

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



Held on Monday 13 April 2015 at 6.30 pm

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

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

In Attendance: Jan Chadaj (Interim Head of IT, IHIT)
Trevor Ferguson (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
Moira Fraser (Clerk)
Andy Fry (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)
Jess James (Station Commander, Station 1)
Simon Jefferies (Group Manager XX)
Fayth Rowe (Committee Officer, CO)
Paul Southern (ACFO)
Andrew Vallance (Director of Resources, DR)

Action

63. REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

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

64. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for inability to attend the meeting had been received from Councillor Philip Bicknell. Councillor Paul Gittings would be arriving at 7.15pm and Councillor Alan Ward would have to leave the meeting at 7.30pm.

65. 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.

All of the Principle Officers present declared a personal interest in agenda item 10 (Car Cash Supplement Review). As their interest was personal they determined to stay in the meeting and listen to the debate and where appropriate answer Members' questions.

66. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 FEBRUARY 2015 AND MATTERS ARISING

RESOLVED that:

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2015 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

67. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that as the Purdah period had started he would keep his announcements brief.

He felt compelled to mention the Awards Ceremony. He commented that it had been a fantastic event and he thanked all those that had organised it. He stated that the change in the structure appeared to have been well received. The Chairman also thanked all those that had attended the event as well as the winners.

The Chairman announced that a water rescue exercise had taken place earlier that day. The exercise marked the start of Water Safety Week. He thanked Jess James and his crew for organising the event. A number of events involving other agencies including the South Central Ambulance Service, Thames Valley Police and the Environment Agency would take place across the region.

The Chairman also noted that the Thames Valley Fire Control Centre had now taken over the calls from Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and the change over appeared to be going well.

The Chairman stated that he would be taking item 9 (Review of the Structure of the Fire Authority) as the last item of business.

68. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

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

69. RECOMMENDATION FROM COMMITTEES

The Committee noted that there were no recommendations from other committees.

70. RETROSPECTIVE WAIVER OF CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS SUPPORT AND MAINTENANCE OF CRITICAL RBFRS SYSTEMS

Andrew Vallance (DR) informed Members of the need to place a number of orders to develop and maintain essential RBFRS systems. The DR lamented that this appeared to be an annual occurrence and Officers had hoped to avoid the need to request a waiver this year. The reasons for the request were set out in paragraph 3.2 of the report.

The DR explained that an additional member of staff had been employed in the procurement team to manage the renewal of these long running contracts primarily associated with IT systems.

Members were not pleased to have this request placed before them again. Officers explained that the authority had a number of significant projects to deal with in the previous financial year and as a consequence did not have the

resources to focus on the re-letting of these contracts. They had however challenged providers on cost and some savings had been achieved.

Jan Chadaj (IHIT) explained that, following the recruitment of the new member of staff, a review of each contract would be undertaken during the current year.

Trevor Ferguson (DCFO) accepted that this was not an ideal situation. The process was being challenged robustly internally and Baker Tilly had been commissioned to review the processes.

Councillor Angus Ross noted that this report had been scheduled to come to the previous SAMC meeting. The report had not been fit for purpose and had therefore withdrawn from the agenda and was brought to this meeting instead. He welcomed the assurances offered by the DCFO.

The Chairman stated that it was unfortunate that this request to retrospectively waiver standing orders seemed to arise annually. He noted the comments of the DCFO and stated that if the situation arose again the following year all the Leaders Members would have serious questions to ask.

Resolved that:

in accordance with grounds (b), (c), (d) and (f) of CSO 24 the Committee agree to retrospectively waiver Contract Standing Orders 20 and 21 in order to place orders for the support and maintenance of essential Fire Authority IT systems as set out in Appendix A labelled STA and repeated in paragraphs 3.7 to 3.16 of the report.

71. FIRE AUTHORITY STRUCTURE

(Councillor Paul Gittings arrived at 7.14pm)

Trevor Ferguson (DCFO) presented the Committee with a range of options to consider in relation to the size of the Fire Authority, Committee Structure, Web Broadcasting and potential use of electronic facilities for Fire Authority papers. The options were set out in paragraphs 2.2.1 to 2.2.8 of the report.

Fire Authority Size

The DCFO explained that the options set out in the report included retaining the current level of Membership at 25 or reducing the membership to 22 or 16 seats. He noted that if Members were minded to retain the current level of Membership, Reading BC would lose a seat and West Berkshire Council would gain a seat.

Councillor Ted Plenty queried whether the number of seats was always based on the electorate or if other authorities used population figures. He felt that the implementation of IER had skewed the figures. The Chairman commented that population figures would be based on Census data which could be out of date and that the electorate provided a more accurate figure.

Councillor Jeff Brooks supported the retention of the status quo.

Councillor Alan Ward was concerned that reducing the numbers would impact on the ability to have appropriate levels of representation in terms of geography as well as political affiliation. He stated that democracy was not cheap. He felt that reducing the numbers would reduce the ability to undertake inter unitary authority political balancing.

Councillor Paul Gittings stated that Members were busy and that there were often clashes with meetings and reducing the membership would exacerbate

attendance issues.

Councillor Gittings was also concerned about the basis for awarding the number of seats to the six unitaries. He felt that IER and the transient nature of the population of Reading had unfairly skewed the numbers.

Councillor Angus Ross stated that the issue of proportional representation could be debated at length. He was of the opinion that a membership of 25 was unwieldy and costly and that reducing the membership would make it more focussed.

The Chairman suggested that the status quo be retained for the 2015/16 Municipal Year and that the seats be allocated as per table 1 of the report. A cross party Task and Finish Group would be set up to look at the Committee Structure as well as the size of the authority and how seats should be allocated. Members supported this approach.

Committee Structure

The DCFO outlined the two options set out in the paper. The first was to retain the status quo and the second was to set up a Task and Finish Group to look at the governance structure of the authority.

Councillor Jeff Brooks queried whether the authority was required to review its Committee Structure. Officers commented that it was best practice. The CFO also noted that the Op A Peer Review had made reference to the review.

Electronic Facilities

Members were asked to consider whether or not electronic facilities should be used to circulate future papers or whether the paper based system should be retained at the present time.

Councillor Pauline Helliar – Symons noted that paragraph 3.25 made reference to 'some savings and efficiencies' and she wondered if any indicative estimates were available.

Councillor Ted Plenty stated that the equipment offered to Members varied between the six unitary authorities and that some authorities did not provide Members with any electronic devices. He was also concerned about how the devices would be supported.

Councillor Jeff Brooks reported that there might also be some PSN issues associated with using a local authority's device. He did not want to have to carry around an additional device provided by the RBFRS. He did not think that removal of the paper based system would generate significant savings.

Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons stated that she did not think that this was a good way forward. This could be a less convenient option for Members, she would not have the time to download and print agendas. She was also concerned that she would not be able to access several pages at the same time as she would be able to do when using hard copy. Another disadvantage was that Members would not be able to annotate pages.

The Vice-Chairman stated that if the proposal was aimed at driving down costs then a number of other methods could be used including:

- Using a smaller font to reduce the number of pages in agendas;
- Using both sides of every page;
- Removing the Declaration of Interest forms included in each agenda;

- Starting reports directly below the end of the previous report.

Councillor Angus Ross did not support the use of a smaller font.

Councillor Alan Ward stated that the minutes were generous and the level of detail could be curtailed. He felt that they should just record the decisions.

The Chairman concluded that at the moment the switch to electronic agendas seemed to be a step too far. He did not support reducing the font size on reports and he felt that using blank pages to separate reports should be continued.

Web Broadcasting

The Committee was asked to consider whether Officers should make arrangements for future Fire Authority meetings to be broadcast via the internet or not at this point in time

Councillor Pauline Helliard – Symons noted that paragraph 3.28 stated that this technology was 'quite low cost' and she wondered if any indicative costs were available. The DCFO stated that if Members supported the principles Officers would work up some costed options for Members to consider including in-house provision.

The Chairman stated that he had no issue with the principle provided that it could be done cheaply and easily.

Councillor Ted Plenty sought clarity that this would only apply to the Fire Authority meetings and Officers confirmed that this was the case.

(Councillor Alan Ward left the meeting at 7.40pm. As he would not be standing again for election the Chairman thanked him for all his efforts over the years.)

Resolved that:

- (a) the Fire Authority size remain at 25 for the 2015/16 Municipal Year and that the seats be allocated as per table1;
- (b) a Task and Finish Group be established to develop proposals in terms of the Committee Structure (including the role and number of champions), size of the Fire Authority and the allocation of seats which would report to the April 2016 Fire Authority meeting;
- (c) electronic facilities would not be utilised at this point in time;
- (d) Officers to look at arrangements for future Fire Authority Meetings to be broadcast via the internet.

72. CAR CASH SUPPLEMENT REVIEW

(All the Principle Officers present at the meeting declared a personal interest in this item by virtue of the fact that they would be in receipt of the supplement. The officers determined to stay in the meeting and answer any questions raised by the Members.)

Andrew Vallance (DR) presented a report to inform the Committee of the outcome of the three-yearly review of car cash equivalent supplements.

In March 2012 the Management Committee had received a report from the working party which had been asked to review the car user scheme and car allowances. Members agreed to the recommendation to move from RPI to CPI as a basis for up-rating and to standardise the review period to 3 years to

remove a previous anomaly between Principal Officers and staff.

The CPI review was conducted in March 2015, based on the CPI figures published in January 2015. The reviewed amounts for 2015 were outlined below:

Officers	
Non-uniformed contribution	2,425
Uniformed contribution	2,744
Insurance contribution	642
Principal Officers	
Contribution	9,151

The total cost of the increase was circa £800.

The changes proposed and agreed in 2012 returned a saving to the Authority by moving from RPI to CPI and a three yearly rather than annual review.

Resolved that:

the up-rating of car cash equivalent supplements be agreed with effect from 01 April 2015 in line with the agreement in March 2012.

73. CREWING STRATEGY

Paul Southern (ACFO) provided the Committee with information on how RBFRS intended to manage crewing until the refreshed IRMP established changes.

Following recommendations from Officers in 2011, the CFA agreed to a recruitment freeze of whole-time station staff in response to the austerity measures. The whole-time establishment at that time was 354 station based personnel.

Officers had been asked to consider appropriate crewing levels and the figure arrived at by Officers was 328. In order to achieve this level there would be a need to go out to national advert, previous applications had been revisited and 11 candidates had been identified through this process and the authority would also need to go out to advert to recruit new fire fighters. Retained personnel had been invited to transfer to Whole Time. Officers would also ensure applicants were processed as far as possible through the application procedure and then be held in a recruitment pool to be called upon when required.

Officers would need to anticipate retirements in advance as the training reserve was no longer in place so regular meetings between Service Delivery Officers and the RBFRS Personnel Managers would take place.

The ACFO noted that approximately 3500 days were lost due to short and long term absence by reason of sickness. The sickness policy and management interventions would be reviewed in 2015 to become more effective. Following some absences an appointment with Occupational Health was required; this did not always align with the return to work date of the individual, resulting in crewing deficiencies. The appointment process and SLA would need to be

reviewed in 2015.

In addition the annual leave policy would be reviewed in 2015 to align with other issues affecting crewing. The impact of off station training was approximately 3 days per annum and the existing system enabled operational staff to cover shortfalls on a pre-arranged overtime basis. The policy would be reviewed in 2015 to become more effective.

Councillor Ted Plenty questioned the rationale behind the figure of 328. Officers explained that this level would enable all whole time frontline appliances to be crewed at a minimum level of 4 fire fighters. The exceptions were at Newbury and Bracknell where they would ride with a crew of five fire fighters. These stations would have higher crewing levels due to their location and the proximity of closest stations to them.

Councillor Jeff Brooks queried how the figure of 328 had been arrived at and whether this level of crewing could be afforded. The ACFO explained that Officers had been tasked with looking at crewing levels and to provide Members with a recommendation. Officers had looked at the levels in detail and this was the level they believed it should be fixed at until such a time as the IRMP established otherwise.

The ACFO stated that crewing figure reports were circulated to Members on a regular basis and that there had been instances where crewing levels were too low to keep the appliances on the run.

The figure of 328 would also allow the special fire appliances at Whitley Wood Fire Station to have a permanent crew of two fire fighters as opposed to being switch crewed. The proposal would also enable flexibility to deal with unplanned crewing deficiencies where additional fire fighters from Newbury, Bracknell or Whitley Wood could be deployed elsewhere.

Councillor Angus Ross queried whether the figure of 328 included the training reserve of 10 fire fighters. The ACFO confirmed that they were not included in the figure. Councillor Ross requested that this be clarified in the report.

In response to a query from Councillor Ross the Chairman explained that he had discussed the crewing levels in depth with the ACFO. He noted that Officers had been asked to work up a proposal which they had done. The crewing levels needed to be based on a pragmatic approach based on risk, equipment and statistics. He therefore supported the Officer's proposal.

Councillor Jeff Brooks stated he assumed that as no submission had been received from the FBU they were happy with the proposal.

Members queried what changes were being proposed in respect of annual leave. The ACFO explained that a new framework and structure would be put in place which moved away from the grey book, there would be a move towards self rostering, crewing levels would be pushed down to the lowest possible levels and that leave would be re-aligned alongside other factors such as college courses in an effort to be as flexible as possible.

Resolved that:

the report be noted.

74. VERBAL UPDATE ON THE TRAINING COMPANY

The Chairman on behalf of Councillor Phillip Bicknell reported that there had been no significant changes since the last meeting. At Month 11 the training

ACFO

company was showing a profit of £11k. This figure was over and above the amount it paid the RBFRS for the services it provided. The Chairman noted that this was a healthy position and he thanked all of those involved.

Resolved that:

the verbal update be noted.

75. 2014/15 BUDGET MONITORING

Andrew Vallance (DR) informed Members of revenue and capital outturns against budgets up to the end of February 2015.

It was noted that at the end of February 2015 the revenue outturn was £186k below the profiled budget. This amounted to 0.5% of the total budget.

The DR noted that he had previously indicated that the outturn would be dependent on levels and nature of Industrial Action. Fortunately since Christmas there had only been a few incidences and the type of action taken had not been expensive.

Councillor Jeff Brooks noted that he had previously requested that the costs associated with Industrial Action be shown on a separate line so that it would be clear to Members and the residents of Berkshire what the financial impact of the Industrial Action was. The Chairman estimated that the costs amounted to around £800k since the start of the Industrial Action

DR

Councillor Angus Ross was concerned that a lot of the Capital Programme funding appeared to have not been spent. He queried when the IRMP decisions would emerge so that the schemes could be taken forward. The DCFO stated that it was anticipated that the information should be available at the September 2015 Fire Authority meeting.

Resolved that:

the report be noted.

76. FORWARD PLAN

The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Forward Plan was presented to the Committee. Councillor Angus Ross requested that the IT Strategy be added to the Forward Plan as an item for SAMC. The Chairman noted that in respect of Verbal Updates on the Training Company it still referred to 'Chairman as Director' and this needed to be updated.

CO

RESOLVED that:

the forward plan be noted.

77. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would take place on Monday 27 July 2015 at 6.30pm in the Brigade Headquarters, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, RG31 7SP

78. 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.

79. PART II MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 9 FEBRUARY 2015

RESOLVED that:

the Part II Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 9 February 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The meeting closed at 7.54 pm