

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



Headquarters · 103 Dee Road Tilehurst Reading Berkshire RG30 4FS
Telephone Reading (0118) 945 2888 Facsimile (0118) 959 0510

Your reference:

My reference: RBFA/DRW
(please quote on all correspondence)
When calling ask for: David R Weller
Direct Line: (0118) 932 2288
Date: 8 December 1999

Dear Member

AGENDA FOR MEETING OF ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

I have pleasure in attaching your Agenda for the meeting of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority to be held on **Wednesday 15 December 1999 in the Council Chamber at West Berkshire Council, Market Street, Newbury commencing at 6.30pm**. A buffet will be provided in the Council Chamber.

Car parking is available in the Public Car Park adjacent to the Council Offices. Car parking charges do not apply after 6.00pm. **Members are advised not to park in the Multi Storey car park opposite as the gates may be locked before the conclusion of the Fire Authority meeting.** A map showing the venue is reproduced overleaf. To reach the Council Offices Members may use either the M4 Motorway or A4 from Reading.

M4 - Leave the Motorway at Junction 12 (Newbury) taking the first exit signposted A34. After approximately one mile the A34 Newbury By-Pass will go off to the right. At this point you should take the left exit signposted Newbury/Thatcham. Follow this road until you reach a set of traffic signals and move over to the right hand lane. Continue on this road passing through the next roundabout (Robin Hood) and continue to the next roundabout (Police Station will be on your left) and as you approach move over to the right hand lane. As you go round the roundabout move over to the left hand lane and take the second exit signposted Town Centre. Continue down this road to the next set of traffic signals and turn left. The road then becomes one-way and you should keep to the left hand lane. Follow this road which bears to the right passing the Bus Station on your left. Just after the entrance to the bus station take the next left hand turn signposted Council Offices and Car Parking turning immediately left into the Public Car Park.

A4 - Leave the Motorway at Junction 11 and take the A4 signposted Thatcham/Pangbourne. Follow the A4 passing through Woolhampton and Thatcham until you reach the Robin Hood roundabout in Newbury where you turn left onto the old A34 and follow the directions above from the Police Station roundabout.

Yours sincerely

David R Weller (Committee Administrator)

To: All Members of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



Headquarters · 103 Dee Road · Tilehurst · Reading · Berkshire · RG30 4FS
Telephone Reading (0118) 945 2888 Facsimile (0118) 959 0510

MEETING: **Royal Berkshire Fire Authority**

DATE AND TIME: **Wednesday 15 December 1999 at 6.30pm**

VENUE: **Council Chamber, West Berkshire Council,
Market Street, Newbury, Berkshire**

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.

D C H Williams
Clerk to the Authority

To: MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
D Ball, P A Barnett, Mrs C Bateson, J C G Brooks, R J Day,
T P Dredge, J M B Egan, B W Gardner, E E Herbert, Mrs V Howes,
A Gregory, A B V P Hickley, D W Liddiard, T D McCann, T Mills,
J Morris, J Orton, T O'Flynn, B J S Patman, K Peak, T N Stephens,
R Turner, R G Vernon-Jackson, R J Webb, (Vacancy)

Briefing Meetings: (All rooms are located on the first floor)

Conservative Group: 6.00pm - Committee Room 3
Labour Group: 6.00pm - Conference Room
Liberal Democrat Group: 6.00pm - Committee Room 1

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

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
WEDNESDAY 15 DECEMBER 1999



AGENDA

PART I AGENDA

PAGE NO.

CONSTITUTIONAL ITEMS

1	Apologies for Absence	-
2	Part I Minutes: Wednesday 15 September 1999 (Copy attached)	1
3	Minutes of Sub-Groups	10
4	Chairman's Communications (if any)	-
5	Petitions and Questions from the Public under Standing Orders 8 & 9	16
6	Questions from Members under Standing Order 10 (if any)	-
7	Notices of Motion under Standing Order 12 (if any)	-
8	Appointment of Member to Personnel Committee and Appointment of Grievance Panel	18
9	Review of Authority Business	20
10	Fairness and Equality: Terms of Reference of Personnel Committee	23

ITEMS FOR RESOLUTION

11	District Audit - Management Letter to Members	25
12	Fixing of Contributions to the Combined Fire Service Fund	33
13	Community Fire Safety Panel	35
14	Service Guarantees and Customer Care Cards	37

Would Members please note that the Appendix referred to in paragraph 2 of the report is Marked to Follow

15	Budget 2000/2001 - Recommendations of the Budget Working Party	39
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Would Members please note that the report referred to in paragraph 3 of the report is Marked to Follow.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

16	1999/2000 Budget Monitoring	110
17	Firefighters' Pension Scheme	114
18	Medical Retirements Half Yearly Report	119
19	Impact of Ill Health as a Result of Accidents - Six Month Report: April - September 1999	121
20	Audit Commission Fire Service Performance Indicators 1998/99	124
21	Inquiry into Fire Service Negotiating Machinery	127
22	Fires, Incidents and Issues of Interest	129
23	Exclusion of the Public	134

PART II AGENDA - CONFIDENTIAL

24	Part II Minutes: Wednesday 15 September 1999 (Copy attached)	135
25	Part II Minutes of Sub-Groups	137
26	Clerk and Monitoring Officer - Review of Contract	138
27	Single Tender Action for the Purchase of TROVE Software Licences	141
28	Date of Next Fire Authority Meeting	-

To note that the next Fire Authority meeting is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 15 March 2000 commencing at 6.30pm at a venue to be determined.

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



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When calling ask for: David R Weller
Direct Line: (0118) 932 2288

Date: 9 December 1999

Dear Councillor

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY AGENDA - DOCUMENTS MARKED TO FOLLOW

I refer to the Agenda for the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority meeting on Wednesday 15 December 1999 and attach copies of the following documents marked to follow:

Agenda item 14: Service Guarantees and Customer Care Cards

*Copy of Appendix A referred to in paragraph 2 of the report
Page Numbers 1 - 7*

Agenda item 15: Budget 2000/2001

*Copy of Appendix 2 referred to in paragraph 3 of the report
Page Numbers 8 - 13*

Please remember to include these documents with your Agenda for the meeting.

For those Members wishing to travel by Public Transport, trains for Newbury leave Reading Station at regular intervals and Newbury Station is located behind the Council Offices. The bus service is Route 102 leaving from outside the Reading Station complex and Newbury Bus Station is adjacent to the Council Offices.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David R Weller'.

David R Weller
Committee Administrator

To: All Members of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

AGENDA ITEM 2: MINUTES: 15 SEPTEMBER 1999

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER AT WOKINGHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL, SHUTE END, WOKINGHAM ON WEDNESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 1999 COMMENCING AT 6.30PM AND CONCLUDED AT 8.58PM

Present: J C G Brooks (Chairman), B J S Patman (Vice-Chairman), D Ball, T P Dredge, J M B Egan, B W Gardner, A B V P Hickley, T D McCann, T Mills, T O'Flynn, T N Stephens, R G Vernon-Jackson

Apologies: P A Barnett, Mrs C Bateson, R J Day, Mrs V Howes, D W Liddiard, Mrs J Orton, D A Veakins, R J Webb

(Councillor B J S Patman, Vice-Chairman in the Chair)

3.01/99 MEMBERSHIP OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 1 - not reproduced) that Councillor T D McCann had replaced Councillor A Spratling as one of the Wokingham District Council representatives on the Fire Authority. The Chairman welcomed Councillor McCann to the meeting.

NOTED

3.02/99 MINUTES: 7 JULY 1999

The Minutes of the last Fire Authority meeting held on Wednesday 7 July 1999, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

2.12/99 Proposed Performance Review and Audit Panel

In Resolution 2 delete "B J Gardner" and insert "B W Gardner"

3.03/99 MINUTES OF PERSONNEL COMMITTEE, URGENCY COMMITTEE AND PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND AUDIT PANEL

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 3 - not reproduced) of the Personnel Committee, Urgency Committee and Performance Review and Audit Panel 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

(Councillor J C G Brooks in the Chair)

3.04/99 CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chairman had nothing to report.

3.05/99 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.

3.06/99 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

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

3.07/99 NOTICES OF MOTION

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

3.08/99 PETITION FROM MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC

The Authority considered a report (Agenda item 8 - not reproduced) on the response to the Petition presented by Mr L N C Ball at the last meeting held on Wednesday 7 July 1999. In accordance with Standing Orders Mr Ball, the petition organiser, was permitted to address the Authority on the subject of his petition.

The petition presented at the last meeting was seeking a formal role for the representatives of accredited bodies in the deliberations of the Authority and a summary of its contents was set out in paragraph 2 of the report (not reproduced).

It was a matter for the Authority to decide how it wishes to organise its business and although some Authorities did permit their FBU representatives to present reports and/or answer questions, most did not. Constitutionally it would not be possible to give employees an official role in the deliberations of the Authority which appeared to be the intention behind the Petition. At present there were well defined structures to enable consultation to take place between the Brigade and representatives of

accredited Unions. There was, however, no standing consultation mechanism to enable Members of the Authority to meet with the Representative Bodies. Although they have been advised that the Chairman and Party Spokespersons were prepared to meet the Representative Bodies at any time, such meetings were a rarity.

If Members were minded to approve the establishment of a Liaison Group, Officers felt that it would be unnecessary to grant Union representatives additional rights to address the Fire Authority or answer questions. It was however always open to the Chairman to exercise his discretion, with the agreement of the Authority, to seek Union views at the Authority meeting.

In supporting the proposed action relating to the establishment of a Liaison Group Members were advised that unfortunately it had not been possible to produce a revised version of Appendix 1 (Constitution and Terms of Reference) as referred to in Resolution 1. To overcome this and avoid any further delay Members approval was therefore sought to the following new Resolution 2:

“That the Chairman and Party Spokespersons be authorised to approve the revised Constitution and Terms of Reference for the Fire Authority Liaison Group (Appendix 1) and that a copy of the approved document be circulated to all Members of the Fire Authority and Representative Bodies for information.”

The proposed new Resolution having been seconded was approved and Members were advised that the remaining Resolutions would be renumbered accordingly.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1 a Fire Authority Liaison Group be established, comprising Members of the Authority and accredited representatives of the Fire Brigade’s Union and Unison.
- 2 the Chairman and Party Spokespersons be authorised to approve the revised Constitution and Terms of Reference for the Fire Authority Liaison Group (Appendix 1) and that a copy of the approved document be circulated to all Members of the Fire Authority and Representative Bodies for information.
- 3 Meetings of the Liaison Group take place prior to the Fire Authority’s Agenda Briefing Meetings with further meetings being arranged at the discretion of the Chairman in consultation with the Party Spokespersons.
- 4 there should be equal numbers of Authority and accredited representatives on the Group and accordingly there be three Authority Members, two Fire Brigade’s Union and one Unison representative and with the approval of the Chairman, other Union/Staff Group representatives by invitation.

4

5 the Party Spokespersons be appointed as the Fire Authority representatives on the Liaison Group and that substitute Members be permitted with the approval of the Chairman.

6 the Chairman of the Authority be authorised to agree a variation of the representation following consultation with the Unions.

7 the Petition Organiser be advised that in the Fire Authority's view, the proposed establishment of a Fire Authority Liaison Group would be the most effective way of establishing a close working relationship between the Authority and the representatives of accredited bodies, which the Petition was seeking to achieve.

3.09/99 FINAL ACCOUNTS - YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 1999

The Authority's approval was sought (Agenda item 9 - not reproduced) to the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 1999 which had been drawn up in accordance with the statutory requirements set out in Part III of the Local Government Finance Act 1982 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996.

In taking Members through the Statement of Accounts the Authority Treasurer drew attention to the following amendment:

Page 27 - In 4th line of final column delete "0" and insert "5"
Amend Total to read "-14,122"

Members attention was also drawn to the External Audit process as set out in paragraph 4 of the report (not reproduced) In the event of the District Auditor identifying any major discrepancies it would be necessary to present a report seeking Members approval to any amendments. A further report on the Auditor's opinion would be presented to a future Fire Authority meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 1999 (as amended) be approved for submission to the District Auditor.

3.10/99 2000/2001 BUDGET

The Authority received a report (Agenda item 10 - not reproduced) which set out the preliminary indications of budgetary requirements for 2000/2001 and prospect for 2001/2202, Budget pressures, Standard Spending Assessments and Government expectations together with the proposed budget process and time-table and were requested to determine the way forward for consideration of the 2000/2001 Budget.

As the Authority had already established a Budget Working Party it was suggested that it gives initial consideration to the Budget requirements and presents its

recommendations to the Fire Authority at its meeting on Wednesday 15 December 1999 for consideration and determination.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1 Officers be asked to submit a report on detailed budget requirements, indicating the implications of setting a budget at the following overall levels:
 - a £20.7m (1999/2000 Budget + 3.5%)
 - b £20.9m (1999/2000 Budget - Efficiency savings + inescapable commitments)
 - c £21.4m (As b above plus an allowance for other pressures)

and that in compiling the report efficiency savings to be identified and proposals for growth to meet other pressures to be prioritised.
- 2 a forecast of the likely Budget requirements for 2001/2002 and 2002/2003 be produced.
- 3 initial consideration of Budget requirements be referred to the Budget Working Party who will present a report with recommendations to the Fire Authority at its meeting on Wednesday 15 December 1999.
- 4 the proposed budget and time-table as set out in the report be approved and adopted.

3.11/99 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY STATEMENT AND STRATEGY

The Authority's approval was sought (Agenda item 11 - not reproduced) to a revised Equal Opportunities Policy Statement together with a strategy designed to implement the policy and achieve the Brigade's target for the recruitment of ethnic minority staff.

The Chairman introduced Mrs Sonia Gandhi, Equal Opportunities Officer (EOO) to the meeting who gave a brief presentation on her role as EOO in the Brigade together with the implications of achieving the Home Office target for the recruitment of ethnic minority staff. In Berkshire this means increasing the proportion of staff from ethnic minorities from the current 1.5% for uniformed staff and 2.4% for non-uniformed staff to 7% for all staff by 2009. It was also likely that targets for the recruitment of woman firefighters would also be introduced.

Following the presentation Members were given the opportunity of asking questions. The Chairman on behalf of members thanked Mrs Gandhi for her attendance at the meeting and for a very full and informative presentation.

Arising from the presentation members considered the Equal Opportunities Policy Statement presented as Appendix 1 (not reproduced) and the following is a summary of the amendments agreed:

- Delete all references to “Fire and Rescue Service” and insert “Fire Authority”
- Fourth paragraph - delete “becoming” and insert “being”
- Fifth paragraph - third bullet point - delete “using existing” and insert “appropriate use of”

RESOLVED: That the:

- 1 proposed Equal Opportunities Policy Statement (as amended) be approved and adopted.
- 2 strategy for its implementation and achievement of the Brigade’s target for the recruitment of ethnic minority staff be noted.

3.12/99 DISPOSAL OR REDUNDANT EQUIPMENT

The Authority was requested (Agenda item 12 - not reproduced) to review its policy for the disposal of redundant or surplus equipment and approval was sought to a revised policy and amendment to Financial Regulation 15.8 to encompass the proposed changes.

In supporting the revised policy Members approved the following minor amendment to Financial Regulation 15.8 as set out in paragraph 7 of the report (not reproduced) to bring it in line with the proposed Resolution 1:

In fifth line after “Officer” insert:- “, after consultation with the Authority Treasurer,”

RESOLVED: That:

- 1 where equipment becomes redundant or surplus to requirements, the Chief Fire Officer, after consultation with the Authority Treasurer, be authorised to consider:
 - i that subject to the estimated disposal value of the equipment not exceeding £3000 such equipment as he considers suitable be donated to any Fire Cadet unit in being in the Brigade at that time; or
 - ii where such equipment is not suitable for use by a Fire Cadet unit but may be suitable for use by a public Fire Brigade in a deprived country, such equipment be donated to such Fire Brigades as he considers

appropriate (subject to the Brigade not incurring any costs or liabilities); or

- iii where such equipment is not considered suitable for either use described in Resolution 1 (i and ii) above, he seeks to sell the equipment to an appropriate market.
- 2 the Chief Fire Officer reports his actions to the next ordinary Fire Authority meeting.
 - 3 Financial Regulation 15.8 be amended to encompass the provisions of Resolution 1 above.

3.13/99 OFFICERS CAR USER POLICIES

The Authority's approval was sought (Agenda item 13 - not reproduced) to rationalise the existing method of vehicle financing in line with the Brigade's commitment to cost effective management.

Currently the car lease benchmark vehicles were based on the Ford Escort or Ford Scorpio which were no longer manufactured. The Treasurer had however identified a Motor Vehicle Purchase Index which could be used to update the figures each April and it was suggested that this method be adopted.

RESOLVED: That the existing system of using selected manufacturer's models as "Benchmark" vehicles for Officer's lease cars be discontinued and replaced with an index-linked monetary value updated each April.

3.14/99 REVIEW OF BRIGADE STRUCTURE

The Authority received a report (Agenda item 14 - not reproduced) on the outcome of the Chief Fire Officer's review of the number of Directorates together with progress on the remaining areas of review and approval was sought to a future course of action.

Members were reminded that the review had been carried out in accordance with the decision made at the Fire Authority meeting in July.

In considering the Chief Fire Officer's proposals as set out in the report Members were of the opinion that a report on the review of the remaining unspecified amendments should be presented to the Fire Authority at its meeting in December. Accordingly an amendment to the suggested Resolution ii was proposed, seconded and agreed.

Members were advised that the financial implications of reducing the number of Directorates to three were fully explained in the Part II Agenda item 23.

RESOLVED: That the Chief Fire Officer be authorised to:

- i amend the Brigade structure to reflect a reduction to three Directorates on a phased basis so as to be fully implemented by the end of December 2000; and
- ii review the remainder of the unspecified amendments including where appropriate consultation with the representative organisations and subject to their being contained within current budgetary provisions, present a report on the outcome of that review to the Fire Authority at its meeting in December 1999.

3.15/99 FIRE CADET SCHEME - PROGRESS REPORT

The Authority received a report (Agenda item 15 - not reproduced) on the progress made in the establishment of the first Fire Cadet Scheme at Crowthorne Fire Station. The inaugural meeting was held on 18 August and it was anticipated that initial training would be completed by 13 October 1999.

Twenty one cadets had been recruited aged between 12 and 15 and instructional staff had been drawn exclusively from Brigade personnel. A set up grant of £5000 had been approved by Bracknell Forest Borough Council. Members wished to place on record their thanks to Bracknell Forest Borough Council for their very generous grant. In addition Members from Bracknell Forest wished to place on record their thanks to Officers from the Borough Council for their help and commitment to the scheme.

Further progress reports would be presented to future Fire Authority meeting.

NOTED

3.16/99 MILLENNIUM PREPAREDNESS

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 26 - not reproduced) of the current state of Millennium preparedness and the work being done to ensure that the Fire and Rescue Service would not suffer significant disruption over the Millennium date change period. An inspection team from Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate had visited the Brigade on 19 August 1999 for their second and final Millennium preparedness audit. As a result of this the Inspectorate have categorised the Brigade's preparedness as "Blue".

NOTED

3.17/99 OPERATIONAL RISK INFORMATION SYSTEM - PROGRESS REPORT

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 17 - not reproduced) of the progress being made towards awarding a contract for the implementation of the Operational Risk Information System (ORIS). As a result of the European tendering process, four companies had submitted formal proposals for the supply and installation of the system. Following a full evaluation, Officers invited one company to enter into pre-contract negotiations, with one other company being held in reserve. Both companies are able to offer the potential to fully meet the Brigade's expectations for the provision of ORIS.

It was anticipated that a report will shortly be presented to the Fire Authority's Urgency Committee seeking approval to award the contract to the preferred prime contractor.

NOTED

3.18/99 1999/2000 BUDGET MONITORING

The Authority was informed (Agenda item 18 - not reproduced) of the Revenue and Capital expenditure against budget up to 31 July 1999 set out in Appendices A (Revenue) and B (Capital) - (not reproduced).

NOTED

3.19/99 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 June 2 to August 1 1999 together with letters of appreciation and news from around the Brigade.

NOTED

3.20/99 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:

	Agenda item	Paragraph
21	Part II Minutes - Wednesday 7 July 1999	1, 8 & 9
22	Part II Minutes of Personnel Committee	1 & 11
23	Proposed Redundancy - Director of Central Services	1

(Note: The following is a summary of the items considered in the Part II Agenda of the Fire Authority meeting held on Wednesday 15 September 1999)

3.21/99 PART II MINUTES: 7 JULY 1999

The Part II Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 7 July 1999 were received and approved as a correct record.

3.22/99 PART II MINUTES OF PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

The Authority was advised (Agenda item 22 - not reproduced) of the Personnel Committee meetings that had taken place since the last Fire Authority meeting.

(Note: At this point the Director of Central Services withdrew from the meeting)

3.23/99 PROPOSED REDUNDANCY - DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL SERVICES

The Authority, having considered the options available, declared the post of Director of Central Services redundant and approved the implementation of a severance package for the postholder.

AGENDA ITEM 3: MINUTES OF SUB-GROUPS

To: Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
Date: 15 December 1999
Officer Contributing: Clerk & Monitoring Officer

A PURPOSE OF REPORT

To advise Members on meetings of the Personnel Committee, Personnel (Disputes) Committee, Budget Working Party, Urgency Committee, Performance Review and Audit Panel and the Fire Liaison Group that have taken place since the last meeting of the Fire Authority in September 1999.

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

None

E SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1 The following meetings have taken place since the last Fire Authority meeting in September 1999:

Personnel Committee:	Tuesday 9 November 1999
Personnel (Disputes) Committee	Friday 22 October 1999
Performance Review and Audit Panel	Tuesday 23 November 1999
Urgency Committee	Tuesday 9 November 1999
Budget Working Party	Tuesday 9 November and Tuesday 7 December 1999
Fire Liaison Group	Monday 29 November 1999

- 2 In view of the importance of Best Value a copy of the Minutes from the Performance Review and Audit Panel meeting held on Tuesday 23 November 1999 is attached as Appendix 1.
- 3 Copies of the Part I Minutes and the Notes of the Fire Liaison Group (if available) can be obtained from David Weller on (0118) 932 2288)

F BACKGROUND PAPERS

Agenda's for the above mentioned meetings

Contact Officer: David R Weller (0118) 932 2288

APPENDIX 1**AGENDA ITEM 2: MINUTES****MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FIRE AUTHORITY'S PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND AUDIT PANEL HELD AT BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS ON TUESDAY 23 NOVEMBER 1999 COMMENCING AT 6.30PM AND CONCLUDED AT 7.55PM**

Present: A B V P Hickley (Chairman), T Mills (Vice-Chairman),
B W Gardner, E E Herbert, Mrs J Orton, T N Stephens

Apologies: J C G Brooks (Ex-Officio)

2.01/99 MINUTES: 16 AUGUST 1999

The Minutes of the last meeting held on Monday 16 August 1999, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

2.02/99 BEST VALUE CONSULTATION

The Panel was informed (Agenda item 2 - not reproduced) of the progress regarding Best Value Consultation.

Members were advised that Opinion Research Services (ORS) had now produced the consultation Questionnaires relating to the Employee Survey and Public Opinion Survey and these would cover all Fire Authority employees and a cross section of the residents of Berkshire respectively. With regard to the Public Opinion Survey the actual areas within the whole County for the survey to take place had not yet been determined but would cover specific areas within both the rural and urban settlements. Officers had met with representatives of Reading Borough and West Berkshire Councils to discuss the possibility of collaboration on this issue.

In considering copies of the two Questionnaires, presented with the Agenda for the meeting, Members were requested to remove Section J from the Employee Survey as the questions set out had not been specifically produced for this Brigade. However Members were of the opinion that the questions were of relevance to Berkshire and requested the Chief Fire Officer to discuss with ORS the possibility of adapting Section J for inclusion in this Fire Authority's Questionnaire. Members also agreed that the longer version of the Public Opinion Survey should be used

2

In noting the contents of the report it was therefore **RESOLVED:** That

- 1 The Employee Survey as presented be approved and adopted for use within the Brigade and that the Chief Fire Officer be requested to discuss with ORS the possibility of adapting Section J for inclusion in that Survey.
- 2 The longer version of the Public Opinion Survey be approved and adopted for use in Berkshire in areas yet to be determined.

2.03/99 REVIEW

The Panel was informed (Agenda item 3 - not reproduced) of progress regarding the review and approval was sought to the Review Methodology as presented in Appendix A (not reproduced).

Members were advised that the final draft included a formal project protocol to ensure the methodology provided satisfactory evidence to support the Authority in proving it was fulfilling its duty under the Local Government Act. It would ensure that functional reviews were planned well, conducted to a timetable and within resource provision. Although it would also apply the four "C's" of Best Value, Members were reminded that the Brigade had agreed to adopt five "C's", namely, Challenge, Compare, Consultation, Competition and Collaboration.

The District Auditor had been consulted on the final draft and had given a verbal approval of the documents. In considering the final draft as set out in Appendix A some Members were of the opinion that Best Value appeared to be very mechanical, time consuming and could cost a significant amount of money to achieve in terms of actual funding and staff resources.

In response to a suggestion by the Authority Treasurer Members agreed that on page 22 (Detailed Review - Part 2 - Compare) the sixth bullet point be deleted and the Chief Fire Officer in consultation with the Authority Treasurer be requested to find another form of suitable wording.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1 The contents of the report be Noted
- 2 Subject to the amendment on page 22 of the document referred to above the Review Methodology be approved.

2.04/99 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN

The Panel's approval was sought (Agenda item 4 - not reproduced) to the first draft of the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) which had been prepared in accordance with Section 6 of the Local Government Act 1999 which sets out those elements which the Secretary of State may, by order, specify and therefore would require to be included in any BVPP.

Members were reminded that the Plan must be published by 1 April 2000. In considering the Draft BVPP, presented as Appendix A (not reproduced), Members were advised that additional amendments to the text were still anticipated and would be included in the next version of the Plan to be presented to a future meeting of the Panel.

This BVPP sets out to underpin the Brigade Strategic Plan in setting challenging targets to meet the Brigade strategic objectives. The District Auditor had been given a copy of the BVPP and would be making observations on the format in due course. The District Auditor had also confirmed that once published, satisfactory distribution could be achieved by a press release informing the public that the BVPP was available at libraries and fire stations etc.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1 The contents of the report be Noted
- 2 The first Draft of the Best Value Performance Plan be approved.

2.05/99 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED: That the next meeting of the Performance Review and Audit Panel be held on Wednesday 12 January 2000 in the Strategic Command Centre commencing at 6.30pm.

NOTE TO: COUNCILLOR J C G BROOKS, CHAIRMAN CFA

Mr Brooks

RE AGENDA ITEM 4 (CHAIRMAN'S COMMUNICATIONS)

When you reach Agenda item 4 (Chairman's Communications) would you please be kind enough to report the following to Members:

- **The LGA Annual Fire Conference “*The Fire Service in the Community*” will be held at the Grand Harbour Hotel, Southampton on 7-8 March 2000. Any Member who is interested in attending should contact the Committee Administrator who also has details of the Draft Programme.**

Thank you

**David R Weller
Committee Administrator**

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

MEMORANDUM

From: Director of Human Resources

Your ref:

To: Chief Fire Officer
Clerk and Monitoring Officer

My ref: DW/SD

Location: Brigade Headquarters

Date: 14 December 1999

CONFIDENTIAL

Subject: QUESTION FROM MEMBER OF PUBLIC

Further to the question submitted by Mr R McAllister I suggest the chairman's response is based on the following:

- 1 In direct response to the two part question asked, the information sought is:
 - a) In the last five years a total of 25 uniformed staff have retired on the grounds of ill health. Of this total, 5 were suffering from stress and / or depression. Of these 5, one case was work-related, and the individual concerned was "office-based".
 - b) Using continuous absence of one month or more as the criteria for "long-term" absence, there are currently 13 uniformed staff on long-term absence. Of this total, 7 are diagnosed as suffering from stress and / or depression. Of these 7, 5 are office based.
- 2 The issue of stress has to be approached with caution. It is not a medical diagnosis and usually has more than one cause. *on related illness*
also having multiple the situation
- 3 The Brigade provides good support to its staff through the Employee Assistance Programme provided by an external organisation, and through Critical Incident De-briefing which focuses on support for staff who have experienced testing operational situations.
- 4 The Fire Service faces many challenges, for example the achievement of "Best Value" and "Equality of Opportunity". As a result the potential for work-related stress is recognised. The most effective response is effective management of workloads and staff. The Brigade is seeking to further improve its performance in these areas through the introduction of a Strategic Planning process and a review of arrangements for staff appraisal.

D Wallace
Director of Human Resources

- 10 If the Chairman is minded to answer the question at the meeting, Members are therefore asked to note the Chairman's response and resolve that a copy of his answer to the question and supplementary (if required) be sent to the questioner.

F BACKGROUND PAPERS

Question received from Mr R McAllistor on 3 December 1999
Fire Authority Standing Order 9

Contact Officer: David R Weller (0118) 932 2288

AGENDA ITEM 8: APPOINTMENT OF MEMBER TO PERSONNEL COMMITTEE AND APPOINTMENT OF GRIEVENCE PANEL

To: Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
Date: 15 December 1999
Officer Contributing: Chief Fire Officer
 Clerk & Monitoring Officer

A PURPOSE OF REPORT

To appoint a Member to the Personnel Committee following the resignation of Councillor D A Veakins and to appoint a Grievance Panel of three from the current Members of the Personnel Committee

B PROPOSED ACTION

The Authority is invited to RESOLVE:

- 1 That Councillor..... be appointed as a Member of the Personnel Committee in place of Councillor D A Veakins.
- 2 That Councillors be appointed as Members of the Personnel Committee's Grievance Panel

C FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications.

D CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN

None

E SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 1 The Authority has received a letter from Councillor D A Veakins (Bracknell Forest Borough Council) tendering his resignation as a Member of the Fire Authority with effect from 15 November 1999. As Councillor Veakins is a Member of the Personnel Committee it will be necessary to appoint a replacement.
- 2 The Fire Authority has received a request to proceed to Stage 4 of the Grievance procedure which involves the establishment of a Grievance Panel. The membership of the Panel would normally be determined by the Personnel Committee but their next scheduled meeting is not until Monday 17 January 2000.

- 3 To ensure that a meeting of the Grievance Panel takes place as soon as possible it is suggested that the Fire Authority appoint a Grievance Panel of three from the current Members of the Personnel Committee who for ease of reference are as follows:

Mrs C Bateson, J C G Brooks, A B V P Hickley, J Morris, B J S Patman
(Vacancy)

- 4 Once the membership of the Panel has been established a meeting of the Grievance Panel will be arranged as soon as possible.

E BACKGROUND PAPERS

Letter from Councillor D A Veakins dated 15 November 1999

Letter requesting the Authority to proceed to Stage 4 of the Grievance Procedure

Contact Officer: David R Weller (0118) 932 2288

AGENDA ITEM 9: REVIEW OF AUTHORITY BUSINESS

To: Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
Date: 15 December 1999
Officer Contributing: Clerk & Monitoring Officer

A PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek Members' views on the workings of the Authority and to consider whether there are any changes they would like to see made to improve the Authority's efficiency.

B PROPOSED ACTION

The Authority is asked to consider the following options and RESOLVE accordingly:

- a whether they wish to continue with the present pattern of meetings
- b whether they wish to see any changes to Committee arrangements
- c whether they wish to seek the approval of the Secretary of State to reduce the size of the Authority
- d whether they wish to amend Standing Orders to permit substitutes at Committees
- e whether they wish to amend Standing Orders to introduce an attendance rule
- f to reduce the quorum of the Urgency Committee from 3 to 2.

C FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There would be some minimal savings if the size of the Authority were reduced.

D CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Clearly it is important that the Authority works as efficiently as possible.

E SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 1 The Combined Fire Authority has now been in existence as a free standing combined Authority for 18 months. It has established a pattern of meeting 5 times a year in different locations. The meetings start at 1830 hours and normally finish after 2 hours. As the decision to meet in this way was taken comparatively recently, it is assumed that the Authority will wish to continue with its present meeting format.

- 2 As much business as possible is put to full Authority but some urgent decisions are taken by the Urgency Committee, comprising the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Mr Morris as Leader of the third Party Group. The present quorum for the Urgency Committee is 3 but it does mean that if a Member fails to attend the meeting for whatever reason, no urgency decision can be taken. The proposal is therefore that the Quorum for the Urgency Committee should be reduced from 3 to 2. Standing Orders will need to be amended to enable this to happen.
- 3 The Authority has also established some specialist Sub Committees eg, Personnel and Audit & Performance Review and there is also a Budget Working Party and a Liaison Group. These Sub Committees/Groups are task oriented, meeting only when there is work to be done. It appears therefore to be an efficient way of working but the Authority is asked to consider whether it agrees.
- 4 Attendance at Authority meetings is variable [like the curate's egg - good in parts]. Overall attendance at the 8 Authority meetings in the past two years has been 65%. 20% of the Members of the Authority have 100% attendance; while another 30% have 80% or more. But it has to be said that there are some very poor attendees.
- 5 Appointment to the Authority is in the hands of the Unitary Authorities but the Authority has no attendance rule. There is a provision in Standing Orders regarding substitute members at Committees but it is unwieldy. In view of that the Clerk has drafted amendments to Standing Orders, regarding attendance and substitute membership, which the Authority is asked to consider (Appendix 1).
- 6 The present size of the Authority is 25, with the Royal Borough, West Berkshire and Wokingham having 5 members, Reading 4 and Slough and Bracknell Forest 3, and the Authority was deliberately increased to that size at the request of the Shadow Unitary Authorities. The Authority is asked to consider whether reducing the size of the Authority, to say 18 would give greater 'ownership' as regards membership. However, based on existing electorates the District with the largest electorate (Wokingham), will be allocated four seats and the smallest (Bracknell Forest) only two with the other Unitary Authorities being allocated three each. Changing the size of the Authority would require an amendment of the Scheme but is something that can be effected by the Secretary of State through Order, without taking up Parliamentary time.

F BACKGROUND PAPERS

Attendance Sheets of 1998/99 Authority meetings.
Details of electorates obtained from Unitary Authorities

Contact Officer: Mr C Williams (0118) 932 2284

APPENDIX 1**A ATTENDANCE (New Standing Order)**

- 1 In the event of a Member failing to attend any meeting of the Authority (attendance at a Committee/Sub Committee or Working Group shall count as Authority attendance) for a period of 6 months, the Clerk shall write to the Member in question drawing their attention to this Standing Order.
- 2 If after being notified by the Clerk of their failure to attend a meeting, the Member, without obtaining the prior approval of the Authority, shall fail to attend any meeting of the Authority for a further six months, they shall cease to be a Member and the appointing Unitary Authority shall be asked to appoint a replacement.

B QUORUM OF URGENCY COMMITTEE TO BE REDUCED TO TWO

Standing Order 27 (E) to be amended as follows:

- (e) With the exception of the Urgency Committee where the quorum shall be 2, the quorum for a Committee or Sub Committee shall be 3 Members of the Committee or Sub Committee concerned or such greater number of Members as the Authority shall determine.

C SUBSTITUTE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES

Standing Order 27 (d) to be amended:

- (d) Where a Member is unable to attend a meeting of a Committee, Sub Committee or Working Group they may nominate another Member of the Authority to attend as their substitute, provided the Clerk is given notice of the proposed change by the Member unable to attend, in advance of the meeting where substitution is to take place. Notice can be given in writing or by telephone.

**AGENDA ITEM 10: FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY
TERMS OF REFERENCE OF PERSONNEL
COMMITTEE**

To: Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
Date: 15 December 1999
Officer Contributing: Clerk & Monitoring Officer

A PURPOSE OF REPORT

To extend the terms of reference of the Personnel Committee to embrace consideration of equal opportunities matters.

B PROPOSED ACTION

The Authority is invited to RESOLVE: That the Terms of Reference of the Personnel Committee be extended to include ‘Consideration of Fairness and Equality Issues and reporting to the Fire Authority as appropriate’.

C FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

D CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The proposal emphasises the importance of the Authority and Brigade implementing their fairness and equality policies

E SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 1 The existing terms of reference of the Personnel Sub Committee are as follows:
 - 1 To determine matters, including staff appeals, relating to uniformed employees of the Royal Berkshire Fire and 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 grievance, wherever the 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 wherever it believes that to be an 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.
 - 6 To approve the Authority's response to consultation on Local and National Council negotiations affecting Conditions of Service.
- 2 At its last meeting on 9 November the Personnel Committee considered the implications for the Brigade of the recent Fire Service Inspectorate Thematic Review on Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service.
 - 3 The Committee felt that this subject was of considerable importance to the Service and Authority. It clearly fell to be discussed initially by the Personnel Committee but the Committee were of the view that the importance would be emphasised if the terms of reference of the Committee were extended to include an express reference to Fairness and Equality issues (also known as Equal Opportunity issues).

F BACKGROUND PAPERS

Minutes of Personnel Committee

Contact Officer: Clive Williams (0118) 932 2284

F BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 1 Local Government Finance Act 1982
- 2 Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996
- 3 Statement of Accounts 1998/99
- 4 District Audit Management Letter to Members - Audit 1998/99

Contact Officer: Donald Illingworth (0118) 932 2284

Management Letter to Members
Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

APPENDIX 1**Management Letter to Members**

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

Audit 1998/99

**DISTRICT AUDIT**

delivering public audit
for the Audit Commission

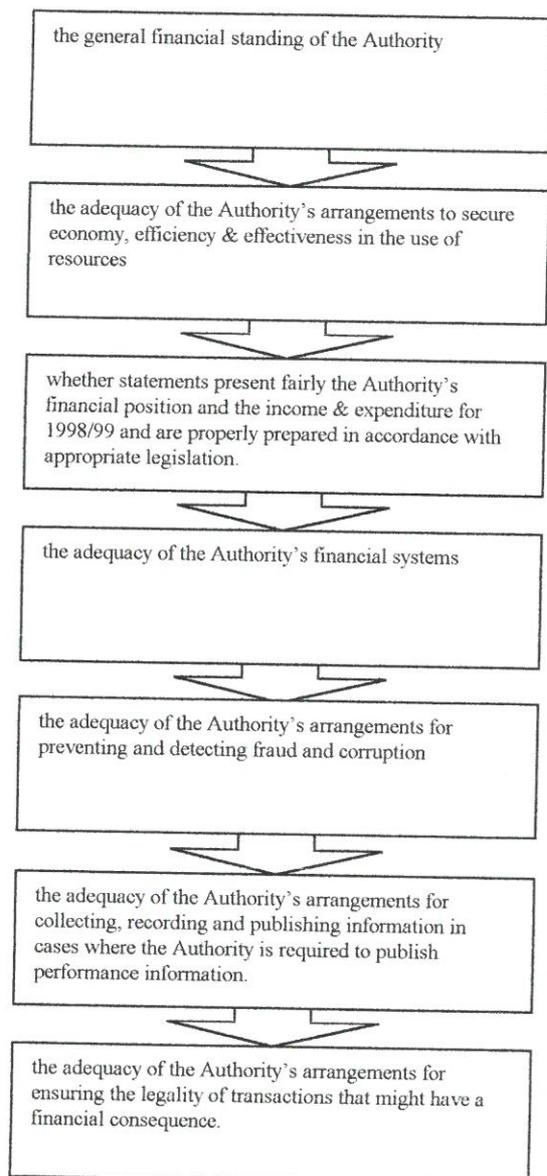
Stephen Taylor *District Auditor*

Hassan Rohimun *Audit Manager*

1. Introduction

This Management Letter summarises for Members the findings of our 1998/99 audit. It is structured around the objectives of our work, which are specified in the Code of Audit Practice.

Under the Code we are required to give an independent assessment of:



Our overall conclusion is positive in relation to all seven objectives.

2. Key Issues from the Audit of Accounts 1998/99

The key issues from the current audit are summarised below:

- Consolidating as a 'stand alone' body
- Preparations for Best Value
- Service and Financial Planning - The development of a long term focus for financial and service plans
- Contributing to further developments in relation to Community Safety

3. Financial Standing

We are required to form an independent view of the Fire Authority's general financial standing. We do this by a number of means including review of your ability to meet future financial obligations, together with past and current financial performance.

The Authority's net revenue expenditure is funded by a levy on the six constituent authorities. As a general rule The Audit Commission have expressed a view that Combined Fire Authorities should not create and maintain reserves. It is considered prudent however to create provisions where a liability is likely or certain to be incurred. After making provisions any surplus or deficit should be transferred to or from the constituent authorities.

The rationale for the provisions made in 1998/99 was discussed with Officers as part of our audit and there are no issues to bring to the attention of members.

The position at the year end 31 March 1999 is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1.

1998/99	Budget (£'000)	Actual (£'000)
Expenditure	18,900	17,942
Provision:		
Capital Financing		250
Future Pension Costs		354
Replacement Clothing		150
Removal of Asbestos		178
Community Safety		26
Total	18,900	18,900

The latest projections are that expenditure for 1999/2000 is on course to meet the budgeted expenditure of £20 million, Table 2. Members are currently considering the budget for 2000/2001.

Table 2.

	1998/99	1999/2000
	£'000	£'000
Budget	18,900	20,000
% Increase		+5.8%

4. Value for Money and Management Arrangements

In discharging our value for money objectives this year we have considered the following issues:

- Consolidating as a 'stand alone' body
- Preparations for Best Value
- Service and Financial Planning
- Community Safety
- Preparations for Year 2000

Consolidating as a 'Stand Alone' Body

As a 'stand alone' body good progress has been made during the year by the Authority in establishing a financial system, financial controls and financial reporting procedures.

Financial services are currently provided, under contract, by CSL. These arrangements are generally working well, with good client control exercised by Officers of the Authority.

Preparations for Best Value

Best Value is one of the Government's cornerstone policies for modernising local government and improving local services. With effect from 1 April 2000 all fire authorities will be under a statutory duty to secure continuous service improvements in the provision of their services.

A key feature of the Best Value initiative is the requirement to produce a Best Value Performance Plan, the first plan needs to be produced by 31 March 2000.

The plan will be a public document in which each authority will, at the least, be required to:

- Report its achievement against a range of nationally and locally determined performance indicators.
- Set a number of targets against which improvements in performance can be monitored.

- Summarise the outcome to date of the five year programme of fundamental service reviews.

For our part the Local Government Act 1999 places a duty on us to issue a report on your Best Value Performance plan by 30 June each year.

We have sought to assist the Authority's preparations for Best Value by:

- Facilitating a series of Best Value seminars and workshops for Regions 5 and 6 of the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association.
- Working with your officers to assess the Authority's preparations against an Audit Commission good practice checklist.
- Reporting the results of our quarterly reviews of the progress made against the Audit Commission's milestones, which provide a check on whether arrangements are in place to meet the statutory timetable.
- Using an Audit Commission study to review the effectiveness of your Service and Financial Planning processes, which will be critical to the achievement of continuous service improvement.

Overall the Authority is making good progress. Particularly in establishing a Performance Review and Audit Panel, drawing up its strategic plan, engaging a market research company to assist in forming a consultation strategy, drafting a methodology for undertaking fundamental reviews and the drafting of a Best Value Performance Plan.

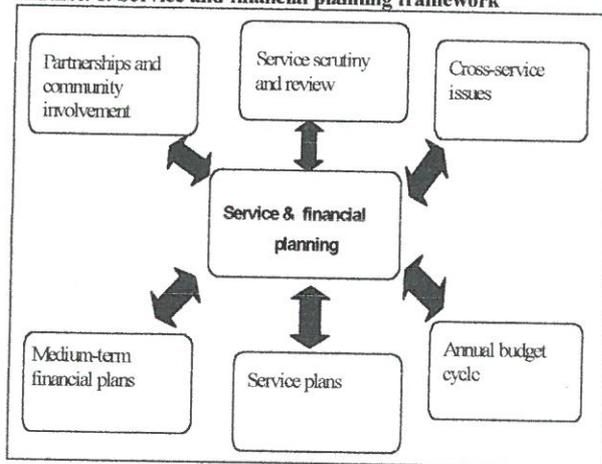
Meeting the statutory deadlines will continue to put pressure on the Fire Authority's limited resources. The Authority will need to continue monitoring the progress of preparations against the critical path that has been established and to further progress the work to date on local performance indicators.

Service and Financial Planning

The statutory framework for 'best value' seeks to achieve change and continuous service improvement. Sound service and financial planning is critical in delivering services to clear standards by the most effective, economic and efficient means available and ensuring continuous improvement is achieved.

Exhibit 1 reflects the integrated approach that the audit has been seeking to promote.

Exhibit 1. Service and financial planning framework



Source Audit Commission

The overall objectives of the review were to:

- Provide the Authority with a view on the extent to which its corporate framework provides an effective basis for Best Value performance planning.
- Highlight the key features and characteristics of effective service and financial planning and how these may be achieved.
- Help the authority to develop a robust approach to medium and longer-term financial planning.
- Provide comparison and information on good practice approaches to issues such as community consultation, cross service and partnership work and service review.

Work is still in progress and the full report will be submitted to the Authority shortly. The key issues arising from this audit are:

- The Authority should seek ways to link strategic planning more closely to financial planning. A long term budget linked to the tactical plan is now being established.
- Corporate planning is innovative and given high priority in the organisation. We will further review service level planning.
- The Authority is in the early stages of developing a coherent approach to consultation. To date research consultants have been commissioned to undertake consultation within a national framework and there are plans to liaise with other Berkshire authorities.

- There are strong monitoring arrangements in place, however the Authority should consider what local performance indicators should be developed to inform the performance review process.
- Planning processes are being geared to Best Value. The business excellence model, now being used for business planning, is a recognised tool to achieve continuous service improvement and the Tactical Plan incorporates Best Value Reviews.

Community Safety

Personal safety is fundamental to the quality of life in any community. The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act created a statutory responsibility for local authorities and police forces to form partnerships with other key agencies, including probation services, fire and health authorities, to reduce crime and disorder in their area. By 1 April 1999 these partnerships were required to undertake a crime audit, consult the local community and produce a three-year strategy to reduce crime and disorder.

Our audit in Berkshire was intended to assess the area's response to the challenge posed by this legislation. Our work was focussed on the local partnerships based on each Unitary Authority area and a separate report was made to each.

Community Fire Safety Officers are contributing to the work of Crime and Disorder partnerships in delivering an integrated approach to local community safety problems and are involved in a number of initiatives with various partner agencies.

In accordance with Home Office guidance, the Service produced a Community Fire Safety Plan for 1999/2000, setting out its approach to fire prevention work. Links to Crime and Disorder partnership initiatives are made within the plan. The Plan recognises the importance proactive community safety activity and outlines a programme of proactive initiatives. The Service has also carried out this year an internal audit of its approach to Community Fire Safety.

Our audit identified a number of issues for partnerships to address. The key issues of interest to the Fire Authority are set out below:

- Ensure there is a clear strategy for partnership working, including funding, monitoring and evaluation.
- Develop systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of community safety work carried out under the strategy

Preparations for Year 2000

The Year 2000 project is an exercise that affects all parts of the Authority's activities, and by its nature, has a fixed deadline for completion. The objectives of our review were to:

- Assess the Authority's progress in addressing Year 2000 issues
- Compare this progress with other public bodies
- Identify areas that still need to be addressed

The review, which was undertaken in February 1999, concluded that the Authority was well advanced with its preparations, and had made good progress in:

- Identifying the actions to be taken, staff responsible for them and deadlines for completion.
- Preparing inventories of systems and equipment that might need modification, prioritising them, and establishing their compliance.
- Amending purchasing guidelines and specifications for new equipment to require Year 2000 compliance.
- Ensuring the compliance of essential communications and command and control systems.
- Preparing operational plans for the Millennium period and maintaining liaison with other emergency services.

Our review found that the following key issues needed to be addressed:

- Steps were required to ensure that the security mechanism on the control centre doors is Year 2000 compliant.
- The Authority needed to clearly specify and document the results of any tests carried out.
- Consideration to external validation of the Authority's in-house testing.
- To ascertain the extent of payments which would need to be made to staff who are on call over the Millennium period.
- To continue the work in progress to complete, test and agree with other emergency services contingency plans to ensure they are compatible with other arrangements.

We understand that the Authority has made progress in addressing these issues during the course of the year.

In respect of Year 2000 preparedness, the Authority has recently been assessed as having 'Blue Light' status by Central Government. This means their assessment process did not identify any risk of material disruption to key services.

5. Statement of Accounts

The approach to support our opinion on the financial statements focuses on an assessment of:

- The main accounting system
- Budgetary control procedures
- Final accounts close-down procedures

In the first year as a 'stand alone' body the Fire Authority generally had satisfactory controls in place in these areas. We feel it important to stress that due to the funding arrangements in place, budgets must be set on a sound basis.

Having reviewed these areas we undertook testing, with regard to our assessment of audit risk and materiality levels, of the reported figures in the financial statements.

An unqualified audit opinion will be issued on the annual accounts for 1998/99 in December 1999 after the statutory period of public inspection.

6. Adequacy of Systems

The Code of Audit Practice 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
- Report on the adequacy of such significant systems and associated internal controls

In meeting these objectives we reviewed the design and tested the following individual systems:

- Main Accounting
- Creditor payments
- Payroll
- Loans
- Investments
- Debtors
- Income from Unitary Authorities

We worked closely with Internal Audit in this area and were able to place reliance on their coverage. On the basis of our work we concluded that the major systems are operating satisfactorily and meet the purposes for which they were designed.

7. Preventing and Detecting Fraud and Corruption

It is our duty to assess the adequacy of the arrangements put in place by the Authority for preventing and detecting fraud and corruption. This year we have reviewed the Authority's overall arrangements for the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption.

We noted that whilst a 'whistle blowing' policy and a procedure for receiving and investigating allegations of fraud and corruption are currently being drafted, the Authority does not have an overall anti-fraud and corruption policy.

In line with good practice we recommend that the arrangements currently in place and being developed should be brought together in an overall anti-fraud and corruption policy.

8. Performance Indicators

The Authority is required to publish its performance indicators annually. The indicators, which are subject to audit, show that the authority is performing well when compared with the national average for 1997/98 and over time, as illustrated in table 3.

The service improved its success rate in attending calls within the nationally prescribed attendance standards, although the average time taken to carry out fire safety certifications increased cost per head of the population increased marginally last year, however performance is still below 1997/98 national average. The cost per head of population, showed a slight increase between the two years, but again was below the 1997/98 national average.

Table 3.

	RBFA 1997/98	RBFA 1998/99	National Average 1997/98
% of calls where attendance standards were met.	95%	97.75%	96%
Cost of Fire Service per head of population.	£23.12	£24.45	£25
Average time taken to carry out inspections for fire safety certificates.	93 days	100 days	127 days

Our review of the 1998/99 performance indicators has been completed and an unqualified opinion has been issued.

9. Legality

It is the Authority's responsibility to act within the law and to take appropriate legal advice where necessary. For our part we are required to assess the adequacy of your arrangements for ensuring the legality of transactions that might have a financial consequence.

We discharged this responsibility in 1998/99 by reviewing your minutes and by maintaining a dialogue with key officers. This work did not identify any issues of concern, and our conclusion is that your arrangements are satisfactory.

10. Future Audit Work

We will continue to work closely with your officers during the 1999/2000 audit, concentrating on:

- The overall budget position – maintaining a watching brief
- The continuing accuracy and quality of the statement of accounts
- The audit of your Best Value arrangements in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1999.

Possible areas for Value for Money audit work will be discussed with officers. These will be finalised through the preparation of the audit plan.

AGENDA ITEM 12:**FIXING OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE
COMBINED FIRE SERVICE FUND**

To: Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
Date: 15 December 1999
Officer Contributing: Treasurer
 Clerk & Monitoring Officer

A PURPOSE OF REPORT

To delegate to the Treasurer the fixing of the contributions to be made by each constituent authority to the Combined Fire Service Fund on the basis of the approved Fire Authority budget and the Council Tax Base for Revenue Support Grant.

B PROPOSED ACTION

The Authority is invited to **RESOLVE:** That the Scheme of Delegation to Officers be amended by adding the following to the activities delegated to the Treasurer of the Combined Fire Service Fund:

'To fix the contributions to be made by each constituent authority to the Combined Fire Service Fund on the basis of the approved Fire Authority budget and the Council Tax Base for Revenue Support Grant.'

C FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Revenue Budget is approved by the Fire Authority at a meeting held in December each year. The proportion of the budget to be met by each constituent authority is calculated on the Council Tax Base for Revenue Support Grant. The contributions are payable by 12 instalments on the first working day of each month.

D CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRATEGIC PLAN

None.

E SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 1 Appendix 'A' reproduces Part 1V of the Berkshire Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1997 on the operation of the Combined Fire Services Fund.
- 2 The Authority's policy is to require the contribution payable by each constituent authority by 12 instalments on the first working day of each month.

- 3 Whilst the Fire Authority approves its Budget in December the fixing of the contributions to be made by each constituent authority cannot be finalised until the Revenue Support Grant Orders are laid by the Government each February. These include the Council Tax Base for Revenue Support Grant for each constituent authority.
- 4 For 1998/99 and 1999/2000 the calculation of the constituent authorities' contributions was approved by the Fire Authority, who had scheduled February meetings which enabled notice to be given to constituent authorities of their contributions by the statutory date of before 15 February.
- 5 The Schedule of meetings for this municipal year approved by the Authority does not include a February meeting - the next scheduled meeting is 15 March 2000. The business needs of the Fire Authority are better accommodated by a March meeting each year.
- 6 Given the Fire Authority approval of the total budget requirement; once the Tax Base for Revenue Support Grant is included in the Government's Revenue Support Grant Order the calculation of each constituent authority's contribution is a mathematical one. It would be appropriate therefore to delegate this activity to the Treasurer and avoid the need for a Special Fire Authority meeting during the first two weeks of February.

E BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 1 Agenda and Minutes, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority: 3 February 1999
- 2 Financial Regulations of the Fire Authority

Contact Officer: Donald Illingworth (0118) 932 2250

