

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



Held on Tuesday, 28th March, 2023 at 6.30 pm

RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD.

**Members:** (\*present)

* Councillor Christine Bateson	* Councillor Mike Smith
* Councillor Tricia Brown	* Councillor Morag Malvern
Councillor Haqeeq Dar	Councillor Sandra Malik
* Councillor Biyi Oloko	Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle
* Councillor Tony Linden	

**In Attendance:** Paul Bremble (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)  
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)  
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P)  
Doug Buchanan (Area Manager, Response and Resilience, AM R&R)  
Becca Chapman (Data, Performance and Risk Manager)  
Daniel Harris (Internal Auditor, RSM)  
Abdifatar Hassan (Democratic Support Assistant, DSA)  
Alison Kennett (EY, External Auditor)  
Jess James (Area Manager Prevention and Protection, AM P&P)  
Andy McLenahan (Head of Facilities, Fleet and Equipment HFF&E)  
Jim Powell (Area Manager, Collaboration and Policy, AM C&P)  
Nikki Richards (Deputy Chief Executive, DcHEX)  
Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL)  
Emma Scott (Senior HR Adviser)

## 40. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Haqeeq Dar, Sandra Malik and Tina McKenzie-Boyle.

## 41. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct, Councillor Tony Linden declared a personal interest regarding Item 6 (External Audit Update) due to his role on the Berkshire Pension Scheme.

**Action**

#### 42. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 JANUARY 2023

The actions in the Minutes were completed.

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held and recorded actions on 23 January 2023, be confirmed, as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

There were no matters properly referred to this Committee for decision.

#### 44. INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (HF&P), introduced RSM's Internal progress report and draft 2023/24 Audit Plan. Five audits were completed in the period and all but one received the highest assurance rating.

On referring to page 23 of the report, Dan Harris (Internal Auditor) explained the Final audit reports for 2022/23 (Risk Management and Cyber Essentials) will be presented to Audit and Governance Committee in July 2023. In referring to the Facilities Management Executive Summary on page 30 of the report, he explained the audit opinion was 'reasonable assurance'. He reported the audit opinion was positive and four management medium actions had been agreed on scheduling, workplace inspections and defects. From page 35 onwards, the report provided further detail on the agreed actions and implementation dates, which was towards the end of June.

In response to a number of questions from Councillor Smith, Andy McLenahan, Head of Facilities, Fleet and Equipment (HFFE) reported PPM Schedule was an acronym for 'Pre-planned maintenance'. A management action had been agreed to record internal contract meetings. In relation to a supplementary question from Councillor Smith, Andy McLenahan explained one of the outstanding items identified was an outbuilding at Slough Fire Station. The building had experienced damp and was subsequently repaired. The second phase of the work was to understand the cause of the problem and it would have been remiss to remove off the system.

Dan Harris reported pages 93 – 94 was the Internal Audit Strategy 2023/24 which listed the range of department audits, proposed timing and fees across the organisation. Six audits were linked to a corporate risk/ strategic commitments, and two core assurance reviews will be held. In referring to appendix B (pages 101-103), Dan Harris reported the table showed a backward look of audit opinions previously provided and was also a forward look at the 23/24 audit plan.

Councillor Smith queried the difference between advisory and risk based. Dan Harris reported 'Risk base approach' was a formal assurance opinion. Cyber

essentials audit was against government standards / self-assessment. Formal audit opinion was not required.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Smith, Nikki Richards, Deputy Chief Executive (DchEx), reported the Service had not signed up to Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation to date, however, the Service was working with a third party (Cyber Essentials Plus accreditors) to achieve this accreditation in the future.

Councillor Smith queried the reason why there had been no audit on IT General Controls since 16/17. Dan Harris reported it had been replaced with Cyber Essentials, of which annual audits were held.

Dan Harris agreed to reflect in future reports that IT General Controls had been superseded by Cyber Essentials.

Internal Auditor (RSM)

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) The findings as presented in RSM's Progress Report be noted; and
- 2) The draft 2023/34 Audit Plan be approved.

#### **45. EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE**

Conor Byrne reported he had written to the Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA) on behalf of the Committee to express growing concerns on the delay of the signing off Statement of Accounts. He tabled a letter from PSAA Chief Executive. Conor Byrne reported there was little that could be done, for example, the main sanction was to replace the auditor, however; the current market has been unable to attract a number of auditors into the sector. He stated he had hoped that the accounts would be signed off at this meeting and stated that he will bring to the July meeting for sign off.

Alison Kennett, External Auditor reported EY were waiting for Deloitte to audit Berkshire Pension Fund accounts. She stated it was beyond her control and all audit firms were in a similar position.

In response to the PSAA letter, Councillor Linden requested A&GC Chair write to the Secretary of State, Michael Gove to inform him of the delay in the signing off of Statement of Accounts.

Conor Byrne advised Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) had three sets of un-audited accounts and reported of the level of resources required. He stated he was concerned.

In response to Councillor Smith, Alison Kennett reported there were no caveats in the 19/20 Statement of Accounts and that they could have been signed off by Deloitte. She added, there was a caveat in the 20/21 Statement of Accounts.

Conor Byrne summarised the main concern around the Berkshire Pension Fund

accounts. He reiterated the contents from the PSAA letter, which stated the Committee should expect the 19/20 Statement of Accounts to be signed off in May 2023.

Councillor Linden stated due to the delay, it was unknown whether Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead were in financial difficulty and requested for the letter to the Secretary of State to be factual.

Nikki Richards reported the letter to the Secretary of State would inform him of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's position and stated it was prudent the Authority made RBWM aware of its concerns.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee note the update from the auditors.

#### **46. ANNUAL REPORT ON MEMBERS DEVELOPMENT**

Councillor Mike Smith, Member Development Champion, presented the report and stated the Fire Authority appointed six new Members in June 2022, and advised following the local elections in May 2023, could see additional new Members. There were 24 actions on the action plan, two of which were amber in the RAG rating. He highlighted a survey was conducted by Democratic Support, however, only a small number of Members responded. He also highlighted the recommendation to the Fire Authority of the new Member Development Strategy which outlined the core responsibilities of Fire Authority members.

In referring to the action plan, Paul Bremble, Head of Corporate Services (HCS), also highlighted the other two red incomplete actions, where around Member / Officer Buddies and the number of Members completing E-learning courses were low.

The Member Development Strategy was created alongside Councillor Smith and Member Development Working Group. Paul Bremble stated the Strategy had been aligned to the draft Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) document and subject to approval, a new action plan will be developed and reported back to this Committee.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) The Member Development Annual Report be noted;
- 2) The progress of the 2022-23 Member Development Action Plan (Appendix A) be noted;
- 3) The results of the Member Development Survey (Appendix B) be noted; and
- 4) The 2023-27 Member Development Strategy be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval (Appendix C).

#### **47. ANNUAL REPORT ON GOVERNANCE**

Paul Bremble presented the report and went through the items the Committee discussed throughout the year. He reported the appendices on Member attendance and allowances was until 28 February and it would be updated prior to the Fire Authority in June. In response to Councillor Linden, he advised the Member allowances spreadsheet will be updated to the end of May, therefore it should then capture all expenses claimed.

Paul Bremble highlighted a small typo in the last sentence of paragraph 3.6, which should be read as '*Royal County of Windsor and Maidenhead*'.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) It be recommended to the Fire Authority;
  - i) Members' Allowances received from 1 June 2022 – 31 May 2023 be noted; and
  - ii) The 2022/23 attendance record of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Members from 1 June 2022 – 31 May 2023 be noted.

#### **48. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT 2022/23 QUARTER THREE (OCTOBER - DECEMBER)**

Becca Chapman, Data, Risk and Performance Manager presented the Quarter Three performance report and explained the data was a snapshot in time, which did not include the Corporate Risk Register.

Quadrant One – Service Provision

Jess James, Area Manager Prevention and Protection reported there were three fire fatalities during the quarter which had gone through Coroners Court. In response to a question from Councillor Linden on the red RAG rating identified in the *Percentage of Full Fire Safety Audits with a 'Broadly compliant' result*, Jess James explained the red was due to the introduction of the methodology of the Risk Based Inspection programme and should see a difference in the rating later in the year.

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Linden on the red RAG rating which identified the *Percentage of hours where there is adequate crewing on on-call frontline pumping appliances (based on 24/7 crewing)*, Doug Buchanan, Area Manager Response and Resilience (AM R&R), reported on-call availability affected Fire Services nationally. Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) were working on recruitment, retention and changing policy around on-call. The most recent Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) had consulted on on-call corporate targets and added, on-call provided resilience to the Service. He added, he will be delivering a presentation on on-call at the next Fire Authority meeting.

Councillor Smith queried the red RAG rating for the *Percentage of Automatic Fire Alarm where RBFRS did not attend*. Becca Chapman explained the rating

was due to the target to reduce attendance via call challenge.

#### Quadrant Two – Corporate Health

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (HF&P) reported Firelink grant had been reduced by 20% and stated that it had been built into the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). He discussed the budget pressures highlighted in the report.

Councillor Linden stated he was pleased with the outcome of the Grey Book Pay Award and Industrial Action did not commence. In response to his question on the increase of the levels in the quarter of sickness days lost and percentage of working time lost, Emma Scott, Senior HR Adviser reported 25% was due to respiratory absence.

Councillor Smith queried the overtime forecast identified on page 193 of the report and asked whether some of those costs should not be predictable. Nikki Richards, Deputy Chief Executive (DchEx), explained although some savings on training were made, there were unpredictable costs in relation to the number of leavers. Overtime was used to balance the lean structure. Doug Buchanan, Area Manager Response and Resilience (AM R&R) reiterated the crewing model was lean and he was working with Budget and Collaboration Lead Member to manage more effectively.

#### Quadrant Three – Priority Programmes

Jim Powell, Area Manager Collaboration and Finance (AM C&P), reported there were no material change since the last meeting on Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP). Jim Powell agreed to circulate the Audit Executive report to the Committee.

AM (C&P)

Councillor Smith congratulated officers on their work on the intranet and website replacement project.

#### Quadrant Four – Assurance

Nikki Richards reported the Built Environment programme had closed and added it was a successful project and had now been built into business as usual.

Doug Buchanan explained the red RAG rating for risk 885, (Climate Change Operational Response) and discussed wildfire capability and review on water rescue capability.

In response to a question from Councillor Bateson, Jim Powell explained the red RAG status to risk 861 (Hydrant Inspection and Repair) will change in quarter four, due to the recruitment of a Hydrant Inspector.

Councillor Linden asked for clarification on the difference between the current score and treated score. Becca Chapman advised there were three scores and

stated the following:

- Inherent Score – was the original score
- Current Score – score as of current date in time
- Treated Score – score where you want it be get to

In response to a question from Councillor Smith, Nikki Richards reported Members received a condensed version of the Corporate Risk Register. The full report includes deadline dates for each mitigation and updates on the likelihood of impact.

Councillor Linden commented he felt the Service was open with its figures and was going in the right direction. Councillor Bateson thanked officers for attaching an abbreviation page at the back of the report.

In response to a question from Councillor Linden, Nikki Richards reported a new EDI Co-ordinator will be starting in May and as an organisation, the Service will continue with positive action, such as Summer Internship. The HMICFRS action plan will be updated.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1) The performance against Service Provision and Corporate Health measures for the targets agreed by the Fire Authority for 2022-23, be noted.
- 2) The progress made on the four priority programmes, be noted.
- 3) The position of corporate risk ne noted.

#### **49. FORWARD PLAN**

**RESOLVED** that the Forward Plan be noted.

#### **50. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

*Post meeting note:* Date of the next meeting was moved to Monday 24 July, 6.30pm at Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG30 7SD.

*Post meeting note:* The Chair and Councillor Linden agreed not to write to the Secretary of State regarding the delay in the signing off of Statement of Accounts.

*(The meeting concluded at 20:23)*