Part I

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT

COMMITTEE	**MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**
DATE OF MEETING	**10 FEBRUARY 2026**
SUBJECT	**QUARTER THREE APPLIANCE AVAILABILITY TO MEET CORPORATE MEASURES 14, 15 & 16**
LEAD OFFICER	**TOM BRANDON, AREA MANAGER RESPONSE AND RESILIENCE**
LEAD MEMBER	**N/A**
EXEMPT INFORMATION	**PART I**
ACTION	**TO NOTE**

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report provides information on quarter three performance with a supporting narrative on the whole-time duty system, on-call duty system, and combined appliance availability.

Whole-time appliance availability was 96.2% against a target of 97.4%.

On-call appliance availability was 28.4% against a target of 50%.

Baseline provision of 14 or more pumping appliances, including whole-time and on-call, was 79.9% against a target of 100%. *[Performance against this measure is calculated based on whole shifts rather than minutes as with whole-time appliance availability]*.

Against a corporate measure target of 75% of emergency incidents attended in 10 minutes, the Service achieved 73.3%.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Management Committee:

2.1 **NOTE** the 2024/25 quarter three performance of **96.2%** appliance availability of the Service's 14 whole-time appliances, against a target of 97.4%, in line with Corporate Measure 14[1].

2.2 **NOTE** the 2024/25 quarter three overall on-call appliance availability performance of **28.4%,** against a target of 50%, in line with Corporate Measure 15[2].

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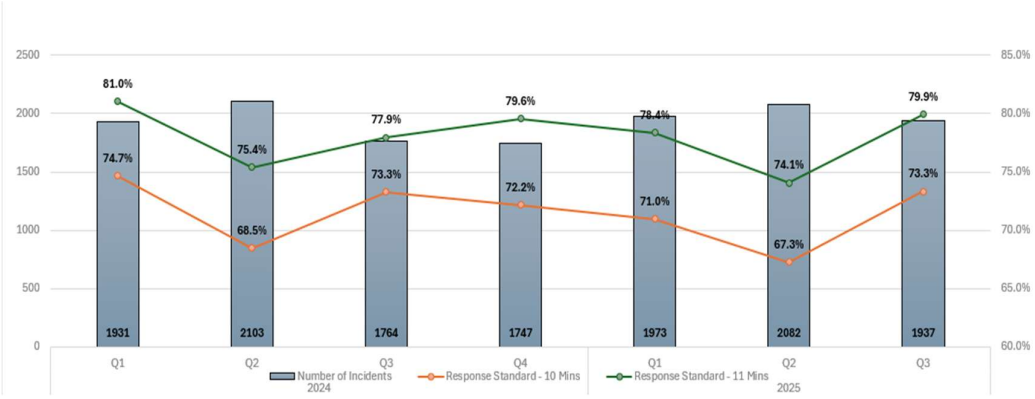
2.3 **NOTE** the 2024/25 quarter three performance of **79.9%** of shifts where 14 or more pumping appliances were available**,** against a target of 100%, in line with Corporate Measure 16[3].

3. REPORT

Response Standard:

3.1 The performance against the response standard for Q3 was below target with 73.3% of all incidents reached within 10 minutes of time of first emergency call being answered.

3.2 The chart below shows the performance trend for the Response Standard over time with the grey bars representing the number of incidents attended and the orange line charting performance against the 10-minute standard. The general expectation is that performance will deteriorate when incident numbers increase and this trend is evident, particularly in the Q2 performance, where incident numbers during the summer spike, and performance dips accordingly:



3.3 Interestingly, the number of incidents attended in Berkshire in Q3, 1937, is a substantial increase compared to the 1764 recorded in the same period the previous year, yet the service maintained an identical performance against the response standard.

3.4 While it is evident that the Service consistently drops below the 75% target, the green line on the chart demonstrates that a significant proportion of incidents, generally close to 80%, are reached within 11 minutes. For example, during Q3, we reached 79.9% of incidents within 11 minutes.

3.5 The table below highlights that performance against the response standard was particularly challenged during the day. The 57% higher incident demand and increased traffic volume during the day can negatively impact call handling and travel times, hampering performance against the standard:

[1] Corporate Measure 14: Percentage of whole-time frontline pumping appliance availability (fire engines).
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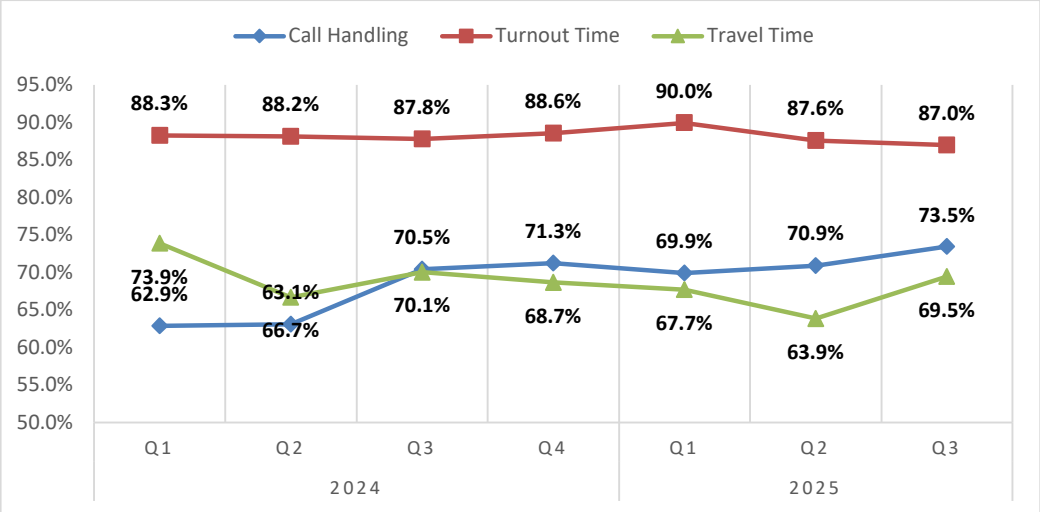
Q3 2025/26	Response Standard Performance	Incidents per hour
Day	68.9%	1.1
Night	77.5%	0.7

Response standard performance for day vs night

3.6 The Response Standard is made up of 3 constituent parts, the **call handling time,** the **turnout time**, and the **travel time**, with targets of 90 seconds each for call handling and turnout times, and seven minutes for travel time to make up the total 10-minute target.

3.7 The Authority, when setting the response standard, knew it was a challenging ambition to reach 75% of incidents within 10-minutes because the measure is highly sensitive to incident volume and profile, and many rural parts of the county, particularly in the west cannot be reached within the target seven minutes of travel time. Other than during 2019, the standard has not been met in any year, outside of those with Covid lockdown measures in place, since it was agreed in 2016.

3.8 The chart below shows performance against the three elements of the standard over time:



Response Standard performance trends by constituent

3.9 It is notable that a substantial improvement in call handling performance is evident from Q3 of 2024/25 onwards, which aligns with the implementation of the new Automatic Fire Alarm policy which launched in September 2024 with the aim of reducing attendance at false alarms.

3.10 To help ensure call handling times are closely monitored, the TVFCS Joint Coordinating Group developed a suite of performance measures for control, which include a more detailed breakdown of call handling performance. This

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work has already enhanced our understanding of call handling performance and is helping us to understand trends with respect to call handling times by incident type.

3.11 Performance against target for turnout time in Q3 was 87.0%, which is similar to the 87.8% recorded during the same period the previous year. Times continue to be monitored internally to ensure any fluctuations in performance are appropriately managed.

3.12 Travel times in target improved markedly to 69.5% in Q3, a rise of 6.4 percentage points from Q2. It is noteworthy that Hungerford achieved its highest level of availability in more than a year during Q3 which can significantly improve travel times in the West. On Call performance is discussed in more detail below.

3.13 For further context, it should be noted that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service was the only fire and rescue service in England to improve its attendance times at primary fires over a ten-year period, improving our average speed of response by 22 seconds, as reported in 2022/23. All other fire and rescue services saw increased attendance times in the same period.

3.14 The most recent MHCLG data, for 2024/25, shows that RBFRS continues to perform above average for most incident types:

Incident Category	**RBFRS**	**English FRS average**
Primary Fire	00:08:44	00:09:06
Dwelling Fire	00:07:52	00:08:06
Other Building Fire	00:08:34	00:09:03
Road Vehicles	00:09:58	00:10:12
House Fire	00:07:58	00:08:36

MHCLG Response time data for 2024/25

3.15 We will continue to closely monitor and manage our performance against the Response Standard alongside longer-term trends in our incident profile and demand. In addition to the detailed work on call handling, we will continuously review the management of our resources via our internal Response Resourcing Group to ensure we are optimising our ability to respond as quickly as possible and explore opportunities in the longer-term that would support this objective.

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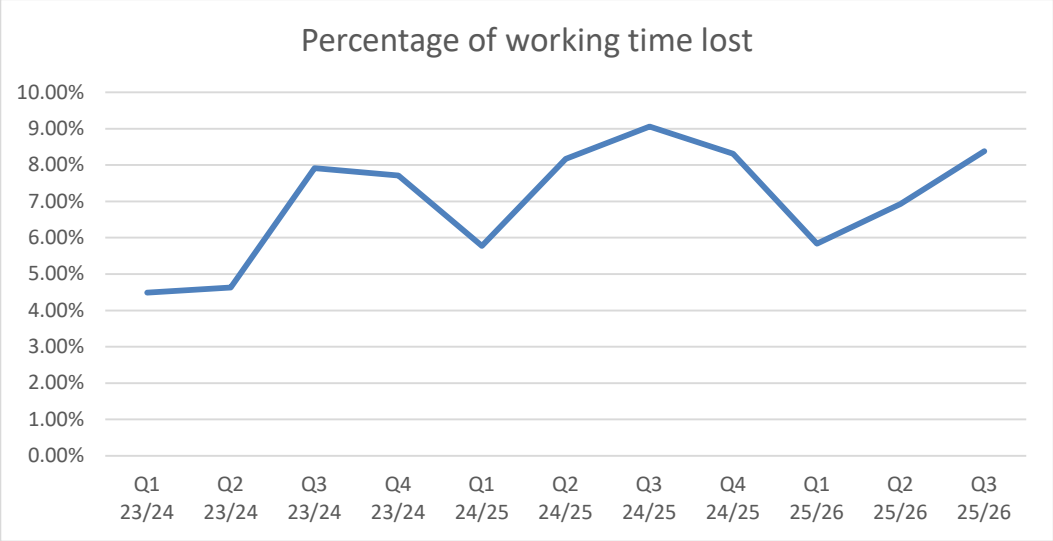
Whole-time Duty System Appliance Availability

3.16 This section of the report provides the 2025/26 quarter three performance update against Corporate Measure 14, which is the *percentage of whole-time frontline pumping appliance availability.* Overall availability for the quarter was 96.2% against a target of 97.4%.

3.17 RBFRS employ a lean operating model, including the Whole-time Duty System (WDS) provision. Maintaining sufficient minimum numbers of qualified firefighters requires effective management combined with flexibility and commitment to provide additional hours from staff on a pre-arranged overtime (PAOT) basis.

3.18 With the arrival of a new cohort of apprentices during Q2, the station-based staff numbers were maintained at or slightly above the establishment level through Q3, ensuring vacancies didn't negatively affect availability.

3.19 Unfortunately sickness among station-based staff deteriorated from 6.9% in Q2 to 8.38% in Q3. While this is a disappointing, it does reflect long-standing trends that see an uptick in sickness as we move from summer into autumn and winter:



Percentage of working time lost – station-based operational staff

3.20 Due of staff turnover the Service now has a significant proportion (38%) of whole-time operational staff in development roles. The training and assessment requirements add further pressure to the management of appliance availability. The operational support and improvement team now meets regularly with colleagues from learning and development to minimise the impacts of training and development on availability by planning and scheduling courses around other demands.

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On-Call Duty System Appliance Availability

3.21 The report also details performance against Corporate Measure 15, which sets a target of *50% of hours where there is adequate crewing on on-call frontline pumping appliances (based on 24/7 crewing).* The overall availability for on-call appliances in Q3 was 28.4%, 4.4 percentage points lower than the previous quarter.

3.22 The table below shows availability performance by quarter in recent years.

Year	Q1.	Q2.	Q3.	Q4.
2025/26	34.3%	32.8%	**28.4%**	
2024/25	34.2%	35.9%	30.9%	36.8%
2023/24	48.2%	38.4%	35.3%	42.7%

Total On Call fire engine availability by quarter

3.23 The table below shows availability performance by station for the year-to-date.

Corporate Measure 15 performance by station for FY 2025/26				
Station	**Q1**	**Q2**	**Q3**	**Q4**
Crowthorne	68.7%	61.3%	**40.6%**	
Hungerford	19.9%	36.2%	**40.0%**	
Lambourn	1.0%	2.7%	**0.4%**	
Maidenhead	25.9%	21.0%	**19.9%**	
Mortimer	55.7%	42.7%	**41.2%**	

On Call fire engine availability by station

[1] Corporate Measure 14: Percentage of whole-time frontline pumping appliance availability (fire engines).
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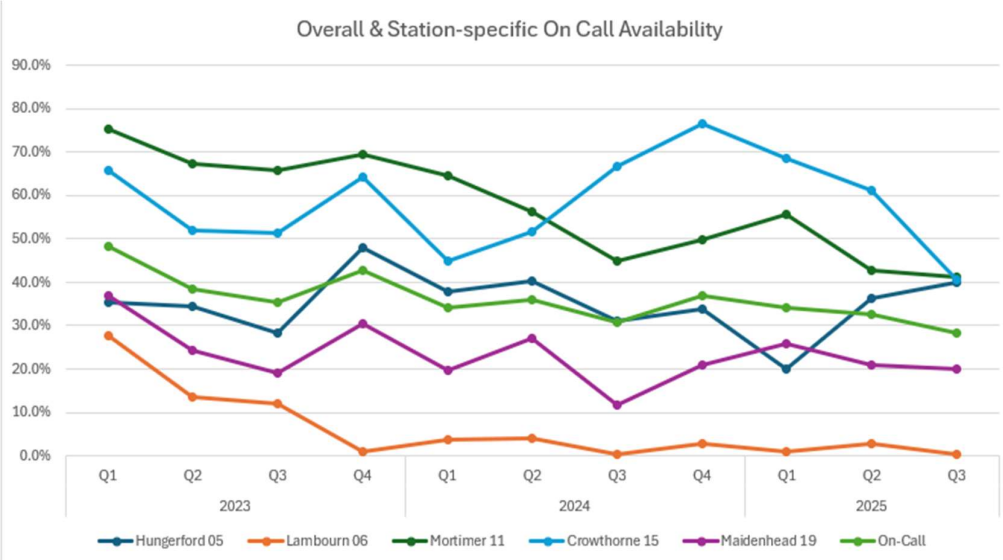
3.24 The chart below shows availability performance by On Call station over time:



3.25 The significant quarter by quarter fluctuations for most stations demonstrate the inherent fragility of the OC duty system where the unavailability of a single key member of staff can hamper performance for the whole station.

3.26 Q3 overall saw a steep decline in availability at Crowthorne driven by the sickness of a key member of staff which saw appliance availability drop from an average of 50.7% during October and November to 20.7% in December. The return to duty in January of that staff member is expected to improve availability markedly for Q4.

3.27 Availability at Hungerford bucked the trend for the quarter, rising as it did from 36.2% in the previous quarter to 40.0% in Q3. A continuation of this improving picture is expected in Q4 with two additional dual-contract members of staff joining the team, including a competent crew manager.

3.28 Availability at Lambourn during Q3 was extremely challenging due to two firefighters being unavailable for operational duties. It as anticipated that this picture will improve for Q4 with one firefighter returning to full duties and another expected to finish their training to become part of critical crewing. Two further firefighters are expected to be contributing to appliance availability by Q2 of the next financial year.

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3.29 Maidenhead's availability dipped slightly from 21% in Q2 to 19.9% during Q3, partly due to leave impacting key roles. However, looking forward to Q4, four firefighters are due to become part of the critical crew and availability is projected to improve by up to 50% as a result.

3.30 Availability at Mortimer continues to be impacted by long-term sickness but the station remains a relatively strong performer with availability remaining above 40%. Any significant improvements to that level are unlikely until we see new recruits becoming part of the critical crew, which is expected to be during Q2 of the next financial year.

Combined Pumping Appliance Availability by Shift

3.31 This section of the report provides the 2025/26 quarter three performance update against Corporate Measure 16. It sets a target of 100% for the availability of 14 or more pumping appliances. Overall combined availability by shift for Q3 was 79.9%.

3.32 There were 14 WDS appliances available for 131 of the 184 shifts that occurred during Q3 which equates to 71.2%. When On Call appliances are taken into account for baseline service provision, the number of shifts with 14 or more appliances was 147 out of 184, or 79.9% of the shifts.

3.33 The table below shows performance against this measure across all shifts and broken down by day and night shifts. It is notable that performance is significantly better for nightshifts where uptake for PAOT and On Call availability are both better:

Shift	Total	x14 WDS available	x14+ WDS/OC available	% of shifts with x14+ available
All	184	131	147	79.9%
Day	92	63	67	72.8%
Night	92	68	80	87.0%

Quarter three performance against CM16 overall and by day/night.

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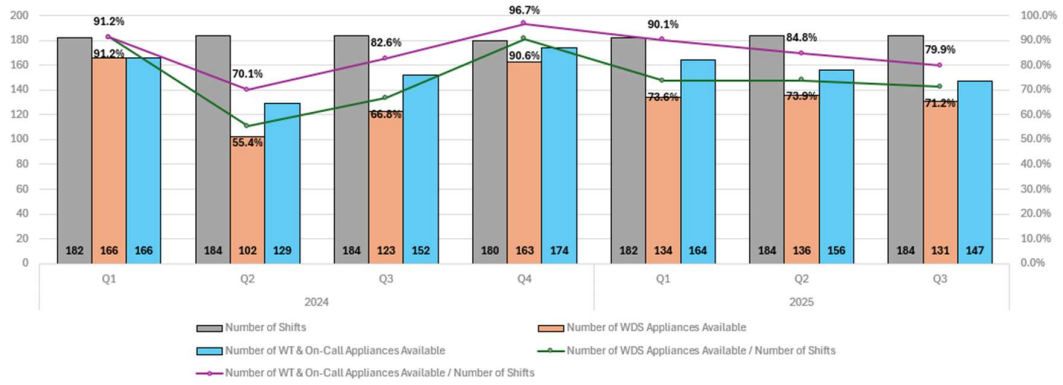
3.34 The table below shows performance against CM16 by quarter since the start of 2024/25:

16. Percentage of time that 14 or more pumping appliances are available					
Target: 100%	**Q1**	**Q2**	**Q3**	**Q4**	**Year to Date**
Previous Year (2024/25)	91.2%	**70.1%**	82.6%	96.7%	81.3%
2025/26 Actual	90.1%	84.8%	79.9%		84.9%

Quarterly performance for CM16 compared to previous year

3.35 The chart below shows performance over time since the measure was introduced, including the number of shifts that 14 WDS appliances were available and number of shifts that The Service had had 14 appliances available when WDS and On Call appliances are combined:



Performance against CM16 over time

3.36 Although performance for Q3 is 2.7 percentage points down when compared to the same quarter last year, it is notable that eight more shifts saw a full complement of 14 WDS appliances available. This performance itself would have been significantly better had it not been for some unforeseen staffing impacts resulting in a high level of WDS appliance unavailability during December.

3.37 It is hoped that a number of other workstreams including the revised leave policy, which came into effect from 1 January, will further contribute to improvements in WDS availability and therefore support the baseline provision of 14 fire appliances.

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3.38 Priority Six (P6) is now ell-embedded within service ways of working and is routinely implemented where On Call appliance availability allows.

3.39 P6 was invoked on 10 occasions during Q3 to support baseline service provision resulting in an estimated saving of £13,782 in PAOT costs.

3.40 Overall, during the period since it was implemented on 16 September 2024 to the end of Q3 in 2025/26, P6 has reduced the PAOT spend by an estimated £71,889.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

4.1 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.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The use of pre-arranged overtime (PAOT) continues to support a lean crewing model and to mitigate the effects of vacancies, sickness and absences for training.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Reliance on pre-arranged overtime to maintain appliance availability could lead to conflict with the following two clauses of the Grey Book:

(25) Employees are free to volunteer to work pre-arranged overtime for no more than twenty-four hours per month, averaged over a six-month period.

(26) Pre-arranged overtime will not be used to make up any planned shortfall in the overall staffing levels set out in the fire and rescue authority's Integrated (Community) Risk Management Plan'

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None identified.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The provision of sufficient minimum qualified firefighters and appliance availability is listed as a corporate risk under risk 681. It is monitored by the Director of Service Delivery, and, as necessary, treatments are reported to the Senior Leadership Team and the Audit and Governance Committee.

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9. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None identified.

10. PRINCIPLE CONSULTATION

10.1 The Assistant Chief Fire Officer.

11. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

11.1 None identified.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 None.

13. APPENDICES

13.1 None.

14. CONTACT DETAILS

14.1 Katie Mills, Assistant Chief Fire Officer/Director of Service Delivery, millsk@rbfrs.co.uk

14.2 Tom Brandon, Area Manager, Response and Resilience, brandont@rbfrs.co.uk

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