

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



Held on Thursday, 30th July 2020, at 6.30 pm

This meeting was held as a remote meeting.

- Members:**
(*present)
- * Councillor Christine Bateson
 - * Councillor Dennis Benneyworth
 - * Councillor Jane Stanford-Beale
 - * Councillor Colin Dudley
 - * Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons
 - * Councillor Christine Hulme
 - * Councillor Tony Linden
 - * Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle
 - * Councillor Harjinder Minhas
 - * Councillor Garth Simpson
 - * Councillor Simon Werner

- In Attendance:** Mark Arkwell (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)
Paul Binyon (Area Manager Response and Resilience, AM R&R)
Andrew Brittain (External Auditor, Ernst Young)
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)
Alex Brown (Head of Capital Projects and Estates, HCP&E)
Doug Buchanan (Area Manager Prevention and Protection, AM P&P)
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P)
Becca Chapman (Data and Performance Analysis Manager)
Steve Foye (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
Dan Harris (Internal Auditor, RSM)
Allison Kennett (External Auditor, Ernst Young)
Katie Mills (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)
James Pinchin (Business Support Officer, BSO)
Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL)
Nikki Richards (Director of Support Services, DSS)
Hannah Sheehan (Democratic Support Assistant, DSA)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE 2020/21 MUNICIPAL YEAR

RESOLVED that Councillor McKenzie-Boyle be elected Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR THE 2020/21 MUNICIPAL YEAR

Action

RESOLVED that Councillor Linden be elected Vice-Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies of absence received.

Councillor Colin Dudley was in attendance as an observer and Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons was in attendance to introduce Item 11 (Member Development 2019/20 Annual Report and Action Plan) as Organisational Development Member Champion.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest from Councillors relating to items to be considered at the meeting, in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct, and any from Officers.

5. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 JANUARY 2020

Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P) proposed the following amendment to section 18 of the minutes; *Alison Kennett (EY) explained EY was waiting to receive figures from Hymans and an IAS19 pension letter to be received from Deloitte. On receipt of the figures and upon EY being satisfied, the financial accounts would be updated. HF&P stated that the accounts would not be signed off until an audit opinion from EY had been received.*

Councillors Dennis Benneyworth and Harjinder Minhas abstained.

RESOLVED that minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2020, following the proposed amendment being made be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

6. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTERS PROPERLY REFERRED TO THIS COMMITTEE FOR DECISION

There were none received.

7. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT 2019/20 ANNUAL REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

The Chairman announced that it was agreed that agenda item 11 be taken as the next item in the agenda.

Councillor Helliar-Symons introduced the report as Organisational Development Member Champion and began by praising the ongoing member development work and stated the importance of the work in keeping Members up to date, in order to work with the Service in the best way. Councillor Helliar-Symons also stated that the new induction programme was well received by Members and encouraged Members who didn't attend 1:1s this year, to do so. Councillor Helliar-Symons also highlighted the *Getting to Know RBFRS* day as a great success, the Safety at Home course very useful and informative and the Control Visits extremely interesting.

Katie Mills explained, as stated in 3.18 of the report, that member development is likely to be impacted by COVID-19 restrictions and courses may need to be delivered remotely, but that the Service is committed to doing this in the most creative way possible.

RESOLVED that:

- The Member Development Annual Report be noted; and
- The 2020-23 Member Development Action Plan be noted.

8. INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

Conor Byrne (HF&P) introduced the report stating that the internal audit contained three reports; 2019/20 Progress Report, 2019/20 Annual Report and 2020/21 Internal Audit Plan.

Dan Harris (RSM) highlighted the Progress Report on pages 15 and 17, which showed the audit opinion of substantial assurance of Key Financial Controls and that 32 of the 34 requirements from the five Cyber Essential Control themes had been established. Overall 2019/20 was a positive audit and appendix A list the 6 substantial opinions that were given.

Dan Harris highlighted the Annual Report on pages 37 and 38 gave the audit opinion for the last financial year on Risk Management and Governance. The opinion was positive and was the highest of the four options that can be provided, shown on page 44. Dan Harris then explained that RBFRS was in the top quartile of Fire Authorities that RSM work with. The remainder of the Annual Report showed the factors and findings that inform opinions. To finish, Dan Harris confirmed that RSM had no conflicts of interest and continue to meet the public sector internal audit conditions.

RESOLVED that:

- The 2019/20 Annual Report as well as the findings from the Key Financial Controls audit and the Cyber Essentials audit be noted.
- The 2020/21 Internal Audit Plan be agreed.

9. EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

Conor Byrne (HF&P) introduced the report and stated that the 2019/20 audit commenced 27 July and will be taken to Audit and Governance Committee at the end of September. He then stated that the scale fee for this years' audit was £26,180 which was set by the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA). However EY's position was that the scale fee was insufficient to allow them to audit Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) accounts. EY believe the fee should increase from £26,180 to £49,907 based on different factors and complexities. Officers do not believe this increase is justified, therefore the recommendation in the report is that the Audit and Governance Committee Chairman write to EY to oppose their proposed fee increase.

Andrew Brittain (EY) highlighted the key risks on pages 75 and 76. Since last years' delay in reporting, EY have been in contact with Deloitte and have been assured there will be no delay this year.

Allison Kennett (EY) stated that the audit had begun this week, it was having to be done remotely while being as efficient as possible. EY were awaiting the draft Statement of Accounts which were imminent and communication will be key in getting the audit finished.

RESOLVED that:

- The update from the External Auditor be noted.
- The Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee write to EY on behalf of the Committee to explain why the Authority opposes the proposed fee increase be agreed.

10. MEMBERS HANDBOOK AND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO) introduced the report and stated that it was seeking the Committees' approval of the constitution amendments set out in recommendations 2.2 to 2.5.

There were two low priority recommendations from the recent audit that suggested a management action to insert the appointment of Chairman and Vice-Chairman at the first meeting of the year and to include a review process in the documents. Paragraph 3.8 highlight changes to the handbook, he reported Financial and Contract Regulations will be brought to the Committee later this year.

He drew Members attention to the typo in paragraph 3.6.4, in relation to Appendix E as it should say '*include a hyperlink*'. Section 2.5 highlight a recent decision by Management Committee in the leadership succession to appoint a Chief Fire Officer or Chief Executive.

RESOLVED that:

- The report be noted.
- It be recommended the Fire Authority agree the proposed amendments to sections of the Members Handbook listed in the report from Appendix A – F;
- It be recommended the Fire Authority agree to include the Complaints Procedure as part of the Handbook;
- It be recommended the Fire Authority agree the removal of Access to information document from the Handbook, due to Members Access to documents are covered in the Standing Orders (Appendix D), and
- It be recommended that the Fire Authority agree all references to ‘Chief Fire Officer’ in its constitutional documents are changed to ‘Chief Fire Officer or Chief Executive’.

11. ANNUAL REPORT ON GOVERNANCE

The Chairman introduced the report and explained that it was scheduled for March, however the meeting was cancelled due to lockdown measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Chairman stated that she was proud of the Service and the Authority’s achievements this year.

Katie Mills (Head of Corporate Services, HCS) gave an overview of the context of the report and highlighted the key areas of the report.

RESOLVED that:

- The Annual Report on Governance be noted.
- The Annual Report be recommended to the Fire Authority on 16 November 2020.

12. ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

Katie Mills (HCS) introduced the Annual Report for 2019/20 stating that it provided a summary of performance in 2019/20 highlighting a number of challenges and achievements.

The following points from the report were highlighted:

- ‘Good’ in all three pillars following the first HMIFCRS inspection.
- Met IRMP targets in the number of Safe and Well (S&W) visits despite COVID-19.
- The response target standard was met for the first time since it was set.
- Maintained 100% wholetime crewing through COVID-19.
- 3 people sadly lost their lives due to dwelling fires.

RESOLVED that:

- The Annual Report prior to external publication be noted.

13. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORTS 2019/20 QUARTER 3 AND QUARTER 4

The Chairman introduced the reports and stated that Quarter 4 provided the latest information on performance. Chairman then asked members for questions by each quadrant of the report, no questions were received.

RESOLVED that:

- The performance against Service Provision and Corporate Health measures for the targets agreed by the Fire Authority for 2019/20 be noted.
- The progress made on the two priority programmes be noted.
- The position of corporate risk be noted.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

30 September 2020, 6.30pm. Venue to be confirmed.

Post meeting note – the meeting due to be held on 30 September was cancelled.

(The meeting concluded at 19.22)