Strategic Asset Investment Framework

10 Year Strategy

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Foreword

Councillor Rachelle Shepherd DuBey, Lead Member for Strategic Assets and Sustainability

It is my pleasure to introduce the latest refresh of our Strategic Asset Investment Framework document. Considering 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 to improve our planning capability whilst also delivering improved facilities so that the benefits can be realised sooner. For example, we will be completing initiatives that will significantly improve sustainability performance across the estate, including insulation and heat pumps to replace obsolete fossil fuel boilers and roof mounted solar panels where practicable to do so. We will also continue to build on last year's work on thematic equality and contaminants management improvements. Notably on the sustainability front, we have completed a major lighting upgrade programme across five of our sites, which are already reducing carbon emissions and realising energy savings. The new Training Centre at Whitley Wood is progressing well, constructed using a modern modular method that has lower environmental impact and will enable us to continue to ensure our staff are well trained and able to deliver services to the public safely and effectively.

The Fire Authority's foresight to focus investment on updating our fire engine fleet continues to realise benefits. In addition to the transformation of the front-line appliance fleet, the Service has invested in off-road light vehicles that have been adapted to better deal with wildfires and this capability will be invested in further. This approach creates capacity to adapt our specialist and support fleet to changing demands and benefit from advances in technology, such as electrification and improved capability to tackle incidents such as wildfires. Operational equipment continues to feature in the plan and the Service has now fully transitioned to best in class heavy duty cordless cutting equipment using a jointly procured tri-service Thames Valley team approach. This collaborative approach echoed the previous success with our breathing apparatus, enabling a large and complex programme of work to be delivered efficiently within the capabilities of the Services' current technical and training resources, thereby delivering excellent value for money. A significant step forward in firefighter protection has seen

the roll out of world class particulate blocking hoods to all frontline operators – this effort was supported by data provided by colleagues at Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Service.

We recognise that Information and Communication Technology underpins most of our operations and areas within the organisation enabling us to deliver our statutory duties. We continue to develop and adapt our systems to benefit from the advances in ICT, allowing the organisation to benefit from the data it gathers. This approach continues to directly support the principles set out in our strategy for ICT.

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 delivering 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 communities across Berkshire.

The Authority's purpose is to create safer and 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 own resilience and work with partners to promote and build resilience in the communities we serve.

5. Sustainability - We are committed to ensuring that we provide a financially sustainable Service and take meaningful action to help address the climate emergency.

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 sixteen 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 and deliver greater efficiency and effectiveness for the future of the Service.

Our Estate

The annual refresh and development of the Strategic Asset Investment Programme (SAIF) provides the Authority with a clear view of the long-term financial pressures associated with meeting planned property improvements as well as 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 new build Theale Community Fire Station in 2022.

The major project introduced in 2023 to redevelop the training centre facilities at the Whitley Wood site is well underway with modular construction largely completed and fitting out well advanced. The on-site work is scheduled to be completed by July 2025. The total expected re-development project cost, including detailed design and planning work is expected to come in within the budget of £3.86 million, despite a volatile construction sector.

The next major activities are heat decarbonisation of five of our worst performing sites, which will be covered later in the 'Sustainability' section of the SAIF, and the refurbishment of Langley Fire Station. Major refurbishments of other wholetime stations will also be carried out over the next five years. 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 – Whitley Wood Training Centre Redevelopment

The Whitley Wood Training Centre re-development project is nearing completion with the building expected to be in use by April 2025 and external works to be completed by July 2025. The new build requirement was expedited due to major damage being sustained to the previous building in summer 2022. This, however, presented an opportunity to completely re-provide not just the training facility, but also to reconfigure the environs. In doing this we have been able to improve the efficiency of the site whilst optimising the internal layout focusing on contaminants management, along with providing modern and inclusive facilities.

By demolishing two current buildings and replacing them with one, two-storey modular training and office space, pressure on a heavily used drill and training yard has been reduced, further enhancing working relationships between all site users. The training centre has been designed in such a way as to allow clear zoning for contaminants, whilst also providing a workflow that will reduce the impact of contamination, in both operational and non-operational areas, as far as practicable. The new building also provides facilities that support a more diverse workforce.

The Authority opted for a modular building as it was deemed imperative that the training centre and fire station crews remained operational from Whitley Wood throughout the entire project. The modular construction method meant that much of the build was constructed off site, resulting in a high quality, fit for purpose, modern facility with significantly reduced impact on all site users compared to a traditional build method. The total amount of site works will be less than 12 months for the entire project and less than 6 months for the new building specifically. This modern construction method also brings reduced environmental impacts, in addition to sustainability features like solar power and electrical vehicle charging points, meaning the building is certified to BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) ‘Very Good’.

The Service's commitment to training through this level of investment in our facilities, supports both the active recruitment process and robust training requirements. Recruits and staff will benefit from the fit-for-purpose facility, meeting the training needs of a modern service.

Case Study – Slough Fire Station Refurbishment

Slough Fire Station is the third station to undergo comprehensive refurbishment works. The specification for the works at Slough were determined by multiple key factors including an extensive staff engagement process with current station staff, the need for investment in facilities to support a more diverse and inclusive workforce, the need to reduce exposure to contaminants and the Service's commitment to becoming more sustainable. The upgrades and improvements include:

- Creating individual bedrooms, showers, and changing facilities to offer greater privacy, improving the equality, diversity, and inclusion characteristics of the station to promote and encourage a more diverse workforce.
- Reconfiguring the ground floor layout and upgrading operational equipment storage to improve decontamination facilities and contaminants flow, to provide a cleaner and safer working environment.
- Reconfiguring and refurbishing the first-floor communal spaces to include a large meeting room to further support closer working between operational station staff and non-operational employees.
- Upgrade and expand the gym to provide a dedicated fitness training space, providing a cleaner and safer working environment, along with supporting staff wellbeing.
- Installation of solar panels on the roof and new LED lighting throughout to reduce emissions and carbon footprint.
- Creating and refurbishing new clean-side and operational laundry arrangements to improve the control of contaminants.
- Refurbishing the breathing apparatus maintenance room; and
- Providing an effective water rescue facility to accommodate this new important operational capability and supporting operational resilience across the county.

These works form part of a wider service strategy to ensure that our built estate continues to meet the needs of our workforce and communities, now and in the future.

Case Study – Wokingham Fire Station

The RBFRS Equality, Diversity, Inclusivity Forum (EDI Forum) was established in 2017 with the objective to develop an inclusive culture within the Service by raising general awareness of equality and diversity matters.

In addition to this, the publication from the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) report “Minimising Fire Fighters Exposure to Toxic Fire Effluents”, has provided background information and best practice for the decontamination of FRS personnel and firefighting equipment after exposure to toxic fire effluent.

From an estate’s perspective, and following consultation and emerging understanding, RBFRS has created guidelines for EDI and contaminants management standards to lay out the minimum facilities that should be expected at each station. It set out the acceptable minimum interim standards and desirable long-term expectations that are to be met when larger station

refurbishments are carried out. Minor capital works and FM delivered interim solutions brought many stations up to the minimum standard whilst they wait for larger scale refurbishments as provided for in the SAIF.

This case study provides detail of interim works that are currently underway at Wokingham Fire Station designed to bring the station up to our EDI and contaminants standards. Wokingham Fire Station is due for further refurbishment upgrades under the SAIF programme of works in 2027/28.

Aspects of this project have been challenging due to the size and configuration, however, to maximise both initiatives, consultation with key stakeholders, including staff from station, regional operations managers and FBU representatives has been key to its success.

The interim upgrades and improvements at Wokingham include:

- Re-configuring the open-plan dorm facility on the first floor to create four individual bedrooms with changing facilities to offer greater privacy improving the equality, diversity, and inclusion characteristics of the station to promote and encourage a more diverse workforce.
- Reconfiguring the first floor to create a female priority dorm to provide individual bedroom with changing facility to offer greater privacy improving the equality, diversity, and inclusion characteristics of the station to promote and encourage a more diverse workforce.
- Reconfiguring and refurbishing the first-floor wellbeing area to include a small meeting room space to further support flexible requirements.
- Providing external washdown to improve the control of contaminants.
- Reconfiguring the ground floor layout to improve decontamination facilities and contaminants flow, to provide a cleaner and safer working environment.

These works form part of a wider Service strategy to ensure that our built estate continues to meet the needs of our workforce and communities, now and in the future. They provide a safer, more diverse, and inclusive workplace in line with the aspirations of our People Strategy, our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Plan and Contamination, Prevention and Management Policy.

Sustainability

The Authority is committed to reducing the impact of the organisation's operations on the environment and reducing its carbon footprint. It will do so in a way that supports the United Kingdom's commitment to sustainable development and reducing the effects of climate change. To help cement its commitment, the Authority released its Sustainability Strategy 2024-2029 on 8 October 2024 which will seek to make an impact and deliver benefits across all business areas, subject to available resources.

In its broader sense the SAIF upholds the Authority's strategic objective of sustainability by promoting asset longevity through refurbishments. Upgrading our current estate and infrastructure is also both more financially and environmentally sustainable than investing in new builds. Introducing sustainable technologies and delivering projects with sustainability in mind will start to significantly reduce our carbon footprint at our sites and reduce operating costs in the longer term.

The carbon footprint of any estate is typically two-thirds of the total generated by overall business activities. Professional consultants independently assessed our estate, with results indicating our buildings contributed 65% of the Authority's carbon output (1,524 tCO_2 per year). In line with our core objectives for estate improvements, as stated above, and in keeping with the Government's commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we are incorporating environmental sustainability into all 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 to make our estate more environmentally friendly and deliver revenue budget savings of approximately £140,000 over the short to medium term. Our strategic planning has been augmented by the production of heat decarbonisation plans (HDP) by specialist consultants, funded by the Government's Low Carbon Skills Fund (LCSF).

To support this key area of work, we have established a permanent Sustainability Officer post that can focus on planning and delivery. Initiatives will include:

- Heat decarbonisation by improving the thermal performance of building fabric and replacing outdated and inefficient heating plant with ground and/or air source heat pumps, coupled with new building management control systems. Using the HDPs, a successful bid was made to the Salix-administered Government Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) for £928,000 to assist with phase 1 of these works during 2024-2026.
- Installation of LED lighting across the estate – this is the least complex initiative and should offer the quickest return on investment with the minimum resource demand. This project has seen five sites completed in 2024, with further sites to be planned for delivery when they are refurbished.
- Where permissible and practicable, installation of solar photovoltaic (PV) systems also offers a good return on investment (estimated 5 years) and will be completed over a two-year period, starting in 2025. Resilience measures using batteries will also be considered if financially viable and practicable.
- 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 to allow the installation of charging points to further support the longevity of our estate. This work will be planned in 2025 for delivery in 2026.

Phasing of Estates Projects

£'000	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/2030 to 2034/35	Total
New Build	Training Centre £463					£463
Major Redevelopment	Langley £1,100		Caversham Rd £1,392		HQ £1,070	£3,562
			Wokingham Rd £500	Wokingham £350		£850
				Whitley Wood £456		£456
			Newbury £790			£790
Sustainability		EV infrastructure £650				£650
	Heat decarbonisation, LED and Solar (P1 sites) £3,142					£3,142
		Solar PV £450	Heat decarb £150	Sustainability £250	Sustainability £1,500	£2,350
Lifecycle Costs					£1,200	£1,200
Minor New Works	£257	£200	£200	£200	£1,800	£2,657
Total	**£10,550**				**£5,570**	**£16,120**

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 fed 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 the necessary works and would be subject to the relevant approvals as set out in the final section of this document.

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/rainwater 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.

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. It may be that as condition surveys are updated, it makes little sense in spending significant sums on some of our older buildings and the need for building a new fire station becomes more urgent. Should this be the case, the SAIF will be updated to reflect this new reality, although revisions to plans will need to be done within the envelope of affordability. Possible solutions could come from redeveloping some of our current sites or looking at some form of land swap.

Disposals

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

Since 2017, 19 new front line pumping appliances have been delivered into service. The Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Services have worked together to design and procure a standard fire appliance that carries an aligned inventory of equipment. This is to enhance the operational response of the three services when deployed by Thames Valley Fire Control Service. Further, by aligning fleet and equipment, the Thames Valley Services have improved interoperability, increased efficiencies through aligned training, policies and procedures, as well as benefiting from more resilient maintenance and logistics opportunities.

In addition to the transformation of the front-line appliance fleet, the Service acquired a new Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) in 2021 and a new off-road capable pumping appliance in 2022. The Service has invested in off-road light vehicles that the fleet and equipment team has been adapting to carry a wildfire optimised pump and equipment package to further enhance the Service's ability to respond to wildfires such as the ones experienced in 2022. Hybrid vehicles are routinely being incorporated into the fleet to start to reduce the environmental impact of our activities and five fully electric vehicles are now in the fleet enabling the impact to be reduced even further.

The Service has now fully transitioned to 'Interspiro' breathing apparatus equipment after the completion of a competitive tender process. The training programme and introduction of the new equipment was managed by a tri-service Thames Valley team which enabled this huge programme of work to be managed within the capabilities of the Services' current technical and training resources. The new equipment has been designed with firefighter health, safety and welfare in mind and has brought innovations such as full telemetry, wireless communications, and personal issue facemasks to our staff. The equipment is identical across the Thames Valley, further aligning our operational response with the goal of reducing the number of operational resources that need to be deployed to an incident where cross border resources are used.

Case study – fire appliance replacement tri-service project

Over recent years, there has been significant work by Thames Valley fire and rescue services to align appliances, this coordinated approach towards developing a standardised appliance has improved effectiveness at cross-border incidents within the Thames Valley as well as improve efficiencies in research, procurement, and training activity.

Purchase of modern, efficient, and safer fire appliances to replace the legacy appliances remaining in the operational, training and reserve fleets that are reaching the end of their programmed life in.

The introduction of new fire appliances in the fleet brings several significant benefits:

- Enhanced standardisation: By aligning the design standards of the fire appliances across the fleet, the new vehicles will ensure greater uniformity and consistency across the entire operational firefighting fleet. This standardisation simplifies maintenance, repair, and replacement processes, reducing downtime and associated costs. It enables identical equipment stowage across vehicles further enhancing operational flexibility in the management of reserve vehicles.

- Streamlined equipment stowage: The legacy appliance fleet, built to a different design standard, has different equipment stowage configurations. Introducing new fire appliances with consistent design standards allows for optimised equipment stowage, ensuring that tools and resources are efficiently organised and easily accessible during emergency response. This streamlining saves crucial time during critical situations and enhances operational efficiency. It reduces the training burden on staff having to know how to operate two equipment types and simplifies the management of operational equipment across the Service.

- Simplified driver training: With the legacy fleet's different design standards, drivers require specific training to operate the older vehicles effectively. The introduction of new fire appliances built to the same design standards as the recent fleet eliminates the need for additional or specialised driver training. Firefighters can transition seamlessly between vehicles, reducing training costs and ensuring greater agility.

Phasing of Fleet and Equipment Expenditure

The on-going fleet replacement programme is a steady state programme. We have aligned our front-line appliance replacement profile to a 12-year cycle as recommended by the National Fire Chiefs Council. The fleet replacement programme will be reviewed regularly as we continue to look for opportunities to build a more environmentally sustainable fleet where operationally and financially viable.

£'000	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/2030 to 2034/35	Total
Appliances	1,596	300	0	1,050	6,300	9,246
Specials	604	500	250	575	0	1,929
White Fleet	347	245	200	0	920	1,712
Operational Equipment	459	50	1,000	0	1,600	3,109
Total	**3,006**	**1,095**	**1,450**	**1,625**	**8,820**	**15,996**

Our ICT

The Strategic Asset Investment Framework for ICT should be considered in close alignment to RBFRS' ICT strategy, which currently runs from 2024-2027. 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 several years before renewing. Instead, flexible subscriptions to software delivery as a service will require revenue funding on an ongoing basis. With the reduction of licencing 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.

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 are likely to result in subscription-based software or platform delivery, there may still be a requirement to capitalise the procurement and implementation costs of such activities for the software or system themselves, as well as for associated hardware requirements driven by the change.

Investment aligned to the ICT strategic principles will support the overall organisational goals of improving efficiency and productivity of its workforce releasing staff capacity for its core and value-adding 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 7 years currently
Fireground Radios	Every 7 years
Network Devices	Every 10 years

Various factors over the medium-term dictate that the ICT investment focus should shift towards the facilitation of the greatest possible consolidation, integration, and exploitations of systems and hardware leading to improvements in efficiency and productivity across all parts of the organisation, enabling capturing and subsequently analysing the data to improve decision making. This will be accomplished by:

- Leveraging capabilities available within ecosystems already engaged with (primarily Microsoft 365) and end user hardware available to improve business processes;
- Greater integration of supporting applications and services with core Microsoft 365 Application suites (e.g. SDS, H&S, Finance, etc.); and
- Improved digital solutions for core operational activities (notably Protection, Enforcement, and Prevention, Data capture and analysis).

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 large-scale migration of core systems to the cloud, improvements in systems responsible for deployment and management of end user hardware as well as significant ICT Hardware refresh, Finance System and Staff Development System. The cloud migration will continue in phases for another two years and is anticipated to be completed by 2027 in line with the ICT Strategy.

Taking all of this into account, the capital requirement over the next 10 years for ICT is likely to be approximately £5.5m. To mitigate single year costs, refreshes may be brought forward/put back by one year to even out the cost profile, dependant on current equipment performance at that time.

The anticipated capital requirement for ICT is shown in the table below.

£'000	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/2030 to 2034/35	Total
ICT Hardware	270	175	139	290	1,120	1,994
ICT Core Infrastructure	15	41	0	37	17	110
Network solutions	20	0	0	0	593	613
Ops end user ICT hardware	0	0	0	0	330	330
ESN*	340	0	0	0	340	680
AV and tele conferencing	35	2	2	107	10	156
Software	28	0	0	0	0	28
Services/Delivery /Projects	313	344	109	109	724	1,599
Total	**1,021**	**562**	**250**	**543**	**3,134**	**5,510**

*** Subject to ESN go live**

Station-end mobilising equipment case study

The system used to mobilise crews to incidents at each station had become outdated and was becoming less dependable. Its function is critical to enable crews to mobilise by analysing signals coming from Thames Valley Control, displaying incident related information and sounding the alarm, printing incident information, as well as performing a number of other automated actions including opening doors on the path to the appliance bay, triggering the opening of bay doors, etc.

Following a rigorous procurement process Multitone were identified as the successful supplier. The replacement equipment chosen will assure the reliability of technology underpinning mobilising and enable continual alignment of equipment with our partner services.

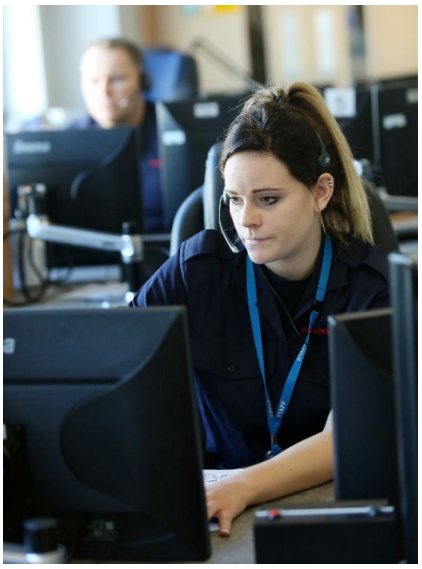
The equipment receives primary mobilising information digitally, relying on a wide area computer network connectivity, delivering a wealth of incident-related information to stations.

In case of a primary connectivity failure, the system is equipped with a secondary route, provided by PSTN telephony.

The specification chosen prepares the Service for migration away from PSTN telephony, currently used as a backup route for mobilising signals and which has been announced End Of Life and is currently planned for switch off by Openreach at the end of 2025.

Paired with access control equipment, our newly refreshed station-end system will continue to support the crews behind the scenes by providing appropriate information on the way to the incident or guarding against contamination of “clean” areas following a return.

Thames Valley Fire Control Service



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 and Rescue Services. As well as providing 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 Services.

The technical refresh of the Integrated Command and Control System (ICCS) was delivered in 2024/25, with the cost of the refresh being met from the Renewals Fund.

Funding will be required for a full system replacement, which will need to be fully tested and operational by April 2028. The three Services will need to consider whether future systems are 'cloud' based, reducing the demand on capital spending but increasing the impact on revenue spending. For planning purposes, £1.7m has been built into the SAIF, to cover the Authority's share of the capital costs of replacing the system. The financing costs and annual revenue costs of this new system have also been built into the Medium-Term Financial Plan. Further clarity is required to fully understand the cost profile, and, over the next 24 months, Officers will work to develop the business case for the new system.

The TVFCS Renewals Fund balance is expected to be £1.35 million by 31 March 2025.

Financial Implications

As evidenced by the most 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.

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.

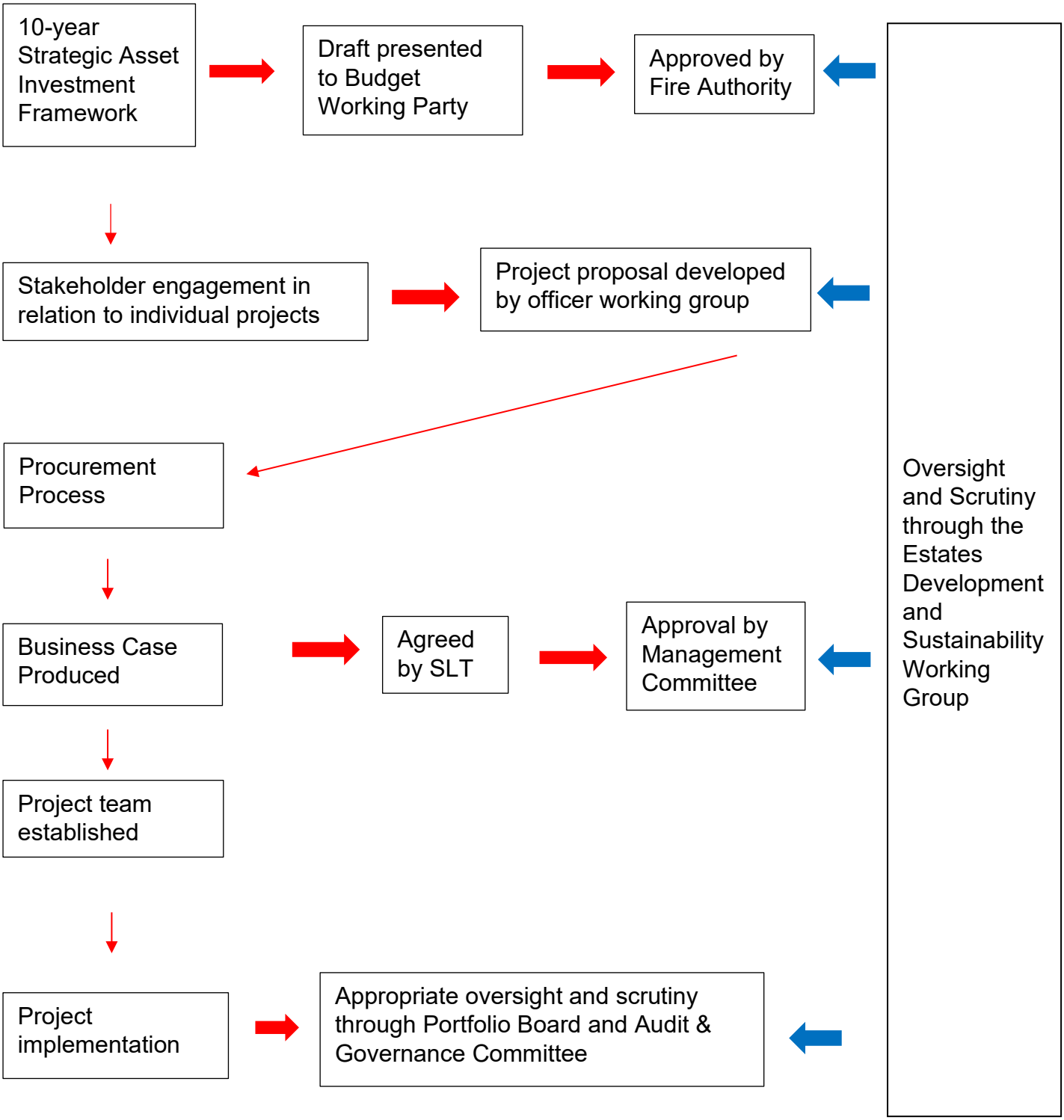
In terms of fleet and equipment and ICT capital expenditure the Authority will fund a significant proportion of this expenditure from its revenue budget. This is a prudent way to finance this type of expenditure given that such assets have shorter lives and therefore need replacing on a regular basis.

The capital receipt from the sale of the Dee Road site in 2022 is funding a large proportion of our capital expenditure in 2024/25. From 2025/26 additional loans will be required to finance the capital programme. This will push up the ratio of financing costs as a proportion of the revenue budget but the ratio will still be below the ceiling of three per cent as set out in the Treasury Strategy. Although the level of capital expenditure will create an additional financial pressure on the revenue budget is affordable over the period of the Medium-Term Financial Plan. 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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