

## **Strategic Assets**

I am delighted to present this catalogue of successful work by our officers over the last year, showing that the Strategic Asset Investment Framework we supported is producing real progress and increasing the capability and efficiency of the Service and giving very good value to our residents for the investments made.

It lists the successful opening of Crowthorne Tri-Service Fire Station, progress with Theale FS, work on other capital projects, the introduction of more Fire Vehicles, better Facilities arrangements and many new initiatives in ICT as well as plans for the current year.

It is a long and detailed report which I believe is very worthwhile for members attention and to be on the record.

### **Property Capital Projects**

The Service continues to complete the delivery of Phase 1 of the Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF) with excellent progress being achieved across the programme over the past year.

Looking back at the last Lead Member report, we indicated we would be delivering a fully operational new fire station at Crowthorne by summer 2020 – and we have. I am pleased to report that despite the challenges of Covid-19, the team delivered the Authority's second tri-service community on-call station on time and on budget in early May 2020. This is a huge achievement, especially when considering the challenges of the current environment. This new community fire station will provide an essential asset to the communities in and surrounding Crowthorne and further enhances the Service's ability to work closely with blue light colleagues. TVP & SCAS are expected to take up their facilities shortly. As soon as it is safe to do so, we will be encouraging the community to use this fantastic local asset and we look forward to inviting Member's to the official opening when the situation allows. The full project closedown report will be reported to Members of Management Committee in July 2020.

Work on the new 24/7 wholetime station at Theale is also continuing in the face of the global pandemic headwind. The working restrictions have inevitably caused a slight impact on timescales (circa 6 weeks), but we are working closely with the build

and professional teams to mitigate these delays where possible in order to deliver this flag ship station to programme by Spring 2022. The site enabling works and removal of the Japanese Knotweed have now been completed and work is progressing, at pace, to remediate the ground in order to commence work on the foundations. We have installed time lapse photography at the site so the build can be captured at each stage of its development. These images can be shared with Members so they can monitor progress whilst 'in person' visits are suspended. We are working with the contractors to ensure that local residents, especially those living next to the site in Wigmore Lane, are kept fully informed of the build process with strong relationships already established with our future neighbours.

In parallel with the Theale development the work to release the sites at Dee Road and Pangbourne for the required capital receipts continues. The Capital Projects team are working with BNP Paribas Real Estate to plan the release of these assets. Engagement with Reading Borough Council has commenced and will continue throughout this process to ensure that the recommended disposal route is cognisant of wider community benefits. The recommendation for the route to dispose of these assets will be presented to Members of Management Committee in July 2020.

As Members are aware, it has been necessary to re-profile the Caversham Road development into Phase 2 of the SAIF. Therefore, the final project of Phase 1 is the refurbishment of the Training Centre at Whitley Wood, albeit with a reduced budget of circa £2m. This project is within the feasibility stage and options will be taken, via officers of SLT, to Members of the Property Development Working Group as soon they are ready for review later this year.

In addition to the programme of work within the SAIF, the Capital Projects team have also taken on the Minor Capital Works programme – some £1.25m of capital investment across six of our most in need fire stations – Bracknell, Caversham Road, Maidenhead, Newbury, Slough and Wokingham Road. Engagement with each team is now complete and it is hoped a programme of works can be brought to SLT by early August and then presented to Members of the Property Development Working Group for their involvement shortly thereafter. Having reviewed the initial feedback from the station, along with a careful review of the building condition

surveys, it is feasible for work to commence in October 2020, with completion of the entire programme of works by Q4 2021/22.

The Fire Authority's ongoing vision, investment and support will ensure that our property assets provide fit for purpose facilities for a modern high-performing fire service, efficient and effective use of public money, compliance with our duty to collaborate and place our stations in the heart of the communities they serve.

### **Fleet, Equipment and Facilities**

During 2019/20 the Fleet Strategy focused on a medium term plan which can be broken down into three main areas of focus; Red fleet, (Fire Appliances and Special appliances), White fleet (All support and light vehicles) and Equipment. We have continued to improve the efficiency of our fleet and we now operate with a fleet of 117 vehicles compared to 145 vehicles in 2015 and down from 123 vehicles in 2018/19.

#### Red Fleet

Through our collaborative procurement with Thames Valley partners we have procured a single standardised vehicle type for all three services. In 2019 we took delivery of four more fire appliances. This means we now have eleven of the new type fire appliances in service in RBFRS. We were expecting to receive another four new appliances in 2020 but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a stop in production has delayed delivery to 2021. The arrival of this next batch of fire appliances will mean all whole-time main fire appliances will have been renewed since 2017.

With the continued support of the Fire Authority and in line with our Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF), in February 2020 the Fire Authority approved the purchase of a further four fire appliances. This has enabled full utilisation of the initial collaborative procurement contract with our Thames Valley partners and continues the renewal of the front line fleet with disposal of the oldest vehicles. Orders have now been placed for these four vehicles although current production timelines suggest an 18 month lead time.

In addition to our front line fire engines, our Fleet Strategy and the SAIF take account of replacement of specialist appliances and capabilities. In the autumn of 2018 a new 45M Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) was ordered and is now in the final stages of build. We anticipate arrival in service in July 2020, subject to testing and final sign off. Procured in collaboration with Oxfordshire and Staffordshire FRS's, this will replace our existing aerial appliance and will bring improvements in height, manoeuvrability, reach and serviceability.

In February 2020 the Fire Authority approved the purchase to renew the water rescue vehicle, the renewal of the 4x4 vehicle at Maidenhead and up to eight double cab pick-up 4x4s to support our on-call stations and provide additional resilience during spate weather conditions. Work is continuing over the coming months to collate user requirements and finalise specifications with a view to placing orders as soon as practicable.

#### White Fleet

Having disposed of older surplus vehicles in 2018/19 (renewing or replacing only where there is a business need) we have this year focused on reallocating existing fleet to meet changing organisational requirements. Redeploying these vehicles has enabled us to decommission and dispose of further older fleet vehicles.

#### Fleet Management

Our Fleet Partnership arrangements with Hampshire FRS have been in place for six years delivering year on year efficiencies. With the agreement of the Management Committee, a new five year agreement came into being on 1 April 2019. This supports our structured programme of maintaining a legally compliant schedule of servicing and testing of all appliances and equipment, thus supporting our operational effectiveness and readiness.

#### Equipment

In July 2019 a new fully managed Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) system for firefighters came into Service. This is the uniform firefighters wear for operational incidents and was procured through the South East Regional Framework and is provided by Bristol Uniforms. The new PPE gives our firefighters excellent protection

for firefighting as well as new jackets tailored specifically for dealing with non-fire incidents.

In addition, all dry-suits for our water rescue teams have been renewed and upgraded, ensuring that team members have the latest and bespoke fitting kit to respond to water rescue incidents.

## Facilities

Our Facilities team continue to deliver a wide range of planned and reactive work to maintain and improve facilities across all our operational sites. Towards the end of 2019 our main facilities contractor decided to withdraw from the UK facilities management market leaving no choice but to seek alternative providers. Our facilities and procurement teams specified and procured a suite of new contracts to cover all facilities related services moving away from one large provider to several smaller providers. This offers greater resilience and should ensure a higher quality of service delivery with the team building new relationships with contractors to ensure both our statutory compliance and response to reactive repairs is customer focused.

Ascot fire station refurbishment works were completed in March 2020. Some of the benefits of this work include complete redecoration, upgraded lighting and a new kitchen.

## Ongoing and looking forward

In February 2019 Management Committee approved a renewed 2019-23 RBFRS Vehicle Fleet and Equipment Strategy which in turn aligns to our renewed Strategic Asset Investment Framework. Following on from the progressive work undertaken since 2015 to create a newer and more efficient fleet, the key focus of the coming year will be to successfully deliver into the Service the vehicles which the Fire Authority has recently approved. This will ensure that new vehicles and capabilities are provided to our teams to support the effective and efficient delivery of services to the public. We will be continuing our Thames Valley operational alignment with work underway for the next joint procurement of front line appliances and the continued standardisation of equipment. This includes the replacement of working at height

equipment as well as a major project replacing Breathing Apparatus which we expect to deliver in RBFRS by 2022/23.

Over the coming year, the facilities team will be looking to fully embed our new contractors and new ways of working in order to re-evaluate and improve the efficiency of the services that are required to be delivered. The team will be working closely with Capital Projects team as part of the whole-time station minor capital works refurbishment programme to ensure that the works result in improved working environments for our operational personnel.

### **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**

The 2019-2020 financial year saw RBFRS ICT's provision make significant progress towards our strategic goals, aligned to the key principles of Simplification, Collaboration and Virtualisation. Continued capital investment as well as unrelenting focus on improved user experience and increasing use of technology has resulted in several notable achievements, a few of which are highlighted below:

Following on from the highly successful first tranche of standard replacement laptops, a full station desktop computer refresh, a second tranche of laptop replacements, and a 2<sup>nd</sup> full refresh of the mobile phone fleet has been completed. As a result, the number of different device types has been drastically reduced, making support far less complex for the ICT team. We have begun to realise asset disposal savings through a 3<sup>rd</sup> party contract which means we are now paid for old equipment rather than paying to have it disposed of. Our charitable donation work continues with further equipment donations to local schools, and a high-profile donation of old mobile phones to a national programme designed to enable families of patients isolated in Intensive care due to Covid-19 to speak and see their loved ones.

Members will remember that RBFRS' HMICFRS report highlighted an opportunity for our service to make better use of technology within our front line services. ICT has fully engaged in a project to digitise the capture and direct upload of safe and well data during home visits, by using android tablets rather than paper based processes. The project has met all engagement and development milestones to date, despite

the potential for disruption due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is expected that all individuals carrying out Safe & Well visits will be using the new system by October 2020. The project has highlighted the benefits of cross-organisational working and involvement of end-users in the development of digital systems, and will be adopted as the model for future similar activities.

Following on from the full IT health check carried out for RBFRS systems and networks in early September 2019, I am proud to report that the subsequent RBFRS Cyber Security Audit yielded our best-ever results, with only two identified actions arising. Both of these actions were associated with in progress – but as of the time of the audit, incomplete - activities. As of the time of this report, both activities are pending full implementation but on temporary hold due to COVID-19 arrangements. Members can therefore be assured that as well as providing modern, fit-for-purpose equipment, our data and ICT equipment is amongst the most secure in the UK.

At the end of the 2019-20 financial year, RBFRS engaged with Microsoft to evaluate our existing virtual server environment, and to assess our readiness for any potential move of services fully into the cloud. I am pleased to report that Microsoft were favourably impressed with both our licensing control and infrastructure environment, and we have identified a number of servers and applications to trial during the 2020-21 financial year. As well as representing an acceleration of our original strategic planning for cloud services, this activity will open up opportunities for further improvements in efficiency and potential cost savings for the future.

It would be remiss of me to neglect the immense impact that the Covid-1 pandemic has had on RBFRS' ICT team, infrastructure and services. Here are just a few of the more significant activities carried out, in some cases in very short timeframes.

- a rota system to allow at least one on-site technical resource for TVFCS support was put in place
- the vast majority of non-station based staff were migrated to full-time home working with no major issues reported
- over 80 Monitors were provided to staff members so they could work from home more safely and comfortably

- a large number of fist microphone/speakers for firefighters were purchased for personal issue to minimise radio cross contamination
- changes to our internet and remote access environment were made to significantly improve application performance
- Cisco WebEx has been trialled and purchased to allow RBFRS to transition to remote meetings
- Fire authority/committee/group meetings using WebEx, started in June 2020.

Through all of this, our infrastructure has held up well with no significant issues to note. The only area of challenge has been with establishing collaborative meetings across partner organisations. The diversity of solutions employed by local authorities, other fire and rescue services and partner agencies made it clear early on that in remote meetings and collaboration were particularly difficult to arrange. These learnings and impacts of this ongoing live business continuity event drove us to choose Cisco WebEx as the most commonly accessible interim solution.

#### Ongoing and looking forward

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on RBFRS and all of its resources, and ICT has been no different. The team has had to adapt to new ways of working for our customers whilst at the same time adapting internal processes to provide effective support whilst maintaining staff safety.

We expect to have completed an internal data audit, created and implemented a formal data classification framework to standardise our documentation, and to have resolved long-standing issues with permissions management and account structures using tools invested in during 2019-20. Following on from this we will aim to achieve Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation during the coming year.

The core activities of ensuring that TVFCS systems are functioning, RBFRS ICT infrastructure is available and RBFRS staff are able to use ICT systems has continued largely unabated by the crisis. In addition, this year will see progress against several Strategic objectives, including the third and final tranche of replacement laptops, and we expect to deploy these during the summer of 2020-21. When completed, this will mean that the oldest computer device in use by the



service will be around 18 months old, and all devices will be from the same family of computers.

As a result of the challenges experienced with inter-organisational collaboration, we will undoubtedly explore accelerated deployment of more integrated collaborative tools such as Microsoft 365 to increase resilience and support any permanent changes in organisational ways of working, as well as accelerated migration of some application servers and their data to fully cloud based systems. Both of these activities will rely on high capacity and robust Network connectivity, which will be evaluated and implemented throughout the year.

Finally, in recognition of the potential for permanent changes to the ways of working for parts of RBFRS, ICT must begin to position services and capabilities for maximum flexibility in terms of location, connectivity and device. This will be embodied within Collaboration and Virtualisation sub-strategies to be developed across the course of the year.

Cllr Angus Ross, Strategic Assets Lead Member