



Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

Statement of Assurance 2013/14

Published March 2015



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1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this Statement of Assurance is for Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA or FA) 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), furthermore 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 Structure

The Statement of Assurance is structured such that headline judgements are made about the adequacy of arrangements associated with financial, governance and operational matters as outlined in the 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. Definitions of the terms 'Fully', 'Substantially' and 'Partially' can be found in **Appendix A**.

The judgements are then supported by information contained in the 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 referenced throughout this document and a list of hyperlinks to these is included in **Appendix F**.

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

For Operational matters and adherence to the National Framework, RBFA has used a combination of Peer Review and internal audit to make an informed judgement.

Details of the feedback can be found in appendices D & E

3.0 Summary Judgements

3.1 Financial Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2013/14 financial year, requirements associated with the appropriate management of financial matters were **Fully met**.

Evidence to support this judgement is set out in **Appendix B**.

3.2 Governance Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2013/14 financial year, requirements associated with appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance were **Substantially met**.

Evidence to support this judgement, information on identified areas for improvement and details of steps taken to address them are set out in **Appendix C**.

3.3 Operational Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2013/14 financial year, requirements associated with operational matters were **Substantially met**.

Evidence to support this judgement, information on identified areas for improvement and details of steps taken to address them are set out in **Appendix D**.

3.4 National Framework Requirements

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2013/14 financial years, the requirements associated with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been **Substantially met**.

Evidence to support this judgement, are set out in **Appendix E**.

4.0 Signatures

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Colin Dudley', with a stylized, looped initial 'C'.

Councillor Colin Dudley

Chairman – Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Iain McCracken', with a stylized, looped initial 'I'.

Councillor Iain McCracken

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 2013/14 financial year, requirements associated with the appropriate management of financial matters were **Fully met**.

The 'Guidance on statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England' states that in order to provide assurance about the adequacy of arrangements associated with financial matters:

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 (England) Regulations 2011 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 in Support of Judgement

RBFA have contracted an external auditor to audit the [statement of accounts for 2013/14](#) accounts. The [audit letter](#) issued by the auditor in relation to these accounts confirms their assurance opinion on the financial matters of the authority.

Review of Financial Improvements Stated 2012/13 Statement of Assurance

The 2012/13 Statement of Assurance recorded the following comment from the auditors on possible future improvement:

The Fire Authority needs to consider the ongoing viability of the trading company, as well as considering whether it continues to meet the original objectives for which it was established.

RBFA completed a review of the trading company and following changes to the structure of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Training Limited (RBFRTL), combined with improved marketing this has resulted in RBFRTL achieving a net profit of c£19,000 in 2013/14.

Areas for Future Improvement

The annual audit letter for 2013/14 has no identified financial improvements.

Appendix C - Governance

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2013/14 financial year, requirements associated with appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance were **Substantially 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.⁵

Evidence in Support of Judgement

RBFA have 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 undertake their assessment of compliance against these standards.

The 2013/14 annual governance statement of the authority can be accessed using the following link - ([annual governance statement 2013/14](#)). Page four of the [external auditors letter](#) confirms assurance in the governance arrangements. The auditors did not identify any areas of concern, however did suggest six areas for improvement.

Review of Governance Improvements Stated 2012/13 Statement of Assurance

The 2012/13 Statement of Assurance recorded six areas of action concerned with improving future governance arrangements.

The six areas of improvement and progress we have made is outlined in the table below:

Governance Improvement Action	Progress Update
1. Continue to develop and embed governance processes for performance and risk management	Governance is being further refined and improved in the Authority to ensure that these processes follow best practice.
2. Improve strategic risk management	Risk management processes have been further reviewed and additional improvements have been identified and are in the process of being enacted and embedded into service activity.
3. Review ethical guidance	This is closed as the Authority regularly reviews ethical guidance to ensure that it operates to current guidelines.
4. Develop a strong counter-fraud culture supported and promoted by members and senior officers	The anti-fraud and corruption policy has been reviewed and will be presented to members of the Audit and Governance Committee in December 2014.
5. Improve data security	RBFA is continuing to work toward compliance with the ISO27001 standard. However, work to ensure compliance to the Code of Connectivity and other projects for the Thames Valley Fire Control Service have taken priority and, once this work is completed, work towards the revised ISO 27001 (27001:2013) will be prioritised.

Areas for Future Improvement

The 2013/14 governance statement identified further areas of improvement in the operation of governance. The following is taken from section 5 of the governance statement headed *Significant Governance Issues*:

Actions needed to achieve full compliance are largely covered by existing improvement plans. The issues and actions can be summarised as follows:

- (a) *Exercising strategic leadership by developing and clearly communicating the authority's purpose and vision and its intended outcome for citizens and service users*

The FA has undertaken a review of its Strategic Commitments with support from the new Chief Fire Officer, Andy Fry. A new policy direction was agreed by the FA in June 2014 and Members and Officers will be working together to produce detailed plans to implement this new vision for the people who live and work in Berkshire.

(b) Ensure that partnerships are underpinned by a common vision of their work that is understood and agreed by all partners

The FA has established several successful partnerships/shared service arrangements. There is however inconsistency in the way that they operate. This needs to be addressed in 2014 to meet the future challenges of the authority and deliver savings and changed ways of working needed for the FA to manage a continually reducing budget.

The legal and financial basis for partnerships needs to be clearly identified in order to avoid confusion caused by imprecise use of the description of partnerships.

(c) Ensure that an effective risk management system is in place.

The responsibility for overseeing the area of risk management within RBFA has been varied in recent years, from the Treasurer (now Director of Resources) to the Chief Fire Officer. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer has taken on the responsibility and became a standing member of the Risk Management Group in May 2013.

A review of corporate risk management was undertaken in 2013, with a corporate decision to devolve the responsibility of risk management to Directorate level. The review identified the manner in which RBFA identify and manage risk as fit for purpose; however, it could be improved.

The management of risk was therefore submitted as an area for peer review, scheduled for September 2013. The intention was to seek feedback from the assessors to determine areas for improvement in the management of risk. The peer review however was postponed due to the requirement for RBFRS to prepare for a national fire-fighter strike. The peer review took place in mid-February 2014.

Combining feedback from the peer review and the officers' review of how risk is managed within RBFA enabled an improvement plan to be established which the Assistant Chief Fire Officer will be aiming to deliver in 2014/15. The Improvement Plan identified actions to be taken on risk scoring, the Risk Management Policy, embedding Risk Management and Reporting on risk.

A recent Internal Audit has suggested the following improvements be made:

- That the Risk Management Policy be redrafted to include greater clarity on risk scoring, the frequency of review and scrutiny for risks at different forums; and what risks will subject to scrutiny;
- As part of the Risk Management Improvement Plan the format of reporting on risk should be considered to ensure individual risks are subject to a suitable level of review by Senior Management/Members; the organisation to reconsider the key risks
- Following the provision of updated guidance on risk management, the Service should provide training to key officers on risk management which should include risk scoring

- *Officers should ensure control measures are sufficiently documented against each risk and proposed control measure are stated for risks where a tolerance level of risk has not been achieved. As part of the Risk Management Improvement Plan the Authority will need to ensure responsibility for monitoring and managing of risk is appropriately assigned*
- *The Risk Management Policy should be enhanced to document a process for mapping assurances to controls. It should explain that assurances can be positive/negative, internal/external and should be dated to demonstrate their relevance. Risk registers should be updated to include reference to assurance.*

In addition, the FA's anti fraud and corruption policy was last reviewed by the FA in June 2006. It is now over due for fresh appraisal and this will be undertaken in 2014 and reported to Audit and Governance Committee and Fire Authority during the 14/15 municipal year

A second group of issues are those that involve a significant financial or reputational risk to the FA. One of the prime purposes of the governance framework is to minimise the occurrence of such risk and ensure that any which do arise are highlighted so that appropriate mitigating action can be taken. These issues are largely substantial challenges to be managed over the long term.

Significant issues in this Group are:

- (i) The FA's budget and impact of year on year savings*
- (ii) Pressures on spending will necessitate new ways of working and major cultural change*
- (iii) Repairs and maintenance of property*
- (iv) Information security and governance particularly in relation to the commencement of the Thames Valley Control Service in late 2014.*
- (v) Industrial relations, particularly with regard to employment terms and conditions including the Fire Fighters Pension Scheme*

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Appendix D - Operations

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2013/14 financial year, requirements associated with operational matters were **Substantially 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.

Areas to support Judgement

A. Integrated Risk Management Plan

The FA produced a [five year Integrated Risk Management Plan](#) to ensure the right resources are in the right place at the right time to respond to emergencies. The plan also includes the community safety strategies and the approach taken toward enforcement of fire safety legislation.

An annual work plan is also produced setting out the areas for review over the coming year ([IRMP 2013/14 Action Plan](#)). The annual plan also includes reference to the work undertaken in the previous year ([Annual Report 2013/14](#)).

If following a review it is deemed appropriate to consider making changes to the way the service is provided to the public, a 12 week public consultation should take place. Consultation is undertaken in accordance with government guidance and responses

received to the consultations are published on the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service website.

Consultation responses to each of the above IRMP reports can be viewed at:

- 5 year IRMP - ([5 year IRMP consultation report](#))
- 2013/14 IRMP - ([IRMP 2013/14 Consultation Report](#))

The FA is required to identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks. This is achieved using local intelligence, historical incident data, and information 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 authority.
- Should the address of an emergency be closer to a fire engine from a neighbouring fire authority, a request will be made for that fire engine 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 country, RBFA has the following specialist resources that can be deployed to assist those in need:

- An incident response unit, to support a large scale hazardous substance incident
- A high volume pump, to support a large scale flooding incident
- 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
- Structured debriefs for large scale or unusual emergencies/events
- 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 the 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 2012/13 Statement of Assurance

The areas of operational improvement identified in the 2012/13 statement of assurance compared to the progress we have made is outlined in the table below:

Operational Improvement Action	Progress Update
<p>1. A review of the 5 year IRMP identified that more transparency is required in the IRMP on how wider community risks are managed.</p>	<p>The annual IRMP action plans include reference to wider community risks as stated in the community risk register.</p> <p>All community risks within Berkshire have been identified and either have a tactical plan for dealing with an emergency on site or are included in standard operating practices of the RBFRS for the safe resolution of an incident.</p>
<p>2. A debrief of the Swinley Forest fire, one of the largest fires in RBFRS history, identified improvements were grouped under 11 sections with each of these containing a number of separate individual improvement actions.</p>	<p>A considerable number of the recommendations relate to how large scale protracted incidents are supported to allow RBFRS to continually maintain service delivery during times of extreme emergency workload.</p> <p>Significant improvements such as enhancing operational support arrangements in terms of both facilities to support deployed crews as well as training additional staff in emergency support roles have been implemented.</p>
<p>3. Following the deaths of two Fire-fighters a Coroners Rule 43 letter – Prevention of Future Death, was issued with national recommendations for the fire service.</p>	<p>RBFA accepted the recommendations and made funding available for RBFRS to purchase improved thermal image cameras.</p> <p>As well as this changes were made to fire-fighter breathing apparatus training and further revised training has been undertaken on dealing with high rise fires.</p>

Areas for Future Improvement

The coordinated response led by RBFRS to flooding in Berkshire and the Thames Valley in February 2014 was part of the largest deployment of UK fire service personnel and equipment since the Second World War.

As part of our internal review and post incident debrief we have identified a number of learning points and recommendations based on our response to which we are currently developing an action plan.

Operational Assessment and Peer Review Challenge

In February 2014 at the invitation of RBFA a Local Government Association peer challenge team spent a week in RBFA and RBFRS to undertake a peer review of the service.

The purpose of the peer challenge is 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 four areas of the organisation that RBFA asked the peer team to specifically look at in some more detail.

The objective of the peer process is:

The OpA self-assessment process is designed to:

- *form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement within the Fire and Rescue Service, and*
- *provide elected members on fire authorities and chief officers with information that allows them to challenge their operational service delivery to ensure it is efficient, effective and robust.*

In addition to undertaking OpA self-assessment the sector led peer challenge process is part of the LGA and Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA)'s approach to self-regulation and improvement which aims to help councils and FRAs strengthen local accountability and revolutionise the way they evaluate and improve services. Peer Challenge is a voluntary process that is managed by and delivered for the sector; it is not a form of sector-led inspection.

RBFA agreed with the peer team that they would look in detail at the following key areas of the organisation:

- leadership and corporate capacity
- risk management
- operational risk management

- training and development

the OpA self assessment requires RBFA and RBFRS to self assess the work of the organisation against the following headings:

- Outcomes for citizens
- Prevention
- Protection
- Response
- Health & Safety
- Call Management and Incident Support

The [peer review team report](#) was published in September 2014. The findings in the report are still being considered and an action plan is being developed. Some of the main findings in report are outlined in the following sections.

The peer review team report was received in September 2014. The findings in the report are still being considered and an action plan is being developed.

The current means of assurance for assessing how well RBFA is meeting the requirements associated with operational matters is based on an internal assessment by RBFRS officers, going forward RBFA will seek to gain additional , independent, assurance by entering into a reciprocal arrangement with another Fire and Rescue Service to provide an annual peer assessment.

Appendix E National Framework

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2013/14 financial years, the requirements associated with the Fire and rescue national framework for England have been **Substantially met**.

To ensure that RBFA and RBFRS are delivering an efficient, effective and economic service across all its areas of operation additional assurance has been provided in 2013/14 through the following processes:

Contracted Internal Audit

RBFA have contracted out internal audit to 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 FA Audit & Governance Committee, to audit various other aspects of the service.

In 2013/14 the following audits were completed:

i. IT resilience planning-

This audit resulted in an amber conclusion. The audit identified: 1 high, 3 medium and 4 low priority improvements.

The agreed action plan for completion of the majority of these improvements is December 2014 with the latest date for an action being December 2015.

ii. Car pool usage

This audit resulted from a red conclusion. The audit identified: 3 high and 4 medium improvements.

The agreed action plan for completion of the majority of these improvements is August 2014 with the latest date for an action being December 2014.

RBFRS Internal Audit

RBFRS has its own Performance Review Department with three qualified auditors who regularly undertake operational debriefs and internal audits. Each year the department undertake six audits as agreed with both RBFRS management and the FA Audit & Governance Committee.

In 2013/14 only four audits were completed due to organisational priorities arising from the wide area flooding at the beginning of 2014. The four audits and outcomes undertaken were:

i. Application of the revised fuel management policy

The outcome of this audit was satisfactory assurance. The audit identified: 1 high, 1 medium and 8 low priority improvements

The agreed action plan for completion of the majority of these improvements is December 2013 with the latest date for an action being March 2014.

- ii. Application of the home fire safety check policy and procedure

The outcome of this audit was limited assurance. The audit identified: 7 high, 4 medium and 5 low priority improvements

The agreed action plan for completion of the majority of these improvements is July 2014 with the latest date for an action being February 2015.

- iii. Application of the recording and application of leave for grey book staff

The outcome of this audit was limited assurance. The audit identified: 2 high, 11 medium and 4 low priority improvements

The agreed action plan for completion of these improvements is November 2014.

- iv. Compliance audit on completion of recommendations resulting from an accident investigation

The outcome of this audit was that four out of five recommendations arising from the accident investigation were found to have not been actioned.

Areas for Future Improvement

For the 2013/14 financial year RBFA has chosen to provide assurance for the extent to which the requirements of the National Framework have been met as a whole but in a bid to provide greater transparency and rigor from the 2014/15 Statement of Assurance onwards, RBFA will provide an assessment of the extent of assurance against the individual requirements of the Framework.

The current means of assurance for assessing how well RBFA is meeting the requirements of the National Framework is based on internal assessment by RBFRS officers, going forward RBFA will seek to gain additional, independent, assurance by entering into a reciprocal arrangement with another Fire and Rescue Service to provide an annual peer assessment.

Appendix F – Hyperlinks to Reports Referenced in the document

Document Reference	Full Web Link
Statement of accounts 2013/14	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/PDFs/statement-of-accounts-1314.pdf
Annual audit letter 2014	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/PDFs/rbfa-annual-audit-letter-2014.pdf
Annual governance statement 2013/14	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/PDFs/Annual-Governance-Statement-2013-14.pdf
five year Integrated Risk Management Plan: 2010/11 – 2015/16	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/irmp/IRMP-2010-11-ActionPlan-PostConsultation.pdf
5 year IRMP consultation report	http://library.rbfrs.co.uk/public_agendas/sj3th000.doc
2013/14 IRMP Action-Plan	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/irmp/IRMP-2013-14-Action-Plan-Consultation-Document.pdf
2013/14 IRMP Consultation-Report	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/irmp/IRMP-2013-14-Consultation-Response.pdf
2013/14 annual report	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/pdfs/action-plan-2013-14-and-annual-report-cs6-hyper-v6.pdf
Community risk register	http://thamesvalleylrf.org.uk/assets/risk%20register/201403%20crr.pdf
Peer review report	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/pdfs/peer-challenge-final-report-0914.pdf