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**ANNUAL
STATEMENT OF
ASSURANCE
2019/20**

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority





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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 2019/20, in consultation with the Chairman of the Fire Authority and Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee.



Statement of Assurance 2019/20

1. 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, as well as overall adherence to the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#).

2. Structure

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England states that the annual Statement of Assurance should:

“...outline the way in which the authority and its fire and rescue service has had regard – in the period covered by the document – to this National Framework, the Integrated Risk Management Plan and to any strategic plan prepared by the authority for that period. The authority must also provide assurance to their community and to government on financial, governance and operational matters”

This 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’](#). In addition to which, a judgement is made on adherence to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for 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 hyperlinked or referenced throughout this document.

In making these judgements, an internal review has been undertaken, which was subject to a moderation exercise to scrutinise the assessments made. Independent auditors have also been instructed 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, an internal review has been undertaken, which was subject to a moderation exercise to scrutinise the assessments made. Further information on operational matters and adherence to the National Framework can be found in **Appendices D & E**.

The internal review has been informed by additional assurance mechanism outlined in **Appendix F**, and, notably, the independent inspection undertaken by Her Majesty's Inspection of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) that took place in 2018/19.

3. Summary Judgements

3.1 Financial Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2019/20 financial year, requirements associated with the appropriate management of financial matters were **fully met** (subject to conclusion of the external audit of the Statement of Accounts 2019/20).

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 2019/20 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**.

3.3 Operational Matters

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2019/20 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**.

3.4 National Framework Requirements

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2019/20 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**.

3.5 Assurance

RBFA gets assurance on its business through a programme of audit and independent inspection. Information on the 2019/20 audits are set out in **Appendix F**.

4. Signatures



Councillor Colin Dudley

Chairman – Royal Berkshire Fire Authority



Councillor Tony Linden

Vice-Chairman – Audit and Governance Committee

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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.

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Appendix B - Finance

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2019/20 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 has contracted an external auditor to audit the Statement of Accounts. The external auditor is currently undertaking the audit of the Accounts 2019/20. The Letter issued by the auditor in relation to these accounts will be used to confirm their assurance opinion on the financial matters of the Authority. The interim judgement on financial matters, based on internal assurance activity, will be finalised and updated in the Statement of Assurance following conclusion of the Audit.

The Annual Audit Letter for 2018/19 identified no financial improvements for 2019/20.

Areas for Future Improvement

To be completed on receipt of the Annual Audit Letter.

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Appendix C - Governance

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2019/20 financial year, requirements associated with appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance were **fully met**.

The ['Guidance on statements of assurance for fire and rescue authorities in England'](#) states that:

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

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

Evidence in Support of Judgement

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

The [Annual Governance Statement 2019/20](#) confirms assurance in the governance arrangements. The appointed Internal Auditors (RSM) undertook a Governance and Risk Management Audit as part of the 2019/20 audit plan. As part of this audit, the auditors found substantial assurance that *"the controls upon which the organisation relies to*

manage the identified area(s) are suitably designed, consistently applied and operating effectively". Substantial assurance is the highest level of assurance assigned by the auditors.

The internal auditor's overall audit opinion for 2019/20 was as follows:

"The organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control"

Review of Governance Improvements stated in the 2018/19 Statement of Assurance:

There were no areas highlighted for future improvement by the Auditors in the 2018/19 Statement of Assurance.

Areas for Future Improvement:

There were two areas highlighted for improvement by the Internal Auditors in 2019/20. In both cases these were assessed as low priorities:

Previous Identified Governance Improvement	RBFA Action Taken
As part of the review of Constitution and Members Handbook (Including the Terms of Reference), the responsibility for electing a Chair and Vice Chair will be added to the relevant Terms of Reference and will be subsequently sent to the relevant body for approval.	The review was completed and an update to the Constitution drafted, which has been approved by the Fire Authority.
As part of the planned review of the Members Handbook, the conditions for reviewing the Terms of Reference of the Fire Authority and its committees will be clearly outlined. The updated Terms of Reference will subsequently be sent to	The review was completed and an update to the Constitution drafted, which has been approved by the Fire Authority.

an appropriate body for approval.	
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Appendix D - Operations

It is the view of RBFA that, at the end of the 2019/20 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 2019-2023](#) includes our Integrated Risk Management Plan. The Authority had 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.

The Plan brings together our three strands of service delivery; Prevention, Protection and Response and sets out our plans to ensure the right resources are in the place, at the right time to respond to emergencies.

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 consultations is available on our website.

The Local Resilience Forum (LRF) 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 produces a [Community Risk Register](#) for the Thames Valley, which highlights potential hazards in our area.

B. Mutual Aid Agreements

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

- In the event of a significant emergency, RBFA can request additional resources from neighbouring fire authorities;
- Should the address of an emergency be closer to a fire 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:
 - 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.

C. Specific Events

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

- Regular performance reports
- Risk based operational debriefs
- Feedback from staff to identify improvements on how the service can be delivered through an operational assurance process
- Attendance at significant emergency incidents by managers to monitor the performance of the firefighters

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 2018/19 Statement of Assurance

As outlined in the Statement of Assurance 2018/19, we remained committed to delivering in accordance with our Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan 2019-23, with our Annual Plan setting our specific focus for 2019/20.

In 2018/19, we were inspected for the first time by HMICFRS. Through the inspection process, we were able to gain independent assurance in relation to the effectiveness and efficiency of the Service, and its operational response. The results were published in June 2019, and it should be noted that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service was judged as 'good' across the three main pillars of 'Effectiveness', 'Efficiency' and 'People'. Where areas for improvement were identified, we put in place an action plan to address these, which was monitored through our Strategic Performance Board and reported to the Audit and Governance Committee.

The 2019/20 year saw the implementation of both phases of the Remotely Managed Stations and Flexi Duty Officer Project. This project followed the Service Redesign consultation in 2016/17, and had a set of clear objectives to be achieved. These were:

- Transfer of additional resources and investment into our frontline station delivery model;
- Achieve a resilient and highly skilled operational command model;
- Secure an efficient and effective middle management tier;
- Provide increased resilience of the organisation across the middle manager tier
- Achieve the agreed IRMP savings of £550k; and
- Provide greater flexibility for promotion, overcoming some existing barriers.

This innovative project was delivered in co-design with the Fire Brigades Union and has seen us create a more resilient incident command model through the introduction of 24 Watch Based Stations Managers. Following this investment in our frontline station delivery model, we were able to reduce the overall number of flexible duty officers across the whole organisation generating the required IRMP savings, whilst still allowing investment in our middle management tier through the recruitment of specialist Protection and Prevention Managers, as well as the addition of a number of specialist Grey Book Officer roles. The project objectives were achieved and the IRMP savings totalled £576k.

This work was an important step in embedding our Service Delivery Hub Model which ensures we continue to target risk and allocate resources as efficiently and effectively as possible at a local level. This is underpinned by the publication of our 2019/20 Local Safety Plans.

Our Annual Report 2019/20 provides a summary of our activities during this period and progress made against our delivering against the Strategic Commitments, Annual Plan 2019/20 and Corporate Measures.

Our previous Integrated Risk Management Plan was underpinned by evidence bases which provide analysis which inform how we target our prevention, protection and response activity to local risk. A significant focus in the last year was reviewing these evidence bases and developing three updated Strategies and Underpinning Risk Analysis covering our Prevention, Protection and Response activities, aligned to the Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan 2019-2023.

These Strategies were developed in 2019/20, and agreed in draft by the Fire Authority for consultation in February 2020.

Areas for Future Improvement

Our Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan 2019-2023, sets out our strategic direction with the Annual Plan 2020/21 setting out specific areas of focus in the next year.

A public consultation was initiated in March 2020, on the proposals contained within our Prevention, Protection and Response Strategies and Underpinning Risk Analysis. The Strategies contain specific proposals on how we intend to target our resources to local community risk over the period 2019-2023.

The outcome of the public consultation was conscientiously considered by the Fire Authority in June 2020, and the three Strategies were agreed. The Strategies provide a roadmap for our activities across Prevention, Protection and Response, with the Annual Plan 2020/21 specifying what activities will be undertaken in-year.

Following the inspection of the Service in 2018/19, an action plan has been developed to progress any recommended areas for improvement. The action plan continues to be progressed and overseen by the Audit and Governance Committee through quarterly performance reporting.

In setting our plans for 2021/22, we recognised that we were operating in challenging and unprecedented times due to the global public health crisis. Whilst our Annual Plan 2020/21 sets out our intent, we recognise that the circumstance related to COVID-19 may pose challenges to some areas of delivery, and we may need to further adapt our areas of focus throughout the year.

Appendix E - National Framework

It is the view of RBFA that at the end of the 2019/20 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 RBFA adheres to the National Framework, an internal assessment was undertaken and subject to an internal moderation exercise to scrutinise the assessments made. The outcome was that RBFA fully met the Framework requirements for 2019/20.

This outcome is further supported by the independent inspection by HMICFRS.

In 2018/19, we were inspected for the first time by her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). Through the inspection process, we were able to gain external, independent, assurance in relation to the effectiveness and efficiency of our operational response. The results were published in June 2019, and it should be noted that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service was judged as 'good' across the three main pillars of 'Effectiveness', 'Efficiency' and 'People'.

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 2019/20 through the following processes:

Contracted Internal Audit

RBFA has contracted out 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 an audit plan agreed with the Audit and Governance Committee, to audit various other aspects of the service.

In 2019/20 the following audits were completed:

- Business Continuity and Emergency Planning
- Financial Planning and Long Term Budgeting
- Risk Management & Governance
- Payroll Provider – DataPlan
- Firefighter Pension Administration
- Key Financial Controls
- IT – Cyber Essentials

RSM's annual internal audit opinion for 2019/20 is as follows:

“The organisation has an adequate and effective framework for risk management, governance and internal control.”

