. The Executive Committee **Agreed** the recommendation presented.