



# ICT Strategy 2024 - 2027

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service



# Contents

Foreword .....	3
Introduction .....	4
Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Strategic Commitments.....	4
Vision and Purpose .....	5
RBFRS Context.....	6
Service Workforce and Culture .....	6
Business Information and Systems department (BIS) .....	6
Progress Since 2019 ICT strategy .....	9
Looking Forward to 2024 – 2027.....	11
Technology and Infrastructure .....	11
Data and Information Intelligence to support our expertise.....	13
Our People and Capabilities .....	14
Processes.....	15
Collaboration .....	16
Action plan: .....	18
Technology and infrastructure: .....	18
Data and information Intelligence .....	18
Our people and capabilities .....	18
Process.....	19
Collaboration .....	19
Digital, Data and Technology Steering Group.....	20



# Foreword

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) is here to ensure citizens, communities, and businesses of Berkshire can go about their lives in a sense of safety and security. Our purpose statement says that we “deliver Prevention, Protection, Response, and Resilience services through Sustainability, Culture, Capability, and Risk Management”. Indeed, it is the service’s vision “to place the community at the heart of all that we do, inspiring trust, confidence, and pride in their Service and encouraging people from all communities to join us”.

Recognising the vital role the fire and rescue services play within communities, at the local and national level, it is incumbent to appropriately consider how our Service positions itself in the digital and global world that we all exist in. The ubiquitousness of digital technology means that RBFRS, just like most other public sector organisations within the UK and beyond, now relies on digital solutions to underpin its day-to-day operations. It also means that expectations of what the Service feels like to its communities and staff members have changed to include a level of digitisation and automation on par with other aspects of our daily lives.

RBFRS does not require a mandate to exist as it delivers a critical public service of protecting and saving lives; it does, however, have a responsibility to deliver those duties in the most effective and efficient manner as it relies on public resources. The principles of sustainability, effectiveness, efficiency and security aligned with the Service’s purpose statement have been at the forefront of designing this strategy. It was built to continue on the trajectory of secure and scalable technology, cognisant of emerging threats, as well as opportunities awarded by the many developments in this field. We have considered the technology itself, as well as people for whom the technology is brought in for and the environment in which we all operate and live in.

Accepting that we are not only living in a digital world but also a world of information, this strategy ensures the opportunities to improve our information intelligence capabilities are captured and underpinned by the Service’s plans.

There are so many opportunities and so much that we still need to do before all the benefits are realised. This strategy is ambitious and will require a considerable amount of effort and will to deliver on all of its aspects. We shall continue to engage with our communities, staff, and partners in Thames Valley to work as one team for the communities we serve, to ensure that our vision statement can be clearly evidenced in the outcomes of this strategy.

I encourage all to read this strategy and engage with the Service to share any feedback or suggestions you may have to allow us to continually improve services offered to our communities.

**Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey**  
Strategic Assets Lead, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority



# Introduction

In 2023 the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) approved its new Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan, in which it re-affirmed the vision and purpose for RBFRS. While the Service has travelled a significant distance on the journey of change and improvement, it is timely to review and reset.

The new ICT Strategy will replace the 2019-24 strategy and action plan. This strategy has been created within the context of a number of both internal and external influencing factors and is designed to align to other RBFRS strategies, including the CRMP and our Culture Plan. Changes and fluctuations with the external environment have accelerated since this strategy's last iteration which is recognised and addressed by annual reviews and necessary updates.

The 2024-2027 RBFA ICT Strategy aims to harness the best available technology, to enhance service delivery, operational efficiency, and resilience. Building on progress made during 2019 – 2024, this strategy addresses emerging public sector trends and incorporates advancements in ICT and data to future-proof the organisation's capabilities. This strategy aligns with RBFRS's vision and purpose to serve and protect the people of Berkshire by providing effective and efficient fire and rescue services. It exists to support RBFA's strategic commitments and vision:

## Royal Berkshire Fire Authority Strategic Commitments

- 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.
- 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. We will provide advice, consultation and enforcement in relation to fire safety standards in buildings.
- 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.

## Vision and Purpose

**Purpose:** We create safer more resilient communities by preventing incidents, protecting homes and businesses and responding to emergencies.

**Vision:** To achieve our purpose, we place the community at the heart of all that we do and deliver the service through our four overarching principles:



### **Culture:**

- We are all committed to creating a safe, dignified and trustworthy Service.
- We are One Team, working together to achieve our purpose. We know that the Service functions better when all parts support each other.
- We take pride in our professionalism and being good at what we do, and we always strive to improve.
- We don't walk past things that are not right, in our workplace or our communities.

### **Capability:**

- We value and invest in developing our people because they are our most important asset and will be the reason we achieve our purpose.
- Our high standards mean we listen and learn to continually improve
- We are trustworthy and transparent. We all focus our talent and resources to reduce risks to our staff and communities.

### **Risk Management:**

- We use evidence and professional judgement to analyse and reduce risks to our communities to achieve our purpose.
- We work with key partners to ensure we are prepared for all foreseeable risks and that we deal with them well together.
- We prioritise the availability and resilience of our valuable assets and resources so that we can continually deliver our purpose.

### **Sustainability:**

- We create resilient communities through our focus on sustainability.
- We provide good value for money to our communities through our focus on sustainability.
- We ensure we are financially sustainable as a Service.



# RBFRS Context

## Service Workforce and Culture

The RBFRS workforce is formed of professionals dedicated to ensuring public safety. The organisation fosters a culture of inclusivity, teamwork, and continuous development, aligning with values of a Safety, Support, and Inclusivity. RBFRS places strong emphasis on diversity, striving to ensure that its workforce reflects the communities it serves, while promoting a culture of learning and innovation to adapt to evolving challenges. The focus on well-being, leadership development, and community engagement ensures a motivated and agile workforce that can respond to both traditional and emerging risks in fire safety and emergency response. This approach is critical to maintaining high service standards and operational resilience across Berkshire.



The Service recognises that both the public we serve and our workforce’s expectations around the technology underpinning its operations are changing, with a major shift of expectations of full digitisation and automation, which has not yet been achieved within the Service. It is accepted that both the level of service offered to communities of Berkshire and staff wellbeing can be enhanced with greater adoption of technological advancements, which have not progressed as far as anticipated between 2019 and 2024. Digitisation, automation, mobility and access to remote working have all become expected in the modern workplace and are recognised as integral to RBFRS’ ability to provide an appealing work environment or to attract and retain a talented workforce.

## Business Information and Systems department (BIS)

BIS is responsible for enabling RBFRS and TVFCS operations through information and communication technology. It is comprised of four constituent functions which are evolving continually: Information and Communication Technology, Technical Programme Management, Systems Business Partnering, and Information Governance led by a new Head of the department who joined the Service in 2023.





The Information and Communication Team is at the core of technical delivery, providing a service desk and systems functions supporting all systems, infrastructure, and applications, providing advice and training, significant elements of technology project delivery, as well as systems design, development, maintenance and cyber security. The team makeup was reviewed in 2019 which addressed the capacity and capability requirements at the time. The nature of demand on the ICT team has shifted significantly towards supporting a more agile environment with a large volume of change and interaction, as well as shifts towards new technologies. This occurred in the backdrop of the service users' technical capability variations becoming a lot more pronounced, with some technology users championing its use and some still requiring support with basic functionalities and applications.

Technological progress in the last 5 years has been significant both within the Service and externally, leading to the ICT team's management identifying a need to review both the capability and capacity within it. Cyber security capability within ICT has been challenged by a significant increase in the number of cyber incidents and their severity.. It remains an area of great importance and one with a significant developmental requirement. In recognition of the developmental needs, the Service identified the level of funding necessary to support access to specialist training, minimising any potential gaps in the short term, enabling a sustainable and long-term solution to be identified and implemented.

The Technical Programme Management team was established in 2024 as a response to a clear need for improved coordination of technology-related activities and projects, given their impact on the wider workforce and services delivered. This was identified through direct engagement with stakeholders, feedback from the staff survey, as well as lessons learnt from previous ICT projects. The team consist of two permanent posts including a Technical Programme Manager and a Microsoft 365 and Process Improvement Specialist. Both roles underpin a delivery of our Productivity and Efficiency Plan, which is predominantly based on BIS or information technology initiatives, as well as providing coordination of wider delivery of key technology focused projects across the department and wider service. The Microsoft 365 and Process Improvement Specialist ensures continual and consistent development of capabilities available within our Microsoft 365 environment and their careful introduction to the Service, with an aim of improving the outcomes, introducing efficiencies or productivity gains.

The goal of the Systems Business Partnering Team is to provide an interface between the systems and end users, matching their needs to the solutions and opportunities available within the service. Research and Development forms a core part of these activities, which include proof of concept projects and initiatives alike. The team are gradually embedding themselves within the wider service to ensure opportunities to match the needs and solutions are not missed, leading to swift improvements in productivity or efficiencies. Work is still required to further progress development of this capability and to ensure capacity to offer a consistently high level of service is available beyond current focus on the management and development of service's HR and Availability Management System.



The Information Governance (IG) team is formed of four permanent members of staff concerned with governance, maintenance and advisory services relating to information the service holds. The team has embedded itself well and is almost universally considered as a stakeholder in initiatives and activities across the service. This is very positive and we hope to build upon this with improvements in information retention compliance across departments. As a result of the ICT team's efforts to migrate all service's digital files to a centralised system, IG now has access to a consolidated system, enabling consistent governance of digitally stored information across its lifecycle, including automation of retention and information classification supported by Artificial Intelligence and machine learning. This move has paved the way for completing the work necessary to improving compliance with the regulatory requirements while at the same time reducing the impact of these activities on capacity of data owners and governance teams alike. This is a great example of the Service's drive towards leveraging technology to improve outcomes, regulatory compliance, while at the same time improving the working conditions of its workforce and setting itself to bring about further efficiencies in the medium to long term.

The following summarises Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats in relation to BIS:

#### Strengths:

- **Customer Support:** BIS provides robust support for systems, infrastructure, and applications, as well as consistent governance of digitally stored information, improving compliance with regulatory requirements.
- **Coordination and Improvement:** The coordination of technology-related activities and projects is improving.
- **User-Centric Approach by design:** BIS recognises its role and focus of matching solutions with users' and whole service's needs to enhance productivity and efficiency.

#### Weaknesses:

- **Capacity and Capability Gaps:** Areas of BIS face challenges in capability and capacity related to their main purpose.
- **Training:** There is no capacity to deliver in-person training to all staff following all technology-related changes in order to bridge significant inequalities in technical capabilities.

#### Opportunities:

- **Technological Advancements:** Significant progress within technologies already available to the Service and externally presents opportunities for further development of capabilities within BIS and the wider service.
- **Specialist Training and Expertise:** Access to specialist training and expertise can address short-term gaps in cyber security capability and support long-term solutions.
- **Process Improvement:** The introduction of a Technical Programme Management team and a Microsoft 365 and Process Improvement Specialist can drive productivity and efficiency gains across the service.





- **Service-wide engagement:** BIS's established position within the service paves the way for introduction of a cross-departmental Digital, Data, and Technology steering group to ensure BIS resources and focus align best with organisational priorities.

**Threats:**

- **Cyber Security Risks:** The increasing seriousness and rate of cyber incidents pose a significant threat.
- **Technological Variations:** Variations in users' technical capabilities can impact the effectiveness of technology adoption and support needs.
- **Resource Allocation:** Ensuring adequate resources and funding to support the initiatives and address capacity and capability gaps is critical to maintaining service posture and capabilities.

## Progress Since 2019 ICT strategy

The last strategy covered a period before, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic and despite the validity of its goals, not all of its commitments could be delivered. While much has been achieved, many of the remaining elements are still relevant and it is recognised that appropriately resourcing the initiatives contained in this document is necessary in order to ensure the Service's posture and capabilities are not lacking behind the needs and expectations of stakeholders, as well as to meet compliance and security considerations.



Equipment standardisation is an area which has progressed well and shown anticipated benefits.

All laptops and desktop computers are consistently deployed and are sourced from the same manufacturer. It has been identified that this approach reduced the administrative burden and allowed the Service to leverage economies of scale during procurement, ensuring prudent expenditure of public funds. Consistency of equipment has helped reduce the amount of training and familiarisation staff required. New opportunities have been identified which allowed the Service to introduce a more advanced 2-in-1 laptop devices replacing a need for a separate tablet in certain cases. Those devices also support our sustainability initiatives including a drive to eradicate unnecessary use of paper. We will continue evaluating if anticipated benefits are being realised.

Standardisation of mobile phones has progressed although more needs to be done. It is anticipated that this goal will be achieved during 2024 – 2027 as well, in line with the provisions in our Strategic Asset Investment Framework.

Core productivity applications have been largely standardised with a shift towards Microsoft 365 productivity suite of applications, smoothing the peaks in capital expenditure over time through replacing periodic large capital expenditure and upgrade activities with subscription-



based model, which significantly contributed towards improving the productivity of ICT team and a reduction of disruption to users. Changes and upgrades are introduced little and often in the spirit of agility. All users within the Service received a licence which not only covers the use of the software on their devices, but also allows staff to benefit from possibilities of the cloud, which opens up a vast number of opportunities.

An evaluation of cloud hosting solutions for RBFRS systems has been completed, which identified Microsoft Azure as the most suitable solution. All systems will require migration which will be one of the key deliverables of the new strategy, enabling the Service to benefit from other products and offerings only available to cloud-hosted systems, as well as improving its business continuity arrangements.

A big area of focus during the 2019-2024 period were a range of improvements relating to network infrastructure, which have suffered significant delays caused in part by global equipment shortages which were ultimately not delivered within the contract time. The Service has reviewed the specification and contractual arrangements, which resulted in uncovering significant opportunities for changes to the specification reflecting both the technological advancements and changing needs of RBFRS and Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS). While opportunities have been identified, aging equipment has continued stretching the capacity of the ICT team and will need to be a priority for the Service.

The general direction of simplification has been maintained, augmenting this approach in 2023 by introducing an evaluation of opportunities to consolidate systems jointly, with evaluation of necessary process or policy changes outside of the ICT team. This added step ensured that software changes were embedded within the business of RBFRS, by linking them with a review of underpinning processes and structure of data. This move led to a discovery of more opportunities for greater consolidation and simplification in areas like employee journey, financial management or management of our community risk.

By October 2023, our ICT team delivered a significant hardware refresh project within TVFCS. This work was necessary to ensure the reliability of server equipment for the remainder of our Computer Aided Dispatch solution's expected life. The new strategy will see a full review of the solution, including procurement of a new contract to deliver this functionality beyond 2030.

The introduction of a Service Desk ICT Incident management toolset and approach proved ineffective. We recognise the need for accountability and clarity of communication driving it and a review and re-design of the solution will be required, broadened to include the Service's stakeholders in activities, with a goal of identifying service-wide opportunities.



# Looking Forward to 2024 – 2027

As we look forward to the period from 2024 to 2027, it is essential to recognise and adapt to the evolving expectations of stakeholders, driven by the proliferation of Information Technology and Data in all aspects of our professional and private lives, with automation and artificial intelligence offering significant opportunities for improving our efficiency and productivity. Our strategy must elevate the Service's information technology baselines across technology, processes, and capabilities, enabling confident integration of digital technologies into our strategic decisions related to delivering fire and rescue services. This approach should address the needs of our communities and staff in a sustainable and responsible manner, supporting our corporate responsibilities.



Our focus areas consider aspects of technology, processes, and people. We aim to ensure that our most valuable resource, the people of RBFRS, and our second most valuable resource, data, are utilised effectively. As a public sector organisation, it is crucial to conduct our business sustainably while allowing us to react to rapidly changing environments and opportunities ensuring the security of our workforce and digital estate.

The following will be a focus of our ICT Strategy in 2024 – 2027:

## Technology and Infrastructure

***Our technology must be resilient and flexible, capable of responding and adjusting to changing requirements and risks.***

A full systems architecture review will be conducted, with clearly defined and documented linkages between systems and data flows. This will enable better record-keeping and documentation which will support the Service in identifying the impact of any given change relating to technology or data systems on the whole of RBFRS and TVFCS.

To support the need for flexibility and scalability, we will adopt and maintain a Cloud-First approach for our systems in alignment with the Home Office guidance, leveraging software as a Service, platform as a Service, and infrastructure as a Service solutions where possible and appropriate, which will support the creation of capacity and improvements in productivity of our technology and data functions. Our systems are hosted within our own data centres which require large capital investments and fall short of what is on offer to organisations within the modern cloud environments. Following the evaluation of candidate cloud environments in 2023, we will deliver a migration of all our systems to cloud hosting leveraging the new opportunities it offers and improving our business continuity arrangements.



Business continuity, cyber security, and sustainability will be explicitly integrated into all of our work following the 'Secure by Design' approach. We will review and adjust our cyber security capability adequately in response to a significant increase in both the volume and sophistication of cyber incidents and attacks. We will ensure our technology-based operations are sustainable, addressing a risk of over-reliance on fully bespoke systems where customisable off-the-shelf solutions, suitable to cater to RBFRS needs, are available. We recognise this may require more flexibility within our processes, but sustainability of our solutions must remain the driving principle for our decision-making.

Our infrastructure has served our staff and the people of Berkshire for a long time and needs a significant upgrade. It is critical in underpinning the confidence in use of digital technologies by our staff. This will be completed during this strategy with the necessary improvements implemented to support both current and future needs. This review will include the necessary enhancements to Wi-fi network coverage across our estate, facilitating stable and seamless communication for all our devices. Recognising the reliance on Internet connectivity will increase the bandwidth across all locations to prevent bottlenecks and ensure effective system utilisation and communication.

We will continue to seek opportunities to standardise and reduce the number of devices our staff require to do their jobs, ensuring they can cope with future demands while being sensible with expenditure. Recognising different styles of consumption, we will favour a device-agnostic approach to development and procurement of digital solutions, with equal consideration for mobile devices.

While significant progress has been made with the adoption of Microsoft 365 remote tools enabling hybrid work, there is still much to achieve. By employing the toolset widely across the Service, we can fully support our processes with automation and augmentation by artificial intelligence. Our Microsoft 365 and Process Improvement Specialist will continue driving the adoption, consolidation and automation of activities within the Microsoft 365 ecosystem and create a pathway for all staff to improve their skills within the platform.

The contract for our Computer Aided System, which supports the operations of TVFCS, will expire during this strategy. We will invest effort early to ensure thorough research and careful planning are in place to secure a new contract for the solution beyond its current life and confidently take us into 2030 and beyond.

We recognise that Information Technology-related standards act as a benchmark of good practice and support organisations in delivering sound service in line with industry and regulatory standards. We will ensure full alignment with the National Fire Chief Council's ICT and Cyber Fire Standard, including adherence to the enhanced model of National Cyber Security Centre's Cyber Assessment Framework, Cyber Essentials Plus as a minimum.

Telephony within RBFRS relies on legacy analogue systems, which have been marked by Openreach to be switched off at the end of 2025. These systems exist alongside mobile telephony, as well as online channels of communication, e.g. Microsoft Teams. We will replace our legacy telephony solution with a modern, VOIP/SIP based equivalent ensuring continual ability to receive 999 calls as well as to support our communication. This will enable



us to seek to consolidate all the communication tools mentioned here into a converged communication solution, simplifying the means by which we communicate.

The Emergency Services Network (ESN) has been in a planning phase for a long time and delayed. While it has not been delivered yet, we are monitoring and are aware of increased activities of that projects and will continue to carefully follow it to ensure we are ready and aligned with the work of the ESN team.

## Data and Information Intelligence to support our expertise

We recognise the importance of data and business information and the key role they play in underpinning good decision making.

***The goal of this strategy is to develop an overarching unified business information intelligence capability strongly supported by appropriate architecture, systems, and skills, which will enable our data and professional expertise of the workforce to combine in delivering the best services to the residents of Berkshire.***

This will see our data, performance, information governance and ICT colleagues joining forces in co-delivering a business intelligence capability supporting the whole service and able to respond to growing needs and requirements of our stakeholders.

To support this aim, all systems considered for procurement or implementation will need to provide a means to seamlessly link to our intelligence and reporting facilities, allowing access to all information required to support the operations of RBFRS. We recognise that while this may have an impact on the choices made within individual teams or departments, the benefits to the whole organisation and its effectiveness must outweigh the potential desire to avoid process adjustments within individual departments or teams. Our goal is to move towards information intelligence as a progression from isolated data reporting, which will enable our most important asset – our people – make well informed decisions while minimising delays.

None of this will be possible without adequate data and information governance. We will employ technology to support our Information Governance team and all data owners in their efforts to ensure compliance with relevant regulations. A full gap analysis and action plan will be produced to address any identified issues. We will seek opportunities to employ technology available to the Service, including artificial intelligence and machine learning capabilities, in support of information classification which is the necessary first step in maintaining our compliance.

Our work does not stop here; adequate ongoing data and information governance are necessary to ensure that our desire for cross-organisational information intelligence can be viable and continue to yield benefits. Our information governance function will support RBFRS in ensuring that data is not only compliant but also accurate and available when needed. As data systems are reviewed, introduced or retired, we will review the data collected and ensure that only necessary information is retained.



## Our People and Capabilities

BIS purpose is to enable the business of the organisation with the use of Information Technology, as well as to advise and educate. It is at the centre of technological innovation and change within RBFRS and it is recognised, that it too needs to innovate and adjust to remain fully aligned to the business needs of the Service. As significant changes are currently occurring within the technologies employed by RBFRS and more are afoot, ***we will ensure that the capabilities of teams within BIS and across the whole service align with the changing needs of the organisation.*** Paired with the architectural review, we will conduct a full review the effectiveness of BIS and ensure that required capabilities and service levels are embedded into the best makeup of the department, reflecting organisational need. We will focus on our technical change, training, and cyber capabilities which our stakeholders indicated as needing more attention and focus. This work has already started and will be concluded during this strategy.

A careful analysis of our digital landscape uncovered, that while information technology is not a focus of most colleagues outside of the Business Information and Systems team, modern solutions allow the digital innovation to occur amongst our colleagues anywhere within the Service, and we have already seen some great examples of how well it complements the progress driven by our tech teams. We will ensure an appropriate environment is created to allow the Service to safely harness the enthusiasm and ability in pursuit of common good.

The proliferation of technology in our professional lives means that it is no longer viable to ignore individual responsibilities relating to digital space. Similarly to health and safety, some areas such as cyber security or protecting information, to name just a couple, are everyone's responsibility. Our goal is to use technology as an enabler which gives our workforce more comfortable and efficient ways of working. This requires a good level of understanding and proficiency in the use of digital tools. It is the only sustainable way of ensuring the Service remains secure, compliant, and can continually respond to its stakeholders' expectations. Our people across the whole service need to understand the role they play in using the technology appropriately and must be equipped with the right skills to do it, adequately to their role, no matter which part or level within the organisational structures.

We will create a baseline for the whole service identifying the base requirements for digital skills across the workforce and within individual departments. Adequate training will be delivered to ensure everyone has the tools required to meet these new baselines. We will ensure they are sustainably maintained and together with the training resources embedded in personal development processes and plans, as well as our onboarding processes.

We will be very careful not to miss an opportunity to adjust our training baselines as digital innovation progresses; we know, that if left unchecked innovation could create inequalities. The use of equality impact assessments must become a norm across our technology and information space with a proactively constructive approach to any areas which need more work. A lack of skills must not be getting in a way of innovation, but become a trigger to ensuring training and knowledge transfer receive sufficient attention. This must come from those instigating change, but also managers in equal measure to ensure the full engagement of their staff. As it is only sustainable to deliver the increasing amount of our training either online or



remotely, we will ensure that the facilities required to consume the training are available across the RBFRS estate, with no station or department being left out.

Technology is changing at a very fast pace, and it can sometimes feel overwhelming. While it may not be possible to avoid some change, we will ensure that a pipeline of major projects is shared via service's intranet site, with updates on progress made available to the service. There are no secrets, just poor information sharing at times which we will work hard to address. To further support these efforts, we will work to create a permanent opportunity to engage with technology teams offering a relaxed and friendly atmosphere of "low tech time" away from the IT office, where colleagues can feel at ease to ask any questions pertaining to technology.

## Processes

RBFRS recognises that as a public sector organisation it must ***focus on utilising the public funding in the most efficient way, to provide the best return on investment for our communities and best working conditions for our staff.*** Process improvement is a key area where time or effort can be saved, and which has been recognised in our Efficiency and Productivity Plan. The plan already tracks some of the ICT activities to ensure the efficiencies are captured and linked to other areas of the organisation.

This ICT Strategy fully supports the efficiency and productivity efforts within RBFRS and will introduce a "Digital First" approach to all processes across the service. This means "zero paper processes or records" by the end of this strategy, unless the legislation makes it impossible. Our ways of working must change to allow us to benefit from automation or augmentation of our work by artificial intelligence. This can improve our work conditions and is necessary to leverage big data for decision making – all of which are clear expectations from the public and central government. Achieving this will significantly reduce the efforts required to remain compliant with data protection and security regulations. It will also go a long way towards supporting our Sustainability Goals.

Addressing the changes in processes as well as the changes in technology included in this strategy creates uncertainty and has a chance of disrupting the business of our fire and rescue service – a risk which is recognised and accepted, but it must be mitigated and reduced to the necessary minimum. We believe that the principles of agile management work well for most change and will adopt the methodology wherever appropriate within the technology and information space to ensure we can pivot if operational requirements necessitate us to. We remember the business we are in, and our practices must recognise and address the specifics of our environment. Our technical change capability will be instrumental in ensuring the impacts are well considered and we put enough effort upfront to reduce the impact down the line.

We recognise it is no longer realistic to plan for technology in detail over a long period of time and with a great dose of certainty. With this in mind, this strategy period has been reduced from 5 to 3 years to allow us to maintain a programme of technology related projects, while providing clarity to our customers and stakeholders, including the areas which will be impacted by the work at a high level. In line with the agile approach and whenever it is possible, we will seek to divide projects into smallest sensible parts in order to reduce impact on the services we deliver, our service users, staff and technology teams alike as well as ensure more flexibility in our



funding. Dividing work into smaller units will allow us to reduce impact of any potential issues or failures and take any learning possible to future endeavours. We need to be able to fail fast, recognising the environment in which we operate as well as the service workforce and the public trends.

Simplification of all data and systems is a joint effort. Recognising the power of data and its potential to better inform leaders' decisions, we will adopt the guiding principles focusing on enabling data intelligence across the Service, discarding incompatible systems or developments before the end of this strategy. We will not let 'the perfect be the enemy of the good' and ensure silo working is not preventing the Service as a whole from serving the public the best it can. We know that best of breed systems might be more appealing to individual teams, but acting as one team for Berkshire, we will do what is best to the whole service's performance and our duties to deliver on our Fire Authority's commitments. To support this, a set of architectural principles will be introduced applicable to all departments which will become a framework integral to all projects and changes commissioned within the service. They will guide all projects through concepts including cyber security, data, or integration ensuring we embed the secure by design principles in all our processes.

We recognise that communication via email has become the main method of interacting in relation to all aspects of RBFRS business, both internally and externally. It has resulted in a situation where it can be hard to sift through critical matters relating to the services provided which are often buried in other communication of a lesser importance. This has led to challenges in our ability to tangibly monitor our performance and being able to address any potential shortcomings in the process. In recognition of the role technology plays in improving the quality of service provided, we will ensure that all departments delivering interaction-based services are able to track the cases allocated to them in an integrated solution, which will give our customers and stakeholders a consistent feel of doing business with and within RBFRS. Doing this will also support automation of processes, allow automated and live reporting to support our managers in making decisions helping to deliver the best service they can. It will improve the management and leadership teams' ability to channel interventions where they are required leading to improving the quality of services, while becoming better placed to identify where staff wellbeing may be affected earlier than it is currently possible.

## Collaboration

Collaboration with other organisations across our region directly impacts the outcomes for the communities we serve.

Our collaboration with fire and rescue services across Thames Valley is of huge importance to the services we deliver to our local communities. Despite different governance structures, we share the same purpose and are perceived as delivering one service to those who need us. We must ***ensure we work together to align our practices and goals as much as possible, to remove barriers which might exist without joint thinking.*** This is particularly important to support the operations of Thames Valley Fire Control Service – a joint Fire Control operating from our HQ at Newsham Court but serving Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Royal Berkshire.





While ICT already collaborates with our partners across Thames Valley, we recognise that more can be achieved through closer sharing of ideas and resources, including long term planning. This will require a new approach as we are aware much more can be achieved if we improve the way in which we work. We will work on a joint approach to achieve this goal.

We will continue to seek opportunities to achieve economies of scale through joint procurement wherever possible or exchange vital information and data including initiatives like Thames Valley Together.

Benefiting from a consistent case management approach and solution, we will seek opportunities to integrate our processes with other public bodies where such collaboration can have a positive effect on the service delivered by RBFRS or our partners. We will actively engage with them ensuring opportunities are not missed due to lack of information.

In recognition of different experiences, we will seek opportunities to share expertise with our fire and rescue service partners where possible, considering either training or sharing of learning from own research and development. This goes beyond the Thames Valley and will be achieved through collaboration with NFCC groups as well as directly with other Fire and Rescue Services across the country.



## Action plan:

### Technology and infrastructure:

**By the end of the strategy, we will:**

1. Deliver a new systems architecture, including links between systems and data.
2. Review all systems and produce a replacement plan with a cloud-first and customisable off the shelf approach as principles in place of fully bespoke systems.
3. Migrate RBFRS systems to cloud and re-engineer our Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity.
4. Deliver improved cyber security capability aligned to the risks and requirements of RBFRS.
5. Deliver new network infrastructure.
6. Deliver device upgrades in line with the standardised approach.
7. Increase adoption of Microsoft 365 toolset available to RBFRS.
8. Procure new CAD system for TVFCS.
9. Ensure full alignment with NFCC Fire Standard and all associated standards.
10. Deliver converged communication solution replacing legacy telephony.

***By March 2026, we will establish a resilient and flexible technology framework for RBFRS by completing migrations of at least 70% of our systems to scalable cloud-based infrastructure and introducing automated risk management systems which detect and respond to changing requirements within 24 hours.***

### Data and information Intelligence

**By the end of the strategy, we will:**

1. Deliver a data strategy supporting RBFRS capability of delivering unified business intelligence.
2. Ensure all systems allow data sharing for service-wide data intelligence by design.
3. Adopt technology to streamline information governance activities.
4. Improve data accuracy and availability.

***By December 2026, we will establish a unified business intelligence platform which allows to integrate data from 100% of RBFRS's core systems, supported by trained personnel, with the capability to provide real-time insights to enhance decision-making and service delivery for Berkshire residents.***

### Our people and capabilities

**By the end of the strategy, we will:**

1. Review effectiveness of all BIS functions, produce a skills and training gap analysis and a forward plan.
2. Create an environment enabling citizen development within RBFRS.



3. Evaluate all departments of RBFRS and create a baseline for technological skillset required.
4. Create training required to breach any gaps within existing workforce and provide new arrivals with means of meeting our baselines.
5. Ensure training facilities are suitably equipped to allow online training across RBFRS estates.
6. Establish a permanent “ICT survey” bringing the expertise closer to staff within RBFRS.

***By August 2025, we will deliver a comprehensive assessment of skill requirements across BIS and RBFRS teams and design a targeted training and development programme to ensure 90% of staff meet technology capability standards aligned with the organization’s evolving needs before the end of October 2026.***

## Process

**By the end of the strategy, we will:**

1. Established a “zero paper” approach across the service and digitalise all processes as they are reviewed.
2. Introduce Agile management principles across BIS and equip staff with skills required to follow them in project work.
3. Create a three-year plan of technical projects embedded in service’s Intranet channels.
4. Develop and embed architectural principles aligned to systems architecture and incorporated into process of change across the service.
5. Deliver a consolidated case management solution to support work of all departments within the service.

***By August 2025 we will deliver a “zero paper processes” timeline across the Service.***

## Collaboration

**Throughout this strategy, we will:**

1. Engage with partners to seek opportunities to integrate systems in the aid of automation.
2. Tighten the communication with our closest partners forming TVFCS and engage in meaningful exchange of information and planning for our technology.
3. Engage with other fire and rescue services directly or through NFCC to both contribute to and share from technical knowledge within the sector.

***By April 2025, we will commence a joint identification of future technological developments and opportunities for alignment across Thames Valley, in collaboration with our TVFCS partners.***



# Digital, Data and Technology Steering Group

A necessary part of planning and delivering any digital, data and technology related capabilities and systems at RBFRS is assurance of their alignment with the environment, priorities and risks' mitigations they support and underpin. A structured approach to ensuring this strategy and priorities remain aligned, which includes representations from all parts of the Service is currently not available. This strategy sets out a vision for the next three years of Digital, Data, and Technology Development within the Service, but it is vital that it remains alive and aligned to a constantly changing environment. A Digital, Data, and Technology Steering Group will be formed with a service-wide representation to support BIS in ensuring service resources are appropriately engaged and utilised to deliver on the vision described in this strategy and that its direction remains aligned with the changes and risks affecting the services delivered by Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service.