

# MHCLG Productivity and Efficiency Plan 2026/27

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service





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# Primary Information

<b>BUDGET (£000)</b>					
<b>Revenue Expenditure</b>	<b>2024-2025</b>	<b>2025-2026</b>	<b>2026-2027</b>	<b>2027-2028</b>	<b>2028-2029</b>
Direct Employee	<b>35278</b>	<b>37437</b>	<b>38878</b>	<b>40043</b>	<b>40802</b>
Indirect Employee	1053	1027	1058	1090	1123
Premises	2999	2688	2749	2792	2875
Transport	1033	1045	1003	1023	1054
Supplies and Services	6972	6989	7009	7186	7800
Capital Financing	883	872	872	1262	1470
Other	2318	2239	2788	2992	3402
<b>Total</b>	<b>50536</b>	<b>52297</b>	<b>54357</b>	<b>56388</b>	<b>58526</b>
<b>Income</b>	<b>2024-2025</b>	<b>2025-2026</b>	<b>2026-2027</b>	<b>2027-2028</b>	<b>2028-2029</b>
Actual Received from Precept	-29829	-32165	-34265	-36684	-39168
Local Government Finance Settlement	-16135	-15799	-16344	-16055	-15809
Other Grants	-1118	-1753	-1373	-1373	-1373
Income Raised Locally	-3454	-2580	-2375	-2276	-2176
<b>Total</b>	<b>-50536</b>	<b>-52297</b>	<b>-54357</b>	<b>-56388</b>	<b>-58526</b>



<b>RESERVES (£000)</b>					
	<b>2024-2025</b>	<b>2025-2026</b>	<b>2026-2027</b>	<b>2027-2028</b>	<b>2028-2029</b>
General Reserves	2404	2527	2637	2749	<b>2801</b>
Earmarked Revenue Reserves of which MRP reserve	4190	3540	2483	2147	<b>2089</b>
Earmarked Capital Reserves	2898	2447	2271	2092	<b>2009</b>
Other Reserves of which revenue of which capital	2348	0	0	0	<b>0</b>



# Efficiency

<b>Berkshire</b>	<b>Actual 2024-25</b>		<b>Actual 2025-26</b>		<b>Forecast 2026-27</b>		<b>Forecast 2027-28</b>		<b>Forecast 2028-29</b>	
Opening Revenue Expenditure Budget (Net)	45,964		47965		50610		52741		54979	
Less Total Direct Employee Costs	35,278		37437		38878		40043		40802	
Non Pay Budget	10,193		10528		11732		12698		14177	
<b>Efficiency Savings</b>	<b>Recurrent</b>	<b>Non-recurrent</b>	<b>Recurrent</b>	<b>Non-recurrent</b>	<b>Recurrent</b>	<b>Non-recurrent</b>	<b>Recurrent</b>	<b>Non-recurrent</b>	<b>Recurrent</b>	<b>Non-recurrent</b>
<u>Direct Employee</u>										
Reduction in Prevention/Protection/Response Staff	-	-		169	292					
Reduction in Support Staff	8	-		350	312					
<u>Indirect Employee (e.g. training, travel etc.)</u>										
All Indirect Employee Costs	2	0		56						
<u>Premises</u>										
Utilities	143	0	208							
Rent/Rates	27	0								
Other Premises Costs	0	0	44		20					
Shared Premises	0	0								
<u>Transport</u>										
Fleet	0	0		58						
Fuel	0	0	10		20					
Other Transport Costs	0	0			8		10			
<u>Supplies and Services</u>										
National Procurement Savings	0	0			200					
Local Procurement Savings	0	0	22		70					
Other Technology Improvements	0	0			35		970		1000	
Decreased Usage	86	0	10		56		20			
<u>Capital Financing</u>										
Revenue Expenditure Charged to Capital	0	0								
Net Borrowing Costs	0	0								
<u>Other</u>										
Other Savings 1 (Please Specify)	0	0								
Other Savings 2 (Please Specify)	0	0								
Other Savings 3 (Please Specify)	0	0								
<b>Total Efficiency Savings (excluding direct employee savings)</b>	<b>258</b>		<b>408</b>		<b>409</b>		<b>1,000</b>		<b>1,000</b>	
<b>Efficiency Savings as a Percentage of Non-Payroll Budgets</b>	<b>2.53%</b>		<b>3.88%</b>		<b>3.49%</b>		<b>7.88%</b>		<b>7.05%</b>	



<b>INCOME</b>											
<b>£000</b>											
	<b>Actual 2024-25</b>		<b>Actual 2025-26</b>		<b>Forecast 2026-27</b>		<b>Forecast 2027-28</b>		<b>Forecast 2028-29</b>		
	<b>Recurrent</b>	<b>Non-recurrent</b>	<b>Recurrent</b>	<b>Non-recurrent</b>	<b>Recurrent</b>	<b>Non-recurrent</b>	<b>Recurrent</b>	<b>Non-recurrent</b>	<b>Recurrent</b>	<b>Non-recurrent</b>	
Income generated from charging policies											
Income generated from trading operations											
Income generated from shared premises											
Income generated from interest on investments		378									
Income generated from other sources			23		28						

## Direct Employee

Throughout 2025/26, there was a constant focus on maintaining fire cover by managing vacancies, sickness and training. By Q3, a revised leave policy and related measures were introduced to further support appliance availability. These efficiencies were largely non-cashable (maintaining outputs with fewer staff at times) and focused on sustaining service levels rather than reducing activity. A general recruitment freeze was put in place for support staff, to allow the Directors to review the need to fill posts on a case-by-case basis. This has resulted in a saving of around £350,000.

## Indirect Employee

The establishment of the Workforce Planning Board has brought together key stakeholders to identify the optimal times in the year to recruit trainee firefighters based on projected establishment numbers and internal resourcing capacity. Robust and accurate forecasting information provided to the Workforce Planning Board meant Board members had the confidence to reduce the number of recruits in 2025/26 compared to the previous year, knowing that firefighter numbers would be sufficient to meet operational needs over the medium-term.



## Premises

Premises-related efficiencies in 2025/26 were driven by enhanced coordinated facilities management and targeted investment, and the use of in-house resources rather than external suppliers. One of our three strategic objectives for the estate is to provide a more sustainability workplace. The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority invested in heat decarbonization, as well as other sustainability features, to reduce carbon output and revenue expenditure. This was supported by circa £1M of central Government funding support via the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS). Initial analysis suggests an annual return in excess of £40,000pa (and 93 tonnes of carbon). Our PSDS application was supported by external specialists contracted via a national collaborative framework, which was established by the FRS National Procurement Hub. In addition to the decarbonisation projects, the changeover from SAN H to DCS had reduced electricity consumption by £10,000.

Additionally, a review of Facilities Management (FM) contracts and delivery models has led to better use of resources and improved outcomes across the estate. This includes improved contract management and insourcing non-specialist FM activity.

The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority continues to benefit from leasing arrangements with other partners, which generates income from underutilised assets. For example, leasing a proportion of Service Headquarters and operational buildings to Police partners or rest accommodation for Ambulance staff.

## Transport

Transport efficiencies in 2025/26 were primarily operational (non-cashable), achieved through improved fleet utilisation rather than fleet reduction – although there were savings on fuel, due to the ongoing electrification of the fleet. Dynamic deployment and an asset-management pilot helped to improve equipment availability and reduce avoidable journeys. Overall, transport spend was contained while maintaining operational readiness. The vehicle maintenance partnership with Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service has been renewed, with savings for the Service of £69,000 per annum compared to using external providers in the commercial sector. For both Services, there is a public sector benefit of more than £125,000 per annum.



## Supplies and Services

Efficiencies in supplies and services were achieved through procurement discipline and changes in behaviour. For example, the new printing contract reduced the number of printers and photocopiers within the Service, and the printing of agenda papers for meetings has been actively discouraged. Tighter controls on discretionary spend helped manage local pressures. The position was also supported by one-off income, including an unbudgeted legal settlement of £58,000. Furthermore, use of collaborative contracts and avoidance of impromptu purchasing improved value for money. For example, Mobile Data Terminal Solution and a contract for our resilience arrangements.

## Capital Financing

Capital financing efficiencies were achieved by aligning the capital programme to the Strategic Asset Investment Framework and avoiding new borrowing in 2025/26, with projects funded through revenue and capital reserves. Major fleet and estate projects have progressed to plan, helping to avoid cost overruns. Overall, disciplined delivery supported long-term affordability by limiting financing costs and preserving reserve capacity for future invest-to-save activity.

## Other

None applicable.

## Future Efficiencies

Looking ahead, the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Efficiency and Productivity Plan identifies initiatives to secure further efficiencies from 2026 onwards, and seeks to realise £4m cashable efficiencies over 4 years. In 2026/27, we have identified circa £1m in cashable efficiencies with future years to be identified through service redesign.



We have established an Efficiency and Investment Board to identify future efficiencies and opportunities to invest-to-save in accordance with the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's Efficiency and Productivity Plan. We will continue to actively use our benefits tracker to ensure both cashable and non-cashable efficiencies are realised. Overall, the focus is on sustained productivity improvements through modernisation rather than one-off reductions.

## Collaboration

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) continued to benefit from new and embedded collaboration arrangements in 2025/26, in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness in line with the Policing and Crime Act duties.

For example, our Thames Valley Operational Alignment programme has seen continued the development and delivery of shared policy, procurement and roll-out of operational equipment. This includes benefitting from the alignment of breathing apparatus sets. This project reduced procurement burden, capital outlay and ongoing training demands. Furthermore, this milestone has enabled a reduction for fire appliance moves across borders and improved intra-operability to improve services to the public.

Other areas of success for 25/26 in the Thames Valley, include:

- » A single Fire Scene Investigation Unit: A jointly-funded fire and rescue service and police approach, seeing improved quality and consistency of delivery and greater cost sharing, with 70% of costs funded by Thames Valley Police.
- » Introduced a single fire crew resilience contract with a third party provider. This shares cost burden and improves interoperability in the event of events such as local or national strike action.
- » Joint completion and assurance of the recommendation from the Manchester Arena Inquiry.
- » Delivery of common approaches to Command Support, including the introduction of a single ICT platform to support intra-operability and enable greater sharing of assets and improved resilience.
- » Establishing a command and control system replacement project and recommitting to the single Thames Valley Fire Control Service, which celebrated 10 successful years in this reporting period.

The Service also recommitted to a joint working partnership with Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service, to



collaboratively deliver fleet maintenance and compliance across our services, reducing costs (relative to commercial arrangements), and improving resilience of critical provision.

RBFRS also partnered with local authorities and other blue-light organisations in prevention activity to improve the targeting of vulnerable groups and maximise reach, without increasing RBFRS resource. Overall, collaboration helped avoid costs, reduce duplication and improve outcomes.

## Assessment of Efficiencies

Overall, RBFRS met its efficiency objectives for 2025/26 without compromising service delivery. Monitoring indicated the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority was on track to remain within its net budget of £47.965m, with underspends in some areas offsetting pressures in others.

Frontline delivery standards (including Response, Prevention and Protection outputs) were maintained, indicating efficiencies were achieved through improved ways of working rather than reduced activity.

Governance arrangements (including Audit and Governance Committee and Strategic Performance Board oversight) provided scrutiny of progress and supported timely corrective action where needed. While some gains were affected by external factors, such as nationally agreed pay awards, these were managed through the Fire Authority's reserves.

In summary, RBFRS delivered 2025/26 efficiencies through productivity, prudent financial management and active risk management, providing a stable platform for future improvements.



# Productivity

## Collaboration

Looking ahead the Service will embed and evaluate existing collaborative approaches. These include:

Reviewing the Thames Valley Fire Control Service legal agreement and working together to undertake a multi-million-pound system replacement due in Q1 of 2028. This work will also support a collaborative approach to the anticipated integration of ESMCP. This approach has celebrated 10 years in the reporting period and is conservatively estimated to have saved in excess of £15 million over this time, as well as improved indirect operational efficiencies and productivity gains. Ongoing recurrent savings of circa £1.5 million per annum is expected.

The Service has re-entered a joint working agreement to deliver fleet maintenance and compliance with Hampshire and Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service. This provides recurring savings for the Service of circa £69,000pa and improves the resilience of our maintenance and support arrangements.

The Service have established a Blue-Light estates collaborative delivery group, to build on existing successes of shared estate use and cost sharing/recovery. These includes sharing Service Headquarters space with police and local authority partners, as well as leasing space within our existing operational fire stations. Work is commissioned to better access community Infrastructure Levy funding following changes to national planning policy.

The Service have an MoU in place with South Central Ambulance Service, to support gaining entry to properties where it is suspected casualties require medical support. Key benefits include improved use of emergency resource and patient outcomes with an improved attendance time, seeing average responses of 9mins 8secs now from 25min previously.

Across the Thames Valley we will continue with our operational alignment programme. This is expected to embed a BaU approach to policy development, alignment training and equipment to deliver greater productivity. We default to buying the same equipment, from fire engines to breathing apparatus sets, this creates improved scale and recurring savings through more efficient cross border



mobilisation.

For example, our combined Breathing Apparatus project has enabled reduced appliance mobilisation across Thames Valley borders. Where support vehicles and staff were previously required, recognising the complexity of operating different policy and procedures, this is no longer the case. Ultimately, this approach and investment leads to improved effectiveness for public safety as well as greater efficiency of resource.

## Asset Management and IT Investment

Following a strategic review of our ICT, we have identified opportunities for further improvements in benefits derived from the investment in technology, by consolidating our Digital, Data, and Technology functions. Our new Digital, Data and Technology Strategy will deliver a range of benefits resulting from new digital processes, such as improved data quality and efficiency.

We have migrated majority of our server infrastructure to cloud hosting, improving resilience of our digital estate as well as reducing costs, with a projected efficiency of circa £405k over 6 years from 2025/2026.

We are also investing in replacing our network infrastructure across the estate to improve stability and quality of connectivity underpinning and enabling our digitalisation efforts.

We are actively pursuing opportunities to leverage existing and emerging technologies to streamline our processes and reduce the administrative burden on our operational and non-operational staff. Examples include, automations delivered via our Microsoft 365 platform as well as the application of Artificial Intelligence (CoPilot) to streamlining lengthy tasks and processes.

We have engaged a business analyst to evaluate our approach to managing risk information, incorporating a holistic review of both processes and systems. This review identified opportunities for improvements which have already been delivered as part of the digitisation of our Operational Risk Information Processes, described within our Efficiency Plan.



## Resourcing

The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority invested in a Transformation Fund to enable the delivery of the Efficiency and Productivity Plan. This has introduced specialist capability into the Service to support key deliverables. This resource has included enhanced capability to optimise our use of Microsoft 365, business analysts to ensure we undertake root and branch reviews of our operating processes and systems, ensuring our future investment is targeted to areas of high efficiency and productivity return.

## Income Generation

We have been proactively pursuing income generation for a number of years. This has included rental income from our estate, cross border recharges which were reviewed in 2025/26, and utilising funding from partners. In addition to which, we have recharge income to provide Thames Valley Control Service support. We have identified opportunities for shared Service provision which has included working with a neighbouring fire and rescue service to provide data protection expertise.

## Other

Our Efficiency and Productivity Plan outlines our plans for the years 2025/26 to 2029/30. We are looking to provide our services in the most efficient and effective way, and we are committed to undertaking an organisation-wide review of our delivery model, which is currently underway, with progress being driven by our Efficiency and Investment Board.

## Outcome-Based Activities

The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority annually sets a range of Corporate Measures, which measures our performance outcomes across both Service Delivery and Corporate Health. This measures our performance against a number of key activities, including Safe and Well Visits, delivery of the Risk Based Inspection Programme, and risk visits.



The Efficiency and Productivity Plan provides case studies which demonstrate how productivity gains have been, or will be, achieved. As an example, we have invested in improving and digitising our operational risk information processes, which is anticipated to achieve 328 hours saved for operational staff. This will then be reinvested in risk-critical activity, such as risk visits and training and development.

In September 2024, we introduced a change to our attendance at Automatic Fire Alarms and in 2025/26, we completed a 12-month evaluation of that change. The evaluation showed that we achieved a saving in operational time, which exceeded 1,440 hours in the first year, further releasing capacity for risk-critical activity.

Further case studies are available in our Efficiency and Productivity Plan.

## Workforce Capacity

In addition to our Corporate Measures, we have been undertaking a series of time and motion studies to baseline our capacity within our functional areas, including Prevention, Protection and Response. The information captured has informed the development of a new operating model for our Protection function – a case study of these changes is included in our Efficiency and Productivity Plan. The outcome of these changes will result in an improved Service, the introduction of a business safety function, and enhanced focus on our regulatory activities. It also delivers improved opportunities for staff whilst achieving £100k cashable efficiencies.

The time and motion studies have helped us to highlight areas requiring further investigation, helping us to identify invest-to-save projects which are seeking to drive productivity gains in the Service. Contained within our Efficiency and Productivity Plan is a case study related to the digitalising of standard testing, as part of our asset management project.

Our benefit tracker captures time saved through our efficiency and productivity projects.

## Increasing Productivity

We have identified work areas that are contributing to productivity, as seen above in the Outcome-Based Activities section. Further



examples are available through the case studies in our Efficiency and Productivity Plan.

In 2025/26, we focused heavily on improving the resilience of our response model and ensuring the effective use of resources to support appliance availability. We delivered this work through our Community Risk Management Plan – which included our ‘Priority Six’ project – which sought to optimise the use of wholetime and on-call resources, and has achieved a cashable efficiency.

We have further invested in our Operational Support and Improvement function to improve the management of our crewing arrangements through a more efficient support model, releasing frontline capacity to focus on the delivery of risk-critical activity.

In 2026, a new leave policy came into effect to support the resilience of our crewing model and reduce the over-reliance on pre-arranged overtime. This change is being actively monitored and evaluated throughout the year.



# Service Changes and Achievements

## What is the Service doing differently this year?

The Service has enhanced its focus on driving efficiency and productivity through establishing the Efficiency and Investment Board, which will ensure a continued, strategic focus on achieving our goals stated in our Efficiency and Productivity Plan.

We have spent a number of years laying solid foundations for leveraging productivity gains and believe that our new governance arrangements will support us achieving our ambitious plans moving forward.

## Why are these changes being made?

As part of our continued prudent financial management of the Service, we have developed a four-year Efficiency and Productivity Plan aligned with the Medium-Term Financial Plan, to ensure financial sustainability going forwards.

## What has been the Service's biggest success this year?

We have commenced significant transformational projects which will modernise core corporate systems (such as Finance, HR and other related workflows) to reduce manual workarounds, duplicate data entry, and expand asset management arrangements to improve inventory control and prevent over-procurement. RBFRS also anticipates cost-avoidance and productivity gains through continued regional and national collaboration.

We have also identified £1.041m in cashable savings to be delivered during 2026/2027, as part of our four-year plan.