

**ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE
MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - PART I**



Held on Tuesday 15 January 2008

Strategic Command Centre, Headquarters, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, 103 Dee Road, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire, RG30 4FS

Those present: Councillor Chris Bowring (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor Mrs Prue Bray (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor Mrs May Dodds (Member, Fire Authority) (*part meeting*)
Councillor Geoff Findlay (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor John Lenton (Member, Fire Authority)
Councillor Alan Ward (Member, Fire Authority) (Chairman) (*part meeting*)

In attendance: Iain Cox (Chief Fire Officer)
Paul Southern (Area Manager, Service Delivery) (*Item 01.04.08*)
Richard Taylor (Clerk and Monitoring Officer)
Andrew Vallance (Authority Treasurer)

Action

In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Chris Bowring took the Chair.

01.01.08 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received. Councillor Mrs May Dodds and the Chairman (Councillor Alan Ward) had conveyed their apologies as they would be late to the meeting.

01.02.08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Having been reminded that in accordance with the Fire Authority's Code of Conduct, Members are required to declare interests which are Personal or Personal and Prejudicial, where appropriate, it was **Noted** that on this occasion there were no such declarations made.

01.03.08 PART I MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2007

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2007 were **Approved** by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and signed by the Vice-Chairman as a correct record.

The Chairman, Councillor Alan Ward, joined the meeting and took the Chair.

01.04.08 OPTIMISATION OF CREWING - REVISED POLICY

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was advised of the background to, and performance of the revised Optimisation of Crewing Policy that is currently undergoing a six month trial period.

Paul Southern took the Committee through the report presented and referred specifically to the implementation of the revised Optimisation of Crewing Policy, safe systems of work at incidents, and the grouping of fire stations into geographical zones to support safe systems of work and better availability of supporting appliances. He confirmed that a report on the trial would be presented to the Executive Committee, and any other Committee as directed.

Paul Southern tabled a copy of an updated report detailing the actual outrun figures for November 2007 and December 2007 for the shift crewing performance, incident crewing performance and causes of crewing at four riders (*copy available from the Committee Manager*). He also tabled data for crewing statistics for the period August 2007 - March 2008 (*copy available from the Committee Manager*), but asked the Committee to disregard the January, February and March 2008 figures as these were not indicative. He noted that since the introduction of geographical zones, there had been a significant reduction in overtime payments for standby movements.

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs Prue Bray regarding granting of leave outside of Policy, Paul Southern explained the reasons why this had previously occurred. He noted that Station Managers were now expected to manage leave appropriately and that guidance and support was being provided to Station Managers. He advised that, to avoid any re-occurrence of leave being granted outside of Policy, Firewatch (*Personnel Information IT System*) was being further developed to identify simultaneous leave periods. He stated that a demonstration of Firewatch could be provided if requested.

Councillor Mrs Prue Bray felt it would be beneficial to reflect the rationale for crewing level variances for unforeseen or known circumstances. Paul Southern agreed to advise the Deputy Chief Fire Officer of this observation.

PS

Councillor Mrs May Dodds joined the meeting.

In response to Councillor Mrs May Dodds' concerns regarding crewing levels at incidents, particularly in the Slough area, involving high rise buildings, houses of multiple occupancy and sheds in rear of properties which were often occupied, Paul Southern reassured her that robust safe systems of work, including the deployment of the required number of appliances and crewing levels were in place to respond to incidents of this nature. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that procedures for dealing with incidents involving high rise buildings were reviewed as required, and he was confident that the procedures in place were fit for purpose. Paul Southern also confirmed that the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service had in fact written to Slough Borough Council to request a schedule of known and registered types of the aforementioned types of properties within the Borough. Paul Southern noted that the Community Safety Team was actively engaged with Slough Borough Council, as well as with the other Berkshire Unitary Authorities, regarding community safety initiatives.

The Chief Fire Officer reassured Councillor Mrs Prue Bray that the implementation of the revised Optimisation of Crewing Policy had not been implemented to make financial savings, but had been developed to reflect the Authority's' new statutory duties whilst ensuring the maintenance of safe systems of work and the efficient

deployment of resources, and that any savings made would be re-invested. He reported that he had been extremely impressed and pleased with how the operational staff had implemented the revised Policy.

Councillor Mrs May Dodds asked that a full explanation be provided for any acronyms referred to in reports to the Fire Authority. Councillor Geoff Findlay suggested that a list of commonly used acronyms be provided to Fire Authority Members within the Members' Handbook.

The **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**:

- **Unanimously Agreed** that, within reports to the Fire Authority, the first reference to an acronym should be explained in full, and that, should a copy of a Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service document be presented to the Fire Authority, a glossary of any acronyms be provided to support the report.
- **Noted** the Optimisation of Crewing revised Policy report, and **Supported** the revised Policy.

01.05.08 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE - MONDAY 21 JANUARY 2008

The Committee considered the items for Resolution on the Agenda for the Executive Committee at its meeting on the 21 January 2008, and the following observations were made:

- **Agenda Item 5 (2008/09 Budget Sub Committee recommendations)** - the Authority Treasurer advised that, as the Budget Sub Committee had held its third meeting on 15 January 2008 to consider the 2008/09 budget, the Sub Committee's recommendations would be circulated to the Executive Committee shortly.
- **Agenda Item 6 (Extension to Cleaning Contract)** - no comments were made.
- **Agenda Item 7 (Three-month extension to Service Level Agreement for Property and Professional Services)** - the Clerk and Monitoring Officer advised that Hampshire County Council could not be used for the full Service Level Agreement without going through a full tendering procedure, where contract values exceeded European Union (EU) limits.
- **Agenda Item 8 (Consultation response to Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy: 2008-2018)** - no comments were made.
- **Agenda Item 9 (Consultation response proposals to establish a 'Centre of Excellence')** - the Chief Fire Officer advised that he, together with the Chairman of the Fire Authority, would be attending a meeting of the Regional Management Board on 16 January 2008 where he hoped that a common view in the South East would be sought.
- **Agenda Item 10 (Consultation response: Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11)** - the Chief Fire Officer summarised the report, and referred the Members specifically to Section 3.5 of the report.

The **Overview and Scrutiny Committee Supported** Councillor Geoff Findlay's recommendation that the Fire Authority Members receive a de-brief report from the Business Continuity Exercise held on 4 December 2008 in Sonning.

PS

01.06.08 PERFORMANCE OF THE AUTHORITY IN RELATION TO ITS POLICY OBJECTIVES AND PERFORMANCE TARGETS

The Chief Fire Officer reported that Nicholas Oxborough had recently been appointed as the Group Manager in Performance Review to replace Christopher Gill, and that he would be the link Officer for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He stated that, unfortunately, Nicholas Oxborough had been unable to attend this meeting as he was attending a pre-arranged 3-day training course.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that a draft Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) report had now been received from the District Auditors. He was pleased to report that an overall score of 3 had been awarded, which had been realised from the following individual assessment scores:

- Service Delivery - 4
- Use of Resources - 3
- Direction of Travel - 3
- Performance Indicators - 2

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee was provided with an overview of the performance of the Authority in relation to its policy objectives and performance targets. Members reviewed the performance indicators included in the report and, in response to a question regarding deliberate fires, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the improvements seen had been as a result of a number of Fire Safety and Community Safety initiatives, including, for example, Call challenge, and work with young people, including the Phoenix Project and Evolution course. The Chief Fire Officer agreed to Councillor Chris Bowring's request that the data for deliberate fires be illustrated to show the varying types of deliberate fires.

CFO

The Chairman asked how any re-deployment of those firefighters who were no longer fit for operational duties would be managed when there were no other suitable employment opportunities available within the Service. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the application of Pension and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) Regulations would be affected if appropriate, but that there might be occasions when a firefighter would be required to leave the Service.

The **Overview and Scrutiny Committee:**

- **Supported** the Chief Fire Officer's suggestion that an invitation be extended to Fire Authority Members to the Passing Out Parades for the Phoenix and Evolution courses.
- **Noted** the Performance of the Authority in relation to its policy objectives and performance targets report.

CFO

01.07.08 MONTHLY BUDGET UPDATE

The Authority Treasurer referred Members to the Budget Monitoring report in the

Executive Committee Agenda for the meeting on 21 January 2008. He reported that he anticipated that there would be a slight underspend at year-end of approximately £200,000. He advised that the Budget Sub Committee had considered how this underspend should be expended and that the Committee had recommended that it be used for the renewal of operational equipment.

The **Overview and Scrutiny Committee Noted** the reported budgetary position to date.

01.08.08 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The date of the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was **Noted** as Tuesday 11 March 2008 at 10am in the Strategic Command Centre, Headquarters, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service