

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



Held on Friday, 14th February, 2020 at 6.30 pm

RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot,  
Reading RG31 7SD

**Members:**  
(\*present)

- |                                    |                                      |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| * Councillor Christine Bateson     | * Councillor Tony Linden             |
| * Councillor Dennis Benneyworth    | * Councillor Jo Lovelock             |
| * Councillor Jeff Brooks           | * Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle     |
| * Councillor Tricia Brown          | * Councillor Angus Ross              |
| * Councillor David Cannon          | * Councillor Garth Simpson           |
| * Councillor Colin Dudley          | * Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey |
| * Councillor Paul Gittings         | * Councillor Jane Stanford-Beale     |
| * Councillor Pauline Helliarsymons | * Councillor Ted Plenty              |
| * Councillor Graham Howe           | * Councillor Dexter Smith            |
| * Councillor Christine Hulme       | * Councillor Simon Werner            |

**In Attendance:** Paul Binyon (Area Manager Response and Resilience, AM R&R)  
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)  
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, H&FP)  
Trevor Ferguson (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)  
Steve Foye (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)  
Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources, Learning and Development, HHR&L&D)  
Andrew McLenahan (Head of Facilities, Fleet and Equipment, HFF&E)  
Katie Mills (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)  
Jim Powell (Area Manager Collaboration and Policy, AM C&P)  
Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL)  
Hannah Sheehan (Democratic Support Assistant, DSA)

**Observers:** FBU Representative

## 46. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for the inability to attend the meeting had been received from Councillors Dennis Benneyworth, Jeff Brooks, Christine Hulme, Tina McKenzie-Boyle, Angus Ross and Simon Werner.

**Action**

**47. 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.

**48. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 JANUARY 2020**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**49. PETITIONS AND QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDERS 19 AND 25**

There were no petitions or questions from members of the public under Standing Orders 19 and 25.

**50. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman made the following announcements:

**On-Call Firefighter Graduation Ceremony**

- On Friday, 31 January, I had the pleasure of joining our on-call firefighters at a graduation ceremony that celebrated those that have joined the Service in the past three years.
- A total of 24 graduates attended the Ceremony, which was held at Easthampstead Park.
- The Ceremony was open to all on-call firefighters who joined our Service in 2017, 2018 and 2019, as well as celebrating the wider dedication and commitment of all of the on-call firefighters within the Service.
- Each of the on-call firefighter graduates was presented with a certificate in front of family, friends and colleagues.
- The event also provided an opportunity to reflect back on some of the challenging incidents our on-call firefighters have attended since 2017 and the ongoing progress and commitment to the on-call service that's provided to the people of Royal Berkshire.

**Change to Senior Leadership Team (SLT)**

- You may be aware that Area Manager Tony Deacon will retire from the Service at the end of March 2020. This follows an outstanding 33-year

career, having served in both Berkshire and Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services.

- Following a rigorous selection process, Group Manager Doug Buchanan has been appointed to the position of Area Manager Service Delivery, where he will oversee Prevention and Protection.
- I am sure you will join me in congratulating Doug who will be a great addition to the Senior Leadership Team. Doug will start his new role from 2 March 2020, allowing for a handover between himself and Tony Deacon.
- We will be advertising the GM vacancy created by Doug's move from the East Hub in due course.

### **Debate on Fire Risks in Flats and Shared Housing**

- Matt Rodda, MP for Reading East recently initiated a Westminster Hall debate on fire risks in flats and shared housing.
- During the debate, he spoke about different types of buildings in the county and the fire safety concerns of local residents. He also talked about our work to date in inspecting high rise premises and the Fire Authority's efforts to increase the council tax precept to help fund our services.
- We continue to work with Berkshire's MPs to address residents' concerns and will continue to make the case for greater financial flexibility when raising the council tax precept.

### **Positive coverage on RBFRS Response Standard**

- Following the release of the Home Office Fire incidents response times, we have seen positive coverage in the County for the Service.
- Articles in both the Reading Chronicle and the Bracknell and Wokingham Midweek highlighted RBFRS as backing the national trend on response times, taking an average of eight minutes and 24 seconds to reach primary fires in 2018-19.
- This is well within the Service's response standard target to reach emergency incidents within 10 minutes on 75% of occasions.
- The article went on to highlight that the crews turnout takes an average of just 54 seconds, which I'm sure we can all appreciate is remarkably quick and call handling took an average of one minute and 10 seconds from the time of call, to understanding the emergency and then mobilised the right resources to deal with the incident as quickly and effectively as possible.

**Wholetime Firefighter Recruitment Process**

- At the end of 2019 the Wholetime Firefighter recruitment process was concluded. Applicants completed a number of stages during the recruitment process including online ability tests, physical tests and an interview.
- We are pleased to have offered positions to 24 new Wholetime Firefighters. 2 of our new Wholetime firefighters will be going straight to their Station postings in February 2020 because they have already achieved competency in their on-call firefighter roles with RBFRS.
- The other 22 new Wholetime Firefighters began their 13 week initial training programme on Monday, 6 January 2020, initially with Red One Ltd in Plympton (the commercial trading arm of Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Service and will be finishing their training at our Whitley Wood Training Centre.
- It is anticipated that our new wholetime firefighters will be placed on stations across Berkshire from April 2020.

**March Car Washes**

- Stations across Berkshire will once again be opening their doors in March to raise as much money as possible for charity.
- Slough, Maidenhead, Langley, Ascot and Newbury firefighters will be raising money for The Fire Fighters Charity, as part of their national car wash league.
- The dates of each event can be found on the RBFRS website and Facebook page.
- I hope some of you will be able to attend one of these events to help make them as successful as possible.

**Member Development Survey**

- Finally, on behalf of the Organisational Development Champion and Member Development Working Group, I urge all Members to complete the Member Development Survey which will be opened until 28 February 2020.
- Your comments will help shape future courses, learning and development opportunities for new and not so new Members.

**Thames Valley Control Service**

- Graham Britten, Monitoring Officer made the following announcement. At just before 6am Friday 24 January 2020 Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) received an emergency call from a family in

Olney, North Buckinghamshire trapped upstairs by a fire on the ground floor of their terraced house. The family consisted of the mother, father and three children; a boy aged three, a girl aged one and a baby girl aged 11 weeks.

- Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) gained the incident information as quickly as possible, and two fire appliances were immediately mobilised. The TVFCS operator remained on the line giving fire survival guidance and advice to the family.
- The first appliance arrived on scene and immediately located and rescued the family, due to TVFCS operators passing on their exact location. Four firefighters wearing breathing apparatus and using two hose-reel jets carried out the rescues and extinguished the fire. The crews had also used their first aid knowledge to administer oxygen on scene.
- At this time there was some concern over the baby since she had become unresponsive. The family were taken to safety within just a few minutes after arrival and first aid was administered to all the family from that point.
- Due to TVFCS staff realising the significance of this fire, an additional 3 appliances were also mobilised to assist. The police and ambulance service also attended the scene, and upon arrival of the first ambulance the 11 week old baby girl straight away received treatment. It was at this time that she was just beginning to regain consciousness.
- Both she and the father were transported to hospital, whilst the mother and the other two children were given first aid at the scene. All the family were suffering from severe smoke inhalation but no burns.

#### **51. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

No reports had been referred by Audit and Governance Committee.

#### **52. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS UNDER STANDING ORDER 30**

There were no questions received from Members under Standing Order 30.

#### **53. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDER 44**

There were no notices of motion under Standing Order 44.

## 54. RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEES

Agenda Item 12 (Pay Policy Statement) had been recommended from Audit and Government Committee on 27 January 2020.

## 55. ANNUAL BUDGET 20/21, MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN & STRATEGIC ASSET INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK AND TVFCS BUDGET

The Chairman introduced the item as Budget and Income Generation Lead Member. He took the Fire Authority back to 2015 when they had reset the Policy direction which became the starting point of change and improvement and the Service's core vision of the following:

- Fire Stations at the heart of the community
- Capacity, Capability and Resilience
- One Team working collaboratively for the people we serve

Last year, was Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) first Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection. The HMICFRS report graded our Service as 'good' and concluded that the Service had been performing to a high standard.

The Chairman stated it had taken 5 years of hard work, commitment and dedication and advised that the Fire Authority must ensure they continue to support this journey.

He advised that the Service had balanced the budget from reserves, although it would not be sustainable in the long term and discussed the work that had commenced in Members lobbying their MPs to make them aware of the funding pressures and the request for greater flexibility for the Fire Authority to increase its precept by a small increase of £5.

The Budget was proposing increasing the precept by 1.99% to £67.60 per Band D household. He reported the results of the recent survey and stakeholders views on the Service's budget. 82% said they would support a £5 increase.

In Councillor Ross's absence and on his behalf, the Chairman stated he was proud of the strategic leadership and the progress made in implementing the Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF).

In referring to Appendix C in the report, Conor Byrne (HF&P) reported the overall financial provision of the SAIF had not changed since last year. Management Committee had agreed £3million be added to the budget for Theale Fire Station in December 2019. The redevelopment of Caversham Road had been moved to Phase 2.

Due to Caversham Road being moved to Phase 2, HF&P advised it was considered prudent to invest in the refurbishment of our buildings with the focus on a number of wholetime stations. A £1.25 million provision had been made in the SAIF for these works to commence in 2020/21.

Appendix D explained the rationale for Fleet purchases to be made in 2020/21. Phase 1 of the ICT spending plan had been updated to take into account new priorities associated with HMICFRS advice. Funding required to implement a digital solution for data capture at Safe and Well visits had been added to the Phase 1 provision.

In discussing reserves (Appendix E), the HF&P reported it was the responsibility of the Chief Finance Officer (HF&P) to advise on the level of reserves to ensure that funding and expenditure balance over the medium term.

He confirmed that the estimates of reserves were based on prudent assumptions. The general reserve stood at 6.8% of the revenue budget and he advised that the level of general reserve was appropriate due to on-going volatility. Consideration will be given over the coming year as to whether the general reserve will require further strengthening.

The HF&P reported that last year's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) assumed the precept would increase by 2.99% annually. The actual flexibility to increase the precept for 2020/21 was 1.99% (down from 2.99%). The average council tax base across Berkshire was 1.33%, £40,000 lower than the forecast in last year's MTFP.

Business rates surplus for 2020/21 was £1,048,000. The MTFP assumes that Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) in future years will increase by 1.5%. The HF&P reported staffing was the biggest expenditure and reported at present there had been ongoing national discussions with the FBU in relation to pay. Pay increases have a significant impact on the budget. Each 1% increase in pay add an additional pressure of £250,000 to the base budget.

The HF&P discussed pay pressures and the steep increases in pension contributions. Fortunately, the Government confirmed that it would reimburse the additional cost in 2019/20 and 2020/21. He reported that the MTFP assumes that from 2021/22 funding for these increased employer pension contributions would be considered as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR).

The decision on Wargrave Fire Station would be made in the Summer. He advised there were no available funds in the base budget for Wargrave to continue as an operational Fire Station and advised it would be funded from reserves.

Departmental savings of £140,000 had been built into the 2020/21 budget. Additional pressures have resulted in a shortfall of £284,000 which will be funded from reserves. There will be a further shortfall in 2021/22, resulting in a cumulative shortfall of £1.2million.

An increase of £5 to the precept would eliminate the deficit, and he reported

RBFA may need to revisit its IRMP if flexibility to increase the precept was not granted in the coming years.

In answer to a question from Councillor Lovelock on what would happen to the capital receipt from Dee Road Fire Station if there were slippage to the sale, HF&P reported RBFA would have to borrow money in the short-term.

The DCFO in answer to a question from Councillor Bateson advised that the type of appliances that had been purchased did not draw a subsidiary for green fleet.

Councillor Gittings thanked HF&P and all staff for the delivery of the budget and expressed his deep concern in the uncertainty expressed in the report. He echoed the Chairman in relation to the continued need to make a case to government very firmly on the need for extra funding to continue with the progress that had been made.

The Chairman advised he would continue to lobby Berkshire MP's to allow for the flexibility to increase the precept by £5 per year.

The votes were recorded and Councillors Bateson, Brown, Cannon, Dudley, Gittings, Helliar-Symons, Howe, Linden, Lovelock, Plenty, Shepherd-DuBey, Simpson, Smith and Stanford-Beale unanimously **Resolved that:**

- An increase in the council tax precept of 1.99% by adopting the formal resolution in Appendix A and the Medium Term Financial Plan in Appendix B be approved.
- The Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF) set out in Appendix C be approved.
- The purchase of vehicles as set out in Appendix D which are within the 2020/21 SAIF fleet provision be approved.
- The expenditure of up to £1.25 million out of the SAIF provision for refurbishment works at wholetime stations, with planned works agreed in consultation with the Lead Member for Strategic Assets supported by the Property Working Group be approved.
- The Reserves Policy in Appendix E be approved.
- The Prudential Indicators, Treasury Strategy and Investment Strategy set out in Appendix F be approved.
- The fees and charges set out in Appendix G be approved.
- The TVFCS budget for 2020/21 as set out in Appendix H, including the contribution to the Renewals Fund of £50,000 be approved.



## 56. IRMP CONSULTATION

Councillor Smith introduced the report as Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Lead Member. He advised the Fire Authority in 2016/17 held a Service Redesign consultation on Prevention, Protection and Response. The report was seeking the Fire Authority to agree an 8 week consultation on the above draft strategies and underpinning risk analysis in support of the Corporate Plan and IRMP 2019-23.

Katie Mills (HCS), took Members through each of the draft strategies via a presentation. For a copy of the presentation, please contact [committeeteam@rbfrs.co.uk](mailto:committeeteam@rbfrs.co.uk)

Councillor Linden asked whether all Unitary Authorities will be consulted. The HCS confirmed all of the six Unitary Authorities will be written to.

In referring to page 44 of the Prevention Strategy (Appendix B), the Vice – Chairman commended the increase in Safe and Well Visits referrals from agencies since 2017 and urged Members to request their local authorities to make the Fire Service aware of vulnerable adults for Safe and Well visits. She also commended the work that had been done in the decline of Accidental dwelling fires.

It was unanimously **Resolved that:**

- The proposed Prevention, Protection and Response strategies and underpinning risk analysis be agreed, and
- The proposals within the strategies be agreed for consultation with the public, staff and stakeholders.

## 57. PAY POLICY STATEMENT

Becci Jefferies (HHR&L&D) reported Section 38 (1) of the Localism Act 2011 requires Royal Berkshire Fire Authority to prepare and publish a Pay Policy Statement each financial Year. The Pay Policy Statement was presented to Audit and Governance Committee on 27 January 2020 and have recommended to the Fire Authority that it is adopted and published.

Updates had been made to the Pay Policy Statement outlined in paragraph 3.5 to 3.7 of the report. Paragraph 3.8 and 3.9 (consultation process to move three individuals who were transferred to RBFRS under the Transfer of Undertakings (TUPE) and interim order on remedy for the transitional protection pension claims) had not been concluded to date.

**Resolved that** the Pay Policy Statement for 2020/2021 for publication be approved.

**58. APPOINTMENT TO PENSION BOARD**

The HHRL&D reported the Local Pension Board had been set up under the auspices of The Public Service Pensions Act 2013 and exists to assist the Fire Authority in its role as Scheme Manager.

One of the employer representative, Doug Buchanan had stepped down and the report was seeking the Fire Authority to agree the appointment of Mark Arkwell onto the Board as employer representative.

**Resolved that** the appointment of Mark Arkwell to the Pension Board as an employer representative.

**59. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday, 29 April 2020, 6.30pm at RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

**60. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

**Resolve 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 the Paragraph 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.

**61. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 JANUARY 2020**

**Resolved that** the Part II minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2020, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**62. FIRE PROTECTION PRESENTATION**

Trevor Ferguson (CFO) presented for note an update on Fire Protection.

*(The meeting concluded at 19:45)*