

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



Held on Wednesday, 31st March 2021 at 6.30 pm  
This was a remote meeting.

## Members: (\*present)

- |                                  |                                      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| * Councillor Christine Bateson   | * Councillor Harjinder Minhas        |
| * Councillor Jane Stanford-Beale | * Councillor Garth Simpson           |
| * Councillor Dennis Benneyworth  | * Councillor Simon Werner            |
| * Councillor Christine Hulme     | * Councillor Pauline Helliars-Symons |
| * Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle | * Councillor Colin Dudley            |
| * Councillor Tony Linden         |                                      |

## In Attendance:

Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)  
Paul Binyon (Area Manager Response and Resilience, AM R&R)  
Andrew Britten (External Auditor, Ernst Young)  
Alex Brown (Head of Capital Projects and Estates, CP&E)  
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)  
Katie Mills (Director of Corporate Services, DCS)  
Tom Nice (ICT Technical Support Officer)  
James Pinchin (Business Support Lead, BSL)  
Jim Powell (Area Manager, Collaboration and Policy, AM C&P)  
Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL)  
Nikki Richards (Deputy Chief Executive, DCEX)  
Hannah Sheehan (Democratic Support Assistant, DSA)  
Gary Thomas (Senior Technical Support Officer, STSO)  
Tregear Thomas (Area Manager, Prevention and Protection, AMP&P)

## 41. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors McKenzie-Boyle and Stanford-Beale.

Councillor Linden, Vice-Chairman, chaired the meeting in the absence of

## Action

Councillor McKenzie-Boyle. Councillors Dudley and Helliar-Symons were in attendance as substitutes for Councillors McKenzie-Boyle and Stanford-Beale.

#### **42. 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.

#### **43. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 JANUARY 2021**

**RESOLVED** that there were no actions recorded and that the Minutes of the meeting on 28 January 2021, be approved as a true and accurate record and signed by the Vice-Chairman.

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

There were no items for consideration referred to this Committee for decision.

#### **45. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL REPORT AND ACTION PLAN**

Councillor Helliar-Symons introduced this item as Organisational Development Champion and as Chairman of Member Development Working Group. She provided a comprehensive introduction and highlighted the importance of Member Development to inform and keep Members up-to-date with changes in the Fire and Rescue Service.

She stated 15 out of 20 Members attended their 1:1's with their Group Leaders and advised that this year 1:1's will be used to discuss Members areas of interest. Online sessions were well attended, however, Councillor Helliar-Symons stated it was not a substitute for when courses could be held face to face, in particular Control visits.

She thanked Katie Mills, Director of Corporate Services (DCS) and team for all their work on Member Development, and Members for completing the Member Development Survey.

In answer to a question from Councillor Dudley, Katie Mills advised that there was an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) element to the Healthy Organisation course, however, officers were looking at developing this provision to include unconscious bias training and was also looking at the Local Government Association (LGA) provision on said training.

Councillor Linden moved the recommendations and it was seconded by Councillor Colin Dudley.

**RESOLVED** that:

- The Member Development Annual Report be noted;
- The progress of the 2020/23 Member Development Action Plan be noted, and
- The results of the Member Development Survey be noted.

#### **46. INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE AND 2021/22 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN**

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (HF&P) introduced the report and handed over to Amir Kapasi, RSM Auditor. Amir Kapasi reported four audits had been completed since the last Committee meeting and stated that no significant issues were identified. He added that Cyber Essentials was an advisory audit.

In response to a question from Councillor Helliar-Symons on page 35 of the report relating to the provision of Risk Management Training, Katie Mills, DCS reported this training was aimed at staff. The audit had identified that Risk Management Training be extended across the organisation where appropriate to the role, and the management action was to build upon existing training provision.

In referring to the Audit Strategy on pages 79 – 82 of the report, Amir Kapasi outlined the audits listed in 2021/22 were linked to the Corporate Register and that the advisory audit on Cyber Essentials would be held again.

The Chairman requested that it be put on record his thanks for all of the hard work that had gone into achieving the audit opinions. On reflection, he stated that every audit held in the last year to date, received the highest assurance from our internal auditors. He requested Members of the Committee to join him in recognising this achievement and note the assurance it offered to both the Fire Authority, and importantly, the people of Berkshire, on the management of the Service.

Councillor Linden moved the recommendations and it was seconded by Councillor Bateson.

**RESOLVED** that:

- The findings as presented in RSM's Progress Report be noted, and
- The 2021/22 Internal Audit Plan be approved.

#### **47. EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT**

Conor Byrne, HF&P, reported he was hoping to present 2019/20 Statement of Accounts to this Committee, however, there was a delay in the signing off the Accounts by the Berkshire Pension Fund. He invited External Auditor, Andrew

Britten to provide further details.

Andrew Britten advised that Ernst & Young (EY) had met with Deloitte last month and reported there were a list of unresolved items, however, EY continue to seek clarification and expect a resolution imminently. He reported EY will complete their review week commencing 12 April 2021. They also advised that the 20/21 Statement of Accounts could not be signed off until the 19/20 Statement of Accounts had been approved.

Councillor Dudley queried whether Andrew Britten could assure the people of Berkshire that the 19/20 Accounts would be signed off.

Andrew Britten responded by informing Councillor Dudley that the Berkshire Pension Fund / Deloitte was the only remaining piece of work that required completion and all other aspects of the Accounts had been completed. He added that EY had booked staff to complete this work by 12 April.

In response to Councillor Dudley, Conor Byrne agreed that in the event of not receiving the letter from EY he would inform the Chairman of Audit and Governance Committee.

HF&amp;P

#### **48. AMENDED FIRE AUTHORITY TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Katie Mills, DCS, presented the report. She reported the recommendation was to amend the Fire Authority Terms of Reference to include Honorary Champion roles and to formalise the existing appointments of Local Government Association representative and Thames Valley Fire Control Joint Committee representative appointments at the annual meeting.

She added that the inclusion of the above roles made no impact on the Scheme of Allowance, and highlighted a small change to the sentence in CO3 (h) on page 99 of the report.

Councillor Dudley stated the honorary appointment of the Armed Forces Champion was in response to the recent Gold Award received for the Armed Forces Covenant, supported by Councillor Ross.

Councillor Linden moved the recommendation and it was seconded by Councillor Dudley.

**RESOLVED** that the amended Fire Authority Terms of Reference (Appendix A) be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval.

#### **49. ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2019/20**

Katie Mills, DCS introduced the report and stated the purpose was for the Service to demonstrate how it adhered to the National Framework. The recommendation proposed that the Statement of Assurance be published in

draft, then republished when the Statement of Accounts were signed off.

Councillor Dudley congratulated all those involved in achieving each of the summary judgements within the four key areas of Finance, Governance, Operations and delivering against the National Framework, which were fully met. He stated this was the result of hard work and dedication by officers and Members. The Finance requirement was subject to the conclusion of the external audit of Statement of Accounts 2019/20, and stated that he had confidence that the Service would be able to provide further assurance to the community when the Statement of Accounts 2019/20 were formally signed off. In conclusion, he stated he was pleased to be able to add his name to the Statement of Assurance on behalf of the Authority.

The Chairman moved the recommendation and it was seconded by Councillor Colin Dudley.

**RESOLVED** that:

- The summary judgements within the Statement of Assurance for each of the four key areas of Finance, Governance, Operations and delivering the National Framework be noted;
- The RBFA Statement of Assurance 2019/20 be approved and published in draft; and
- The Statement of Assurance will be finalised and re-published by the Director of Corporate Services, following the conclusion of the audit of the Statement of Accounts 2019/20, in consultation with the Chairman of the Fire Authority and Chairman of the Audit and Governance Committee.

## **50. GENDER PAY GAP REPORT 2020**

Becci Jefferies, Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development (HHR&L&D), reported it was a requirement under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations for the Authority to publish gender pay gap data. The mean gender pay gap had been calculated by adding up the hourly rate of all male/female employees and dividing that figure by the total number of male/female employees. She stated that the median was a more accurate calculation than the mean and explained the median was calculated by listing all hourly rates of each gender and finding a central rate. This year the median was 1.51%.

In response to a question from Councillor Hulme on the underrepresentation of women in the operational workforce, Becci Jefferies reported Human Resources had struggled over the Covid period due to other workloads, however work was underway to develop an online video to promote Positive Action. She added that she will also be working with other Services to look at ways to attract female Firefighters.

Councillor Dudley queried how Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) achieved the median of 1.51%, as the National median was 17.3%.

Becci Jefferies reported RBFRS has published a clear Pay Policy Statement, local consideration to pay has been made, periodic equal pay audits were held and an established process on how roles were evaluated.

In response to a question from Councillor Werner, Becci Jefferies stated the report includes all quartiles and stated that the Gender Pay Gap report related to conditions to certain roles, for example senior level roles with additional condition to operational response.

Councillor Dudley stated there was not a glass ceiling in the Service and referred to the recent recruitment process of the Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive, as an example. However, he added that the Service could work harder to reduce the gender pay gap even further.

Councillor Linden moved the recommendation and it was seconded by Councillor Bateson.

**RESOLVED** that:

- The details of the Gender Pay Gap Report shown in Appendix A be noted and agreed it is published on the RBFRS website; and
- The Action Plan in Appendix B be noted.

## **51. ANNUAL REPORT ON GOVERNANCE**

Katie Mills, DCS, presented the report and stated the Annual Report on Governance will be presented to the Fire Authority in June. She confirmed that the figures will be updated.

Councillor Linden moved the recommendations and it was seconded by Councillor Benneyworth.

**RESOLVED** that:

- The report be noted.
- It be recommended that the Fire Authority:
  - Note the Member' Allowances received for the period of June 2020 – February 2021;
  - Note the 2020/21 attendance record of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Members (2.2.1 and 2.2.2 will be updated to the end of May 2021).

## **52. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020/21 - QUARTER 3 (OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2020)**

Becca Chapman, Data and Performance Manager (D&PM), provided a summary of the Quarter Three Performance report. She reported overall performance was good, and that the team continued to monitor the number of

incidents. In referring to Service Provision, she stated the Service have continued with Safe and Well visits which were risk assessed. In relation to Corporate Health, staff sickness levels were low and the Service were making good progress on the build of Theale Community Fire Station.

The Chairman requested Members ask questions by each of the four quadrants of the report. Councillor Dudley asked a question relating to Quadrant One, Service Provision. In response, Paul Binyon, Area Manager Response and Resilience (AM R&R), reported the drop in availability to 90% was due to the impact of Covid-19 (November – December 2020). In relation to performance measure 14, he stated the increase to 78% was due to On-call availability, which had exceeded the 75% target and had sustained that target to date.

Councillor Benneyworth's question was in relation to Quadrant Two, Corporate Health. Page 13 of the report, stated there had been improved performance on staff sickness compared with last year in spite of the impact of Covid-19. Becci Jefferies, HHR&L&D, reported there were a combination of factors. She made reference to staff working from home and the work the Service had done towards health improvement. For example, restorative and support work from Occupational Health and Movement Specialist. Measures were also put in place to minimise the impact to staff.

The Chairman asked a question on Quadrant Three, Priority Programme. He queried how confident was the Service in the delivery of Theale Community Fire Station to time and budget, given the impacts of the pandemic over the past year. Alex Brown, Head of Capital Projects and Estates (HCP&E), stated contingency had been built into the programme to deal with impacts such as Covid-19 and Brexit and that she was confident the Service was on target to deliver this project.

In response to Councillor Dudley's question on page 30 of the report Quadrant Four, Risk. Jim Powell, Area Manager, Collaboration and Policy (AM, C&P) reported a significant piece of work had been undertaken to deliver the first phase of a new suite of guidance aligned to the National Operational Guidance (NOG), which was also aligned across the three Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Services (FRS). He added that this risk will continue to be addressed through the second project phase over the next 12 months.

Councillor Dudley stated he found Quarter Three Performance Report outstanding and stated the numbers showed the Service was supporting the people of Berkshire. The Vice-Chairman concurred and thanked Officers and staff for their dedication during Covid-19.

Councillor Linden moved the recommendation and it was seconded by Councillor Dudley.

**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.

**53. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Monday, 19 July 2021. Venue to be confirmed.

*(The meeting concluded at 7.46pm)*