

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

***Our Commitments
to the people of
Royal Berkshire***



Introduction

As Chairman of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority I am delighted to be introducing this important document.

My role, alongside the other twenty-four councillors on the Fire Authority, is to ensure that the people who have elected us benefit from having the best possible fire and rescue service in Royal Berkshire - a responsibility we take very seriously.

At a time when we continue to see our budgets reduce, it's more important than ever to be really clear about what we want to achieve. That's why the Authority decided earlier this year to review and reset its policy direction – to make certain we are concentrating on doing the most important things for the people we serve.



In this document we set out our priorities in the form of six Strategic Commitments. The Commitments aren't intended to cover everything we do or all the things that are important to us – such as, for example, operating in an environmentally sustainable way and promoting equality of opportunity. They have been developed and published to make clear to people outside Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service what our key priorities are at this time and, also, to guide the work of our officer colleagues within the Service to ensure that the priorities are addressed.

Each of the Commitments is supported by a policy statement which explains in high-level terms: why the Commitment has been made; what it is intended to achieve; and how we are going to go about fulfilling it. Both the Commitments and the statements that support them will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Fire Authority, so that they remain current by being adapted to reflect changing circumstances.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service has a proud history. Members of the Fire Authority are determined to ensure that it also has a bold, bright future and believe that the Commitments we are making in this document will provide a platform from which that can be achieved for the people of our county.

Councillor Colin Dudley
Chairman – Royal Berkshire Fire Authority

Commitment 1 - We will educate people on how to prevent fires and other emergencies, and what to do when they happen.

Members of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority have made this commitment to reflect a statutory responsibility. In making this our first Commitment we acknowledge that many people would say that our top priority should be having firefighters available to respond quickly to emergencies. That is essential, but we firmly believe in the 'prevention is better than cure' philosophy, and therefore see stopping emergencies happening in the first place as the best of all scenarios.

By fulfilling this commitment, we will achieve the following outcomes:

- 1. Minimise the risk to life from fires and other emergencies.*
- 2. Minimise the social, economic and environmental impact of fires and other emergencies.*

In order to fulfil this commitment, members of the Fire Authority will set challenging targets and carefully monitor progress on their delivery. We will also focus, alongside our officer colleagues, on the following priority areas for improvement:

- a. Effective information sharing with other organisations, to ensure that our resources are targeted effectively at those most at risk.*
- b. Joining-up prevention activity with other organisations, so that every professional contact with vulnerable people addresses as many risk factors as possible.*
- c. Increasing capacity for volunteers to deliver prevention services.*

Should proposals arise in connection with this Commitment that involve potentially significant changes to our community risk management arrangements, a full public consultation on the proposals in question will take place.

Commitment 2 - We will ensure a swift and effective response when called to emergencies.

Members of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority have made this commitment to reflect a statutory responsibility, and in recognition of the need to have well trained, well-equipped, fit and healthy firefighters available to immediately respond to emergencies when they do happen.

By fulfilling this commitment, we will achieve the following outcomes:

- 1. Minimise the risk to life from fires and other emergencies.*
- 2. Minimise the social, economic and environmental impact of fires and other emergencies.*

In order to fulfil this commitment, members of the Fire Authority will set evidence-based emergency response standards and monitor performance

against them. We will also focus, alongside our officer colleagues, on the following priority areas for improvement:

- a. Increasing the resilience of the Retained Duty System (a system involving part-time, on-call firefighters being paged to respond to emergencies from their homes or places of primary employment etc).*
- b. Employing flexible fire engine crewing arrangements.*
- c. Improving the fitness and health of firefighters.*
- d. Sharing emergency response resources with other fire and rescue services.*

Should proposals arise in connection with this Commitment that involve potentially significant changes to our community risk management arrangements, a full public consultation on the proposals in question will take place.

Commitment 3 - We will ensure appropriate fire safety standards in buildings.

Members of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority have made this commitment to reflect a statutory responsibility, and to demonstrate our recognition that, by combining the provision of sound professional advice and proportionate regulation of fire safety standards, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service will support responsible economic growth.

By fulfilling this commitment, we will achieve the following outcomes:

- 1. Minimise the risk to life from fires and other emergencies.*
- 2. Minimise the social, economic and environmental impact of fires and other emergencies.*
- 3. Support responsible economic growth in Royal Berkshire.*

In order to fulfil this commitment, members of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority will set targets for inspections of fire safety standards in buildings and monitor progress on their delivery. We will also focus, alongside our officer colleagues, on increasing the installation of sprinklers and other fire suppression systems in buildings.

Should proposals arise in connection with this Commitment that involve potentially significant changes to our community risk management arrangements, a full public consultation on the proposals in question will take place.

Commitment 4 - We will seek opportunities to contribute to a broader safety, health and wellbeing agenda.

Members of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority have made this commitment to reflect our view that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service should make its assets (its buildings, equipment, people and powerfully-positive brand) available to partners and commissioners in order to improve safety, health and wellbeing outcomes for people across the county.

By fulfilling this commitment, we intend to achieve a broad range of positive outcomes, including those associated with:

- 1. Public safety.*
- 2. Reductions in crime and disorder.*
- 3. Aspiration, attainment and employability of young people.*
- 4. Public health.*

In order to fulfil this commitment, members of the Fire Authority will, alongside officer colleagues, focus on the following priorities:

- a. Working with colleagues from South Central Ambulance Service to support improvements in arrangements for responding to medical emergencies in Royal Berkshire.*
- b. Working with councillors and officers from local authorities in Royal Berkshire, to maximise the contribution that RBFRS is able to make in achieving important safety, health and wellbeing outcomes associated with local government priorities.*
- c. Working with the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner, to maximise the contribution that RBFRS is able to make in delivering elements of the Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan.*

Commitment 5 - We will ensure that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service provides good value for money.

Members of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority have made this commitment to acknowledge the importance of wisely investing public money.

By fulfilling this commitment, we will maximise the return on investment of available financial resources by making certain that they are used as efficiently as possible. In doing so, we will also ensure that Council Tax is set at a reasonable level.

In order to fulfil this commitment we will set budgets that are aligned to organisational priorities. We will scrutinise the way in which these budgets are spent, with a particular emphasis on successful delivery of projects and achievement of performance targets. We will also focus, alongside our officer colleagues, on the following priority areas for improvement:

- a. Developing shared service arrangements with partner organisations, to deliver capable support services at lower cost.
- b. Developing shared service arrangements with partner organisations, to deliver effective frontline services at lower cost.
- c. Developing arrangements for sharing buildings with partner organisations – with a particular emphasis on sharing with other blue-light services.
- d. Exploring opportunities to exploit advances in technology (such as the rollout of Super-Fast Broadband across Royal Berkshire) to support flexible working arrangements and improve service delivery.
- e. Increasing the profitability of our trading company.
- f. Seeking opportunities to charge for service we provide and facilities we offer, where it is appropriate to do so.
- g. Securing sponsorship.

Commitment 6 - We will work with Central Government to ensure a fair deal for Royal Berkshire.

Members of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority have made this commitment to reflect the importance of ensuring that the interests of residents and businesses in the county are taken into consideration by Central Government during the process of developing and setting fire policy – including that associated with funding arrangements.

By fulfilling this commitment we will ensure that Government Ministers and civil servants properly consider circumstances in Royal Berkshire when developing and setting policy.

In order to fulfil this commitment we will proactively and reactively lobby Central Government – both directly and through the Local Government Association – to influence fire policy decisions that will affect people in Royal Berkshire.

As an early example of this approach, with the support of our officer colleagues, we will prepare a submission to Government, setting out details of our experience having recently dealt with serious flooding in Royal Berkshire, to ensure that necessary lessons feed-in to future national and local flood response policy development.