

## **AGENDA ITEM 2**

## **MINUTES**

### **MINUTES OF THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS ON THURSDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2004 COMMENCING AT 9.00AM AND CONCLUDED AT 10.15AM**

**Present:** Mrs C Bateson, P Bryant, Tom Crisp, Owen E Jeffery, Ron Webb, Simon Werner

#### **1.01/04 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN 2004**

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Ron Webb be elected Chairman of the Fire Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the ensuing year.

#### **1.02/04 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN 2004**

**RESOLVED:** That Councillor Mrs C Bateson be elected Vice-Chairman of the Fire Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the ensuing year.

#### **1.03/04 TIMES AND VENUES FOR FUTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

The Committee was requested (Agenda item 4 – not reproduced) to consider and agree on the times and venues for future Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meetings in 2004.

**RESOLVED:** That future Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meetings in 2004 be held on the following dates in the Lecture Room at Station 20, Whitley Wood Road, Reading (subject to availability), commencing at 10.30am:

**Wednesday 10 March,  
Wednesday 21 July  
Tuesday 30 November**

**Tuesday 15 June  
Wednesday 29 September**

#### **1.04/04 ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED AT FUTURE MEETINGS – DEVELOPMENT OF A FORWARD PLAN**

On the invitation of the Chairman Members discussed the type of issues that they would wish to see reported to future meetings together with the development of an associated Forward Plan and the following is a bullet point summary of the comments made:

- ◆ The following list of issues were suggested as possibilities for discussion at future meetings:
  - Implications and consequences of arson
  - Equality and ethnic minority involvement in the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service
  - Financial implications of Precept on Band D Properties in Berkshire
  - Regular Monitoring Report on the Budget
  - PPV
  - Crewing levels
  - ORIS Functionality
  - Implications of any communications breakdowns and implementation of backup procedures
  - Long term future for the Fire Service in connection with the establishment of Regional Management Boards
  
- ◆ In addition to the above list of issues Members whilst being fully supportive of the need for closer liaison between the Executive Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee did however recognise the fact that neither Committee should be in a position to dictate.
  
- ◆ The Chief Fire Officer reminded the Committee that depending on the subject under discussion it might take a little while to produce the actual report required. With this in mind Councillor Owen Jeffery suggested that, because of the demands on Officers time, it might be prudent for the Committee to consider prioritising the list of issues raised and also to receive a Rolling Plan on a monthly basis.
  
- ◆ Councillor Mrs Christine Bateson raised the question of whether the Committee would have the power of “Call-In”. Whilst it would always be possible for the Committee to re-visit any item and if necessary make recommendations to the executive Committee. It was however agreed that the “Power to Call-In” would be added to the list of issues to be considered at a future meeting.
  
- ◆ The Clerk took the opportunity of reminding Members that the Fire Authority, at its meeting in December 2003, had Resolved that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would in reality be an after-event Committee and would therefore have limited capacity with no additional remit. Whilst acknowledging the Authority’s decision Members felt that there was the need for this procedure to be reviewed.
  
- ◆ Members were also reminded that the Fire Authority could overturn any decision made by the Executive Committee, that is not specifically delegated to them.
  
- ◆ In supporting the development of a Forward Plan it was agreed that the Committee’s work be reviewed in six months time (June 2004) and that this be added to the Forward Plan.
  
- ◆ It was also agreed that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman would discuss requests for items to be discussed at future meetings in consultation with other Members.

**RESOLVED: That the list of potential issues be circulated to Members of the Committee with a request that they prioritise the list and return it to the Committee Administrator and that the Chief Fire Officer/Clerk and Monitoring Officer be asked to develop a Forward Plan and present this to the Committee, at its next meeting on Wednesday 10 March 2004, for consideration and determination.**

#### **1.05/04 AGENDA FOR THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Committee was invited (Agenda item 5) to consider the contents of the Agenda for the Fire Authority's Executive Committee inaugural meeting (not reproduced) held on Thursday 22 January 2004 and the following is a bullet point summary of the comments made and where necessary decisions reached:

##### **Agenda item 5: Budget 2004/2005**

It was reported that the Executive Committee, at its meeting on Thursday 22 January 2004, approved Option D which would set a Budget of £29,428,694 with a Band D Council Tax of £47.97. This is a 19.8% increase on the 2003/2004 Budget.

However following that meeting a further letter was received from the ODPM, which meant that the Executive Committee's decision on the Budget had been overtaken by events. A Special Meeting of the Executive Committee has therefore been arranged for Friday 6 February 2004 to discuss the options now available, in the light of the ODPMs letter, and produce a revised recommendation for consideration by the Fire Authority at its meeting on Wednesday 11 February 2004.

The Executive Committee will also be considering the implications of the Authority being capped and on the invitation of the Chairman the Clerk and Monitoring Officer briefly explained the legal implications of capping.

Some Members were of the opinion that the setting up of a £500,000 Reserve Fund is wrong and suggested that the Executive Committee was made aware of the OSC concern. However having discussed this matter further it was decided that the Committee should not on this occasion intervene but that Members should if they so wish make their views known to the respective Party Leaders.

It was proposed and seconded that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman be authorised to meet with the three Party Leaders to discuss the implications of the 2004/2005 Budget together with the procedure for handling the Budget process in future years in terms of scrutiny. However having discussed this matter further it was agreed that any decision on the proposal be deferred and that it be added to the Forward Plan for discussion at a future meeting of the Committee.

**RESOLVED: That the proposal relating to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman being authorised to meet with the three Party Leaders to discuss the implications of the 2004/2005 Budget together with the procedure for handling the Budget process in future years in terms of scrutiny be deferred and added to the Forward Plan for discussion at a future meeting of the Committee.**

**1.06/04           PROCEDURE FOR CALLING MEETINGS IN THE FUTURE**

It was agreed that this matter had been dealt with under Minute Number 1.04/04.

**1.07/04           DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 10 March 2004 in the Lecture Room at Station 20, Whitley Wood Road, Reading, (subject to availability) commencing at 10.30am.

*(Post Meeting Note: The Lecture Room at Station 20 has been booked for all meetings as identified in Minute Number 1.03/04)*