

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	10 FEBRUARY 2026
SUBJECT	REPLACEMENT OF SPECIAL ASSET – WATER RESCUE SUPPORT VEHICLE
LEAD OFFICER	PAUL BROOKS, HEAD OF ASSETS
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR RACHELLE SHEPHERD-DUBEY
EXEMPT INFORMATION	PART I
ACTION	TO AGREE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) has a proactive planned fleet and equipment replacement programme which seeks to renew vehicles and operational equipment where necessary to support the requirements of the service.
- 1.2 RBFRS has aligned its front-line appliance replacement profile to a 12-year cycle as recommended by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), with other fleet assets to be lifecycled based on several factors, including emerging operational needs, reliability, condition and sustainability.
- 1.3 As reported in October 2025, the Service has been managing challenges with water rescue assets due to the failure of a towing vehicle routinely based at Caversham Road Fire Station. Urgent work is underway fitting out the new replacement vehicle but, whilst water rescue capability is being maintained, there is reduced capacity and a lack of resilience that needs to be addressed.
- 1.4 A provision of £604,000 has been made in the SAIF 2025 for the replacement of special assets and this paper seeks to gain approval from the Management Committee to draw down up to £100,000 for the replacement of a critical capability.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Management Committee is requested to **APPROVE** capital expenditure of up to £100,000 to replace the water rescue special asset as described in paragraph 3.2.

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3. REPORT

- 3.1 RBFRS has a proactive planned fleet and equipment replacement programme which seeks to renew vehicles and operational equipment where necessary to support the requirements of the service.
- 3.2 As reported in October 2025, RBFRS has aligned its front-line appliance replacement profile to a 12-year cycle as recommended by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), with other fleet assets to be lifecycled based on several factors, including emerging operational needs, reliability, condition and sustainability.
- 3.3 As reported in October 2025, the Service has been managing challenges with water rescue assets due to the failure of a towing vehicle routinely based at Caversham Road Fire Station. Urgent work is underway fitting out the new replacement vehicle but, whilst water rescue capability is being maintained, there is reduced capacity and a lack of resilience that needs to be addressed.
- 3.4 The water rescue unit at Slough has served the Service well but it is not sustainable for crews to continue using without substantial alterations to the current stowage. Replacing the vehicle with a more specialised one will offer will mean that the current Slough-based water rescue Transit van will be repurposed to Learning and Development. L&D have been hiring a transit van for over 12months at an annual cost of c£5000 the repurposing of the Slough transit will provide L&D with a vehicle more appropriate for their needs with better seating capacity and would present a cost saving against the ongoing costs of vehicle hire which will no longer be required.
- 3.5 Continuing to strive for excellence, the Service is looking to introduce a replacement water rescue specialist vehicle to be based at Slough. Purchasing the water rescue vehicle will provide the resilience required to the Service in terms of water rescue assets, whilst also improving interoperability between crews at Slough and Caversham Road. This will also improve effectiveness and potential efficiencies in training and at incidents, reducing risk to the organisation to an acceptable level.
- 3.6 Provision has been made in the SAIF for 2025/26 of £604,000 for special asset replacement and upgrades, with the cost for the water rescue vehicle originally estimated in the Assets Service Plan at £125,000. Market testing and an improved procurement approach has driven the cost down to c£100,000, some 20% less than the original estimate.
- 3.7 **Benefits.** The purchase of this vehicle will enhance both designated water rescue stations and their ability to attend water and flood incidents across the county; it will provide an identical and familiar platform for all water rescue staff to work from similar to that of our appliance fleet. Additional benefits include:

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- 3.7.1 Alignment with Thames Valley partners in Buckinghamshire as the vehicle type and general stowage is the same.
- 3.7.2 Enhanced capability for the Slough crews to function at the required level safely and efficiently.
- 3.7.3 Enhanced wading and flood response capability across the service.
- 3.7.4 Operational personnel will value the investment the Service is making to improve capability and operator safety.
- 3.7.5 Provision of enhanced contamination control with decontamination available in situ.
- 3.8 Overall, it is considered that the recommended approach is pragmatic; it will provide a sustainable modern fit for purpose vehicle, providing the crews with efficient stowage and the ability to decontaminate and undress/dress on scene in some privacy.

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.
- 4.2 **Resilience.** We will ensure our resilience and work with our partners to promote and build resilience in the communities we serve.
- 4.3 **Sustainability.** We are committed to ensuring that we provide a financially sustainable Service and take meaningful action to help address the climate emergency.

5. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 RBFRS requires up to £100,000 for the replacement of an operationally critical asset special vehicle and the budget request is within the provision contained in the SAIF 2025.
- 5.2 Every effort will be made to value engineer the fitting out aspects and balance out risk to ensure that best value for money is achieved.

6. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 In accordance with Section 3.5.iv of the RBFA financial regulations, financial provision in the SAIF does not give authority to spend on capital projects. Provision

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is only converted into capital once approved by the Management Committee, hence the need for this paper.

- 6.2 The HIWFA/RBFA Fleet Support Joint Working Agreement (JWA) has provision in it for procurement activity with guiding principles in Clauses 5.1.7, 15.1 and 15.2 of the main agreement document ensuring all activity is aligned with, and compliant with, public procurement legislation.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no known negative implications to proceeding with this vehicle change.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Not changing this vehicle presents a future risk to our staff and the organisation by not being able to provide an effective water rescue response with adequate decontamination facilities. Risks include:

8.1.1 Interoperability issues between Caversham Road and Slough water rescue teams.

8.1.2 Potential for manual handling safety events to occur whilst current trailer-based stowage is used.

8.1.3 Boat capability at risk of being taken off the run in the event of a vehicle breakdown.

9. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Sustainability is considered in all asset procurement exercises. In this case, the procurement of a more modern and efficient vehicle will ensure there is alignment with the RBFRS Fleet & Equipment Strategy and the RBFA Sustainability Strategy seeking to minimise carbon emissions.

10. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 10.1 The recommendations in this report provide an excellent opportunity for collaboration with HIWFRS under the Fleet Support JWA and the specifications of the proposed vehicle match that of our collaborative partners in Buckinghamshire FRS.

11. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 11.1 The Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Head of Finance and Procurement were consulted during the preparation of this report.

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- 11.2 The Lead Member for Strategic Assets and Sustainability and the Monitoring Officer were consulted during the preparation of this report.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 12.1 [Strategic Asset Investment Framework \(rbfrs.co.uk\)](http://rbfrs.co.uk)

13. APPENDICES

- 13.1 None.

14. CONTACT DETAILS

- 14.1 Paul Brooks – Head of Assets (Estates, Fleet & Equipment), brooksp@rbfrs.co.uk
- 14.2 Pete Skinner – Group Manager Fleet & Equipment, skinnerp@rbfrs.co.uk