

# MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY



Held on Monday, 22nd April, 2024 at 6.30 pm

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

**Members:**  
(\*present)

- |                               |                                      |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| * Councillor Wendy Griffith   | Councillor Tricia Brown              |
| * Councillor Dave McElroy     | * Councillor Jeff Brooks             |
| * Councillor Owen Jeffery     | * Councillor Haqeeq Dar              |
| * Councillor Joshua Reynolds  | * Councillor Paul Gittings           |
| Councillor Ishrat Shah        | * Councillor Pauline Helliars-Symons |
| Councillor Robert Stedmond    | * Councillor Morag Malvern           |
| * Councillor Helen Taylor     | * Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle     |
| * Councillor Billy Drummond   | * Councillor Mike Smith              |
| * Councillor Peter Frewer     | * Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey |
| Councillor Dennis Benneyworth | * Councillor Simon Werner            |

**In Attendance:** Mark Arkwell (Deputy Fire Officer, DCFO)  
Wayne Bowcock (Chief Fire Officer, CFO)  
Paul Bremble (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)  
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)  
Paul Brooks (Head of Assets, HoA)  
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P)  
Ben Cairns (Area Manager Response and Resilience, AM R&R)  
Dave Creases (Area Manager Prevention and Protection, AM P&P)  
Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development, HHR&L&D)  
Katie Mills (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)  
Jim Powell (Area Manager, Collaboration and Policy, AMC&P)  
Christian Riley (Communications and Engagement Officer)  
Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL)  
Michaela Smith (Democratic Support Assistant, DSA)  
Lukasz Wrona (Head of Business and Information Systems, HBIS)

**Observers:** Kathryn Richardson (HMICFRS Liaison Service Lead)

| **Action**

**53. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Benneyworth, Shah and Stedmond.

**54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest received 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.

**55. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 FEBRUARY 2024**

**RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2024, be approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

**56. 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.

**57. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS****Automatic Fire Alarm Consultation**

Following the last Fire Authority meeting in February, the Authority launched a public consultation asking people across Berkshire to consider how Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) respond to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs).

The consultation focusses on how the Service responds to AFA in buildings such as shops, offices, leisure centres, colleges, sports grounds, libraries, schools and health centres. A full list of all buildings affected by the consultation is available on the Service's website.

False alarms account for 45% of all the incidents attended and the majority of these were the result of automatic fire alarm systems, of which we know 99% require no action by our Service. This has caused significant disruption to the delivery of essential services and training.

The consultation will be held for 10 weeks and will close on Monday, 13 May 2024. The Chair encouraged Members to share the AFA consultation with their

communities to ensure as many views are captured on the three proposed changes to response.

### **People strategy published**

The People Strategy is now published. The plan covers a three-year period, from 2024-2027 to align to our Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

The Strategy was originally written and consulted on at the end of 2022. Shortly after this, the whole fire sector came under increased scrutiny publicly. In response to this evolving landscape, the roll out and implementation was paused. Subsequently, the Service spent the whole of 2023 engaging with people across the Service about their experiences of working in the fire and rescue service. The original Strategy has been revised to reflect what was heard and learnt.

The Strategy contains eight objectives that are broad in nature and the intent is to develop delivery plans for each one as part of our annual planning process. This will result in a number of different work streams and work packages making it a key thread of the rbfrs development programme. The Chair asked Members to read the refreshed People Strategy.

### **Improved Maternity and Adoption Leave Pay**

The Chair was delighted to inform Members that the Service has increased its maternity and adoption offering for staff with up to 52 weeks full pay inclusive of annual leave, bank holidays and keeping in touch days.

He stated our people are at the core of what helps deliver our critical services to the people of Royal Berkshire.

This is just one of a number of steps we are taking to ensure our staff are being heard and we are doing what we can to better look after them.

This enhancement further embeds our commitment to continue to build an inclusive culture where everyone feels valued and has been consulted.

### **Charity Car Washes**

Over the past month, several fire stations across the county have hosted the first charity car washes of the year to raise money for The Fire Fighters Charity. Firefighters, volunteers and cadets from Caversham Road, Crowthorne, Newbury and Bracknell fire stations have each hosted a car wash in support of the Charity.

In total, our staff and volunteers have already raised an incredible £4,900 for The Fire Fighters Charity.

On behalf of the Authority, the Chair thanked everyone involved, as well as members of the public who came out and donated generously in support of this great cause.

## Breathing Apparatus Project

During 23/24 the Thames Valley Collaboration Breathing Apparatus Alignment project went live. The £1.7m collaboration project involved the three fire and rescue services of the Thames Valley.

Running over three years, the Thames Valley Breathing Apparatus Project has delivered one of the most significant combined collaboration investments to date.

As part of this project collaborative procurement has saved £1.1M across the total contract. The project has involved operational and support staff from across all three services, including procurement, training, fleet, health and safety, policy, and equipment teams, as well as the firefighters themselves.

Further savings have been made as additional Breathing Apparatus support appliances are no longer required to be deployed on 'over the border' fire incidents. This change in procedure was implemented from the Thames Valley Fire Control in January 2024.

This project forms part of an aligned commitment to ensure firefighters across the Thames Valley have the best equipment to enable them to provide the best possible response to our communities.

The project has now successfully delivered more than 4,000 items of new firefighting equipment to firefighters operating out of the 60 fire stations across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire.

The new sets have improved the safety and wellbeing of operational staff through personal issue facemasks, lighter breathing apparatus sets and live telemetry to the entry control point enabling 'real time' monitoring of air consumption, status of the wearer and the 'wear' temperature for each breathing apparatus set whilst in use at an incident.

## Wholetime Recruitment

Over the past two months, our latest cohort of Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices have been hard at work completing their initial training course and we're now fast approaching their graduation ceremony, marking the completion of the first phase of their journey into becoming firefighters.

The Chair invited members to join him at Maidenhead Fire Station on Friday, 10 May to celebrate our latest recruits and the progress they have made so far.

## Firefighter Career Discovery Sessions

Following a successful pilot in 2023, we have announced another series of Firefighter Career Discovery Sessions to help more people find out more about the role of a firefighter.

Sessions will begin on 30 April 2024 and run until 27 June 2024 and so if you have contacts in the community, particularly those that may be unfamiliar with the work of the fire and rescue service, we would be grateful if you would share this information with them.

Moving forward, these sessions will be held on a rolling basis to enable us to take a more proactive and structured approach. Additionally, this will help us to build a wider network of applicants across the region and establish more relationships with community groups.

Anyone interested in attending is asked to register in advance through our website at [rbfrs.co.uk/discovery](http://rbfrs.co.uk/discovery).

## **Veterans' Hub Event**

The Chair announced that the Service will be hosting the latest event in the series of successful Armed Forces Veterans' Hub Events, on Tuesday, 14 May at Crowthorne Community Fire Station.

Between 10am and 1pm, attendees will be able to speak to a range of organisations. There is no need to book in advance therefore, please spread the word to anyone who may be interested in coming along and taking part.

## **Fire Cadet Graduation**

Members were informed that our current cohort of Fire Cadets will celebrate their graduation on the afternoon of Wednesday, 10 July.

The Chair stated he attended last year's graduation and was impressed by the cadets and the creative, fire safety inspired demonstrations they performed for families and friends gathered at Newbury Fire Station.

Whilst the venue for this year's graduation ceremony has not yet been confirmed, Members should have received a hold in their RBFRS outlook diaries. If you have not yet received an invitation, please contact either Fayth or Michaela.

## **Fire Authority Members**

Sadly, Councillors Helliar-Symons and Malvern will be standing down in May 2024.

Councillor Helliar-Symons joined the Fire Authority in June 2006. During her time on the Fire Authority Pauline has been Vice-Chair of the Management Committee and Fire Authority, Chair of the Member Development Working Group, and Group Leader for the Conservative Group. She has been involved in many other working parties and committees over the past 18 years.

Councillor Malvern joined in June 2022 and was appointed as Vice-Chair of Audit and Governance Committee between June 2022 to May 2023. She has also been our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Member Champion for the past 18 months.

The Chair passed on his thanks to Pauline and Morag for their contribution and service to the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service and Fire Authority, and presented them with tokens of appreciation.

On behalf of the Fire Authority, the Chair gave his best wishes to Councillors Wendy Griffith, Dave McElroy, Mike Smith and Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey who were all standing for re-election this year.

**58. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

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

**59. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS UNDER STANDING ORDER 30**

There were no questions from Members under Standing Order 30.

**60. NOTICES OF MOTION UNDER STANDING ORDER 44**

There were no notices of Motion under Standing Order 44.

**61. RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEES**

There were no recommendations of Committees received.

**62. ANNUAL PLAN 2024/25**

Paul Bremble (Head of Corporate Services, HCS) introduced the Annual Plan stating the plan sets out objectives and key deliverables for the Service for 2024/25 within the context of the Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2023/27 and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) Development Programme.

He explained the plan reflected the Fire Authority's strategic commitments and briefly went through each component of the plan listed in paragraphs 3.5.1 to 3.5.6 of the report.

Changes to the strategic commitments were made at the Members / Officers workshop held earlier in the year to more robust wording, and in discussing His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMICFRS) Paul Bremble reported the Service will be inspected in late 2024.

In referring to Corporate Measures starting on page 41 of the agenda pack, Councillor Mike Smith queried the reason for the term '*monitor*' in (9) of the 2024/25 target column. Katie Mills (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO) confirmed the target was inherent following an update to the risk-based inspection programme and advised the target would be set at 100% to be completed within set timescales.<sup>[1]</sup>

The same question was asked on columns (24) and (25) compliments and complaints targets. Paul Bremble reported this data will be continually

monitored across the year as no target figure had been set against compliments and complaints. He advised additional data could be added into the report in reference to previous years.

The Chair commented it would have been useful in the column to also include the targets set for 2022/23 as it would have provided a baseline and comparison to the 2023/24 and 2024/25 target columns.

In referring to the measure around percentage of working time lost to sickness across all staff groups, Councillor Mike Smith queried whether the figures had improved. Becci Jefferies (Head of Human Resources and Learning and Development, HHR&L&D) explained several factors can skew absence data and that Human Resources (HR) were working to understand trends. She reported the Fitness, Health and Wellbeing Champion annual report which was part of this agenda pack highlight this work and stated that the Service continue to improve the management of sickness absence.

In response to a question from Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle, Becci Jefferies replied the data was a benchmark when reporting RIDDOR incidents.

Wayne Bowcock (Chief Fire Officer, CFO) added the Corporate Measures outlined in the Annual Plan were regularly reported to Audit and Governance Committee for scrutiny.

Councillor Helliard-Symons queried whether near misses were recorded. Becci Jefferies confirmed they were. Councillor Wendy Griffith asked, how were the Service planning to increase diversity of the workforce by 100% as there was not a statement on how the Service intend to achieve this. Becci Jefferies confirmed this was being reviewed by the EDI Steering Group and results will be fed-back once agreed.

The Vice-Chair felt the EDI targets outlined in the report were ambiguous, Katie Mills confirmed diversity was very broad and there was a baseline which the Service was monitoring. The Vice-Chair asked a question about the Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) consultation and the Chair stated that the Service were unable to anticipate the consultation result at this time.

Becci Jefferies confirmed data was being monitored and will be passed to the Audit and Governance Committee later in the year, in response to a question about grievances from Councillor Drummond.

In answer to a question from Councillor McKenzie-Boyle, Paul Bremble stated the number of compliments out-weigh complaints.

In moving the recommendation of the report, the Chair stated the Annual Plan was ambitious but appropriate. Councillor Mike Smith seconded the recommendation.

**RESOLVED** that the Annual Plan 2024/25 be approved for publication (Appendix A).

<sup>[1]</sup> The Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) methodology has been developed by the Data, Risk and Performance team, working with the Protection team to give a prioritised list of premises deemed to pose the greatest life risk using specific factors and weighting. Further factors will be included in the methodology as the data becomes available and in response to changing knowledge of local risk.

### **63. RBFRS SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAMME: PHASE 1**

Paul Brooks (Head of Assets, HoA) reported the Authority was committed to reducing carbon footprint. A baseline study in 2022 confirmed that estates contribute 65% (1,524 tonnes) of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) carbon output per year. In 2023 an estate heat decarbonisation plan was produced by net zero specialists Faithful & Gold (now known as Atkins Realis), grant funding of £40,450 was secured and Atkins Realis were commissioned by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) procurement project.

Eleven Fire Station sites were prioritised for actions based on several factors including energy usage and building age and these sites would form phase one of the programme over the next two years. Within these 11 sites, five have been given the highest priority (Priority 1 sites) based on the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding (PSDS) technologies, subject to Fire Authority approval.

The Service worked with Atkins Realis during 2023 to develop a credible bid for public sector funding 'Phase 3C' for the five priority sites and secured full grant funding of £927,845 in February this year. Paul Brooks stated the bid process was complex and thanked Sophie Fox, Sustainability Co-ordinator for leading this project. In addition, he highlighted RBFRS were only one of three fire and rescue services (FRSs) to successfully receive this funding in 2023/24.

The report was seeking the Fire Authority to approve the capital expenditure for the delivery of RBFRS Sustainability Programme Phase 1. Salix will fund 52% percent of this project and RBFRS will match at 48%. The completion date is due on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026. Paul Brooks advised the Service will be fully engaged with the relationship manager at Salix throughout the delivery of the programme.

Paul Brooks detailed the programme would adopt a whole building approach which included low carbon heating, LED lighting, voltaic systems, fabric improvements and cavity wall installation with carbon savings being more pronounced than financial savings. Expected annual savings include 380,000 kilowatt hours, carbon saving of 132 tonnes, and financial saving of £60K based on Salix calculations.

These improvements would link in with RBFRS Sustainability Strategy, and allow strategic alignment with the NFCC, UK Government, local authorities, and the internal response to climate emergency.



Following a question from Councillor Mike Smith about the Salix calculation method and estimated savings, Paul Brooks replied that the methodology was difficult to understand, and explained the Service cannot 'opt out' of certain technologies, and savings were required to be looked as one, not individually.

Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle queried whether any potential risks had been identified if Salix opted-out. Paul Brooks advised the funding calculations was based on Service measures and were agreed with Salix.

Councillor Josh Reynolds asked several questions regarding calculations, savings, and payback periods based on building age. Paul Brookes explained that it was not a linear equation and that a variety of factors affect the calculations and figures. He reiterated that the technologies in the programme was a whole building approach and all the technologies identified in the report had to be completed to satisfy the funding process. In relation to the age of some of the buildings, Paul Brooks added that an Asset Investment Programme will be developed, forming part of the Estate Strategy and the most sustainable buildings would be included as part of the life extension programme.

Councillor Billy Drummond queried the cost difference in heat pumps at identified sites. Paul Brookes reported the cost was based around the total system. Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO) explained the positioning of the pipework in some sites caused fluctuation costs.

The Vice-Chair commended the detail of the report and the questions asked by Members. He referenced Fire Authority approval to extend the Lead Member Strategic Assets role to Strategic Assets and Sustainability Lead Member 18 months ago.

Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey asked how much carbon reduction the Service had made in White Fleet. Mark Arkwell confirmed that electric vehicles (EV) and hybrids were in use and that wider fleet savings will be looked at under the Sustainability Strategy action plan.

Councillor Dave McElroy in acknowledging the use of water by the Service, queried whether the Service was going to consider its water usage as part of reducing carbon footprint. Paul Brooks confirmed water usage had been looked at a recent sustainability workshop.

The Chair highlighted the Service's prevention activities would help reduce incidents and reduce water usage. He added the planned works on the sites identified would make those buildings a better place to work for staff and stated staff needed to feel they were invested in.

**RESOLVED** that:

1) A capital expenditure budget of £1.77 million for delivery of the 'RBFRS Sustainability Programme Phase 1' as set out in the SAIF be approved.

2) It be noted the above budget includes two distinct, but accountably connected, elements:

- Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) grant funds of £927,845, administered on behalf of the UK Government by Salix be noted; and
- RBFRS contributory funds of £842,155 be noted.

3) The PSDS element is on a cost recovery basis in arrears, which will lead to additional cash outflows in the short-term before reimbursement has been received be noted.

#### **64. 2024/25 CORPORATE CALENDAR**

**RESOLVED** that the 2024/25 Corporate Calendar be approved for publication.

#### **65. LEAD MEMBER AND CHAMPION ANNUAL REPORTS**

The Annual Reports were presented by the Lead Members and Member Champions.

a) Budget and Income Generation Lead – Councillor Mike Smith

Councillor Mike Smith thanked all those involved in creating the budget. He highlighted the following:

- Fire Authority's budget 24/25 was just over £46 million.
- Increases to inflation.
- Precept capped at 2.99% - limited ability to increase Authority's income.
- Uncertainty of Pay Awards.
- 10 additional Firefighters – paid for reduction in overtime.
- New training centre.
- General Reserve at 5%.
- The Authority will not be borrowing in 2024/25.

b) Collaboration Lead Member – Councillor Simon Werner

Councillor Simon Werner outlined the successful breathing apparatus procurement across the Thames Valley. He advised potential savings were currently being evaluated. Thames Valley Together Project, a partnership data sharing project to reduce violence and increase fire safety. The recommendations from the Manchester Arena inquiry would lead to better preparation should similar events arise, and looking forward, a joint procurement process on body worn cameras, shared training facilities and a Thames Valley wide Operational and Technical Communication Strategy to enable the public's ability to use mobile phone technology to send videos of incidents directly to the

control room. Councillor Werner recommended the report and thanked everyone for their hard work.

- c) Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) Lead – Councillor Paul Gittings reported the Corporate Plan and CRMP 2023-27 was launched last year, which sets out how the Service will respond to risk. In referring to the current Automatic Fire Alarm Consultation (AFA) consultation, he stated the number of AFA's the Service attended was at 45%, and 99% were false alarms. He stated the results of the consultation will be brought to the Fire Authority for consideration and thanked Officers for their support during the past year.
- d) Strategic Assets and Sustainability Lead Member - Councillor Shepherd-DuBey, thanked Paul Brooks (HoA) and his team for their fresh thinking and independent reviews. She stated the contamination work that had been carried out at stations had created a healthier environment for Firefighters, and commended the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion improvements to stations that had been made thus far. She highlighted the new improved training centre building and the careful refurbishment planning meant minimal disruptions to normal working duties.
- e) Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Member Champion - Councillor Malvern, commended the Service published a Gender Pay Gap Report and the Ethnicity Pay Gap Report and stated that it's not a requirement for the latter to be published, and highlighted the Service goes over and above what they are required to legally do. She highlighted the Neuro-Diversity handbook was very positive and offered great hope for the future. She thanked officers for their support during the year.
- f) Community Safety Member Champion - Councillor Griffith, thanked all the teams that assist Councillors when visiting communities to promote fire safety and prevention. She stated although positive steps had been taken, there was much needed work to be done in the community in promoting fire safety. The Chair commented that he was grateful to Councillor Griffith for the good work undertaken by her in relation to promoting fire safety in the community.
- g) Safety, Health, Fitness and Wellbeing Champion - Councillor Owen Jeffery, stated that health, safety, wellbeing and the mental health of staff was a clear priority to the Authority and something that was taken very seriously. In referring to page 118 of the report, he stated he observed the physical tests operational staff were put through. He stated he was impressed with the support and encouragement given to all those involved.
- h) Armed Forces Honorary Member Champion - Councillor Shepherd-DuBey, reported the Armed Forces Covenant was a formal pledge by the Authority to support members of the armed forces community. The Service continue to host an Armed Forces Veterans' Hub for veterans to come together and meet organisations who can provide them with advice or support.

The Chair thanked everyone who had been involved in the preparation of the reports.

**RESOLVED** that the Lead Member and Member Champion Reports be noted.

**66. FORWARD PLAN**

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

**67. MINUTES OF THE STANDING COMMITTEES**

**RESOLVED** that it be noted the Minutes of recent meetings were published on RBFRS website.

**68. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

Monday 24 June 2024, 6.30pm at RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

*(The meeting concluded at 8.02pm)*