

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Annual Statement of Assurance 2017-18





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Introduction

1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this Statement of Assurance is for Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) to formally confirm the adequacy of arrangements for the effective management of financial, governance and operational matters in Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS). The Statement confirms the extent to which the requirements of the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England \(July 2012\)](#) have been met.

2.0 Context

A Statement of Assurance is a backward look at the adequacy of the arrangements noted above within the previous financial year. In preparing this Statement, it is acknowledged that a revised [Fire and Rescue National Framework was published in May 2018](#), and effective from 1 June 2018. However, for the purpose of this Statement, the 2012 version is applicable.

In July 2017, it was announced that the remit of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Police Constabulary would be extended to include fire and rescue services in England. Subsequently, it was confirmed that RBFRS' first inspection would take place in January 2019. In preparing for the inspection, RBFRS has completed and submitted a self-assessment document to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Police Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in September 2018. In order to ensure a consistency of approach, and ensure the effective use of our resources, the review undertaken to inform the RBFRS self-assessment, has been used to form the basis of this Statement.

3.0 Structure

The Statement of Assurance is structured in such a way that headline judgements are made about the adequacy of arrangements associated with financial, governance and operational matters as outlined by the then named Department for Communities and Local Government document, [Guidance on statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England](#). These judgements confirm whether necessary standards are being Fully, Substantially or Partially Met. The definitions for each judgement can be found in **Appendix A**.

The judgements are supported by information contained in attached Appendices. Where appropriate the appendices also include details of steps that have been, or will be, taken to address identified areas for improvement.



A number of supporting documents are hyperlinked or referenced throughout this document.

In making these judgements, RBFA has instructed independent auditors to review both Financial and Governance matters and details of their feedback can be found in **Appendices B & C**.

For operational matters and adherence to the National Framework, RBFA has also used internal audit and the Operational Peer Assessment to make an informed judgement details of which can be found in **Appendices D & F**.



4.0 Summary Judgements

4.1 Financial Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2017/18 financial year, requirements associated with financial matters were **fully met**.

Evidence to support this judgement and past and future areas of improvement are addressed in **Appendix B**.

4.2 Governance Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2017/18 financial year, requirements associated with governance matters were **fully met**.

Evidence to support this judgement and past and future areas of improvement are addressed in **Appendix C**.

4.3 Operational Matters

It is the view of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) that, at the end of the 2017/18 financial year, requirements associated with operational matters were **fully met**.

Evidence to support this judgement and past and future areas of improvement are addressed in **Appendix D**.

4.4 National Framework Requirements

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2017/18 financial year, the requirements associated with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been **fully met** as set out in **Appendix E**.

4.5 Assurance

RBFA gets assurance on its business through a programme of audit. Information on the 2017/18 audits are set out in **Appendix F**.

5.0 Signatures



Councillor

Chairman – Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

Councillor

Chairman – Audit and Governance Committee



Appendix A – Definitions of Overall Judgement

Fully	The requirements of applicable legislation and guidance are being consistently met.
Substantially	The requirements of applicable legislation and guidance are mostly being met. Where legislation and guidance are not being met there is minimal risk to the Fire Authority discharging associated duties and powers for the provision of a fire and rescue service.
Partially	The requirements of applicable legislation and guidelines are being inconsistently applied exposing the Fire Authority to considerable risk in discharging the necessary duties and powers associated with the provision of a fire and rescue service.



Appendix B – Finance

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2017/18 financial year, requirements associated with financial matters were **fully met**.

The 'Guidance on statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England' outlines the following matters be incorporated within the Statement of Assurance in relation to operational arrangements:

Fire and rescue authorities are responsible for ensuring that their business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.

It is a statutory requirement under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 for authorities to publish the financial results of their activities for the year. This 'Statement of Accounts', shows the annual costs of providing the service and is determined by a Code of Practice which aims to give a "true and fair" view of the financial position and transactions of the authority. The authority is responsible for approval of the statement of accounts prior to publication.

The statement of assurance may briefly set out what assessment procedures are in place with regard to the authorities' statements of account.

Evidence to support judgement

RBFA has contracted an external auditor to audit the [Statement of Accounts](#). The [Annual Audit Letter for year ended 31 March 2018](#), in relation to these accounts confirms their assurance opinion on the financial matters of the authority.

The Annual Audit Letter for 2016/17 identified no financial improvements for 2017/18.

Areas for Future Improvement

The Annual Audit Letter for 2017/18 identified no financial improvements for 2018/19.



Appendix C: Governance Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2017/18 financial year, requirements associated with appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance were **fully met**.

The 'Guidance on statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England' states that;

The Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2011 also requires authorities to prepare an annual governance statement in support of this statement of accounts. This governance statement is an expression of the measures taken by the authority to ensure appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance. The statement of assurance may set out what work authorities have undertaken to review the effectiveness of their governance framework, including the system of internal control.

Greater transparency is a key element of the Framework and is at the heart of the Government's commitment to enable the public to hold their authorities to account for the way they spend public money. In preparing the statement of assurance, fire and rescue authorities may consider the principles of transparency set out in the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency

Evidence in support of judgement

RBFA has contracted an external auditor to audit the governance arrangements of the Authority. The Authority undertakes an annual assessment of the governance arrangements using the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government. The external auditor also undertakes its assessment of compliance against these standards.

The [Annual Governance Statement 2017/18](#) confirms assurance in the governance arrangements.

The auditor's opinion for the governance arrangements for 2017/18 is as follows:

"Taking account of the issues identified, the authority can take substantial assurance that the controls upon which the organisation relies to manage the identified areas are suitably designed, consistently applied and operating effectively"

Review of governance improvements stated in the 2016/17 Statement of Assurance



<p>1. Individual development plans for Members “the lack of individual assessment and development plans for existing Members could lead to members not being as effective in discharging their duties”</p>	<p>New Member Development Strategy supported by the Member Development Action Plan which includes a skills based questionnaire and 1:1 process for Members led by Group Leaders.</p>
<p>2. Risk Register Where on some occasions accountability and ownership on the risk register has not been aligned to the Risk Management Policy, there is the potential for breakdown in the risk management process.</p>	<p>Ongoing training and support offered by the Data and Performance Team</p> <p>The Corporate Risk Register is reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team on a fortnightly basis.</p>
<p>3. Risk assurances have on some occasions not been fully captured on the strategic and operational risk registers.</p>	
<p>4. Evidence of some duplication between the strategic risk register and the operational risk register.</p>	

Areas for future improvement

There were five low areas highlighted for improvement by the Auditors in 2017. In all cases these were assessed as low priorities:

Identified Governance Improvements
<p>1. A defined remit to be put in place highlighting the purpose of the Member Development Task and Finish Group</p>
<p>2. Risk Register template to be updated to enable treatment assurance levels to be included in final register</p>



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| 3. All risk owners to be reminded of the need to regularly assess the risk treatments and owners, but in particular during periods of known staff changes. |
| 4. Risk database to be updated to include a quick link to the Risk Management Database Quick Guide. |
| 5. New Corporate Risk reporting format for the Audit and Governance Committee to ensure key information is captured to evidence direction of travel |



Appendix D – Operations

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2017/18 financial year, requirements associated with operational matters were **fully met**.

The 'Guidance on statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England' outlines the following matters to be incorporated within the statement of assurance related to operational arrangements:

A. Fire and rescue authorities already consult on, and publish, their integrated risk management plans, which set out local strategies including cross-border, multi-authority and national arrangements where appropriate. The statement of assurance should include details of consultation on these plans, and confirm that appropriate information was provided to enable active and informed participation.

B. The statement of assurance may also indicate where fire and rescue authorities have entered into agreements and/or mutual aid arrangements with other relevant bodies. The level of detail included will be a matter for each individual fire and rescue authority and may be linked to their integrated risk management plan.

C. It is not the aim of statements of assurance to set out the operational procedures for fire and rescue authorities. However, statements of assurance are the appropriate vehicle with regard to specific events, which raise issues of operational competence or delivery. For example, when advice is received under health and safety or other legislation, it is appropriate for the fire and rescue authority to use the statement of assurance as a means to inform their communities that these matters have been considered and, where appropriate, acted on.

Evidence in support of judgement

A. Integrated Risk Management Plan

The [Corporate Plan 2015-2019](#) includes our Integrated Risk Management Plan. The Authority has a statutory duty under the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2012, to produce a plan to 'identify and assess all foreseeable fire related risks' at a county, regional and national level. The plan brings together our three strands of Service Delivery; prevention, protection and response. It includes the community safety strategies, the approach taken towards enforcement of fire safety legislation and our plans to ensure the right resources are in the place at the right time to respond to any emergency.

The public and any other stakeholder must be consulted on the content of the plan and are consulted again if we plan to change the service we currently deliver. The consultation must be undertaken in accordance with the legal principles of consultation and current government guidance. The responses received to any



consultations are considered by the Fire Authority before any decision is made.

[Further information on consultations is available on our website.](#)

The Local Resilience Forum was set up under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, and established a framework for emergency planning and response ranging from local to national level. The Thames Valley LRF identity is achieved using local intelligence, historic incident data and information is available from the Local Resilience Forum's [Community Risk Register](#).

B. Mutual Aid Agreements

RBFA has mutual aid agreements with each of the neighbouring fire and rescue services whereby:

- In the event of a significant emergency, RBFA can request additional resources from neighbouring fire authorities;
- Should the address of an emergency be closer to a fire appliance from a neighbouring fire authority, a request will be made for that fire appliance to attend the incident;
- Specialist equipment and trained personnel can also be requested from other fire and rescue services to attend significant emergencies in Berkshire.

In the event of a national emergency elsewhere in the county, RBFA has the following specialist resources that can be deployed to assist those in need;

- An incident response unit, to support large scale hazardous substance incident;
- A high volume pump, to support large scale flooding incidents;
- A water rescue unit, to support rescues from large scale flooding incidents.

C. Specific Events

RBFA actively monitors how the Service is delivered to the community of Berkshire through a variety of systems including:

- Regular performance reports
- Risk based operational debriefs
- Feedback from staff to identify improvements on how the service can be delivered
- Attendance at significant emergency incidents by managers to monitor the performance of fire fighters.

RBFA ensures that all relevant matters arising from the above areas are considered and where appropriate changes are made to improve the way the community is served throughout Berkshire.



Review of Operational Improvements Stated in the 2016/17 Statement of Assurance

As outlined in the Statement of Assurance 2016/17, a Local Government Association Fire Peer Challenge was undertaken in February 2017. The purpose of the peer challenge was to provide RBFA and RBFRS with a critical friend assessment of how the organisation is working. The peer challenge provided feedback on the operational self assessment (OpA) completed by RBFRS against a set of national standards, as well as feedback on 3 focus areas that RBFA asked the peer team to look at specifically in more detail.

The recommendations from that review were formed into an action plan following the publication of the [Fire Peer Challenge Report](#) in 2017.

The action plan was implemented by officers and overseen by the Audit and Governance Committee. All actions have been subsequently completed as reported in our latest [Quarterly Performance Report](#).

Areas for Future Improvement

In 2018/19, RBFRS will be working to further embed the outcomes of the [IRMP Service Redesign consultation](#). This includes embedding our Service Delivery hub model and further developing our [Local Safety Plans](#) to ensure we target risk and allocate resources effectively at a local level.

We are looking to introduce greater efficiency into our service provision, and will be introducing remotely managed stations to this end; with further resilience in mind, we will also look to introduce more flexible and cost effective way of deploying officers.

In the areas of protection and prevention, we are reviewing our ways of working to ensure they are both efficient and effective and fulfil the proposals adopted following the Service Redesign consultation.



Appendix E - National Framework

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2017/18 financial year, the requirements associated with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been **fully met**. This assessment has been based on the judgements outlined in **Appendices B-D**.



Appendix F - Other Assurance Processes

To ensure that RBFA and RBFRS are delivering an efficient and effective service across all its areas of operation, additional assurance has been provided in 2017/18 through the following processes:

Contracted Internal Audit

RBFA has contracted out internal audit to RSM, an external company. Apart from auditing aspects of the FA required by legislation, they are also instructed, as part of an audit plan agreed with the Audit and Governance Committee, to audit various other aspects of the Service.

In 2017/18, the following audits were completed:

- IRMP Post Consultation Review
- Risk Management and Governance
- Procurement
- Cyber Security
- Timesheets and Timekeeping
- Key Financial Controls
- Firefighter Pension Administration

RSM's annual internal audit opinion for 2017/18 is as follows:

“The organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control. However, our work has identified further enhancements to the framework of risk management, governance and internal control to ensure that it remains adequate and effective”

Future areas of improvement

From 2018/19, the inspection programme for fire and rescue services will commence with RBFRS being inspected in January 2019. The inspection programme is independent to fire and rescue services and managed by [Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services](#).

