

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



Held on Wednesday, 23 March 2022, at 6.30 pm
Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) Headquarters
Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD

Members:
(*present)

Councillor Christine Bateson	*	Councillor Tony Linden
* Councillor Jane Stanford-Beale	*	Councillor Harjinder Minhas
* Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle		Councillor Garth Simpson
* Councillor Alison Swaddle	*	Councillor Simon Werner
Councillor Avtar Cheema		* Councillor Helliars-Symons (substitute)

In Attendance: Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
Andrew Brittain (External Auditors, Ernest and Young, EY)
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)
Doug Buchanan (Area Manager Response and Resilience, AM R&R)
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P)
Becca Chapman (Data, Performance and Risk Manager, DP&R)
Sam Faulknall-Mills (Performance and Planning Officer, P&PO)
Dan Harris (Internal Auditors, RSM)
Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development, HHR&L&D)
Allison Kennett (External Auditors, Ernest and Young (EY)
Andy McLenahan (Head of Facilities, Fleet and Equipment (HFF&E)
Katie Mills (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)
James Pinchin (Business Support Lead, BSL)
Nikki Richards (Deputy Chief Executive, Dep ChEx)
Hannah Sheehan (Democratic Support Assistant, DSA)
Angela Smith (Programme Office and Inspection Manager, PO&IM)
Tregear Thomas (Area Manager Prevention and Protection, AM P&P)

44. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bateson, Cheema and Simpson. Councillor Helliars-Symons attended as a substitute for Councillor Simpson.

45. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Action

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.

46. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 JANUARY 2022

The Chairman proposed the recommendation and it was seconded by Councillor Linden.

Two actions were recorded at the last meeting and were included in the post meeting notes for clarity.

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2022, be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

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

Item 13 Strategic Asset Investment Framework ICT Business Case was referred by the Fire Authority on 15 February 2022.

48. INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (HF&P), introduced the report, stating that two audits, relating to firefighter pension administration and payroll had been completed since the last meeting. Both were issued the highest assurance opinion.

Dan Harris, Internal Auditor (RSM), highlighted page 23 of the agenda, which summarised the final report. He stated that both audits were issued the highest assurance opinion and that there were four low priority actions arising. Two actions were applicable to Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) and the other two actions were for West Yorkshire Pension Fund, to implement.

Dan highlighted the progress against the audit plan 2021/22 on page 25 and explained that each audit thus far had resulted in the highest assurance opinion. He also stated that page 26 outlined the remaining audits. Both the audits on Value for Money and Key Financial Controls would have a draft report by the end of the week, with no significant issues identified. The Cyber Essentials audit was pushed back slightly to June/July.

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

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

Dan Harris left the meeting.

49. EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

Conor Byrne, HFRP, introduced the report stating that it was hoped that the audited Statement of Accounts 2020/21 would be presented at the meeting. Due to the ongoing delays with the audit of Berkshire Pension Fund, this was not possible. It was anticipated the Statement of Accounts 2020/21 will be brought to the July meeting for sign off.

Andrew Brittain, External Auditor (EY), stated the Draft Audit Result Report was attached at Appendix A. The Executive Summary on page 85 was the same as what was brought to the Committee on 24 January, with one update on Materiality. The change was an update to the planning materially assessments uses draft results and reconsiders risk assessments.

Andrew also explained that the delay in pensions reporting was due to EY awaiting conclusions from Deloitte. Section 5 of the report outlines the unadjusted differences in pension data.

Allison Kennett, External Auditor (EY) stated that EY were still awaiting the Whole of Government Accounts return from the National Audit Office (NAO), so were unable to yet complete that audit. There was one remuneration for Officers to provide a document in relation to investment properties, this had been provided and was sent to EY Real Estate for assurance.

Allison added that page 116 outlined the position in relation to audit fees. The proposed increase in the fee was awaiting determination by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited (PSAA).

Councillor Helliar-Symons highlighted page 87 of the report and emphasised it stated Royal Berkshire Fire Authority do provide value for money.

The Chairman asked which stage had been reached with Deloitte? Andrew explained that EY have received the assurance letter from Deloitte but it was caveated, due to the audit of the Royal County of Berkshire Pension Fund was still open, which formed part of the overall audit. Andrew stated that he hoped this would be concluded as soon as possible.

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

RESOLVED that the contents of the Draft Audit Results Report in Appendix A be noted.

Andrew Brittain and Allison Kennett left the meeting.

50. ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2020/21

Angela Smith, Programme Office and Inspection Manager (PO&IM), introduced the report explaining it was an annual requirement the Authority publish their Statement of Assurance. The report outlined the summary judgements for the

four key areas; Finance, Governance, Operations and the delivery of the National Framework. The internal assessment by RBFRS Officers concluded that the framework criteria was fully met in each of the four areas.

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

RESOLVED that:

- 1) 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.
- 2) The RBFA Statement of Assurance 2020/21, be approved.
- 3) 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 2020/21, in consultation with the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, be agreed.

51. MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT REVIEW AND CONSULTATION RESULTS

Graham Britten, Monitoring Officer (MO), introduced the report, stating that in November the Committee recommended that the Fire Authority note the findings and actions from the audit against the 15 best practice recommendations by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL). Following this, in January the Committee agreed that subject to the gifts and hospitality threshold being amended, a six-week consultation on the adoption of the Draft RBFA Members Code of Conduct commence, on 28 January 2022. The results can be seen on pages 150-151 of the cover report.

Councillor Linden stated that the consultation had a positive response from the public and that it was important that the RBFA Code of Conduct is updated regularly.

The Chairman moved the recommendation and it was seconded by Councillor Stanford-Beale.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The results of the Draft RBFA Member Code of Conduct consultation (Appendix B); be noted and
- 2) It be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval the adoption of the RBFA Member Code of Conduct (Appendix A).

52. PROTOCOL ON MEMBER OFFICER RELATIONS

Graham Britten introduced the report, stating that it was seeking approval for the revised Protocol on Member and Officer Relations. The changes were highlighted in yellow for ease of reference in Appendix A. Graham added his thanks to Fayth Rowe for revising the draft protocol who had looked at comparisons with other Local Authority protocols.

Councillor Helliar-Symons said that she had been involved in the revising of the protocol and that the changes highlighted in yellow made perfect sense.

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

RESOLVED that the amendments to the Protocol on Member and Officer Relations and that it be published on the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service website, be agreed.

53. COMPLAINTS, COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS POLICY REVIEW

James Pinchin, Business Support Lead (BSL), introduced the report explaining the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy had been reviewed and updated to provide a more efficient and effective service for complainants as well as reducing administrative burden on the Service.

The main changes outlined in the report included the removal of a secondary appeal to Fire Authority. Complaint handling should focus on the outcomes for the complainant and while a secondary appeal might appear beneficial to a complainant, it actually increases the time for the complainant to receive a final resolution.

Another addition was the Unreasonable Complaint Behaviour Policy, which sets out clear examples of what constitutes as unreasonable complainant behaviour, with a range of actions the Service can take. Even though there are only a small minority of cases where people pursue their complaints in a way that was unreasonable or vexatious, they can impede the investigation of their complaint and can have a significant resource issue for the Service.

Other changes include an adjustment to out-of-hours provision, with duty officers performing a triage function to assess whether a complaint needs to be investigated urgently or can wait for usual business hours, and the response time has been changed from 7 working days to 10 days. This is to reflect differing working patterns within the organisation and remove any ambiguity.

A new internal reporting system has been included within the policy based on a recommendation from our HMICFRS inspection, this will make it easier for the senior leadership team to track issues and identify any trends.

An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out to ensure that the Service has identified potential impacts and accessibility checks and guidance have been added to the policy.

Overall the changes recommended aim to improve customer service experience for complainants and alleviate unnecessary administration burden for the Service.

Councillor Helliar-Symons asked who completes the Complaints Form on page 229. James explained that the Officer who receives the complaint would complete in the form.

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

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The proposed changes to the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy, be agreed; and
- 2) It be noted that staff and representative bodies will be consulted on the proposed changes, and if further amendments are proposed will be presented to the next Audit and Governance Committee. If no further changes are required following publication, the Policy will be published.

54. MEMBER DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL REPORT AND PROGRESS AGAINST ACTION PLAN

Councillor Helliar-Symons introduced the report and stated that in October 2019 the Fire Authority approved its three-year Member Development Strategy, which aligned to the Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan. The coming year will be the final year of the Strategy, but it would be useful to know Members thoughts and if there was anything they would like added.

As outlined at 3.9 of the report, courses and activities listed in the Action Plan have become business as usual. Courses will be reviewed as part of the development of a new Strategy.

Councillor Helliar-Symons also emphasised 3.12 and 3.15 of the report and encouraged all Members to visit Fire Stations.

She stated only 13 responded to the survey, and while it would've been useful to have 100% of responses, the feedback was valuable and has been used to update the skills questionnaire.

There were three suggested revisions to the skills questionnaire. Only 11 Members said that they had a good understanding of how RBFRS works, this was vague, and to gain a better understanding, further detail has been added to this question. The questionnaire now outline areas Members can tick if they understand them well or if they would welcome more information. This can then be followed up in their 1:1 with their Group Leader. Another addition was a question that asked Members what areas of the Fire Authority they would prefer to be involved with, this will be useful to the Chairman when assigning roles, based on Member skills and expertise. The final change is in regard to the timing of 1:1s, it's suggested that new Members undertake their 1:1 as soon as

they are appointed, as part of their induction and existing Members have theirs in September/October.

The Chairman stated that the success of Member Development highlights how Officers and Members work together.

The Chairman moved the recommendation.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The Member Development Annual Report, be noted;
- 2) The progress of the 2020-23 Member Development Action Plan (Appendix A), be noted; and
- 3) The results of the Member Development Survey (Appendix B), be noted.

55. ANNUAL REPORT ON GOVERNANCE

Katie Mills, Head of Corporate Services (HCS), introduced the item, explaining the report outlined Member Attendance and Allowances from 1 June 2021 to 28 February 2022.

The Chairman moved the recommendation.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) It be recommended that the Fire Authority:
 - Note Members' Allowances received from 1 June 2021 – 31 May 2022;
 - Note the 2021/22 attendance record of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Members from 1 June 2021 – 31 May 2022.

56. ICT CLARIFICATION AND BUSINESS CASES

Nikki Richards, Deputy Chief Executive (Dep ChEx), presented the report on behalf of Tony Vincent, Head of Business and Information Systems (HBIS). The report followed a request made at Fire Authority on 15 February, that further detail be provided in regards to the mandatory and discretionary spending proposals included in the ICT SAIF. Tony Vincent prepared the report which provided additional information and business cases for clarity.

The Chairman moved the recommendation.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report, the appended business cases and associated Equality Impact Assessments, be noted.

57. CIPFA FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT CODE REPORT

Conor Byrne, HF&P introduced the item, explaining that the CIPFA have published a financial management code, which the Authority are required to

demonstrate compliance with from 2021/22. Appendix A outline the six principles, the associated seventeen standards and how the Authority has complied in the current year.

The Chairman asked whether this will bring all financial elements under one report? Conor explained that this was the case and it also provided a summary of where we are.

The Chairman moved the recommendation.

RESOLVED that the contents as presented in the CIPFA FM Code report (Appendix A), be noted.

58. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT - QUARTER THREE

Sam Faulknull-Mills, Performance and Planning Officer (P&PO), introduced the quarter three report, stating that progress has been made against plans in all four quadrants.

Tregear Thomas, Area Manager Prevention and Protection (AM P&P) gave an update on item 8, page 12 of the report, total number of full fire safety audits carried out in premises in Berkshire. He stated that the total number of audits carried out was below the expected target, this was due to the impact of the Omicron Variant and a number of Fire Safety Officers (FSO) staff extractions to work on HRRB Programme. He stated, the number completed was to the end of Q3, therefore there was a quarter remaining to complete the target of 1100.

Doug Buchanan, Area Manager Response and Resilience, (AM R&R) explained items 15 and 16 on page 13 of the report. Wholetime and On-Call crewing had been impacted by pandemic related pressures. There was 10.7% sickness over the Christmas period. So far, in Quarter 4 it was starting to take a more positive direction of travel. Recruitment activity for both On-Call and Wholetime continued.

Councillor Stanford-Beale asked when On-Call availability would be expected to improve? Doug explained that On-Call availability had already improved so far in quarter 4. A recruitment drive was ongoing, but it will take some time to get those Firefighters in the role.

Councillor Stanford-Beale highlighted page 14 and asked why there were no returns received from respondents satisfied with the Service Safe and Well visits? Becca Chapman explained that it was a satisfaction measure, the data was extracted from questionnaires completed after the visits and no responses were received in quarter 4.

Councillor Helliard-Symons highlighted page 39-42 of the report on Performance Management and asked whether the PDR audit to quality check objectives had taken place yet, and how many PDRs had taken place? Nikki Richards explained that the audit had taken place and smart objectives were identified

and additional training provided. Currently 98.2% of staff had completed their PDRs.

Becci Jefferies provided further information on page 20, explaining that sickness increased in quarter 3, this was due to Covid and a significant proportion of respiratory problems following Covid. 26% of sickness in quarter 3 was due to Mental Health. To address this, a Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan was in place. It has also been recognised that Mental Health has been more long term with Green Book staff. Further investigations were ongoing to look at the best way to seek early intervention.

Nikki Richards explained the number of RIDDOR accidents on page 20, the target remained red due to progress and where we are in the year. The annual target was a maximum of 6 and to date, there have been 4, so the target at the end of quarter 4 should be achieved.

Councillor Helliard-Symons asked why there was no data in the report for near misses. Nikki explained that near misses were reported to Heads of Service and Directors on a monthly basis.

Sam Faulkner-Mills highlighted page 22 Priority Programmes and explained that the final two appliances which RBFRS purchased became fully operational at Slough Fire Station.

Tregear Thomas explained why the target for ensuring a high standard of service through the quality assurance of our Protection activities, remained red for quarters 1-3. This is due to limited progress, as a result of other programmes taking priority.

Katie Mills provided an update on progress against CRMP Project 4, Response Resource Deployment, Specialist Water Rescue and stated it remained red due to vacancies, but will go green once the positions were filled.

Jim Powell explained Appendix A the percentage of occasions where time to mobilise is within 90 seconds.

Councillor Linden asked a question in relation to the number complaints received in the quarter. Katie explained that there hadn't been a significant spike in complaints received and that all complaints had been dealt with in line with the Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy.

The Chairman moved the recommendation.

RESOLVED that:

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

59. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday, 28 July 2022, at 6.30pm, Lynda Kenyon Suite, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD.

(The meeting concluded at 19:47)