

AGENDA ITEM 2 MINUTES

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS, DEE ROAD, TILEHURST, READING ON MONDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2004 COMMENCING AT 10.00AM AND CONCLUDED AT 11.30HRS

**Present: Mrs C Bateson, P Bryant, Tom Crisp, J S Grewal,
 Owen E Jeffery
 T Mills (Chairman of the Fire Authority)**

Apologies: Simon Werner

4.01/04 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN 2004/2005

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

4.02/04 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN 2004/2005

RESOLVED: That Councillor J S Grewal be elected Vice-Chairman of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the ensuing year.

4.03/04 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 to be made.

4.04/04 MINUTES: 21 JULY 2004

The Minutes of the last meeting held on Tuesday 21 July 2004, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following comments:

Minute 3.04/04: Regional Fire Control Rooms – PowerPoint Presentation

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO(SD)) reported that Surrey Fire Authority have nominated Sanchia Lyons from their Human Resources Section to lead and co-ordinate on all Human Resource matters originating

from the Regional Control Project. She will therefore be submitting reports to the Regional Management Board as matters progress including the retention packages, interim recruitment strategies etc.

4.05/04 PRESENTATION FROM COUNCILLOR TERRY MILLS – REGIONAL MANAGEMENT BOARD FOR THE SOUTH-EAST

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Terry Mills to the meeting who provided a presentation on his attendance at, and experience of the recently established Regional Management Board for the South East.

The following is therefore a brief summary of the slide Presentation, comments made and the decisions taken in respect of Members concerns:

Note: Whilst the following Minute only presents a brief summarisation of the slides presented a full set will be e-mailed to Members of the Committee in due course – Copies of the full Slide Presentation are available to all other Fire Authority Members on request from the Committee Administrator).

Section 4.17 of the White Paper – “Our Fire and Rescue Service” required Regional Management Boards to be established before 1 April 2004 and the collaborative requirements were based on six key themes:

Reports were presented to the Fire Authority in October/December 2003 and February 2004 on the setting up of RMB’s. Whilst Schedule 3 of the Agreement outlines the functions of the South East Regional Management Board the consultation has been limited with very short timescales.

Since their establishment there has been two meetings of the South East Regional Management Board (RMB) with a further meeting planned in the very near future. The RMB consists of the nine Fire Authorities in the former CACFOA South East Region and one Elected Member who is usually accompanied by the relevant Chief Fire Officer represents each Authority.

The principles of the South East RMB are to maximise effectiveness and minimise costs. The administrative costs are borne in turn by the host Authority, which for year 1 is Surrey.

The six key themes referred to in the presentation all have a lead Principle Officer from the nine Brigades, with the majority of the work being done by CFOA Workgroups with Royal Berkshire leading on training and as reported in the minutes Surrey are responsible for human resources.

The LGA guidance was published in November 2003 with further guidance being published in January 2004, which clarified details of the six key workstreams, emphasising the Government’s intention to intervene if RMB’s are not effective and requires each RMB to submit a progress report to the ODPM.

Mr Mills also reported that all RMB had received a letter from Nick Raynsford MP seeking their commitment to making the FiReControl Project a success and whilst the South East RMB confirmed their commitment their response contained a few caveats relating to the cost and staffing implications etc.

One particular problem for this and probably other Fire Authorities is that the RMB was established after the Budget was set for 2004/2005, which has resulted in no specific budget line being identified within the approved Budget. As there is no additional funding from the ODPM to establish RMB's this and some other Authorities will have to find the additional funding required from within their existing approved Budget.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO(SD)) clarified the cost of Officers attending the Working Groups based on the six key themes which could be quite significant in terms of Officers time and associated salaries.

In summary the six key themes are as follows:

1. Resilience plans for large scale emergencies (New Dimensions)

The incident response units are already in place for mass public decontamination with urban search and rescue units, high volume pumping equipment and water rescue equipment to follow shortly.

2. Integrating common and specialist services

Whilst there are currently nine initiatives in the category in the South East only fire investigation has been given as an example. Whilst much of the work is already ongoing through CFOA and Practitioners Groups there is a lack of clarity of expectation and a danger of unwarranted proliferation.

3. Establish Regional Control Centres

Section 2.16 of the National Framework requires RMB's to ensure transition to new Regional Control Centres by the end of 2007 and also a requirement to work with the Government to roll out the Firelink project. One particular problem in this area is that the timescales are extremely tight and funding arrangements remain unclear and the implications to existing staff in RBFRS Control Room.

4. Introduce Regional Procurement

Fire Service Circular 11/2004 curtailed an Authority's freedom to enter into long term contracts for major additional equipment. In its place a national procurement strategy was launched in September 2004 and the National Framework requires Fire and Rescue Authorities to implement it. One particular aspect is the setting up of 'Firebuy', a fire procurement agency for fire specific procurement.

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer advised Members that as 'Firebuy' will be a completely separate Company with Directors, there could be significant cost implications for the nine Fire Authorities. 'Firebuy' has been established by

Central Government and will be imposed. Further details are available on the ODPM Web-Site.

When further information is available on the establishment of 'Firebuy' a report will be presented to a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. Mr Mills indicated that whilst it is recognised that the agenda is set there is a need to work out how best to implement it to achieve the maximum benefits for this Authority.

5. Regional Approach to Training

As reported earlier Royal Berkshire is responsible for training and a significant amount of work has already been done. In addition Elected Members training has also been set up in parallel to this.

6. Regional Personnel and Human Resources Functions

RMB's are required to establish the most efficient and effective means of delivery, either through lead authorities or outsourcing. Whilst details are still unclear integrated policies are clearly expected and this is coupled with a specific expectation for a regional equalities strategy.

In response to a question on recruitment the ACFO (SD) reported that there is a central pool within the South East Region, which six of the nine Authorities pull on to recruit it's fire-fighters. The pool has been established for some time and all applicants within the pool are to the recognised standard. If an applicant is prepared to be appointed to any of the nine Fire Authorities then he/she is placed in the central pool. A list is also maintained of the applicants preferred Brigades and this is considered at the time of any appointment offer.

In response to a further question it was confirmed that the appointment of lead authorities had not been a contentious issue and was not a Member decision, it was based on Officer recommendations. RMB have endorsed the list of lead authorities with a view to spreading the load to those Authorities that appeared to have the most experience in a particular field. It was also reported that Berkshire's Deputy Chief Fire Officer is now the representative at national level for the Control Project.

The National Framework was published in July 2004 and the recent Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 gives "teeth" to the framework, and comes into force on 1 October 2004. Whilst the framework re-emphasises the six key workstreams it also views RMB's "as an appropriate forum for improving collaboration" on IRMP's, which is effectively seen as a seventh theme but is not mandatory.

One important aspect of RMB's is that under Section 22 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 the Secretary of State has the power to intervene if he feels "that a Fire and Rescue Authority is failing or is likely to fail to act in accordance with the National Framework and he may by Order require an Authority to do something, stop doing something or not to do something. It should be noted however that any intervention is subject to the Local Government Intervention Protocol.

In conclusion Mr Mills indicated that the main issues are:

- Regional Management Board established after the Budget was set for 2004/2005
- No additional funds from the ODPM to establish RMB's
- Lack of clarity as to the exact requirements of each workstream
- As a Joint Committee the RMB is unable to employ people directly
- There is a capacity issue as no extra resources are available to tackle several large agenda's
- Driven by ODPM's expectations for efficiencies through regional working

Mr Mills indicated that whilst some funding has been committed to covering administration costs the expectations of RMB's are taking up a considerable amount of time and effort and although the funding issue is still unclear it is likely that Authorities will have to identify a specific budget line for the next and future financial years. Authorities will not know what budget pressures there will be for example on 'Firebuy' and Regional Controls and this and other budgetary issues could create difficulties for Fire Authorities especially as they now set their own Precept. The District Auditor could pick up on this specific funding and seek an explanation as to its origin.

As Members had some concerns over the establishment of RMB's it was agreed that a report detailing these concerns would be presented to the Executive Committee for consideration and referral on to the Fire Authority to determine whether a response to the ODPM and/or the South East Regional Management Board was required.

In summary therefore the Committee's main areas of concern were:

1. Reinforce the concept that Royal Berkshire Fire Authority do not believe that it would be beneficial to allow Regional Management Boards to become Regional Fire Authorities and if necessary seek reassurances from the Minister for Fire Nick Raynsford MP.
2. Express serious concerns over the extremely ambitious timescales for the establishment of Regional Fire Controls and consider the economies that the Authority can expect through the closure of its Control Room.
3. Seek further information from the ODPM on exactly how much the establishment of Regional Control Rooms will actually cost in terms of set-up costs and redundancy costs.
4. Concern that funding issues are still unclear and the expectations of savings may not be met especially where Fire Authorities are already "efficient". Identify the need to establish clarity in the funding for Regional Management Boards and look at how the Fire Authority would wish to structure such issues through sensible funding arrangements including the possible development of a formal funding regime.
5. Concern over the future capacity issue in that no extra resources will be available from the ODPM to tackle several large agenda's.

6. Concern over the potential introduction of “Firebuy” and the potential funding implications for Fire Authorities.
7. The lack of clarity as to the exact requirement of each of the six key workstreams and reiterate the fact that all six have potential resource implications in terms of Officers time and potential budgetary implications. Seek further information as to who will be responsible for picking up the additional budgetary costs.
8. The Authority is concerned that as a Joint Committee the RMB is unable to employ personnel direct and therefore has serious reservations on potential impact on its staff resources if, for example, Officers are seconded to undertake RMB issues and therefore requiring their work to be undertaken by another Officer albeit on a temporary basis.

RESOLVED: That:

1. **Based on the Committee’s concerns set out above a report be presented to the Fire Authority’s Executive Committee for consideration and, if necessary, referral on to the Fire Authority to determine whether the Fire Authority Chairman, in his capacity as RMB Representative, is steered to make comment and/or ask questions at RMB level or alternatively to develop a response to the ODPM and/or the South East Regional Management Board.**
2. **When further information is available on the establishment of ‘Firebuy’ a report be presented to a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting for consideration and possible referral to Executive Committee or the Fire Authority.**

4.06/04 REGIONAL MANAGEMENT BOARDS – FIRE AUTHORITY CHAIRMAN

Members were of the opinion that the question of how the Fire Authority Chairman, in his capacity as RMB representative, is steered to make comment or ask questions at RMB level has already been dealt with in the previous item and no further action was required.

4.07/04 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

In noting that the next meeting is scheduled to take place on Tuesday 30 November 2004 commencing at 10.00am at Station 20, Members asked that the venue be changed to Brigade Headquarters with the meeting commencing at 10.30am.

(Post Meeting Note: The meeting will be held in Meeting Room 3 at Brigade HQ)