

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	24 JANUARY 2024
SUBJECT	CODE OF CONDUCT CONSULTATION
LEAD OFFICER	GRAHAM BRITTEN, MONITORING OFFICER
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR TRICIA BROWN
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	DECISION

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To review the results of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) Member Code of Conduct Consultation; and to recommend to the Fire Authority that future Code of Conduct consultations are held every three years, or sooner subject to updates made to the document.
- 1.2 The Code of Conduct will continue to be reviewed on an annual basis by the Monitoring Officer and Democratic Support Team.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **NOTE** the outcome of the second annual consultation on the RBFA Member Code of Conduct; and
- 2.2 **RECOMMEND** to the Fire Authority that it agree that the RBFA Member Code of Conduct Consultation be held every three years, subject to any proposed updates for which the draft Code of Conduct document will be consulted upon sooner.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 On 16 November 2020 (minute reference 34) the Fire Authority approved the Member Code of Conduct be reviewed on an annual basis commencing 2021/22; and where possible take into account the views of the public,

community organisations, and neighbouring and appointing authorities following recommendation from the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL).

- 3.2 Following approval by the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 24 January 2022 (minute reference 38), the draft Code of Conduct based on the Local Government Association (LGA) Model Code of Conduct and National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) Core Code of Ethics was subject to a 6-week public consultation.
- 3.3 On recommendation from the Audit and Governance Committee, the Fire Authority approved the adoption of RBFA Code of Conduct at its meeting on 28 April 2022 (minute reference 71).
- 3.4 Two consultations have subsequently been held. The first was held between 28 January–11 March 2022, receiving 44 responses, and the second, from 22 November–13 December 2023 receiving 19 responses.
- 3.5 For the consultation held between 22 November–13 December 2023 Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) Communications and Engagement Team promoted the consultation across the following social media platforms; X (formerly known as Twitter), LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. The total impressions (audience reached) in promoting the consultation across the above social media platforms were:
 - Facebook reach total (for the whole consultation period) = 37,575
 - Facebook posts reach (consultation specific) = 1,579
 - X, formerly known as Twitter posts reach (consultation specific) = 2,073
 - X, formerly known as Twitter post engagement (consultation specific) – 45
 - Facebook post interactions (consultation specific) = 11
- 3.6 There was no change to the Members Code of Conduct between both consultation periods. The above figures indicate although the total reach using social media platforms was relatively high, the consultation did not attract a high response rate.
- 3.7 Due to the low response rate, this report is seeking recommendation to the Fire Authority to approve future Code of Conduct consultations are held every three years, subject to recommended changes to the document for which a consultation would be held sooner.
- 3.8 Appendix A shows the results of the consultation and indicate 89.47% (17) answered yes, supporting the behaviours required of councillors, as set out in RBFA Code of Conduct, when they are publicly representing RBFA on official business, and when using social media.
- 3.9 86.67% (13) answered yes, the expected standards of councillor conduct and the actions that could be taken should an allegation be made, was clear.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 Resilience: We will ensure we are resilient and work with our partners to promote and build resilience in the communities we serve.
- 4.2 Sustainability: We will ensure that we provide a financially sustainable and environmentally friendly service to our communities.
- 4.3 People: We will support our staff by providing a safe and inclusive environment for them to thrive in, building a diverse organisation that is engaged with, and accessible to, our communities.

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.
- 6.2 Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Member Code of Conduct is published on Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) website.

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 Monitoring Officer was consulted during the preparation of this report.
- 10.2 Head of Finance was consulted during the preparation of this report.
- 10.3 Senior Leadership Team was consulted during the preparation of this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Fire Authority agenda and minutes – 16 November 2020, minute reference 34.

11.2 Audit and Governance Committee agenda and minutes – 24 January 2022, minute reference 38.

11.3 Fire Authority agenda and minutes – 28 April 2022, minute reference 71.

12. APPENDICES

12.1 Appendix A – Results of Code of Conduct consultation, December 2023.

13. CONTACT DETAILS

13.1 Fayth Rowe, Democratic Support Lead rowef@rbfrs.co.uk