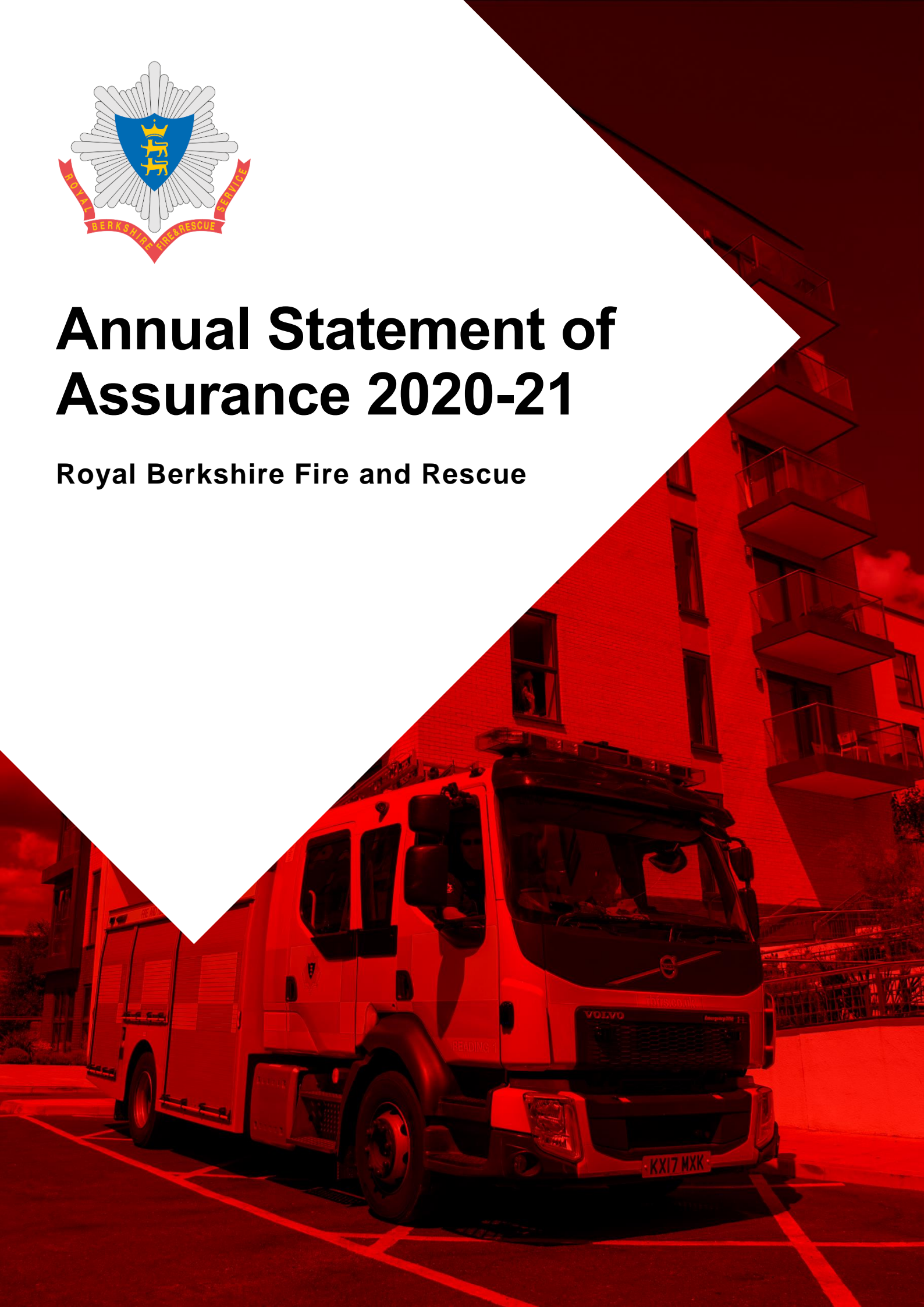




Annual Statement of Assurance 2020-21

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue





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The Statement of Assurance will be finalised and re-published, following the conclusion of the audit of the Statement of Accounts 2020/21, in consultation with the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee.



Introduction

We are required by the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#) to provide an Annual Statement of Assurance on financial, governance and operational matters to enable our communities, Government, local authorities and partners to make a valid assessment of our governance arrangements. This Statement of Assurance sets out the governance arrangements the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) had in place for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

We have written this document in accordance with the [guidance](#) published by the Department for Communities and Local Government on Statements of Assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England, which suggests that where relevant information is clear, accessible and user friendly is available within existing documents, extracts or links to these documents may be included within a Statement of Assurance. This Statement includes extracts or links to key documents, or other sources of information, where relevant.

In 2018/19 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) completed its first cycle of inspections and the next cycle is underway. Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) was rated as 'good' across the three main inspection pillars of 'effectiveness', 'efficiency', and 'people'. A copy of the inspection report is available on the HMICFRS website. RBFRS continues to deliver its action plan to address the area for improvements identified in its first inspection, which is overseen by the Audit and Governance Committee. HMICFRS will re-inspect RBFRS in 2022, providing further external assurance.

The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England sets out the Government's priorities and objectives for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England. The National Framework outlines the high-level expectations although it does not require a detailed account of operational matters which are best determined locally.

The key priorities established by the framework are:

- Making appropriate provision for fire prevention and protection activities and response to fire and rescue related incidents;
- Identifying and assessing the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks their areas face;
- Collaborating with emergency services and other local and national partners to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the service they provide;
- Being accountable to communities for the service they provide; and
- Developing and maintaining a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse.



Our legal responsibilities

The following legislation provides the main legal basis and outlines the statutory responsibilities and powers of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.

- The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- The Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- Policing and Crime Act 2017

In 2018, the Government launched a revised Fire and Rescue National Framework which sets out the Fire Authority's main responsibilities and these are shown below:

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority is required to:

- Contribute to safer communities by developing an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) to identify, assess and mitigate all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks faced by the communities of Royal Berkshire.
- Work in partnership with the people of Royal Berkshire and a wide range of partners locally and nationally to deliver a capable, resilient service.
- Be accountable to you for our actions and decision making.
- Have scrutiny arrangements in place that reflect the high standard you expect for an important public safety service.
- Provide assurance to you and to Government on financial, governance and operational matters and on national resilience capability.



How we make our judgements

In looking at our obligations, we have made a judgement on each based on the following definitions

Fully met	The requirements of applicable legislation and guidance are being consistently met.
Substantially met	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.
Partially met	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.



Summary Judgements

Financial Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2020-21 financial year, requirements associated with the appropriate management of financial matters were fully met. This is subject to conclusion of the external audit of the Statement of Accounts 2020-21.

Governance Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2020-21 financial year, requirements associated with appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance were fully met.

Operational Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2020-21 financial year, requirements associated with operational matters were fully met.

National Framework Requirements

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2020-21 financial year, the requirements associated with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been fully met.



Financial Assurance

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2020/21 financial year, requirements associated with the appropriate management of financial matters were fully met. This is subject to conclusion of the external audit of the Statement of Accounts 2020/21.

Evidence in support of the judgement

The Fire Authority places significant importance on ensuring that its financial management arrangements are in line with the expectations of a public body. An annual, independent audit is undertaken to review the Fire Authority's Statement of Accounts, which summarise the financial position of the Fire Authority at the end of the financial year and performance throughout the year.

The primary function of the external auditor is to express an opinion as to whether the Fire Authority's financial statements are free from material misstatement. However, the auditor also has responsibility for assessing whether the Fire Authority has reliable systems of control in place and the arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources.

The unaudited [2020-21 Statement of Accounts](#) are published on the Service website. The accounts are audited by independent external auditors who provide a view on the information contained in the accounts being 'true and fair'. The auditor considers whether the Authority has demonstrated it has delivered value for money prior to signing the audit statement.

The external auditor is currently undertaking the audit of the Accounts 2020/21. The [Annual Audit Letter](#) issued by the auditor in relation to these accounts will be used to confirm their assurance opinion on the financial matters of the Authority. The interim judgement on financial matters, based on internal assurance activity, will be finalised and updated in the Statement of Assurance following conclusion of the Audit.

The external audit of the draft statement of accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021 has not yet been completed by our external auditors, EY LLP, due to the delay in completing the audit of the financial year ending 31 March 2020, and subsequent rescheduling of the audit of the financial year ending 31 March 2021. This situation is allowed for by [Regulation 10, paragraph \(2a\) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015](#).

Therefore this notification explains, as per paragraph (2a), that we are not yet able to publish our audited 2020-21 final Statement of Accounts in line with deadline of 30 September 2021, as per paragraph (1). The Audit and Governance committee will consider the results of the 2020-21 audit at its meeting, after which we will publish the final audited accounts.

Further information about how the Service implements financial controls can be found in our [Constitution](#).



Areas for Future improvement

To be completed on receipt of the Annual Audit Letter.

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Governance Assurance

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2020-21 financial year, requirements associated with appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance were fully met.

Evidence in support of the judgement

Our governance arrangements

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority is a combined Fire Authority which means it is made up of 20 elected councillors from the six Unitary Authorities in Berkshire: Bracknell Forest, Slough Borough, Reading Borough, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, West Berkshire and Wokingham. The Fire Authority is a legal body with statutory duties and responsibilities, including the scrutiny of the Service as a whole. The Fire Authority is responsible for setting the strategic direction, policies and priorities of the Service.

Find out more about the Fire Authority on our [website](#).

Organisational governance

The Fire Authority, as a public body, places significant emphasis on ensuring that effective governance arrangements are in place.

Governance is concerned with how the Fire Authority manages its affairs on a day to day basis including business practices, standards of conduct and overall management procedures.

The Fire Authority undertakes an annual assessment of the governance arrangements using the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*. Our Annual Governance 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 [Annual Governance Statement 2020/21](#) confirms assurance in the governance arrangements.

The Fire Authority is committed to being fully transparent in accordance with the principles of good governance and legal requirements.

Contracted internal audits

RBFA has contracted out internal audit to RSM, an external company. In addition to auditing aspects of the Fire Authority required by legislation, the internal auditors are also instructed, as part of the audit plan agreed with the Audit and Governance Committee, to audit various other aspects of the service.

In 2020/21 the following core audits were completed:



- Key Financial Controls (Annual Pension Return)
- Risk Management and Governance
- IT - Cyber Essentials
- Firefighter Pension Administration
- Payroll Provider – Data Plan
- Capital Projects
- Fleet Management

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.

The internal auditor's overall audit opinion for 2020/21 was as follows:

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

The appointed Internal Auditors (RSM) undertook a Governance and Risk Management Audit as part of the 2020/21 audit plan. As part of this audit, the auditors found substantial assurance that *“effective arrangements and processes in relation to governance and risk management”*.

Substantial assurance is the highest level of assurance assigned by the auditors.

Areas for improvement

There were three low priority management actions highlighted by the internal auditors in 2020/21 as a result of the Governance and Risk Management Audit. Actions will be progressed over the year and will be reported on at our [Strategic Performance Board](#).

- We will ensure that minutes are updated to specifically record that actions agreed at previous meetings have been discussed and progress updates received. Only when actions are reported as completed will progress updates stop.
- We will update the Audit and Governance Committee, Fire Authority and Management Committee Terms of References to include a footnote outlining that these should be read in accordance with the organisation's Standing Orders.
- As part of the implementation of the risk management course, we will identify all staff responsible for risk management within the organisation. An exercise will then be completed to ensure appropriate risk training has been provided and a formal record will be retained to evidence this.



Operational Assurance

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2020-21 financial year, requirements associated with operational matters were fully met.

Evidence in support of the judgement

Management of Risk

The [Corporate Plan 2019-2023](#) includes our Community 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 brings together our three strands of service delivery; Prevention, Protection and Response and sets out our plans to ensure the right resources are in the place, at the right time to respond to emergencies. Our Protection, Prevention and Response Strategies agreed in 2020/21 provide a roadmap for our activities across the three areas.

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, as well as our own Consultation Principles which has also been subject to public consultation.

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

The processes we have adopted use a combination of risk modelling, historical data and professional judgement to make an assessment of impact and consequence with likelihood that an event will occur, ensuring that a thorough analysis has been completed. Our published [risk methodology](#) outlines the methods of modelling and mapping used to calculate risk and risk location within Berkshire.

We take into account local community and risk information by creating [Local Safety Plans](#) which feed into our risk management process. We outline our approach, the risks and the associated analysis in our [Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan](#) published on our website.

We work closely with our partners as part of the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (TVLRF) and actively provide resource, capacity and capability in support of the work of the Forum. RBFRS is committed to a programme of joint service training with Thames Valley Police, South Central Ambulance Service and the three Thames Valley fire services to deliver JESIP training to enable and fulfil the requirements of the JESIP Doctrine.



Specific Events

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

- Regular performance reports
- Risk based operational debriefs
- Feedback from staff to identify improvements on how the service can be delivered through an operational assurance process
- Attendance at significant emergency incidents by managers to monitor the performance of the firefighters

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.

A number of key performance indicators (KPIs) are used to monitor performance of our emergency response arrangements. The Strategic Performance Board (SPB) scrutinise performance and report to the Senior Leadership Team. Members play a key role in scrutinising performance through regular reports and presentations to Audit & Governance Committee and the full Fire Authority. All our [performance reports](#) and performance against targets are published on our website.

The Operational Assurance Framework exists to monitor, report and act on outcomes from active monitoring and incident debriefs and this feeds into both national operational learning and joint organisational learning.

Mutual Aid Agreements

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

- In the event of a significant emergency, RBFA can, and have, requested 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 county, RBFA has the following specialist resources that can be deployed to assist those in need:

- A Mass Decontamination Unit (MDU), to support large scale hazardous substance incident;
- A High Volume Pump, (HVP) to support large scale flooding incidents;
- A Water Rescue Unit, (WRU) to support rescues from large scale flooding incidents.



Health and Safety Assurance

We have an established suite of key health and safety performance indicators that enable us to closely monitor health and safety performance at all levels. The indicators cover areas such as personal injuries and vehicle accidents, near misses, events that are reportable to HSE under the RIDDOR, fitness testing and sickness. This is monitored quarterly by our Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee. RIDDOR injury events, sickness and fitness data are also monitored by our Strategic Performance Board.

A comprehensive health and wellbeing provision is in place to support employees throughout their career. During 2020/21 significant effort was placed on protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of staff in all roles, ensuring measures were in place to maintain operational resilience and ensure safe working environments. Proactive advice and support was provided to take account of the range of challenges being faced by individuals and protect the most vulnerable staff.

Training Assurance

Operational staff in qualification is regularly measured and development and assessment pathways take account of the skills and knowledge required for role. On-call individuals are afforded additional training opportunities alongside their whole time colleagues. Operational staff in qualification is measured at our Strategic Performance Board with papers published on our website.

An annual training plan is developed and a suite of core skill courses are available for all staff. During the period of the pandemic and the periods of restricted attendance and movement, training and learning support was delivered utilising online facilities and through the introduction of a learning management system that will provide a blended approach to training and assessment and support flexibility of access to learning into the future.

Duty to Collaborate

The Corporate plan and CRMP 2019-2023 outlines the legislation contained in the Policing and Crime Act 2017, which places a duty on emergency services to collaborate in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness. To support, champion and provide strategic oversight of collaborative activity within the service, RBFA has appointed a Lead Member for Collaboration. This Councillor forms part of Thames Valley Steering Group and is joint lead for Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) Joint Committee. The Thames Valley Collaboration Steering Group provides the structure, governance and direction for blue light collaboration. This and our collaboration activities are explained in greater detail in the [Thames Valley Collaboration Report](#) and the Thames Valley Collaboration Register.



Areas for Future Improvement

Reporting and assurance activity is managed through our Strategic Performance Board and Audit and Governance Committee. This monitors any actions and improvement plans.

Our [Annual Report](#) provides the details of our successes along with areas of improvement in line with our Vision. Our [Annual Plan](#) sets out our Annual Objectives and highlights areas of focus in achieving these Objectives.

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National Framework Assurance

It is the view of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) that, at the end of the 2020/21 financial year, requirements associated with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been fully met.

Evidence in support of the judgement

To provide an assessment of how well RBFA adheres to the National Framework, an internal assessment was undertaken and subject to an internal moderation exercise to scrutinise the assessments made. We use external evaluations through audits, assessment against professional standards and independent inspections. The outcome was that RBFA fully met the Framework requirements for 2020/21.

This outcome is further supported by the independent inspection by HMICFRS who judged RBFRS as good across the three main pillars of 'Effectiveness', 'Efficiency' and 'People'.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a legal obligation to comply with the public sector equality duty (PSED). This is a duty on public authorities to consider how our policies, decisions and activities affect people who are protected under the Equality Act. This incorporates nine protected characteristics age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

To meet our statutory obligations, when exercising our functions, we must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

The general equality duty is supported by specific duties to help organisations to show compliance, requiring public bodies to additionally:

- Publish diversity information annually to demonstrate our compliance with the equality duty;



- Prepare and publish specific and measurable equality objectives at least every four years.

We are committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in both the service we deliver to the community and the employment of our staff. EDI is about understanding and respecting differences and ensuring the right people receive the right services. We also understand that a diverse workforce with individuals who can offer different skills, experience and knowledge will benefit us as an organisation and ensure we are able to meet the needs of the diverse community we serve.

The diversity of our workforce is important and we are working hard to attract and retain a wider pool of applicants into all positions.

An Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Forum assists the Service to consider its activities and pulls of diversity of experience regarding areas for attention and progression/development. We consult on and publish our Equality Objectives as part of our commitment to meeting the duties placed upon us. The Forum is a knowledge-sharing and consultative body that supports the Service to maintain progress regarding our objectives by drawing on a range of perspectives and experiences.

Our Future Plans

RBFA is determined to continue to provide a safe and efficient service, whilst meeting changing local needs and balancing the budget. Plans put in place over the last few years have provided a good foundation to meet that challenge.

In 2018, RBFA published our [Corporate Plan and CRMP 2019-2023](#), demonstrating how RBFRS will deliver its services, in order to achieve the Fire Authority's six Strategic Commitments. Work will start during 2022 to refresh this key document.

Our [Annual Plan for 2021/22](#) is published on our website and includes specific areas of focus for the year ahead in support of our Vision for 2023 and beyond, and to ensure RBFRS utilises and maximises its available resources to deliver a quality service to the people of Royal Berkshire.

The Impact of Covid-19

As with all public sector organisations, the Covid-19 global pandemic has had a unique impact on our service. Our [Annual Governance Statement](#) details the Authority's consideration of Covid-19 and provides a summary of the impact on Governance for the period of the pandemic. We have also continued to meet our statutory responsibilities throughout the period of Covid-19 pandemic and this was highlighted by HMICFRS in their [Covid-19 Thematic inspection letter](#).



HMICFRS were 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 had “adapted and responded to the pandemic effectively.”

Our internal governance arrangements have proved adequate in supporting a swift response to COVID-19. This will continue to be a significant governance issue during 2020/21 and will continue to be managed through internal governance arrangements, learnings from this period will be fed into the COVID-19 Learning Report.

How we engage with our communities

You can get involved with the work of the Fire Authority by attending the public meetings that are held regularly by the Authority.

We value the views of our communities to ensure we are providing the service you need. We consult formally on the ways in which we propose to deliver services through the CRMP consultation and this and more information about our plans and priorities can be found on our website www.rbfrs.co.uk.

Access to information

A range of information about RBFRS is routinely published on our website. For more information on access to data and information, please visit our [website](#).

Should you require help with accessing the information in a different format, please view our [accessibility statement](#) or contact us using communications@rbfrs.co.uk.

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