

Approved on 8.02.16

**MINUTES OF THE BRIEFING MEETING OF ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE  
AUTHORITY'S MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**



Held on Monday , 07 December 2015 at 6.30 pm

**Brigade Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot,  
Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD**

**Members:** \* Councillor Phillip Bicknell  
(\* *present*) Councillor David Burbage  
\* Councillor Colin Dudley (Chairman)  
\* Councillor Paul Gittings  
\* Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons  
\* Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle  
\* Councillor Edward Plenty  
Councillor Angus Ross

**In Attendance:** Conor Byrne (Head of Finance, HoF)  
Trevor Ferguson (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)  
Moira Fraser (Clerk)  
Andy Fry (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)  
Anne-Marie Scott (Director of People and Organisational  
Development, DPOD)  
Paul Maynard (Area Manager, Trading Company)  
Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)

FBU Representatives

**Action**

**40. REPRESENTATIVE BODIES**

The FBU confirmed that they wished to address the Management Committee on the agenda item 8 (Car Review).

**41. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting had been received from Councillors David Burbage and Angus Ross.

**42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct there were no declarations of interest received from Members.

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Officers.

**43. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 OCTOBER 2015 AND  
MATTERS ARISING**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2015 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

*Matters Arising:*

**Item 8 (27<sup>th</sup> July 2015) Receipt of Announcements, Page 2** – The CFO to ensure that Ellie Gray has circulated the photographs from the opening ceremony to all Members.

**CFO to Action**

**Item 33 (20<sup>th</sup> October 2015) Crewing Level Monitoring, Page 7** – The ACFO noted that the report about staffing levels in Control would be going to the TVFC Joint Committee later that week and that a relevant extract from that report would be included in the Management Committee report at the 08<sup>th</sup> February 2016.

**ACFO to Action**

#### **44. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman announced that along with the CFO and James Hunt he had recently visited the South Central Ambulance Service's Control Centre at Bicester. He explained that it had been a fascinating visit albeit that it was a markedly different operation than that of the RBFRS. The control room was split into two sections and the volume of calls was unbelievably high.

The Chairman also announced that, as of the previous Monday, the co-responding scheme had now been rolled out to the Wokingham Fire Station too. The CFO noted that to date Fire Fighters had attended six life threatening incidents as part of this scheme. Members felt that it would be useful to have a report back on the scheme in six months time.

**MO to Action**

The Chairman stated that RBFRS fire fighters had recently attended three significant fires at the Cube in Bracknell, Wokefield Park and Pinchwood Lakes Hotel. There were lessons to be learnt from all the incidents. Most significantly it was evident that collateral damage to all the properties would have been significantly reduced had sprinklers been installed. He congratulated the crews on the fantastic job they had done and in two of the three cases the fires had not spread. The Cube had already been gutted before the crews arrived.

The ACFO stated that this frequency of events was unusual and that it was pleasing to see that training and knowledge had been used to good effect. He was proud of the way fire fighters had dealt with the incidents,

Members also noted with regret that there had also recently been two fire related fatalities.

The CFO noted that the Bracknell fire had highlighted the weaknesses in building regulations. The focus tended to be on saving lives but did not take account of the environmental, social and economic impact that a fire could cause. He was of the view that this fire could be used as a case study to lobby for changes to these regulations so that a more collective approach could be taken.

Councillor Paul Gittings noted that a few years ago RBFRS Fire Authority Members had lobbied their local authorities on the need to install sprinklers in buildings they had control over via a Motion. He queried whether there was any merit in revisiting these motions. He asked that Officers draft some model wording that could be used if members were minded to do so.

**MO to Action**

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

There were no issues arising from the Audit and Governance Committee on this agenda. It was noted that at the Audit and Governance meeting the previous week the Chairman had requested that in relation to the reporting of

response standards in the Performance Report a fourth recommendation be added to the report to make the Fire Authority aware that the checked failure process had been stopped. The performance data in this area might therefore show a significant drop in performance from that previously reported and would also bring the validity of the data held for the 2009-2012 into question.

#### **46. SHARED PARENTAL LEAVE- REVIEW**

Anne-Marie Scott (Director of People and Organisational Development, DPOD) introduced the report which provided an update on the situation in relation to Shared Parental Leave (SPL) following the decisions by the Management Committee on the 01<sup>st</sup> December 2014. The new policy and procedures had been put in place following legislative changes. Members agreed to offer shared parental leave at statutory pay rates but that this decision should be reviewed in December 2015.

Officers had therefore undertaken the review. It was noted that although 16 employees had been eligible none had taken up the new provisions. Officers were therefore recommending that the statutory pay rates be retained.

Members concurred with the recommendation.

#### **Resolved that:**

- **the report be noted;**
- **the policy of offering Statutory Shared Parental Leave be continued.**

#### **47. CAR REVIEW**

Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO) provided members with a progress report into the review of car schemes within the RBFRS.

Eddie Cardoso thanked the Chairman for the Opportunity to address the Committee on behalf of the FBU. He asked if the following could be clarified::

1. if the review would apply to both Principal and Fire Officers;
2. whether it had been noted that other brigades such as Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire had maintained the current scheme;
3. why no SCFO Officers had been interviewed;
4. was this a CMT of Fire Authority report as CMT appeared to be making recommendations.

He commented that it was disappointing that it appeared as if CMT had already made a decision and that other options would not be considered. Option 2 in effect amounted to a 'pay cut'.

The ACFO stated that it was the intention to include all uniformed Officers in the review and that this therefore did include Principal Fire Officers. He was aware that other authorities had retained their lease schemes. He stressed that the matter was still currently under review and therefore no decisions had been made to rule this option in or out. Officers were trying to establish the most cost effective option for the authority.

The interviews that had been conducted to date were undertaken in the context of fact finding and had therefore only taken place with specific officers for example HR and Finance. The next step in the process would be to set up

a Task and Finish Group which include FBU Representatives as well as end users. He stressed that he had endeavoured to be open and transparent with regard to this review and had previously shared the report with the FBU.

The ACFO stated that the Management Committee had directed Officers to rationalise the lease car scheme and to identify the most cost effective solution. If any changes to employment conditions were proposed they would be subject to consultation and negotiation as was the norm.

Councillor Colin Dudley re-iterated that no decisions had been made and that the matter would be considered by a Task and Finish Group. They who would be tasked with bringing a report back to the Management Committee. At which point a decision would be made.

The ACFO noted that there were a number of schemes in place and that an independent consultant had been commissioned to provide a report setting out various options. The ACFO noted that the current lease scheme provided good value for money. A provided car scheme could however generate benefits which included reduced financial commitments alongside improvements in tax compliance, carbon emissions, corporate image and branding and could assist with the management of road risk and standardise capabilities of vehicles.

The review had unearthed a number of issues as set out in the appendices.

The Chairman noted that there were two kinds of users: casual users (who tended to use their own or pool cars) and essential users where a business case was provided that it was essential for them to have access to a company car. Officers stated that generally this was the case.

Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons stated that the report included a lot of useful research. She had however expected to see figures comparing the costs of leasing and buying vehicles. Officers explained that this issue would be looked at by the Task and Finish Group. She also asked if joint procurement with other authorities could be factored into the review. Officers stated that these issues, including procurement processes, would be looked at to establish which would offer the most cost effective solution.

The ACFO confirmed that it was anticipated that this review would be completed by the end of March 2016.

Councillor Ted Plenty asked if the review would touch on or make comment on the use of pool cars. The ACFO stated that the scope of this review was to look at the cost and use of car schemes. SAMC were looking closely at the provision and use of pool cars. They had set up a Task and Finish Group which was looking at the availability of the fleet and a recommendation had emerged to dispose of around 20% of the assets. Work on the car pool scheme was ongoing.

The Chairman thanked Officers for the report and stated that he looked forward to seeing the recommendations emerging from the Task and Finish Group.

**Resolved that:**

- that the report be noted.

#### **48. WORKFORCE INFORMATION**

Anne-Marie Scott (Director of People and Organisational Development, DPOD) provided Members with a range of strategic level workforce information. The report provided key workforce statistics and also identified potential challenges and actions being taken to ensure that a skilled, competent and engaged workforce was maintained. This was the third iteration of the report and sickness and long term succession planning remained key areas of focus.

The DPOD noted that recent recruitment activity had resulted in 18 new fire fighters under the age of 29 being employed. This had had a impact on the age profile of the authority. There was also a downward trend in terms of accident statistics. In addition one female fire fighter and one with a disability had been employed which had resulted in slight changes to the workforce profile.

Retention remained high and stable but the recent organisational restructure would impact on this area when the next report was presented to Members.

The DPOD stated that the report drew attention to high sickness levels in the authority. In this area the authority was the fifth or sixth worst performing authority in the country despite a proactive approach being adopted. A number of initiatives were being adopted to try and redress this issue, This included looking at reporting sickness by service, changes being made to the sickness policy, the introduction of training for managers on dealing with sickness and the Occupational Health contract was being retendered placing more emphasis on managing down sickness and where appropriate accelerating returns to work.

Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle asked for feedback on the recent staff survey. The DPOD noted that the response rate had been very high (80%). A response was being produced but early indications were that across the board responses were positive and that there were high levels of engagement. There were issues around leadership and communications. The survey did not however provide any clues around sickness.

Councillor Paul Gittings queried whether the aging workforce was having an impact on sickness levels. The DPOD stated that although there had not been much profiling against age she did not think this was an issue. She noted that around a third of the workforce had not been sick at all and they continued to be rewarded. One of the biggest areas of concern was the middle group who had 20 to 30 days of uncertified sickness. It was felt that this area was not being well managed and that stricter management could help to reduce these figures.

Councillor Gittings noted that the highest numbers of days being lost was in Control which was not necessarily where you would expect to see this. The DPOD explained that this was a small team. They had been through a lot of change and had to get used to a range of new systems and new ways of working. The figures had also been skewed by a few long term absences.. Additional support had been provided to the managers in this area.

Councillor Helliard-Symons commented that around one fifth of absence was

attributed to mental health issues. She queried what internal support was being offered to employees. The DPOD noted that nationally musculoskeletal injuries and mental health issues were the greatest contributors to sickness absence. The authority had a fairly good system of support in place included access to telephone counselling and Occupational Health, In addition there been an awareness campaign and mindfulness training had been introduced. Training was also being put in place for managers to help them recognise symptoms early so that appropriate action could be taken.

Councillor Phillip Bicknell explained that mental health covered a range of issues and he asked if there was anything more that the authority could do to support employees. The DPOD stated that it was always possible to do more but that she believed that the authority provided a good range of services. The CFO noted that there number of episodes were low but that periods of absence were high. Prevention was therefore very important.

Councillor Plenty noted that the data covered the period ending the 30<sup>th</sup> September and he therefore queried if an improvement in Control had been seen since then. The DPOD noted that to date this quarter there had been a downward trend in Control days lost.

The Chairman thanked Officers for the fantastic report and members commented that they like the new format and presentation.

**Resolved that:**

- **the report and the actions taken/planned to address the highlighted issues be noted.**

**49. CREWING LEVEL MONITORING**

Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO) informed the Management Committee of the crewing levels for wholetime and retained appliances for the second quarter of 2015/16.

The ACFO highlighted the following:

- the authorised station based establishment was 328 and there was a focus on maintaining this level;
- between October 2015 and March 2016 there were up to seven uniformed personnel that could retire;
- early indications were that four would do so;
- 14 new fire fighters had been employed which had resulted in a slight improvement in availability but this had been impacted negatively by sickness absence;
- In addition the authority had also had to honour existing approved annual leave for fire fighters that had changed stations;
- During this quarter the service maintained crewing at 56 and the availability of the 14 wholetime appliances on 184 (100%) of shifts;
- The positive effect of the RSU was set out in the graph on page 52.

The Chairman asked if there were any occasions when the Bracknell and Newbury Stations had been crewed with two appliances on a five four basis. The ACFO stated that this had not happened during this quarter and that the service had been running as lean as possible.

Officers were now in the process of recruiting the second tranche of fire fighters. Twelve new recruits would start in January and would then undergo a three month training period. It was noted that five new retained fire fighters had also recently been recruited subject to relevant checks.

The Chairman thanked the ACFO for the excellent report.

**Resolved that:**

- **the report be noted.**

**50. VERBAL UPDATE ON THE TRAINING COMPANY**

Councillor Phillip Bicknell reported that activity in November and December had slowed down as was historically the case. Work was being undertaken to increase the courses that would be offered. Other authorities were filling vacancies on water rescue courses.

Some capital expenditure on equipment was needed. It was hoed that perhaps one of the pool cars that was being disposed of could be acquired.

The current financial position was an overspend of £317. This sum did not take account of the £60k the authority would have had to spend on training. Work was ongoing in respect of setting up the Commonality Interest Company. A report would be taken to the Fire Authority in February 2106.and the business plan would be developed by April 2106.

**Resolved that:**

- **That the verbal update be noted.**

**51. 2015/16 BUDGET MONITORING**

Conor Byrne stated that at the end of October an underspend of £132k was being reported. This was largely attributable to an unbudgeted for adjudication reward. The overspend on overtime was being offset by operational vacancies and changes arising from the 2015 pension scheme. Low fuel prices were also a contributory factor. It was anticipated that at year end the underspend would be between £50k and £100k.

**Resolved that:**

- **the report be noted.**

**52. FORWARD PLAN**

The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Forward Plan for was presented to the Committee.

**Resolved that:**

- **the forward plan be noted.**

**53. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would take place on Monday 08 February 2016 at 6.30pm in the Brigade Headquarters, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, RG31 7SP

#### **54. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**Resolved:**

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the public be excluded from the meeting for the following Agenda Items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in the paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 4 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the said Act indicated and is exempt information if, and so long as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

#### **55. PART II MINUTES OF HE MEETING HELD ON 20 OCTOBER 2016**

**Resolved that:**

That the Part II Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2016 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

*The meeting closed at 7.55 pm*