

# ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



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**MEETING:** **Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Meeting**

**DATE AND TIME:** **Wednesday 13 December 2000 at 6.30pm**

**VENUE:** **Frank Hutchings Memorial Hall, Bradley  
Moore Square, Harts Hill Road, Thatcham  
Berkshire**

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## NOTICE OF MEETING

You are requested to attend the above meeting at the time and date indicated, when it is proposed to deal with the business set out in the attached Agenda. A buffet will be provided before the meeting.

D C H Williams  
Clerk to the Authority

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**To: MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY**

Mrs C Bateson, J C G Brooks T Bucknell, R J Day, T P Dredge, R A Flood,  
E L Glasson, A Gregory, J P Green, E E Herbert, Mrs V Howes O E Jeffrey,  
D W Liddiard, T D McCann, D McCarthy, T Mills, J E R Mole, J Morris,  
Mrs J Orton, D Parker, M Pritchett, B J S Patman, Ms K Peak, A J Ross,  
D Wilson

**Briefing Meetings:**

Conservative Group: 5.45pm - Hall 2  
Labour Group: 5.45pm - Hall 1 (Screend Off Area)  
Liberal Democrat Group: 5.45pm - Committee Room

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**For Further Information regarding this meeting, please contact:  
David R Weller (0118) 932 2288**



ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY  
WEDNESDAY 13 DECEMBER 2000



## AGENDA

### PART I AGENDA

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*To note that the next Fire Authority meeting is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 14 March 2001 in the Council Chamber, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Town Hall, St Ives Road, Maidenhead commencing at 6.30pm.*

*Members are advised that the Annual Fire Authority meeting in June 2001 will be hosted by Bracknell Forest Borough Council.*

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**AGENDA ITEM 2: MEMBERSHIP OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE  
FIRE AUTHORITY**

**To:** Royal Berkshire Fire Authority  
**Date:** 13 December 2000  
**Officer Contributing:** Clerk & Monitoring Officer

**A PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To advise Members of changes in the representative membership of the Fire Authority.

**B PROPOSED ACTION**

The Authority is invited to NOTE the report.

**C FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications.

**D CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

There is no contribution to the Strategic Plan.

**E SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

The Fire Authority has been advised of the following changes in its Member representation:

**Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead**

Councillor D Wilson replacing Councillor J Tryon (Conservative)

**F BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Notification of change from Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

**Contact Officer:** David R Weller (0118) 932 2288



**AGENDA ITEM 3: MINUTES: 6 SEPTEMBER 2000**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY HELD IN THE FRANK HUTCHINGS MEMORIAL HALL, BRADLEY MOORE SQUARE, THATCHAM ON WEDNESDAY 6 SEPTEMBER 2000 COMMENCING AT 6.30PM AND CONCLUDED AT 8.03PM**

**Present: J C G Brooks (Chairman), B J S Patman (Vice-Chairman), Mrs C Bateson, T Bucknell, R J Day, R A Flood, E L Glasson, John P Green, E E Herbert, Mrs V Howes, O E Jeffery, D W Liddiard, T D McCann, T Mills, J E R Mole, D Parker, M Pritchett, J Tryon**

**Apologies: T P Dredge, A Gregory, D McCarthy, A J Ross**

**3.01/00 MEMBERSHIP OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY**

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 2 - not reproduced) of the following changes in the representative membership:

**Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead**

Councillor M Pritchett (Lib/Dem) replacing Councillor Mrs S Lanehart

**Wokingham District Council**

Councillor J P Green (Con) replacing Councillor D Ball  
Councillor A J Ross (Con) replacing Councillor R Turner

The Chairman on behalf of the Fire Authority welcomed Councillors J Green and M Pritchett to the meeting.

**NOTED**

**3.02/00 MINUTES: JUNE 2000**

The Minutes of the last meeting held on Wednesday 24 June 2000, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following comments/amendments:

**2.07/00 Chairman's Communications**

In response to a question the Chairman confirmed that the Members Induction Day was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 1 November 2000 and the



programme for the day together with a response form would be circulated shortly.

**2.16/00      Emergency Special Service Calls - Issues and Implications  
of Levying Charges: Progress Report**

In Resolution 1 delete "approved in principle and that" and insert "noted and"

**3.03/00      PART I MINUTES OF SUB-GROUPS**

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 4 - not reproduced) of the Personnel Committee, Performance Review and Audit Panel, Urgency Committee, Community Safety Panel and Fire Liaison Group meetings that had taken place since the last meeting. Members were advised that copies of the Part I Minutes were available from the Committee Administrator.

**NOTED**

**3.04/00      CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS**

The Chairman had nothing to report.

**3.05/00      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.

**3.06/00      QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS**

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

**3.07/00      NOTICES OF MOTION**

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

**3.08/00      APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS TO ATTEND FIRE  
CONFERENCE IN MANCHESTER**

The Authority's approval was sought (Agenda item 9 - not reproduced) to the



appointment of the Fire Authority's delegates to attend the Fire Conference in Manchester in November.

**RESOLVED:** That Councillors J C G Brooks and B J S Patman, together with a representative of the Labour Group (to be nominated by the Party Spokesperson) be appointed to attend the Fire Conference in Manchester on 6 - 9 November 2000.

**3.09/00            MODERNISING LOCAL GOVERNMENT: STRATEGIC  
PLANNING AND THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIRE  
AUTHORITY**

The views of the new Authority were sought (Agenda item 10 - not reproduced) as to whether they were satisfied that the present structure of the Authority was best suited to meet the Authority and Service's Strategic Objectives.

Members were advised that under the agreed Strategic Plan, the Clerk was required to raise this subject. Following consideration of the proposals set out in the report and the implications of these proposals on the future structure of the Authority it was **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1        Any decision in respect of Resolution 1 and 2(i) be deferred and that the Clerk be requested to present reports on specific proposals relating to the role of Committees/Panels/Working Parties and the feasibility of establishing a fully independent Standards Committee to the Fire Authority meeting in December for consideration and determination.
- 2        In future membership of any Grievance or Disputes Panel should be open to every Member of the Fire Authority subject to suitable training.

**3.10/00            FINAL ACCOUNTS - YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2000**

The Authority's approval was sought (Agenda item 11 - not reproduced) to the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2000.

Members were advised that the Statement of Accounts had been prepared in accordance with Part III of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996 as summarised in paragraph 3 of the report (not reproduced). Members attention was also drawn to paragraph 4 of the report (not reproduced) which detailed the External Audit process.

In considering the Statement circulated with the Agenda (not reproduced) it was agreed that the Authority Treasurer be requested to:

- Produce a Factsheet on the implications of and background to the Fire-Fighters Pension Fund for circulation to Members;



- In future reports identify the high and low percentage increases and produce explanatory text;
- Produce a greater level of explanation in respect of paragraphs 3a and 3b as set out on page 8 of the Statement for circulation to Members.

**RESOLVED:** That the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2000 be approved.

### **3.11/00 FUTURE OF BRIGADE FIRE CONTROL ROOM**

The Authority received a report (Agenda item 12 - not reproduced) on the publication of a national report by HM Fire Service Inspectorate into the future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales, together with the possible effects upon this Brigade's Control Room and approval was sought to the way forward currently being explored by the Chief Fire Officer.

The report prepared by Mott Macdonald had been commissioned by the Home Office was to achieve substantial financial savings for all Fire Authorities and how best to meet their future mobile communications and control requirements. The report identified Best Value options in the provision of Fire Control Rooms, considering amalgamation with other emergency services/Fire Brigade Control Rooms and/or a mixture of both options. Members were advised that the report outlining the options for communications has yet to be published.

The report concluded that the requirements of Best Value would best be met by appropriate amalgamations of Fire Control Rooms and based on an illustrative model suggested that this Brigade's Fire Control Room should amalgamate with those of Oxfordshire County Council, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority and Northamptonshire County Council to create a separate Control Room Agency. The Agency could be funded proportionately by the constituent Brigades and directed by a Board comprising a small number of Elected Members from each Authority.

The Chief Fire Officer of Northamptonshire considered however that the alignment of that Authority should be with East Midlands rather than the Thames Valley. Accordingly the Chief Fire Officers have submitted a proposal for a single Control Room serving the three Thames Valley Brigades to HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services, together with a request to the Home Office for funding to appoint consultants to assist with a feasibility study. To date no response has been received to this request.

When a final decision has been made there may be implications for the Control Room staff in that a single Control Room may result in a need for less Control staff than those currently employed by the three Brigades. Whilst it was too early to determine how staff would be selected for employment within the Agency-based Control Room, Members were reminded that it may be necessary, at some time in the future, to



consider opportunities for the redeployment of those staff as an alternative to compulsory redundancy.

In noting the recommendations made by HM Fire Service Inspectorate it was **RESOLVED:** That the Chief Fire Officer be:

- (i) authorised to explore the creation of a Thames Valley Fire Control as a separate Agency, of which the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority would be a full partner.
- (ii) requested to present further reports to future Fire Authority meetings as appropriate to keep Members informed of progress or to seek political direction.

### 3.12/00 2001/2002 BUDGET

The Authority received a report (Agenda item 13 - not reproduced) which detailed the

- Preliminary indications of Budget requirements for 2001/2002 and the prospect for 2002/2003 - Appendix A (not reproduced)
- Budget pressures and the Government's Comprehensive Spending Review 2000
- Best Value and Efficiency Savings together with Service and Financial Planning
- Standard Spending Assessments - Appendix B (not reproduced) and Government Expectations
- Budget Process and Timetable - Appendix D (not reproduced)

and approval was sought to the next course of action as detailed in the report. In addition to the Appendices referred to above, Members attention was also drawn to Appendix C (not reproduced) which set out the Fire Service spending compared with SSA in 1999/2000.

In supporting the future course of action as set out in Section B of the report the following amendment to the figures set out in Resolution 1 was agreed:

In Resolution:1:

- (a) delete "£22.0m" and insert "£21.7m" and in
- (c) delete "£22.5m" and insert "£22.8m"

**RESOLVED:** That:

- 1 Officers be asked to submit to submit a report on detailed budget requirements to the Budget Working Party on the implications of setting a budget at the following overall levels:

- |     |        |                              |
|-----|--------|------------------------------|
| (a) | £21.7m | (2000/2001 Budget plus 2.5%) |
| (b) | £22.5m | (2000/2001 Budget plus 5.0%) |
| (c) | £22.8m | (2000/2001 Budget plus 7.5%) |



- 2 Any proposal for budget growth or contractions must incorporate a defined link to Strategic Plan priorities and be prioritised.
- 3 Bearing in mind the Strategic Plan target to improve financial efficiency by 2% per year and the similar aim of the Government's Best Value initiative, the Performance Review and Audit Panel and the Officers to report on the meeting of the financial saving set out in Appendix A (not reproduced).
- 4 A forecast of the likely budget requirements for 2002/2003 and 2003/2004 be produced.
- 5 The proposed budget process and timetable set out in Appendix D (not reproduced) be adopted.

### **3.13/00 FIRE AUTHORITY'S ANNUAL REPORT 1999/2000-09-17**

The Authority's approval was sought (Agenda item 14 – not reproduced) to the 1999/2000 Annual Report which covered the activities and significant aspects of the Brigade for the period 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000.

Copies of the Report were tabled at the meeting and the Chief Fire Officer, in apologising for the lateness of the Report invited Members with any questions on its contents to either contact him or one of his Directors. As with previous years the Annual Report is accompanied by the Strategic Plan 2000-2005 which identifies targets and objectives that span beyond the current financial year.

In noting the distribution arrangements set out in paragraph 5 of the report (not reproduced), Members were advised the Annual Report would eventually be placed on the Brigade's Web-Site. In addition Members asked the Chief Fire Officer, if sufficient copies were available, to investigate the feasibility of circulating a copy of the Report to Secondary Schools in Berkshire and in future years the cost of producing the Report in different languages.

**RESOLVED:** That the 1999/2000 Annual Report be approved.

### **3.14/00 2000/2001 BUDGET MONITORING**

The Authority was informed (Agenda item 15 – not reproduced) of the revenue and Capital expenditure against budgets up to 31 July 2000 as set out in Appendices A and B (not reproduced).

**NOTED**



**3.15/00 PREMISES MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS**

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 16 – not reproduced) of the current and outstanding maintenance requirements for the Authority's building stock. The report had been prepared in response to a resolution agreed at the Fire Authority meeting in June 2000.

The report was based upon the condition survey conducted by Reading Borough Council on behalf of the Authority and details of the outstanding works identified within that survey were presented in Annex A (not reproduced). The recommended works had been placed into Categories 'A', 'B' and 'C'. All category 'A' work had been completed whilst category 'B' work was being prioritised. Category 'C' work would form part of a future programme.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that unfortunately, since the report had been prepared it had become apparent that the Tower at Station 1 would have to be demolished and that options for its replacement were currently being explored.

**NOTED**

**3.16/00 VEHICLE MAINTENANCE – BEST VALUE EXERCISE PROGRESS REPORT**

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 17 – not reproduced) of progress being made with the Vehicle Maintenance Best Value and European Tendering exercise. In noting the progress to date including a copy of the Project Plan presented as Annex A (not reproduced), Members were advised that a further detailed progress report would be presented to the Authority meeting in December prior to its submission to the Urgency Committee in early January 2001 for consideration and approval.

**NOTED**

**3.17/00 HM FIRE SERVICE INSPECTORATE REPORT FOLLOWING PERFORMANCE REVIEW INSPECTION**

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 18 – not reproduced) of the receipt of the Report following the Performance Review Inspection carried out in the Brigade by HM Inspectorate on 26 and 27 January 2000 which analysed ten aspects of the Brigade's performance as summarised in paragraph 2 of the report (not reproduced).

The Report, a copy of which had been circulated to Members, was extremely supportive and complimentary about the performance of the Authority and the Brigade. The Report contained only three recommendations all of which were being actioned at the time of the Inspection.



In congratulating the Chief Fire Officer and other Officers on the excellent report, Members asked that reference to the Inspection Report and its availability be placed on the Brigade's Web-Site. In response to a request from a Member the Chief Fire Officer agreed to investigate the feasibility of extending the Brigade's Counselling Service to garage personnel who attend major accidents.

**NOTED**

### **3.18/00 FIRES, INCIDENTS AND ISSUES OF INTEREST**

The Authority received a report (Agenda item 19 – not reproduced) summarising some of the incidents attended by the Brigade during the period May 1 to 31 July 2000 together with extracts from letters of thanks and appreciation and news from around the Brigade.

**NOTED**

### **3.19/00 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Wednesday 13 December 2000 at the Frank Hutchings Memorial Hall, Thatcham commencing at 6.30pm. Members were advised that Fire Authority meetings in March and June 2001 would be held at the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Bracknell Forest Borough Council respectively.

### **3.20/00 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>
22	Part II Minutes – Wednesday 14 June 2000-09-17	1, 8, 9 & 11
23	Part II Minutes of Sub-Groups	1, 8 & 9

*(Note: The following is a summary of the items considered in the Part II Agenda of the Fire Authority meeting held on Wednesday 6 September 2000)*



**3.21/00      PART II MINUTES:      JUNE 2000**

The Part II Minutes of the last meeting held on Wednesday 14 June 2000 were received and approved as a correct record.

**3.22/00      PART II MINUTES OF SUB-GROUPS**

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 23 – not reproduced) of the Sub-Group meetings that had been held since the last Fire Authority meeting.

Signed.....  
Chairman

**Date: 13 December 2000**



**AGENDA ITEM 4:****PART I MINUTES OF SUB-GROUPS**

**To:** Royal Berkshire Fire Authority  
**Date:** 13 December 2000  
**Officer Contributing:** Clerk & Monitoring Officer

**A PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To advise Members on meetings of the Personnel Committee, Urgency Committee, Performance Review and Audit Panel Community Fire Safety Panel and the Fire Liaison Group that have taken place since the last meeting of the Fire Authority in September 2000.

**B PROPOSED ACTION**

The Authority is invited to NOTE the report.

**C FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications.

**D SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 1 The following meetings have taken place since the last Fire Authority meeting in June 2000:

**Personnel Committee:** Wednesday 1 November 2000

**Performance Review  
and Audit Panel** Thursday 2 November 2000

**Urgency Committee** Monday 9 October and Monday 4 December 2000

**Fire Liaison Group** Monday 27 November 2000

**Community Safety Panel** Monday 9 October 2000

- 2 Copies of the Part I Minutes (if available) can be obtained from David Weller on (0118) 932 2288)

**E BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Agenda's and Minutes for the above mentioned meetings

**Contact Officer:** David R Weller (0118) 932 2288



**AGENDA ITEM 6:****PETITIONS - PROPOSED REMOVAL OF  
RESCUE SUPPORT VEHICLE FROM NEWBURY****To:****Royal Berkshire Fire Authority****Date:****13 December 2000****Officers Contributing:****Chief Fire Officer****Clerk & Monitoring Officer****A PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To inform Members that the Fire Authority has received two Petitions under Standing Order 8 relating to the proposed removal of the Rescue Support Vehicle from Newbury and supporting the Fire-Fighters and Control Staff in Berkshire. Under Standing Order 8 the Petition Organiser or his/her representative may address the Fire Authority on the subject of the Petition for not more than five minutes.

**B PROPOSED ACTION**

The Authority is invited to **RESOLVE: That**

- 1 The Petitions be received and considered in conjunction with Agenda item 13 (Budget 2001/2002).
- 2 The Petition Organisers be informed of the Fire Authority's decision.

**C FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications.

**D CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

There is no contribution to the Strategic Plan

**E SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 1 The following Petitions have been received from:

(a) Mr I A Wood, Upper Lambourn containing 135 signatures

“ I am writing to you all with reference to a very important piece of equipment/ emergency vehicle that we the people of Lambourn rely on and are about to suffer from the movement of, what will effect us most is a much greater response time of the vehicle. The Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue are at the moment deciding whether or not to move this Vehicle from its current location in Newbury to a different Station within the County of Berkshire. This to us as a remote part of the



County would mean a far greater response time when that unit is called upon like the Maltshovel Lane incident on September 6 2000.

Therefore I as local trainer am asking you as local people, employees, employers and owners to support me with this Petition to the Fire Service and see if we can make a difference in protecting our livelihoods.”

(b) Mr C McFadden, Maidenhead containing 1927 signatures

“We, the undersigned, support the firefighters and control staff in Berkshire who are resisting changes that will reduce and endanger the level of service provided to us, the public who live in the county.

We agree with the firefighters and control staff that there should be:

- a guarantee of at least five firefighters on every pumping appliance in the county;
- a guarantee that professional local control staff will not be relocated outside the county;
- dedicated specialist crews available in all parts of the county twenty-four hours a day.

We recognise that the people of Berkshire deserve a professional fire service and that at present we pay less than 7 ½ pence per day for that service. Compared with other services we recognise that this excellent value for money. We agree with the firefighters that an increase to only eight pence per day would allow all special appliances in Newbury, Whitley Wood and Slough to be primary-crewed twenty-four hours a day.”

*(Note: It is understood that further signatures may be received and these will be reported at the meeting)*

- 2 With regard to the first Petition, Mr Wood, the Petition Organiser has advised the Clerk that he does not wish to address the Fire Authority meeting on the subject of his Petition. It is understood that Mr McFadden will be addressing the meeting.
- 3 The Petitions relate to proposals set out in the Review of Special Appliances considered by the Performance Review and Audit Panel at its meeting on Thursday 2 November 2000. The Panel resolved that the outcome of the review be referred to the Budget Working Party for consideration and recommendation to the Fire Authority meeting in December 2000. The second Petition also refers to the number of fire-fighters on pumping appliances and the re-location of the Control staff.
- 4 Accordingly this matter has been included in the Budget report (Agenda item 13) which sets out the recommendations of the Budget Working Party. It is therefore suggested that the Petitions be considered in conjunction with that report and Members are therefore asked to Resolve accordingly and decide whether they wish the Petition Organiser of the



second Petition, or his representative, to address the meeting at this point or during consideration of the Budget report.

- 5 Under Standing Order 8(d) the Petition Organiser, or his/her representative, can address the Authority on the subject of the Petition for not more than five minutes. Members are not entitled to speak during the Petition Organiser's address or ask questions unless it relates to a point of clarification.

## **E BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 1 Petition received from Mr Ian A Wood
- 2 Petition received from Mr C McFadden
- 3 Fire Authority Standing Order 8

**Contact Officer:** David R Weller (0118) 932 2288







2. In noting the recommendations made by HM Fire Service Inspectorate the Authority Resolved:  

“That the Chief Fire Officer be authorised to explore the creation of a Thames Valley Fire Control as a separate Agency, of which the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority would be a full partner.”
3. In October a meeting took place between the Chief Fire officer's of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire on the future of Control Rooms. The outcome of that meeting was that the proposals put forward by this Brigade relating to the Consultation process and the establishment of a Joint Member Steering Panel have been approved by Members of Buckinghamshire County Council. Although the matter has not yet been put presented to Oxfordshire Members no problems were anticipated.
4. It is anticipated that Royal Berkshire would be the lead Authority in terms of arranging and Clerking the Members Steering Panel although final approval to this proposal is still to be sought from the Clerk's to the other two Authorities.
5. The Clerk and Monitoring Officer is currently preparing a Draft Constitution and Terms of Reference and initially they will be presented to an Officers meeting for consideration and discussion prior to them being presented to all three Authorities for approval.
6. Subject to no adverse comments or objections being received it is anticipated that the inaugural meeting will take place in January 2001 in Berkshire with future meetings taking place at locations in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire on a rotating basis.
7. Members are therefore asked to appoint the three Authority representatives together with their named Standing Deputies.

## **E BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Agenda item 12: Fire Authority meeting in September 2000  
Minutes of Brigade Management Team Meeting - 12 October 2000

**Contact Officer:** David R Weller (0118) 932 2288



**AGENDA ITEM 10:****MODERNIZING LOCAL GOVERNMENT –  
STANDARDS COMMITTEE****To:****Royal Berkshire Fire Authority****Date:****13 December 2000****Officer Contributing:****Clerk and Monitoring Officer**

Chief Fire Officer

Authority Treasurer

**A PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To seek approval to the establishment and constitution of a Standards Committee for the Authority.

**B PROPOSED ACTION**

The Authority is invited to **RESOLVE: That:**

- 1 A Standards Committee of 7 be established with one member nominated by each of the political groups and 4 'Independent Members' appointed by the Authority from those responding to a County wide advertisement.
- 2 The Terms of Reference of the Committee should be those set out in Appendix 1, suitably amended.

**C FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

These are minimal and will depend on how often the proposed Standards Committee has to meet. It is not envisaged that it will meet frequently.

**D CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

It is fundamental to the delivery of the Strategic Plan that the public has confidence in the integrity of the Authority.

**E SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 1 Under the Local Government Act 1999, the Authority is required to establish a Standards Committee with independent membership.
- 2 Following the last meeting of the Authority on 6 September, the Clerk contacted the 6 Unitary Councils for information on how they were approaching the issue.



3 Replies were received from Slough Borough, Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead and Wokingham District.

4	Slough -	Standards Committee -	10
		Majority party	3
		Opposition party	3
		Independents	4
	RBWM	Standards Committee -	7
		Mayor	1
		Opposition Backbencher	1
		Independents	5
	Wokingham District	Ethics/Standards/Audit Committee -	10
		Liberal Democrat	5
		Conservative	5

5 In Slough an advertisement was placed in the press and the independent members were selected from those responding. If a complaint is received and directed at an individual Councillor, the Panel hearing it will be drawn exclusively from the independents.

6 In the case of RBWM, 50 organisations were approached and 15 nominations received. The selection of organisations gave rise to some criticism and RBWM will be recommended to also adopt open advertisement in future.

7 In Wokingham, the present arrangement is interim, and one of the terms of reference of the Ethics/Standards/Audit Committee is to advise on the introduction of non-councillors into the process. It is also understood that the DETR and LGA are working on model guidance, yet to be issued.

8 RBWM and Wokingham supplied the terms of reference for their new Committee and these are set out in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 respectively.

## **F BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

**Contact Officer:** Clive Williams: (0118) 932 2284



**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**STANDARDS BOARD**

1. To advise the Council on the adoption, operation, review and amendment of a local Code of Conduct for Members and Officers.
2. To be responsible for ensuring compliance throughout the Council with all appropriate codes of conduct and procedures, including (but not limited to):
  - i. the National Code of Local Government Conduct;
  - ii. the Local Codes of Conduct (when adopted);
  - iii. the Council's Standing Orders;
  - iv. the Council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy;
  - v. the Council's complaints procedures;
  - vi. the seven principles of public life set out in the Nolan Report.
3. To monitor and review the various corporate complaints procedures and complaints submitted through the Local Government Ombudsman.
4. To act as an interface with the Regional Standards Board.
5. To "consider and determine any allegations against Members of the Council of misconduct" (e.g. the breach of the National Code) and to resolve upon or recommend to the Council any sanction it sees fit as a consequence of a finding of misconduct.
6. To be responsible for liaison between the Council and any external agencies (e.g. Police, District Auditor) on matters relating to its role.
7. To provide training and guidance to Members on issue of conduct, standards and probity.

**Specific Delegations**

1. To make recommendations to the Council on the adoption, implementation, maintenance and review of a Local Code of Conduct for Members and Officers.
2. To make recommendations to the Council on the discretionary elements of the Local Code of Conduct, including monitoring and revisions.
3. To consider and make recommendations on the effective training of Councillors in matters of conduct and advice to individual Councillors on issues relating to the treatment of personal interests and the propriety of conduct generally.
4. To determine the appropriate action on matters referred to it by the Regional Standards Board, other than specific complaints arising from the Code of Conduct.



## TERMS OF REFERENCE

5. To undertake formal investigations into matters referred to the Board by the Monitoring Officer.
6. To use disciplinary powers as appropriate to recommend to Council any or all of the following:
  - i. censure;
  - ii. require a formal apology to the complainant to be made;
  - iii. withdrawal of Council facilities;
  - iv. removal of the Member from office/positions held;
  - v. request to the relevant political group to take appropriate action in respect of the Member;
  - vi. to make a formal referral of the Member's conduct to the appropriate agency, e.g. the Police.
7. To ensure compliance throughout the Council with all appropriate Codes of Conduct and procedures from time to time approved by this Board.
8. To review and recommend amendments to corporate, directorate and Ombudsman complaints procedures.
9. To consider and determine appropriate matters referred to the Board.
10. To make recommendations to the Council on the adoption, operation, review and amendment of the Code of Conduct of Council Employees.
11. To consider and make recommendations to Council on the Members' Allowance Scheme and to monitor and review its operation.
12. To arrange for an Ethical Governance Audit of the Council, its processes and procedures to be undertaken and to consider the report and make appropriate recommendations upon it to the Council.

### Membership

1. The Standards Board shall comprise five non-councillor (lay) members and two Councillors, one from each of the two main parties in accordance with the Criteria and Procedure for the Board.
2. Criteria for lay membership of the Standards Board
 

Close links to the local community, e.g. at least one of the following:

  - i. Resident in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.
  - ii. Working in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.
  - iii. Any other close objective link.



## TERMS OF REFERENCE

3. Not politically active, i.e. not a political appointee, not an MP, not a current Parish, District or County Councillor, not a former Parish, District or County Councillor within the previous ten years or an aspiring future Councillor. Not active in any political parties and having no public links to any of the political parties.
4. Not an employee or former employee of the Council.
5. Not involved in the Council, e.g. not a major supplier, partner, contractor, employee.
6. A proven track record of contribution to the community. This could involve working in the local community, e.g. as a GP, or having active community links via e.g. the voluntary sector or via public bodies.
7. Evidence of relevant experience, e.g. used to the process of hearing and evaluating evidence and coming to a fair decision, used to dealing with complaints on issues of probity, ability to act with impartiality, independence and without fear or favour.
8. Exemplary personal character - i.e. a person of sufficient status locally to command respect and public credence.
9. Available and willing to undertake the role.
10. The Chairman shall be selected from 1 of the 5 Lay Members.
11. Councillor Members of Standards Board

Councillor appointments to the Standards Board shall be one from the majority group and one from the largest minority group.

Members of the Cabinet shall not be eligible to be appointed to the Standards Board.

Appointment of Councillors to the Standards Board should take account of the individual standing of the Councillor, their experience in dealing with matters similar to those to be considered by the Standards Board and the criteria underlying the appointment of Lay Members.

### Selection of Lay Members

The selection of lay members must be kept non-political.



## TERMS OF REFERENCE

An invitation will be sent to likely individuals and to key stakeholders requesting nominations against the criteria on a confidential basis. Stakeholders can, amongst others, include the following:

- The Chambers of Commerce
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Police Authority
- Health Authority/Trusts/PCGs
- Major businesses locally
- Local religious leaders
- Local community groups and voluntary groups, e.g. via the CAB, CVS or direct to e.g. the Lions, the Rotary Group, Soroptimists, WAMSAD etc
- Local housing associations
- Parish councils

Nominees meeting the criteria will be sought from the types of organisations set out above and from stake-holders and local political parties (making it clear that it will not be a political appointment). It is not appropriate to have anybody employed by the Council or by another Berkshire Council nominated. The candidates to be proposed as lay members should also represent, as far as possible, the geographical spread of the Council area. The candidates meeting the criteria will be referred to the Cabinet for recommendation to Council, which will make the appointments.

### Term of Office

Initially for a period of one year but with the option to reappoint.

### Operation

Members of the Board will seek to achieve a consensus view to recommend to Council. The Board will not have executive powers and, in the event of a disputed recommendation, individual Members' views will be reported to the Council.

### Process

1. The Terms of Reference of the Standards Board will be made known publicly and advertised as well as specific notification that any complaint concerning a Councillor should be made in the first instance, to the Monitoring Officer. Complaints can also be made to other Councillors or other officers who should then refer them to the Monitoring Officer.
2. An initial review will be undertaken to exclude vexatious complaints, ones outside the Board's scope or ones that have already been investigated. This review will include the following:
  - i. check the complaint is about an existing Councillor;



## TERMS OF REFERENCE

- ii. make sure the complainant has identified themselves and is willing to undergo the process;
  - iii. check the complaint does relate to "misconduct";
  - iv. check the complaint should not also be referred (or referred instead) to someone else, e.g. Police or District Auditor;
  - v. check it has not already been investigated;
  - vi. check there is sufficient information to justify a fuller investigation;
  - vii. check it is not frivolous or vexatious.
3. Complaints may be made by anyone. They are not limited to people on the Electoral Roll (this would exclude people working in the area who may be being directly affected), they also include members of staff and other Councillors.
  4. The complaint should be made in writing and should identify the Councillor or Councillors complained of, the issue of complaint and must be signed by the person complaining.
  5. If the Monitoring Officer believes that the matter should not proceed, the complainant has a right for that decision to be reviewed by the Chairman of the Standards Board.
  6. If the complaint is accepted it will proceed to a full investigation carried out by the Monitoring Officer or a nominee.
  7. As part of the investigation, the Member complained of will have the right to:
    - i. receive a full copy of the complaint;
    - ii. to be invited for interview and to submit additional material;
    - iii. to have a copy of the report which will be made available 10 days before it is considered by the Standards Board ;
    - iv. to attend the relevant Standards Board, with a representative if required, and give evidence (the Member will be excluded when the Board goes into private session).
  8. The Leader and Chief Executive of the Council will normally be invited to attend a Standards Board meeting to offer advice and comment but will withdraw when the Board is considering its recommendation.
  9. The Standards Board reports its recommendations to Council. At this stage, it is a public report and the matter is considered in public session.



## APPENDIX 2

## WOKINGHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING	ETHICS/STANDARDS /AUDIT COMMITTEE
NUMBER OF PLACES	10
POLITICAL BALANCE	5 CONSERVATIVE
	5 LIBERAL DEMOCRAT
FRQUENCY OF MEETINGS	ONCE EACH CYCLE

## INDICATIVE TERMS OF REFERENCE AND POWERS

Subject to the general reservation of powers to the Council

the terms of reference of the Committee shall be as follows and it shall have delegated authority to exercise and perform the Powers and Duties of the Council in relation to the following functions:-

- (1). To monitor expenditure and income against the budgets under its control, taking appropriate action to keep within its overall budget allocation and reporting to the Policy and Strategy Committee on any discrepancies which cannot be accommodated.
- (2). To consider any specific matters referred by the Council or a Committee or Sub-Committee of the Council
- (3). To identify issues, which in the view of the Committee represent a major change in policy for reference to the Council.
- (4). To exercise responsibility for performance in relation to matters under its control, having regard to economy, efficiency and effectiveness, ensuring compliance with the Council's Key Objectives and the highest standards of customer care, giving due consideration to the implications of any decision taken.
- (5). Within allocated resources and agreed policy priorities, such other activities as may contribute to the assessment and fulfillment of present and future needs either by the Council or other organisations as appropriate.
- (6). To review with management the adequacy of the internal control system.
- (7). To review the adequacy of the authority's business systems and procedures.
- (8). To review with management the adequacy of policies and practices to ensure compliance with relevant statutes, directions, guidance and policies.
- (9). To review with management compliance with the relevant standards or codes of corporate governance.



- (10). To review with management the financial statements.
- (11). To ensure that the internal audit function is adequately resourced and has appropriate standing within the body.
- (12). To review the activities of the internal audit function, including its work programme, co-ordination with the external auditors, the reports of significant investigations, and the responses of executive management to specific recommendations.
- (13). To manage on behalf of the Council all aspects of its relationship with external auditors, including: -
- considering the objectives and scope of any non-audit or consultancy work which it is proposed should be undertaken by the external auditors, and to review the remuneration for this work;
  - discussing with the external auditors before the audit commences the scope of the audit and the extent of reliance on internal audit and other review agencies;
  - discussing with the external auditors any significant issues arising from the review of the financial statements;
  - reviewing the external auditor's management letter and management's response. This also to go to the Policy and Strategy Committee.
- (14). Making, monitoring and reviewing the Council's Contract and Financial Regulations.
- (15). To develop and to keep under review the framework and supporting codes, in accordance with any relevant legislative provision and good practice, for the achievement of high standards of conduct of Officers and Members of the Authority, including monitoring and reporting on compliance with them.
- (16). To set up and to keep under review appropriate procedural arrangements for any alleged breaches of those standards or codes to be drawn to the attention of the Council's Monitoring Officer, otherwise known as "Whistle Blowing Arrangements".
- (17). To set up and to keep under review appropriate procedural arrangements, including the involvement of an independent person, for the proper investigation of alleged breaches of the standards or codes.
- (18). To work in partnership with statutory and other appropriate Bodies, set up by Government, to foster and to oversee the maintenance of high standards of conduct in public life.
- (19). To determine any issues needing Member decision arising from any Contract for outsourced services under the control of the Committee.



**AGENDA ITEM 11: MODERNISING LOCAL GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE OF FIRE AUTHORITY**

**To:** Royal Berkshire Fire Authority  
**Date:** 13 December 2000  
**Officer Contributing:** Clerk and Monitoring Officer  
Authority Treasurer  
Chief Fire Officer

**A PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To review the Authority's Committee Structure.

**B PROPOSED ACTION**

The Authority is invited to **RESOLVE: That:**

- 1 Membership of the Performance Review and Audit Panel (PRAP) be increased from 6 to 9.
- 2 Membership of the Community Safety Panel be increased from 3 to 6.
- 3 PRAP be authorised to approve the Best Value Performance Plan in the event that it is impossible to obtain Authority approval within the required timescale.
- 4 To leave unaltered its Committees, Budget Working Party and Fire Liaison Group.
- 5 In the event of Members approving Resolutions 1 and 2 above to appoint the following three additional Member representatives to the:
  - Performance Review and Audit Panel.....
  - Community Safety Panel.....

**C FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There will be some increase in Members' Allowances if the size of some Panels is increased.

**D CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

It is important to the Authority's Committee Structure is such that decisions are taken at the appropriate level without any undue delay.

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Main body of handwritten text, appearing to be a list or series of notes, with some numbers and symbols interspersed.



## **E SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 1 At their meeting on 6 September, the Authority gave preliminary consideration to the Committee structure and requested further information.
- 2 Unlike the Constituent Unitary Councils, the Authority is not subject to the requirements of the Local Government Act 1999, and is still free to determine its Committee structure regardless of the provisions of the 1999 Act.
- 3 The Authority's present structure is very functional, in that Committees, Panel or Working Parties have been established to meet a perceived need. As a result they meet as and when there is business to be transacted and not otherwise. The Terms of Reference of each body are contained in the Members Handbook and are reproduced as Appendix 1 for ease of reference.
- 4 The Authority presently has 2 Committees, 2 Panels, a Working Party and a Liaison Group.

### **i Committees**

#### **a Urgency Committee**

The Committee meets only when there is a decision to be taken, which could not reasonably be delayed to the full Fire Authority. The fact that all three Party groups are represented on the Urgency Committee ensures that no minority group is disadvantaged. It is felt that the procedure works efficiently and fairly and that no changes are required.

#### **b Personnel Committee**

The Committee has 6 members. As one of its functions is to make senior appointments, it is considered to be of the right size.

It was also given enhanced powers earlier this year so again it is not considered that any changes are required.

### **ii Panels**

#### **a Performance Review and Audit Panel**

There are presently 6 members on the panel.

It is envisaged that the work of the Panel will become increasingly important as work on the Authority's Best Value Plan intensifies. The keen interest that is being taken by the public and FBU in the outcome of the Review of Specialist Vehicles is a case in point.

It is considered that the Best Value Plan, should remain an Authority document requiring Authority approval but there is an issue as to whether the Panel should be



given delegated powers to approve the Plan, should there not be a convenient Authority Plan meeting, or whether approval should be dealt with by the Urgency Committee.

The Authority may also wish to consider increasing the size of the Panel from 6 to 9. As mentioned at the meeting on 6 September, 9 Members of the Authority are unable to sit on any Committee, Panel or Working Party.

**b Community Safety Panel**

There are presently 3 members on the Panel. Again it is felt that the Community Safety Plan should be a Fire Authority document but there is not the same statutory timescale as in the case of the Best Value Plan, so that there is no need to require urgency action. But the Authority may wish to consider increasing the size of the Panel to say 6.

**iii Budget Working Party**

The Budget Working Party comprises 6 members and could not be given executive powers. No change is envisaged.

**iv Royal Berkshire Fire Liaison Group**

The Group in total comprises 6, with the Authority having 3 places for the 3 party spokespersons. As the Group exists to enable the Authority and the Unions to raise matters of mutual concern, no changes are envisaged.

**F BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- i Local Government Act 1999
- ii Report to Fire Authority – 6 September 2000

**Contact Officer:** Clive Williams (0118) 932 2284



TR1

**TERMS OF REFERENCE OF COMMITTEES****1 URGENCY COMMITTEE**

Where, as a matter of urgency, any decision or direction of the Authority is required and cannot be reasonably delayed until a meeting of the Authority, such decision shall be made by its Urgency Committee and reported to the next meeting of the Authority for information.

Meetings of the Urgency Committee shall only be called for items which are truly urgent. Any decisions involving a change in policy or new policy will be referred to the next or a special meeting of the Authority. The Clerk will determine whether or not a matter is suitable for urgency action.

**Membership**

The Urgency Committee shall consist of the nominated spokesperson of the three largest party groups concerned.

**Quorum**

The quorum for the Urgency Committee will be 2 Members.

**2 PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**

- 1 To determine matters, including staff appeals, relating to uniformed employees of the Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service.
- 2 To determine appeals submitted by employees of the Authority in accordance with the Authority's local disciplinary, grievance and capability procedures.
- 3 To make recommendations to the Authority in the case of appeals involving individual grievances, whenever its decision would have resource implications for the Authority.
- 4 To invite the Authority to review the effects of the policy relating to an individual grievance whenever it believes that to be the appropriate course of action.
- 5 To agree corporate personnel policies, unless there are major policy or resource implications for the Authority when the Committee shall consider and recommend to the Authority.



## TR2

- 6 To approve the Authority's response to consultation on Local and National Council negotiations affecting Conditions of Service
- 7 The consideration of fairness and equality issues and reporting to the Fire Authority as appropriate.

**Membership**

The Personnel Committee shall comprise 6 Members. Membership (3) of the Grievance or Disputes Panel shall be open to every Member of the Fire Authority

**Quorum**

The quorum for the Personnel Committee will be 3 Members.

**3 BUDGET WORKING PARTY**

To consider and make recommendations to the Authority on issues relating to its budget.

**Membership**

The Working Party shall consist of 6 Members.

**Quorum**

The quorum for the Budget Working Party will be 3 Members.

**4 PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND AUDIT PANEL**

- 1 To oversee via the Best Value Performance Plan:
  - (i) setting of clear priorities for the Fire Authority;
  - (ii) the consultation arrangements with local residents and other stake holders;
  - (iii) the selection of services for thematic areas to review;
  - (iv) the setting of targets for improvement and reports to the Authority as appropriate.



## TR3

- 2 To review the outcome of fundamental performance reviews.
- 3 To monitor performance and challenge failure.
- 4 To oversee the internal and external audit arrangements for the Fire Authority and to ensure adequate monitoring and effective co-ordination between the Internal Audit function and the appointed External Auditor (District Audit) , within the overriding requirement to provide an adequate and effective Audit service in accordance with Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Accounts and Audit regulations 1983.
- 5 To ensure that recommendations contained in the internal and/or external Audit reports, including the Annual Management Letter, particularly those detailing opportunities for achieving efficiency savings and/or cost reductions are adequately addressed by Chief Officers.
- 6 To receive reports as necessary from the Treasurer concerning all significant irregularities.

**Membership**

The Performance Review and Audit Panel shall comprise 6 members, including the nominated deputy spokespersons of the three largest party groups concerned. The spokespersons of the three largest party groups shall be ex-officio members of the Panel.

**Quorum**

The quorum for the Performance Review and Audit Panel shall be 3 members.

**5 COMMUNITY SAFETY PANEL**

- 1 The Panel shall have a membership of three elected members together with appropriate key Officers as determined by the Chief Fire Officer.
- 2 The Panel shall meet at least four times a year on dates to be determined.
- 3 The Panel will:
  - (i) consider the future direction and implications of Community Safety within the Brigade;
  - (ii) monitor the effectiveness of Community Safety initiatives, and,



## TR4

- (iii) make recommendations to the Fire Authority in respect of (I) and (ii) above;
- (iv) consider, in conjunction with the Authority Treasurer, appropriate resources including financial resources and make recommendations to the Fire Authority;
- (v) consider the Annual Community Safety Plan and refer the Plan to the Fire Authority for approval.

## 6 ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE LIAISON GROUP

### TITLE

- 1 The Group shall be called the Royal Berkshire Fire Liaison Group hereinafter called 'Liaison Group'.

### REPRESENTATION

- 2 The Liaison Group shall comprise the 3 Party Spokespersons of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and an equal number of representatives of the accredited bodies, as follows:

Fire Brigade's Union	2
Unison	1

**Total** 6

- 3 If a member of the Liaison Group ceases to be a member of the Fire Authority, or a representative of the relevant Union he/she shall thereupon cease to be a member of the Liaison Group, and the vacancy shall be filled by the Fire Authority or the Unions as appropriate.
- 4 The Unions or the Authority may appoint substitutes to take the place of any of their representatives who are unable to attend a particular meeting.
- 5 The Chairman of the Authority may agree to additional Union representatives attending the whole or part of Liaison Group meetings by invitation and may also agree on behalf of the Authority a variation in Union Core membership.

### CHAIRMAN

- 6 A Chairman and Vice-Chairman shall be appointed by the Liaison Group at the



## TR5

first meeting after the annual meeting of the Fire Authority to hold office for a year. The Chairmanship and Vice-Chairmanship of the Group shall be drawn from the Authority.

**SECRETARY**

- 7 The Secretary to the Liaison Group shall be the Clerk to the Fire Authority. The Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer to the Fire Authority shall be entitled to attend as of right and/or send a representative.

**VOTING**

- 8 There shall be no voting on matters discussed and any agreements, disagreements etc, shall simply be recorded as such.

**CONSULTATION AND NEGOTIATION**

- 9 The Liaison Group exists for discussion and consultation purposes only. It will not be used as a means of formal negotiation.

**FUNCTIONS**

- 10 The functions of the Liaison group shall be:
- to provide a regular means of contact between the Authority and the Unions in order to:
    - establish a forum for a free exchange of views where a relationship of mutual trust and understanding can be fostered, and
    - prevent differences and endeavour to reconcile them should they arise, always providing that no question of individual discipline, promotion or efficiency should be within the scope of the Liaison Group.
  - to consider any relevant matters referred to it by the Authority or the Unions.
  - to express views to the Authority on:
    - the interpretation and application of nationally negotiated agreements;
    - the payment of local allowances to employees of the Authority.

**RULES AND REGULATIONS**

- a The Liaison Group shall meet prior to the Authority's Agenda Briefing meetings



## TR6

with further meetings being arranged at the discretion of the Chairman and in consultation with the other Party Leaders.

- b The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Group may direct the Secretary to call a meeting at any time.
- c The matters to be discussed at any meeting of the Liaison Group shall be stated upon the notice summoning the meeting, but with the agreement of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Group additional items may be considered on the grounds of urgency.
- d The quorum of the Liaison Group shall be two, comprising at least one representative of the Authority and one Union representative.
- e The minutes of meetings of the Liaison Group shall be produced by the Secretary and submitted to the next appropriate meeting of the Liaison Group.
- f A report on matters discussed at the meeting of the Liaison Group shall be produced by the Secretary and submitted to the next appropriate meeting of the Authority.



**AGENDA ITEM 12: DISTRICT AUDIT – MANAGEMENT LETTER  
TO MEMBERS**

**To: Royal Berkshire Fire Authority**  
**Date: 13 December 2000**  
**Officer Contributing: Authority Treasurer**

**A PURPOSE OF REPORT**

**To inform Members of the receipt of the District Auditor's Management Letter to Members in respect of the Audit for the year 1999/2000.**

**B PROPOSED ACTION**

**The Authority is invited to NOTE:**

- 1 The positive comments made in the report**
- 2 That an unqualified audit opinion will be issued on the Annual Accounts for 1999/2000.**
- 3 The proposed action in respect of the three recommendations contained in the letter.**

**C FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

**There are no financial implications arising from the report**

**D CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

**The report has paragraphs on Asset Management. This study is relevant to the Strategic Plan.**

**E SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 1 The District Auditor has completed the Audit of Accounts for 1999/2000 which were approved by the Authority at the meeting held on 6 September 2000.**
- 2 An unqualified Audit opinion will be issued on the annual accounts for 1999/2000.**
- 3 The District Auditor each year produces a Management Letter to Members and that on the Audit for 1999/2000 is attached as Appendix 1.**



4 There are three recommendations:

**Recommendation R1**

The draft budget monitoring procedures should be finalised and circulated to all budget holders.

Proposed Action

The Authority's Financial Regulation 6 covers this matter.

Monthly monitoring information is produced.

- a For each budget holder
- b For the Brigade Management Team
- c An overall Booklet is produced for the three Party leaders, and for the Directors
- d Each meeting of the Fire Authority is appraised of spending compared with budget.

The Treasurer and Head of Financial Services are currently finalising supplementary Financial Instructions and these will be issued to Budget Holders prior to the next financial year.

**Recommendation R2**

Members must continue to ensure revenue budgets are set which are commensurate with the development needs of the Authority and the financial position of the constituent authorities.

Proposed Action

This has always been the practice of the Members of this Fire Authority and will continue to be the case.

**Recommendation R3**

The Authority should continue to address the Action Plan arising from our Best Value audit and also amend procedures as appropriate in the light of experience gained from reviews.

Proposed Action

The Action Plan for the Best Value Performance Plan Audit is being actioned as agreed. Procedures will be amended as appropriate in the light of experience gained from completed reviews

5 Stephen Taylor, District Audit and Hassan Rohimun, Audit Manager will attend the meeting to present the Management Letter and answer Members questions.



**F BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 1 Local Government Finance Act 1982.
- 2 Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996.
- 3 Statement of Accounts 1999/2000.
- 4 District Audit Management Letter to Members – Audit 1999/2000.

**Contact Officer:** Donald Illingworth (0118) 032 2284)



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## Management Letter to Members

*Royal Berkshire Fire Authority*

Audit 1999/2000



DISTRICT AUDIT

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delivering public audit  
for the Audit Commission

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*Stephen Taylor*                      *District Auditor*

*Hassan Rohimun*                      *Audit Manager*



## Introduction

- 1 This Management Letter summarises for members the results of our audit for 1999/2000 and comments on the Authority's progress during that year and to date.
- 2 This year has been a demanding one for the Authority and alongside the significant challenge of responding to the Best Value agenda as set out in the Local Government Act 1999, the Authority is also engaged in a series of other major national and local challenges, including:
  - a Performance Review Inspection from HM Fire Service Inspectorate which resulted in a positive report
  - commitment to the aims of community safety through the publication of Community Fire Safety Plan
  - leading initiatives which pool the resources and expertise of brigades for the benefit of all, such as the interactive training packages
  - the need to continue to deliver efficient and effective services in a changing environment and against continuing budget pressures.
- 3 Under the Code of Audit Practice, we are required to give an independent assessment against seven key objectives and our conclusion is shown overleaf:



Objective	Audit conclusions
The general <b>financial standing</b> of the Authority.	The Authority's financial standing shows good overall control of spending in the year. Continued financial pressures will require effective budgetary control.
The adequacy of the Authority's arrangements to <b>secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness</b> in the use of resources.	Our value for money work is in the process of being reported and the work to date suggests that the Authority has a positive approach to managing its resources.
Whether <b>statements</b> present fairly the Authority's financial position and the income and expenditure for 1999/2000.	We are satisfied that the statement of accounts presents fairly the financial position of the Authority and an unqualified audit opinion will be issued in December.
The adequacy of the Authority's <b>financial systems</b> .	There were no material issues arising from our work on significant financial systems.
The adequacy of the Authority's arrangements for <b>preventing and detecting fraud and corruption</b> .	From our overall review, arrangements are considered to be adequate.
The adequacy of the Authority's arrangements for collecting, recording and publishing information in cases where the Authority is required to publish <b>performance information</b> .	Our work concluded that arrangements for collecting and reporting performance information are adequate.
The adequacy of the Authority's arrangements for ensuring the <b>legality</b> of transactions that might have a financial consequence.	On the basis of our work during the audit, this objective is satisfied. There have been no enquiries from electors during the year.

- 4 Our overall conclusion is that you are performing well in addressing the challenges without detriment to existing service delivery. The following recommendations are highlighted for members:

**Recommendations**

- R1 The draft budget monitoring procedures should be finalised and circulated to all budget holders.*
- R2 Members must continue to ensure revenue budgets are set which are commensurate with the development needs of the Authority and the financial position of the constituent authorities.*
- R3 The Authority should continue to address the Action Plan arising from our Best Value audit and also amend procedures as appropriate in the light of experience gained from completed reviews.*



- 5 We have also completed our first audit of the Authority's Best Value Performance Plan during the year. Following our review we issued a qualified audit opinion and made a number of recommendations, which are currently being addressed by the Authority. Whilst this was a separate statutory responsibility in the first year, we have included a brief summary for information in this Management Letter.

## Financial health

*The Authority's financial standing shows good overall control of spending in the year. Continued financial pressures will require effective budgetary control.*

- 6 The Authority continues to pursue its objective of providing high quality, economic and efficient services against the background of continued financial pressures. We have reviewed financial performance for 1999/2000 and to date and future financial strategies.

## General fund spending

- 7 The Authority's expenditure for 1999/2000 met the budgeted expenditure of £20 million, this indicates good overall budgetary control. However, budgetary control would be further strengthened if the draft budget monitoring procedures were finalised and distributed to all budget holders.

### **Recommendation**

*R1 The draft budget monitoring procedures should be finalised and circulated to all budget holders.*

- 8 The Audit Commission's view is that combined fire authorities should not create and maintain reserves, however, it is considered prudent to create provisions where a liability is to be incurred. The level of provisions at 31 March 2000 amounted to £1.44 million as illustrated in Exhibit 1. It is noted that whilst the provisions for replacement protective clothing and removal of asbestos had not been utilised during the year, they are being used in 2000/01.



**Exhibit 1 Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Provisions**

	1998/99 Actual £'000	1999/2000 Actual £'000
<b>Provisions</b>		
• capital funding	323	129
• future pension cost (Fire-fighters)	354	851
• future pension cost (Local Government)	-	130
• replacement of firefighting protective clothing	150	150
• removal of asbestos	178	178
• community safety.	26	0
	<b>1,031</b>	<b>1,438</b>

**2000/01 forecast**

- 9 For the financial year 2000/01 the Authority increased its budget requirement by £1.19 million, which amounts to an increase of 5.95%. As is the case with most fire authorities, budgets are above SSA, and in the case of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, the budget is 7.78% above the SSA of £19.66 million. The 2000/01 budget position reported to the November meeting of the Budget Working Party indicates that the projected outturn for the year will be in line with the original budget.

**The future**

- 10 With the ongoing impact of the cost of fire-fighters' pensions, together with the growth needs of the service, there will be a continued pressure on the annual budget, and on the levies required of the constituent authorities. There is, therefore, a need for Authority to continue to exercise caution over its spending plans and to continue to seek efficiency savings where possible. The Government has announced that fire authorities would receive an SSA cash increase of 5% in 2001/02, of 4.5% in 2002/03 and of 4.1% in 2003/04.

***Recommendation***

- R2 Members must continue to ensure revenue budgets are set which are commensurate with the development needs of the Authority and the financial position of the constituent authorities.*



## Best Value

*We gave a qualified opinion on the Authority's first Best Value Performance Plan. Action is currently in hand in respect of recommendations made.*

- 11 As members will be aware, this year was the first year of the Best Value regime. Under this the Authority had to prepare and publish a Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) summarising the Council's assessments of its performance and position in relation to its statutory duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement to the way its functions are exercised. Our role as auditors has been to give an opinion on whether the BVPP complies with legislation and to report on the arrangements that underpin the achievement of Best Value.
- 12 Our conclusion from this was that the BVPP did not comply with the requirements of legislation in certain areas and we made a number of recommendations in relation to improvements to the Plan to ensure compliance with legislation. Our review did highlight that whilst there were areas of non-compliance in regards to the Plan, the Performance Management arrangements which the Authority has in place for achieving Best Value showed evidence of good practice.
- 13 Our statutory report following the audit contained a number of recommendations to the BVPP and the processes underpinning Best Value. Our findings were presented to members of the Performance Review and Audit Panel in July and key messages are summarised in Exhibit 2 below.

### Exhibit 2 Outcomes from our first Best Value audit

Issue	Key recommendation	Action taken
Compliance	<p>The plan should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• set out how improvements in efficiency at corporate and service level have been assessed</li> <li>• detail proposals on how better performance will be delivered</li> <li>• specify the level of efficiency improvements expected</li> <li>• include a statement that summarises the Authority's policy on consultation</li> <li>• include a summary of the Authority's methodology for service selection.</li> </ul>	<p>The Authority is ensuring that these areas are being addressed in the drafting of the 2001/02 Best Value Performance Plan.</p>
Performance Information	<p>The Authority must ensure there is a system to record, report and monitor performance against the required indicators and that any reported figure can be readily substantiated to source documentation.</p>	<p>The Authority has implemented a new performance management system, which is actively being used to record, report and monitor performance against both national and local performance indicators.</p>



## Exhibit 2 cont'd

Issue	Key recommendation	Action taken
Managing the process	The Authority should ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is a detailed project plan for service reviews with start dates, finish dates and key milestones</li> <li>• that the skills needed for each review are identified</li> <li>• progress of reviews are reported to management.</li> </ul>	Project timetables were established for reviews, training was given to key staff on the review process and progress is being reported to management.
Consultation	The Authority should ensure consultation impacts on future policy-making and there is further consultation on the corporate objectives and priorities.	The reports from all consultations are submitted to Brigade Management Team and the Authority's Performance Review and Audit Panel to decide on the strategic impact of the findings.

- 14 As required by legislation, the Authority produced an Action Plan within 30 working days of the statutory report and our recommendations are currently being implemented. This will continue to be reviewed as part of our ongoing audit responsibility.
- 15 The audit of 2001 will follow-up recommendations above as well as assessing your approach in response to ongoing developments in Best Value and the outcome from your reviews.
- 16 Next year will also see the start of inspections of the Best Value reviews by HM Fire Service Inspectorate. Auditors and inspectors will liaise closely to ensure you gain an efficient service.

***Recommendation***

*R3 The Authority should continue to address the Action Plan arising from our Best Value audit and also amend procedures as appropriate in the light of experience gained from completed reviews.*



## Value for money and management arrangements

*Our value for money work is in the progress of being reported and the work to date suggests that the Authority has a positive approach to managing its resources.*

- 17 Our agreed value for money programme this year is detailed in Exhibit 3. Due to the nature and timing of our value for money work some of this remains in progress.

### Exhibit 3 Value for money and management arrangements work in 1999/2000

#### National studies

- Asset management (being finalised).

#### Management arrangements

- New ethical framework.

#### Follow-up

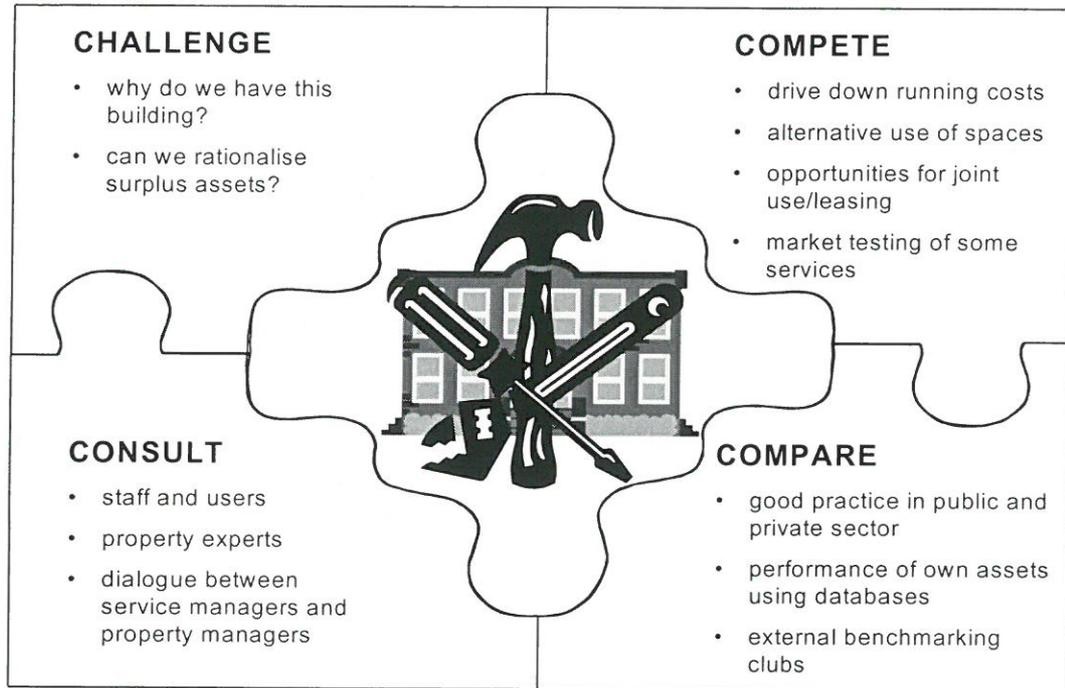
- Community Safety (A Community Safety Plan has been published)
- Service and Financial Planning (followed up through our work on the Best Value audit).

## Asset management

- 18 The Authority's buildings are a visible form of reassurance to the public. It is vital that these assets are fit for purpose, sustainable and capable of supporting the Authority's operational and strategic objectives.
- 19 Property is central to the achievement of Best Value in three ways:
- the land and properties that local authorities own should contribute towards continuously improving service delivery
  - the support services required to manage assets, and property running costs should be subject to their own Best Value review
  - the opportunity cost of holding property and its contribution to corporate objectives should be challenged.
- 20 Although property is a valuable asset, it is expensive to run and maintain. Expenditure on property is a large element of the Authority's spending. Effective property management cuts across all services and is likely to feature prominently in Best Value reviews.



#### Exhibit 4 Asset management and Best Value



- 21 Our investigation will focus on how the Authority is addressing:
- property strategy and review
  - making better use of space
  - financial management and performance information
  - property management.
- 22 As part of our review we will be carrying out some comparisons between the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and other Brigades across the country. Our review will also provide a useful lead into the Best Value review of premises which is scheduled for 2002/03.

#### New ethical framework

- 23 Following the Local Government Act 2000, which received Royal Assent in July, the Government is proposing a new ethical framework for Fire Authorities. Amongst the main components of the proposals will be:
- a set of general principles to govern the conduct of members
  - a model code of conduct for members
  - the establishment of a standards committee
  - a new statutory code of conduct for officers.



- 24 Once the detailed guidance has been received the authority will need to ensure the requirements of the act are fully implemented and there are satisfactory monitoring arrangements to ensure compliance with the new ethical framework.

## Statement of accounts

*We are satisfied that the statement of accounts presents fairly the financial position of the Authority.*

- 25 The approach to support our opinion on the financial statements focuses on:
- main accounting system
  - budgetary control processes
  - final accounts closedown.
- 26 The conclusions from our work on the core processes is that systems and processes are operating satisfactorily. Only minor issues were raised during the audit and there are no issues to raise with members.
- 27 The Authority considered and approved the accounts well in advance of the 30 September deadline. The support of the Finance Team is acknowledged in undertaking our audit.

## Adequacy of systems

*There were no material issues arising from our work on significant financial systems. Minor areas for control improvement are being discussed with management for their action.*

- 28 The Code requires us to review significant financial systems and associated controls to:
- support our opinion on your annual accounts by assessing the accuracy of the output from these systems
  - report on the adequacy of such significant systems and associated internal controls.
- 29 In meeting these objectives we:
- assess the adequacy of your overall control environment
  - review the design, and where appropriate, test individual systems
  - place reliance upon the work of Internal Audit.
- 30 From our work we concluded that the significant financial systems are operating satisfactorily in a sound control environment. We identified a small number of opportunities to strengthen the operation of some systems and these are being agreed with officers.



- 31 We were able to place significant reliance on the work of Internal Audit in accordance with our joint working protocols and a cyclical plan.

## Prevention of fraud and corruption

*From our overall review, arrangements are considered to be adequate and are currently being enhanced. We did not identify any significant weaknesses in the specific areas we examined.*

- 32 The standard of probity in the public sector is a high profile topic. The Audit Commission undertakes annual surveys to determine the level of reported fraud and corruption. These continue to show an upward trend in proven fraud. The primary responsibility for the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption rests with the Authority. However, we have a specific duty under the Code of Audit Practice to assess the adequacy of the arrangements put in place by the Authority for preventing and detecting fraud and corruption.
- 33 On the basis of our work, we concluded that the overall arrangements for preventing and detecting fraud are adequate.

## Legality

*On the basis of our work during the audit, this objective is satisfied. There have been no major issues raised or objections from electors during the year.*

- 34 It is the responsibility of the Authority to act within the law and to take appropriate legal advice where necessary. For our part we are required by the Code of Audit Practice to assess the adequacy of your arrangements for ensuring the legality of transactions that might have a financial consequence.
- 35 Our review of the overall control environment, minutes and consideration of new legislation and current local government issues did not identify any major areas of concern. There has also been no correspondence on issues raised by local electors during the course of the audit. Similarly, neither of your statutory officers (the Clerk as Monitoring Officer and the Treasurer as S151 Officer) has had to exercise their formal powers associated with unlawful or potentially unlawful action. Evidence from our discussion of issues arising during the year and from our review of minutes suggests that they have performed their roles appropriately.



### Citizen's Charter indicators

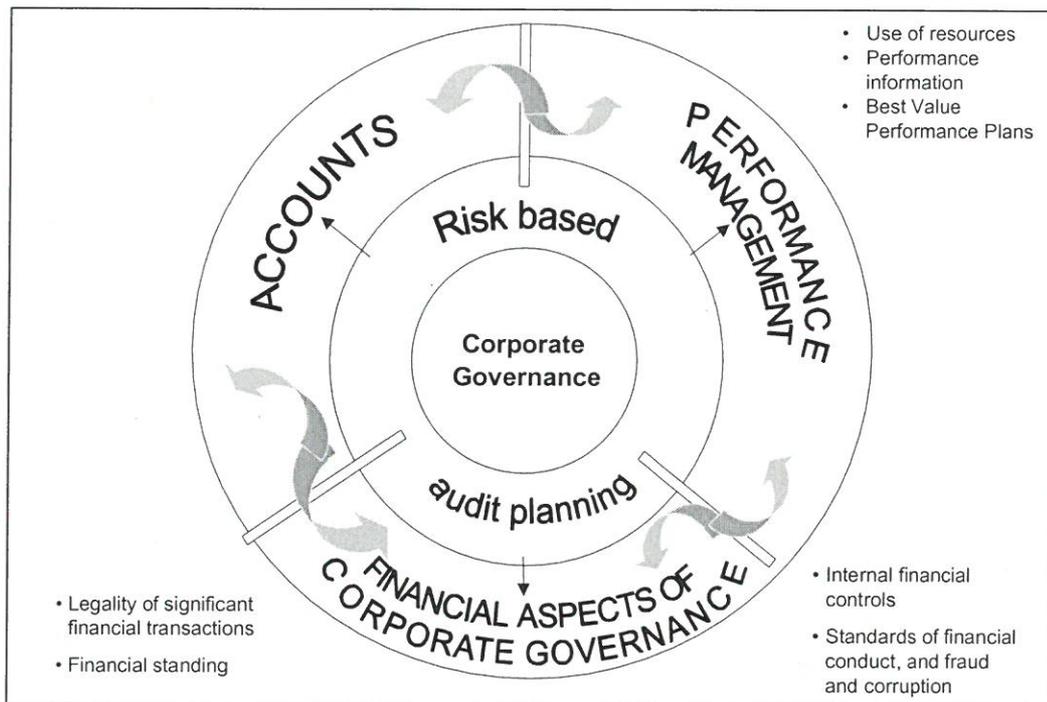
*Our work concluded that the Authority's arrangements for collecting and reporting performance information are adequate.*

36 The Authority has produced Performance Indicators showing actual performance for 1999/2000. The audit work to assess the adequacy of arrangements in place for collecting, recording and publishing these Indicators has also been completed and on the basis of our work, we concluded that the arrangements for collecting, recording and publishing these Performance Indicators were adequate.

### Future audit work

- 37 Next year's audit will be the first year conducted under a revised Code of Audit Practice which now incorporates our responsibilities for Best Value certification.
- 38 The new audit is based in the Audit Commission model of integrated public audit which comprises three main elements set out in the following exhibit.

Exhibit 5 Audit Commission Public Audit Framework

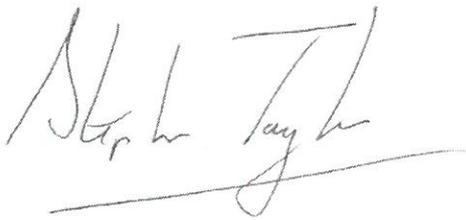




- 39 We will shortly be starting our planning discussions for the next year and the Audit Plan will be tailored to your circumstances so that our audit effort is directed to those areas of greater risk. We will also be liaising with the HM Fire Service Inspectorate as they commence their work on the Authority's Best Value review programme.

## Acknowledgement

- 40 Local Government continues to go through a period of change alongside the implementation of Best Value in the year. This has resulted in a demanding year for the Authority and some significant challenges will be faced next year as required by the Local Government Act 2000.
- 41 Our aim is to continue to provide you with a high standard of audit service that is relevant to your needs and meets the requirements of the Code of Practice. We would like to thank the Authority's officers for their contribution and co-operation, which has once again greatly facilitated our audit work. We look forward to working with you again over the coming year.



Stephen Taylor  
District Auditor

27 November 2000



## COMMENTS REGARDING INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION REPORT ON THE OUTCOMES OF THE SPECIAL APPLIANCE REVIEW

**Switch Crewing:** This form of crewing allows for personnel to crew either of a number of appliances, usually two, although in certain circumstances the number of vehicles may be more.

It is usually used to crew appliances which because of the relatively small number of calls attended would make primary crewing very costly when compared to their use.

This system is used throughout the British Fire Service and is not peculiar to Berkshire.

**Page 7, Para 3.5:** The review teams proposals seek to establish a 'buffer' of 12 personnel (3 on each shift) which could be utilised to maintain 5 riders on each pump without compromising the availability of the special appliances.

**Page 8, Para 3.9:** For clarification, the major reasons for the constant crewing problems is due to the loss of staff to other Brigades, light duties and long term sickness.

The management of sickness levels has resulted in a significant decrease in this area although personnel are engaged on light duties (rehabilitation to full duties) for longer periods of time. This results in reduced levels of staff available for frontline operational duties, but does allow every effort to be made to return individuals to full duties rather than premature retirement.

**Page 8, Para 3.10 table:** The Brigade currently has 14 recruit firefighters at Training School who will be allocated to station strength during the early part of January 2001.

**Page 9, Para 4.2, Item 111:** The review teams recommendations in relation to the Fire and Rescue boat are clearly stated and do not merely seek for its disposal.

**Page 10, Para 4.5:** The whole point of the Operational Management and Training Reserve is to maintain crewing levels.

The proposals do seek an increase in the number of pumps that will be switch crewed but the number of times that this will actually happen is drastically reduced. For example, both the aerial appliances will be taken off pre-determined attendances (eg responding to a fire alarm purely due to the height of the building) because the evidence clearly shows that on 605 calls during 1999 they were used on 23 occasions and never when responding to a pre-determined attendance. The result being that these special appliances will be switch crewed approximately 23 times a year with their respective pump. Because there are 2 aerial appliances this means that each particular pump will be switch crewed approximately 12 times a year.

As a further example of this the Incident Control Unit (ICU) has been mobilised on only 9 occasions during the last 8 months.

**Page 11, Table 4:** In the table provided, under 'proposed levels' the optimum crewing should read 57 (not 60) with minimum crewing likely to be 56 (not 57).

**Pages 11 and 12, Para's 5.4, 5.6 and 5.7:** The figures used to illustrate the FBU's argument are challenged at this time.

**Page 12, Para 5.13:** Home Office recommendations expect crewing levels on pumping appliances to be sustained at 5 riders on 75% of occasions. Stations with more than 1 pumping appliance are allowed to crew the '2<sup>nd</sup>' pump with 4 riders. However, every effort will be made to crew both pumps at Slough with 5.

**Page 13, Para 5.14 and 5.16:** The figures used are challenged at this time.

**Page 13, Para 5.16.1:** See comments relating to Page 12, Para 5.13.

**Page 16, Para 6.1 and 6.2:** See comments relating to Page 10, Para 4.5.

**Page 16, Para 6.3:** The use of a nodal system to map attendance times for the second pump into Slough shows that Langley and Windsor can achieve the times from their home stations and Maidenhead's first pump can reach the majority of the B risk within the allocated time. Current policy (which will be maintained) insists on one pump remaining in the Slough area at all times and 'standby' moves are facilitated to maintain this level of cover.

**Page 17, Para 6.5:** During the past 8 months the Chemical Incident Unit (CIU) has been mobilised on 48 occasions. At this current rate the yearly total will be in the region of 72 calls.

The CIU is currently switch crewed with Whitley Wood's pump. The pump has been mobilised on 1,007 calls since April 1<sup>st</sup> this year.

The proposals will mean that 2 pumps (not 1 as at present) crews could be available to crew this appliance. Slough's first pump has attended 803 calls since April 1<sup>st</sup>, approximately 200 less calls than Whitley Wood's appliance.

**Page 17, Para 6.7 and 6.8:** The Incident Control Unit has been mobilised on 9 occasions during the past eight months, at this present call out rate it will attend in the region of 14 calls for 2000/2001.

**Page 17, Para 6.8:** See comments relating to Page 17, Para 6.5.

**Page 18, Para 7.1:** See comments relating to Page 9, Para 4.2 Item III

**Page 18, Para 7.2:** The paper to the June Fire Authority meeting was an update only, further evidence, in particular, the major accident investigation report on the Windsor incident caused sufficient concern for the team to review its earlier work.

**Page 18, Para 7.3:** River awareness training is currently given to all operational personnel, not only to the Fire and Rescue boat crews.

**Page 18, Para 7.5:** The current boat has only been used on inland waterways and extreme doubt exists as to its use for any purposes during widespread flooding other than on the river, canals, gravel pits or similar areas.

**Page 19, Para 8.2:** Part of the rationale behind the Training and Operational Management Reserve is to facilitate a buffer to allow for the release of personnel from operational duties to attend training courses.

**Page 20, Para 9.3:** Pumping appliances attend road traffic accidents at present, along with the RSV's. The reviews recommendations will facilitate a quicker response with the necessary rescue equipment.

**Page 20, Para 9.2.1 (bottom of page) and Page 21, Para 9.2.3:** Service area targets such as these are not only achieved by a quick response but also by proactive Community Safety initiatives.

**Page 21, Para 9.5:** There still exists some doubt nationally as to the process that will be implemented to review Standards of Fire Cover. Although a number of Brigades are involved in pilot schemes no definite picture has emerged at present.

