

**ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY MINUTES  
WEDNESDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2006**



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**HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WOKINGHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL, SHUTE  
END, WOKINGHAM, BERKSHIRE COMMENCING AT 6.30PM AND CONCLUDED  
AT 8.20PM**

**Present:** James E R Mole (Vice-Chairman),  
Christine Borgars (Leader of the Labour Group),  
Mrs Christine Bateson, Dr Paul Bryant, John P Green,  
Jagjit S Grewal, David Howes, Mrs Vicky Howes,  
David Maclsaac, Peter North, Barrie J S Patman,  
Fred Pugh, Angus J Ross, Dexter J Smith, Rob Stanton,  
Emma Webster, Simon Werner, Derek J Wilson

**Also in Attendance:** Paul Sidwell (Member of the Standards Committee)

**Apologies:** Mike Adams, Mrs Prue Bray, Jeff C G Brooks, Tom Crisp,  
Geoff S Findlay, Chris Maskell, Alan Ward

**(Councillor James Mole, Vice-Chairman in the Chair)**

**COUNCILLOR TERRY MILLS**

**Members stood in silent tribute to the memory of Councillor Terry Mills,  
Chairman of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, who sadly passed away on  
Tuesday 27 December 2005.**

**1.01/06 WELCOME FROM CHAIRMAN OF WOKINGHAM DISTRICT  
COUNCIL**

Members received a welcome from Councillor Iain Brown, Chairman of the Wokingham District Council. The Vice-Chairman thanked Councillor Brown for his warm welcome.

**1.02/06 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Dr Paul Bryant be elected Chairman of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority for the remainder of the ensuing year.

It was noted that Dr Bryant would resume the role as the Authority's representative on the South East Regional Management Board until the Authority's Annual Meeting in June 2006.

**(Councillor Dr Paul Bryant in the Chair)**

**1.03/06 MEMBERSHIP OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY**

It was reported (Agenda item 4 – not reproduced) that Bracknell Forest Borough Council had appointed Councillor Alan Ward as a Member of the Fire Authority in place of the late Councillor Terry Mills.

The Chairman also took the opportunity to welcome and introduce the recently appointed Committee Manager, Mrs Lynda Kenyon who would be taking over from David Weller, Committee Administrator, when he finally retires on Tuesday 28 February 2006. He wished David all the very best in his retirement.

He also reported that Councillor Christine Borgars, Reading Borough Council and Leader

of the Labour Group on the Authority, would not be standing for re-election and this would therefore be her last Authority meeting. On behalf of Members and Officers he wished to place on record his thanks to Councillor Borgars for the very valuable contribution that she had made to the work of the Authority and wished her every happiness in the future. Councillor Borgars thanked the Chairman for his kind comments.

The Chairman also announced the following changes to the Conservative Group's membership on Committee's:

Executive Committee:	Councillor Christine Bateson would be replacing the late Councillor Terry Mills.
Overview and Scrutiny Committee:	Councillors John P Green and Angus Ross would be replacing himself and Councillor Bateson.

**NOTED**

**1.04/06 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 made. Members were reminded that they were required to sign the statutory Declaration of Acceptance of Office in the presence of the Clerk and Monitoring Officer.

**NOTED**

**1.05/06 PART I MINUTES: 14 DECEMBER 2005**

The Part I Minutes of the last meeting held on Wednesday 14 December 2005, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**1.06/06 PART I MINUTES OF COMMITTEES, WORKING PARTY'S AND OTHER GROUPS**

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 7 – not reproduced) of the Fire Authority's Committees, Working Parties/Forums and other meetings that had taken place since the last meeting in December 2005. Copies of the Part I Minutes are available on

request from the Committee Manager (0118) 932 2288 or by e-mail on kenyonl@rbfrs.co.uk.

## **NOTED**

### **1.07/05 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Chairman had nothing further to report.

### **1.08/06 PETITIONS AND QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

The Authority noted that no Petitions or Questions had been received from the Public under Standing Orders 8 and 9.

### **1.09/06 QUESTIONS FROM FIRE AUTHORITY MEMBERS**

The Authority noted that no questions had been received from Fire Authority Members under Standing Order 10.

### **1.10/06 NOTICES OF MOTION**

The Authority noted that no Notices of Motion had been received from Members under Standing Order 12.

### **1.11/06 BUDGET 2006/2007**

The Fire Authority was requested (Agenda item 12 – not reproduced) to finalise the Budget requirements and set the Precept for 2006/2007 based on the recommendations of the Executive Committee. In addition to the report the following Appendices were also presented (not reproduced):

Appendix A:	Provisional Grant and Tax Base Figures for 2006/2007
Appendix B:	Medium Term Financial Plan 2006/2007 to 2008/2009 (3.85% Tax Increase)
Appendix C:	Revenue Bids
Appendix D:	Revenue Savings
Appendix E:	Capital Bids
Appendix F:	Prudential Code Report and Treasury Management Strategy Report 2006/2007

In speaking to the report the Authority Treasurer advised that the final Grant figures had been published on 6 February 2006, which had shown an increase of £13.00 over the figures produced in Appendix A. This very slight increase would require some of the figures shown in the proposed Resolution to be amended as follows:

2a	£30,816.709 should read £30,816.722
2c	£29,957.231 should read £29,957.231
2d	£14,721.000 should read £14,721.013

He also confirmed that the final Council Taxbase figures have now been received from the six billing Authorities in Berkshire.

At its meeting on Monday 23 January 2006 the Executive Committee had considered the Revenue Budget as summarised in Appendix B, which would set a Budget of £29,957.218 with a Band D Council Tax of £47.97 being an annual increase of 3.85% or in cash terms an increase of £1.78 per Band D property.

It was noted that the proposed Budget includes the maintenance of the general reserve of £500,000, plus the transfer of the pension's provision to general reserves. In addition the new arrangements for financing firefighters' pensions whilst removing the liability for funding normal retirement pensions, add a liability for funding ill-health retirements.

Section 43 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 requires Precepting Authorities to have regard to the level of reserves needed for meeting estimated future expenditure when calculating the budget requirement. It is therefore the responsibility of the Authority Treasurer to advise on the level of reserves that should be held and to ensure that there are clear protocols for their establishment and use. In order to assess the adequacy of unallocated general reserves when setting the budget, finance directors should take account of the strategic, operational and financial risks facing the Authority. Members attention was drawn to Note 1 of Appendix B which sets out the most significant risks facing the Authority next year and the size and likelihood of each risk, which indicates that a reserve of £1.6m is required to meet the risks as listed (not reproduced).

In addition under Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003, the Authority Treasurer is obliged to report on the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves. He therefore confirmed that the estimates laid out in the report are robust and the proposed reserve of £1,600,000 is sufficient to ensure the Authority's wellbeing in the next financial year.

The Revenue Bids were set out in Appendix C and under the proposed Budget it would only be possible at the moment to fund those listed under "Unavoidable". In addition Appendix C also provided an indicative projection of needs for 2007/2008 and 2008/2009. Directors had also produced a list of potential savings and these were identified in Appendix D.

In noting the total Capital Budget identified in Appendix E is set at £1,446,000, Members were advised that Credit approvals have now been abolished and replaced with a new prudential capital finance system introduced on 1 April 2004. Whilst the Authority is free to borrow as much as it believes prudent, unless a national limit is imposed, the Government will only provide Revenue Support Grant for financing £738,000 of Capital expenditure in 2006/2007. Any expenditure in excess of this amount will have to be met from the Council Tax. New regulations are likely to make leasing more expensive, as they will reduce the period over which an operating lease can be taken out.

Members were reminded that when approving Capital bids, it should be borne in mind that the full annual revenue costs will not be incurred until 2007/2008 bring further pressure for compensatory savings and/or increased Council Tax in that year. In advising that the Capital Programme may appear to be relatively affordable for 2006/2007 the Authority Treasurer drew Members attention to the fact that this may not be the case in future years.

Arrangements are under way to design and print 520,000 leaflets for distribution to the six billing Authorities by the end of February 2006. It has also been necessary to consult the public and business community on the proposed Council Tax Precept.

In addition to the overall Budget, Members approval was also sought to the Medium Term Financial Plan, the Capital Programme and the Prudential Indicators, Treasury Strategy and Investment Strategy as set out in Appendices B, E and F respectively.

Members were then given the opportunity to ask questions and/or seek points of clarification and the following is a bullet point summary of the main comments made:

- ❖ Page 78: In respect of the Capital Project Appraisal for desktop hardware a Member referred to the comments indicating that whilst the objective is to provide 30% of staff with new PCV's in each year the current IT budget does not allow the replacement of desktop hardware at the rate set out in the policy and therefore sought clarification on the actual budget spend. In explaining the background to this the Chief Fire Officer indicated that such expenditure is not included in the Base Budget as it has to be approved by the Authority following an annual review of the current Policy each year.
- ❖ Councillor Ross indicated that whilst hardware costs are reducing the complexity of setting up are extremely high. It was reported that following a review of the human resources strategy within the Information Systems Department a new member of staff would be joining the IT Section in three weeks time.
- ❖ Page 29: Councillor Stanton referred to the fact that the majority of the highly desirable bids appear to be new posts and therefore sought clarification as to whether they were necessary. The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) in confirming that all the posts would be located in Community Safety reminded Members that the promotion of safety in the community is a duty placed on Fire Authorities. In explaining that RBFRS would prefer to appoint as many as possible the CFO indicated that there were a number of alternative sources of funding available and he was hoping to attract some of this to provide some of the new posts.
- ❖ Page 17: In response to a question the Authority Treasurer explained the background to the Collection Fund Surplus, which originates from the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities.

It was therefore proposed by Councillor James Mole that the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's 2006/2007 Budget be approved. The proposal having been seconded by Councillor Christine Borgars was put to the vote and carried unanimously.

**RESOLVED: That in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the following amounts be now calculated for the year 2006/2007:**

- 1 The aggregate council taxbase of the six Berkshire unitary authorities has been notified as 317,444.25**
- 2a £30,816,722 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Authority estimates for the items set out in Section 43(2)(a) to (d) of the Act**
- 2b £859,491 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Authority estimates for the items set out in Section 43(3)(a) to (b) of the Act**
- 2c £29,957,231 being the amount by which the aggregate at (2a) above exceeds the aggregate at (2b) above, calculated by the Authority in accordance with Section 43(4) of the Act as its budget requirement for the year**
- 2d £14,721,013 being the aggregate of the sums which the Authority estimates will be payable for the year in respect of redistributed non-domestic rates and, revenue support grant**

- 2e £17,941 being the net aggregate of the surpluses and deficits on billing authorities' Collection Funds to be received in 2006/2007
- 2f £47.94 being the amount at (2c) plus the amount at (2e) above less the amount at (2d) above, all divided by the aggregate council taxbase at (1) above, calculated by the Authority, in accordance with Section 44(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.
- 2g The Authority, in accordance with Section 40(2)(a) of the Act, hereby sets the following amounts of Council Tax for the year 2006/2007 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Valuation Band	£
A	31.96
B	37.29
C	42.61
D	47.94
E	58.59
F	69.25
G	79.90
H	95.88

Being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at (2f) by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Authority, in accordance with Section 47(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

- 2h The Authority, in accordance with Section 40(2)(b) of the Act, hereby sets the following amounts payable as precepts by the billing authorities for the year 2006/2007:

Authority	Taxbase	Precept	Collection Fund Surplus/ (Deficit)	Net Yield from C Tax
Bracknell Forest	41,850.00	2,006,289.00	7,517.00	2,013,806.00
Reading	51,293.00	2,458,986.42	0.00	2,458,986.42
Slough	39,213.70	1,879,904.78	0.00	1,879,904.78
West Berkshire	58,641.06	2,811,252.42	23,183.00	2,834,435.42
Windsor & Maidenhead	63,272.39	3,033,278.38	4,923.00	3,038,201.38
Wokingham	63,174.10	3,028,566.35	(17,682.00)	3,010,884.35
<b>Total</b>	<b>317,444.25</b>	<b>15,218,277.35</b>	<b>17,941.00</b>	<b>15,236,218.35</b>

- 3 That the Medium Term Financial Plan, the Capital Programme and the Prudential Indicators, Treasury Strategy and Investment Strategy as set out in Appendices B, E and F respectively be approved.**

### **1.12/06 INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (IRMP) CONSULTATION RESULTS**

The Authority received a report (Agenda item 13 – not reproduced) on the results of the IRMP consultation process, and were requested, as recommended by the IRMP Working Party, to approve the Year III IRMP without further amendment for implementation on 1 April 2006.

Members were reminded that a key element of modernisation within the UK Fire Service is that individual Fire Authorities will adopt a locally determined risk-based approach to managing the risks and resources in their areas, which is known as the IRMP. It is a requirement under this process to consult all appropriate stakeholders on IRMPs, both on the intentions of the plan and the outcomes.

Having commenced formal consultation on the intentions for the Year III IRMP on 1 October it was completed on 31 December 2005 and as with previous years the Fire Brigades' Union have, and continues to be, an integral part of the planning process.

It is also a requirement that following the completion of the consultation process all responses must be evaluated and formally considered by the Fire Authority before it determines the adoption of the IRMP and implementation of the proposed Action Plans on 1 April 2006.

The results of the consultation process was presented in Appendix 1 (not reproduced).. Members attention was drawn to a Table (not reproduced), which indicated that for the three years 2003 to 2005 the total responses received were 37, 110 and 167 respectively. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) advised that whilst the 167 responses received during this year's consultation is an improvement on the 110 received last year it is still disappointing especially when the significant commitment by Officers, which is in excess of 200 hours, dealing with the process is taken into consideration.

Of the responses received 107 were from Internal Stakeholders and 60 from External Stakeholders and a summary of the trends and general points raised during the consultation was set out in the Appendix (not reproduced). One significant trend raised by Internal Stakeholders is the concern that any change to the shift system may have an impact on family life and any such changes should therefore be family friendly. No other consistent or meaningful trends were identified.

Members therefore considered the consultation responses set out in the Appendix and the following is a bullet point summary of the main comments made:

- ❖ Councillor Christine Borgars wished to place on record the Labour Group's thanks to the ACFO, SDO Gollop and the remainder of the Internal Officer Team for all their hard work in producing a very clear, concise and informative IRMP document, which has been widely accepted.
- ❖ Councillor Christine Bateson indicated that whilst the initial response is higher than last year she would prefer to see more responses from external stakeholders. In response to a question the ACFO confirmed that only two Berkshire Unitary Authorities (Slough Borough and Bracknell Forest Borough Councils) had responded.
- ❖ In response to a further question the ACFO confirmed that all the Unitary Local Strategic Partnerships had been consulted with two receiving Presentations. In addition a list identifying key Officers in the Unitary

Authorities have been produced and RBFRS are making more use of Focus Groups.

The ACFO also reported that Officers would be meeting with the Fire Brigades' Union on Thursday and a further meeting of the IRMP Working Party is scheduled to take place on Monday 3 April 2006. In addition work on the development of a five-year plan will be starting in the summer.

Throughout this extensive consultation process no significant proposals or evidence has been given to suggest that any change was needed to the Year III IRMP and Action Plan. It was therefore proposed by Councillor Emma Webster that the proposals contained within the Year III IRMP and Action Plan be progressed as from 1 April 2006 with no amendment. The proposal having been seconded by Councillor David Maclsaac was put to the vote and carried unanimously.

**RESOLVED: That, as recommended by the IRMP Working Party at its meeting on Monday 30 January 2006, the Year III IRMP and Action Plan be approved without further amendment for implementation on 1 April 2006.**

#### **1.13/06      RESPONSE TO OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER (ODPM) CONSULTATION ON LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE**

The Authority's approval was sought (Agenda item 14 – not reproduced) to the proposed response to the ODPM's consultation on Leadership and Development in the Fire and Rescue Service as initiated by Fire and Rescue Service Circular 61-2005, with a closing date for responses of 13 March 2005. An Executive Summary of the Consultation Document had been produced and a copy was presented as Appendix 2 (not reproduced).

It is proposed that the Fire and Rescue Service adopts a transformational as opposed to a transactional leadership model. In noting how this will be delivered as summarised in paragraph 3 of the report (not reproduced), Members were advised that one issue not fully addressed in the Consultation Paper is the capacity of Fire and Rescue Service Authorities to manage the continuous professional development of Chief Fire Officers.

Members therefore supported the Authority's responses to the Response Questionnaire as set out in Appendix 3 (not reproduced), with no amendment.

**RESOLVED: That the proposed consultation response as set out in Appendix 3 be approved for submission to the ODPM**

#### **1.14/06      2005/2006 BUDGET MONITORING**

The Authority was informed (Agenda item 15 – not reproduced) of the Revenue and Capital Expenditure against Budgets up to 31 December 2005 as presented in Appendices A and B respectively (not reproduced). Whilst the Revenue Budget is underspent by £290,000 as of 31 December 2005, it is anticipated that the Budget will be fully spent by the end of the financial year.

With the approval of the Chairman, the Authority Treasurer tabled a detailed breakdown of the Authority's financial position as shown in Appendix A (not reproduced).

The Authority Treasurer drew Members attention to the fact that income is £252,000 over budget due to the success of the Community Fire Safety Department in attracting third party funding. The additional money is being spent on community

safety initiatives, which could include the funding of an additional post as referred to in the 2006/2007 Budget report.

In response to a question on the number of vacant posts that currently exist in Community Safety and how many of these have not been filled for six months the Chief Fire Officer replied that there are no vacant posts as the posts identified are those that RBFRS would like to create in the future.

**NOTED**

**1.15/06 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the Annual Fire Authority Meeting is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 28 June 2006 in the Council Chamber, Bracknell Forest Borough Council, Easthampstead House, Town Square, Bracknell commencing at 6.30pm.

**1.16/05 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 I of Schedule 12A of the said Act indicated:

	<b>Agenda item</b>	<b>Paragraph</b>
17A	Chairman's Communications (Additional Item)	1
18	Part II Minutes: Wednesday 14 December 2005	1, 7 & 8
19	Part II Minutes of Committees	1, 7 & 8
20	Fire Brigades' National Employers Circular EMP/1/06	1

*(Note: The following is a summary of the items considered in the Part II Agenda of the Fire Authority meeting held on Wednesday 8 February 2006)*

**1.17/06 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS**

In response to a letter from the Fire Brigades' Union regarding the firefighters pension scheme and proposed strike ballot, Members approved the Authority's Draft letter to the ODPM.

**1.18/06 PART 11 MINUTES: 14 DECEMBER 2005**

The Part II Minutes of the last meeting held on Wednesday 14 December 2005 were received and approved as a correct record.

**1.19/06 PART II MINUTES OF COMMITTEES**

The Authority was advised of the Executive Committee meetings that have taken place since the last meeting of the Fire Authority in December 2005.

**1.20/06 FIRE BRIGADES NATIONAL EMPLOYERS CIRCULAR EMP/1/06**

The Authority approved the Authority's response and future action to a request from the Fire Brigades National Employers Circular EMP/1/06.