



Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

Statement of Assurance 2014/15



Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Statement of Assurance 2014/15

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 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 the main Statement and, where this is the case, hyperlinks are provided to the document in question. A hyperlinked list of all these is included in **Appendix G**.

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 a combination of external audit and internal audit to make an informed

judgement. Details of the feedback from the external audit element 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 2014/15 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 2014/15 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 2014/15 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

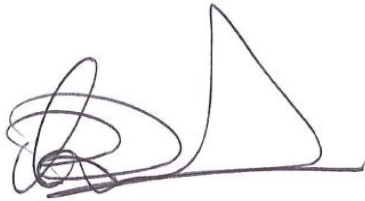
It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2014/15 financial year, the requirements associated with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been **substantially met**.

Evidence to support this judgement and details of steps planned to address areas for improvement, are set out in **Appendix E**.

3.5 Assurance


RBFA gets assurance on its business through a programme of audit. Information on the 2014/15 audits, are set out in **Appendix F**.

4.0 Signatures

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Councillor Colin Dudley

Chairman – Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Iain McCracken' with a stylized flourish at the end.

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 2014/15 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](#) accounts. The [Audit Letter](#) 2014/15 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 in 2013/14 Statement of Assurance

The annual audit letter for 2013/14 identified no financial improvements for 2014/15.

Areas for Future Improvement

The annual audit letter for 2014/15 identified no financial improvements for 2015/16.

Appendix C - Governance

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2014/15 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.

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 2014/15 annual governance statement of the authority can be accessed using the following link [Governance Statement](#). Page four of the auditors [Audit Letter](#) 2014/15 confirms assurance in the governance arrangements. The auditors did not identify any areas of concern.

Review of Governance Improvements Stated 2013/14 Statement of Assurance

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

Previous Identified Governance Improvement	RBFA Action Taken
<p>1. Exercising strategic leadership by developing and clearly communicating the authority's purpose and vision and its intended outcome for citizens and service users.</p>	<p>The Authority has undertaken a review of its strategic commitments with support from the Chief Fire Officer. A new policy direction was agreed by the Authority in June 2014 and significant work continues to ensure this mission is translated into reality. The establishment of the Organisational Development and IRMP programmes in 2015 are laying the foundations to deliver this new policy direction.</p> <p>A "Vision 2019" document and associated video has been produced. These are intended to outline a single 'big picture' of what the future will be like once the Fire Authority's policy commitments have been delivered. The video has been shared with the Fire Authority and will be used during a third phase of the staff engagement programme.</p>
<p>2. Ensure that partnerships are underpinned by a common vision of their work that is understood and agreed by all partners</p>	<p>The Authority has established several successful partnerships/shared service arrangements, including the Thames Valley Fire Control Service. Harnessing the learning from existing partnerships and shared services will be essential in their continued development, particularly across the Thames Valley. Recent Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) signed with other Thames Valley Fire Authorities and Thames Valley Police, will provide the legal and financial basis for these partnerships.</p>
<p>3. Organisational Development</p>	<p>The development of the four projects which underpin the OD programme will ensure that the capacity and capability is developed within the Authority, to ensure effective governance, linked to the new corporate planning framework. It is acknowledged that skills gaps do exist and this work will need to continue through to 2019.</p>

<p>4. Ensure that an effective risk management system is in place</p>	<p>Significant efforts have been made in Quarters 3 and 4 of 2014/15 to deliver and embed risk management in the organisations core planning and performance management processes. A new risk management policy and framework was approved by the Authority. The framework ensures all strategic risks, Service Plan and programme risks are assessed against the achievement of objectives. Training on the new framework was provided to all Directors and Heads of Service and the approach rolled out during quarter one of 2015/16. CMT now review the corporate risk register on a monthly basis and it is reported through to the Fire Authority through the quarterly Corporate Performance Report.</p>
<p>5. Fraud and corruption</p>	<p>The Anti fraud and corruption policy was reviewed and agreed by the Authority in 2014/15; this was the first review for almost 9 years. For 2015/16, we will be indentifying the essential managerial skills and competencies managers need to fully embed this new policy.</p>

Areas for Future Improvement

The Governance Statement identifies the following improvements for 2015/16.

Identified Governance Improvement	RBFA Action Taken
<p>1. Chief Financial Officer</p>	<p>The Director of Resources is the Responsible Financial Officer for the Authority under section 112 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. He has responsibility for the proper administration of the Authority's financial affairs. The role of Director of Resources is likely to be removed in a drive to find the efficiency necessary to balance the budget. In the new structure, the Head of Finance and Procurement (HoFP) will take responsibility for maintaining and reviewing financial regulations and ensuring that they remain fit for purpose, submitting any additions or changes necessary to the Authority for approval.</p>

	<p>The HoFP will also be responsible for reporting any breaches of the Regulations to the Authority. The HoFP will attend Corporate Management Team meetings, complying with the requirements of the '<i>CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government</i>' as set out in the Application Note to '<i>Delivering Good Governance on Local Government: Framework</i>'.</p>
<p>2. Compliant Purchasing and Effective Contract Management</p>	<p>The new Corporate Management Team have been carrying out a series of “deep dive” audits and reviews on the internal control procedures within the Authority. One such area where a “deep dive” has been undertaken is the area of “compliant purchasing and effective contract management”. Early indications from this work are that there is scope for better controls, leading to greater value for money and the minimisation of organisational risk. The challenge for 2015/16 will be the development of best practice in these areas, with decreasing budgets and increasing demands from new regulations and guidance.</p>
<p>3. Information Assurance and Information Technology</p>	<p>Central to delivering more targeted and efficient services across Berkshire will be the development of sophisticated Information Assurance and Information Technology strategy. The Authority have committed to a significant programme of capital investment in IT infrastructure in 2015/16. As the organisation moves towards a greater reliance on IT systems and processes, particularly greater use third party sensitive personal information, then the challenge of having appropriate governance arrangements, will be greater than ever. Any outstanding actions from the Network Security and IT Audit- follow up will also be addressed in the revised strategy.</p>
<p>4. The Authority’s budget and impact of year on year savings</p>	<p>We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that</p>

	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="858 416 1342 562">(i) Pressures on spending will necessitate new ways of working and major cultural change<li data-bbox="858 562 1401 707">(ii) The condition of the Authority's estate will necessitate a significant programme of capital investment<li data-bbox="858 707 1394 889">(iii) Industrial relations, particularly with regard to employment terms and conditions including the Fire Fighters Pension Scheme
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Appendix D - Operations

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2014/15 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 [5 yr IRMP](#) 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.

The IRMP Annual Plan 2014/15 sits alongside a report on the previous year's work plan [the Annual Report 2013/14 and Corporate Plan 2014/15](#).

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](#)
- 2014/15 IRMP reports: [Bracknell Fire Station Consultation](#) and [Optimisation of Emergency Cover in Ascot, Bracknell and Slough](#)

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.

Following the wide area flooding of 2013 RBFRS commissioned an internal review of the operational response to this major event. The findings resulted in 5 key recommendations:

1. Planning

- a. Local Authorities should put in place detailed local flood plans within each of the six local authorities in Berkshire, starting with those historically more at risk from flooding, e.g. West Berkshire Council and The Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council.

2. LRF Response

- a. Multi-agency Tactical Co-ordinating Groups should be established as soon as the risk of significant widespread flooding is predicted for a given area.

3. RBFRS's Operational Preparedness for Widespread Flooding

- a. RBFRS should undertake a review of its current widespread flooding and water safety provision and capability to ensure that the service it provides matches the risk determined through the flood risk assessment and planning process.

4. NCAF Support

- a. RBFA should make representations to the Fire Minister, confirming the critical importance of being able to draw upon flood response capability from across the UK via national resilience arrangements.
- b. RBFRS, through engagement with other TVLRF partners, should ensure that 'calls for support' via the NCAF arrangements are based on detailed and accurate assessment of 'outcome requirements'.

5. RBFRS delivery of Health and Wellbeing advice

- a. The role of the FRS in delivering and supporting flood specific messaging and education should be formally captured within the LRF preplanning arrangements, with the suggested 'home' being the LRF's Warning and Informing Group.

These recommendations have now been included in service plans for 15/16.

The full report can be found by following this [link](#).

Review of Operational Improvements Stated in 2013/14 Statement of Assurance

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

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 headings below, which identified a number of improvements. The improvements identified in February 2014 were outlined in a final report in September 2014 and are stated below.

Areas for Future Improvement

The peer review team report was published in September 2014; an action plan was then developed for 2014/15 and beyond. In October 2015 the Peer Review team returned to complete a mid-point review of progress made against the “Areas to Explore” from the final report. The full details of the progress made and the mid-point assessment can be found by following this [Link](#).

The Chair of the returning peer team did write to the Fire Authority following the visit and the key points from each of the area are shown below:

Leadership and corporate capacity

- A key part of this difference is the visible and engaging professional and political leadership that now exists within the Service
- We observed high levels of strategic, organisational and political awareness within both CMT and Members of the Authority and were particularly struck at how well Members and officers are working together

Governance

- Decision-making is underpinned by evidence which provides for a line of sight from analysis, consideration by officers and thereafter decision making by Members
- Members will challenge this evidence and through frequent engagement are ensuring that they take the best possible decisions in the interests of their communities
- There are comprehensive arrangements being introduced to address issues pertaining to performance, finance and business processes

Communications and partnership working

- The organisation has a higher level of self-awareness and indeed contextual awareness of the future challenges for the Fire sector.
- We repeatedly heard from staff the improvements that have been made in communication processes and indeed the personal investment being made by both officers and Members to demonstrate their commitment to engagement.

Key skills and succession planning

- The skill set within both CMT and the Authority appears a lot more balanced and aligned to the future challenges of the Service.
- Senior officers are personally demonstrating their commitment to further development and at a corporate level the initiative with Cambridgeshire in respect of your annual statement of assurance is commendable

Risk management

- The management of the corporate risk register is much improved than was the case in February 2014
- In terms of community risk management, your strategic teams demonstrated a move from a previous response centric service to one that now puts prevention as a key priority

Training and development

- It was reassuring that a review of the NVQ process has now taken place and that this is being modified in a more user friendly way.

Appendix E National Framework Requirements

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2014/15 financial year, the requirements associated with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been **substantially met**.

The national framework states national aims that fire authorities need to take consideration of. To provide an assessment of how well RBFRS meets the national aims, RBFRS officers conduct a self-assessment on these areas. In order to introduce independence to these assessments, RBFRS entered into a reciprocal agreement with Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS). In this arrangement, each service assesses the other's analysis of the extent to which National Framework requirements are being met, and provides a written report as a 'critical friend'. The first such assessment took place in October 2015, with CFRS visiting RBFRS, to review the self-assessments and supporting evidence.

The summary feedback from CFRS was as follows:

"I am pleased to report that having undertaken a review of the documentation and having spoken with senior managers we are able to confirm that based on the information received we would offer our support to your statement of assurance and feel it is both an appropriate and accurate reflection of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service"

The detailed feedback can be found at this [link](#) .

Areas for Future Improvement

The assessment against the national framework identified the following improvements for 2015/16.

Identified national framework Improvement	RBFA Action Taken
Review and refresh of IRMP	RBFRS have begun a strategic refresh of its IRMP, articulating a clear understanding of risk through analysis of various data sets, and better integrating response, prevention and protection.
Implement partnership plans	As a result of the peer review undertaken in February 2014, RBFRS has developed plans for greater partnership work and collaboration. These now need to be fully implemented.
Community engagement through consultation and the website	RBFRS has engaged the Consultation Institute to improve community consultation. The RBFRS website is being updated and a new Content Management System is planned for roll out from December 2015.

Appendix F Other Assurance Processes

To ensure that RBFA and RBFERS are delivering an efficient, effective and economic service across all its areas of operation, additional assurance has been provided in 2014/15 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 2014/15 the following audits were completed by the external internal audit company:

- Statement of Accounts
- Fire Fighter Pension Administration
- Key Financial Systems
- Annual Governance Statement
- Governance
- Risk Management
- IT Systems and Security
- Car Pool Usage

RBFERS Internal Audit

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

In 2014/15 the following audits were completed by RBFERS Performance Review Team:

- High Rise information gathering
- The Recording of Operational Training
- Operational Risk Information
- Safeguarding Procedures
- Management of Occupational Road Risk
- Fleet Maintenance Records (This audit was postponed due to the infancy of the project)

Each of the audits above generated a number of recommendations for local implementation. These recommendations are prioritised against risk and allocated a timescale for completion. The progress towards completion of recommendations is reported quarterly to the Strategic Performance Board through the quarterly performance report, ensuring that audits can be signed off in the recommended timescales.

Areas for Future assurance

An Annual Audit Plan is agreed with the Audit and Governance Committee. Areas for audit and assurance in 2014/15 Plan include:

- Statement of Accounts
- Fire-fighter Pension Administration
- Key Financial Systems
- Annual Governance Statement
- Risk Management and Governance
- IT Systems and Security
- Contract Management
- Accident investigation process

Appendix G – Hyperlinks to Reports Referenced in the document

Document Reference	Full Web Link
Statement of Accounts	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/PDFs/statement-of-accounts-1415n.pdf
Audit Letter 2014/15	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/PDFs/rbfa-annual-audit-letter-2015.pdf
Governance Statement 2014/15	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/PDFs/annual-governance-statement-2014-15n.pdf
Five Year IRMP	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/irmp/IRMP-2010-11-ActionPlan-PostConsultation.pdf
Action Plan 2014/15 and Annual Report 2013/14	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/pdfs/action-plan-2013-14-and-annual-report-cs6-hyper-v6.pdf
5 Year IRMP Consultation Results	http://library.rbfrs.co.uk/public_agendas/sj3th000.doc
Bracknell Fire Station Proposals (consultation report)	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/pdfs/irmp-bracknell-stn-proposals-consultation-final-report-2014.pdf
Optimisation of Cover in Ascot, Bracknell and Slough (final report)	http://www.rbfrs.co.uk/pdfs/irmp-Ascot-Bracknell-Slough-Optimisation-Report-final.pdf
Community Risk Register	http://thamesvalleylrf.org.uk/_assets/risk%20register/201403%20crr.pdf
RBFRS Flood Review	P:\Transfer\SoA\A RBFRS Flooding Report July 2015.pdf
Op A Mid Point progress Report	P:\Transfer\SoA\OpA Mid-point Progress Report.pdf
RBFRS self Assessment compared to CFRS Assessment	P:\Transfer\SoA\Comparison of RBFRS Self Assessment and Cambridgeshire FRS Assessment of the aims stated in the National Framework.pdf