

# ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2018/19

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority



Due to the impact of Covid-19, it has not been possible to formally present the Statement of Assurance 2018/19 to a meeting of the Fire Authority for final approval. In the interim, the draft Annual Statement of Assurance 2018/19 has been approved by the Chairman of the Fire Authority and Chairman of Audit and Governance Committee and will be presented to the Fire Authority at its next meeting for formal consideration.



# CONTENTS

Find Royal Berkshire on Facebook @RBFRSOfficial, on Twitter @RoyalBerksFire, on LinkedIn Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service, or on our website www.rbfs.co.uk

PURPOSE	3	APPENDIX B - FINANCE	8
STRUCTURE	3	APPENDIX C - GOVERNANCE	9
SUMMARY JUDGEMENTS	5	APPENDIX D - OPERATIONS	11
SIGNATURES	6	APPENDIX E – NATIONAL FRAMEWORK	16
APPENDIX A – DEFINITIONS OF OVERALL JUDGEMENT	7		

DRAFT



## Statement of Assurance 2018/19

### 1. Purpose

The purpose of this Statement of Assurance is for Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) to formally confirm the adequacy of arrangements for the effective management of financial, governance and operational matters, as well as overall adherence to the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#), have been met.

### 2. Structure

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England states that the annual Statement of Assurance should:

*“...outline the way in which the authority and its fire and rescue service has had regard – in the period covered by the document – to this National Framework, the Integrated Risk Management Plan and to any strategic plan prepared by the authority for that period. The authority must also provide assurance to their community and to government on financial, governance and operational matters”*

This Statement of Assurance is structured such that headline judgements are made about the adequacy of arrangements associated with financial, governance and operational matters as outlined in the Department for Communities and Local Government document [‘Guidance on statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England’](#). In addition to which, a judgement is made on adherence to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. These judgements confirm whether necessary standards are being Fully, Substantially, or Partially Met.

Definitions of the terms ‘Fully’, ‘Substantially’ and ‘Partially’ can be found in **Appendix A**.

The judgements are then supported by information contained in attached Appendices. Where appropriate the appendices also include details of steps that have been, or will be, taken to address identified areas for improvement.

A number of supporting documents are hyperlinked or referenced throughout this document.

In making these judgements RBFA has instructed independent auditors to review both Financial and Governance matters and details of their feedback can be found in **Appendices B & C** respectively.

For Operational matters and adherence to the National Framework, RBFA has used an internal audit to make an informed judgement. Details of the internal audit and also a link to the Her Majesty's Inspection of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) that took place in RBFRS in 2018/19, can be found in **Appendices D & E.**

Additional assurance mechanisms are in place by way of periodic external audit, which is referenced in **Appendix F.**

DRAFT



## 3. Summary Judgements

### a. Financial Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2018/19 financial year, requirements associated with the appropriate management of financial matters were **fully met**.

Evidence to support this judgement is set out in **Appendix B**.

### 3.2 Governance Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2018/19 financial year, requirements associated with appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance were **fully met**.

Evidence to support this judgement, information on identified areas for improvement and details of steps taken to address them are set out in **Appendix C**.

### 3.3 Operational Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2018/19 financial year, requirements associated with operational matters were **fully met**.

Evidence to support this judgement, information on identified areas for improvement and details of steps taken to address them are set out in **Appendix D**.

### 3.4 National Framework Requirements

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2018/19 financial year, the requirements associated with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been **fully met**.

Evidence to support this judgement, are set out in **Appendix E**.

### 3.5 Assurance

RBFA gets assurance on its business through a programme of audit. Information on the 2018/19 audits are set out in **Appendix F**.

#### 4. Signatures



**Councillor Colin Dudley**

**Chairman – Royal Berkshire Fire Authority**



**Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle**

**Chairman – Audit and Governance Committee**

DRAFT



## Appendix A – Definitions of Overall Judgement

<b>Fully</b>	The requirements of applicable legislation and guidance are being consistently met.
<b>Substantially</b>	The requirements of applicable legislation and guidance are mostly being met. Where legislation and guidance are not being met there is minimal risk to the Fire Authority discharging associated duties and powers for the provision of a fire and rescue service.
<b>Partially</b>	The requirements of applicable legislation and guidelines are being inconsistently applied exposing the Fire Authority to considerable risk in discharging the necessary duties and powers associated with the provision of a fire and rescue service.

DRAFT



## Appendix B - Finance

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2018/19 financial year, requirements associated with the appropriate management of financial matters were **fully met**.

The 'Guidance on Statements of Assurance for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England' states that in order to provide assurance about the adequacy of arrangements associated with financial matters:

*Fire and rescue authorities are responsible for ensuring that their business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.*

*It is a statutory requirement under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 for authorities to publish the financial results of their activities for the year.*

*This 'Statement of Accounts', shows the annual costs of providing the service and is determined by a Code of Practice which aims to give a "true and fair" view of the financial position and transactions of the authority. The authority is responsible for approval of the statement of accounts prior to publication.*

*The statement of assurance may briefly set out what assessment procedures are in place with regard to the authorities' statements of account.*

### **Evidence in Support of Judgement**

RBFA has contracted an external auditor to audit the [Statement of Accounts](#). The auditor's letter issued by the auditor in relation to these accounts confirms their assurance opinion on the financial matters of the Authority.

The Annual Audit Letter for 2017/18 identified no financial improvements for 2018/19.

### **Areas for Future Improvement**

[The Annual Audit Letter for 2018/19](#) identified no financial improvements for 2019/20.



## Appendix C - Governance

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2018/19 financial year, requirements associated with appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance were **fully met**.

The [‘Guidance on statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England’](#) states that:

*The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011, also requires authorities to prepare an annual governance statement in support of this statement of accounts. This governance statement is an expression of the measures taken by the authority to ensure appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance. The statement of assurance may set out what work authorities have undertaken to review the effectiveness of their governance framework, including the system of internal control.*

*Greater transparency is a key element of the Framework and is at the heart of the Government’s commitment to enable the public to hold their authorities to account for the way they spend public money. In preparing the statement of assurance, fire and rescue authorities may consider the principles of transparency set out in the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency.*

### **Evidence in Support of Judgement**

RBFA has contracted an external auditor to audit the governance arrangements of the authority. The authority undertakes an annual assessment of the governance arrangements using the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*. The External Auditor also undertakes their assessment of compliance against these standards.

The [Annual Governance Statement 2018/19](#) confirms assurance in the governance arrangements.

The auditor’s opinion for the governance arrangements for 2018/19 is as follows

*“The organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control”*

**Review of Governance Improvements stated in the 2017/18 Statement of Assurance:**

There were five areas highlighted for improvement by the Auditors in 2017. In all cases these were assessed as low priorities

Previous Identified Governance Improvement	RBFA Action Taken
1. A defined remit to be put in place highlighting the purpose of the Member Development Task and Finish Group	Terms of Reference in agreed for Member Development Task and Finish Group.
2. Risk Register template to be updated to enable treatment assurance levels to be included in final register	Template updated.
3. All risk owners to be reminded of the need to regularly assess the risk treatments and owners, but in particular during periods of known staff changes.	Regular reminders scheduled.
4. Risk database to be updated to include a quick link to the Risk Management Database Quick Guide.	Quick link included in the risk database.
5. New Corporate Risk reporting format for the Audit and Governance Committee to ensure key information is captured to evidence direction of travel	Corporate Risk reporting format in place and evidencing direction of travel.

**Areas for Future Improvement:**

There were no areas highlighted for future improvement by the Auditors in 2018.

## Appendix D - Operations

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2018/19 financial year, requirements associated with operational matters were **fully met**.

The 'Guidance on Statements of Assurance for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England' outlines the following matters to be incorporated within the statement of assurance related to operational arrangements:

- A. Fire and rescue authorities already consult on, and publish, their integrated risk management plans, which set out local strategies including cross-border, multi-authority and national arrangements where appropriate. The statement of assurance should include details of consultation on these plans, and confirm that appropriate information was provided to enable active and informed participation.*
- B. The statement of assurance may also indicate where fire and rescue authorities have entered into agreements and/or mutual aid arrangements with other relevant bodies. The level of detail included will be a matter for each individual fire and rescue authority and may be linked to their integrated risk management plan.*
- C. It is not the aim of statements of assurance to set out the operational procedures for fire and rescue authorities. However, statements of assurance are the appropriate vehicle with regard to specific events, which raise issues of operational competence or delivery. For example, when advice is received under health and safety or other legislation, it is appropriate for the fire and rescue authority to use the statement of assurance as a means to inform their communities that these matters have been considered and, where appropriate, acted on.*

## Areas to support Judgement

### A. Integrated Risk Management Plan

The [Corporate Plan 2015-2019](#) included our Integrated Risk Management Plan. The Authority had a statutory duty under the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework, to produce a plan to identify and assess all foreseeable fire related risks at a county, regional and national level.

The plan brought together our three strands of service delivery; prevention, protection and response. It includes the community safety strategies, the approach taken towards enforcement of fire safety legislation and our plans to ensure the right resources are in the place at the right time to respond to any emergency.

The public and any other stakeholder must be consulted on the content of the plan and are consulted again if we plan to change the service we currently deliver. The consultation must be undertaken in accordance with the legal principles of consultation and current government guidance.

The responses received to any consultations are considered by the Fire Authority before any decision is made. Further information on consultations is available on our website.

The Local Resilience Forum was set up under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and established a framework for emergency planning and response ranging from local to national level. The Thames Valley LRF identity is achieved using local intelligence, historical incident data and information is available from the Local Resilience Forum's [community risk register](#).

### B. Mutual Aid Agreements

RBFA has mutual aid agreements with each of the neighbouring fire and rescue services whereby:

- In the event of a significant emergency, RBFA can request additional resources from neighbouring fire authorities.
- Should the address of an emergency be closer to a fire engine from a neighbouring fire authority, a request will be made for that fire engine to attend the incident.
- Specialist equipment and trained personnel can also be requested from other fire and rescue services to attend significant emergencies in Berkshire.

- In the event of a national emergency elsewhere in the country, RBFA has the following specialist resources that can be deployed to assist those in need:
- An incident response unit, to support a large scale hazardous substance incident
- A high volume pump, to support a large scale flooding incident
- A water rescue unit, to support rescues from large scale flooding incidents

### **C. Specific Events**

RBFA actively monitors how the service is delivered to the community of Berkshire through a variety of systems including:

- Regular performance reports
- Structured debriefs for large scale or unusual emergencies/events
- Feedback from staff to identify improvements on how the service can be delivered.
- Attendance at significant emergency incidents by managers to monitor the performance of the fire fighters.

RBFA ensures that all relevant matters arising from the above areas are considered and where appropriate changes are made to improve the way the community is served throughout Berkshire.

### **Review of Operational Improvements stated in the 2017/18 Statement of Assurance**

As outlined in the Statement of Assurance 2017/18, we remained committed to implementing the outcomes of the Service Redesign Consultation in 2018/19. In particular, this saw a significant focus on the delivery of our innovative Remotely Managed Stations and Flexible Duty Officer project, which aimed to:

- » Transfer additional resources and investment into our front line station delivery model.
- » Achieve a resilient and highly skilled operational command model.
- » Secure an efficient and effective middle management tier.

- » Provide increased resilience of the organisation across the middle manager tier.
- » Achieve the already agreed IRMP savings necessary to balance the budget.
- » Provide greater flexibility for promotion, overcoming some existing barriers.

In 2018/19, we focused on the delivery of phase one of this project, which focused on changes at a station level by creating a resilient and highly skilled operational command model, recruiting 24 new watch-based Station Managers who were trained in Level 2 Incident Command.

The Remotely Management Stations and Flexible Duty Officer Project, was an important step in embedding our Service Delivery Hub Model, which was introduced to ensure we target risk and allocate resources as efficiently and effectively as possible at a local level. This was underpinned by the publication of our [2018/19 Local Safety Plans](#).

In 2018/19, we were inspected for the first time by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). Through the inspection process, we were able to gain external assurance in relation to the effectiveness and efficiency of our operational response. Whilst the results of the inspection were not published until the summer of 2019/20, it should be noted that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Services was judged as 'good' across the three main pillars of 'Effectiveness', 'Efficiency' and 'People'.

Our [Annual Report 2018/19](#) also provides a summary of our activities during this period and progress made against our Strategic Commitments, Annual Objectives and Corporate Measures.

Mindful that the current Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan ran until 2019, in 2018, we undertook a consultation on its successor. Following the consultation, we published our [Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan 2019-2023](#).

### **Areas for Future Improvement**

Our Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan 2019-2023, sets out our strategic direction over the next four year period with the [Annual Plan 2019/20](#) setting out specific areas of focus in the next year. In relation to operational activity in particular, the Integrated Risk Management Plan is supported by five priority projects with activities identified to mitigate local risk in 2019/20.

Following the inspection of the Service in 2018/19, an action plan has been developed to progress any recommended areas of improvement. The action plan was implemented by officers and is overseen by the Audit and Governance Committee through the quarterly performance reporting.

DRAFT



## Appendix E - National Framework

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2018/19 financial year, the requirements associated with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been **fully met**.

To provide an assessment of how well RBFRS meets the national aims, RBFRS officers conducted a self-assessment relating to the National Framework requirements. An internal moderation exercise involving the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer and the Director of Support Services was undertaken to scrutinise the assessment judgements. The outcome was that RBFRS fully met the Framework requirements for 2018/19.

This outcome is further supported by the independent inspection by HMICFRS.

## Appendix F - Other Assurance Processes

To ensure that RBFA and RBFRS are delivering an efficient, effective and economic service across all its areas of operation additional assurance has been provided in 2018/19 through the following processes:

### Contracted Internal Audit

RBFA have contracted out internal audit to RSM, an external company. Apart from auditing aspects of the Fire Authority required by legislation they are also instructed, as part of an audit plan agreed with the Audit & Governance Committee, to audit various other aspects of the Service.

In 18/19 the following audits were completed:

- Fleet disposal in the last 12 months
- Recruitment practices for all temporary and permanent appointments in the last 18 months
- Risk and Governance Management
- GDPR compliance
- Key financial controls
- Payroll Provider (follow up review)
- VAT and PAYE
- Capital Investment Strategy
- Facilities



- Firefighter Pension Administration

RSM's annual internal audit opinion for 2018/19 is as follows:

*“The organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control”*

DRAFT

