

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE OF MEETING	13 NOVEMBER 2024
SUBJECT	EFFICIENCY AND PRODUCTIVITY PLAN UPDATE
LEAD OFFICER	KATIE MILLS, ASSISTANT CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR JEFF BROOKS
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	DECISION

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the progress against delivering the commitments set out on the Efficiency and Productivity Plan 2024-27, as agreed by Fire Authority in February 2024.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Fire Authority:

- 2.1 **NOTE** the progress against delivery the commitments made in the Efficiency and Productivity Plan 2024-27, and the use of the Transformation Fund to support the delivery of this programme.
- 2.2 **AGREE** that six monthly progress updates against the Authority’s Efficiency and Productivity Plan updates be provided to the Management Committee.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 The Fire Authority agreed the Efficiency and Productivity (E&P) Plan 2024-27 in February 2024. The E&P Plan was drawn up with the express purpose of maximising the resources available to support the Fire Authority’s purpose and vision, as set out in the Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan. The projects identified in the Plan seek to improve ways of working through business process improvement, better utilisation of resources and effective use of technology.
- 3.2 The E&P Plan sets out an efficiency target of £535k for 2024/25, alongside identified areas of focus to support the delivery of productivity gains. The identified efficiencies are intended to enable the release of resources to be reinvested into frontline service delivery, for example, through funding of 10 additional wholtime firefighters. Progress against the efficiency target will be reported via the budget monitoring reports to Management Committee on a quarterly basis.

3.3 To support the delivery of the E&P Plan, a Productivity Programme has been established to oversee delivery of business improvement and transformational change projects. The Programme for 2024/25 consists of the following projects:

3.4 Understanding Organisational Productivity

3.4.1 The purpose of this project is to better understand data requirements for assessing current levels of productivity within the Service. The project is reviewing current data sets and identifying opportunities to improve our understanding of organisational capacity.

3.4.2 As part of this project we are carrying out time and motion studies across the Service to better understand where staff are losing time to inefficient business processes and systems. The project will identify ways in which we can release capacity in support of organisational priorities such as the training and development of our operational staff. The time and motion studies will also be key to understanding whether we have realised the intended 'time saving' benefits of our E&P Plan projects.

3.4.3 The project has recently trialled time and motion studies in four stations and is in the process of analysing the findings. The findings will be used to inform future projects as part of the Productivity Programme. We are shortly due to commence similar time and motion studies in Prevention and Protection.

Further information on the objectives and expected benefits of this work is contained in **Appendix A**.

3.5 Better use of Microsoft 365

3.5.1 Significant progress has been made by the Service in its adoption of Microsoft 365. We have been focusing on employing the Microsoft 365 toolset more widely across the Service, to improve our ways of working through automation and augmentation by artificial intelligence. To continue this journey, we have recruited a Microsoft 365 and Process Improvement Specialist, utilising the Transformation Fund, to continue to drive the adoption, consolidation and automation of activities within the Microsoft 365 ecosystem and create a pathway for all staff to improve their skills within the platform.

3.5.2 A project has been commissioned to deliver business process improvement through the use of Microsoft 365. The objectives of this project are to:

- **Improve data management:** The establishment of a clear governance structure will ensure data integrity and security through Microsoft 365.
- **Improve management information:** Introducing digital solutions will make the data more consistent, visible and reportable.
- **Increase efficiency:** Optimising the utilisation of SharePoint and Microsoft Productivity apps will provide team members with the tools they need to work more efficiently.

- **Better Knowledge Management:** Enforcing a single source of truth for all organisational data, reducing confusion.
- **Streamlined Request and Prioritisation Process:** Creating a clear request and prioritisation tool for visibility and tracking will streamline workflows and allow customers to see that the service is investing in making the process of delivering efficiencies more streamlined and transparent.
- **Standardising knowledge:** introduction of training sessions both for existing and new employees will improve adoption to Microsoft.

3.5.3 In addition to a project looking broadly at the use of Microsoft 365, a separate project has been commissioned to introduce the use of **Microsoft Power Bi**, a data visualisation platform, to the Service. Power Bi will enable staff to visualise and analyse data to support business intelligence and enable more effective management of services. Currently, the process for accessing performance information is time consuming and can be, for a non-specialist user, inaccessible and challenging to analyse.

3.5.4 The integration of Power Bi will release management time and enable greater access to live performance information, through integration with data held in our existing systems, into a single management platform. This work has started and we are currently developing Power Bi with information related to our operational risk visits to test our use of the system, with an anticipated go live date for this information of January 2025.

3.5.5 A presentation will accompany this report at the Fire Authority to provide a selection of case studies to demonstrate how work undertaken to date is already achieving efficiency savings and productivity gains for the Authority, particularly in relation to the use of Microsoft 365.

3.6 Protection and Prevention Improved Ways of Working

3.6.1 The Service has identified a need to replace its IBIS system, which effectively acts as a database for the risk information held by the Service and is used in support of risk-critical Service Delivery activity.

3.6.2 The system was built in-house for Fire Safety and Incident Data and has grown exponentially over the years to hold a vast amount of data and information. IBIS continues to be maintained, developed and supported in-house and requires specialist support. As a result of its specialist nature and the criticality of the system in supporting the delivery of Protection and Prevention activity its ongoing use has been identified as a Corporate Risk (Risk 955).

3.6.3 Critical to the system is the 'Addressbase' data which is used to identify premise information, to identify community risk and operational risk information. The Service has identified improvements that can be made to our management of this data and the business processes that support its use (Corporate Risk 954).

3.6.4 The replacement of IBIS, underpinned by improved management and use of data, is a significant project that will span multiple years. To support the delivery of the project, we are recruiting a specialist Business Analyst using Transformation

Funding to produce and analyse current processes and data flows. The Business Analyst will use this information to identify, implement and evaluate improvements and new ways of working, ensuring robust processes and governance is in place to maintain accurate data and specify the requirements of a system replacement for IBIS.

3.6.5 Following the recruitment to this post, we will be scoping the project further and developing a Project Initiation Document.

3.7 Assets and Standard Checks Digitisation Pilot

3.7.1 We require a fully integrated system in which to effectively capture assets whilst enabling the accurate tracking of their value. This project will result in us reviewing and automating business processes to enable auditing of equipment on appliances. This will enable us to reduce the effort taken to perform standard equipment checks by crews, whilst improving our physical and financial management of assets.

3.7.2 The automation of the 'equipment checking' process, where firefighters manually check their appliances to ensure all items are present, was identified as a potential opportunity to deliver productivity gains on station. This new process would comprise of placing coded labels on each item of equipment to be scanned by the user. This would result in a quick inventory checking mechanism via RBFRS' core operational system Firewatch (FW) as opposed to staff manually scribing and uploading the information. It would also ensure any new items purchased by Stores are tracked and included on budgetary reporting where appropriate and that there is a record of decommissioning and disposal of items. Maintenance information and the ability to report defects will also be accessible via the coding. It will flag to the user when equipment tests are due or when it is due for decommissioning. Effectively this will result in complete management of assets throughout their life cycle.

3.7.3 Time and motion studies will be used to support understanding of time saved by crews. The project team estimates standard checks account for 240 hours per annum. The pilot anticipates a 66% saving in time spent on this activity post automation.

3.7.4 We are currently trialling the automation of this process with stations via the Firewatch system. The pilot is expected to be evaluated against set criteria by April 2025. Further information on the objectives and expected benefits of this work is contained in **Appendix B**.

3.8 Staff Development System Replacement

3.8.1 RBFRS operates a range of electronic systems and manual processes to facilitate and manage staff development and the performance management of individuals and teams. The processes and systems are not integrated and their fitness for purpose is increasingly in question. This project will support improved usability and accessibility for managers and staff, to reduce time and capacity associated with procuring, managing, administering, and using multiple systems, and to improve data intelligence and reporting to support organisational growth, development, and performance.

3.8.2 The project is targeting implementation of the new solution by September 2025. The project is currently at a procurement stage. Further information on the objectives and expected benefits of this work is contained in **Appendix C**.

3.9 Finance System Replacement

3.9.1 With our current financial system at end of life and support ceasing in December 2024, the Finance System Replacement Project will procure and implement a new and modern finance system.

3.9.2 The project will review and refresh processes and procedures, introducing new ways of working in Finance and Procurement, and automation where possible. The project aims to introduce a modern cloud solution enabling improved integration, providing a functionally richer system minimising manual tasks, introducing data visualisations, and reducing organisational risk. This results in improved productivity and produces cost efficiencies in the longer term.

3.9.3 The project is currently at a procurement stage. Further information on the objectives and expected benefits of this work is contained in **Appendix D**.

3.10 Further to projects identified above, a number of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) priorities also support the delivery of the E&P Plan including the recent changes to the Automatic Fire Alarms Policy and Priority Six and the provision of 14 appliances through the utilisation of on-call and wholetime resources. The Service is in the process of establishing and resourcing a project to deliver Priority Three of the CRMP which sets out that we will develop our response model to ensure that we are providing the most effective response to incidents within Berkshire, ensuring that it is aligned to the risks identified, sustainable and provides value for money. Additional resources to support the delivery of this work has been enabled via the Transformation Fund.

3.11 The E&P Plan also has interdependencies with the delivery of the Strategic Assets Investment Framework. As well as addressing immediate pressures in the revenue budget, it is essential that we plan to reduce future pressures. To this end, over the medium-term, the Authority has devoted a proportion of its capital expenditure to invest-to-save projects that will not only lower utility costs but also reduce our carbon emissions. Projects that are being progressed over the medium term are set out in the Authority's Strategic Asset Investment Framework. In support of these commitments, the Authority recently approved the Sustainability Strategy with the Chair and Chief Fire Officer signing the Sustainable Development Policy Statement.

3.12 Further to the specific projects identified with the E&P Plan, the Head of Business Information and Systems is currently developing a new ICT Strategy to build on previous iterations. The 2024-2029 ICT Strategy will harness the best available technology, to enhance service delivery, operational efficiency and resilience. Building on the progress made during 2019-2024 this Strategy will address emerging public sector trends and will incorporate advancements in ICT and data, including artificial intelligence, to future-proof the organisation's capabilities. The new Strategy has been drafted and is intended to build further upon our use of Microsoft 365 and will be key to identifying future projects to support the delivery of the Efficiency and Productivity Plan.

- 3.13 The Fire Authority has allocated £900k to a Transformation Fund to support improved ways of working within the Service. Whilst this Fund is not exclusively allocated to the E&P Plan (as organisational transformation extends beyond this programme of work) a significant amount of this funding has been set aside to resource the delivery of the projects associated with this Plan. Table 1 includes all funding that has been allocated to-date.
- 3.14 As Table 1 sets out, most of this funding has now been allocated. Whilst this funding has enabled a good deal of progress, the potential for future change and improvement is vast and as we identify opportunities for business improvement and better use of technology, our ability to deliver against this programme may be limited by existing capacity and capabilities.

Table 1 – Transformation Fund

Description	Period	Funding Allocated
Asset Management Project Assistant	18 Months	33,320
M65 and Business Process Improvement Specialist	2 Years	93,938
Business Analyst – Prevention and Protection	18 Months	105,000
Technical Project Manager	2 Years	136,210
Community & Risk Analyst	18 Months	58,743
CRMP Priority Three Group Manager Change and Improvement	2 Years	148,867
CRMP Priority Three Station Manager Change and Improvement	2 Years	128,606
Organisational Development Project Manager*	12 Months	93,150
Learning and Development Project Manager*	12 Months	80,730
Unallocated		21,436
Allocated		878,564

*These posts are in place to support the delivery of the Service's Culture Plan and People Strategy and do not form part of the E&P Plan.

- 3.15 As part of the Efficiency and Productivity Programme, we have developed a range of tools to support both the prioritisation of future work, alongside the tracking of benefits associated with our commissioned work. In future reports to Management Committee, we will be reporting on the prioritisation of our work plans, as well as the benefits realised through these workstreams and the return on investment in transformational change by the fire Authority.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 The priorities set out in the E&P Plan is supports the delivery of all six Strategic Commitments.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The report sets out the use of the Transformation Fund to support the delivery of the current projects within the E&P Plan.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Fire Authority has a statutory duty to manage its budget and spend money properly and appropriately and ensure the efficient and effective use of their resources, pursuing all feasible opportunities to keep costs down while discharging their core duties effectively.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 All projects within the Efficiency Productivity Programme are equality impact accessed.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Corporate Risk: A number of the projects identified within the E&P Plan, directly contribute to managing and mitigating identified Corporate Risk.
- 8.2 Transformation Funding: The identification of future improvements and transformation may be limited by existing capacity and capabilities.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 9.1 In the development of all projects, the Service will consider the opportunities to collaborate in support of the Efficiency and Productivity Plan.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 10.1 Senior Leadership Team

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Efficiency and Productivity Plan 2024-2027
- 11.2 Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan 2023-2027
- 11.3 Strategic Asset Investment Framework

12. APPENDICES

12.1 Appendix A: Understanding Organisational Capacity

12.2 Appendix B: Asset and Standard Checks Digitisation

12.3 Appendix C: Staff Development System

12.4 Appendix D: Finance Replacement System

13. CONTACT DETAILS

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

Understanding Organisational Capacity

Objectives:

- Understand the data requirements for assessing current levels of productivity / efficiency across the Organisation. This project will only cover data that is pertinent to improving productivity of our workforce.
- Build understanding of our Capacity Vs What we do, through the Utilisation Survey, Time and Motion Studies, current data sets and other data sources.
- With a focus initially on Response, moving to Protection and Prevention and then the Wider Service. Produce a detailed analysis and recommendations for improvement where appropriate.
- Enhance our productivity metrics to demonstrate how the organisation measures productivity.
- Make recommendations for the utilisation of new applications and processes to contribute towards continuous improvement.
- Satisfy the HMICFRS area for improvement linked to the efficiency pillar as described above.
- Identify an appropriate resource to establish and implement a benefits tracker to monitor Productivity and Efficiency gains.
- The sector is continually developing in this area. This project will consciously maintain a close link into the wider sector and where appropriate will consider whether what the sector is establishing would be beneficial for RBFRS to adopt.

Benefits:

- New opportunities to improve the data quality in relation to the productivity of its workforce.
- Improved understanding of the capacity of its workforce with a view of recommending some changes to improve productivity.
- Reinvestment of staff capacity to support the delivery of organisational priorities.
- The improvements provided by this project will ensure RBFRS is able to meet the requirements as set out by HMICFRS in the efficiency area of an inspection.
- Better understanding of technology that is required to improve productivity.
- With a high proportion of the Operational workforce being in development, it is envisaged that this project, using the data available, will ensure sufficient time is being spent on training and development.

Assets and Standard Checks Digitisation

Pilot Objectives:

- Assess operational equipment data on Firewatch to ensure it has consistent terminology and is up to date on a locker-by-locker basis for pumping appliances selected for the trial
- To set up a comprehensive taxonomy that can categorise all equipment items, locker by locker for pumping appliances on the trial stations
- Test the proposed scanning concept from equipment tagging to data capture
- To fully engage the operational user group on the trial stations to gain buy in and gather improvement suggestions
- Provide provision of reports to assist with the process and for appreciation of managers
- To replicate the scanning process for special appliances on completion of the pumping appliances

Benefits:

- Efficiencies in inventory checking by station staff
- Improved quality of recorded equipment data by eliminating the need to manually update an Excel spreadsheet
- Enable full audit trail for entire life cycle of all operational items
- Efficiencies in returning equipment after swap over at an incident

Staff Development System

Objectives:

- To implement a transparent, integrated, intuitive HR information and learning management system to facilitate organisational growth, development, and performance.
- Provide staff with a user friendly and intuitive system to drive their own development and performance.
- Facilitate managers in robustly managing the development and performance of individual staff members and teams.
- Simplify and negate the use of multiple electronic and manual systems, digitising these processes and the overly complex and time-consuming administration procedures being used currently.
- Improve integration of systems and processes, to provide a one stop shop, to achieve time saving and capacity efficiencies for managers and staff.
- Improve the relevance, accuracy, and usefulness of data. Ability to interrogate data, and improve trend identification, analytics, data intelligence and reporting to provide a better evidence base for decision making and risk management.
- Provide accessibility from a range of devices, meeting accessibility standards (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines - WCAG).
- Improve the resilience of our development, support and performance capability by partnering with a supplier who can host the new solution and provide industry experts to help evolve the application moving forward, therefore providing a future proof solution.
- Provide data storage, with streamlined and improved archiving and destruction processes, supporting compliance with GDPR and ease of access to information for reporting.

Benefits to be Delivered

- The new system will release time and capacity across the Service in creating an improved and intuitive user experience.
- The solution may improve organisational capacity, staff development timeframes, lack of experience in the operational cohort and data compliance, reducing risk in these areas.
- Improved data storage and reporting will aid decision making and risk management and assist compliance with audits and external verifiers.
- The streamlining of systems will improve the ability to comply with Equality Act and General Data Protection Regulations and Data Subject Access Requests as information will be more accessible and contained in one place.
- Ability to progress talent management, succession planning and identification of potential through greater visibility of staff development and performance outcomes.

Measures of success and benefits realisation need to be further defined once the new solution is procured and understood.

In addition, non-monetary benefits are as follows.

- Time and capacity burden for all staff and managers reduced as:
 - Data for performance management and staff development held in one place.
 - Ability to manage concurrent development and performance activity from one place managed through dashboards.
 - Current manual processes digitised (e.g. PDR).
 - Course bookings switch to self-service.
 - Reduces training burden and upskilling requirements – only need to know how to use one system.

- Time and capacity burden for managers/central teams (R&D, HR, BIS, Procurement) reduced as:
 - Minimises volume of procurement processes required.
 - Minimises volume of contract management requirements.
 - System development, ongoing administration and support reduced from 3-5 systems to one system.
 - Additional reporting functionality.

- Improved accessibility going forward as:
 - System available across a range of devices.
 - WCAG compliance.
 - Information not currently digitised will be accessible.
 - New opportunities for data intelligence to inform decision-making and risk management.
 - Integration with other RBFRS systems (e.g. Firewatch and MS 365).

- Security improvements.
 - Security improvements, including single sign on.
 - Compliance with GDPR records and data in one place, with more effective storage, interrogation, and destruction of data.

- Future focused/future proof solution.
 - Solution fit for the future.
 - Solution provides the foundation for future developments and enhancements.

Finance System Replacement

Objectives:

Phase 0:

- Procurement of new solution, via framework. **(November)**

Phase 1, by October 2025:

- Introduce a new finance solution, providing core finance capability, with minimum disruption to existing users and the day to day running of organisation.
- Identify and deliver process efficiencies through automation and new ways of working.
- Comprehensive training and support to existing and new users, in preparation for rollout.
- Provide accessible reporting, including the ability to collate reports using non-financial information from other RBFRS systems, e.g. headcount data
- Implement budget forecasting.
- Proof of concept for Contracts Management module.
- Ensure appropriate level of support is available from the Finance Systems Manager and IT.
- Resolve basic level user issues in-house.

Full implementation of the Budget Module, to support budget setting, and full utilisation of the Contracts Module, will follow the initial October implementation (date TBC).

Any additional future phases will be subject to an approved business case. Future phases could include:

- Fixed Assets module.
- Stock Inventory module.
- Expenses module, to replace Certify.
- Payroll, to replace Dataplan.

Benefits:

- Reduces financial risk due to reconciliation.
- Mitigates the risk of working on an unsupported system.

- Better user experience/ users happier to engage with processes. Measure – user feedback/survey.
- Non-financial, real-time data to be held and used in a finance system e.g. establishment.
- Better assurance of the finance function thereby proving, to the Fire Authority, that RBFRS is providing value for money
- Increased process automation and less manual intervention leading to fewer mistakes.
- Increased efficiency in financial activities.
- Removal of old server and associated costs.