



**Agenda
for the Meeting
of the
Audit and Governance Committee**

Wednesday, 24th January, 2024

At

6.30 pm

RBFRS Headquarters
Lynda Kenyon Suite
Newsham Court
Pincents Kiln
Calcot
Reading
Berkshire
RG31 7SD

For further information regarding this meeting, please contact:

Committee Team

0118 938 4611

E-Mail at committeeteam@rbfrs.co.uk

Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD



MEETING: Audit and Governance Committee Meeting

DATE AND TIME: Wednesday, 24th January, 2024 at 6.30 pm

VENUE: Lynda Kenyon Suite
RBFRS Headquarters
Newsham Court
Pincents Kiln
Calcot
Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD

S U M M O N S

You are hereby summoned to attend the meeting of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority at the time, date and venue indicated above, when it is proposed to deal with the business set out in the enclosed Agenda.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Britten'.

GRAHAM BRITTEN
Monitoring Officer

To: Members of the Audit and Governance Committee:

Councillor Dennis Benneyworth	Councillor Morag Malvern
Councillor Tricia Brown	Councillor Dave McElroy
Councillor Haqeeq Dar	Councillor Joshua Reynolds
Councillor Billy Drummond	Councillor Robert Stedmond
Councillor Owen Jeffery	

Copy to: Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

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Pincent's Kiln
Calcot
Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD

AGENDA

- 1. Apologies for Absence**
- 2. Declarations of Interest**

Purpose:

To receive Declarations of Interest from Councillors relating to items to be considered at the meeting, in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct, and any from Officers.

- 3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 October 2023 (Pages 5 - 12)**

Recommendation:

That the Minutes of the meeting and any recorded actions held on 30 October 2023, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

- 4. Consideration of any matters properly referred to this Committee for decision**

There were no matters referred to this Committee for decision.

- 5. Internal Audit Update (Pages 13 - 52)**

Purpose:

To note RSM's progress report.

- 6. External Audit Update (Pages 53 - 54)**

Purpose:

To note the update report from the External Auditors, EY.

7. Pay Policy Statement *(Pages 55 - 74)*

Purpose:

To note the report, and recommend the draft Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 (Appendix A) to the Fire Authority for approval.

8. Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap reports 2023 *(Pages 75 - 116)*

Purpose:

To note the Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap reports, and agree that they are published on rbfrs and gov.uk website.

9. Code of Conduct Consultation *(Pages 117 - 132)*

Purpose:

To note the outcome of the second consultation on the RBFA Member Code of Conduct; and recommend to the Fire Authority that it agree the RBFA Code of Conduct Consultation be held every three years, subject to any proposed updates for which the draft Code of Conduct document will be consulted upon sooner.

10. Quarterly Performance Report- Quarter Two *(Pages 133 - 136)*

Purpose:

To note of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service's (RBFRS) quarter two performance for the 2023/24 financial year.

11. Forward Plan *(Pages 137 - 138)*

Purpose:

To note the Forward Plan.

12. Date of next meeting

Thursday 28 March 2024, at 6.30pm, RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE



Held on Monday, 30th October, 2023 at 6.30 pm

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD

Members: * Councillor Dennis Benneyworth * Councillor Morag Malvern
(*present) * Councillor Tricia Brown * Councillor Dave McElroy
* Councillor Haqeeq Dar * Councillor Joshua Reynolds
* Councillor Billy Drummond Councillor Robert Stedmond
* Councillor Owen Jeffery

In Attendance: Paul Bremble (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)
Andrew Britten (EY External Auditor)
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P)
Ben Cairns (Area Manager, Response and Resilience, AM R&R)
David Crease (T/Area Manager, Response and Resilience, AM R&R)
Daniel Harris (Internal Auditor, RSM)
Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development, HHR&L&D)
Katie Mills (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)
Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL)
Lukasz Wrona (Head of Business Information Systems, HBIS)

Observers: Sandie Whiteman

Action

17. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence was received from Councillor Robert Stedmond.

18. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Under the Authority's updated Code of Conduct which was adopted in April 2022, Members' Allowances were categorised as 'Non-Registrable Interests'.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed he had granted dispensations to all Members to allow all Members to speak and vote on Agenda Item 12 (Independent Review of Scheme of Allowances).

There were no Declarations of Interest from Members in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct.

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Officers.

19. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 JULY 2023

There were no recorded actions.

Subject to the amendment to include Councillor Owen Jeffery's attendance at the last meeting, it was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting on 24 July 2023, be approved as a true record to be signed the Chair.

20. CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTERS PROPERLY REFERRED TO THIS COMMITTEE FOR DECISION

There were no matters properly referred to this Committee for decision.

21. INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

Dan Harris, RSM Internal Auditor reported one audit had been finalised since the last meeting. On referring to Appendix A page 24, he concluded the production and delivery of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) was well designed and had established community engagement activity. He stated the audit opinion was '*Reasonable Assurance*' and four additional audits (Sickness Absence Management, Information Governance/GPDR, Payroll provider – Dataplan and Firefighter Pension Administration (West Yorkshire pension Fund WYPF)) will be presented at the next Committee meeting in January 2024.

The audit opinion gave two medium and two low actions. In response to a question from Councillor Owen Jeffery, Dan Harris reported 5 out of 9 CRMP controls listed on pages 26 – 28 had already been through Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meeting and were enhancements that were required.

In referring to page 34, Dan Harris reported benchmarking was a summary of previous years. Page 35 of the report compared Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue (RBFRS) assurance levels between 2020/21 to 2022/23. In conclusion, he stated RBFRS were performing very well.

Pages 39 to 40 was an overview of high priority actions across the client base.

RESOLVED that RSM's report be noted.

22. EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (HF&P) reported EY (External Auditors) had completed 2020/21 Statement of Accounts. He stated the delay in signing off the Authority's financial statements was due to delays in Deloitte's audit of the Royal County of Berkshire Pension Fund. As part of its audit of property valuations, EY concluded that two properties were materially understated by £1.504 million. Prior to 2017, the Authority's properties were valued on a depreciated replacement cost basis (DRC). In 2023, the Authority's new valuers argued for a change in valuation methodology, which was subsequently adopted. This new methodology, unfortunately proved to be unreliable at valuing recently built properties and EY recommended that the Authority revert back to using DRC to value its properties. This understatement was amended in the Authority's Statement of Accounts.

Andrew Britten, EY External Auditor stated an unqualified opinion had been given on the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts. He stated, EY had recommended the valuation of two Fire Stations were reverted back to the DRC methodology, which would be the cost to rebuild.

In response to Councillor Owen Jeffery's statement on the reason why EY did not pick up the method of the valuation of properties sooner, Andrew Britten reported opinions on how to value properties were under the CIPFA code. In discussing Wokingham and Crowthorne Fire Stations, he explained, in 2017 the valuation method did not matter, however Crowthorne rebuild was significantly different and the recommendation was made to value under the same methodology.

Conor Byrne reported valuers stated the DRC methodology was a better comparison to the market due to new stations being refurbished or going to be refurbished with equality, diversity and inclusion facilities.

Councillor Dennis Benneyworth queried the timeframe of when subsequent Authority's Statement of Accounts would be signed off.

Andrew Britten reported central government were consulting and considering how the sector could sign off previous years' of Statements of Accounts. He stated, 475 local authorities were affected and only five authorities' 2022/23 Statement of Accounts were audited by the required deadline of 30 September 2023.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The Audit Results Report in Appendix A, be noted.
- 2) The 2020/21 Statement of Accounts in Appendix B, be approved.

23. FIREFIGHTER PENSIONS - VERBAL UPDATE

Becci Jefferies, Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development (HHR&L&D), provided a verbal update on Firefighter Pensions. She reported reform to Firefighter pensions were made in 2015, which followed a legal challenge based on age discrimination. Proposals to remedy that discrimination came into effect on 1 October 2023 by the introduction of new legislation. The legislation was complicated and was in two parts;

- 1) Forward looking – from April 2024 - move Firefighters to new pension scheme
- 2) Retrospective remedy.

Firefighters will be given a choice and all firefighters will be rolled back into legacy scheme. Becci Jefferies stated the process was putting a strain on the Service and Pension Administrators. In Berkshire, 279 Firefighters were affected by the remedy. She stated that the Service had 18 months to resolve cases and Human Resources (HR) were currently collating information from affected individuals.

Calculations were complex and were only valid for a period of time. For example, she stated it took seven hours to work on the first retirement case. The Service's Pension Administrators (West Yorkshire Pension Fund, WYPF) were also working with 23 other Fire Authorities and regular contract meetings were held between WYPF and HR.

In addition, she provided a brief update on the Matthews case and stated it was another discrimination case which affected on-call staff. She explained on-call staff do not have a set salary and to remedy individual cases pay was required to be calculated. 253 on-call staff were affected which also went as far back as 1970's. She stated her team had payroll records but these were all on microfiche. The requirement to complete this remedy was also 18 months.

The tools to calculate the remedy were due to be launched on 31 October 2023. Some individuals fit within both cases which presented additional challenges and risks. She assured Members the Service were working hard to ensure they were on top of resolving remedies within the allocated timeframe.

In response to a question from the Chair, Becci Jefferies reported 56 individuals were within both cases. In response to Councillor Josh Reynolds, she stated the remedies affected resources and she was in the process of submitting budget bids to create additional support to help with the demand over the next two years.

Councillor Owen Jeffery asked the reason the remedies had to be completed in 18 Months. Becci Jefferies reported the timeframe was set out in law. Councillor Morag Malvern asked whether there was any leeway. Becci Jefferies reported some representations were made as part of a consultation, however, it had become law with very few exception circumstance.

In response to Councillor Dar, Becci Jefferies reported individuals could challenge calculations. She stated for Matthews cases, the Fire Authority have

three months to write to affected Firefighters and individuals have 6 months to respond. In some cases, tracking services will have to be used for individuals that no longer work for the Service.

24. INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES AND DRAFT SCHEME OF ALLOWANCES 2024/25

Paul Bremble, Head of Corporate Services (HCS) reported the last Independent Review of Members Scheme of Allowance was held four years ago in 2019. The recommendation from the independent review was an increase in Members average time spent on Fire Authority business per year from 18 days in 2019, to 19 days in 2023. Due to the increase in the average number of days there was a small increase to the basic allowance. Travel and subsistence allowance remained unchanged.

Councillor Haqeeq Dar was not present in the room when the vote took place.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The findings of the Independent Review of Royal Berkshire Authority Scheme of Allowances (Appendix A and B) be noted; and
- 2) The draft Scheme of Allowance 2024/25 (Appendix C) be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval, subject to any future indexation that may be applied.

25. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT

Paul Bremble, Head of Corporate Services (HCS), went through each quadrant starting with Service Provision. He stated operational exercises improved the Service's response to incidences and evidenced preparedness on how staff deliver training. He discussed the Erleigh Road Fire incident which occurred on 5 April 2023 and reported the target of 0 fire deaths would not be achieved. The *Percentage of High Risk Safe and Well Referrals completed* were slightly down in the quarter.

Councillor Josh Reynolds queried the target time to complete high risk safe and well referrals. Katie Mills, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO), reported it was 14 days, however due to the complexity of some cases the target was more challenging to achieve. For example, delays in staff being able to enter the property due to resident's personal circumstances.

Councillor Josh Reynolds asked whether Members could expect the percentage for the quarter between *Percentage of Very High Risk Safe and Well Referrals completed within 72 hours* currently 37.5% to go down, and *Percentage of High Risk Safe and Well Referrals completed* currently 43.1% to go up. Katie Mills, explained it was dependant on the nature of the case and reported in quarter

one, prevention teams focused on improving performance for Very High Risk referrals, resulting in 37.5% (exceeding the target of 35%).

In response to a supplementary question from Councillor Josh Reynolds, Katie Mills reported there was a methodology to triage referrals. In terms of the measure, *Increase the number of Referrals for Safe and Well visits received from our partners*, she explained that the Service still do not see a significant number of referrals from Slough, therefore adult referrals programmes were targeted to areas where referral numbers are lower.

Paul Bremble reported measures of actual targets highlighted in blue were to indicate that it was moving in the right direction.

Councillor Billy Drummond queried how did 4.1% of working time lost to staff sickness across all groups compared to other Fire and Rescue Services. Becci Jefferies, Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development (HHR&L&D) reported the Service were trending quite well in comparison to other Services and identified the graph showing performance.

In discussing quadrant two (Corporate Health), Becci Jefferies, HHR&L&D reported she would provide Members with the breakdown of sickness across all staff groups.

HHR&L&D

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (HF&P) provided a finance update.

Quadrant three (Priority Programmes), Paul Bremble (HCS), reported the Service had made a good start to the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) against priorities and non-statutory duties. He stated work was in progress to establish a Development Programme to strengthen the Service's One Team approach and a series of staff conferences will be held in quarter two.

The Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF) sets out how the Service will maintain and renew vital capital assets to support the delivery of services. In relation to ICT, Paul Bremble highlighted Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP) was highlighted as due it was a national procurement and a detail update will be provided in 12 months. Lukasz Wrona, Head of Business Information Systems (HBIS), explained there were equipment delays in the delivery ESMCP.

Quadrant four (Assurance) – Paul Bremble reported (risk 902) Resource and Development (R&D) staffing was a new risk that had been identified. Risk (917) Culture inherent and current score had been identified as high. The Senior Leadership Team monitored all risks in the Risk Register regularly.

Paul Bremble took Members through the HMICFRS Action Plan and stated a gap analysis had been developed to track the implementation of 19 Fire Standards.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The performance against Service Provision and Corporate Health measures for the targets agreed by the Fire Authority for 2023/24 be noted;
- 2) The progress made on the priority programmes be noted; and
- 3) The position of corporate risk be noted.

26. FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

27. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Wednesday, 24 January 2024, at 6.30pm, RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD.

28. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the public be excluded from the meeting for the following Agenda Items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the said Act indicated and is exempt information if, and so long as, in all circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

29. PART II MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 JULY 2023

The action in the minutes had been completed.

On being put to the vote, Councillors Dennis Benneyworth and Owen Jeffery abstained.

RESOLVED that the Part II Minutes of the meeting held on 24 July 2023, be approved as a true record to be signed by the Chair.

(The meeting concluded at 8:01pm)

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ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



COMMITTEE	AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	24 JANUARY 2024
SUBJECT	INTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE
LEAD OFFICER	CONOR BYRNE, HEAD OF FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT
LEAD MEMBER	n/a
EXEMPT INFORMATION	n/a
ACTION	FOR NOTE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Committee will receive an update on audit activity since the last Committee meeting.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is requested to:

- 2.1 **NOTE** RSM's Progress Report.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 RSM has completed four audits since the last Committee meeting.
- 3.2 The payroll and firefighter pension audits received the highest substantial assurance ratings.
- 3.3 The GDPR Governance audit report is a factual report and as such does not provide a level of assurance, or internal audit opinion. It does, however, identify some issues that require management attention to address weaknesses.
- 3.4 The Sickness Management audit received the second-highest assurance rating and includes three medium-risk actions.
- 3.5 Further details on these audits can be found in RSM's Progress Report, which is attached as **Appendix A**.

Agenda Item 5

- 3.6 A representative from RSM will attend the meeting to provide further detail and answer any questions from Members.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 Commitment 5 – Sustainability. We will ensure that we provide a financially sustainable and environmentally friendly service to our communities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The work of the internal auditors assures Members that the Authority's finances are in good order.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 In accordance with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, the Head of Internal Audit is required to provide an annual opinion, based upon and limited to the work performed, on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the organisation's risk management, control and governance processes. The opinion should contribute to the Authority's Annual Governance Statement.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The internal audit programme aims to identify key risks and report on the effectiveness of controls and mitigating actions.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 9.1 Internal audits will consider how the Authority is meeting this requirement where applicable.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 10.1 The Chief Fire Officer has been consulted on the report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan.

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Appendix A – RSM Progress Report

13. CONTACT DETAILS

- 13.1 Conor Byrne - Head of Finance and Procurement
Email: byrnec@rbfrs.co.uk
Tel: 07585 991602

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Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service

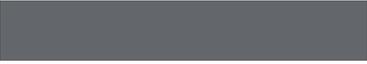
Internal Audit Progress Report

For the Audit and Governance Committee on 24 January 2024

This report is solely for the use of the persons to whom it is addressed.
To the fullest extent permitted by law, RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP will accept no responsibility or liability in respect of this report to any other party.

THE POWER OF BEING UNDERSTOOD
AUDIT | TAX | CONSULTING

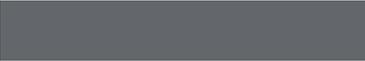




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Agenda Item 5
Appendix A



1 Key messages

The internal audit plan for 2023/24 was approved by the Audit and Governance Committee at the 24 July 2023 meeting. This report provides an update on progress against that plan and summarises the results of our work to date.

We have issued four reports in final since the last meeting:

- Payroll Provider – Dataplan
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Governance
- Sickness Absence Management, and;
- Firefighter Pension Administration (WYPF).

2 Reports

2.1 Summary of final reports being presented to this committee

This section summarises the reports that have been finalised since the last meeting.

Assignment	Opinion issued	Actions agreed		
		L	M	
<p>Payroll Provider – Dataplan</p> <p>We confirmed that overall controls were robust, well designed and applied in line with relevant procedures in relation to payroll processing. We also confirmed that the guide regarding the processing of the payroll for RBFRS staff outlined the required procedures for new starters, leavers and amendments which we found had been appropriately applied throughout the sample testing we carried out as part of this review.</p> <p>Our review concluded that there were also robust controls in place covering financial controls and the general framework of control at Dataplan regarding year end documentation, reconciliations and overpayments. However, we found a minor weakness in regards to there being limited user access rights to the ePaysafe system in which RBFRS use to authorise and download reports from Dataplan.</p>	<p>Substantial Assurance</p>	1	0	
<p>Sickness Absence Management</p> <p>Overall, we confirmed that controls were generally well-designed and were operating effectively, including the information provided in the Sickness Absence and Attendance Policy. We noted that the guidance provided to managers offered a comprehensive breakdown of each process to help ensure that standard procedures are followed consistently. We confirmed that the EAP was accessible to staff via the intranet, and a helpline was available 24 hours a day in case staff members could not access the portal, and OH was utilised by management to obtain professional support as required.</p> <p>We did however identify several weaknesses in the compliance with controls relating to managers not completing the sickness absence training, Return to Work Forms not always being completed in full or retained on file and the breach of trigger points did not follow the standard escalation procedure documented in the Policy.</p>	<p>Reasonable Assurance</p>	2	3	0



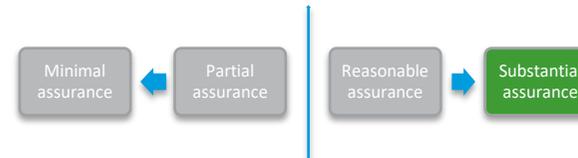
Firefighter Pension Administration (WYPF)

From our review we concluded that there are robust controls in place to manage pension administration processes at WYPF and these controls are being followed in practice. Work instructions were in place and accessible to staff, starters, leavers and amendments had been processed correctly, pension payment runs reconciled and mechanisms to recover overpayments had been put in place.

In addition, we followed up two low priority management actions agreed during our review in 22/23. This confirmed that neither action had been addressed and the actions have been re-agreed with management.

Substantial Assurance

2 0 0



General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Governance

We have been commissioned to perform an assignment of the current data governance processes, procedures and controls with regards to the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and UK Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018.

The scope of this GDPR audit includes a broad range of coverage given the remit of GDPR and the corresponding UK DPA Act 2018. Moreover, this assignment is designed to assess the current control framework in place and to evaluate opportunities for future areas of controls development, based on the evidence presented to us. This takes into account both ICO guidance and relevant best practice identified at other similar organisations, providing a high-level framework of actions, where applicable.

Our report is a factual report and we do not provide a level of assurance, or internal audit opinion, and should not be taken to provide such. However, we have identified some significant issues that do need some urgent management attention to address the weaknesses.

Advisory

17 actions (unrated)

2.2 Themes

Theme*	Low	Medium	High	Unrated (GDPR)
Planning	0	0	0	0
Policies and / or procedures	2	0	0	7
Non-compliance with policies / procedures	1	4	0	0
Design of the control framework	3	0	0	8
Training / awareness for staff	0	1	0	1
Management of performance information	0	0	0	0
Terms of Reference	0	0	0	0
Lack of segregation of duties	0	0	0	0
Security	0	0	0	0
Governance weaknesses	1	0	0	1
Information technology	0	0	0	0
Succession Planning	0	0	0	0
Total	7	5	0	17

* The themes arising above relate to the finalised 2023/24 reports only

We do not have any concerns in respect of themes arising to raise with the Committee at this stage.

Appendix A – Progress against the internal audit plan 2023/24

Assignment and Executive Lead	Status / Opinion issued	Actions agreed			Target Audit Committee (as per IA plan)	Actual Audit Committee
		L	M	H		
IT General Controls	Not yet commenced	0	0	0	July 2024	-
Information Governance/GDPR	FINAL - Advisory	17 unrated			January 2024	January 2024
Community Risk Management Plan	FINAL – Reasonable Assurance	2	2	0	January 2024	October 2023
Risk Management and Governance	Not yet commenced	0	0	0	July 2024	-
Firefighter Pension Administration (WYPF)	FINAL – Substantial Assurance	2	0	0	January 2024	January 2024
Sickness Absence Management	FINAL – Reasonable Assurance	2	3	0	October 2023	January 2024
Payroll Provider – Dataplan	FINAL – Substantial Assurance	1	0	0	January 2024	January 2024
Key Financial Controls	Not yet commenced	0	0	0	March 2024	-

Appendix B – Other matters

Changes to the audit plan

Detailed below are the requests that have been made for changes to the audit plan:

Note	Auditable area	Reason for change
1	Key Financial Controls	Originally planned as a General Ledger review however it was explained January 2025 would be a better time to do the General Ledger audit in preparation for the cut over to the new system. We received a further request from the Head of Finance to change this audit to a tax piece of work, which will be undertaken as an advisory review.

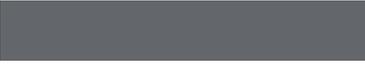
Head of Internal Audit opinion 2023/24

The Committee should note that the assurances given in our audit assignments are included within our Annual Assurance report. In particular the Committee should note that any negative assurance opinions will need to be noted in the annual report and may result in a qualified or negative annual opinion.

We have issued one advisory report (GDPR) that whilst advisory in nature, did identify a number of significant issues. This report will therefore impact but will not in isolation qualify our opinion. We will provide a further update at the next Committee meeting and keep the Head of Finance updated should any further opinions be issued that may affect the year end opinion.

Information and briefings

Since the last Audit and Standards Committee, we have issued our quarterly Emergency Services client briefing.



Quality assurance and continual improvement

To ensure that RSM remains compliant with the IIA standards and the financial services recommendations for Internal Audit we have a dedicated internal Quality Assurance Team who undertake a programme of reviews to ensure the quality of our audit assignments. This is applicable to all Heads of Internal Audit, where a sample of their clients will be reviewed. Any findings from these reviews being used to inform the training needs of our audit teams.

The Quality Assurance Team is made up of; the Head of the Quality Assurance Department (FCA qualified) and an Associate Director (FCCA qualified), with support from other team members across the department.

This is in addition to any feedback we receive from our post assignment surveys, client feedback, appraisal processes and training needs assessments.

Post assignment surveys

We are committed to delivering an excellent client experience every time we work with you. Your feedback helps us to improve the quality of the service we deliver to you. Currently, following the completion of each product we deliver we attached a brief survey for the client lead to complete.

We would like to give you the opportunity to consider how frequently you receive these feedback requests; and whether the current format works. Options available are:

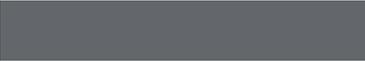
- After each review (current option).
- Monthly / quarterly / annual feedback request.
- Executive lead only, or executive lead and key team members.

Appendix C - Key performance indicators (KPIs)

	Delivery				Quality		
	Target	Actual	Notes (ref)		Target	Actual	Notes (ref)
Audits commenced in line with original timescales	Yes	Yes	*	Conformance with PSIAS and IIA Standards	Yes	Yes	
Draft reports issued within 10 days of debrief meeting	10 days	8 days		Liaison with external audit to allow, where appropriate and required, the external auditor to place reliance on the work of internal audit	Yes	Yes	
Management responses received within 10 days of draft report	10 days	27 days		Response time for all general enquiries for assistance	2 working days	2 days	
Final report issued within 3 days of management response	3 days	1 days		Response for emergencies and potential fraud	1 working day	N/A	

Notes

* This takes into account changes agreed by management and Audit Committee during the year. Through employing an 'agile' or a 'flexible' approach to our service delivery we are able to respond to your assurance needs.



For more information contact

Dan Harris, Partner and Head of Internal Audit

Daniel.Harris@rsmuk.com

+44 1908 687915

The matters raised in this report are only those which came to our attention during the course of our review and are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the weaknesses that exist or all improvements that might be made. Actions for improvements should be assessed by you for their full impact. This report, or our work, should not be taken as a substitute for management's responsibilities for the application of sound commercial practices. We emphasise that the responsibility for a sound system of internal controls rests with management and our work should not be relied upon to identify all strengths and weaknesses that may exist. Neither should our work be relied upon to identify all circumstances of fraud and irregularity should there be any.

Our report is prepared solely for the confidential use of Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service, and solely for the purposes set out herein. This report should not therefore be regarded as suitable to be used or relied on by any other party wishing to acquire any rights from RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP for any purpose or in any context. Any third party which obtains access to this report or a copy and chooses to rely on it (or any part of it) will do so at its own risk. To the fullest extent permitted by law, RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP will accept no responsibility or liability in respect of this report to any other party and shall not be liable for any loss, damage or expense of whatsoever nature which is caused by any person's reliance on representations in this report.

This report is released to you on the basis that it shall not be copied, referred to or disclosed, in whole or in part (save as otherwise permitted by agreed written terms), without our prior written consent.

We have no responsibility to update this report for events and circumstances occurring after the date of this report.

RSM UK Risk Assurance Services LLP is a limited liability partnership registered in England and Wales no. OC389499 at 6th floor, 25 Farringdon Street, London EC4A 4AB.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – PAYROLL PROVIDER - DATAPLAN

Why we completed this audit and background

A review of Payroll - Dataplan was undertaken as part of the approved Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24. The objective of the review was to allow management to take assurance that controls are in place and are being applied for adequately delivering the payroll contract.

Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service (RBFRS) has outsourced the processing of their payroll to West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF) who have in turn subcontracted the payroll element to Dataplan. Dataplan has been a provider of payroll services for over 50 years and has been processing the payroll of RBFRS since April 2016.

At RBFRS between January 2023 and October 2023 the service have had 54 new starters and 63 leavers. These are sent to Dataplan via Action 5 sheets which captures all the relevant information required for the payroll to be updated accordingly.

At Dataplan, the RBFRS payroll account is managed by a permanent team of two members of staff, consisting of the Deputy Head of Education and a Payroll Processor, who are supported by other members of the Education team as required. RBFRS utilise Flexipay Payroll Software to manage the payroll with the current monthly payroll figure equating to circa £2mRBFRS and Dataplan utilise ePaysafe, an online payroll portal to share payroll related documentation including amendment notifications and monthly exception reports.

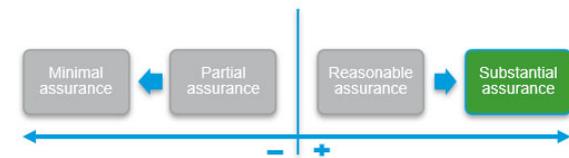
Conclusion

We confirmed that overall controls were robust, well designed and applied in line with relevant procedures in relation to payroll processing. We also confirmed that the guide regarding the processing of the payroll for RBFRS staff outlined the required procedures for new starters, leavers and amendments which we found had been appropriately applied throughout the sample testing we carried out as part of this review.

Our review concluded that there were also robust controls in place covering financial controls and the general framework of control at Dataplan regarding year end documentation, reconciliations and overpayments. However, we found a minor weakness in regards to there being limited user access rights to the ePaysafe system in which RBFRS use to authorise and download reports from Dataplan.

Internal audit opinion:

Taking account of the issues identified, the Authority can take substantial assurance that the controls upon which the organisation relies to manage this area are suitably designed, consistently applied and effective.



Key findings

We noted the following controls to be adequately designed and operating effectively:

Contract



We reviewed a copy of the signed contract header which has been agreed between the parties Dataplan, WYPF and RBFRS. We noted that the contract had been signed by all parties and was dated for the period 4th January 2016 to 3rd January 2019. We have also received a further two contract extension letters, the first was dated November 2019, which WYPF have triggered the extension option of the contract for a further two years which extends the date to 3rd January 2021. The second contract extension letter is dated 11 January 2021 which extends the contract agreement for 3 years and 4 months to 3rd May 2024.

We confirmed through review that both contract letters addressed to DataPlan had been signed by the Business Development Manager at WYPF for the continuation of the provision of payroll services for RBFRS.

Procedures



We reviewed the Operational Guide to Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Payroll and confirmed that a version control table which specifies the current version was last reviewed 10 October 2023 and is scheduled for its next review in October 2024 and was therefore in date at the time of our review. We noted that the contents of the guide included sufficient and detailed information on the below:

- Key contact details at Dataplan and RBFRS that are required within the payroll process;
- Processes relating to pension information and payroll such as processing Action Sheet 5's, checks and sign off process and manual overtime/additional hours;
- Checks and signing off process focussing on action sheets 5 and imported spreadsheets; and
- The reports that are to be produced for RBFRS.

We also confirmed that the Operational Guide was made available to all staff through the system network folders and intranet system.

New Starters



We reviewed a sample of ten new starters since January 2023 and we confirmed the following:

- In all cases the new starters had a completed an Action 5 Sheet in full with the relevant information and received by Dataplan in a timely manner;
- In all cases the start date that had been captured within the Action 5 Sheet was accurately reflected within the payroll system;
- In all cases the new starters had been paid in line with their start date for the month; and
- In all cases the new starter had been processed into the system by a member of the Payroll Team in line with guidance, these had been independently checked by a different member of staff.
- In all cases the new starter had been paid accurately in line with their agreed contract.

Leavers



We selected a sample of 10 leavers since January 2023 and confirmed the following:

- In all cases for each leaver an Action 5 Sheet was completed in full and submitted to Dataplan in a timely manner to process the leaver within the required timeframe;
- In all cases the leave dates had been processed accurately onto the Flexipay payroll system;
- In all cases the leaver had been removed from the payroll in line with the leave date; and
- In all cases the leaver had been processed within the system by a member of the payroll team and independently checked by another member within the team.
- In all cases the leaver had been paid accurately to the days worked within the last month.

Amendments and Data Feed



We reviewed a sample of 10 amendments since April 2023 and confirmed the following:

- In all cases the amendments had been processed as per the details captured within the Action 5 Sheet including the notification to WYPF and had been submitted to Dataplan in a timely manner;
- In all cases the amendment had been processed by one member of the payroll team at Dataplan and reviewed independently by another member of staff; and
- In all cases the amendment had been accurately applied to the payslip/payroll system as required.

We were informed that as part of the amendment process Dataplan upload Balancing Payment spreadsheets and Dataplan conduct a check on the calculations to ensure that the amendments have been accurately processed. We reviewed August, September and October 2023 to ensure the Balancing payment check had been conducted and in each case, we confirmed that the imported amendment spreadsheet had been processed by one member of staff and the 20% check that is required as per guidance was conducted by a different member of staff. This was evidenced with the Senior Team Member at Dataplan who walked through the folders/files.

Temporary Changes



Through review of a sample of 5 temporary changes since April 2023 we confirmed that:

- In all cases the temporary amendment had been actioned as per the action 5 spreadsheet which had been processed in a timely manner to Dataplan.
- In all cases the payslip had been updated accurately to reflect the amendment and the following payslip had reverted back from the temporary promotion pay as per the Action 5 Sheet.
- In all cases the amendment had been processed by one member of the payroll team and independently checked by another member of staff.

- In all cases the temporary promotion had been paid accurately to the wage required and reverted back to the original wage for the following month.

From our sample of 5 multiple amendment changes we confirmed that:

- In all cases the multiple amendments assigned to one individual had all been processed onto the payroll system accurately and in a timely manner.
- In all cases the multiple amendments had been processed by one member of the payroll team and independently checked by another member of staff.

BACS Runs and Exception Reports



We reviewed the following three types of reports for August, September and October 2023 as generated by the Flexipay system once errors from the pay check have been addressed and cleared:

- Analysis of Pay for Period;
- Variance Report; and
- Payslip Report.

In all instances, we confirmed that the reports had been uploaded by the Senior Team Manager at Dataplan to the system. For the month of August, we confirmed that the reports had been approved by the Head of Human Resources, for the month of September the reports had been approved by Head of Finance and Procurement and for the month of October the reports had been approved by the Senior HR Adviser Service Provision. It was also noted that by RBFRS approving these reports they authorise Dataplan to complete the payroll cycle and make the payment within the BACS runs.

Pension Contributions



Through discussion with the Senior Team Manager we were informed that the Flexipay system will calculate the pension contributions automatically. Within the flexi pay system there are fields for both pension and non-pension, for any salary amounts that do not require pension deductions these are put through in the non-pensionable fields to ensure they are disregarded for pension purposes. Due to there being different bandings depending on a person's earnings, the system will look at the total pensionable pay and then deduct the amounts based on which percentage bracket the persons earnings fall into automatically.

As the system automatically calculates the deductions, we reviewed a sample of five pension contribution change requests submitted to Dataplan during 2023/24 and confirmed the following:

- In two cases a pension opt-out action 5 sheet had been submitted and they had both been accurately removed from the employees payslips;
- In two cases and RDS pensions opt-in request had been submitted which had been accurately added to the employees payslip; and
- In one case a pension opt-in action 5 sheet had been submitted and had been accurately added to the employees payslip.



Overpayments and Underpayments

Through discussion with the Senior Manager at Dataplan we were informed that internally at RBFRS the HR team monitor overpayments and underpayments. RBFRS make contact with the staff member to negotiate how the overpayment or underpayment will be repaid and once a repayment schedule has been agreed with the member of staff, an Action 5 sheet will be submitted to Dataplan to implement onto the payroll system. There were a total of 14 overpayments from the payroll download report where we selected our sample from. From a report of overpayments and underpayments sent to Dataplan in 2023/24, we reviewed a sample of five (four overpayments and one underpayment) and confirmed the following:

- In all cases the overpayment was reclaimed as per the instructions specified in the action sheet;
- In the case of the underpayment, the payment had been processed accurately as per the action sheet;
- In all cases of overpayments, the amounts were accurately deducted from the employee payslips;
- In all cases the overpayments and underpayment were processed in a timely manner; and
- In all cases the overpayments and underpayment had been processed by one member of the payroll team and independently checked by another member of staff.



Tax Code Changes

We obtained the September 2023 HMRC tax code change report that had been received by Dataplan, within the report we selected 5 employees where a tax code change had occurred. From our sample testing of five tax code changes we identified that in all cases the tax code change had been processed accurately. We also noted that the following payslip to the tax code change had been correctly altered.



Year End Documentation

Through review the of the evidence provided for the year end documentation we were able to confirm:

- The month end Bacs file for March 2023 was created and processed in March 2023;
- The RTI File was submitted in March 2023 and was confirmed by HMRC that it had been processed and was 'ok';
- The Employees p60 files had been sent to RBFRS in May 2023; and
- An example of a tax code uplift from 1250L to 1257L had been applied to an RBFRS member.



Access Rights

We were informed through discussion with the Senior Team Manager at Dataplan that the Flexipay system is the payroll system used by Dataplan with the access rights being controlled by the Flexipay Manager. We were also informed that the Human Resources functions are performed internally by RBFRS within their own systems, therefore members of staff who have access to the HR system do not have access to Dataplan's payroll system.

We reviewed a report of users of the Flexipay system as at November 2023 and confirmed that 51 staff member accounts, one Master account and one IT account have been created to use the system. In the 51 staff member accounts, we noted that there were four members of staff with 'management access' who are all senior managers at Dataplan. We noted that there are two accounts called Edna and Master account which are restricted to the use of Directors only at Dataplan. We confirmed that the IT account is only available to members of IT support team and it was also noted that five different profiles are assigned to members of staff within the system, Manager, Basic, Standard, Project and IT. We confirmed that each of the profiles have the appropriate restricted access based on the job role and that all profiles leave auditable trails within the system.

We also agreed one low priority management action, detailed in section 2 below.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION (GDPR) GOVERNANCE

Why we completed this audit

We have been commissioned to perform an Agreed Upon Procedures (AUP) assignment of the current data governance processes, procedures and controls with regards to the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and UK Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018. The scope of this GDPR audit includes a broad range of coverage given the remit of GDPR and the corresponding UK DPA Act 2018. Moreover, this assignment is designed to assess the current control framework in place and to evaluate opportunities for future areas of controls development, based on the evidence presented to us. This takes into account both ICO guidance and relevant best practice identified at other similar organisations, providing a high-level framework of actions, where applicable.

Our report is a factual report and we do not provide a level of assurance, or internal audit opinion, and should not be taken to provide such. However, we have identified some significant issues that do need some urgent management attention to address the weaknesses.

Headline findings

The key findings from this review are as follows:

Personal Data Maps

We noted issues with completeness and coverage of key areas in Personal Data Maps, such as a general description of technical and organisational security measures. We also found that in two of a sample of five Personal Data Maps, the Maps had a review date of April 2020 and were therefore out of date. If data is not appropriately mapped across the organisation, there is a risk of the organisation being unaware of the data being held, how such data is used by different departments and how it flows through the organisation. This could also lead to issues with lawfulness of processing, security and retention.

Third Party Management

Through review of the Contracts Register, we noted that this did not record information such as whether the contract contains the required contractual data confidentiality terms and conditions/clauses. We were also advised by the DPO that the Service does not centrally track third parties where there is sharing of personal data without a contract. This could lead to ineffective tracking of third parties, resulting in personal data being shared without appropriate safeguards.

Through review of the Standard Terms of Business, we noted that certain areas were not covered, such as the subject matter of the processing or the fact that the processor must only engage a sub-processor with the controller's prior authorisation and under a written contract. We were also provided with one example contract for the Service of Intranet and Website Replacement and noted that whilst a section was included on 'Protection of Personal Data and Security of Data', this did not cover the same areas as the Confidentiality and Data Protection section in the Standard Terms of Business; This could result in personal data being shared with third parties without appropriate safeguards.

ICT Password Policy

Through review of the ICT Password Policy, we noted that some areas were not detailed, such as account lockout counter reset time. We also noted that the password configuration did not follow National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) best practice, who state, for instance, that password changes should not be enforced. Without a password policy that details all minimum requirements, there is a risk that inappropriate password settings are in place that do not adequately protect the organisation's systems against unauthorised access.

Records Management

Through review of the Records Retention Policy and Document Management Policy and Procedure, we found that no reference was made to areas such as how compliance with retention schedules is to be monitored (for instance, a programme of audits).

We also noted issues with regards to the completeness of Records Retention Schedules and the fact that Schedules for two departments from a sample of five were still in draft at the time of the audit (one was blank). Moreover, certain information was not being recorded in the Schedules, such as format of the record (electronic, paper etc.). Without a suitable policy and schedules, there is a risk of an inconsistent approach to data storage and retention, potentially leading to personal data being mismanaged.

Training

We noted through inspection of a training compliance report that at the time of our review, only 341 out of 646 staff had completed the Protecting Information training (52.32%). We also found that aside from quarterly reports which are issued to Heads of Service (who are then responsible for taking action) with regards to overdue training, there is no central chasing or escalation process for training that is significantly overdue. If training is not kept up to date, this could lead to staff not being kept up to date with data protection practices and requirements, increasing the risk of a data breach as a result of user error.

Senior Management Awareness

There is no dedicated forum to oversee GDPR compliance. We were advised by the DPO that if something required reporting to the ICO, this would be reported to the Senior Leadership Team (although this has not been required in the last 12 months), however, there was no regular reporting to any forum on aspects such as GDPR training, data breaches or personal data requests. The absence of an GDPR/DPA governance group with formal responsibility for GDPR/DPA increases the risk of a lack of oversight of data protection requirements, which could result in data issues existing that may lead to legislative non-compliance and control weaknesses.

Data Protection Policy

We noted that the Data Protection Policy did not refer to areas such as lawful bases for processing information. Without a comprehensive policy, there is a risk of an inconsistent approach to data protection or staff being unaware of key areas, potentially leading to personal data being mismanaged.

Privacy Notices

We noted that the Privacy Notices in place at the Service were not consistent and did not cover certain areas, such as the right to restrict processing. Without comprehensive privacy notices, there is a risk that data subjects are not aware of all information required to comply with their right to be informed about their personal information.

Personal Data Requests

Our review of the Subject Access Request (SAR) Policy, we noted that it focused predominantly on the right of access rather than all rights under GDPR. We also noted that some aspects were not included, such as verifying the identity of third parties acting on behalf of data subjects. This could result in an inconsistent approach by staff to dealing with personal data requests, potentially leading to rights not being met appropriately or in a timely manner.

We also noted some areas that were not covered in the SARs and Data Subject Requests (DSRs) Log, such as which data subject right is being exercised. This could lead to key information with respect personal data requests not being retained for analysis and investigation where required, resulting in process improvements not being identified or issues not being resolved appropriately.

Lawful Basis (including Consent Processes)

Through discussion with the DPO, we were advised that although the Service is aware of the lawful bases it uses to process personal information (such as consent), this had not been formally and centrally documented and agreed. If the lawful bases identified by the organisation are not documented, there is a risk that staff will be unaware of the lawful bases under which personal data is obtained, or lawful bases being inconsistently applied.

We were advised by DPO that there is no documented consent management policy in place (although we noted some references to consent in other policies such as the Data Protection Policy, however these were not comprehensive). If the processes for managing consent are not appropriately documented, there is a risk that staff will be unaware of the requirements to adhere to under GDPR to obtain consent from data subjects.

We found during our review of a sample of three consent forms that they were not in a consistent format and therefore sometimes did not cover areas such as the right to withdraw consent. This could lead to the organisation not informing data subjects of key information prior to obtaining their consent to process their personal data.

Data Breach Management

We noted through review of the Information Security and Data Breach Policy that reference had not been made to some areas, such as reporting and recording of near misses in addition to actual data breaches. Without a comprehensive policy, there is a risk of data breaches not being effectively and consistently managed by staff to ensure damage is minimised and further breaches are prevented.

We also noted that certain areas were not being recorded on the Data Breach Log, such as whether special category data was lost/impacted, and that the Log was not being fully completed. This could lead to key data breach information not being retained to ensure a sufficient audit trail in the event of a data breach investigation by the ICO and to inform thematic analysis of breaches to identify trends that need to be addressed.

We also made the following observations:

Data Protection Officer

We noted through review of the Job Description of the Information Governance Manager that they had responsibility to act as the Data Protection Officer for RBFRS in the fulfilment of all RBFRS statutory responsibilities associated with the UK Data Protection Act 2018. We also noted that other responsibilities had been included, such as ensuring that the Service is able to meet its information governance obligations in respect of data protection.

In terms of reporting, we noted that they reported to the Head of Business information and Systems directly, but also had dotted-line reporting to the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive Officer and Senior Risk Information Officer in the context of acting as Data Protection Officer for the Service. We noted that the DPO was supported by Information Governance Officers and that such responsibilities were set out in the Information Governance Officer Job Description.

We reviewed email correspondence between Act Now Training and the DPO which confirmed that the DPO had completed the GDPR Practitioner Certification in November 2021.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – SICKNESS ABSENCE MANAGEMENT

Why we completed this audit and background

A review of Sickness Absence Management was undertaken as part of the approved Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24. The objective of the review was to allow management to take assurance that controls are in place for adequately managing sickness absences and that these are operating effectively and are consistently applied.

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority, and Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire Fire Authority established a unified arrangement to manage emergency call handling and resources (including sickness absence management) across the entire Thames Valley region, called Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS), covering the counties of Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Royal Berkshire, inaugurated in July 2015.

Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service (RBFRS) has a Sickness Absence and Attendance Policy in place that gets reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team on a two-year basis. The policy is accompanied by eight procedure documents which are used to assist managers in ensuring that the correct steps are followed. Managers receive training on sickness absence when they are promoted or hired, but there is currently no regular refresher training. Until May 2023, Crew Managers were not obligated to attend the Managing Sickness Absence course, but since then the training has become mandatory.

The Service liaises with Health Assured to provide an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) where staff can contact for support with mental health, trauma, relationships, and work. An anonymised quarterly report is sent to the Service with the number of calls per category, demographic, and other key metrics. The report is briefly presented at the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee on a quarterly basis. The Service also has an Occupational Health (OH) portal provided by Health Partners where managers can refer staff members in case their sickness absence relates to mental health conditions or if the absence was longer than two weeks.

Sickness records are physically kept, and a two-stage process is in place to ensure that only relevant HR members are able to access the files. Currently, there are no digital sickness absence records, however, the Service is in the early stages of implementing a digital alternative.

A Health and Wellbeing Survey was completed in July 2022 to allow the service to better understand what platforms staff members used to obtain support, and how helpful they were. A stress Indicator Tool was also completed in May 2022 which benchmarked the service against peers in the industry on areas such as work demands, peer support, and role importance. We undertook a full population test to determine the total number of duty days lost due to sickness absence between September 2022 and September 2023 from a total of 85 recorded absences, further details can be found in Appendix A of this report.

Conclusion

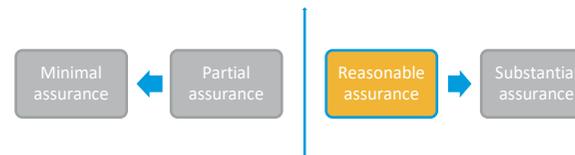
Overall, we confirmed that controls were generally well-designed and were operating effectively, including the information provided in the Sickness Absence and Attendance Policy. We noted that the guidance provided to managers offered a comprehensive breakdown of each process to help ensure that standard procedures are followed consistently. We confirmed that the EAP was accessible to staff via the intranet, and a helpline was available 24 hours a day in case staff members could not access the portal, and OH was utilised by management to obtain professional support as required.

We did however identify several weaknesses in the compliance with controls relating to managers not completing the sickness absence training, Return to Work Forms not always being completed in full or retained on file and the breach of trigger points did not follow the standard escalation procedure documented in the Policy.

Internal audit opinion:

Taking account of the issues identified, the Authority can take reasonable assurance that the controls upon which the organisation relies to manage this area are suitably designed, consistently applied and effective.

However, we have identified issues that need to be addressed in order to ensure that the control framework is effective in managing the identified area(s).



Key findings

We identified the following weaknesses for which we have agreed three medium-priority management actions:



Managers Training

We reviewed a sample of 10 managers out of the 18 working within the Service at the time of our review and found that seven had completed the mandated sickness absence training. Out of the 10, we noted that the most recent completion was in November 2019, and the oldest in March 2017. However, we found no evidence that the training had been completed in the remaining three instances, as it was not recorded.

There is a risk that if managers are not provided with adequate training and specifically for mandated training, this may result in non-compliance with the agreed standard procedures and potential mismanagement, and/or inconsistent management, of staff sickness. **(Medium)**



Sickness Self-Certification and Return to Work Interview Forms

We sought to review a sample of 20 staff members who had been recorded as absent on sickness absence between September 2022 - September 2023. In one case, we noted the employee worked permanently for a different Fire Service and was contracted for a fixed term to TVFCS. In this instance, the sickness related to their full-time employment and as such this was removed from our sample reducing it to 19. Through review of the individual employee health files, we found that 16 interviews were documented on file in a timely manner. However, we noted the following for the remaining three:

- In one instance, the Form was signed 18 days after the employee returned to work.
- In another instance, the employee went on maternity leave straight after being absent, so a return-to-work interview was not required.
- In the remaining instance, no evidence of a Form was found. Additionally, for this case, we reviewed older absences and noted that no Forms had been retained on the employee's file since 2021, however, we noted that an annotation was included on the Fire Watch system concerning the sickness absence. Through discussion with the Wellbeing Manager, we noted that descriptive comments should not be left on Fire Watch as there is a risk that they can be seen and accessed by other managers.

There is a risk that line managers may not understand the underlying issue of sickness absence if they do not complete the return to work interview and form promptly. There is also a risk that by choosing to have a descriptive commentary on Fire Watch, personal information may be available to other managers to read. **(Medium)**



Final Written Warning

From the sample of 19 staff members with recorded sickness absences from September 2022 to September 2023, we identified two cases where the Further Formal Review Meeting (Final Written Warning) should have been initiated but was not. In one instance, a formal review was initiated on April 11, 2023, but a subsequent absence on April 22, 2023, related to a doctor's appointment was not escalated as required due to a manager's decision. In the other case, a staff member had extensive absence due to a medical condition since 2015. Legal representation was provided to the staff member, and a reasonable adjustment to the working pattern and shift was agreed in November 2022, aiming to mitigate future absences. However, since the agreement, there have been six more absences due to the aforementioned condition, and an additional two due to flu. We noted that the first written warning was given in July 2023, which was after six absences within 12 months.

There is a risk that the final written warning stage is not warranted which may result in an inconsistent application of the policy, which in turn may result in reputational damage and financial loss to the Service if agreed procedures are not followed. **(Medium)**

We noted the following controls to be adequately designed and operating effectively:



Data Analytics

A full population data analytics test had been completed as part of the audit encompassing sickness absence data from September 2022 to September 2023. Through analysis, we noted that the most common short-term reason for sickness absence was having a cold with a total of 35 duty days lost as a result. We also found that the two most common factors for long-term absences were respiratory infection (COVID) and work stress. With a total of 89 duty days lost for the former, and 78 for the latter.



Sickness Absence and Attendance Policy

We reviewed the Sickness Absence and Attendance Policy, effective May 2021 and noted it was made available to staff via the intranet and through review, we noted the following:

- The Policy included a breakdown of responsibilities for line managers, HR, employees, and employee representatives, with a table showing the responsibilities of both the manager and employee during the absence;
- It was included that all sickness absences must be certified by either a self-certification form or a GP fit note;
- The Policy stated that sickness should be reported on the first day of absence and failure to report may result in disciplinary action and loss of pay; and
- The Policy covered the management of short-term sickness absence procedures.

We noted the Policy was due for review in May 2023 and was therefore out of date at the time of our review by four months. However, we noted that the Policy was in the process of being revised at the time of our review through review of meeting notes from the Sickness Absence Focus Group covering potential changes to the Policy to be considered.



Managers Guidance

We reviewed the suite of eight manager guides used to accompany the Policy on sickness absence, including guides on managing absence for disabled employees, return-to-work interviews, and long- and short-term sickness absence. We confirmed through review that the guides offered comprehensive instructions for managers, including suggested questions to ask during meetings and guidance on identifying patterns of absence. We confirmed through our review that the guides were made available to staff on the intranet.



Managing Sickness Absence Training Material

We reviewed a copy of the Crew Manager Control Training Booklet and noted it included training on managing sickness as part of the 18-month pathway. We also confirmed it documented the units required to complete the course, and a reason why the training is necessary.

However, we found that there was no mention of the escalation process that managers have to undertake if trigger points had been hit by absentees. Through discussion with the Wellbeing Manager, we confirmed that the training provided operates in conjunction with the Sickness Absence Management Policy that contained the requirements for trigger points to be monitored and acted upon.



Workshops

To support the launch of the revised Sickness Absence and Attendance Policy, we were informed that workshops are planned for staff to be held between November 2023 and January 2024 which was in the future at the time of our review. Through review of the schedule for the planned workshops, we noted that there were three workshops planned covering Policy / Role of Managers / Supports, Absence Management Processes, and Return to Work Interviews. We also confirmed that each workshop had a separate session for each grade of staff (Blue, Green, Red, and White) across the period.



Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

Through review, we confirmed that the Service utilises the Health Assured EAP which we confirmed is accessible to all staff via the intranet including a helpline that is available 24 hours per day. We also noted that employees can be referred to the Programme where applicable. Through review of the reports from March and June 2023 provided to RBFRS by the provider, Health Assured, we confirmed they contained an annual utilisation of the EAP service by RBFRS employees (14.8% in March and June 2023). A summary of the total number of calls received during the period with a commentary suggesting the common trend and statistical data around counselling call categories, legal calls, and benchmarking data.

Through review of the Action Plan Update document presented at the Health and Safety Wellbeing Committee in April and July 2023, we confirmed that an update was provided on the use of the EAP.

We also noted through review of the Health and Wellbeing survey conducted in July 2022 that of the 107 responses, 25% of staff had noted that they had used the EAP service via telephone, short-term counselling, the smartphone app or the online health portal indicating that staff have an awareness of the programme and that it was being used for its intended purpose.



Occupational Health

We reviewed all nine sickness absences recorded between September 2022 and September 2023 that were longer than two weeks or due to mental health, we noted the following:

- In eight instances a referral to Occupational Health (OH) was made, an outcome report was documented, and in each instance, a recommendation was given to the Service.

- In the remaining instance, there was no referral made to OH. Through review of Fire Watch, we noted that the line manager noted that they had discussed with the leaver concerning the Occupational Health referral, however, the absentee noted that this would not be necessary in this instance.

We were informed that employees with long-term health conditions would receive cyclical OH referrals for support following any updates to their health.



Sickness Records

During an on-site visit to the Service's headquarters, we reviewed the measures in place for accessing sickness records. We confirmed that in order to access sickness records, staff members from the HR department had to unlock a combination locked cabinet which would reveal a key which was for a box where the employee sickness records were stored. We also noted during our on-site visit that records cabinets were locked, and only opened when required.

Through discussion with the Wellbeing Manager, we observed that the lock combination remains the same even after a staff member departs from the team because their key fob would be taken away and they would not be able to enter the gate or the doors to the office. Lastly, through discussion, we noted that only HR staff have access to sickness records which we were unable to quantify during our review.

Through discussion with the Wellbeing Manager, we noted that the Service is currently in the process of integrating SharePoint into its operations to be used as a digital means of storing employee sickness data. However, this was in the early stages and there were no definitive timeframes to note at the time of our review.



Health and Wellbeing Survey

Through review of a copy of the Health and Wellbeing Survey completed in July 2022, we noted the following:

- The review consisted of 13 questions that were answered by 107 staff members from the Service.
- Questions sought to understand what platforms staff members had used to obtain support, how helpful they were, and to raise any current concerns about their health.

Results from the survey highlighted that staff were aware of support available for ill health and that staff health was affected by factors such as work stress, physical health, and mental health. Through review of the agenda (in absence of formal minutes) for the November 2022 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee we noted that there was an agenda item that related to the Health and Safety Wellbeing Survey. Through review of the briefing note produced by the Wellbeing Manager, we confirmed that a verbal update on the Survey was planned to be presented.



Governance Oversight for Monitoring Absence Data

Joint Co-Ordination Group

We reviewed the papers for the Joint Co-Ordination Group from June, July, and September 2023 alongside the performance matrixes for these months. We found that in each instance the performance matrix contained a proportion breakdown of long-term absence and short-term absence. We also found that an action log was kept where actions were raised with an owner included for each action along with a due date.

Audit and Governance

We reviewed papers and minutes for the March and July 2023 Audit and Governance Committee. Through review, we noted that sickness data was presented to the Committee and was scrutinised and challenged as appropriate during the meetings.

Strategic Performance Board

We reviewed the Agenda for the Strategic Performance Board and noted that corporate health was included (which covers the number of sickness instances). Through review of the papers from May and August 2023, we confirmed that an update on corporate health had been provided, encompassing areas such as the percentage of working time lost to sickness across all staff, and sickness by contract type. Through review of the action log, we confirmed that all actions included a due date, an owner, and a description.



Sickness Working Group

We reviewed the Terms of Reference for the Sickness Working Group and found that it outlined the group's scope and membership, with a total of eight required members for each meeting. The EDI coordinator's presence was required on a case-by-case basis. The Terms of Reference were last reviewed in September 2022 and included keeping an agenda and action logs for each meeting.

We have also agreed on two low-priority management actions detailed in section 2 of this report.

DETAILED FINDINGS AND ACTIONS

This report has been prepared by exception. Therefore, we have included in this section, only those areas of weakness in control or examples of lapses in control identified from our testing and not the outcome of all internal audit testing undertaken.

Managers Training				
Control	<p>There is no cyclical training for line managers on managing sickness absences.</p> <p>As part of the revision to the Policy, the Service is looking to implement a training workshop to raise awareness of the new changes in the document.</p> <p>When a member of staff is promoted into a managerial role, internal training/workbook is provided to them, and it is expected that all modules are completed within 18 months (from which training regarding sickness absence)</p> <p>Until May 2023, Crew Managers were not obligated to attend the Managing Sickness Absence course, but since then the training has become mandatory.</p>	Assessment:		
		Design	x	
		Compliance	N/A	
Findings / Implications	<p>Through discussion with the Wellbeing Manager, we noted that currently there is no cyclical refresher training for line managers on sickness absence. Through review of a sample of 10 managers working within the Service at the time of our review, we found that in seven instances the mandated sickness absence training was completed, with the most recent completion being in November 2019, and the oldest completion being in March 2017 indicating that since these dates, no further training has been completed.</p> <p>In the remaining three instances, we noted that there was no documented evidence of the training having been completed.</p> <p>There is a risk that if managers are not provided with adequate training, this may result in non-compliance with the Policy and could result in potential mismanagement of staff sickness.</p>			
Management Action 1	<p>All managers will undertake mandatory sickness absence training which will be monitored and tracked through to completion.</p> <p>We will introduce a cyclical refresher session to keep the staff informed of any changes or updates in the process.</p>	Responsible Owner:	Date:	Priority:
		Helen Morbin	September 2024	Medium

Sickness Self-Certification and Return to Work Interview Forms

Control	Sickness Self-Certification and Return to Work Interview Forms are required to be completed on the next duty day of the absentee's return. These are used by the manager to better understand the reason for the sickness and whether the individual is well enough to return to normal work duties or whether adjustments need to be made.	Assessment:	
		Design	✓
		Compliance	×

Findings / Implications We sought to review a sample of 20 staff members who had been recorded as absent on sickness absence between September 2022 and September 2023. In one case, we noted the employee worked for a different Fire Service and as such this was removed from our sample reducing it to 19. Through review of the individual employee's health files, we found that 16 interviews were documented on file in a timely manner. However, we noted the following for the remaining three:

- In one instance the Form was completed and signed by the employee and manager 18 days later than the return to work date; through review of Fire Watch, we confirmed that the line manager and employee had two shifts together where they could have completed the document;
- In one instance the absentee went straight on maternity leave and did not return to work, therefore the Form was not required due to the staff member still being on maternity leave at the time of our review, and as such this was not considered an exception; and
- In the remaining instance, there was no evidence of a completed Form on file. Additionally, for this case, we reviewed older absences and noted that no return to work had been documented on file since 2021, however, we noted that an annotation was made on the Fire Watch system concerning the sickness absence. Through discussion with the Wellbeing Manager, we noted that descriptive comments should not be left on Fire Watch as there is a risk that they can be seen and accessed by other managers.

There is a risk that line managers may not understand the underlying issue of sickness absence if they do not complete the Form promptly once the absentee has returned to work. There is also a risk that by choosing to have a descriptive commentary on Fire Watch, personal, sensitive information may be available to other managers to read.

Management Action 2	We will communicate to line managers the importance of completing the Sickness Self-Certification and Return to Work Interview Forms in a timely manner. We will discuss the right to privacy risk and reiterate that this may be infringed when providing detailed commentary on Fire Watch.	Responsible Owner:	Date:	Priority:
		Simon Harris	February 2024	Medium

Trigger Points

Control	<p>The Line Manager is required to track all trends and trigger points through the employees' individual sickness record on FireWatch. The Service has outlined the following trigger points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three or more periods of absences of sickness in any rolling 12-month period. • Ten or more days absence within any 12-month period (short term so not necessarily consecutive for example five days followed by five days). • Non-compliance with the sickness policy. • Failure to attend OH appointments without good cause or justification. <p>Where trends or trigger points are identified, action will be taken by the line manager and a meeting must be arranged to discuss attendance.</p> <p>For return-to-work interviews, managers review absences and sickness patterns to identify breach of trigger points. Four stages follow after the breach of a trigger point, starting with an informal review and referral to support. If sickness levels remain high, formal action is required, and two (first and final) written warnings may be issued.</p> <p>A final hearing determines future employment, with dismissed employees having the right to appeal.</p>	Assessment:	
		Design	✓
		Compliance	x

Findings / Implications	<p>From the sample of 19 staff members who had been recorded as absent on sickness absence between September 2022 - September 2023, we reviewed the individual employee's health files, and noted the following:</p> <p>Out of the sample of 19, we noted that 11 had activated a trigger point. In each instance, the trigger point activated was three or more sickness instances in a 12-month rolling period. Out of the 11, three did not require an escalation as determined by the line manager, and eight were moved to the first Formal Review Meeting. For the eight, we confirmed that a Formal Review Meeting Outcome letter was documented in six instances. For the remaining two cases, we found the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In one instance a prior sickness absence resulted in a Formal Review Meeting, and the most recent sickness absence which was four months later was registered on file as informal resulting in non-compliance with the standard procedure, and: • In the remaining instance there was no outcome letter stored on file, only a note raised on Fire Watch, stating the outcome. <p>Out of the eight instances where Formal Review Meetings were required, we noted that only four had the invitation letter documented on file, and out of the four only two letters were sent a least five days before the meeting in line with the Policy.</p> <p>Out of the 11 where trigger points had been activated, we found two instances which should have been raised to the Further Formal Review Meeting as per the Policy but had not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In one case a formal review was raised for the absentee in April 2023, and on 22 April 2023 a second absence was recorded, however, it was not escalated to the Further Formal Review Meeting as per the Policy, we noted that the line manager stated on the notes section of FireWatch that the absence would not be taken into consideration.
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Trigger Points

- In the remaining instance, we noted that a staff member had extensive absence due to a medical condition since 2015. We noted that it was recorded that legal representation was provided to the staff member, and a reasonable adjustment to the working pattern and shift was agreed upon in November 2022, aiming to mitigate future absences. However, since the agreement, there have been six further instances of absence due to the aforementioned condition, and an additional two due to flu. We noted that the first written warning was given in July 2023, which was after six absences within 12 months, outside of the Policy requirements.

If the Policy is not being complied with and informal meetings are not held with invitation letters not being sent in a timely manner, there is a risk of challenges from workforce unions and potential employment law cases arising resulting in legal and financial implications for the Service.

Management Action 3	We will monitor compliance with the Sickness Absence Policy and challenge managers where non-compliance is noted.	Responsible Owner: Helen Morbin	Date: January 2024	Priority: Medium
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – FIREFIGHTER PENSION ADMINISTRATION (WYPF)

Why we completed this audit and background

A review of Pension Administration - West Yorkshire Pension Fund was undertaken as part of the approved Internal Audit Plan for 2023/24. The objective of the review was to allow management to take assurance that controls are in place and are being applied for adequately delivering the pension administration contract.

The pension administration processes for Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Services (RBFRS) are carried out by an external service provider, West Yorkshire Pension Fund (WYPF), and have been since April 2016. WYPF utilise an internally developed pension system called UPM to manage the pension administration process, maintain member profiles and record invoices for overpayments.

RBFRS has three pension schemes in progress which are administered through WYPF: the 1992, 2006 and 2015 Firefighters Pension Schemes. The 1992 scheme was replaced for new members by the 2006 scheme in April 2006, and the 2006 scheme was replaced by the 2015 scheme in April 2015. At RBFRS there are have been five retirees in year, one of which was an internal staff member and the remaining four who were firefighters. Of the retirees, two have been through the immediate detriment process due to the dates their service started and the impact it potentially had on their retirement packages.

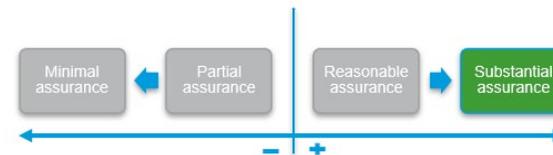
Conclusion

From our review we concluded that there are robust controls in place to manage pension administration processes at WYPF and these controls are being followed in practice. Work instructions were in place and accessible to staff, starters, leavers and amendments had been processed correctly, pension payment runs reconciled and mechanisms to recover overpayments had been put in place.

In addition, we followed up two low priority management actions agreed during our review in 22/23. This confirmed that neither action had been addressed and the actions have been re-agreed with management.

Internal audit opinion:

Taking account of the issues identified, the Authority can take substantial assurance that the controls upon which the organisation relies to manage this risk are suitably designed, consistently applied and effective.



Key findings

We identified the following findings:



Work Instructions

We confirmed through walkthrough with the Senior Pension Officer that the UPM system, which all staff have access too, includes direct links to the intranet which holds the working instructions on key processes relating to administration of Fire Fighters pensions. The working instructions have responsible owners who are captured within the documentation, and the owners ensure that the documentation remain in date with the relevant information.



Immediate Detriment

Retiring Fire Fighters who were initially on the 1992 scheme before joining the 2015 scheme are offered 'immediate detriment'. This means where applicable, the member can decide to either receive benefits that the member would be entitled to under the terms of the 1992 Scheme or the 2015 Scheme.

Through review of a sample of five cases of retired members at RBFRS and a walkthrough with the Member Services Manager we confirmed that all supporting documentation for the immediate detriment cases had been retained in the UPM system. We reviewed a sample of two cases where immediate detriment was offered to the retiree. In both cases, we confirmed that the member had received all the required information, and documentation had been processed accurately by WYPF.



New Starters

We selected a sample of 10 new starters that had started at RBFRS since January 2023 and confirmed that all starters had been processed accurately onto the UPM system, were put onto the relevant pension scheme, and had been sent a welcome letter confirming all the required information necessary.



Leavers

We selected a sample of five retirees and 10 leavers that had left since January 2023. From the five retirees we noted that two of these were immediate detriment cases, one was a non-firefighter and two were normal retirees. Through review of the sample, we confirmed in all cases the retirees had received a Retirement Quote and a Retirement Pack which had been authorised appropriately, pension advice letters had been sent, and the lump sum was accurately processed and reconciled to the pack sent.

For the 10 leavers we confirmed in all cases a leaver notification had been received, a compliance letter had been sent to the leaving member and the leavers matrix had been performed. We noted that in five cases the leaver had not had a deferred benefits calculation due to issues with calculations from government treasury relating to the care pension that they get annually. The figures had been given incorrectly for the past two years, therefore WYPF have put this process on hold until correct figures have been input into the system from the government treasury.



Abatement

From checking the UPM system, the Senior Pensioner Officer searched the system for re-employed pensioner cases with the system returning 1 active member. Through review of the employee file, the member has been re-employed but at a different company and there is active discussion between RBFRS and WYPF to understand if the pension can be abated. We were advised that due to open recruitment /competition this will not be abated. Therefore no further testing was required to be completed. From the RBFRS leaver report there was no leaver reasons identified for the member of staff taking early retirement.



Tax Code Changes

Tax code changes are downloaded by the WYPF IT team direct from the HMRC. The files are then uploaded into the UPM system and matched to the member using details such as national insurance number, payroll number and name, any tax code changes associated to the member are automatically applied. From the information on the HMRC report, we were advised that due to other fire clients information being present in the report and due to the commercially sensitive and confidential information we could not view the report.



Overpayments

Overpayments are processed by the finance team at WYPF. For amounts that are under £100 these are automatically written off, then any relating to injury reviews, which could be over £10k are referred back to RBFRS to agree timescales and amounts. For regular amounts the WYPF finance team contact the member to arrange either a one-off payment to be invoiced or for the amount to be deducted (potentially on an ongoing basis) from their pension payments. Once a member has agreed, an invoice or confirmation letter is sent to the member.

Through our sample of the five overpayments made for RBFRS members, we reviewed the UPM system during our onsite walkthrough, we confirmed that the member had been contacted regarding the overpayment and the agreed schedules had been input accurately into the UPM system.



Annual Allowances

WYPF runs an annual pensions benefits statement each year which is processed through the UPM system that highlights and produces a list of members who have exceeded the £40,000 annual pensions allowance. For members who have breached the allowance, spanning over three years, WYPF sends out a Pensions Savings statement which is automatically produced by the system, and sent to the member by 6 October. We sampled five members that breached the £40k allowance limit in 2023 and confirmed that in all cases the Pension Saving Statements were sent before 6 October.

From our sample of five, it was noted that in four cases, the breach of the current tax year could be 'carried forward' from previous tax years. In the other instance, the member could not 'carry forward' from previous tax years due to previous breaches and requested that WYPF calculate and pay the tax charge. Through testing, we confirmed that the member was informed of the requirements under both Scheme Pays via letter, and the deduction to benefits and annual allowance tax charge was calculated by a finance team member and authorised by the Senior Pensions Officer at WYPF. Additionally, we confirmed the member was sent a Scheme Pays Actual Confirmation letter, and the request to pay was added to UPM and submitted via BACS in line with the Scheme Pays deadline.



Pension Payment Runs

Monthly pension payments are processed through an online payment system, with two essential roles involved: a preparer and an authoriser. The authorisation task is distinct from the preparation of transactions, ensuring a dual-staff control mechanism. The testing conducted on payment runs for August, September, and October 2023 confirmed the process. For each payment run, we verified that the Fire Payroll Checklist was completed and the SQL Reports Checklist was finalized.

Additionally, the BACS File Summary Reports were consistently produced in accordance with the month-end timetable. Gross-to-Net reports were also generated, and the figures, specifically the Net Pay and tax amounts, were found to align with the reconciliation spreadsheet in all instances.

We have agreed two ‘low’ priority management actions, and these are documented within the detailed findings below.

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



COMMITTEE	AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	24 JANUARY 2024
SUBJECT	EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE
LEAD OFFICER	CONOR BYRNE, HEAD OF FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT
LEAD MEMBER	n/a
EXEMPT INFORMATION	n/a
ACTION	FOR NOTE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Members will receive a verbal update on progress in relation to the audits of the 2021/22 and 2022/23 Statements of Accounts.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Committee is requested to:

- 2.1 **NOTE** the update.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 EY completed its audit of the Authority’s Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021 which allowed the accounts to be approved at the last Committee meeting.
- 3.2 A representative from EY will provide a verbal update on progress in relation to the audits of the 2021/22 and 2022/23 Statements of Accounts.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 Commitment 5 – Sustainability. We will ensure that we provide a financially sustainable and environmentally friendly service to our communities.

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5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 External audit of the Statement of Accounts provides assurance to Members that the Authority's finances are in good order.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The auditor's opinion as to whether financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority is based on compliance with the CIPFA LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The audit of the accounts is conducted in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK and Ireland), which involves an examination of the accounting system, internal controls and related data to the extent considered necessary in the circumstances and is not designed to identify - nor necessarily be expected to disclose - all fraud, shortages, errors and other irregularities, should any exist.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 9.1 EY were appointed by PSAA through a national procurement exercise.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 10.1 No issues for statutory officers.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 None

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 None

13. CONTACT DETAILS

- 13.1 Conor Byrne - Head of Finance and Procurement
Email: byrnec@rbfrs.co.uk
Tel: 07585 991602

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	24 JANUARY 2024
SUBJECT	ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY – PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024/2025
LEAD OFFICER	LUCY GREENWAY, SENIOR HR ADVISER – ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
LEAD MEMBER	N/A
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	DECISION

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Section 38 (1) of the Localism Act 2011 requires the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) to prepare and publish a Pay Policy Statement each financial year. This statement includes information on remuneration for all staff as defined by the Act.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Audit and Governance Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTE** the report; and
- 2.2 **RECOMMEND** that the draft Pay Policy Statement for 2024/2025 (Appendix A) to the Fire Authority for approval.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 Sections 38 to 43 of the Localism Act 2011 require that relevant authorities in England prepare a Pay Policy Statement for each financial year. Pay Policy Statements must be approved by a meeting of the full Fire Authority and subsequently published.
- 3.2 Amendments to the draft Pay Policy Statement for RBFA for the forthcoming year (2024/2025) is drafted (Appendix A) taking into account guidance issued

Agenda Item 7

by the Department of Communities and Local Government Transparency Code 2014 and the Local Transparency Publishing Organisational Information guidance provided by the Local Government Association in 2015.

- 3.3 Whilst it has not been necessary to amend the format of the Pay Policy Statement for 2024/2025, a number of updates have been included and are detailed below.
- 3.4 Updated section relating to pensions legislation relating to address age discrimination issues with legacy Firefighter pension schemes.
- 3.5 Updated section relating to the second options exercise for retained Firefighters.
- 3.6 Update to information relating to employer contribution rates for the Firefighters pension scheme.
- 3.7 Update of the section on car users in line with changes to the Car User Scheme.
- 3.8 Update of the section relating to enhanced mileage rates for casual, essential and lease car users.
- 3.9 Inclusion of information relating to incidental mileage claims for Flexible Duty Officers, Level 4 Officers and those on a continuous duty rota.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.5 Sustainability: We will ensure that we provide a financially sustainable and environmentally friendly service to our communities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This report is prepared to enable RBFA to meet its obligations under Sections 38 to 43 of the Localism Act 2011 and the Local Transparency Code 2015 and in accordance with issued Government guidance.
- 6.2 The Pay Policy Statement must be approved by the full Fire Authority and therefore if there are any changes, these will be made before it is presented to at the Fire Authority meeting on 15 February 2024.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct equality issues arising from this report.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no risk management issues arising from this report.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

9.1 N/A.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

The following individuals have been consulted in preparation of this report.

10.1 Monitoring Officer

10.2 Head of Finance and Procurement

10.3 Chief Fire Officer

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Localism Act 2011

11.2 Openness and Accountability in Local Pay, Guidance under Section 40 of the Localism Act, February 2012, Department for Communities and Local Government.

11.3 Openness and Accountability in Local Pay, Guidance under Section 40 of the Localism Act, February 2013, Supplementary Guidance, Department for Communities and Local Government.

11.4 Hutton Review of Fair Pay in the Public Sector: Final Report, March 2011

11.5 Pay Policy and Practice in Local Authorities – A guide for Councillors, Local Government Association (January 2013) issued November 2013 to Local Authority Chairs

11.6 Local Government Transparency Code 2014 – Department for Communities and Local Government, October 2014.

11.7 Local Transparency Publishing Organisational Information - Local Government Association 30 November 2015

12. APPENDICES

12.1 Appendix A – RBFA Pay Policy Statement 2024/2025

13. CONTACT DETAILS

13.1 Lucy Greenway

Senior HR Adviser (Organisational Development)

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Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

Pay Policy Statement 2024/2025



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Introduction

This Pay Policy Statement reflects the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's (RBFA) long standing Pay and Reward Strategy, which has been in place since its inception in 1998.

It has been formulated to discharge the RBFA's obligation to publish such a statement as required by Section 38 (1) of the Localism Act 2011. The purpose of this statement is to provide transparency with regard to RBFA's approach to setting the pay of its employees by identifying:

The methods by which salaries of all employees are determined;

The detail and level of remuneration of its most senior staff as defined by the relevant legislation;

The detail and level of remuneration for the lowest level of post/employee;

The ratio of pay of the top earner and that of the median earner.

RBFA seeks to balance the need to reward its staff sufficiently to attract, motivate and retain the talented individuals needed to deliver a first class fire and rescue service with the need to ensure that RBFA delivers its strategic commitment of providing good value for money.

This policy statement has been approved by RBFA. It will be subject to review annually and in accordance with new or proposed legislation to ensure that, it remains relevant and effective. Information supplied to inform the Pay Policy Statement will be based on figures available at the time of writing (31 October 2023).

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Pay Policy Statement 2024/2025

Accountability and Decision Making

The Fire Authority is responsible for decision making in relation to the recruitment, pay, terms and conditions and severance arrangements in relation to its' employees subject to the exercise of delegated powers. The Fire Authority has approved the pay ranges for any post in excess of £100,000 per year on appointment.

Responsibility and Scale

For 2024/2025, RBFA was directly responsible for a budget of £41,974,800 and the employment of 639 staff. The Fire Authority provides services to a total population of 949,700 residents.

The Fire Authority's Pay Strategy - How is Pay Determined?

The RBFA's overall approach to determining the pay of its employees is to participate in national collective bargaining for fire-fighters and fire control staff through the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services; for non-operational support staff through the NJC for Local Government Services and for Directors through NJC for Brigade Managers of Fire and Rescue Services. These arrangements account for a total of 459 employees covered by NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services, 176 employees covered by NJC for Local Government Services and four covered by NJC for Brigade Managers of Fire and Rescue Services.

The pay scale rates for apprentices have been reviewed and remain well in excess of the National Minimum Wage for apprentices as at 1 April 2023.

The RBFA's long term approach to pay and reward has been to continue to support national pay bargaining as the most effective way to manage payroll costs and the challenge of running a fire and rescue service in one of the highest cost-of-living areas outside London.

RBFA does not pay any location allowances related to the cost of living in Berkshire.

There are occasions where the job evaluation scheme and pay grading structure does not take into account market factors such as market pay rates for specialist and technical project roles, or fluctuating demand for skills in the marketplace. It is therefore sometimes necessary to pay a supplement in addition to base salary in order to recruit and retain staff. To this end, a Role

Specific Supplement Policy has been published to ensure RBFA has a fair, transparent and controlled approach to pay. Currently five individuals receive a role supplement.

At times we need ad hoc project work to be completed, which is achieved via Framework arrangements or paid on a casual hourly or day rate as appropriate to the task, duration and/or local market rates.

The Fire Authority also operates an individual Merit Payment Scheme to reward individual employees in any staff group as a result of specific exceptional performance in a one off task, sustained high performance within their normal job, or undertaking temporary additional responsibility where another allowance is not applicable.

The NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services

The NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services currently provides a nationally agreed competence based pay structure of six roles ranging from Firefighter to Area Manager and a parallel, with fewer levels, structure for Fire Control staff. For each role there is a Role Map and National Occupational Standards have been established.

Firefighters begin their careers as trainees for which there is a separate rate of pay. Wholetime Firefighters join under an apprenticeship scheme for which they are paid a trainee rate of pay. On satisfactory completion of initial training they move onto the development rate of pay and undertake a Development and Assessment Pathway (DAP). When they have demonstrated competence against the National Occupational Standards they receive competent pay. A similar structure of development and competent pay rates exists for each role, and for roles from Watch Manager to Area Manager, there are two job sizes at each role level for competent staff, which are based on the scale of the duties and responsibilities of the post. Allocation of posts to roles and job sizes within roles is determined through locally agreed evaluation processes.

For staff on Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services conditions, a two year pay award was agreed in March 2023 equating to a seven percent increase backdated to 1 July 2022 and a five percent increase which took effect from 1 July 2023.

Other elements of pay include:

- ✓ Allowance payments for work undertaken outside the role map
- ✓ Continuous Personal Development (CPD) payments
- ✓ Locally agreed allowance for Area Managers undertaking a Head of Service role
- ✓ An operational allowance for being available to undertake 'Gold' level command
- ✓ Station Manager allowances paid to Watch Based Station Managers

- ✓ A flexible duty allowance paid to officers undertaking duties as part of the flexible duty rota
- ✓ A one-off payment made to members of the Pension Board for attendance at each Pension Board meeting
- ✓ Training allowance for Training Centre Instructors

Full details of the NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services terms and conditions of service are set out in the Sixth Edition of the NJC Scheme of Conditions of Service and any subsequent updates, Local Agreements reached between the Fire Authority and the Fire Brigades Union and the Fire Authority's Policies.

The NJC for Local Government Services

The NJC for Local Government Services National Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Service, sets the framework and provides a national pay scale for the pay and conditions of service for the Fire Authority's non-operational support staff.

RBFRS uses the pay ranges identified within the national pay scales, localised to reduce the number of spinal column points (SCP) within each grade and further extended to provide ten pay grades. Posts are allocated to a grade through a process of job evaluation using the HAY job evaluation methodology.

Staff are appointed to a spinal column point (SCP) in the appropriate pay grade and progress subject to satisfactory performance confirmed through an annual appraisal (Performance and Development Review (PDR)), to the top of their pay scale by annual increments on the first of April each year. Based on the outcome of PDRs, there are provisions for the acceleration or stopping of incremental progression. In order to avoid possible claims for age discrimination, there are no more than six SCPs in each grade range.

Fire Safety Inspecting Officers (FSIOs) progress through pay grades as they complete nationally recognised fire safety qualifications. Trainees in Procurement are able to receive increment SCP increases within their Grade subject to the achievement of the relevant examinations in addition to annual increments.

For staff conditioned to the NJC for Local Government Services, a pay award of £1,925 was agreed on 1 November 2023, with those on SCPs above the maximum of the NJC pay spine but graded below deputy chief officer (for RBFRS those SCP 36 and above) receiving a 3.88 per cent pay award. This award was backdated to 1 April 2023.

Senior Managers' Pay

A new Senior Leadership Team (SLT) structure was put in place with effect from 1 December 2021. This structure retains four positions designated as Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (CFO/CEX), Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services (DCEX), Deputy Chief Fire

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Appendix A

Officer/Director of Operations and Collaboration (DCFO) and Assistant Chief Fire Officer/Director of Service Delivery (ACFO). The ACFO role can be assigned as either operational or non-operational role.

Conditions of service for the CFO/CEX, DCEX, DCFO and ACFO are aligned with those set out in the National Joint Council for Brigade Managers of Fire and Rescue Services Constitution and Scheme of Conditions of Service. The DCEX is aligned to the Joint National Council for Joint Chief Officers of Local Authorities – Constitution, Conditions of Service, and Salaries document; A decision by the CFO on 20 June 2016, aligned the pay award for the non-operational Director (DCEX position) to those set out in the National Joint Council for Brigade Managers of Fire and Rescue Services. The non-operational ACFO role is awarded pay increases in line with the DCEX arrangements.

The CFO/CEX, DCEX, DCFO and ACFO are each placed on a five point pay range set by the Fire Authority:

CFO/ CEX	CO16	£144,858	DCFO/ DCEX	CO11	£116,499	ACFO	CO9	£107,441
	CO17	£149,629		CO12	£120,476		CO10	£110,516
	CO18	£154,413		CO13	£124,450		CO11	£116,499
	CO19	£159,930		CO14	£128,426		CO12	£120,476
	CO20	£165,303		CO15	£140,074		CO13	£124,450

The Chair and Vice-Chair determine where on the agreed pay scale the CFO/CEX is placed, based upon year-end performance appraisals. The RBFA have determined that the CFO/CEX, as Head of Paid Service determines where on the agreed pay scales the Directors are placed based upon year-end performance appraisals.

For staff on Chief Officers of Local Authorities, the NJC for Chief Officers of Local Authorities agreed a four percent pay award effective from 1 July 2022, with a further 3.5 percent increase from 1 January 2023.

In addition the operational CFO/CEX and DCFO are entitled to a vehicle for use in connection with Fire Authority business. Those in these roles are entitled to a Provided Car or receive contributions towards lease cars line with the contributions for other eligible staff as outlined in the Car User Scheme. The non-operational DCEX and ACFO receive a Car Allowance of £1,239 per annum.

The operational Director posts (CFO and DCFO) also receive an additional allowance for providing out of hours operational incident command cover and services based on 10% of the mid-point of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer salary range, currently £11,649 per annum.

There are no other bonuses or additional payments currently made to the Directors. In the event a merit payment is made, details will be included in the annual report to the Management Committee.

Senior Managers' pay (i.e. Grade 7 to 10, Area Managers and Directors) accounts for 6.54% of the total pay bill (which includes all taxable earnings, including base salary, variable pay, allowances and lease car cash value).

Benefits Other Than Pay

Pensions

The RBFA offers membership of the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme (2015) to newly appointed staff engaged in operational fire-fighting. From 1 April 2022, all operational members in a Firefighters’ Pension Scheme became members of the 2015 Firefighters Pension Scheme.

Non-operational support staff and Control Staff are offered membership of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS).

In 2015 most public service pension schemes were reformed. These reforms included ‘transitional protection’ for people closer to retirement. The Courts have ruled that this directly discriminated against some younger pension scheme members. The Public Services Pensions and Judicial Offices Bill (PSPJO) received Royal Assent on 10 March 2022 and this set out in law HMT’s solution to the age discrimination. Secondary legislation came into force on 1 October 2023 which addressed the issues with legacy schemes. The impact on RBFA is significant and will continue to be monitored.

A legal settlement under the Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 allowed certain retained firefighters with service between 1 July 2000 and 5 April 2006 to become members of the pension scheme. Eligible firefighters were asked whether they wanted to join this scheme in an options exercise which took place in 2014-2015. More recently, this judgment was challenged, and the European Court of Justice ruled that service going back to the start of employment could be taken into account. This resulted in a second options exercise allowing eligible retained firefighters to buy pension service as a special member of the Firefighter Pension Scheme 2006, backdated to the start date of their employment. This will also have a significant impact on RBFA.

The respective contributions made by the RBFA and employees who are members of these pension schemes, from 1 April 2023 are as follows (in all cases members are auto-enrolled into the appropriate pension scheme in accordance with legislation in relation to workplace pensions):

Scheme	Employer Contributions	Employee Contribution Bands
2015 FPS (2015 Scheme)	28.8*%	11% - 14.5%
LGPS	14.8**%	5.5% - 12.5%

* from 1 April 2024 the employer contribution rate will increase to 38.7% following a valuation of the scheme by the Government Actuary’s Department (GAD).

** Employer contributions for members of the LGPS scheme are set at 14.8% of annual salary. RBFA also pays an employer annual lump sum to the pension fund of £363,000

Car Provision

The RBFA offers a Car User Scheme to staff who are required have access to a vehicle to be used in connection with their official duties. A revised Car User Scheme was adopted in May 2023 to ensure a fair and equitable process for determining the provisions for staff across the service. The scheme is in three parts:

1. Lease Cars

Lease Cars are available for essential car users meeting the criterial for a lease car as set out in the Car User Scheme. The annual allowance is determined as follows:

a. Non-Operational Lease Car Users

The standard allowance for new leases for non-Operational car users is £3,500 per annum. Where the a non-Operational lease car user requires an enhanced vehicle specification specifically related to the requirement of their role which will be not be met by the standard allowance, a dynamic benchmarking exercise will take place in line with the RBFRS Car User Scheme. This exercise generates a real time baseline allowance taking into account the volatility and price fluctuations in the market.

Lease car allowances for non-operational lease car users with leases agreed prior to the adoption of the revised scheme are based on a standard rate of £2,000 per annum and the enhanced rate of £3,500 per annum. The enhanced lease car rate was provided for individuals who need an enhanced vehicle specification specifically related to the requirement of their role. When these leases expire these staff will be eligible for the new scheme.

b. Operational Lease Car Users

Operational lease car users are provided a lease car that meets the minimum standard of an appropriate vehicle for their role. The lease car contribution will be based on a dynamic benchmarking exercise undertaken at the time the car is requested in line with the RBFRS Car User Scheme. This exercise generates a real time baseline allowance which meets the required vehicle specification outlined in the Car User Scheme and taking into account volatility and price fluctuations in the market.

Lease car allowances for operational lease car users with leases agreed prior to the adoption of the revised scheme are based on the enhanced rate of £3,500 per annum.

2. Provided Cars

Following a change in taxation rules for car users, a Provided Car Scheme is available for Flexible Duty Officers (FDO), Level 4 Officers and Principal Officers as an alternative to a lease

car. The Fire Authority also maintains a pool of provided vehicles for use by other members of staff requiring access to a vehicle as part of their role.

3. Car Allowance

A car allowance of up to £1,239 per annum is payable to those using their own car who meet the criteria of an essential user as outlined in the Car User Scheme but who are not eligible for a lease car.

Mileage Rates

RBFA pays an enhanced mileage rate to Casual and Essential car users above the authorised HMRC rates. Any amount over the HMRC authorised rates are subject to tax and national insurance. The enhanced mileage rates are reviewed on an annual basis and are based on the CPI rate of inflation.

Flexible Duty Officers and Area Managers on the Level 4 rota can claim reasonable incidental mileage when providing cover as part of a 24 hour or weekly operational cover in accordance with their respective operational rotas. Individuals on a continuous duty rota can claim business mileage for all journeys undertaken.

Lease car users are paid mileage based on whatever is higher of the HMRC Advisory rate and the average monthly prices of road fuels. This is reviewed on a monthly basis. Provided car users will reimburse their commuting and incidental mileage at the same rate that lease car user mileage is paid.

Cycle to Work Scheme

RBFA participate in the national "Cycle to Work" scheme through which its employees hire bicycles to use for travelling to and from work.

Subscriptions

Individuals required by RBFA to be members of professional bodies in relation to their duties are reimbursed subscription fees.

Uniform

The RBFA provides uniform clothing for its operational firefighting and control room staff and some Green Book staff engaged in public facing activities such as prevention work, Fire Safety Inspecting Officers and HQ reception staff. A number of other staff are provided with work wear as required for the purpose of their role. In addition, the operational firefighting staff are issued with and required to wear Personal Protective Equipment when undertaking operational duties.

Employee Assistance Programme

The RBFA provides an employee assistance programme for all its staff.

Occupational Health Support

The RBFA provides an Occupational Health Service to all its staff which seeks to keep them fit and well to undertake their duties and to ensure their speedy and safe return to work when they are injured or sick.

Healthcare Provision

Where appropriate and cost effective, the RBFA may pay for physiotherapy, private medical assessment and/or treatment for its staff in order to secure their more rapid return to work following injury or sickness.

RBFA also provides the opportunity for staff to access the Benenden employee healthcare scheme at no direct cost to employees other than tax due on the benefit. This is currently at a cost of £12.80, for those who choose to opt into the scheme. As at 31 October 2023, there were 469 members of the scheme.

Outplacement Support

In the rare event of employment being terminated on the grounds of redundancy, RBFA may provide appropriate outplacement support to the employee(s) concerned in order to assist them to find alternative employment elsewhere.

Highest and Lowest Paid Employees

The CFO/CEX is the RBFA's highest paid employee. The policy regarding their remuneration is set out in RBFA's Senior Managers Pay section.

The CFO/CEX is selected by an RBFA Members' Appointment Panel following a comprehensive selection process and national advertising campaign.

Remuneration Packages (as at 31 October 2023):

Basic Salary and (operational command allowance (per annum)	Total remuneration (including pension contributions and car provision)
---	--

CFO/CEX	£165,303	£227,915.31
Lowest paid employee (excluding Apprentices)	£25,819	£29,640.21
Competent Firefighter	£34,501	£39,434.64

From April 2023, the compulsory government National Living Wage for workers over 23 years of age and over is £10.42 per hour. Please note the National Living Wage is distinct from the Living Wage, which is the level of pay recommended by the Living Wage Foundation, an independent campaign group. In assessing this requirement on current pay arrangements in RBFA it is noted that the lowest paid post to which an employee would be recruited would attract an hourly rate of £11.79 (excluding apprentices on apprenticeship rates of pay).

Given that staff pay and benefits dominate the RBFA budget, the current and anticipated future reductions in RBFA's financial resources mean that these costs are and will continue to be under close scrutiny.

RBFRS has in some cases found it difficult recruit suitable professionally qualified staff through normal channels and in some areas the use of interim agency staff or contractors working outside of IR35 legislation, is in place.

Reviews will be required to ensure appropriate remuneration is in place to attract and retain staff as structures within the Service are examined. Consideration of the total reward available to respond to changing organisational pressures and the linkages between pay and performance and redesigned structures will continue to be explored through organisational change programmes to ensure staff are attracted to, and retained by RBFA. In accordance with our Equality Policy, pay is monitored and reviewed. An equal pay audit was completed during 2022/2023. RBFA has published its Gender Pay Gap report in line with legislation, which can be viewed on the Services' website and also at gov.uk. RBFA also publishes an Ethnicity Pay Gap Report which is available on the Services' website.

Pay Multiples

The relationship between the rate of pay for the median full time equivalent earnings and the highest paid employee excluding pension, can be described as the pay multiple.

The multiple between the median full time equivalent earnings and the CFO/CEX is 1:4.66.

Payments on Termination of Employment

Compensation Policy

The RBFA currently exercises its discretions under the Local Government (Early Termination of Employment), (Discretionary Compensation) Regulations 2006 to enhance statutory redundancy payments by paying one and a half times the Statutory Redundancy Pay Table and waiving the statutory maximum week's pay for calculation of redundancy payments. These discretions only apply to staff who are offered membership of the LGPS, that is Fire Control Staff and non-operational support staff.

Uniformed operational staff at all levels are not currently covered by the Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) Regulations 2006 and in the event of redundancy, their compensation is limited to statutory redundancy pay.

Special Severance Payments

Special Severance Payments (SSPs) are payments made to employees outside of the statutory or contractual payments when leaving employment in public service. SSPs will include any outstanding loans, bursaries or training expenses which are not being repaid by the employee. Payments (or write off of loans which includes bursaries or training expenses) will only be made where there is a convincing case that it is in the interest of the tax payers.

As a public body, the RBFA must demonstrate it has appropriately considered whether making a SSP is an appropriate use of public money, and that payments are consistent with the Public Sector Equality Duties under the Equality Act 2010. Therefore, when an SSP may apply, the case is fully considered and appropriate approvals are sought in line with the scheme of budget delegation before any such payments are made or loans written off.

Pensions Policy

RBFA has adopted a policy of considering the re-engagement of its retired operational staff subject to certain conditions. In the event that re-engagement of a retiree takes place, their pension payments may be abated (up to 100%) to ensure that they do not earn more in retirement than they did immediately prior to their retirement. This is outlined in the Services' Pensions and Retirement Planning Policy.

Publication of Pay Statement

Upon approval of the full Fire Authority, this statement will be published on RBFA's web site. In addition RBFA publishes the following details for Directors for the two most recent years in its Annual Statement of Accounts:-

- ✓ Salary including fees and allowances
- ✓ Any sums payable by way of expenses allowance that are chargeable to UK income tax (Benefits in Kind/Car Allowance)
- ✓ Total Remuneration excluding pensions
- ✓ Employer Pension Contributions
- ✓ Total Remuneration including pensions

In addition, RBFA publishes the numbers of employees earning £50,000 and over in bandings of £5,000 and any compensation for loss of employment and any other payments connected with termination

ROYAL BERKSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

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-  Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service
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ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT

COMMITTEE	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	24 JANUARY 2024
SUBJECT	GENDER AND ETHNICITY PAY GAP REPORTS 2023
LEAD OFFICER	LUCY GREENWAY, SENIOR HR ADVISER ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
LEAD MEMBER	N/A
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	DECISION

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 introduced a requirement for the Authority to publish statutory calculations every year showing how large the pay gap is between their male and female employees, as per the calculations detailed on the UK government website (gov.uk). Information must normally be published on the Authority's website before 31 March each year and uploaded onto the Government's Gender Pay Gap Reporting Service.
- 1.2 Ethnicity Pay Gap reporting is not mandatory in the UK, however, for the third year, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) has opted to publish its Ethnicity Pay Gap figures voluntarily.
- 1.3 The calculations are complex and prescriptive and include set pay elements on which to base the comparison between male and female and white and ethnic minority groups pay. The complexities of Retained Duty System (On-Call) pay and working patterns increases the difficulties in reporting for RBFRS.
- 1.4 The pay elements included in the calculation are: hourly rate; allowances; on call rates; salary sacrifice deductions; shift premiums and holiday pay. The pay element calculations exclude overtime.
- 1.5 The Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap Reports are based on the hourly pay rates as at 31 March 2023 (the 'snapshot' date for the public sector).

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- 1.6 Our findings for 31 March 2023 identify a median Gender Pay Gap of -2.32% (2022's national median average was 8.3%). The median Ethnicity Pay Gap was for March 2023 was -5.70% (there are no national median averages reported). The median rate is used because it removes the effect of outliers which can skew the figures.
- 1.7 Both the ethnicity and gender pay gap calculations consider pay only and do not consider the overall demographics of the workforce. Care should therefore be taken when considering these figures and they should be looked at in the context of the demographics of the workforce, where female and ethnic minority staff are still significantly underrepresented.
- 1.8 Specific actions to address the findings of the Gender and Ethnicity Pay Gap reports are contained within the Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan (Appendix C).

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Audit and Governance Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTE** the details of the Gender Pay Gap Report shown in Appendix A; and **AGREE** it is published on the RBFRS and gov.uk website
- 2.2 **NOTE** the details of the Ethnicity Pay Gap Report shown in Appendix B and **AGREE** it is published on the RBFRS website.
- 2.3 **NOTE** the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan.

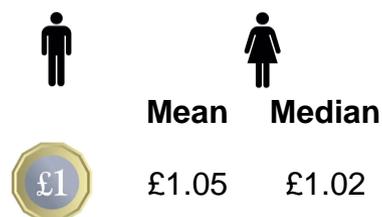
3. **REPORT**

Gender Pay Gap

- 3.1 Appendix A shows the findings from the calculations used to report the Gender Pay Gap for RBFRS. The method of calculation is set by the Government Gender Pay Gap service and is complex and is made more so by the complex Retained Duty System (On-Call) work patterns and pay structures.
- 3.2 The Gender Pay Gap Report is based on data as at 31 March 2023 at which point Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) employed 644 staff, with 493 (77%) being male and 150 (23%) being female.
- 3.3 The mean gender pay gap is calculated by adding up the hourly rate of all male/female employees and dividing that figure by the total number of male/female employees.
- 3.4 The median gender pay gap is calculated by listing all hourly rates of each gender and finding the central rate. The median rate is considered to be a better measure as it 'discounts' very high or very low rates which can skew the figures.
- 3.5 A positive pay gap indicated males are paid more than females. A negative pay gap indicates females are paid more than males.

3.6 Our findings have identified overall the mean gender pay gap is -5.70% (i.e. females are paid slightly more than males) and the median is -2.32% (i.e. the median pay for females is more than that of males).

3.7 In simple terms for each £1 earned by males, at RBFRS, females earn:



3.8 At RBFRS the median gender pay gap is considerably better than the available national figures (2022). The national median gender pay gap for 2022 was 8.3%.

3.9 The Gender Pay Gap figures should be considered in the context of the workforce demographic. While RBFRS is below the national average, and we are confident that we are paying staff the same salary for roles of equivalent value, the gap has been created by the recruitment of a large proportion of males into the Firefighter Apprentice roles.

3.10 As part of our reporting we are required to identify the mean and median pay gap for the four quartiles which are shown below. Figures for 2022 have also been included for comparison.

Quartile	Mean Pay Gap		Median Pay Gap	
	2022	2023	2022	2023
Lower	-5.57%	-19.80%	-2.25%	-5.49%
Lower Middle	1.27%	1.54%	0.55%	1.59%
Upper Middle	1.77%	-0.19%	-0.66%	-0.79%
Upper	4.89%	-2.78%	2.57%	-0.46%

3.11 A review of the quartiles shows that the greatest variance with both the mean and medium pay gap is within both the lower and upper quartiles when compared to last year. Recruitment activity of predominantly male Firefighter Apprentices in 2022/23 and subsequent movement within the quartiles has impacted this variance.

3.12 The lower middle quartile remains a positive pay gap for both the mean and median despite all other quartiles moving to a negative pay gap. This quartile has the highest proportion of males overall and is made up of predominately male Firefighters and Crew Managers. Most additional payments are made for skills associated with these roles.

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- 3.13 In the other three quartiles the females predominately fall near the top of the quartile leading to the negative pay gap for both the mean and median.
- 3.14 Due to the various elements which make up pay in the fire service including allowances, detachment payments and uniform allowances, the quartiles can be very fluid and therefore pay gaps in this area can appear to be different from the pay gap as a whole.
- 3.15 It is recognised that despite the Gender Pay Gap figures showing a negative pay gap, females are still significantly underrepresented in the operational workforce accounting for 6.85% of this group as at 31 March 2023, which is slight increase in comparison to 6.5% as at 31 March 2022. The service continues to work hard to attract a more diverse workforce through a positive action plan and recruitment opportunities.
- 3.16 Where specific circumstances exist and can be evidenced and the benefit or risk to the organisation quantified, a role specific salary supplement may be applied to an individual, subject to consideration of a business case. An equal pay audit was completed in September 2022 and was presented to the Committee on 23 January 2023. The next equal pay audit will take place in Q1 of 2024.
- 3.17 In line with government guidance issued by the Government Equalities Office an action plan was developed and updated accordingly (Appendix C).
- 3.18 The Report and its action plan will be published on our website and the gender-pay-gap.service.gov.uk site in accordance with the requirements of The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017.

Ethnicity Pay Gap

- 3.19 Appendix B shows the findings from the calculations used to report the Ethnicity Pay Gap for RBFRS. The method of calculation is the same as that set by the Government Gender Pay Gap service and is complex and is made more so by the complex Retained Duty System (On-Call) work patterns and pay structures. However, instead of calculating the gap using male and female, the ethnic groups of white and ethnic minority are used. All Staff identifying as white regardless of other descriptor e.g. white-Irish or white-other are allocated to the white group for the purposes of reporting in accordance with guidance.
- 3.20 The Ethnicity Pay Gap Report is based on data as at 31 March 2023 at which point Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) employed 644 staff with 619 (96%) whose declared ethnicity is white and 25 (4%) declaring they are from an ethnic minority.
- 3.21 The mean ethnicity pay gap is calculated by adding up the hourly rate of all white/ethnic minority employees and dividing that figure by the total number of white/ethnic minority employees.

- 3.22 The median ethnicity pay gap is calculated by listing all hourly rates of each ethnicity group and finding the central rate. The median rate is considered to be a better measure as it ‘discounts’ very high or very low rates which can skew the figures.
- 3.23 A positive pay gap indicated those in the white group are paid more than those in the ethnic minority group. A negative pay gap indicates that white staff are paid more than ethnic minorities.
- 3.24 Our findings have identified overall the mean ethnicity pay gap is -11.12% (i.e. those in ethnic minorities group are paid slightly more than those in the white group and the median is -5.61% (i.e. ethnic minority staff are paid slightly more than white staff).
- 3.25 In simple terms for each £1 earned by white staff, at RBFRS, ethnic minorities earn:

	Mean	Median
	£1.11	£1.05

- 3.26 The Ethnicity Pay Gap figures should also be considered in the context of the workforce demographic. While RBFRS is below the national average, and we are confident that we are paying staff the same salary for roles of equivalent value, the gap has largely been created by the recruitment of 36 Firefighter Apprentice roles in 2022/23, all of which were white. It is recognised that staff from ethnic minority groups are significantly underrepresented across the Service.
- 3.27 The mean and median pay gap for the four quartiles are shown below. Figures for 2022 have been included for comparison.

Quartile	Mean Pay Gap		Median Pay Gap	
	2022	2023	2022	2023
Lower	-5.57%	-6.86%	-2.25%	-11.43%
Lower Middle	1.27%	-0.82%	0.55%	-1.66%
Upper Middle	1.72%	2.91%	-0.66%	2.30%
Upper	4.87%	2.10%	2.57%	-2.25%

- 3.28 Due to the various elements which make up pay in the fire service including allowances, detachment payments and uniform allowances, the quartiles can be very fluid and therefore pay gaps in this area can appear to be different from the pay gap as a whole. The variance year on year can be explained by the movements of staff between quartiles.

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- 3.29 The overall proportion of ethnic minority staff across each of the quartiles is broadly consistent, aside from the upper quartile that has highest proportion due to movement within the quartiles following recruitment activity. Whilst this could indicate there are no mobility or progression concerns relating to ethnic minority staff, it is acknowledged that culturally, barriers may exist which are not evident from these figures, and that staff in ethnic minority groups may experience challenges regarding their career progression which relate to biases or barriers which may exist within the organisation. RBFRS is taking action to identify any such trends and address this.
- 3.30 62.5% of staff from ethnic minority groups have over five years' service, meaning they are more likely to have achieved competent status (for staff conditioned to the NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (Grey Book)) or reached the top of their pay spine (staff conditioned to the NJC for Local Government Services (Green Book)) which will contribute to the negative pay gap found in the majority of quartiles and overall.
- 3.31 Despite the figures showing a negative pay gap, it is recognised that staff from ethnic minority groups are significantly underrepresented across the Service, and RBFRS commits to working hard to attract a more diverse workforce and has taken action to address the overall diversity within RBFRS. Examples of this can be found in the Ethnicity Pay Gap report.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 Commitment 5 – We will ensure that RBFRS provides good value for money.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 RBFRS is required to publish its gender pay gap figures for 2023 before 31 March 2024. A failure to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty or the specific duties can be investigated and enforced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission or alternatively challenged by way of judicial review.

7. EQUALITY DIVERSITY AND INCUSION IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The report identifies that a gender pay gap does exist in RBFRS, reflecting that overall females are paid more than males on average. This can be attributed to the different terms and conditions and where the hourly rates of males and females fall within each quartile. The Gender Pay Gap Report (Appendix A), Ethnicity Pay Gap Report (Appendix B) and the EDI Action Plan (Appendix C) outlines the measures being taken to tackle this issue across the Service.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Failure to publish gender pay information annually before 31 March each year would be a breach of the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017.
- 8.2 There are currently no requirements to publish Ethnicity Pay Gap information, however this will be published on the RBFRS website along with the Gender Pay Gap information.
- 8.3 An equal pay audit was completed based on data as at March 2022 and did not highlight any issues of pay inequality at RBFRS. This report was presented to the Audit and Governance Committee meeting on 23 January 2023. The next equal pay audit will take place in Q1 of 2024.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 9.1 N/A.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 10.1 Monitoring Officer
- 10.2 Head of Finance and Procurement
- 10.3 Chief Fire Officer

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Not included on the report but available on request:

- 11.1 The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017
- 11.3 RBFRS Equality Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan
- 11.4 Managing Gender Pay Reporting Guidance (issued by ACAS in conjunction with the Government Equalities Office) February 2019
- 11.5 Equal Pay Audit reported to Audit and Governance Committee 23 January 2023.

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Appendix A – RBFRS Gender Pay Gap Report 2023
- 12.2 Appendix B – RBFRS Ethnicity Pay Gap Report 2023
- 12.3 Appendix C - EDI Action Plan

13. CONTACT DETAILS

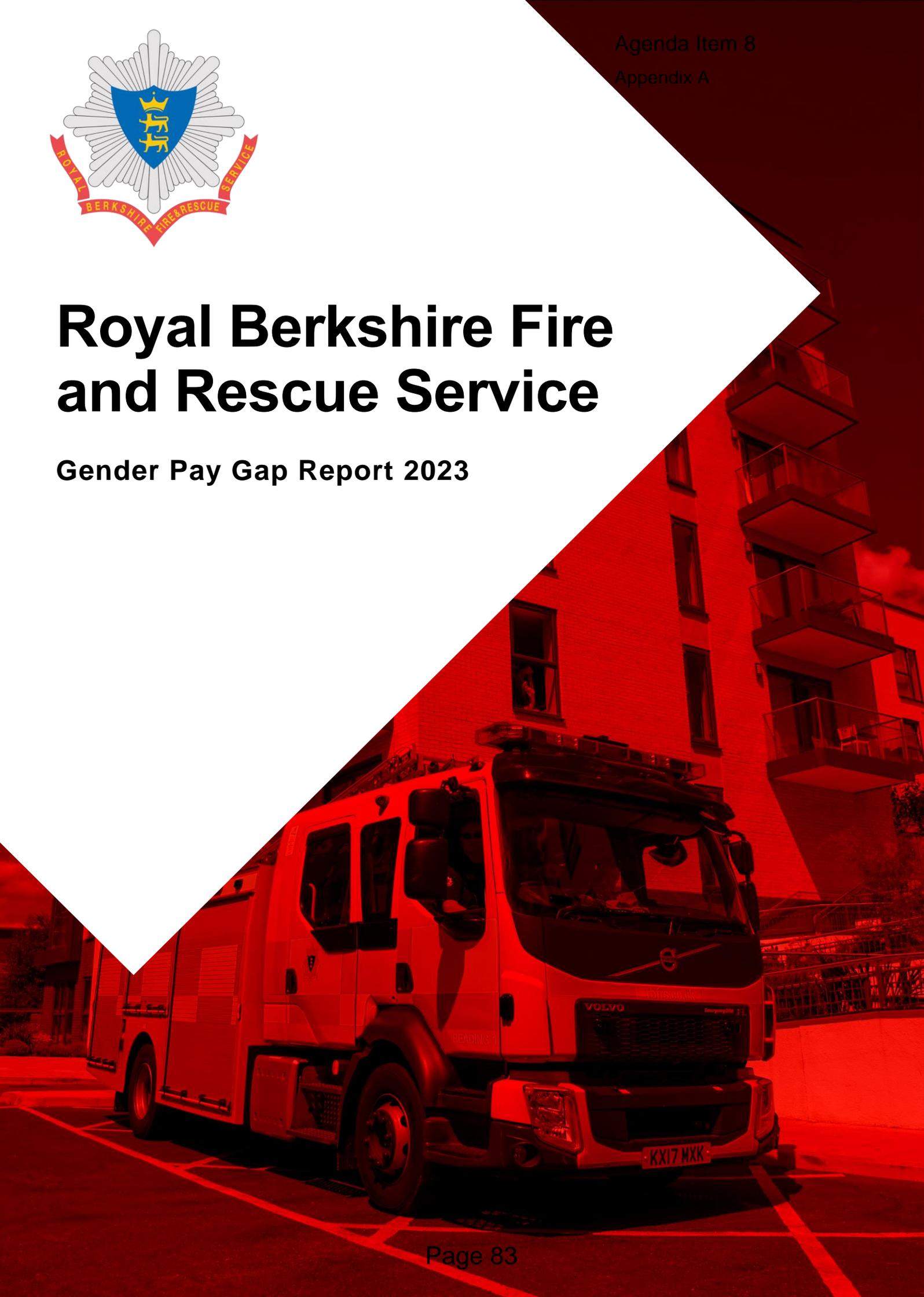
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Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Gender Pay Gap Report 2023





Executive Summary

The gender pay gap report for Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) provides information on the pay gap that exists between males and females within the Service. The pay gap is calculated according to specific calculation requirements using the mean and median average rates of hourly pay for males and females and this is also split into four quartile pay bands. A positive pay gap shows that females are paid more than males.

Due to national reporting requirements and provisions, RBFRS can only report the Gender Pay Gap for staff who identify as either male or female. RBFRS have, and continue to use, internal reporting mechanisms which take into account all gender identities and expressions that are not limited to the binary of male and female.

Our mean pay gap is -5.70% and our median pay gap is -2.32%. This shows on average for each £1 earned by males, females earn £1.05 according to the mean gender pay gap and £1.02 for the median. The median gap is a more accurate measure of a gender pay gap as it discounts very high or very low rates of pay that can skew the overall average. The national median gender pay gap for 2022 was 8.3%.

The mean and median pay gap is also calculated for each of the quartile pay bands (lower, lower middle, upper middle and upper). Due to the various elements making up pay within the Fire Service, including allowances and payments for additional responsibilities, these quartiles can be very fluid and pay gaps across the quartiles can appear different from the overall pay gap. Each quartile is also impacted year on year by movement within the quartiles in terms of recruitment of new staff, pay increases and promotions.

While RBFRS is confident that it is paying the same salary to roles of equivalent value to all staff, care should be taken when considering the latest gender pay figures. It is important that, while the gender pay gap figures at RBFRS indicate a strong position and demonstrate we do not operate a pay system that disadvantages female staff, it is recognised that females are still significantly underrepresented in the operational workforce. The mean and median gap should therefore be considered in the context of these workforce demographics. The Service continues to work hard to attract a more diverse workforce through a positive action plan and recruitment opportunities.



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Background

Gender pay gap reporting requires employers with more than 250 employees to publish statutory calculations every year showing how large the pay gap is between their male and female employees. The method for calculating this information is published on the UK government website gov.uk.

RBFRS are required to report on the following:

Mean gender pay gap	The difference between the mean hourly rate of pay of male employees and that of female employees as a percentage.
Median gender pay gap	The difference between the median hourly rate of pay of male employees and that of female employees as a percentage.
Mean bonus gap	The difference between the mean bonus pay paid to male employees and that paid to female employees as a percentage.
Median bonus gap	The difference between the median bonus pay paid to male employees and that paid to female employees as a percentage.
Bonus proportions	The proportions of male and female relevant employees who were paid a bonus during the relevant period
Quartile pay bands	The proportions of male and female employees in the lower, lower middle, upper middle and upper quartile pay bands.

In 2022 the UK average Gender Pay Gap using Office for National Statistics Data shows the average median pay gap for all employees is 8.3% (please note, the national average mean pay gap figures are not published).

RBFRS reported the lowest average mean and the sixth lowest mean gender pay gap for our Fire Service family group in 2021-2022.

RBFRS' Pay and Bonus Gender Pay Gap

This Gender Pay Gap Report is based on data as at 31 March 2022. RBFRS employed 644 staff with 493 (77%) identifying as male and 150 (23%) identifying as female.

Due to national reporting requirements and provisions, RBFRS can only report the Gender Pay Gap for staff who identify as either male or female. RBFRS have, and continue to use, internal reporting mechanisms which take into account all gender identities and expressions that are not limited to the binary of male and female.



	Mean		Median	
Year	2022	2023	2022	2023
Pay Gap	3.08%	-5.70%	9.91%	-2.32%
Bonus*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

* RBFERS does not offer a bonus scheme therefore this measure has not been calculated. Additional Responsibility Allowances (ARAs) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) payments are included in ordinary pay. For clarity, ordinary pay is defined as basic pay, shift premium pay, pay for piecework, pay for leave and allowances.

A **negative** pay gap shows that females earn 5.70% more than males based on a **mean** hourly rate of pay and 2.32% more than males on **median** hourly rates of pay. These figures do demonstrate a strong position in terms of pay, but it is important to consider them the context of the demographics of the workforce where female operational staff are underrepresented.

What do the mean and median gender pay gap figures tell us?

The mean gives an overall indication of the size of the gender pay gap in RBFERS. A high mean gender pay gap indicates that a payment system is operated that disadvantages women. At RBFERS, the median gender pay gap is considerably less than the most recently published national figures. This indicates that when comparing the median hourly rates when calculated using the nationally agreed method for the workforce as a whole, males earn on average slightly less than females.

The median is typically a more representative figure as the mean can be skewed by a handful of highly paid employees this can be seen more clearly when you compare quartile on quartile.

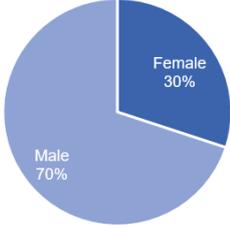
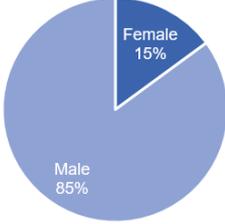
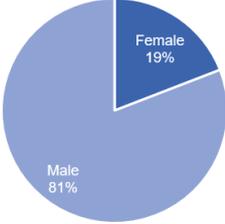
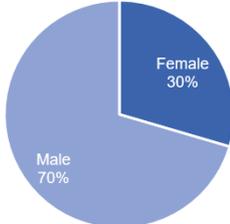
The quartile distribution detailed below (which is based on the actual hourly ordinary pay for all staff) gives an indication of how males and females are distributed across the organisation, in addition to the mean and median pay gap in each of the quartiles.

Quartile Pay Bands

The proportion of males/females in each quartile pay band is as follows:

Quartile	Year	Mean Pay Gap	Median Pay Gap
Lower	2023	-19.80%	-5.49%



		2022	-5.57%	-2.25%
Lower Middle		2023	1.54%	1.59%
		2022	1.27%	0.55%
Upper Middle		2023	-0.19%	-0.79%
		2022	1.77%	-0.66%
Upper		2023	-2.78%	-0.46%
		2022	4.89%	2.57%

Commentary

The mean and median pay gap was calculated for each of the quartiles to give an indication of the range and distribution of male and female pay. The figures above differ from the overall gender pay gap for RBFRS due to the scope for variation in hourly pay. This is as a result of the large range of roles and grades in the upper middle and upper quartiles compared to the smaller ranges in the lower quartiles. The national median gender pay gap has decreased from 15.4% in 2021 to 8.3% in 2022.

The proportion of female employees in the workforce as a whole has decreased by one per cent since the last report, whilst the proportion of male employees has remained the same. It is therefore important that this is taken into account when considering the gender pay gap figures.



In the Lower quartile, both the mean and median pay gap has increased in comparison with last year in favour of females. There has been an increase in the proportion of females in the lower quartile this year, with NJC for Local Government Services (Green Book) grade three posts and competent Firefighters (Control) who are predominately female at the top end of the quartile. This quartile also contains 36 Apprentice Firefighters, 32 of which are male.

The Lower Middle quartile has the highest portion of males overall. It is also predominately made up of Firefighters and Crew Managers, who are also mostly male. Additional payments for specific skills are included in the hourly rate when calculating the Gender Pay Gap. This makes a difference to the overall mean and median in this quartile and in RBFRS as a whole, as such allowances are available to staff conditioned to Grey Book terms and conditions, the majority of which are male. In addition, whilst all employees received a pay award this year, those employed on NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (Grey Book) terms and conditions received a larger percentage increase as a result of national pay negotiations.

In the Upper Middle quartile, the proportion of females has decreased in comparison to last year however the majority of females in the quartile can be found at the top of the quartile in terms of the hourly rate which has had positive impact on the pay gap for females. This quartile is also impacted by the recruitment of a significant number of male apprentice Firefighters which sit in the Lower quartile. The bottom of the Upper Middle quartile is predominately competent Firefighters, of which the majority of male. The pay award has also impacted the pay gap this quarter.

The Upper quartile includes seven Heads of Service (six male and one female). The Upper quartile also contained four Directors (two male and two female). It contains a high proportion of higher earning employees conditioned to Green Book terms and conditions, the majority of which are female. There has also been an increase in the proportion of females in the upper quartile in comparison to last year due to recruitment activity and as a subsequent the movement across the quartiles.

It is recognised that women are still significantly underrepresented in the operational workforce accounting for 6.85% of this group as at 31 March 2023, despite a small increase in comparison to 6.5% as at 31 March 2022. The service continues to work hard to attract a more diverse workforce through the EDI Action Plan and positive action activities. RBFRS is confident that it is paying the same salary to roles of equivalent value to all staff. An equal pay audit was carried out in September 2022, which did not highlight any underlying causes for concern. A further equal pay audit will be carried out on quarter one of 2024.

The Service continues to work hard to attract a more diverse workforce, and is already undertaking actions to address the overall diversity within the workforce. Specifically in terms of increasing the representation of females in operational roles, this has included (but is not limited to):

- Implementation of a programme of positive action events including 'have a go' days that are specifically female focused. Evaluating these events to see how they translate to recruitment and where attendees reach within the recruitment process if not recruited.
- Expanding our equality monitoring processes and reviewing the data we gather to allow RBFRS to monitor the career progression of underrepresented groups within the service.



- Focusing on retention of female identifying staff by taking action to ensure our workplace is inclusive, including improving facilities particularly on fire stations, improving our female wellbeing package including menopause awareness and recognising events such as International Women's Day

In addition, since our last Gender Pay Gap Report there have been a number of cultural reviews undertaken nationally within in the Fire and Rescue Sector resulting in the publication of the Independent Cultural Review of London Fire Brigade and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) values and culture in the Fire and Rescue Services. RBFRS have a conducted gap analysis against the recommendations of both reports to determine key action points moving forward.

Specific actions to address the gender pay gap are contained in the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan which is appended to this report. A version of the plan will be published on the RBFRS website.

Wayne Bowcock
Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive
November 2023

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FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

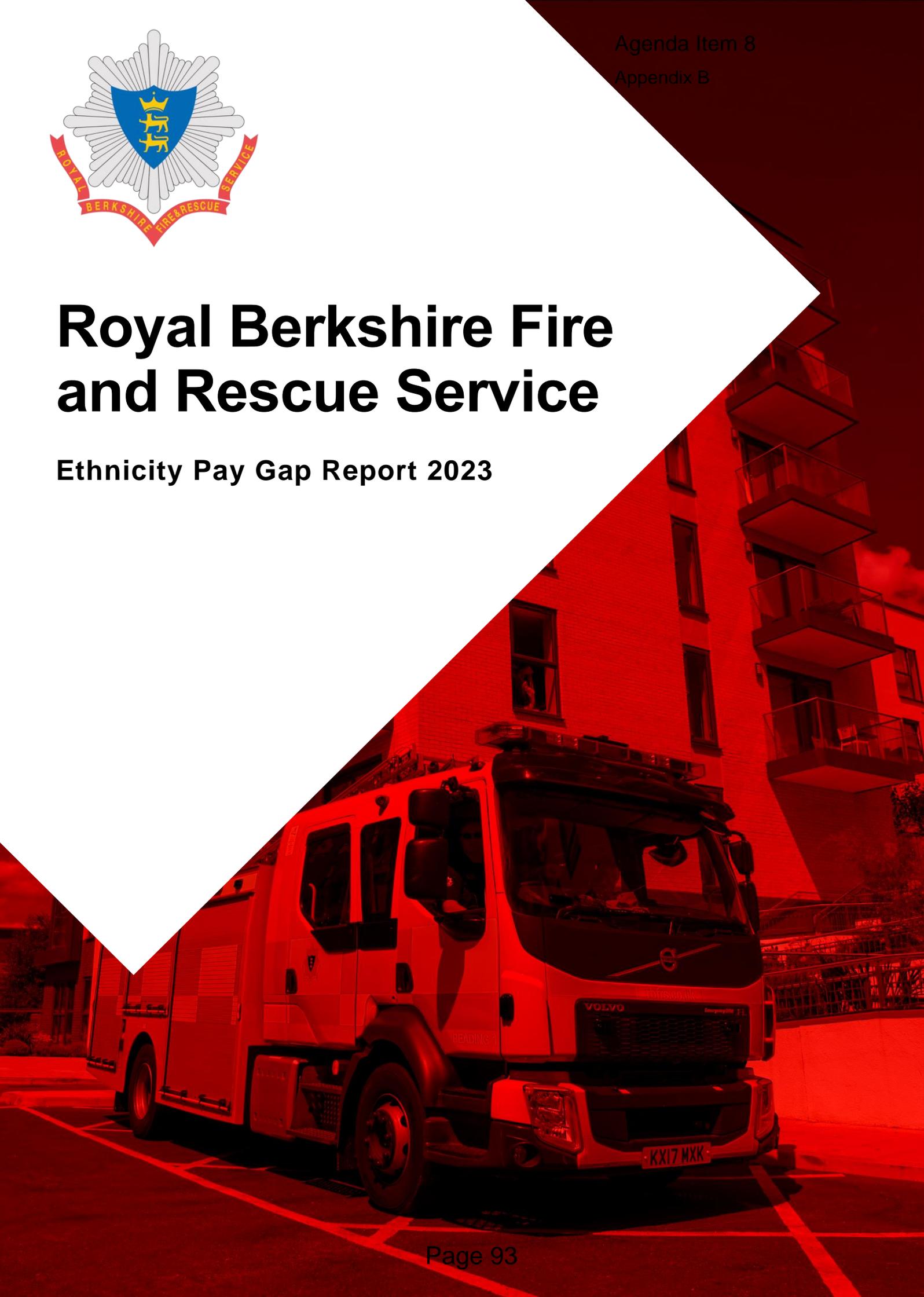
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Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Ethnicity Pay Gap Report 2023





Executive Summary

The ethnicity pay gap report for Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) provides information on the pay gap that exists between white and ethnic minority staff within the Service. Currently there is no legislative requirement for organisations to publish their ethnicity pay gap but RBFRS has opted to publish this information voluntarily. The continued publication of this report is an important tool to help us achieve our ambition to fully embed a transparent, diverse and inclusive culture.

RBFRS follows the CIPD and Race Disparity Audit's recommendations in this report, referring to ethnic minority groups rather than BME/BAME (black and minority ethnic/black, Asian and minority ethnic) which highlights some groups and omits others.

The ethnicity pay gap is calculated using the mean and median average rates of hourly pay for white and ethnic minority staff, and this is also split into four quartile pay bands. A negative pay gap shows that ethnic minority staff are paid more than white staff.

Our mean pay gap is -11.12% and our median pay gap is -5.61%. This shows on average for each £1 earned by white staff, ethnic minority staff earn £1.11 according to the mean ethnicity pay gap and £1.05 for the median. The median gap is a more accurate measure of an ethnicity pay gap as it discounts very high or very low rates of pay that can skew the overall average.

The mean and median pay gap is also calculated for each of the quartile pay bands (lower, lower middle, upper middle and upper). Due to the various elements making up pay within the Fire Service, including allowances and payments for additional responsibilities, pay gaps across the quartiles can appear different from the overall pay gap. Each quartile is also impacted year on year by movement within the quartiles in terms of recruitment of new staff, pay increases and promotions.

While RBFRS is confident that it is paying the same salary to roles of equivalent value to all staff, care should be taken when considering the latest ethnicity pay figures. The ethnicity pay gap figures at RBFRS demonstrate we do not operate a pay system that disadvantages ethnic minority staff, but it is important to recognise that ethnic minority staff are still significantly underrepresented in the workforce. The ethnicity pay gap calculations consider pay only and not the overall demographics of the workforce.

RBFRS is taking action to address this including the development of an Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan, positive action activities and developing community engagement activities through our Local Safety Plans.



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Background

Currently organisations with more than 250 employees are required to publish their gender pay gap by law, but there is no requirement to publish their ethnicity pay gap. RBFRS has opted to publish these figures voluntarily. The method for calculating the ethnicity pay gap mirrors that of gender pay gap reporting and show how large the pay gap is between their white staff and staff from ethnic minority groups.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) report on the following:

Mean ethnicity pay gap	The difference between the mean hourly rate of pay of white employees and that of ethnic minority employees as a percentage.
Median ethnicity pay gap	The difference between the median hourly rate of pay of white employees and that of ethnic minority employees as a percentage.
Mean bonus gap	The difference between the mean bonus pay paid to white employees and that paid to ethnic minority employees as a percentage.
Median bonus gap	The difference between the median bonus pay paid to white employees and that paid to ethnic minority employees as a percentage.
Bonus proportions	The proportions of white and ethnic minority relevant employees who were paid a bonus during the relevant period
Quartile pay bands	The proportions of white and ethnic minority employees in the lower, lower middle, upper middle and upper quartile pay bands.

This is the third year that RBFRS has reported the ethnicity pay gap, and due to the reporting of ethnicity pay gap figures being voluntary rather than a legal requirement, there are no national average figures reported to benchmark RBFRS ethnicity pay gap.

The latest research available from the CIPD suggests that when analysing available national data for 2021, the average mean ethnicity pay gap was 8.1% and the average median ethnicity pay gap was 12.9%.

RBFRS’ Pay and Bonus Ethnicity Pay Gap

This ethnicity pay gap report is based on data as at 31 March 2023. RBFRS employed 644 staff with 619 (96%) declaring their ethnicity as white and 25 (4%) declaring they are from an ethnic minority.



Due to the reporting requirements and provisions, RBFRS can only report the ethnicity pay gap for staff who declare their ethnicity.

RBFRS follows the CIPD and Race Disparity Audit’s recommendations in this report, referring to ethnic minority groups rather than BME/BAME (black and minority ethnic/black, Asian and minority ethnic) which highlights some groups and omits others.

The overall ethnicity pay gap for RBFRS is as follows:

	Mean		Median	
Year	2022	2023	2022	2023
Pay Gap	3.61%	-11.12%	9.91%	-5.61%
Bonus*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

* RBFRS does not offer a bonus scheme therefore this measure has not been calculated. Additional Responsibility Allowances (ARAs) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) payments are included in ordinary pay. For clarity, ordinary pay is defined as basic pay, shift premium pay, pay for piecework, pay for leave and allowances.

A **negative** pay gap shows that white staff earn 11.12% less than staff declaring they are from an ethnic minority based on a **mean** hourly rate of pay and 5.61% less than staff declaring they are from an ethnic minority based on **median** hourly rates of pay. These figures do indicate a strong position in terms of pay, but it is important to consider them in the context of the demographics of the workforce where staff from ethnic minority groups are still underrepresented.

What do the mean and median ethnicity pay gap figures tell us?

The mean gives an overall indication of the size of the ethnicity pay gap in RBFRS. A high mean ethnicity pay gap would indicate a payment system that disadvantages ethnic minority groups – specifically when comparing the mean hourly rates when calculated using the nationally agreed methods for the workforce as a whole, staff identifying their ethnicity as white (white British, white Irish or white other) earn less on average than staff from ethnic minority groups.

The median is typically a more representative figure as the mean can be skewed by a handful of highly paid employees this can be seen more clearly when you compare quartile on quartile).

The quartile distribution detailed below. This is based on the actual hourly ordinary pay for all staff and gives an indication of how white and ethnic minority staff are distributed across the organisation, in addition to the mean and median pay gap in each of the quartiles.

Quartile Pay Bands

The proportion of white/ethnic minority staff in each quartile pay band is as follows:



Quartile		Year	Mean Pay Gap	Median Pay Gap
Lower		2023	-6.86%	-11.43%
		2022	-5.57%	-2.25%
Lower Middle		2023	-0.82%	-1.66%
		2022	1.27%	0.55%
Upper Middle		2023	2.91%	2.30%
		2022	1.72%	-0.66%
Upper		2023	2.10%	-2.25%
		2022	4.87%	2.57%



Commentary

The mean and median pay gap was calculated for each of the quartiles to give an indication of the range and distribution of white and ethnic minority pay. When broken down into the four quartiles, the ethnicity pay gap differs significantly from the overall ethnicity pay gap. This can in part be attributed to the scope for variation in hourly pay in each of the quartiles. In addition each quartile, contains a number of longer serving staff members, which sit in the upper, higher paid, part of each of the quartiles. Longer serving staff are more likely to have achieved competent status (for staff conditioned to the NJC for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (Grey Book)) or reached the top of their pay spine (staff conditioned to the NJC for Local Government Services (Green Book)). 62.5% of staff from ethnic minority groups have over five years' service. It should be noted that each quartile is also impacted year on year by movement within the quartiles in terms of recruitment of new staff, pay increases and promotions.

In the Lower quartile, five staff are from ethnic minority groups, in the Lower Middle three staff are from ethnic minority groups, in the Upper Middle quartile there are five staff from ethnic minority groups and in the Upper quartile there are eleven staff from ethnic minority groups. In each of these quartiles, staff from ethnic minority groups occupy a range of grades and roles, which will impact the overall mean and median pay gap of each of the quartiles.

In 2023 RBFRS recruited a significant amount of apprentice Firefighters, all of which were white. This has resulted in a movement within the quartiles with more staff from ethnic minority groups moving into the Upper quartile in comparison to last year. There is also a greater negative gap in both the mean and median in the Lower quartile due to the bottom of the quartile being predominately made up of On-Call (Retained) employees all of which are white. The middle of the Lower quartile is also made up predominantly of apprentice Firefighters, again all of which are white.

The Lower Middle quartile has a negative pay gap for both the mean and median in comparison to last year. Two of the three staff who are from an ethnic minority group are in the top of the Lower Middle quartile. The Upper Middle quartile has a greater positive pay gap in comparison to last year as the five staff from ethnic minority groups are in the bottom half of the quartile. Staff from ethnic minority groups are distributed evenly throughout the Upper quartile and this quartile has also been impacted by movement in the lower quartiles.

The proportion of staff from ethnic minority groups has remained the same when compared to last year. While the overall proportion and number of staff from ethnic minority groups across each of the quartiles is broadly consistent despite some movements this year (which could indicate there may be no mobility or progression concerns relating to ethnic minority groups), it is recognised that ethnic minority groups are still underrepresented in the workforce. The progression pathways will also differ for Grey and Green Book staff (whereas Grey Book staff have specific routes for promotion, Green Book departments are often relatively flat in their structure and offer less scope promotion). 67% of employees from an ethnic minority are Green Book staff. It is therefore important that the ethnicity pay gap figures are considered in the context of this demographic.



As a Service, we are confident that staff have equal access to promotion and development opportunities, but it is also acknowledged that culturally, barriers or biases may exist which are not evident from these figures, and that staff in ethnic minority groups may experience challenges regarding their career progression. RBFRS is taking action to identify any such trends and address this.

The Service is currently expanding our equality monitoring processes to take into account progression, development and promotion. This will allow career progression and development to be monitored across the Service, with any causes for concern targeted and addressed as appropriate.

Notwithstanding the known issues with underrepresentation amongst ethnic minority groups, RBFRS pays staff in accordance to nationally agreed terms and conditions and is satisfied that it is paying the same salary to roles of equivalent value across all staff groups. An equal pay audit was carried out in September 2022, the results of which did not indicate any underlying causes for concern. The next equal pay audit will take place in quarter one of 2024.

The Service continues to work hard to attract a more diverse workforce and has already taken actions to address the overall diversity within the RBFRS workforce. These include but are not limited to:

- » Positive action activities and recruitment opportunities, including attendance at careers events and the hosting of 'Have a Go Days' at our stations
- » An internship programme aimed at 16 and 17 year old residents of Berkshire from ethnic minority groups that are currently under-represented within the Service ran over the summer of 2023. This paid internship gave students an opportunity to develop workplace skills and discover opportunities available within RBFRS. The pilot scheme is scheduled to continue in Summer of 2024 following an evaluation with the eligibility criteria to be reviewed, potentially changing to allow those 18 years or over to apply.
- » Identifying and developing community engagement activities through our Local Safety Plans including community inclusion advocates in each Hub.

In addition, since our last Ethnicity Pay Gap Report there have been a number of cultural reviews undertaken nationally within in the Fire and Rescue Sector resulting in the publication of the Independent Cultural Review of London Fire Brigade and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) values and culture in the Fire and Rescue Services. RBFRS have a conducted gap analysis against the recommendations of both reports to determine key action points moving forward.

Specific actions to address the ethnicity pay gap are contained in the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan which is appended to this report.

Wayne Bowcock
Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive
November 2023

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Equality Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan

2023/2024



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Introduction

At Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, we are committed to promoting Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion and making a positive difference for all our employees and the wider community that we serve. But this is more than just a statement – it's about how we can work towards the society we want to see, both within and outside our organisation.

For us, this means valuing every employee as a unique individual. We want to recruit, develop and retain the most talented people and make the best use of their skills and experience to deliver effective services to our communities, recognising the value that a diverse workforce brings.

We aim to identify, understand and eliminate all barriers that prevent access to services, information, and employment. The services we deliver are risk based according to the needs of particular groups.

We also want to work together to create a truly inclusive work environment, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect and whose contributions are recognised and valued equally.

Legislation

The Equality Act 2010

Under the Equality Act 2010, public bodies have a general duty to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and promote good relations between people sharing different protected characteristics. The 9 protected characteristics are

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Race / Ethnicity
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Marriage and Civil Partnership

Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty was introduced from The Equality Act 2010. The aim of the general duty is to integrate considerations of the advancement of equality into the day-to-day business of public authorities.



Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.

- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share characteristics and those who don't.
- Foster good relations between people who share a characteristic and those who don't.
- The action plan below will support our organisation to carry out the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Demographic Overview

The demographic profile varies across Berkshire particularly when comparing on a local authority level. The below gives an overview of the demographic breakdown for each of the 6 local authority areas in Berkshire. As an organisation it is important, we strive to represent the community that we serve.

Age Profile

Local Authority	15 and under	16-64	65 and over
Reading	21%	67%	12%
West Berkshire	20%	61%	19%
Bracknell Forest	21%	65%	15%
Wokingham	21%	61%	18%
Slough	26%	64%	10%
Windsor and Maidenhead	20%	61%	19%

Disability

Local Authority	% with a disability
Reading	13%
West Berkshire	13.2%
Bracknell Forest	12.3%



Wokingham	11.9%
Slough	13.4%
Windsor and Maidenhead	12.7%

Ethnicity

Local Authority	White	Asian/Asian British	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	Other ethnic group
Reading	74.8%	13.6%	4.0%	6.7%	1.0%
West Berkshire	94.8%	2.5%	1.6%	0.9%	0.2%
Bracknell Forest	90.6%	5.0%	2.0%	1.9%	0.4%
Wokingham	88.4%	7.4%	2.1%	1.4%	0.7%
Slough	45.7%	39.7%	3.4%	8.6%	2.6%
Windsor and Maidenhead	86.1%	9.6%	2.3%	1.2%	0.8%

Language

Local Authority	English	Polish	Punjabi	Urdu	Nepalese	Any other language
Reading	85%	3%	1%	1%	2%	9%
West Berkshire	97%	1%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Bracknell Forest	94%	1%	0%	0%	1%	4%



Wokingham	95%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%
Slough	73%	6%	6%	5%	0%	10%
Windsor and Maidenhead	93%	1%	1%	0%	0%	5%

Religion

Local Authority	Christian	No religion	Hindu	Muslim	Sikh	Other
Reading	50%	30%	4%	7%	1%	2%
West Berkshire	58%	38%	1%	2%	0%	2%
Bracknell Forest	61%	28%	2%	1%	0%	1%
Wokingham	60%	26%	2%	3%	1%	1%
Slough	41%	12%	6%	23%	11%	1%
Windsor and Maidenhead	62%	22%	2%	4%	2%	1%

Index of Multiple Deprivation

England average 16,422 (the lower the number the more deprived)

Local Authority	Rank
Reading	16,551
West Berkshire	24,962



Bracknell Forest	24,498
Wokingham	29,227
Slough	13,064
Windsor and Maidenhead	26,476

Equality Objectives

Under the Equality Act 2010, public bodies have a general duty to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and promote good relations between people sharing different protected characteristics. To meet the general duty RBFRS have a Specific Duty to develop Equality Objectives every four years.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service has set out 4 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives for 2022-2026 to ensure that as an organisation we provide opportunities for everyone to reach their potential to be able to deliver effective services to our communities. This means objectives are not just based on processes and policies but focussed on improving outcomes for our employees and people in our community.

Objective 1 – Increasing the diversity of staff at all levels:

We recognise the value that a diverse workforce brings and will take action to increase the diversity of job applicants, seeking individuals with the right behaviours and skills to help us reflect and engage with our local communities.

Objective 2 – Leadership and corporate commitment:

We will support our organisational leaders to understand their role in tackling inequalities and demonstrating inclusive behaviours, in line with our Behavioural Competency Framework. This commitment means we will be strong and visible in our leadership and ensure that all staff and members of our local communities have confidence in our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Objective 3 – Improving our service delivery by creating strong links with our community:

We will connect and communicate with our diverse local community to develop meaningful and sustainable links, which help us to increase our understanding of their needs. We will ensure that we tailor our prevention, protection and response activities accordingly and target the most vulnerable people with the greatest risk.



Objective 4 – Building on our inclusive culture:

We will continue taking action to ensure we have a culture where everyone feels valued and is treated with dignity and respect and support all staff to contribute to the creation of an inclusive working environment.

Governance

The EDI action plan is overseen by the EDI Steering Group which is made up of a number of colleagues across RBFRS who all have key roles to play in improving the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at RBFRS. The group meets regularly as defined in the terms of reference and has a responsibility to review the actions within the action plan during each meeting. Information is fed up through the EDI forum and other networks into the EDI Steering Group. The necessary items are then fed up from the EDI Steering Group into the Senior Leadership Team.

A separate monitoring spreadsheet has been created and action leads are responsible for updating their own actions and feeding back to the group and highlighting any risks that may have arisen since the previous meeting. Reporting will also come from service delivery and other relevant departments across the organisation.

Quarterly reporting against the EDI objectives are also completed as part of the Strategic Procurement Board reporting. Updates from the EDI Action Plan will also feed into the Annual Member Champion Report.

In March 2024, a full Action Plan review will be completed identifying the successes and challenges throughout the completion of the action plan. The learnings from this will support us with the creation, delivery and implementation of the EDI Action Plan for the following year.



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan

Objective 1 – Increasing the diversity of staff at all levels.

Ref	Action	Measure	Lead	Due Date	Associated strategies
1.1.1	Review the equality monitoring data	Creation and implementation of an EDI data action plan.	Head of HR and L&D	Dec 23	EDI Data Action Plan
1.1.2	Review the equality monitoring data	Identify data sets to be presented to steering group on a quarterly basis.	Head of HR and L&D	Ongoing	EDI Data Action Plan
1.2.1	Continue the Summer Internship scheme to support individuals from ethnic minority groups.	Complete year 2 of the pilot scheme.	Democratic Support Lead	Sept 24	Change 100 Internship
1.2.2	Continue the Summer Internship scheme to support individuals from ethnic minority groups.	Produce an evaluation report for year 2 of the pilot.	Democratic Support Lead	Oct 24	Change 100 Internship
1.3.1	Implementation of an ongoing programme of positive action events.	Steady flow of Have a Go Days spread across Berkshire in the 23/24 financial year.	AM R&R AM P&P	Mar 24	Local Safety Plans
1.3.2	Implementation of an ongoing programme of positive action events.	Evaluation of positive action have a go days and how they translate to recruitment.	EDI Coordinator	Mar 24	
1.3.3	Implementation of an ongoing programme of positive action events.	Steady flow of community engagement events being hosted/attended across Berkshire in	AM R&R AM P&P	Mar 24	Local Safety Plans



the 23/24 financial year.

Objective 2 – Leadership and Corporate Commitment

Ref	Action	Measure	Lead	Due Date	Associated strategies
2.1.1	Maintain Disability Confident Leader status.	Renewed Disability Confident Leader in April 2024.	EDI Coordinator	Mar 24	Disability Action Plan, Disability Policy
2.1.2	Improve opportunities for recruitment and retention of disabled staff.	Complete all actions within disability action plan.	EDI Coordinator	Nov 23	Disability Action Plan, Disability Policy
2.2.1	Senior Leadership Team to host EDI activities.	3 coffee/tea breaks hosted by SLT annually.	Chair	Mar 24	Annual Staff Surveys
2.2.2	Senior Leadership Team to host EDI activities.	Collate qualitative feedback from attendees.	Chair	Mar 24	Annual Staff Survey
2.3	Develop an open and fair process to identify, develop, and support high potential staff and aspiring leaders.	Creation of a project plan.	Head of HR and L&D	Mar 24	HMICFRS Report Development Programme
2.4	Identify further gaps within RBFRS EDI offer.	Completion of the NFCC EDI Maturity model.	EDI Coordinator	Dec 23	
2.5.1	Introduce face to face EDI Training to RBFRS.	Training specification for RBFRS developed.	EDI Coordinator	Jun 23	
2.5.2	Introduce face to face EDI Training to RBFRS.	Training provider procured for the 23/24 financial year.	EDI Coordinator	Mar 24	



2.6	Demonstrate commitment of EDI to Berkshire Community.	Update RBFRS EDI pages with relevant EDI information.	EDI Coordinator Comms	Dec 23
2.7	Review EIA Guidance for staff.	Updated pages on Siren.	EDI Coordinator	Nov 23

Objective 3 – Improving our service delivery by creating strong links with the community.

Ref	Action	Measure	Lead	Due Date	Associated strategies
3.1	Introduce Community Inclusion Advocates across stations.	Minimum of 1 advocate operating within each hub.	West Hub Manager	Dec 2023	Local Safety Plans
3.2.1	Review the internal Community Contacts list.	All contacts on the community contacts list contacted to reconfirm their commitments.	Comms	Feb 24	
3.2.2	Review the internal Community Contacts list.	New contacts from hubs added.	Hub Managers	Ongoing	
3.3.1	Provide positive action information for both internal and external awareness.	Completion of an events planning guide on siren.	EDI Coordinator	Dec 23	Local Safety Plans
3.3.2	Provide positive action information for both internal and external awareness.	All events data captured within monitoring form.	Hub managers	Ongoing	



Objective 4 – Building on our Inclusive Culture

Ref	Action	Measure	Lead	Due Date	Associated strategies
4.1	Improve the accessibility of RBFRS technology.	Sign up to the Accessible Technology Charter.	Comms Head of BIS	April 2024	
4.2	Provide supportive material for individuals accessing RBFRS buildings.	Creation of visual guides for RBFRS HQ and stations.	ACFO Director of Service Delivery	Jan 24	Local Safety Plans
4.3.1	Embed the Equality of Access into the organisation.	Develop business as usual approach to embedding Equality of Access.	Chair	Ongoing	Local Safety Plans
4.3.2	Raise the awareness of Equality of Access to the organisation.	Documents shared with all staff and linked on Siren.	Chair	Dec 23	
4.4	Introduce accessible bathroom signage.	All accessible bathroom signage reviewed and replaced where necessary.	Facilities Rep	Oct 23	Disability Confident Accreditation
4.5.1	Expand support for Neurodivergent staff.	Revised guidance produced for staff and managers for the use of Do-It Profiler.	Head of HR and L&D	June 23	
4.5.2	Expand support for Neurodivergent staff.	All staff aware they can complete the Do-It profiler.	Head of HR and L&D	Ongoing	
4.5.3	Expand support for Neurodivergent staff.	Updated Neurodiversity pages on siren.	Head of HR and L&D	Aug 23	

ROYAL BERKSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

-  RoyalBerksFRS
-  @RBFRSOfficial
-  RoyalBerkshireFire
-  Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service
-  rbfrs.co.uk

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ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	24 JANUARY 2024
SUBJECT	CODE OF CONDUCT CONSULTATION
LEAD OFFICER	GRAHAM BRITTEN, MONITORING OFFICER
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR TRICIA BROWN
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	DECISION

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To review the results of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) Member Code of Conduct Consultation; and to recommend to the Fire Authority that future Code of Conduct consultations are held every three years, or sooner subject to updates made to the document.
- 1.2 The Code of Conduct will continue to be reviewed on an annual basis by the Monitoring Officer and Democratic Support Team.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **NOTE** the outcome of the second annual consultation on the RBFA Member Code of Conduct; and
- 2.2 **RECOMMEND** to the Fire Authority that it agree that the RBFA Member Code of Conduct Consultation be held every three years, subject to any proposed updates for which the draft Code of Conduct document will be consulted upon sooner.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 On 16 November 2020 (minute reference 34) the Fire Authority approved the Member Code of Conduct be reviewed on an annual basis commencing 2021/22; and where possible take into account the views of the public,

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community organisations, and neighbouring and appointing authorities following recommendation from the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL).

- 3.2 Following approval by the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 24 January 2022 (minute reference 38), the draft Code of Conduct based on the Local Government Association (LGA) Model Code of Conduct and National Fire Chiefs Council's (NFCC) Core Code of Ethics was subject to a 6-week public consultation.
- 3.3 On recommendation from the Audit and Governance Committee, the Fire Authority approved the adoption of RBFA Code of Conduct at its meeting on 28 April 2022 (minute reference 71).
- 3.4 Two consultations have subsequently been held. The first was held between 28 January–11 March 2022, receiving 44 responses, and the second, from 22 November–13 December 2023 receiving 19 responses.
- 3.5 For the consultation held between 22 November–13 December 2023 Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) Communications and Engagement Team promoted the consultation across the following social media platforms; X (formerly known as Twitter), LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. The total impressions (audience reached) in promoting the consultation across the above social media platforms were:
 - Facebook reach total (for the whole consultation period) = 37,575
 - Facebook posts reach (consultation specific) = 1,579
 - X, formerly known as Twitter posts reach (consultation specific) = 2,073
 - X, formerly known as Twitter post engagement (consultation specific) – 45
 - Facebook post interactions (consultation specific) = 11
- 3.6 There was no change to the Members Code of Conduct between both consultation periods. The above figures indicate although the total reach using social media platforms was relatively high, the consultation did not attract a high response rate.
- 3.7 Due to the low response rate, this report is seeking recommendation to the Fire Authority to approve future Code of Conduct consultations are held every three years, subject to recommended changes to the document for which a consultation would be held sooner.
- 3.8 Appendix A shows the results of the consultation and indicate 89.47% (17) answered yes, supporting the behaviours required of councillors, as set out in RBFA Code of Conduct, when they are publicly representing RBFA on official business, and when using social media.
- 3.9 86.67% (13) answered yes, the expected standards of councillor conduct and the actions that could be taken should an allegation be made, was clear.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 Resilience: We will ensure we are resilient and work with our partners to promote and build resilience in the communities we serve.
- 4.2 Sustainability: We will ensure that we provide a financially sustainable and environmentally friendly service to our communities.
- 4.3 People: We will support our staff by providing a safe and inclusive environment for them to thrive in, building a diverse organisation that is engaged with, and accessible to, our communities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications relevant to the report.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Section 27 of the Localism Act 2011 requires relevant authorities to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by Members and Co-Opted Members of the Authority. Each local authority must publish a Code of Conduct.
- 6.2 Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Member Code of Conduct is published on Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) website.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no negative equality and diversity implications from the recommendations.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The recommendation will have no adverse effect on the conduct or delivery of the Authority's functions.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 9.1 Future updates to the Code of Conduct and future consultations thereof will be made with Fire Authority partners and communities.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 10.1 Monitoring Officer was consulted during the preparation of this report.
- 10.2 Head of Finance was consulted during the preparation of this report.
- 10.3 Senior Leadership Team was consulted during the preparation of this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Fire Authority agenda and minutes – 16 November 2020, minute reference 34.

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11.2 Audit and Governance Committee agenda and minutes – 24 January 2022, minute reference 38.

11.3 Fire Authority agenda and minutes – 28 April 2022, minute reference 71.

12. APPENDICES

12.1 Appendix A – Results of Code of Conduct consultation, December 2023.

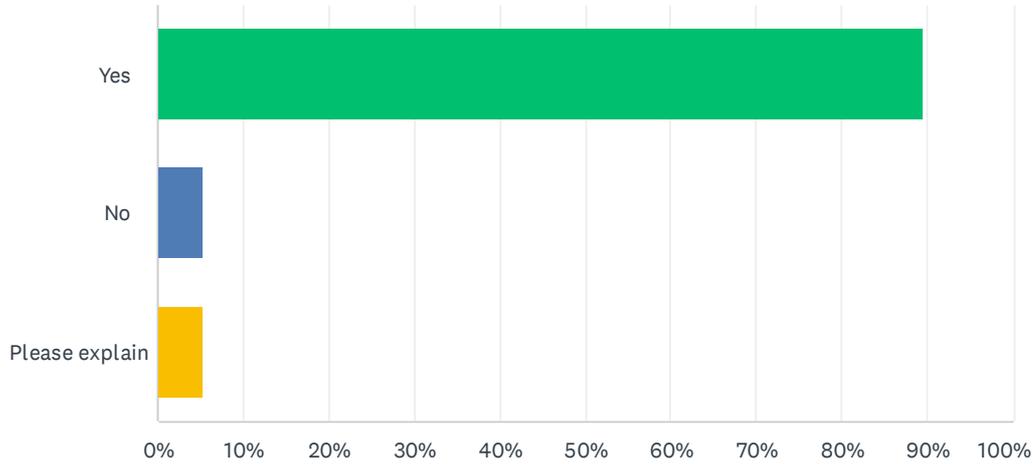
13. CONTACT DETAILS

13.1 Fayth Rowe, Democratic Support Lead rowef@rbfrs.co.uk

Appendix A

Q1 Do you support the behaviours required of councillors, as set out in the RBFA Code of Conduct when they are publicly representing Royal Berkshire Fire Authority on official business and when using social media?

Answered: 19 Skipped: 0



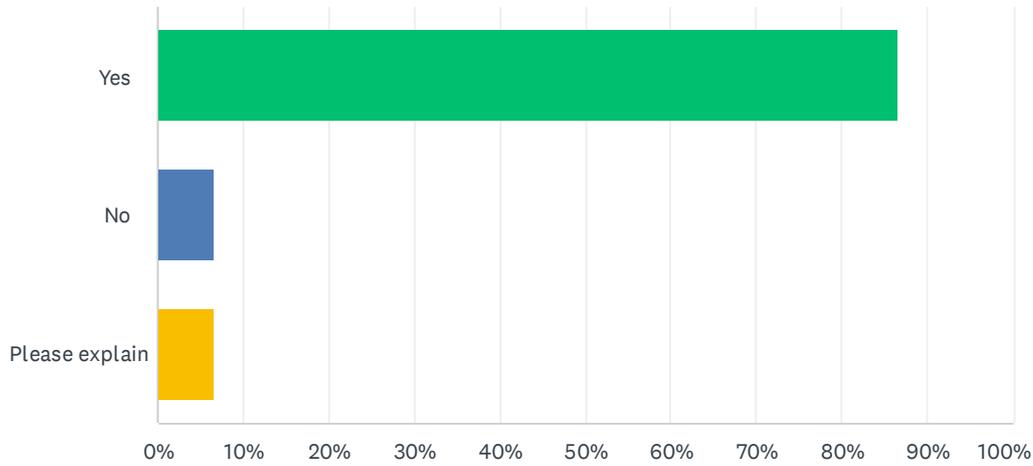
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	89.47% 17
No	5.26% 1
Please explain	5.26% 1
TOTAL	19

#	PLEASE EXPLAIN	DATE
1	But it would be nice if they did what the preach	11/22/2023 5:21 PM

Appendix A

Q2 Do you think the expected standards of councillor conduct and the actions that could be taken should an allegation be made, are clear?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 4

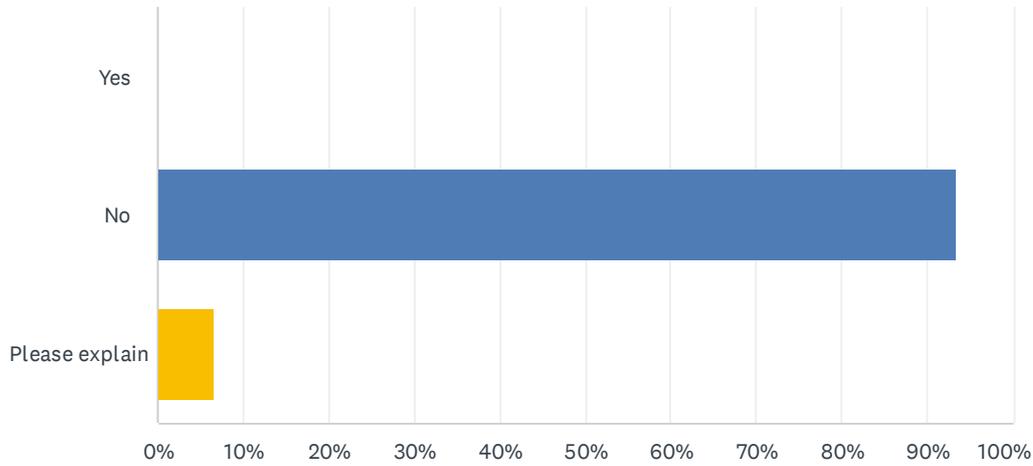


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	86.67% 13
No	6.67% 1
Please explain	6.67% 1
TOTAL	15

#	PLEASE EXPLAIN	DATE
1	Councillors do not represent the community in Berkshire	11/22/2023 5:23 PM

Q3 Have you got any other comments you would like to make on the RBFA Code of Conduct?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 4



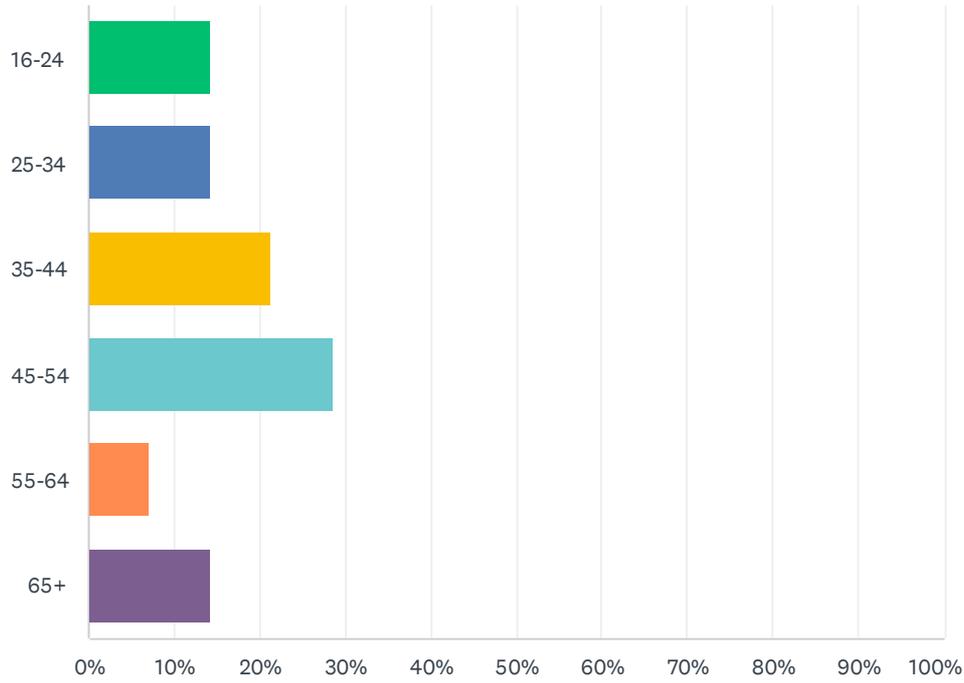
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	0.00% 0
No	93.33% 14
Please explain	6.67% 1
TOTAL	15

#	PLEASE EXPLAIN	DATE
1	I just hope they better themselves and help the fire service safe money I feel that all expenses the service pays on them should be communicated as this is part of the budget that could improve the service	11/22/2023 5:26 PM

Appendix A

Q4 What age group do you belong to?

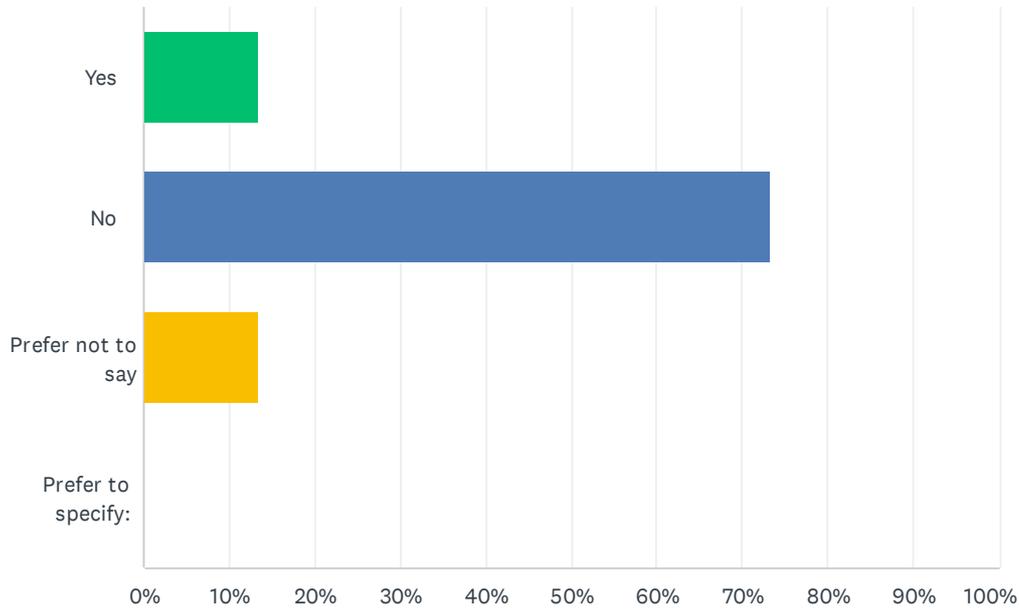
Answered: 14 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
16-24	14.29% 2
25-34	14.29% 2
35-44	21.43% 3
45-54	28.57% 4
55-64	7.14% 1
65+	14.29% 2
TOTAL	14

Q5 Would you consider yourself to have a disability or long-term health condition?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 4

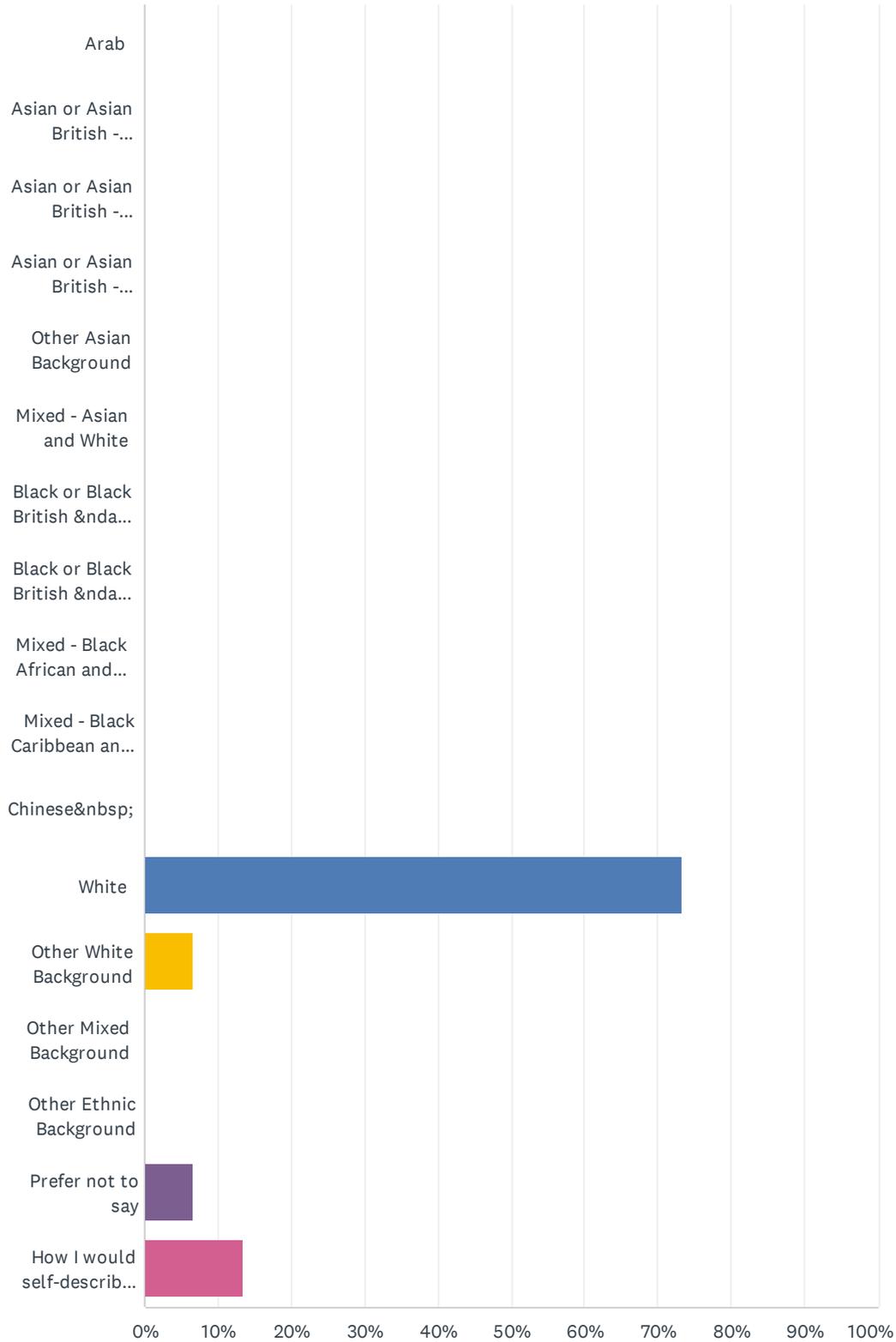


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes	13.33% 2
No	73.33% 11
Prefer not to say	13.33% 2
Prefer to specify:	0.00% 0
TOTAL	15

#	PREFER TO SPECIFY:	DATE
	There are no responses.	

Appendix A
Q6 How would you describe your ethnic origin?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 4

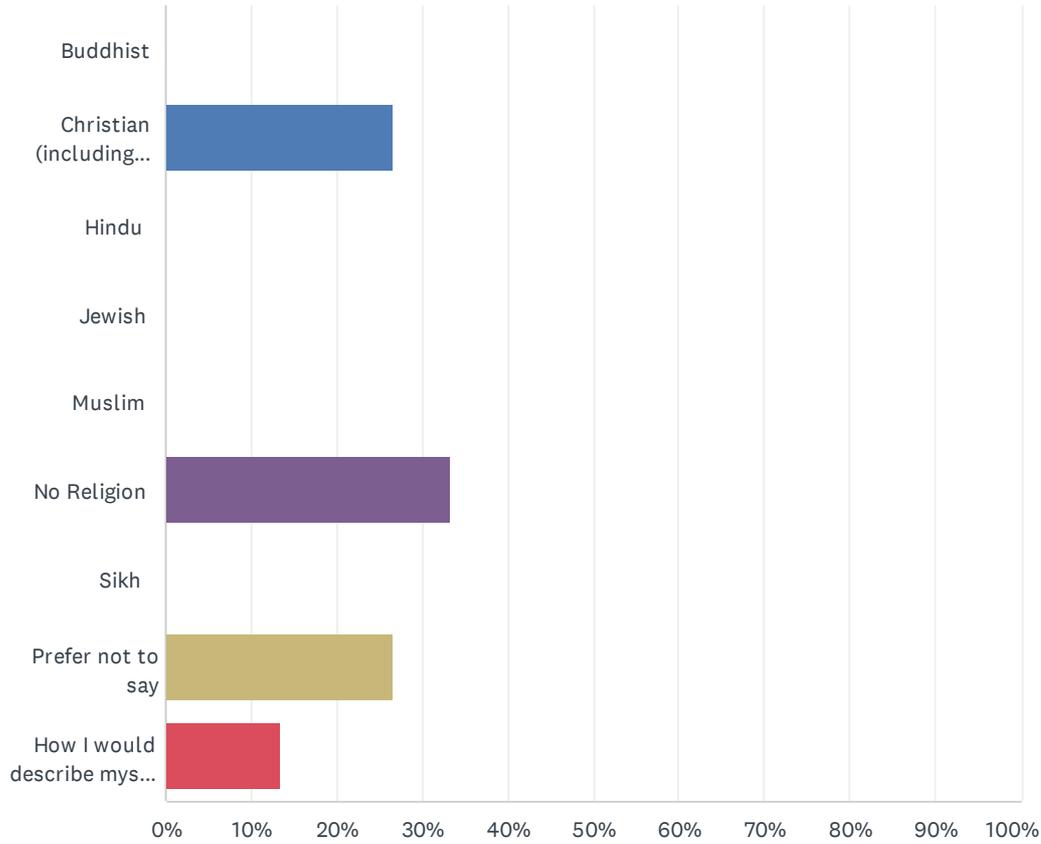


ANSWER CHOICES	Appendix A ANSSES	
Arab	0.00%	0
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	0.00%	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	0.00%	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0.00%	0
Other Asian Background	0.00%	0
Mixed - Asian and White	0.00%	0
Black or Black British – African	0.00%	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0.00%	0
Mixed - Black African and White	0.00%	0
Mixed - Black Caribbean and White	0.00%	0
Chinese	0.00%	0
White	73.33%	11
Other White Background	6.67%	1
Other Mixed Background	0.00%	0
Other Ethnic Background	0.00%	0
Prefer not to say	6.67%	1
How I would self-describe is not listed here	13.33%	2
TOTAL		15

Appendix A

Q7 What is your religion?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 4

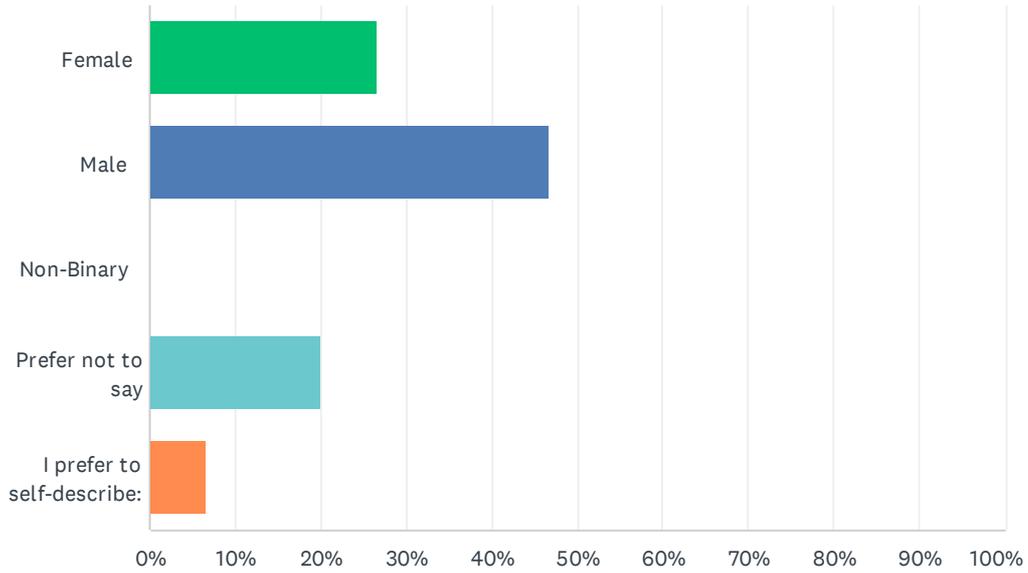


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Buddhist	0.00%	0
Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)	26.67%	4
Hindu	0.00%	0
Jewish	0.00%	0
Muslim	0.00%	0
No Religion	33.33%	5
Sikh	0.00%	0
Prefer not to say	26.67%	4
How I would describe myself is not listed here	13.33%	2
TOTAL		15

Appendix A

Q8 What best describes your gender?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 4



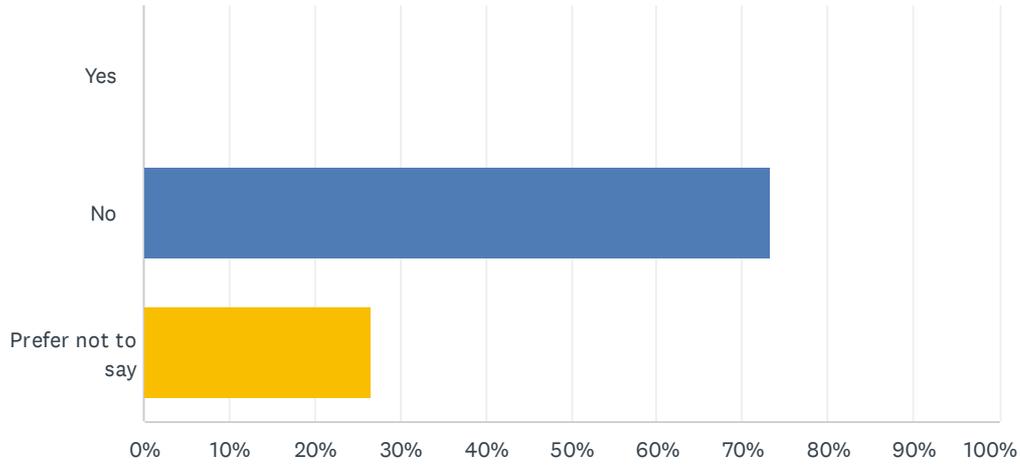
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Female	26.67% 4
Male	46.67% 7
Non-Binary	0.00% 0
Prefer not to say	20.00% 3
I prefer to self-describe:	6.67% 1
TOTAL	15

#	I PREFER TO SELF-DESCRIBE:	DATE
1	mmm	11/22/2023 8:27 PM

Appendix A

Q9 Do you consider yourself to be trans?

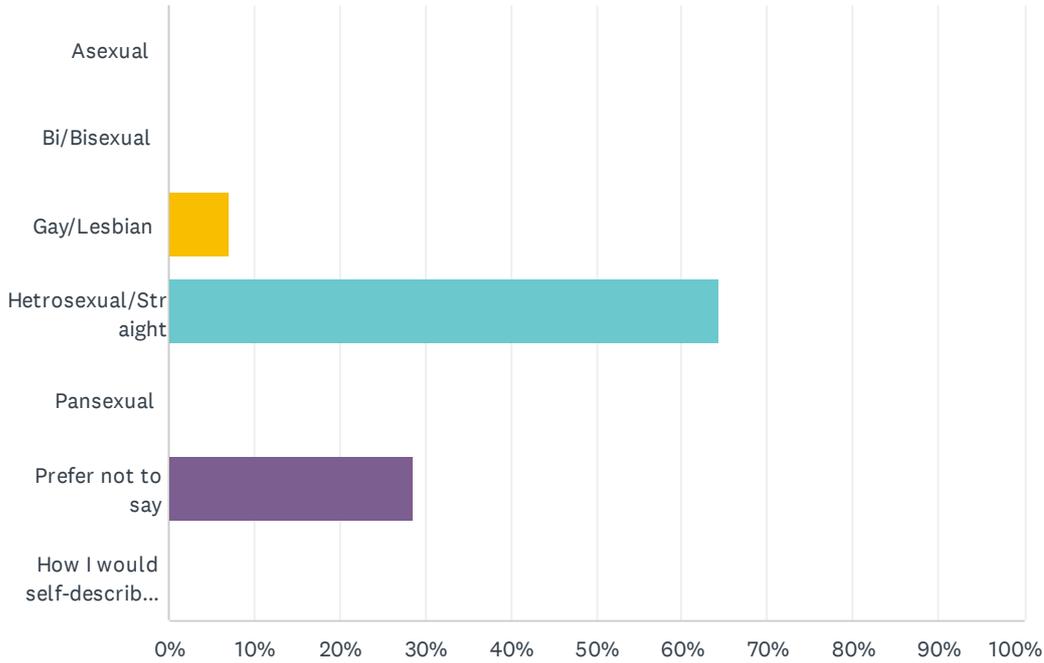
Answered: 15 Skipped: 4



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	0.00%	0
No	73.33%	11
Prefer not to say	26.67%	4
TOTAL		15

Q10 What best describes your sexual orientation?

Answered: 14 Skipped: 5



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Asexual	0.00% 0
Bi/Bisexual	0.00% 0
Gay/Lesbian	7.14% 1
Hetrosexual/Straight	64.29% 9
Pansexual	0.00% 0
Prefer not to say	28.57% 4
How I would self-describe is not listed here	0.00% 0
TOTAL	14

#	HOW I WOULD SELF-DESCRIBE IS NOT LISTED HERE	DATE
	There are no responses.	

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ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



COMMITTEE	AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	24 JANUARY 2024
SUBJECT	QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023-24 QUARTER 2 (JULY – SEPTEMBER 2023)
LEAD OFFICER	PAUL BREMBLE, HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES
LEAD MEMBER	N/A
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	TO NOTE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide Audit & Governance Committee with an overview of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) second quarter (July - September 2023) performance for the 2023-24 financial year.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Audit & Governance Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTE** the performance against Service Provision and Corporate Health measures for the targets agreed by the Fire Authority for 2023-24.
- 2.2 **NOTE** the progress made on the priority programmes.
- 2.3 **NOTE** the position of corporate risk.
- 2.4 **DISCUSS** and **AGREE** any further actions, if appropriate.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 The quarterly performance report supports the Performance Management Framework which provides structure and governance that will enable RBFRS to measure, monitor and manage outputs and outcomes in a timely manner, allowing the organisation to respond and make informed decisions to ensure that statutory obligations and the Fire Authority's Strategic Commitments are successfully delivered.
- 3.2 Following data capture, review and analysis, evidence is reviewed by the Strategic Performance Board (SPB) whose purpose is to lead, support and

Agenda Item 10

monitor the effective delivery of the Strategic Objectives by monitoring and reviewing performance across the four Quadrants.

- 3.3 Informed by these processes, key data and highlights have been extracted and reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and are presented in this report for scrutiny at the Audit and Governance committee.
- 3.4 The attached report provides an overview of performance for the second quarter (July - September 2023) performance for the 2023-24 financial year. It reports performance in four key areas:
- 3.5 Quadrant one - Service Provision - This section presents data and information which will allow members to monitor how RBFRS are doing at delivering its statutory obligations and any internal services provided between teams, departments and functions.
- 3.6 Quadrant two - Corporate Health - This section brings together all data, information and measures from across the organisation, which will allow members to monitor how RBFRS are managing key resources, e.g. People and Finance.
- 3.7 Quadrant three - Priority Programmes (CRMP, RBFRS Development Programme and the Strategic Asset Investment Framework) - This section will allow members to monitor progress of work designed to deliver a defined outcome which is different to or improves on current working practices, policies and procedures in support of delivering against the strategic commitments and Corporate Plan 2023-27.
- 3.8 Quadrant four - Assurance - This section groups provides an assessment of corporate risks that may impact on service delivery. This section will also include data and information from audit monitoring and an update on the HMICFRS Action Plan.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 **Prevention:** We will reduce the risk to our communities through our partnership duties and prevention education activities, ensuring that our services are accessible to all.
- 4.2 **Protection:** We will support those with responsibility for premises to understand their duties in ensuring the safety of all people using buildings covered by the Building Safety Act 2022 and Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, whilst ensuring that our services are accessible to all.
- 4.3 **Response:** We will ensure that our people are trained and resources are located to provide the most effective response and to have a positive impact on incidents in our communities.
- 4.4 **Resilience:** We will ensure our resilience and work with our partners to promote and build resilience in the communities we serve.
- 4.5 **Sustainability:** We will ensure that we provide a financially sustainable and environmentally friendly service to our communities.

- 4.6 **People:** We will support our staff by providing a safe and inclusive environment for them to thrive in, building a diverse organisation that is engaged with, and accessible to, our communities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This report provides RBFA financial information under the corporate health quadrant.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 This report provides RBFRS equality and diversity information under the corporate health quadrant.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 This report provides RBFRS corporate risk information under the assurance quadrant.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 9.1 This report provides information on RBFRS performance measures and targets, as such there are no identified areas for collaboration.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 10.1 The Chief Fire Officer was consulted during preparation of this report.
10.2 The Head of Finance and Procurement was consulted on the content of this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Annual Plan 2023-24

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Included with main report.

13. CONTACT DETAILS

- 13.2 Paul Bremble
Head of Corporate Services, 07786 145153
13.3 Becca Chapman
Data, Performance and Risk Manager, 07585 991629

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ITEM	DECISION BODY	NEXT REPORTING DATE	REPORTING FREQUENCY	RECOMMENDED ACTION	LEAD OFFICER	LEAD MEMBER	PART I / II
Draft Annual Budget 24/25	Management Committee	6.02.24	Annual	Note and recommend	HF&P	N/A	Part I
Training Centre Redevelopment	Management Committee	6.02.24	Ad-hoc	agree	DCFO	N/A	Part I
AFA consultation proposal	Management Committee	6.02.24	Ad-hoc	Note and Recommend	AM C&P	N/A	Part I
Budget Monitoring Q3	Management Committee	6.02.24	Annual	Note	HF&P	Budget and Income Generation Lead	Part I
Appliance Availability Q3	Management Committee	6.02.24	Quarterly	Note	AM (R&R)	N/A	Part I
Annual Budget 24/25, Medium Term Financial Plan & Strategic Asset Investment Framework and TVFCS Budget	Fire Authority	15.02.24	Annual	Agree	HF&P	Budget and Income Generation/ Collaboration and Strategic Assets Lead	Part I
Code of Conduct Consultation	Fire Authority	15.02.24	Annual	Note	MO	N/A	Part I
AFA consultation proposal	Fire Authority	15.02.24	Ad-hoc	Agree	AM C&P	N/A	Part I
RBFRS Development Programme	Fire Authority	15.02.24	Ad-hoc	Note and Recommend	DChEx	N/A	Part I
Pay Policy Statement	Fire Authority	15.02.24	Annual	Agree	HHR&L&D	N/A	Part I
Internal Audit Report	A&GC	28.3.24	quarterly	Note	HF&P	N/A	Part I
External Audit Report	A&GC	28.3.24	quarterly	Note	HF&P	N/A	Part I
Annual Report on Members Development	A&GC	28.3.24	Annual	Note and Recommend	HCS	Member Development Champion	Part I
Annual report on Governance / Members attendance and allowances / Code of Conduct annual consultation results	A&GC	28.3.24	Annual	Note and Recommend	HCS	A&GC Chairman	Part I
Quarter 3 Performance Report	A&GC	28.3.24	Quarterly	Note	Data, Performance and Risk Manager	N/A	Part I
CRMP P4 Statutory Duties report	Management Committee	9.04.24	Ad-hoc	agree	HCS	N/A	Part I
Corporate Calendar 2024/25	Fire Authority	22.04.24	Annual	Agree	HCS	N/A	Part I
Lead Member and Champion Annual Reports	Fire Authority	22.04.24	Annual	Note	Lead Officers	Lead Members	Part I
Annual Plan	Fire Authority	22.04.24	Annual	Agree	HCS	N/A	Part I
Integrated Service Delivery Strategy	Fire Authority	22.04.24	Ad-hoc	Agree	ACFO	N/A	Part I

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