

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



Held on Thursday, 12th September, 2024 at 5.30 pm

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

- Members:**
(*present)
- * Councillor Greg Bello
 - * Councillor Dennis Benneyworth
 - * Councillor George Blundell
 - * Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle
 - * Councillor Jeff Brooks
 - * Councillor Tricia Brown
 - * Councillor Billy Drummond
 - * Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey
 - * Councillor Peter Frewer
 - * Councillor Harjinder Gahir
 - * Councillor Paul Gittings
 - * Councillor Wendy Griffith
 - * Councillor Owen Jeffery
 - * Councillor Mohammed Nazir
 - * Councillor Dave McElroy
 - * Councillor Zafar Satti
 - * Councillor Wayne Smith
 - * Councillor Helen Taylor
 - * Councillor Lou Timlin
 - * Councillor Simon Werner

- In Attendance:**
- Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
 - Wayne Bowcock (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)
 - Tom Brandon (Area Manager Response and Resilience, AM R & R)
 - Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)
 - Paul Bremble (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)
 - Paul Brooks (Head of Assets, HoA)
 - Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P)
 - Katie Mills (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)
 - Nikki Richards (Deputy Chief Executive, DChEx)
 - Christian Riley (Communications and Engagement Officer)
 - Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL)
 - Jo Watson (Communications and Engagement Lead)
 - Lukasz Wrona (Head of Business and Information Systems, HBIS)

29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence received from Councillors Wendy Griffith, Dave McElroy and Helen Taylor.

Councillors Tricia Brown and Tina McKenzie-Boyle attended the meeting virtually.

30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Action

There were no Declarations of Interest received 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.

31. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 09 JULY 2024

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2024, be approved as a true record, and signed by the Chair.

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

There were no petitions from the Public under Standing Orders 19 and 25.

33. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

Welcome New Members

On behalf of the Fire Authority, the Chair welcomed Councillor George Blundell from Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, and Councillors Mohammed Nazir and Harjinder Gahir from Slough Borough Council.

Councillor George Blundell had been appointed to replace Joshua Reynolds MP as he has stepped down from the Fire Authority.

The Chair also informed Members that Councillor Neel Rana from Slough Borough Council who had also stepped down from the Fire Authority and wished him all the best in future endeavours.

Incident in Hungerford

On Friday, 16 August, our crews responded to a devastating fire at a house on Priory Avenue, Hungerford.

A large response was sent to the scene, including two crews from Newbury Fire Station, the Aerial Ladder Platform and crews from Dorset and Wiltshire and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Firefighters found a fire at a two-storey semi-detached house, with the fire on the first floor. One man was located and rescued from the building, however, he sadly passed away shortly afterwards, as a result of his injuries.

On behalf of the Fire Authority, the Chair gave his deepest condolences to the man's friends and family at this extremely difficult time.

Following the incident, our Prevention teams have been out in Hungerford offering Safe and Well Visits, which provide valuable safety advice to residents. The local Fire Authority Member, Councillor Benneyworth has also helped to arrange for us to give a presentation to Hungerford Town Council on 4 November, to help us promote Safe and Well Visits to the wider community.

Slough Apartment Block Incident

In the early hours of 22 August, our crews responded to a fire at MOSAIC apartments in central Slough.

Many of you will be aware that this involved a high rise with cladding and there has been some media interest around it, so I felt it would be useful to share an update.

On the night of the incident, our crews arrived in under 5 minutes of the first call and made the swift decision to evacuate all the residents to ensure their safety. Due to this rapid and decisive action and working in conjunction with Thames Valley Fire Control to provide advice to residents, we evacuated nearly 300 residents with no casualties reported. The fire was effectively contained which prevented it from spreading more significantly. At the height of the incident 12 fire appliances, the Aerial Ladder Platform and the Incident Command Unit were in attendance.

The fire investigation is underway and will examine the way the fire developed and to what extent the cladding contributed to the spread of the fire. From initial findings, we do not believe that the fire was started deliberately. It is a complex investigation, which we estimate may take several weeks to complete.

As a Service, our teams continue to robustly engage with the person responsible for the building to ensure appropriate fire safety measures are in place for those remaining in their homes. This has included supporting them to implement additional fire safety measures, such as providing extra staff to continually patrol the building and a change in evacuation strategy to simultaneous evacuation. These additional fire safety measures will remain in place until remediation works are complete.

Additionally, our teams have been out offering fire safety advice to those who remain in their homes and we will return again once the people directly affected by the fire have returned home.

We are continuing to work with Slough Borough Council to support the safe return of residents to their property.

As with all incidents, it remains a priority to ensure that we continue to identify appropriate learning and implement this across the Service. To support this, we have been carrying out an assurance exercise internally. There are also debriefs

planned, including our internal operational one and a multi-agency debrief through the Local Resilience Forum.

The safety of residents remains of paramount importance to us. We will continue to keep Members updated in relation to this incident.

Grenfell Phase 2 Report

The Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2 Report was published on Wednesday, 4 September 2024.

The 72 people who lost their lives in the Grenfell Tower Fire are at the forefront of our minds and our thoughts are with their families and loved ones, and all those who continue to be affected by this tragedy.

As a Service, we will need to take time to consider and understand the report in full, and each of the recommendations, to give them our full consideration and share an update as appropriate in due course.

English Veterans' Awards

We delighted and humbled to have been shortlisted as a finalist in the English Veterans' Awards, in the 'Employer of the Year' category.

This is a fantastic recognition of our efforts to create established pathways for transition from the Armed Forces to the fire and rescue service.

We are proud to support those who serve, and who have served, and their families.

The winner will be announced at an awards ceremony, taking place at De Vere, Wokefield Estate near Reading on 23 October.

Ultra Marathon Challenge for the Fire Fighters Charity

Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, has recently completed a gruelling challenge to raise money for The Fire Fighters Charity.

He has ran three ultra marathons – totalling more than 250 kilometres, which he completed earlier this year.

An ultra marathon is any run longer than a typical marathon, but in Mark's case he ran 58km, 106km and 115km in three different races. Two of Mark's runs were on the Serpent Trail in West Sussex and the other was up in the Scottish-highlands.

To date, more than £1,300 has been raised for the charity and there is still time to donate.

For those of you not familiar with the Fire Fighters Charity, it provides a fantastic range of services to support the fire and rescue service community.

I am sure all Members will congratulate Mark on a fantastic achievement, and we will share a link to Mark's fundraising page should you wish to donate.

Effective Business Continuity Arrangements Implemented in TVFCS

Last night, Thames Valley Fire Control Service experienced issues with receiving 999 emergency calls. This was due to a national outage on one of BT's systems, which affected a number of emergency services.

In light of this, the team worked incredibly quickly and effectively to implement our business continuity arrangements, whilst 999 calls were routed to Staffordshire and West Midlands Fire Control in line with our contingency arrangements.

Thanks to the quick and decisive action taken, business as usual resumed in TVFCS within 25 minutes of the initial reported issue.

Thank you to Red Watch for remaining so calm under pressure, to Station Manager Laura Clark and Group Manager Simon Harris for their quick response and Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Mark Arkwell for his prompt support provided.

This highlighted how effectively our arrangements were put in place to continue to provide a seamless 999 service to our communities across the Thames Valley despite the challenges faced.

34. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

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

35. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS UNDER STANDING ORDER 30

There were no questions from Members under Standing Order 30.

36. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDER 44

There were no notices of Motion under Standing Order 44.

37. RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEES

There were no recommendations of Committees.

38. APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEES, LEAD MEMBER VACANCY, AND BUDGET WORKING PARTY

In outlining the report was to appointment new Members onto Committees, the Chair moved recommendations 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.6 – 2.9 be voted upon en bloc. This was seconded by Councillor Billy Drummond.

The Chair proposed Councillor George Blundell (recommendation 2.4) be appointed onto Budget Working Party. This was seconded by Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey.

Councillor Owen Jeffery proposed the Chair, Councillor Jeff Brooks be appointed as Finance Lead Member (recommendation 2.5). This was seconded by Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey. The Chair informed Members they were saving the Fire Authority one additional special responsibility allowance by appointing him as Finance Lead Member.

On being put to the vote, it was unanimously **RESOLVED** that:

- 1) The nominations received from the Group Leaders be appointed onto the Audit and Governance Committee and Management Committee;
- 2) The ungrouped Member Councillor Dave McElroy (Green) be appointed onto the Management Committee;
- 3) The one ungrouped Member Councillor Mohammed Nazir (Independent) be appointed onto the Audit and Governance Committee;
- 4) Councillor George Blundell (Liberal Democrat member) be appointed onto the Budget Working Party to replace Joshua Reynolds MP;
- 5) Councillor Jeff Brooks be appointed as Finance Lead Member to replace Joshua Reynolds MP;
- 6) It be approved Councillors Harjinder Gahir and Mohammed Nazir basic allowance is backdated from 1 August 2024.
- 7) It be approved Councillor George Blundell's basic allowance is backdated from 1 September 2024.
- 8) It be noted Councillor Neel Rana stepped down from the Authority and his membership ended on 31 July 2024;
- 9) It be noted Joshua Reynolds MP stepped down from the Authority and his membership ended on 31 August 2024.

Audit and Governance Committee (9 seats)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cllr Owen Jeffery (LD) 2. Cllr Lou Timlin (LD) 3. Cllr Billy Drummond (LD) 4. Cllr Tricia Brown (Lab) 5. Cllr Greg Bello (Lab) 6. Cllr Harjinder Gahir (Lab) 7. Cllr Dennis Benneyworth (Con) 8. Cllr Zafar Satti (Con) 9. Cllr Mohammed Nazir (Independent)
Management Committee (11 seats)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cllr Jeff Brooks (Lib Dem) 2. Cllr George Blundell (Lib Dem) 3. Cllr Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey (Lib Dem) 4. Cllr Simon Werner (Lib Dem) 5. Cllr Paul Gittings (Lab) 6. Cllr Wendy Griffith (Lab) 7. Cllr Peter Frewer (Lab) 8. Cllr McKenzie-Boyle (Con) 9. Cllr Wayne Smith (Con) 10. Cllr Helen Taylor (Independent) 11. Cllr Dave McElroy (Green)

39. COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN (CRMP) PRIORITY 6 AND OPERATIONAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICY

Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO), presented the report and firstly apologised to Members for receiving the '*To follow*' item late. He went on to provide an overview of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Priority 6 (P6) via a presentation.

The Chair reported Fire Authority Members recently received communication from the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) regarding the implementation of P6, and explained the presentation was to ensure all Members were informed as 10 new Members had been appointed since the Fire Authority approved CRMP in April 2023. He stated P6 was due to be implemented in April 2024 but had been delayed twice in response to concerns raised by the FBU. The Fire Liaison Group (FLG), meeting between Fire Authority Group Leaders, FBU and Directors) met regularly with the last meeting held as recent as Tuesday 10

September 2024. The Chair stated this was an opportunity for Members to ask questions.

In discussing the rationale for implementing P6, Mark Arkwell, DCFO listed the following:

- It would align **resource to evidence-based risk** in meeting the RBFA's duties and public commitments
- It would improve **resilience and reliability** of base line response model (14 fire engines) that is not over reliant on voluntary use of over time.
- It would support **investment** into the longer-term stability and sustainability of responses resource. E.g. 10 additional firefighter roles
- It would protect **speed of response** (<0.6% impact on Response Standard)
- It would improve **recognition and value** of the on-call system
- It would safeguard the **welfare of staff**, whilst recognising the importance of PAOT

He stated Pre-arranged Overtime (PAOT) had increased to £1.4m and P6 is anticipated to reduce the amount spent on pre-arranged overtime by circa £150,000 in the revenue budget, which would be immediately reinvested into 10 additional firefighter posts.

Mark Arkwell, DCFO discussed the cultural and health (mental health and physical health) benefits on whole-time colleagues in terms of additional working hours. He highlighted the policy was reviewed and changed to the following:

*'We will **not** pay pre-arranged overtime to crew above 13 wholetime appliances on occasions when the following applies:*

- **We have 14 fire engines or more in Berkshire (Minimum of 1 on-call)**
- *It on a night shift when average incident rates per hour are lower*
- **There is no known or foreseeable increase in risk profiles – as determined by local managers**

*We have revised our degradation plans to ensure that **no wholetime fire station should be left without at least one fire engine at night, as a result of P6.***

The Response Standard impact based on a 5-year average was 75.3%.

The Vice-Chair stated he felt Mark Arkwell had addressed the points made from the email Members received from the FBU. He stated that there were budget pressures and felt the Authority's decision around P6 was around the effective use of resources. In referring to paragraph 3.33 of the report, he stated local managers were enabled to pay PAOT if they believed the risk profile in Berkshire to be at a heightened state. The Vice-Chair also proposed an amendment to the recommendation for an update report be brought back to the Authority in three months.

The Chair echoed the proposal for a report to be brought back to either Management Committee or Fire Authority in the New Year. He also stated Directors will be looking at the data daily following the implementation of this policy.

Councillor Lou Timlin thanked Mark Arkwell for the presentation and stated that she understood the Authority must make difficult decisions. In response to her question on whether the 0.6% impact include 10 additional Firefighters, Mark Arkwell replied it was based on predicted modelling if the Fire appliance came off the run.

The Chair proposed the amended recommendation, which was seconded by the Vice-Chair.

On being put to the vote, it was unanimously **RESOLVED** that the implementation of Priority 6 through amendments to the Operational Resource Management Policy be noted, and it be agreed that an update of the policy be brought back to Management Committee or Fire Authority in the New Year.

40. FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted and an update on CRMP 6 be included to a Management Committee or Fire Authority in three months.

DSL

41. MINUTES OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

RESOLVED that it be noted the Minutes of recent meetings were published on RBFRS website.

42. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Wednesday 13 November 2024, 6.30pm at RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

(The meeting concluded at 18:37)