

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Annual Report
» 2024-2025



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» Welcome

Welcome to the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) Annual Report. Over the past year, staff and volunteers for the Service have once again shown tremendous professionalism and commitment when delivering our vital services to the community.

This is a view that has been backed up in the latest inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), which has assessed that overall, RBFRS is providing a good service to the public. Of the 11 areas they inspected, RBFRS received 'Good' grades for eight of them. The remaining three were graded as 'Adequate'.

In an increasingly challenging inspection process, with the addition of the 'adequate' grade which maps against the previous 'good' grade, the Service is rightly proud of the continued improvement recognised by HMICFRS in this inspection.

To further improve upon the already high standards set, this year the Fire Authority set out a comprehensive investment programme in the Service's people, estate, training and equipment. For example, around £4 million is due to be invested in new fire engines in the coming years, and we will invest in IT systems that are modern and efficient to improve productivity across the Service.

Additionally, plans to refurbish the Training Centre in Whitley Wood, Reading are nearing completion

with the installation of a modular building on site. Once fully completed, this new Training Centre will ensure that we have access to modern, first-class and sustainable facilities to train and develop our firefighters, enabling them to continue to provide the high level of public service that residents of Berkshire enjoy.

We must also continue to be alert to the risks that our communities face. The climate emergency has been recognised by fire and rescue services across the country and, over the last two decades, services have responded to a growing number of emergency incidents that are associated with the effects of climate change.

Two recent examples of this are the heatwave in the summer of 2022, which saw record breaking temperatures in England, and the flooding in 2024, that have increased demand on the Service's resources. Therefore, alongside our Community Risk Management Plan, this year we were pleased to announce the launch of RBFRS' Sustainability Strategy, which aimed at improving the Service's efficiency while mitigating the impact it has on the planet.

Before going any further, we would like to take this opportunity to recognise the contributions of staff and volunteers that have made the Service what it is today. While there are too many to recognise in this document, we hope that this report gives you some indication of the fantastic work that is happening across Berkshire each and every day.



**Councillor
Jeff Brooks**

Chair,
Royal Berkshire
Fire Authority



Wayne Bowcock

Chief Fire Officer
and Chief Executive,
Royal Berkshire Fire
and Rescue Service

» Your Fire and Rescue Service

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service provides Prevention, Protection, and Response to incidents across the Royal County of Berkshire.

Twelve wholetime fire stations and four on-call fire stations cover 488 square miles from Langley in the East to Lambourn in the West. The Service protects a diverse cultural population of approximately 959,000, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The Service's highly-trained fire crews deal with incidents ranging from road and rail accidents to fuel and chemical spills, aviation and waterway accidents, collapsed buildings, large animal rescues, and, of course, fires.

Along with providing a swift and effective response to incidents, one of the Service's aims is to educate people on how to prevent fires and other emergencies. Our Service works with schools, businesses, residents, and community groups throughout Royal Berkshire to raise awareness and educate people about a wide variety of safety issues.

The Service has joined forces with Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service and Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service to establish a shared emergency call handling centre, Thames Valley Fire Control Service.



» Your Fire and Rescue Service



Fire Stations

Wholetime	11
On-call	4
Wholetime and On-call	1

Staff

Non-operational	197
Wholetime	382
On-call	60
Control Staff	41

Volunteers

14

Incidents attended

All Emergency Incidents	7549
Fires in the home	390
Fires in other buildings	146
Road traffic collisions	437
Outdoor fires	725
Water rescues	86
Flooding Incidents	216

Prevention & Protection

Safe and Well Visits	5462
Fire Safety Audits	673
Building consultations	2231

» About Us - Community Risk Management Plan

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service produces a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) to ensure we deliver the right resources at the right time, in the right place.

The CRMP balances resources against risk. Our CRMP contains information on what RBFRS is going to do over a four-year period and is supported by annual action plans.

RBFRS has a Programme Board to ensure that it meets the statutory requirements of the CRMP process whilst supporting the achievement of the strategic commitments and objectives.

The board provides leadership and support for the delivery of the CRMP programme, which is outlined in the Corporate Plan and CRMP 2023-27, which outlines six key priorities for the four year period:

1. We will develop our Integrated Service Delivery Strategy to meet the changing profile of risk in Berkshire due to climate change, societal and technological shifts.
2. We will develop a Risk Based Prevention Programme to target those most vulnerable and at risk from emergency incidents.
3. We will develop our response model to ensure that we are providing the most effective response to incidents within Berkshire, ensuring that it is aligned to the risks identified, sustainable and provides value for money

4. We will review the incidents that do not form part of our core statutory responsibilities, to better understand the implications for the Service in attending these incidents. Notwithstanding the review of our response and the gathering of this data, public safety will remain the primary priority of the Service.
5. We will develop our Service to reduce the impact of fire safety issues in commercial buildings.
6. We will maintain 19 frontline fire appliances, and a baseline service provision of 14 frontline fire appliances, utilising wholetime and on-call staff as effectively as possible, through local management.

The Programme Board makes recommendations for consideration by the Fire Authority through its CRMP Working Party.

We manage the risks we identify through an integrated approach. This means we consider the full range of treatments we have at our disposal and identify the most effective and efficient way to reduce community risk.



» About Us - Awards and Nominations

In 2024-25, the Service was recognised as part of several national schemes and awards presentations for our work in the fire and rescue sector. Some of the highlights from the year include:

Thames Valley Fire Investigation

The Thames Valley Forensic Fire Investigation Unit (FFSIU) was honoured with a nomination for the Collaboration Award at the Excellence in the Fire and Emergency Services Awards in December 2024.

The FFSIU represents an unparalleled partnership between Thames Valley Police, Oxfordshire County Council's Fire and Rescue Service and the Fire and Rescue services of Buckinghamshire, and Royal Berkshire.

Since its launch, the unit has attended over 116 fire investigations across the Thames Valley region. Its remit includes providing forensic fire investigation services for incidents suspected to involve criminal activity, serious injuries, or fatalities.

As the largest forensic fire investigation collaboration between fire services and police in the UK, the FFSIU is truly unique.

It operates under a shared quality management system with Thames Valley Police, fostering a cohesive "one team" approach.

The unit's forensic contributions have already supported evidence in a number of crown and coronial cases across the Thames Valley, underscoring its critical role in delivering justice and supporting community safety.

Apprentice Awards

During National Apprenticeship Week 2025, seven of our Wholetime Firefighters were nominated for awards at the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Apprenticeship Awards in London.

The seven Apprentices were all nominated for the Operational Apprentice of the Year Award, competing with other Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices from fire and rescue services across the UK. Well done to Cameron, Firefighter at Slough Fire Station, who was recognised as the runner-up for the Award.

Robin, one of our Station Managers, was also recognised for his efforts in supporting our apprentices with a nomination for the Excellence in Apprenticeship Support Award. This Award aims to recognise an outstanding team or individual that provided the best support for their apprentices, with Robin being one of the finalists.

Disability Confident Leader

In May, we were pleased to hear that we had maintained our status as a Level Three 'Leader' in the Disability Confident scheme.

The Disability Confident Scheme includes over 20,000-member organisations from across the country and, as a Leader, the Service ranks amongst the top 600 organisations in the Scheme.

To become a Disability Confident Leader, organisations must demonstrate how they have pioneered disability inclusion. The accreditation process involved the submission of evidence of the Service's disability inclusion work, and was

validated by Business Disability Forum, an existing Disability Confident Leader organisation. This status lasts for three years before Leader organisations are required to resubmit evidence for further revalidation.

Over the past three years, the Service has proven its commitment to disability inclusion by undertaking several initiatives. It actively participate in Leonard Cheshire's Change100 scheme, aimed at providing opportunities for university students with disabilities. RBFRS was the first fire and rescue service to sign up for the scheme in 2017 and has supported the programme every year since.

The Service became a member of the Disability Confident scheme in 2018, before becoming a Disability Confident Employer, the second level of the scheme, in 2019 and a Disability Confident Leader, the highest level of the scheme for the first time in 2021.

» About Us - Awards and Nominations

Make a Difference Awards

We were delighted that Red Watch at Caversham Road Fire Station and a member of our Control staff were shortlisted as finalists in the BBC Radio Berkshire Make a Difference Awards.

They were shortlisted in the Bravery Category for their efforts in rescuing two people trapped in a vehicle in Land's End Ford near Twyford on 10 May 2023.

The caller was unsure of his exact location, but a member of our Control staff calmly gathered all the information he could to pass onto attending crews. He gave lifesaving advice and managed to stay on the line reassuring them until the crews arrived at the scene.

When crews arrived in the area, they followed their intuition and attended Land's End Ford before searching downstream for several hundred meters.

They found the vehicle almost fully submerged with two people trapped inside. Both were desperately trying to keep breathing in a small air pocket just a few inches deep.

Two of our firefighters entered the water and managed to force entry to the vehicle, before pulling the occupants to safety. The crew then provided immediate emergency care and assisted the ambulance service, as they were in a very serious medical condition.

Both people survived after a period in hospital thanks to the composure and bravery of firefighters and control staff.

The Service is a 'good fit' employer for veterans to transition to and employs at least 25 veterans in a variety of roles.

English Veterans Awards

In 2024, we were delighted to have been shortlisted in the 'Employer of the Year' category at the English Veterans Awards. The Service is committed to promoting the inclusion of those who have served their country, ensuring equality and inclusion as part of our broader Equality, Diversity and Inclusion programme.

The Service is a 'good fit' employer for veterans to transition to and employs at least 25 veterans in a variety of roles. We recognise that ex-forces personnel have great strengths and strong transferable skills to bring to any role within our Fire and Rescue Service.

Veterans have a strong commitment to public service and community. We are proud to support those who serve, and who have served, and their families.



» Social Media Highlights



Followers: **10,069**
New followers: **841**
Interactions: **24,681**
Reach: **378,028**



Active users: **366,000**
Page Views: **588,000**
Form Submissions: **13,132**
File Downloads: **17,765**



Followers: **3,037**
New followers: **468**
Interactions: **4,622**
Reach: **29,540**



Subscribers: **600**
New Subscribers: **72**
Views: **39,200**
Hours Watched: **827.4**



Followers: **11,437**
Interactions: **1,025**
Profile visits: **973**
Posts: **601**



Followers: **3,543**
New followers: **642**
Interactions: **4,322**
Page views: **3,720**

» Timeline of the Last Year



Project Delivers Stronger Alignment

Following a successful joint procurement project, all firefighters across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire now use the same breathing apparatus sets and associated equipment. Alignment between the three fire and rescue services of the Thames Valley (TV) is stronger following the successful delivery of a £1.7m collaborative project.

**April
2024**

Welcoming our Newest Cohort of Firefighters

On Friday, 10 May 2024, we welcomed 17 new Wholetime Firefighters during a Graduation Ceremony at Maidenhead Fire Station.



Service Enhances Environmental Protection Capabilities

The Decontamination and Environmental Protection Unit is used at incidents where there is a risk to the local environment or where there is a need to operate in gas tight suits.

**May
2024**

Property Manager Fined for Several Fire Safety Breaches

A property manager in Slough was ordered to pay £22,646.82 for fire safety breaches following a successful prosecution brought by the Fire Authority. The guilty plea followed an investigation conducted by the Service in early 2023.

Supporting Pride Month Across Berkshire

As part of Pride Month, crews from Wokingham, Bracknell, Newbury, Caversham Road and Wokingham Road fire stations attended pride events throughout the summer. During the events, crews, joined by staff from across the Service, took the opportunity to talk about fire safety, and recruitment.

**June
2024**



Fire Cadets Recognised for Achievements

Thirty-nine Fire Cadets from across Berkshire demonstrated their new skills at a Graduation Ceremony held at Maidenhead Fire Station

Ground Broken at New Fire Service Training Centre

Joined by Members of the Fire Authority, local Councillors and Yuan Yang MP, the Groundbreaking ceremony marked the beginning of works on the new Training Centre.

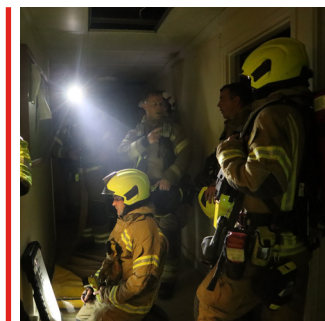
**July
2024**

Year Three of the Summer Internship

The Scheme encourages those who may not have considered a career in the sector to explore some of the roles available to them. The scheme was open to people from Berkshire who were aged 17-18 and from ethnic groups that are under-represented in the Service.



**August
2024**



Multi-Service Exercise at the AMC Tower.

We led a joint exercise with our blue light partners, local authorities and Thames Valley Fire Control Service at the University of Reading.

Changes to our Automatic Fire Alarm Policy

Members of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority decided to make the change following a public consultation, which attracted a total of 389 responses during the consultation period.

**September
2024**

» Timeline of the Last Year



Celebrating International Control Room Week

During International Control Room Week, we celebrated Thames Valley Fire Control Service's dedicated staff who help keep our communities safe.

Service Launches Sustainability Strategy

The Service announced the launch of our first Sustainability Strategy, aimed at improving efficiency while mitigating our impact on the planet.

**October
2024**

Excellence Recognised at Awards Ceremony

We celebrated our annual Awards Ceremony on Friday, 29 November 2024, to recognise the exceptional work of our staff, volunteers and partners.

18 New Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices

We welcomed a second cohort of Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices at a graduation ceremony held at Maidenhead Fire Station.

Milestone Moment in Construction of Service's New Training Centre

The last module of our new Training Centre building was hoisted into place, marking a key milestone in the project.

**November
2024**



Thames Valley Forensic Fire Investigation Unit Nominated

The Thames Valley Forensic Fire Investigation Unit was honoured with a nomination for the prestigious Collaboration Award at the Excellence in the Fire and Emergency Services Awards in December. This recognition came just 18 months after the unit's inception in 2023.

**December
2024**

Tri-Service Fire Engine Investment

In January, staff from the Service joined colleagues from Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service to finalise the design of our newest vehicles. Built by Emergency One in Cumnock, Scotland, these state-of-the-art vehicles will be deployed at Newbury and Theale fire stations in 2025.



**January
2025**



Apprentices Nominated for National Awards

Seven of our Wholetime Firefighters were nominated for awards at the National Fire Chiefs Council Apprenticeship Awards in London. Robin, one of our Station Managers, was also recognised for his efforts in supporting our apprentices with a nomination for the Excellence in Apprenticeship Support Award.

**February
2025**

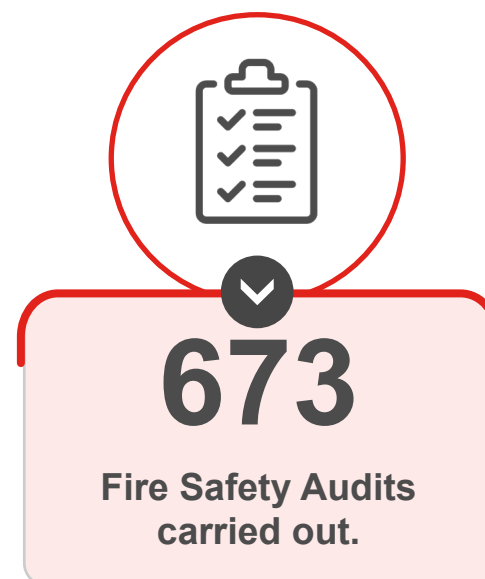
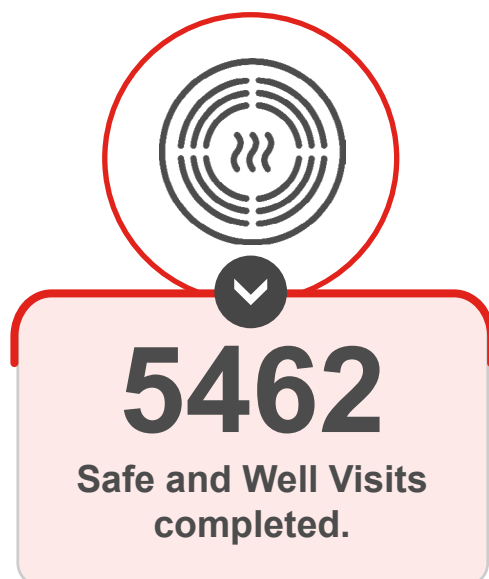
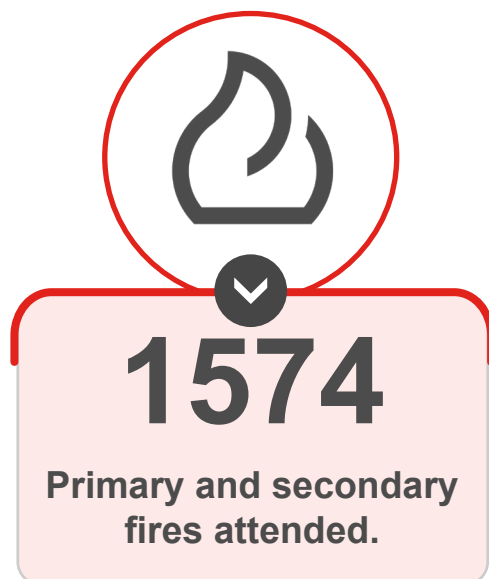


New Fire Safety Advisers

The Service welcomed three new Fire Safety Advisers into our Protection Teams, bringing the total number of Fire Safety Advisers in development across the Service up to 11.

**March
2025**

» Our Year in Numbers



» Our Performance

In order to monitor performance and ensure we are working towards our Annual Objectives and CRMP commitments, a number of performance measures were agreed by Royal Berkshire Fire Authority for the 2024/25 Annual plan.

Our performance measures and targets enable us to manage our performance and demonstrate our effectiveness at preventing and protecting against potential risk and responding to incidents to ensure that we provide value for money to the communities that we serve.

These measures monitor the delivery of our statutory obligations and the services we provide, along with how key resources are managed, including Staff, Finance and Health & Safety.

Performance is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Strategic Performance Board and by the Audit and Governance Committee. Our year end performance against the Corporate Measures can be seen on pages 34 to 36.

Response

In 2024/25, there were 7,549 emergency incidents within Berkshire. This is lower than the last two years but aligned with pre-pandemic figures. Whilst we have experienced a reduction in incident numbers, the incidents we respond to are becoming more resource intensive. Flooding and outdoor fires, especially larger wildfires, are examples of resource intensive incidents the crews respond to.

Q1 and Q2 were comparable to last year, however in Q3 and Q4 we did not see as many extreme weather incidents such as storms and flooding (a

14.29 percent decrease in flooding incidents).

Whilst Road Traffic Collision incidents remained consistent with a decrease of 3.32 percent along with fires in “other” buildings, we saw an increase in “fires in the home” (5.64 percent) and “outdoor fires” (6.90 percent). The greatest reduction was in “water rescue” with a drop from 86 to 59 percent (-31.40 percent)

Our wholetime fire engines have been available 96.9 percent of the time this year, under our 99 percent target and a reduction on availability since 2023-24.

This year we substantially increased the number of referrals from our partners by 26.1 percent, to 5376.

Q4 showed an improvement to 98.1 percent as we start to see the benefits of Priority 6 of our Community Risk Management Plan. Our on-call crews have achieved 32.7 percent availability this year. This is lower than our 50 percent target.

However, some areas have seen improvements and many stations are maintaining their standards. Last year, we established an Operational Support Team who have close oversight of resourcing gaps to maximise appliance availability.

The impact of the loss of key personnel has been

minimised whilst our recruitment campaigns have also been succesful.

In 2024/25, we attended 72 percent of all emergency incidents within 10 minutes of receiving the call. We did not achieve our Response Standard target of 75 percent. Whilst the number of incidents were lower in Q3 and Q4, the response standard dropped for the travel component.

In September (Q3), we introduced a new AFA policy which we continue to evaluate alongside the response standard and additional Prevention and Protection activities being undertaken.

We have also undertaken work to review the standard during the day and night without any significant conclusion.

Prevention and Protection

Our strategy to prevent fires and other emergencies includes the provision of Safe and Well Visits to those who are at heightened risk of dying or being injured as result of an accidental dwelling fire.

We work closely with partner agencies to ensure individuals with risk factors are referred to us. This approach allows us to support the most vulnerable in our communities. This year we substantially increased the number of referrals from our partners by 26.1 percent, to 5376.

Our Fire Safety Inspecting Officers and Advisers completed nearly 700 Full Fire Safety Audits in premises falling under the Regulatory Reform Order 2005, which outlines our duty to enforce fire safety in non – domestic premises.

» Our Performance

We have continued to embed our new Risk Based Inspection Programme methodology which combines a focus on the inherent risk of premises types.

To ensure we target our resources at the highest risk premises, we identified the Very High and High risk properties and introduced a specific audit time frame of one to three years.

Corporate Health

We lost 6.25 percent of working time to sickness in 2024/25, which means we did not meet our target of a maximum of five percent. We did see an improvement in Q4 after a particularly high Q2 and Q3. There continue to be wider societal trends of increased sickness and absence, including impacts on mental health, and pressures on the NHS which may delay treatment and lengthen absence.

We continue to provide support and assistance to managers and promote early intervention to ensure consistency of policy application across the Service.

Health Partners (Occupational Health) benchmarking data shows for the rolling 12 months to the end of March 2025 that 21 percent of RBFRS cases related to musculoskeletal issues.

This compares to 28 percent for their emergency services clients and 26 percent across their client base. 50 percent of RBFRS cases are related to mental health issues.

This compares to 35 percent for their emergency services clients and 31 percent across their client base.

The gap between RBFRS and other emergency services clients and the client base is widening, which potentially reflects the number of mental health absences linked to employee relations cases.

Audits

In 2024-25, internal audits were carried out across a number of areas of the Service. These areas were:

- Driving Licence Checks
- Payroll Provider – Data Plan
- Risk Information
- Fire Fighter Pension Administration
- Operational Vehicle Compliance
- Key Financial Controls – General Ledger
- Risk Management and Governance

Our auditors found substantial assurance for two of these, reasonable assurance in four and one with partial assurance.

- Cyber Security
- Follow up
- Discipline and Grievance Handling

Three of our audits were completed within the year. However we are awaiting findings or the final report.

Statement of Assurance

We are required by the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England to provide an Annual Statement of Assurance on financial, governance and operational matters to enable our communities, Government, Local Authorities and partners to make a valid assessment of our governance arrangements.

This is produced and published on our website and confirms the extent to which the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been met.

**Our Fire
Safety Inspecting
Officers and Advisers
completed nearly 700
Full Fire Safety Audits in
premises falling under
the Regulatory Reform
Order 2005.**

» HMICFRS Inspection

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) has completed their latest inspection of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS), assessing that overall, RBFRS is providing a good service to the public.

This inspection was HMICFRS's third assessment of the Service's effectiveness and efficiency, and how well it looks after its people. Of the 11 areas inspected, RBFRS received 'Good' grades for eight of them. The remaining three were graded as 'Adequate'.

This result comes in an increasingly challenging inspection process, with the addition of the 'adequate' grade which maps against the previous 'good' grade.

The principal findings are as follows:

- The Service continues to provide an effective prevention, protection and response for the public, by working well with other fire and rescue services and organisations such as the police, local authorities and health providers.
- The Service is working hard to transform its estate, technology and ensure staff are being productive at work. This is supporting the service to improve its ways of working and provide a more efficient service to the public.
- Staff are proud to work for the service and the culture is positive. Concerns can be raised and will be dealt with appropriately. The service looks after its people and this enables them to put the community at the heart of what they do.

The Service has addressed many of its areas for improvement from the last inspection in 2022. This includes efforts to reduce the burden of unwanted fire signals following a public consultation and ensuring that it is monitoring the collection of risk information, making it quickly available to staff responding to incidents.

Responding to the report, Councillor Jeff Brooks, Chair of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, said: "This assessment provided by HMICFRS is clear. RBFRS is a fantastic Service, made up of dedicated staff offering exceptional services to our residents.

"As a Fire Authority, we have challenged ourselves to have plans which not only maintain the positive levels of service offered, but crucially invest in equipment, fire stations and training to equip RBFRS for the years ahead.

Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer, said: "Our staff should be proud of the assessment delivered by this report. RBFRS has consistently been rated as a 'Good' service by HMICFRS and this does not happen by coincidence.

"I am privileged to witness the professionalism and commitment from staff across the Service, working as one team, every day, to make this possible. We will now reflect on this positive assessment and recommendations, before we challenge ourselves to raise the bar even higher, for the benefit of our staff and communities."

You can read the [full inspection report](#) on the HMICFRS website.

HMICFRS Results

Outstanding		
Good	Understanding fire and risk	Preventing fire and risk
	Public safety through fire regulation	
	Responding to fires and emergencies	
	Future affordability	Right people, right skills
	Promoting fairness and diversity	
	Promoting values and culture	
Adequate	Responding to major incidents	Best use of resources
	Managing performance and developing leaders	
Requires Improvement		
Inadequate		

» Culture

Annual Awards Ceremony

The Service celebrated a year of outstanding achievements at its annual Awards Ceremony on Friday, 29 November 2024. This event, which took place at the Select Car Leasing Stadium in Reading, provided an opportunity to give thanks and recognition for the exceptional work of our staff, volunteers and partners.

Proceedings began with the presentation of awards to staff who have served for 20 or 30 years in the fire and rescue sector. These awards were presented by the Lord Lieutenant of the Royal County of Berkshire, Mr Andrew Try. There were then 11 categories in which Awards were presented. Some highlights of the evening's awards included:

1. The Water Rescue Project received the award for Project of the Year. This was an important piece of work, a Community Risk Management Plan 2023-27 priority, and involved a significant revision of current water rescue provision, resulting in the addition of the necessary training and equipment at Slough Fire Station.
2. Certificates of commendation were awarded to a crane driver and two colleagues who performed a challenging and skilful rescue during a fire on Station Hill in Reading.
3. Mariana Skoknova received the Excellence in Public Service Award for her outstanding and unwavering professionalism and commitment to her duties as a Customer Services Assistant.
4. Newbury Red Watch received the Watch of the Year Award for showing continuous

improvement and development whilst building a strong and diverse team and ultimately reducing risk in their local area.

5. Fayth Rowe received the Culture and Inclusion Award for her unwavering commitment to improving diversity and inclusion within the Service and our communities, particularly through her dedication to enhancing the career prospects of young people and under-represented groups.

Speaking on the Ceremony, Councillor Jeff Brooks, Chair of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority said: "It was a very special evening which enabled us to recognise the Service's achievements and people. This event provides an opportunity for us to thank people on behalf of residents' right across Berkshire for the exceptional work that they do"

Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer, said: "I am delighted that we were able to recognise and celebrate the outstanding achievements of all those who work for, and with, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service at the event.

"It really was a hugely uplifting evening that exemplified the fantastic public services provided by RBFRRS and how we put communities at the heart of all we do. Hopefully, all staff know, all year around, how proud I am of their dedication and service."

Several corporate sponsors helped make the 2024 annual Awards Ceremony possible. Thank you to BT, Integrate, Multitone and Lighthouse Events for their generous support ahead of and during the ceremony.



Summer Internship Scheme

In August, the Service welcomed five young people from across the county as part of the Summer Internship Scheme. The Summer Internship Scheme encourages those who may not have considered a career in the fire and rescue sector to explore some of the many roles available to them.

This year, the scheme was open to people from Berkshire who are aged 17-18 and from ethnic groups that are currently under-represented in the Service. During the five-week programme, interns worked as part of several teams and took part in activities aimed at increasing their awareness of the work done by the Service.

They also visited five different fire stations over the course of their placements, where firefighters and fire safety inspectors taught them more about their roles. As part of these station visits, the interns took part in firefighting drills, worked with firefighters and joined our inspectors on fire safety audits.

Claudia Trott, Equality Diversity and Inclusion Lead, said: "Now in its third year, our Summer Internship Scheme has allowed the Service to engage with young people from across Berkshire who might not have previously considered a career in the fire and rescue sector.

"It was a pleasure to welcome out latest cohort of interns and introduce them to the Service. They made positive contributions during their time with us and developed important professional skills that they will be able to take forward into their future careers.

"The Scheme has also taught the Service valuable lessons, further broadening our understanding of how to engage with younger people and some of the diverse communities within Berkshire. The lessons learned from programmes like the Internship will better allow us to engage with communities across Berkshire and develop new recruitment pathways for people to join the Service."

"The lessons learned from programmes like the Internship will better allow us to engage with communities across Berkshire."

- Claudia Trott, EDI Lead

Leonard Cheshire Change 100 Scheme

The Change 100 Programme was developed by Leonard Cheshire and 2024 marked the seventh year of our Service's participation.

As part of the Scheme, the Service welcomed two interns for 100 days over the summer and autumn.

This year, the interns worked as part of the Communications and Engagement and Procurement teams. The Programme provides an opportunity for them to develop new skills and build confidence. All the while, the Service gains increased organisational diversity awareness and broadens its capacity to deliver services.

Culture Plan

As a Service, there are so many positives about our culture and how we work together. It is clear that we have strong foundations, built upon our collective drive to provide a safe, supportive and inclusive service to our colleagues and communities.

A Service's culture is about 'how it feels to work around here', which is of course influenced by things like the behaviour of those you work with, as well as the processes, systems and environments we experience every day.

To ensure we pick up on all these various factors that influence culture, we have published Our Culture Plan, which aims to support the organisation to continue to be one that we all feel proud to belong to.

Our Culture Plan has been shaped by conversations and feedback from across the organisation. What is clear is that whatever our role within the Service, we are connected by a deep desire to serve, joined together by our core purpose – to create safer, more resilient communities by preventing incidents, protecting homes and businesses and responding to emergencies.

This doesn't mean that there aren't things that we still need to improve and work on together. What has been clear through the conversations we've been having and the recent Leadership Forums is that we are both proud of where our culture is now and we are up for continuing to find ways to create an even more safe, supportive and inclusive environment.

» Culture

Fire Fighters Charity Fundraisers

This year has been another successful year for fundraising for the Fire Fighters Charity. Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, the Service held many community events that collected donations for the cause.

Throughout the year, Slough, Crowthorne, Wokingham, Bracknell and Newbury fire stations all hosted car washes that raised money for the Fire Fighters Charity. Between them all, a donation total of over £5,195 was collected.

In May 2024, the Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices raised around £7,000 when they collectively cycled 488 miles on static bikes at the Lexicon in Bracknell.

The next cohort of Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices followed suit, by raising more than £3,000 for the Fire Fighters Charity, when they each rowed 38.5 miles on rowing machines in October.

Maidenhead Fire Station hosted a fun-filled Open Day in June. Around one thousand people attended the event, which resulted in them raising over £1,500 for The Fire Fighters Charity.

In July, firefighters attended the annual Hungerford High Street Carnival, where they collected £433 for the charity.

Over the summer Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, ran three ultra-marathons, over 250km, across four days. Persevering through hilly terrains in West Sussex and the Scottish Highlands, Mark completed this challenge and ended up raising £1,375 for the Fire Fighters Charity.

2024 also marked 10 years since clothing recycling banks were introduced to our fire stations across the county. In those 10 years, our fire stations have seen large amounts of donations. The Fire Cadets contributed to our clothing recycling banks, by taking part in a fundraising challenge for the Fire Fighters Charity.

At the start of 2025, the Cadet units competed to see how much clothing they could recycle in the annual 'Bag It and Bank It' campaign. Crowthorne totalled 159.1kg, Maidenhead collected 142kg, Whitley Wood gathered 91.5kg, and Newbury obtained 85kg. Congratulations to the Fire Cadets for bagging over 477kg of clothes for the Charity.

The Turkey Trot, a Christmas charity run, was held in December, in which staff took part in a 5k run starting and finishing at HQ. Throughout the morning, £130 was raised for The Fire Fighters Charity.

While these are just a few of the fundraising events mentioned above, the Service raised an approximate donation total of over £41,336 for The Fire Fighters Charity. Thank you to everyone for their efforts and contributions!



Supporting our Communities

Throughout 2024/25, our staff have worked closely with many of the communities that we serve. We have been hard at work engaging with groups and attending community events across Berkshire. Here are some of the highlights:

In 2024, we attended a record four pride events across Berkshire. Beginning in July, crews from Newbury, Bracknell and Wokingham attended their local pride events alongside staff from our Protection, Prevention and Professional Services Teams.

In September, a crew and fire engine were sent to Reading Pride's parade for the first time. This was followed by an event at King's Meadow where firefighters and other staff from across the Service represented the organisation at Reading Pride.

Crews from across the County have actively engaged with many of our religious communities throughout the year. On Sunday, 5 May 2024, firefighters from Red Watch at Wokingham Road Fire Station joined Vaisakhi celebrations in Reading.

The crew supported the event, visited the local Gurdwara and joined the procession as it passed through East Reading.

Later, on Sunday, 8 September, crews from Slough and Langley Fire Stations joined their local Hindu community to celebrate the festival of Raksha Bandhan. During the festival, the Crews had the opportunity to discuss many of the career opportunities available within the Service, including apprenticeships and internships for young people.

Building on a strong relationship that they had built with the local Baptist Church, firefighters from Wokingham Fire Station hosted a series of coffee and cake mornings at Wokingham Baptist Church to help brighten that time of year so many find the toughest.

January can be one of the loneliest months for the elderly and vulnerable. To help counter this, Wokingham Green Watch hosted several sessions throughout January 2025 to offer people a chance to get together and meet up.

Speaking on the sessions, Sam Batten, Watch Manager for Wokingham Greens, said: "Each event had a great turnout and made a real difference to the lives of those we met."

Finally, at the end of February 2025, Saleem Sheikh, Safe and Well Technician, and Ashok Kumar, Community Safety Adviser, visited Mosques in Reading ahead of Ramadan.

There, the pair offered Safe and Well visits to people at the Mosques. One visit to Aisha Masjid and Islamic Centre in Reading resulted in 51 requests for Safe and Well Visits.

Speaking on the visit, Saleem said: "It was fantastic to see such a positive uptake in our Safe and Well offering.

"Some of the individuals who signed up are considered high-risk and might have been overlooked without the proactive approach we've taken."

"Some of the individuals who signed up are considered high-risk and might have been overlooked without the proactive approach we've taken."

**Saleem Sheikh,
Community Safety Adviser**

» Culture

Armed Forces Veterans' Hubs

To support members of the armed forces community, we hosted several Armed Forces Veterans' Hub events throughout 2024/25.

Our Veterans' Hubs offer a place for veterans to come together and meet other veterans or organisations who can provide them with further support.

The Armed Forces Veterans' Hub programme was launched on Saturday, 7 November 2020, following receipt of the Gold Award in the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme in 2020. This affirms the Fire Authority and Service's ongoing commitment to the Armed Forces community.

This year, our Veteran's Hub events have been well attended, with dozens of people turning out at fire stations across the county.

At our last event in the financial year, held at Bracknell Fire Station, we were delighted to be joined by Peter Swallow, MP and Cllr Jenny Penfold, Mayor of Bracknell Forest.

Our Veteran's Hubs are hosted at fire stations across the county. During the 24/25 financial year, we hosted events at Crowthorne, Maidenhead, Newbury and Bracknell fire stations.

Future events have been planned throughout the rest of 2025 at Whitley Wood, Newbury and Maidenhead fire stations.

Health and Wellbeing

This year, the Service made several policy changes and supported schemes to help support the health and wellbeing of our staff:

Restructure of the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team and New Strategy

During the year, the Health and Safety and Health and Wellbeing Teams were restructured to create the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Team. This recognised the synergies and collaborative working that has always existed between the two departments.

The restructure has created additional capacity to enable us to be more proactive and preventative in respect of delivering the aims of our Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy: safe and healthy people, safe and healthy places, safe and healthy processes. As a new department we have published a new, ambitious strategy for 2025 – 2028 which sets out our priorities for the period.

Mental Health Awareness LMS Package

In July, the face-to-face Mental Health Awareness training was adapted into an LMS training package. New starters now have to complete the LMS course (Mental Health Awareness Part 1) before booking onto the face-to-face session (Mental Health Awareness Part 2).

By changing the format of the Mental Health Awareness course, staff can now revisit the Mental Health Awareness Part 1 course on LMS at any time, as a refresher.

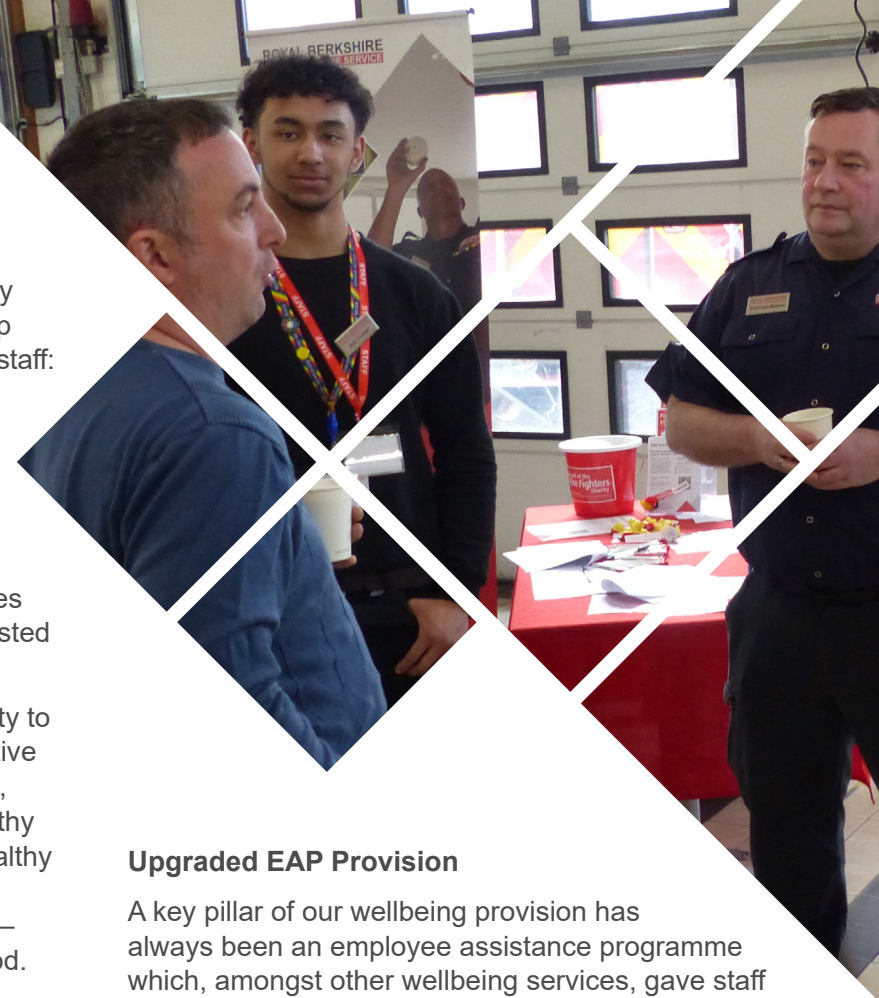
Upgraded EAP Provision

A key pillar of our wellbeing provision has always been an employee assistance programme which, amongst other wellbeing services, gave staff access to six counselling sessions.

In response to rising mental health related sickness absence across the organisation we upgraded this provision to include 12 counselling sessions.

The enhanced number of sessions facilitates a longer therapeutic journey and minimises the additional expenditure previously incurred when further sessions were required.

The upgraded EAP provision also includes access to coaching for all employees which supports our coaching strategy.



Flu Vaccinations

The Service once again encouraged staff to get the flu vaccination ahead of the 2024/25 winter season. If staff were not eligible for the free vaccine, RBFRS offered the opportunity to claim back up to £22 via Certify.

This annual opportunity helps to support staffing levels by preventing winter flu absences.

Cycle2Work Scheme

This year, the Service continued to provide opportunities to apply to the Cycle2Work scheme. RBFRS's Cycle2Work scheme is provided by Halfords, and benefits employees by offering a cost-effective way of getting cycle equipment.

The scheme encourages fitness as a way of commuting to workplaces, while enabling staff to save tax and National Insurance contributions via salary sacrifice. This year, Cycle2Work had a total of 11 applicants.

Supporting National Awareness Campaigns

Throughout the year, RBFRS continued to support national awareness campaigns that offer advice and resources for various health and wellbeing causes, such as mental health, women's health and men's health.

To name just a few, we supported: Stress Awareness Month, Testicular Cancer Awareness Month, Mental Health Awareness Week, Alcohol Awareness Week, World Suicide Prevention Day, Stoptober, World Menopause Day, Time to Talk Day, Prostate Cancer Awareness Month, and Dry

January.

The Service Delivers Improved Maternity and Adoption Pay

Changes to the Service's maternity and adoption leave now offer those eligible an increased maternity and adoption pay provision of up to 52 weeks full pay.

Following the changes, those eligible are entitled to 45 weeks full pay made up of both statutory and enhanced maternity and adoption pay, which inclusive of annual leave, bank holidays and keeping in touch days, making up to 52 weeks full pay.

This is a significant increase to previous provision available.

Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer said: "I am delighted that we are able to increase our enhanced maternity and adoption pay offering.

"Our people are at the core of what helps us deliver our critical services to the people of Royal Berkshire. We need to ensure that they are well looked after and this is just one step we are taking to ensure this.

"This change, which was consulted on with staff and trade unions, further embeds our commitment to continue to build an inclusive culture where everyone feels valued."

The changes are part of a broader programme that focuses on supporting positive working arrangements to attract and retain highly skilled and valued staff.

"Our people are at the core of what helps us deliver our critical services to the people of Royal Berkshire."

Mark Arkwell,
Deputy Chief Fire Officer

» Capability

Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices

We formally welcomed 35 new Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices to the Service in 2024, with a further eight currently completing their initial training course.

Two cohorts of Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices graduated in two ceremonies held at Maidenhead Fire Station. The first, held on Friday, 10 May 2024 recognised 17 of the new recruits who began their training earlier in 2024.

The second ceremony took place later in the year on Friday, 1 November, when the remaining 18 firefighters who began their training in July 2024 completed their basic training course.

Both cohorts of graduates celebrated successfully completing their training alongside family and friends at the ceremonies, and were presented with certificates by Chief Fire Officer, Wayne Bowcock, Chair of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, Jeff Brooks, and High Sheriff of the Royal County of Berkshire, Mr Alexander Barfield.

Much like previous cohorts of Wholetime Firefighter recruits, anyone, from any background or walk of life could apply to be a Firefighter Apprentice, as long as they were new to the role.

During the training course, the Firefighter Apprentices were thoroughly tested with a range of practical and theoretical training, core skills, breathing apparatus, fire behaviour, water rescue and road traffic collision training.

Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer, said: "Whilst their initial training is now complete, these

"I know our new Graduates will make us proud as they work to protect the people of Royal Berkshire."

- Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer

ceremonies mark just the beginning of their journey as Firefighters. In taking up their roles, they will continue our proud commitment to serving our communities. I know our new Graduates will make us proud as they work to protect the people of Royal Berkshire."

Councillor Jeff Brooks, Chair of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, said: "Whilst our apprentices come from many different walks of life, they all have one thing in common. None of them had any prior firefighting experience before beginning their training in July. Now, they stand ready to serve the community, and I am pleased that they have chosen to begin their firefighting careers here in Berkshire."

As part of the apprenticeship, the recruits are asked to organise an event to raise money for The Fire Fighters Charity. This year, both cohorts together raised a combined total of more than £10,000 by completing two fundraising challenges.

The Apprentices have now joined their new watches at fire stations across the county to continue their development.



» Capability

Exercises at the University of Reading

In September, we were joined by Thames Valley Fire Control Service and blue light partners from across the Thames Valley for a major training exercise in the AMS Tower at the University of Reading.

The exercise saw crews respond to a fire on the fourth floor of the tower, with casualties, made up of volunteers from the Service, Wokingham CLASP and actors from the Casualty Actors Union, being scattered across the fifth and sixth floors above the 'fire.'

Crews from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire worked alongside Thames Valley Police, South Central Ambulance Service, Ambulanz, Reading Borough Council and Wokingham Borough responded to the 'incident' on the evening of Monday, 16 September.

"Crews were subjected to challenging conditions throughout the exercise and there is some really valuable learning for us to take away from it."

- Matt Weldon, Watch Manager

Starting at 7:30pm, the exercise lasted for several hours as firefighters equipped with breathing apparatus worked their way through the building. At the same time, staff at Thames Valley Control Service responded to a high number of calls from actors involved in the exercise, feeding that information back to the fireground to inform crews at the scene.

Speaking on the exercise, Matt Weldon, Watch Manager, said: "This scenario was a great opportunity to test our multi-agency response to a major incident in a high-rise building. Crews were subjected to challenging conditions throughout the exercise and there is some really valuable learning for us to take away from it.

On Monday, 31 March 2025, we held a second exercise at the AMS Tower involving crews from across the Service and our blue light partners.

Following calls to Thames Valley Fire Control Service, which Control staff used as an opportunity to practice delivering fire survival guidance, firefighters responded to another simulated high-rise flat fire.

We were again joined at the scene by crews from Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire fire and rescue services. Berkshire Lowland Search and Rescue, Thames Valley Police, South Central Ambulance Service and Ambulanz also supported the exercise. The Casualties Union and Explorer Scouts joined staff from across the Service to act as casualties during the exercise, which was made possible by the University of Reading for allowing us use of their facilities.



» Capability

Incidents in Berkshire

In 2024/25, the Service responded to a dynamic range of incidents in and around Berkshire. Some of the more significant incidents include:

Rescue From Height in Caversham

A rescue from height on Sunday, 21 April, when we received reports of people trapped on a fairground ride on George Street in Caversham. Crews from Wokingham Road and Theale fire stations were sent to the scene alongside an aerial ladder platform and an Officer. Upon arrival, crews rescued three people trapped six metres off the ground on a fairground ride.

Fire at Broadmoor Hospital

Crews responded to a large incident on Saturday, 25 May when we were called to a fire in a derelict building at the old Broadmoor Hospital site near Crowthorne. At the height of the fire around 40 firefighters from Berkshire, Hampshire and Surrey attended the fire, alongside three Officers. Crews worked alongside Officers from Thames Valley Police and Berkshire Lowland Search and Rescue Service. Firefighters extinguished the fire using two aerial ladder platforms.

Paul Bremble, Area Manager, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, said: "This was a significant fire at a derelict building on the old Broadmoor Hospital site which required a large response from our Service and our partners. Although there was significant damage inside the building, crews worked effectively to contain the fire and prevent it from spreading."

Hazmat Incident in Thatcham

A Hazardous Material (Hazmat) incident on Thursday, 11 July, where we received reports of an unknown substance on Bath Road in Thatcham.

Two crews from Newbury Fire Station were sent to the scene alongside an Officer and the Decontamination and Environmental Protection Unit from Whitley Wood Fire Station.

On arrival, crews discovered a large barrel leaking an unknown substance onto the road. Firefighters worked with Thames Valley Police to close the road and contain the unknown substance in an overdrum.

High-rise fire in Slough

A high-rise fire in Slough on Thursday, 22 August where crews from across the entire county were sent to the scene alongside an Incident Command Unit, Aerial Ladder Platform and five Officers.

Several crews from Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service were also sent to the scene and in total, more than 50 firefighters responded to the fire.

Upon arrival, crews discovered a fire on the eighth floor of an apartment complex. Firefighters equipped with breathing apparatus used seven main jets and the aerial ladder platform to extinguish the fire.

Crews also supported the evacuation of 282 people from the property, ensuring that everybody in the building was accounted for and uninjured.

An investigation into the cause of the incident found that a faulty lightbulb fitting was the source of the fire.



» Capability

“Although there was significant damage inside the building, crews worked effectively to contain the fire and prevent it from spreading.”

- Paul Bremble, Area Manager

Road Traffic Collision in Bracknell

Whilst we respond to many road traffic collisions, an incident on Friday, 20 December involved a more complex rescue on Market Street in Bracknell. Crews from Bracknell and Ascot fire stations were sent to the scene alongside an Officer. Upon arrival, they discovered a person trapped under a car. Firefighters rescued the person before placing them in the care of South Central Ambulance Service.

Animal Rescue in Reading

An animal rescue on Wednesday, 22 January, when we received reports of a swan in need of rescue on Thames Side Promenade in Reading.

A crew from Theale Community Fire Station was sent to the scene, alongside the Animal and Water Rescue Unit from Caversham Fire Station. Upon arrival, the crews found a swan which had a leg trapped behind a metal railing and were able to release it.

Service Acquires Three New Appliances

In early 2025, the Service acquired three new appliances in a joint procurement process undertaken alongside our partners at Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service.

As part of the acquisition, Berkshire received three brand new fire appliances built on Volvo platforms by Emergency One in Cumnock, Scotland. In January 2025, a joint team from all three Thames Valley fire and rescue services visited Emergency One's workshop to finalise the designs.

While the stowage layout differs slightly from other Thames Valley appliances, the new vehicles have been designed in collaboration with all three Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Services to ensure maximum consistency and familiarity. The new appliances also feature the latest equipment available to UK fire and rescue services. These include Holmatro e-cutting and spreading tools, as well as out-of-cab breathing apparatus storage.

With a design agreed, Emergency One built the vehicles before sending them to Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service's workshops in Eastleigh where work has been underway to onboard our new appliances.

This work will ensure that all essential systems are working effectively such as the new particle filtration systems. The vehicles are expected to arrive in Berkshire in June 2025 where they will have the final equipment enhancements before being formally delivered to Newbury and Theale Fire Stations.



» Risk Management

Contaminants Management

Since the Fire Brigades Union and University of Central Lancashire published their 'Interim Best Practice Report: Minimising Firefighters' Exposure to Toxic Fire Effluents' report – which showed evidence of firefighters being at risk of developing types of cancers due to breathing and ingesting contaminants – the Service has been dedicated to reducing the risk of coming into contact with contaminants.

This year, we have continued to develop our work on decontamination by implementing new measures that prioritise the health and safety of our operational staff. The Estates Development Programme ensured that the layout of our fire stations is optimal for managing the risk of contaminants, by zoning areas and improving layouts of facilities.

The use of nitrile gloves was also introduced, adding an additional barrier to prevent the skin absorption of the gases produced by incidents. Since the introduction of the exposure log webform, the Contaminants Working Group has continued to encourage staff at Stations to log their exposures, thereby allowing the Service to keep track of potential contaminants risks.

Particulate blocking flash hoods were also introduced to the Service. These hoods block over 96 percent of harmful particulates, helping to shield our firefighters from contaminants. All stations were also supplied with two additional loan stock helmets per appliance, which are used when staff's personal issue helmets become contaminated or damaged, requiring cleaning or repair. The

introduction of these additional helmets reduces the time appliances need to be taken off the run, whilst allowing staff to thoroughly clean their PPE.

During the year, new Decon bags were delivered to all appliances. They are designed to provide staff with a single point to store and access personal decontamination equipment to be used at incidents, where personal equipment have been contaminated by the products of combustion.

“We have seen the additional firefighter posts are already making a positive difference, ensuring our fire engines are available more often.”

- Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

CRMP Priority 6 Update

The past year saw the successful introduction of Priority Six ('P6'), one of the six objectives set out in the Fire Authority's current Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

The primary intention of P6 has been to improve the availability of our fire engines through better use of the on-call duty system, reducing our overreliance

on overtime and investing in more firefighter posts.

In September 2024, Priority Six was formally implemented, with a new Operational Resource Management Policy (ORMP). This meant a commitment to maintaining 19 frontline fire engines, and a baseline provision of 14 frontline fire engines, using wholtime and on-call staff as effectively as possible.

The reduction in overtime payments is being reinvested by the Fire Authority to support ten additional wholtime firefighting posts that are already in service. The change also recognised the value and importance of our on-call firefighters.

At that time, it was agreed that the implementation would be subject to a three-month evaluation to assess if the objectives had been met and judge its impact on our response model.

The evaluation reported back in February 2025 and found that Priority Six was implemented 16 times, when an on-call unit provided the 14th fire engine of our minimum provision.

Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, said:

“This approach has already helped to reduce our overreliance on voluntary overtime and enabled investment into more frontline roles.

“We have seen the additional firefighter posts are already making a positive difference, ensuring our fire engines are available more often to serve the people of Berkshire.

“Closer management of crewing locally has also seen an improvement in our availability.”

» Risk Management

Christmas Fire Safety Campaign

Staff, Volunteers, Cadets and partners all weighed in to support our Christmas Fire Safety Campaign.

Starting on Monday, 2 December, staff, volunteers and cadets were joined by some of our partners from across the Thames Valley to deliver 12 messages as part of the #RBFRS12Days campaign.

Every other day, one short video covering a topic of safety messaging was posted on Facebook, Instagram, X and YouTube, leading up to Christmas Eve.

Each video covered a different message relevant to either Christmas fire safety or general winter weather advice, ranging from business fire safety advice and e-bikes to chimneys and decorations.

An emphasis was also placed on flooding and water safety following the heavy floods experienced across the county following Storm Henk around this time last year.

This year, the campaign was supported by several of our partners including Thames Valley Police, South Central Ambulance Service, the Environment Agency and several charities in Berkshire.

The campaign was also very kindly supported by people from a variety of teams and departments across the Service.

After reviewing the analytics, we found that the videos had a combined total of 35,394 views across all our platforms.

Schools Programme

Year 5 pupils from across Berkshire have been benefitting from freshly designed Fire Safety Workbooks, helping to support engagement and education.

In December, new StayWise Fire Safety Workbooks were delivered to Year 5 pupils across the county. The StayWise Fire Safety Workbooks are a learning tool for young people to learn about the Service.

The workbooks contain important information about the Service and practical steps that children can take to keep themselves safe. The learning in the workbooks is reinforced through quizzes, word searches, codebreakers and drawing exercises.

Every station has received a number of the new workbooks depending on how many students that are expected to receive a visit in the local community.

These numbers have been worked out from data provided by each local authority. All other supporting documents, including the session plan and PowerPoint were also uploaded ahead of sessions taking place in schools.

The new workbooks were quickly put into action after being distributed to stations. In December, Blue Watch from Slough Fire Station visited Godolphin Primary School in Slough and handed the workbook out to around 100 Year 5 children.

The feedback received so far from children has been very positive. Thank you to everyone who is working to deliver this information to children across the County.



» Risk Management

Fire Cadets Programme

Fire Cadets is a youth initiative programme operated by firefighters, staff and volunteers with support from the Service's Safety Education Team, and takes place at four fire stations across the County – Crowthorne, Maidenhead, Newbury, and Whitley Wood.

The scheme is open to young people aged between 13 and 17 years old and allows the Cadets to experience what it is like to be firefighter in today's fire and rescue service.

In July 2024, the Fire Cadets from all four Cadet showed off their new skills at a Graduation Ceremony held at Maidenhead Fire Station.

During the Graduation Ceremony, each unit showcased the skills they had learnt, by performing graduation drills, which involved scenarios such as vehicle and domestic 'fires'.

Feedback from the graduating cohort of 2023-24 was very positive, with the Cadets commenting that they really enjoyed the challenging but fun nature of the programme.

The following Cohort of 35 Fire Cadets joined us in October for the 2024-25 year.

During this time, the Cadet Units got involved in lots of Service activities. They helped fundraising efforts by joining firefighters at charity car washes, and supported prevention work by designing vibrant fire safety posters as part of their Cadet Award.

The Cadets also attended a school careers fair with Crowthorne Fire Station to promote the Fire Cadets programme and other opportunities within the Service.

Meanwhile, the unit from Whitley Wood Fire Station took part in some collaborative work with the Police Cadets. During the visit, they demonstrated some of the operational skills that they have developed since joining the Fire Cadets programme.

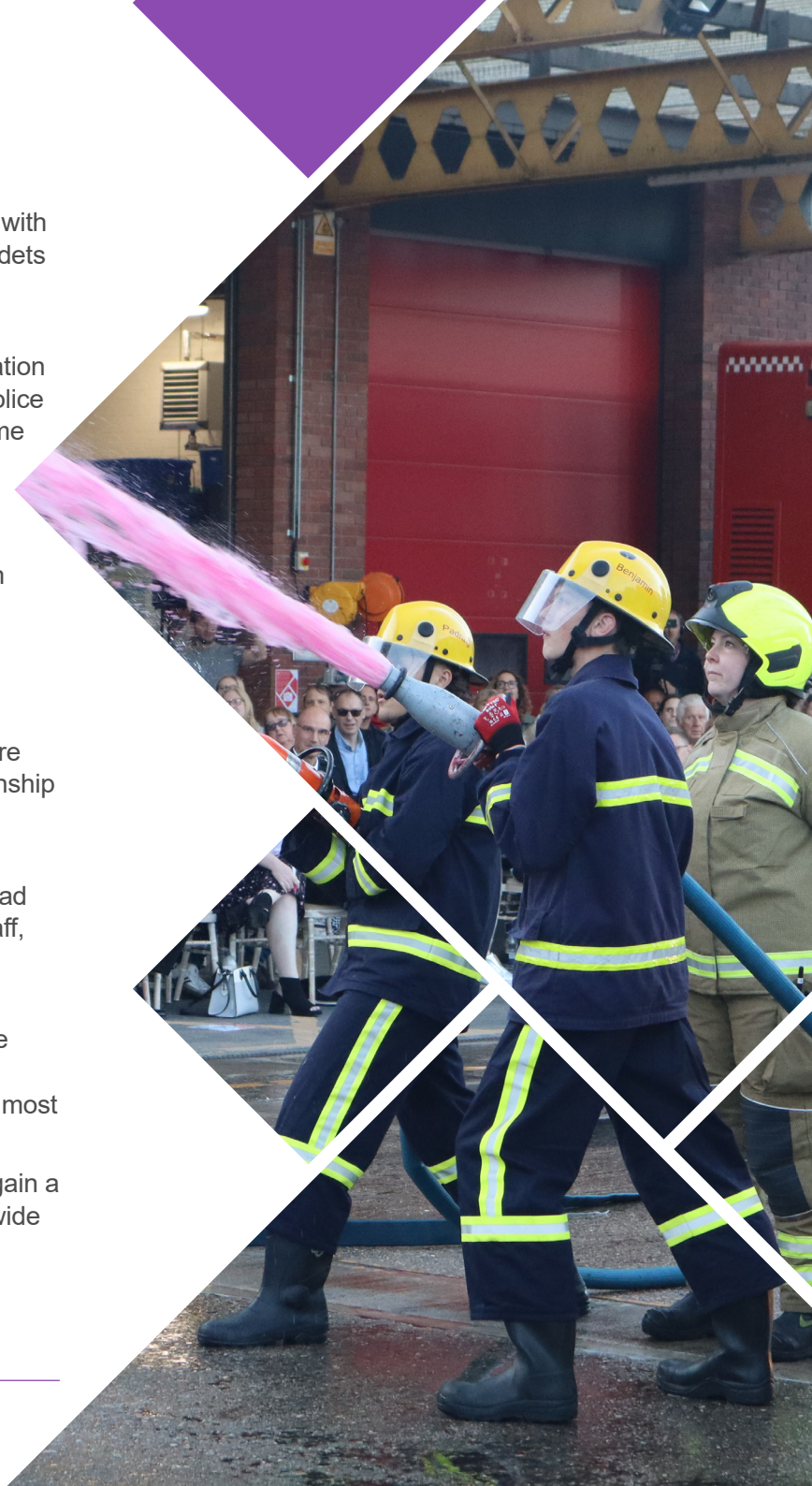
Some of the Cadets at Maidenhead Fire Station even filmed a video for our Christmas Fire Safety social media campaign, highlighting key safety messages for using Christmas trees and decorations.

In January 2025, the Cadets took part in The Fire Fighters Charity's "Bag It and Bank It" championship by collecting clothing and textiles from their communities to raise money for the Charity.

The following month, three of our Fire Cadets had the opportunity to interview four members of staff, including Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer.

During this panel, the Cadets asked questions about what skills are needed to work for the Fire and Rescue Service, what keeps them positive, what they would change about the Service, the most memorable moment in their career, and more.

This unique opportunity allowed the Cadets to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the wide variety of roles within the Service.



» Risk Management

Biker Down

On Monday, 24 June 2024, staff from across the Thames Valley worked together to promote a new series of Biker Down sessions at the Cassington Bike Night in Oxfordshire.

Thames Valley Biker Down is a course run by all three Thames Valley fire and rescue services to provide bikers with the knowledge they need to stay safe on the road. The course is split into three parts:

- What to do if you see or come across an accident.
- How to treat any injured riders or people.
- How to avoid being part of an accident (the science of being seen).

In the summer of 2024, over 70 riders and their passengers (pillions) from around the area attended sessions at Wokingham and Theale fire stations. Later in August, we hosted a joint course with the Metropolitan Police. This course was attended by more than 20 riders from across Southern England and Wales.

In October, the Service ran a course for members of Berkshire Lowland Search and Rescue. Speaking on the course, Steve Lee, Community Safety Advisor, said: "Although they aren't all motorcycle riders, the feedback we received from them was very positive.

"They said that they enjoyed the course, learnt new skills and feel more prepared should they come across a 'biker down' out and about."

Automatic Fire Alarm Changes

In September 2024, RBFRS changed the way it responds to Automatic Fire Alarms in certain types of buildings.

Following a public consultation, RBFRS has stopped automatically sending a fire engine when there is an automatic fire alarm notification in buildings such as shops, offices, leisure centres, sports grounds, libraries and health centres. A full list of all buildings affected is on our website. The Service continues to attend automatic fire alarm notifications at schools, at higher risk buildings and where anyone sleeps, such as hotels, hospitals, care homes, houses, and flats.

In all cases, an emergency response is still being sent to 999 calls and confirmed fires.

The Service looked to change its AFA policy as 99 percent of the automatic fire alarm calls received are false alarms. Attending these incidents takes time and resource that otherwise disrupts the delivery of essential services and training.

Members of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority decided to make the change following a public consultation, which attracted a total of 389 responses during the consultation period.

Councillor Jeff Brooks, Chair of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority said: "I would like to thank all those who responded during the consultation period. The comments provided were very helpful in assisting the Fire Authority Members to reach a decision on the best way forward. The Authority very much took in to account the views of residents and other respondents in coming to its decision."

**"The Authority
very much took in
to account the views
of residents and other
respondents in coming
to its decision."**

**Councillor Jeff Brooks,
Chair of RBFA**

» Risk Management

Property Manager Fined for Safety Breach

On Wednesday, 19 June 2024, Mr Waheed Afzal pleaded guilty to six charges under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 at Reading Magistrates' Court. The guilty plea followed an investigation conducted by the Service in early 2023.

The investigation found that there were several serious fire safety deficiencies at a property managed by Mr Afzal above a restaurant on High Street, Slough. The breaches included a lack of a linked fire detection system between the commercial and residential units at the property, insufficient emergency lighting, inadequate fire doors and non-fire resisting glazing that would have compromised the means of escape in an emergency.

Mr Afzal was fined of £16,000 following the conviction which, in addition to the victim surcharge and the Fire Authority's prosecution fees, brought the total cost paid by the defendant to £22,646.82.

Michal Kosierb, Fire Safety Enforcement Lead at RBFRS, said: "This case shows that businesses must take their commitments to fire safety seriously and that we will take action where necessary in the interest of public safety.

"As a Service, our purpose is to help keep businesses, people and communities safe. We will continue to work with business owners to help them protect themselves and their livelihoods. However, cases like this demonstrate that, if people's safety is at stake, we will take decisive action to ensure businesses comply with the law."

New Fire Safety Inspectors

In February, the Service welcomed three new Fire Safety Advisers into our Protection Teams, bringing the total number of Advisers in training across Berkshire to 11.

The three recruits became County's newest Fire Safety Advisers, taking the first step towards becoming Inspectors through an extensive training programme within the Service.

All three bring with them experience that will carry into their new roles whilst completing their training.

The road to becoming a fully trained Fire Safety Advisers generally takes between two and three years, during which the recruits will work as part of our Protection Teams whilst completing their Level 3 and Level 4 diplomas in Fire Safety.

This is the fourth cohort of trainees to join our Protection Teams since 2020 as the Service looks to expand its Protection capabilities in light of the changing risk profile of Berkshire.

"If people's safety is at stake, we will take decisive action to ensure businesses comply with the law."

Michal Kosierb, Fire Safety Enforcement Lead

» Sustainability

Sustainability Strategy

During the last year, RBFRS has launched its first ever Sustainability Strategy, aimed at improving the Service's efficiency while mitigating the impact it has on the planet.

The heatwave in the summer of 2022, which saw record breaking temperatures in England, and the flooding earlier this year are just two recent examples of climate related incidents that have increased demand on the Service's resources.

Speaking on the new strategy, Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer, said: "As a Service, we recognise the climate emergency, and the socioeconomic issues that it is causing both globally and locally.

"Sustainability cannot be defined as a single goal or objective. It feeds into everything we do as a Service and necessitated us taking a cross-functional approach that will be enabled by this ambitious strategy.

To this end, the strategy has been created to guide the Service as we look to reduce the impact we have on the environment while fostering social inclusion and economic development within the communities we serve."

The Sustainability Strategy aligns to the Service's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) for 2023-2027, which outlines a need to develop our response to the impact of climate change.

Although the effect of human activities on climate will continue to be felt well beyond the life of the CRMP, it is important that mechanisms are put in place to adapt the services we deliver.

The new strategy was developed with Mortice Consulting, a firm that specialise in providing specialist sustainable solutions for cultural, heritage and public sector organisations.

Working with Mortice, the Strategy captured work that has already happened within the Service, using these milestones to shape tangible and measurable targets for the future.

Ben Melham, Director at Mortice Consulting, Said: "We are proud to have partnered with Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service in developing their sustainability strategy. This strategy reflects a thoughtful approach to integrating sustainability across the service, while building on the progress RBFRS has already made in enhancing its environmental and social responsibility.

"We are confident that this strategy is an important step toward embedding sustainable practices that will benefit both RBFRS and the communities it serves for years to come."

The new Strategy is mapped against the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs and aligned with our service commitments. As a partner and signatory of the Net Zero Government Initiative, the United Kingdom has pledged to bring their government emissions, including fire and rescue activities, to net zero by 2050.

The SDGs will help guide the Service, alongside other government institutions, in meeting this ambitious goal. RBFRS aims to add sustainability into the conversation through its work, with a view to positively impacting both its staff and the communities that it serves.

"As a Service, we recognise the climate emergency, and the socioeconomic issues that it is causing both globally and locally."

Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer

» Sustainability

Redevelopment of our Learning and Development Centre

May of 2024 saw the Service receive permission to redevelop our Learning and Development Centre at Whitley Wood.

The approved plans, designed in consultancy with Ridge and Partners, called for the demolition of our old Training Centre buildings to make way for a two-storey, modular structure.

After the initial groundworks were completed by Newglen, the Service held a short groundbreaking ceremony on Friday, 26 July 2024. Attended by the local Member of Parliament, Yang Yuan, and councillors from Reading Borough Council's Whitley Ward, the ceremony marked the beginning of major works at the site.

Reading-based demolition company J Mould began clearing the site in August whilst our construction partner, Premier Modular Limited (PML), manufactured the modules that would become the new building in Drifffield, Yorkshire. In November, the modules were transported from the East Riding of Yorkshire to Whitley Wood where, in just four days, they were assembled on-site.

Starting on Monday, 18 November, the modules were then installed throughout the week, with the last component being lifted into place by the afternoon of Thursday, 21 November.

Speaking on the assembly of the building, Paul Brooks, Head of Assets at RBFRS, said: "We were very pleased to have the new structure installed without having to stop the delivery of training for our

firefighters or disrupting operational fire cover from the adjacent fire station."

He continued: "Once fully completed and commissioned, this new Training Centre will ensure that we have access to modern, first-class and sustainable facilities to train and develop our firefighters, enabling them to continue to provide the high level of public service that residents of Berkshire enjoy."

To mark the completion of the installation of the modules, the Service hosted another short ceremony at the site on Friday, 22 November. The ceremony was attended by Yuan Yang MP and members of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority whose investment made the project possible. The guests were given an update on the project and were shown around the site by representatives from the Service, Ridge and PML.

Martin Irvine, Senior Business Development Manager at PML, said: "We are proud to be delivering the new Training Centre for RBFRS and their community, who are truly embracing sustainable modular construction and trusting our expertise in the industry. It was great to see the local Member of Parliament, councillors and stakeholders come together to celebrate this key milestone in the project at Whitley Wood; it shows a great level of commitment to the community by all parties."

With the structure now in place, work is underway to finalise the new building before April 2025 when the Service's Learning and Development Team will move in. An official opening ceremony for the new building is being planned for summer 2025.



» Sustainability

Refurbishment of Slough Fire Station

Following a refurbishment programme spanning several months, major upgrades at Slough Fire Station have now been completed.

The project, which followed similar refurbishment projects at Bracknell and Maidenhead Fire Station, has modernised one of the Service's busiest stations.

Speaking on the improvements, Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer at RBFRS, said: "The works at Slough are part of a broader programme of improvements designed to make our estate more in keeping with the requirements of a modern, high-performing fire and rescue service."

"Each refurbishment project has had a focus on key themes. These include mitigating the risks to our staff from contaminants that they might encounter at emergency incidents, improving our facilities to support the needs of a more diverse workforce, and creating spaces that are more sustainable; both financially and environmentally."

As part of the Slough project, improvements have been made to the Station's amenities, including renovated work and rest spaces, improved washroom, showering and wider contaminants management facilities.

Throughout the entire refurbishment project, firefighters have continued to operate from Slough and will now continue to do so from their newly upgraded fire station.

New Lighting Across the Estate

In the Autumn of 2024 new LED lighting was installed at several sites across our estate to help make them more energy efficient.

Bracknell, Wokingham, Lambourn and Caversham Road fire stations all received upgrades to their lighting alongside Newsham Court – our headquarters building.

The new lighting will save the Service an average of £27,807 and 26.1 tonnes of CO2 every year.

Following a survey of all the lighting fixtures across our estate that were not LED, electricians from Laser gradually replaced the older lighting fixtures over several weeks.

Based on usage and cost projections, the new lighting will save the Service an average of £27,807 per year, with the overall return on our initial investment being approximately six years.

The new lighting should also enable us to make CO2 savings in the region of 26.1 tonnes of carbon.

These changes have been made in line with the Service's Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF) where we have committed to spend £225,000 on upgrading all the lighting across our estate.



» Corporate Measures

Service Provision

Service Provision monitors the service we provide to the public. Performance is monitored in relation to attendance at incidents, types of incidents, Prevention activities and fire safety in commercial buildings.

Measure	2024/2025 Target	2024/2025 Actual
Number of fire deaths	0	3
Number of non-fatal fire casualties	31 max	49
Number of deliberate primary fires	125 max	81
Number of deliberate secondary fires	223 max	178
Prevention		
Increase the number of Referrals for Safe and Well Visits received from our partners	10%	17.4%
Percentage of Safe and Well referrals, where there has been a threat or incidence of arson, completed within 48 hours	100%	100%
Percentage of Very High Safe and Well Referrals completed within target time	40%	26.0%
Percentage of High Risk Safe and Well Referrals completed within target time	57%	45.8%
Protection		
Proportion of Fire Safety Audits conducted against premises identified as High or Very High Risk in our Risk Based Inspection Programme	monitor	11.4%
Percentage of Fire Safety Audits with a 'Broadly Compliant' result	69% max	76.9%
Percentage success when cases go to court	80%	100%
Percentage of statutory fire consultations completed within the required timeframes	95%	97.1%

» Corporate Measures

Measure	2024/2025 Target	2024/2025 Actual
Response		
Percentage of occasions where the first fire engine arrives at an emergency incident within 10 minutes from time the emergency call was answered	75%	72.0%
Percentage of wholetime frontline pumping appliance availability	97.4%	96.9%
Percentage of hours where there is adequate crewing on on-call frontline pumping appliances (based on 24/7 crewing)	50%	32.7%
Resilience		
Percentage of visits to Very High, High and Medium Operational Risk sites completed in timescale	100%	63%
Number of Service Delivery Hub exercises completed	12	11
Efficiency		
Percentage of Automatic Fire Alarm calls where RBFRS did not attend	30% (min)	41.0%
Customer Experience		
Percentage of domestic respondents satisfied with the overall service	100%	100%
Percentage of commercial respondents satisfied with the overall service	95%	100%
Percentage of respondents satisfied with the services with regards to Fire Safety Audits	90%	100%
Percentage of domestic respondents satisfied with the service regards their Safe and Well Visit	100%	98.7%
Number of complaints received	Monitor	22
Number of compliments received	Monitor	37

» Corporate Measures

Corporate Health

The Corporate Health quadrant monitors the wellbeing of the organisation. Performance is monitored in relation to staffing levels, health and safety and finances within RBFRS, to ensure the organisation is being run safely, efficiently and is cost effective.

Measure	2024/2025 Target	2024/2025 Actual
Human Resources and Learning & Development		
Percentage of working time lost to sickness across all staff groups	5%	6.5%
Percentage of eligible staff with Personal Development Reviews	100%	81%
Number of formal grievances	Monitor	22
Health and Safety		
Number of *RIDDOR accidents and diseases	4 (Max)	3
Finance and Procurement		
Percentage of spend subject to competition	85%	91.4%
Compliant spend as a percentage of overall spend	100%	100%
Freedom of Information		
Number of Information Commissioner assessments finding that the Service has breached Information Rights Legislation (Free-dom of Information Act, Environmental Regulations or Data Pro-tection Legislation)	0	0

*RIDDOR is the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013. Under RIDDOR we have a duty to report certain events, those events being accidents that led to a person being unfit for their normal work for more than 7 days, or 'specified injuries' which are more serious types of injuries. These include injuries such as broken bones, crush injuries and amputations.

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE



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