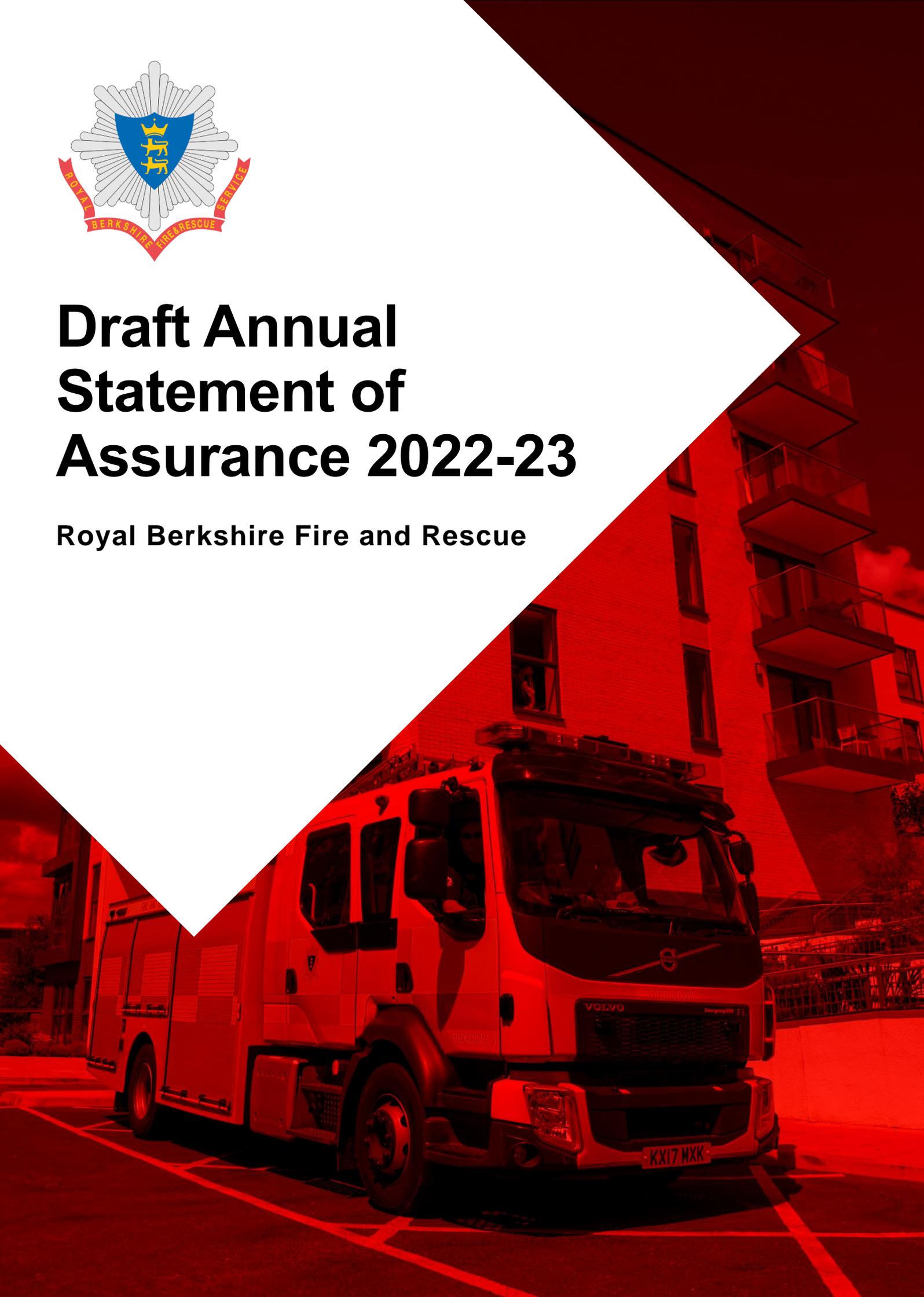




Draft Annual Statement of Assurance 2022-23

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue





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The Statement of Assurance will be finalised and re-published, following the conclusion of the audit of the Statement of Accounts 2021/22, in consultation with the Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee.

If you need this document in a different format, you can reach us at consultations@rbfrs.co.uk or call us on 0118 945 2888 with details of the request and your contact information. Alternatively, send it to us in the post addressed to Consultations, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

We will consider the request and get back to you. For more information on accessibility at Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, please read our [Accessibility Statement](#).



Introduction

We are required by the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#) to provide an Annual Statement of Assurance on financial, governance and operational matters to enable our communities, Government, local authorities and partners to make a valid assessment of our governance arrangements. This Statement of Assurance sets out the governance arrangements the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) had in place for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

We have written this document in accordance with the [guidance](#) published by the Department for Communities and Local Government on Statements of Assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England, which suggests that where relevant information is clear, accessible and user friendly is available within existing documents, extracts or links to these documents may be included within a Statement of Assurance. This Statement includes extracts or links to key documents, or other sources of information, where relevant.

In 2022, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) completed a second inspection of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS). The report was published in January 2023, and we remained rated as 'good' across the three main inspection pillars of 'effectiveness', 'efficiency', and 'people'. A copy of the inspection report is available on the [HMICFRS website](#). RBFRS continues to deliver its action plan to address the area for improvements identified by HMICFRS during its inspection, which is overseen by the Audit and Governance Committee. The next inspection cycle is underway with HMICFRS due to inspect RBFRS in Q3 2024/25, providing further external assurance.

The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework

The [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#) sets out the Government's priorities and objectives for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England. The National Framework outlines the high-level expectations although it does not require a detailed account of operational matters which are best determined locally.

The key priorities established by the framework are:

- Making appropriate provision for fire prevention and protection activities and response to fire and rescue related incidents.
- Identifying and assessing the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks their areas face.
- Collaborating with emergency services and other local and national partners to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the service they provide.
- Being accountable to communities for the service they provide; and
- Developing and maintaining a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse.



Our legal responsibilities

The following legislation provides the main legal basis and outlines the statutory responsibilities and powers of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.

- The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- The Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- Policing and Crime Act 2017

In 2018, the Government launched a revised Fire and Rescue National Framework which sets out the Fire Authority's main responsibilities and these are shown below:

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority is required to:

- Contribute to safer communities by developing a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) to identify, assess and mitigate all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks faced by the communities of Royal Berkshire.
- Work in partnership with the people of Royal Berkshire and a wide range of partners locally and nationally to deliver a capable, resilient service.
- Be accountable to you for our actions and decision making.
- Have scrutiny arrangements in place that reflect the high standard you expect for an important public safety service.
- Provide assurance to you and to Government on financial, governance and operational matters and on national resilience capability.



How we make our judgements

In looking at our obligations, we have made a judgement on each based on the following definitions.

Fully met	The requirements of applicable legislation and guidance are being consistently met.
Substantially met	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 met	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.



Summary Judgements

Financial Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2022-23 financial year, requirements associated with the appropriate management of financial matters were fully met. This is subject to conclusion of the external audit of the Statement of Accounts 2021-22.

Governance Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2022-23 financial year, requirements associated with appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance were fully met.

Operational Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2022-23 financial year, requirements associated with operational matters were fully met.

National Framework Requirements

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2022-23 financial year, the requirements associated with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been fully met.



Financial Assurance

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2022/23 financial year, requirements associated with the appropriate management of financial matters were fully met. This is subject to conclusion of the external audit of the Statement of Accounts 2021/22 and 2022/23.

Evidence in support of the judgement

The Fire Authority places significant importance on ensuring that its financial management arrangements are in line with the expectations of a public body. An annual, independent audit is normally undertaken to review the Fire Authority's Statement of Accounts, which summarise the financial position of the Fire Authority at the end of the financial year and performance throughout the year. However, due to staff shortages at Audit firms large backlogs of audits have developed, including our own audits. The Government is consulting on proposals regarding clearing the backlog.

The primary function of the external auditor is to express an opinion as to whether the Fire Authority's financial statements are free from material misstatement. However, the auditor also has responsibility for assessing whether the Fire Authority has reliable systems of control in place and the arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources. The external auditor is currently undertaking the value for money aspects of the audit of the Accounts for 2021/22 and 2022/23.

The audited 2021-22 Statement of Accounts have been published on the Service website. The auditors have issued an unqualified opinion on the accounts which provides evidence of good financial management. While not relating to 2022/23, this is the latest information available. The accounts are audited by independent external auditors who provide a view on the information contained in the accounts being 'true and fair'. The auditor also considers whether the Authority has demonstrated it has delivered value for money prior to signing the audit statement.

Further information about how the Service implements financial controls can be found in our [Constitution](#). We publish a number of [financial documents](#) on our website.

Areas for Future improvement

To be completed on receipt of the Annual Audit Letter for 2021/22 and 2022/23.



Governance Assurance

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2022-23 financial year, requirements associated with appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance were fully met.

Evidence in support of the judgement

Our governance arrangements

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority is a combined Fire Authority which means it is made up of 20 elected councillors from the six Unitary Authorities in Berkshire: Bracknell Forest, Slough Borough, Reading Borough, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, West Berkshire and Wokingham. The Fire Authority is a legal body with statutory duties and responsibilities, including the scrutiny of the Service as a whole. The Fire Authority is responsible for setting the strategic direction, policies and priorities of the Service.

Find out more about the Fire Authority on our [website](#).

Organisational governance

The Fire Authority, as a public body, places significant emphasis on ensuring that effective governance arrangements are in place.

Governance is concerned with how the Fire Authority manages its affairs on a day to day basis including business practices, standards of conduct and overall management procedures.

The Fire Authority undertakes an annual assessment of the governance arrangements using the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*. Our Annual Governance Statement explains how the Authority has complied with the Framework and meets the requirements of [Regulation 6\(1\) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015](#), which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an Annual Governance Statement. The draft [Annual Governance Statement 2022/23](#) confirms assurance related to the governance arrangements.

The Fire Authority is committed to being [fully transparent](#) in accordance with the principles of good governance and legal requirements.

Contracted internal audits

RBFA has contracted out the internal audit to RSM, an external company. In addition to auditing aspects of the Fire Authority required by legislation, the internal auditors are also instructed, as part of the audit plan agreed with the Audit and Governance Committee, to audit various other aspects of the service.

In 2022/23 the following core audits were completed:



- IT General Controls
- Firefighter Pension Administration – WYPF
- Payroll Provider – Dataplan
- Governance and Risk Management
- Key Financial Controls – Accounts receivable and expenses
- IT general controls
- Health & Safety and Mandatory Training
- Facilities Management
- Grenfell Action Plans

Our auditors issued a positive assurance opinion on seven audits, with IT General controls receiving a partial assurance. Four substantial assurances were received with reasonable assurance given on the Health & Safety including mandatory training, Facilities Management and Governance and Risk Management with medium recommendations issued. These are being addressed. For IT general controls, high recommendations were issued with plans developed to address these.

All audit actions are monitored through the Strategic Performance Board and Audit and Governance Committee.



Operational Assurance

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2022-23 financial year, requirements associated with operational matters were fully met.

Evidence in support of the judgement

Management of Risk

The Fire Authority has a statutory duty under the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework, to produce a plan to identify and assess all foreseeable fire related risks' at a county, regional and national level.

Our Corporate Plan and CRMP 2023 – 2027 outlines our strategic activities for Protection, Prevention and Response. The Plan brings together our three strands of service delivery and sets out our plans to ensure the right resources are in the place, at the right time to respond to emergencies. This plan was developed during 2022/23 and was consulted on before being taken to the Fire Authority in April 2023 for agreement.

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, as well as our own Consultation Principles which has also been subject to public consultation.

The responses received to any consultations are considered by the Fire Authority before any decision is made. Further information on our [consultations](#) are available on our website.

RBFRS follows the National Fire Standards for Community Risk Management Planning (CRMP) Process, which includes the assessment of risk. The Service has a comprehensive evidence base that identifies the risks to the communities of Berkshire. Our CRMP and Evidence base is externally audited.

The processes we have adopted use a combination of risk modelling, historical data and professional judgement to make an assessment of impact and consequence with likelihood that an event will occur, ensuring that a thorough analysis has been completed. Our published [risk methodology](#) outlines the methods of analysis used to calculate risk and risk location within Berkshire.

Our services to the community

The primary legislation associated with fire and rescue services in England and Wales is the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 which sets out the statutory responsibilities of the Authority for providing a FRS that has the people, equipment and training needed to carry out the following core functions:



- The provision of information, advice and encouragement on the prevention of fires, restricting the spread of fires in buildings and the means of escape from fires. We use our data and information from partner agencies to identify members of the public who are at the greatest risk from fire and we deliver Safe and well visits to them. Additionally, we work closely with partner agencies to reduce deliberate fires and arson.
- We carry out fire safety, road safety and water safety talks in schools and work with partner agencies to keep our communities safe, as well as social media campaigns.
- Our firefighters and fire safety officers undertake inspections of workplaces providing advice and guidance to owners and occupiers to enable them to be compliant with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, ensuring our communities are safe, using enforcement action where necessary.
- A comprehensive Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) exists to support our protection activities. Our RBIP utilises a methodology using societal risk based on occupancy type combined with known risk factors. Consistency of approach is achieved through the use of National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) audit forms.
- We respond to emergencies including fires, road traffic collisions, air and rail crashes, water rescues and flooding, hazardous chemical incidents and many other types of emergencies. Our firefighters regularly train, maintain and test equipment to ensure they remain ready to respond to emergencies at all times.

We take into account local community and risk information by creating [Local Safety Plans](#) which feed into our risk management process. We outline our approach, the risks and the associated analysis in our [Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan](#) published on our website.

We work closely with our partners as part of the Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum (TVLRF) to help understand local risk and actively provide resource, capacity and capability in support of the work of the Forum. RBFRS is committed to a programme of joint service training with Thames Valley Police, South Central Ambulance Service and the three Thames Valley fire services to deliver JESIP training to enable and fulfil the requirements of the JESIP Doctrine.

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 through an operational assurance process
- Attendance at significant emergency incidents by managers to monitor the performance of the firefighters
- All protection and prevention activities are subject to both internal quality assurance.



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.

The Strategic Performance Board (SPB) scrutinise performance and report to the Senior Leadership Team. Members play a key role in scrutinising performance through regular reports and presentations to Audit & Governance Committee and the full Fire Authority. All our [performance reports](#) and performance against targets are published on our website.

The Operational Assurance Framework exists to monitor, report and act on outcomes from active monitoring and incident debriefs and this feeds into both national operational learning and joint organisational learning.

Mutual Aid Agreements

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

- In the event of a significant emergency, RBFA can, and have, requested additional resources from neighbouring fire authorities
- 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 county, RBFA has the following specialist resources that can be deployed to assist those in need:

- A Mass Decontamination Unit (MDU), to support large scale hazardous substance incident;
- A High Volume Pump, (HVP) to support large scale flooding incidents;
- A Water Rescue Unit, (WRU) to support rescues from large scale flooding incidents.

Health and Safety Assurance

We have an established suite of key health and safety performance indicators that enable us to closely monitor health and safety performance at all levels. The indicators cover areas such as personal injuries and vehicle accidents, near misses, events that are reportable to HSE under the RIDDOR, fitness testing and sickness. This is monitored quarterly by our Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee. RIDDOR injury events, sickness and fitness data are also monitored by our Strategic Performance Board.

A comprehensive health and wellbeing provision is in place to support employees throughout their career. During 2022/23 effort was placed on protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of staff in all roles, ensuring measures were in place to maintain operational resilience and ensure safe working environments. Proactive advice and support is provided to take account of the range of challenges being faced by individuals and protect staff.



Our Operational Assurance Framework illustrates how the learning outcomes from internal and external events identified through accident investigations, debriefs, active monitoring reports and stakeholder engagement are implemented via forums such as the OLAB and Health & Safety & Wellbeing Committee.

Information is shared with staff via H&S bulletins. To provide assurance on the effectiveness of our health and safety management arrangements, we have an established programme of station assurance visits. Internal audits are carried out by our internal auditors and by the Health and Safety Team. In addition, peer audits are carried out by Health and Safety Practitioners from the NFCC South East Region.

Training Assurance

Operational staff in qualification is regularly measured and development and assessment pathways take account of the skills and knowledge required for role. On-call individuals are afforded additional training opportunities alongside their whole time colleagues. An annual training plan is developed and a suite of core skill courses are available for all staff. Middle and Supervisory managers attend a leadership development programme.

The range of training products to support staff access learning more flexibly continues to broaden. The blend of practical and online facilities provides a more effective and efficient approach to training and assessment and has enabled the Service to disseminate important packages to enhance understanding of risks within the community and operational environment.

All internal and external delegates attending our training courses and development days are invited to complete evaluation forms. These are analysed by the Training Manager and used to inform improvements in delivery.

Duty to Collaborate

The Corporate plan and CRMP 2019-2023 outlines the legislation contained in the Policing and Crime Act 2017, which places a duty on emergency services to collaborate in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness. To support, champion and provide strategic oversight of collaborative activity within the service, RBFA has appointed a Lead Member for Collaboration. This Councillor forms part of Thames Valley Steering Group and is joint lead for Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) Joint Committee. The Thames Valley Collaboration Steering Group provides the structure, governance and direction for blue light collaboration. This and our collaboration activities are explained in greater detail in the [Thames Valley Collaboration Report](#) and the Thames Valley Collaboration Register.

Reporting and assurance activity is managed through our Strategic Performance Board and Audit and Governance Committee. This monitors any actions and improvement plans.

Our [Annual Report](#) provides the details of our successes along with areas of improvement in line with our Vision. Our [Annual Plan](#) sets out our Annual Objectives and highlights areas of focus in achieving these Objectives.



January saw the publication of our HMICFRS report and highlighted areas for improvement which will be monitored and progressed via our internal governance processes.

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National Framework Assurance

It is the view of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) that, at the end of the 2022/23 financial year, requirements associated with the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been fully met.

Evidence in support of the judgement

To provide an assessment of how well RBFA adheres to the National Framework, an internal assessment was undertaken and subject to an internal moderation exercise to scrutinise the assessments made. We use external evaluations through audits, assessment against professional standards and independent inspections. The outcome was that RBFA fully met the Framework requirements for 2022/23 and actions are in place to monitor for changes.

This outcome is further supported by the independent inspection by HMICFRS who judged RBFRS as good in our previous inspection across the three main pillars of 'Effectiveness', 'Efficiency' and 'People'.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a legal obligation to comply with the public sector equality duty (PSED). This is a duty on public authorities to consider how our policies, decisions and activities affect people who are protected under the Equality Act. This incorporates nine protected characteristics age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

To meet our statutory obligations, when exercising our functions, we must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

The general equality duty is supported by specific duties to help organisations to show compliance, requiring public bodies to additionally:

- Publish diversity information annually to demonstrate our compliance with the equality duty;
- Prepare and publish specific and measurable equality objectives at least every four years.



We are committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in both the service we deliver to the community and the employment of our staff. EDI is about understanding and respecting differences and ensuring the right people receive the right services. We also understand that a diverse workforce with individuals who can offer different skills, experience and knowledge will benefit us as an organisation and ensure we are able to meet the needs of the diverse community we serve.

The diversity of our workforce is important and we are working hard to attract and retain a wider pool of applicants into all positions. Our [equality and diversity objectives](#) are published on our website. [Performance](#) against these objectives are also published and monitored by our Strategic Performance Board.

An Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Forum assists the Service to consider its activities and pulls of diversity of experience regarding areas for attention and progression/development. We consult on and publish our Equality Objectives as part of our commitment to meeting the duties placed upon us. The Forum is a knowledge-sharing and consultative body that supports the Service to maintain progress regarding our objectives by drawing on a range of perspectives and experiences.

Our Future Plans

RBFA is determined to continue to provide a safe and efficient service, whilst meeting changing local needs and balancing the budget. Plans put in place over the last few years have provided a good foundation to meet that challenge.

In April 2023, RBFA will review the outcomes of the public consultation on our Corporate Plan and CRMP 2023-2027, demonstrating how RBFRS will deliver its services, in order to achieve the Fire Authority's six Strategic Commitments. The CRMP aligns to the requirements of the [Fire and Rescue Service National Framework for England 2018](#) and the [Community Risk Management Planning Fire Standard](#).

Our [Annual Plan for 2023/24](#) is published on our website and includes specific areas of focus for the year ahead in support of our Vision for 2023 and beyond, and to ensure RBFRS utilises and maximises its available resources to deliver a quality service to the people of Royal Berkshire.

We will continue to monitor the government's policies on Fire Reform, in particular the White Paper that was published earlier in 2022 and participate in consultations and engage with ministers to provide an evidence led response which will support the needs of our communities.



How we engage with our communities

You can get involved with the work of the Fire Authority by attending the public meetings that are held regularly by the Authority.

We value the views of our communities to ensure we are providing the service you need. We consult formally on the ways in which we propose to deliver services through the CRMP consultation. We offer our community the opportunity to sign up for updates regarding our consultations which are published on our [Consultation Hub](#). This and more information about our plans and priorities can be found on our website www.rbfrs.co.uk.

Access to information

A range of information about RBFRS is routinely published on our website. For more information on access to data and information, please visit our [website](#).

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