

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Held on Wednesday, 10th December, 2025 at 6.30 pm

RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincent's Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD

## Members: (\*present) (\*\* virtual)

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|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| * Councillor Peter Frewer         | * Councillor Jeff Brooks             |
| Councillor George Blundell        | * Councillor Paul Gittings           |
| * Councillor Wendy Griffith       | * Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey |
| ** Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle | Councillor Simon Werner              |
| Councillor Wayne Smith            | * Councillor Dave McElroy            |

**In Attendance:** Annie Pratt (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)  
Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources and Learning Development, HHR&L&D)  
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P)  
Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL)  
Frank Long (Group Manager (B) Intelligence Risk and Performance Manager)  
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)  
Katie Mills (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)  
Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)  
Michaela Smith (Democratic Support Assistant, DSA)  
Nikki Richards (Deputy Chief Executive, DChEx)  
Paul Brooks (Head of Assets, HoA)  
Steve Leonard (Group Manager, West Hub Manager)  
Wayne Bowcock (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)

## 35. REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

There were no questions received from Representative Bodies on any of the agenda items.

## 36. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received. Councillor McKenzie-Boyle joined the meeting on-line.

## Action

**37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest from Members in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct. There were no Declarations of Interest from Officers

**38. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 7 OCTOBER 2025**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting on 7 October 2025, be approved as a true record to be signed the Chair.

**39. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair made the following announcements.

**Welcome Cllr Knowles**

On behalf of the Fire Authority, the Chair welcomed Cllr Knowles, a new Member from RBWM who was replacing Cllr Helen Taylor who has stood down from the Fire Authority. The Chair thanked Helen Taylor and wished her every success in future endeavours.

**Condolences**

It is with great sadness to announce Mr Alan Ward, husband of Pauline Helliars-Symons both ex-Fire Authority Members, passed away recently. On behalf of the Fire Authority, the Chair passed on sincere condolences to Pauline Helliars-Symons. The Chair asked that Members remember Alan Ward in a one-minute silence.

**Equality Objectives Consultation**

At last week's meeting, four proposed Equality Objectives that were to be consulted on were noted. That consultation is now up, and the Service are now asking RBFRS staff and the public for their thoughts on the proposed objectives. The objectives outline ways in which RBFRS aim to better understand risk, provide a more accessible service, help RBFRS develop and retain talent, and promote new opportunities across the fire and rescue sector. The consultation is running for 10 weeks until Monday, 16 February 2026. The Chair asked Members to please spread the word around their wards and within their authorities to help RBFRS reach as many people as possible.

**State of Fire and Rescue 2024-25 Report Released**

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services (HIMCFRS) released its third annual [State of Fire and Rescue report](#). It is the first annual report on fire and rescue since the new Government came into power in July 2024.

The report contains his assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England, which is based on the inspection reports published between February 2023 and August 2025.

In its report, HMICFRS mentioned Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service as one of the services that had maintained a positive culture since they started inspecting fire and rescue services.

It is recognised that staff in the organisation demonstrate positive behaviours and felt empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours when they come across them. This is partly attributed to the Active Bystander training, which had increased confidence in knowing how to challenge inappropriate behaviours. This national recognition of our positive culture is something RBFRS should all be really proud of.

RBFRS is full of staff who go out of their way to make people feel safe, supported and included. This does not happen by coincidence and the Chair thanked everyone who has contributed to create a positive working environment.

To read the full report, [please visit the HMICFRS website](#).

### **David Barnes Elizabeth Emblem Presentation**

On Monday, 17 November, Chief Fire Officer Wayne Bowcock, attended a ceremony at Caversham Road Fire Station, where he presented the Elizabeth Emblem to honour David Barnes.

In 1977, David Barnes tragically lost his life whilst on duty responding to a fire at Clarkes Builders Merchant. He was only 44 years old. At the height of the fire, over 100 firefighters were in attendance and David had entered the building to tackle the blaze. Tragically, Neil Goldsmith also lost his life at the incident.

The Elizabeth Emblem is awarded as a mark of recognition to the next of kin of those who lost their lives in the course of undertaking eligible public service.

During the ceremony, Wayne presented the emblem to Ms McBean, David's widow.

### **Staff, Volunteers and Partners Recognised at Annual Awards Ceremony**

A range of outstanding achievements were recognised at the RBFRS Awards Ceremony, which was held on Friday, 21 November.

This event, which took place at Select Car Leasing Stadium, Reading, provided an opportunity to give thanks and recognition, on behalf of our Berkshire residents, for the exceptional work of staff, volunteers and partners.

With 28 staff members eligible for Long Service Awards and Long Service and Good Conduct Medals this year, and a total of 13 separate award categories to present, there was plenty to celebrate.

Staff who have served 20 years' or 30 years' service received their Long Service Award or Long Service and Good Conduct medal from the Lord Lieutenant of the Royal County of Berkshire, Mr Andrew Try, before a number of awards were presented.

This year the Service introduced a Partner Recognition Award, allowing them to thank some of the dedicated partners they work with daily to keep communities safe.

Members and Officers attended and congratulated the recipients in person or followed proceedings online. The Chair said he was sure Members would agree it was a fantastic event which showcased some of the best work carried out by Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service and its partners.

### **Recruitment process for next Chief Fire Officer**

Following the Chief Fire Officer's announcement that he intends to retire at the end of March 2026, the process to find his successor will get underway soon. To help manage the process and ensure we identify the best possible candidates, an external agency had been appointed.

This role is a very exciting opportunity to lead the Service on the next part of its journey. RBFRS are seeking an inspiring and inclusive leader who shares and promotes their values.

The Service welcome applicants who can bring expertise and experience to drive the Service forward and help shape the future. This role will be open to staff from both operational and non-operational backgrounds as either a Chief Fire Officer or a Chief Executive Officer.

The Chair confirmed he would keep Members updated on this important process and further information will be published to prospective applicants via the RBFRS website.

### **Changes to Fire Authority Pages on Website**

From the end of this month, the contract with Modern Gov will come to an end. As a result, Members – and indeed the public – will not be able to access information on previous meetings in the same way.

All previous agendas from the past six years, as well as minutes from every meeting of the Fire Authority, will still be available and can be provided on request.

RBFRS staff are currently rebuilding part of the Service's website to host a new platform with all the information previously held by Modern Gov, and are working with website provider, Perspicuity, to complete the transition.

Further updates on this transition will be provided in due course.

### **Armed Forces Covenant Gold Award Revalidation**

This morning, the Service received news that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service has been successfully revalidated for the Gold Award in the Armed Forces Covenant's Employer Recognition Scheme for a further five years.

The work to get this point has been led by Paul Brooks as the Service Armed Forces Lead Officer and a small group of staff who dedicate their time and effort to ensure RBFRS have been able to sustain their prestigious Gold status.

More information will be published in due course, along with an official announcement, and the Chair stated he was sure Members would agree that this is a great achievement for the Service and demonstrated their commitment to supporting veterans and the Armed Forces community.

## **40. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

There were no issues arising from the Audit and Governance Committee.

## **41. CRMP PRIORITY PROGRAMME VERBAL UPDATE**

Annie Pratt, Head of Corporate Services, HCS, gave Members a verbal update on the CRMP Priority Programme.

The programme of activities is scheduled to begin in the New Year, the initial phase would help to establish timelines and governance arrangements, workshops have been arranged, and a report would be given to Management Committee once completed.

The protection restructure has begun to strengthen resilience and mitigate risk and the consultation will allow staff to feedback on the proposed changes.

To ensure the Service continue to provide an effective response further projects include reviews of crewing arrangements, staffing models and operational requirements with findings reported through CRMP governance. A review of Berkshires incident command was completed which covered risks faced by flexi duty officers along with current, as well as future operational demands.

Annie Pratt stated a recommendation would be presented to SLT on the specialist capability framework and Annie would be working with Paul Brooks, Head of Assets to allocate resources.

A further suite of measures had been implemented to strengthen appliance availability including utilising the training centre appliance. The ten additional fire fighters have reduced the Services' reliance on overtime, and provided resilience against sickness, leave and training requirements. RBFRS are aiming to improve communication between departments particularly HR and operational teams and to enhance support for staff who are on sick leave. Initiatives include daily crewing briefings as well as a review of the DAPs (development assessment pathways) and the recruit's course, to decrease time away from stations.

The leave policy was reviewed and the consultation completed with over 100 responses from staff and 150 initial engagements. Following feedback, the policy was adjusted, and the policy will be evaluated again within twelve months.

The Vice-Chair acknowledged the quality of the completed work and noted that the Service had a particularly demanding response standard. He recognised that several of the proposed changes would be challenging to implement and affirmed that the Service will continue to work diligently to ensure these are delivered effectively.

## **42. 2025/26 BUDGET MONITORING - QUARTER 2**

Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P, confirmed at the end of quarter 2 the forecast outturn position on the revenue account is expected to equal the budget and as Members would recall, £350,000 was set aside at the end of last year to cover any additional monies needed for pay award.

Overall variances against this year's budget meant use of reserves was forecast as £408,000 less than expected. Reasons for the outturn included department vacancies of £278,000, Home Office charges for the Airwave system forecast as £289,000 less than budget and an additional income of £58K from the settlement of a legal dispute.

Number of staff on wholetime stations were below the budgeted number during quarter 1. A proportion of firefighters at development level was higher than expected and a forecast salary cost saving of around £240,000 on wholetime stations for the year.

In quarter 1 pressure on the overtime budget to cover sickness, firefighters on light duties and additional overtime for training resulted in the overtime forecast totalling £390,000 over budget for the year. On-call stations were currently showing a net negative variance across the county, with a net variance of £93,000, with Lambourn being £55,000 of this amount.

Non staff variance related to the PPE contract estimated to be higher than budget by £30,000 for the year. Treasury management activity for quarter 2 was detailed in Appendix D and all treasury management operations had been conducted in full compliance with the Authority's Treasury Management Practices.

The Chair asked Conor Byrne if he was correct in his understanding that the Service would have additional potential reserves of £408,000 compared to budget and Conor Byrne confirmed this was correct. The Chair stated the Service was in a good position financially.

The Chair moved the recommendation, and it was seconded by the Councillor Shepherd-DuBey.

It was unanimously **RESOLVED** that the 2025/26 Budget Monitoring – Quarter 2 report be noted.

#### 43. APPLIANCE AVAILABILITY - QUARTER 2

Steve Leonard, Group Manager, presented the Quarter Two Appliance Availability report.

For wholtime appliance availability RBFRS achieved 96.3% against a target of 97.4%. Apprentices and additional fire fighter posts helped to achieve the 1.1%-point improvement compared to the same quarter last year even though additional pressures including sickness and training impacted results.

On-call appliance availability was below the 50% target at 32.8%. Challenges in this area included Hungerford and Lambourn although both stations were showing signs of improvement which was positive. The figures do not factor in on-call crewing of 4x4 appliance data, and these appliances were used regularly in the summer period. Supervisory managers continue to be supported, and it was hoped the Service will soon recruit for the role of Level 1 commander.

Combined appliance availability of 14 or more pumping appliances was 84.4% against a target of 100% , and the 10 additional fire fighters made a positive impact on this result. The significant improvement from last year assisted by improved crewing oversight and additional posts meant quarter 2 2024 figures stood at 98, whilst this quarter on 51 occasions appliances were unavailable. Night shifts performed better at 95.7% compared to 73.9% for day shift, mainly due to greater availability on on-call at night, than during the day.

The response standard target of 75% was not achieved. RBFRS were able to respond to 67.3% of incidents within 10 minutes, further broke down to 62.3% for day and 72% for night. The UK witnessed the worst wildfire season on record during the summer; with 850 confirmed in the UK , Berkshire had 20. RBFRS

were called to 355 fires in the open, key challenges included travel distances, time of incident, simultaneous incidents and difficulty in locating incidents. Call handling improved slightly to 70.9%, turnout times remained strong at 87.6%, travel times fell to 63.9% due to demand and RBFRS continued to outperform national averages for most incident types.

The revised leave policy, management of light duties and sickness were expected to positively improve availability, reduce overtime costs and RBFRS are committed to monitoring trends, optimizing resources, and supporting staff to maintain resilience.

The Chair stated he was pleased the Service was outperforming the national average but felt the 67.3% response time needed to improve.

The Chair asked that the last four quarters performance figures be included in the report to assist with understanding trends (3.1, 3.2, 3.3).

Steve Leonard added that two new on-call fire fighters completed initial courses earlier in the month which would assist with improving station performance in Lambourn.

The Vice-Chair asked a question about response times and Steve Leonard confirmed that the omission of 4x4 appliance data within the data, would not change figures as the response standard is based on the first appliance in attendance. An appliance would always attend an incident, a 4x4 may be used if back up was required and can often prove more beneficial than an appliance.

Councillor McElroy enquired about the correlation between response standard and number of incidents and a separate question on wildfires trends. Steve Leonard explained that incidents can require more than one appliance, and multiple appliance incidents happen throughout the year. He confirmed there was an increased trend of fires in the open in rural locations, and that these were linked to land management and climate change - when an area experiences hotter, dryer weather conditions, then fires will spread. Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO, added that factors impacting speed of response included weather and road conditions and locating the incident, especially if the incident was in the open. RBFRS dealt with rural and urban areas, and each bring its own challenges and risks.

Councillor Griffith asked if there had been any impact of not attending automatic fire alarms (AFAs) and a separate question on additional crewing. Steve Leonard stated the Service proactively looked at crewing and weather conditions in the summer months to see if extra resource was needed. In relation to AFAs the data was not available at the moment. Annie Pratt, Head of Corporate Services, HCS, stated one of the greatest challenges concerning leave was when staff request holiday at the same time, and the Service were trying to manage this more effectively. Mark Arkwell added evaluation regarding AFAs is on-going, but RBFRS expect to see a positive impact on availability, but also a

Area  
Manager  
R&R

negative impact on speed or response. The potential reason for this is the nature of the AFA as these usually occur in built up areas closer to fire stations.

The Chair moved the recommendation, and it was seconded by Councillor Griffith.

It was unanimously **RESOLVED** that:

- 1) The 2024/25 quarter two performance of 96.3% appliance availability of the Service's 14 whole-time appliances, against a target of 97.4%, in line with Corporate Measure 14<sup>3</sup> be noted; and
- 2) The 2024/25 quarter two overall on-call appliance availability performance of 32.8%, against a target of 50%, in line with Corporate Measure 15<sup>2</sup> be noted; and
- 3) The 2024/25 quarter two performance of 84.8% of shifts where 14 or more pumping appliances were available, against a target of 100%, in line with Corporate Measure 16<sup>3</sup> be noted.

#### **44. FORWARD PLAN**

**RESOLVED** that the Forward Plan be noted.

#### **45. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Tuesday 10 February 2026, 6.30pm at RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, RG31 7SD.

*(The meeting concluded at 19:27).*

<sup>1</sup> Corporate Measure 14: Percentage of whole-time frontline pumping appliance availability (fire engines).

<sup>2</sup> Corporate Measure 15: Percentage of hours where there is adequate crewing on on-call frontline pumping appliances (fire engines).

<sup>3</sup> Corporate Measure 16: Percentage of time that 14 or more pumping appliances are available (fire engines available for whole shifts).