

<b>Title of Report:</b>	<b>Fire Service</b>
<b>Report to be considered by:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	2 July 2013

**Purpose of Report:** To inform the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission of the processes in place to ensure that adequate fire service coverage is provided within the West Berkshire area.

**Recommended Action:** To note the report and carry out scrutiny on the item.

<b>Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Chairman</b>	
<b>Name &amp; Telephone No.:</b>	Councillor Brian Bedwell – Tel (0118) 942 0196
<b>E-mail Address:</b>	bbedwell@westberks.gov.uk

<b>Contact Officer Details</b>	
<b>Name:</b>	Elaine Walker
<b>Job Title:</b>	Principal Policy Officer
<b>Tel. No.:</b>	01635 519441
<b>E-mail Address:</b>	ewalker@westberks.gov.uk

# Executive Report

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 On 26 February 2013 the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission resolved to undertake a review of the approach taken by the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service to provide appropriate cover to the West Berkshire area.

## 2. Minutes of the meeting of 26 February 2013

- 2.1 The minutes of the OSMC meeting of 26 February 2013 record that:

### **Proposed review - Fire Service Response Times**

*(Councillors Webster, Brooks and Holtby declared a personal interest in Agenda item 12 by virtue of the fact that they were appointed to the Fire Authority by the Council. As their interest was personal and not prejudicial they determined to take part in the debate and vote on the matter).*

The Commission received a report proposing a review of the Fire Service following local news reports that 40% of fires were not being attended within target times but that measures had been put in place to address this.

Councillor Brooks advised the Commission that he had been involved with the Fire Authority and Fire Service since 1994, and stated that targets were being met in 75% of cases. Councillor Brooks suggested that the scope of the review be widened to include consideration of where fire stations were situated, particularly in light of current discussions regarding a new fire station at Theale. Councillor Brooks suggested that a more appropriate line of questioning would be to ask the Fire Service how they intended to ensure cover for West Berkshire. Councillor Brooks further suggested that the Commission should not develop recommendations for the Fire Service as this implied a level of knowledge that might be lacking, instead, constructive comment should result from the review.

Councillor Webster suggested that it would be informative to invite the Deputy Chief Fire Officer to provide a strategic overview for the Berkshire area, and also link Officers from local fire stations to provide an insight to the West Berkshire area in particular. Councillor Brooks believed this might prove counter productive, but assured the Commission that in their roles as members of the Fire Authority, they would ensure the correct people attended.

Councillor Rendel expressed his view that appliances might not be deployed appropriately in all cases, and this might have an impact on whether response targets could be met.

Councillor Vickers asked whether those members of the Commission who were also members of the Fire Authority might be considered to have a conflict of interest in respect of this review, and asked for clarification.

Councillor Franks requested that sufficient information be made available prior to the review to ensure that lines of questioning were appropriate and focussed, for example mapping information and the number of retained fire fighters.

The Commission agreed that the review be undertaken at a full Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission meeting, and agreed to widen the scope of the review as proposed by Councillor Brooks.

The Commission discussed the merits of holding the review meeting at a fire station, but it was decided not to do so, as this might distract from the purpose of the review.

RESOLVED that:

- David Lowe clarify whether members of the Commission who were also members of the Fire Authority might be considered to have a conflict of interest in respect of this review;
- The terms of reference for the review be amended to encompass how the Fire Service intended to ensure cover for West Berkshire.

### **3. Terms of Reference for the review**

3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission will therefore undertake a full in-meeting review to:

- (1) Establish the reasons why the target for attending dwelling fires was not being met;
- (2) Ascertain whether the current fire service provision is sufficient to give appropriate coverage across the West Berkshire area, with particular consideration for the rural nature of the district;
- (3) Consider the effect of the forthcoming restructure of the fire service in West Berkshire on the ability to provide coverage across the area;
- (4) Suggest recommendations for improvement as appropriate.

3.2 A representative from the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service will be present to provide the Commission with relevant information.

### **4. Recommendation**

4.1 It is recommended that Members of the Commission carry out scrutiny of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service's performance and coverage in West Berkshire.

### **Appendices**

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There are no appendices to this report.

### **Consultees**

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**Local Stakeholders:** None

**Officers Consulted:** None

**Trade Union:** N/A