

# ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



<b>COMMITTEE</b>	<b>MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>4<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2024</b>
<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>RBFA ICT STRATEGY 2024 - 2027</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	<b>LUKASZ WRONA, HEAD OF BUSINESS AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS</b>
<b>LEAD MEMBER</b>	<b>CLLR RACHELLE SHEPHERD-DUBEY</b>
<b>EXEMPT INFORMATION</b>	<b>NONE</b>
<b>ACTION</b>	<b>FOR DECISION</b>

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report introduces proposed Royal Berkshire Fire Authority’s new ICT strategy which outlines a comprehensive plan to enhance the digital capabilities of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service between 2024 - 2027.
- 1.2 The strategy focuses on leveraging advanced technology to improve service delivery, operational efficiency, and resilience, aligning with the service's vision and purpose to protect the people of Berkshire.
- 1.3 Key initiatives include the adoption of a Cloud-First approach, enhancing cyber security measures, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.
- 1.4 The strategy also emphasizes the importance of data and information intelligence, aiming to develop a unified business intelligence capability to support informed decision-making and improve outcomes for the community.

## 2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Management Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTE** the content of the document including progress since its last 2019-2024 strategy.

2.2 **NOTE** the evaluation of the RBFRS resources and capabilities within the document.

2.3 **NOTE** the action plan within the strategy document.

2.4 **APPROVE** RBFA ICT Strategy 2024-2027 (Appendix A).

### 3. **REPORT**

3.1 The Public and RBFRS workforce's expectations have significantly shifted towards full digitisation and automation of processes as reflected in public opinion surveys and RBFRS whole-staff survey and feedback.

3.2 With the proliferation of technology and assumptions of digitisation and automation, expectations of what public sector organisations should deliver are continually growing assuming continual productivity gains through adoption of new technological solutions.

3.3 RBFRS faces challenges with demand on its resources exceeding capacity across its grey and green book staff base.

3.4 The Royal Berkshire Fire Authority ICT Strategy 2024–2027 outlines a progressive and forward-looking approach to enhancing the technological and operational capabilities of the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service. It builds upon the previous strategy (2019–2024) and aligns with broader organizational priorities, including the Community Risk Management Plan, the Culture Plan, and national standards. The strategy aims to address emerging challenges, leverage technological advancements, and drive efficiencies in service delivery while maintaining a strong focus on sustainability, security, and workforce development.

3.5 The 2019–2024 strategy yielded several achievements, such as:

**Equipment Standardization:** All laptops and desktops are now consistently deployed, reducing administrative burdens and training requirements.

**Productivity Tools:** Transition to the Microsoft 365 suite has introduced a subscription-based model, enabling continuous updates and enhanced collaboration.

**Cloud Hosting Evaluation:** Microsoft Azure was identified as the most suitable solution for future system migrations, prioritizing scalability and disaster recovery.

3.6 Despite these successes, some areas faced delays. Network infrastructure improvements and the standardization of mobile devices remain ongoing priorities, with a commitment to address these gaps during the 2024–2027 period.

3.7 The Business Information and Systems (BIS) department, central to the ICT strategy, comprises several key functions, including ICT support, technical program management, systems business partnering, and information governance. While the department provides robust support for systems, applications and good information governance, challenges such as technical capability or capacity gaps exist.

3.8 Recent developments within BIS include:

- Establishment of a Technical Programme Management team to oversee ICT projects.
- Background work to enable efficiency within information governance.

3.9 Cyber security remains a significant area for improvement, with increased threats necessitating investments in specialist training and advanced risk mitigation measures.

3.10 The strategy identifies five key focus areas to drive technological and operational transformation:

1. **Technology and Infrastructure:**

- Transition to cloud-based systems, emphasizing scalability and business continuity.
- Upgrades to network infrastructure, Wi-Fi coverage, and device standards.
- Enhanced adoption of Microsoft 365 tools to enable automation and hybrid working.

2. **Data and Information Intelligence:**

- Integration of systems to enable seamless data sharing and improve reporting capabilities.
- Development of a unified business intelligence platform to support evidence-based decision-making.

3. **Processes:**

- Implementation of a “Zero paper” approach to digitize workflows and enhance sustainability.
- Adoption of Agile project management principles to increase flexibility and responsiveness.

4. **People and Capabilities:**

- Comprehensive skill gap analysis and targeted training programs to build whole-workforce proficiency in digital tools.
- Creation of ICT engagement opportunities, including an “ICT surgery” for staff support as well as introduction of “Citizen Development”.

5. **Collaboration:**

- Strengthened partnerships with Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) and Thames Valley partner organisations, as well as other fire and rescue services to align technology and processes.
- Joint procurement and shared expertise initiatives to achieve economies of scale.

3.11 The strategy sets ambitious yet achievable milestones, including:

- Migrating 70% of systems to cloud infrastructure by March 2026.
- Establishing a unified data intelligence platform by December 2026.
- Procuring a new Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system for TVFCS.
- Developing a “Zero paper” environment plan by August 2025.

3.12. These initiatives aim to modernize RBFRS operations, enhance service delivery with example anticipated ROI:

### 1. **Cloud Migration**

Moving systems to Microsoft Azure will likely reduce long-term infrastructure costs (eliminating large capital investments in on-premises hardware) and improve disaster recovery, operational resilience, and scalability.

- **Potential Savings:** Avoidance of hardware replacement cycles and energy savings from reduced data centre reliance estimated at c £20k pa, based on a single HQ data centre.
- **Operational Benefits:** Enhanced continuity and availability for critical systems.

### 2. **Standardization of Equipment**

Standardizing laptops, desktops, and mobile devices reduces procurement and administrative overhead while streamlining training and support efforts.

- **Observed Savings:** Economies of scale achieved during procurement with average £150 per laptop saved compared to RRI.
- **Efficiency Gains:** Reduced time spent troubleshooting a wide variety of devices.

### 3. **Adoption of Microsoft 365**

Transitioning to a subscription-based model has reduced peaks in capital expenditure and smoothed out costs over time.

- **Productivity Improvements:** Frequent updates and integrated tools (e.g., Teams, SharePoint) enhance collaboration and help to automate manual processes, freeing staff to focus on higher-value tasks.
- **Operational Continuity:** Remote working and hybrid working tools provide flexibility for modern work environments, enhancing staff satisfaction and retention.

### 4. **Cybersecurity Enhancements**

Investments in cybersecurity training and capability address increasing threats, reducing the likelihood of costly breaches or downtime.

- **Cost Avoidance:** Preventing cyber incidents that could disrupt operations, result in data loss, or harm RBFA reputation.

- **Operational Savings:** Automation of security tasks (e.g., classification of information via AI) reduces manual oversight requirements.

## 5. “Zero Paper” Initiative

Digitizing processes and reducing paper usage aligns with sustainability goals and operational efficiency.

- **Direct Savings:** Reduced expenditure on physical storage, paper, and printing supplies already reflected in 50% reduction in new MFD contract.
- **Compliance and Productivity Gains:** Automated workflows reduce time spent on manual documentation and enhance regulatory compliance.

## 6. Unified Business Intelligence Platform

Creating an integrated data intelligence system supports evidence-based decision-making and operational efficiencies.

- **Efficiency Gains:** Improved access to real-time data minimizes delays and enhances resource allocation.
- **Cost Avoidance:** Better insights reduce the risk of ineffective decision-making or inefficient resource utilization.

## 7. Collaboration

Joint planning, procurement, and information sharing with Thames Valley and other partners help to achieve economies of scale.

- **Cost Savings:** Shared infrastructure or services reduce duplication of effort and expenditure.
- **Operational Benefits:** Integrated systems streamline cross-organizational processes.

## 4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 Prevention: We will reduce the risk to our communities through our partnership duties and prevention education activities, ensuring that our services are accessible to all.
- 4.2 The strategy enables more effective and accessible prevention initiatives through digital tools and platforms. By adopting a unified business intelligence system and cloud technologies, RBFRS can analyse data more effectively to identify high-risk areas and target prevention education campaigns.
- 4.3 Protection: We will support those with responsibility for premises to understand their duties in ensuring the safety of all people using buildings covered by the Building Safety Act 2022 and Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, whilst ensuring that our services are accessible to all.

- 4.4 The ICT strategy aligns with the Building Safety Act 2022 and the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 by supporting the integration of systems that allow better tracking and monitoring of compliance and safety data. Improved data-sharing capabilities ensure timely and accurate information flow to those responsible for fire safety in premises, enhancing their understanding and adherence to statutory duties. The strategy's focus on automation can streamline inspections and safety reporting, further aiding compliance efforts.
- 4.5 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.
- 4.6 Enhancing technological infrastructure, such as upgrading network systems and adopting cloud-based platforms, ensures that RBFRS personnel can access critical information in real-time during incidents. The action plan includes a new Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) system to improve emergency response capabilities and resource allocation. Moreover, investments in staff training on digital tools enhance the readiness of responders to leverage technology effectively during emergencies.
- 4.7 Resilience: We will ensure we are resilient and work with our partners to promote and build resilience in the communities we serve.
- 4.8 The strategy strengthens resilience by embedding disaster recovery and business continuity as core principles of cloud migration and system upgrades. By moving to scalable and secure cloud infrastructure, RBFRS ensures uninterrupted service delivery during crises. Collaboration with partners in the Thames Valley region enhances joint resilience planning, while improved cyber security protects critical operational systems against threats.
- 4.9 Sustainability: We are committed to ensuring that we provide a financially sustainable Service and take meaningful action to help address the climate emergency.
- 4.10 Sustainability is central to the strategy, with initiatives like "zero paper" processes and energy-efficient cloud hosting contributing to environmental goals. Standardized equipment procurement reduces electronic waste, while digital workflows minimize reliance on physical resources. These measures align with the commitment to address the climate emergency and provide a financially sustainable service.
- 4.11 People: We will support our staff by providing a safe and inclusive environment for them to thrive in, building a diverse organisation that is engaged with, and accessible to, our communities.
- 4.12 The strategy prioritizes staff support by fostering a safe and inclusive environment. Investments in training ensure that all staff, regardless of

technical ability, can thrive in a digitized workplace. The introduction of initiatives such as “ICT surgeries” and remote training opportunities reflects an inclusive approach to workforce development. Additionally, digital tools improve internal communication, workload management, and accessibility, fostering engagement and well-being.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Cloud subscription costs: Transitioning to a subscription-based model shifts costs from periodic capital expenses to ongoing operational expenses. Costs already included in medium-term financial plan.
- 5.2 Upfront investment required to deliver cloud migration already provisioned for within SAIF.
- 5.3 Upfront investment in infrastructure upgrades already provisioned for within SAIF.
- 5.4 Investments in advanced threat detection tools, staff training, and compliance with cyber standards like Cyber Essentials Plus will contribute to upfront costs which are unavoidable.
- 5.5 Establishing training programs for the workforce to enhance digital literacy and aligning capabilities with technology needs will require dedicated funding.
- 5.6 Long term anticipated implications of the strategy are positive due to time saving, cost avoidance, improved resource allocation.
- 5.7 Energy savings realised progressively throughout the strategy period and beyond further contribute to positive long-term environmental and financial benefits.

## **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Positive impact on Data Protection and Privacy Compliance.
- 6.2 Adherence to industry cybersecurity standards helps to mitigate a risk of legal liability in case of cyber incidents.
- 6.3 The strategy positively contributes to accessibility and inclusion laws.
- 6.4 The strategy supports the Authority’s obligations under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (as amended by the Environment Act 2021)

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

- 7.1 Increased Accessibility of services offered by RBFRS.
- 7.2 Workforce inclusivity enhanced by training initiatives and hybrid working models.
- 7.3 Strategy will support the Authority’s ability to identify underserved or vulnerable groups in the community, allowing to target outreach programs more precisely.

- 7.4 The risk of digital exclusion will be mitigated by the focus on staff training and support.
- 7.5 EIAs for all ICT projects will be conducted to proactively identify and address potential inequalities.

## **8. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Increased use of digitised systems heightens exposure to cyber threats. This will be mitigated by investment in improved threat detection systems, staff training and adherence to secure-by-design principles.
- 8.2 Poor cost management or unforeseen expenses can result in unplanned financial expenditure. This will be mitigated by close monitoring of project budgets and contingencies built in.
- 8.3 Change resistance risk from staff who may lack the technical skill required to operate new systems will be mitigated by tailored training and skill development aligned with staff roles.

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

- 9.1 The strategy specifically addresses the duty to collaborate.

## **10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION**

- 10.1 CFO
- 10.2 Head of Finance
- 10.3 Monitoring officer

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 11.1 RBFA ICT Strategy 2019-2024 (Available upon request to Management Committee Members)

## **12. CONTACT DETAILS**

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