

# Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Sustainability Strategy  
» 2024 - 2029



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## » Foreword

**W**elcome to Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's (RBFA) Sustainability Strategy 2024 – 2029. I am excited to be introducing this important new document, which sets out, in strategic terms, the aims and objectives of what Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) aims to achieve over the next five years with regards to sustainability.

We recognise the climate emergency and the social and economic issues that we are facing, along with their impact, both globally and locally across communities in Royal Berkshire.

This strategy explains how we aim to tackle our contribution to climate change through cultural change and the delivery of various initiatives and projects.

We have developed a roadmap for achieving our future goals that will be developed over the life of the strategy.

This strategy sets out what sustainability means to the Service and how we prioritise our commitment to reducing our impact on the planet whilst continuing to protect the communities we serve.

It explains not only the importance of our work, but also why we need to do it and how we intend to achieve it. The plan will also set out how we intend to measure our effectiveness in meeting our objectives and evaluate our success.

In the development of the strategy, we recognise that there has already been a huge amount of effort towards targeting some of the issues identified, including our response to adverse weather

conditions and the economic challenges faced in our communities.

If we do not strive for change, we will continue to face these challenges, which is why we are focusing on working closely with our local communities, businesses, and partner agencies to deliver first-rate services.

By working collaboratively, we hope to share the importance of sustainability across the sector and communities.

This would not be possible if it were not for the most important asset we have at our disposal – our people.

Our staff and the people we serve are at the heart of the sustainability strategy; we would be unable to deliver our commitments without the hard work and dedication of our staff and the willingness to learn and deliver our new initiatives.

Our approach to sustainability covers a wide range of elements and it is necessarily ambitious. By launching this strategy, we are making our commitment to sustainability and a low carbon future clear.

We recognise that there will be challenges in delivering our plans, however we intend to sustain our 'One Team for Berkshire' approach and integrate sustainability across all elements of the Service, making it an organisational priority.



**Wayne Bowcock**

Chief Fire Officer  
and Chief Executive,  
Royal Berkshire Fire  
and Rescue Service



**Councillor Rachelle  
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Lead Member for  
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## » Executive Summary

**R**BFRS recognises the climate emergency and the social and economic issues that are creating an impact both globally and locally. This recognition has culminated in the production of the inaugural RBFRS Sustainability Strategy, which aims to be credible and deliverable.

RBFRS outlines its commitment to sustainability through four strategic themes. These themes provide a framework which builds on action already undertaken by RBFRS in these areas and prioritises aspects where we can have the greatest impact and action on the climate emergency in order to set the conditions for a more sustainable future.

### Our sustainability strategic themes:

1. **Our People** – Collaborating with the stakeholders to promote sustainability and empower the sector, community and teams to reduce the impacts and create a sustainable future.
2. **Guardianship** – Support and create a safer community by reducing wildfires, flooding and contaminants to protect the community and environment.
3. **Consumption Reduction** – Conserve scarce natural materials through the reduction of RBFRS consumption.
4. **Decarbonisation** – Reduce the amount of carbon emissions produced by RBFRS and to prevent additional carbon emissions affecting the climate.

» This strategy sets out how we aim to action and implement a more sustainable fire and rescue service to support the key RBFRS strategic commitment:

**Commitment 5: Sustainability.** *We are committed to ensuring that we provide a financially sustainable service and take meaningful action to help address the climate emergency.*

This strategy is supported by an RBFRS Sustainable Development Policy Statement that has been jointly signed by the Chair of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and the Chief Fire Officer.

## » Introduction

This is the inaugural RBFRS Sustainability Strategy that has its foundations in the signing of the Emergency Services Environment and Sustainability Group Charter by Royal Berkshire Fire Authority in February 2023.

Climate change was identified as a risk some time ago stimulating UK Fire and Rescue Services to adapt to and mitigate as a sector.

More widely, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) is placing greater emphasis on work in this area.

Over the last two decades, fire and rescue services have responded to a growing number of emergency incidents linked to climate change, such as flooding, wildfire, heatwaves, landslides, sinkholes, high-intensity storms and high winds.

They have done this by primarily deploying and coordinating their existing resources, skills and equipment not only to support stricken communities in their times of need but also to help their multi-agency partners with areas of their priority work in order to better manage the crisis overall.

Sustainability is not a stand-alone component or objective and it cuts across everything we do as an organisation driving the need for a corporate wide, cross functional approach that is enabled and supported by an appropriate strategy that is not constrained or siloed.

Noting this, the strategy is intended for a wide audience including:

- **Members of the Fire Authority** – to support decisions on investment priorities and the annual revision of the Strategic Asset Investment Framework
- **Senior Leadership Team (SLT)** – to identify portfolio changes to meet the needs of the Service and to maintain consideration of property assets in everything we do
- **Public** – it provides a statement of RBFRS's property asset management practices and priorities, putting community accessible fire stations at the heart of the communities they serve
- **RBFRS Staff** – to support engagement, innovation and delivery of the initiatives and actions outlined within the strategy

## » What is Sustainability to us?

There are many definitions of sustainability, this is due to the varied elements that it covers. Sustainability is often associated only with the environment, but its development covers far more issues. Sustainable development is defined by the United Nations (UN) as:

*“Sustainable development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”*

*Sustainable development calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and planet. For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonize three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected, and all are crucial for the well-being of individuals and societies.*

*Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. To this end, there must be promotion of sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion, and promoting integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems.”*

**Source: United Nations**

*“Sustainability is creating resilient communities, taking action to be environmentally friendly and ensuring we are financially stable.”*

**Source: RBFRS sustainability workshop, June 2024**

### Our Core Elements

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service is viewing sustainability and its development in a broader sense, capturing the three core elements as stated by the UN. These are:

**Economic Growth**

**Environmental Protection**

**Social inclusion**

## » Defining Net Zero

**F**rom a macro perspective, the UK's broader definition of 'net zero' refers to the balance between the amount of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere and the amount removed or offset.

Achieving net zero means that any emissions produced by human activities, such as industry, transportation, and agriculture, are balanced by an equivalent amount of greenhouse gases being removed through natural processes (like tree planting) or technological solutions (such as carbon capture and storage).

Key points of the UK's net zero strategy include:

- 1. Reduction of emissions:** The primary goal is to significantly reduce emissions across all sectors of the economy, including energy, transport, agriculture, and industry. This involves increasing energy efficiency, transitioning to renewable energy sources, and adopting low-carbon technologies.
- 2. Carbon offsetting:** For emissions that are difficult to eliminate entirely, the UK plans to use methods like reforestation and carbon capture and storage to offset the remaining emissions.
- 3. 2050 Target:** The UK has legally committed to reaching net zero emissions by 2050. This target was set to align with global efforts to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, as recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

» For the purposes of this strategy, Net Zero Carbon has been defined as:

*"The carbon emissions associated with operational energy consumption across the estate and fleet are zero or negative on an annual basis. Most of the fuel and power is supplied from on-site and off-site renewable energy sources, with any remaining carbon balance offset."*

- 4. Economic and social transition:** The UK's net zero strategy also involves transitioning the economy to be more sustainable, which includes supporting industries, creating green jobs, and ensuring that the transition is fair and inclusive for all communities. By reaching net zero, the UK aims to reduce its impact on climate change, contributing to global efforts to mitigate the effects of rising temperatures and environmental degradation.

## » Benefits

There are many benefits to acting in a more sustainability conscious way that are both financial and non-financial. Adopting sustainable practices and technologies can significantly **reduce operational and energy costs**. By improving efficiency across the estate, tackling consumption and reducing waste which, over time, can lower costs. Another key action in this area is to ensure sustainable procurement and address scope 3 emissions.

By implementing sustainable practices and technologies this can significantly **reduce our carbon production**, therefore benefiting the planet and contributing to **reducing the impact of the climate emergency**.

Addressing social inclusion by promoting equality, diversity and inclusion will allow for accessible opportunities within the community which will help **support engagement, recruitment and retention**.

Employees want to work for services that align with their values. A strong commitment to sustainability can **boost workplace morale and inspire innovation**.

By using companies that employ, locally, resource responsibility and invest in community development it will help to support decent work and **economic growth benefiting the community**.

As sustainability and the climate emergency become more prevalent, it is likely that regulations will become stricter. In embracing sustainability, we can **stay ahead of regulations and compliance changes**.

## » Context

### The Impact on Our Service

The climate emergency is forcing fire and rescue services to adapt quickly to an escalating threat, requiring more resources, advanced training, and comprehensive strategies to protect lives, property, and the environment. There are several key challenges, as represented in Figure 1 (page 10), but they include:

#### Increased frequency and intensity of wildfires:

Due to rising global temperatures, prolonged droughts, and changing weather patterns, wildfires are becoming more frequent, intense, and widespread.

**Increased risk of flooding:** Changing weather patterns are also leading to higher intensity rainfall increasing the risk of flooding events, especially in the Thames Valley area.

**Resource strain:** The increased demand for firefighting efforts, both in terms of personnel and equipment, places a heavy burden on us, meaning we must be prepared year-round, leading to higher operational costs and potential shortages of equipment and personnel.

**Health and safety risks:** Firefighters face greater health risks due to exposure to extreme heat, smoke, and hazardous materials during prolonged wildfire or flooding events. The physical and mental toll on firefighters is increasing, requiring better health support and mental health resources.

**Infrastructure and preparedness:** The changing climate necessitates investment in infrastructure and technology to improve response times and efficiency. This includes upgrading equipment to handle more severe fire and flooding conditions.

**Community preparedness and education:** We play a crucial role in educating communities about fire prevention and evacuation procedures, and water safety. The increased risk requires ongoing public awareness campaigns and collaboration with local authorities to improve community resilience.

**Collaboration:** The scale of modern wildfires and flooding often exceeds the capacity of an individual fire service, necessitating greater collaboration and mutual aid between regional and national fire and rescue services.

Figure 1 – The impact of climate change on RBFRS



# » The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

In November 2022, ahead of COP27<sup>1</sup>, the UK joined the Net Zero Government Initiative as a partner and signatory. This Initiative is led by the United States and participants agreed to develop and publish a roadmap laying out how they would bring their government emissions to net zero by 2050

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) were created to standardise targets for governments to meet, addressing the urgent environmental, political and economic challenges that are prevalent in today's society. The goals produced address sustainability in its wider format and capture more than just carbon and environmental impacts.

In the production of this strategy, we have mapped our current activities against the SDGs which are portrayed in Figure 2.



Figure 2 – The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals.

<sup>1</sup> 'Conference of the Parties' – the countries who signed up to the original UN Climate Agreement in 1992 [COP27: Delivering for people and the planet | United Nations / https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/cop27](https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/cop27)

## » Our Corporate Vision

Our Vision Wheel (Figure 3) has been developed in advance of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), as a simple way to represent how we will all deliver services within our communities. This has been developed through consulting staff and members of the public, many of whom believed it was vital that we placed our community at the heart of all that we do.

We want to continually focus on the relationships we have with our communities, to inspire trust, confidence and pride in their Service and encourage people from all communities to want to join us. Several other themes were also identified as being important to our staff and the public. We intend to deliver the four quadrants of our public-facing work: our Prevention, Protection, Response and Resilience services through our four overarching principles: Sustainability, Culture, Capability and Risk Management. We will maintain these areas as a key priority over the next four years.

### Culture

- We are all committed to creating a safe, dignified and trustworthy Service.
- We are One Team, working together to achieve our purpose. We know that the Service functions better when all parts support each other.
- We take pride in our professionalism and being good at what we do and we always strive to improve.
- We don't walk past things that are not right, in our workplace or our communities.

### Sustainability

- We create resilient communities through our focus on sustainability.
- We provide good value for money to our communities through our focus on sustainability
- We ensure we are financially sustainable as a Service.



Figure 3 – RBFRS vision wheel.

### Capability

- We value and invest in developing our people because they are our most important asset and will be the reason we achieve our purpose
- Our high standards mean we listen and learn to continually improve
- We are trustworthy and transparent. We all focus our talent and resources to reduce risks to our staff and communities

### Risk Management

- We use evidence and professional judgement to analyse and reduce risks to our communities to achieve our purpose.
- We work with key partners to ensure we are prepared for all foreseeable risks and that we deal with them well together.
- We prioritise the availability and resilience of our valuable assets and resources so that we can continually deliver our purpose.

## » Our Sustainability Vision

**O**ur vision is to build a more sustainable Service to reduce the impact of the organisations operations on the environment and reduce carbon emissions in line with the government's commitment.

This strategy will strive to continually improve its performance based on sustainability.

### **We will:**

- Act in a way that meets governmental targets and supports our local communities to strive for a more sustainable future
- Achieve the sustainable development targets set by government policy with set check in points to review progression
- Review this statement annually and revise it where necessary based upon our commitments and targets
- Report on our performance
- Meet all relevant current and foreseen statutory regulations and official codes of practice
- Focus our efforts on key areas of opportunity as led by our Strategic Themes
- Regularly Monitor progress and strive for continual improvement
- Lead the conversation on sustainability and provide staff with the knowledge, support and resources to make positive departmental changes

## » Strategic Themes

To enable us to speak in one language and to make the strategy accessible, impactful and actionable, we have formed themes in which projects and actions can be connected. The themes have been selected based on the work that is currently being undertaken by the Service and benchmarked against the UN SDGs.

During the production of the strategy, we have consulted with staff from all departments and at varying levels to ensure we have captured input and perspective from everyone.

An accompanying specific and separate action roadmap helps track our progress against UN SDGs and our strategic themes, in more detail.

**The themes are:**



**Our People**



**Guardianship**



**Consumption  
Reduction**



**Decarbonisation**

## » Theme One – Our People

This theme addresses collaboration with stakeholders to promote sustainability and empower the sector, community and teams. This will help to reduce impact and create a sustainable future through communication, learning and development.

People are at the heart of RBFRS, crews, departments and local communities, so introducing sustainability and encouraging buy-in and innovation are key to the success of this strategy.

Education and learning are essential in engagement of the subject matter. RBFRS already facilitates education and learning through two streams.

UN SDGs related to the 'Our People' theme are:



### Current relevant strategies and documents

- People Strategy
- Health Safety and Wellbeing Strategy
- RBFRS Purpose and Vision
- RBFRS Behavioural Competency Framework
- HMICFRS Values and Culture Action Plan
- RBFRS EDI Objectives

## » Theme Two – Guardianship

This theme is addressing the support and creation of a safer community and environment by reducing wildfires, flooding and contaminants. Due to the climate emergency.

The environment is changing because of the current climate emergency – this is leading to more wildfires, more flooding, and more extreme conditions. As a result, this is driving more response and rescue operations, more education around safety and more general resource. This directly impacts the services provided by RBFRS and is necessary to support the strategic commitments.

UN SDGs related to the 'Guardianship' theme are:



### Current relevant strategies and documents

- Corporate Plan
- Community Risk Management Plan
- Integrated Service Delivery Strategy

## » Theme Three – Consumption Reduction

This theme addresses consumption and how we can conserve scarce natural materials. Reducing and preventing waste is the first step to reducing the overall carbon footprint of the Service. This includes addressing our supply chain through procurement and contract management.

UN SDGs related to the 'Consumption Reduction' theme are:



### Current relevant strategies and documents

- Annual Report
- Annual Plan
- Quarterly performance reports
- HMICFRS inspection reports



## » Theme Four – Decarbonisation

This theme addresses how we can reduce the amount of carbon produced by RBFRS and prevent additional carbon emissions affecting the climate. This can be done through implementing new sustainable technologies and improving site efficiencies. We will continue to operate, manage and develop our estate and operations to reduce our Scope 1 and 2 emissions.

The decarbonisation theme is also key to achieving the government commitment to reach net zero by 2050. Although the other themes carry a huge amount of importance in improving sustainability within the Service, it is crucial that we address our carbon output by decarbonising our estate and, where practicable, our fleet. The over production of carbon in the atmosphere is the leading cause of the climate emergency.

UN SDGs related to the 'Decarbonisation' theme are:



### Relevant strategies and documents

- Strategic Asset Investment Framework
- Property Asset Management Plan
- Fleet and Equipment Strategy



## »» The RBFRS Draft Sustainability Roadmap

It is important in this strategy that there is clear route to deliver our goals and targets. During this initial development of the strategy, staff from all departments were given the opportunity to identify their current progress towards sustainability and where they would like to be in the next 5 years.

This important piece of consultation has resulted in a draft roadmap that will be used by the RBFRS sustainability team to consider likely projects ranging from quick wins to larger scale investments, which could be delivered depending on resource availability and capacity.

Notably, the roadmap is currently a desk level planning document and is not an indelible commitment in terms of resources, hence it is not included here.

## »» Governance and Reporting

RBFRS adheres to a strict governance and reporting framework to ensure that we are informing all key stakeholders on progress, taking direction from our overarching leadership and using the correct decision-making channels to align with our commitments.

Progress will be reported internally monthly to the Estate Management Group and SLT, quarterly to the RBFA Members' Estate Development and Sustainability Working Group and six-monthly to the RBFA Management Committee.

External reporting will be via the RBFRS Annual Report to update external stakeholders on our performance over the year.

## » Monitoring and Evaluation

**R**BFRS will be working in line with UK government targets which is currently to be Net Zero by 2050. With this in mind, we also acknowledge that this target is 25 years away and that if we can achieve this any quicker, we will aim to do so.

Our main target for this strategy is to seek continual improvement against what could be a moving baseline. To achieve this, progress will be continually monitored by the RBFRS Sustainability Co-ordinator, and a meeting held quarterly with key internal stakeholders to review progress.

In order for this strategy to be effective we will strive to keep the roadmap updated to ensure that we are accounting for new technologies, opportunities and learnings.



## » Appendix One – UN Sustainable Development Goals Statement



- We provide accessible career opportunities.
- We provide equal rights to resources.
- We aim to empower disadvantaged groups through training programmes and ensuring that our recruitment process does not exclude marginalised groups.



- We have addressed site specific issues on stations to ensure all facilities are inclusive and where the gold standard is not possible, making adaptations to ensure they are suitable.
- Support and promote female leadership and female firefighters within the Service.



- We work with local community food banks and homeless shelters through volunteering and donations.



- Protect water based ecosystems by assessing incidents and avoiding contaminants running into local bodies of water.



- We are providing resource and access for staff to various healthcare and wellbeing services.
- Employing a health and wellbeing manager to support staff and ensure information is relevant and up to date.



- We have committed to delivering solar PV projects in the Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF).



- Through the learning and development team, we provide all staff with equal opportunity to educational resources and provide essential training surrounding core skills to all employees.
- We provide quality education to communities by educating them on fire safety and the fire service.



- We invest in the education and training of our staff.
- We provide fair wages and good working conditions.
- We are always working to create new and better work opportunities.
- We provide equal pay for work of equal value.

## » Appendix One – UN Sustainable Development Goals Statement



- Commitment to upgrading current infrastructure and retrofitting infrastructure to promote asset longevity.
- For any new build projects, research and deploy sustainable infrastructure. (Example using a modular building for our new training centre).



- We are in the process of delivering a heat decarbonisation project to remove fossil fuels from several sites and lower emissions.
- We are transitioning several fleet vehicles to electric.
- We are starting to further promote climate conscious behaviour through our processes.



- Supporting equality of opportunity through recruitment and promoting process.
- Ensuring that the services we provide are accessible to everyone including disadvantaged and marginalised groups. This may be through learning and education or through training.



- Using the decontamination and environmental protection initiative, undertake assessments at incidents to reduce the amount of water pollution.



- Through community engagement, educate people on access to services.
- Providing designated community fire stations and safe areas for locals to utilise when they are needed.



- We have reduced the use of paper- based products and have introduced systems to reduce the need for printing.
- We follow BREEAM regulations in new build projects and ensure to conduct ecology surveys for the preservation of existing habitat.



- We have introduced the use of a service 'marketplace' to reduce items going to landfill.
- We are addressing our consumption of materials and resources through various contracts. This is not at gold standard, but conversations and small changes have been made.



- We promote transparency and accountability through our reporting channels. This ensures open governance, fair resource allocation and clear communication to allow us to build trust with all stakeholders.
- We collaborate with authorities and services for knowledge sharing and support continual improvement within the sector.

# ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

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