



Thames Valley Fire Control Service Joint Committee Meeting

Monday, 16 March 2026, 14:00hrs

Minutes

- Present:** Councillor Duncan Banks, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority
Councillor Llew Monger, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority
Councillor Neil Fawcett Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor Peter Frewer, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
- In Attendance:** Louise Harrison, Chief Fire Officer (BFRS)
Graham Britten, Director of Legal and Governance (BFRS)
Paul Scanes, Head of Response and Resilience (BFRS)
Katie Nellist, Democratic Services Officer (BFRS)
Tim Readings, Area Manager Policy and Assurance (RBFRS)
Lukasz Wrona, Head of Business Information & Systems (RBFRS)
Mike Swadling, Area Manager Response, Resilience & Collaboration (OFRS)
Martin Hall, Senior Commercial Specialist (OFRS)
Simon Harris, Group Manager (TVFCS)
- Online:** Rob McDougall – Chief Fire Officer (Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service)
Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (RBFRS)
Asif Hussain, Head of Finance and Assets (BFRS)

Action

1. APOLOGIES

Councillor Simon Werner (Royal Berkshire Fire Authority)
Councillor Jenny Hannaby (Oxfordshire County Council)

2. INTRODUCTIONS

All Members and Officers present gave a brief introduction.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest received.

4. MINUTES AND RECORDED ACTIONS OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 15 DECEMBER 2025

RESOLVED - that the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2025, be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

RESOLVED - that the Exempt Minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2025, be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

5. TO DEAL WITH BUSINESS REMAINING FROM THE LAST MEETING, IF ANY

None.

6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS (WRITTEN QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 26.1)

None received.

7. QUESTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER 9.5 (QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC)

None received.

8. TVFCS Q3 2025/26 BUDGET OUTTURN

The Head of Finance and Procurement (RBFRS) advised Members that at the end of Q3, officers were forecasting a year-end outturn on the revenue account that was going to be £23k over budget, this equated to a variance of 0.78%. This small variance was explained by the amount of government grant received to compensate for the rise in the employer's National Insurance (NI) rate. The budget, which was in line with government guidance at the time, assumed reimbursement for the full amount of the NI rate increase. However, the actual grant received was substantially lower than anticipated.

Following on from the production of this revenue account forecast at Q3, officers now had an indication from OCC Treasury that interest earned on the balances of the renewals fund was likely to be between £60k and £65k for 2025-26.

Members would recall that when the budget was set for 2026-27 in December, to be prudent, interest earned was not taken into account when calculating the renewals fund position for 2025-26 and future years. Therefore, the unbudgeted interest for 2025-26 would more than compensate for this small adverse variance on the revenue account.

Turning to the renewals fund itself, accrued expenditure to the end of Q3

amounted to £67k. Phase one of the replacement project commenced with the appointment of the business analyst, and this had incurred a cost of £50k to the end of Q3. In addition to this role, OCC appointed a procurement lead and the cost of that at the end of Q3 was £14k. The cost of the hardware update was £3.5k. Overall, costs from the renewal fund for 2025-26 were in line with those projections presented to the Joint Committee in December.

RESOLVED –

That the Q3 2025/26 budget outturn position as detailed in Appendices A and B be noted.

9. TVFCS PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT Q3 2025/26

The Head of Response and Resilience (BFRS) advised Members that he was pleased to present the Thames Valley Fire Control Service performance report for Quarter 3, covering the period from October to December 2025. This quarter reflected continued stability in the control room operations, following the introduction of the revised performance measures that were reviewed by the Joint Coordination Group (JCG) last year. These updated measures were now fully embedded within the performance dashboards. Each metric included its own narrative summary, which had allowed officers to reduce duplication and streamline the written report.

There were two measures that continued to remain challenging to report accurately. These were PS 1.3 – the average time to alert stations, excluding call-challenged incidents, and PS 1.6 – challenged calls that result in no attendance. The JCG continued to explore alternative methods to capture and evaluate these measures reliably, and updates would be brought back to the Committee once that work concluded.

Under “Great Place to Work – People,” the dashboards continued to show steady performance. There were no significant workforce concerns arising this quarter, and staff wellbeing indicators remained broadly positive.

For Public Safety and Effectiveness, operational performance across call handling and incident support remained consistent. As always, officers continued to focus on quality and speed of response, supported by ongoing work to strengthen data capture in key areas.

In terms of Public Value and Efficiency, The Service continued to operate efficiently, with performance within expected parameters. Not specifically included in this report, officers were now pleased to report that a six-point action plan which was logged with NEC had all been closed and monitored closely.

The Chairman asked that under the Executive Summary at 1.1 it referred to JCC, should it be JCG.

The Group Manager (TVFCS) advised that it should be JC for Joint Committee.

The Chairman noted that on ‘Public Safety – Effectiveness’ PS1.1 Emergency Calls answered, it said that some technical issues were experienced within the quarter, what were the issues.

The Group Manager (TVFCS) advised they were the technical issues that resulted in the six-point action plan with NEC. The technical issue experienced related to the part of the system where BT's geolocation services were presented to the operators. In order to provide call handling with access to this service, officers had to migrate the service to the fall-back telephony solution, which had the same functionality as the primary solution, but did not have the same call logging functionality built into it. In those periods where the fall-back telephony solution was being used, control staff had access to the technology they needed to do the job but did not have access to the call logging that would allow officers to accurately record the number of calls that had been received.

RESOLVED –

That the TVFCS Q3 Performance Monitoring Report for 2025/26 be noted.

10. INTER AUTHORITY AGREEMENT PROGRESS UPDATE – TO RECEIVE A PRESENTATION

The Area Manager Policy and Assurance (RBFRS) gave a presentation and advised Members that the legal agreement was due to expire, and the expiration of the legal agreement would mean that it had become a key dependency for the tech replacement programme. Officers could not sign a new contract with a new supplier that would outlast the lifespan of the current legal agreement. The main challenge was getting through the governance process in a timely manner to ensure there was a new inter-authority agreement in place in time before the tech replacement programme.

As previously discussed, it would not mean completely redrafting the legal agreement, with the maturity of the partnership and the success of ongoing collaboration projects, there were no fundamental flaws within the agreement, but it was outdated. Officers had been identifying causes within the legal agreement that no longer reflect current practise in terms of management or governance or financial constraints that were developed over a decade ago that reflected perhaps a lack of confidence amongst partners that no longer exists. It was also important to note that there was a plan B, should it run into unforeseen problems.

The Group Manager (TVFCS) had undertaken quite a bit of work to identify some financial clauses within the agreement for example, the fact that a TVFCS contract could not be signed without going out to all authorities, irrespective of the value of the contract, officers would be looking to achieve some agreement around levels of delegated authority, obviously with the agreement of authority levels before that happens. Finance colleagues have a meeting on the 1 April 2026 to consider some of the recommendations. The Group Manager (TVFCS) had worked hard to pick up elements around management of TVFSC that needed to be addressed, so progress was being made but the timeline was relatively tight.

The revised legal agreement would need to be brought to the Joint Committee meeting in July because officers did not want to be bringing it to members at the same time as the tech replacement decision.

The Director of Legal and Governance asked if officers were looking at the

current version of the inter-authority agreement as there had been revisions made and approved by this Joint Committee on 25 July 2016. He would send the Group Manager (TVFCS) the current version, to ensure they were all looking at the same one.

The Chief Fire Officer (OFRS) felt it was worth reflecting that this document was created when there were some challenges to overcome making sure the three authorities could come together. It was a very different situation now, and the legal agreement needed to take into account how well the three authorities work together and therefore making sure the inter-authority agreement allows that to continue, and ensure it keeps providing this service in the best way possible.

11. TVFCS C&C PROCUREMENT UPDATE – TO RECEIVE A PRESENTATION

The Senior Commercial Specialist (OCC) gave a presentation and advised this was a procurement update for the TVFCS system. The plan phase started at the end of last year and all the tasks set out were now completed. The next stage was the definition stage. The contract was originally going to be defined using Oxfordshire County Council staff, but it was agreed that it would be better to get some external resources to assist with it, and that had now been undertaken and appointments made. Whilst there was a delay to that particular aspect of work, it should now be available at the end of the month ready for stage two of the competitive flexible procedure. The amber status for the definition stage was just a reflection of the fact there was a month's delay, but the route back to green was well defined. A key attribute in the definition phase was to actually specify what the requirements were for the new service.

The procurement had now been published, and so it was now moving into the procurement phase. The anticipation was that the procurement would now end in October, which was a reflection of the delay mentioned earlier. The overall plan was still to be able to deliver the replacement service broadly in line with the timescale set out, which was to have a new system in place by 1 April 2028, which allowed for a transition period of 18 months.

The procurement phase was a competitive flexible approach; and the next stage was the detailed stage where officers would be looking at those requirements and receiving supplier responses. In terms of feedback, 22 suppliers had opened the expression of interest in the pack, of those, five had indicated intent to respond and all of the participants of the supplier day had indicated an intent to respond. It was good news that people had actually read the tender and planned to respond.

Projects risks were defined on the slide; most were green but there were two amber, financial pressure/approval and LGR that needed further work and the risks were being looked at in more detail.

The Area Manager Policy and Assurance (RBFRS) asked about the timeline for this procurement, as the Joint Committee meetings were September or December and this looks like it was ready October.

The Senior Commercial Specialist (OCC) advised that the second stage was to invite all bidders that want to participate, and have them approved to submit their responses, which would take from April until June, the three top bidders would then be invited to do a set of demonstrations and a presentation, and that would take until the end of August. Officers may then invite two bidders to participate in a negotiation phase. Officers would like to have a decision made before 19 October which was the current contract start date.

Councillor Fawcett asked about one of the risks, which was local government reform. Was this referring to Oxfordshire going through a lot of government reform, or was it referring to the potential changes that the government might make to fire, or both.

The Senior Commercial Specialist (OCC) advised that they did not know the outcome of that particular risk but were working towards the plan in a positive way and would mitigate anything that might occur as a consequence.

Councillor Fawcett felt it would be better to split those into two different elements, as although they were both government reforms, they were actually very different strands and would have different potential risks, particularly in terms of what happens to Oxfordshire, there would be points at which there would be opportunities for mitigation, depending on each stage of the process.

The Senior Commercial Specialist (OCC) advised members there was some opportunity in the way the contract was designed to consider managing known risk, but the scale of that particular set of risks was so unknown, that it would be very difficult to actually make provision for that, whereas some of the other risks that were being considered, like ESN, would be things that could be considered within a contract.

14. FORWARD PLAN – TO NOTE

Noted.

15. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Monday 13 July 2026 (Annual Meeting) – 2pm at OFRS HQ

(The meeting closed at 2.40pm)