

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



Held on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> December 2015 at 7.30pm

Brigade Headquarters, Lynda Kenyon Suite, Newsham Court, Pincents Lane, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD

- Members:**
- \* Councillor Frank Abe
  - \* Councillor David Absolom
  - \* Councillor Alistair Auty
  - Councillor Joginder Bal
  - \* Councillor Christine Bateson
  - \* Councillor Phillip Bicknell
  - Councillor Paul Bryant
  - \* Councillor David Burbage
  - Councillor Anthony Chadley
  - \* Councillor Colin Dudley
  - \* Councillor Adrian Edwards
  - \* Councillor Paul Gittings
  - \* Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons
  - \* Councillor Carol Jackson-Doerge
  - \* Councillor John Lenton
  - \* Councillor Chris Maskell
  - \* Councillor Tom McCann
  - \* Councillor Iain McCracken
  - Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle
  - \* Councillor Ian Pittock
  - \* Councillor Edward Plenty
  - \* Councillor Angus Ross
  - \* Councillor Ishrat Shah
  - \* Councillor Jane Stanford-Beale
  - \* Councillor Emma Webster

- In Attendance:**
- Conor Byrne (Head of Finance, HOF)
  - David Chambers (Fire Officer)
  - Stephen Chard (Committee Officer)
  - Andrew Collman (Fire Officer)
  - Trevor Ferguson (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
  - Andy Fry (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)
  - Darran Gunter (Chief Fire Officer, CFO – Dorset Fire and Rescue Service)
  - Colin Herbst (Fire Safety Officer)
  - Martyn Howlett (Fire Officer)
  - Linda Pye (Committee Officer)
  - Nikki Richards (Head of Business Information and Systems, HBIS)
  - Fayth Rowe (Committee Officer)
  - Anne-Marie Scott (Director of People and Organisational Development, DPOD)
  - Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)

- Observers:**
- Officers, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service
  - Members of Representative Bodies
  - Members of the Public

## 56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Joginder Bal, Paul Bryant and Tina McKenzie-Boyle.

## 57. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct,

**Action**

Councillor Angus Ross stated that should the Fire Control Service be discussed in agenda item 14 he declared a personal interest as he was the Chairman of the Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Committee.

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Officers.

## **58. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2015**

### **RESOLVED that:**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2015 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the arrival times for Councillors David Burbage and Emma Webster being corrected.

## **59. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDERS 19 AND 25**

There were no questions from members of the public under Standing Orders 19 and 25.

## **60. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman made the following announcements:

### **1. Filming Fire Authority**

The Chairman announced that the Fire Authority meeting would be filmed and if anyone did not want to be filmed, they should indicate this.

### **2. Presentations**

#### **Operational Assessment Mid Point Review**

The Chairman welcomed CFO Darran Gunter from Dorset Fire and Rescue Service. Darran was the lead peer from the last Operational Peer Assessment in early 2014. In October 2015 Darran returned with a number of his colleagues from the original peer team and they completed a “mid-point” assessment of the progress the Service had made since their original visit. Darran would be presenting the headline findings from that mid-point assessment under agenda item 10.

Darran was kind enough to give this presentation to the Management Committee on the last day of the team’s return visit. The Chairman was sure that Members would be very pleased with the excellent progress made to date and the clear direction of travel which the returning peer team identified.

#### **Bringing Fire safety to Harare**

In the latest edition of the Shout newsletter, a feature about “Bringing fire safety to Harare, Zimbabwe” was included. The feature was about RBFRS Fire Safety Officer Colin Herbst. The Chairman stated that he had invited Colin to this meeting to tell the authority first hand of his time volunteering in Zimbabwe.

In addition, Members would also receive a presentation from Firefighters David Chambers, Martyn Howlett and Andrew Collman on their time spent volunteering in Uganda.

### **3. Visit to South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) Mobilising Control**

On 28 November 2015 the Chairman visited South Central Ambulance Service’s

mobilising control in Bicester with the Chief Fire Officer and James Hunt, the FBU official who was leading on Co-Responding.

The visit was absolutely fascinating and a real eye-opener in terms of illustrating the excellent job that colleagues in the ambulance service did in trying to meet the demands associated with responding to around half-a-million calls every year. Clearly they had some real challenges on their hands and the Chairman was left in absolutely no doubt that the Fire and Rescue Service had a really important role to play in working alongside the experts in SCAS to help address the challenges in question. He looked forward to building upon the Co-Responding schemes that were already operating out of Hungerford and Wokingham Fire Stations.

Whilst attending the visit, assistance was given with an incident that provided a clear illustration of the sort of benefits that even closer working between the fire and ambulance service would deliver. SCAS had been called to an emergency in woods near Crowthorne, involving a casualty who had fallen and suffered a head injury. The casualty was some distance from the nearest roadway and it was suggested that fire crews from Maidenhead should be mobilised to assist SCAS colleagues with the logistics of locating and retrieving the casualty so that they could be taken to hospital. The Chairman thought that this was a really good example of joined-up emergency services in action.

Having visited the SCAS control room, the Chairman was even more convinced that the policy decision to focus on providing assistance to ambulance colleagues was the right one – it was good for the Fire Service, it was good for SCAS and, most importantly of course, it was good for the Fire Authority's constituents when they were in need of potentially life-saving medical care. He congratulated Members on making this decision and thanked Officers in their continued work to protect the community.

Councillor David Burbage reported that he had also observed the activity of the SCAS control room and he reinforced the importance of emergency services working closely together.

#### **4. RBFRS had attended three significant fires in close succession**

The first occurred late evening on 3 November 2015 at The Cube, Downmill Road, Bracknell. Appliances were on the scene very quickly and the premises was safely evacuated. Due to the materials used in the construction of the building the fire had spread rapidly affecting the structural integrity of the building. An early decision was taken to fight the fire from outside as it was deemed too dangerous for firefighters to enter the building. At the height of the incident there were 10 fire engines in attendance and a number of specialist vehicles, including an aerial appliance and command unit.

The second fire occurred on 11 November 2015 at 5.30pm at Wokefield Park Hotel, Mortimer. A total of 12 fire engines along with an aerial appliance, water bowser and the new Zetros specialist vehicle attended the fire. The hotel was safely evacuated before fire crews tackled a very severe fire in one of the accommodation wings. The expertise of the fire crews managed to stop the fire spreading to the other parts of the hotel, ensuring minimal damage and financial loss.

The third fire occurred in the Reading Lake Hotel, Pingewood on the 21 November 2015 at 11.35am. The initial call indicated that persons were still inside the building, however it was later confirmed that the hotel had been safely evacuated.

At the height of the fire there were 10 fire engines in attendance, supported by a water bowser, an aerial appliance and a command unit. Fire crews managed to contain the fire to the hotel accommodation wing, despite high winds which periodically changed direction, making firefighting operations particularly challenging.

Although in the case of each of these three major fires, firefighting operations went well and no members of the public or firefighters were injured, the environmental and economic consequences were severe and that would not have been the case had sprinklers been installed in these properties. As a result, the Chairman was now in discussions with officer colleagues about how these fires might be used as a platform to lobby for changes to the Building Regulations and associated guidance documents, so that they better addressed the consequences of serious fires in business premises, as well as the life-safety implications. This was particularly important from an economic viewpoint when considering that the large majority of businesses who had suffered fires were not able to reopen. The installation of sprinklers would significantly reduce the impact of fires.

## **5. Fire Related Deaths**

The Chairman was very sad to report that since the last meeting of the Authority, three people had tragically lost their lives to fire in Royal Berkshire. In each case it looked likely that the fate of the individuals in question had already been sealed before the first fire engines that attended had even left their fire stations and before the alarm call had been received. Unfortunately this was a scenario that remained all too familiar and officers were now looking very closely at the circumstances surrounding each of the incidents alongside colleagues from other agencies, to see whether upstream preventative measures could have reasonably been put in place to prevent these fatalities – including through provision of sprinklers or other fire suppression systems.

## **6. Second Co-Responding Scheme Launched**

A second co-responding scheme had been launched and was up and running at Wokingham Fire Station. The scheme went live on 3 December 2015 and involved the crew responding to medical emergencies in a fire engine. As of the 12 December 2015 crews from Wokingham had responded to 17 calls. Most of these involved the administration of oxygen therapy for a range of conditions before the arrival of ambulance personnel, and also using a Pulse Oximeter to monitor oxygen levels and heart rate of the patient. Patients had ranged in age from a 7 week old baby girl to a 97 year old lady. This was another important step in delivering against the commitment made last year to have firefighters working more closely with ambulance colleagues to improve the response to medical emergencies in Royal Berkshire, and the Chairman was sure that Members would want to join him in wholeheartedly welcoming this new addition to the co-responding team. This was a fantastic scheme which the Chairman would like to see rolled out across the county.

## **7. Update on IRMP consultation**

Following the production of the corporate plan and IRMP for 2015 – 2019 (tabled at the meeting) the Fire Authority would be entering into a consultation period which would start on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016 and would run for 12 weeks until the 4<sup>th</sup> April 2016.

The consultation would be launched on the new RBFRS website inviting people to

read through the plan and comment using an online survey. This would be supported through use of social media, local media and a leaflet and poster campaign. Engagement events for both staff and key stakeholders were being planned for the New Year.

Based on the analysis of the feedback received a report would be produced in May 2016.

#### **8. Update on the FBU's legal challenge in relation to the transitional protection – 2015 firefighters' pension scheme**

The Fire Authority had received a letter from Matt Wrack, General Secretary of the FBU. In the letter he updated on progress in the legal challenge the FBU launched on the basis that transitional arrangements in the 2015 scheme were discriminatory. The outcome of this legal process was not expected until the Spring of 2017. Most importantly he further confirmed that the FBU Executive Council had agreed that no further strikes would be called in relation to the trade union dispute on pensions whilst the legal case was pursued, i.e. until at least June 2017. The Chairman was sure that all Members would welcome this news and join him in hoping that the dispute was brought to a close without any further unnecessary and damaging strike action.

#### **9. New RBFRS website**

The new RBFRS website would go-live on Thursday 17 December 2015. The website had been built in-house and supported by a local organisation who was an expert in Wordpress. The new website would be hosted in a secure data centre with the appropriate disaster recovery arrangement and would be monitored by the supplier.

The new website would be a key part to the RBFRS external communications and would continue to be developed to improve the information provided to residents and businesses. The Chairman felt that the new website had an improved look and would be much easier to navigate.

The Modern.gov element would go live in the next few days. For those who were unfamiliar with this software, Modern.gov would enable the more efficient collation of Committee papers. Councillors and members of the public would be able to subscribe to receive notification of meetings and would be able to download papers directly onto their devices. The Chairman looked forward to using this facility as he currently used it within his own Unitary Authority in Bracknell.

The Chairman thanked all those who had been involved in the development of the website and the implementation of Modern.gov. Although these had been challenging areas of work, excellent outcomes had been achieved.

#### **10. Signing In/ Councillors Lanyards**

For security purposes, Members and visitors to this building were being asked to sign in at Reception. This was in addition to the Attendance Sheet that Members were required to sign.

Members would have noticed that Councillor lanyards and passes had been available at Reception, and on signing out he asked if Members could make sure they returned them.

#### **11. Fire exits**

The Chairman explained the fire exits to be used if the alarm was to sound as

there was no scheduled fire alarm test.

### **Bringing fire safety to Harare, Zimbabwe/Voluntary work in Uganda**

Andy Fry (Chief Fire Officer, CFO) introduced these presentations by stating that it was a pleasure for him to work with officers who were willing, as well as serving the public on a day to day basis, to work on a voluntary basis and these presentations were two examples of this.

Firstly, Colin Herbst spoke of his time working with a fire safety charity in Harare, Zimbabwe in August 2015 and highlighted the following points:

- The main objective of the operation was to provide fire safety and operational training to the Harare Fire Brigade.
- An area of 371 square miles was served by 4 stations and 170 staff which included ambulance staff. A maximum of 10 officers would be on duty at the Headquarters with a further 4 on duty at each of the other 3 stations. It was the case that significant distances needed to be covered before an incident could begin to be responded to.
- The equipment available was described, this had largely come from donations from England of redundant equipment, much of which was considerably dated and in some cases not available for use, with limited resources to fix broken equipment. However, the donated equipment was still an improvement on the equipment available in Zimbabwe. It was also the case that a single battery needed to be shared between appliances. Engines and equipment were unreliable.
- The training programme covered:
  - Use of breathing apparatus
  - Road traffic collisions
  - Incident command course
  - Technical fire safety
  - Trauma life support ambulance staff training
  - Introduction to community fire safety
- Community safety work was undertaken for the first time in a school and an elderly people's home.
- Reference was also made to a visit to a council building in the area. This served as an example of the many unsafe working practices that were in place in the country.

A presentation was then provided by Firefighters David Chambers, Martyn Howlett and Andrew Collman on their time spent volunteering in Uganda as part of the work of a community fire safety charity that was run by UK volunteers.

Martyn explained that fire was a particular concern in boarding schools. This was due to their layout and the need to lock the doors and windows of the boarding schools to protect children from the high risk of being kidnapped.

David added that there was a focus on spreading fire safety messages in schools for children of different ages. This included 'Shout, Get Out, Stay Out', action to take in the event that clothing caught fire and the importance of breaking the fire

triangle when fighting a fire.

Andrew explained that such messages/fire safety practices were delivered to a very large number of children and young people. The children were able to demonstrate their learning of key messages.

The charity was looking to widen its work across Uganda as it was still the case that children were losing their lives in school fires.

The officers thanked the Fire Authority and the CFO for their support in enabling them to make this trip.

The Chairman commented that these were highly enlightening and very humbling presentations. They were clear examples of how seriously fire fighters took their work and showed a willingness of officers to share the benefits of their training outside of their day job.

## **61. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

It was noted that agenda item 15 on Local Government Pension Scheme Pooled Investments had been referred from Audit and Governance Committee at their meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015.

## **62. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS UNDER STANDING ORDER 30**

There were no questions from Members under Standing Order 30.

## **63. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDER 44**

There were no Notices of Motion under Standing Order 44.

## **64. RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEES**

It was noted that agenda item 20 had been recommended from the Strategic Asset Management Committee on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2015, and items 11, 12 and 13 from the Audit and Governance Committee on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2015.

## **65. OP A PEER REVIEW TEAM MID POINT REVIEW – PRESENTATION BY CHIEF FIRE OFFICER DARRAN GUNTER**

Andy Fry, Chief Fire Officer (CFO), presented the report which provided the Committee with feedback from the Operational Assessment Peer Review Team at their mid-point review. The Review Team had provided an independent view of arrangements within the Fire Authority which included leadership and capacity to undertake the actions it had set out to do.

Appendix 1 to the report provided a summary of a self assessment of progress to date by RBFRS Officers compared with comments from the Operational Assessment Peer Review Team.

Operational Assessment (Op A) Peer Review was developed following the abolition of the audit and inspection regime and the national performance framework and they were central to a shift that had been made to sector-led improvement and greater local accountability. The Op A peer review was delivered at no direct cost to the Fire Authority and was carried out in February 2014. The final report had been received in September 2014 and when the initial findings had

been presented to the Fire Authority an offer had been made to return in 18 months time to review progress. This was the first time that the Fire Authority had received a mid point review and feedback provided suggested that this had worked well.

RBFRS Officers had developed a programme of events which gave the review team the opportunity to talk to staff and Members in regard to progress. In advance of the visit Officers had supplied a large portfolio of evidence together with a summary of self assessment of progress highlighting actions taken to address the suggested area to explore, described in the final report. The two day visit had culminated in a feedback session to the Management Committee Members plus the Chairs of the other Fire Authority Committees and Working Parties.

The CFO welcomed Darren Gunter, the Chief Fire Officer from Dorset FRS, who gave a presentation on feedback from the mid-point review.

The Peer Challenge was part of sector led improvement and complemented the Op A self assessment. It took the role of a critical friend with no intervention or enforcement powers. All four team members had been part of the original team in February 2014 and they had been made to feel very welcome. People had been open and honest and the impression given was that they were hungry for change.

The focus for the review in October 2015 was around the action plan from the Peer Challenge in February 2014 which included:

- Leadership and Corporate Capacity
  - Vision
  - Governance
  - Organisational development
  - Communication and partnership
  - Key skills, capacity and succession planning
- Risk Management
- Training and development
- Light touch on other areas of the action plan

The key messages from the review team were as follows:

- Felt like a different organisation – it was more business like and there was evidence of purpose, vision, energy and leadership
- Staff believed CMT and the Fire Authority had been transformed
- The relationship between Officers and Members had vastly improved and there now appeared to be a one team approach with a common purpose
- Trust had improved: between Officers, Members, middle managers and wider staff
- Improved Member engagement and governance
- Confidence in the leadership and direction of CMT
- Improved culture – listening and involving
- It would be necessary to keep the focus on community outcomes

**Leadership** - In terms of leadership it was felt that CMT had a high level of strategic and organisational awareness with a good skill set. There now appeared to be cohesion, direction and a desire to engage. However, the challenge would be to provide some substance and change to support the plans and processes which had been put in place. A consistency of leadership style throughout the

organisation also needed to be established.

**Governance** – Evidence based decision making had been established in which Members were now engaged which had promoted good Officer/Member working relations. A good policy framework had been established with the new Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan. There appeared to be a strengthened and more robust challenge from Members to Officers and this was apparent from the more frequent budget working party meetings. However, Members needed to drive the development of key deliverable strategies to underpin strategic commitments.

**Organisational Development** – It was noted that a comprehensive organisational development process was in place which connected with other key dependencies. Performance monitoring had improved but this now needed to be cascaded to stations. The issue around silo working had now been addressed and the fragmented approach had disappeared. A strategic skill base was now in place.

It would be necessary to develop a medium term financial strategy which would specifically address the future reduction in revenue budget, the development of an Asset Management Strategy aligned to future capital spend and an alignment to the IRMP. The review team had not seen any evidence of devolvement of budgets but it was recognised that the organisation was on a journey. The authority would need to consider balancing strategic thinking with visible action and delivery improvement.

**Communication and Partnerships** – The review team had noted that there appeared to have been a complete turnaround of staff communications and engagement with a good mix of communication methods. There was a personal commitment to communications from CMT which had been well received by operational personnel. The RBFRS profile had been raised through wider engagement with local authorities and other strategic partnerships with early positive signals in relation to information sharing. However, the authority might want to consider a timely external engagement strategy which would include a plan, purpose and desired outcome.

**Capacity and Skills** – There appeared to be a balanced CMT skill set with good personal commitment to on-going development. The priority was to ensure that there was an immediate and sustainable approach to middle management leadership and the organisation needed to be aware of the instability of an over reliance on temporary or interim positions. The review team had found little movement on previously identified training and development findings e.g. maintenance of competency and supporting policies.

**Risk** – The Corporate Risk Register appeared to be in a much better place and was underpinned by a comprehensive policy. It was felt that the monitoring of risk had improved but that there were a number of omissions such as fire fighter safety, sustainability of RDS, future revenue and capital budgets and capacity to delivery of the change programme including single points of failure. The review team had confirmed that the Thames Valley Control Project and legacy ICT remained potentially high risk.

**Other areas** – There seemed to be a new focus on prevention from Members and staff and it would now be essential to develop and deliver a modern prevention strategy. The commitment to RDS was improving, however, challenges remained in relation to recruitment, retention and availability. The review team had liked the concept of local IRMPs but it would be necessary to ensure that whole time

stations had the relevant tools and local discretion. Positive feedback had been received in relation to extending the role of firefighters and the Memorandum of Understanding with Cambridgeshire FRS which provided peer challenge of the operational element for the Statement of Assurance was a particularly notable and worthwhile practice.

Darren Gunter stated that the Fire Authority should be proud of the progress which had been made and he was sure that it had a good future ahead of it. He thanked both Members and Officers for all their work and noted that there appeared to be a real desire to change within the organisation.

Councillor Colin Dudley thanked Darren Gunter for the time taken to undertake the mid point review and for attending the Fire Authority meeting to report back on findings. He would ensure that the plans which had been put in place were delivered and he appreciated the honesty of the review team which had been excellent. Darren Gunter responded that this had been an excellent case study and that it had been the most profitable he had been involved in.

Councillor Ishrat Shah enquired whether there was a plan in place for people with mobility problems. It was noted that the Fire Service worked closely with National Health and therefore it was aware of where the most vulnerable people were located. In response to a further question about whether it would be possible to remotely monitor smoke alarms, this would require good staff, assisted technology and continued work with health professionals.

**RESOLVED that:**

The report be noted.

**66. AMENDMENTS TO CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS**

Trevor Ferguson, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), informed Members of the updates made and future changes which would be required to the Contract Standing Orders.

RBFRS Contract Standing Orders needed to be amended on at least a bi-annual basis to reflect the changes in the EU Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) financial thresholds which were reset every two years in January with the next change due in January 2016. In addition, the RBFRS Contract Standing Orders should reflect any process, compliance and governance changes within RBFRS.

The following key amendments were proposed to the Contract Standing Orders:

- **Removal of any ambiguity around delegation and ownership** – where the existing Contract Standing Orders were ambiguous in relation to accountability or delegation of powers, this had now been clarified.
- **Clarity around the new EU legislation** – Further clarity had been provided in relation to questions raised by Members on the relationship between English and EU law.
- **The monitoring and management of the Contract Standing Orders** – the Contract Standing Orders had been amended to ensure greater control of expenditure and greater oversight from the procurement function in the day to day management of contracts.

## DRAFT

The RBFRS Contract Standing Orders would need to come back to the Fire Authority in April 2016 with further amendments to reflect forthcoming changes in EU Financial Thresholds from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 and changes in internal roles within RBFRS.

The DCFO explained that a significant amount of work had gone into updating the Authority's governance arrangements which included Contract Standing Orders. This work would continue as outlined from January 2016.

The updated Contract Standing Orders were considered at the Audit and Governance Committee on 3 December 2015. The Audit and Governance Committee recommended that the Authority approve the amended Contract Standing Orders; and agree that a further update of the Contract Standing Orders should be completed for the April 2016 Fire Authority to reflect the following:

- Forthcoming changes in EU financial thresholds from 1 January 2016
- Changes in internal roles within the RBFRS with new Heads of Service financial authority limits to be reviewed.

Councillor Colin Dudley recommended acceptance of these recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Iain McCracken who in doing so thanked officers for their work on the Contract Standing Orders.

Councillor Angus Ross referred to the Contract Procedure Rules document which he commended. In terms of the section on Framework Agreements, Councillor Ross highlighted the importance of the Strategic Asset Management Committee (SAMC) being involved in these discussions for capital projects as was current practice. He therefore felt that the involvement of the SAMC (and its Members) in these discussions should be recognised within the report.

Councillor Dudley reiterated his proposal to accept the recommendations of the Audit and Governance Committee, but with the inclusion of a minor amendment to the Contract Standing Orders to reflect Member involvement as described by Councillor Ross.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- The amended Contract Standing Orders be approved;
- It be agreed that a further update of Contract Standing Orders should be completed for the April 2016 Fire Authority meeting to reflect forthcoming changes in EU Financial Thresholds from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 and changes in internal roles within RBFRS – New Heads of Service financial authority limits to be reviewed.

### **67. STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE (2014/15)**

Trevor Ferguson, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), provided the Committee with a copy of the Statement of Assurance for the financial year 2014/15 for sign off.

The Statement had been prepared and published in accordance with a requirement set out in the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (July 2012) and would be published on the website to provide an accessible way in which communities, Government, local authorities and other partners might make an assessment of RBFA's overall performance. The following summary judgements had been made for each of the four key areas of focus and evidence

to support those judgements together with any information on identified areas for improvement and details of steps taken to address them, if necessary, were set out in Appendices B to E:

**Financial** – requirements associated with the appropriate management of financial matters were fully met.

**Governance** – requirements associated with appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance were substantially met.

**Operational** – requirements associated with operational matters were substantially met.

**National Framework** – requirements associated with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England had been substantially met.

The DCFO noted that Darren Gunter's presentation had made mention of Cambridgeshire FRS which would provide a critical friend in relation to the operational element for the Statement of Assurance in the two years where no Op A Peer Review took place.

**RESOLVED that:**

- The summary judgements for each of the four key areas of Finance, Governance, Operations and delivering the National Framework be agreed;
- The RBFA Statement of Assurance for 2014/15 be approved.

**68. REVIEW OF MONITORING OFFICER AND COMMITTEE SERVICES ARRANGEMENTS**

Trevor Ferguson, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), updated Members on Committee Services arrangements with West Berkshire Council together with a review of the Monitoring Officer arrangements.

At its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2015, the Fire Authority approved the co-operation agreement with West Berkshire Council for the provision of Committee Services and appointed the DCFO as the Monitoring Officer for the Fire Authority. It was agreed that the Audit & Governance Committee would undertake a review of the revised arrangements in 12 months time.

**Committee Services:** The contract with West Berkshire Council commenced on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2015 for a period of 3 years, with the ability for the Fire Authority to terminate in advance, on 12 months notice. The services provided under the contractual arrangement were set out in Appendix 1 to the report. Each requirement within the arrangement had been met to date and would be enhanced with the introduction of the Modern.gov committee software system which would be used by the RBFRS Committee Officer and two colleagues from West Berkshire. This system would streamline the collation, handling and administration of committee papers and was already in use at West Berkshire Council who would host a discreet instance within their IT infrastructure on behalf of the Fire Authority. The software was due to go live in early January 2016.

It was noted that regular meetings had been held with the RBFRS Committee Officer and West Berkshire colleagues to check the progress of the agreement and it was felt that good working relationships had been formed, the arrangements worked well and were providing the additional resilience desired. Informal

feedback from the Chairs of the various Committees had also been positive.

**Monitoring Officer:** The Deputy Chief Fire Officer had been appointed Monitoring Officer on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2015. As the DCFO was not legally qualified it was agreed that arrangements would be put in place to ensure that he had access to the legal advice necessary to carry out the functions of the role. These arrangements had been put in place with the Monitoring Officer of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority. The DCFO had also attended a number of conferences and training events linked to the Monitoring Officer role.

Over the past 11 months this arrangement had worked very effectively and the Monitoring Officer from Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority had been heavily involved in redrafting the Authority's Constitution and providing legal advice on emerging issues. Significant progress had been made on a number of areas of the Monitoring Officer's responsibility and having considered the effectiveness of the arrangements in place since January 2015 it was recommended that this arrangement be extended on a permanent basis with further reviews in 12 and 24 months time.

The financial implications of these two areas were detailed in paragraph 4.1 of the report and it had been possible to achieve some savings.

In addition to noting these updates, the Audit and Governance Committee recommended that the arrangement with West Berkshire Council for the provision of Committee Services continue with further reviews in 12 and 24 months time and, as already noted, that the appointment of the DCFO as Monitoring Officer be made a permanent arrangement, but again with reviews conducted in 12 and 24 months time.

Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons asked the DCFO whether he felt the arrangement of him fulfilling the Monitoring Officer role was working. The DCFO reported that his close involvement with the decision making process and with service areas was a useful aspect in making this work. The advice available/provided by the Monitoring Officer from Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority had also been very important.

Andy Fry (Chief Fire Officer, CFO) explained that the appointment of the DCFO to the Monitoring Officer role had been questioned by auditors. The CFO advised that there were two key aspects which needed to be fulfilled to make this arrangement work. Firstly, access to legal expertise (this was provided from the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority) and secondly, the need for the Monitoring Officer to have a clear line of sight of key decisions (this was achieved by the DCFO as a member of Corporate Management Team). Therefore, auditors were satisfied with this arrangement.

Councillor Iain McCracken endorsed the fact that legal advice was sought from the very experienced Monitoring Officer at the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority. He also reported that as Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee he would continue to hold the Authority's Monitoring Officer to account.

Councillor Angus Ross queried whether the Committee Services function would extend to all meetings of the Thames Valley Fire Control Service. The DCFO felt that there was potential to explore the specific addition of this meeting to the Co-operation Arrangement.

**RESOLVED that:**

- The update on the co-operation agreement with West Berkshire Council for the provision of Committee Services be noted;
- The update on the Monitoring Officer role and achievements since appointment in January 2015 be noted;
- It be agreed that these arrangements should be implemented on a permanent basis with further reviews by the Audit & Governance Committee in 12 and 24 months time.

**69. RESPONSE STANDARDS PERFORMANCE REPORTING (CHECKED FAILURES)**

Paul Southern, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), presented a report which brought to the attention of Members of the Fire Authority anomalies in the performance reporting of Response Standards due to the 'Checked Failures' process.

This report had been referred to the Fire Authority by the Audit and Governance Committee following the discovery of the 'Checked Failures' process. The 'Checked Failures' process had been highlighted through the improved scrutiny and performance reporting linked to the new performance management framework and quarterly reporting.

Through the development of the new performance management framework, work had been undertaken to develop good quality performance information, which had made it clear that some anomalies existed in how performance information had been presented and reported in the past and the report explained in full what those anomalies were.

**Q2 Data Accuracy Issues:** Much of the data required for performance reporting under 'service provision' came from incident data which was captured via the Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) 'Vision' system. A number of issues remained with the system and work to align the outputs from Vision and the required fields for performance monitoring had been significant over the last few months and had improved the quality and accuracy of data. However, the volume of work required to provide full and accurate reporting against the new corporate measures and targets was significant and therefore gaps remained in a number of areas.

The Fire Authority had previously used a process known as 'checked failures' which meant that information on performance against the Fire Authority's response standards was subject to local checking prior to reporting. The rationale for this process was to enable managers to assess whether improvements could be made to the attendance times or whether the incident attendance time was never going to be achieved e.g. a road traffic collision on the motorway 15 miles from the fire station would have an 11 minute response standard. As the attendance standard would never be achieved through improvements, it would have been deemed to be a checked failure and therefore not included in the performance report. Although some of the reasons used within the 'checked failure' process might have been justifiable reasons why the Service had not met the performance target, they should not have resulted in these incidents being excluded from the performance

reporting information.

The production of performance information relating to response standards provided both the Fire Authority and the public with an opportunity to understand and scrutinise the service they had been provided with. The introduction of the 'checked failure' process had made this process of scrutiny less effective. Therefore to ensure that future performance reporting was both meaningful and transparent, the checked failures process had now been stopped and therefore the performance data in this area might show a significant drop in performance from that previously reported. The validity of the data held for the 2009-2012 period was now questionable and the figures provided for actual attendance between 2009 and 2012 could only be considered as indicative. The actual figures from 2013-14 were considered to be accurate and therefore gave a clearer picture on the impact of the checked failures process on reporting.

It should be noted that although the performance reporting had not been presented in a clear manner, all risk modelling for fire station locations that had been undertaken had been based upon actual incident data and not the performance report information.

In response to a query in relation to the setting of targets the ACFO confirmed that targets had not been set as they were response standards and not actual targets. Councillor Christine Bateson said that if she was a resident this would be worrying as she would like to know what assurance could be given that response times to incidents was improving. The ACFO advised that actual attendance had not been affected and that it was simply the way the figures had been presented. Officers would try and improve response times but that this could only be achieved through improvements in call handling.

Councillor Frank Abe also had concerns and asked what the Fire Authority was proposing to do. The ACFO stated that previously, performance reports had not been scrutinised closely but now there was a higher level of scrutiny through the Strategic Performance Board, CMT, Audit & Governance etc. The 'checked failure' process would continue but it would not be included in the performance reports.

Councillor Paul Gittings agreed that members of the public might be confused and he suggested that a standard should be set as good practice. Councillor Colin Dudley confirmed that this was a piece of work which was being undertaken by the IRMP Working Party. They had looked across the country and there were no fixed Government standards for Fire Authorities. All areas were different depending on the level of traffic/distance. The IRMP Working Party would attempt to come up with some reasonable standards for consideration by the Fire Authority.

Councillor David Burbage asked what the current performance was. The ACFO confirmed that the most up to date information was in the column marked '2015 YTD' in the table set out in the report.

Councillor Christine Bateson referred to the issues around traffic congestion in the Berkshire area and she asked if anything was being done differently. The ACFO confirmed that practices had been changed in that crews used to rig on the appliance but that they now rigged prior to going out. More intelligent information was also available now on the various road closures/traffic congestion and the Fire Control Service would be aware of where the nearest fire appliance would be for despatch.

Councillor Colin Dudley proposed the report which was seconded by Councillor

Iain McCracken. He thanked Audit & Governance Committee for picking up this issue and he felt that there was not anything untoward in the figures but that it was necessary to report actual response standards. Councillor Christine Bateson agreed that it was essential that the Fire Authority was transparent and that there was the element of Overview and Scrutiny.

Councillor David Burbage stated that he would be interested in pursuing different ways of responding in order to achieve quicker response times and that it was essential to work more closely with the other emergency services to improve standards.

Councillor Phillip Bicknell understood that it was necessary to have standards but that all the public wanted was for an appliance to turn up at an incident in the quickest time possible. He felt that the Fire Authority should get the message across to members of the public that they always tried to get to an incident in the quickest time possible.

Councillor Colin Dudley noted that response standards were a blunt instrument. The Fire Control Service could be busy at times but actually the number of calls was decreasing due to better prevention measures. The percentages set out in the report only showed when the standard had been achieved or not, it did not reflect the times that appliances arrived at an incident in say 3 minutes which was well ahead of the report standards. IRMP were looking at other ways of measuring the ability to attend incidents in the quickest possible time and he looked forward to receiving that report. He agreed with other Members that he would like to see more opportunities for the Fire and Ambulance Services to be combined in the future.

**RESOLVED that:**

- The previous use of the process referred to as ‘Checked Failures’ as outlined in the report be noted;
- It be agreed that all future reporting on response standards would not be included in this process.

**70. LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME POOLED INVESTMENTS**

Councillor John Lenton advised that on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2015 he received an e-mail (in his capacity as Chairman of the Royal County of Berkshire Pension Fund) from Mr Marcus Jones, Minister for Local Government, to invite the Fund, together with 89 other administering authorities, to develop proposals for the pooling of the funds in up to six “British Wealth Funds” each with at least £25bn of assets. (The Berkshire Fund had about £1.7bn of assets). The pools apparently could be national or regional but one pool had to invest in infrastructure.

Initial Proposals to the Government were required by 19 February 2016 with “refined and completed submissions” by 15 July 2016.

The Royal County of Berkshire Pension Fund (RCBPF) was the pension fund for Non-Uniformed employees of the Berkshire Fire Authority. Uniformed employees were members of the separate Fire Fighters Pension Fund. There were around 200 other organisations in the RCBPF including the 6 Unitary Authorities. In total the Scheme had approximately 60,000 members.

Unlike almost all other Government Pension Schemes, but, like private sector schemes, Local Government Pension Funds were funded by contributions made

## DRAFT

by employees and employers. The contributions were invested with the intention that the contributions plus interest, dividends and capital gains would be sufficient to pay the pensions earned by the employees.

The present structure of the Berkshire Scheme was that it was administered by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) on behalf of all six unitary councils, the Fire Authority and about 200 other organisations.

The Fund was managed by the Pension Fund Panel of five RBWM Councillors elected at the RBWM Annual Meeting. The Panel was supported by an Advisory Panel which had members from each of the other five Borough Councils plus Union and other representatives. Investments were made by the Panel with the support of external advisors.

To meet its future pension obligations the fund had to estimate the likely life span of its members, the growth in their earnings and future inflation. Present estimates were that investments by the fund would have to return an average of 4.5% per annum over and above inflation.

It followed that the fund had to plan many years ahead as, to take an extreme example, an employee now aged 20 would be starting to earn a pension which she/he would still be drawing when she/he was 90 years old. In other words it was necessary to plan over a period of 70 years. This was achieved by investing in a diversified range of mainly long term investments.

Under the Government's proposals, all or part of the pension funds would be invested in six "British Wealth Funds which were able to invest in infrastructure and drive local growth". The justification was that by making larger investments, costs could be reduced.

It now appeared that some of the Berkshire Scheme's funds would remain under its control where there was a clear local interest. For example it had just invested nearly £6m in private sector rented homes in Wokingham.

One objective was that the changes would provide "An improved capacity to invest in infrastructure". Apparently only 0.3% of Local Government Funds were invested in infrastructure (in the case of Berkshire it was 4.2%).

It was well known that the Government was anxious to increase infrastructure spending in many areas including roads, railways, public housing and access to Heathrow, if the third Heathrow runway went ahead.

This appeared to be a major reason for putting the proposals forward. The Government was anxious to increase infrastructure investment but at the same time was trying to reduce the "Deficit". Local Authority Pension Funds could be used to increase infrastructure spending without increasing the published Deficit.

What was not recognised was that a major reason why pension funds did not invest in national infrastructure was that the returns were too low. As mentioned above the Berkshire Fund aimed to achieve a return of inflation plus 4.5% on its investments but the Treasury could presently borrow money at an interest rate of less than 1%.

Also, in order to keep the infrastructure investments "off the balance sheet", the Government would not wish to underwrite a guaranteed rate of return. However as public sector investments were notorious for costing more than predicted and returning less than expected, pension funds would usually want some form of

guaranteed rate of return.

The proposals were an encouragement to mergers and/or cooperation between funds. This was desirable anyway because Funds like the Berkshire Scheme were too small to gain economies of scale or plan for management succession. The problem was that solvent funds wished to remain independent. For example the Berkshire Scheme negotiated for three years to arrange some form of merger or cooperation with two nearby Pension Funds but last summer the other two funds terminated negotiations for no clear reason except that their Councillors clearly wished to retain their independence. Since the Government's announcement feelers had been put out to several funds concerning some form of merger. So far only one positive response had been received while the others did not appear to have yet put much thought into the matter.

It was still early days and it remained to be seen whether the Government would relax its timetable. At present it was anticipated that the Berkshire Scheme would invest in some of the six pools and retain its holdings in smaller investments (too small for the pools but where it have identified opportunities). It now appeared that the Berkshire Scheme would not be forced to sell investments where there would be a penalty for early disposal.

The main risk was political. As indicated above Pension Funds had to work on a very long time scale. During the remaining 70 year life span of the 20 year old employee, there would be 12 to 20 or more General Elections, several changes of Government and numerous unexpected financial crises. It would be imprudent to assume that Pension Funds would be immune from being raided during this period. If the proposals resulted in lower returns than were currently anticipated, this should not jeopardise members' pension entitlements as any shortfall would be for the account of the participating Borough Councils and other employers.

Councillor Lenton offered further updates as this progressed over time.

**RESOLVED that:**

The update be noted.

**71. FORWARD PLAN**

**RESOLVED that:**

The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Forward Plan for the period January to June 2016 was noted.

**72. MINUTES OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES**

**RESOLVED that:**

It be noted that the minutes of the following meetings had been published on the RBFRS website:

- Strategic Asset Management Committee – 7<sup>th</sup> July 2015 (approved);
- Management Committee – 27<sup>th</sup> July 2015 (approved);
- Audit and Governance Committee – 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015 (approved).

**73. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2016, 6.30pm in the Lynda Kenyon Suite, Brigade Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD.

**74. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND 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 Agenda Items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the said Act indicated and is exempt information if, and so long as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

**75. PART II MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2015**

**RESOLVED that:**

The Part II Minutes of the meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to one minor amendment.

**76. REDEVELOPMENT OF HUNGERFORD FIRE STATION**

The Committee considered an exempt report.

**RESOLVED that:**

The recommendations as set out in the exempt report be agreed.

*(The meeting concluded at 9.40pm)*