RBFA Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

2023 - 2024



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Scope of responsibility

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (the Authority) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with relevant legislation and standards and that public money is both safeguarded and properly accounted for. It also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999, to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Authority is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, use of its resources and including arrangements for the management of risk and the maintenance of an effective internal control environment.

The Authority has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance which is consistent with the principles of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy/Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (CIPFA/SOLACE) '*Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework'* (2016 edition). This 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 Authority also reviews and reports its compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code (FM Code) which is designed to support good practice in financial management and allow the Authority to demonstrate that it is financially sustainable. The FM Code came into force on 1 April 2021. Local authorities are required to prepare an Annual Governance Statement in order to report publicly on the extent to which they comply with their own code of governance, which in turn is consistent with the good governance principles in the Framework.

This includes how authorities have monitored and evaluated the effectiveness of their governance arrangements in the year, and on any planned changes in the coming period. The process of preparing the governance statement should itself add value to the effectiveness of the governance and internal control framework. The Annual Governance Statement is intended as a valuable means of communication. It enables an authority to explain to the community, service users, tax payers and other stakeholders its governance arrangements and how the controls it has in place manage the risks of failure in delivering its outcomes.

The overall aim is to ensure that:

- Resources are directed in accordance with agreed policy and according to priorities.
- There is sound and inclusive decision-making.
- There is clear accountability for the use of those resources to achieve desired outcomes for service users and communities.

Purpose of the Governance Framework

The Governance Framework comprises the systems, processes, culture and values by which the Authority is directed and controlled. It enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate and cost-effective services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that Framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure and can, therefore, only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise risks in relation to the achievement of the Authority's policies, aims and objectives; to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised.

The Governance Framework has been in place within the Authority for the year ended 31 March 2024, and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts.

The Governance Framework

The governance measures in place reflect the seven principles of good governance set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE '*Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework'* (2016 edition) as set out below.

Core Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law

The Constitution of the Authority establishes the roles and responsibilities of Members of the Authority and its Committees, together with officer functions. It includes details of delegation arrangements. The Constitution is kept under review to ensure that it is fit for purpose. Proposed changes are overseen by the Audit and Governance Committee. The Audit and Governance Committee's views on the suitability of any changes are reported when they are presented to the full Fire Authority for approval.

The Constitution also contains procedure rules, standing orders and financial regulations that define how decisions are taken and where authority lies for decisions. The statutory roles of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and Chief Financial Officer are described together with their contributions to provide robust assurance on governance and that expenditure is lawful and in line with approved budgets and procedures. The influence and oversight of these posts is supported by the post-holders' membership of the Senior Leadership Team.

A local Members' Code of Conduct is in place for all Members and was agreed by the Authority in April 2022 following a consultation in November 2023 to ensure our community still supported the code of conduct. A Register of disclosable pecuniary interests for each Member is reviewed annually and published on the Authority's website. This is further supported by Protocol on Member and Officer Relations which sets out respective obligations and expectations.

In the event of an allegation being made that a Member has breached the Authority's Code of Conduct, The Complaints Procedure related to Members of the Fire Authority is available on the RBFRS website.

The role of Monitoring Officer is fulfilled as part of a collaborative arrangement with Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority. This arrangement has been in place since 2017/18 and has proved to be effective in ensuring suitable discharge of this responsibility.

All employees are bound by the Employee Code of Conduct and provides a framework for the behaviour, decisions and actions of employees. It is based on the national Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services in England and supports a consistent approach to ethics and behaviours across RBFRS. The Employee Code of Conduct also sets out the requirement for the

declarations of interests and for employees to register offers or acceptance of gifts and hospitality. The Officer Register of Gifts and Hospitality is publicly available on the RBFRS website.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) published the findings of their review of the handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services in England. The contents were reviewed for action and a comprehensive action plan in place.

A Grievance, Bullying and Harassment Policy, Complaints Procedure, Whistle Blowing Policy and Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy are maintained and kept under review, providing the opportunity for members of the public and staff to raise issues when they believe that appropriate standards have not been met.

Regular updates on formal grievances, compliments and complaints received is presented to the Audit and Governance Committee via the quarterly performance report.

The Local Pension Board is set up under the auspices of The Public Service Pensions Act 2013. The Board exists to assist the Fire Authority in its role as Scheme Manager; to secure compliance with the various firefighter pension scheme regulations and other legislation relating to governance and administration of the scheme; and secure compliance with requirements imposed by the Pensions Regulator. A six-monthly report is provided to the Audit and Governance Committee.

We are committed to data protection and processing personal data in line with the requirements of the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. It also sets out the process by which data incidents are recorded and investigated, and where appropriate, reported.

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority is committed to the highest possible standards of integrity, openness and accountability. The Authority recognises that sound systems of public accountability are vital to effective management and to protecting the public funds entrusted to it. The Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy outlines the Authority's commitment to creating an anti-fraud culture and maintaining high ethical standards in its administration of public funds.

The Whistleblowing policy outlines arrangements to give staff confidence to challenge and report allegations of inappropriate behaviour and gives the Authority the means to investigate such reports. There is the opportunity to use Say So, an organisation engaged so that workplace concerns can be reported confidentially.

To positively develop our culture, the RBFRS Culture Plan has been created. This is an organisational development programme that seeks to develop our culture through five key pillars. This work will be managed and reported through a programme structure to ensure robust management.

Core Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

The Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan 2023-27 was agreed by the Fire Authority following consultation with the public, staff and stakeholders. The Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2023-27, sets out the contribution the Authority will make to its mission; serving the people of Royal Berkshire. It is linked to the Budget, ensuring that the aspirations in the plan are realistic in the context of funding constraints within which the Authority operates.

A Consultation Strategy is in place which underpins all consultation activity and we work with the Consultation Institute to ensure best practice is followed. The Authority has consulted on and agreed its CRMP Consultation Principles, which are published within the Consultation Strategy. Details of our previous public consultations are available on our website. All consultations are supported by a communication and engagement plan aimed at engaging our stakeholders.

Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Objectives 2022-2026 have been published on our website and underpin our engagement activity.

Whilst the Corporate Plan spans a four-year period, it is reviewed annually. An Annual Plan is produced and published on the website, setting out Annual Objectives together with Corporate Measures. For 2023/24, for each Unitary Authority area we have published a dedicated annual Hub Safety Plan , which sets out localised risk and how resources will be targeted to meet that risk.

An Annual Report is published on our website that takes account of matters that have arisen during the last 12 months and reports on performance for that period.

Corporate Measures that are set annually via the Annual Plan are internally monitored through the Strategic Performance Board prior to reporting via the Audit and Governance Committee. Any strategic projects are managed through the Programme Board, with our Priority Programmes being reported to the Audit and Governance Committee via the Quarterly Performance Reports. In addition to publishing the Quarterly Performance Reports, we publish key performance information on our website on a monthly basis.

Our website also contains a 'Transparency and Governance' section publishing financial and staff information which includes the Council Tax Leaflet, procurement card transactions and payments over £500. We work closely with our neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services, notably through long standing collaboration with Thames Valley partners and the wider Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum. These partnerships and collaborative activities allow us to share our understanding of risk and contribute to wider regional risk reduction. We actively seek collaborative opportunities, such as sharing the facilities in our fire stations with Thames Valley Police and South Central

Ambulance Service, joint procurement arrangements and our joint Thames Valley Fire Control Service.

Working together leads to greater resilience and increases our efficiency and effectiveness. The governance arrangements are set out in the Thames Valley Emergency Services Collaboration Five Year Plan, together with a Thames Valley Collaboration Register, and are publicly available on our website.

Meetings of the Fire Authority and its committee meetings are accessible to the public and dates are published on the website, including the minutes and decisions taken at those meetings. The Authority appoints two members to the Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Committee and papers are published on the website for these meetings.

Standing orders are published outlining the rules for the operation of Authority and committee meetings. The Scheme of Delegation sets outs those decisions which can only be taken by the Fire Authority or the Audit and Governance committee and those which can be taken by the Chief Fire Officer/chief Executive.

Core Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

The Corporate Plan and CRMP provides a clear vision and formal statement on the organisation's purpose and intended outcomes, including how we will manage our resources to achieve those outcomes. Our Community Risk Management Plan sets out how we will safely and effectively manage risk across our Prevention, Protection and Response activities. Our Consultation Principles set out that we will consult with a wide range of stakeholders, including the public, on any changes that will have a material impact on the performance of the services we provide.

The Strategic Asset Investment Framework, sets out our intent for the management and investment in our capital assets which include our buildings, fleet and ICT, underpinning the Corporate Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan. We monitor the delivery of our corporate strategies and report on these through our Audit & Governance Committee.

The Organisational Risk Management Policy sets out our approach to the identification and management of risk which may impact on our ability to provide our services. The Corporate Risk Register is reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team and is reported to the Audit and Governance Committee.

In support of our sustainability principles, and recognising there is a global climate emergency, the Authority is committed to reducing the impact of the organisation's operations on the environment and reducing its carbon footprint. It will do so in a way that supports the United Kingdom's

commitment to sustainable development and reducing the effects of climate change by achieving Net Zero by 2050, in line with the UK government target.

The estate contributes 65% of the Authority's direct carbon output, therefore, investment is being made to reduce the negative impact our buildings have on the environment. Strategic planning has included the production of heat decarbonisation plans to enable the first significant steps for the Authority to achieve its Net Zero Carbon aspiration by investment in sustainability initiatives at sites in the portfolio.

The fleet also contributes significantly to the Authority's carbon footprint, so investment is being made to modernise our fleet with more efficient assets. This includes, where possible, and as technology allows, hybrid vehicles, plug-in hybrid vehicles and fully electric vehicles, to reduce the environmental impact of our operational activities.

A key element to the revenue budget setting process is ensuring the long-term sustainability of the organisation, taking into account the current pressures, risks and challenges that the Service faces.

Core Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

Fire Authority meetings take place approximately three times per year with separate committee meetings for Audit and Governance and Management committees. In accordance with the Scheme of Delegation, all relevant items for decision are taken to the appropriate and relevant committee for scrutiny and approval.

Medium to long-term planning is informed by the Medium Term Financial Plan, Strategic Asset Investment Framework and Reserves Policy, which set out the financial strategy for the Authority. This enables the Authority to understand likely future challenges, and ensure its strategic planning is realistic.

Where necessary, appropriate action is identified to mitigate potential financial risk. This is further supported by the Authority's Efficiency and Productivity Plan, which was refreshed as part of the budget setting process for 2024/25. Savings of £565,000 are planned to be delivered in 2024/25.

Our Performance Management Framework sets out how we will manage performance to ensure organisational aims and objectives are achieved. This Framework sets out how we will measure and monitor performance and where and when the organisation will manage performance. This is further supported by the Organisational Risk Management Policy as set out above.

The Authority will inform the public about changes we intend to make, or would like the public's views on, and then engage in a process of public consultation. This enables assessment of

feedback from communities and partners on our options. Responses are analysed and then presented to Fire Authority.

Core Principle E: Developing the Authority's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

A key theme of the Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan is Capacity, Capability and Resilience. Our vision outlines our capability commitments and that we value and invest in developing our people to ensure we can deliver the best possible service.

A new People Strategy has been developed and published with an action plan in progress to support the delivery of its objectives. The purpose of the strategy is to create a professional, flexible workforce that is diverse in thought and representation that can create safer more resilient communities. Progress against action plans will be monitored through our programme structure.

The Authority has developed a new Member Development Strategy that was agreed by the Fire Authority in April 2023. This strategy is supported by a Member Development Action Plan and reviewed annually.

The training needs of Members and officers are identified through appraisal and review processes. Appropriate training is made available to ensure that individuals are able to undertake their current roles effectively and that they have the chance to develop to meet their, and the Authority's, needs.

There is a Leadership Development Programme in place for supervisory and middle- managers, with the Senior Leadership Team developed through coaching and external leadership development courses. We provide access to a coaching and development platform which has a range of tools including a 360-degree feedback tool.

Our Behavioural Competency Framework has leadership at its core and is directly linked to our Employee Code of Conduct and our Equality and Diversity and Inclusion Objectives, and therefore the FRS Core Code of Ethics. Our performance development review structure and recruitment are aligned to the framework.

Our Workforce Planning Group allows us to monitor our workforce profile, as well as anticipate future workforce needs for capacity and capability and plan accordingly.

The health and wellbeing of colleagues is a priority and our Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan supports our staff, with a particular focus on Mental Health. Progress against action plans are monitored in our Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

Independent assurance is provided by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) across the three pillars of 'effectiveness', 'efficiency' and 'people'

HMICFRS inspected RBFRS during 2022 with the report published in January 2023. RBFRS was graded as 'good' in all three pillars. Progress on the areas for improvements identified by HMICFRS are reported through our Programme Board. We are due to be inspected again in 2024 with the report published in 2025.

Since the introduction of the Fire Standards Board (FSB), we have been an active and engaged participant in the development of the new fire standards and responding to the FSB consultations. On all of the published progressional standards, we undertake a gap analysis to check our compliance and create action plans if any gaps are reported, also making use of the implementation tools. Progress is reported to the Audit and Governance Committee.

Core Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

The Authority ensures that the Service has appropriate governance arrangements in place and that risk and performance are being effectively managed. As set out above, there is a Performance Management Framework and Organisational Risk Management Policy which sets out how this is achieved.

The Authority has ownership of the strategic risks of the Service and is responsible for monitoring and challenging risks and actions appearing on the Corporate Risk Register. This responsibility for risk and performance management is delegated by the Authority to the Audit and Governance Committee.

The Head of Finance and Procurement is appointed as the Chief Finance Officer and ensures the sound administration of the financial affairs of the Authority, as required by the statutory duties associated with section 112 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. The Chief Financial Officer is required to adhere to professional standards set by CIPFA.

Until October 2015, the Authority's insurance was arranged through a consortium of nine fire and rescue authorities. These fire and rescue authorities are now members of the Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company Ltd (FRIC). The company commenced trading in November 2015 and now has 14 member authorities. The Authority's risk protection arrangements are provided through the pooled funds of the company. The aims of the Company are twofold: to reduce risk to the Authority by driving up standards, for example, by adopting best practice in relation to driving standards and also to reduce the cost to the Authority of its risk protection arrangements over the longer-term.

The Audit and Governance Committee provides independent assurance to the Authority and scrutinises the performance of our service and reviews audit reports from internal and external auditors and approves the statement of accounts.

Management Committee receives quarterly budget monitoring reports.

Core Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability

Data is published on the website in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code to promote openness and accountability through reporting on local decision-making, public spending and democratic processes.

The Authority has a designated statutory Data Protection Officer (DPO) that reports through the Authority's Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) which is the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services. Both the DPO and SIRO ensure legal compliance with data protection requirements.

The Authority publishes on the website monthly listings of all procurement card expenditure and payments over £500 that have been made. A contracts register is also maintained and published detailing businesses with whom we have official agreements and supply regular services.

The Pay Policy has been approved by the Authority and is subject to review annually. It is produced in accordance with new or proposed legislation to ensure that it remains relevant and effective. The Pay Policy Statement for 2024-25 has been approved by the Authority.

In addition to publishing the Gender Pay Gap Report for 2023 on our website, the Authority also published an Ethnicity Pay Gap Report for 2023 which goes further than the statutory Gender Pay Gap report and gives clearer and more extensive information regarding how individuals are paid at RBFRS and how individual pay elements are distributed across the various protected groups. An Equal Pay Audit was undertaken in 2022 with outcomes reported to the Authority in January 2023. An update of the Equal Pay Audit is due to be commissioned in 2024/25.

An annual Statement of Assurance is produced to formally confirm to Government, stakeholders and the communities we serve, the adequacy of arrangements for the effective management of financial, governance and operational matters in RBFRS. The Statement confirms the extent to which the requirement of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been met.

The Audit and Governance Committee undertakes the scrutiny function within the Authority and provides a robust challenge to the Authority. The Committee reviews performance and risk within the Authority, initiating reviews where it considers performance could be improved.

The Authority's Internal Audit Service is carried out by external contractors appointed under contract. The appointed Internal Auditor (RSM) is required to provide an annual independent and objective opinion to the Authority on risk management, governance and the control environment.

The annual Audit Plan is agreed by the Audit and Governance Committee and in 2023/24 RSM has reported on the following audits:

Audit	Assurance Level
Payroll provider – Dataplan	Substantial assurance
Sickness Absence Management	Reasonable assurance
Firefighter Pension administration (West Yorkshire Pension Fund)	Substantial assurance
Community Risk Management Plan	Reasonable assurance
Risk Management and Governance	Reasonable assurance
IT General Controls	Reasonable assurance
GDPR Governance	Advisory Audit
High Level Tax Process Review	Advisory Audit

Review of Effectiveness

The Authority has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the senior managers who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Internal Auditors' (RSM) annual report, and by the findings and reports issued by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

The Authority has an Audit and Governance Committee with responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the risk, control and governance processes and associated assurance processes to ensure internal control systems are effective and that policies and practices are in compliance with statutory and other regulations and guidance.

Significant Governance Issues addressed in 2023/24

The following provides a progress report against the significant governance issues identified in the last Annual Governance Statement

Governance matter identified	Action taken in 2023/24	Lead Officer	Target Date
HMICFRS The service is being inspected as part of Tranche 3 of the inspection programme with formal inspection activity starting from Q2 24/25	During 23/24, RBFRS continued to work on the HMICFRS Action Plan built from the areas for improvement and this was monitored and scrutinised in Programme Board.	Paul Bremble	Closed
Development of a new People Strategy Our people are our most important asset and the current People Strategy ran until 2021. Our new People Strategy will continue our journey of improvement and support our staff to be the best public servants they can be, creating a workforce that can deliver excellence to our communities.	Following extensive staff engagement, the new People Strategy has been revised and has now been published. Our annual plan will look to support the delivery of the People Strategy and our Community Risk Management Plan outlines plans to develop the service over the four years. Our new vision outlines our commitments to capability, and culture.	Nikki Richards	Closed

New Community Risk Management Plan Our CRMP and Corporate Plan runs to 2023 and requires a review to ensure our future plans are relevant to our communities and reflect an ever changing world. Our CRMP outlines how we will manage the risk from Fire and rescue related incidents. Our new CRMP will continue our journey of improvement and could change how we deliver the service.	The CRMP public consultation completed in March 2023 and the proposals and outcome of the consultation were reviewed by the Fire Authority in April 2023. The Fire Authority agreed the consultation outcome in April 2023.	Paul Bremble	Closed
Funding The Authority's funding position going into 2023/24 is one of extreme volatility due to both the uncertain political and economic uncertainty at a national level. This uncertainty means that it is increasingly difficult to predict the outcomes of the financial settlements received from central Government which will determine the financial parameters within which the Authority will have to operate.	The Chief Fire Officer wrote to central Government and proactively lobbied local MP's for further clarity and support on the funding settlement. Scenario planning highlighted the implications of a financial settlement that would require expenditure cuts to balance the budget.	Wayne Bowcock	Closed
Pensions The pensions landscape remains complex with technical policy and secondary legislation associated with the Sargeant case still to be finalised.	During 2023/24 RBFRS continued to support those due to retire and began work to meet the legislative requirements to remedy the discrimination found in public sector pensions. In 2023/24 we took action to ensure we were appropriately resourced to respond to the pension workload.	Becci Jefferies	February 2024

	RBFRS will continue to work to the timelines set subject to the availability of Government advice. Updates to A&G Committee provided oversight of the emerging issues.		
Sustainability Recognising we are in a global climate emergency, there are increasing expectations that organisations should consider sustainability as an important and strategic objective. It is our intention to support the wider Government sustainability and environmental targets. A strategy needs to be set out so the organisation can set its direction towards becoming more sustainable and environmentally friendly.	In 2023/24 we reviewed outcomes of the organisational carbon footprint assessment to help inform future strategy.	Paul Brooks	Closed
Government White Paper, Fire Reform and PCCs A consultative White Paper was published in 2022, setting out the Government's reform agenda in relation to fire.	The Authority considered the White paper and its proposals when published and responded to the consultation.	Wayne Bowcock	Closed
Cyber security threat There is increasing use of and movement to cloud based IT services. With increased remote working there is additional pressure on those services. There have been increased incidences and threats of ransomware attacks and the potential for the risk of cyber-attacks to increase in frequency.	This is an on-going challenge and needs vigilance. We continued to focus resources in this area and continued to work with our external partners to commission audits of our systems to test for vulnerabilities. We continued to review and adjust our IT Disaster Recovery plans in response to changing cyber threat patterns and operational needs. We continued to educate and train our staff to recognise and appropriately handle cyber security risks. An ongoing action plan is being developed.	Lukasz Wrona	March 2024

IT General Controls A review of arrangements governing the operations of our technology estate highlighted inconsistencies in approach resulting from significant changes within the service in recent years. It is important to understand and address those inconsistencies as they may have an impact on the effectiveness of our IT and security controls in place and to ensure technology appropriately and securely supports the Service in delivering its' statutory duties.	We worked with the findings of the IT General Controls audit to address the risks identified in the physical estate. We reviewed the policies and processes governing the delivery and consumption of technology within the Service addressing inconsistencies and aligning with appropriate guidance. We will focus our effort on ensuring the value of IT and Security training is appreciated amongst our staff and increase the proportion of staff who maintain an appropriate level of competence. This will lead to a reduction of risk to our IT estate.	Lukasz Wrona	Closed
Legislation and legal changes – Employment Law There are a number of bills proposing changes to employment law. The Service will need to consider the impact of any emerging legislation on ways of working and the workforce and how we need to respond to it.	Emerging and ongoing legislation was monitored in 2023/24.	Becci Jefferies	Closed
Legislation and legal changes – Telecommunications Act The Telecommunications Act potentially changes the dynamic of our negotiating position in relation to the income we can generate from telecommunication masts. The Service will need to mitigate the impacts as far as possible.	The Service took account of the Telecommunications Act as far as possible in its lease arrangements.	Paul Brooks	Closed

Legislation and legal changes – Building Safety Act Under Building Safety Act 2022 (BSA), the HSE is the named Building Safety Regulator (BSR) in England. Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 (FSER) came into force and were an important step towards implementing the recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 Report. The new Regulations brought these changes into force and sit alongside the Fire Safety Act amendments to the Fire Safety Order. The new FSER imposed new duties on the responsible persons (RP) for multi-occupied residential buildings and requires them to take specific actions depending on the height of their buildings.	The Service continues to develop an action plan in response to these changes. RBFRS has also recently employed five new Fire Safety Inspectors with two being directly funded and available to the Building Safety Regulator to form a multi-disciplinary team to assess new and existing high-rise buildings.	Dave Crease	Closed

Significant Governance Issues to be addressed in 2024/25

The following provides a progress report against the significant governance issues identified in the last Annual Governance Statement

Governance matter identified	Action to be taken in 2024/25	Lead Officer	Target Date
HMICFRS The service is being inspected as part of Tranche 3 of the inspection programme with formal inspection activity starting from Q2 24/25	Our tranche 3 inspection will formally start with the document and self-assessment submissions followed by fieldwork starting in September 2024. The report will be published early 2025. Any findings from the new report will be considered in the development of the annual plan and service plans. Work associated with these outcomes are unknown until publication and so cannot be planned.	Nikki Richards	March 2025
Funding The Authority was able to produce a balanced budget for 2023/24 despite the ongoing economically challenging position of local authority funding and the fire and rescue settlement agreement. The 2024/25 outlook is uncertain due to it being an election year and the likelihood of a short term financial settlement again when at least a three year settlement is required.	The Chief Fire Officer will engage with the new Berkshire Prosperity Board. He will also brief Berkshire MPs (including building relationships if there are any changes post election). The Chief Fire Officer will ensure full engagement with NFCC Finance Committee to support sector wide messages to LGA and Central Government to support a longer-term settlement and/or short term protection of existing budgets and full awareness of the significant financial pressures and their impact on risk management	Wayne Bowcock	March 2025

Pensions The pensions landscape remains complex due to the legislative requirements to remedy the discrimination found in public sector. There remains significant pressure on the Service in relation to implementation and additional workload pressure for the Pension Administrator in meeting the requirements and the timeframes.	RBFRS will continue to work to the timelines set subject to the availability of Government advice. Data calculations and records will be maintained in accordance with the regulatory requirement. We will continue to work together with the pension administrator and across the sector to ensure effective management of pension arrangements and make representations to ensure cases can be processed in a timely way. Updates to A&G Committee will provide oversight of the emerging issues.	Becci Jefferies	March 2025
Workforce Our people are our most important asset and a revised People Strategy 2024- 2027 was launched in April 2024. The strategy focuses on eight objectives across a three-year period. The activity to meet the objectives will also align to the current Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). Workforce retention is being impacted and we are experiencing a high percentage of staff in development. This will also impact internal costs and capacity.	We will review the routes available to support the recruitment and retention of staff. We will ensure our workforce planning takes account of forecasted changes and requirements. We will review the outcomes of our staff engagement and implement the outcomes. A programme of work will be developed supporting the delivery of the People Strategy objectives and will be monitored using a programme structure.	Becci Jefferies	March 2025

Sustainability The focus on the global climate emergency is increasing and it is incumbent on all responsible organisations to take a positive and forward-thinking approach to sustainability in the wider sense. We will make a positive commitment to support the wider Government sustainability and environmental targets in the RBFA Sustainability Strategy to be produced in 2024. The strategy will set out the organisation's strategic sustainability objectives and to facilitate an action plan to deliver meaningful and credible effect on our journey to become more sustainable and more environmentally friendly.	The following will be progressed: Develop and launch the RBFA Sustainability Strategy in 2024 – to include progress to date and strategic objectives. Expand the role of the Lead Member for Strategic Assets and Sustainability. Review internal governance structure to support sustainability.	Paul Brooks	March 2025
Cyber security threat There is an increasing use of and movement to digital and cloud-based IT services. With the increased circumstances of remote working and use of digital services there is a growing additional pressure on those service areas. The rate of cyber-attacks, incidences and threats of ransomware attacks has been growing continually and therefore the associated risk of cyber-attacks is set to increase.	This is an on-going and growing challenge which needs vigilance. We will continue to focus our resources in this area and continue to work with our external partners to commission audits of our systems to test for vulnerabilities. We will continue to review and adjust our IT Disaster Recovery plans in response to changing cyber threat patterns and operational needs. We will continue to educate and train our staff to recognise and appropriately handle cyber security risks. An ongoing action plan is being continually developed.	Lukasz Wrona	March 2025

Data Protection Act Compliance The GDPR / Data Protection Audit outlined several areas where the Service needed to make improvements to ensure its policies and processes were up to date with the guidance shared by the Information Commissioner. It made several recommendations which range from adjusting documentation to introducing additional governance and oversight of the Data Protection position of the Service.	New governance arrangements will be introduced to provide the Service with an opportunity to scrutinise Data Protection related matters at a board level. Documentation, processes, and policies will be updated in line with the latest recommendations from the ICO and the Audit Findings.	Lukasz Wrona	March 2025
Legislation and legal changes – Employment Law There are a number of bills proposing changes to employment law. The Service will need to consider the impact of any emerging legislation on ways of working and the workforce and how we need to respond to it.	Emerging and ongoing legislation will be monitored for impacts and how we will respond to them.	Becci Jefferies	March 2025
Legislation and legal changes – Telecommunications Act The Telecommunications Act potentially changes the dynamic of our negotiating position in relation to the income we can generate from telecommunication masts. The Service will need to mitigate the impacts as far as possible.	The Service will mitigate the impacts of the Telecommunications Act as far as possible and the external environment will be monitored.	Paul Brooks	March 2025

Legislation and legal changes – Procurement Act 2023 The **Procurement Act 2023** brings significant changes to the UK's public procurement system, aiming to improve efficiency, transparency, and value for money. Changes will impact our processes and will require a complete review of our processes and implementation of improvements by February 2025.	A working group will be set up to review the changes, understand the impacts and develop a plan. New Contract Standing Orders will be produced for approval by Fire Authority.	Conor Byrne	February 2025
Thematic Inspection outcomes by HMICFRS: Values and culture and misconduct In March 2023, HMICFRS produced the 'Values and culture in fire and rescue services' report which contained 35 recommendations. In 2024, the Misconduct report was published and contained various recommendations. The recommendations were directed at Fire and Rescue Services, external bodies such as the Local Government Association, the Home Office and National Fire Chief's Council. Gap analysis of these recommendations have been completed and resulted in plans encompassing various service areas of the organisation.	We will continue to implement the HMICFRS values and culture recommendations and publish our actions on our website. Our cultural journey will be via the RBFRS Culture Plan which is an organisational development programme that seeks to create and develop our culture through five key pillars: people, places, processes and systems, structure and communication and engagement. The misconduct recommendations will also have an accompanying action plan. The plans of work created will be monitored via our Governance processes. We will make it easier to engage with our staff, ensure our values can be articulated and that we will increase our consultation with staff through forums and surveys, maintaining a constant focus on our standards and behaviours.	Nikki Richards	March 2025

Accessibility

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