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AGENDA ITEM 2 MINUTES

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S PERSONNEL COMMITTEE HELD AT BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS ON THURSDAY 20 FEBRUARY 2003 COMMENCING AT 6.00PM AND CONCLUDED AT 7.25PM

**Present: B J S Patman (Chairman), Owen E Jeffery, D Morgan,
D J Wilson**

Apologies: P Hingley, C Maskell

1.01/03 ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN 2002/2003

RESOLVED: That Councillor Owen E Jeffery be elected Vice-Chairman of the Personnel Committee for the remainder of the ensuing year.

1.02/03 PART I MINUTES: 24 JULY 2002

The Part I Minutes of the last meeting held on Wednesday 24 July 2002, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

1.03/03 PROCEDURE FOR DISPUTES PANEL HEARINGS

The Committee was requested (Agenda item 5 – not reproduced) to consider whether the existing policy in respect of Dispute Panel recommendations, currently considered in Part II Authority business, should be varied.

At its meeting in June 2002 the Fire Authority considered a number of recommendations from meetings of the Disputes Committee held on 25 September 2001 and 18 March 2002. One of the recommendations adopted read as follows:

That the outcome of the Disputes Panel Hearing be reported to the Fire Authority under the Part II Agenda but where deemed appropriate the decisions so made be capable of being promulgated to staff."

At a meeting of the Fire Liaison Group held on 5 June 2002, the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU) expressed reservations over this decision and asked that when Disputes involve Policy and not identifiable individuals, the recommendation of the Disputes Panel should be considered in the Part I Fire Authority Agenda so that the public and the FBU can hear the debate. As the issue was raised at subsequent Fire Liaison Group meetings by the FBU the Chairman determined that a report be presented to the Personnel Committee to consider and make a recommendation to the Authority.

In noting that it is always open to the Authority to transfer a Part II item in to the Part I Agenda, Members were advised that three options, as set out in paragraph 6 of the report (not reproduced) were available to the Authority.

Having considered the options set out in the report and recognising the concerns expressed by the FBU, Members were of the opinion that even during a Disputes Panel concerning policy matters there is a real possibility that reference could be made to an individual or individuals during the Hearing. It was therefore proposed, seconded and agreed that no variation be made to the existing Policy and that the decision be referred to the Fire Authority with a recommendation that it be approved.

RECOMMENDED: That no variation be made to the existing Policy

1.04/03 MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF PERSONNEL SERVICES

The Committee was advised (Agenda item 6 – not reproduced) of the Management Review of Personnel Services, reported to and approved by the Performance Review and Audit Panel on 24 April 2002.

The review was included in the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) for 2001/2002 as a Best Value Review in its own right. Following advice from HM Fire Service Inspectorate and the District Auditor, this review was conducted as a Management Review that forms one component of the strategic corporate Best Value Review of corporate support. The Management of people is a shared responsibility between line management and personnel specialists. The review therefore divided the areas of activity into seven specific areas, as set out in paragraph 2 of the report (not reproduced).

The Review Team looked at each area in turn and identified improvements as described in paragraphs 3-7 of the report (not reproduced). Members' attention was drawn to the recommendations of the continuous improvement plan set out in paragraph 8 of the report. It was noted that in respect of recommendation 3 the establishment of Focus Groups had been deferred due to the ongoing strike action and the long-term sickness of two Personnel Department staff. The target date for implementing these Groups had therefore been revised and was now 30 June 2003.

The Independent Review of the Fire Service led by Professor Sir George Bain was published in December 2002 and amongst its findings was a view that current Fire Service personnel policy, procedures and practice gave cause for concern. It recommended that in addition to an improved programme of HR Management being put in place as a matter of priority there should also be an increased investment in human resources staff as part of the process of implementing reform. Whilst Royal Berkshire cannot be entirely exempted from this criticism, the management review of personnel, indicates that a reasonable framework of personnel policy and procedures in place, supported by adequate resources, but that this practice needs further development together with a refocusing of the resources.

The Chairman expressed the hope that when the industrial dispute is resolved there will be some form of guidance issued and funding made available. In response to a

suggestion the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that a progress report would be presented to a future meeting in approximately six months time when the Focus Groups had been established and a review of structures had taken place.

NOTED

1.05/03 WORKING LIFE SURVEY

The Committee was advised (Agenda item 7 – not reproduced) of the results of the Working Life Survey undertaken by The Lancaster Group within the Brigade during January/February 2002. Of the 695 survey questionnaires circulated some 302 were returned, representing a 43% response rate.

The Brigade had been divided into four departments with six job bands applied to the workforce as set out in Appendix 1 tabled at the meeting (not reproduced). The Chief Fire Officer advised that the overall response to the Questionnaire had been a positive one and the Lancaster Group had identified five levels of risk from stress. Although overall hazard scores for most of the departments and job bands were quite low, they did overlay some very high scores, which require remedial action. The survey report confirmed some of the issues raised by employees within the Partnership for Common Sense (PCS) initiative and reinforced the need for the works currently being undertaken under the PCS umbrella.

Members' attention was drawn to paragraph 10 of the report (not reproduced) which set out the positive actions taken or being undertaken by the Brigade to address the issues identified. In response to a question the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that as the Lancaster Group conduct similar surveys in other Brigades there had been a comparison with other Fire Services. He also confirmed that overall the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service had been given Level One risk status.

NOTED

1.06/03 FIREMAN'S PENSION SCHEME ORDER 1992 – RESERVE FORCES SERVICE LEAVE

The Committee was advised (Agenda item 8 – not reproduced) of the potential impact on the Fireman's Pension Scheme from Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) personnel undertaking service in the Reserve Forces.

Members were advised that in the light of current events there is the possibility of the call-up of reservists employed by RBFRS. The extent of the potential reserve forces commitment amongst personnel is currently unknown so this information is therefore being sought as a matter of urgency.

The Fire Policy Division of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has recently issued Fire Service Circular 5/2003 which provides information about the position of members of the Fireman's Pension Scheme called up to serve in the Reserve Forces.

A summary of the information received from the ODPM was set out in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the report (not reproduced).

In response to a suggestion by Mr Jeffery that no employer had the right to stop an employee from undertaking his duty as a Reservist the Chief Fire Officer indicated that this fact would have to be checked with the appropriate Authority as previously. fire-fighting had been regarded as a 'reserved occupation' from military service.

NOTED

1.07/03 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED: That a further meeting of the Personnel Committee be arranged for Thursday 27 March 2003 at Brigade Headquarters commencing at 6.00pm.

1.08/03 EXCLUSION OF THE 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 items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraphs of Part I of Schedule 12A of the said Act indicated:

	Agenda Item	Paragraph
11	Part II Minutes: Wednesday 24 July 2002	1
12	Redman versus Royal Berkshire Fire Authority	1

Note: The following is a summary of the items considered in the Part II Agenda of the Fire Authority's Personnel Committee held on Thursday 20 February 2003)

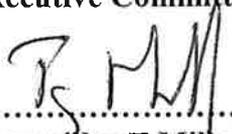
1.09/03 PART II MINUTES: 24 JULY 2002

The Part II Minutes of the last meeting held on Wednesday 24 July 2002 were received and approved as a correct record.

1.10/03 REDMAN VERSUS ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

The Committee was advised of the outcome of Ms K Redman's application to the Employment Tribunal.

Approved by Executive Committee – Thursday 22 January 2004

Signed:.....

 Councillor T Mills
 Chairman

Date: 22 January 2004

