

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Held on Tuesday, 9th April, 2024 at 6.30 pm



Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

Members: (*present)

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|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| * Councillor Wendy Griffith | * Councillor Jeff Brooks |
| * Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle | * Councillor Paul Gittings |
| * Councillor Ishrat Shah | * Councillor Pauline Helliarsymons |
| * Councillor Mike Smith | * Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey |
| * Councillor Helen Taylor | * Councillor Simon Werner |
| * Councillor Peter Frewer | |

In Attendance:

Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
Paul Bremble (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)
Paul Brooks (Head of Assets, HoA)
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P)
Ben Cairns (Area Manager Response and Resilience, AM R&R)
Katie Mills (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)
Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development, HHR&L&D)
Jim Powell (Area Manager Collaboration and Policy, AM C&P)
Tim Readings (Group Manager CRMP)
Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL)
Michaela Smith (Democratic Support Assistant, DSA)

Observers:

Ellie Wilde Technical Programme Manager

64. REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

There were no questions received from Representative Bodies on any of the agenda items.

65. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Action

Apologies were received from Councillor Helen Taylor.

66. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest from Members in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct. There were no Declarations of Interest received from Officers.

67. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 FEBRUARY 2024

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting on 6 February 2024, be approved as a true record to be signed the Chair.

In response to a question on the Minutes from Councillor Helliar-Symons, Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) explained smoke hoods were used at incidents for the safe exit of casualties.

68. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

Automatic Fire Alarm Consultation

Following the last Fire Authority meeting in February, the Authority launched a consultation asking people across Berkshire to consider how their fire and rescue service responds to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA).

The consultation focusses on how the Service responds to AFAs in buildings such as shops, offices, leisure centres, colleges, sports grounds, libraries, schools and health centres. A full list of all buildings affected by the consultation is available on the Service's website.

False alarms account for 45% of all the incidents attended and the majority of these are the result of Automatic Fire Alarm systems, of which 99% require no action by our service. This causes significant disruption to the delivery of essential services and training.

The consultation is running for 10 weeks in total and will close on Monday, 13 May 2024. The Chair requested members encourage communities to participate in the consultation to ensure we capture as broad a view as possible on the three proposed changes to our response.

Charity Car Washes

Over the past month, several fire stations across the county have hosted the first charity car washes of the year to raise money for The Fire Fighters Charity.

Firefighters, volunteers and cadets from Caversham Road, Crowthorne, Newbury and Bracknell fire stations have each hosted a car wash in support of the Charity.

In total, staff and volunteers have raised £4,900 for The Fire Fighters Charity from the car washes.

On behalf of the Authority, the Chair thanked everyone involved in organising and running the car washes, as well as members of the public who came out and donated generously in support of this great cause.

Sustainability Grant

In March, the Service successfully won a grant worth more than £920,000 from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) to help reduce our carbon footprint and improve energy efficiency.

Building on the Service's successful Low Carbon Skills Fund Grant bid secured in 2023 and benefitting from further Fire Authority investment, the Service now intends to invest £1.77 million in sustainability improvements over the next two years across five of our least energy efficient buildings.

As an Authority, we recognise that the Service has a key role to play in protecting our environment. By working together, we are incorporating environmental sustainability into all our major rebuild projects and improvement works.

On behalf of the Authority, the Chair thanked Salix who administer the PSDS on behalf of HM Government, for their support and guidance throughout the application process. He also made special thanks to Sophie Fox, RBFRS Sustainability Coordinator and Atkins Realis consultancy group for their work in preparing our successful bid for the grant.

Wholetime Recruitment

Over the past two months, our latest cohort of Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices have been hard at work completing their initial training course and we're now fast approaching their graduation ceremony, marking the completion of the first phase of their journey into becoming firefighters.

The Chair invited members to join him at Maidenhead Fire Station on Friday, 10 May to celebrate our latest recruits and the progress they have made so far.

Firefighter Career Discovery Sessions

Following a successful pilot in 2023, we have announced another series of Firefighter Career Discovery Sessions to help more people find out more about the role of a firefighter.

Sessions will begin on 30 April 2024 and run until 27 June 2024 and so if you have contacts in the community, particularly those that may be unfamiliar with the work of the fire and rescue service, we would be grateful if you would share this information with them.

Moving forward, these sessions will be held on a rolling basis to enable us to take a more proactive and structured approach. Additionally, this will help us to build a wider network of applicants across the region and establish more relationships with community groups.

Anyone interested in attending is asked to register in advance through our website at rbfrs.co.uk/discovery.

Veteran's Hub Event

The Chair announced the Service will be hosting the latest event in the series of successful Armed Forces Veterans' Hub Events, on Tuesday, 14 May at Crowthorne Community Fire Station.

Between 10am and 1pm, attendees will be able to speak to a range of organisations and charities that support the armed forces community, such as Operation Courage - the NHS service that provides specialist care for those Armed forces veterans suffering from a mental health crisis - Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, The Armed Forces Charity and the Royal Navy Association.

The Armed Forces Veterans' Hub was launched in 2020 following receipt of the Gold Award in the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme. This affirms the Fire Authority and Service's ongoing commitment to the Armed Forces community.

The Veterans' Hub is open to all veterans and there is no need to book in advance so I'd like to ask members to please spread the word to anyone who may be interested in coming along and taking part.

Fire Cadet Graduation

The Chair informed members the current cohort of Fire Cadets will celebrate their graduation on the afternoon of Wednesday, 10 July.

He stated he attended last year's graduation and was impressed by the cadets and the creative, fire safety inspired demonstrations they performed for families and friends gathered at Newbury Fire Station.

Whilst the venue for this year's graduation ceremony has not yet been confirmed, members should have received a hold in their RBFRS outlook diaries. He requested members to contact Fayth or Michaela if they have not received an invitation.

69. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

There were no issues arising from the Audit and Governance Committee.

70. RECOMMENDATION FROM COMMITTEES

RESOLVED that it be noted item 8 (Multi-Agency Incident Transfer (MAIT)) was a recommendation from Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) Joint Committee on 18 March 2024.

71. MULTI-AGENCY INCIDENT TRANSFER (MAIT) ADOPTION

Jim Powell (Area Manager, Collaboration and Policy, AM C&P) introduced the item explaining Multi-Agency Incident Transfer (MAIT) provides emergency services with a messaging solution. This was recommended from the Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) Joint Committee on 18th March 2024 and explained as part of the TVFCS legal agreement all new contracts were required to be approved by each Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Service partner.

MAIT was identified as a remedy following the Grenfell Tower enquiry with funding received from the Home Office two years ago. The Fire Service sector are leaders in this technology, as they are the only emergency service to have implemented this. The Welsh Fire Service already has this platform and it is hoped all Fire and Rescue services in England will implement MAIT by 2025.

Group Manager Simon Harris who is based in Control is the technical lead in the project team and interest amongst other services in relation to this project has increased.

He reported MAIT will improve efficiencies in how the Service operates in large scale incidents as information can be transferred quickly and smoothly negating the need to use the telephone as contact will be made through a web interface.

Councillor Werner stated communication is key and it was positive to see the Fire Service were taking the lead on this.

Councillor Griffith queried whether MAIT would be affected if the internet went down. Jim Powell confirmed this would be an issue, however connections were robust with back-ups in place. He confirmed in terms of business continuity several layers of resilience have been built in between control rooms.

The Chair highlighted the table on page 27, and stated with Home Office funding the contract cost was not a large investment for the Fire Service.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) the contract between Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) and AVR Group Ltd for the supply and support of MAIT 'hub' services in TVFCS to commence in 24/25 at a cost of no more than £25,000 for years 3 and 4 of the contract be agreed; and
- 2) the initial implementation costs will be recovered through TVFCS revenue recharges aligned to the stipulations of the Inter-Authority Agreement be noted.

72. CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO) provided an update on Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) Cultural Development on behalf of the Chief Fire Officer, Wayne Bowcock.

He stated the Chief Fire Officer had committed to bring an update to Management Committee following detailed analysis of recent prominent Fire and Rescue Service cultural reports including Independent Culture review of London Fire Brigade (LFB 2022), His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) spotlight Report and the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service Culture Review Report.

Mark Arkwell stated a gap analysis had been completed against the 140 recommendations combined within the above cultural reports, as well as the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) also examining the results of the recent staff survey.

He added there were several positive actions RBFRS have taken an evolving approach in the last two years towards workforce engagement in relation to culture, including, Active Bystander, SLT visibility at fire stations and keeping in touch calls and an independent information gathering exercise undertaken by Intersol Global.

The Service continues to work on its culture and due to the quantity of combined recommendations within the above cultural reports, the Chief Fire Officer has requested for a simplified single plan. It is proposed such plan would be brought to Members at the next scheduled Members / Officers workshop. This would give Members the opportunity to understand the data and gain assurance as well as contribute to steering our action plans. Further regular updates will be given to the Audit and Governance Committee as and when required. Timing is critical and the aim is to engage with Members and stakeholders by the summer.

In response to a question from the Chair, Mark Arkwell reassured Members the Service was comfortable with the progress being made thus far.

In response to a question from Councillor McKenzie-Boyle, Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL) gave the proposed dates of the Members / Officer workshop were in July and September 2024, and stated the full calendar

of committee meetings and workshops in 2024/25 will be agreed at the Fire Authority meeting on 22 April 2024.

Thanking Mark Arkwell for the update and referencing paragraph 3.10, the Vice-Chair queried the timeframe of getting this work done in time for the planned His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service (HMICFRS) inspection in the autumn. Mark Arkwell reported the Service continues to work hard to protect and improve its culture and acknowledged the gap analysis had identified areas that required further consideration and improvement. He stated the cultural journey did not have an end point and was confident the Chief Fire Officer will ensure a clear plan is provided and progress is made before the HMICFRS inspection.

In response to a question from Councillor Smith, Fayth Rowe (DSL) confirmed the workshop dates again, and stated the dates would be going to the Fire Authority for approval later this month.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

73. STATUTORY POWERS

Paul Bremble (Head of Corporate Services, HCS) reported the intention of this report was to help provide clarity for decision-makers involved in the planning and delivery of Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Priority 4. He stated public safety will remain the primary priority for the Service and reassured members the report was not recommending the Service cease attending the incidents outlined in Appendix A. In addition, he stated the contents of the report provided the Service with a greater understanding in this area and could be used as a tool to support Members when lobbying central government for appropriate funding required to resource incidents. It was also recognition of the role the Fire and Rescue Service in public safety.

Tim Readings (Group Manager, CRMP) reported there was a lack of clarity in the exercise of statutory powers and statutory duties in the Fire and Rescues Service and the purpose of Appendix A (Statutory Powers) was to support the Authority's understanding of the work carried out by the Service and what the Service is funded to deliver.

Tim Readings reiterated the purpose of the report was not to propose that the Service cease attending certain incident types and explained that attendance at many incident types is based on public expectation. RBFRS attend non-statutory incidents on a discretionary basis and 17-20% made up (excluding automatic fire alarms) the overall incident demand in 2019-2022. These incidents include incident types such as lift rescues, or a persons locked in a bathroom and had always been classed as emergencies.

The recent CRMP consultation returned strong feedback indicating the public were keen for the Service to review their duties. Feedback also confirmed a

desire amongst stakeholders for the Service to use their statutory powers to support incidents such as animal and water rescue, amongst others.

Tim Readings reported CRMP Priority 3 will look at the Service's response model and Appendix A (Statutory Powers) will provide a better understanding of these incident types and will assist in building a more robust response model.

The Chair reassured Members that the Service were not proposing to cease attending certain incident types. In response to a question from the Chair, Tim Readings explained the purpose of the report was to clarify the Service's Statutory duties and powers which will in turn assist in the development of CRMP Priority 3 (response model).

In answer to a question from Councillor Mike Smith, Tim Readings reported the incident types in Appendix A represent a mean average of 19% of demand. He explained it was important to understand the Service's demand level and acknowledge that these types of incidents were not our statutory duties. Tim Readings stated that the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework for England is clear that the exercise of statutory powers should not be to the detriment of response to statutory duties. He advised Appendix A was not trying to make cuts to these incident types but was trying to understand the level of demand. He explained that, in particular, animal rescue was of public concern during the CRMP consultation.

Mark Arkwell (DCFO) confirmed fire and rescue authorities must have due regard to the Fire and Rescue National Framework in carrying out their duties, therefore it was prudent to understand the incidents attended. He clarified the purpose of Appendix A was addressing how the Service will attend to these incident types and was not saying that the Service would not attend these incident types. For example, sending a flexi duty officer, instead of a fire engine, to a person locked in a room.

Katie Mills (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO) confirmed that the report needs to be read in context of the CRMP document. We have a public commitment to respond to incident types.

The Vice-Chair reminded Members that the Authority had made a commitment to look at this issue, as many incidences were non-fire related. For example, how the Service respond to someone that was stuck in a lift. He stated CRMP was a revolving process. Councillors Shepherd-Dubey, McKenzie-Boyle and Shah echoed the above comments.

The Chair advised it would be helpful if the report wording was amended and further context applied.

In answer to Councillor Smith's question on RBFRS collaborative work with partners in licensing, building regulation and housing, Katie Mills stated this work was reported through corporate measures and performance data which were presented to Audit and Governance Committee. She stated she was happy to

provide further information to Councillor Smith. In answer to a supplementary question from Councillor Smith, Tim Readings reported there was a statutory duty to be consulted on and respond to building regulations planning applications and that the Service cannot enforce changes to planning applications.

The Chair moved the recommendation and requested Officers acknowledge the comments made by Members. This was seconded by Councillor Shepherd-DuBey.

RESOLVED that the Statutory Powers report be noted with comments.

74. DISCIPLINE AND COMPLAINT EFFECTIVENESS ASSESSMENT

Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development, HHR&L&D) stated the report detailed an overview and comparison on discipline and complaint cases in 2021/22 & 2022/23 which had been streamlined for confidentiality purposes.

The Human Resources (HR) team reviewed cases to determine trends and also examined sickness absence and leavers to identify where improvements could be made to processes.

The report detail types of cases, appeals, outcome, gender, ethnicity, and length of service. There has been an increase in discrimination, bullying and harassment cases, and a significant increase in complaints, which could be related to recent London Fire Brigade (LFB) cultural review in late 2022.

The report will be updated to include this year's performance and will be going to the next Audit and Governance meeting for scrutiny.

In referring to paragraph 3.3.3. Councillor Smith queried whether the increase in disciplinary cases relating to discrimination was due to an increase in reporting. Becci Jefferies advised there could be several factors, for example education and training within the service and the general awareness when onboarding new staff. Mark Arkwell (DCFO) stated he saw the data as positive as it had demonstrated staff were more comfortable coming forward then they were in the past.

Councillor McKenzie-Boyle commented it was good to see 'SaySo' being used and Councillor Helliard-Symons stated she was impressed there were only 29 complaints in 2022/23 in comparison to the number of employees. The Chair added he was pleased that exit interviews were conducted by a member of the HR team and not the Line Manager. Becci Jefferies reported there had been some additional work to review the leaver process and understand information related to reasons for leaving and the exit interview process.

Councillor Griffith commented that due to anonymity 'SaySo' was not always helpful. Becci Jefferies agreed and said that reporting an issue is important, but it was difficult to investigate an anonymous complaint and get sufficient detail.

The Chair and Councillors Shepherd-Dubey and Smith made positive comments about the report.

RESOLVED that the details of the Discipline and Complaint Effectiveness Assessment report be noted.

75. FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

Councillor Smith requested for the data on the forward plan to show information after the end of year, instead of municipal year.

DSL

76. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 22 July 2024, 6.30pm at RBFRS Headquarters, Pincent's Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

77. 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 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.

78. PART II MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 6 FEBRUARY 2024

RESOLVED that the Part II Minutes of the meeting on 6 February 2024, be approved as a true record to be signed the Chair.

79. WHITLEY WOOD FIREHOUSE CONTRACT COST WAIVER

RESOLVED that the aggregated costs waiver for the operationally critical works carried out on the Whitley Wood Training Centre firehouse facility be approved.

80. RETROSPECTIVE REPORT ON A CONTRACT WAIVER FOR SAGE 1000 SUPPORT AND MAINTENANCE

Action

RESOLVED that the Retrospective Report on a Contract Waiver for Sage 1000 Support and Maintenance be noted.

(The meeting concluded at 19:49)