

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



Held on Thursday, 28th January 2021, at 6.30 pm  
This was a remote meeting.

**Members:**  
(\*present)

* Councillor Christine Bateson	* Councillor Tony Linden
* Councillor Jane Stanford-Beale	* Councillor Harjinder Minhas
* Councillor Dennis Benneyworth	Councillor Garth Simpson
Councillor Christine Hulme	* Councillor Simon Werner
* Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle	

**In Attendance:**

Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)  
Lincoln Ball (Chair of Pension Board, CPB)  
Paul Binyon (Area Manager Response and Resilience, AM R&R)  
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)  
Doug Buchanan (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)  
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P)  
Becca Chapman (Data, Performance and Risk Manager, DP&RM)  
Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources, Learning and Development, HHR&L&D)  
Amir Kapasi (Internal Auditor, RSM)  
Allison Kennett (External Auditor, Ernst Young)  
Katie Mills (Director of Corporate Services, DCS)  
James Pinchin (Business Support Lead, BSL)  
Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL)  
Nikki Richards (Deputy Chief Executive, DCEX)  
Hannah Sheehan (Democratic Support Assistant, DSA)

## Action

### 29. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hulme and Councillor Simpson.

### 30. 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.

**31. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3 NOVEMBER 2020**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2020, be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

There were none received.

**33. INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE**

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (HF&P), introduced the report. Three audits have been completed since the last meeting and all three audits were issued the highest assurance opinion.

Amir Kapasi, RSM, gave an overview of the Progress Report stating that there had been three audits; Fleet Management, Firefighter Pension Administration and Dataplan and three substantial assurance opinions.

There were two low priority actions arising from the audit. In relation to Firefighter Pension Administration, West Yorkshire Pension Fund to develop written succession plans for Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service. The second action in relation to Dataplan, to provide evidence of independent checks on new starter forms will be maintained centrally prior to the employee being added to the payroll.

Councillor McKenzie-Boyle proposed the item and Councillor Linden seconded.

**RESOLVED** that the findings presented in RSM's Progress Report be noted.

**34. EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE**

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (HF&P), introduced the report. He stated there have been positive developments since the agenda pack was published. EY has received confirmation from Deloitte, that they have now concluded their work on the Berkshire Pension Fund.

Allison Kennet, EY, stated that EY received Deloitte's letter this week, so they can now proceed with the audit. EY resources mean that they will not be able to commence work until Monday, 8 February, due to the uncertainty of when they are going to receive the report. At the first glance it looks better than last year, but unfortunately some work is yet to be concluded, which EY will be considering. The audit is nearly completed, with just the LGPS pension issues and the letter of management representation outstanding, so EY are hoping to get it complete by the end of February.

Councillor Bateson asked for an update on Deloitte's proposed fee increase for completion of the audit. Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement explained that there had previously been discussion regarding a fee increase proposed by EY in relation to work that they were required to do which should have been done by Deloitte, but that we had since had feedback from the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) adjudicator who has stated that we don't need to pay the additional amount. It has always been agreed between auditors that they would do that work to provide clients such as ourselves with the information, without charging an additional amount.

Councillor McKenzie-Boyle proposed the item and Councillor Linden seconded.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee note the update from the External Auditor.

### **35. CODE OF ETHICS FOR FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE (ENGLAND) PRESENTATION**

Nikki Richards, Deputy Chief Executive, delivered the presentation on the draft Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services (England).

The draft Code of Ethics was out for consultation at the end of last year. It was brought to the Audit and Governance Committee as this is where we bring our own Employee Code of Conduct.

Following Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) national report on the State of Fire and Rescue 2019, it was recommended that there should be a Code of Conduct developed for all Fire and Rescue Services. The Local Government Association (LGA), working with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has produced this draft Code of Conduct, for all fire and rescue services in England.

The Core Code has been developed to provide clarity throughout the sector. It provides a clear understanding to the general public with regards to expected standards of professional behaviour. All fire and rescue service personnel are expected to use the Code to guide behaviour at all times, whether at work or away from work. The Code is based around the Nolan Principles; Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership.

The draft five fire and rescue service ethical principles are; Community at our Heart, Integrity, Dignity and Respect, Leadership and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Services' (RBFRS) Employee Code of Conduct has Seven Guiding Principles. These are; Serving the Public, Honesty and Integrity, Respect for Others, Accountability, Representing RBFRS, Management and Leadership and Political Neutrality. There is significant overlap between the draft Code of Ethics and the RBFRS Employee Code of Conduct. The Service is confident that it will be relatively straightforward to implement the final version of the national Code of Ethics.

If you would like a copy of the presentation please contact [committeeteam@rbfrs.co.uk](mailto:committeeteam@rbfrs.co.uk)

Councillor McKenzie-Boyle proposed the item and Councillor Linden seconded. **RESOLVED** that the presentation be noted.

### **36. COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLIMENTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

Katie Mills, Director of Corporate Services (DCS), introduced the report. The report contains the updated Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy and Procedure. The Complaints Policy has been reviewed, so that it continues to be fit for purpose. Whilst no material changes have been made to the complaints element of the Policy, the Policy has been extended to include comments and compliments.

Councillor McKenzie-Boyle proposed the item and Councillor Linden seconded.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee approve the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy and Procedure.

### **37. ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY- PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2021/22**

Becci Jefferies, Head of HR and Learning and Development (HHR&L&D), introduced the report and advised it was an annual requirement for Members to produce a Pay Policy Statement. In referring to the draft statement for 2021/22 contained in Appendix A she reported the format of the statement remained the same and the figures used are those at 31 October 2020. The updates that have been made are detailed at 3.4-3.8 of the covering report.

Councillor McKenzie-Boyle proposed the item and Councillor Stanford-Beale seconded.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee recommends the Fire Authority approve the Pay Policy Statement for 2021/22.

### **38. LOCAL PENSIONS BOARD- ANNUAL REPORT**

Lincoln Ball, Chair of the Local Pensions Board (CLPB), introduced the report. Lincoln stated that the Local Pension Board considers the performance of the local firefighter pensions' administrators as broadly to a good standard. National issues continue to dominate firefighter pension and, in particular, the mechanism to provide remedy for the age discrimination created by HM Government's introduction of the 2015 pension scheme. Lincoln highlighted 3.13 of the report which shows the performance figures for the year, 1 April 2019- 31 March 2020.

Lincoln also highlighted section 8.2 of the report, which states that the Pension Board is very aware there is a significant likelihood of errors from the administrators.

Councillor McKenzie-Boyle proposed the item and Councillor Linden seconded.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee note the contents of the report including activities undertaken by RBFRS, the Pension Administrator and the Local Pensions Board, since the last report.

### **39. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER 2**

Becca Chapman, Data, Performance and Risk Manager, introduced the report. The report provides an overview of performance for the second quarter (July-September 2020) of the 2020/21 financial year. Due to the significant impact of COVID-19 we have reviewed our Service Plan and project activity to ensure we retain our focus of our core priorities, as a result we will focus on our core data for reporting for the remainder of 2020/21.

Councillor McKenzie-Boyle proposed the item and Councillor Linden seconded.

**RESOLVED** that;

- The performance against Service Provision and Corporate Health measures for the targets agreed by the Fire Authority for 2020/21 be noted.
- The progress made on the two priority programmes be noted.
- The position of corporate risk be noted.

### **40. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday, 31 March 2021, at 6.30pm. The public will be able to watch this meeting on Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service YouTube page.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/RoyalBerkshireFRS>

*(The meeting concluded at 19:15)*