

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE



Annual Statement of Assurance 2016/17

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), further more the statement confirms the extent to which the requirement 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 arrangements within the previous financial year. Whilst this statement of assurance has been finalised in the months immediately following the Grenfell tower fire, the judgements relating to arrangements for financial, governance, operational and national framework compliance do not take account of the impacts of the incident. This incident has had, and will continue to present, very significant implications for all in the fire and rescue service and the wider fire sector. It has drawn into sharp focus the remit and potential limitations of current statutory functions of a Fire and Rescue Authority and application of building control measures. As a learning organisation reflecting on the incident and the work that has followed, it is clear that the level of technical competence required of the organisation and its employees is and will continue to be greater than ever before and the rigour with which the statutory functions need to be fulfilled to manage risk effectively is equally more testing. It is against this harder test and with regard for current and emerging information that we will assess our arrangements for the future. A great deal of work is being undertaken in this financial year with local authority partners in response to the Grenfell Tower incident. The results of this work will be reflected in the next statement of assurance.

3.0 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 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 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 have used internal audit to make an informed judgement. Details of the internal audit and also a link to the Operational Peer Assessment report that took place in RBFRS in 2017 can be found in **Appendices D & E**.

Additional assurance mechanisms are in place by way of periodic external audit which is referenced in **Appendix F**.

4.0 Summary Judgements

4.1 Financial Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2016/17 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**.

4.2 Governance Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2016/17 financial year, requirements associated with appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance were **fully 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**.

4.3 Operational Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2016/17 financial year, requirements associated with operational matters were **fully 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**.

4.4 National Framework Requirements

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2016/17 financial year, the requirements associated with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been **fully met**.

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

4.5 Assurance

RBFA gets assurance on its business through a programme of audit. Information on the 2016/17 audits are set out in **Appendix F**.

5.0 Signatures

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Colin Dudley', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Councillor Colin Dudley

Chairman – Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'John...', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

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 2016/17 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 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 in Support of Judgement

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

The annual audit letter for 2015/16 identified no financial improvements for 2016/17

Areas for Future Improvement

The annual audit letter for 2016/17 identified no financial improvements for 2017/18

Appendix C - Governance

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2016/17 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 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 undertakes their assessment of compliance against these standards.

The 2016/17 annual governance statement of the authority can be accessed [here](#). Page four of the governance statement confirms assurance in the governance arrangements.

The auditor's opinion for the governance arrangements for 2016/17 is as follows:

"The Authority can take substantial assurance that the controls upon which the organisation relies to manage both governance and risk management are suitably designed, consistently applied and operating effectively".

Review of Governance Improvements Stated in the 2015/16 Statement of Assurance

Previous Identified Governance Improvement	RBFA Action Taken
1. Budget management – devolution of budgets to middle managers to support delivery of corporate plan and Vision 2019.	Training was delivered to all senior and middle managers to support the devolution of budgets in Quarter 1 2016/17.
2. Procurement – revision of contract standing orders.	Contract standing orders were re-written in 2016/17 and approved by the Audit and Governance Committee.
3. Financial regulations – revision to provide a transparent framework for staff to operate within.	As part of the new ways of working indicated in the Authority’s “Vision” contained in the Corporate Plan 2015-19, Financial Regulations in 2016/17 were revised and approved by the Authority.

Areas for Future Improvement

There were four areas highlighted for improvement by the Auditors. In all cases they were assessed as low priorities:

Identified Governance Improvement
1. Individual development plans for members <i>“the lack of individual assessment and development plans for existing members could lead to members not being as effective in discharging their duties”.</i>
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.
3. Risk assurances have on some occasions not been fully captured on the strategic and operational risk registers.
4. Evidence of some duplication between the strategic risk register and the operational risk register.

Appendix D - Operations

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2016/17 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.

Areas to support Judgement

A. Integrated Risk Management Plan

The [Corporate Plan 2015-2019](#) includes our Integrated Risk Management Plan. We have a statutory duty under the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2012 to produce a plan to 'identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue 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 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.

RBFRS has a consultation strategy and the responses from the recent Service redesign consultation are contained in the following report:

[Service redesign summary report](#)

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, historical 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 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 in the 2015/16 Statement of Assurance

There are no outstanding operational improvement actions stated in the 2015/16 Statement of Assurance

Areas for Future Improvement

This year's Statement of Assurance has not been subject to external moderation as RBFA invited a Local Government Association peer challenge team to spend a week undertaking a peer review of the Service in February 2017.

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 3 focus areas that RBFA asked the peer team to specifically look at in some more detail.

The OpA process is designed to:

- *Form a structured and consistent basis to drive continuous improvement within the Fire and Rescue, 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'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:

- Progress made by RBFRS since the last peer visit in 2014
- The extent to which delivering the RBFA Corporate plan 2015-19 will improve outcomes for communities across Royal Berkshire
- The extent to which delivering the RBFA Corporate plan 2015-19 will meet the requirements of the Home Office fire reform programme, under the themes of efficiency and collaboration, transparency and governance and workforce reform.
- The peer review team report will be published before the end of 2017. Recommendations from the report have been translated into an action plan that will be implemented by officers and overseen by the audit and governance committee.

Appendix E - National Framework

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2016/17 financial year, the requirements associated with the Fire and rescue national framework for England have been **fully met**.

To provide an assessment of how well RBFRS meets the national aims, RBFRS officers conducted a self-assessment relating to the national framework requirements. An internal moderation exercise chaired by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer was undertaken to scrutinise the assessment judgements. The outcome was that RBFRS Fully met the framework requirements for 2016/17.

Appendix F - Other Assurance Processes

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 2016/17 through the following processes:

Contracted Internal Audit

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

In 16/17 the following audits were completed:

- Fire fighter pension administration
- IT general controls
- Key financial systems
- IRMP consultation
- Sickness absence
- Emergency service mobile communications project part 1
- Risk management and governance

RSM's annual internal audit opinion for 2016/17 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.”