

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



COMMITTEE	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	28 MARCH 2024
SUBJECT	MEMBER DEVELOPMENT ANNUAL REPORT AND PROGRESS AGAINST ACTION PLAN
LEAD OFFICER	PAUL BREMBLE, HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR OWEN JEFFERY
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	NOTE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To receive an Annual Report and to note the progress of the Action Plan on Member Development activities in 2023/24.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That Audit and Governance Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTE** the Member Development Annual Report;
2.2 **NOTE** the progress of the 2023/24 Member Development Action Plan (Appendix A);
2.3 **NOTE** the results of the Member Development Survey (Appendix B), and
2.4 **NOTE** 2023-2027 Member Development Strategy (Appendix C), and protocol for Station visits (Appendix D).

3. REPORT

- 3.1 In June 2023, the Fire Authority appointed eight new Fire Authority Members and appointed Councillor Owen Jeffery as Member Development Champion.
- 3.2 Focus was made towards targeting Member Development courses to new and returning Members appointed into new roles. The majority of returning members have attended the courses listed in Table one, therefore their learning and development was encouraged by attending formal fire station visits arranged by Democratic Support Team. In addition, all Members were encouraged to make informal visits to fire stations (protocol for station visits attached at Appendix D).

- 3.3 Appendix A show the progress against 2023/24 Action Plan and Red, Amber, Green (RAG) status has been included to indicate whether actions were completed during the year. There is one red action identified in the action plan.
- 3.4 The red action, number (22) Modern.gov Training was not held during the year. Modern.gov Training will be removed from the action plan in 2024/25 and will be made available upon request. Members will be given the opportunity to request Modern.gov Training at New Member Induction sessions, as well as periodic email reminders from Democratic Support Team. In the last four years, Modern.gov training was provided to three Members, therefore the demand for this training session is low.
- 3.5 Modern.Gov Training was not offered this year due to the roll out of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) email accounts to all Fire Authority Members. Focus was made on this roll out and Democratic Support and ICT Teams will continue to support and ensure the Authority comply with data processing processes.
- 3.6 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) is captured in Healthy Organisation Member Development course and relevant Protecting Information / Information Governance policies were sent to Members electronically to confirm they have read and understood them. This negates the need for Members to complete the Protecting Information and EDI e-learning courses.
- 3.7 Relevant Information Governance policies such as Security, Password, Data Protection and Acceptable use of ICT Resources (this includes RBFRS email accounts) will be issued to Members on an annual basis to read and record agreement, in line with recent Internal audit management action.
- 3.8 This year, most courses were condensed to one-hour sessions and held during lunchtime periods and on Microsoft TEAMS to provide greater flexibility in Member attendance. Some sessions were also arranged as hybrid meetings for those Members who wanted to attend in-person. We have found this time of day (lunchtime training sessions) suitable for most Members, provided advance notice was given. Democratic Support Team will continue to review this when planning training sessions in 2024/25.
- 3.9 Each year, Members are requested to complete an anonymous online survey on Member Development courses / activities attended, and where possible, Democratic Support use survey results to develop courses or activities for the next Municipal year.
- 3.10 This year, the online survey (Appendix B) was held from 16 February – 23 February 2024 and was completed by 6 respondents, which is over 20% of the overall Fire Authority. Member participation in the survey was not compulsory, and as outlined in paragraph 3.2, new Members were targeted to attend courses as longer serving Members had attended the courses on offer in previous years.

- 3.11 The feedback received (Appendix B) was positive with particular praise for the Safety at Home course (*'a life altering session'*), station visits (*'great to see the teams and what they do'*) and the Induction course (*'the induction meeting with the other members and the Fire Chief was excellent'*) The courses/ visits meet expectations and the comments received were based around how much they received a good understanding of how RBFRS operate. In response to feedback received from last year's Member Development survey, more organised fire station visits were arranged in 23/24. Station visits are seen as an important activity for Members to learn about the Authority's assets, e.g. station, fire appliances, equipment, and people (Grey/Green Book staff).
- 3.12 Member Development Working Group has requested course surveys are followed up after each course/visit rather than an annual survey with the aim to capture qualitative data. Starting in June 2024, course surveys will be circulated to Members following course attendance.
- 3.13 The Fire Authority approved its Member Development Strategy on 27 April 2023 (minute reference 89) and is attached as Appendix C for note.
- 3.14 Table One shows Member attendance on courses, workshops and station visits held during 2023/24. *Member Induction* highlighted the Service's Vision providing an introduction to the Service by Wayne Bowcock; Chief Fire Officer and Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement.
- 3.15 *Station visits* were arranged based on the location of the station and Members Unitary Authority area, therefore not all 20 Members were targeted to attend a specific fire station. Slough station visit was the exception as all Members were invited to attend due to the planned refurbishment works which was due to commence.
- 3.16 *Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS)* visit, *Safety at Home* and *Wellbeing* courses were aimed at all Fire Authority Members; however, a number of Members have attended the above over the years.
- 3.17 All the courses / visits outlined in the Action Plan (Appendix A) are designed to inform Members about various departments of the Service. *Safety at Home* looked at the importance of installing and testing Fire alarms in the home, electrical and cooking safety, and *Wellbeing* course focussed on the various organisational initiatives that are in place to improve staff mental health.
- 3.18 EDI was covered in a number of areas of Members Development. For example, during station visits, thematic improvements including EDI and contaminants plans were shown. This included improvements to shower facilities, sleeping accommodation and multifaith / community rooms to attract a more diverse workforce. As stated in paragraph 3.6, the content of *Healthy Organisation* course looked at the Equality Act 2010, the Service's EDI Objectives, EDI action plans and positive action initiatives. In addition, the Member / Officer workshop in October 2023 designed a new Member

Charter which sets out the Authority's support in the delivery of the Service's Vision and its stance on creating a safe environment for staff to thrive.

- 3.19 *Understanding Audit and Governance Committee* course was rolled out at the end of 22/23 and is an overview of how the Service manages performance against objectives and priorities set out in the Annual Plan. The course covers Response Standard, Appliance Availability, and project action plans. Although new 23/24 Members who were appointed onto Management Committee were targeted to attend this course, it is felt a change in the course title will indicate that this course is aimed at all Members and not just Audit and Governance Committee members.
- 3.20 Greater financial detail on the Service's funding streams, Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), Strategic Asset and Investment Framework (SAIF), Treasury Management and budget monitoring was delivered by Head of Finance and Procurement in *Understanding Financing the Fire Authority course*.
- 3.21 Two specific Local Government Association (LGA) courses were targeted and attended by Members who were appointed to their roles at the beginning of the year. The Democratic Support Team continue to review LGA's list of courses and will signpost Members accordingly.

Table One

Course title	Number of new members identified to attend	Number of existing Members that were identified to attend	Numbers of members that attended
Understanding A&GC course	8	3	8
Theale Stn visit	3	3	3
Annual Planning Members / Officers Workshop	8	12	10
Members Workshop	8	12	13
Bracknell Stn visit	1	6	3
Understanding the Financing of the Fire Authority	8	12	5
Healthy Organisation	8	12	6
Maidenhead Stn visit	4	2	6
Slough Stn visit	8	12	6
New Member Induction	8	0	8
Control Visit	8	12	5
Wellbeing Course	8	12	3
Understanding the Fire Authority	8	0	2
Safety at Home	8	12	5
Local Government Association course (s)	1	1	2

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

4.1 All Strategic Commitments are supported by the Member Development Programme.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The majority of the Member Development courses and activities have been delivered in-house within existing resources. External courses were provided at a subsidised rate by LGA as Royal Berkshire Fire Authority are members.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Member Development Strategy and Action Plan supports the Fire Authority in discharging its statutory duties.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EDI training forms part of the Member Development Programme.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None specified.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

9.1 As outlined in the Member Development Strategy, we will continue to identify opportunities to work with partners to deliver the Member Development programme where possible.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

10.1 Statutory officers and the Senior Leadership Team have been consulted in the development report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Fire Authority Agenda and Minutes – 27 April 2023, minute reference 89.

12. APPENDICES

12.1 Appendix A – Member Development Action Plan

12.2 Appendix B – Member Development Survey Results

12.3 Appendix C – Member Development Strategy 2023-2027

12.4 Appendix D – Protocol for Station visits

13. CONTACT DETAILS

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

13.2 Michaela Smith, Democratic Support Assistant smithmj@rbfrs.co.uk