

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



Held on Monday 27 July 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 (Vice-Chairman)
* Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle
* Councillor Edward Plenty
* Councillor Angus Ross

In Attendance: Trevor Ferguson (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
Moirra Fraser (Clerk)
Andy Fry (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)
Ellie Gray (Senior Corporate Communications Officer)
Jess James (Station Commander)
Paul Maynard (Acting Area Manager – Response)
Andy Parsons ((Interim Head of Estates, IHE)
Fayth Rowe (Committee Officer, CO)
Anne-Marie Scott (Director of People and Organisational
Development, DP&OD)
Paul Southern (Acting Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)

Eddie Cardoso (FBU Representative)
Stephen Collins (FBU Representative)

Action

4. REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

The FBU confirmed that they did not have any questions relating to any items on the agenda but that they might wish to comment on any sickness absence issues raised during the discussion of item 9 (Workforce Information).

5. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting had been received from Councillors Pauline Helliar-Symons and Phillip Bicknell. Councillor Emma Webster was acting as a substitute for Councillor Bicknell.

6. 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.

Andy Fry (CFO), Trevor Ferguson (DCFO) and Paul Southern (ACFO) declared a personal interest in item 18 (Salary Review- Directors).

7. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 April 2015 and 24 June 2015 AND MATTERS ARISING

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2015 and 24 June 2015 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

8. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that The Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) was officially opened on Friday (17 July) by the Rt Hon Mark Francois MP, Minister of State for Communities and Resilience. The plaque had been successfully unveiled and would be in situ soon. The event was also attended by the Lead Member from Oxfordshire FRS and the Chairman of Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes FRS. The Minister was very impressed with the facility and the Chairman therefore thanked Councillor Angus Ross for overseeing the project in his role as Chairman of the Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Committee.

Following the ceremony the Chiefs and Chairs met with the Minister and an open and frank discussion ensued. The Chairman had asked that consideration be given to the Government Funding being announced for the next four years. This would assist with budgeting and planning. The Minister undertook to take this up with colleagues.

The Chairman thanked all the staff that had delivered the project and those that had attended and arranged the opening ceremony. He requested that the photographs from the event be circulated to all members.

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(Councillor Edward Plenty arrived at 6.35pm)

9. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

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

10. 2015/16 APPOINTMENTS PANEL AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Trevor Ferguson, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Monitoring Officer (DCFO), put forward a proposal to appoint five members of the Management Committee to the Appointments Panel.

The proposed Terms of Reference for the Panel were as follows:

To exercise the powers of the Fire Authority upon:

- (1) The determination of the duties associated with any proposed appointment to the statutory posts of the Chief Fire Officer (Head of Paid Service), the Monitoring Officer or Treasurer, posts which were to be advertised externally, including any qualifications or qualities to be sought in the successful appointee.
- (2) The appointment to the posts of Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer, which would be advertised externally.
- (3) The remuneration package and conditions of employment and method of recruitment for posts referred to in paragraphs (1) and (2) above.
- (4) The shortlisting and interview of suitably qualified applicants for the posts referred to in paragraph (1) above, and the interview of suitably qualified applicants for the posts referred to in paragraph (2) above.
- (5) To advise the Fire Authority upon, and to recommend the appointment of, successful applicants for the posts referred to in paragraph (1) to the full Fire Authority for confirmation.

It was noted that the quorum for the Appeals Panel would be three members.

The Terms of Reference would be revisited by the Task and Finish Group that had been set up to consider a range of governance issues.

Resolved that:

- The Terms of Reference be noted.
- The following members of the Management Committee be appointed to the Appointments Panel:
 1. Councillor Colin Dudley
 2. Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons
 3. Councillor Paul Gittings
 4. Councillor Angus Ross
 5. Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle

11. BUDGET WORKING PARTY 2016/17 AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

Trevor Ferguson, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Monitoring Officer (DCFO) put forward a proposal to approve the membership of the 2016/17 Budget Working Party, to agree the terms of reference and to note the future meeting dates.

The purpose of the Budget Working Party would be to prepare the 2016/17 budget in detail; to consider the potential consequences of future Comprehensive Spending Reviews and the likelihood of significant reductions in grant levels and to prepare a three year financial plan.

Resolved that:

- The Membership of the 2016/17 Budget Working Party be approved as follows:
 - Chairman: Councillor David Burbage
 - Vice-Chairman: Councillor Phillip Bicknell
 - Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons
 - Councillor Paul Gittings
- The Terms of Reference for the 2016/17 Budget Working Party be approved as laid out on page 13 of the agenda.
- The future meeting dates of the 2016/17 Budget Working Party be noted.

12. WORKFORCE INFORMATION

Anne-Marie Scott, Director of People and Organisational Development (DP&OD), presented a report to provide strategic level workforce information, Previously, Members had been provided with detailed information relating to staff sickness. This report had been expanded to include more areas of information relating to the gender, ethnicity, age and disability profile of the workforce; days lost due to sickness absence and fitness test pass rates and contract status. The report, which was still being developed, also included information pertaining to workforce planning. This version had less text and more graphical information.

Some of the key headlines included:

It was noted that the gender profile was broadly in line with other FRS and the Fire Authority would continue to work towards encouraging female applicants

into the operational roles.

The Fire Authority had historically struggled to attract successful applicants from BME communities and recent events in the community had targeted minority groups. However, the limited operational recruitment over the last five years had exacerbated this issue. As part of the current recruitment process work had been undertaken with colleagues in Slough in an effort to redress this issue.

RBFRS had an aging workforce profile which resulted in potential operational risks around the required fitness levels of operational staff (particularly in the light of the pension scheme changes) as the organisation would have a larger number of operational individuals over the age of 50. Actions to address this included the development of systematic workforce planning, increased support and management of fitness for operation staff and initiatives to encourage young people into the service. In addition around 30% of the workforce was in the 45-54 year old category which needed to be factored into future workforce planning.

RBFRS continued to work with staff to address disability issues to ensure reasonable adjustment activity was undertaken to encourage retention of staff and this positive work was reflected in the increasing numbers of disabled staff.

Turnover within the organisation remained at a very low level for operational staff at less than 2%. Turnover of non-uniformed staff was stable and well below the national Public Sector average. The total turnover for the 2014/15 financial year at RBFRS was 5.9% compared to the national benchmark figure for the Public Sector for the previous year of 9.4%. Currently 15% of the roles in organisation were covered by interim or agency staff. This was primarily due to the organisational restructure that was taking place.

Specific issues around recruitment and retention of employees in control were being looked into.

The number of days lost to short term sickness for 2014/15 was 5.5 days per employee which exceeded the corporate target of 5.1 days per employee. It was noted that approximately a third of staff had no absences due to sickness during 2014 and the authority continued to reward this achievement through personnel. The DP&OD noted there had been a significant decrease (182 days) in the number of days lost to sickness absence in quarter 1 of 2015/16 than there had been for quarter 1 of 2014/15. Work was being undertaken on a health and Wellbeing Strategy and the occupational Health Contract was being re-procured.

Causes of sickness absence were broadly similar across the organisation with musculoskeletal and mental health being the main causes of long term sickness.

There had been a slight reduction of 2.3% in overall fitness pass rates since the last testing period and one explanation for that difference was that 97.7% of eligible personnel were tested in October 2014 compared to only 89.6% in April 2014.

The DP&OD noted that much of the detail previously included in the report was now set out in the appendices and she asked if members supported this approach.

The Chairman welcomed the new format of the report. His only suggestion

was that he would like to see some standardisation of the graphs used to illustrate the information. He also felt that it was important to include information on what was being done to redress any issues highlighted.

Officers agreed to standardise the use of graphs where they could but commented that some national information was provided in a format that would be difficult to change. In addition some information such as trend data was best presented on line graphs. The DP&OD commented that the report format was a work in progress and she would try and include more information on measures being implemented to address 'problem areas' in future iterations.

Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle felt that it would also be useful to include more information around risk in future iterations of the report. Officers concurred with this suggestion.

Councillor Angus Ross felt that it would be useful to include trend data in the report. He also asked if it would be possible to differentiate between musculoskeletal injuries being incurred at work and those occurring outside of the work place. He was particularly concerned about the number of days lost (22) by staff in control due to musculoskeletal problems. He stated that it was important that time was taken to ensure that these employees made the necessary adjustments to their chairs and desks etc due to the number of hours they spent in them.

Councillor Paul Gittings stated that the layout was readable and the benchmarking data was useful. He felt that more analysis of what was being done to address problems was needed. He noted that the number of days lost to sickness absence had decreased and commented that he wondered if this was a result of the increase in the number of return to work interviews that were being conducted. He welcomed the fact that the recruitment freeze was being lifted.

Councillor Gittings asked if there was any information available as to why the turnover of staff in control was so high. Of the 7% of applicants recruited less than 50% (4 people) had stayed on. Officers had looked at the exit information and no common reasons for leaving had emerged. One of the reasons could be that this was a new team, employing new processes and that some of the roles had been advertised as temporary. It also involved very small numbers of people. The DP&OD explained that without detailed follow up interviews with those that had left it would be difficult to be more specific. The DP&OD would report any updates at the next meeting.

The DP&OD commented that the recent recruitment freeze had had an impact on the age profile of the organisation. As the authority was now starting to recruit again it was likely that age balance would be addressed.

Councillor Emma Webster stated that it would be useful to hold follow up meetings with those employees that had left the control team. Councillor Webster noted that there had been a significant increase in the reason given for number of days lost as mental health issues. This had increased from 334 in the previous six months (April 2014 to September 2014) to 730 days in the period from October 2014 to March 2015. She queried if there had been any change to the way this figure was measured. The DP&OD stated that there had been no change.

Councillor Webster then queried what initiatives were being put in place to assist staff. The DP&OD explained that Officers were in the process of putting

DP&OD

together a Health and Wellbeing Strategy and associated action plan, an employee assistance programme was in place and employees also had access to the Occupational Health Service. The DP&OD noted that nationally there had been a significant increase in reporting of mental health issues. This could be due to the fact that a number of high profile individuals had spoken publicly about their mental health issues. The levels were not inconsistent with this sector. The rate of increase was however concerning. This aspect would be revisited and she would report back to the next meeting. Councillor Webster stated that it would be useful to have some data on the number of people accessing the services that were being offered.

DP&OD

The CFO noted that mental health issues were a significant cause of concern. It was important to make links between the mental and physical health of employees and to address the health of the 'whole person'. One source of assistance for both mental and physical help was through the Fire Fighters Charity. The CFO hoped that the new occupational health contract could be linked to this organisation.

Councillor Edward Plenty was particularly concerned about the level of musculoskeletal injuries to non-uniformed staff and he asked if additional information could be provided on the reasons for these injuries occurring at the next meeting. The DP&OD stated that she did not have that information to hand but would endeavour to provide more detail at the next meeting.

DP&OD

Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle asked if the authority undertook a staff survey. Officers explained that this had not been done for the last five years but that a survey would be completed by Christmas 2015. The survey should provide useful information about the workforce.

Members noted that mental health was a very broad category and covered both stress and other mental health issues. Officers noted that they did not hold any more detail on the nature of the mental health issues. They could try and obtain a more detailed breakdown from Occupational Health

DP&OD

The Chairman queried whether information was held on how many musculoskeletal injuries occurred at work versus those that occurred outside of work for uniformed staff. Officers would endeavour to provide more detail at the next meeting.

DP&OD

Resolved that:

- The report and any actions to be taken/planned be noted;
- The new high level format be agreed;
- The inclusion of Strategic Equality information and statistics to remove the need for a separate Equality Statistic report annual in September be agreed.

13. WORKFORCE PLANNING

Anne-Marie Scott, Director of People and Organisational Development (DP&OD), presented a report to provide strategic information required for longer term workforce planning. The information would also assist Members to align reductions in the workforce (around 10%) through natural wastage with reductions in the fire fighter workforce required to balance the budget. This approach would also help to avoid redundancies wherever possible.

Workforce and succession planning was a key plank of good people management and it ensured that the organisation had the correct level of skill, capacity and resilience to deliver services now and in the future. RBFRS had not previously engaged effectively in long term workforce planning and that had led to current under resourcing, a workforce age profile that created some concern and a lack of processes and structures to nurture and develop internal talent. The changes to pension arrangements had also had an impact the age profile of the organisation.

Current workforce numbers had been benchmarked at 31st December 2014 in order to provide a starting point to inform planning around capacity going forward. This would provide a baseline figure against which to compare the minimum level of staff needed to deliver the service. It also helped to facilitate detailed workforce financial planning and helped to identify areas for potential efficiency. This information was based on the organisation as it was currently configured and did not yet take account of changes which might result from the IRMP process.

It was proposed that the Management Committee would receive regular updates as part of the six monthly HR information report.

Councillor Emma Webster stated that the authority was not historically great at succession planning. She queried what steps were being put in place to stop the need to bring back senior officers as consultants to cover vacancies. Officers noted that they were currently undertaking a piece of work focussing on succession planning. A meeting had taken place earlier that afternoon to review the processes for moving through the organisation at every level and to ensure that a more proactive approach was being adopted to ensuring people with the right competencies were in place before they were needed.

The ACFO stated that a good piece of work had been undertaken by AMS and HR to ensure that the recruitment of fire fighters was front loaded in order to anticipate demand.

Eddie Cardoso commented that the FBU welcomed the report and the processes that were being put in place.

Resolved that:

- The information provided and plans for strategic workforce planning be noted;
- The intention to bring regular updates on workforce planning to the Management Committee as part of the six monthly HR Information report be noted.

14. REVIEW OF CHARGES FOR FIRE INVESTIGATION AND INCIDENT RECORDING SYSTEM REPORTS

Trevor Ferguson, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, presented a report which provided Members of the Management Committee with information in relation to current charges levied by Fire Authorities for Fire Investigation and Incident Recording Systems.

The 'Freedom of Information' update report to the Management Committee in February 2015 included statistics about the number of Fire Investigation and Incident Recording System reports charged for in the 2014/15 financial year

and the Chairman had suggested that a review of charges should be undertaken in May 2015.

Eighteen Fire and Rescue Services had provided information about their charges however, it should be noted that many authorities did not routinely produce Fire Investigation reports.

The average charge for an Incident Recording System report across the 18 authorities was £65.15 with a range of charges from £0 to £144 and this made the Fire Authority the third highest charge in the sample at 45% higher than the average.

The average charge for a Fire Investigation report, across 10 authorities that had published a charge was £334.21 with a range of charges from £0 to £196.40 which made the Fire Authority the second highest charge in the sample.

Councillor Angus Ross queried if there was a general level of acceptance of the charges made by the authority. The DCFO responded that none of the charges had met with a significant challenge. Councillor Emma Webster opined that if they were not being challenged perhaps they were not high enough. The authority's budget was being cut and the only way to deal with reduced income would be to decrease costs or increase income.

The Chairman proposed that the Budget Working Party be asked to undertake a review of these charges. The CFO cautioned that any charges would have to be regarded as reasonable.

Resolved that:

- The report be noted.
- The Budget Working party be asked to review charges for fire investigation and incident recording system reports.

15. VERBAL UPDATE ON THE TRAINING COMPANY

As Councillor Phillip Bicknell had given his apologies for this meeting it was agreed that this item would be discussed at the next meeting of the Management Committee.

16. 2015/16 BUDGET MONITORING

Trevor Ferguson presented a report to inform Management Committee of revenue and capital outturns against budgets up to the end of June 2015.

It was noted that at the end of June 2015 the revenue outturn was £105k below the profiled budget.

The overspend against the uniformed employee budget was due to overtime payments to station-based staff who were catching up on training courses after the previous year's Action Short of Strike. It was anticipated that the number of overtime payments would reduce once this training had been completed.

The Authority had received additional unbudgeted income as a result of an adjudication award in relation to the construction of Wokingham Fire Station. This income would be used to part-fund the remedial works currently being carried out to the station.

To date £87k of the profiled £113k of the Capital Programme had been spent.

Councillor Emma Webster requested that further detail be provided in relation to 'Strategic Misc' in the 'Supplies Other' Appendix C at the next meeting.

HoF

Resolved that:

- The report be noted.

17. FORWARD PLAN

Resolved that:

- The Forward Plan be noted subject to the inclusion of the IT Strategy as an item for SAMC.

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18. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place on Tuesday 20 October 2015 at 6.30pm in the Brigade Headquarters, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, RG31 7SP.

19. 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.

20. PROPERTY UPDATE – NEWSHAM COURT/WOKINGHAM FIRE STATION

Andy Parsons, the Interim Head of Estates (IHE), updated Members of the Management Committee on the contractual issues relating to the new Headquarters at Newsham Court and Wokingham Fire Station.

Resolved that:

That the exempt report be noted.

21. SALARY REVIEW - DIRECTORS

Anne-Marie Scott, Director of People and Organisational Development (DP&OD), advised Management Committee of any salary increases received by Directors following the annual personal development interview.

Resolved that:

That the exempt report be noted.

The meeting closed at 8.03 pm