

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



Held on Wednesday 27 March 2013 at 6.30pm

Council Chamber, Wokingham Borough Council, Civic Offices,  
Shute End, Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 1BN

**Members:**

Councillor Alistair Auty	*Councillor Christine Bateson
Councillor Phillip Bicknell	*Councillor Chris Bowring ( <i>part</i> )
*Councillor Prue Bray ( <i>part</i> )	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 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 ( <i>part</i> )	*Councillor Emma Webster
<i>present</i>	

**In**

**Attendance:**

Iain Cox (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)  
Andy Mancey (AM, Response, AMR)  
Carolyn Rowe (Committee Manager)  
Fayth Rowe (Committee Officer)  
Gerry Rowe (Graham Construction, GR)  
Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)  
Andrew Vallance (Director Resources, DR)

**Observers:** Officers, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service  
Representative Bodies

## 374. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Alistair Auty, Phillip Bicknell, Jeff Brooks, Paul Bryant, Diana Coad, Andrew Cumpsty, David Holtby and Peter Jones.

## 375. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Members or Officers.

## 376. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 FEBRUARY 2013

The Chairman noted that the actions had been discharged.

With reference to the minutes, the Chairman highlighted that the increase in the

**Action**

base budget would not just be used towards the new Fire Station in Theale or Calcot. The Director of Resources (DR) confirmed that the increase of the precept would be used for the new Fire Station in 2013/14 and 2014/15, and would then be used to meet other requirements.

**Resolved:**

- a) That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 February 2013 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

**377. 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.

**378. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- a) The Chairman, Cllr Dudley, reminded FA Members about the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) Awards Ceremony to be held on 31 May 2013. He asked that responses to the invitation, which included partners, be given as soon as possible, and stated that it provided an excellent opportunity to see the work of the Authority. The ceremony would be attended by the Lord Lieutenant, Mary Bayliss.
- b) The Chairman announced that there would be a Members Briefing by the CFO after the RBFA on 24 April 2013 to outline future options for the Authority.
- c) Cllr McCracken announced that the Charity Clay Pigeon Shoot on 24 March 2013, had been very successful. He reported that the event had been well attended by RBFRS and that they had won the event.
- d) The Chairman reported that there had been two serious fires, one in Whitley Wood, and the other in Datchet, where there had been a fatality. He invited the AM Response (AMR) to provide details.

AMR reported that the first incident had been in Whitley Wood, Reading on 12 March 2013. RBFRS had been called to a fire in a communal staircase in flats. Five people had been rescued and RBFRS had assisted five more people to vacate the building. The cause of the fire was arson, and the fire had started in a baby's pram in the communal hallway. AMR reported that RBFRS Fire Safety and Reading Borough Council were working together and that four people had been arrested in connection with the incident. A copycat incident had taken place a week later. RBFRS were working as partners with Thames Valley Police on a joint investigation

AMR reported that the second incident tragically resulted in the fatality of an elderly man in Datchet. RBFRS had received a call to a fire at 08.23. The 1<sup>st</sup> pump had arrived in 6 minutes and the 2<sup>nd</sup> pump had arrived in 9 minutes. The fire had been so severe that Urban Search and Rescue assistance had been required to remove the deceased, and had been accidental with a fire in the loft of the property. There had not been smoke detectors in the property. As a result of the above incident, hot street Home Fire Risk Checks were carried out in 19 properties in the surrounding area and smoke alarms had been fitted. On behalf of RBFA, the Chairman thanked the crews that had dealt with both incidents.

- e) The Chairman announced that Cllr Webster would be attending the National Arboretum Remembrance Service on 12 May 2013 on his

behalf.

- f) The Chairman reported that he would be attending a Service of Thanksgiving to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Coronation of Her Majesty at Reading Minster.

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

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

### **380. NOTICES OF MOTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 44**

A motion under Standing Order 44 had been received from Cllr Gittings, which he read out as follows:

“This authority notes the use of the Regulatory Reform Committee in Parliament to allow fire and rescue authorities in England to contract out their full range of services.

It believes that Fire and Rescue Services in Berkshire, as defined by the Integrated Risk Management Programme, are best delivered as a non-profit making public service function, fully accountable to elected members of this authority.

It requests that the Chief Fire Officer writes to the Fire Minister Brandon Lewis to ask for an urgent clarification of the recent legislative moves and for the minister to give an undertaking that this will not lead to private companies being able to bid to run the core services as outlined above.”

The motion was seconded by Cllr Plenty who reserved his right to speak.

Cllr Gittings stated that the motion was on an important issue facing RBFA and other Fire Authorities. He stated that he was proud to be associated with the Service, and reminded Members of recent achievements such as the Swinley Forest fire, recent water rescues, and winning the world extrication championships. He stated that RBFA was under threat from public spending cuts, and asked RBFA to support his motion to seek reassurance that the Fire Service would not become a for profit organisation. He thanked Cllr Helliar-Symons for the very comprehensive report from the Fire Minister, and said that he had considered withdrawing the motion but had read that 999 was under threat of privatisation.

In response, the Vice-Chairman stated that she could see where Cllr Gittings was coming from, and that there had been a rumour sent around by Labour. It had been stated twice that there were absolutely no plans to privatise the fire service - it was a frontline, high risk job, and it was not the Government's intention - albeit there was a need for flexibility, such as with the Fire Service College, and Thames Valley Control Fire Service where RBFRS was sharing resources. The Vice-Chairman concluded by stating that as the Fire Minister had already given assurances at the Fire Conference that the Fire Service would not be privatised, the motion was invalid, and she asked Members to vote it down.

Cllr Bray stated that she thought the motion was part of a strategy by the Labour Party, based on community safety in Cleveland. She accepted what Cllr Helliar-Symons said and had heard no inkling from the coalition government, but would have no problem in supporting seeking confirmation.

Cllr Webster stated that Cleveland was not frontline, and it was being used to cause concern. She had heard some queries about whether 101 would continue, but she had not heard anything regarding 999.

Cllr Ward stated he could not let go unchallenged any presumption that privatisation would be inefficient and a poorer service.

Cllr Lenton queried what the phrase “not for profit” meant and said that the motion was nonsense.

The Chairman said that he did not wish to waste officer or the minister’s time, and that this had already been asked and answered twice. He said that he did not agree to writing a letter as it would give strength to the notion.

Cllr Plenty who seconded the motion, advised that he did not wish to speak.

Cllr Gittings stated that he was disappointed as the motion was written to be non-party political, and to seek clarification. He remained deeply concerned as the Minister didn’t debate it in the House of Commons. He added that mutualisation would lead to fragmentation, affecting mobilisation when a concerted effort was needed. He stated that at Reading Council the Conservatives had moved that the service should be moving to different models. He hoped RBFA would remain non profit making, and not there to sweat an asset.

In being put to the vote, the motion was voted down with 5 in favour and 9 against.

*Cllr Alan Ward left the meeting at this point.*

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

It was noted that there was a separate agenda item on the Fuel Management Audit which had been referred to the FA by the Audit and Governance Committee at their meeting on 13 December 2012

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### **382. RECOMMENDATION OF COMMITTEES**

There were two reports with recommendations from Committees:

- a)Scheme of Member Allowances, and
- b)Royal Berkshire Pay Policy Statement

#### **a) Audit and Governance 14 March 2013: Scheme of Member Allowances**

The Chairman moved the recommendations from Audit and Governance with the amendment to ask that **the review include the numbers of Members on the Fire Authority as well**. This was seconded by Cllr McCracken.

Cllr Bray stated that whilst she was content for a review of the scheme, it would be unlikely that any uplift would be acceptable. She recognised that the review did not commit the FA, and said that she would abstain.

Cllr Burbage stated that he agreed completely with Cllr Bray –and that the FA were obliged to have a review, and it was a good point to look at numbers too. This was a review, so it was not looking for an increase or decrease.

Cllr Gittings said that it was iniquitous that Members had to vote for their own allowances. There was a vast disparity across FRS’s. He said that he would support the review, but would find it hard to recognise any increases other than

perhaps that awarded to the firefighters, or perhaps the retail price index. The review should look at the numbers and also the Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) for those who give more of their time, but it was a bad system.

Cllr McCracken stated that as Chairman of Audit and Governance Committee, the Committee had recognised that it had been 4 years since a review had been done and it was right and appropriate for it to be undertaken. It had also been a decision of the Committee that the allowances should be reviewed by an independent body which was right and proper.

Cllr Edwards spoke in favour of the review, and in favour of encouraging Members to sit on the FA, including the self employed, where the loss of earnings should be taken into account.

Cllr Plenty stated that he agreed with much that had been said, and whilst it might be because he was fairly new, but he had noticed that there were SRAs where he hadn't noticed much happening. He welcomed the review and particularly the appropriateness of some of the SRAs.

Cllr Lenton said that it was never a good time but that these were very bad times - especially having put up the precept by 9%. He said that there was no point in having a review at this time if it was not going to be implemented, as it would then be out of date. He concluded that it was the wrong time.

The Chairman stated that it was strange and difficult to vote on your own allowances, and that was exactly why it should be in the hands of an independent person. They should look at the numbers of FA members, and the duties and if these warranted the allowances paid. He added it should look at all Members as well as those with SRAs, and that he did not intend it to be restricted.

In being put the vote **as amended**, with 10 in favour and no one against it was **resolved:**

- a) That the report be noted;
- b) That in light of the survey data a full review of the current Scheme of Allowances be authorised and further, that an external/independent resource to conduct/participate in a review be used; **and that the review should include the number of Members on the Fire Authority.**

#### **b) Management Committee 25 March 2013: Royal Berkshire Pay Policy Statement**

The Chief Fire Officer introduced the item and advised there was a requirement to publish the Pay Policy Statement for 2013/14 by the end of March 2013 for the Fire Authority to meet its obligation under section 38 (1) of the Localism Act 2011.

The Chairman moved the recommendation which was seconded by Cllr Emma Webster., and it was unanimously

**resolved:**

- a) That the Pay Policy Statement be Approved

*Cllr Prue Bray and Cllr Chris Bowring left the meeting at this point.*

### **383. NEW BHQ TENDER - PRESENTATION**

The ACFO introduced the item and stated that the Tender opening had been attended by the Vice-Chairman, and Cllr Edwards. He reported that there had been a clear winner. He introduced Gerry Rowe (GR), Contracts Manager from Graham Construction. Members welcomed GR and congratulated Graham Construction on being awarded the contract.

GR gave a presentation about Graham Construction, including its history, and its aims and experience. In response to Member questions GR stated the following:

- The project would be run from the Bristol office;
- Graham Construction was a corporate member of the Considerate Constructors Scheme;
- The project manager would take this contract through the defect period;
- There was out of hours support available from their facilities management service in Bracknell, and cover was 24/7;

Cllr Ross, as Chairman of the Strategic Asset Management Committee added his congratulations, and said that he looked forward to working with Graham Construction. He asked about working with local people, whether local premises would be acquired, and also about working with IKEA.

In response, GR stated that Graham Construction was used to working with others in close proximity – in this case IKEA, and that they would go and see them, and they would undertake liaison with any other contractor. He outlined their commitment to apprenticeships and stated that it would be part of the project.

In response to further Member questions GR stated the following:

- whilst he couldn't give a specific answer to the percentage of projects completed on time and on budget and to specification, they would not get into that position as they would always guide the client if there were issues, and they would be looking for mitigation measures;
- with regard to change control, Graham Construction did not put in place lots of addendums, if the client knew what they wanted, that what they were given, and also the client may re-specify and that could be incorporated.

The ACFO added that there may be instances where there could be value engineering, but it could not be varied enormously because that might be open to challenge.

The Chairman added his congratulations, and said that the FA would ask GR to come back to a future meeting. He concluded that he looked forward to the project being completed on time, on budget and to specification.

### 384. FUEL MANAGEMENT AUDIT

The CFO introduced the report in the absence of the DCFO, and outlined the actions and policy amendments that had been undertaken. He stated that the next step was to ensure that they were adhered to. He stated that the changes that were underway, and those which had been undertaken would meet all the Auditor's recommendations.

The Chairman asked about the process and this was outlined by AMR. The Chairman stated that he had just visited Bracknell station and there had been discrepancies in entries, with some incomplete - being without numbering or signatures. Also, an incorrect time had been entered.

The Chairman stated that the RBFA needed complete assurance that the asset was being looked after, and he asked what assurance could be given to the Members of RBFA.

The CFO reported that RBFRS Central Team regularly checked the recording of fuel at fire stations and he reassured RBFA that stations with fuel had been visited and reminded of the procedure of recording. A discussion had been held with the Internal auditors, Haines Watts on the implementation of a digital process. He stated that an audit process had been put in place but evidentially the process was not happening. He added that AMR was well aware of the issues and he stated that the stations would be visited. The digitising of the process would mean upgrading the pumps, but was an option. The CFO stated that he was very disappointed and upset.

AMR firstly apologised, saying that the RBFA had clearly been let down. He stated that the procedure had been made clear to the crews and additional checks had been put in place. Checks had been undertaken on Monday and had been correct, but clearly RBFA have been let down. AMR stated that the audit had not identified that any fuel had been missing, but clearly the risk was there.

The Chairman invited Members to visit stations and check the fuel logs.

Cllr Edwards agreed with this, and asked that it be recorded that he supported Members undertaking unannounced spot checks.

The ACFO offered to provide a list of stations with fuel facilities for circulation to Members.

ACFO /  
CM

Cllr Bateson asked for a report to be brought back in six months.

Cllr Webster stated that when she had looked, the records had been complete. She suggested that a message be sent to all stations.

The CFO said that he would make sure of this and he confirmed that the message would be that the Chairman has raised this and that the CFO was very disappointed.

CFO

Cllr McCracken as Chairman of Audit and Governance Committee (A&GC) stated that the Committee would be receiving a six monthly report back. Cllr Bateson agreed that she was happy that the report back should be to A&GC.

DCFO

In response to Cllr Maskell, the Chairman stated that Members had an open invitation to visit any Fire Station, but it did not remove the responsibilities of officers.

Councillor Edwards stated that Members were acting in the capacity of a critical friend.

The Chairman said that he was happy with the recommendation being to note the report, but requested that officers take note of all the comments made.

**Resolved:**

That the report be noted.

**385. FORWARD PLAN**

Members received the forward plan.

**Resolved:**

That the forward plan be noted.

**386. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

**Resolved:**

- a) That the next meeting will be held on Wednesday 24 April 2013 at 6.30pm, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 1BN.

The meeting closed at 8.10 pm