

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Held on Tuesday 10 February 2026 from 5.30pm

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

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

- |                                  |                                      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| * 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:**

Councillor Tricia Brown  
Councillor Billy Drummond  
Councillor Owen Jeffery  
Annie Pratt (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)  
Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources and Learning Development, HHR&L&D)  
David Crease (Area Manager, Prevention and Protection, AM P&P)  
Fayth Rowe (Executive Services Manager, ESM)  
Frank Long (Group Manager (B) Intelligence Risk and Performance Manager)  
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)  
Irene Kema-Onyeri (Deputy Head of Finance and Procurement)  
Katie Mills (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)  
Lukasz Wrona (Head of Business and Information Systems, HBIS)  
Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)  
Michaela Smith (Democratic Services Officer, DSO)  
Paul Brooks (Head of Assets, HoA)  
Paul Keenan (Group Manager (B) Change Improvement)  
Tim Readings (Area Manager, Policy and Assurance)  
Wayne Bowcock (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)

## Action

### 51. REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

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

### 52. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were received.

**53. 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

**54. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 DECEMBER 2025**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting on 10 December 2025, be approved as a true record to be signed the Chair.

**55. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair made the following announcements.

**Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer, Recognised in King's New Year's Honours**

The Chair began by congratulating Wayne Bowcock for being recognised in The King's New Year's Honours List.

At the end of 2025, it was announced that Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS), had been awarded the King's Fire Service Medal for showing exceptional leadership and outstanding commitment to fire and rescue services. On behalf of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) and RBFRS, the Chair congratulated Wayne on being recognised as part of The King's New Year's Honours and said he should be deeply proud of all his achievements. The Chair stated, Wayne had been an excellent Chief of the Service and throughout his many years providing public service to the community, he had demonstrated superb service and commitment. He will leave a profound and lasting mark on the Service.

**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 has 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 previous rounds of inspections, HMICFRS assessed and gave graded judgments for 11 diagnostic questions. For the inspection programme which commenced in 2025 they have combined RBFRS efficiency questions and

reduced the overall number of diagnostic questions to 10. This is intended to reduce duplication and concentrate more on outcomes for communities and the workforce.

Further information will be provided in due course as the inspection process date nears, but the Chair said he has no doubt that the Service will once again extend a very warm welcome to the inspection team.

### **Nominations Now Open - 2026 Awards Ceremony**

The nominations for the 2026 RBFRS Awards Ceremony are now open.

This year, the window for eligible nominations is for contributions made between 1 June 2025 and 2 June 2026. The Chair asked Members to please take the time to reflect on the past year and recognise a colleague, a team or a member of the public for their work.

A nomination can be made via a link that will be sent after the meeting.

Nominations will be accepted until 12 noon on Monday, 2 June 2026.

### **Equality Objectives Consultation**

As a reminder, the Equality Objectives Consultation will be closing soon, and the Chair asked Service 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 to develop and retain talent, and promote new opportunities across the fire and rescue sector.

The consultation will close on Monday, 16 February 2026. The Chair asked Members to please spread the word around their wards and within their authorities to help the Service reach as many people as possible.

### **Public Consultations in Neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services**

Fire and rescue services in the region have been running public consultations on proposed changes to their services.

This includes Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service and Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Team has been responding directly to the consultations, using RBFRS data and risk methodologies to

present an objective view of the potential impact to RBFRS. As a close partner, the Service have already submitted a response to both Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire's consultations.

The RBFRS responses to the [Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service consultation](#) and the [Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service consultation](#) will be sent after the meeting.

These consultations are at different stages, however and decisions have not yet been made by the respective authorities on their proposed way forward.

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

The new Fire Authority pages on the RBFRS website are now live and can be accessed by both members, and the public.

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

The new agenda papers for all upcoming meetings are in a slightly different format. Any questions or concerns, please email the [Committee Team](#).

### **Thames Valley Fire Control Service Technology Replacement Initial Business Case and Commercial Strategy**

The Thames Valley Fire Control Service Technology Replacement Initial Business Case and Commercial Strategy is currently on the agenda as a Part Two paper. However, this will now be a Part One item but still keep the commercially sensitive aspects and appendices in Part Two.

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

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

### **57. ANNUAL BUDGET 2026/27, MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN, SAIF AND TVFCS BUDGET**

The item was introduced by Irene Kema Onyeri (Deputy Head of Finance and Procurement) who stated the purpose of the report was to seek Management Committee recommendation for Fire Authority Approval and summarised the Authority funding total was £56,610 million. This was comprised of components for Government grants (£9,034 million), Business Rates (£7,261 million), Collection fund (£49,000) and Council Tax (£34,266 million).

Irene Kema Onyeri confirmed the following points:

- The precept consultation 2026/27 which took place in January collected 230 responses and 181 people supported the increase.
- In February updated NNDR1 Business Rates figures were received from each unitary and the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) was adjusted as the actual funding was £77,000 higher than the Government's original estimate.
- Within efficiency plan savings a savings total of £1.041 million was identified within the base budget.
- Budget pressures included the unbudgeted 1.2% pay award for 2025/26 which was incorporated into the 2026/27 budget and pay increments for 2026/27 and subsequent years were included. The Authority's share of the Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) contribution increased by £40,000. Anticipated capital expenditure for 2026/27 was expected to reduce the RBFRS bank balance which had resulted in a reduction in investment income of £232K.
- It was anticipated total reserves would decline by 19% over the next four years, despite the reduction, reserves were being managed appropriately to ensure the Authority remained within the recommended thresholds.
- Risks included the assumption that a 3% pay award for 2026/27 (below the current rate of inflation) could result in a higher pay award, and the potential increase in supplier pricing.
- The proposed TVFCS Revenue Budget for 2026/27 was £3,121,533, an increase of £114,239. Additional factors included increased ICT recharge costs and a reduction in National Insurance Grant Income.
- A significant budget pressure was expected in 2028/29 when the new command and control system becomes operational, with annual costs projected to rise from under £200,000 to approximately £1.1 million.
- As of 31 March 2025, the Renewals Account balance was £1.44 million. Planned Renewals Fund expenditure for 2026/27 was £796,000, mainly for the Command-and-Control system replacement and included a contingency.

The Chair re-iterated several of the above points and the Vice-Chair thanked Conor Byrne and the finance team and said he recommended the budget. In answer to a question from Councillor McKenzie-Boyle about the fiver for fire the Vice-Chair answered that lobbying was done. Wayne Bowcock (Chief Fire Officer, CFO) added that the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) had lobbied to get the funding floor increased from 2.2% to 3.8% and said that RBFRS are now amongst the highest services that are heavily reliant on council tax for core funding.

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

It was **RESOLVED** the:

- 1) Responses to the public consultation on the precept for 2026/27 were considered; and

- 2) Medium Term Financial Plan be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval; and
- 3) Efficiency and Productivity Plan be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval; and
- 4) Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF) be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval; and
- 5) Prudential Indicators, Treasury Strategy and Investment Strategy be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval; and
- 6) Reserves Policy be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval; and
- 7) TVFCS revenue and capital budgets for 2026/27 and the Authority's 2026/27 contribution of £90,000 to the TVFCS Renewals Fund be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval; and
- 8) Fees and charges for 2026/27 be recommended to the Fire Authority for approval.

## **58. REPLACEMENT OF SPECIAL ASSET - WATER RESCUE SUPPORT VEHICLE**

Paul Brooks (Head of Assets) presented the item and stated that RBFRS had a proactive planned fleet and equipment replacement programme and had aligned its front-line appliance replacement profile to a 12-year cycle. Fleet assets are lifecycled based on several factors including emerging operational needs, reliability, condition and sustainability.

The water rescue unit at Slough has served the Service well but the van being used presently is not sustainable. Replacing the vehicle with a specialised unit would allow the Slough based water rescue van to be repurposed to Learning & Development and would lead to a saving of £5k.

The Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF) has a provision of £604k for special asset replacements for the year and the water rescue vehicle was projected to not exceed £100k. The purchase of a vehicle would provide benefits of enhanced water and flooding incident response, better operational facilities for Slough, and enhanced contamination control amongst others. Paul Brooks concluded that the recommended approach was pragmatic and would provide a sustainable modern fit for purpose vehicle to support both operational effectiveness and staff safety.

The Chair stated that RBFRS received no grants or funding for water rescue but provided the service to the public as it is required. Wayne Bowcock (CFO) added that, nationally, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) continue to lobby for funding for water rescue and flood response. Highlighting climate change Councillor McKenzie-Boyle said she was concerned that water rescue incidents would increase in the future and this vehicle was a necessity.

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

On being put to the vote, it was unanimously **RESOLVED** that Management Committee approve capital expenditure of up to £100,000 to replace the water rescue special asset as described in paragraph 3.2.

## **59. SCHEME OF MEMBER ALLOWANCES ANNUAL REVIEW**

The Monitoring Officer Graham Britten explained the 2026/27 Scheme of Allowance Review would be a recommendation from Management Committee to Fire Authority.

The Fire Authority was obliged to approve the annual scheme of allowances in advance of the ensuing financial year, that the independent remuneration panels (IRPs) are detailed and linked within the report and the recommendation was consistent with previous years.

The Chair asked for clarification on point 2.3 and Graham Britten (MO) confirmed that the uplifted rate was applied to the Scheme of Allowances from 1 April 2025 and backdated to 1 April 2025 as this mirrored the scheme that was approved in the previous financial year.

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

Members then voted on the item; there were 7 for and 3 abstained.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- 1) Report be noted; and
- 2) Recommended that the Fire Authority:
- 3) Note 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, and
- 4) Approve Scheme of Allowances continue to be indexed to the annual local government Green Book increased for allowances continues 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); and
- 5) Note the 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).

## **60. BUDGET MONITORING QUARTER 3**

Irene Kema Onyeri (Deputy Head of Finance and Procurement) introduced the item and stated that the overall forecast for 2025/26 showed expenditure was in line with the budget.

Within Revenue outturn, the following points were covered:

- The grey book pay award was higher than the 2% budgeted amount leading to a cost pressure of £229K, staffing levels at wholetime stations were below budget in Q1 and increased numbers of development-level firefighters led to a forecast salary saving of £190K. The green book pay award resulted in an additional pressure of £115K, covered by reserves.
- Overtime costs were forecast to be £481K over budget due to staff shortages and increased sickness cover.
- There was a net negative variance of £121K for on-call stations.
- An Asset Management Survey was commissioned costing £48K and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) contract costs were expected to be £26,000 above budget.
- Home Office Airwave charges were £287K below budget, and delays in the new Network Refresh (WAN) saved £47K.
- Transitioning to a new payroll contract would cost £64K with unbudgeted, and cross-border costs being £14K over budget.
- Other income costs included £61K from a legal settlement and £16K income from cross-border recharging. The use of reserves to cover pay awards reduced by £264,000 due to favourable variances elsewhere.

Within Capital Summary, the following points were covered:

- The L&D Training Centre build was completed in March 2025 on budget.
- Phase 1 of the heat decarbonisation project began in August 2025 with partial funding via a £928K grant.
- Management Committee approved £24K for PV installations, and Langley Project estimates were also presented to the Committee in Q2.
- Work continued at Windsor Fire Station to address EDI requirements and notable progress was made across five projects within the Minor Capital Works project
- Within ICT the Network Refresh (WAN), Firewatch and hardware upgrade projects were underway and due to be finished by the end of Q4 2025/26.
- For Fleet and Equipment light vans and hydrant vans were being fitted out, fleet replacement vehicles purchased and the first three appliances operational.

Within Treasury update the following points were covered:

- Investment totalling £4 million was set to mature in March this year.
- Interest earnings budget for 2025/26 was £604K and the Authority's debt position was unchanged in Q3 2025/26 and remained at £8.5 million.

The Chair asked if there were any Q4 risks and Wayne Bowcock (CFO) answered that the time of year may impact overtime due to incidents, but nothing would be outside of budget expectations.

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

On being put to the vote, it was **RESOLVED** that Management Committee note the 2025/26 Budget Monitoring – Quarter 3 report.

## 61. CRMP PRIORITY PROGRAMMES

The verbal update on the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) was presented by David Crease (Area Manager, Prevention and Protection, AM P&P) and Annie Pratt (Head of Corporate Services, HCS).

David Crease (AM P&P) explained that Priority 2 related to prevention and a greater emphasis had been placed on accessing partner data to assist with the referral process and to prioritise and resource activities. The NHS could highlight members of the public who have vulnerabilities and by working with the NHS RBFRS are able to offer safe and well visits to specific individuals.

During the recent Members workshop managing building safety was discussed along with recent legislation changes. As part of Priority 5 the protection structure was reviewed and expected benefits of the improvements included governance and accountability and out of hours fire safety support. The creation of a business fire safety team would support local business to implement safe working and public spaces.

Annie Pratt (HCS) covered Priority 3 and explained the leave policy and other initiatives had moved to the evaluation phase, data and trends had been analysed and feedback would be gathered to assist with future improvements.

Priority 1 unified all CRMP priorities so the Service can adapt to changing risks, aligning prevention, protection and response. It has helped the Service adjust to climate, societal and technological change, with water, wildfire and alternative-energy risks showing the integrated approach in action.

The water rescue review was a CRMP objective and presented a clear commitment to the public to strengthen the service's capability in the area. The water rescue unit in Slough had significantly improved coverage in Berkshire.

A water rescue video created by the crews was then shown to Members.

Enhancements to assist with wildfire included an increased fleet of 4x4 vehicles, trained wildfire supports officers, engagement with landowners and greater flexibility in resource deployment.

There was no evidence of any significant rise in alternative-energy-related incidents, and EV fires remained low, with the Service maintaining its focus on responder and public safety. Work continued with Trading Standards and the Police to address risks from aftermarket e-scooter conversions, alongside

ongoing public education on safe battery charging and disposal.

Councillor Jeffery was advised by David Crease that, although EV testing had been carried out, no specialist equipment had been purchased because nothing suitable was currently available on the market. Responding to Councillor McElroy, Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO) explained that while incident volumes had not increased, the potential impact of an EV-related incident was significant, making a rapid and effective response essential.

Annie Pratt concluded saying that work on a new CRMP had begun and meetings had been planned in including a Members CRMP working party meeting, with an update planned for the Management Committee meeting in April this year. A public consultation was planned for the Summer of 2027, with Fire Authority sign off planned for the end of 2027.

The Vice-Chair stated that while the new CRMP will need to evolve to reflect future changes, the current CRMP must continue to deliver effectively in the meantime.

## **62. APPLIANCE AVAILABILITY QUARTER 3**

Paul Keenan (Group Manager (B) Change Improvement) confirmed the report detailed the Service's availability performance in Q3 across whole time, on call, and combined duty systems, as well as performance against the Response Standard.

For Q3, performance against the response standard was 73.3%, slightly below the 75% target and the Service maintained an identical performance compared to the same period last year, while attending 10% more incidents. Higher levels of traffic and 57% more incidents per hour during the day combined to make the standard less achievable for day shifts. Ministry of housing, communities and local government (MHCLG) data for 2024/25, showed RBFRS continued to perform above average for most incident types including primary fires, house fires and road vehicle incidents.

Wholetime availability in Q3 was 96.2% against a target of 97.4%. Sickness among station-based staff deteriorated from 6.9% in Q2 to 8.38% in Q3, this was in line with a long-standing trend of increased sickness levels in autumn and winter than in summer.

On call appliance availability in Q3 was 28.4%, 4.4% lower than the previous quarter, mainly due to sickness of key staff members and higher than usual demand for leave. Crowthorne availability returned an average of 50.7% during October and November and 20.7% in December. Hungerford availability was 36.2% in the Q2 rising to 40.0% in Q3. Lambourn availability was 0.4% due to two firefighters being unavailable for operational duties. Maidenheads availability dipped from 21% in Q2 to 19.9% for Q3, availability at Mortimer continued to be impacted by long-term sickness with availability above 40%.

Combined appliance availability of 14 appliances by shift for Q3 was 79.9% against a target of 100%. Overall performance would have been significantly better had it not been for unforeseen staffing impacts resulting in an increase in wholtime appliance unavailability during December.

Paul Keenan concluded stating that the Priority Six (P6) had been utilised on ten occasions during Q3, saving an estimated £13,782 in overtime and during the period since it was implemented in September 2024 to the end of Q3 in 2025/26, P6 has reduced pre-arranged overtime spend by an estimated £71,889.

The Chair stated that on call remains a challenge for the Service and asked if the next report can include detail of what the Service is doing to improve this.

Paul Keenan

The Chair asked Becci Jefferies ((Head of Human Resources and Learning Development, HHR&L&D) about sickness data and Becci Jefferies confirmed that sickness was monitored and compared to see if interventions are positively reducing sickness levels. Sickness types are tracked, and the Service drills down to case levels to assist colleagues with available support.

Reinforcing Paul Keenan comments Katie Mills (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO) confirmed that unforeseen staffing challenges meant planned targets were not met; however, Katie Mills expects that year-end results will demonstrate clear progress and improvement.

The Vice-Chair said as detailed in the report the Service compares favourably to fire services in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, but weaknesses still need to be addressed.

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

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

- 1) Whole time appliance availability of 96.2% for Q3 against the 97.4% target (Corporate Measure 14) be noted; and
- 2) On call availability of 28.4% for Q3 against the 50% target (Corporate Measure 15) be noted; and
- 3) Combined availability performance of 79.9% of shifts achieving 14+ appliances against a 100% target (Corporate Measure 16) be noted.

### **63. TVFCS AGREEMENT REPLACEMENT PROJECT**

Councillor Frewer explained the item concerned the future direction of the shared control service, noting that the Thames Valley partnership had shown what could be achieved when three Authorities commit to a unified approach. The partnership had strengthened resilience, sped up decision-making, ensured consistent emergency response standards, and delivered significant financial efficiencies. The Joint Committee had reviewed what the service would need in the years ahead and concluded that a modernised mobilising system was essential to keep pace with technology and support future operations.

Tim Readings confirmed Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) delivered critical call handling and mobilisation for 2.5 million residents. The current system was nearing end of life: the contract ends in April 2028, and key components become unsupported in 2029, meaning it cannot be relied on long term to meet statutory duties. The issue was already being managed through a formally governed programme, with a business case, commercial strategy, and a full programme structure under Joint Committee oversight which included an executive sponsor, programme board, technical leads, structured risk management, and defined milestones covering market engagement through to transition.

Following the process, the Joint Committee has recommended that all three Fire Authorities proceed to procurement. This was a member-led, tri-authority decision, and the Committee was satisfied that the programme is mature, controlled, affordable, and ready for the next stage. The recommended approach was to procure a cloud-based or hybrid system, aligned with modern public-sector IT practice. Moving away from on-premises hosting would strengthen resilience and cyber security and ensure readiness for the Emergency Services Network and future technological change.

The item would be discussed in further detail in line with Part II regulations after items 64 & 65.

The Chair asked if further information could be provided at the next Management Committee meeting in relation to providers in the marketplace, where systems are being used and like for like revenue information to provide further assurance to Members.

Tim  
Readings

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

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

- 1) Officers to proceed with the procurement of a replacement command and control system, targeting a cloud-based or hybrid solution as recommended by TVFCS Joint Committee be approved; and
- 2) That the anticipated project costs and potential increased revenue implications, as described in this report and detailed in the Annual Budget 26/27 and TVFCS Budget as recommended by TVFCS Joint Committee be noted; and
- 3) That Fire Authority will be asked to approve contract award, following the outcome of the tender process, in Q2/3 2026 as recommended by TVFCS Joint Committee be noted.

## 64. FORWARD PLAN

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

**65. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Thursday 16 April 2026, 6.30pm at RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, RG31 7SD.

**66. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED** that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the public be excluded from the meeting for the following Agenda Items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the said Act indicated and is exempt information if, and so long as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

*(The meeting concluded at 20:14).*