

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	23 MARCH 2022
SUBJECT	MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT REVIEW AND CONSULTATION RESULTS
LEAD OFFICER	GRAHAM BRITTEN, MONITORING OFFICER
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR TINA MCKENZIE-BOYLE
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	FOR DECISION

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To review the results of the Draft Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) Member Code of Conduct Consultation, and to recommend the adoption of the RBFA Code of Conduct to the Fire Authority for approval.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That Audit and Governance Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTE** the results of the Draft RBFA Member Code of Conduct consultation (Appendix B); and
- 2.2 **RECOMMEND** to the Fire Authority for approval the adoption of the RBFA Member Code of Conduct (Appendix A).

3. REPORT

- 3.1 In November 2020, Audit and Governance Committee recommended the Fire Authority; note the findings and actions from the audit against the 15 best practice recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL). The Committee also recommended a review of the Code of Conduct be held annually commencing 2021/22, and where possible take into account

the views of the public, community organisations, and neighbouring and appointing authorities. Minute reference 24.

- 3.2 In January 2022, Audit and Governance Committee agreed that subject to the gifts and hospitality amendment threshold be brought back to £25, instead of £50, a six-week consultation be held to commence on 28 January 2022 on the adoption of the Draft RBFA Member Code of Conduct. The Committee also agreed for the consultation findings be brought back to its next meeting, minute reference 38.
- 3.3 The consultation was circulated via Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue (RBFRS') social media platforms and via email to Unitary Authorities, Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Service Partners and community groups. The consultation document was available in printed version upon request. There were no requests for a printed version.
- 3.4 Throughout the consultation period (Friday 28 January until Friday 11 March) regular tweets, repeat emails were circulated and a post on Facebook was made in the final consultation deadline week. The online questionnaire asked three questions below:

Question 1. Do you support the behaviours required of councillors, as set out in the Draft RBFA Code of Conduct when they are publicly representing Royal Berkshire Fire Authority on official business and when using social media? Yes / No / please explain

Question 2. Do you think the expected standards of councillor conduct and the actions that could be taken should an allegation be made, are clear? Yes / No / please explain

Question 3. Have you got any other comments you would like to make on the Draft RBFA Model Code of Conduct. Yes / No / please explain

3.5 **Key results**

- A total of 44 respondents participated in the consultation, however not all 44 respondents completed all of the consultation questions.
- Nine respondents indicated they heard about the consultation via email, five social media and one on Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service website. A number of respondents skipped this question.
- 100% of respondents' support the behaviours required of councillors, as set out in the Draft RBFA Code of Conduct when they are publicly representing Royal Berkshire Fire Authority on official business and when using social media. One respondent commented '*All people should treat each other with dignity and respect*'.

- 90.91% think the expected standards of councillor conduct and the actions that could be taken should an allegation be made were clear. Two respondents answered 'No', but did not provide a comment or suggestion on how this could be improved. One respondent commented '*Good clear expectations from people in public office*'
- 90.91% did not have any other comments they would like to make on the Draft RBFA Model Code of Conduct. One respondent commented the seventh Nolan principle of public life 'Leadership' had not been included in the Appendix. The appendix has been subsequently updated to include all seven Nolan principles of public life.

3.6 The total impressions (audience reached) in promoting the consultation across Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook was 3,504.

3.7 Lessons learnt from the first Code of Conduct consultation would be applied prior to future consultations and review of the Code of Conduct. For example, the use of graphics and video content to explain the purpose of the consultation would be used in 'reels' and 'stories' in social media platforms, such as Instagram. In addition, the time of the year and number of other live public consultations would be reviewed, to avoid too many organisational public consultations at any one time.

3.8 Appendix B show the survey results in its entirety, which include the demographic of respondents.

3.9 Based on the survey, (Appendix B) Members are asked to note the survey results and recommend the adoption of the RBFA Code of Conduct to the Fire Authority for approval.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

4.1 Commitment 5 – We will ensure that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service provides good value for money.

4.2 Commitment 6 – We will work with Central Government and key stakeholders in the interests of the people of Royal Berkshire.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct financial implications relevant to the report.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 requires relevant authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-Opted Members of the authority. Each local authority must publish a code of conduct.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no negative equality and diversity implications from the recommendations.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The recommendation will have no adverse effect on the conduct or delivery of the Authority's functions.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

9.1 Future updates to the Code of Conduct and future consultations thereof will be made with Fire Authority partners and communities.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

10.1 Chief Fire Officer was consulted during the preparation of this report.

10.2 The Head of Finance and Procurement was consulted during the preparation of this report.

10.3 Monitoring Officer report author.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Audit and Governance Committee Minute reference 38 – 24 January 2022.

11.2 Local Government Association Model Code of Conduct.

11.3 Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services (England).

12. APPENDICES

12.1 Appendix A – RBFA Member Code of Conduct

12.2 Appendix B – RBFA Member Code of Conduct survey results

13. CONTACT DETAILS

13.1 Graham Britten, Monitoring Officer 01296 744441

13.2 Fayth Rowe, Democratic Support Lead 0118 938 4611