

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

Held on Tuesday, 25th November, 2025 at 6.30 pm

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



Members: (*present)	Councillor George Blundell * Councillor Greg Bello Councillor Dennis Benneyworth * Councillor Jeff Brooks * Councillor Tricia Brown * Councillor Billy Drummond * Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey * Councillor Peter Frewer Councillor Paul Gittings Councillor Wendy Griffith	* Councillor Mohammed Nazir * Councillor Andy NG Siu-hong Councillor Dave McElroy * Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle * Councillor Owen Jeffery * Councillor Dilbagh Parmar * Councillor Wayne Smith Councillor Zafar Satti Councillor Helen Taylor Councillor Simon Werner
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In Attendance: Wayne Bowcock (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)
Nikki Richards (Deputy Chief Executive, DChEx)
Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
Katie Mills (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)
Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development, HHR&L&D)
Paul Brooks (Head of Assets, HoA)
Annie Pratt (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)
Claudia Trott (Equality Diversity and Inclusion Lead)
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)
Irene Kema Onyeri (Deputy Head of Finance and Procurement)
Fayth Rowe (Executive Services Manager)
Michaela Smith (Democratic Support Officer)
Christian Riley (Communications and Engagement Officer)

21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Benneyworth, Blundell, Satti, Gittings, Griffith, McElroy, and Werner.

Action

22. 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 received from Officers.

23. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 JUNE 2025

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2025, be approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

24. PETITIONS AND QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC UNDER STANDING ORDERS 19 AND 25

There were no petitions and questions from the Public under Standing Orders 19 and 25.

25. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair made the following announcements.

State of Fire and Rescue 2024-25 Report Released

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services' (HMICFRS) has 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 contained 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 mentions 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 demonstrated 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 a positive culture is something the Service should 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 creating 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.

The Fire Fighters Charity Addresses Letter of Thanks to RBFRS

At the end of October, the Fire Fighters Charity sent a letter to express gratitude for the fundraising contributions from RBFRS throughout the previous financial year. In 2024-25, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service raised a grand total of £78,621 for the Fire Fighters Charity! This is a fantastic achievement, that can only be made possible by the commitment and dedication of staff across the Service. The Chair asked Members to join him in expressing gratitude and congratulating all those who participated in fundraising events over the financial year, resulting in the Service raising this large amount for this important charity.

Open Day at Newbury Fire Station

Last month, an Open Day was held at Newbury Fire Station. The crew from Blue Watch organised the event with a fun Halloween theme to coincide with the October half-term holiday. Lots of local people attended the Open Day, where they watched live demonstrations, participated in hose reel activities, met the firefighters and explored the fire engines, and learnt CPR skills from a team of Community First Responders from South Central Ambulance Service. The Chair asked Members to join him in congratulating everyone who dedicated their time and effort to making the Open Day a huge success.

Remembrance

In November, staff across the Service marked Remembrance Day and Remembrance Sunday by attending special events across the county.

On Monday, 3 November, the most recent Armed Forces Veterans' Hub was held at Newbury Fire Station, where guests had the opportunity to talk to a wide range of charities and organisations who were there to offer their support and services. At the event, Pete Skinner, Group Manager, and his son ran a Poppy Appeal stall raising money for the Royal British Legion. Staff attended services and parades across the county on Remembrance Sunday, representing Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service in Newbury, Theale, Bracknell, Reading, Sandhurst, Windsor, Pangbourne, Slough, Maidenhead, Thatcham and

Crowthorne. Then at 11am on Remembrance Day, RBFRS observed the national two-minute silence across the Service's sites, to mark the end of the First World War, and to acknowledge the courage and sacrifice of those who served their country and acknowledge our responsibility to work for the peace they fought hard to achieve. This was an important time of year that means a great deal to so many, and the Chair thanked everyone for taking time to mark the occasion.

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 the Service identify the best possible candidates, an external agency has been appointed. The 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 Service values. RBFRS welcome applicants who can bring expertise and experience to drive the Service forward and help shape its 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 said he will keep Members updated on this important process and further information will be published to prospective applicants via the RBFRS website.

Staff, Volunteers and Partners Recognised at Annual Awards Ceremony

Lastly, a range of outstanding achievements were recognised at the RBFRS Awards Ceremony, which was held on Friday, 21 November. The event, which took place at Select Car Leasing Stadium, Reading, provided an opportunity to give thanks and recognition, on behalf of 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 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 RBFRS to thank some of the dedicated partners they work with daily to keep communities safe. The Chair stated many Members attended and congratulated recipients in person or followed proceedings online and 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.

26. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

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

27. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS UNDER STANDING ORDER 30

There were no questions from Members under Standing Order 30.

28. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDER 44

There were no notices of Motion under Standing Order 44.

29. RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEES

There were no recommendations from Committees.

30. SUSTAINABILITY UPDATE PRESENTATION

Paul Brooks (Head of Assets, HoA) presented the slideshow stating the sustainability strategy was agreed in October 2024, and six-monthly updates were agreed with the Authority, this update being the first of those.

The policy document detailed RBFRS' position in a succinct way, as well as the environmental policy statement linked to climate emergency. RBFRS have mapped the policy to the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the strategic themes of reducing consumption, decarbonisation, people and guardianship.

Sustainability Roadmap achievements included establishing a single waste stream management, working with local community action groups, National Fire Estates Group and National Fire Station Design Workshop and Conference. Achieving carbon literacy and carbon data reporting were future goals. The refurbishment of the Whitley Wood Training Centre had been awarded BREEM, a design standard for environmental sustainability.

Decarbonising of five sites, removal of gas boilers and LED lighting project are some of the initiatives within the capital program and future projects included solar photovoltaic and EV infrastructure.

Councillor Bello stated the work done by the Estates Development and Sustainability Working Group and the Officers was tremendous and was pleased to visit Langley Fire Station and see the changes first hand.

The Chair suggested COMMS release a statement detailing the work currently taking place and the progress made against the plan.

COMMS Team

It was **RESOLVED** that the sustainability update be noted.

31. EQUALITY OBJECTIVES

Claudia Trott (Equality Diversity and Inclusion Lead) explained she was seeking approval of the proposed 2026 Equality Objectives, that the objectives were a legal requirement under the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty, and reflect RBFRS' commitment to fairness, inclusion and effective service delivery.

Setting equality objectives means RBFRS services are accessible, equitable, and responsive to the diverse needs of communities. Failure to meet these duties carries legal and reputational risks and the Service has a duty to publish measurable equality objectives at least every four years.

Current objectives included increasing diversity, leadership commitment, improving service delivery and building on inclusive culture. Progress made included the Summer and Change 100 Internship, Have a Go days, training and the creation of a neurodiversity network. In the last 3.5 years, female staff and ethnic minority staff numbers within the Service increased but compared to Berkshire demographics the Service remained underrepresented in both groups.

Proposed objectives were:

Equitable Access - Using risk-based analysis and robust evidence, we will ensure our prevention, protection and response activities are targeted where they are needed most, particularly for communities who face higher risks or barriers.

Employer of Choice - We will actively promote RBFRS as an employer of choice and will seek to attract and retain a workforce that reflects the community of Berkshire.

Belonging at Work - We will cultivate a workplace culture where every individual feels a strong sense of belonging by embedding inclusive behaviours into everyday interactions.

Inclusive by Design - We will continue to embed inclusion into the planning, design and delivery of our services in order to proactively reduce barriers across our communications, processes and premises..

Once approved, public consultation will take place and will include a press release, local authority engagement, and staff interaction. Following the consultation, feedback will be gathered and the objectives reviewed before a further report is brought to the Fire Authority in April 2026. Following final approval an action plan outlining a phased four-year approach to achieve these objectives will be created,

Claudia Trott stated the early December was the intended date for consultation in response to a question from the Chair.

	Action
<p>Councillor Brown raised questions relating to careers and language, a spelling error on page 33, queried the date on the Equality Impact Assessment and wording used on page 28 in the measures section in relation to the number of respondents.</p>	Claudia Trott
<p>Claudia Trott confirmed work had been completed on the external website in the career section, that language could be worked into the objectives and the date was the version history, not related to the contents of the report. Spelling would be corrected and wording on page 28 would be amended.</p>	
<p>The Chair asked whether the objectives could be linked into the Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development, HHR&L&D) agreed and confirmed the EVP was being developed.</p>	
<p>In response to the Chairs question on diversity, Claudia agreed it was not a standalone Berkshire problem, it was a national problem, and the Service had and continues to liaise with The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) on this issue.</p>	Claudia Trott
<p>The Chair stated investigation was needed in relation to the ways other services were dealing with diversity pressures. Wayne Bowcock (Chief Fire Officer, CFO) agreed it would assist with Member understanding and stated the NFCC national EDI lead had brought a fresh, positive approach and had offered practical advice to services in relation to this national issue.</p>	
<p>Councillor Nazir said it was a brilliant report and showed compliance with the Equality Equalities Act. He asked what the Service would be doing differently this time to achieve ethnic minority involvement and offered to assist with any planned activities. Claudia Trott replied that the Service had reached out to specific community groups covering religion, gender, race and sexual orientation, including language translation as part of the consultation. The Chair and Councillor McKenzie-Boyle agreed that Members should be involved with communicating the work the Service is doing in relation to this issue at their council meetings.</p>	
<p>Councillor Brown moved the recommendations, and it was seconded by Councillor Shepherd-DuBey.</p>	
<p>On being put to the vote, it was RESOLVED that:</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) the contents of the report be noted; and 2) the proposed objectives outlined in 3.11 be agreed; and 3) the consultation approach outlined in 3.16 be agreed. 	

32. ANNUAL TREASURY REPORT AND MID-YEAR REPORT

Irene Kema Onyeri (Deputy Head of Finance and Procurement) presented the report stating that treasury management in local Government is regulated by the CIPFA Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the Prudential Code.

Both the Annual Treasury Report for 2024/25 and the Mid-Year Treasury Management Update for 2025/26 showed that performance is in line with the prudential indicators approved by the Authority in February 2024.

The Authority had not adopted any complex investment strategies and evolved the ethical dimension to its investment strategy for 2025/26 which is now based on a broader range of criteria.

Through cash-flow management, the Authority has taken advantage of the relatively high interest rates still available, despite the reductions in the bank rate, this allowed the Authority to make a number of fixed-term deposits throughout 2025/26, aiming to maximise investment returns while ensuring capital security.

In 2024/25 income generated from investments totalled £870K, interest received for the first half of this year was £269K and it is anticipated that total investment income for 2025/26 to be £598K, £6k below the budgeted figure. Borrowing remained at £8.922 million during 2024/25 and in the first quarter of 2025/26 repaid £394K which reduced the total outstanding debt to £8.528 million. Interest paid on loans was £333K in 2024/25 and would be £316K in 2025/26.

The Chair commented on financing costs as a proportion to net revenue on page 66 and said the Service was 1.71%, well within the 3% fiscal rules. In answer to a question about income, Irene Kema Onyeri said that investment income interest received for the 2024/25 financial year totalled £870K and estimated interest income for 2025/26 was £598K.

Councillor Nazir asked if the Service published a list of investments that has been made and Irene Kema Onyeri replied that the Service works with treasury advisors, and the list is not published but can be made available if requested. The Chair suggested the Ethical Investment Policy be circulated to Members.

In response to a question from the Chair about borrowing Irene Kema Onyeri stated that information on investment strategies were detailed in page 67. Wayne Bowcock (Chief Fire Officer, CFO) added that around the time of budget meetings the Service publish a range of documents including a revised Treasury Management Strategy and accompanying policy papers which details Service investment principles.

The Chair moved the recommendations, and it was seconded by Councillor Shepherd-Dubey.

On being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that:

Irene
Kema
Onyeri

Action

- 1) the Annual Treasury Report for 2024/25 be noted; and
- 2) the Mid-Year Treasury Management Update for 2025/26 be noted.

33. FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

34. MINUTES OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES

RESOLVED that it be noted the Minutes of recent meetings were published on RBFRS website.

35. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 23 February 2026, 6.30pm at RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincent Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

(The meeting concluded at 19:39)