

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



Held on Wednesday 17th August 2016 at 6.30pm

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

Members:

(* present)

Councillor Malcolm Alexander	* Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons
Councillor Alistair Auty	* Councillor Carol Jackson-Doerge
* Councillor Christine Bateson	Councillor Chris Maskell
* Councillor Phillip Bicknell	* Councillor Iain McCracken
* Councillor Paul Bryant	Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle
* Councillor Avtar Cheema	Councillor Phillip Mirfin
* Councillor Colin Dudley	* Councillor Mohammed Rasib
Councillor Adrian Edwards	Councillor Angus Ross
* Councillor John Ennis	* Councillor Ishrat Shah
Councillor Paul Gittings	* Councillor Emma Webster

In Attendance:

Trevor Ferguson (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
Moirra Fraser (Committee Officer)
Mark Gaskarth (Area Manager, West)
Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources, Learning and Development, HHRLD)
Simon Jefferies (Area Manager, Risk and Performance)
Katie Mills (Head of Corporate Services, HCS))
Dave Myers (Area Manager, East)
Linda Pye (Committee Officer)
Nikki Richards (Head of Business Information and Systems, HBIS)
Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)

Observers:

Officers, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service
Members of Representative Bodies

21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting had been received from Councillors Malcolm Alexander, Alistair Auty, Adrian Edwards, Tina McKenzie-Boyle, Phillip Mirfin and Angus Ross.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct, Councillor Paul Bryant stated that should the Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) be discussed at the meeting he declared a personal interest as he was a member of the TVFCS Joint Committee. He would therefore not participate in any debate on the TVFCS should it materialise

Action

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Officers.

23. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 JUNE 2016

RESOLVED that:

The Minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2016 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

24. PARTICIPATION OF THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDERS 19 AND 25

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

25. ISSUES ARISING FROM AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Councillor Iain McCracken confirmed that no reports had been referred to the Fire Authority by the Audit and Governance Committee

26. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that the position of Chief Fire Officer had now been advertised externally and would be open until 30 August 2016 with the selection process taking place during September. Following this process, the Appointments Panel would recommend a suitable candidate for appointment to a special meeting of the Fire Authority taking place on 28 September 2016.

The Chairman also noted that on 6 September, a 'Getting to know Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service' evening had been planned for Councillors as an opportunity to see in practice how officers were supporting the delivery of Vision 2019. There would be a number of demonstrations including animal and water rescue and road traffic collision extrication alongside the Incident Command Unit, co-responding and the Health and Well-being Team. Other guests invited to attend included the Lord Lieutenant and High Sherriff. The Chairman highly recommended that Members attend the event.

The Chairman reported that there had been a terrible accident on the A34 on the 10th August 2016 in which four people (one adult and three young people) had lost their lives and another person had been seriously injured. He thanked Control Staff for the way they had handled the situation as it developed and also the crews from Newbury Fire Station and colleagues from Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service that attended the scene. He thanked them for their professionalism and bravery and for the assistance that they had provided to all those involved in the tragedy. The Chairman noted that the police investigation was ongoing

The Chairman commented that the authority had been calling for more people to join the service as retained (part-time) firefighters and so the Retained Support Unit and HR team had been hard at work arranging 'have a go' events and a retained recruitment weekend. 'Have a go' events had been held on 18 June and 3 July 2016 as well as a retained recruitment weekend on 6 and 7 August 2016. During these events, candidates had had a chance to undergo the physical and written tests required to become a firefighter. Ten candidates were eager to complete the tests in the hope of becoming a retained firefighter and more 'have

a go' events would be held later that year with the hope of increasing the number of retained firefighters.

Brandon Lewis MP had been confirmed as the new Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service at the Home Office and he had written to all Chief Fire Officers and Fire Authority Chairman setting out his commitment to delivering the programme of fire reform. A copy of the letter was available on the Home Office website page under the published documents section should Members wish to read it.

The Chairman congratulated James Blake who had recently achieved a silver medal in the 500 metre mixed small boat race and a bronze medal in the 200 metre twenty man race at the European Dragon Boat Championship as part of Team GB.

27. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS UNDER STANDING ORDER 30

There were no questions from Members under Standing Order 30.

28. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDER 44

There were no Notices of Motion under Standing Order 44.

29. RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEES

The Fire Authority noted that the following agenda items had been recommended by the Audit and Governance Committee on the 28 July 2016:

Item 10 – Revised Contract Regulations

Item 11 – New Financial Regulations

The Fire Authority noted that the following agenda item had been recommended by the Management Committee on the 11 August 2016:

Item 13 – Efficiency Plan

30. REVISED CONTRACT REGULATIONS

Trevor Ferguson in his capacity as the authority's Monitoring Officer presented the Contract Regulations to the Committee for approval. The Regulations had been discussed at the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on the 28 July 2016. The Committee had asked that it be highlighted that in respect of IT purchases of software or systems the approval of the Head of Business Information and Systems was required prior to the commencement of the procurement process.

He informed Members that the new regulations had been completely rewritten and included the recommendations from the latest internal audit report as well as changes to ensure compliance with the UK Contract Regulations 2015. They also reflected the new organisational structure and governance arrangements.

Key changes included:

- The rationale for single tender actions as well as Member and Officer approval levels had been set out in greater detail. A new template had been prepared to capture such approvals in order that they could be held centrally

for audit purposes.

- Low value quotations and tenders would in future be undertaken within departments rather than centrally managed by the Procurement Team. However, in order to ensure that procurement remained compliant and delivered value for money, only those staff that had been trained would be able to carry out procurement activities. An in-house training programme would therefore be carried out over the next few months to ensure that staff had the appropriate skills.
- Greater emphasis had been placed on the management of contracts in accordance with the corporate risk framework. A risk register would be retained for all contracts over £50k. A new contract management framework would be developed in the next few months and training provided to relevant staff.
- Officer award of contracts would now be limited to a ceiling of £1 million. Any contracts which exceeded this level would require the approval of the Management Committee.
- The option to create an Approved Supplier list in limited circumstances had been added where a single supply contract was not the best solution due to new and changing market entrants and availability to deliver services. These types of list would often be used for very low value construction works.

Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons congratulated Officers on the production of an excellent document. The Vice Chairman noted that under CR5 Roles and Responsibilities comment was made that Directors and Heads of Service were responsible for ensuring that all staff attended relevant training and she queried how this would be monitored. The DCFO noted that this compulsory training would form part of the Essential Skills Core Skills Programme and would therefore be monitored through that process.

Councillor Paul Bryant noted that the Rules stated that they also needed to be followed by staff in the Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS). He queried whether that was referred to in the TVFCS's constitution. The DCFO confirmed that the legal agreement stated that the TVFCS would be governed by the RBFRS's Contract Regulations. He also requested that a typographical error on page 29 CR29 Appendix One – Contract Regulations Terminology 'Contract' the second 'which' be removed from the explanation. The DCFO agreed to do so.

Councillor Iain McCracken thanked Officers for the time and effort they had put into updating the document following robust discussion and Audit and Governance meetings.

The Chairman thanked Councillor McCracken for his input into getting the document re-written and he also thanked the other Audit and Governance Members for their efforts.

RESOLVED that:

The revised Contract Regulations, as amended by the removal of the typographical error on page 29 of the document, be approved.

31. NEW FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Trevor Ferguson in his capacity as the authority's Monitoring Officer requested that the Fire Authority agree the revised Financial Regulations which had been recommended for approval by the Audit and Governance Committee. The revised Regulations had been discussed at the 28 July 2016 Audit and Governance Committee meeting and they had recommended that the Fire Authority approve the revised document.

The Financial Regulations reflected not only the new committee structure of the Fire Authority but also the corporate vision of devolved decision making, responsibilities and accountabilities. More autonomy would be given to individual Fire Stations and therefore staff would require budget monitoring and financial training.

The aim of the Financial Regulations was to provide Officers and Members with a financial framework within which they could operate to deliver the corporate objectives as set out in the Corporate Plan. For example, the Regulations emphasised the importance of ensuring that the Corporate Plan, IRMP and Medium Term Financial Plan were all aligned.

Financial planning was key to managing financial risk and achieving value for money and therefore the Financial Regulations emphasised the need for all Officers and Members to think about broader financial impacts of decisions across the organisation and into the future. By following this approach the Financial Regulations were much more than simple adherence to an abstract set of policies and procedures.

The Financial Regulations also looked at the responsibilities of each Committee. The role of Audit and Governance would be to anticipate future risks in relation to funding streams, involvement in the financial cycle which would include budget setting, borrowing requirements and the Financial Code. The Committee would also look at quarterly monitoring reports and the Statement of Accounts at year end. The Financial Regulations would be considered by Audit and Governance Committee on an annual basis to ensure that they remained fit for purpose.

Councillor Christine Bateson queried how much discretionary budget the CFO held. The DCFO agreed to provide her with a written response.

DCFO to action

Councillor Bryant requested that the words he/she and s/he on pages 47 and 48 of the document be replaced with the term 'officer'. The DCFO agree to make this change.

RESOLVED that:

The revised Financial Regulations, subject to the inclusion of amendments on pages 47 and 48, be approved.

32. SUMMARY REPORT OF RESPONSES TO THE RESPONSE STANDARDS CONSULTATION

Simon Jefferies, Area Manager (Risk and Performance), AM(RP), outlined the legislative context of the consultation including the Fire and Rescue National Framework (for England) 2012. The Framework set out high level expectations for fire and rescue authorities in England but did not prescribe operational

matters. In May 2013 Sir Ken Knight (CFRA) had reiterated that each authority should determine their own rules for response times.

A report from a peer review had found that the Fire Authority's standards lacked clarity and were confusing. It was therefore proposed that a simpler more transparent method for reporting, which would also align to the Department of Communities and Local Government definition of a response standard, be developed.

The consultation, which had sought the views of the public, staff and other stakeholders on the way the Fire Authority published and reported on its performance in respect of attendance at incidents, had run from the 16th May to 25th July 2016. Consultation had taken the form of an online questionnaire, public and staff engagement sessions and station visits. The demographic and equality data from this consultation exercise had primarily showed similar trends in responses to those of the IRMP 2015-19 consultation but improvements in some areas had been achieved through more focused engagement.

A total of 326 responses had been received and the responses were split equally between employees and members of the public.

Two public engagement sessions had also been held to directly engage and seek the views of members of the public. As part of the engagement process GM Jim Powell had carried out over twenty visits to fire stations. Presentations had also been given to staff at service headquarters.

The consultation process had adhered to the Gunning principles i.e. the consultation had taken place at the formative stage, provided sufficient information to allow intelligent consideration by consultees, allowed sufficient time to consult and Members were being asked to conscientiously consider the outcomes of the consultation prior to making a decision.

Responses to the questions gave the following information:

Question 1 – whether the respondent supported the existing 'attendance time' measure or the proposed 'response time' measure. 21.03% (61) supported the measurement of attendance time whilst 78.97% (229) supported a change to a measure of response time.

The key theme that had emerged in respect of this question was one of 'public expectation' in that the public expected the standard to include call handling time. Respondents felt that a response standard was a clearer and more accurate way of reporting and that it was easier to analyse. Some of those that had supported an attendance standard were concerned that the inclusion of call handling would put pressure on control staff.

Councillor John Ennis noted the split in the response between staff and members of the public and he queried whether the staff expectations were different than those of the public. Simon Jefferies felt that the difference would not be that great and that there had been overwhelming support for a change to 'response time'.

Question 2 – whether the respondent wished to measure performance to only dwelling fires and road traffic collisions (as currently happened) or move to the proposal that times to all emergency incidents should be measured. 10.14% (29) stated that they supported the existing measure whereas 89.86% (257) agreed that an all emergency measure should be introduced.

Those that supported all emergency incidents felt that it would be a truer

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reflection of the work undertaken by the RBFRS and that it would result in truer, more accurate and transparent information being presented.

Those that supported the status quo felt that these were priority incidents which might pose a higher risk to the public.

Question 3 – if the published standard should continue to report the measure of time for multiple fire engines or introduce a published standard that measured only times for the first fire engine to arrive at an incident. 41.26% (118) supported a standard that continued reporting of times for multiple fire engines whilst 58.74% (168) supported the move to a standard that reported the time of the first appliance to arrive.

Those that supported a single appliance standard felt that this would provide sufficient immediate response to start to tackle the emergency and that it was the most crucial element.

Those that supported multiple fire engines stated that residents would expect to know how long each appliance should take in the event that they were needed and that a single pump standard would not provide sufficient resources.

Councillor Paul Bryant referred to the two pump model and asked whether a three or four pump model would be better. Simon Jefferies confirmed that this measure was from a DCLG definition. However, RBFRS would send the level of resources required for an incident. For instance, two pumps were usually sent to dwelling fires and road traffic incidents. However, six pumps would be sent to a thatched cottage fire. The first pump in attendance would be measured and reported to the public – all pump response times would be measured and reported internally. Councillor Bryant was concerned that it was being made more complex than it needed to be. Councillor Colin Dudley reiterated that the level of response would not change but merely how attendance was measured and reported.

The current published standard had no target attached to it and therefore Question 4 asked respondents if they supported the published standard as it was or if they wanted to change to a published standard that had a target to achieve. 49.82% (139) supported the existing standard with no target whilst 50.18% (140) supported a published standard with a target attached.

Those that wished to retain the current system stated that it was already suitably clear and accurate and there was no logical reason to change. They felt that a target measure could be misleading to the public and create cuts in service if target aims were not met at some stations.

Those that supported a change felt that it would set a target to aim for and could assist with identifying areas for improvement. They also felt that a target would be clearer and easier to understand.

It was stressed that the consultation had concentrated on the way the Fire Authority's standards were published and reported to the public and was not about changing the current standards of performance.

Should Members support the changes, then the Fire Authority would need to choose the performance target i.e. to fill in the 'X' minutes on 'Y' percentage of occasions and five options had been developed by the IRMP Working Party and agreed at the Fire Authority meeting on 17th February 2016.

Councillor Emma Webster thanked Simon Jeffries, Jim Powell, the Trade Unions

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and the IRMP Working Party for their contributions to the work on the response standards and also to those who had responded to the consultation. She reiterated that there would be no change to the services provided to the community but that the Fire Authority were looking to clarify response standards following extensive consultation.

In regard to the recommendations Councillor Webster was pleased to have seen a huge level of support for the proposal to change to a 'response time' measure rather than the existing 'attendance time' measure. She therefore proposed to change to a 'response time' measure.

Question 2 asked whether the respondent wished to measure performance to only dwelling fires and road traffic collisions (as currently happened) or move to the proposal that times to all emergency incidents should be measured. The consultation response indicated that a high response for all incident types was required and therefore it was proposed to move to measuring all emergency incidents.

Question 3 had asked if the published standard should continue to report the measure of time for multiple fire engines or introduce a published standard that measured only times for the first fire engine to arrive at an incident. It was felt that the evidence would lead to measuring the first pump in line with the DCLG.

In relation to Question 4 - if respondents supported the published standard as it was or if they wanted to change to a published standard that had a target to achieve. Councillor Webster felt that it would be better to set a target but she would return to that at a later stage.

Councillor Colin Dudley seconded all the proposals as set out by Councillor Webster.

Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons felt that this had been an excellent process of consultation which would assist in clarifying any ambiguity and the recommendations brought into line the expectations of members of the public. In respect of setting a published standard with a target Councillor Helliard-Symons felt that this was a clear and transparent way to report on performance and would also highlight those stations which were doing well and those which were not.

Councillor Paul Bryant referred to the key indicators which were reported on by local authorities. They had clear indicators which could be benchmarked against a number of other local authorities. He queried how RBFRS would be able to compare with other fire authorities if each was allowed to set its own response standards. Councillor Colin Dudley agreed that it would be difficult as that would depend on whether attendance time or response time standards had been set. However, he felt that the responses to the consultation undertaken by other fire authorities would be similar to Berkshire's. Simon Jefferies confirmed that this was a local issue but that the Home Office were talking about harmonising standards.

Councillor Phillip Bicknell commented that capturing more data across the board meant that it could be broken down and issues could then be pin pointed.

Councillor John Ennis supported the recommendations which demonstrated the high level of trust the public had in RBFRS and he felt that this was a good way forward.

Councillor Colin Dudley noted that often consultation exercises could be quite

technical and therefore it was difficult to obtain meaningful opinions. However, this consultation had been easy to understand and this had been reflected in the number of responses received. Responses had been split 50:50 between members of staff and the public. It was good that staff had spared the time to comment and that the public cared sufficiently to express an opinion. The proposals had been put forward for consideration by the IRMP Working Party and the response from the FBU had been taken into account. The proposals being considered that evening were broadly in line with the response from the consultation and Councillor Dudley was therefore supportive of them.

In respect of recommendation 2.6 the Fire Authority was being asked to select a time and percentage from current performance statistics. Councillor Emma Webster referred Members to the table set out on page 57 of the agenda. She was proposing that the response standard for the first pump to all emergency incidents should be 10 minutes with a percentage of expected performance of 75%. However, it was also felt to be important that the time should be recorded for all pumps, with the second pump being expected to arrive within two minutes of the first pump. A large number of incidents required more than one pump in attendance and, although this was not a requirement of DCLG, it was felt that it would assist in helping to achieve all standards in Berkshire. This was seconded by Councillor Iain McCracken and agreed by the Fire Authority.

The ACFO confirmed that all performance KPI's were reported to Audit and Governance Committee and he would ensure that the agreed standards formed part of that performance report going forward.

RESOLVED that:

1. The outcomes of the consultation as set out in the full summary report of consultation responses be noted.
2. The published standard for the RBFA should be changed from an attendance time to a response time as outlined in the first proposal of the Response Standard consultation document.
3. The published standard for the RBFA should be extended to an all emergency incident measure as outlined in the second proposal of the Response Standard consultation document
4. The RBFA to change to publishing a measure for the first fire appliance to arrive at an incident in line with the Department for Communities and Local Government response time definition as outlined in the third proposal of the Response Standard consultation document.
5. The RBFA to change to publish their performance standard as a target with a time and percentage as outlined in the fourth proposal of the Response Standard consultation document.
6. The response standard time be set as 10 minutes and the corresponding target percentage be set at 75%. Response standard times would be recorded for all pumps, with the second pump being expected to arrive within two minutes of the first pump.

33. EFFICIENCY PLAN

Trevor Ferguson, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) presented the draft

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Efficiency Plan which Members were being asked to approve.

At its meeting on 17th February 2016 the Fire Authority had agreed to accept in principle the Government's offer of a four year settlement. A workshop had been held on 4th July 2016 at which Members had confirmed that they wished to accept the four year settlement and had tasked Officers with developing an Efficiency Plan in line with Home Office guidance. The draft Efficiency Plan was attached as an appendix to the report. The document had to be submitted to Central Government by the 14th October 2016.

The Management Committee had considered the Plan at its meeting on the 11th August 2016 and had recommended that the Fire Authority approve it.

The Home Office offered flexibility to fire and rescue authorities on the format of efficiency plans but the report highlighted those areas which the plan should include namely:

- Plans should be published on the website;
- They should cover a four year period;
- They should demonstrate cashable and non-cashable savings;
- They should set out an approach to collaboration;
- They should demonstrate how flexible working practices would be achieved;
- They should include a commitment to transparency;
- They should include a strategy for the use of reserves;
- They should be updated annually.

The DCFO stressed that this process would in no way impact on the integrity of the annual budget setting process.

Councillor Paul Bryant noted that on page 7 (Non Cashable Savings 2016/17 to 2019/20) of the document (or page 11 of the to follow papers) in the second paragraph and in the last sentence in made reference to collaborating with colleagues in local authorities and NHS. He queried why it did not also mention the police. The Chairman noted that crews received targeted data from colleagues in the NHS and local authorities about those people that were at risk of dwelling fires in specific areas but that it would be acceptable to make reference to the police if Members so wished.

Mark Gaskarth explained that Officers were already working with the police and that they had been trained to undertake fire safety checks. Work was also being done to deliver more joined up data about the most vulnerable residents. He was therefore content to add the police to the sentence too.

Councillor John Ennis noted that the authority had set aside a reserve of £483k to fund temporary shortfalls and queried what this would be used for. The Chairman explained that a reserve fund had been set aside to draw down on in the event that the authority was unable to make savings as quickly as hoped.

The Chairman stated that in addition to the document being a requirement of Central Government for receipt of the four year settlement it had also proved to be a useful exercise for the authority. The Plan illustrated that the authority was making efficiency savings across the whole sector and also demonstrated the collaborative work that was being undertaken with local authorities and other blue light organisations. He felt that alongside the Vision 2019 this would prove to be a very useful document and he thanked Officers for the excellent report.

RESOLVED that:

The Efficiency Plan, subject to the inclusion of reference to the police on page 7, be approved.

34. FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED that:

The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Forward Plan for the period August to December 2016 be noted.

35. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETINGS

Part II Meeting – Wednesday, 28th September 2016 at 5.30pm, RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, RG31 7SD

Public Meeting – Wednesday 19th October 2016, 6.30pm, RBFRS, Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, RG31 7SD

(The meeting concluded at 7.45pm)