

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



Held on Wednesday 19 October 2016 at 6.30pm

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

<b>Members:</b>	Councillor Malcolm Alexander	* Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons
(* present)	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

<b>In Attendance:</b>	Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HOFPP)
	Trevor Ferguson (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
	Moira Fraser (Committee Officer)
	Andy Fry (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)
	Katie Mills (Head of Corporate Services)
	Dave Myers (Area Manager East)
	Paul Maynard (Area Manager, Trading Company)
	Linda Pye (Committee Officer)
	Nikki Richards (head of Business Information and Systems)
	Fayth Rowe (Committee Officer)
	Anne-Marie Scott (Director of People and Organisational Development, DPOD)
	Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)
	Councillor Jeff Brooks

<b>Observers:</b>	Officers, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service
	Members of Representative Bodies
	Members of the Public

## Action

### 49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting had been received from Councillors Malcolm Alexander, Alistair Auty, John Ennis, Paul Gittings, Carol Jackson-Doerge and Chris Maskell.

### 50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillors Angus Ross and Paul Bryant stated that should the Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) be discussed at the meeting they declared a personal interest as they were members of the TVFCS Joint Committee. They would therefore not participate in any debate on the TVFCS should it materialise.

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Officers.

## **51. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2016**

### **RESOLVED that:**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2016 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

In terms of the minutes of the meeting held on the 17 August 2016 the Chairman clarified that in relation to the recording of the performance of the Authority's second pumps, particularly where it was felt appropriate for them to arrive within Two minutes of the first pump, this measurement and scrutiny would be managed through quarterly performance reports. Councillors Emma Webster and Iain McCracken would agree a range of measures including the performance targets for second pump attendance within two minutes of the first pump. These measures however were internal measures for Member scrutiny and were not part of the simplified response standard, as defined by DCLG, "*our first pump, to all incidents, within 10 minutes, on 75% of occasions*". The Chairman stated that Members would recall that central to the decision to adopt the DCLG definition of a response standard, was the desire to make performance reporting to the public very clear and easily understood.

## **52. 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.

## **53. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman made the following announcements:

### **Blue Light Pledge**

The Fire Authority was being asked to sign the Blue Light Time to Change Association Pledge, joining a growing number of emergency service employers, associations and support organisations showing their commitment to ending mental health stigma and discrimination in the workplace.

The Blue Light Programme was designed to tackle the high level of mental health need for people who worked in services such as Fire, Police, Ambulance and Search and Rescue.

In excess of 400 organisations had signed the pledge to date including The Firefighters Charity, South Central Ambulance Service, Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service.

On behalf of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, the Chairman and the Chief Fire Officer, Andy Fry, would be signing the pledge at the end of the meeting and he urged all Fire Authority Members to pledge their support.

Councillor Adrian Edwards commented that in his role of Champion for Safety, Health, Fitness and Wellbeing he wished to add his support to this initiative. The Blue Light Programme set out a range of activities and ways of supporting the emergency services including setting up a helpline and the development of targeted information, training and promotional materials. The RBFRS would be pledging its commitment by delivering relevant training through the Core Skills Programme, making use of the Trauma Support Team, and continued support of the Employee Assistance Programme and with Occupational Health. Councillor Edwards noted that a great deal of work had been undertaken by the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Group, in consultation with the FBU to develop the Pledge and identifying ways to actively tackle mental health stigma and discrimination.

### **Hungerford Community Fire Station**

The Chairman was pleased to announce that planning permission to refurbish Hungerford Fire Station and develop the first community tri-service station had been approved this week by West Berkshire Council.

Work could now begin on site in November 2016, with an expected completion date by June 2017.

A full operational response would be maintained in Hungerford during the refurbishment work, with the retained crew and appliance operating from an alternative location, located on the Hungerford Trading Estate.

A groundbreaking event was planned to take place on 8 November, and all Members would shortly be receiving an invitation.

### **Recruitment of new recruits**

The most recent wholetime recruitment campaign had now closed with a massive 550 requests for application packs from individuals within a 30-miles radius of Reading. Next steps included short-listing all applications and, those that were successful, would be invited to selected tests which would start in November 2016. This was in addition to the 15 fire fighters recruited earlier in the year and the additional eight fire fighters recruited in September 2016. The fire fighters had been put through an inhouse training programme that all Members should be very proud of this gold standard training programme.

### **Bracknell Fire Station celebrating 50 years**

The Chairman reported that on Saturday, 8 October 2016, Bracknell Fire Station had held an event celebrating 50 years! This had been a great event and was attended by both current and past fire fighters and their families as well as Members. He thanked the Station Commander and Watches for the excellent evening. An open day would also be arranged for the 25 October 2016 from 10am-4pm and the event would be open to the public and Members.

### **Paul Southern retirement**

The Chairman noted that Paul Southern the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, would be retiring after 30 years of unblemished service. The Chairman stated that the ACFO was a true servant to the people of Berkshire. The Chairman commented that he was loyal, reliable, industrious, confident and highly regarded by his peers, staff and elected Members. He thanked Paul for his many years of service and commented that he would be sorely missed.

The Chairman then invited two former Chairmen to wish the ACFO well.

Councillor Paul Bryant wished the ACFO a happy retirement. He commented that Paul had been a delight to work with and that he was always exceptionally knowledgeable.

Councillor Jeff Brooks stated that Paul was a likeable and respected man and that it was never easy to achieve both and wished him a very happy retirement.

Councillor Ishrat Shah also thanked Paul for his service and wished him a happy retirement.

Paul Southern thanked Members and Officers for the gifts that he had received. He thanked members for their enthusiasm, tolerance and support. He stated that the most important asset of the Authority was its people and that they were the reason why he had enjoyed his time at the Authority so much. He was of the opinion that it was the best Fire Service in the country if not the world. He thanked all Members and Officers as he would not have been able to achieve all he did without them.

The ACFO received a standing ovation from all those present.

*The meeting was adjourned from 19h00 to 19h06.*

#### **54. ISSUES ARISING FROM AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

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

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

There were no questions from Members under Standing Order 30.

#### **56. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDER 43**

There were no Notices of Motion under Standing Order 43.

#### **57. RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEES**

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

Item 11 – Statement of Assurance 2015/16

Item 12 – Social Media Protocol for Members

Item 13 – Annual Treasury Report

#### **58. 2017/18 FINANCE SETTLEMENT CONSULTATION**

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (HOFPP), set out the Authority's response to the Government's consultation on the 2017/18 Local Government Finance Settlement.

On 15 September 2016, the Department for Communities and Local Government, issued a technical consultation paper on the 2017/18 Local Government Finance Settlement. The closing date for responses was 28 October 2016 and the Fire Authority's response was set out in Appendix A to the report.

The consultation covered two areas which were relevant to the Fire Authority – consideration as to whether specific grants should be included within the multi-

year settlement from Government and the cap on Council Tax increases.

The Authority currently received Fire Revenue Grant which for 2016/17 amounted to £340,142. Allocations of Fire Revenue Grant were decided on an annual basis and notification by Government of the actual amounts to be awarded to each Fire Authority did not happen before approval of the Authority's budget in February. The draft response to the consultation stated that the Fire Authority would like Fire Revenue Grant allocations to be part of the multi-year settlement rather than being determined on an annual basis.

The consultation proposed giving shire district councils the power to increase Council Tax by less than 2% or up to and including £5, whichever was higher. Police and Crime Commissioners in the lowest quartile would also be able to increase Council Tax in the same way but this had not been extended to Fire Authorities. The draft response asked the Government to consider allowing Fire Authorities the same power.

Councillor Colin Dudley stated that paragraph 3.4 on page 5 of the agenda was an important statement in that local authorities and the Police and Crime Commissioner were able to increase Council Tax by up to 2% or up to and including £5, whichever was the higher. However, Fire Authorities did not have the same power. He referred to the 'Fiver for Fire' initiative which the Fire Authority had taken up a couple of years ago and which had been supported by residents across the district. Residents seemed surprised to learn that the Fire Authority cost equated to only £61 per year for a household on an average Band B property. The Chairman therefore felt that it would be appropriate for him to compose a letter to the Prime Minister expressing his disappointment that the power to increase Council Tax had not been extended to Fire and Rescue Services.

Councillor Emma Webster suggested that the Chairman might want to garner support from other Fire and Rescue Services in the lower quartile in order to present a united front. The Chairman confirmed that he would send a copy of his letter to the other Fire and Rescue Services in question.

Councillor Iain McCracken referred Members to the responses to Questions 1 and 3 and in particular specifically mentioned paragraph 4 of Question 3 which stated that it was recognised that the Policing and Crime Bill would place a statutory duty on police and fire authorities to work together which might in the short term require significant investment. It was important to bear this in mind for the future.

**RESOLVED that:**

The response to the consultation as set out in Appendix A be approved.

**59. STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2015/16**

Trevor Ferguson, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), provided the Fire Authority with a copy of the Statement of Assurance for the 2015/16 financial year.

The process demanded that the RBFRS formally confirmed the adequacy of arrangements for the effective management of the financial, governance and operational matters in the service. The statement also confirmed the extent to which the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England

(July 2012) had been met.

The DCFO noted that this was the fourth SoA that the RBFA had issued. For the second year running the operational element of the document had been subject to reciprocal external moderation by a team from Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service. They had highlighted the quality of self assessment and internal moderation findings. They had also commented on the considerable progress that had been made over the previous twelve months.

The DCFO noted that:

- Financial management requirements were fully met (previously fully met);
- Governance requirements were substantially met. An external auditor had been appointed to audit the governance arrangements of the authority. They had identified further enhancements to the framework of risk management, governance and internal control to ensure that it remained effective (previously substantially met).
- Operational requirements were fully met (previously substantially met).
- National Framework requirements were fully met. (previously substantially met).

The Statement of Assurance had received unanimous support from the Audit and Governance Committee.

Councillor Iain McCracken thanked Officers for their diligence which culminated in this excellent result.

**RESOLVED that:**

- The summary judgements within the Statement of Assurance for each of the four key areas of finance, governance, operations and delivering the National Framework be noted;
- The publication of the RBFA Statement of Assurance 2015/16 be agreed.

**60. SOCIAL MEDIA PROTOCOL FOR MEMBERS**

Katie Mills, Head of Corporate Services (HOCS), presented the Social Media Protocol which had been recommended by the Audit and Governance Committee on 28 September 2016.

Social media was a highly effective communication tool and the policy was designed to support Members by providing advice and guidance on the use of social media. It provided a channel for Councillors to interact with the public in their official capacity as Members of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and to promote the work of the Service locally. The Social Media Protocol had been aligned to those in place in local authorities and advice and training would be provided to Members from the HOCS.

Councillor Colin Dudley noted that social media was part of every day lives and the Protocol related to Members of the Fire Authority acting as a representative of the Fire Authority. He asked if there was any cross over with personal social media accounts. The HOCS advised that this would only be an issue if a Member was expressing the views of the Fire Authority and where it related to the business of the Fire Authority.

Councillor Emma Webster advised that if a person was acting as an Elected Member and speaking with that hat on there was a clear delineation and Members might want to take that into account.

**RESOLVED that:**

The Social Media Protocol be approved.

**61. ANNUAL TREASURY REPORT**

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (HOFP), presented the Annual Treasury Report for 2015/16 in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management in Public Services.

The Annual Treasury Report for 2015/16 was set out in Appendix A of the report and had been considered and agreed by the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2016. The HOFP noted that the report reflected the Authority's cautious approach in relation to investment and that all investment was therefore placed in short term call accounts.

The HOFP stated that Treasury Management largely related to investment income from the call account. The internally managed funds earned an average rate of return of 0.54% which compared favourably with the 7 day LIBID rate of 0.36%.

It was noted that interest received in the year totalled £34,000 as interest rates had remained at exceptionally low levels throughout the year. No borrowing had been undertaken as capital expenditure was financed by grant and revenue contributions.

The Chairman queried whether the HOFP was confident that the rate of return was acceptable when balanced against risk. The HOFP confirmed that he was.

**RESOLVED that:**

- The Annual Treasury Report for 2015/16 be noted.

**62. FORWARD PLAN**

**RESOLVED that:**

The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Forward Plan for the period 21<sup>st</sup> November 2016 to 6<sup>th</sup> December 2016 be noted.

**63. MINUTES OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES**

It was noted that the minutes of the following meetings were published on the RBFRS website:

- Audit and Governance Committee – 28 July 2016
- Management Committee – 11 August 2016

**64. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

An Extraordinary meeting would be held on Tuesday 6 December 2016 at 5.00pm in the Lynda Kenyon Suite, RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court,

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Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD.

*(The meeting concluded at 7.30 pm)*