

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

Annual Report
» 2023 – 2024



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» Welcome

Welcome to the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) Annual Report. Over the past year, our staff have responded to numerous major events and incidents, and showcased exceptional operational readiness, while engaging with the community.

During the last year, as a Service we have tackled several major fires, protecting lives and property across Berkshire. Notable incidents include the rapid response to a large fire in central Reading, which was successfully contained without casualties.

With global media organisations reporting on the incident, our response teams did an excellent job under pressure in quickly extinguishing the fire and making the scene safe. We are grateful to the crane operator, Glen Edwards, and his team for their amazing efforts in rescuing a man from the 8th floor of the building prior to our arrival.

At the start of April, a fire broke out at a house in Erleigh Road, Reading, which tragically claimed the lives of two people, Naseem Khalid and Mohammed Hussain. However, due to the lifesaving actions of crews, three others were rescued. We thank all those that responded bravely in such difficult circumstances. But of course not all our work makes headlines and there are many people that deserve to be commended for their professionalism and dedication to their roles, so we recognised more staff and volunteers at our Awards Ceremony at Welford Park, near Newbury in September.

The Service played a crucial role during periods of severe flooding following Storm Henk in January. Our teams worked tirelessly to evacuate residents, protect properties, and manage flood defences. The region experienced several intense storms, during which RBFRS provided essential support by clearing fallen trees, securing damaged structures, and ensuring public safety.

This year the Fire Authority approved plans to invest in new training facilities and fleet to further strengthen RBFRS' capability to respond to communities across Berkshire. This includes refurbishment of the training centre at Whitley Wood, Reading, as well as the replacement of a number of our front line vehicles including new Fire Appliances, with allocated investment of approximately £6 million.

Our inspection report by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, was published in January 2023. The report confirmed that RBFRS is providing a good service to the public – and this verdict has only been possible thanks to each and every one of our staff that has worked tirelessly for the safety of our communities.

As we move forward, we extend our gratitude to the dedicated firefighters, staff, and volunteers who embody our values of service, integrity, and professionalism every day.



**Councillor
Jeff Brooks**

Chair,
Royal Berkshire
Fire Authority



Wayne Bowcock

Chief Fire Officer
and Chief Executive,
Royal Berkshire Fire
and Rescue Service

» Your Fire and Rescue Service

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service provides prevention, protection, and response services across the County of Berkshire.

Twelve wholtime fire stations and four on-call fire stations cover 488 square miles from Langley in the East to Lambourn in the West. It serves a diverse cultural population of approximately 959,000, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

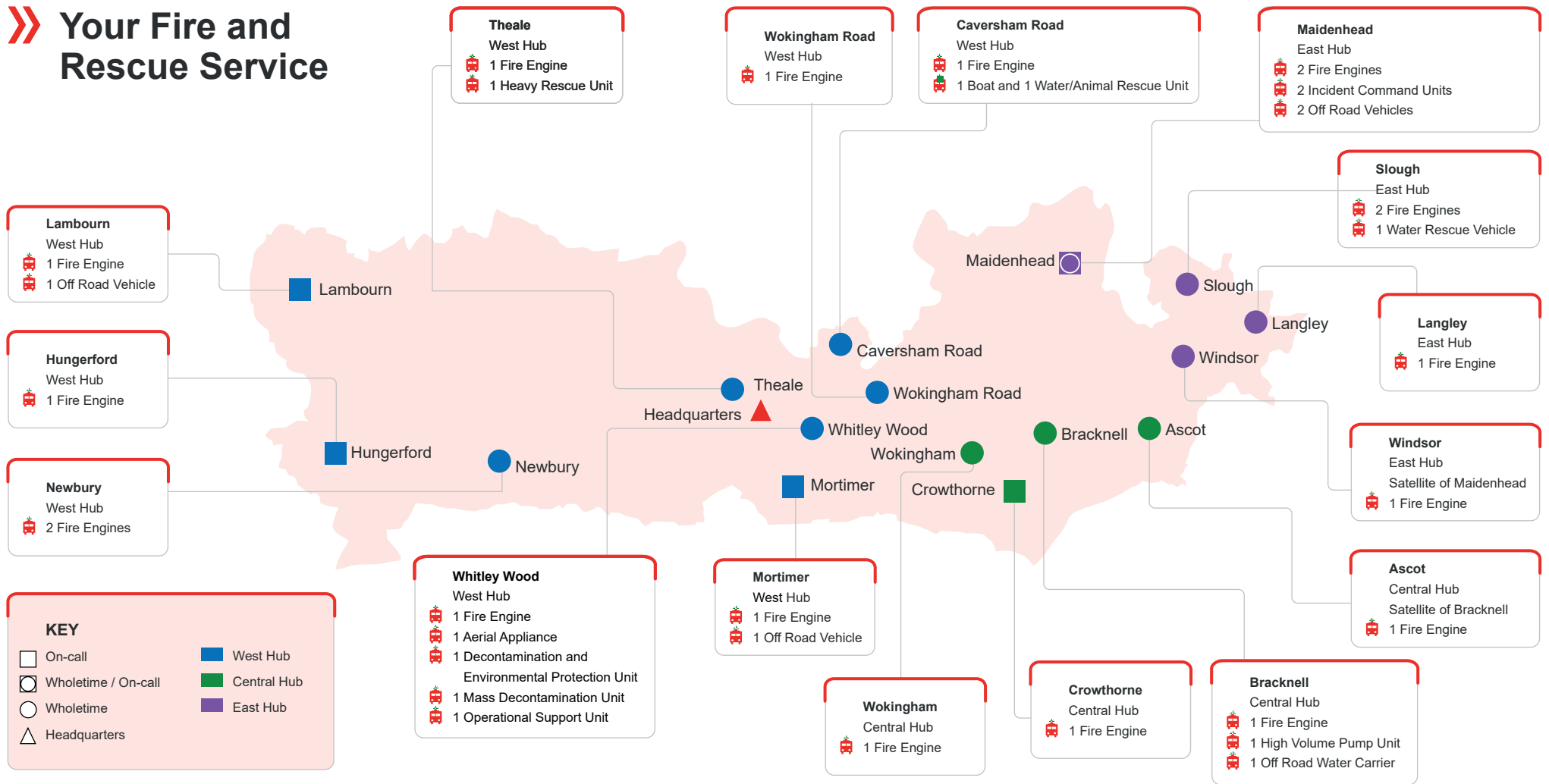
The Service's highly-trained fire crews deal with incidents ranging from road and rail accidents to fuel and chemical spills, aviation and waterway accidents, collapsed buildings, large animal rescues, and, of course, fires.

Along with providing a swift and effective response to incidents, one of the Service's aims is to educate people on how to prevent fires and other emergencies. Our Service works with schools, businesses, residents, and community groups throughout Royal Berkshire to raise awareness and educate people about a wide variety of safety issues.

The Service has joined forces with Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service and Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service to establish a shared emergency call handling centre, Thames Valley Fire Control Service.



» Your Fire and Rescue Service



Fire Stations		Staff		Incidents attended 2023-2024		Prevention & Protection 2023-2024	
Wholetime	11	Non-operational	175	All Emergency Incidents	8,026	Safe and Well Visits	5,260
On-call	4	Wholetime	371	Fires in the home	368	Fire Safety Audits	716
Wholetime and On-call	1	On-call	53	Fires in other buildings	152	Building consultations	774
		Control Staff	41	Road traffic collisions	452		
		Volunteers	11	Flooding	252		
				Water rescues	86		
				Other incidents	6,716		

» About Us - Community Risk Management Plan

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service produces a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) to ensure we deliver the right resources at the right time, in the right place.

The CRMP balances resources against risk. Our CRMP contains information on what RBFRS is going to do over a five-year period and is supported by annual action plans.

RBFRS has a Programme Board to ensure that it meets the statutory requirements of the CRMP process whilst supporting the achievement of the strategic commitments and objectives.

The board provides leadership and support for the delivery of the CRMP programme, which is outlined in the Corporate Plan and CRMP 2023-27, which outlines six key priorities for the four year period:

1. We will develop our Integrated Service Delivery Strategy to meet the changing profile of risk in Berkshire due to climate change, societal and technological shifts.
2. We will develop a Risk Based Prevention Programme to target those most vulnerable and at risk from emergency incidents.
3. 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

4. We will review the incidents that do not form part of our core statutory responsibilities, to better understand the implications for the Service in attending these incidents. Notwithstanding the review of our response and the gathering of this data, public safety will remain the primary priority of the Service.
5. We will develop our Service to reduce the impact of fire safety issues in commercial buildings.
6. 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.

The Programme Board makes recommendations for consideration by the Fire Authority through its CRMP Working Party.

We manage the risks we identify through an integrated approach. This means we consider the full range of treatments we have at our disposal and identify the most effective and efficient way to reduce community risk.



» Social Media Highlights



Followers: **9,567**
New followers: **1,431**
Impressions: **2,139,777**
Engagements: **30,132**



Users: **333,000**
Page Views: **551,000**
Form Submissions: **8,465**
File Downloads: **18,508**



Followers: **2,715**
New followers: **336**
Reach: **7,800**
Engagements: **1,800**



Hours watched: **759.6**
Views: **35,000**
Subscribers: **544**
New subscribers: **90**



Followers: **11,683**
New followers: **141**
Impressions: **976,306**
Engagements: **8,780**



Followers: **2,942**
New followers: **523**
Impressions: **155,728**
Posts: **328**

» Timeline of the Last Year



Largest Apprentice Cohort Graduates at Newbury

On Friday, 12 May, the Service welcomed 23 new Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices in a graduation ceremony at Newbury Fire Station. As part of the apprenticeship, the recruits raised £15,000 for The Fire Fighters Charity by cycling 500 miles, the distance of Windsor to Balmoral on static bikes.



Supporting Pride Month 2023 Across Berkshire

On Saturday, 10 June, Firefighters from Bracknell Fire Station attended the first ever official Bracknell Pride event.

A few weeks later on Saturday, 24 June, Blue Watch from Newbury Fire Station represented the Service at Newbury Pride for the second year running.



Recognising Outstanding Public Service

Our Awards Ceremony took place on 9 September, coinciding with Emergency Services Day, at Welford Park near Newbury. Staff who have dedicated 20 and 30 years of Service were recognised during the Ceremony, while a number of staff awards were also presented on the day.

April 2023

May 2023

June 2023

July 2023

August 2023

September 2023

Service Responds to Major Fire on Erleigh Road

On Wednesday, 5 April, crews responded to a serious fire on Erleigh Road in Reading. Over 40 members of staff attended the incident to tackle the blaze and, in the aftermath of the fire, over 100 residents were visited and 80 Safe and Well Visits were completed.

Refurbishment at Maidenhead

First started in September 2022, the final stage of Maidenhead Fire Station's refurbishment programme was completed in May 2023. The refurbishment project considered recommendations from the EDI work stream and the Service's Contaminants Policy so that our station environments are more inclusive and better protect staff from contaminants.

BA Donations to Ukraine

89 BA sets and 304 air cylinders were donated by the Service as part of the latest convoy that was sent to Ukraine. The donation of this equipment was a national effort, coordinated by the charity FIRE AID UK and the National Fire Chiefs Council. Our Service also donated water rescue equipment to support those engulfed by floods in southern Ukraine after a major dam was destroyed.



Fire Cadets Impress at Graduation

On Wednesday, 5 July, 37 Fire Cadets demonstrated their new skills at a Graduation Ceremony at Newbury Fire Station. During the event, cadets from Crowthorne, Maidenhead, Newbury, and Whitley Wood demonstrated a range of skills required to deal with different emergency fire and rescue scenarios.

Year Two of the Summer Internship

In July and August, we welcomed five new interns as part of The Summer Internship Scheme aimed at 16 and 17 year olds from underrepresented groups. The five-week placement saw five Interns rotating across several departments and visiting six fire stations.



Reading Pride 2023

On Saturday, 2 September, staff from across the Service took part in Reading Pride, talking about our Service, fire safety advice and career opportunities.

»» Timeline of the Last Year



Second Wholetime Apprentice Cohort

An unprecedented second cohort of Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices graduated within a calendar year on Friday, 10 November.

The graduates celebrated months of training and hard work with family and friends at the Ceremony and were presented with certificates.



Fire in Central Reading Makes Headlines

At 11:38am on Thursday, 23 November, we received reports of a fire on Station Hill in Reading. At its peak, over 50 firefighters were on the scene from fire stations across the County. Additionally, the Aerial Ladder Platform and Incident Command Unit was sent to the scene, alongside six Officers.



Service Responds to Thames Valley Flooding

At the start of January, the Service was called to action in response to significant flooding events in Berkshire and across the Thames Valley. At the height of the flooding, Firefighters from across the County assisted with the evacuation of vulnerable people from the village of Wraysbury.

October 2023

November 2023

December 2023

January 2024

February 2024

March 2024

Blue Nimbus: Multi-Agency Exercise

On 4 October, partners across the Thames Valley took part in an exercise to test our joint response to severe flooding. The exercise, named Blue Nimbus, was organised by Thames Valley Local Resilience Forum to test responding agencies awareness of the Multi-Agency Flood Plan and their responsibilities within it.

Water Rescue Response in the East

In the Autumn, crews at Slough began providing a 24/7 water rescue response. Staff completed an intensive training course to qualify as Swift Water Rescue Technicians (SWTs).

The addition of a new water rescue unit was a risk-based, evidence-led decision, made as part of our Community Risk Management Plan.

Fire Safety Inspectors Complete Training

Four Fire Safety Inspectors (FSIs) were formally recognised for completing their training at a Ceremony at Newsham Court on 17 November 2023. The course generally takes between two and three years, in which the trainees undertook real inspections whilst completing a Level 3 and Level 4 Diploma in Fire Safety.



Firefighter Discovery Sessions

Ahead of future recruitment campaigns for Wholetime Firefighters, a programme of activities began across the County, in an effort to give prospective applicants a feel for what being a firefighter involves. Starting in the Winter of 2023, these sessions have proven popular amongst prospective recruits.

Service Secures Circa £1m in Grant Support

Following a rigorous application process, the Service received a substantial grant to invest into energy efficiency and reducing the carbon footprint of our estate. The Service successfully won an additional £927,000 from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) to significantly reduce our carbon footprint and improve energy efficiency.



Implementation of Tethered Wade Training

In early 2024, our Wholetime Apprentices were the first to receive Tethered Wade Training. Tethered wade offers an additional method for reaching individuals in shallow water. This training will be rolled out to Water Rescue Module 2 responders, ensuring a dynamic and adaptable response to water related emergencies in the region.

» Our Year in Numbers



1,461

Primary and secondary fires attended.



8,026

Emergency incidents responded to.



72.3%

Incident response times within 10 minutes.



5,260

Safe and Well Visits completed.



2,318

Other services provided by RBFRS.



716

Fire Safety Audits carried out.

» Our Performance

In order to monitor performance and ensure we are working towards our Annual Objectives and CRMP commitments, a number of performance measures were agreed by Royal Berkshire Fire Authority for the 2024/25 Annual Plan.

These measures monitor the delivery of our statutory obligations and services we provide, along with how key resources are managed, including staff, finance, and health & safety.

Performance is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Strategic Performance Board and by the Audit and Governance Committee. Our year end performance against the Corporate Measures can be seen on pages 33-35.

Our strategy to prevent fires and other emergencies includes the provision of Safe and Well Visits to those who are at heightened risk of dying or being injured as result of an accidental dwelling fire.

We work closely with partner agencies to ensure individuals with risk factors are referred to us, which allows us to target the most vulnerable in our communities. This year we increased the number of referrals from our partners by 9.2 percent, to 4,266.

Fire Safety Inspecting Officers completed over 700 Full Fire Safety Audits in premises falling under the Regulatory Reform Order 2005, which outlines our duty to enforce fire safety in non – domestic premises.

We have continued to embed our new Risk Based Inspection Programme, to ensure we target our resources at the highest risk premises. This year, 26.2 percent of our audits were carried out on premises identified as High or Very High risk.

In 2023/24, there were 8,026 emergency incidents within Berkshire. This is the second highest number of incidents in recent years, only having been exceeded in 2022/23 when incident numbers were very high due to a hot, dry summer. We saw a particularly high number of incidents over the winter months, due to storms and flooding.

We have continued to see a return to pre-pandemic incident levels for Road Traffic Collision incidents with an increase of 8 percent.

False alarm call volumes have continued to rise with a further 9.4 percent increase from last year and levels of these incidents are now substantially higher than pre-pandemic. The majority of these calls are from Automatic Fire Alarm systems. We continue to seek ways to reduce the numbers of these calls we receive, and manage our response to them to ensure a risk-based approach.

We lost 5.5 percent of working time to sickness in 2023/24, which means we did not meet our target of a maximum of 4 percent. There continue to be wider societal trends of increased sickness and absence, including impacts on mental health, and pressures on the NHS which may delay treatment and lengthen absence. We continue to provide support and assistance to managers and promote early intervention including workshops to ensure consistency of policy application across the Service.

Our Wholtime fire engines have been available 97.4 percent of the time this year, under our 99 percent target. There has been an increased requirement for risk critical operational training due to high numbers of staff in development. Our on-call crews have achieved 40.0 percent availability



» Our Performance

this year. This is lower than our 50 percent target and we have continued to strive to increase availability of on-call. This year we have established an Operational Support Team who have close oversight of resourcing gaps to maximise appliance availability.

In 2023/24, we attended 72.3 percent of all emergency incidents within 10 mins of receiving the call. We did not achieve our Response Standard target of 75 percent. There are several factors associated with the fall in performance in this area. The total number of incidents this year was high which impacts travel times. We are also seeing a higher proportion of false alarm and special service calls, which require longer call handling times.

Our performance measures and targets enable us to manage our performance and demonstrate our effectiveness at preventing and protecting against potential risk and responding to incidents to ensure that we provide value for money to the communities that we serve.

Audits

In 2023-24, there were 8,026 emergency incidents within Berkshire. This is the second highest number of incidents in recent years.

In 2023-24, internal audits were carried out across the Service.

These were:

- Community Risk Management Plan
- Firefighter Pension Administration
- General Data Protection Regulation
- Payroll Provider - Data Plan
- Sickness Absence Management
- Cyber Essentials*
- Key Financial Controls*

Our external auditors found substantial assurance in two of these audits, and reasonable assurance in the rest (* we are still awaiting the finalised reports for the Cyber Essentials and Key Financial Controls audits). All audit actions are monitored through the Strategic Performance Board and Audit and Governance Committee.

Statement of Assurance

We are required by the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England to provide an Annual Statement of Assurance on financial, governance and operational matters to enable our communities, Government, Local Authorities and partners to make a valid assessment of our governance arrangements.

This is produced and published on our website and confirms the extent to which the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been met.

Welcome to Newsham Court



» HMICFRS Inspection

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspected all fire and rescue services for the third time in 2021/22. The inspection confirmed that RBFRS is performing to a high standard, receiving three 'good' judgments across the three areas (effectiveness, efficiency and people) inspected.

The principal findings from the HMICFRS assessment of the Service over the past year are as follows:

- The Service understands the risk and demand in its area. It has evaluated the way it mitigates risk using its prevention, protection and response teams. It has revised its risk-based inspection programme and is now more focused on the highest risk. This makes sure it can keep the communities of Royal Berkshire safe from fire and other risks.
- The Service is facing challenges in recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce. The cost-of-living crisis and pressures raised through pension changes make workforce planning difficult for the service. It should continue to assess innovative ways to mitigate this risk.
- The Service has improved its work in equality, diversity and inclusion and its workforce demonstrates positive values and behaviours. The Service seeks feedback and challenge from its workforce and the community. This supports it to make decisions based on the needs of both.

More information about the inspection can be found on the RBFRS website. RBFRS' next inspection is due in 2024.

Effectiveness

“Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service’s overall effectiveness is **good**.”

Efficiency

“Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service’s overall efficiency is **good**.”

People

“Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service is **good** at looking after its people.”



» Culture

Values and Culture

The Service's Vision is for our staff to work together as one team for the communities we serve. It is therefore vital that our staff work in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment.

During a time where the whole sector has come under increased scrutiny for its culture and values, we decided to pause the rollout and implementation of our People Strategy, so that we could spend the whole of 2023 engaging with and listening to staff across the Service. The original Strategy has been revised to reflect what we have heard and learnt and we intend to now deliver the eight objectives across a three-year period (2024-2027). This will align implementation of our current Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

Since the culture of any organisation is not static and continuously evolves due to changes internally and externally, an RBFERS Development Programme has now been created. This Programme has been created to enable us to positively develop our culture, creating mutually beneficial improvements across the five areas identified (People, Places, Processes and Systems, Structure and Communications and Engagement) and our culture.

The Service was already ahead of some of the wider sector in some areas, for example, through the provision of a confidential way for staff to raise concerns. A confidential reporting line was introduced in 2018 and is available to all staff at any time. The Service's Employee Assistance Programme also offers a confidential telephone helpline to staff whenever they need it.

One of the key areas that we've continued to focus on is tackling bullying and harassment in the workplace. To support staff with knowledge and tools for dealing with challenging situations in the workplace, all staff were invited to conferences held in June, July and September 2023. The conferences included a session on Active Bystander training, to provide staff with techniques and a toolkit for dealing with challenging situations.

In addition, following a number of unsettling stories in the media about culture in other fire and rescue services, direct communication has been sent to staff from underrepresented groups within the Service to provide reassurance and remind them of sources of support. Wider communications making it clear that the Service takes a zero-tolerance position on discrimination, harassment or bullying has also been issued.

Our activities have involved a wide range of stakeholders, including members of the Fire Authority, who were engaged through Members' Workshops to help maintain political support for the steps taken.

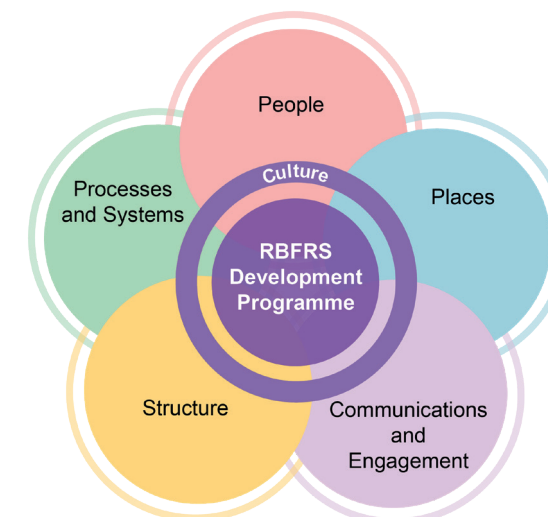
In March 2023, a report was published by His Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) into the values and culture of all 44 fire and rescue services (FRSs) in England. Our progress against HMICFRS's recommendations is now available publicly on our website, and will be reviewed annually, with the next review due to take place in April 2025.

In the meantime, ongoing engagement and tracking of our cultural progress takes place through our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Steering Group



and Forum and regular staff engagement sessions.

During 2023-24, a number of activities have taken place to improve culture and inclusion. You can read about some of the initiatives on the following pages.



The five pillars of the RBFERS Development Programme

» Culture

Discover a Career as a Firefighter Sessions

In November and December 2023, our Service ran a series of events aimed at helping to encourage more people to consider a career as a firefighter.

The sessions were timed to take place ahead of the recruitment window and were geared towards those that had a limited or no understanding of the role. Over the course of four sessions, attendees gained a greater understanding of the role of a firefighter and what the recruitment process involves.

The programme aimed to target individuals from groups that are currently underrepresented within the Service. This includes females, individuals from ethnic minorities, individuals with a disability or long-term condition, LGBTQ+ individuals and individuals from different faith groups. To ensure we were targeting these groups we reached out to community contacts across Berkshire inviting them to share information of the sessions with their communities and to encourage sign up.

The first two sessions were held online with support from staff in the Resourcing and Development and Learning and Development Team, as well as operational firefighters to give an insight into the training programme and the recruitment process.

In session three, attendees got the chance to receive a guided tour of the station, followed by a demonstration of a drill. In the final session, people got the opportunity to try the physical tests they would have to pass during recruitment,

including the Drill Ground Assessment and Equipment Assembly.

A total of 67 people attended the sessions, with 42% of those identifying as being from an underrepresented group. Many of those that attended the sessions went on to apply for the Service's Wholetime Apprenticeship Programme, which opened for applications in December 2023.

Following the success of the 'Discover a Career as a Firefighter' programme, it was commissioned to be run again in 2024/2025 to help expand the career talent pipeline of the Service.

Change 100 Internships

The Change 100 Programme was developed by Leonard Cheshire and 2023 marked the sixth year of our Service's participation. As part of the Scheme, the Service welcomed two interns for 100 days over the summer and autumn.

The interns worked as part of the Communications and Engagement and Data and Performance Teams. The Programme provides an opportunity for them to develop new skills and build confidence. All the while, the Service gains increased organisational diversity awareness and increases its capacity to deliver services.



» Culture

Summer Internship Scheme

The Summer Internship Scheme is designed for young people in Berkshire, specifically targeting individuals from ethnic groups that are under-represented in the Service. The Scheme is a three-year pilot and will run annually until summer 2024.

For the first year of the pilot scheme, the Programme was designed for a five-week period over the summer. Individuals were eligible to apply if they were aged between 16 and 18, lived in Berkshire and were from an ethnic group that is currently under-represented within the Service.

As the scheme is a pilot, the project team revised the recruitment criteria for the second year of the programme. Whilst the focus remained on under-represented young people from Berkshire, the Service changed the age criteria and welcomed five interns aged 16 and 17 in the 2023 cohort.

The five final interns were chosen following a three stage application process that involved nearly 50 applicants.

The five-week placement saw five Interns rotating across several department including: Facilities, Business Support, Enforcement, Programme Office, and Collaboration and Policy with some also working with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator.

The interns spent one day every week at one of our fire stations. Across the five weeks, they visited Whitley Wood, Theale, Slough, Caversham Road and Maidenhead. Crews at each of these stations

"It gave me so many memories that I will forever cherish. I met so many amazing people that I wouldn't have come across if I didn't come here."

- 2023 Summer Intern

introduced them to a range of operational skills including working at height, BA shuffle, cutting open vehicles, water rescue, animal rescue and many more!

The interns visited Wokingham Fire Station to spend time with Central Hub's Protection Team, learnt more about our Prevention work and spent time completing core skills courses and working on their career development.

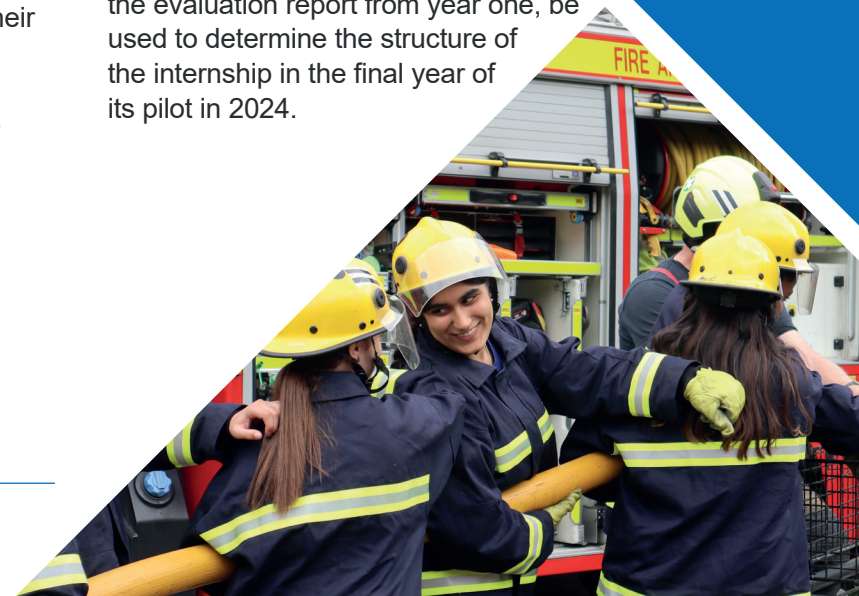
One intern, when asked what they would tell others about the internship, said: "I would first of all tell them to go for it because it is an amazing opportunity that, for me, was once in a lifetime. It gave me so many memories that I will forever cherish. I met so many amazing people that I wouldn't have come across if I didn't come here.

"I have learnt so much about the Service, what it does and how many jobs you can have in the Service beyond becoming a firefighter. I think it

really opened my eyes and showed me a whole different career direction that I never thought about."

Another responded: "The internship opened my eyes to the fire service. The fire service has lots of different teams and its more than just firefighters going out to stop fires. Each department is equally important, and all need each other to ensure the fire service acts as efficiently as possible. "What I learnt from the internship means that I can now tell my friends more about the fire service and all of its different teams. I have a much better knowledge of the fire service."

In May 2024, a third cohort of interns will be selected to take part in the Internship Programme. Several aspects of the Scheme have again been altered based on the findings of the previous year's evaluation report. In 2024, the interns will rotate on a bi-weekly basis between five departments. The age bracket has also been raised to include just 17 and 18 year olds. The outcomes of this year's Scheme will, combined with the evaluation report from year one, be used to determine the structure of the internship in the final year of its pilot in 2024.



» Culture

Awards Ceremony

On Saturday, 9 September 2023, we held our annual Awards ceremony at Welford Park, near Newbury.

The event provided the opportunity to recognise the efforts and achievements of staff, volunteers and partners over the past 12 months.

During the event, staff that have dedicated 20, or 30, years to public service were presented with Long Service and Good Conduct Medals or Long Service Awards by The Lord Lieutenant of the Royal County of Berkshire, Mr James Puxley.

This event was made possible thanks to the generous donations of the sponsors: AVE Services, Corrigenda, Fireblitz, Hub Telecoms, Kensington Mortgages and Say So.

Councillor Jeff Brooks, Chair of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority said: "It was such an honour to be here today to recognise some of our amazing members of staff, and partners for the incredible contribution, dedication and acts of courage that we have seen in the past year.

"How fitting that the event shared the date with Emergency Services Day – I can't think of a better opportunity to honour the contributions of so many dedicated public servants and to say thank you."

A number of awards were presented during the event. Some of the highlights include:

Certificates of Commendation were presented to those that responded to the tragic fire on Erleigh Road, Reading, as well as staff from Thames Valley

"I am extremely proud of our Service and the way we serve the communities of Royal Berkshire."

- Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer said

Fire Control Service who worked under extreme pressure during last year's heatwave.

RBFRS' Duty Officers received the Team of the Year Award for their high performance despite the pressures they faced in 2022/23 and in recognition of the work that they do, every day, to keep the community safe.

Central Hub Teams and South Hill Park Arts Centre in Bracknell received the Innovation of the Year Award for an exciting art project to promote water safety on Berkshire's waterways.

The Fundraiser of the Year Award was won by the Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices, who raised more than £14,800 for the Fire Fighters Charity during a charity bike ride.

They cycled the equivalent of 500 miles in remembrance of Scotland Fire and Rescue Service firefighter Barry Martin, who sadly lost his life in the line of duty in January 2023 and to celebrate the Coronation of King Charles III.



» Culture

Pride Events in 2023

In 2023, the Service participated in several Pride events across the Royal County to show support for the LGBTQ+ community and to engage with them directly. In June, which is Pride Month, crews from Newbury and Bracknell took part in their respective town's Pride events. In the case of Bracknell, this was the first Pride event held in the town and it was important to show our support for this landmark event.

In September, a crew from Caversham Road Fire Station attended Reading Pride alongside Prevention, Protection and non-operational staff from across the Service. These events gave the Service an opportunity to promote careers and important safety advice. One of our core aims remains to ensure that everyone feels safe to access our services, enabling us to better serve our County.

Getting to Know RBFRS

An event was held at Newbury Fire Station to showcase what our Service delivers for the communities of Royal Berkshire. It was attended by Members of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, Mayors and the High Sheriff of the Royal County of Berkshire, Simon Muir.

Following the publication of the Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), the event provided an opportunity to explore the key themes of the Vision that has been set out for the next four years.

Staff members from across the organisation were

on hand to explain how they deliver services to the community. Guests got the opportunity to speak to staff from various teams, including representatives from the Fleet and Equipment, CRMP, Human Resources, Safety Education and ICT teams, as well as an opportunity to speak to the Health and Wellbeing Manager and the Volunteer Coordinator.

After the groups had spoken to all the teams, there were demonstrations from Newbury's firefighters and fire cadets.

Firefighters on Blue Watch carried out a road traffic collision demonstration, before the fire cadets showed some of the skills they have learnt on their course.

Charity Events

Crews from across Service continued to run Car Washes and Open Days at their stations to raise money for The Fire Fighters Charity and other local causes, as well as share important safety information with the public. At Whitley Wood Fire Station, staff from all across the Service, including non-operational, Prevention and Protection staff, joined crews to perform demonstrations, share important safety information, and showcase some of the career paths available within the Service.

Various car washes took place across the County, including at Crowthorne, Maidenhead, Slough, Newbury, Ascot and Langley fire stations, raising thousands for worthy causes.



» Culture

Armed Forces Veterans' Hubs

To support members of the armed forces community, our Service hosts a number of Armed Forces Hub events. At these events, attendees are able to speak to a range of organisations and charities that support the armed forces community and each other.

During the last year we have hosted events at Maidenhead and Newbury with an event at Crowthorne planned for May.

Cycle2Work Scheme

As with previous years, the Service again offered all staff the opportunity to obtain a bike and cycling safety equipment through the Halfords' Cycle2Work Scheme. The Scheme is aimed at encouraging staff to cycle to work rather than drive, and enables staff to save tax and NI contributions as the bike is paid for via salary sacrifice.

There were two opportunities to join the scheme in the last financial year. The first was in April/May 2023 and the second was in September/October 2023. In total, 16 applications were made from within the Service.

Flu Vaccinations

The Service again encouraged staff of all ages to have an annual flu vaccination ahead of winter 2023/24 to support the capacity of the NHS and support the Service in maintaining crewing and staffing levels by preventing absence.

The offer available to all staff, who did not meet the

criteria for a free NHS vaccination, was to claim up to £19.99 towards the cost of their vaccination.

Working with the OddBalls Foundation

In early 2024, the Service announced a series of talks in partnership with the OddBalls Foundation to address the risks of testicular cancer; the most common type of cancer found in men aged between 15-49.

The OddBalls Foundation was founded in December 2015 and engages with schools, universities and workplaces through their University Ambassador Programme. The University of Reading OddBalls Ambassador, Esther Morgan, alongside Ambassadors from several other universities, held several remote talks with the Service in March of 2024.

Each talk was 30 minutes long and gave every watch, as well as non-operational staff, the opportunity to learn more about testicular cancer including the symptoms, diagnosis and treatment and the support available to people with testicular cancer.

Mental Health Awareness Training

In continued efforts to raise awareness and challenge stigma around mental health, the roll out of a second mental health awareness training course began in October 2023, the first being in 2018/19. This is mandatory training for all staff and by the end of the financial year approximately half of staff had received the training. Delivery continues into 2024/25.



» Capability

Service Responds to Thames Valley Flooding

At the start of January, the Service was called to action in response to significant flooding events in Berkshire.

As a result of the heavy rainfall associated with Storm Henk in January, crews from across the County responded to a range of challenging incidents, including water rescues, flooded properties and evacuations.

Our teams worked alongside partners across the Thames Valley, including council partners, Thames Valley Police, South Central Ambulance Service and Berkshire Lowland Search and Rescue.

Our initial response to the floods was focused in the west, where crews undertook several flood-related incidents near Shefford Woodlands, Ufton Nervet, Theale, Inkpen, Hungerford and Newbury. As the situation developed, crews were also called out to flood-related incidents in Pangbourne, Sindlesham, Brimpton, Wargrave, Hurst, Henley and Sonning.

At the height of the flooding, firefighters from across the County assisted with the evacuation of vulnerable people from the village of Wraysbury.

Crews worked alongside partners from the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, Thames Valley Police, South Central Ambulance Service and Berkshire Lowland Search and Rescue to evacuate residents to rest centres in the area.

Thames Valley Fire Control Service worked incredibly hard to triage calls as they came in. Through this effective triage system, incidents were

“Thanks to everyone involved in the response to the floods. This truly showed how our teams all collectively work together extremely effectively.”

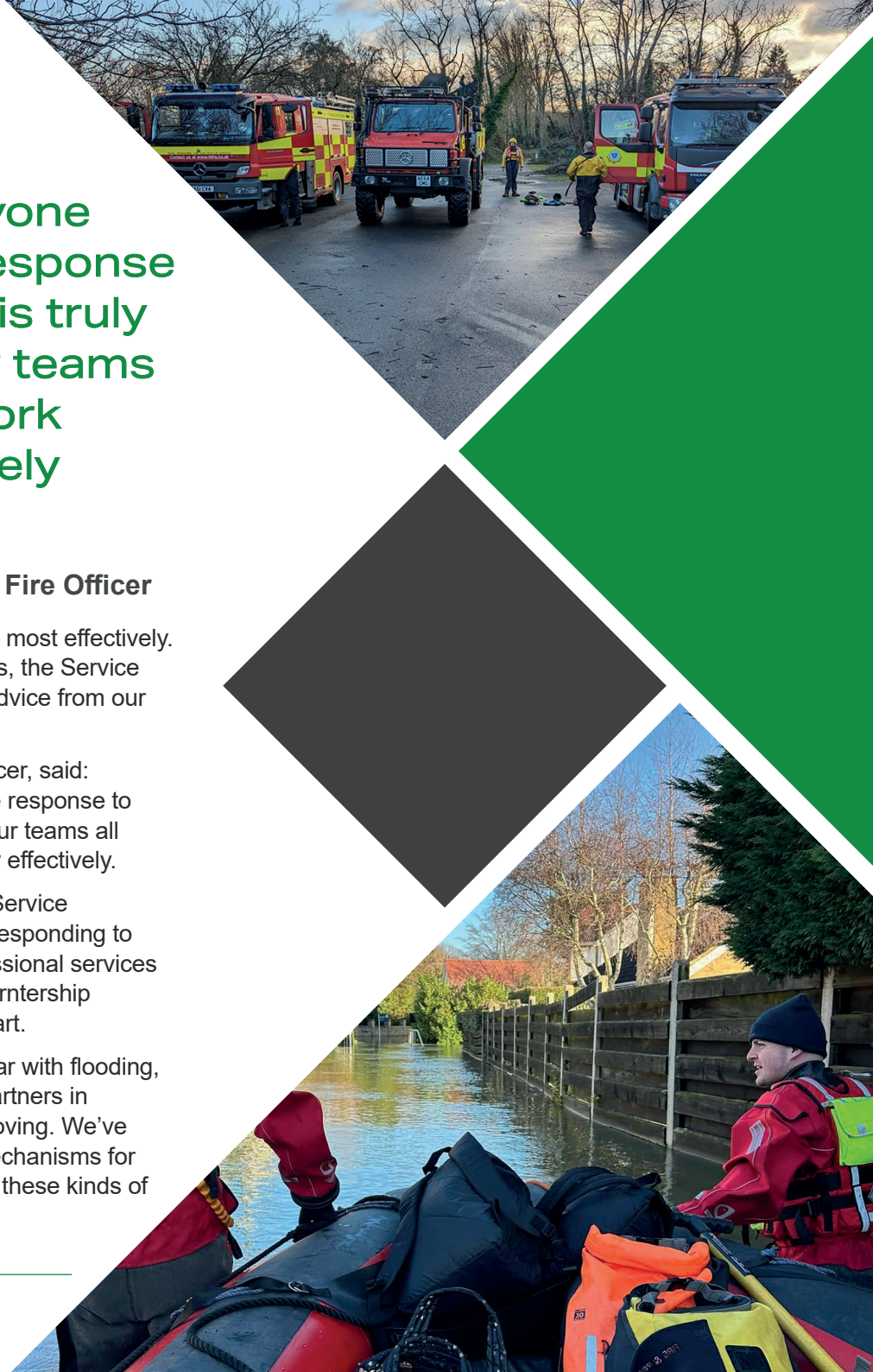
- Katie Mills, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

able to be filtered and responded to most effectively. Whether this be by partner agencies, the Service or residents themselves following advice from our teams.

Katie Mills, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, said: “Thanks to everyone involved in the response to the floods. This truly showed how our teams all collectively work together extremely effectively.

“From Thames Valley Fire Control Service taking and triaging the calls, crews responding to emergencies, to Officers and professional services that supported incidents and our partnership response - everyone played their part.

“Sadly, we’re becoming more familiar with flooding, so the way that we work with our partners in response to these incidents is improving. We’ve got some really well established mechanisms for drawing everyone that’s involved in these kinds of emergencies together.”



» Capability

High-rise Fire in Central Reading Makes Headlines

Over 50 firefighters responded to a high-rise fire on Station Hill, Reading which made headlines across the world.

Crews from fire stations across the County, including Caversham Road, Wokingham Road, Newbury, Ascot, Bracknell, Maidenhead, Windsor, Whitley Wood and Theale were sent to the scene.

Additionally, the Aerial Ladder Platform and Incident Command Unit was on the scene, alongside six Officers. Crews found the fire in a high-rise building under construction, so firefighters equipped with breathing apparatus used two main jets to extinguish the fire.

Two people were taken into the care of South Central Ambulance Service (SCAS) and were later discharged from Hospital.

“Following the fire in Reading town centre, I would like to add my thanks to the crane operators for an incredibly skilful rescue.”

- Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer

One person was rescued from the rooftop of the construction site by a crane, propelling the incident into an international news story.

Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, said: “Following the fire in Reading town centre, I would like to add my thanks to the crane operators for an incredibly skilful rescue under extremely difficult circumstances. Without their actions, we may be looking at an entirely different scenario.”

Erleigh Road

On Wednesday, 5 April, crews responded to a serious fire on Erleigh Road in Reading.

The first crew arrived within four minutes of the 999 call and were immediately faced with a well-developed house fire.

Our teams immediately got to work in tackling the fire and rescued five of the occupants and provided life-saving CPR.

Over 40 members of staff attended the incident to tackle the blaze. The crews worked tirelessly into the early hours of the morning, spending over six hours at the scene.

Sadly, two people lost their lives as a result of the fire.

In the aftermath of the fire, over 100 residents were visited and 80 Safe and Well Visits were completed. This work was undertaken alongside our partners, including Thames Valley Police, Reading Borough Council and local community groups, to deliver prevention advice to as many people as possible.



» Capability

Breathing Apparatus Project

New breathing apparatus sets are being worn by our firefighters, following a successful project run alongside Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Service and Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service.

140 of the BA sets were issued to staff, each with their own personal issue facemask made from the latest, technologically advanced Chemical, Biological, Radiation, Nuclear (CBRN) certified material. The roll out of the new BA sets forms part of our ongoing commitment to ensure our crews have fit for purpose equipment to enable them to provide the best response to our communities.

The BA sets, manufactured by Interspiro have been produced as part of the Thames Valley Operational Alignment Programme, which aims to deliver seamless, cross-border mobilisation of fire and rescue service assets by Thames Valley Fire Control Service and firefighters who can work together using the same operational guidance, training, and equipment.

As part of the tendering process, operational firefighters from the Service took part in a rigorous and thorough practical evaluation, in which BA sets were tested for ease of use and operability. Participants from on-call and wholtime stations braved sweltering temperatures during the height of summer 2022 to support the evaluation process, which saw the Interspiro sets coming top with users, largely as a result of its robust, light-weight harness which proved fully adjustable to meet the

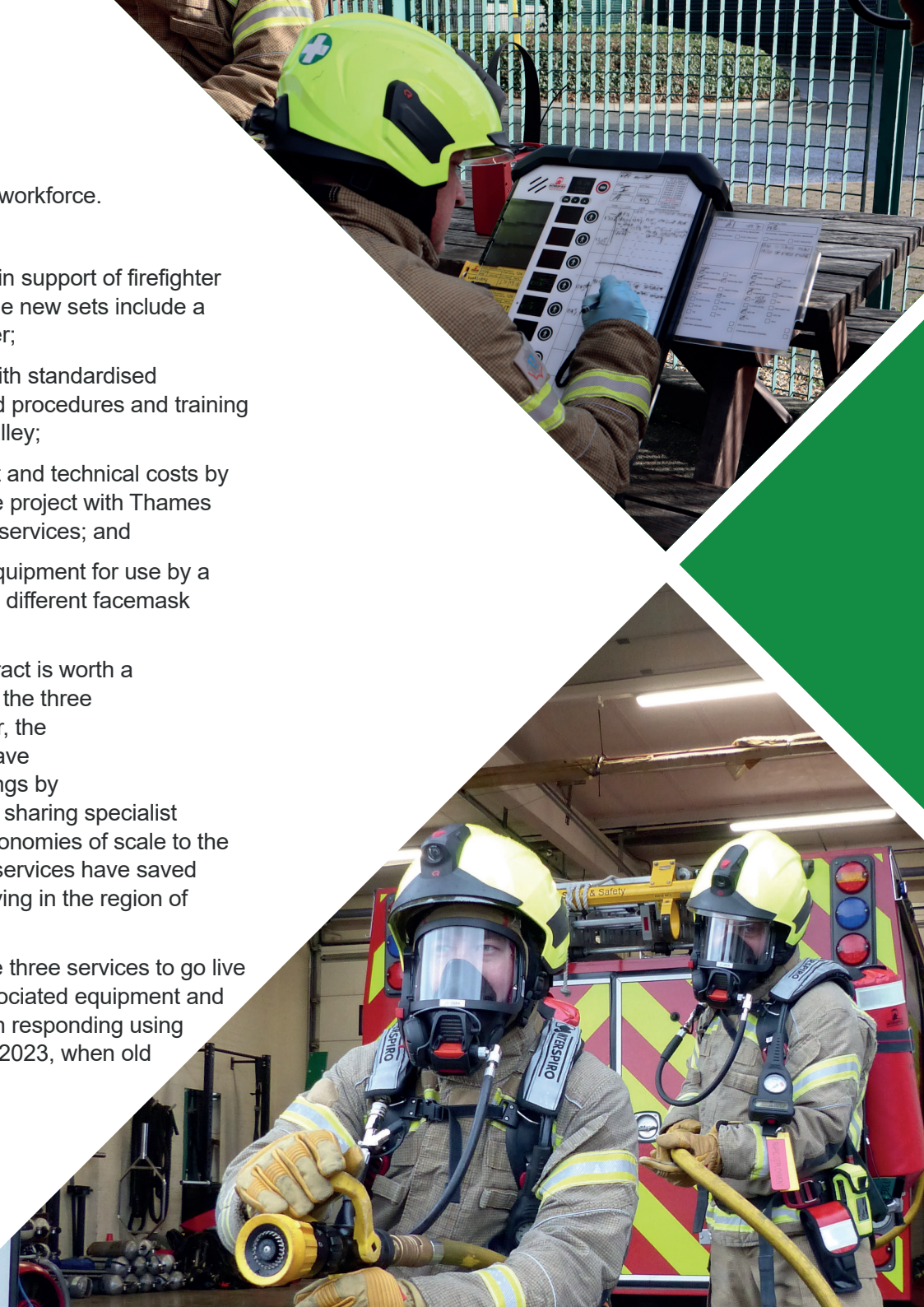
requirements of a diverse workforce.

The new sets provide:

- The latest technology in support of firefighter safety and comfort. The new sets include a lighter, 300 bar cylinder;
- Improved alignment with standardised equipment and aligned procedures and training across the Thames Valley;
- Reduced procurement and technical costs by running a collaborative project with Thames Valley fire and rescue services; and
- Lighter, better fitting equipment for use by a diverse workforce with different facemask fitting requirements.

The BA collaborative contract is worth a total of £1,768,468 across the three services. Working together, the Thames Valley services have been able to achieve savings by not duplicating processes, sharing specialist resources and bringing economies of scale to the project. In total, the three services have saved £532,178 with RBFRS saving in the region of £130,000 for the first year.

RBFRS was the first of the three services to go live with the new sets and associated equipment and firefighters from have been responding using the new sets since March 2023, when old kits were replaced.



» Capability

Enhanced Water Rescue Response in the East of Berkshire

Following four tragic accidental drownings in Berkshire's waterways in 2022, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service advanced plans to provide a specialist water rescue capability in the East of the County, to complement the existing water rescue capability provided from Caversham Road Fire Station in Reading.

In 2022, RBFRS attended 46 water-related incidents across Berkshire (including those involving person, vehicle and animal rescue) with the Slough Weir within the Jubilee River an identified risk. The Jubilee River was designed as a flood relief channel and not as a place for recreational swimming.

An extensive review as part of our Community Risk Management Planning identified that Slough Fire Station would be the preferred location to operate the new capability from. Crews at Slough were then provided with over 50 hours of intensive training to qualify as Module 3 Swift Water Rescue Technicians (SWTs).

A dedicated water rescue vehicle and associated equipment has been allocated to the station to enable firefighters to respond to water rescue incidents. The addition of the necessary training and equipment has been made possible by investment from Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.

While this work was undertaken, during July, members of Berkshire Lowland Search and Rescue provided Water Rescue support to our Service at weekends, in addition to the Water Rescue Team

“Providing an enhanced water rescue capability from Slough provides additional reassurance to our communities that we can provide a swift and effective response to water-related incidents.”

- Councillor Jeff Brooks, Chair of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

based at Caversham Road and provided additional support to strengthen our water rescue resilience across Berkshire.

In the summer months, there is historically a heightened risk of water-related incidents owing to the hot weather, particularly during weekends, and members of BLSAR's water team were co-located at Slough Fire Station ready to respond immediately to any calls.

Councillor Jeff Brooks, Chair of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, said: “We identified an opportunity to upskill our teams to increase our water rescue capabilities in the East of Berkshire.

“Providing an enhanced water rescue capability from Slough provides additional reassurance to

our communities that we can provide a swift and effective response to water-related incidents. It also builds upon all our prevention activity this year, working with partner organisations and schools in particular to promote water safety.

“Thank you to our partners from Berkshire Lowland Search and Rescue for their support. This positive working partnership has provided us with layers of resilience at what tends to be a busy time of year for water rescue.”

Chris Curry, Emergency Planning Officer for Berkshire Lowland Search and Rescue, said: “As an established partner agency, we are proud to have provided water search and rescue support to RBFRS for several years. We were pleased to have been able to complement the water rescue team based at Caversham Road whilst training and resources were being put in place in Slough, thus providing additional support to strengthen the overall water rescue resilience across Berkshire.”



» Capability

Wholetime Firefighter Apprentices

Two cohorts of Firefighter Apprentices have joined the Service during the last financial year. In May 2023 we saw a group of 23 new Firefighter apprentices graduate at a ceremony at Newbury Fire Station; this was followed by a further eight apprentices graduating in a ceremony at the same location in November 2023.

RBFRS has recruited apprentices into this very important role for the last two years, and has seen three groups of apprentice firefighters that have graduated. We are very proud that the apprentices have chosen Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue to begin their fire and rescue service careers.

Much like previous Wholetime recruitment, anyone, from any background or walk of life, could apply to be a Firefighter Apprentice, as long as they were new to the role.

The Service commissioned an external provider, the Fire Service College (Capita). Capita are approved to deliver the Operational Firefighter Apprenticeship through the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers (RoATP).

The Apprentices are thoroughly tested with a range of practical and theoretical training, core skills, breathing apparatus, fire behaviour, water rescue and road traffic collision training.

Upon completion of the course, the Apprentices returned to our Training Centre, and other locations in Berkshire, for a further five weeks with Instructors to help integrate them into RBFRS' ways of working.

This includes specific operational training on

equipment, safeguarding training, organisational awareness training and a host of realistic scenarios to put what they had learnt into practice in a safe environment.

Their development will continue with support of their line manager, and an Apprenticeship talent coach, supported by the Service.

It is anticipated the Apprenticeships will be completed within 24 months of the start dates.

During the Graduation Ceremony there are two special awards presented. The Endeavour Award is presented to the Firefighter that has demonstrated the most effort to improve during the course. This was awarded to George Holden in May and Ashley Ward in November.

Ashley said: "I'm really surprised to win the Award, but very proud. I don't think you always know how well you're doing, so for someone else to notice, it's great. Everyone in the group has done so well."

The Silver Axe is an Award given to the Firefighter that has performed to the highest standards throughout the course. This was awarded to Mike Selmes in May and Bethany Ashcroft in November.

Upon receiving the Silver Axe Award, Bethany said: "It was an absolute honour, I didn't expect it. Everyone has worked so hard, so to be picked out of a good bunch, I'm really pleased."

In January 2024, another group of Apprentices were recruited. This group are undergoing training and are due to graduate at a ceremony at Maidenhead Fire Station in front of their family and friends in May 2024.



» Capability

On-call Crews Support the Community

On-call crews were mobilised a total of 674 times over the last year, providing an important role in protecting the communities of Berkshire.

The On-call station mobilised to most incidents was Mortimer and Lambourn was mobilised to the fewest. Availability and location play a factor in this, with Mortimer averaging approximately 68% availability and Lambourn 13%.

Incidents of note that on-call crews have attended include the Multi-Agency response to flooding at Wraysbury, a large fire at a commercial premise in Tessa Road, Reading, a vehicle fire involving cylinders in Crowthorne.

On-call crews have also taken part in numerous Service, Hub, and Station exercises over the course of the year, to help maintain their competency and ensure that they are ready to respond.

During the past year, on-call staff have been trained in the use of the new Ranger 4x4 response vehicles, which are now located at on-call stations. This will enable the Service to increase its level of response to wildfire incidents and other incidents that require this capability.

Overall on-call firefighter availability for 2023-24 was 40.0%, which represents a small drop on the previous year figure of 40.6%.

The current number of on-call firefighters in the Service is 61. During the last year 14 new recruits have joined, which is encouraging. The impact of the new recruits on fire engine availability will be seen

once they have completed relevant courses, which will enable them to support their crew.

Positive joint working between wholetime and on-call staff has resulted in an increase in our fire engine availability and we hope to build upon this in the years ahead.

On-call firefighters are active in promoting community safety. A total of 19 school visits have been completed by on-call firefighters during this year. This does not include those carried out by Maidenhead staff, which are recorded differently as the station is both wholetime and on-call.

Other activities carried out by our on-call crews over the last year include risk visits, open days and attendance at community events, alongside partners.

A number of 'Have a Go' days have also been held during the year. These are to enable people who may be interested in joining as an on-call firefighter to visit a station, talk to crews and try some of the fitness tests that they would need to pass.

There have also been four National Fire Standards Testing days to test potential recruits, all held at Training Centre. These events are predominately supported by on-call crews, and organised by the on-call Station Manager and the recruitment team.

To help measure the impact of our on-call staff, a new report has also been developed in 2023/24, which shows the availability provided by on-call staff. The initial report is positive, highlighting the dedication of our on-call staff in serving communities across Berkshire.



» Capability

TVFCS Control Room

In September 2023, Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) undertook a full refresh of the hardware that runs the Control room. The mobilising system used by TVFCS was originally installed and commissioned in spring 2015, when TVFCS became operational and had been in 24/7 operation since then.

The work to replace the servers and associated hardware in a live Control room environment is a complex and challenging piece of work. It requires the disconnection of systems from the old hardware and connection to the new hardware, whilst maintaining our ability to handle incoming emergency calls and mobilise our response to incidents.

The work to actually connect the new hardware required a high degree of cooperation between all parties involved, and was supported by Operational Support Rooms set up by each fire and rescue service.

Simon Harris, Group Manager, Thames Valley Fire Control Service, said: "The hardware that TVFCS uses was starting to show its age and I'm really pleased that we have been able to get the replacement equipment in and installed to continue to benefit the people across the Thames Valley. The upgrade process went well, which is in no small part down to the hard work of the project team."

Sharepoint Migration

Following the migration of the Service's Intranet system onto Microsoft Sharepoint, all teams and departments' working areas were migrated onto the same system over a period of 8 months.

This project aimed to streamline our data management process and enhance collaboration and security across all stations and departments within the organisation. As result of this project a total of 5TB of data has been migrated into Sharepoint sites.

The SharePoint migration project brings several benefits to our organisation, with a primary focus on enhancing team collaboration and bolstering security measures. By centralizing our data storage on SharePoint, we have provided a unified platform for teams to collaborate, share information effortlessly.

"The upgrade process went well, which is in no small part down to the hard work of the project team."

- Simon Harris, Group Manager, Thames Valley Fire Control Service

Viva Engage

In August we launched a new communications channel for staff to connect with each other. Viva Engage, a Microsoft 365 application, is now available for staff on their desktop and mobile devices.

This new application provides a social noticeboard, allowing everyone to share updates across the Service and follows the introduction of other Microsoft 365 products such as Teams and Sharepoint, the platform that our intranet, Siren, was built on. Viva Engage therefore seamlessly integrates with our intranet system and provide new opportunities for colleagues to connect with each other.

With our workforce based at a number of locations across the County and some of the workforce working remotely, Viva Engage gives us a new tool to engage and strengthen relationships with colleagues, share their work and perspective, and find answers to their questions.



» Risk Management

Community Risk Management Plan Approved for Next Four Years

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) agreed the Corporate Plan and Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) for 2023 – 2027 in May 2023, following a public consultation.

The consultation ran for 11 weeks between 11 January and 27 March, receiving a total of 662 responses from the public and staff. Thank you to everybody who provided feedback on the plans.

At the Fire Authority meeting on Thursday, 27 April, Members of RBFA conscientiously considered all feedback received and a summary report, which recommended changes to the plans based on the feedback that was received.

Our Vision



The CRMP explains how all fire and rescue-related risk in the community is evaluated and how resources are allocated to manage those risks. These risks include house fires, road traffic collisions and chemical spills, but they also include other less common hazards such as wide area flooding, terrorist attacks and building collapse.

The priorities of the new plan have been agreed as follows:

Priority 1. We will develop our Integrated Service Delivery Strategy to meet the changing profile of risk in Berkshire due to climate change, societal and technological shifts.

Priority 2. We will develop a Risk Based Prevention Programme, in collaboration with partner agencies, to target those most vulnerable and at risk from emergency incidents.

Priority 3. 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.

Priority 4. We will review the incidents that do not form part of our core statutory responsibilities, to better understand the implications for the service in attending these incidents. Notwithstanding the review of our response and the gathering of this data, public safety will remain the primary priority of the Service.

Priority 5. We will develop our Fire Protection service to support the resilience of businesses, to ensure the safety of all people using buildings

covered by the Fire Safety Act 2021, Building Safety Act 2022, and Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to ensure that our enforcement role is effective and clear.

Priority 6. 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.

The overarching vision set out in the plan is for RBFRS staff to work together as one team for the communities we serve. In order to fulfil that vision it is vital that staff work in a safe, supportive and inclusive environment.

Although progress has been made in creating a service that reflects the communities it serves, there is more work required to achieve this goal.

» Risk Management

Contaminants Measures

Researchers at the University of Central Lancashire conducted a study that found that a firefighter's risk of developing cancer is increased by high levels of harmful chemicals that remain on PPE following exposure to smoke.

It found that skin absorption, rather than inhalation, is the leading cause of exposure to the gases created during a fire.

Over the last two years, work has been completed to identify the reasonable and practical steps the Service and individuals can take to minimise firefighters' exposure to contaminants.

So in December 2023, a number of new measures were introduced to reduce the potential occupational risk of exposure to contaminants.

The new measures included:

- Zoning our stations, using a traffic light system;
- A web form to track exposure to potential contaminants; and
- The new Contamination Prevention and Management Policy.

In addition, as part of the Estates Development Programme, work is continuing is around our station facilities to ensure the layout is optimal for managing the risk of contaminants amongst other factors. As we progress in our journey to managing the risk of contaminants.

These changes are the first steps we are taking around managing contaminants. As more research

and information is shared with us, we will continue to adapt and evolve the way we manage the potential risk.

“Without these vehicles with their specialist crews, we would see much more serious harm to the environment at incidents.”

- Andrew Barnes, Senior Advisor, Environment Agency

Service Enhances Decontamination and Environmental Protection Capabilities

A Decontamination and Environmental Protection Unit (DEPU) has been added to the Service's fleet.

This new vehicle is equipped to use at incidents where there is a risk to the local environment or where there is a hazard which requires our crews to operate in gas tight suits.

The Environment Agency has part funded this new vehicle, which is based at Whitley Wood Fire Station in Reading, but will be used across the county to support at incidents where there is a need to

limit the exposure of hazardous materials to our firefighters, the public or the environment.

At an incident, this will be crewed by a driver and an OIC (Officer-In-Charge).

Andrew Barnes, Senior Advisor in the Environment Agency's Environment Incident Preparedness Team said “Environmental Protection Units allow a swift emergency response to serious pollution incidents which is critical in preventing serious harm to the environment.

“Without these vehicles with their specialist crews, we would see much more serious harm to the environment at incidents like large fires, chemical spills, and road traffic collisions. It is a pleasure to partner with Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service to expand this important capability.”



» Risk Management

Automatic Fire Alarm Consultation

In March 2024, we opened a public consultation to ask for feedback on how the Service responds to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs).

The consultation asked for people's views on how their fire and rescue service responds to Automatic Fire Alarms in buildings such as shops, offices, leisure centres, colleges, sports grounds, libraries, schools and health centres.

Our Service needs to change the way it responds to automatic fire alarm notifications to ensure communities and firefighters are kept safe.

This is because 99% of the automatic fire alarm calls received are false alarms. Attending these types of incidents takes time and resource and therefore causes significant disruption to the delivery of essential services and training. RBFRS will continue to send fire engines to automatic fire alarm notifications at higher risk buildings, where anyone sleeps, such as hotels, hospitals, care homes, houses, and flats.

Most importantly, the Service will continue to maintain an emergency response to 999 calls, confirmed fires and to automatic fire alarm notifications from residential homes.

Following the consultation, work will begin on analysing and compiling the responses into a summary report for decision makers. Royal Berkshire Fire Authority will meet in June 2024 to conscientiously consider the results of consultation and make decisions on the options.

Don't Take the Risk campaign

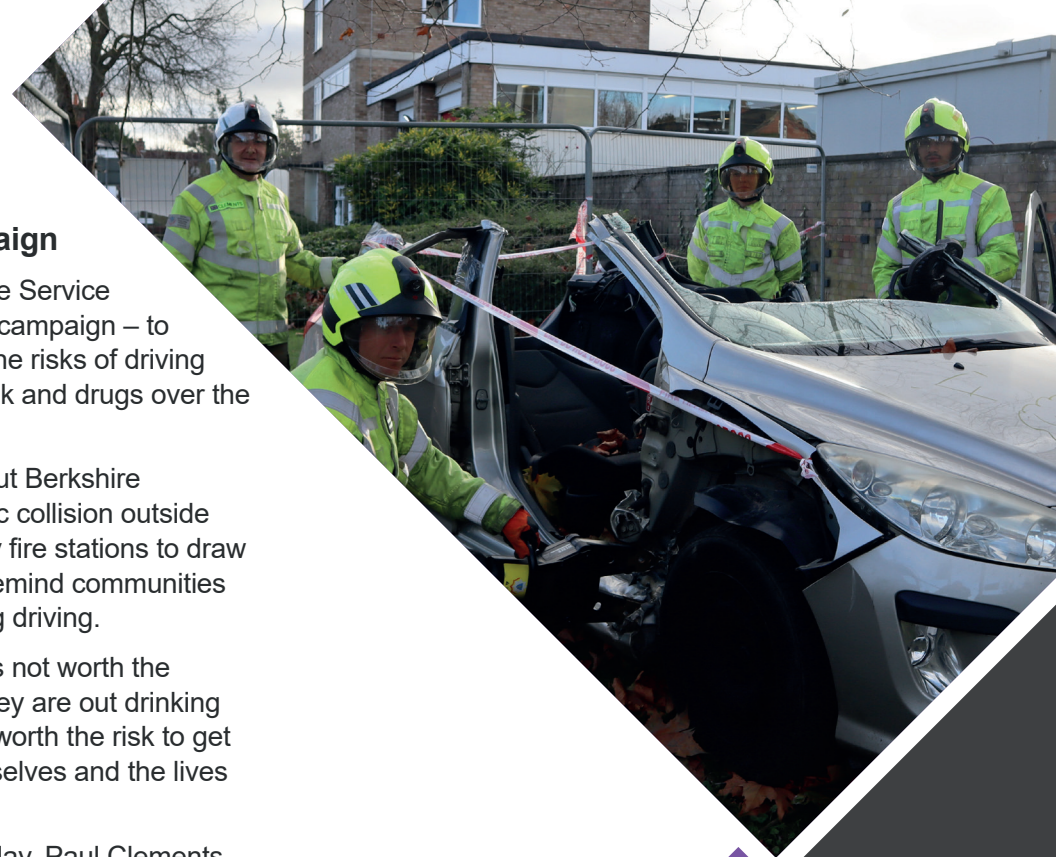
During December 2023 the Service supported a road safety campaign – to raise awareness about the risks of driving while under the influence of drink and drugs over the festive season.

Each year, firefighters throughout Berkshire construct a simulated road traffic collision outside Wokingham Road and Newbury fire stations to draw the attention of the public and remind communities about the risks of drink and drug driving.

The theme of the displays is “it's not worth the risk”, reminding people that if they are out drinking over the festive period, it is not worth the risk to get behind the wheel and put themselves and the lives of others in danger.

Commenting on this year's display, Paul Clements, Watch Manager, said: “The aim of the campaign is to remind drivers of the dangers of driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs. Road traffic collisions can be life-threatening, so we need to take every step we can to stop them from happening.

“The message is simple. Do not drink or take drugs and drive. It's not worth the risk to yourself and others. If you are out drinking, particularly over the festive period, book a taxi, catch the bus or arrange a lift from a designated driver.”



» Risk Management

#Waterwise Campaign

The #WaterWise campaign a campaign was created with the overall mission to warn and inform the public about the risks of accidentally drowning and what actions to carry out in an emergency.

Conscious of the wider interest in water safety amongst our partners in the. Thames Valley, we spoke to colleagues in Communications teams at Thames Valley Police, South Central Ambulance Service, the Environment Agency and neighbouring fire and rescue services to agree a joint approach. The resulting campaign was called #WaterWise and looked at how we can use all our communications channels alongside our existing activities and networks.

Filming by our Communications and Engagement Team took place in April 2023 with spokespeople from a range of organisations appearing in front of camera to provide guidance in their respective areas of expertise. We were delighted that Tom Dean, double Olympic Swimming Gold Medalist, was happy to speak on the importance of swimming in safe areas and in groups. Once the filming was complete, the videos were used on social media, as well as circulated to schools across the area for them to use in any suitable display areas, including screens on buses for example.

To help encourage more young people to swim in safe areas, we have been supporting a leisure centre that has been offering free lessons to children. Leisure Focus has swimming pools in Maidenhead and Windsor providing a secure environment for residents to swim in. This summer,

Leisure Focus offered 60 free swimming sessions for young people aged 13 to 17. In total, 754 individuals participated in swimming lessons and 945 individuals took part in casual swim sessions over the summer.

Furthermore, in April, we participated in a joint water safety demonstration at Virginia Water. Organised by Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, crews from Caversham Road and Ascot joined several other agencies. This provided an ideal opportunity to talk to members of the community and demonstrate a number of water rescue techniques throughout the day.

Another event, focussed on throwlines, took place in July at Pangbourne Meadows, next to Whitchurch Bridge in Berkshire. Staff from Thames Valley Police and members of the local community received training on how to use a throw line. Firefighters from Caversham Road Fire Station (Green Watch) were also on hand to explain the dangers of swimming in open bodies of water, including cold water shock.

#Winterwise Campaign

Following cold weather warnings issued by the Met Office in December 2022, Berkshire residents were warned to be extra vigilant when it comes to ensuring their homes remain warm during these colder months. Local fire prevention teams were concerned that some residents may try to find alternative ways to stay warm and light their homes amid a cost-of-living crisis. In response, the 'Winter Wise' campaign was launched, which aims to educate people about a range of fire risks within the home.



» Sustainability

Whitley Wood Training Centre

Due to extensive flooding of the Service's Training Centre in June 2022, the Whitley Wood Training Centre redevelopment project was brought forward as a high priority for refurbishment under the Estates Development Programme (EDP) to ensure continuity and delivery of training for our operational crews.

Throughout 2023, the Estates Team have worked to create plans for a new Training Centre at Whitley Wood and, in December 2023, submitted the final plans to Reading Borough Council.

The proposed plans will see the demolition of the existing Training Centre and the construction of a two-storey, modular building in its place.

These works are essential as the Service looks to enhance the training it provides to firefighters, improving the effectiveness of Berkshire's fire and rescue service.

Premier Module Limited have been chosen to manufacture and install the new building and, by electing to use a prefabricated building, the Service has been able to reduce the cost, both financial and ecological, of the build.

The proposed plans incorporate the latest contaminants management protocols to ensure that firefighters can train for hazardous incidents in an environment that does not compromise their health.

A decision from the Council is expected in April 2024 and, if approved, work on the new Training Centre is due to begin in May 2024 with completion and opening expected in Summer 2025.

Minor Capital Works Programmes

In February 2019, funding was approved by the Fire Authority for £1.25m as part of the Minor Capital Works Programme covering six stations. This was to look at providing an improved working environment for all crews and staff on stations while being fit for purpose.

The refurbishment projects consider recommendations from the EDI work stream and the Service's Contaminants Policy so that our station environments are more inclusive and better protect staff from potential contaminant exposure.

First started in September 2022, the final stage of Maidenhead Fire Station's refurbishment programme was completed in May 2023. Maidenhead was the second major station refurbishment to be completed following Bracknell Fire Station in September 2022.

As part of the works, the first floor was completely transformed into a bright open-plan office with two station meeting rooms and additional meeting space for the rest of the Service.

The communal dorm space, previously located on the ground floor, was removed and reconstituted as individual dorms on the first floor. Both the female and male bathroom areas were modernised to include individual shower, changing, and toilet facilities.

To comply with the new decontamination protocols, improved clean and dirty side laundry facilities were also added to the station as part of the project.



» Sustainability

Following the works at Maidenhead Fire Station, the Fire Authority approved plans to refurbish Slough Fire Station as part of a wider programme of improvements being made to the Service's Estate

Councillor Jeff Brooks, Chair of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority, said: "The works will provide a much improved working environment for our current and future staff, bringing our workplaces up to date to meet the needs of a modern fire and rescue service and our next generation of firefighters."

So far, phase one of the refurbishment programme has been completed. This saw the introduction of new bathroom and showering facilities, a refurbished kit room built in line with the Service's new Contaminants Policy.

Government Grants Accelerate Sustainability Upgrades

In March of 2024, the Service successfully won £927,845 from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) to go towards reducing our carbon footprint and improving energy efficiency.

Building on the Service's successful Low Carbon Skills Fund Grant bid secured in 2023 and benefitting from further Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) support, the Service intends to invest £1.77 million in sustainability improvements over the next two years starting with five of our least energy efficient buildings.

The two-year programme will see the introduction of sustainability features at properties that qualified for the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme grant support. The scheme is run by the Department for

Energy Security and Net Zero and is delivered by Salix Finance.

Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, said: "As a fire service, we are committed to ensuring we are doing all we can to reduce our impact on the environment. This funding is a fantastic boost to help deliver our ambition of rapidly improving our estate for the benefit of staff, public and the planet.

"I believe it's right for us to play a leading role in responding to the climate emergency and with 65 percent of our carbon coming from the estate we are sensible to focus on this area first. This grant reflects months of hard work to ensure that we receive central support to deliver our local commitment to reduce our carbon output.

"I'd like to thank Salix who administer the PSDS on behalf of HM Government, for their support and guidance throughout the process and we look forward to continuing our relationship with them during our programme."

Features will include new LED lighting, solar panels,

"As a fire service, we are committed to ensuring we are doing all we can to reduce our impact on the environment."

- Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer



air-source heat pump systems and improved building fabric insulation. These improvements will save 132 tonnes of carbon generation, result in greater efficiencies and will see a significant reduction in our energy bills.

In July 2023 RBFPS were successful in bidding for the Salix Low Carbon Skills Fund and received £40,450 in funding. The funding was used to pay for the professional services of Atkins Realis who pulled together a Heat Decarbonisation Plan (HDP) for 11 fire stations in Berkshire. The HDP has identified the gaps and inefficiencies in the Service's buildings and provided a programme road map for reducing our carbon output and making our estate more energy efficient.

The HDP was successfully completed, and RBFPS received the funding in full from Salix in December 2023. In February 2024 Salix requested that the Service's HDP be published on their website as an example for other Public Sector bodies, due to the high standard of work.

» Sustainability

Breathing Apparatus Sets Donated to Ukrainian Firefighters

Our Service donated a number of breathing apparatus (BA) sets to help support Ukrainian firefighters in their vital work during the ongoing war. In total, 89 BA sets and 304 air cylinders have been donated by RBFRS as part of the latest convoy that was sent to Ukraine.

The donation of this equipment is part of a national effort, which has been coordinated by the charity FIRE AID UK and the National Fire Chiefs Council. Four convoys including a total of 69 fire appliances and tens of thousands of items of life-saving kit and equipment have already been donated.

Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer, said: “We have recently replaced our BA sets and rather than disposing of the old kits, there is no better use for them than donating them to Ukrainian firefighters, who clearly have great need for them and who we will continue to show our full support at every opportunity.

“Alongside the donations from fire and rescue services across the UK, we hope that this equipment will assist in the immense relief effort that is needed in Ukraine.”

Members of the Fleet and Equipment Team had prepared the sets for the donation and use by Ukrainian firefighters. Other fire and rescue services are donating a range of other equipment and appliances.

“Alongside the donations from fire and rescue services across the UK, we hope that this equipment will assist in the immense relief effort that is needed in Ukraine.”

- Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer

Fire Hoses Donated for Benefit of Animals

In line with our commitment to provide an environmentally friendly service to our communities, we have donated some more old fire hoses to the Berkshire College of Agriculture Zoo to help enrich the lives of the animals living there.

In the past, as you can see from the photos, fire hoses have been used to make toys, browser racks for food, feeders, hammocks, cargo nets, mats or just simply climbing opportunities. Due to its toughness and durability, fire hoses are a tried and tested material for use.

A number of hoses have been donated that are surplus to requirements, and we are pleased to re-purpose old materials in a sustainable way that benefits animals living in the zoo.



» Corporate Measures

Service Provision

Service Provision monitors the service we provide to the public. Performance is monitored in relation to attendance at incidents, types of incidents, Prevention activities and fire safety in commercial buildings.

Measure	2023/2024 Target	2023/2024 Actual
Number of fire deaths	0	4
Number of non-fatal fire casualties	34 max	38
Number of deliberate primary fires	135 max	100
Number of deliberate secondary fires	244 max	187
Prevention		
Increase the number of Referrals for Safe and Well Visits received from our partners	10%	9.2%
Percentage of Safe and Well referrals, where there has been a threat or incidence of arson, completed within 48 hours	100%	100%
Percentage of Very High Safe and Well Referrals completed within target time	35%	37.3%
Percentage of High Risk Safe and Well Referrals completed within target time	50%	50.2%
Protection		
Proportion of Fire Safety Audits conducted against premises identified as High or Very High Risk in our Risk Based Inspection Programme	monitor	26.2%
Percentage of Fire Safety Audits with a 'Broadly Compliant' result	60% max	69.0%
Percentage success when cases go to court	80%	0 cases
Percentage of statutory fire consultations completed within the required timeframes	95%	96.9%



» Corporate Measures

Measure	2023/2024 Target	2023/2024 Actual
Response		
Percentage of occasions where the first fire engine arrives at an emergency incident within 10 minutes from time the emergency call was answered	75%	72.3%
Percentage of wholetime frontline pumping appliance availability	99%	97.4%
Percentage of hours where there is adequate crewing on on-call frontline pumping appliances (based on 24/7 crewing)	50%	40.0%
Resilience		
Percentage of visits to Very High, High and Medium Operational Risk sites completed in timescale	100%	69.8%
Number of Service Delivery Hub exercises completed	12	12
Efficiency		
Percentage of Automatic Fire Alarm calls where RBFRS did not attend	30% (min)	25.3%
Customer Experience		
Percentage of domestic respondents satisfied with the overall service	100%	100%
Percentage of commercial respondents satisfied with the overall service	95%	100%
Percentage of respondents satisfied with the services with regards to Fire Safety Audits	90%	96.3%
Percentage of domestic respondents satisfied with the service regards their Safe and Well Visit	100%	99.6%
Number of complaints received	Monitor	21
Number of compliments received	Monitor	21



» Corporate Measures

Corporate Health

The Corporate Health quadrant monitors the wellbeing of the organisation. Performance is monitored in relation to staffing levels, health and safety and finances within RBFRRS, to ensure the organisation is being run safely, efficiently and is cost effective.

Measure	2023/2024 Target	2023/2024 Actual
Human Resources and Learning & Development		
Percentage of working time lost to sickness across all staff groups	5%	5.5%
Percentage of eligible staff with Personal Development Reviews	100%	94.0%
Number of formal grievances	Monitor	17
Health and Safety		
Number of *RIDDOR accidents and diseases	Max 4	3
Finance and Procurement		
Percentage of spend subject to competition	85%	89.5%
Compliant spend as a percentage of overall spend	100%	99.7%
Freedom of Information		
Number of Information Commissioner assessments finding that the Service has breached Information Rights Legislation (Free-dom of Information Act, Environmental Regulations or Data Pro-tection Legislation)	0	0

*RIDDOR is the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013. Under RIDDOR we have a duty to report certain events, those events being accidents that led to a person being unfit for their normal work for more than 7 days, or 'specified injuries' which are more serious types of injuries. These include injuries such as broken bones, crush injuries and amputations.



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