

Strategic Assets & Sustainability –

2025-26 Lead Member Annual Report

Assets (Estates, Fleet & Equipment, Sustainability)

Context

The period of change experienced during 2023–24 stabilised during 2025–26 following the re-organisation of the Estates and Fleet & Equipment teams. While earlier managerial turnover created challenges, it also provided the opportunity to reshape services to improve capability, resilience, and consistency.

The decision taken in 2023–24 to combine Facilities and Property Capital Projects into a single Estates function has continued to deliver benefits throughout 2025–26. Bringing responsibility for Estates, Fleet and Equipment (including Supplies, but excluding ICT), and Sustainability into one area of responsibility has improved service quality, strengthened governance, and delivered efficiencies and cashable benefits.

RBFRS is ensuring strategic insight and influence with the Head of Assets co-chairing the NFCC National Fire Estates Group and as a member of the NFCC Finance Committee. Regionally, RBFRS is a founder member of the new Thames Valley Estate Delivery Group seeking collaborative opportunities around geography, scale and services to realise efficiency and operational benefits.

Estates – Facilities, Capital Projects, Property Management and Sustainability

Review

The successful appointment of a permanent Estate Manager in March 2025 has provided stability and leadership throughout 2025–26, supporting the full integration of Facilities and Property Capital Management. Co-location of teams has continued to deliver benefits, improving collaboration, resilience, and service delivery.

The re-organisation of the Facilities team and establishment of an in-house Maintenance Support Team has started to realise cashable and non-cashable benefits. These include significantly increased agility and flexibility, reduced reliance

on outsourced services, delivering improved value for money and more assured compliance.

Facilities services during the year have continued to evolve, supported by professional soft services providers (principally waste and cleaning) and a hard services provider delivering planned preventative maintenance. Contracts were again extended during the year, ensuring continuity while work continues to rationalise arrangements and reduce contract interfaces where possible.

The Property Capital Projects team continued to deliver throughout 2025–26, flexing resources to manage workload and to include taking on more property management related functions. The additional leadership capacity now built in with the creation of a deputy role has demonstrated considerable value over the year. This theme was repeated with the dedicated Sustainability Officer role providing real focus on the new strategy and delivery of the roadmap and decarbonisation programme.

The strategic shift away from large-scale rebuild projects towards refurbishment of existing sites continued throughout the year, delivering more affordable, sustainable, and timely improvements across the estate. Priority areas remained:

- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), coupled with safety to provide dignified places
- Contamination control
- Sustainability and carbon reduction
- Investment in building fabric, security and longevity

Due to changes in legislation during 2025, a further range of EDI and personnel security related improvements were completed across the estate, including upgrades to dormitories and showering/changing facilities.

Major Projects and Sustainability

The Whitley Wood Training Centre redevelopment progressed in line with approved plans. The new modular training and office building became operational in April 2025, with external works and landscaping completed by July 2025. The project

delivered modern, flexible accommodation with clear contaminant zoning, improved EDI provision, and enhanced sustainability performance, achieving a BREEAM 'Very Good' rating.

Following the publication of the RBFA Sustainability Strategy 2024–2029, sustainability activity during 2025–26 focused on delivery through a developing roadmap. This included progress on the jointly funded RBFRS / Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme heat decarbonisation programme, targeting five of the Service's least energy-efficient sites. These sites are on track for completion on time and under budget.

More widely, an innovative solution has been identified using an external relocatable pod to resolve the dignified space quandary at Windsor Fire Station with completion expected in June 2026. A similar issue has been identified at Ascot Fire Station with design and planning fast tracked to provide a solution by July 2026. Design and planning activity for the Langley Fire Station refurbishment project is well advanced with a high degree of certainty of costs and risks.

A notable achievement during the year was the replacement of LED lighting at six sites, including Newsham Court, delivering immediate cashable benefits. Design and planning work has also started early on the installation of roof mounted solar arrays to further aid decarbonisation of the estate. Environmental sustainability has continued to be embedded into all major estate projects, aligning with Government commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Ongoing Delivery and Priorities

During 2025–26, the Estates team continued to embed a highly customer-focused approach, underpinned by improved processes, procedures, and more assured compliance. Improved integration and collaboration across the service has supported delivery of the estates development objectives set out in the Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF), approved by Members in February 2025.

Key estates priorities for delivery during the coming year includes:

- Embedding, planning and (where practicable), delivery of the SAIF 2026 six-sites refurbishment programme
- Tendering and award of a new bundled contract to deliver hard facilities management services
- Tendering and award of the delivery contract and significant completion of the Langley Fire Station refurbishment project
- Completion of EDI improvements at Windsor Fire Station and Ascot Fire Station
- Delivery of roof-mounted solar arrays on selected fire stations
- Planning for the provision of EV charging at selected sites
- Ongoing review of the Property Asset Management and Sustainability Strategies.

Fleet & Equipment

Review

The revised Fleet and Equipment Strategy issued in October 2024 continued to guide activity throughout 2025–26. The focus remained on consolidating progress made in transforming the front-line appliance fleet and specialist vehicles. Since 2017, 27 new front-line pumping appliances have been delivered, representing a c50% refresh and supporting greater standardisation across the Thames Valley.

White fleet vehicles continued to be introduced through established procurement processes, with blue-light conversions generally delivered via the Hampshire & Isle of Wight FRS Joint Working Agreement (JWA). Notably, the JWA was reviewed and refreshed with another 5-years term entered into from August 2025.

Electric vehicles were well utilised during the year, with guidance issued to ensure they are used appropriately. Mild hybrid response cars performed well, with additional vehicles added to the fleet in 2024-25 and embedded into operational use during 2025–26.

The SAIF provides for the next phase of fleet renewals, ensuring continued development of a fit-for-purpose fleet.

On the equipment front, the transition to Interspiro breathing apparatus is complete, delivering enhanced firefighter health, safety, and interoperability across the Thames Valley. The rollout of improved smoke hoods has further strengthened contaminant protection.

The RBFRS Workwear Project made significant progress during the year. Following extensive wearer trials, a supplier was appointed to deliver workwear from April 2025, ensuring improved quality, EDI outcomes, and sustainability compared to national framework solutions.

Ongoing Delivery and Priorities

There are no new frontline appliances planned for the next two years, but planning and procurement activity will commence during 2026-27. The national firefighter PPE contract is also being developed for use from 2028, although RBFRS, with Thames Valley partners are also assessing independent options to gauge value for money.

The CRMP will help clarify strategic asset requirements, to support and inform our future procurement needs for special appliances and operational equipment. Specialist capability is a challenging area to balance out the needs of a steady state programme that considers ageing and/or obsolescence whilst also trying to meet future capability needs based on horizon scanning. The risks in this area are being mitigated by using a specialist capability framework (SCF) that was stood up in February 2026.

This coming year will include delivery of the light and specialist vehicle elements of the SAIF along with developing and embedding the SCF to deliver selected capabilities. The firefighter PPE requirements will be developed and agreed to ensure the needs of end users are met.

Sustainability considerations continue to be embedded within fleet and equipment planning, including increased use of hybrid and electric vehicles and horizon

scanning for alternative fuels. The overarching objective remains the creation of a sustainable rolling procurement plan that ensures RBFRS maintains safe, reliable, and fit-for-purpose assets.

The Fleet and Equipment Strategy will continue to be reviewed throughout the year.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Review

The RBFRS ICT strategy for 2024-2027 is fully supported by SAIF. The funding model for ICT has been transitioning from perpetual licensing of software to subscription-based services in line with what the industry dictates. This shift impacts the SAIF, as RBFRS will no longer need to capitalise on periodic and routine large software update purchases with the expectation that they will last for several years before renewal. Instead, subscriptions to software delivery as a service require ongoing revenue funding. Consequently, core capital funding requirements going forward will primarily be associated with inevitable digital change as well as the refresh and/or expansion of existing hardware, including laptops/desktops, mobile phones, tablets, networks, and operational communications devices such as mobile data terminals (MDTs), Airwave/ESN (emergency services network) devices, station end and fireground radios.

Forecasting new or wholesale software or system replacement projects is challenging and will leverage the technology roadmap and service planning process to maintain a three to five-year scanning horizon to anticipate system requirements impacting the SAIF. While most such projects will likely rely on subscription-based software or platform delivery, there may still be cases where procurement or implementation costs need to be capitalised, whether for the software or system itself or for associated hardware requirements driven by the change.

Investment aligned with the ICT strategic principles will support the overall organisational goals, minimising disruption and leveraging technology for efficiency, releasing staff capacity for value-added activities. The 'work smarter' approach will positively impact staff resilience and the overall sustainability of the Service.

For these benefits to be realised, it is imperative to maintain the ongoing refresh of technical resources to fully leverage opportunities in advanced software and systems for the organisation's benefit.

Ongoing and looking forward

Projects underway include a finalisation of large-scale migration and consolidation of core systems to the cloud and within the new infrastructure, improvements in systems responsible for deployment and management of end user hardware as well as significant ICT Hardware refresh.

Taking all of this into account, the capital requirement over the next 10 years for ICT is likely to be approximately £5.39M. It is important to note that expenditure will vary from year to year, as various refresh cycles unwind. 2026/27 will likely require £798,000 as this year is expected to continue development of SDS and delivery of the Finance system as well as development and delivery of a new Data Lake to underpin critical improvements in Service's Data and Intelligence activities, including those underpinning Risk Management Database project.

To mitigate single year costs, refreshes may be brought forward/put back by one year to even out the cost profile, dependant on current equipment performance at that time.

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