

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



Held on Tuesday 27th February 2018 at 6.30pm

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

Members: (* <i>present</i>)	*	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 Jason Brock		Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle
	*	Councillor Paul Bryant	*	Councillor Phillip Mirfin
		Councillor Avtar Cheema	*	Councillor Mohammed Rasib
	*	Councillor Colin Dudley	*	Councillor Angus Ross
	*	Councillor Adrian Edwards	*	Councillor Atiq Sandhu
	*	Councillor Paul Gittings	*	Councillor Emma Webster

In Attendance: Richard Battley (Head of Facilities and Assets)
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer)
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HOFP)
Neil Carter (West Hub Manager)
Stephen Chard (Committee Officer)
Trevor Ferguson (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)
Steve Foye (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
Mark Gaskarth (Area Manager, Collaboration and Policy)
Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources, Learning and Development)
Simon Jefferies (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)
Paul Jones (Central Hub Manager)
Katie Mills (Head of Corporate Services)
Lloyd Palmer (East Hub Manager)
Jim Powell (Area Manager (Service Delivery))
Linda Pye (Committee Officer)
Nikki Richards (Director of Support Services)
Fayth Rowe (Committee Officer)
Tony Vincent (Head of Business and Information Systems)

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

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43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting had been received from Councillors Avtar Cheema and Tina McKenzie-Boyle.

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct Councillors Emma Webster and Iain McCracken declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 9 by virtue of the fact that they were members of the Thames Valley Police and Crime Panel.

In accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct, Councillors Angus Ross and Malcolm Alexander stated that should the Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) be discussed at the meeting they declared a personal interest as they were a member 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.

45. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 OCTOBER 2017

RESOLVED that:

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2017 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

46. 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.

47. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman made the following announcements:

Armed Forces Covenant

The Chairman stated that the Fire Authority was honoured to be joined by representatives of the Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence, who were visiting to witness the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant. In attendance were Colonel Atkins, Major Knight, Dr Karen Arnold and Kate Long.

The Armed Forces Covenant was a promise from the nation, that those who were serving or had served in the armed forces and their families were treated fairly. By signing the Covenant, the Fire Authority pledged to support the Armed Forces Community, including serving personnel, reservists, veterans, spouses and military families.

Contained within the covenant were a number of commitments that the Fire Authority had signed up to. These included promoting the fact that this was an armed forces friendly organisation, working with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) to establish an employment pathway for people leaving the Armed Forces, supporting employees who chose to be members of the reserve forces, supporting local cadet units in the community and actively supporting Armed Forces Day which took place every year.

Some of this work was already underway, as a number of reservists and former Armed Services personnel already worked within the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRRS), doing vital work across a range of departments. Job

vacancies in the RBFRS were also now being advertised on a dedicated website for people leaving the Armed Forces. This provided a career pathway for them to enter the fire service.

Running parallel to the Armed Forces Covenant, was the tiered Employer Recognition Scheme, which offered Bronze, Silver and Gold certificates and recognition based on the level of employer commitment. RBFRS had already gained the Bronze level, which would soon be proudly displayed and the intention was to work towards the Silver standard, following that the Gold standard.

Shortly before the meeting began, the Chairman explained that he and the Chief Fire Officer had met with the distinguished guests and formally signed the Covenant on the Fire Authority's behalf.

The Chairman handed over to Colonel Atkins, Deputy Commander, Reserve Headquarters at the 11th Infantry Brigade to say a few words:

Colonel Atkins gave thanks for the invitation to sign the Armed Forces Covenant and for the opportunity of addressing Members. He explained that he represented all three armed forces and that the signing of the Covenant was an important step to take and one that was very much appreciated. As described by the Chairman, the Covenant was a commitment to all areas of the large armed forces community which included veterans, reservists, spouses/partners of serving officers and their families.

The Covenant also formed the basis for a solid foundation in working together. An important aspect of which was work with cadet organisations. Colonel Atkins also highlighted the importance of the CTP in aiding the employment pathway at all levels, including service leaders.

Colonel Atkins was also delighted at the support of the RBFRS for Armed Forces Day.

Colonel Atkins looked forward to continuing to work together in partnership. He once again gave thanks to the Fire Authority and was delighted to present the Bronze Employer Recognition Certificate.

Councillor Dudley gave thanks for this presentation. In recognition, he presented Colonel Atkins with the RBFRS Crest and presented all four representatives with a crested pen.

Eddie Cardoso's retirement

After more than 30 years of dedicated service, Station Manager Eddie Cardoso would be retiring in April 2018. Eddie had joined the Fire Service in 1986 as part of the Retained Duty System (RDS) at West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, based in East Wittering Fire Station. He stayed with West Sussex for two years before joining RBFRS on the 21 March 1988 as a wholetime firefighter.

Eddie's first posting was to Bracknell, where he remained until October 1993. In 1993 he was successfully appointed to the role of Leading Firefighter at Whitley Wood Fire Station, before transferring afterwards to Wokingham Road. After several more years in the role, temporary acting up positions, and various other postings Eddie was then appointed to the role of Sub Officer at Dee Road Fire Station on Green Watch in August 1998, returning later to Wokingham Road and then to Wokingham Fire Station itself. Eddie was promoted to the role of Station Manager in Performance Review in 2009, transferring to the then Dee Road Headquarters to work alongside many other supporting departments and senior

teams. In July 2015, he was transferred to the Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS).

Many would also know that Eddie had been an active member of the Fire Brigades Union, supporting staff, passionately campaigning, and working closely with managers and others to resolve issues both locally and nationally. His colleagues described him as a supportive, friendly, caring colleague, who always had time for people. Councillor Dudley gave his personal agreement to that description of Eddie.

As everyone who had worked alongside Eddie would know, he had been an asset to RBFRS, and his achievements included being a key supporter for TVFCS, helping shape the future of RBFRS over the years by working on projects, policy and performance review and implementation through his roles as a member of staff, a manager and an FBU official. He would be missed and the Chairman offered very best wishes for his future and presented him with a farewell gift.

Eddie Cardoso gave thanks for this presentation and the unexpected gift. He was thankful for the opportunity given to him to begin working for the RBFRS in 1988. Eddie felt that throughout his time at the RBFRS a professional, but also friendly working relationship had always been maintained amongst colleagues, both Members and Officers. He was also pleased at the many achievements made by the Service over the years to the benefit of Berkshire's residents.

Workplace of the Year Award - Get Berkshire Active

The Chairman was pleased to announce that RBFRS had been awarded Workplace of the Year at the Get Berkshire Active awards on Friday 23 February 2018. This was a fantastic achievement and Councillor Dudley gave thanks to the team for their efforts in achieving this award.

The nomination was based around the work of the Fire Service to improve the physical fitness of its staff, including the provision of equipment, policies around time and fitness standards, and the training and development of Physical Education Supervisors amongst the initiatives.

Additionally, all staff were encouraged to be active through health promotion campaigns and were able to access a range of specialist support. As an organisation, the Fire Service was committed to the broader health and wellbeing agenda of the communities it served and Councillor Dudley was delighted that the Service had received the award.

Charity skydive for the Fire Fighters Charity

On Sunday 22 April 2018, some Fire Service staff would be taking to the skies in an effort to raise money for the Fire Fighters Charity. Eleven members of staff would be jumping from 10,000 feet in the air on a tandem skydive, which would take place on the outskirts of Salisbury.

This skydive had been organised as part of a year of fundraising for the Fire Fighters Charity, after the Charity was nominated by the Mayor of Bracknell and Fire Authority Member, Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle as her chosen mayoral charity.

Anyone wishing to donate to the team, should go to [JustGiving.com](https://www.justgiving.com) and search for "RBFRS skydive".

The Chairman wished the best of luck to the team on their skydiving adventure and was hopeful they could raise as much money as possible for this very worthwhile charity.

Time to Talk Events

As part of efforts to raise awareness of mental health in the workplace, a number of events were held during the week commencing 5 February 2018 in support of Time to Talk Day. Time to Talk Day was a day run by Time to Change that aimed to bring people together to get talking and break the silence around mental health problems.

Members of the Senior Leadership Team led breakfast sessions at Newsham Court, each with different themes to encourage staff to be comfortable talking about their mental health. Events were also held at Caversham Road, Bracknell, Langley and Newbury Fire Stations during the week with many people engaging with the activities and in some cases talking about their own experiences.

A Leadership Forum held on 1 February 2018 also focused on the subject of mental health, with the Service's middle managers taking part in sessions on how to reduce stigma and support staff in the workplace.

It was a really important subject, and the Chairman therefore said thank you and well done to the team that had made all these events possible. Councillor Dudley added that mental health was often a hidden problem and it was therefore very important to talk about and be open on mental health issues.

Charity Car Washes

During March, fire stations would once again be taking part in the National Car Wash League, to raise money for the Fire Fighters Charity. Bracknell, Slough, Wokingham, Maidenhead, Caversham Road and Newbury firefighters would be washing as many cars as possible for a good cause at different Saturdays during the month.

Details of the car washes were on the website and social media pages, and the Chairman asked Members to please try to go along to support the events if possible. This was a good opportunity to raise funds and it would be nice to break fund raising records.

48. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS UNDER STANDING ORDER 30

There were no questions from Members under Standing Order 30.

49. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDER 44

There were no Notices of Motion under Standing Order 44.

50. RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEES

It was noted that item 12 (Royal Berkshire Fire Authority – Pay Policy Statement 2018/19) had been recommended from the Audit and Governance Committee on 19 December 2017.

51. 2018/19 BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN

Councillor Phillip Bicknell, Lead Member for Finance, introduced the report which

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set out for approval the 2018/19 Budget and the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to enable the Fire Authority to finalise its budget requirements and approve the Band D Council Tax precept for 2018/19.

Councillor Bicknell reported continued financial volatility over the past year, not just for the RBFRS's budgetary position but also for the wider economy. The annual rate of inflation had risen to 3% and this had had a knock on effect in terms of expectations around the pay award for both uniform and non-uniform staff.

Volatility in the economy had also impacted on the Authority's funding streams. For example, tax base growth was lower than anticipated, although Business Rate income had increased. However, there was a variation in growth across the six Berkshire unitary authorities.

The Fire Authority had also incurred and would continue to incur significant additional costs for fire safety activities post the Grenfell fire of June 2017.

Given the economic climate and the fact that the Fire Authority was one of the lowest precepting fire authorities nationally, the Management Committee tasked the Chairman and the Chief Fire Officer with lobbying Berkshire's Members of Parliament (MPs) to make them aware of these issues and to ask for greater flexibility to increase Council Tax when setting the budget. In turn, MPs had been lobbying Government on the Fire Authority's behalf to seek this flexibility and increase Council Tax by up to £5 per annum (Band D) rather than the maximum of 1.99% (approximately £1.24 per annum) without holding a referendum. While the £5 was not progressed, there had been agreement to increase the Council Tax precept by up to 2.99% (a total of £1.87 per year) in both 2018/19 and 2019/20. However, Councillor Bicknell reported that subject to approval of this increase to the precept, this was still insufficient to balance the budget over the next three years. Therefore, savings and income generation proposals would still need to be sought over and above the £2.4m of savings already committed to and already achieved in many cases by the Fire Authority. Councillor Bicknell therefore highlighted the importance of continued contact with MPs and in turn the Government for further financial flexibility in future.

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (HOFP), presented the report. He commenced by referring Members to the MTFP as shown in Appendix B. The HOFP described the current funding position and highlighted the additional cost pressures that had arisen over the last year.

Starting with funding, there were three main sources: government grant, Business Rates and Council Tax. Government grant for 2018/19 was in line with expectations as part of the four-year settlement. The Business Rates surplus for 2018/19 was £92k more than 2017/18. However, this overall increase in the surplus masked variation between unitary authorities. The 2018/19 amounts for three unitary authorities were actually below those for 2017/18, two were substantially higher and one was broadly similar. Volatility was also present when considering Council Tax income for 2018/19. Last year's MTFP assumed an increase in the Council Tax Base of 2%. In fact, the overall increase in the tax base for 2018/19 was only 1.6% although again there was quite a bit of variation between unitary authorities with the highest being 2.2% and the lowest being 1.3%.

The effect of this reduced growth rate was that precept income would be £91,000 lower than that forecast in last year's plan. The collection fund surplus was set at

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£110,000 for 2018/19 whereas in 2017/18 the surplus was higher at £233,000. However, the ability to increase the precept by 2.99% rather than 1.99% would generate an additional £221,000 in 2018/19.

The net effect of these changes was that funding for 2018/19 would be £33.479 million based on a precept increase of 2.99%, which was an increase of 0.94% over the current year's funding.

Turning to the expenditure side of the MTFP the volatility around planning assumptions was even starker. On top of the cost pressures identified in last year's MTFP there were significant new pressures as set out in the lavender coloured section of Appendix B. The most significant of these new pressures related to pay. Over the last few years, budget reports to the Fire Authority had stressed that pay awards of 1% were becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. 2017/18 had seen significant developments in terms of negotiations around pay awards for both uniformed and non-uniformed staff. One of the catalysts for this change had been the uplift in inflation to the current rate of 3%. The Fire Brigade's Union (FBU) had rejected an unconditional pay increase of 2% and a further increase of 3% based on changes to the firefighter role for 2017/18. An offer to non-uniformed staff of 2% for both 2018/19 and 2019/20 had been rejected by Unison.

Given that unconditional pay offers of 2% for both uniformed and non-uniformed staff had been rejected it would seem prudent from a financial planning perspective to assume that pay increases over the next three years would not be less than 2%. Building in pay increases of 2% into the MTFP had had a significant impact. In 2018/19 alone, the Authority would need to find an additional £266,000 plus £148,000 if the uniformed pay award was 2% in 2017/18.

A separate pressure had surfaced in relation to the Authority's resilience arrangements. The Home Office had stipulated that fire authorities must have robust resilience arrangements in place in the case of industrial action. To this end, contractual arrangements would be put in place to ensure that the Fire Authority could meet its statutory obligations during periods of industrial action. The anticipated cost would be around £175,000, including set up costs, in year 1 of the MTFP and would fall to just over £100,000 from year 2.

Finally, in terms of additional pressures, the Authority had faced the additional costs of post-Grenfell activities. A four-phase plan to deal with the additional workload post Grenfell was presented to Management Committee on 19 September 2017. Recruitment of additional resources was well under way and as a consequence unbudgeted costs of £180,000 were expected to be incurred in 2017/18. Due to the savings made to date the in-year costs would be able to be met from existing budgets. However, the recurring costs had been built into the MTFP: £200,000 had been built into the budget for 2018/19, rising to £400,000 in 2019/20 and £600,000 in 2020/21.

In terms of budget bids, there was only one which was for recruit training. A dedicated budget for recruit training previously existed but was removed some years ago when the recruitment freeze was put in place. The bid for £119,000 was required so that between 10 and 14 recruits could be trained in the summer of 2018. It was anticipated that recruitment campaigns and training would need to be provided in future years to ensure firefighter establishment levels were maintained.

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Given these substantial additional pressures on the budget, officers had been seeking out additional savings and income over and above the Efficiency Plan savings of £2.4 million. Some examples of this were as follows:

- A decision was made to stop attending the Royal County of Berkshire Show as it was felt that it was not the best way of reaching out to target groups in terms of fire prevention activities. This would save £28,000 on an annual basis.
- When the Area Manager, Risk & Performance, post became vacant the opportunity was taken to disestablish the post, create a new non-uniformed post and reallocate responsibilities. This would save £19,000 from the base budget.
- Good progress was being made to ensure that the Authority maximised revenue streams from its asset base.
- £98,000 in additional income / savings would be delivered from collaborative activities and partnership working in 2018/19.

Despite these and other measures, the net position was that £353k would have to be taken from reserves in 2018/19 and £293k would need to be taken in 2019/20. Fortunately, the early delivery of some of the Efficiency Plan savings in the current financial year could be used to fund these deficits in the next two financial years. However, by 2020/21, £656k of recurring savings or income would need to be built into the base budget to avoid depletion of reserves.

Appendix D on page 19 of the reports pack set out the Authority's Strategic Capital Investment Framework. The purpose of the Framework was to establish a provision for programmes of capital works that would maintain and enhance the Authority's assets and this potential capital expenditure was linked to future borrowing requirements as set out in the Authority's Treasury Strategy. It should be noted that the amounts within the Strategic Capital Investment Framework were provisional and individual capital projects would need Committee approval before they could proceed. The capital receipt from the sale of Windsor Fire Station and the Development Fund would provide the initial funding for the capital programme. Thereafter, the Authority would need to borrow to finance its capital expenditure. The revenue financing costs of this additional borrowing had been built into the MTFP.

Appendix E contained the Authority's Reserves Policy. There was no statutory minimum or maximum level of reserves. Members therefore needed to determine the appropriate level of reserves based on the risks facing the Authority. Given the volatility around funding streams, the uncertainty around pay awards and possible industrial action, it was recommended that the General Reserve was maintained at its current level of £2.3 million which was just under 7% of the revenue budget. This was higher than the 5% level that the Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework set as a benchmark but it was felt that it was justified given the current volatility in funding and expenditure.

The predicted use of earmarked reserves and capital receipts was shown in Appendix F. This showed earmarked reserves falling from £7.8 million at March 2018 to £2.3 million by March 2021. It was suggested that the Authority should maintain £1m in the Development Fund as a contingency against the inherent risks and opportunities that might arise in delivering a major capital programme.

Appendix G was the Half-Yearly Treasury Management Update. It confirmed that

during the financial year to date the Authority had operated within the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2017/18.

Appendix H contained the Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2018/19. It showed that capital expenditure in 2018/19 would be funded from the sale of Windsor Fire Station and the Development Fund. It was anticipated that borrowing would not be required until the end of 2019/20 with the financing costs of £355k not impacting on the revenue account until 2020/21.

Appendix I set out fees and charges for 2018/19. These would on average go up by 3% compared to the current year.

The Thames Valley Fire Control Service budget for 2018/19 was approved by the Joint Committee on 18 December 2017 and was shown in Appendix J. The total revenue budget for 2018/19 was £2,105,422 plus a contingency of £150,000 giving a total of £2,255,422. The Authority's share of the revenue budget excluding the contingency was £800,060 (38%). The Authority's capital contribution to the renewal fund was £50,000.

The HOFPP then turned to the report's recommendations. In particular the resolution, detailed in Appendix A, to increase the Band D precept from £62.49 to £64.36 which was an increase of 2.99%.

Councillor Colin Dudley gave thanks for this comprehensive report and for all the work that had gone into producing it. He then asked Members for any questions on the report.

Councillor Paul Bryant queried some of the figures in Appendix B (the MTFP). He questioned the Animal Rescue and Cross Border Income which was shown as a £44k pressure in 2017/18, but was zero for the following two financial years. The HOFPP confirmed this was a pressure in 2017/18, but this was unconfirmed for 2018/19 and 2019/20.

Councillor Bryant continued by noting the £355k borrowing cost in 2020/21 and he queried the absence of any costs before that time. The HOFPP explained that Appendix B served to highlight changes to borrowing costs, there were no additional costs until 2020/21. The cost of interest payments of existing loans are already within the base budget.

Councillor Bryant next queried 'Revenue Funding of Capital', this was a £94k pressure in the current financial year, but showed as £94k income in 2018/19. The HOFPP clarified that the £94k was additional one-off only funding in 2018/19 that would not continue.

Councillor Bryant's final question was in relation to capital expenditure. The financing of capital expenditure was funded by capital reserves through to 2018/19, but capital reserves were not proposed for use in 2019/20 and 2020/21. The HOFPP confirmed that it was possible to fund capital expenditure from reserves in 2018/19, but it would become necessary to borrow to fund capital expenditure from 2019/20.

Councillor Chris Maskell offered congratulations for being able to balance the budget for 2017/18, but noted this would be challenging for the medium term with a need to achieve savings to balance the budget in future. He acknowledged that reserves would be used as an interim measure but queried what action would be taken to avoid depletion of reserves. In response, the HOFPP pointed out that the

proposed use of reserves would be covered by the advance delivery of savings in the current financial year. As stated earlier, by 2020/21, £656k of recurring savings or income would need to be built into the base budget to avoid depletion of reserves and this was work in progress with savings options and potential income streams being explored.

Councillor Angus Ross queried how the budget would be presented, external to the Fire Authority. Using the Strategic Capital Investment Programme as an example, he felt there was a need for some context to help explain the table of figures. Simon Jefferies (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO) explained that a detailed ten year Capital Investment Programme would be presented to Members in April 2018. This would accompany the indicative costs provided in these budget papers, therefore giving context.

Councillor Dudley then proposed approval of the report's recommendations. Recommendation 2.1 (which included approval of an increase in the Council Tax precept of 2.99%) would be taken as a recorded vote. This was seconded by Councillor Bicknell who added that there was a continued need to lobby Government for further funding flexibility.

Councillor Paul Gittings reported that the Labour Group were broadly supportive and would support the proposals. It was important to protect jobs and the terms and conditions of the workforce, as was avoiding the closure of fire stations. He also gave thanks to the HOFP for his report and for the very useful briefing provided ahead of this meeting. Thanks were added to all staff involved.

Councillor Gittings welcomed the greater flexibility afforded by increasing the precept by 2.99%, a higher increase would also have been supported if this had proved possible. Efficiencies had enabled a balanced budget to be set for 2018/19, but greater volatility was highlighted for 2019/20 and 2020/21. There were also extra burdens to fund, and rightly so, post Grenfell with £200k already identified in each of the next three years.

The pay award was another area of financial volatility. A pay increase was well deserved for public servants, but there was of course the need to meet the associated cost. There was also uncertainty in terms of Business Rates and the Council Taxbase.

Councillor Gittings reiterated his support for the 2018/19 budget and highlighted the importance of carefully scrutinising budget monitoring into the future.

In terms of lobbying, it was important that public bodies received the required funding for vital/statutory services, i.e. fire. He was hopeful that the Government would take heed of lobbying and would end austerity, thereby enabling public sector bodies to meet their obligations. This would also avoid or at least lessen the need to increase Council Tax. Councillor Gittings was hopeful that this would find the support of all Fire Authority Members.

Councillor Emma Webster reminded Members of the decision, following public consultation, to keep Wargrave Fire Station open for a further twelve months. She put on record her thanks to Councillor Bicknell, the HOFP and the team for their work in enabling the station to remain open for an extended period of time.

Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons gave credit to the Chairman and the CFO for their efforts in lobbying Berkshire's MPs and Nick Hurd MP, the Fire Minister. Letters had also been written to the Fire Minister by Bracknell Forest, Windsor and Maidenhead, and Wokingham Councils, copied into the Berkshire MPs. She

agreed with the importance of highlighting the issues that were being faced.

Councillor Helliar-Symons added her pleasure at the ongoing budget commitment to keep Wargrave Fire Station open. The funding for doing so had been contributed to by the saving identified from not attending the Royal County of Berkshire Show.

Councillor Bicknell stated that the top priority for Conservative Members was the safety of residents and only necessary taxation should be imposed to help achieve this. Councillor Bicknell commended the budget and praised the good work of the officers involved, in particular the HOFFP.

RESOLVED that:

- An increase in the Council Tax precept of 2.99% be approved by adopting the formal resolution in Appendix A and the Medium Term Financial Plan in Appendix B. This was approved unanimously as a recorded vote.
- The Strategic Asset Investment Framework set out in Appendix D be approved;
- The Reserves Policy in Appendix E and the proposed use of Reserves in Appendix F be approved;
- The mid-year Treasury Management report in Appendix G be approved;
- The Prudential Indicators, Treasury Strategy and Investment Strategy set out in Appendix H be approved;
- The fees and charges set out in Appendix I be approved;
- The TVFCS budget for 2018/19 as set out in Appendix J, including the contribution to the Renewals Fund of £50,000 be approved.

52. PRESENTATION ON THE STRUCTURE AND PROCESS OF NEWLY FORMED RBFRS HUBS

Steve Foye, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, referred to the service restructure which had taken place in 2017 and the fact that the Hubs had arisen out of that restructure.

Jim Powell, (Area Manager (Service Delivery)), referred to the RBFRS Vision which had gone live on 1st September 2017, whereby fire stations would be at the heart of the community. The aim was to provide strong and sustainable arrangements for the delivery of prevention, protection and response activities in an integrated way across Berkshire. The Fire Service faced the challenge of identifying around £1m of savings whilst still providing the best service possible to the community. It would adopt a more integrated approach and would continue to build on new ways of working with a focus on those most at risk. Three Hubs had been established with each being managed by a Group Manager which was a similar set up to Local Police Area Commanders. The three Hubs were as follows:

Hub	Area	Manager
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East Hub	Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead and Slough	Lloyd Palmer
Central Hub	Bracknell Forest and Wokingham	Paul Jones
West Hub	Reading and West Berkshire	Neil Carter

GM Lloyd Palmer, East Hub Manager, gave a presentation on Prevention activity:

Each Hub had a dedicated Community Safety Advisor, known as a CSA, assigned to coordinating and assisting in Prevention activity in their hub area. The CSA reported to an Officer who had the responsibility of being the hub 'Prevention Lead' and, together, they prioritised and assigned Prevention activity undertaken by hub staff.

Working closely with the hub Safe and Well Technicians, as well as fire station personnel and unitary partners, the CSA maintained a focus on local risk and associated needs, whilst also maintaining effective links with Prevention policy colleagues working at Service Headquarters. This approach ensured that hub activity incorporated the wider Prevention agenda, with initiatives remaining targeted and focused in accordance with central policy expectations.

Also operating within each hub were two Safe and Well Technicians, who worked closely with the Service's Safe and Well Coordinator and partners in the unitary authorities in identifying those deemed to be at most risk within the community. Since the implementation of the hubs, good working relationships had been developed with partners, and this work continued.

Technicians would carry out visits with these residents, some of whom had a range of complex needs requiring specialist preventative interventions. These interventions could include installation of a range of assistive technologies. The hubs adopted a flexible approach to delivering these visits and the technicians could be redeployed across the county as demand dictated.

Fire Station staff undertook Prevention activity on a daily basis. Working in liaison with the hub Community Safety Advisor, activity included undertaking local initiatives to address identified risk, whilst also engaging and participating in wider national initiatives.

Fire crews working in the community focused on those who were vulnerable and at risk from dying in fire, but with less complex needs, and also those people who were more likely to have fires in the home and be injured.

Fire crews also delivered educational initiatives in schools covering a range of subjects including fire safety. In addition to this activity, where capacity permitted, Fire Station staff participated in other community engagement activities, such as hosting visits from Cubs, Brownies and other community groups.

GM Paul Jones, Central Hub Manager, gave a presentation on Protection activity:

Each hub had a Uniformed Protection Station Manager. The disposition of the Fire Safety Inspecting Officers (FSIO) across the three hubs was based on projected demand through analysis of local risk. However, there was the flexibility to deploy these resources as demand changed across the county. This had recently been demonstrated by allocating two inspecting officers to the

Community Safety Project Team in response to the increased demand post Grenfell. The Service had recruited 10 new inspecting officers who would be shared amongst the hubs and over the next 18–24 months would complete a full programme of qualification, training and mentoring to achieve their competency and full capability.

In line with the decisions taken by Members as part of the IRMP, FSIOs had shifted the focus of the risk based inspection programme to ensure those premises that present the most risk were targeted and were most likely to result in action that would increase the safety of people in the community. Other key areas of statutory work included reacting to Post Fire Inspections following incidents attended by operational personnel, fire safety issues raised by members of the public or other partner agencies and building consultations from the local authority. This included working with unitary authorities as they developed their local plans.

Potential changes to the Fire Safety order following the Hackett Report could see an increase in demand and the recent recruitment would enable the authority to adapt to these changes as well as accounting for succession planning.

GM Neil Carter, West Hub Manager, gave a presentation around Operational Response activity:

The implementation of Hub working had not changed the model of response – the nearest appliance providing the quickest response would always be mobilised. Mobilisation of appliances and officers took no account of hub boundaries, was borderless and controlled by Thames Valley Fire Control Services.

The Fire Authority could further support incidents as necessary through the attendance of officers, fire engines and specialist capabilities from anywhere in Berkshire or from neighbouring Counties.

In terms of managing response performance and station personnel, the three hub managers took responsibility for the stations located in their unitary areas. The exception to this was Ascot which, although in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, came under the management of the Central Hub due to the satellite crewing arrangements with Bracknell.

The implementation of the remotely managed stations, one of the outcomes of the service redesign decisions made by members in April last year, would take effect in early 2019. This would see further alignment to unitary areas with Windsor being remotely managed from Maidenhead.

Similar to the Protection and Prevention functions, officers had been nominated to lead on response performance. For example, to meet the response standard set by the Fire Authority in 2016, the lead officers in each hub continually analysed and addressed the factors that influenced this measure so that improvement could be driven towards the target time of 10 minutes on 75% of occasions. Managers had also been nominated to lead on the Retained function tasked with improving the availability of respective retained appliances.

As set out in the IRMP the Fire Authority continued to place fire stations at the heart of its communities. Across each of the three hubs risk profiling had been developed which enabled Hub Managers to target resources to meet the needs of the community and reduce risk.

For 2018/19 plans would be introduced for each Hub and Unitary Authority area demonstrating to the public the truly integrated approach to managing risk in the local community. The Fire Service continued with its commitment and intent to work together as one team for the people it served. Over the coming year the Service would be engaging with staff across fire stations and other teams to further improve and assure the delivery of services to the public.

Councillor Malcolm Alexander noted that in terms of Prevention and Protection the Fire Service liaised with local authorities and he asked if liaison work took place with Registered Social Landlords. Jim Powell confirmed that different pathways would be considered as moving forwards.

Councillor Iain McCracken queried whether a representative would be attending Community Safety Partnership meetings. Jim Powell confirmed that a representative already attended these meetings and was fully engaged with the process.

The Chairman thanked all the Officers concerned and stated that they were doing an excellent job. He had visited two of the Hubs and would hope to visit West Hub shortly. These Hubs were a hive of activity and he encouraged other Members to visit if at all possible.

RESOLVED that:

- The update be noted.

53. 2018/19 MEMBER SCHEME OF ALLOWANCE REVIEW

Graham Britten, Monitoring Officer, presented the report which sought to approve the minor changes (shown as tracked changes) made to the 2018/19 Member Scheme of Allowance and to receive for note the recommendations of each of the six unitary authority Independent Remuneration Panels (IRPs) to their respective Councils. The Local Authority (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 (Regulations 10 and 19(2)) required the authority to make a scheme of allowances before the beginning of the financial year and to have regard to the recommendations made by the IRPs of its constituent Councils.

The report recommended that the 2018/19 Member Scheme of Allowances (appended as Appendix A with indicative figures based on a 2% uplift only) be approved.

Councillor Colin Dudley proposed acceptance of the recommendation. This was seconded by Councillor Malcolm Alexander. Councillor Dudley reiterated the fact that the review was undertaken by an independent body. Approval of the recommendation would mean that Member allowances were linked with increases to staff pay (as recommended by the independent review of South East Employers).

Councillor Alexander referred Members to paragraph MA40 of the Scheme of Allowances which stated that 'travelling and subsistence allowances are not taxable, provided receipts are submitted with claims' and questioned the accuracy of this statement. In response, Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HOFPP) explained that this point did need to be confirmed. Correspondence had been exchanged with HMRC which indicated that journeys to headquarters were taxable, but a definitive response was still awaited.

Councillor Paul Gittings raised a concern that Members were required to vote on their own pay increases. He felt this was an area that should be set nationally. Labour Members would be opposing the report's recommendation. Councillor Gittings pointed out that Reading Borough Council Members had not taken pay increases, alongside staff.

Councillor Jason Brock stated that it was important to debate this report and the appropriate use of Council Tax payers' money. The amounts were relatively small but he also felt that the recommendation should be refused. He added that such a move would not go as far as matching the sacrifices that employees had been expected to make whilst continuing to perform their jobs well.

Councillor Chris Maskell was supportive of the need for allowances for Councillors to enable them to carry out their duties. However, he added his concerns to this proposed pay rise and in particular its timing, when the public were being asked for more Council Tax.

Councillor Emma Webster acknowledged that this was a matter for careful consideration. She had looked at the potential to not take an approved increase, however this had proved to not be straight forward. Members did still have options. In her case, Councillor Webster explained that she had made the decision to give recent increases to her allowances to charity – the Fire Fighters Charity. Members had the choice of doing likewise if they were uncomfortable with taking the increase or they could of course take the allowance if approved.

Councillor Dudley stated that there was an acceptance from all Members that allowances should be paid, the purpose being to make up for any income lost by undertaking public duties. When allowances were previously set, following recommendations by South East Employers, Members opted to take 20% off of this approved allowance as public gift, i.e. giving 20% of Members time free of charge. When the allowances were reviewed, agreement was reached to link increases to the pay increases of non-uniform staff – therefore the 2% proposed.

If the 2% was refused by Members, and a suggestion had been made that the saved sum be put the deficit, it would in fact only save £1,640. Councillor Dudley commended the report and put its proposed acceptance to the vote. It was approved by the majority of Members with 13 for and 5 against.

RESOLVED that:

- The 2018/19 Member Scheme of Allowances (appended as Appendix A with indicative figures based on a 2% uplift only) be approved.

54. ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY – PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2018/18

Becci Jefferies, Head of HR and Learning and Development, presented a report which stated that Section 38(1) of the Localism Act 2011 required Royal Berkshire Fire Authority to prepare and publish a Pay Policy Statement each financial year. This statement included information on remuneration for all staff as defined by the Act.

The Pay Policy Statement for 2018/19 contained a number of updates as set out below and figures used for the statement were those as at 31st October 2017.

Further to advice received from the Monitoring Officer, an inclusion regarding the

need for the Fire Authority to approve remuneration for any post that paid in excess of £100,000 per annum, on appointment, had been made. This brought the Pay Policy Statement in line with the terms of reference of the Authority, which were amended in light of statutory guidance issued in February 2013.

Details of the apprenticeship pay had been included in the 2018/19 Pay Policy Statement.

The Statement included reference to the new Car User Scheme and associated allowances, effective from 1st October 2017.

The section relating to the Senior Manager Pay Group had been updated to reflect the reduction in the car lease allowance received.

Councillor Paul Bryant referred to page 48 of the agenda – last sentence on that page should read ‘The Chief Fire Officer is selected by an RBFA Members’ Appointment Panel following a comprehensive selection process.’

RESOLVED that:

- The Pay Policy Statement for 2018/19 be approved.

55. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT ACTION PLAN

Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons, the Member Champion for Organisational Development, introduced the report which sought approval of the Action Plan in support of the Member Development Strategy. She reported that this had been produced following several months of hard work, in particular by Katie Mills, Head of Corporate Services and Councillor Helliard-Symons gave thanks for Katie’s efforts. This work had also been progressed by a Member Development Task and Finish Group, the membership of which comprised herself and Councillors Malcolm Alexander, Paul Bryant and Tina McKenzie-Boyle. The primary aim of this work had been to tidy up and formalise member development.

In terms of the content of the Action Plan, it set out how it was proposed to support the delivery of the Member Development Strategy and it detailed the key areas of activity.

Councillor Helliard-Symons stated that it was important to recognise what Members needed to know and learn in order to make informed decisions for the RBFRS and in working with officers. The Service was under constant change so there was always a need for all Members, regardless of their different areas of knowledge, to keep up to date with training.

Councillor Helliard-Symons then drew Members attention to four new areas identified in the action plan:

- A need for each Group Leader to undertake, at least annually, informal 121s with their Members with a view to establishing training needs for the coming year. This process would commence soon. The output of these would help the Head of Corporate Services to develop the new programme. Councillor Helliard-Symons referenced Members to Appendix C to the report which provided a short skills questionnaire for Members to complete to help inform this process.
- The need for all Members to visit two fire stations per year, one wholetime and one retained fire station. There was no better way to understand the work

undertaken, the issues being faced and ideas for improvements. Visits could be undertaken either informally or on a more formal basis. For formal visits, a protocol was in place and this was circulated to Members. As part of this it was useful practice to make contact in advance with Station Managers highlighting any particular issues that Members wished to cover. The Head of Corporate Services agreed to circulate a list of contact details for all Station Managers. Members were also encouraged to visit the Control Room, Councillor Helliar-Symons suggested that could be done informally either in advance of or post a Fire Authority meeting, and again notice should be given of doing so.

KM to action

- For new Members, two 'buddies' would be provided. An experienced Member and an officer. This would provide a good opportunity to ask questions of clarity to aid their learning process.
- The potential to roll out training with local authorities was another consideration. Some joint training had already been arranged with Bracknell Forest Borough Council. This had the benefit of saving costs to both parties.

Councillor Helliar-Symons recommended to Fire Authority both the principles of the report and the practicalities it proposed.

Moving to questions, Councillor Christine Bateson, who had been a Fire Authority Member for some time (close to 20 years), advised that on becoming a Fire Authority Member she met with both the CFO and the Chairman, and queried if this practice continued for new Members. Councillor Helliar-Symons felt that this could be added to the Member induction programme if Members felt this would be a useful addition. She also recalled meeting with the CFO and the Chairman when she joined the Fire Authority.

Councillor Emma Webster agreed with the importance of visiting Fire Stations, but added that it would also be useful for Members to visit other departments who would welcome the opportunity to meet Members, i.e. Finance, ICT and Communications. She felt it would be useful for the documentation to be widened to cover all employees. Councillor Helliar-Symons responded by stating that this was something to address via the 121 meetings. It could however become a formal part of Member development.

Councillor Iain McCracken was pleased to note from the action plan that the use of Modern Gov was being advocated. He asked whether Members would need to receive additional equipment to enable its use, tablets etc and whether a cost would be incurred. The Head of Corporate Services explained that no additional devices were required to achieve this, but a Fire Authority login and password would be needed. Councillor McCracken was also pleased to note that the action plan would be reviewed annually by the Audit and Governance Committee.

Councillor Chris Maskell agreed with the importance of visiting fire stations and he referred to a visit he made to Whitley Wood Fire Station a few years ago when he was provided with a comprehensive programme for the visit. This was both important and useful so that Members could be adequately prepared in advance.

Councillor Helliar-Symons proposed approval of the Action Plan in support of the Member Development Strategy. This was seconded by Councillor Dudley.

Councillor Malcolm Alexander congratulated the Chair of the Task and Finish Group and the Head of Corporate Services for their work. He stated that he enjoyed being part of the task and finish group, it was well run and held

worthwhile meetings.

Councillor Dudley echoed the comments made by the Vice-Chairman. It was imperative for Members to have the necessary information and skills to be able to make decisions for the Fire Authority. He added that he would be conducting 121s with all Conservative Members.

RESOLVED that:

- The Action Plan in support of the Member Development Strategy be approved.

56. FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED that:

The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Forward Plan for the period 26th March 2018 to 30th July 2018 be noted.

Councillor Angus Ross noted that at a previous meeting he had asked for an additional column to be included on the Forward Plan which would show the Lead Member and he asked again if that could be included in the next version. The Director of Support Services apologised for the oversight and confirmed that it would be amended as requested in future.

FR to action

57. MINUTES OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

RESOLVED that:

The minutes of the following meetings had been published on the RBFRS website:

- Management Committee – 19th September 2017
- Audit and Governance Committee – 27th September 2017
- Management Committee – 4th December 2017

58. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Monday 30 April 2018, 6.30pm in the Lynda Kenyon Suite, Brigade Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD.

(The meeting concluded at 8.13pm)