

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	EXTRAORDINARY FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE OF MEETING	12 SEPTEMBER 2024
SUBJECT	MEMBER UPDATE: COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN PRIORITY 6 AND OPERATIONAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT POLICY
LEAD OFFICER	PAUL BREMBLE, HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR PAUL GITTINGS
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	FOR NOTE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authority's (RBFA) Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2023-27 identifies six priority areas for the Service to deliver. This report specifically provides an update on the Service's progress in relation to priority six (P6), which states:

"We will maintain 19 frontline fire appliances, and a baseline service provision of 14 frontline fire appliances, utilising wholetime and on-call staff as effectively as possible, through local management".

- 1.2 An overview of P6 is provided, including details of specific enabling policy changes, anticipated benefits and risks, consultation and feedback received.
- 1.3 Changes to the Operational Response Management Policy (ORMP), developed in seeking to deliver key components of P6, reduce the occasions where pre-arranged overtime (PAOT) can be utilised, at night in normal risk conditions, in enabling the delivery of the Service's base line response provision of 14 fire engines.
- 1.4 Key clarifications provided in the ORMP, following consultation feedback from the FBU, clarify where local station based managers can elect to continue to pay PAOT if there professional judgement deems this appropriate and

following an assessment of risk. Further, the ORMP now provides clearer guidance on the Service's degradation expectations. This means that no wholetime fire station should be left without an immediately available fire engine as a result the policy changes resulting from delivery of P6. It follows that, despite a theoretical impact of 0.6% on response standard performance, if policy is correctly applied the impact is most likely to be negligible.

- 1.5 Robust monitoring, assurance and evaluation arrangements are in place to identify impacts including any unintended consequences. An evaluation report will be provided to the Fire Authority for review.
- 1.6 The update is provided ahead of the anticipated implementation of the revised ORMP on 16 September 2024, which will be accompanied by further communications.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To **note** the implementation of Priority 6 through amendments to the Operational Resource Management Policy.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 The Fire Authority is required to publish a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) which reflects the Service's latest risk analysis across Berkshire and sets out how the Service intend to allocate available resources to mitigate these risks effectively.
- 3.2 At the Fire Authority meeting in January 2023, it was agreed to publicly consult on a proposed CRMP 2023-27 ('The CRMP'). The CRMP was subsequently approved by the Fire Authority on 27th April 2023.
- 3.3 The CRMP identifies six priority areas for the Service to deliver and improve how we manage the risk in Berkshire.

Priority Six (P6)

- 3.4 Prior to the current CRMP the Service had stated its aim to maintain a minimum availability of 14 *wholetime* appliances with five On-Call appliances providing additional cover and resilience.

3.5 CRMP P6 states:

“We will maintain 19 frontline fire appliances, and a baseline service provision of 14 frontline fire appliances, utilising wholetime and on-call staff as effectively as possible, through local management.”

3.6 Additionally, within the CRMP document, P6 confirms:

- *We will continue to maintain our response standard of the first fire appliance arriving at the incident within 10 minutes on 75% of occasions*
- *We recognise that we are entrusted with public money and have a duty to spend it wisely in order to ensure we provide our services efficiently we will seek to ensure we deliver good value for money.*

3.7 The intention of P6 is to confirm the Fire Authority’s commitment to maintaining the number of frontline fire appliances in Royal Berkshire. It also seeks to ensure appropriate, risk-based decisions are taken when considering how to use resource and assets most effectively and efficiently. This includes an improved use of our on-call response teams.

3.8 Improvements to the efficient management of resources, such as those associated with P6, enable the Service to deliver a more resilient and sustainable response model. Benefits and impacts are considered in more detail later in this report.

3.9 To progress this specific priority, the Service consulted staff on changes to the Operational Resource Management Policy (ORMP), which is a key enabler to deliver P6, during February and March 2024. In addition to the formal consultation period of 28 days, the Service have continued to consider the views of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and have provided clarifications and made adjustments to the ORMP.

3.10 The key ORMP change seeks to reduce the use of pre-arranged overtime (PAOT) on occasions when crewing numbers are insufficient to support the availability of the 14th wholetime appliance. This only applies at night and when there is no known or foreseeable increased risk profile across Berkshire. This approach recognises the increased availability of on-call units at night, which on average is more than double that of the day, and the reduced incidents per hour for the same period.

- 3.11 Further clarifications have been included in the ORMP following feedback from the FBU. These are clarified in the 'Post consultation changes' section of this report.
- 3.12 It should be noted that some progress has already been made in the delivery of P6, namely that where there are excessive numbers of Wholetime Firefighters available, they can be deployed to provide cover from an on-call location, if it supports increased availability.

HMICFRS Assessment

- 3.13 In the Service's most recent HMICFRS inspection, published in January 2023, an 'Area for Improvement', was received which states:

'The service should monitor and review its response model with reduced availability of its fire engines and in line with its community risk management plan.'

- 3.14 In the previous assessment of 2019, the HMI commented:

'The availability of on-call firefighters increases at night. However, the Service's current wholetime shift pattern provides the same number of wholetime firefighters 24 hours a day. This means there are more firefighters available at night than there are during the day. Royal Berkshire FRS should make sure its current shift patterns provide the most efficient and productive service to the public.'

- 3.15 The HMI is essentially questioning why there is more capacity during the night when demand is lower. The HMI is also seeking assurances that the Authority and Service are taking steps to ensure that our identified response capacity needs, as articulated in our CRMP can be sustainably available.

The delivery of P6 makes is expected to make progress in these areas, helping to better align our resources to foreseeable risk and seeking to provide more resilient response arrangements, that are less dependent on the use of voluntary overtime.

Anticipated Benefits

3.16 Compliance with National Conditions of Service

The scheme of conditions of service (sixth edition), also known as the 'Grey Book', is a nationally agreed document that represents the national terms and conditions of employment for uniformed employees in the Fire and Rescue Service. It is the product of joint consultation and negotiation between representatives of Fire and Rescue Authorities and recognised trade unions, such as the FBU.

The 'Grey book' clarifies conditions relating to the use of PAOT. Section 4.26 states:

'Pre-arranged overtime will not be used to make up any planned shortfall in the overall staffing levels set out in the fire and rescue authority's Integrated (Community) Risk Management Plan'

3.17 The Service have a responsibility to ensure it is compliant with these conditions as well as safeguard individual's welfare from working excessive hours.

3.18 In line with condition 26, the Service should avoid the excessive use of PAOT to support its response model as described in our CRMP. The Service is at risk of becoming over-reliant on PAOT. The changes associated with P6 reduces the reliance on PAOT and is in keeping with Grey Book conditions.

3.19 Reinvestment into frontline services.

The Service has an obligation to ensure it uses public money in an appropriate way and in the best interests of the public. The Service has consistently overspent on its PAOT budget for several years, despite significant increases in budget allocation. The cost of operational PAOT has increased from £635,000 in 2017 to £1,188,000 in 2024. This expenditure peaked in 2023 at £1,503,000.

3.20 The changes to the ORMP, are anticipated to result in a reduced expenditure of circa £154,000pa, as identified in the Fire Authority's 2023-2026 Efficiency Plan, which will help bring PAOT spend more in line with budgets. Changes such as these enable the Fire Authority to reinvest this saving into more frontline personnel and provide a more resilient and reliable response resource model. For example, the anticipated saving is intended to part

offset the costs of the additional 10 wholetime firefighter posts, introduced by the Authority this year.

Staff welfare

The Service support the continued use of PAOT and recognise its importance to our staff and the delivery of our response model. However, the Service have a responsibility to ensure our staff are not working excessive hours that may impact their mental and physical health. The Service monitors this information and has started to identify a growing trend of staff working excessive hours. Changes within the ORMP will reduce the number of occasions when PAOT is available for some periods, however it remains confident their will continue to be ample PAOT opportunities available for staff that wish to benefit from it.

3.21 On-call staff value and recognition

On-call staff have previously expressed that they feel undervalued or that their commitment is insufficiently recognised, as they are not considered within the 14 fire appliance baseline response model.

3.22 On-call staff will continue to be a key capability for both immediate emergency response and resilience across our response requirements.

3.23 It is anticipated that by improving the recognition and use of our on-call teams this may help attraction and retention and provide additional opportunities to develop and maintain competence.

Anticipated Impacts to response standard performance

3.24 The CRMP evidence base outlined the anticipated impact to the Service's response standard. This identified the likely impact of utilising an on-call appliance as part of the 14 baseline to be a 1% reduction in the Service's response standard performance, if applied both day and night.

3.25 The modelling methodology predicts realistic worst-case scenarios and this information was made available during the consultation.

3.26 During the development of the CRMP, the Service's most recent full year data, at the time, showed that the response standard performance in year 2021-22 was 77.2%. At night only, the response standard performance was 79%.

- 3.27 The Service have revisited more recent response standard performance, including the most recent full years data of 23/24. It showed that performance for day and night was 72.3% with 75.6% at night only.
- 3.28 The original P6 assumption was that the policy change would apply to both day and night periods. However, following review of more recent response performance this has been adjusted to apply at night only. The anticipated impact to the response standard performance is expected to be minimal, with a theoretical maximum of 0.6% suggesting the Authority's response target of 75% would still be achieved. It should be noted that there are a wide range of factors that impact the response standard performance such as volume of incidents, weather and traffic conditions etc. In practise, it is expected the impact of ORMP change would be significantly less than 0.6%. The Service will monitor any potential impact closely and report on this at the monthly Response Resourcing Group, chaired by the AM Response. This information will form part of the evaluation report that will be provided to Members.
- 3.29 To further safeguard against impacts to the Service's response standard performance, the degradation guidance within the ORMP has been strengthened to support local managers when considering which fire appliance should be made unavailable first, where sufficient wholetime crew are not available. This follows feedback received from the FBU. The addition clarifies the '*need to minimise the impact of degradation on operational performance against the response standard*'. In practice, this would mean that the second fire appliance based at Slough would normally be the first to be made unavailable. A more consistent application to the approach, will minimize the impact on response standard performance. Further, it seeks to provide assurances that whole-time fire stations should not be left without an immediately available fire engine, at night as a result of P6.

Consultation

- 3.24 During the CRMP consultation the Service provided the following information to assist the public and other stakeholders in their understanding:
- an overview document
 - the full CRMP consultation document
 - an evidence base supporting the CRMP.
- 3.25 The evidence base document showed the detailed analysis that had been carried out to inform the CRMP priorities.

3.26 The resourcing to risk section of the evidence base sets out the response standard for the Service, which remains the same, namely, attending 75% of incidents within 10 minutes. It illustrates the planning assumptions underpinning the key measure, including likely and expected variations in performance. There is no national standard for response performance although, it should be noted that RBFRS perform well when compared to the national average response times to primary fires, as illustrated in figure 1.

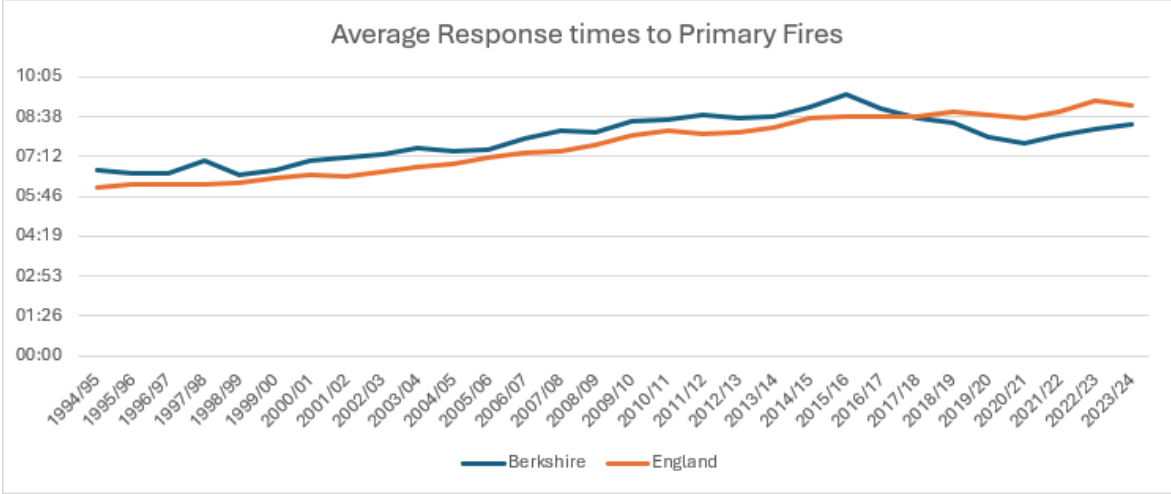


Figure 1: FRS average response time performance (Home Office, 2024)

3.27 The Service commissioned independent modelling to test the ability to meet demand with different combinations of appliance availability. This used historical incident data over the previous six years. This analysis, in combination with utilisation analysis, identified that if key locations are covered in accordance with the Service’s degradation plan, it is anticipated that the Service would be able to meet the expectations of fire cover and response standards in normal conditions with a minimum of 14 appliances.

3.28 Feedback from the public consultation included 411 respondents, of which 78.8% were in overall agreement with priority 6. 116 of these were RBFRS employees, with 83.6% (97) in agreement with P6.

3.29 The Service’s county-wide response standard of attendance at 75% of incidents within 10 minutes is not changing.

Internal Consultation

- 3.30 Significant changes to policy are subject to a 28 day internal consultation process with staff and representative bodies, including the FBU.
- 3.31 The FBU have been consulted throughout both the CRMP and the proposed changes to the ORM Policy. The Service has gone beyond normal consultation approaches and time periods in seeking to identify a position that satisfies the FBU's feedback in relation to the ORMP. This includes meeting pre, during and post the agreed consultation period. The Service have delayed the launch of the ORM Policy, originally scheduled for launch in April 24, to facilitate ongoing dialogue with the FBU on this policy change. At the time of writing this report the FBU are still in opposition to the policy change, despite clarifications and adjustments made following the consultation.
- 3.32 The FBU originally commented on the proposed ORM Policy in March 2024, rejecting its introduction and providing the following feedback:

'As discussed, we do not believe this should be introduced until the 10 extra posts have been established otherwise, we see this as a deliberate attempt to reduce fire cover and the service to the public.'

'This is a blatant drive to reduce cost at the sacrifice of fire cover and a reduced service to the public. As we stated in our CRMP response we will oppose fire cuts by any means necessary.'

This is not in the job profile for WBSM, they have not got responsibility for other stations crewing and certainly not to monitor RDS (on-call).'

Feedback from our women's section is that they feel this may be indirect discrimination for the following reason. This will adversely affect the ability of single parents to undertake contractual overtime like other colleagues, single parents struggle to be able to do overtime on days and nights can be the only time they can do this with the help of others in their support network. Single parents are more likely to be female, this is backed up by the LGA which suggests that 90 percent of single parents are female, with 49 percent of these living in poverty.'

Post- Consultation Changes

- 3.31 The Service held a series of meetings with local FBU representatives to listen and consider feedback. Every effort was made to appease the FBU's

concerns whilst retaining the effect required by introducing the ORM policy changes.

3.32 More recently, the FBU raised P6 via the Fire Liaison Group (FLG) meeting attended by the Fire Authority's Chair, Vice-Chair and Conservative Group Lead, outlining their concerns with the proposed changes. FLG is quarterly recognised forum for Fire Authority and Representative Body representatives to meet. As a result, the FBU were requested to write to more clearly express their concerns to FLG members. On receipt of this information, the Service entered further dialogue with FBU representatives, directly with the Deputy Chief Fire Officer who is responsible for internal industrial relations. As a result, further policy adjustments and clarifications were provided. These include:

3.33 More detailed explanation of how the Service is enabling local managers to continue to pay PAOT if they believed the risk profile in Berkshire to be at heightened state. The adjusted policy states:

'Watch based managers are expected to consider the anticipated risk profile for the period and have the authority to make short-term risk-based decisions on the most effective and efficient use of available resource.'

'If managers identify heightened risk conditions that can reasonably be anticipated to materially affect the risk profile of Berkshire, then it may be appropriate for PAOT to be used to maintain our 14 WT appliances AND maximise the on-call availability. For example, this could include unusually high-risk indicators such as the Fire Severity Index or Flood Alert Status. The decision to use PAOT in this instance can be made by the WBSM or an appropriate supervisory manager in their absence.'

3.34 Additionally, the Service adjusted the guidance on the degradation aspect of the ORMP. 'Degradation' is the term used for the scaling down of resources available to supply fire cover when crewing has fallen below the required level in meeting our baseline requirements. The revised ORMP (V8.2) confirms that the first appliance to be made unavailable where crewing numbers or insufficient should *'minimise the impact of degradation on operational performance against the response standard'*. This means no wholtime fire station should be left without at least one fire engine at night as a result of P6. The use of the degradation approach will also be more closely monitored to ensure this aspect of policy is followed, by local managers, via the Response Resource Group (RRG) monthly meeting.

Further, the Service confirmed the level of monitoring and scrutiny of the proposed policy change.

Assurance, Review and Evaluation

- 3.35 The Service will monitor the impact of this policy change and how it works for staff and communities in practise. The newly formed Operational Resource and Improvement Team will monitor activity and impacts on a more frequent basis, escalating any issues as required. The policy change will be reviewed monthly at the Service's Response Resource Group (RRG), chaired by the AM Response and Resilience. The FBU have been invited to participate in these meetings.
- 3.36 An evaluation update of P6 is currently scheduled on the Fire Authority's committee forward plan for Q1 25/26.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 **Response:** We will ensure that our people are trained and resources are located to provide the most effective response and to have a positive impact on incidents in our communities.
- 4.2 **Resilience:** We will ensure we are resilient and work with our partners to promote and build resilience in the communities we serve.
- 4.3 **Sustainability:** We are committed to ensuring that we provide a financially sustainable Service and take meaningful action to help address the climate emergency.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The implementation of priority six through the operational resource management policy is expected to reduce the PAOT spend by circa £156,000 a year, if policy is appropriately followed and consistently applied. This money is to be reinvested into frontline resource and helps support the cost burden of the additional 10 wholetime firefighter roles recently introduced into the Service.
- 5.2 Cost savings will form part of the evaluation report to be received by Members.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has undertaken in considering the Operational Resource Management Policy. The EIA identified that although there were no specific groups that would be affected by this change, there is the potential for staff members to feel unwelcome due to the lack of familiarity with different staff members due to having to work at a different location. There is also the impact to staff moving to different locations and the extra time and travel this would have on their homelife circumstances. The EIA identified these as having a neutral impact and it being the line managers responsibility to consider individual circumstances and discuss this with staff.
- 7.2 The Service have considered the concerns raised by the FBU in relation to a perceived adverse impact on single parents' ability to undertake PAOT. The Service does not agree that this policy change would adversely impact staffing groups such as single parents or females as presented. The Service recognises that individual circumstances could affect staff's ability to access PAOT at different times. PAOT is not contractual and there remains many opportunities to undertake PAOT throughout the working week.

RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Service must ensure it has a resilient and sustainable crewing model in delivering its statutory functions. There is a risk that the Service is over reliant on voluntary PAOT in delivering its baseline response model to meet the foreseeable risk identified within its CRMP. There is increasing evidence that despite the significant increases in use of PAOT, this is insufficient (or not being applied effectively) to ensure sustainable delivery of the base line response provision.
- 8.2 There has been opposition raised by the FBU on the implementation of the changes to the ORMP. There is the potential for union members to take industrial action in objection to the changes. It is understood, although not confirmed by the FBU, that their branches would be prepared to participate in a ballot for a level of industrial action, known as action short of strike.
- 8.3 The response modelling shows that there is a potential for an impact of 0.6% reduction in in the performance of the Service's response standard. The Service believes this to be a worst case scenario and highly unlikely in

practice. The impacts of the ORMP changes resulting from P6 will be monitored closely by officers and reported to Members of the RBFA.

- 8.4 There is a significant risk that staff undertake too many PAOT hours and this impacts individual health as well as fatigued performance. Further, the Service believes a number of staff are breaching the National Conditions of Service (Grey book 4.25) and undertaking more than the allowed PAOT amount. This is defined as no more than 24hrs per month, averaged over a 6 month period. The Service have already put in place more active monitoring and management of breaches of this national condition.

7. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 9.1 N/A

8. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 10.1 Corporate Plan and CRMP 2023-27 Consultation 2023
10.2 Chief/Deputy/Assistant Fire Officer, Head of Finance and Procurement
10.3 Fire Authority April 2023
10.4 Senior Leadership Team

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Corporate Plan and CRMP 2023-27 Consultation
11.2 Evidence Base of CRMP
11.3 Fire Authority agenda and minutes, 27 April 2023

10. CONTACT DETAILS

- 13.1 Paul Bremble, Head of Corporate Services, bremblep@rbfrs.co.uk