

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S STRATEGIC ASSET MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Held on Tuesday 5 April 2016 at 5.30pm

Whitley Wood Fire Station, Whitley Wood Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG2
8FS

- Members:**
- Councillor David Absolom
 - (* present) * Councillor Christine Bateson
 - * Councillor Paul Bryant
 - * Councillor Adrian Edwards (*Vice-Chairman*)
 - * Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons
 - Councillor Chris Maskell
 - Councillor Tom McCann
 - * Councillor Angus Ross (*Chairman*)

- In Attendance:**
- Alex Brown (Strategic Property Manager)
 - Conor Byrne (Head of Finance, HF)
 - Stephen Chard (Clerk)
 - Trevor Ferguson (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
 - Simon Jefferies (Interim Head of Risk Management, IHRM)
 - Nikki Richards (Head of Business, Information and System, HBIS)
 - Paul Southern (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)

Action

49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for inability to attend the meeting had been received from Councillor David Absolom.

(Councillor Angus Ross temporarily vacated the Chair at 5.36pm. Councillor Adrian Edwards in the Chair).

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct there were no declarations of interest received from Members.

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Officers.

51. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2016 AND MATTERS ARISING

Resolved that the Part I Minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2016 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Councillor Christine Bateson accepted that she had arrived late at the meeting as noted in the minutes, but pointed out that this was due to traffic delays on the M4. She therefore felt it would be appropriate for the reasons for her delay to be noted.

Matters Arising:

Draft ICT Strategy - Nikki Richards, Head of Business, Information and System (HBIS), confirmed that an updated version of the ICT Strategy had been provided as part of today's agenda for Members approval.

52. REQUESTS FOR WAIVER OF CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS

Nikki Richards, Head of Business, Information and System (HBIS), presented the report which requested that the Strategic Asset Management Committee agree a waiver of Contract Standing Orders for the two contracts detailed in Appendix A.

The Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) had successfully undertaken a rigorous programme of procurement to ensure ICT contracts were procured in accordance with contract standing orders and full compliance had been achieved. The request for a waiver of contract standing orders for two of these contracts was part of this programme.

The first of these contracts was for a chemical substances database called Chemdata which provided hazard information used by specialist officers when responding to incidents. This tool was used nationally and was a cornerstone of officers training. There was no reasonable alternative provider currently available. A decision to seek an alternative provider would result in an issue being created in terms of maintaining training provision.

The HBIS confirmed that Chemdata was the existing provider and this request was part of the annual renewal process for this licence. If agreed, this renewal would in fact be for the next two years.

Trevor Ferguson, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), explained that this renewal could not be automatically undertaken by officers. In the absence of a competitive tender process for this contract, if was necessary to bring the request to waive Contract Standing Orders to Members for approval.

Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons was concerned at the monopoly held by the supplier for this contract and queried whether efforts had been made to reduce costs. In response, the DCFO advised that the standard fee was paid for this service. The HBIS added that options had been considered in an effort to reduce the cost of the contract, such as collaborating with another fire service to share costs, but this had not proved possible to date.

The second contract was for a four month extension with an existing supplier (Easynet) to allow implementation of a new internet service provider. This included up to one month of dual running to ensure there was no interruption to the RBFRS internet service. Installation would be 90 days after initial site surveys had been undertaken across the entire RBFRS estate and this could not take place until post contract award. The switch over and dual running could not be achieved within the existing contract life as establishing the specification and the overall tender process took longer than expected.

The new supplier was confirmed, following a competitive tender process, as UniCORN (a service managed by BT). They were Public Services Network (PSN) compliant and would ensure faster internet connections. The HBIS confirmed the cost of this contract extension would total £54k.

(Councillor Angus Ross returned to the meeting and resumed in the Chair at



5.45pm).

Councillor Ross confirmed that he did challenge officers on the need for these exceptions, but after considering the circumstances for both requests felt they were acceptable.

Resolved that the two requests for a waiver of Contract Standing Orders be agreed as detailed in Appendix A to the report.

53. DRAFT SAMC ANNUAL REPORT

Councillor Angus Ross introduced the SAMC's draft annual report, which would also be presented to the Fire Authority at its meeting on 25 April 2016.

The report noted that during 2015/16 the SAMC had continued to ensure that the strategic overview of the Authority's Capital Programme was managed effectively and had assisted officers with the delivery of the Authority's Capital Programme in relation to premises, transport fleet and information technology. It was also becoming involved in progressing shared assets with other blue light services and local authorities.

The main item of business for the Committee this year had been assisting officers in developing a new medium term strategic approach to delivering the Capital Programme. Councillor Ross was pleased to confirm that this had resulted in the agreement of the Strategic Asset Investment Framework at the Fire Authority meeting in January 2016. The Committee had also overseen the settlement of the final account for the new Headquarters.

Councillor Paul Bryant commented that the report reflected well the work of the SAMC over the past year. Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons added that the report served as a pleasing opportunity to note the progress that had been made.

Resolved that:

- the report be noted;
- the report would be presented to the Fire Authority for consideration at its meeting on 25 April 2016.

54. REVIEW OF BUYING PROCESSES AND CONTROLS

Trevor Ferguson, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), introduced the report which provided an update on both the findings of the Baker Tilly audit of the review of buying processes and the agreed action plan. Appendix A to the report contained the final version of the Baker Tilly report. This included the agreed action plan that had been suggested and was being implemented by officers.

At the end of 2014/15 it was identified that the organisation was using a significant number of Single Tender Actions (STAs) to authorise spend for IT contracts and systems. This was a matter for concern as these STAs were quite often retrospective and the ability to demonstrate the appropriateness of an STA was not always clearly evident. The potential inappropriate use of STAs could have significant business, legal and reputational risk for the Fire



Authority and the RBFRS.

Following this and in response to the direction of the Chairs of Management Committee, Audit and Governance, and SAMC, the new Corporate Management Team had been carrying out a series of "deep dive" audits and reviews on the internal control procedures within the Authority. This audit was one of the first "deep dive" audits.

The DCFO pointed out that the agreement made to waive Contract Standing Orders as part of Agenda Item 4 was very much an exception to only be made in unique circumstances.

The report had already been presented to the Audit and Governance Committee, but the audit had also been commissioned by SAMC and so the report was being presented here also.

An important element of the action plan was the rolling out of appropriate training on the processes required to be followed and the need to achieve good value for money. This training was particularly important for new Heads of Service recruited as part of the recent senior management restructure.

As the action plan was implemented over time, it could create the potential for changes to be made to Contract Standing Orders as processes evolved.

To summarise, the DCFO noted that while satisfactory progress was being made, further work was needed to ensure the necessary compliance continued to be achieved.

Councillor Angus Ross queried whether there had been any scrutiny of procurement processes in place in other fire authorities as part of this process in order to ascertain whether there were improvements that could be made. The DCFO confirmed that this had been undertaken and it was the case that different approaches were in place in other fire authorities. It was however the priority to continue to ensure that compliance levels were adhered to, alongside seeking the best value for money possible. The DCFO added that the RBFRS had worked with the Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service on this matter and guidance had also been obtained from an expert in this area who had previously worked for Oxford City Council.

Councillor Paul Bryant queried how contract renewals would be considered. The DCFO explained that the potential for contract renewals would be carefully considered.

Resolved that:

- the findings of the Baker Tilly audit be noted;
- the officer action plan be noted.

55. FINAL DRAFT OF THE ICT STRATEGY 2016-2019

Nikki Richards, Head of Business, Information and System (HBIS), presented the report which sought consideration and comment from the Strategic Asset Management Committee on the ICT Strategy 2016-19. The intention of the ICT Strategy was to design and embed a reliable, resilient ICT support service which would technically enable the implementation and ongoing delivery of the Strategic Commitments and Vision 2019. The ICT Service would support day to



day operations of the RBFRS and, in time, would also fully support the Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS).

This was the second time the ICT Strategy had been presented to SAMC and all comments made on the content etc of the first version by Members had been taken into consideration. Members specifically requested that the document be written in plain English and where possible, 'jargon' had been removed and further explanation provided. However, a reasonable level of technical information remained as this was an operational document to be used as a reference for decision making by technical staff internally. The Strategy also reflected comments received from the Corporate Management Team.

The effective use of ICT would play a key part in achieving the Strategic Commitments and Vision 2019 and was an important component in supporting the effective and sustained delivery of service improvement and new ways of working. The Strategy, like the Corporate Plan, was committed to exploring shared service solutions and collaborative working. Discussions were ongoing with Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service in relation to the possibility of forming a shared technical communications team.

It was also noted that the Strategy would work on the basis of extending the ICT planning horizon to a three year period rather than the current annual cycle.

An important change made to the Strategy following feedback was the inclusion of ICT Core Objectives as opposed to guiding principles. The HBIS also reiterated that the Strategy was an active document which was supported by action plans. Its implementation by officers, which had already commenced, would be monitored by the Audit and Governance Committee and by Corporate Management Team, with progress also reported routinely to SAMC.

Trevor Ferguson, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), reported on discussions he had held with Councillor Angus Ross on governance arrangements for this and other key documents for the RBFRS. It had been noted that different approval mechanisms were in place with key strategic documents signed off by Members and operational documents falling within the remit of Corporate Management Team. However, the nature of the ICT Strategy meant that it overlapped Members and officers, and it was therefore felt appropriate that Members should consider and comment on the Strategy.

Councillor Ross therefore felt that a more appropriate recommendation would be for SAMC to agree the ICT Strategy 2016-19.

Councillor Christine Bateson queried whether it was the intention to incorporate an internet cloud system. The HBIS advised this was a consideration, but data security needed to be investigated. Cost was another factor as it was important to ensure the most cost effective solutions were in use. Therefore there was no commitment to such a system at the present time.

Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons commented that this updated version of the Strategy was clearly written and easy to follow. She also pointed out that the Strategy linked very well with the Authority's strategic objectives.

Councillor Ross gave thanks to officers and Members for their work in finalising the Strategy, and for the progress that had already been made in terms of its implementation. He reiterated the need for SAMC to resolve that the ICT Strategy be approved, rather than merely commenting on a final draft version.



Councillor Ross therefore proposed the following recommendation for SAMC:

- That SAMC considered, commented and agreed the ICT Strategy 2016-19.

Councillor Paul Bryant sought clarification on the reference made in the report to collaborative working with the TVFCS. The HBIS clarified that the ICT team did currently provide support to the TVFCS, but did not collaborate on any projects, or share ICT supply or service contracts.

Councillor Bateson queried the frequency with which updates on implementation of the Strategy would be presented to Members. The HBIS confirmed that the Strategy would be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure its focus remained current. Quarterly reports would also be provided to SAMC and the Audit and Governance Committee.

Councillor Ross therefore proposed a second recommendation for SAMC's approval: that the Strategy would be reviewed on an annual basis.

Resolved that:

- the ICT Strategy 2016-19 had been considered, commented upon and agreed;
- the ICT Strategy 2016-19 would be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure its focus remained current.

(The meeting adjourned at 6.05pm and reconvened at 6.10pm).

56. 2015/16 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance (HF), introduced the report which informed SAMC of capital expenditure against budgets for 2015/16.

Capital expenditure to the end of February 2016 was £732k. The detail of this spend was outlined in the appendix to the report.

The forecast outturn for 2015/16 was £1,997m and this figure was in the process of being validated. The confirmed figure would be contained within the final accounts presented to the Fire Authority.

The appendix to the report also provided an update on progress with the Authority's capital projects.

Councillor Angus Ross noted that in terms of Light Vehicles, a review had been completed and up to five vehicles would be ordered by March 2016 subject to SAMC approval. Councillor Ross queried whether this had been completed. The HF referred Members to the comments of the Transport Manager which confirmed that the necessary approval had already been granted, tenders had been completed and vehicles were on order. Delivery was anticipated in mid June 2016.

Paul Southern, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), added that the outcome of the White Fleet Review had been presented to SAMC in September 2015 and Members agreed that delegated authority would be given to officers to procure multiuse vehicles on the understanding that this would be achieved within the agreed financial envelope. The ACFO also gave his understanding that the vehicles were indeed on order, but he agreed to circulate an update to SAMC

ACFO to

Members with confirmation on this point.

Councillor Paul Bryant queried expenditure at Dee Road when considering that this site was due to be vacated. The DCFO advised that it was necessary to replace internal doors at Dee Road in order to adhere to safety requirements. He also clarified that the site would not be fully exited for a period of approximately two years.

In terms of the Hungerford Station refurbishment, the DCFO confirmed that the relatively new doors procured for Hungerford had been reused as part of the refurbishment.

Councillor Christine Bateson queried progress with the Ascot/Bracknell Fire Stations upgrade. The DCFO confirmed that works at both stations had been completed. Further information would be provided as part of the Part II Property Update.

Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons referred to the funding outlined in the slippage column for funding due to slip to 2016/17. She understood the reasons for areas of slippage but queried the forecast underspend that would remain. The HF explained that after taking into account forecast expenditure for 2015/16 and the slippage anticipated into 2016/17, an underspend in the region of £600k would remain. Councillor Ross commented that it would be useful to gain an understanding of where the forecast underspend had been identified for future reporting.

Councillor Helliar-Symons queried how the underspend would be utilised. The HF explained that the sum would be placed in reserves. He also advised that to date it had not been necessary to borrow in order to fund the Capital Programme and this would be avoided for a further period of two years. The placement of this underspend in reserves would help to delay the need to borrow funds and delay associated repayment costs.

Councillor Ross added that the capital receipt from the sale of the Windsor site would also increase the reserves position.

Councillor Bateson then referred to the process for procuring new appliances. It had previously been reported that this could take up to two years and Councillor Bateson queried if this timeframe included the design phase. The ACFO clarified that standard fire engines/appliances could be procured within a relatively short timeframe as they were available from the production line. The procurement of bespoke appliances could however be a far more time consuming process. The ACFO explained that efforts were ongoing across the Thames Valley to align the appliances/engines in use across the area with a view to reducing timescales for production and achieving a greater level of consistency.

Councillor Bryant queried future plans for the Caversham Road Fire Station. The DCFO explained that some remedial works had been necessary to ensure that minimum requirements were adhered to at this station. A further update would be provided as part of the Part II Property Update. Councillor Ross highlighted the need to minimise spend on this fire station as future options for a fire station in this area were in the process of being considered.

Resolved that the report be noted.

**57. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Noted as Tuesday 12 July 2016 at 5.30pm at Ascot Fire Station.

It was noted that this meeting might be cancelled subject to Fire Authority's approval of the new committee structure at the Fire Authority meeting on 25 April 2016.

58. 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 Agenda Items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the said Act indicated and is exempt information if, and so long as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

59. PART II MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2016

The Part II Minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

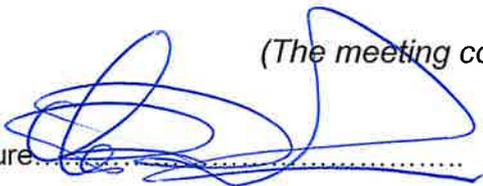
60. PROPERTY UPDATE

The Committee considered an exempt report.

Resolved that the recommendations as set out in the exempt report be agreed.

(The meeting concluded at 6.48pm)

Signature



Print Name

C. R. DUDLEY

Date signed

25/7/17