

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



Held on Monday, 28 July 2014 at 6.30 pm

**Strategic Command Centre Headquarters, Royal Berkshire Fire and  
Rescue Service, Dee Road, Tilehurst, Reading, RG30 4FS**

**Members:** \* Councillor Phillip Bicknell  
(\* *present*) \* Councillor Jeff Brooks  
\* Councillor Colin Dudley (Chairman)  
\* Councillor Paul Gittings  
\* Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons  
\* Councillor Edward Plenty (*from 6.40pm*)  
Councillor Angus Ross  
\* Councillor Alan Ward

**In Attendance:** Jan Chadaj (Interim Head of IT, IHIT)  
Moirra Fraser (Clerk)  
Andy Fry (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)  
Becci Jefferies (Head of HR, HHR)  
Andy Mancey (Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer, A/ACFO)  
Paul Southern (Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer, T/DCFO)  
Caroline Redzikowska (Director of Corporate Services, DCS)  
Andrew Vallance (Director of Resources, DR)

**630. REPRESENTATIVE BODIES**

The FBU confirmed that they did not wish to address the Management Committee on any of the items on the agenda.

**631. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for inability to attend the meeting was received on behalf of Councillor Angus Ross.

**632. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest received.

**633. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 07 APRIL AND 25 JUNE  
2014 AND MATTERS ARISING**

**Resolved:**

That the minutes of the meetings held on 07 April 2014 and 25 June 2014 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the correction of Matt Clark's designation as a Crew Manager on the Minutes of the 07<sup>th</sup> April 2014.

### **634. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman announced that he had attended the passing out parade for young fire fighters which he described as fantastic day attended by a wonderful group of young people. He had also attended an event hosted by 'The Fire Break' which was an organisation primarily aimed at improving the lives of woman with low self esteem.

The Chairman noted that the series of two hour strike actions had now come to an end and a new period of action short of strike had commenced. It appeared as if this action was being interpreted differently in Berkshire when compared to other areas especially at change over times. As a consequence junior officers were refusing to act up and this had meant that at Newbury Fire Station there was no fire cover in place from time to time. This had meant that the Temporary Deputy Chief Fire Officer had been required to provide that cover.

*(Councillor Edward Plenty arrived at 6.40pm)*

The Chairman stated that he was disappointed that the FBU had opted to localise the action.

The CFO also commented that there was discretion locally and that he had hoped not to get into the position the service was now in. This was a national issue and it appeared that locally there was an attempt to bring the fire service to its knees. He hoped that discussions with senior FBU officials would result in a sensible approach being adopted.

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

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

### **636. RECOMMENDATION FROM COMMITTEES**

Item 19 had been recommended from the Strategic asset management Committee following the meeting on the 22 July 2014.

### **637. BUDGET WORKING PARTY 2015/16 AND TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The DCS introduced the report which set out the draft terms of reference for the Budget Working Party for the current Municipal Year. The terms of reference were the same as those adopted for the previous year and would form the basis of the work for the group. Councillor Alan Ward commented that they had worked well before and he therefore agreed that no amendments were required.

The Chairman stated that any savings proposals should be raised with Councillor Ward so that they could be integrated with the budget as a whole.

#### **Resolved that:**

- the Terms of Reference of the Budget Working Party for 2015/16 be agreed.

**638. HR MONITORING REPORT – STAFF RETENTION, RETIREMENTS, ACCIDENTS AT WORK, SICKNESS AND EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

Becci Jefferies (Head of HR, HHR) introduced the report which provided information pertaining to staff retention, workplace accidents, sickness absences and equality and diversity statistics during the period 01 October 2013 to 31 March 2014 at the RBFRS.

The HHR informed Members that:

- the turnover rate for this six month period was 5.8% which meant that the total for the financial year was 9.6% against a national figure of 9.4% for the public sector;
- one employee had retired for ill health/ medical reasons during this period;
- the equality and diversity statistics showed minimal change over this period;
- the number of accidents at work leading to sickness absence had increased by two days since the previous period (13 workplace accidents led to 89.5 days lost);
- the average number of duty days sickness absence had increased from 3.75 (in the previous period) to 5.1 days. The total number of duty days lost had increased by 764 duty days to 2850 duty days in this period. This was the highest figure since 2007;
- there had been an increase in the number of duty days lost in terms of both short and long term sickness absence for non-uniformed and wholetime staff;
- the highest cause for sickness absence in terms of total duty days lost remained musculoskeletal illness/injury;
- the highest causes for short term sickness absence were gastro-intestinal, respiratory and musculoskeletal illness/injury.

Officers were looking at options to improve the prevention of musculoskeletal injury. One proposal was to undertake musculoskeletal screening for those employees most at risk and then prescribing exercises to try and prevent employees from sustaining the injuries. This proposal was based on research from the USA where it had been successfully implemented and had helped to decrease episodes of this type of injury. In addition a health fayre was being arranged for September which would include a number of stalls designed to improve fitness, health awareness and nutrition.

Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons queried what had caused the four redundancies (RDS employees). Officers explained that this was associated with Newbury Fire Station. She also asked what reasons had been given for the ten resignations for other reasons. The HHR stated that providing this information might identify the individuals concerned and she would therefore discuss this with Councillor Helliard-Symons outside of the meeting. Councillor Helliard-Symons noted the trend data on page 31 of the agenda but requested that in future this be provided for a six year period.

Councillor Helliard-Symons queried how successful the authority was at recording near misses and how stringent managers were on picking up on these issues. The Chairman stated that the authority appeared to be very good

at reporting near misses based on the comments from the HSE. The T/DCFO stated that the authority had responded well to the health and safety target to increase reporting of near misses. The process had been streamlined to assist employees with reporting.

Councillor Pauline-Helliar-Symons raised concerns about the sickness absence statistics and was concerned that only 101 fitness tests had been undertaken. She queried how the monitoring of this was done. Officers explained that this was fed into the appraisal process. Paul Mortimer was supervising the testing while Helen Morbin was on maternity leave. The recent strike action and flooding in January had meant that some of this work had not been completed. Some of the testing work had been delegated to the PE Supervisor on the watch and they had not completed the BMI and waist size measurements.

Councillor Helliar-Symons asked who was responsible for checking fitness levels. Officers explained that managers were responsible for checking the process. They worked with the Health and Fitness Advisor and HR and liaised with Occupation Health to ensure that there were no underlying medical conditions. Anyone outside of the 'fit range' would be checked. The Councillor stated that she had very serious concerns that some fire fighters were not fit.

Councillor Paul Gittings stated that he was shocked by the huge increase in the average number of duty days sickness absence especially when considered alongside the recent strike action. The Councillor queried whether this could be due to employees being stressed or over worked as a consequence of the recruitment freeze and the impact of the industrial action? The Chairman stated that while the effects would be felt they would not have had a greater impact in Berkshire than elsewhere. He did not feel that the recruitment freeze and industrial action were the reasons that the wholtime staff demonstrated the highest levels of sickness in the country. The HHR explained that she had tried to establish if other authorities were collecting and defining information in the same way but had not been able to ascertain that level of detail. She noted that where an employee was off sick on a day of industrial action they were required to be certified sick by a doctor.

Councillor Alan Ward referred to table 3.4.10 which provided analysis of average days lost per age group. He noted that there were seven employees aged 65 and over and the average days lost for this group was 19.8 days. he felt that this information was compelling and queried what was being done about this situation. The HHR explained that the majority of staff in this group were non-uniformed. Long term absence was managed between the line manager and Occupational Health with a view to getting employees back to work.

Councillor Jeff Brooks also stated that the sickness absence figures were alarming and queried what knock on effect this had on crewing levels and overtime payments. Officers stated that this was the subject of a more detailed piece of work and input was being sought from the FBU. The CFO noted that this was a multi-faceted problem which needed to be explored. A number of factors were being worked on including fitness and weight which were associated with musculoskeletal injuries/illness but that a holistic approach had to be taken. Each of the Directors had specific objectives within their own

directorates to improve sickness absence levels, The Member Champion Councillor Alan Ward was also involved in the programme.

Councillor Ted Plenty noted that sickness levels for non-uniformed staff were also very high and he queried if there was a cultural issue within the authority. The CFO reiterated that this was a multi-faceted issue and that it could therefore not be attributed to a specific thing. Officers were considering ways to incentivise people as part of this process.

The Chairman noted that return to work interviews were taking up to nine days to complete when they should be done within three days. It was noted that these interviews were undertaken by line managers and with the shift patterns this could lead to delays. The Chairman stated that the target should therefore be two or three working days.

The Chairman stated that the report appeared to raise more questions than answers. He stated that the length of time being taken to conduct return to work interviews indicated that employees did not view them as being important. He requested that managers ensure that they were undertaken in a timely fashion and thereby highlighting that they were important. He also asked that regular checks be undertaken to ensure that the interviews were being conducted.

Councillor Alan Ward was sceptical about the effectiveness of Occupational Health. He stated that when employees were off sick for long periods of time this undermined the morale of their colleagues. In his opinion if employees were no longer able to do the work then they needed to 'part company' with the authority.

Councillor Paul Gittings requested that another report be brought to the Management Committee setting out what action the authority was going to take to address these issues. He supported ensuring that return to work interviews were being conducted as swiftly as possible. He felt that many of the issues were as a result of low staff morale and he felt that a means of establishing why this was happening needed to be found perhaps through the FBU.

Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons stated that issues with morale could not be unique to Berkshire. She was aware that the CFO was committed to fitness and that this needed to be permeated throughout the service. She felt that where employees were not able to meet the required fitness standards they should be the subject of early retirement.

*(Councillor Alan ward left at 7.30pm)*

Councillor Phillip Bicknell noted that some fire fighters had a second job and he queried how many injured in their other roles.

The Chairman stated that sickness in the RBFPS was a significant issue and a greater understanding about the figures was needed. Where employees were genuinely physically or mentally ill the authority needed to support them. There was evidence to support that return to work interviews were a key part of addressing this problem and it was therefore vital that they were undertaken

within 3 days.

**Resolved that:**

- the report be noted
- a report be brought back to the next Management Committee meeting.

**639. VERBAL REPORT ON THE TRAINING COMPANY**

Councillor Phillip Bicknell noted that the company continued to operate at a profit and that a more detailed report would be brought to the next meeting.

**Resolved that:**

- the report be noted
- a report be brought back to the next Management Committee meeting.

**640. 2014/15 BUDGET MONITORING**

Andrew Vallance stated that at month 3 an underspend of £100k was being reported. Whether this could be sustained at year end would depend on the level of industrial action that took place through the remainder of the year. He was pleased to note that the DCLG had paid the Bellwin claim in full.

**Resolved that:**

- the report be noted

**641. FORWARD PLAN**

The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Forward Plan was presented to the Committee. The DCS noted that due to the large number of items the Audit and Governance Committee had to consider an additional meeting had been scheduled for October.

**Resolved that:**

- the forward plan be noted.

**642. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Monday 06 October 2014 at 6.30pm in the Brigade Headquarters, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, RG31 7SP

**Resolved:**

**643. EXCLUSION OF THE 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.

**644. PART II MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 07 APRIL 2014**

**Resolved:**

That the Part II Minutes of the meeting held on 07<sup>th</sup> April 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**645. PART II STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 JUNE 2014**

**Resolved:**

That the Part II Minutes of the meeting held on 25 June 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**646. FIRE STRIKE CONTINGENCY ARRANGEMENTS**

The T/DCFO presented an exempt report for discussion.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations as set out in the exempt report be agreed.

**647. PRINCIPAL OFFICER RESILLIENCE ARRANGEMENTS**

The DCS presented an exempt report for discussion.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations as set out in the exempt report be agreed.

**648. DISPOSAL OF WINDSOR FIRE STATION**

Members discussed the proposals for the disposal of the fire station

**Resolved:**

The exempt recommendations be agreed

**649. UPDATE ON BHQ**

The DR presented an exempt report for discussion.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations as set out in the exempt report be agreed.

**650. SHARED SERVICES**

Councillor Brooks declared non pecuniary interest as a Member of West Berkshire Council.

The DCS presented an exempt report for discussion.

**Resolved:**

That the recommendations in the exempt be agreed.

*The meeting closed at 9.10pm*