

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE
AUTHORITY**



Held on Wednesday 20 February 2013 at 7.30pm

**Council Chamber, Reading Borough Council, Civic Centre, Reading,
Berkshire RG1 7TD**

Members:

*Councillor Alistair Auty	*Councillor Christine Bateson
*Councillor Phillip Bicknell	Councillor Chris Bowring
*Councillor Prue Bray	*Councillor Jeff Brooks
*Councillor Dr Paul Bryant	*Councillor David Burbage
*Councillor Diana Coad	*Councillor Andrew Cumpsty
*Councillor Colin Dudley(<i>Chairman</i>)	*Councillor Haqeeq Dar
*Councillor Adrian Edwards	*Councillor Paul Gittings
*Councillor David Holtby	*Councillor Mrs Pauline Helliar-Symons
*Councillor Peter Jones	*Councillor John Lenton
Councillor Chris Maskell	Councillor Iain McCracken
*Councillor Edward Plenty	*Councillor Mohammed Rasib
*Councillor Angus Ross	*Councillor Rebecca Rye
*Councillor Alan Ward	*Councillor Miss Emma Webster
<i>*present</i>	

In

Attendance:

Olaf Baars (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
Conor Byrne (Senior Accountant, SA)
Iain Cox (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)
Caroline Redzikowska (Director Corporate Services, DCS)
Carolyn Rowe (Committee Manager)
Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)
Nicole Targett (Corporate Communications Manager, CCM)
Andrew Vallance (Director Resources, DR)

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

357. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Chris Bowring, Cllr Iain McCracken and Cllr Chris Maskell.

Action

358. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Director, Corporate Services referred Members to the Dispensation she had granted to all Members of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) for the decision on item 11, the 2013/14 budget, on the grounds that members were residents of Berkshire, and that without the dispensation everyone would be excluded and the budget could not be set. Cllr Adrian Edwards also sought an individual dispensation which was granted for this item. There were no other Declarations of Interest received from Members or Officers.

359. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 DECEMBER 2012

The Chairman noted that the actions had been discharged.

The correct spelling for "Bearwood" College item 347 ,and "Standing" Committees item 354 were noted for amendment and it was

Resolved:

- a) That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 December 2012 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

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

There were no items received under standing orders 19 and 25, participation of the public.

361. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

- a) The Chairman, Cllr Colin Dudley, formally announced the CFO's decision to retire. Cllr Dudley said that this was not the CFO's last Fire Authority meeting and that he would wish to speak further then.
- b) Cllr Diana Coad wished to announce her thanks for the animal rescue work undertaken by RBFRS. They had recently shown courtesy, care and compassion in a lengthy process in assisting a horse to stand. She stated that she understood that RBFRS had since also asked to return to undertake training in future.
- c) ACFO Paul Southern announced that RBFRS had recently been audited for Health and Safety (ROSPA). This had involved 5 auditors from outside Berkshire and the final report was due on 11 March 2013. RBFRS had last been audited in 2006 when it received a score of 78/100. This time it had been indicated that the score would be no lower than 91/100, which the auditor had advised was the highest he had awarded. A further update would be brought to Members as part of the Annual Health and Safety report.
- d) Cllr Paul Bryant advised that he had recently attended an LGA meeting of the Fire Commission, which was chaired very actively by Kay Hammond. He had circulated a report to Members and suggested that Members contact him if they have any queries.

362. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

The Chairman stated that he had been advised by Cllr McCracken, Chairman of Audit and Governance, that there were no issues arising.

363. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS UNDER STANDING ORDER 30

There were no Questions received from the Fire Authority Members under Standing Order 30.

364. NOTICES OF MOTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 44

There were no notices of motion under Standing Order 44.

365. RECOMMENDATION OF COMMITTEES

It was **Noted** that the only recommendation was from the Management Committee regarding the Budget 2013/14, which was a separate agenda item.

366. AMENDMENT TO FINANCIAL REGULATIONS FR9, FR17 AND FR18

The Director of Resources introduced the report which sought agreement to amend three financial regulations to incorporate technical updates in accordance with current arrangements. It was unanimously

resolved:

- a) That the amendments to the Financial Regulations FR9, FR17 and FR19 be **approved**.

367. 2013/14 BUDGET

The DR presented the report and outlined key aspects. He advised that there had been a number of changes under the new Government arrangements. RBFA had received a slightly lower cut in grant than some, but the figures signalled the “backloading” over the CSR 2010 review period that had been anticipated – with cuts increasing to a total of 19.4%.

DR referred to the capital budget stating that the bid for Theale Fire Station had been unsuccessful, and that the 2013/14 capital grant would therefore be £960,000. The Budget Working Party (BWP) had considered this in coming to their recommendations.

A mini comprehensive review was also expected with an expected grant cut in 2015/16 of the average of the last 4 years – which for RBFA would be approximately 5%.

In response to Member questions the following points were made:

- the 2013/14 freeze grant offer of 1%, if accepted, would be paid for each of the next two years (2013/14, and 2014/15). It was not known if a freeze grant offer would be made for 2014/15, but DR thought it likely.
- the £3,648,000 shown in 2014/15 was for the sale of Dee Road and Windsor but this was not anticipated to be the whole amount of the capital receipt.

Cllr Alan Ward, as the Chairman of the Budget Working Party moved paragraph 3.1.2 being the recommendation of both the BWP and the Management Committee, and this was seconded by the Chairman. Cllr Ward stated that the recommendation demonstrated a degree of compromise which was required in accepting the Government’s offer. There were good reasons, including to fund the building of a Fire Station at Theale, but not everyone agrees to a £5 per annum rise. He stated that it was with some reluctance he recommended any increase but that there was the opportunity to raise the budget base which would not be repeated.

Cllr Ward added that there was also some compromise regarding the savings in paragraph 3.1.2, but he believed they formed a coherent package.. He thanked Members of the Budget Working Party for their constructive approach and paid tribute to the Officers, in particular the Director of Resources.

The Chairman seconded, and stated that any increase was never welcome, but that the £5 per annum represented 9.6 pence per week. The IRMP survey showed that the public were surprised at how little the sum for RBFA was. He added that when compared to the precept of other combined FAs, RBFA was the second lowest, and this had resulted in the Government dispensation for a £5 per annum rise applying to RBFA.

The Chairman added that the FA needed to remind the public that it was not just a fire service but also a rescue service, including animal rescue, and that RBFRS had recently won an award for its extrication skills.

On being put to the vote the Fire Authority unanimously agreed the recommendations of the Management Committee, and

Resolved:

- a) To increase the Band D Council Tax Precept by £5 to £60.66 in 2013/14;
- b) To use the additional income raised by the increase towards the development of the new fire station at Theale or Calcot in 2013/14 and 2014/15; and
- c) To accept the list of savings as set out in Appendix C.

Cllr Ward moved the remaining recommendations in the report 2.1- 2.5, and this was seconded by the Chairman.

Cllr Ward stated that the first vote had been key, but that he wished to draw Members' attention to the content of the appendices which included the Medium Term Plan, the Capital Programme, and the important Treasury Management and Prudential Indicators reports.

Cllr Burbage commended Cllr Ward stating that the increase was only in line with inflation over 3 years, and for using it to fund the capital programme and avoid borrowing. He hoped this might enable Theale Fire Station to be put in place sooner rather than later.

Cllr Gittings agreed with Cllr Ward that there had been co-operation on the BWP, and added his thanks to the officers. He reflected that the BWP had made a similar recommendation the year before which had been rejected. He added that without the freeze on recruitment and the savings from retained (which were regrettable) the FA would soon run out of road and face stark choices. It was regrettable that being the 2nd lowest, did not mean we were spared from cuts, or that we received the capital bid. He stated that it should be clear that this was not a generous offer from Government, but was actually asking the people of Berkshire to pay. He looked forward to the developments in Dee Road, and considered that the public were getting good value for money. Whilst there were some concerns on the cuts, the motion would be supported. It provided a breathing space, albeit one to watch going forward, and he paid tribute to the Firefighters for keeping Berkshire safe and for adapting to the savings.

Cllr Brooks stated that there looked to be agreement, and for good reason, because the budget being brought forward was sensible. He thanked officers throughout the Brigade including firefighters and non uniformed officers and said that it would be supported as it was the right thing to do.

In seconding, the Chairman spoke of the prevention, protection and response work undertaken by the Brigade which were the essence of what the public expected. Prevention was why calls were going down, and when there was a fire the public could rely on the Brigade's response. RBFA had the 2nd lowest precept, and the public, if asked would say yes. These were the reasons he supported the recommendations

In summing up Cllr Ward thanked Cllr Burbage and agreed it was very important to avoid borrowing and the ongoing cost of that. He thanked Cllr Gittings and with regard to the capital bids, reminded Members that RBFA would still receive the share of the 75% that was distributed on a per capita basis. In concluding he added that whilst he was sceptical about the focus group view, he supported the recommendations.

Resolved that the recommendations as set out in the report as follows be agreed:

2.1. **That the Fire Authority in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended (“the Act”), agree that the following amounts be now calculated for the year 2013/14:**

2.1.1. The aggregate council taxbase of the six Berkshire unitary authorities has been notified as 309,927.79.

2.1.2a) £35,040,368.74 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Fire Authority estimates for the items set out in Section 42A (2)(a) to (d) of the Act

2.1.2b) £548,000 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Fire Authority estimates for the items set out in Section 42A (3) (a) to (b) of the Act

2.1.2c) **£34,492,368.74 being the amount by which the aggregate at a) above exceeds the aggregate at b) above**

2.1.2d) £15,640,848 being the aggregate of the sums which the Fire Authority estimates will be payable for the year in respect of redistributed non-domestic rates and revenue support grant

2.1.2e) A surplus of £51,301 being the net aggregate of the surpluses and deficits on billing authorities’ Collection Funds to be received in 2013/14.

2.1.2f) £18,800,219.74 being the amount at (2.1.2c) less the amount at (2.1.2d) above, less the amount at (2.1.2e) above, calculated by the Fire Authority in accordance with Section 42A (4) of the Act as its council tax requirement for the year

2.1.2g) £60.66, being the amount at (2.1.2f) above divided by the aggregate council taxbase at (2.1.1) above, calculated by the Fire Authority, in accordance with Section 42B(1) of the Act, as the basic amount of its Council Tax for the year.

2.1.2h) The Fire Authority, in accordance with Section 40(2)(a) of the Act, hereby sets the following amounts of Council Tax for the year 2013/14 for each of the categories of dwellings shown below:

Valuation Band	£
A	40.44
B	47.18
C	53.92
D	60.66
E	74.14
F	87.62
G	101.10
H	121.32

Being the amounts given by multiplying the amount at (2.1.2g) by the number which, in the proportion set out in Section 5(1) of the Act, is applicable to dwellings listed in a particular valuation band divided by the number which in that proportion is applicable to dwellings listed in valuation band D, calculated by the Fire Authority, in accordance with Section 47(1) of the Act, as the amounts to be taken into account for the year in respect of categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands.

2.1.2i) The Fire Authority, in accordance with Section 40(2)(b) of the Act, hereby sets the following amounts payable as precepts by the billing authorities for the year 2013/14:

Authority	Taxbase	Precept	Collection Fund Surplus/ (Deficit)	Net Yield from Council Tax
Bracknell Forest	41,120.00	2,494,339.20	12,901.00	2,507,240.20
Reading	47,610.00	2,888,022.60	61,240.00	2,949,262.60
Slough	36,042.44	2,186,334.41	0	2,186,334.41
West Berkshire	59,884.24	3,632,578.00	(33,454.00)	3,599,124.00
Windsor & Maidenhead	61,834.71	3,750,893.51	9,547.00	3,760,440.51
Wokingham	63,436.40	3,848,052.02	1,067.00	3,849,119.02
Total	309,927.79	18,800,219.74	51,301.00	18,851,520.74

2.1.2j) The Fire Authority determines that in accordance with the set of principles set by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for the year, its relevant basic amount of Council Tax for 2013/14 is not excessive.

2.2 That the Fire Authority APPROVES the Medium Term Financial Plan set out in Appendix A and the associated savings listed in Appendix C.

2.3 That the Fire Authority APPROVES the proposed Capital Programme set out in Appendix D.

2.4 **That the Fire Authority APPROVES the mid-year Treasury Management report in Appendix E.**

2.5 That the Fire Authority APPROVES the Prudential Indicators, Treasury Strategy and Investment Strategy set out in Appendix F.

368. BUDGET MONITORING

The DR introduced the report, and advised that a revenue underspend of £935,000 was forecast, and that some of the savings that had just been approved were in these areas, including some of the retained budget. As such, the same level of underspend was not projected for next year, although some retained underspend may still be expected.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

369. NEW BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS

The ACFO provided a verbal update, advising members of the current tender process for the refurbishment.

Cllr Bryant stated that the Control Project PSG had visited the building, and that Buckinghamshire would also be present at the next meeting.

Cllr Ross as Chairman of the Strategic Asset Management Committee suggested, and the Chairman agreed that visits to the building might be arranged for FA Members in the Spring and before the work starts.

ACFO

370. MINUTES OF STANDING COMMITTEES

On agreement that they be taken together as one item, it was unanimously

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meetings of the Fire Authorities Standing Committees be received as follows:

- a) Audit & Governance Committee – 13 December 2012 (not yet approved).
- b) Strategic Asset Management Committee – 15 January 2013 (not yet approved).
- c) Management Committee – 28 January 2013 (not yet approved).

371. 2013/14 PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS

Resolved:

That the Programme of Fire Authority Meetings 2013/14 be agreed.

372. FORWARD PLAN

Resolved:

That the forward plan be noted.

373. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Resolved:

- a) That an **extraordinary** meeting be held on **Wednesday 27 March 2013**, at 6.30 pm at Wokingham Council, Shute End, Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 1BN
- b) That the next meeting is on **Wednesday 24 April 2013** at 6.30 pm, at Bracknell Forest Council, Easthampstead House, Town Square, Bracknell, Berkshire RG12 1AQ.

Approved 27.03.13

The meeting closed at 8.25 pm.