

## **AGENDA ITEM 2                    MINUTES**

### **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD IN THE LECTURE ROOM, STATION 20, 270, WHITLEY WOOD ROAD, READING ON TUESDAY 15 JUNE 2004 COMMENCING AT 10.30AM AND CONCLUDED AT 11.23AM**

**Present:**        Mrs C Bateson (Vice-Chairman in the Chair), P Bryant,  
                     Owen E Jeffery,

**Apologies:**    R Webb (Chairman), Tom Crisp, Simon Werner

#### **2.01/04            MINUTES:                    5 FEBRUARY 2004**

The Minutes of the inaugural meeting held on Thursday 5 February 2004, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

#### **2.02/04            ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED AT FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Committee was requested (Agenda item 3 – not reproduced) to consider whether any of the issues previously suggested by Members of the Committee should be considered at future meetings.

Members were reminded that at the last meeting held on Thursday 5 February 2004 it was agreed that a list of the potential issues identified at that meeting be circulated to Committee Members to prioritise and return it together with any additional issues. A summary of the issues referred to and their suggested prioritisation together with the additional issues raised was presented in Appendix 1 (not reproduced).

Having considered the summary presented in Appendix 1, it was noted that the number one priority was the long-term future for the Fire Service in connection with the establishment of Regional Management Boards. In view of this Members supported a suggestion that Councillor Terry Mills, Fire Authority Chairman, should be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee and speak on his attendance at and experience of the recently established Regional Management Board for the South-East.

Having decided that Councillor Mills be invited to the meeting scheduled to take place on Wednesday 29 September 2004, Members were advised by the Committee Administrator that a report is being presented to the Fire Authority meeting on Wednesday 30 June 2004 on the frequency of Fire Authority and associated Committee meetings. If the Fire Authority is minded to approve the report then the dates of future meetings may be subject to change.

The Chairman also requested the Chief Fire Officer to prepare a report for presentation to the meeting in September (or the alternative date) on the implications of Regional Management Boards, its effect on the future of the Fire Service, how the Authority is feeding into the RMB scenario and whether there are any overview and scrutiny actions that could or should be taken by this Committee as a result of this new initiative. It was also agreed the report should include input from the Fire Brigades' Union.

The ACFO reported that as far as collaboration working is concerned numerous issues have been identified with Co-responders being picked up by RBFRS. The proposed list is subject to confirmation by the RMB at its meeting in July.

In noting that the second priority issue referred to the implications of any communications breakdowns and implementation of back-up-procedures, Members agreed that the establishment of Joint Control Rooms should be identified as the second priority for consideration at future meetings. Members were reminded that the Fire Brigades' Union were giving a presentation to the Fire Authority meeting on 30 June 2004 on their perception of the issues surrounding the establishment of Regional Control Rooms and the information provided may be useful to Members. In emphasising the need for confirmation of the issues and implications surrounding the existing and ongoing provision of Control Rooms Members suggested that the Chief Fire Officer present a report on this particular subject to the next meeting of the Committee scheduled to take place on Wednesday 21 July 2004.

As the above mentioned issue will be subject to a decision being made at RMB level it was agreed that the matter would be further discussed at the September meeting of the Committee and that the Deputy Chief Fire Officer be invited to attend and address the Committee on the current situation.

In noting that there is already a mandate on this issue and, as such, the Committee will not have any influence in changing the process, Members were of the opinion that as a Committee they could discuss the process involved including the high legal issues and high financial costs involved. Members were advised of concerns that have been expressed in Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service on the question of Regional Control Rooms and its outcome, which included a letter from the Mr Eastwood, the Chief Fire Officer of Hampshire, being circulated to all Fire Authorities in the Region.

The Chairman asked those Members who had not yet completed and returned the Response Form to kindly do so as soon as possible so that further discussions can take place on the prioritisation list at future meetings.

**RESOLVED: That:**

- 1. The Chief Fire Officer be requested to prepare a report for presentation to the meeting in September (or the alternative date) on the implications of Regional Management Boards, its effect on the future of the Fire Service, how the Authority is feeding into the RMB scenario and whether there are any overview and scrutiny actions that could or should be taken by this Committee as a result of this new initiative and that the report should include input from the Fire Brigades' Union.**

2. **The Chief Fire Officer be requested to present a report confirming the issues and implications surrounding the existing and ongoing provision of Regional Control Rooms to the next meeting of the Committee scheduled to take place on Wednesday 21 July 2004.**
3. **Councillor Terry Mills, Fire Authority Chairman, be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee and speak on his attendance at and experience of the recently established Regional Management Board for the South-East.**
4. **The Deputy Chief Fire Officer be invited to attend and address the Committee at its meeting in September on the current situation regarding Regional Control Rooms.**

#### **2.03/04 FUTURE LICENSING POLICY – FIRE SERVICE INPUT**

The Committee considered an issue raised by Councillor Owen Jeffery (Agenda item 4 – not reproduced) regarding the potential implications for the RBFRS in respect of the new Licensing Policy that Unitary Authorities in Berkshire are required to produce.

On the invitation of the Chairman Councillor Jeffery reported that under new regulations, West Berkshire Council, like all other Councils, will assume responsibility for issuing licences to pubs and clubs etc, previously dealt with by Local Magistrates Courts. This is in addition to the entertainment and taxi licences covered up to now by the Unitary Authorities. The West Berkshire Council's Licensing Committee, at its meeting on Tuesday 1 June 2004, had therefore discussed the issue of future Fire Service input into the new Licensing Policy, which the six Berkshire Unitary Authorities, having consulted the public, are required to produce, and must by law adopt by December 2004 at the latest.

Councillor Jeffery indicated that as it is likely to have cost implications for the Brigade in terms of Senior Officer time there is also the overriding need to ensure that the Policy, its interpretation and implementation is right. It is therefore essential that the Unitary Councils have the support and informed knowledge of the Brigade's Fire Safety Officers.

The ACFO reported that the Brigade are aware of these proposed changes to the law and as such the Divisional Officer ( Fire Safety) has already been in contact with the six Berkshire Unitary Councils and has arranged a meeting to enable a cross discussion and sharing of best practice to take place.

It would of course be prudent to try and produce a common standard across the County to alleviate the problem of differing standards being introduced across Royal Berkshire. It was agreed that a letter from the Fire Authority suggesting this course of action be sent to each Unitary Authority.

**NOTED**

**2.04/04          DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

In noting that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 21 July 2004 it was **Agreed**, in response to a request from the Chairman that the time of the meeting be brought forward from 10.30am to 9.30am.