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MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY URGENCY COMMITTEE HELD AT BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS, TILEHURST ON MONDAY 27 APRIL 1998 COMMENCING AT 6.00 PM AND CONCLUDED AT 7.15 PM

Present: J C G Brooks, J J Connolly, B J S Patman

1.01/98 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Mr J C G Brooks be elected chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

1.02/98 ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman advised the Committee that he believed that it would be more appropriate to discuss its response as employers to the issues raised in agenda item 4 in part II of the meeting. However, in view of the presence of representatives of the Fire Brigades Union and their concerns regarding the proposals, he indicated that he would invite the representatives to address the Committee on those concerns prior to moving the exclusion of the press and public.

1.03/98 MEMBERSHIP OF THE APPEALS PANEL

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 2 - not reproduced) inviting it to approve the appointment of Mr J M B Egan as a member of the Appeals Panel.

RESOLVED: That Mr J M B Egan be appointed to the Appeals Panel.

1.04/98 MODERNISING LOCAL GOVERNMENT - IMPROVING SERVICE THROUGH BEST VALUE

The Committee received a report (Agenda Item 3 - not reproduced) advising it of the publication of the Government's consultation paper on Best Value with a view to formulating the Authority's response to the proposals contained therein.

The Committee agreed to support the Chief Fire Officer's suggested response to the consultation paper, noting, however, that there was a need to ensure that any changes avoided blurring of the respective responsibilities of Her Majesty's Inspectorate, the Health & Safety Executive and the District Auditor, all of whom already had roles in ensuring the quality of service provision. It was noted that the Authority would have a further opportunity to comment on the Government's proposals as the present proposals would form part of a new Local Government Bill which was expected to be published and the subject of consultation in the summer.

RESOLVED: That the proposed response to the Government's consultation paper on "Best Value" as set out in Appendix "A" of the report be approved.

1.05/98 FIRE BRIGADES' NATIONAL EMPLOYERS CONSULTATION PAPER ON NEGOTIATING OBJECTIVES

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4 - not reproduced) inviting it to formulate its response to a consultation paper from the Fire Brigades' National Employers regarding their negotiating objectives. The Committee noted that the paper had arisen from the recent employers' conference.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that he was intending to discuss the paper in part II of the meeting, but wished to hear the views of Steve Robinson-Day and Paul Clark from the Fire Brigades Union who were present, before moving the exclusion of the press and public.

Messrs Clark and Robinson-Day welcomed the opportunity to address the Committee on such an important issue and indicated that the following were the key points to which Members should have regard:

- That it would be unwise to reduce cover until fire safety initiatives were in place.
- That Berkshire had yet to reach the point where there was the scope for the sort of flexibility envisaged.
- That the proposals were premature.
- That the FBU would object to any proposals envisaging a reduction in personnel and/or increasing hours.
- That proposals to alter sick pay entitlement were unacceptable.
- That the proposals could prove to be a disincentive to those contemplating a career in the service.

- That the existing pay formula had avoided conflict.
- That the illustrative model set out in the consultation paper offered nothing for the firefighters.
- That the need for flexibility was recognised but the FBU would expect something in return for giving up something.

In noting these views and that the firefighters were understandably wary of the proposals, the Chairman indicated that he saw what was being proposed as something which could lead to more local flexibility at an operational level, but acknowledge the concerns expressed about losing the national pay agreement.

The Chief Fire Officer advised the Committee that the proposals should be seen as a vehicle to change rather than the answer in themselves. The current conditions of service were recognised as being very prescriptive and detailed, and therefore not necessarily conducive to reflecting local needs. He believed that the type of flexibility being proposed could be advantageous to both the Authority and its staff as it could also lead to improved conditions in recognition of the local circumstances. He stressed that the way forward must be to establish a good contact between staff and management to ensure a means of negotiating the best mutual outcome.

Having heard the views of Messrs Robinson-Day and Clark, the Chairman thanked them for attending the meeting and indicated that the Committee would be considering carefully what they had said.

1.06/98 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the press and 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
4 Fire Brigades' National Employers' Consultation Paper on Negotiating Objectives	11
6 Single Tender Action - Whitley Wood Fire Station: Willow Wall	8 & 9

The following is a summary of the matter dealt with in part II of the meeting:

**1.07/98 FIRE BRIGADES' NATIONAL EMPLOYERS
CONSULTATION PAPER ON NEGOTIATING OBJECTIVES**

The Committee discussed the consultation paper in the light of the representations which had been made on behalf of the Fire Brigades' Union and agreed:

That consideration of the Authority's response to the National Employer's consultation paper on negotiating objectives be deferred until a further meeting of the Urgency Committee at 6.00 pm on Tuesday 19 May 1998; and,

That the Chief Fire Officer be requested to prepare a suggested response to the consultation paper for consideration by the Committee at the next meeting.



Chairman
19 May 1998

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**Not for Publication - Exempt Information
Section 100(A)(4) - Local Government Act 1972**

AGENDA ITEM 4 : PART II MINUTES - 27 APRIL 1998

**1.07/98 FIRE BRIGADES' NATIONAL EMPLOYERS
CONSULTATION PAPER ON NEGOTIATING OBJECTIVES**

The Committee discussed the consultation paper in the light of the representations which had been made on behalf of the Fire Brigades' Union.

The Chief Fire Officer indicated that there seemed to be a significant majority of those present at the conference who had supported the principle of the proposed changes.

The Human Resource Consultant made reference to the consultation paper and confirmed that establishing a local negotiating framework had resource implications in itself. He believed that a reasonably prescriptive national agreement with flexibility at the edges might be an alternative way forward, albeit not an option within the report.

In the light of these views, the Chairman believed that there was a need for Members to consult their colleagues before finalising the Authority's response to the proposals. In view of this it was agreed to defer a final decision until a further meeting of the Committee when the Chief Fire Officer would present a suggested response to Members for consideration.

RESOLVED:

- 1 That consideration of the Authority's response to the National Employer's consultation paper on negotiating objectives be deferred until a further meeting of the Urgency Committee at 6.00 pm on Tuesday 19 May 1998; and,
- 2 That the Chief Fire Officer be requested to prepare a suggested response to the consultation paper for consideration by the Committee at the next meeting.



Chairman
19 May 1998

