MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE EXTRAORDINARY FIRE AUTHORITY

Held on Wednesday, 14th October, 2026 at 5.30 pm

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

Members:		Councillor Greg Bello		Councillor Wendy Griffith
*(*present)*		Councillor Dennis Benneyworth	**	Councillor Chetna Jamthe
*(** virtual)*		Councillor George Blundell	*	Councillor Owen Jeffery
	*	Councillor Jeff Brooks		Councillor Dave McElroy
		Councillor Tricia Brown	*	Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle
	*	Councillor Billy Drummond		Councillor Mohammed Nazir
	*	Councillor Peter Frewer		Councillor Andy NG Siu-hong
	*	Councillor Harjinder Gahir		Councillor Neel Rana
	*	Councillor Paul Gittings		Councillor Wayne Smith
		Councillor Genevieve Gosling	*	Councillor Simon Werner

In Attendance:
Annie Pratt (Head of Corporate Service, HCS)
Conor Byrne (Assistant Director of Finance and Efficiency)
Fayth Rowe (Executive Services Manager)
Jo Watson (Communications and Engagement Manager)
Lukasz Wrona (Head of Business and Information Systems, HBIS)
Mark Antell (Senior Communications and Engagement Officer)
Mark Arkwell (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)
Martin Hall (Oxfordshire County Council Procurement Team) - Virtual
Michaela Smith (Democratic Services Officer)
Tom Brandon (Area Manager Response and Resilience, AM R&R)

Action

22. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Benneyworth, Councillor Blundell, Councillor Gosling, Councillor Griffith, Councillor McElroy, Councillor Nazir, Councillor Rana and Councillor Smith.

Councillor Jamthe joined the meeting online at 17:50.

Martin Hall, Oxfordshire County Council Procurement Team, joined the meeting online at 17:40.

Action

23. 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.

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.

HMICFRS Inspection

Recently, the Service marked an important milestone as the HMICFRS inspection process concluded. Whilst Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) will not receive the final report until February 2027, the Chair took the opportunity to thank everyone across RBFRS who contributed to the inspection.

Since the process began in July, the Service has supported interviews, focus groups and evidence gathering, welcomed inspectors to stations and workplaces, and, most importantly, continued to provide outstanding service to the local communities.

The inspection considers a significant range of evidence from across the organisation, and the Chair was grateful for the professionalism, openness and commitment shown throughout. Early feedback from inspectors highlighted the warm welcome they received across RBFRS, which reflected the culture, pride and dedication that is seen every day within the Service.

On behalf of the Fire Authority, thank you to everyone who played a part in supporting the inspection and in showcasing the very best of RBFRS.

Wildfire Provision Statement

The Service recognised the impact of climate change following the exceptionally hot summer and have invested heavily in specialist training, 4x4 wildfire vehicles, and officer expertise.

The Service continued that investment through lighter-weight helmets, additional welfare shelters, and work with Thames Valley partners to explore options for future wildfire-specific PPE and work closely with partners to utilise drone capabilities.

The safety of RBFRS firefighters remains a priority, and RBFRS will continue to review and enhance how to respond to wildfires for the benefit of local communities.

Reminder – Annual Awards

RBFRS will be holding the Annual Awards event on Friday 20th November. Members have been invited to celebrate the great work of our staff and partners in creating safer, more resilient communities here in Berkshire.

RBFRS remain committed to providing opportunities to recognise and reward staff for their fantastic achievements. On this occasion, the Service have been fortunate to secure a new venue at Easthampstead Park Hotel – where the venue hire will kindly be provided free of charge.

The Service are now undertaking a sponsorship drive to cover as much of the additional costs, such as catering and the awards, as possible. Any assistance Members can give in spreading this opportunity will be greatly appreciated.

The Chair said he looked forward to seeing as many of the Members there as possible and reminded Members to respond to RSVPs. These are always wonderful events and a reminder of the hard work and dedication of everyone that helps deliver the Service we are rightly proud of.

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.

Action

29. RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEES

It was **NOTED** that no recommendations received from Committees.

30. SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM APPOINTMENTS

The Chair introduced the item and explained the report sought approval of the appointment of Katie Mills as Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Enabling Services, her appointment as Deputy Monitoring Officer, and the associated designations for Conor Byrne.

The Chair said he was pleased to propose these recommendations. Following a thorough recruitment process, Katie Mills demonstrated that she was exceptionally well suited to the role and on behalf of the Fire Authority congratulated Katie and thanked Conor Byrne for taking on additional responsibilities.

Mark Arkwell (Chief Fire Officer, CFO) welcomed the proposals and thanked Katie Mills and Conor Byrne. He noted that, alongside strengthening the leadership team, the changes would deliver savings of approximately £176,000 through the removal of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer post, supporting the Authority's wider efficiency objectives.

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

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

1) The appointment of Katie Mills to the role of Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Enabling Services with effect from 18 August 2026, on the salary set out at paragraph 3.11 be approved; and

2) The appointment of Katie Mills to the role of Deputy Monitoring Officer be noted;

3) In accordance with the redesignation of role, the salary for the Assistant Director of Finance and Efficiency, Conor Byrne as set out in 3.15 be approved; and

4) Conor Byrne in his role of Assistant Director of Finance and Efficiency, be designated as the Pension Scheme Manager with effect from 14 October 2026 be approved.

Action

31. LEGAL AGREEMENT RELATING TO THE STEADY STATE OPERATION OF THE THAMES VALLEY FIRE CONTROL SERVICE

Mark Arkwell (CFO), introduced the report, noting that although Area Manager Tim Readings had led much of the work on this item and the following report, he was unfortunately unable to attend the meeting.
The proposed changes to the Thames Valley Fire Control Service Inter-Authority Agreement is to support the proposed CAD replacement contract considered later in Part II. The report also provided an opportunity to simplify the existing agreement, making governance, management and assurance arrangements more straightforward. He highlighted a revised cost-sharing arrangement, under which the cost of the new system would be split equally between the three authorities. This was expected to deliver savings of around £35,000 per year for RBFRS.

In response to a question from the Chair, Mark Arkwell confirmed that approval would also be required from Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Services. He noted that Royal Berkshire Fire Authority was the first authority to consider the proposal and that the remaining authorities were expected to do so within the following week.

Councillor Werner commented that when the arrangement was established in 2015, a detailed governance framework had been necessary to provide assurance to all parties and welcomed the proposed simplification of the governance arrangements, noting that it reflected the maturity of the partnership.

The Vice-Chair agreed with the comments made by Councillor Werner and queried the figures within the cost apportionment figures in point 3.31 of the report. In response, Conor Byrne (Assistant Director of Finance and Efficiency) confirmed that the percentages quoted in point 3.31 reflected the current cost apportionment model and explained that the proposed change applied only to the new command and control system, where the costs would in future be shared equally between the three authorities.

In response to a question from the Chair, Conor Byrne explained that the proposed amendments had been subject to a thorough review by the finance leads from all three authorities. Many of the changes were administrative in nature and aimed to streamline governance processes that had been deliberately detailed when the partnership was first established. He added that experience had demonstrated that the existing budget and governance arrangements worked effectively, allowing some controls to be simplified whilst maintaining appropriate oversight. The amendments had also been reviewed by legal advisers, including Monitoring Officer Graham Britten and Sarah Hayes of Oxfordshire County Council, who had drafted the revised clauses. The Chair welcomed this assurance, noting the importance of legal scrutiny given the absence of an in-house legal team.

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

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

1) The deed of variation to the legal agreement relating to the Steady State Operation of the Thames Valley Fire Control Service, noting that this will include the extension of the agreement so that its expiry coincides with the end of the initial term of the replacement command and control system contract be approved;

2) The Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer, to take all necessary steps to execute and implement the deed of variation be authorised; and

3) The Monitoring Officer to make any minor or consequential drafting amendments required before execution, provided these do not materially alter the substance of the agreement approved by the Fire Authority be authorised.

32. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 12 November 2026, 6.30pm at RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

33. 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.

34. PREFERRED BIDDER AND CONTRACT AWARD – THAMES VALLEY FIRE CONTROL SYSTEM (TVFCS) COMMAND AND CONTROL REPLACEMENT

Councillor Werner introduced the report on the procurement of a new Command and Control system for the three collaborating fire authorities, highlighted the success of the partnership over the past decade and noted that all three authorities remained committed to a shared system.

Councillor Werner moved the recommendations, and it was seconded by Councillor Frewer.

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

1) The award of a contract for the Thames Valley Fire Control Service ("TVFCS") Command and Control System to be approved; and

	Action
2) The Fire Authority delegates authority to the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority and appropriate Statutory Officers, to finalise and enter into necessary contractual agreements required to implement the replacement programme.	

(The meeting concluded at 18:31)