

Approved on 7.12.15

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



Held on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2015 at 6.30 pm

**Brigade Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincent's Kiln, Calcot,  
Reading, Berkshire RG31 7DS**

**Members:**

(\* present)

- \* Councillor Phillip Bicknell
- \* Councillor David Burbage
- \* Councillor Colin Dudley (Chairman)
- Councillor Paul Gittings
- \* Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons (Vice-Chairman)
- Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle
- Councillor Edward Plenty
- \* Councillor Angus Ross
- \* Councillor Iain McCracken (substitute)

**In Attendance:**

Conor Byrne (Head of Finance, HoF)  
Trevor Ferguson (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)  
Moirra Fraser (Clerk)  
Andy Fry (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)  
Darren Gunter (Chief Fire Officer, Dorset Fire and Rescue Service)  
Clare Hudson (LGA)  
Simon Jeffries (T/Area Manager (Risk Management))  
Nikki Richards (Head of Business Information and Systems)  
Becca Singh (LGA Challenge Manager)  
Paul Southern (ACFO)

FBU Representatives

**Action**

**26. REPRESENTATIVE BODIES**

The FBU confirmed that they wished to address the Management Committee on the agenda item 8 (Crewing Level Monitoring).

**27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting had been received from Councillors Paul Gittings, Tina McKenzie-Boyle and Ted Plenty. Councillor Ian McCracken substituted for Councillor McKenzie-Boyle.

**28. 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.

**29. MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 27<sup>th</sup> JULY 2015 AND 11<sup>th</sup>  
AUGUST 2015 AND MATTERS ARISING**

That the minutes of the meetings held on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2015 and 11<sup>th</sup> August 2015

be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the attendance at the meeting being corrected .

**Matters Arising:**

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

EG

**Item 12 (27<sup>th</sup> July 2015) Workforce Information), page 6** – The CFO would ensure that the outstanding information would be compiled into a single document which would be circulated to the Committee.

CFO

**Item 16 (27<sup>th</sup> July 2015) 2015/16 Budget Monitoring, page 9** – Conor Byrne provided the following detail in relation to ‘Strategic Misc’ in the Supplies Other which was raised by Councillor Webster at that meeting. The Head of Finance explained that the £4k comprised expenditure of £3k on a survey for small fires and the remaining expenditure related to a joint team workshop run by Jackie Greer.

**Item 17 (27<sup>th</sup> July 2105) Forward Plan, page 9** – it was conformed that IT strategy had been included as an item for SAMC.

### **30. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman announced that a task and finish group had been set to draft a response to the Government consultation document pertaining to closer working between the emergency services. A draft response was compiled and was circulated to all Members via email on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2015.

Members were asked to make comment by the 19<sup>th</sup> October and it was assumed that if no comment was received Members were content with the response. Two responses were received, one confirming acquiescence with the content and the other making comment on four of the questions.

An update response was tabled at the meeting. No further comments were made at the meeting. The Chairman explained that Anthony Stansfeld the Police and Crime Commissioner would be submitting a separate letter from Thames Valley Police which would echo the comments made by the RBFA. The response would be submitted by the deadline of 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2105. The Chairman thanked all those involved in the production of the response and Members for taking the time to read the response.

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

There were no issues arising from the Audit and Governance Committee.

### **32. PEER REVIEW PRESENTATION**

Members of the Management Committee received a presentation from the Peer Review following their review in January 2014. Darren Gunter, Becca Singh and Clare Hudson introduced themselves to the Committee.

Mr Gunter reported that the peer review team had initially visited the RBFRS in February 2014. These peer reviews were designed to provide sector led improvements. Peer review teams were invited to attend authorities as a critical friend to provide feedback on specific key areas.

He commented that the team had been well received by staff and the trade

unions. They had participated in open, honest and constructive discussions and were willing to provide solutions during their one and a half day visit.

Authorities did not always ask for follow up reviews and they were therefore very pleased to be invited back. The review had focussed on seven key areas including Leadership, Corporate Capacity, Organisational Development, Risk Management, Training and Development and other areas.

The team would not be producing an extensive report. The RBFRS had produced an action plan and they would use that as a template to report back on.

### *Key Messages*

- The mood of the organisation had undergone a significant transformation since the February 2014 visit;
- Staff were under the impression that CMT and the FA had transformed the organisation and
- review team felt that they should be congratulated;
- The relationship between Officers and Members had improved significantly;
- From the grass roots up there was a sense of trust and respect in the organisation;
- There was improved Member engagement and improved governance arrangements;
- There was confidence in the leadership of CMT;
- The organisation exhibited an improved culture and there was a need to keep focussing on community outcomes.

### *Leadership Themes*

- There was a high level of strategic and organisational awareness within CMT;
- The leadership team was seen as strong, focussed, cohesive with a desire to engage in an open style which was unique within Fire and Rescue Services;
- CMT must be aware of style over substance
- The leadership style needed to be cascaded down through the organisation.

### *Governance*

- Members were comfortable that the information provided to them allowed them to challenge Officers effectively and also allowed them, to make evidence based decisions;
- The relationship between Members and Officers were excellent.
- There was a roadmap in place to bring the policy and governance framework together;
- Members were able to robustly challenge Officers;
- Members needed to ensure that they drove the strategic commitments and engaged in the strategies;

### *Organisational Development*

- The root map was comprehensive;
- The authority had uniquely identified the interdependencies and the risks posed by each area;
- Performance monitoring had improved;
- Silo working had gone and decisions made by CMT and the FA were no longer being diluted;
- CMT exhibited good strategic skills and the different personalities complemented each other;
- MTFs needs to be extended to include work on scenarios to reflect changes to income streams;
- A key priority was to get an Asset management Strategy in place that was aligned to the IRMP;
- Ensure horizon scanning was happening so that opportunities were not missed e.g. Essex Cultural Review.

### *Communication and Partnerships*

- There had been a complete turnaround in this area;
- Staff were of the opinion that there was a personal commitment amongst CMT to 'look people in the eye';
- The profile of the organisation was being raised through engagement with other authorities;
- The image of the brand continued to improve;
- Thought should be given on how communication with other authorities could be improved.

### *Capacity and Skills*

- There were some key vacancies in the organisation and consideration needed to be given as to when these vacancies needed to be filled;
- Interim and temporary appointments were not a long term solution;
- Work needed to be undertaken around competency recording in terms of learning and development;
- The corporate risk register was an excellent document and was very well written;
- Fire fighter safety would always be a risk and need to be included in the register
- The presentation of risks associated with revenue and capital budgets (labelled leadership) should be revisited;

### *Other Areas*

- Commitment to RDS was improving;
- It was positive to see that fire fighters were being empowered at a local level;
- Positive feedback had been received in respect of co-responders;
- The 'buddy arrangements' with Cambridgeshire was noteworthy and

the authority should be congratulated on setting it up.

In summation the authority had made fantastic progress was on the right trajectory and should be congratulated.

The Chairman thanked the team for their input.

Councillor David Burbage asked if the team had got any sense from speaking with staff about the possibilities of improving the RDS position. Mr Gunter stated that the labour market was a contributory factor. Many authorities were experiencing the same issue that the hourly rate combined with the decrease in number of calls and busy lives were exacerbating the problem. Some authorities were defining the hours and providing greater surety to the RDS fire fighters,

Councillor Burbage commented that improvements in mobile technology rendered the old model redundant. GPS technology now meant that mobilisation could be based on that approach and therefore there was no longer a requirement to live within five minutes of a fire station.

The CFO stated that the introduction of co-responders was likely to make a positive contribution. It would improve the reward package and this was being borne out by the pilot in Hungerford. The Chairman agreed with this sentiment. He stated that the approach of paying a lumpsum for a stated number of hours might be the way forward.

Councillor Phillip Bicknell asked what the timeline was for doing this. The CFO stated that a consistent approach to co-responders needed to be adopted by the four areas covered by the South Central Ambulance Service. They were in the process of looking at demand and where this demand was not being met. They could then commission the fire service to deliver the service.

Councillor Angus Ross was concerned that the training associated with co-responders might result in fire fighters spending too much time training and not enough time on the fire engines. He was reassured that training would take place outside of normal hours.

The CFO thanked the team for taking time out of their busy lives to provide an independent perspective on progress being made.

**Resolved that:**

- The Review be noted.

**33. CREWING LEVEL MONITORING**

Paul Southern, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), informed Management Committee of the crewing levels for wholtime and retained appliances for the first quarter of the 2015/16 financial year. The ACFO explained that a new format had been used in the production of the report and he welcomed any feedback on the presentation.

The authorised station based establishment (roles from Firefighter to Watch Manager) had been reset at 328 excluding the Retained Support Officers. The chart set out in paragraph 3.3 of the report illustrated that as at June 2015 there were 309 personnel employed in posts.

The recruitment freeze, which had been previously authorised by the Fire Authority, had realised significant savings to date. However, unless a future change to the provision of emergency response within RBFRS was decided,

then it was recommended that the current establishment should not be reduced further to provide financial savings.

The ACFO advised that a recruitment process had just been completed which had seen 14 firefighters join the service from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2015. Although a recruitment process had been undertaken a number of existing firefighters had applied to join as new recruits. These firefighters were already deemed to be competent and therefore a transfer course would be run to enable them to become familiar with RBFRS policy and procedures which might have been different from their previous service. The advantage of employing 14 competent firefighters was that crewing could be bolstered much quicker than the three months required if new recruits had been taken on. It also improved the level of skills across the front line of the Service.

Between the start of October 2015 and the end of March 2016, there were up to seven uniformed personnel who could retire. Of those, it was more than likely that four of those seven would retire although this was difficult to predict as only one month's notice was required. Taking account of the retirement profile over the coming 12 months RBFRS had created an initial pool of applicants who had been processed through several stages of the recruitment process and subject to time delays between certain stages, would only need to be refreshed in some areas.

The Optimisation of Crewing Resources Policy defined the minimum crewing levels for wholetime appliances. In order to fully crew all 14 wholetime fire appliances at minimum levels, the number of wholetime staff required on duty each shift was 56 personnel. During the reporting period the Service maintained crewing levels at 56 and the availability of the wholetime appliances on 182 (100%) of shifts. In order to provide a primary crew for the special appliances at Whitley Wood Fire Station in addition to crewing all wholetime fire appliances 58 personnel were required on duty each shift. The Service maintained crewing at 58 or more, on 61 (33%) of shifts. On the occasions where this could not be achieved the special appliances were switch crewed with the fire appliance at the station.

To maintain planned crewing levels the service utilised a variety of means to ensure minimum crewing levels were achieved. When options to maximise crewing had been exhausted pre-arranged overtime would be used.

Graphs/tables setting out the availability of retained appliances, retained appliance availability per station and hours provided by the Retained Support Unit for crewing appliances were also set out in the report.

As sickness was a contributory factor affecting crewing levels, RBFRS was undertaking a number of initiatives to reduce sickness levels and these were set out in a separate report. The ACFO commented that the 103 instances of sickness related to 3360 shifts.

In terms of the Retained Duty System two new fire fighters had been recruited for Hungerford, three for Wargrave, there were two potential further recruits for Wargrave and two for Crowthorne.

The FBU commented that the figures pertaining to overtime costs were misleading. The costs needed to be offset against the underspend resulting from establishment vacancies. The ACFO confirmed that this was a valid point and that he had met with the FBU since the report had been produced. He thanked the FBU for their willingness to look at various options.

The Chairman sought clarity on crewing levels. The ACFO explained that the

intention was to try and maintain a minimum of four fire fighters on each of the 14 appliances The exceptions were Bracknell (five) ANS Newbury and Whitley Wood (five and four). This would ensure that there was a buffer to address any shortfalls arising from short notice sickness.

The Chairman queried the way in which annual leave was managed as their appeared to be an imbalance between stations. The ACFO noted that the annual leave policy was being reviewed. One of the options being considered was self rostering.

Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons noted that paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6 referred to both 14 and 19 new trainees. Officers confirmed that there were 14 new trainees and that the reference to 19 trainees was a typographical error. The ACFO noted that 14 competent new fire fighters had started on the 01<sup>st</sup> October 2015 and that a further 11 new trainees would be starting on the 01<sup>st</sup> January 2016. The Chairman asked if there had been some change as he had previously been informed that 15 new employees would be starting in October 2015. Officers noted that unfortunately, despite 15 offers being made, one of the new recruits had failed to turn up.

ACFO

The Chairman queried whether the report included data for Control. Officers confirmed that it did not. A separate report was produced for the TVFCB. On the basis that the RBFRS employed these members of staff it was agreed that in future this report would be presented to the Management Committee alongside the crewing level monitoring report.

Councillor David Burbage queried the timeliness of these reports. It was explained that this was in part due to the scheduling of meetings. It was therefore agreed that the quarterly reports would include a section which would provide an up to date position.

ACFO

Members also queried the net financial position in terms of the spend on overtime against the underspend arising from vacancies. The ACFO agreed to provide this information which would show the full in year effect outside of the meeting.

**Resolved that:**

- The report be noted.

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

Councillor Phillip Bicknell reported that, as was historically the case, the summer period had resulted in a loss (£16k) but that as of September an improved position was emerging. A new administrator had been appointed. In addition Paul Maynard had been appointed as the new head of the Training Company. The appointment was on a full time basis and he would have a mandate aggressively increase trading. His initial focus would be on setting up the Community Interest Company (CIC) and he would be tasked with looking at a broader market than just training.

Members asked for an indicative timescale for this work to be undertaken. Officers explained that they had not been able to recruit to Paul Maynard's former role and therefore there had been a slight delay while a transitional arrangement was put in place. It was envisaged that work on the CIC would be undertaken in January with a view to bringing a report to the February 2016 Fire Authority meeting. Trading would commence soon after that.

**Resolved that:**

- That the verbal update be noted.

**35. FORWARD PLAN**

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

**Resolved that:**

- The Forward Plan be noted.

**36. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting would take place on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015 at 6.30pm in the Brigade Headquarters, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, RG31 7SP

**37. 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.

**38. PART II MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 27<sup>th</sup> JULY AND 11<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2015**

**Resolved that:**

The Part II Minutes of the meetings held on 27<sup>th</sup> July and 11<sup>th</sup> August 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**39. PROPERTY UPDATE – WOKINGHAM FIRE STATION**

Trevor Ferguson updated Members of the Management Committee on the current position in respect of the dispute at Wokingham Fire Station and the proposed next steps.

**Resolved that:**

That the exempt report be noted.

*The meeting closed at 7.57 pm*