

# ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



<b>COMMITTEE</b>	<b>MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>08 OCTOBER 2024</b>
<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>QUARTER ONE APPLIANCE AVAILABILITY TO MEET CORPORATE MEASURES 14 AND 15</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	<b>AREA MANAGER RESPONSE AND RESILIENCE</b>
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	<b>N/A</b>
<b>EXEMPT INFORMATION</b>	<b>NONE</b>
<b>ACTION</b>	<b>TO NOTE</b>

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides information on quarter one performance with a supporting narrative on the whole-time duty system and the on-call duty system appliance availability.

Whole-time availability across the quarter was 97.7% against a target of 97.4%. This is a 0.1 percentage point decrease in comparison to Q4 of last financial year.

On-call appliance availability through the quarter was 34.1% against a target of 50%. This represents a 7.4 percentage point decrease in comparison to Q4.

Against a corporate measure target of 75% of emergency incidents attended in 10 minutes, the Service achieved 74.7%. See supporting narrative.

## 2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Management Committee:

- 2.1 **Note** the 2024/25 quarter one performance of **97.7%** appliance availability of the Service's 14 whole-time appliances in line with Corporate Measure 14<sup>1</sup>
- 2.2 **Note** the 2024/25 quarter one overall on-call appliance availability performance of **34.1%**, in line with Corporate Measure 15<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Corporate Measure 14: Percentage of whole-time frontline pumping appliance availability (fire engines).

<sup>2</sup> Corporate Measure 15: Percentage of hours where there is adequate crewing on On-Call frontline pumping appliances (fire engines).

**3. REPORT**

**Response Standard:**

3.1 The Response Standard during this period was slightly below the target of 75%, at 74.7% of all incidents reached within 10 minutes of time of first emergency call being answered. This is an improvement on the Q4 performance of 70.1% and very similar to the Q1 performance from the previous year of 74.6%.

3.2 The number of incidents in Q1, 1931, was above the five-year average for the quarter but did not exceed the maximum experienced for Q1 since 2019. The table below highlights both the lower incident demand at night, and the superior performance against the response standard:

<b>Q1 2024</b>	<b>Average Incidents per hour</b>	<b>Response Standard Performance</b>
Day	1.1	71.54%
Night	0.8	77.23%

*Incident rates for day vs night including corresponding response performance.*

3.3 The Response Standard is made up of 3 constituent parts, the **call handling time**, the **turnout time**, and the **travel time**, with targets of 90 seconds each for call handling and turnout times, and seven minutes for travel time to make up the total 10-minute target.

3.4 The Authority, when setting the response standard, knew it was a stretching and ambitious target to reach 75% of incidents within 10-minutes because the measure is highly sensitive to incident volume and profile, and many rural parts of the county cannot be reached within the target seven minutes of travel time.

3.5 Call handling performance improved in Q1, which is consistent with a return to more usual call volumes for the time of year, following the unusually high demand experienced in January and the spike in calls associated with the flooding caused by Storm Henk.

3.6 The improved performance in call handling may also be attributable to the additional time that passed, affording the control staff recruited in the last financial year the opportunity to build their confidence in managing 999 calls effectively and efficiently.

3.7 To help ensure call handling times are closely monitored, the TVFCS Joint Coordinating Group developed a suite of performance measures for control, which include a more detailed breakdown of call handling performance. This work has already enhanced our understanding of call handling performance and is helping us to understand trends with respect to call handling times by incident type.

3.8 Worthy of note is the decision taken by the Fire Authority in July 2024, in relation to the Service’s response to automatic fire alarms. Following the

implementation of these changes from September, the impact will be evaluated with respect to call handling times.

- 3.9 Our turnout times have remained good and consistent over recent years. They continue to be monitored internally to ensure any fluctuations in performance are appropriately managed.
- 3.10 Positively, travel time performance continued to improve in quarter one. We continue to closely monitor the impact of travel times and to understand where local works are impacting the road infrastructure.
- 3.11 As stated in the report, our Response Standard is an ambitious and stretching measure agreed by the Fire Authority and reports from the time the emergency call is received to the time of arrival on scene. For further context, it should be noted that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service was the only fire and rescue service in England to improve its attendance times at primary fires over a ten-year period, improving our average speed of response by 22 seconds, as reported in 2022/23. All other fire and rescue services saw increased attendance times in the same period. From Home Office data for the 2023/24, we continue to perform above the average for England for most fire incident types in terms of attendance times.
- 3.12 We will continue to closely monitor and manage our performance against the Response Standard, together with longer-term trends in our incident profile and demand. In addition to the detailed work on call handling, we will continuously review the management of our resources via our internal Response Resourcing Group to ensure we are optimising our ability to respond as quickly as possible and explore opportunities in the longer-term that would support this objective.

### **Whole-time Duty System Appliance Availability**

- 3.13 This section of the report provides the 2024/25 quarter one performance update against Corporate Measure 14, which is the *percentage of whole-time frontline pumping appliance availability*. Overall availability for the quarter was 97.7%, which exceeds the 97.4% target.
- 3.14 RBFRS employ a lean operating model, including the Whole-time Duty System (WDS) provision. Maintaining sufficient minimum numbers of qualified firefighters requires effective management combined with flexibility and commitment to provide additional hours from staff on a pre-arranged overtime (PAOT) basis. Even with these measures, the 14<sup>th</sup> WDS appliance was degraded on 33 occasions during Q1 because of a lack of uptake for PAOT, clearly demonstrating an overreliance on overtime to maintain our baseline service provision.
- 3.15 Significant work has been undertaken to address high levels of sickness across teams and Q1 saw whole-time sickness continue to drop from 4.8% in Q4 to 4.6% in Q1, below the Service's 5% target.

- 3.16 The leaver profile continues to present challenges in maintaining consistent establishment levels across our whole-time duty system. Whole-time leaver numbers during the past three financial years have averaged 36 per annum, or 11% of the establishment. The total number of leavers in Q1 was 12, which was three fewer than in the same quarter the previous year, but when added to the predicted 26 leavers for the rest of the year, would equal the previous record of 38 leavers (12%) during 2022/23.
- 3.17 While the Service continues to recruit apprentice firefighters to replace leavers, the number of WDS does fluctuate throughout the year, which results in the use of PAOT to cover shortfalls due to sickness and training. The overtime budget is currently forecast to be £395,000 overspent for the year. However, thanks to the Authority’s decision to recruit to an additional 10 firefighter posts, the cohort of 18 apprentices that is due to arrive on stations in November should ensure a healthy buffer above establishment, despite the challenging leaver profile.
- 3.18 By virtue of staff turnover during the past two years, the Service now has a significant proportion (39%) of operational staff in development roles. The training and assessment requirements add further pressure to the management of appliance availability. Service Delivery management continues to work closely with colleagues in learning and development to minimise the impacts of training and development on availability by planning and scheduling courses around other demands.

**On-Call Duty System Appliance Availability**

- 3.19 The report also details performance against Corporate Measure 15, which sets a target of *50% of hours where there is adequate crewing on on-call frontline pumping appliances (based on 24/7 crewing)*. This measure is being applied across the individual and overall availability of the Service's five on-call appliances. The overall availability for on-call appliances in Q1 was 34.1%, a 7.4% reduction against the quarter four performance and 15.9% below target. However, On Call appliances were available for 27 of the 33 shifts when the 14<sup>th</sup> WDS appliance was degraded, meaning P6 could have been enacted to maintain our baseline pumping appliance availability on more than 80% of occasions.
- 3.20 The Q1 performance continues to reflect the sensitivity of the on-call system. The table below provides year-on-year availability for the previous two financial years. Notably, since the Covid years, the 50% target for availability has not been met in any quarter, and availability has fluctuated with a low of 33.5% to a high of 46.5%.

Year	Q1.	Q2.	Q3.	Q4.
2023/24	46.5%	38.4%	33.5%	41.5%

<b>2022/23</b>	44.4%	40.3%	35.9%	41.7%
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*Year on year comparison Identifying Covid restrictions in 2020.*

3.21 The table below shows availability performance by station with previous quarter figures in red for comparison. Performance deteriorated in Q1 at all stations except for Lambourn, where a temporary watch manager was appointed following a period with no supervisory manager at the station:

<b>5. Percentage of hours where there is adequate crewing on on-call frontline pumping appliances (based on 24/7 crewing)</b>					<b>2024/25</b>
<b>Station</b>	<b>Q1 (Q4 2023/24)</b>	<b>Q2</b>	<b>Q3</b>	<b>Q4</b>	<b>Year to Q1</b>
Crowthorne	43.2% (61.5%)				43.2%
Hungerford	38.8% (47.5%)				38.8%
Lambourn	3.7% (1.7%)				3.7%
Maidenhead	19.0% (29.8%)				19.0%
Mortimer	65.8% (67.2%)				65.8%

*On Call fire engine availability by station.*

3.22 Evidence suggests that the 7.4% overall reduction in availability was primarily due to the number of leavers from the On Call establishment. Despite the recruitment of 15 new On Call staff, the loss of 19 trained firefighters led to an overall reduction from 65 to 61.

3.23 The overall reduction in staffing has been exacerbated by the requirement for new staff to undertake extensive training before they are able to wear breathing apparatus and become part of the 'critical crew'. During Q1, 14 new firefighters were still undertaking the On Call Training Programme (OCTP).

3.24 Crowthorne has experienced a 17.3% drop in availability since Q4. This has been down to a mixture of reasons including transferees to WT either reducing their hours or leaving the station altogether. On a positive note, it is anticipated before the middle of Q2, 3 of those on OCTP at the station will move into development and be classed as critical crew for the station.

3.25 Hungerford's availability has fluctuated in Q1 due to key personnel being either on restricted duties or sick. However, the station had a new starter and should also see another firefighter become part of critical crewing for the station in Q2.

3.26 The appointment of a temporary watch manager at Lambourn has had a positive impact on morale and a new firefighter that joined in Q1 is making good progress with their OCTP.

- 3.27 Maidenhead's On Call availability tends to fluctuate from month to month as crewing is predominately reliant on dual contract personnel. This is being addressed with a drive to increase the number of purely On-Call firefighters. Positive recruitment at the station has resulted in six new firefighters joining the station in Q1 who are currently working through their OCTP.
- 3.28 Mortimer saw a marginal decrease but still managed to maintain its availability at over 65% during Q1. Mortimer also welcomed a recruit to the station in Q1.

#### **4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS**

##### **4.1 Commitment 3 – 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.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The use of pre-arranged overtime (PAOT) continues to support a lean crewing model and to mitigate the effects of vacancies, sickness and absences for training.

#### **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Reliance on pre-arranged overtime to maintain appliance availability could lead to conflict with the following two clauses of the Grey Book:

*(25) Employees are free to volunteer to work pre-arranged overtime for no more than twenty-four hours per month, averaged over a six-month period.*

*(26) 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'*

#### **7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 None identified.

#### **8. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The provision of sufficient minimum qualified firefighters and appliance availability is listed as a corporate risk under risk 681. It is monitored by the Director of Service Delivery, and, as necessary, treatments are reported to the Senior Leadership Team and the Audit and Governance Committee.

#### **9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE**

- 9.1 None identified.

**10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

10.1 None

**11. APPENDICES**

11.1 None

**12. CONTACT DETAILS**

12.1 Katie Mills, Assistant Chief Fire Officer/Director of Service Delivery

12.2 Tom Brandon, Area Manager, Response and Resilience