

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY'S AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



Held on Monday, 4 November 2019, at 6.30pm

RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot,  
Reading, Berkshire RG31 7DS

**Members:** \* Councillor Christine Bateson  
(\* present) \* Councillor Dennis Benneyworth  
\* Councillor Tricia Brown  
\* Councillor Graham Howe  
\* Councillor Tony Linden  
\* Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle  
\* Councillor Satpal Parmar  
Councillor Jane Stanford-Beale  
Councillor Simon Werner

## In

**Attendance:** Mark Arkwell (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)  
Paul Binyon (Area Manager, Response and Resilience, AM R&R)  
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P)  
Steve Foye (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)  
Allison Kennett (External Auditor, Ernst & Young)  
Tim Lo (Internal Auditor, RSM)  
Jacky Manning (HR Manager)  
Katie Mills (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)  
Jo Reeves (Clerk)  
Nikki Richards (Director of Support Services, DSS)  
Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL)  
Hannah Sheehan (Democratic Support Assistant, DSA)  
Kevin Suter (External Auditor, Ernst & Young)

## Action

### 4. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting had been received from Councillors Dennis Benneyworth and Jane Stanford-Beale.

### 5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct there were no declarations of interest received from Members.

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Officers.

### 6. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 SEPTEMBER 2019

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2019, be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

It was noted that a meeting between Conor Byrne and the External Auditors would be held the following day (5 November).

## **7. INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE**

Conor Byrne, HF&P presented the Internal Audit Progress Report. Tim Lo, Internal Auditor RSM stated one audit on long-term budgeting and reporting had been completed since the last meeting. The opinion in relation to that audit was that the organisation had in place suitably designed, consistently applied and effective controls.

### **RESOLVED THAT:**

The Internal Audit Progress Report be noted.

## **8. EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE**

Conor Byrne, HF&P presented a verbal update to the Committee in relation to the audit work on the 2018/19 Statement of Accounts and the delays in signing off the accounts.

Kevin Suter, External Auditor from Ernst Young (EY), stated that the impediment to signing off the financial statements related to the audit by Deloitte of the Berkshire Pension Fund, which was still ongoing and he was unable to predict timescales for progress. It was proposed to wait until this matter was concluded before finalising the 2018/19 Accounts.

Members expressed their frustration with the delay.

### **RESOLVED THAT:**

The verbal update from the External Auditor be noted.

## **9. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT**

Katie Mills, HCS, presented the draft Annual Governance Statement.

Local authorities were required to prepare an Annual Governance Statement in order to report publicly on the extent to which they complied with their own code of governance.

Councillor Tony Linden asked for more information on the comment on page 46 regarding volatility of Business Rates income; and asked whether the General Election might impact on the timetable for the Finance Settlement. Conor Byrne advised that historically Business Rates income was hard to forecast and could cause budget volatility to the hundreds of thousands. Local government could usually expect a draft settlement in December but there was no requirement on the Government to produce this document. The final settlement was often released after authorities had set their budgets. The organisation was in unchartered territory this year and a further discussion would be held at the next meeting regarding the assumptions underpinning the budget.

### **RESOLVED THAT:**

The Annual Governance Statement be approved.

## **10. EQUAL PAY AUDIT**

Jacky Manning, HR Manager, presented the Equal Pay Audit to the Committee, which reviewed the effectiveness of policies and practices with regard to fair pay regardless of Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Disability and Contract.

Overall employees were found to be treated fairly in terms of basic pay, overtime and merit payments regardless of their personal characteristics. Four actions were identified to improve processes.

Members identified some minor typographical corrections on pages 62 and 63 of the agenda pack which would be corrected.

Councillor Satpal Parmar asked why employees from ethnic minorities were found to earn 9.1% more than their white British counterparts. Jacky Manning advised that this figure was based on the breakdown of Green Book employees averages across the range.

### **RESOLVED THAT:**

The report be noted.

## **11. GENDER PAY GAP REPORT 2019**

Jacky Manning, HR Manager, presented the report, which stated the pay gap between male and female employees, as per the Government calculation methodology. The median pay gap on 31 March 2019, was 4.1%, compared to 17.9% nationally in 2018.

An error had been identified in the previous year's calculation and this had been corrected and included in the report.

An action plan had been produced to help enable future improvements, particularly around the recruitment of female firefighters.

Councillor Tricia Brown commended the work of officers and asked what she could do as a Councillor to support recruitment of women into the service. Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle suggested that female Councillors should be visible as ambassadors for the Service at Recruitment events. She also welcomed any Member to join the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Forum.

Councillor Linden highlighted that campaign materials and media coverage should ensure that the organisation attracted women. Katie Mills highlighted a recent campaign, which had included a diverse range of staff in a diverse range of roles.

Members discussed the importance of promoting the Service as an employer to people of all ages, including schools.

### **RESOLVED THAT:**

- The details of the Gender Pay Gap Report be noted;
- The change to the 2018 Gender Pay Gap figure be noted; and
- The Action Plan be noted.

**12. EMERGENCY SERVICES MOBILE COMMUNICATIONS PROGRAMME (ESMCP) UPDATE**

Steve Foye, DCFO, introduced the report regarding the national project to replace 'Airwave', the Emergency Services Network. Little had changed since the previous report. Members expressed their disappointment that there was little update due to the national context.

Councillor Christine Bateson requested that in future, a glossary was appended to each agenda to aid understanding of acronyms.

Katie Mills, HCS, informed the meeting that a glossary detailing a list of acronyms had been enclosed in Members Handbooks and was also available on RBFRS website.

**KM**

**RESOLVED THAT**

The report be noted.

**13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday, 27 January 2020, at 6.30pm, Lynda Kenyon Suite, RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire, RG31 7SD.

*The meeting concluded at 7.06 pm*