

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



Held on Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 2026 at 6.30 pm

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

<b>Members:</b> <i>(*present)</i>	*	Councillor Greg Bello	*	Councillor Dave McElroy
	*	Councillor Dennis Benneyworth	*	Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle
		Councillor George Blundell		Councillor Mohammed Nazir
	*	Councillor Jeff Brooks	*	Councillor Andy NG Siu-hong
	*	Councillor Tricia Brown	*	Councillor Dilbagh Parmar
	*	Councillor Billy Drummond	*	Councillor Zafar Satti
		Councillor Peter Frewer	*	Councillor Wayne Smith
	*	Councillor Paul Gittings		Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey
	*	Councillor Wendy Griffith	*	Councillor Simon Werner
	*	Councillor Genevieve Gosling		
	*	Councillor Owen Jeffery		

**In Attendance:** Annie Pratt (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)  
Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development, HHR&L&D)  
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P)  
Fayth Rowe (Executive Services Manager)  
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)  
Lola O'Neill (Business Support Officer)  
Lukasz Wrona (Head of Business and Information Systems, HBIS)  
Mark Antell (Communications and Engagement Manager)  
Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)  
Michaela Smith (Democratic Services Officer)  
Paul Brooks (Head of Assets, HoA)  
Tim Readings (Tim Readings (Area Manager, Policy and Assurance)  
Wayne Bowcock (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)

## 57. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Blundell, Frewer, Nazir and Satti.

## 58. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest from Members in accordance with the

**Action**

provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct.

There were no Declarations of Interest received from Officers.

**59. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 NOVEMBER 2025 AND 10 FEBRUARY 2026**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2025 and the Extraordinary meeting on 10 February 2026, be approved as true records and signed by the Chair.

**60. 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.

**61. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair made the following announcements.

**Wayne Bowcock's Last Official Fire Authority Meeting**

The Chair thanked the Chief Fire Officer, Wayne Bowcock, as this was his last Fire Authority meeting in an official capacity. Wayne retires from the Service in March 2026, after 33 years serving in five different fire and rescue services and has overseen a hugely successful period for RBFRS, driving forward many key areas of focus for the benefit of local communities.

The Chair said Members would agree it was a pleasure working with Wayne and his knowledge and experience had been extremely valuable to all Members of the Fire Authority and thanked Wayne for his contributions to both Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service and Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.

As confirmed at the Fire Authority on 10 February, Mark Arkwell had been appointed as the next Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive Officer and would assume the role at the end of March 2026. The Chair congratulated Mark and said he looked forward to working with him to continue to deliver the very best service to the people of Royal Berkshire.

**Welcome to a New Councillor**

Councillor Genevieve Gosling joined RBFRS from Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (RBWM). Due to changes in the political balance at RBWM, the Conservative Group would gain one additional seat. The Fire Authority had

lost its Independent Member, Councillor Knowles. On behalf of the Fire Authority, the Chair welcomed Councillor Gosling and said he looked forward to working with her.

#### Access to Siren

In a previous meeting, questions were raised about whether Members could access the RBFRS intranet system, Siren. After looking into this, RBFRS can clarify that Members cannot currently access Siren as it is only shared internally with staff through their RBFRS devices. Therefore, as was previously the case, any supporting documents and information held on Siren would be provided by Fayth Rowe or Michaela Smith.

#### Inspection by HMICFRS Announced

The date of the next inspection of RBFRS had been announced by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services.

RBFRS inspection week had been brought forward due to a change to HMICFRS timetable, and is due to begin in September 2026, with document submission and the HMICFRS staff survey due to take place in June/July 2026. In their most recent inspection report from April 2025, HMICFRS assessed and graded 11 areas. RBFRS received 'Good' grades for eight of them, and the remaining three were graded as 'Adequate'.

Further information will be provided in due course on the inspection process, and the Chair said he was sure the Service would once again extend a very warm welcome to the inspection team.

#### Wholetime Recruitment

The Service was now accepting applications to join the next cohort of Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices.

Open to people who are new to firefighting, the Service's Wholetime apprenticeship programme is a direct pathway into a rewarding career in the fire and rescue services. As part of the apprenticeship, the Service was welcoming applicants from any background or walk of life, so long as they are new to firefighting. There is no stereotypical firefighter. The application window opened for three weeks and would close on Tuesday, 10 March. To find out more and apply, please visit [rbfrs.co.uk/careers](https://rbfrs.co.uk/careers).

The Chair asked that Members promote this round of recruitment amongst their communities to spread the news of this exciting career opportunity.

**62. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

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

**63. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS UNDER STANDING ORDER 30**

There were no questions from Members under Standing Order 30.

**64. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDER 44**

There were no notices of Motion under Standing Order 44.

**65. RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEES**

To note that:

- Item 10 (Budget 2026/27) had been recommended from Management Committee on 10 February 2026; and
- Item 11 (Pay Policy Statement) had been recommended from Audit & Governance Committee on 26 January 2026; and
- Item 12 (2026/27 Scheme of Allowance Review) had been recommended from Management Committee on 10 February 2026.

**66. ANNUAL BUDGET 2026/27**

After giving a brief financial introduction, the Chair asked Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P) to present the main points of the annual budget.

Within the Medium-Term Financial Plan, the following points were covered:

- The Services funding position for 2026/27 and the settlement funding assessment which consisted of the revenue support grant, the business rates baseline and the business rates top-up grant.
- The council tax precept would generate £1.876 million, with the total council tax income for 2026/27 being £34.268 million and total funding from all sources amounted to £50.61 million.
- The Efficiency Plan detailed planned savings for the next four years and total pressures totalled £2.9 million, with most of this attributed to pay (pay awards for 2025/26 were 3.2%, slightly above the budgeted assumption of 3%).
- In relation to financial costs to net revenue stream, the Service had a maximum ratio of 3% and for 2025/26 the estimated ratio was 1.59% increasing to 2.71% for 2029/30. Risks continue to be carefully managed.

The Chair added it was positive the Service was in a position that it did not need to use its reserves to balance the budget.

Within Efficiency and Productivity Plan, Councillor Jeffery asked for clarification on '*direct entry post.*' Wayne Bowcock (Chief Fire Officer, CFO) explained this was a scheme for direct entrants and part of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Scheme. The Service agreed to support and engage with the scheme, but the scheme was now closed.

Commenting on the Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF) the Chair confirmed the Service had invested substantially in appliances, equipment and buildings in recent years. The Service was also investing in dignifying sanitary areas and workspaces within stations and work needed to be carried out at other stations to improve facilities.

Within the Treasury and Investment Strategy, Conor Byrne (HFP) explained one of the key purposes of the strategy was to demonstrate there was sufficient resources to pay for the programme. Capital expenditure would be funded by capital receipts and although the capital programme was ambitious, it was affordable.

Discussing the Reserves Policy, the Chair explained the Service had both a General Fund and Earmarked Reserves. Conor Byrne (HFP) stated the Reserve balances included a capital receipts decrease had been planned and remained adequate. The Chair commented that Reserves were stabilising and looked healthy. Councillor Griffith raised a question on the date of the proposed money transfer on page 7 of the policy and Conor Byrne (HFP) confirmed that date should be 2025/26.

During the discussion of TVFCS Revenue and Capital budgets, Councillor Werner stated, TVFCS Joint Committee continued to work with each FRS partner and confirmed the procurement process had started for the new replacement system. The final area that was briefly reviewed were fees & charges.

The Vice-Chair thanked Conor Byrne (HFP) and his team for their work on the budget, he also thanked the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the Budget Working Party Members and said he recommended the budget. Councillor Benneyworth also offered thanks to the Finance Team and Budget and Efficiently Working Party Members.

The Chair moved the recommendations, and it was seconded by the Vice-Chair.

Members then voted on the item; there were 14 for and 1 abstained.

It was **RESOLVED** that the:

- 1) Increase in the Band D precept of £5 for 2026/27 by adopting the formal resolution in Appendix A be approved; and
- 2) Medium-Term Financial Plan in Appendix B be approved; and
- 3) Efficiency and Productivity Plan in Appendix C be approved; and
- 4) Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF) in Appendix D be approved; and
- 5) Prudential Indicators, Treasury Strategy and Investment Strategy in Appendix E be approved; and
- 6) Reserves Policy in Appendix F be approved; and
- 7) TVFCS revenue and capital budgets for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix G, as well as the Authority's 2026/27 contribution of £90,000 to the TVFCS Renewals Fund be approved; and
- 8) Fees and charges for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix H be approved.

## **67. PAY POLICY STATEMENT**

Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources and Learning Development, HHR&L&D), informed Members the Authority was required to publish a Pay Policy Statement each financial year and all data collated was based on data available as at 31 October 2025. Aside from standard annual updates to the budget, population of staff figures, pay awards and pay multiples it had not been necessary to amend the format or content of the Pay Policy Statement for 2026/2027.

The Chair moved the recommendations, and it was seconded by Councillor Jeffery.

On being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that the Pay Policy Statement for 2026/2027 (Appendix A) for publication subject to any further recommendations considered appropriate be approved.

## **68. 2026/27 SCHEME OF MEMBER ALLOWANCE ANNUAL REVIEW**

The Chair presented the item and confirmed it was a recommendation from Management Committee.

The Vice-Chair said he felt it was a well-presented report and that Members should support it. Councillor Jeffery agreed with the Vice-Chairs comments and added he felt the decision should not sit with Members but an independent body.

The Vice-Chair moved the recommendations, and it was seconded by Councillor Jeffery.

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

- 1) The 3.20% (£7.77 per month to Member Basic Allowance) uplifted rate of allowances in accordance with annual Local Government Green Book was applied to Scheme of Allowances effective from 1 April 2025 (Appendix A) and backdated to 1 April 2025 be noted; and
- 2) The Scheme of Allowances continue to be indexed to the annual Local Government Green Book increase for allowances (should any increase be agreed by the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services in 2026/27) be approved; and
- 3) Recommendations made by each of the six unitary authority Independent Remuneration Panels (IRPs) have been reviewed in line with The Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 regulations 10 and 19 (2). (Background papers of each Unitary Authority IRP is located in paragraph 12) be noted.

## **69. PROPORTIONALITY AND APPOINTMENTS TO COMMITTEES**

Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO) explained there was an obligation to review the proportionality across the Authority and its committees. The recommendation asked the Authority to agree the proportionality and to make the two appointments to the Audit & Governance Committee and the Management Committee in line with the group leaders wishes.

The Chair moved the recommendations, and it was seconded by Councillor McKenzie-Boyle.

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

- 1) The political proportionality of the Authority as detailed in Table 1 and the allocation of seats on its committees as detailed in Tables 3 and 4 be agreed; and
- 2) The Conservative Members onto its committees in accordance with their Conservative Group Leader's wishes be appointed; and
- 3) Councillor Knowles's membership on the Fire Authority ended on 20 January 2026 be noted.

## **70. FORWARD PLAN**

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

**71. MINUTES OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES**

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

**72. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

30 April 2026, 6.30pm at RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

(The meeting concluded at 19:59)