

Part I

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	16 MARCH 2026
SUBJECT	ANNUAL REPORT ON GOVERNANCE AND MEMBERS DEVELOPMENT
LEAD OFFICER	ANNIE PRATT, HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR TRICIA BROWN
EXEMPT INFORMATION	PART I
ACTION	NOTE AND RECOMMEND

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To consider the Annual Report on Governance detailing Member Attendance and Allowances in 2025/26 and annual review of Member Development for submission to the Fire Authority in June 2026.
- 1.2 For the purpose of this report, appendices A and B (Members Allowances and Attendance) are shown from 1 June 2025 to 31 January 2026. As outlined in recommendation 2.2.1 and 2.2.2, the appendices will be updated to the end of May 2026 for submission to the Fire Authority in June 2026.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **NOTE** the report; and
- 2.2 **RECOMMEND** that the Fire Authority:
 - 2.2.1 **NOTE** Members' Allowances received from 1 June 2025 – 31 May 2026; and
 - 2.2.2 **NOTE** the 2025/26 attendance record of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Members from 1 June 2025 – 31 May 2026; and
 - 2.2.3 **NOTE** the Member Development Annual Report.

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3. REPORT

Governance

- 3.1 This year has seen the appointment of two new Members in June 2025, Councillor Dilbagh Parmar from Slough Borough Council and Councillor Andy Ng Siu-hong from Wokingham Borough Council. We received two mid-year appointments, Councillors Knowles and Councillor Gosling from Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM) due to Councillor Taylor stepping down and changes to the council's political balance.
- 3.2 We said farewell to Councillors Lou Timlin and Harjinder Gahir in June 2025, Councillor Helen Taylor in December 2025 and Councillor Neil Knowles in January 2026. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the above for contribution to the Authority and wish them all the best in the future. .
- 3.3 The update and annual report from the Pension Board detailed that complexity continues to be an issue in the administration of firefighters' pension scheme, which impacted the Scheme Manager's current risks. The board considered the Pensions Administrator as adequate, with performance against the target sitting at 81.5%, down from 93.33% for 2023/24. Although targets are being met in certain areas there had been several significant issues including a breach logged and raised with the Pensions Regulator in relation to the production of annual benefit statements.
- 3.4 RSM, our internal auditors, confirmed they were making good progress with their reports and a further five final reports had concluded with a positive assurance opinion. The draft version of the 2024/25 Annual Report included a positive annual opinion which was very well received by Members.
- 3.5 Work continues on the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme with re-surveying RBFRS sites to confirm mobile signal strength. RBFRS have liaised with both Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire fire and rescue services to refresh the business case to ensure plans stay on course. I'm pleased that all parties are actively engaged in this very important program.
- 3.6 It was positive to know that Grant Thornton had substantially completed their audit, with the only outstanding item being an assurance letter required from a third party. We were also informed they found no significant weaknesses within the Authority's arrangements across any of the value for money criteria. Overall findings confirmed the quality of the arrangements in place were strong, with relatively few areas of improvement compared to other fire and rescue services. Another good result.

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- 3.7 We were presented with the results from the Gender, Ethnicity and Disability Pay Gap Report and Members were impressed with the contents in particular that the Service publish figures although there is no mandatory ruling to do so.
- 3.8 Within the results of the Discipline and Complaint Effectiveness Assessment Members were informed an external audit took place in 2024/25 to provide reassurance that policies and procedures had been followed, and overall, the audit found the service has a robust suite of policies and procedures which was reassuring to hear.
- 3.9 Results from the 2025/26 Quarterly Performance showed some stations were struggling with targets relating to on call appliances. Although this was disappointing, it was positive to hear the Service had and continued to take steps to improve this and that the target was a 'healthy one to aspire to'. We were shown a great result in Q2 with a 100% of referrals for 'threat of or incident of arson' being completed within 48 hours. Wildfires and hot dry weather in the summer months remains an issue but the Service continues to be pro-active in the ways they can reduce these risks which was reassuring to hear.
- 3.10 As part of the 2025/26 Quarterly Performance Members were told of two recorded fatalities in Q1. The Serious Fire Investigation (SFIR) process highlighted the significance of emollient creams in one incident and led to a Joint Organisational Learning (JOL) event because emollient creams are known to contribute to fire deaths. This is another example of how the Service have taken positive action on the back of a sad event.
- 3.11 No formal complaints have been received against Members this year. It is positive that the Authority have potentially six Independent Person (s) on standby, should we need them to investigate complaints against Members, alongside our Monitoring Officer, Graham Britten.

Member Attendance and Development

- 3.12 Table 1 shows the Member Development courses held during the municipal year. On 19 January 2026, a new Staff Development System (SDS) was implemented to include all aspects of staff development, in one place / portal. It will include eLearning courses, assessments, in-person and virtual courses, Development and Assessment Pathway (including the under-pinning competency framework), performance management (PDRs, 1:1s and 360 feedback) and MyPath (Talent Management). It brings together functionality currently found across multiple systems, into one place.
- 3.13 Democratic Support will be working closely with colleagues in Learning and Development to tailor the SDS portal for Fire Authority Members, where they

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can access courses such as EDI, Cyber Security, Protecting Information and relevant courses for Member Development.

3.14 It is hoped SDS will be rolled out to Fire Authority Members in 2026/27 Municipal Year.

Table 1

Course title	Number of new members identified to attend	Number of existing members that were identified to attend	Total number of members that attended
New Member Induction	2	2	2
Safety at Home	2	9	3
Wellbeing Course		10	1
Members Workshop	2	20	14

3.15 RBFRS run an annual EDI course for Members and it was decided to postpone the 2025/26 EDI course as the Service proposed 2026 Equality Objectives at the Fire Authority Meeting in December 2025. A consultation has taken place; feedback is being gathered and the objectives reviewed before a further report is brought to the Fire Authority in April 2026. Following final approval, an action plan outlining a phased four-year approach to achieve these objectives will be created. Once this has been completed a refreshed EDI course will be offered to Members, as well as the option to complete EDI course on the SDS portal.

3.16 Appendix A sets out Member attendance at all Fire Authority and Committee meetings. During this unitary year, three extraordinary meetings were held on the same dates as Management Committee meetings (10 December 2025 and 10 February 2026).

Democratic Services advised Audit & Governance Committee Members that attendance at these extraordinary meetings was optional. This was because the meetings were expected to last approximately 15 minutes, and the Fire Authority Terms of Reference (CO1) state that the quorum is 7 Members - of which 11 Management Committee Members were already present.

For transparency, where an Audit & Governance Committee Member chose not to attend an extraordinary meeting, their attendance has been recorded as 'Absent' and highlighted in blue in Appendix A. Where a Member did attend, this has been added to their total required meeting attendance for the unitary year.

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Member Allowances

3.17 Members Allowances were increased following National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services pay agreement for Green Book staff. Members Allowances are indexed to Green Book pay conditions. Allowances were increased by 3.20% and this percentage was backdated to 1 April 2025.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

4.1 All Strategic Commitments are supported.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Member Allowances and expenses (Appendix A) outline the cost to the Fire Authority.

5.2 The majority of the Member Development courses and activities have been delivered in-house within existing resources. Any external courses are provided at a subsidised rate by LGA as Royal Berkshire Fire Authority are members.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Member Development Strategy and Action Plan supports the Fire Authority in discharging its statutory duties.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EDI training forms part of the Member Development Programme.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no risk implications in this report.

9. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None

10. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

10.1 RBFRS will continue to identify opportunities to work with partners to deliver the Member Development programme where possible

11. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

11.1 Statutory officers and the Senior Leadership Team have been consulted in the development report.

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12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 None.

13. APPENDICES

13.1 Appendix A – Member Allowances

13.2 Appendix B – Member Attendance

14. CONTACT DETAILS

14.1 Michaela Smith, Democratic Services Officer, 07799 287706.