

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	04 DECEMBER 2024
SUBJECT	QUARTER TWO APPLIANCE AVAILABILITY TO MEET CORPORATE MEASURES 14, 15 & 16
LEAD OFFICER	AREA MANAGER RESPONSE AND RESILIENCE
LEAD MEMBER	N/A
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	TO NOTE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides information on quarter two performance with a supporting narrative on the whole-time duty system, on-call duty system, and combined appliance availability.
- 1.2 Whole-time availability across the quarter was 95.2% against a target of 97.4%. This is a 2.5% decrease in comparison to Q1.
- 1.3 On-call appliance availability through the quarter was 35.5% against a target of 50%. This represents a 1.4% increase in comparison to Q1.
- 1.4 Baseline provision of 14 or more pumping appliances, combined whole-time and on-call, was 70.7% against a target of 100%. This is a 20.5% reduction in performance compared to the 91.2% recorded in Q1. *[Performance against this measure is calculated based on whole shifts rather than minutes as with whole-time appliance availability].*
- 1.5 Against a corporate measure target of 75% of emergency incidents attended in 10 minutes, the Service achieved 68.5%.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Management Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTE** the 2024/25 quarter two performance of **95.2%** appliance availability of the Service's 14 whole-time appliances, in line with Corporate Measure 14¹.
- 2.2 **NOTE** the 2024/25 quarter two overall on-call appliance availability performance of **35.5%**, in line with Corporate Measure 15².

2.3 **NOTE** the 2024/25 quarter two performance of **70.7%** of shifts where 14 or more pumping appliances were available, in line with Corporate Measure 16³.

3. REPORT

Response Standard:

3.1 The Response Standard during this period was below the target of 75%, at 68.5% of all incidents reached within 10 minutes of time of first emergency call being answered. This is a reduction from the Q1 performance of 74.7% and below the Q2 performance from the previous year of 72.9%.

3.2 The number of incidents in Q2, 2103, was 9% higher than the 1931 recorded in the previous quarter, which is consistent with the traditionally higher demand experienced during the summer months. The table below highlights both the lower incident demand at night, and the superior performance against the response standard. The lower incident demand and reduced traffic volume overnight can positively impact both call handling and travel times:

Q2 2024	Average Incidents per hour	Response Standard Performance
Day	1.2	65.52%
Night	0.8	70.96%

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 was little changed from Q2 but remained below target throughout the quarter. This will have been partially due to the relatively high call volumes that we see over the summer period in Q2. Spate conditions due to flooding meant call volumes in September were particularly high, and on a par with the five-year maximum recorded for the month. This has had a significant impact on call handling and travel times during that month.

3.6 Worthy of note is the introduction, on 20 September of the change in policy to reduce attendance at automatic fire alarms. Early indicators are that the decision to stop mobilising fire engines to some low and medium risk premises has had a positive impact on call handling times, but a full evaluation will follow.

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- 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 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.
- 3.9 Much of the reduction in performance against the response standard compared to Q1 can be attributed to appliance travel times, which dropped off significantly because of the increase in call volumes that are associated with the summer months in Q2. Unusually, September recorded higher incident numbers than July or August as a result of demand driven by spate flooding conditions.
- 3.10 The degradation of appliances is discussed below in more detail but it's impact on the response standard is worthy of note here because modelling shows that even with a single appliance degraded, we can see an impact between 0.6% and 4.5%. During Q2 at least one appliance was degraded on 80 occasions – 43% of the 184 shifts in Q2. While modelling for the impact of multiple appliance degradation is highly complex and uncertain, it is reasonable to expect the impact to worsen with increasing numbers.
- 3.11 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.

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Whole-time Duty System Appliance Availability

- 3.13 This section of the report provides the 2024/25 quarter two performance update against Corporate Measure 14, which is the *percentage of whole-time frontline pumping appliance availability*. Overall availability for the quarter was 95.2% against a target of 97.4%.
- 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.
- 3.15 Very high demand for leave during the summer months is a regular feature of Q2 that impacts staffing and reduces the availability of appliances and this year was no exception. That reduction was amplified as result of a corresponding increase in absence due to ill health. Disappointingly, the downward trend in sickness absence was reversed, with 8.2% of station-based staff working time lost in Q2, compared with 5.8% in Q1. This sickness, combined with the high demand for leave and limited uptake for PAOT resulted in one or more appliances being degraded during 47 day shifts and 33 night shifts.
- 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 reduced from 12 in Q1 to four in Q2, substantially lower than the 12 that were predicted. However, when added to the predicted 22 leavers for the rest of the year, the annual total would equal the previous record of 38 leavers 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 £586,000 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 arrived on stations in November should ensure a healthy buffer above establishment. This should reduce the Service's reliance on PAOT to maintain baseline service provision for Q3 onwards.
- 3.18 By virtue of staff turnover during the past two years, the Service now has a significant proportion (38%) 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.

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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 Q2 was 35.5%, a 1.4% improvement compared with Q1 performance but still 14.5% below target and 2.9% lower than the same period last year.
- 3.20 The Q2 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.
2024/25	34.1%	35.5%		
2023/24	46.5%	38.4%	33.5%	41.5%
2022/23	44.4%	40.3%	35.9%	41.7%

Year on year comparison

- 3.21 The table below shows availability performance by quarter for the year-to-date. Performance improved in Q2 at all stations except for Lambourn and Mortimer:

5. Percentage of hours where there is adequate crewing on on-call frontline pumping appliances (based on 24/7 crewing)					2024/25
Station	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Year to Q2
Crowthorne	43.2%	51.7%			47.5%
Hungerford	38.8	40.4%			39.6%
Lambourn	3.7%	3.3%			3.5%
Maidenhead	19.0%	25.7%			22.4%
Mortimer	65.8%	56.5%			61.1%

On Call fire engine availability by station.

- 3.22 Over the past 18 months, recruitment for the on-call team has been very strong, with 15 new starters, one re-joiner, a new dual contract, and two personnel returning from sabbaticals. This positive recruitment trend is

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expected to continue into Q3 of 2024/25, with five new starters confirmed and a re-joiner finalising their return to Lambourn.

- 3.23 In response to feedback, the service has reviewed the training and development for on-call recruits and is implementing ongoing improvements. These will involve more localised training and a reduction in the time recruits must take off from their primary jobs, resulting in a better work-life balance.
- 3.24 Crowthorne has seen the most significant increase in availability, rising by 7.5% from Q1 to Q2, and this trend is likely to continue. The increase is attributed to three firefighters moving out of trainee status and becoming part of the critical crew.
- 3.25 Hungerford has seen an increase in availability in Q2, with one new starter and the return of a firefighter from sabbatical. Work is currently underway to identify a new Watch Manager for the station, as the current one is due to retire early in Q3. This transition may temporarily reduce availability while staffing and crewing for the station are assessed.
- 3.26 Lambourn has experienced a boost in morale since the appointment of a temporary Watch Manager. Due to current staffing levels, this has had a minimal impact on availability. Looking ahead to Q3, expectations are more optimistic with one new starter and a former firefighter expected to rejoin the station.
- 3.27 Availability in Maidenhead has improved but remains challenging due to several personnel being on reduced-hours contracts and a large number in development. It is anticipated that six trainee firefighters will join the critical crew by the end of Q4. This should result in a significant improvement in availability from that point forward.
- 3.28 Mortimer's availability has slightly decreased this quarter due to a key firefighter transitioning to a whole-time position, necessitating changes to their on-call commitments. However, there are positive developments, as the station's newest firefighter is projected to be part of the critical crew by the end of Q3 or the start of Q4.

Combined Pumping Appliance Availability by Shift

- 3.29 This section of the report provides the 2024/25 quarter two performance update against Corporate Measure 16. This is a new measure introduced this year to assist in monitoring our compliance with our CRMP commitment to ensure a baseline service provision of 14 pumping appliances. It sets a target of 100% for the availability of 14 or more pumping appliances. Overall availability for the quarter was 70.7%, down from 91.2% in Q1.

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- 3.30 It is worthy of note that On Call appliance availability is only included as contributing to the baseline provision where an entire shift is covered - even a single hour of unavailability will mean that the contribution of On Call appliances are not counted for the entire shift. This explains why WDS availability of 14 appliances is significantly better at 95.2% than availability of 14 appliances combining WDS and On Call, which only reached 70.7%.
- 3.31 There were 14 WDS appliances available for 104 of the 184 shifts that occurred during Q2 which equates to 57%. When On Call appliances are taken into account for baseline service provision, the number of shifts with 14 or more appliances was 130 out of 184, or 70.7% of the shifts.
- 3.32 This is a significant reduction when compared to Q1 performance of 91.2%, which can be attributed to high levels of leave associated with the summer months, 16 WDS leavers during Q1 and Q2 combined, and the increase in station-based WDS sickness from 5.8% in Q1 to 8.2% in Q2.
- 3.33 The table below shows performance against this measure across all shifts and broken down by day and night shifts. It is notable that performance is significantly better for nightshifts, where demand for PAOT is higher and On Call availability is better:

Shift	Total	x14 WDS available	x14+ WDS/OC available	% of shifts with x14+ available
All	184	104	130	70.7%
Day	92	45	56	60.9%
Night	92	59	74	80.4%

Performance against CM16 overall and by day/night.

- 3.34 It is anticipated that the introduction of P6 from 16 September, combined with the arrival on stations of 18 new apprentices in November will substantially improve service performance against this measure.
- 3.35 It is also noteworthy that work is due to commence in January to address CRMP Priority Three: *“...[to] develop our response model to ensure that we are providing the most effective response to incidents with Berkshire, ensuring that it is aligned to risks identified, sustainable and provides value for money.”* The intention of P3 is to enhance the service that we deliver, and a significant part of that work will be to make sure that crewing models, ways of working, policies and procedures are all enhanced to ensure we have the right people

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with the right skills located to optimise our appliance availability and provide the most effective response.

CRMP Priority Six Update

- 3.36 Because CRMP Priority Six was not introduced until 16 September, it had a limited impact on performance in Q2. A verbal update, focusing on the period up to the end of November, will be given at the Management Committee meeting on 4 December 2024.

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:

- 6.1.1 *(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.*
- 6.1.2 *(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.

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9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

9.1 None identified.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None.

11. APPENDICES

11.1 None.

12. CONTACT DETAILS

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