

# Annual Governance Statement 2020/21



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## ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2020/21

### 1. Scope of Responsibility

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (the Authority) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with relevant legislation and standards and that public money is both safeguarded and properly accounted for. It also has a duty under the [Local Government Act 1999](#), to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Authority is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of its functions including arrangements for the management of risk.

The Authority has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE '*Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework*' (2016 edition). This statement explains how the Authority has complied with the Framework and meets the requirements of [Regulation 6\(1\) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015](#), which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an Annual Governance Statement.

The Authority has also reviewed its compliance with the new CIPFA Financial Management Code (FM Code) which is designed to support good practice in financial management and allow the Authority to demonstrate that it is financially sustainable. The FM Code came into force from 1 April 2021.

Local authorities are required to prepare an Annual Governance Statement in order to report publicly on the extent to which they comply with their own code of governance, which in turn is consistent with the good governance principles in the Framework. This includes how they have monitored and evaluated the effectiveness of their governance arrangements in the year, and on any planned changes in the coming period. The process of preparing the governance statement should itself add value to the effectiveness of the governance and internal control framework. The

Annual Governance Statement is intended as a valuable means of communication. It enables an authority to explain to the community, service users, tax payers and other stakeholders its governance arrangements and how the controls it has in place manage risks of failure in delivering its outcomes.

The overall aim is to ensure that:

- Resources are directed in accordance with agreed policy and according to priorities;
- There is sound and inclusive decision-making; and
- There is clear accountability for the use of those resources in order to achieve desired outcomes for service users and communities.

## 2. Purpose of the Governance Framework

The Governance Framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values by which the Authority is directed and controlled. It enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its Annual Objectives and to consider whether those Objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that Framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure and can, therefore, only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise risks in relation to the achievement of the Authority's aims and objectives; to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised.

The Governance Framework has been in place within the Authority for the year ended 31 March 2021, and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts.

## 3. The Governance Framework

The governance measures in place reflect the seven principles of good governance set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE '*Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework*' (2016 edition) as set out below.

*Core Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law*

The Constitution of the Authority establishes the roles and responsibilities of Members of the Authority and its Committees, together with officer functions. It includes details of delegation arrangements. The Constitution is kept under review to ensure that it is fit for purpose. Proposed changes are overseen by the Audit and Governance Committee. The Audit and Governance Committee's views on the suitability of any changes are reported when they are presented to the full Fire Authority for approval.

The Constitution also contains procedure rules, standing orders and financial regulations that define how decisions are taken and where authority lies for decisions. The statutory roles of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and Chief Financial Officer are described together with their contributions to provide robust assurance on governance and that expenditure is lawful and in line with approved budgets and procedures. The influence and oversight of these posts is supported by the post-holders' membership of the Senior Leadership Team.

A local Members' Code of Conduct for all Members has been agreed by the Authority and a Register of disclosable pecuniary interests for each Member is reviewed annually and published on the Authority's website. This is further supported by [Protocol on Member and Officer Relations](#) which sets out respective obligations and expectations. To ensure legal compliance and to avoid a conflict arising, there are two appointed "Independent Persons" in the event of an allegation being made that a Member has breached the Authority's Code of Conduct. The [Complaints Procedure](#) related to members of the Fire Authority is available on the RBFRS website.

The role of Monitoring Officer is fulfilled as part of a collaborative arrangement with Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Authority. This arrangement has been in place since 2017/18 and has proved to be effective in ensuring suitable discharge of this responsibility.

All employees are bound by the Employee Code of Conduct which includes standards of conduct. The Employee Code of Conduct also sets out the requirement for the declarations of interests and for employees to register offers or acceptance of gifts and hospitality. The [Officer Register of Gifts and Hospitality](#) is publicly available on the RBFRS website.

A Grievance, Bullying and Harassment Policy, Complaints Procedure, Whistle

Blowing Policy and Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy are maintained and kept under review, providing the opportunity for members of the public and staff to raise issues when they believe that appropriate standards have not been met.

Regular updates on complaints received and their resolution is presented to the Audit and Governance Committee via the quarterly performance report.

The Local Pension Board is set up under the auspices of [The Public Service Pensions Act 2013](#). The Board exists to assist the Fire Authority in its role as Scheme Manager; to secure compliance with the various firefighter pension scheme regulations and other legislation relating to governance and administration of the scheme; secure compliance with requirements imposed by the Pensions Regulator. A six monthly report is provided to the Audit and Governance Committee.

*Core Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement*

The [Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan \(IRMP\) 2019-23](#), sets out the contribution the Authority will make to its mission; serving the people of Royal Berkshire. It is linked to the Budget, ensuring that the aspirations in the plan are realistic in the context of funding constraints placed upon the Authority.

The Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan is agreed following consultation with the public, staff and stakeholders. The Authority has consulted on and agreed its IRMP Consultation Principles, which are published within the Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan. A Consultation Strategy is in place which underpins all consultation activity and we work with the Consultation Institute to ensure best practice is followed. Details of our [previous public consultations](#) are available on our website. In 2020/21, we undertook a [Budget and Council Tax Consultation](#) prior to setting the 2021/22 budget. Our [Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Objectives](#) underpin our consultation activity.

Whilst the Corporate Plan spans a four-year period, it is reviewed annually. An [Annual Plan](#) is produced and published on the website for each of those four years, setting out Annual Objectives together with Corporate Measures. Each Unitary Authority area also has a dedicated annual [Local Safety Plan](#), which sets out localised risk and how resources will be targeted to meet that risk.

An [Annual Report](#) is published on our website taking account of matters that have arisen during the last 12 months and reporting on performance for that period.

Corporate Measures that are set annually via the Annual Plan are internally monitored through the Strategic Performance Board prior to reporting via the Audit and Governance Committee. Any strategic projects are managed through the Programme Board, with our Priority Programmes being reported to the Audit and Governance Committee via the [Quarterly Performance Reports](#). In addition to publishing the Quarterly Performance Reports, we publish key performance information on our website on a monthly basis. Our website also contains a [‘Transparency and Governance’](#) section publishing financial and staff information which includes the Council Tax Leaflet, procurement card transactions and payments over £500.

The Authority is fully committed to working in partnership and has a record of partnership working that predates the statutory duty to collaborate, as set out in the [Policing and Crime Act 2017](#), with examples including a joint Control Room and fleet maintenance arrangements. The three Thames Valley Fire Services, Thames Valley Police, Police and Crime Commissioner and South Central Ambulance Service have put in place governance arrangements to manage and ensure the effectiveness of collaboration in the Thames Valley. The governance arrangements, which are set out in the [Thames Valley Emergency Services Collaboration Report](#), together with a [Thames Valley Collaboration Register](#), are publicly available on our website.

Meetings of [the Fire Authority and its committee meetings](#) are accessible to the public and dates are published on the website, including the minutes and decisions taken at those meetings. The Authority appoints two members to the Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Committee and papers are published on the website for these meetings.

*Core Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits*

The Corporate Plan and IRMP provides a clear vision and formal statement on the organisation’s purpose and intended outcomes, including how we will manage our resources to achieve those outcomes. Our Integrated Risk Management Plan sets out how we will safely and effectively manage risk across our Prevention, Protection and Response activities. We have consulted on and published [strategies](#) for our Prevention, Protection and Response activities, which set how we will target local risk to achieve economic, social and environmental benefits, making best use of our available resources.

Our Consultation Principles set out that we will consult with a wide range of stakeholders, including the public, on any changes that will have a material impact on the performance of the services we provide.

The [15-year Strategic Asset Investment Framework](#), sets out our intent for the management and investment in our capital assets which include our buildings, fleet and ICT, underpinning the Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan.

The Organisational Risk Management Policy sets out our approach to the identification and management of risk which may impact on our ability to provide our services. The Corporate Risk Register is reviewed on a four weekly basis by the Strategy Leadership Team, and is reported to the Audit and Governance Committee.

*Core Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes*

Medium to long-term planning is informed by the [Medium Term Financial Plan](#), which sets out the financial strategy for the Authority. This enables the Authority to understand likely future challenges, and ensure its strategic planning is realistic. Where necessary, appropriate action is identified to mitigate potential financial risk. This is further supported by the Authority's [Efficiency Plan](#).

Our Performance Management Framework sets out how we will manage performance to ensure organisational aims and objectives are achieved. This Framework sets out how we will measure and monitor performance and where and when the organisation will manage performance. This is further supported by the Organisational Risk Management Policy as set out above.

*Core Principle E: Developing the Authority's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it*

A key theme of the Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan is Capacity, Capability and Resilience. Our [People Strategy 2018-21](#), sets out how we will support our staff to be the best public servants they can be, creating a workforce that can deliver an efficient and effective service.

The Authority has agreed a Member Development Strategy 2020-23, which is further



supported by a Member Development Action Plan.

The training needs of Members and officers are identified through appraisal and review processes. Appropriate training is made available to ensure that individuals are able to undertake their current roles effectively and that they have the chance to develop to meet their, and the Authority's, needs.

There is a Leadership Development Programme in place for supervisory and middle managers, with the Senior Leadership Team developed through coaching and external leadership development courses.

Our Behavioural Competency Framework is directly linked to our People Strategy, Equality and Diversity and Inclusion Objectives and our Behavioural Charter, and has leadership at its core.

Our Workforce Planning Group allows us to monitor our workforce profile, as well as anticipate future workforce needs and plan accordingly.

We have a Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan, to support our staff, with a particular focus on Mental Health.

Independent assurance is provided by [Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services](#) across the three pillars of 'effectiveness', 'efficiency' and 'people'. In June 2019, the first inspection report for Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Services was issued in which it said the Service was performing to a high standard in these areas and was graded as 'good' in all three pillars.

*Core Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management*

The Authority ensures that the Service has appropriate governance arrangements in place and that risk and performance are being effectively managed. As set out above, there is a Performance Management Framework and Organisational Risk Management Policy which sets out how this is achieved.

The Authority has ownership of the strategic risks of the Service and is responsible for monitoring and challenging risks and actions appearing on the Corporate Risk Register. This responsibility for risk and performance management is delegated by the Authority to the Audit and Governance Committee.

The Head of Finance and Procurement is appointed as the Chief Finance Officer and ensures the sound administration of the financial affairs of the Authority, as required by the statutory duties associated with section 112 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The Chief Financial Officer is required to adhere to professional standards set by CIPFA.

Until October 2015, the Authority's insurance was arranged through a consortium of nine fire and rescue authorities. These fire and rescue authorities are now members of the [Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company Ltd \(FRIC\)](#). The company commenced trading in November 2015. The Authority's risk protection arrangements are provided through the pooled funds of the company. The aims of the Company are twofold: to reduce risk to the Authority by driving up standards, for example, by adopting best practice in relation to driving standards and also to reduce the cost to the Authority of its risk protection arrangements over the longer-term.

*Core Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability*

Data is published on the website in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code to promote openness and accountability through reporting on local decision-making, public spending and democratic processes.

The Authority has a designated statutory Data Protection Officer (DPO) that reports through the Authority's Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) which is the Director of Support Services. Both the DPO and SIRO ensure legal compliance with data protection requirements.

The [Pay Policy](#) has been approved by the Authority and is subject to review annually. It is produced in accordance with new or proposed legislation to ensure that it remains relevant and effective. The Pay Policy Statement for 2021-22 was approved by the Authority in March 2021.

In addition to publishing the [Gender Pay Gap Report for 2020](#), on our website. The Authority, also published an [Equal Pay Audit](#) which goes further than the statutory Gender Pay Gap report and gives clearer and more extensive information regarding how individuals are paid at RBFPS and how individual pay elements are distributed across the various protected groups.

An annual [Statement of Assurance](#) is produced to formally confirm to Government, stakeholders and the communities we serve, the adequacy of arrangements for the effective management of financial, governance and operational matters in RBFRS. The Statement confirms the extent to which the requirement of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been met.

The Audit and Governance Committee undertakes the scrutiny function within the Authority and provides a robust challenge to the Authority. The Committee reviews performance and risk within the Authority, initiating reviews where it considers performance could be improved.

The Authority’s Internal Audit Service is carried out by external contractors appointed under contract. The appointed Internal Auditors (RSM) is required to provide an annual independent and objective opinion to the Authority on risk management, governance and the control environment. The annual Audit Plan is agreed by the Audit and Governance Committee and in 2020/21 RSM undertook the following audits:

<b>Audit</b>	<b>Assurance Level</b>
Risk Management and Governance	Substantial Assurance
Key Financial Controls (Annual Pension Return)	Substantial Assurance
Firefighter Pension Administration	Substantial Assurance
Payroll provider – DataPlan	Substantial Assurance
Capital Projects	Substantial Assurance
Fleet Management	Substantial Assurance
IT – Cyber Essentials	Advisory

Our auditors found substantial assurance on all six of these audits (a seventh audit was completed which was an advisory audit with no assurance level assessment required). All audit actions are monitored through the Strategic Performance Board and Audit and Governance Committee.

RSM’s Annual Report provides the following overall audit opinion for 2020/21 as follows: *“The organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control.”*

#### 4. Review of Effectiveness

The Authority has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the senior managers within the Authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Internal Auditors' (RSM) annual report, and by the findings and reports issued by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

## 5. Significant Governance Issues Addressed in 2020/21

The following provides a progress report against the significant governance issues identified in the last Annual Governance Statement.

Governance Matter Identified	Action Taken in 2020/21	Lead Officer	Target Date
<p><u>Volatility of Funding</u></p> <p>Volatility of funding will continue to be a significant and ongoing pressure for the Authority in 2020/21. In addition to the pressure which emerged in 2019/20, the Authority continue to monitor a number of possible budgetary pressures which may create challenges in the future.</p> <p>Our Medium Term Financial Plan assumes that future pay will increase by 2%. However, there are ongoing national discussions with the Fire Brigades Union in relation to pay. Any such pay increase beyond 2%, without significantly increased funding, would be unaffordable for the Authority.</p> <p>The Authority will await the outcome of the Government's three-year Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and consideration of funding the additional pension cost pressure. Further potential volatility may result from the CSR and the likely resetting of the business rates funding baseline.</p> <p>In addition to the departmental savings of £140,000</p>	<p>The outbreak of the global coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic had profound financial consequences for the Authority. However, lobbying of Government through the NFCC resulted in additional funding which meant that the Authority has been able to take all necessary measures to preserve its ability to provide critical emergency response and to protect its staff from unnecessary risk during 2020/21.</p> <p>The challenges of the pandemic meant that the multi-year CSR was postponed for a year, as was the decision to reset the business rates baseline so lobbying for a fair settlement will recommence in 2021/22.</p>	<p>Trevor Ferguson</p>	<p>On-going</p>

<p>being built into the base budget for 2020/21, work is ongoing to deliver a further £200,000 in 2021/20.</p> <p>These shortfalls highlight why the Chairman of the Fire Authority has been lobbying MPs and the Government to provide the Fire Authority with increased flexibility around the setting of the precept. Our current IRMP model is required to deliver an effective and efficient service for the people of Berkshire. However, should additional funding not be secured in the upcoming CSR, the Authority will have to consider revisiting its IRMP model to balance the budget.</p>			
<p><u>HMICFRS</u></p> <p>HMICFRS has been due to undertake its second inspection of RBFRS in 2020/21. However, with the outbreak of COVID-19, it took the decision to suspend its inspection activity. In July 2020, HMICFRS confirmed its plans to recommence the round two inspection programme in early 2021. As a Service in tranche two, this means the next inspection of RBFRS is now likely to take place in 2021/22.</p>	<p>During 2020/21, RBFRS has continued to work towards its HMICFRS Action Plan, which is monitored through the strategic Performance Board and Audit and Governance Committee. It has been confirmed that the Service will now form part of tranche three, with formal inspection activity due to commence early in 2022, with field taking place in spring-summer 2022.</p> <p>HMICFRS was commissioned by the</p>	Katie Mills	On-going

	<p>Home Secretary to inspect how fire and rescue services in England were responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The inspection of RBFRS took place in October 2020, and largely focused on the period between April and June 2020.</p> <p>HMICFRS issued a findings letter and in summary stated that the Service has “adapted and responded to the pandemic effectively”.</p>		
<p><u>Built Environment</u></p> <p>The Built Environment Programme will remain an area of focus in 2020/21, with ongoing additional financial pressures this creates for the Fire Authority. Following a gap analysis to identify areas of improvement, work will continue to be delivered to ensure the Authority appropriately responds and learns from the findings of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. Alongside this, the risk posed by High Risk Residential Buildings remains a significant national challenge and forms part of the national Fire Chiefs Council Building Risk Review Programme. The Authority will continue to contribute towards this national programme as well as build on the</p>	<p>We have established the Built Environment Programme and identified programme objectives and priority areas of work.</p> <p>We have set up a specific programme of work to address Grenfell Inquiry recommendations, which has resulted in improvements to the way we deliver our services including introducing new equipment such as Smokehoods, delivery of training and making our risk information more accessible for crews</p>	Mark Arkwell	On-going

<p>work already undertaken locally to address the challenges posed by the High Risk Residential Buildings with the Service, where appropriate, making full use of its statutory powers to drive remediation of those buildings.</p>	<p>at an incident.</p> <p>We have completed Phase One of our High Risk Residential Building project, which has seen us audit all 198 HRRB's within Berkshire as part of the National Building Risk Review programme.</p>		
<p><u>Pensions</u></p> <p>2020/21 will see significant changes to firefighter pension schemes, in particular, recent outcomes of the Sargeant case will result in wide ranging impacts for administration of firefighter pension schemes for many years to come. Changes to pension provision is likely to impact retirement planning and see staff exit the service earlier than planned, leading to loss of organisational knowledge and expertise. Evaluating the impact and responding to the changes in pension regulations and ensuring the workforce is resourced appropriately through effective workforce planning, will therefore be a priority area of focus.</p>	<p>In the absence of legislation following the Sargent case, RBFA resolved that firefighters who previously were members of relevant legacy pension schemes, who met the eligibility criteria would be deemed to be members of their old schemes.</p> <p>RBFRS have focussed activities on preparation for responding to emerging guidance and the regulations when laid and with the Pension Administrators have established agreed processes to address 'immediate detriment' cases despite the lack of clarity on matters such as taxation.</p>	<p>Becci Jefferies</p>	<p>On-going</p>



	Analysis of staff data has been used to support workforce planning and ensure action was taken to secure additional staff through a transfer process, to account for turnover.		
<p><u>Strategic Asset Investment Funding</u></p> <p>The need for going investment in its assets will remain an issue for the Fire Authority in 2020/21. In achieving the objectives set out in the Strategic Asset Investment Framework, the lack of available capital funding beyond Phase One of the Programme will remain a significant challenge.</p>	<p>Despite the impact of the pandemic, progress was made in implementing Phase One of the Strategic Asset Investment Framework.</p> <p>The challenges of the pandemic meant that the Government settlement for 2021/22 was based on a roll-over of funding so lobbying for capital funding will recommence in 2021/22.</p>	Conor Byrne	On-going
<p><u>Leadership Succession</u></p> <p>It is likely to be a significant year of change for the Senior Leadership Team of RBFRS as both the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer will be eligible to retire in July 2021, and May 2021, respectively. To ensure the continuity of leadership and that the Service does not lose momentum in delivering on the Authority's plans and commitments the transition will need to be well planned. As a result, Leadership Succession Planning will be a significant governance issue in</p>	<p>An extensive and rigorous recruitment exercise was undertaken for a Chief Fire Officer or Chief Executive in 2020/21. Following the recruitment process, Fire Authority approved the appointment of Wayne Bowcock in March 2021, with Wayne joining the Service in June 2021, as Chief Fire Officer Designate prior to departure of the Trevor Ferguson, Chief Fire Officer,</p>	Trevor Ferguson	March 2021

<p>2020/21.</p>	<p>in July 2021, allowing for a suitable handover period.</p> <p>To avoid unnecessary disruption and provide as much continuity as possible, whilst creating additional capacity to support the transition, interim arrangements were established and have been effective from January 2021.</p>		
<p><u>Delivery of Prevention, Protection and Response Strategies</u></p> <p>In March 2020, the Authority undertook a consultation on draft Prevention, Protection and Response strategies and underpinning risk analysis. These strategies built on the Evidence Bases previously developed in 2016/17, and set out the direction of travel across the core areas of service provision. The consultation concluded in 2020/21 with the Fire Authority giving conscientious consideration to the results in June 2020. Following this consideration, the three strategy documents were approved for delivery by officers commencing in 2020/21.</p>	<p>The delivery of the Prevention, Protection and Response Strategies were incorporated into the Annual Plan 2020/21. However, the delivery of the commitments for the 2020/21 year were impacted by the pandemic. The Service is in a period of recovery following the pandemic, and where work areas have been impacted, these have been reviewed by part of the corporate planning processes. Delivery against the strategies has been included in the Annual Plan 2021/22.</p>	<p>Katie Mills</p>	<p>On-going</p>

## 6. COVID-19

In March 2020, COVID-19 emerged in the UK as a public health emergency. As a governance issue that has spanned 2019/20 and 2020/21, the Authority's consideration of COVID-19 has been summarised separately for the purposes of the Annual Governance Statement and provides a summary of the impact on Governance for the period of the pandemic.

Internally, a number of important steps were taken to ensure robust governance arrangements were put in place to respond to the risk posed by COVID-19 in accordance with the Business Continuity Management and Critical Event Management Policy. A COVID-19 Critical Event Management Team (CEMT) was established and chaired at a Director level. Sub-groups were established to lead on Response and Recovery activities.

Action and decision logs were put in place to support the COVID-19 governance structure to ensure all decisions were captured, together with an information log to ensure a record was kept of related information coming into the organisation and required action.

The Authority's priority was to ensure continued delivery of critical emergency services response during this time. Whilst non-essential activity was initially stopped, service delivery activity was risk assessed to understand where the risk of fire was greater than the risk of COVID-19.

As the Country moved through the crisis, RBFRS established recovery plans for its Prevention, Protection and Response service delivery as well as support functions. These recovery plans were aligned to the national COVID Alert Levels, and have been reviewed as new guidance has been issued.

In March 2021, the decision was taken to hibernate the regular COVID-19 CEMT as risk-assessed plans aligned to the Government's Roadmap were in place. CEMT continues to meet as required to respond to both changes in the local risk profile and national guidance, and a standing item has been included on the Senior Leadership Team meetings to discuss COVID-19 related matters. The Senior Leadership Team continues to monitor the organisational risk posed by COVID-19 through the

Corporate Risk Register. The internal governance structure ensures that the latest guidance and advice from Government and the Fire and Rescue Sector is considered in a timely manner with appropriate action taken and recorded.

RBFRS has been an active participant in the Local Resilience Forum throughout working to ensure effective planning at a local level to respond to the crisis. Whilst the maintenance of our core services has remained the priority throughout, a range of additional activities in support of both the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum and the tri-partite agreements established between the National Fire Chiefs Council, Fire Brigades Union and the Fire and Rescue Service National Employers.

During this time, business activities have been maintained with homeworking successfully supported where appropriate to the role, in line with Government guidance. The health, safety and wellbeing of staff has been of the utmost importance with advice, guidance and support offered in response to COVID-19. The organisation has adapted to new ways of working and aspects of normal business activity have started to resume. For example, our audit programme is continuing and being carried out virtually.

Immediate action was taken to ensure the workplace was COVID secure and mitigate the risk to our staff. RBFRS has published a [COVID-19 Risk Assessment](#) on its website and all of its workplaces have been declared COVID Secure.

Initially, the Fire Authority meetings in March and April 2020, were cancelled whilst legislation was put in place to enable remote Fire Authority meetings. The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, came into force on 4 April 2020. This enabled remote Fire Authority meetings to take place and the normal Fire Authority calendar resumed in June 2020, with the annual Fire Authority meeting. The Regulations applied to Fire Authority held before 7 May 2021, and physical meetings has since resumed in accordance with Covid-19 regulations.

Our Annual Plan 2020/21 was reviewed to take account of the impact of COVID-19. Through our corporate planning processes in 2020/21, we have reviewed the impact of COVID-19, and developed the Annual Plan 2021/22 to account of where delivery was impacted in the previous year by the pandemic.

Mindful of the pressures posed by the pandemic, RBFRS adapted its internal governance arrangement to take account of this pressure. The Strategic Performance Board did not meet in Quarters Two and Three of 2020/21, and resumed in Quarter Four. Streamlined performance reporting continued to ensure oversight and transparency of our critical core services and Corporate Measures with reports continuing to be presented to the Senior Leadership Team and Audit and Governance Committee.

In February 2021, Management Committee approved entering into a mutual aid agreement between the Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Authorities to ensure resilience in Principal Officer arrangements. This allowed the Authority to utilise a Principal Officer of another Thames Valley authority if a Principal Officer was, or was likely to be, incapacitated by illness or self-isolation due to COVID-19.

HMICFRS was commissioned by the Home Secretary to inspect how fire and rescue services in England were responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The inspection of RBFRS took place in October 2020, and largely focused on the period between April and June 2020. HMICFRS issued a findings letter and in summary stated that the Service has “adapted and responded to the pandemic effectively”.

The internal governance arrangements have proved adequate in supporting a swift response to COVID-19. COVID-19 will continue to be a significant governance issue in 2020/21, and will be managed through our internal governance arrangements.

## 7. Significant Governance Issues in 2021/22

In addition to COVID-19, as outlined above, the following significant governance issues have been identified for 2021/22:

Governance Matter Identified	Action to be taken in 2021/22	Lead Officer	Target Date
<p><u>Volatility of Funding</u></p> <p>The Authority's funding position going into 2021/22 is one of extreme volatility with large COVID-19 related collection fund deficits offset by exceptional Government support. In addition, there is uncertainty around the outcomes of the Government's upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review which will determine the financial parameters within which the Authority will have to operate.</p>	<p>Lobbying of MPs and Government will continue during 2021/22 to highlight the need for a fair financial settlement across the sector which is a pre-requisite for delivering an efficient and effective service.</p> <p>Scenario planning will highlight the implications of a financial settlement that requires expenditure cuts to balance the budget.</p>	Wayne Bowcock	February 2022
<p><u>Pay Award</u></p> <p>The 2021/22 Budget was set on the basis that there would be no pay award for staff in line with the Government's announcement of a pay freeze for public sector workers. Furthermore, the Authority would not have been able to balance its budget if any form of pay rise had been factored in. Pay award negotiations since the budget was set will create a significant budget pressure.</p>	<p>Unbudgeted pay awards will need to be funded through the use of reserves during 2021/22.</p> <p>Scenario planning for 2022/23 will take account of pay awards and strategies will be developed to bring the budget back into balance.</p>	Conor Byrne	February 2022

<p><u>Pensions</u></p> <p>The pensions landscape remains complex and the technical policy and legislation associated with the Sargeant case is not expected to be in place before April 2022. During the 2021/22 year RBFRS will be required to consider how to deal with each individual retirement situation as they occur against the lack of clear guidance and absence of new legislation.</p> <p>Guidance on the O'Brien/Matthews case and how retained duty system staff should be treated is still awaited and will create significant additional workload pressure for the Service and the Administrator in the same timeframe.</p> <p>Responding to the changes in pension regulations and ensuring the workforce is resourced appropriately through effective planning and will remain a priority area of focus.</p>	<p>RBFRS will ensure it is prepared for when regulations come in to force by taking account of emerging guidance and working together with the pension administrator and across the sector to ensure effective management of pension arrangements.</p> <p>Recruitment of Firefighters will be scheduled to meet workforce needs.</p> <p>We will increase our pension knowledge and support available to meet workload pressures by recruiting a Pensions Officer.</p> <p>Quarterly updates to A&amp;G Committee will provide oversight of the emerging issues.</p>	<p>Becci Jefferies</p>	<p>March 2022</p>
<p><u>Strategic Asset Investment Framework</u></p> <p>Although implementation of Phase One of the Strategic Asset Investment Framework continues, the lack of funding for Phase Two remains an issue</p>	<p>Lobbying of MPs and Government will continue during 2021/22 to highlight the need for financial support to renew our assets to enable</p>	<p>Wayne Bowcock</p>	<p>December 2021</p>

for the Fire Authority.	the Authority to deliver an efficient and effective service to the public.		
<p><u>HMICFRS</u></p> <p>The Service is due be inspected as part of tranche 3 of the inspection programme with formal inspection activity due to commence in early 2022. Fieldwork is anticipated to take place in spring-summer 2022, with the dates to be confirmed by HMICFRS.</p>	<p>We will remain focused on delivering the HMICFRS Action Plan.</p> <p>We will continue to proactively engage in the inspection programme and, in particular, seek to understand the changes to the Round Two inspection activity to ensure that the Service is suitably prepared.</p> <p>The inspection activity has been considered in the development of the Annual Plan 2021/22 and Service Plans.</p>	Katie Mills	March 2022
<p><u>Built Environment</u></p> <p>The Built Environment Programme will remain an area of focus for 2021/22. RBFRS will continue to deliver within its priority areas of work to ensure that it continues to learn and improve as a result of the findings of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry.</p> <p>The Authority will need to ensure that it is well</p>	<p>We will continue to deliver against the priority areas of work identified as part of the Built Environment Programme.</p> <p>We will continue to link in with the national programme of work to ensure we are well positioned for the</p>	Mark Arkwell	March 2022



<p>prepared for the upcoming legislative changes related to the built environment and the challenges these will bring.</p> <p>The risk posed by High Risk Residential Buildings is still a significant challenge both at a national and local level. The Authority will continue to build on the work already undertaken in 2020/21, making full use of its statutory powers to drive remediation of those buildings.</p>	<p>future and prepare ourselves for the upcoming legislative changes e.g. Building Safety Bill and the outcomes of Grenfell Phase 2.</p> <p>Alongside this, we will continue with Phase 2 of the HRRB project working with responsible persons to ensure our building are compliant.</p>		
<p><u>FM code</u></p> <p>Implementation of the FM Code is required from 2021/22 onwards. A review of the Code's requirements has been undertaken and actions will be taken during 2021/22 to further strengthen governance.</p>	<p>Local Governance arrangements will be consolidated within an overarching Governance Framework.</p> <p>Reporting on the performance of the Authority's significant partnerships and contracts will be brought together and reported on a quarterly basis.</p>	<p>Katie Mills Connor Byrne</p>	<p>October 2021</p>
<p><u>Leadership Succession</u></p> <p>Interim arrangements remain in place within the Senior Leadership Team to support the transition between Chief Fire Officers and to ensure continuity in arrangements, whilst creating additional capacity</p>	<p>The Chief Fire Officer will work with the Fire Authority to agree the structure and process to substantiate vacancies with the Senior Leadership Team.</p>	<p>Wayne Bowcock</p>	<p>January 2022</p>

at a senior level.			
<p><u>Implementation of Fire Standards</u></p> <p>The role of the Fire Standards Board is to oversee the identification, organisation, development and maintenance of professional standards for fire and rescue services in England.</p> <p>It has a phased programme approach for the development and delivery of Fire Standards with Phase One, which consists of ten Standards, largely due to take place in 2021/22.</p> <p>All fire and rescue authorities must implement the standards approved, with HMICFRS having regard to the standards as part of its work.</p>	<p>RBFRS will assign lead officers for all Standards and engage in the consultation phase to inform development.</p> <p>When approved, a gap analysis will be completed and action plan developed which will identify further work required to fulfil the Standard.</p>	Katie Mills	March 2022
<p><u>Fire Reform</u></p> <p>A consultative White Paper is due to be published in 2021, setting out the Government's reform agenda in relation to fire and exploring specific proposals on fire governance in more detail.</p>	The Authority will consider the White Paper and its proposals when published and respond to the consultation.	Wayne Bowcock	When published
<p><u>Development of new People Strategy</u></p> <p>Our people are our most important asset and the</p>	We will undertake a staff engagement programme to inform the	Nikki Richards	January 2022

<p>current People Strategy runs until 2021. A key theme of the Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan is Capacity, Capability and Resilience. Our new People Strategy will continue our journey of improvement and support our staff to be the best public servants they can be, creating a workforce that can deliver excellence to our communities. It will also allow the Service to consider working arrangements following the pandemic, and its longer-term strategy for ways of working.</p>	<p>development of our new strategy, which we aim to publish by January 2022.</p>		
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## 8. Conclusion

The Authority will monitor the governance issues identified in this Statement through its performance and risk management arrangements. This ensures regular review and scrutiny of the issues identified by the Senior Leadership Team and the Authority. The Annual Governance Statement for 2021/22, will include an updated position against the governance issues identified in the 2020/21 Statement.

Signed:

Date:

Chairman of Audit and Governance Committee for Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

Signed:

Date:

Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive

