

**ROYAL BERKSHIRE
FIRE AUTHORITY**

Annual Report

2010/11



The Annual Report of
Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
2010/11

MAKING BERKSHIRE SAFER

Contents

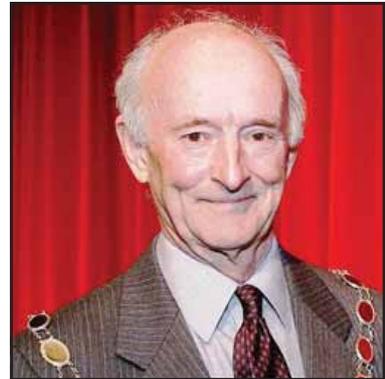
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Introduction

Councillor Dr Paul Bryant

Chairman of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

Thank you for taking the trouble to read our Annual Report. Our role as Fire Authority Members, drawn from each of the six local unitary authorities in Berkshire, is to ensure that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service delivers value for money without compromising standards of service. As the public sector continues to tackle huge challenges, there are times when difficult decisions have to be made. We are determined to uphold the high standards for which we are known and to maintain our frontline services. We have seen many changes this year and there will be more to come in the next 12 months but you can rest assured that the provision of a high quality fire and rescue service for Berkshire remains our priority.



Iain Cox QFSM

Chief Fire Officer

Welcome to our annual report for 2010-2011. It includes information on our activities throughout the year and details of our work in Berkshire's communities. It explains how 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 on page 18.



Executive Summary

The year has been defined by change. The change in Government and political direction saw a review of, and changes to, our funding allocation and budget levels, the cancellation of the long-delayed Regional Control Centre project, changes in national, regional and local fire and rescue service working practices and arrangements and legislative changes that affected the way the Authority employs and pays sections of its operational staff.

Work to refine the Fire Authority's strategic planning process is now complete. This has achieved tangible results through greater integration between strategy and service delivery, linked in to future financial planning, risk management and the performance and evaluation framework. This has enabled the Authority both to respond effectively to a shifting political agenda and continue its work in meeting its commitments to provide a high quality fire and rescue service for Berkshire.

A great deal of work has been done to look at how best the Authority can 'do more for less'. The Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) was unequivocal in its message that public services will have to 'do more for less'.



Firefighters on an operations exercise

Who We Are?

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service is run by Royal Berkshire Fire Authority. This is a Combined Fire Authority which means it is made up of 25 representatives (elected councillors) from each of the six Unitary Authorities in Berkshire. The Chairman is Councillor Dr Paul Bryant, of West Berkshire Council.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) is responsible for providing 24-hour cover for an area of 125,914 hectares, ranging from Langley fire station and Slough fire station in the east and Lambourn, Hungerford and Newbury fire stations in the west.

It has 18 fire stations and employs more than 700 staff, in both operational and support roles, who serve a population of around 800,000 people.

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 significant stretches of waterways.

Our Chief Fire Officer, Iain Cox QFSM, 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 corporate management team.

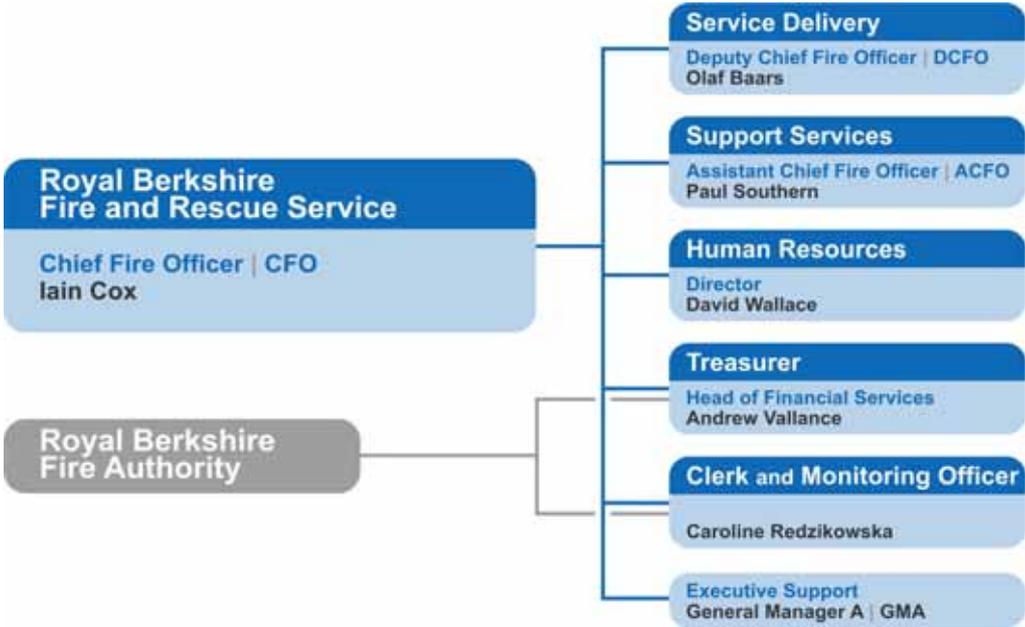


Diagram showing the top-level organisation chart for Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Our Strategic Commitments

People, their homes, their communities and their businesses and leisure activities 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 as set out in our 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

Review of the Year

The section below includes the year's key projects and activities from each of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service's four departmental directorates:

Strategic

Completion of Retained Duty System (RDS) Review

This project examined the problems surrounding recruitment and retention, availability and training of RDS (or part-time) firefighters. The review made a number of recommendations, including the establishment of a retained support unit (RSU). The RSU will provide a core team of experienced junior officers to support RDS availability at key periods and also ensure that effective training and recruitment activities are in place. The new unit will begin work later this year.

As part of the review, the closure of Cookham retained fire station was completed. The station had been closed temporarily for 18 months due to staffing shortages with remaining staff transferred to Maidenhead or to the wholetime duty system.

Completion of Officer Cover Review

This project looked at numbers and availability of operational officers. RBFRS Officers have worked the same rota system since 1985. A previous IRMP Officer Cover Review was completed in 2006 and this review builds upon that earlier work. In October 2010 project managers were briefed to undertake a further review of officer cover. Consultation has been completed and negotiation is under way with relevant staff and representative bodies.

Completion of a Review of Crewing for the Heavy Rescue Unit (HRU)

To tackle both financial constraints and to reduce road risk, RBFRS looked at mobilising its HRU to larger scale incidents only (those requiring enhanced rescue capability e.g. major road, rail and air incidents and structural collapses).

During a seven-month trial, RBFRS attended 75 road traffic collisions (persons trapped) and the HRU was used on two of these occasions. Such a significant reduction in the number of incidents at which the HRU is required means that permanent crewing will no longer be necessary. The vehicle will therefore be switch crewed, i.e. staffed by fire station personnel who crew the pump. This means that the 12 staff who currently crew the HRU will no longer be required, resulting in a saving of £428,000. It is intended to reduce the numbers of firefighters at the station through natural wastage rather than redundancy. This initiative is supported by the enhancement of rescue capabilities on all front line pumps.

All of the above projects involved consultation. Public consultation was carried out via the three-month IRMP consultation period. Internal consultation with staff and representative bodies, included face to face meetings and regular briefings, to ensure that the views of those affected by the changes were taken into account.

Service Delivery

Animal Rescue Unit

Large animal rescues can be hazardous to both fire crews and members of the public. To ensure that these are carried out as safely as possible, RBFRS has established a highly-trained animal rescue unit, centrally based at Caversham Road Fire Station in Reading. It is supported by officers who have also received specialist training from experts at Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service, the national leader in large animal rescue techniques.

Operational Exercises

This year, RBFRS carried out 68 operational exercises, including 17 occasions where partner agencies and fire appliances from other fire and rescue services participated. These exercises, some involving up to 10 pumps, featured a range of challenging scenarios including hazardous materials, working at height, road traffic collisions, water management and fires. This programme forms a vital part of ensuring that officers and crews are maintaining the highest standards of operational response.

Reduction of Unwanted Fire Signals (Automatic Fire Alarms)

With up to 95% of automatic fire alarms turning out to be false alarms, usually due to faulty detection systems, RBFRS fire crews were spending a great deal of their time responding to unwanted calls. Despite working with business owners and managers for many years, commercial false alarm calls remained at a high level. Basing its approach on the national protocol from the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) RBFRS has worked with businesses throughout the county and their alarm receiving centres, to deal with the problem. This included the introduction of a 'call challenge' policy. This asks a caller to confirm whether or not the alarm relates to a false signal or to a fire, enabling a response to be sent only when required. The policy has reduced attendance to false alarms significantly (2,038 in 2009/10 and 1,641 in 2010-11, a reduction of 397, or 19%) and work continues to drive these down even further.

Cancellation of the Regional Control Centre (RCC) Project

The cancellation of this long-delayed project in December 2010 means that RBFRS, together with other fire and rescue services, now has to develop alternative plans for mobilising and managing operational resources at incidents and related support functions. At the moment, the Fire Authority is considering a range of potential options, including the possibility of working with Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire on a Thames Valley basis and this work is ongoing. The three services collaborated on a scoping project looking at an area covering, as a minimum, the Thames Valley, but also exploring the potential for working with other fire and rescue service partners, South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) and Thames Valley Police (TVP). The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has been contacted with regard to possible funding options and a response is awaited. The options will take account of the need for a resilient service that the RCC project was expected to deliver.

Slough Census Project

RBFRS' Prevention team, together with operational staff at Slough and Langley, played a major role in supporting Slough Borough Council's (SBC) efforts to generate a high level of 2011 Census returns. This was to support a more accurate population figure for the town and thus central to future funding arrangements for the council and for the people of Slough. RBFRS provided two of its own vehicles for the census project. Members of the RBFRS Prevention team and operational crews joined staff and volunteers from Slough Borough Council to raise awareness of the importance of completing census forms amongst Slough's communities. Early indications are that census returns are significantly better than the 2001 census. RBFRS' reputation as a major community support organisation has been further enhanced, with participation in the project being deemed by SBC as 'mission critical'.

Fire Deaths

There were three fire deaths in private dwellings in Berkshire during 2010/11. Two were attributed to accidents in the home. The third followed an arson attack on a property. This led to a murder enquiry, resulting in the subsequent prosecution and imprisonment of the offender.

Fire Safety Enforcement

Fire Safety is very important to RBFRS. The primary role of our enforcement work is to protect the public from the risk of fire whilst carrying out our enforcement actions arising from fire safety inspections in an equitable, practical and consistent manner. We recognise that most businesses wish to comply with the law and therefore we take care to help them meet their legal obligations without unnecessary expense, whilst taking firm action. Where appropriate, this includes prosecution, although this is very much a last resort, against those who flout the law and act irresponsibly. In 2010-11, two commercial fire safety prosecutions were concluded, both of which resulted in significant fines for the responsible persons. Four further cases are set for 2011-12 and another three are still under investigation.



The result of an arson fire on a motorcycle

Support Services

Wokingham Fire Station

The construction of the first fire station to be built in Berkshire for more than 20 years was begun in November 2010. Wokingham Community Fire Station will become a wholetime (24-hour) station and will feature an area that community groups will be able to utilise. The building incorporates the latest environmental features, including roof-mounted photo voltaic and solar panels, use of 'rain water' and recycled materials. It is due to open in the autumn of 2011. The station will be equipped with automatic fire suppression (sprinklers). RBFRS believes that the installation of sprinklers in schools, care homes and similar buildings will reduce fire deaths and injuries as well as reducing the damage to buildings.

New Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

The project to obtain new firefighting clothing for RBFRS operational staff was a complex procurement exercise undertaken by the south-east region fire and rescue services. The new kit is being issued and individually fitted to each wearer on a rolling basis and includes the latest protective clothing and equipment technology. Extensive wearer trials, involving RBFRS and six other fire and rescue services, were carried out as part of the project to ensure that the new kit will meet the toughest of challenges.

Environmental Achievements

RBFRS continues its successful work in monitoring and reducing its carbon footprint. In addition, work on the regulatory aspects of the environmental management system has been completed. A survey of drainage on all RBFRS premises is being undertaken, together with a review of the environmental impact of our activities, including training, water usage and firefighting media. RBFRS is also carrying out a Green Fleet Review, looking at all aspects of vehicle usage within RBFRS and will report its findings in 2011-12.

i. Introduction of New waste Arrangements within RBFRS

A new, three-year, waste management contract has been let to local company Grondon. This covers the collection of general waste and, for the first time, introduces recycling at all sites and buildings within RBFRS. This initiative removes plastic bottles, tins, cardboard and paper from our waste. Previously, we were unable to separate our waste and therefore paid a premium for waste collections. As none of the recycled waste material goes to landfill, RBFRS no longer has to pay landfill charges.

ii. Energy Consumption

RBFRS uses an external organisation to monitor and report on energy and water use for RBFRS. The use of smart meters generates easy to read reports and analysis of our energy consumption. These figures are compared over a rolling 24 month period, and show costs and changes in amounts used (and for energy, CO2 output). The reports

compare usage per square metre, or number of staff employed, and are useful for direct comparison with similar sites and premises. Station Commanders use the smart meter information to take instant action to address any increases in energy consumption.

iii. Public Safety: Sprinklers in New Housing Development - a first for Berkshire
Sprinklers are to be installed in a development of new houses in Thatcham following RBFRS concerns over access to adequate water supplies for firefighting. The development, at Rainsford Farm, will incorporate a hard standing to the Kennett and Avon Canal to enable fire appliances to draw water from the canal, together with the installation of a sprinkler system to each property.

Procurement

i. New Print Strategy

A review of print requirements resulted in the development of a new approach, using multi-functional devices (MFDs). These will provide a 'one stop shop' for all in-house printing requirements and will provide improved speed, performance, data security and accountability. Using PIN-activated technology, they will print, scan, fax and photocopy and are intended to replace existing individual desktop printers. Work on the new contract has been completed and the MFDs are due to be installed in the summer of 2011.



Firefighters wearing breathing apparatus in our Training Centre's fire house

Human Resources

A Busy Year

This has been a busy year for the team. Achievements included attendance at Reading and Brighton Pride plus numerous career and community awareness events. Level three of the Equality Standard was achieved and RBFRS continues its work in widening access to people of all backgrounds.

An Independent Advisory Group was established. This consists of members of the public, selected on a random basis, to act as an unbiased forum for consultation on a wide variety of issues. Consultation within RBFRS is carried out via representative bodies, groups and individuals, dependent upon the issue involved. All consultation activity, together with reports and papers to the Fire Authority, is required to meet principles of partnership working and is closely monitored by Authority Members.

Fitness and Health

This remains a key part of the department's activity. Operational staff are required to maintain sufficient levels of fitness to enable them to carry out their roles but much work has also been done to encourage non-operational staff to keep themselves active and healthy. Initiatives such as the Cycle to Work Scheme, the annual Health Fair, regular Instructing Exercise and Fitness programmes and a Health and Wellbeing Framework which is due in the summer of 2011, are supported by monitoring and the provision of individual support and encouragement.

Employee Survey and Departmental Restructure

HR staff also conducted an employee survey and assisted management colleagues in the completion of departmental restructures. The team also completed an equal pay review, designed and introduced a career grade scheme for fire safety inspecting officers and recruited 16 retained duty system firefighters

Health and Safety

A programme is also in place for a series of health and safety campaigns which include; fire safety, drugs and alcohol, hydration, breathing apparatus, stress and road risk. Particular successes for the health and safety team include the work which has recently been completed on heat effects, rehydration and monitoring of crews.

The Risk Assessment system has been reviewed and the outcomes include simplified methodology and a reduction in the number of assessments and paperwork. Breathing apparatus failures have been a particular focus of attention and the service have now seen a decrease in these failures. The Health and Safety Team have delivered two internal Managing Safely courses which are accredited by the Institute of Occupational Safety and Health and some specific courses in Manual Handling and Risk Assessment. All stations have also received a health and safety audit.



Firefighters performing a rescue at a building site

Learning and Development

During 2010 -11 much work has been done by the Learning and Development team in order to manage the quality of the learning delivered by the department and to assist RBFRS workforce development. In particular:

- The drive for a better qualified more competent workforce
- To support RBFRS managers in determining individual roles within services
- To assist RBFRS review of its organisational structures and the simplifying of progression routes for staff
- To allow individuals to develop rewarding careers

Underpinned by a comprehensive annual Learning and Development plan, and building on previous OFSTED 'outstanding' and Matrix Standard awards, this year has seen the development of several notable pieces of work.

An Integrated Qualifications Framework is being developed in response to Fire Sector Skills Council (Skills for Justice) qualifications in Breathing Apparatus, Incident Command, Water Rescue and core skills. If we think of our courses as becoming 'qualifications' then we can adopt a methodology of using them as building blocks for the achievement and maintenance of competence in all roles within the service.

Against a backdrop of several high profile National incidents, the Learning and Development department has introduced a structured programme of training for all Officers that include opportunities for simulation, exercises, assessment and self study across a broad range of subjects. To ensure consistency and standardisation, the department has also made a significant contribution to the 'recording of training' element through the RBFRS Firewatch platform.

Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) accredited Incident Command courses continue to be delivered from the Incident Command training suite at Whitley Wood. A recent review of the programmes and the introduction of a number of e-learning packages have resulted in development of facilities and course content to more accurately reflect the incident ground, and to support operational and tactical command decision making for both development and competent Incident Commanders. South East FRS work streams for both Coaching Skills and e-learning are coordinated and led by Learning and Development Officers.

Performance

Notable Statistics for 2010-11

The following details highlight some of the more notable statistics for Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service during **2010-11**:

- We attended **2,622** fires
- We carried out **270** rescues

- We carried out **57** animal rescues
- We attended **409** road traffic collisions

- We attended **197** malicious false alarms
- We attended **989** deliberate fires and **425** accidental house fires

- We carried out **6,699** home fire safety checks
- We attended **1,634** automatic fire alarms (non-domestic premises)

- *Our attendance at dwelling fires and road traffic collisions against the Fire Authority standard:*
 - First pump in 8 minutes and second in 10 minutes ~ **62.6%**
 - First pump in 10 minutes and second in 12 minutes ~ **77.2%**
 - Attendance at road traffic collisions (involving life risk) in 11 minutes ~ **84.4%**

Financial Performance

The Fire Authority's 2010/11 revenue budget was £33.802 million. The actual out-turn was £32.910 million, resulting in a corporate underspend of £892,000 which has been transferred to reserves.

Capital expenditure was £1.367 million against a budget of £2.819 million. The main reason for the variance was the late commencement of the building works for the new Wokingham Fire Station, which is now scheduled for completion in August 2011.

The Fire Authority's outstanding debt has remained at £8.842 million during 2010/11 as the 2010/11 capital programme was fully financed through revenue resources and capital grants.

For more detailed information about these and other performance data, take a look at our Corporate Plan on our website www.rbfrs.co.uk/stats.asp

Have Your Say

Have Your Say - Help Us Plan

Most of the people and organisations that use our services, particularly in emergencies, have little choice in who provides these services. Consultation and contact with our communities helps us to ensure that our service meets the needs of a wide range of users.

We use both formal and informal routes for consultation to assist in our planning process. A formal approach is used for statutory consultations such as those for budget or and risk management planning. For more informal issues, open days, road shows and public events are valuable sources of feedback from people in the community. Our day-to-day links with our partners in the police and ambulance services and with other response agencies, plus Berkshire's local authorities, mean that we share information on a regular basis to help us to work more efficiently together.

The formal consultations undertaken by Royal Berkshire Fire Authority are listed below.

Annually

- IRMP action plans
- Partnership and organisational planning
- Precept and budget consultation

Every two years

- Workforce Opinion Survey

Every three years

- National Public Opinion Survey
- Strategic Integrated Risk Management Plans (as appropriate)

How Can I Get Involved?

- Community engagement – look for details of our community activities on the website
- Group visits
- Community events – look out for us at community events throughout the year
- Schools and Colleges
- Councillors – look up your local Fire Authority Member and give them your views
- Surveys – help us by taking part in surveys
- Consultation – using community representatives and formal consultation groups
- IRMP – look at our progress on the website and let us know what you think
- Budget – all details are on the website
- Fire Authority – why not come to a meeting and see what goes on?
- Volunteering - help us to help you - be a Community representative or help with translation

How to Contact Us

Address

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Email

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Website

www.rbfrs.co.uk

Home Fire Safety Checks

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 or visit www.rbfrs.co.uk

Volunteering

For more information on volunteering opportunities, email our Volunteer Coordinator: taylorm@rbfrs.co.uk

Consultations, Events, News and all other Activities

For details, please visit our website at www.rbfrs.co.uk

Freedom of Information Requests

Information and details of our publication scheme are also available on our website at www.rbfrs.co.uk. Email: foi@rbfrs.co.uk

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