



Strategic Asset Investment Framework

10 Year Strategy

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Foreword

Councillor Dave McElroy, Lead Member for Strategic Assets and Sustainability



It is my pleasure to introduce the latest refresh of our Strategic Asset Investment Framework document.

This framework sets out how we intend to invest in our key capital assets of Estates, Fleet and Information Communication Technology (ICT) over the next decade. As we identify the evolving risks within Royal Berkshire, and seek to continually improve our services to the public, it is essential that we maintain appropriate investment in these key resources.

In light of the broader economic situation and the changing needs of our communities and staff, it remains imperative that we continue to seek ever greater value from the public purse. To help achieve this we have included features such as extending the life of many of our buildings and fleet, introducing 'green' technologies where we can reduce energy costs and our carbon footprint, improving the equality of our facilities to support, attract and retain a more diverse team and better enable our staff to manage the contaminants they may encounter during emergency incidents.

We have made a clear financial provision for the first half of this plan that will enable an accelerated approach to achieve some of our ambitions. For example, we will introduce thematic equality, sustainability and contaminants management improvements across our whole estate so that the benefits can be realised sooner. We will do this while continuing to target more significant improvements where they are needed such as a new Training School that will enable us to continue to ensure our staff are well trained and able to deliver services to the public safely and effectively.

We are now benefiting from our updated fire engine fleet following the Fire Authority's foresight to focus investment in this area, having introduced 19 new appliances over the past five years. This was achieved via an efficient collaborative approach with Thames Valley neighbours. Our plan now sees us protecting this investment through maintaining a replacement plan aligned to the National Fire Chief's Council recommended time periods. This approach creates capacity to adapt our specialist and support fleet to changing demands and benefit from advancements in technology, such as electrification and improved capability to tackle incidents such as wildfires.



Finally, our investment in ICT technology directly supports the principles set out in the ICT Strategy, of Simplification, Automation and Optimisation. We recognise that we must continue to adapt our systems to benefit from the advances in the ICT market and our organisational need.

I would like to thank colleagues across the Service for their enormous efforts in delivering the many successes to date and I look forward to seeing this ambitious plan providing meaningful improvements to both our communities and staff.



Introduction

The Fire Authority's key responsibility is to make sure it provides an effective fire and rescue service for the communities across Berkshire.

The Authority's purpose is to create safer more resilient communities by preventing incidents, protecting homes and businesses and responding to emergencies.

The Authority has a set of commitments that we regularly review. They explain how we intend to achieve our purpose:

1. Prevention - We will reduce the risk to our communities through our partnership duties and prevention activities, ensuring that our services are accessible to all.
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.
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. Resilience - We will ensure our resilience and work with our partners to promote and build resilience in the communities we serve.
5. Sustainability - We will ensure that we provide a financially sustainable and environmentally friendly service to our communities.
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.



To ensure that we have the right resources, in the right place, at the right time to deliver on these key themes, we need to maintain a significant asset base. This document sets out the Authority's 10-year strategy for the replacement and improvement of these assets.

In simple terms, the strategic assets of RBFRS can be broken down into three broad categories:

- Our buildings, which includes 16 fire stations and our headquarters site which includes Thames Valley Fire Control Service;
- Our fire appliances, equipment and support fleet; and
- Our ICT infrastructure and systems.

By working in collaboration with relevant partners – particularly those from the blue light services – RBFRS can deliver greater monetary and non-monetary benefits for the communities we serve. Therefore, at the core of this framework is the concept of collaboration.

RBFRS is rightly proud of the success to date in this area. This programme provides more opportunities to collaborate further and deliver greater efficiency and effectiveness for the future of the Service.



Our Buildings

The annual refresh and development of the SAIF provides the Fire Authority with a clear view of the long-term financial pressures on meeting planned property improvements, replacement and refurbishment programmes that are urgently needed to ensure the built estate continues to meet its workforce delivery requirements now and into the future.

The previous phase of the Strategic Asset Investment Programme started in 2017 with the transformation of Hungerford Fire Station into the Service's first community tri-service station. This now provides shared facilities for Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Thames Valley Police and South Central Ambulance Service. This phase also incorporated the rebuilding of Crowthorne Community Fire Station in 2020 and the completion of the newly built Theale Community Fire Station in 2022.

The next major project will be the redevelopment of the training centre facilities at the Whitley Wood site and this is scheduled to be completed over the next two years. Early feasibility work on the project suggests that the cost of the re-provision of facilities is estimated to be circa £3.65 million. This figure is currently only a financial provision that is being used for planning purposes and, in line with established practice, the project will be developed into a full business case for detailed consideration and approval by Fire Authority Members later in 2023.

In addition to the training centre project, refurbishment works at Slough are scheduled to continue and be completed in 2023/24. These works are a good example of broader estate improvements, which are based on four core objectives:

- Improving equality, diversity and inclusion – creating facilities that support, encourage and promote a more diverse workforce now and into the future;
- Improving contamination control – addressing the growing risk of contaminants by providing better facilities for decontamination and contamination control;
- Sustainability – making the estate more environmentally friendly by carrying out upgrades and initiatives to reduce our carbon output and realise potential revenue savings by doing so; and
- Improving the building fabric – investing in the fabric of the buildings to ensure longevity of our current estate and to provide fit-for-purpose workplaces for our staff.



Case Study – Theale Community Fire Station

One of the high-profile projects within the previous phase of the SAIF was the successful delivery of the new tri-service community station at Theale. This station strengthens the Service's reach into West Berkshire, as well as playing its part in supporting an efficient delivery of operational response to the whole county. The provision of a new blue light hub also supports closer working and property sharing with our colleagues within the police and ambulance services, further strengthening the emergency response to the local communities and also supporting a more efficient use of the public purse.

The Capital Projects team were able to build on the previous redevelopment successes at Hungerford and Crowthorne. Utilising the lessons learned from these two projects, the team were able to fine tune the collaborative design aspects to further enhance working relationships between all site users. In terms of wider Service requirements, the new station aligns with our People Strategy, by providing facilities that support a more diverse workforce and the entire station is fully accessible.

In addition, modern construction techniques and materials, along with design features such as solar power, electrical vehicle charging and the planting of over 1,500 native shrubs and trees will help reduce our impact on the environment. There has also been significant emphasis on improving the control of contaminants for operational staff through improved zoning and cleaning facilities.

The successful completion of this project in terms of quality, time and cost is a continuing demonstration of the sound strategic planning of the Authority and the strong working relationship between Officers and Members.

Case Study – Maidenhead Refurbishment

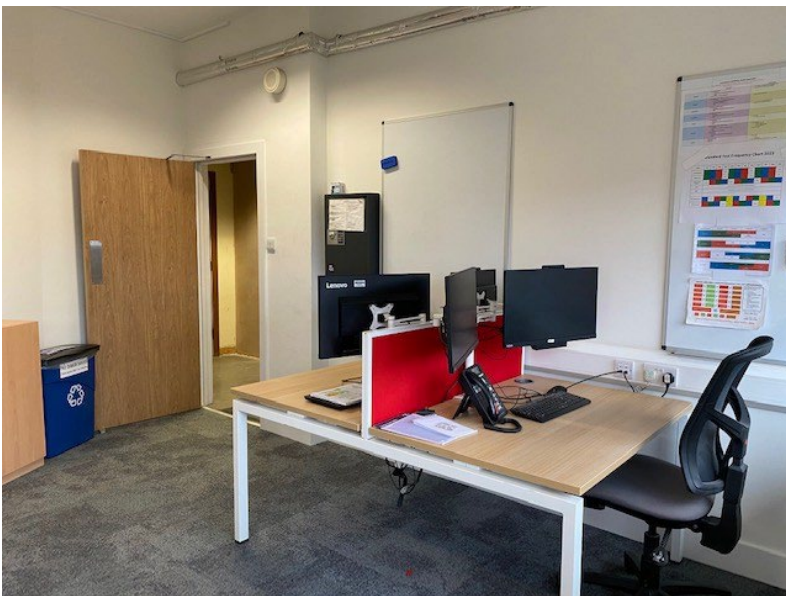
After a period of staff engagement, work began in September 2022 to refurbish Maidenhead Fire Station to make it a fit for purpose, modern workplace whilst aligning to the objectives set out above. The upgrades and improvements include:

- Creating individual bedrooms to offer greater privacy, improving the equality, diversity & inclusion on the station to promote and encourage a more diverse workforce;
- Increasing and improving shower provision for female staff, including individual shower changing cubicles;
- Improving the male W/C and shower facilities to improve privacy and conditions;



- Reconfiguring and refurbishing the first floor offices to provide an open plan work space and meeting facilities, to further support the closer working between Response, Prevention and Protection staff;
- Reconfiguring existing dormitory and gym to provide new gym and office space;
- Installing new LED lighting into refurbished areas;
- Creating and refurbishing new clean and operational laundry arrangements to improve the control of contaminants;
- Refurbishing the Breathing Apparatus (BA) maintenance room; and
- Relocating the South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) room to provide better access for SCAS and better use of space on station for crews.

This refurbishment project has significantly transformed the station and has made it a more fit-for-purpose modern workplace. The improvements immediately address some of the challenges that can be found within our estate, as well as laying the foundations to provide better facilities for our future needs and workforce.





Environmental Sustainability

Our recent carbon footprint assessment undertaken by Planet Mark indicates that 64.7% of the organisation's carbon output comes from our buildings. In line with our core objectives for estate improvements, as stated above, and in keeping with central government's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we are incorporating environmental sustainability into all of our major rebuild and improvement works. In addition to targeted improvement works at our most in need locations, the SAIF identifies thematic estate wide improvement programmes that we will accelerate to make our estate more environmentally friendly and deliver revenue budget savings over the medium term. These will include:

- The installation of LED lighting across the estate will be the first sustainability project to be delivered and should offer the quickest return on investment with the minimum resource demand. This project is therefore planned in for 2023/24.
- Installation of Solar PV also offers a good return on investment (estimated 5 years) and will be completed over a two-year period, starting in 2024.
- The cost of upgrading our power infrastructure to support electric vehicle (EV) charging is planned into the SAIF. The costs within this project are to pay for upgrades to power supplies at stations, which will be required to support the installation of charging points and further support the longevity of our estate.

Phasing of the Work

Estates development projects have been phased based on organisational priority and service delivery requirements, alignment to the core estate development objectives and capacity to effectively undertake the necessary work. Where immediate improvements can be undertaken to expedite some of the core estates development objectives, opportunities will be explored in further detail and feed into the phasing where appropriate. The actual cost of delivering each of these projects only becomes known once a detailed design specification has been undertaken and a tender process completed. Indicative costs are shown for all of the necessary works and would be subject to the relevant approvals.

Plans for the first four years are shown in more detail and the impacts feed into the Authority's Medium Term Financial Plan. Whilst we can anticipate a requirement of further investment to reduce our environmental impact and utilities cost, we are not able to specify the areas of spend at this stage. However, we do feel it appropriate to make a financial provision for future investments which could include features such as ground/air source heat pumps or grey/rain water capture, for



example. We anticipate that technological developments over the coming years will offer alternative opportunities or make existing options less cost prohibitive. We also intend to be more active in accessing grant funding during this period.

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28 to 2032/33
New Build	Training Centre £3.65m				
Major Redevelopment	Slough £0.735m		Caversham Rd £1.219m	Whitley Wood £0.455m	
			Langley £0.895m	Wokingham £0.35m	
			Wokingham Rd £0.32m	Newbury £0.79m	
Sustainability	LED lighting £0.25m	Power supply upgrades £0.2m		EV Infrastructure £0.45m	£1.5m
		Solar PV £0.25m			
Minor Works	£0.175m			£0.211m	£1.5m
Total	£2.985m	£2.05m	£2.659m	£2.256m	£3m



Joint Ventures

Given the age and condition of many of our properties, the Authority is keen to explore the possibility of joint ventures as a means of delivering new fire stations from a reduced capital outlay. This could come from redeveloping some of our current sites or looking at some form of land swap. It is not currently expected that any joint venture would happen before year five of the SAIF.

Disposals

The Service successfully disposed of the Dee Road and Pangbourne sites which were surplus to requirements following the opening of Theale Community Fire Station.

Properties are disposed of in accordance with the Authority's *Guiding Principles for Property Asset Release* to ensure full transparency in relation to the management of valuable assets.



Our Fleet and Equipment

In 2015, a review of the RBFRS fleet was completed. The review identified that RBFRS had the second oldest pumping appliance fleet amongst English fire and rescue services. Since 2017, 19 new front line pumping appliances have now been delivered via a collaborative arrangement across the Thames Valley. In addition to the transformation of the front-line appliance fleet, the Service acquired a new Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) in 2021 and has recently taken delivery of its first four hybrid vehicles and currently awaits delivery of its first electric vehicles. The Service is in the process of replacing its entire Breathing Apparatus (BA) equipment through a collaborative procurement process with our Thames Valley fire and rescue partners which is due to go live in March 2023.

Phasing of the Work

The on-going fleet replacement programme aims to be a steadier state programme. We have aligned our front-line appliance replacement profile with the NFCC recommended 12 years to support this and to continue the improvements made over the past few years. We will continue to look for opportunities to build a more environmentally sustainable fleet where operationally and financially viable.

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28 to 2032/33
Appliances	£1.12m	£0.9m	£0.6m		£5.25m
Specials	£0.008m	£0.164m	£0.61m	£0.35m	£0.5m
White Fleet	£0.21m	£0.275m	£0.287m	£0.245m	£0.62m
Operational Equipment	£0.1m	£0.1m	£0.05m		
Other Equipment	£0.049m	£0.008m			£0.115m
Total	£1.487m	£1.447m	£1.547m	£0.595m	£6.485m



Case study – Breathing Apparatus replacement tri-service project

Over recent years, there has been significant work by Thames Valley fire and rescue services to align operational equipment carried on the common appliance fleet. Coupled with alignment of operational procedure, this coordinated approach towards developing a standardised appliance inventory has improved effectiveness at cross-border incidents within the Thames Valley as well as improve efficiencies in research, procurement and training activity.

The standardisation of Breathing Apparatus (BA) equipment was widely recognised as the next key enabler for the Thames Valley Services to further deliver increased operational alignment. Following approval of the business case the project structure was established and shared individual tasks to specialists within each Service.

In order to develop a technical specification, quality assessment and practical trial plan, a multidiscipline approach was taken. This included a review of accident and incident data to identify any trends, a staff survey to understand the needs of current BA users and what features they would like to see incorporated in future, an equality and diversity impact assessment, a horizon scan of emerging trends and future risks and a review of the current British and European standards for BA.

A robust procurement process ensured that suppliers were challenged to present their best solution. The proposals were reviewed for quality and technical merit and concluded with practical trials in July 2021. The trial was a key part of the tender process as it demonstrated the proposed equipment was fit for purpose, met requirements and was suitable for the diverse workforce of the Thames Valley Services.

In order to provide a challenging environment for the equipment, trials were carried out at the Fire Service College in Moreton-in-Marsh. Trials were supported by training instructors from each Service who devised and facilitated scenarios. The process was overseen by members of the project team, including Fire Brigade Union (FBU) representation. Once the contract had been awarded, the project team worked closely with the supplier to identify potential improvements based on feedback from the trial. Notably this engagement has led to a redesign of the cylinder offered to the Services, which has reduced its weight.

The project will result in all BA wearers across the Thames Valley using identical equipment which will reduce complexity in managing incidents, where multiple Thames Valley Services are operating and will reduce the logistical impact these incidents have on individual services. Once this is in place it will unlock further Operational Alignment opportunities across the Thames Valley



with the ultimate goal of having a Thames Valley firefighter who, regardless of Service, is trained and equipped to operate seamlessly anywhere in the Thames Valley.





Our ICT

The Strategic Asset Investment Framework for ICT should be considered in close alignment to RBFRS' ICT strategy, which has recently been updated to reflect key changes in funding volatility and which currently runs from 2022-2025. Strategically, the funding model for ICT is shifting away from perpetual licensing of software into subscription based services. This impacts the SAIF going forward as RBFRS will no longer need to capitalise periodic and routine large software update purchases and expect them to last a number of years before renewing. Instead, flexible subscriptions to software delivery as a service will require revenue funding on an ongoing basis. With the removal of the software component, core capital funding requirements going forward will be largely associated with refresh and/or expansion of existing hardware, notably laptops/desktops, mobile phones, tablets, networks, and operational communications devices such as MDTs, Airwave/ESN devices, station end and fireground radios. As refresh cycles can be tied to depreciation periods, in the main these costs will be far more predictable and modelled to smooth out annual requirements.

New or wholesale software or system replacement projects are far more difficult to forecast and will need to use the technology roadmap and service planning process to maintain a five-year scanning horizon to anticipate system requirements that will impact the SAIF. Although the majority of such projects will probably rely on subscription based software delivery, in some cases there may still be a requirement to capitalise the procurement and implementation costs of such activities, either for the software or system itself, or for associated hardware requirements driven by the change.

Investment aligned to the new ICT strategic principles of Simplification, Automation and Optimisation will support the overall organisational goals of minimising costs over the short to medium term, and more importantly releasing staff capacity for value-added activities. The 'work smarter' approach will have positive downstream impacts in staff resilience, and the overall sustainability of the service.

For this to be realised, it is imperative that ongoing refresh of technical resources is maintained, so that opportunities in more advanced software and systems can be fully leveraged to the benefit of the organisation. It is recommended therefore that all periodic hardware and network refresh schedules are maintained as at present, as shown in the table overleaf.



Device	Refresh Cycle
Laptops/Desktop computers	Rolling 3 years
Tablets	Rolling 2 years
Smartphones	Rolling 2 years
MDTs	Every 5 years
Airwave / ESN Devices	Over 5 years currently
Fireground Radios	Every 5 years
Network Devices	Every 10 years

Economic factors over the medium term dictate that the ICT investment focus should shift towards the facilitation of the greatest possible improvement in efficiency across all other parts of the organisation. This will be accomplished by:

- Leveraging existing services (primarily Microsoft 365) to improve business processes;
- Greater integration of supporting applications and services with core Microsoft 365 application suites (e.g. LMS, H&S, Sage etc.); and
- Improved digital solutions for core operational activities (notably Protection, Enforcement, and Prevention).

Phasing of the Work

The phasing of works is purely indicative and based on business needs, keeping in step with appropriate technological advances, national initiatives and security standards; any of which may alter the phasing of works.

Projects underway include a full MDT refresh, a full Station end refresh, and a full fireground radio refresh. In addition, RBFERS airwave devices are due to be refreshed later in 2023.



Taking all into account, the capital requirement over the next 10 years for ICT is likely to be approximately £3.0m, with an average annual requirement of approximately £250k. It is important to note that this nominal figure is likely to vary from year to year, as various refresh cycles unwind. 2028/29 will require approximately £700k as this is the standard cycle year for MDT, Station End and Fireground radio replacement. To mitigate single year costs, these refreshes may be brought forward/put back by one year to even out the cost profile, dependant on current equipment performance at that time.

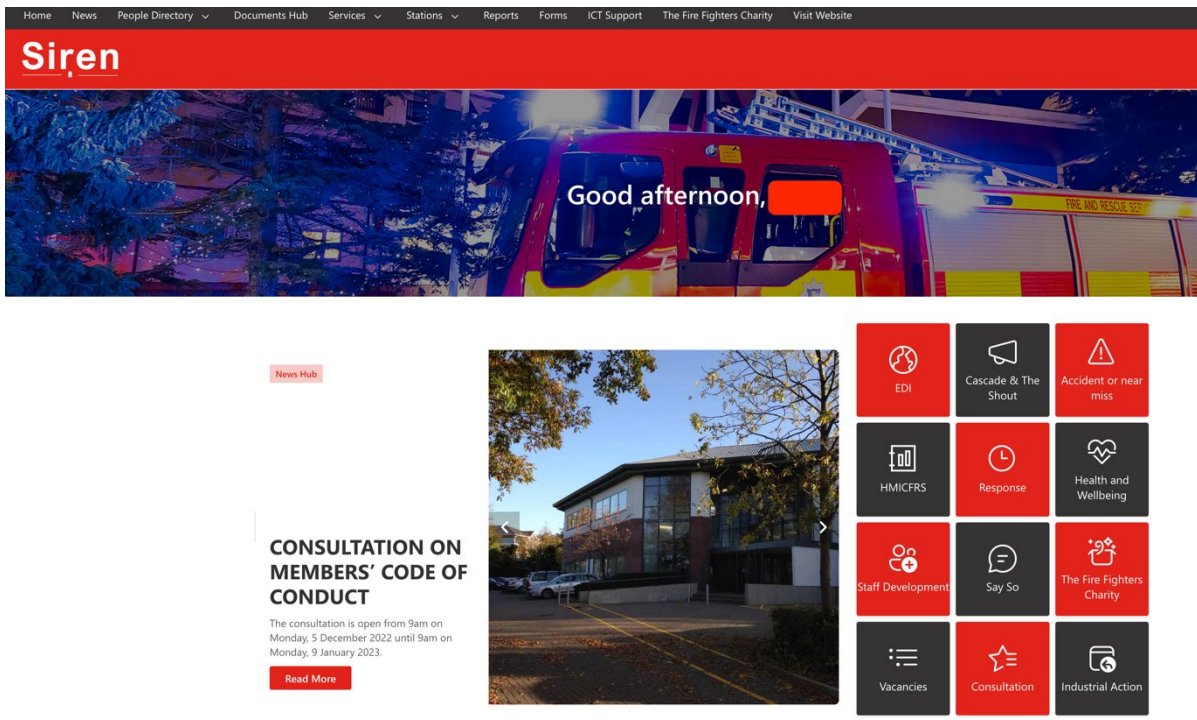
	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28 to 2032/33
Hardware	£0.107m	£0.13m	£0.142m	£0.145m	£1.359m
Services	£0.093m	£0.103m	£0.109m	£0.111m	£0.713m
Total	£0.2m	£0.233m	£0.251m	£0.256m	£2.072m

Intranet Replacement Case Study

Our intranet site, Siren, was under a restrictive and inflexible support contract that resulted in an inability to make significant changes or include additional integration points to the system, so we decided to go to market for an alternative solution. After a rigorous tendering and selection process, a SharePoint based Intranet solution was selected.

SharePoint is an underpinning technology of the Microsoft 365 suite of applications, and provides a web-based framework for website and application development, as well as providing many integration tools and native integration to other Microsoft platforms.

The new Siren site retains significant carried-over look and feel from the old site in order to minimise user disruption and need for training.



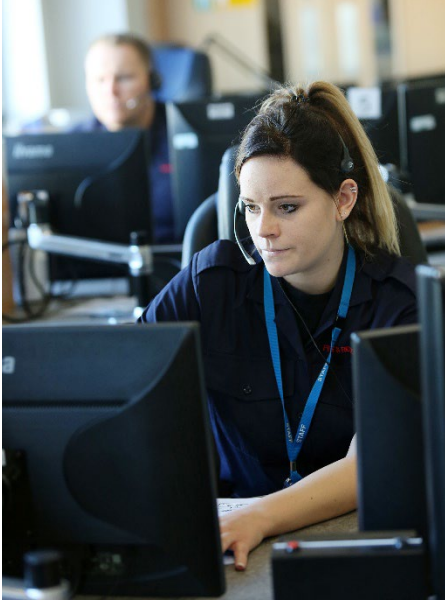
The system is delivering productivity gains for several key teams and for most users through calendar/teams/email integration and for the first time, mobile access to Siren.

The intranet over time will become the key launch point for all staff to accomplish their daily tasks, minimising the time spent switching between applications, searching for information or people, and double keying of data from one format to another. As such, it is a foundational element in the ICT strategy focus of using existing products and services to maximum effect (SharePoint was already live at RBFRS due to the migration to Microsoft 365 and use of Teams).

Our internet presence was also migrated to a WordPress solution with appropriate integration between internet and intranet sites, to prevent the need to post the same content twice, saving time for content owners. Both migrations were completed without incident.



Thames Valley Fire Control Service



The Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS), based at RBFRS' headquarters, was established in 2015 to answer 999 calls and mobilise fire engines to incidents across the Thames Valley. TVFCS operates on behalf of the three Thames Valley fire and rescue services, serving a combined population of over two million people.

This collaborative arrangement delivers a single joint emergency call handling, mobilising and resource management function, which has delivered significant cost efficiencies to all three fire services. As well as benefiting from increased resilience, TVFCS continues to deliver efficiencies and improved performance. Since its establishment, TVFCS has brought about collective savings of over £1 million a year for the three fire and rescue services.

There are three areas that require capital expenditure in 2023/24.

Firstly, the voice recording system requires updating to ensure that call taking can be scrutinised in the event of an inquiry or investigation and can be used for debriefing, training and assurance in the control room environment. Quotes indicate that the cost of this upgrade will be around £90,000.

Secondly, there is a requirement to upgrade an ancillary system to allow operators and supervisors to continue to seamlessly view and monitor the screens of other operators at their own workstation. The original cost of the system in 2014 was £31,000, however recent market analysis indicates this will now be around £45,000 to £50,000.

Lastly, the Uninterrupted Power Supply (UPS) for secondary control at Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue headquarters needs replacing. The current unit is in its 11th year of a 12 year lifespan. UPS is an essential element of the business continuity framework that ensures TVFCS can operate during power outages. Quotes received this year indicate a cost of approximately £10,000.

A full system replacement will be required between 2028 and 2030 and is likely to cost around £1.8 million. The three fire and rescue services have each been paying £50,000 annually into a capital renewals fund which will pay for the system replacement.



Financial Implications

As evidenced by the recent HMICFRS inspection, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service has been judged 'good' in terms of delivering an effective and efficient service that meets the needs and expectations of residents and taxpayers within the County.

When considering the renewal or enhancement of our capital assets, we consider the extent to which capital expenditure increases the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation, thus, balancing the needs of the users of our services against the needs of those who are required to fund those services. An example of this is the new Theale Community Fire Station, which will provide better response times to high risk areas than current arrangements. In addition, the running costs of a newly built fire station with the same footprint are over 40% lower than the running costs of existing fire stations.

Based on the Authority's current financial planning assumptions projected capital expenditure over the next four years is affordable, though much will depend on future rates of inflation, pay award settlements and funding settlements.

In terms of fleet and equipment and ICT capital expenditure the Authority will fund this from its revenue budget. This is a prudent way to finance this type of expenditure given that such assets have shorter lives and therefore need replacing on a regular basis.

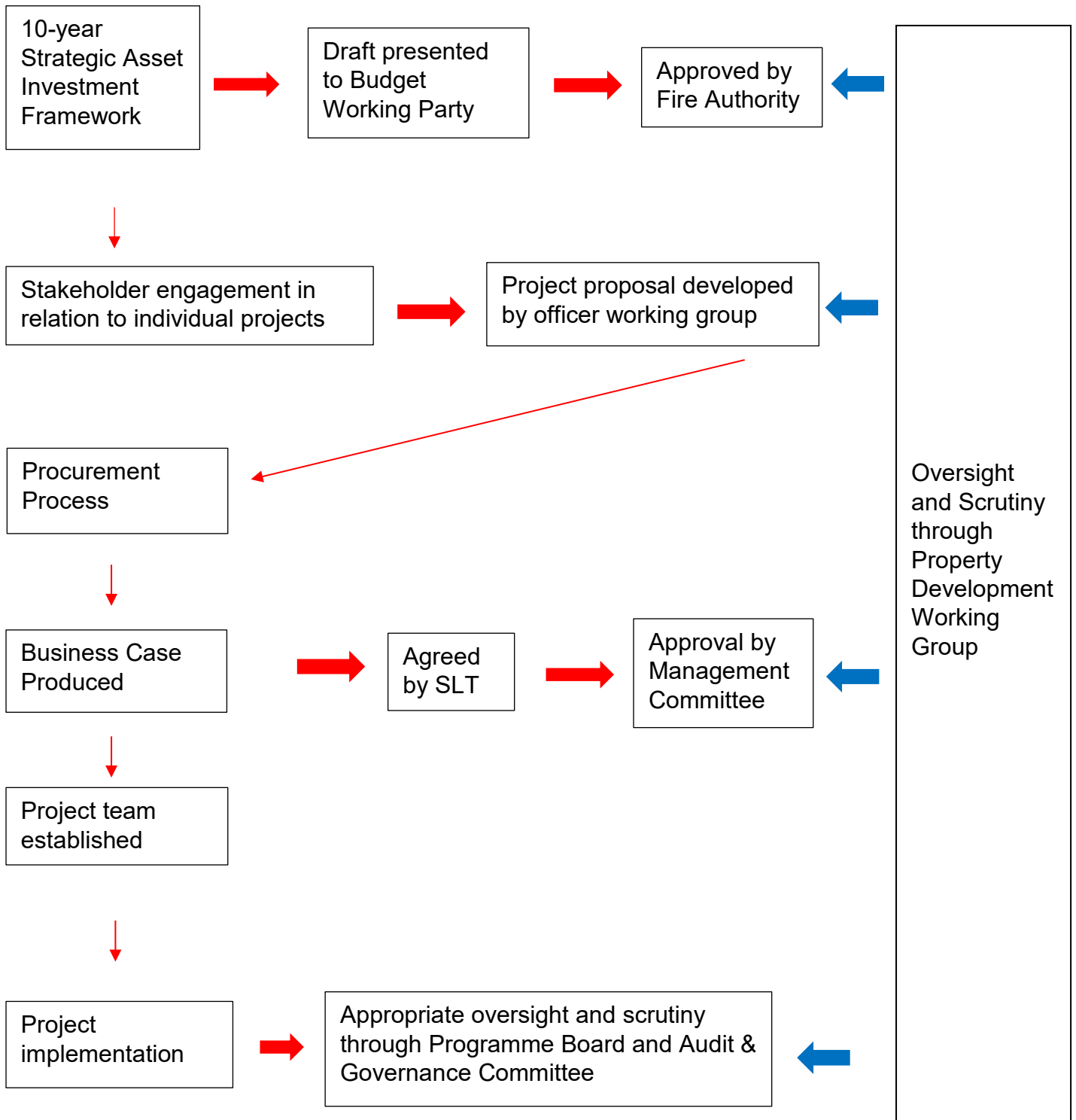
The higher than anticipated capital receipt from the sale of the Dee Road site in 2022 will fund a large proportion of our planned estate development works over the next four years. The balance will be financed through a limited amount of borrowing. Beyond this period and, where appropriate, we will seek to work with partners and other stakeholders to explore joint-venture options which could lead to the building of a new fire station at a reduced cost to the Authority.

Whilst recognising that novel approaches to enhancing our properties may be possible in some instances, it remains the case that such options will be limited. Therefore, it is critical that we move swiftly over the next four years to deliver capital programmes of work that will generate future savings in the revenue budget.

Finally, given the capital-intensive nature of fire and rescue services, we are keen to see the establishment of a national Transformation Fund against which we could bid to secure funding for capital projects that are both environmentally sustainable and deliver savings in running costs.



Governance Arrangements



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FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

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