

ROYAL BERKSHIRE
FIRE AUTHORITY

Annual Report

2009/10

The Annual Report of
Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
2009/10

MAKING BERKSHIRE SAFER

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Introduction

Welcome to the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Annual Report for 2009-10. It includes information on our activities and our work in Berkshire's communities. It explains how the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service is managed and run and how you can help us to provide an even better service in the future.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service is your Fire and Rescue Service. We hope you enjoy reading this report. If you have any questions or would like to let us know what you think, you can contact us using the details in the "How to Contact Us" section.



Firefighter putting out a car fire

Who We Are?

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service is run by Royal Berkshire Fire Authority. This is a Combined Fire Authority which is composed of representatives (elected councillors) from each of the six Unitary Authorities in Berkshire. The current Chairman of the Fire Authority is Dr Paul Bryant, from West Berkshire Council.

About Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service is responsible for providing 24-hour emergency cover for an area of 125,914 hectares, bordered by Langley and Slough in the east and Lambourn and Newbury in the west.

It has 19 fire stations and employs 736 staff (uniformed and professional support staff) serving a population in excess of 825,000 people. Last year we attended 4,862 operational incidents.

Berkshire includes one of Europe's busiest motorways, the M4, and includes heavily-populated urban centres with varied communities, such as Reading and Slough, busy commercial and industrial centres, together with large rural areas and hundreds of miles of waterways.

The Chief Fire Officer, Iain Cox QFSM, has the responsibility for ensuring that the service you receive achieves community, central and local government expectations. He has devoted his entire career to Berkshire. After graduating from Reading University, he joined us in 1979 as a trainee firefighter, rising through the ranks to become Chief in 2003. He leads the top management team that advises Members of the Fire Authority.



Water Rescue Unit at a training exercise

Our Strategic Commitments

Introduction

People and places are important – our job is to ensure that everyone who lives, works in, travels through, or visits Berkshire, does so as safely as possible. We aim to do this to the highest standards and our vision is captured in these strategic commitments:

- Minimise loss of life, injury and damage from fire, road traffic collisions and other hazards.
- Improve public safety and business safety and reduce risk through targeted education and enforcement of fire safety legislation .
- Demonstrate continuous improvement and efficiencies, ensuring consultation and partnership working.
- Be an employer of choice, offering equality of opportunity and development to all.
- Provide resilient emergency response, through risk management and planning.
- Conduct our activities in an environmentally sustainable way.

Minimise loss of life, injury and damage from fire, road traffic collisions and other hazards

Between April 2009 and March 2010, we attended 4,862 incidents. These included:

- Fires
- Road traffic collisions
- Plane crashes
- Water rescues
- Incidents involving chemicals or hazardous materials
- Animal rescues

Last year we saw a reduction in the number of false alarms by 32%. This was achieved by working closely with businesses, alarm receiving centres and key staff to ensure that the fire and rescue service were only called when there was a genuine need. Following a concerted campaign, the number of property and vehicle arson incidents has been reduced to 417, a reduction of 12.8% on the previous year. This is a significant reduction in the number of incidents from 1205 recorded in 2001.

Our firefighters are equipped with the full range of firefighting equipment and fire appliances for dealing with emergency incidents. They train regularly for a wide range of incident types and scenarios, to ensure that they are ready to respond to every emergency. Whilst calls to property fires are falling, down by 6.7%, our firefighters save many lives at road traffic collisions, by rescuing casualties from their vehicles and ensuring they get to hospital for vital medical care. Our firefighters also deal with incidents ranging from office workers trapped in a lift, or a toddler's head stuck in a fence, motorway collisions, grass fires involving hundreds of hectares of land, explosions and collapsing buildings.

Improve public safety and business safety and reduce risk through targeted education and enforcement of fire safety legislation

Thankfully, deaths in house fires are now rare but even one such death is too many. The 7 people who died in dwelling fires in 2008/09 appears to be an anomaly, the 2 fire deaths recorded last year is more representative of the average. We have of course an aspiration to have no fire deaths. A great deal of time and effort is devoted to trying to prevent fires and other incidents happening. We do this through targeted education – by explaining to people, at home, at school or college and in the workplace, how fires and other accidents can happen and what they can do to minimise the risk. Last year we delivered 7167 Home Fire Safety Checks to individual homes, of these 60% were within our most “at risk” groups.

Our firefighters and specialist community safety teams carry out home fire safety checks for vulnerable people, fitting free smoke detectors and advising on how residents can keep safe from fire. With interventions such as these we have seen a decrease in the number of fire casualties from 67 in 2008/09 to 29 in 2009/10 - a 57% reduction.

Statistics indicate that people between the ages of 17 and 24 are more likely to become involved in road traffic collisions. To reduce this risk, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service works with partners including the Police, Highways Agency, Ambulance Service, schools and local authorities on a number of road safety initiatives. By working in partnership we combine specialist knowledge, resources and data, which enables a cost effective, targeted approach.

Road safety initiatives include:

- Safe Drive Stay Alive – a Thames Valley partnership comprising of emergency services and road safety organisations. The scheme aims to highlight the dangers of driving with excessive speed, not wearing seatbelts and peer group pressure that can lead to accidents. Schools, colleges and other education establishments, both state and private, are invited to a local theatre to see the show, which runs over a two week period. During the DVD presentation the characters ‘come alive’ from the screen to tell their story.
- Motorwise – the project is run by the Berkshire Association of Clubs for Young People and supported by the Service, Thames Valley Police, Connexions Berkshire and local driving instructors. The Service delivers a module based on ‘first emergency service on the scene’ and the ‘golden hour’ (the critical time to rescue casualties from vehicles and get them to hospital). It is aimed at young people generally less than 17 years old and is held in venues across the six unitary authorities.

In addition, operational crews and Prevention department staff support local road safety officers at road safety awareness events.

As the enforcing Authority of fire safety legislation for commercial property in Berkshire, we also have the option to prosecute those who fail to meet these standards. We carried out 1462 inspections and our enforcement activities in 2009/10 included 5 prosecutions for serious offences under the Fire Safety Order, 3 of which have been successfully completed. We work closely with businesses to ensure that they are meeting legal standards for ensuring the safety of their staff and customers.

The Service actively encourages the fitting of sprinklers in high risk buildings, especially in schools, due to the significant costs, loss and disruption associated with fires in school buildings in the community. Increasingly, 'domestic' type sprinklers are becoming available to protect the vulnerable in their homes. Whilst sprinklers are only mandatory in a small range of buildings, high rise flats, large uncomparted buildings etc. the Service is keen to promote the use of sprinklers and is happy to provide advice to those considering their use.

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority continues to press at local, regional and national level for sprinkler systems to be fitted in all properties. Through its consultation process within the Unitary Authority Building Control Departments, we have recommended sprinkler systems to be fitted within new build premises or retrospective fitting on upgrading of properties.

Demonstrate continuous improvement and efficiencies, ensuring consultation and partnership working

As a single fire and rescue service covering six different unitary authority areas, we work closely with unitary authority officers to ensure that the service continues to maintain its high standard of delivery. We are members of six Local Strategic Partnerships in Berkshire, which bring together public service organisations to design and deliver local services. In addition to joint working aimed at reducing fires and road traffic collisions, we are also involved in partnership work with young people and in reducing anti-social behaviour. As an example, malicious calls have been reduced from 253 in 2008/09 to 199 in 2009/10.

We work closely with other agencies, such as the police and ambulance services, the education sector, the Highways Agency, Environment Agency and many others. This helps to ensure that you, as a member of the public, receive a service that is efficient and of a high standard.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service has been recognised by the Audit Commission as having best practice in the following areas:

- Phoenix (a youth initiative targeted at young people at risk of entering the Youth Justice system). 7 programmes were run last year.
- Evolution (a longer term programme designed for those who have already entered the Criminal Justice System). 4 events were run last year.
- Hot Streets (a multi-agency home fire safety check programme, where each Fire Station targets a high risk area for blanket safety information coverage). 187 were delivered last year.
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). This programme provides an opportunity to embed the fire safety message to vulnerable communities as they learn a second language. Following the completion of a successful pilot in Slough. A full programme will commence in September 2010 covering unitary authorities within Berkshire.

In order to ensure proactive Fire Authority Member engagement within the Fire and Rescue Service a number of “Champions” have been appointed. The Member Champions assist with communication and positive action over the area they represent. The Fire Authority has Member Champions for; Member Development, Communications, the Environment, Equality and Diversity, Community and Partnerships.

We have been closely scrutinised by the Audit Commission and other inspection bodies, to ensure that we spend taxpayer’s money wisely and that service levels are of a high quality. All of our planning processes are required to meet strict financial standards and, where appropriate, we collaborate on projects with other fire and rescue services to pool expertise, avoid duplicated effort and to obtain optimum value for money.

In addition to the external scrutiny the Fire Authority has established an internal Audit and Performance Review Committee to scrutinise and review decisions made, or actions taken, in connection with the discharge of any Fire Authority function.



Firefighter Jon Murby fitting a breathing apparatus mask

Be an employer of choice, offering equality of opportunity and development to all

People are our most important resource. Like any organisation, we are only as good as the people who work for us. From the moment they join us, our staff have regular opportunities to grow and develop, both professionally and personally.

Their roles are often demanding and we have set up a number of employee support programmes, including occupational health and an employee welfare scheme. As the profile of society is changing, so are we. We are seeing people from a far wider variety of backgrounds than previously applying to join us and we are working to improve this still further. As part of our work to increase the diversity of our workforce, we were awarded the status of Stonewall Diversity Champion last year and also won an excellent report from Ofsted on the quality of our professional training for firefighters. New national targets focus our diversity efforts into ensuring we recruit more effectively from under represented groups. Last year, 7.5% of new recruits were women, and 12.8% were from ethnic minority groups. To support this initiative we are actively supporting events where under represented groups can be most effectively encouraged to consider the fire service as a career.

We have achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. To achieve Level 3, we had to demonstrate that robust equality objectives and targets had been set. We are now working towards achieving the final two levels of the Equality Standard. The Equality Standard is a tool to combat discrimination as part of the culture, administration and governance that can be found in many public sector organisations. Working with the Equality Standard enables us to focus on equality, to ensure that discriminatory barriers are identified and removed.

We are training managers at all levels in mentoring, coaching and management skills and encourage all of our staff to participate in training and development throughout their careers.

Provide resilient emergency response, through risk management and planning

Our aim is to ensure our communities are as safe as possible. We identify and plan for every level of risk against extensive contingency and scenario arrangements. We use sites across the county, and nationally to train. This helps us to ascertain exactly what level of resource is needed for every type of incident. We plan and train with other fire and rescue services, other emergency services, partner agencies, and the voluntary sector at local, regional and national level. Last year we ran 15 major training exercises. All of the information gained from operational incidents and training exercise is recorded in our extensive information system which helps us compile a detailed 'risk map' of every area in Berkshire.

As required by Government we produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) every year, which sets out the key risks in Berkshire and how we will respond to them. This includes the management of risk associated with the difficulties in recruiting and retaining part-time community firefighters (retained firefighters) or the development of additional residential and commercial areas in the county. We plan how we replace our fire engines, protective clothing and breathing apparatus for our firefighters and our special appliances.

We are also required to respond outside of Berkshire in cases of regional or national need – for example, during severe flooding or to support other fire and rescue services involved in major incidents. During the heavy snowfalls in December 2009 and January 2010 when ambulances were unable to attend incidents, our off-road vehicles were used to transport paramedics to urgent cases on over 270 occasions.



A road traffic collision demonstration at Newbury Races

Conduct our activities in an environmentally sustainable way

We provide an emergency service 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Our vehicle fleet includes operational fire appliances, response officers' and managers' vehicles. This adds up to a significant amount of energy expenditure or 'carbon footprint'.

We are working hard to minimise this and have set up a number of initiatives, including a carbon footprint reduction programme, operational environmental awareness (including equipment specification, dealing with spillages, managing environmental impact during incident procedures, specialised training and use of cold smoke simulations when training firefighters). However, the age and condition of our premises stock makes it difficult to make them carbon neutral.

We are also working hard to reduce energy consumption in the workplace and progress is monitored by senior managers.



Firefighters at a trench rescue incident

How can I get involved?

Community Engagement

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, through partnership working, is committed to involving the communities we serve in helping us shape our future. We actively engage with all groups to raise awareness of both our plans and community safety activities. By involving all sections of the local community we are able to develop a greater understanding of local needs and promote our messages in an appropriate manner. We participate in events throughout Berkshire through our Community Liaison Officer, Communities Engagement Group and fire station personnel.

Should you wish us to take part in your event please contact us as detailed on the contact page.

Consultation

We recognise the users of our services, especially in an emergency, have little choice in the service provider. To compensate for this lack of choice and in order to assist the decision-making process, we will consult with stakeholders on a number of matters.

Consultation takes the form as either written documents, which are circulated to key contacts in the community e.g. doctors surgeries, parish councils or as presentations to meetings e.g. community engagement groups, public meetings etc.

A number of consultations are also available on our web site www.rbfrs.co.uk and would welcome comments in response to the consultations when they are underway.

Volunteering

In addition to our permanent staff Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service has a growing volunteering programme in operation across Berkshire. Volunteers include:

- Community advocates
- Young firefighter instructors
- Hospital information stand volunteers
- British Sign Language volunteers

If you are interested in volunteering opportunities at Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, please visit our website www.rbfrs.co.uk



Hospital information stand volunteers

Our Financial Performance

Funding

The service is funded partly by Government grant. The remainder of the funding comes from the council tax. The Budget for 2010/11 has been set at £33.8 million (equivalent to a Band D council tax of £55.66). The budget for 2009/10 was £33.5 million. Actual spending was £32.9 million.

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
	£000	£000	£000
Revenue budget	32,444	33,493	33,802
Outturn	31,333	32,945	-

Investments 2009/10

Capital funding was spent and linked to strategic priorities during 2009/10 as follows:

	£000
Vehicles	496
Buildings	1,271
Information Systems	70
Equipment	36
Total	1,873

Performance

For further information on our performance data please consult our website www.rbfrs.co.uk or request a copy of the 2010/11 Corporate Plan, which is also available online.

How to Contact Us

Address

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Email

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Website

www.rbfrs.co.uk

Freedom of Information (FOI) requests

email: foi@rbfrs.co.uk or visit our website for further information.

Free Home Fire Safety Check

To book a home fire safety check for a vulnerable person (people who are elderly, disabled, don't speak English as their first language or are tenants in shared rented accommodation) call our freephone number 0800 587 6679.

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