



Efficiency and Productivity Plan

2025-26



Buckinghamshire
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE
we save lives

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Budget

The following table shows the sources of income and planned spending for the financial years 2023-24 through to 2025-26:

Revenue Expenditure	2023-24 £000	2024-25 £000	2025-26 £000
Direct Employee	25,703	28,855	30,737
Indirect Employee	874	938	1,126
Premises	2,441	2,324	2,368
Transport	1,180	1,256	1,337
Supplies and Services	5,652	6,066	6,410
Capital Financing	1,870	1,693	2,661
Other	2,483	670	-501
Total	40,203	41,802	44,138
Income	2023-24 £000	2024-25 £000	2025-26 £000
Actual Received from Precept	-25,194	-26,192	-28,530
Local Government Finance Settlement	-12,745	-13,010	-13,081
Other Grants	-989	-933	-877
Income Raised Locally	-1,275	-1,667	-1,650
Total	-40,203	-41,802	-44,138

In the last financial year, the budget scrutiny process involved a number of member challenge sessions from lead members, executive committee members and the full authority. The budget was significantly enhanced through these sessions which led to a budget which met the strategic priorities set by members, strengthened the financial resilience of the Authority and set a clear platform for future transformation of the Service.

Based on the anticipated cost pressures, planned efficiency savings, and forecast funding, the Service is showing a balanced budget position for 2025-26 through to 2029-30.

Reserves

The table below shows the forecast usable reserve levels over the life of the medium-term financial plan (MTFP):

Usable Reserves	2023-24 £000	2024-25 £000	2025-26 £000	2026-2027 £000	2027-28 £000
General Reserves	1,625	2,040	2,040	2,040	2,040
Earmarked Revenue Reserves	3,798	5,290	240	0	0
Earmarked Capital Reserves	5,796	6,221	4,954	1,698	1,139
Total	11,219	13,551	7,234	3,738	3,179

As can be seen from the table, at the end of 2023-24 approximately half of the total usable reserves are held for investment in the capital programme, which consists predominately of investment in our estate, fleet, and ICT capabilities. The amount to be held in the General Fund to mitigate the risk of unforeseen circumstances and major one-off events has been increased to just over £2m, to reflect increases in inflation.

The Service has recently launched its new Community Risk Management Plan, and this funding will be used to help achieve the objectives identified within that Plan. The Plan will focus on several key areas that require significant capital investment, including:

- Optimising the use of assets to improve response and resilience, including to the increasing threat of extreme weather events such as wildfire and flooding.
- Investment in local training facilities to further enhance the service provided to the public.
- Maximising opportunities to improve productivity, efficiency and effectiveness through innovation and the use of up-to-date technology.
- A significant refurbishment/rebuild of High Wycombe fire station.

Precept

At its meeting on 12 February 2025, the Authority approved a Band D equivalent precept of £84.46, which was an increase of £5 from the previous year.

Efficiency

The table below summarises the cashable efficiency savings in non-pay budget costs the Service has made during 2023-24 and 2024-25 and plans to make during 2025-26:

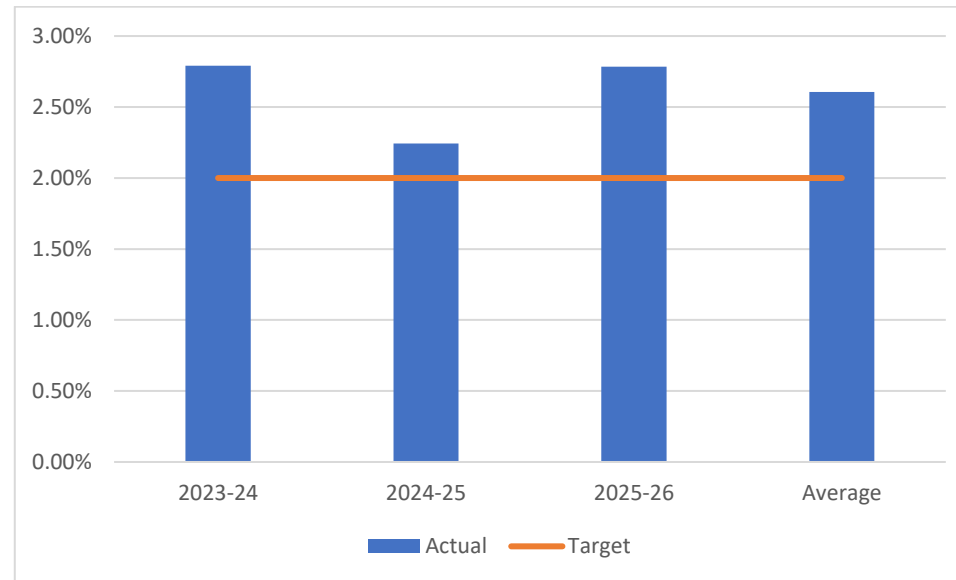
Category	Actual 2023-24 £000		Actual 2024-25 £000		Forecast 2025-26 £000	
Opening Revenue Expenditure Budget (Net)	36,450		39,470		42,989	
Less Total Direct Employee Costs	25,703		28,855		30,737	
Non Pay Budget	10,747		10,615		12,252	
Efficiency Target (2% of non-pay budget)	215		212		245	
	<i>Recurrent</i>	<i>Non-recurrent</i>	<i>Recurrent</i>	<i>Non-recurrent</i>	<i>Recurrent</i>	<i>Non-recurrent</i>
Rent/Rates			150			
Shared Premises	166					
Other Technology Improvements	40		43			
Decreased Usage			20			
Revenue Expenditure Charged to Capital	-254					
Net Borrowing Costs	348		25			
Other – Reduction in Bank Costs					311	
Other – Reduction in Cross Border Charges					30	
Total Efficiency Savings	300		238		341	
Efficiency Savings as a Percentage of Non-Payroll Budgets	2.79%		2.24%		2.78%	
Over/(Under)	0.79%		0.24%		0.78%	

An outline of the efficiencies delivered within each category is as follows:

- Rent/Rates – the Service has vacated its only operational leasehold property, which accommodated the USAR capability as well as our central stores, office accommodation and main meeting room. This has been enabled by the increase in remote office working and optimising the wider use of our estate.
- Shared Premises – the Service completed the construction of a purpose built Blue Light Hub, which houses fire, police and ambulance all on one site. The savings shown here represent both the premises savings from consolidating two fire stations into one, as well as those achieved from sharing the cost of premises with the other emergency services.

- Other Technology Improvements – the investment in Office 365 and remote working has enabled efficiencies in courses and conference fees, mileage, subsistence, and travel budgets across the Service.
- Decreased usage – this consists of several smaller improvements across a range of activities, including reducing the use of consultancy and third-party legal services.
- Revenue Expenditure Charged to Capital – investment in improving the estate during previous years, as well as the sale of assets surplus to requirements, has reduced the amount of revenue funding required to support our future capital programme. Collaborative procurement of frontline pumping appliances continues to mitigate against future increases in costs. More recently, the collaborative procurement of breathing apparatus (BA) sets across the Thames Valley services resulted in savings of over £0.5 million across the three services, with this Service's savings being £187k.
- Net Borrowing Costs – the planned repayment of historic borrowing will reduce the cost of interest payments in future years. Further savings were realised because of the early repayment of another loan. Recent rises in the Bank of England base rate have increased the amount of income the Service is able to generate through its in-house Treasury Management function. The latter is only shown 2023-24 as the guidance for 2024-25 was revised and stated that interest income should now be excluded from declared efficiency savings (and is now shown within the new Income section).
- Bank Costs – improved workforce planning, introduction of new roles, and increasing skill levels across key areas has reduced the number of additional (bank) shifts that are required to maintain the same number of frontline pumping appliances.
- Cross Border Costs – the actions taken to reduce bank costs have also seen a reduction in the number of times the Service has required support from neighbouring fire and rescue services.

The chart below shows the savings achieved/planned for each year, and on average over the three-year period, against the target of 2% efficiency savings target expressed as a percentage of non-payroll budgets:



As can be seen from the above, the Service exceeded the target for 2023-24 and 2024-25 and has firm plans in place to meet the target in 2025-26.

Income

The table below summarises the income the Service has generated during 2023-24 and 2024-25 and plans to generate during 2025-26:

Category	Actual 2023-24 £000		Actual 2024-25 £000		Forecast 2025-26 £000	
	<i>Recurrent</i>	<i>Non-recurrent</i>	<i>Recurrent</i>	<i>Non-recurrent</i>	<i>Recurrent</i>	<i>Non-recurrent</i>
Income generated from charging policies	-578		-643		-593	
Income generated from shared premises	-423		-472		-457	
Income generated from interest on investments	-983		-1,229		-600	
Income generated from other sources		-132		-141		
Total Efficiency Savings		-2,116		-2,485		-1,650

An outline of the income delivered within each category is as follows:

- Charging policies – covers a range of services for which the Service charges third parties. More than a third of the total amount relates to charges made to telecommunications providers for siting their equipment on our drill towers.
- Share premises – the Service acts as a landlord for some other public bodies on a number of our sites. The most significant income here relates to the income received from Thames Valley Police and South Central Ambulance Service for their use of the tri-service Blue Light Hub in Milton Keynes.
- Interest on investments – this is generated from the in-house treasury management of the Service's cash balances. The income generated is significantly affected by market rates.
- Other sources – ah-hoc income generated throughout the year, for example, costs recovered from seconding officers to other organisations

In both 2023-24 and 2024-25 the Service significantly overachieved against the income budget, largely driven by interest rates staying higher for longer than forecast, enhancing the interest achieved on investments.

Productivity

Home Fire Safety Visits

One of the key productivity improvements for the Service is in relation to Home Fire Safety Visits. Understanding the low numbers of Home Fire Safety Visits delivered by the Service was identified in 2021 by HMICFRS as an area for improvement. The number of visits reported in 2019 by HMICFRS as delivered by the Service was 3.9 per 1,000 population compared to the national average of 10.4. During 2022-23 the total number of visits undertaken was 2,403. As a result of using staff more productively the Service has seen significant progress in increasing the number of visits and then sustaining these numbers over the past couple of years:

Output	2023-24	2024-25
Home Fire Safety Visits	5,024	5,039*

* projected visits based on number delivered at the end of February 2025.

These visits are also targeted effectively, with 93% and 90% of those visits delivered to the most vulnerable residents during 2023-24 and 2024-25 respectively.

Fire Safety Audits

As well as increasing visits in the home, the Service also has ambitious plans in place to increase the number of audits undertaken in businesses and public places. From 2023-24 to 2024-25 the Service increased the number of audits undertaken by more than 25%:

Output	2023-24	2024-25
Fire Safety Audits	468	596*

* projected audits based on number delivered at the end of February 2025.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The primary way in which the Service currently measures productivity is through the use of KPIs, which are reported to Members on a quarterly basis. A copy of the most recent report can be found here - <https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g18972/Public%20reports%20pack%2019th-Mar-2025%2010.00%20BMKFA%20Executive%20Committee.pdf?T=10> (starting on p.15).

Supplementary Information

The efficiency savings shown on pages 3-5 of this document only show cashable non-payroll savings made in 2023-24 and 2024-25, and those planned for 2025-26. It does not include any non-cashable efficiency savings or cashable savings initially made prior to 2023-24, but which continue to benefit the Service and residents of Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes. Details of some of these efficiencies are included below.

Collaboration (including Procurement)

The Service collaborates closely with other fire and rescue services, most notably with Royal Berkshire and Oxfordshire (as well as Thames Valley Police and South Central Ambulance Service) under the banner of Thames Valley collaboration. A summary of achievements and the five-year business plan for this collaboration can be found here – <https://www.rbfrs.co.uk/app/uploads/2023/01/Thames-Valley-Collaboration-5-Year-Business-Plan-FINAL-v1.4-.pdf>. Since this plan was published, collaboration has continued and the recent joint procurement of breathing apparatus across the three services has saved more than £0.5 million. Furthermore, it further enhances the interoperability of the three services when supporting each other at incidents.

The Service also continues to explore collaboration opportunities across a range of back-office functions. This includes the recently agreed sharing of the data protection function with a local council, saving the Service over £30k per year.

As well as realising efficiencies from the Blue Light Hub noted earlier, there have been other collaborative estates projects that have provided benefits that have primarily accrued to other third-parties. During 2023-24 the Service completed the co-location of community policing teams onto sites at Newport Pagnell and Princes Risborough. The works have been funded by Thames Valley Police, with the Service only charging a peppercorn lease and recovering incremental costs for utilities etc. During 2022-23 the Service welcomed ground support teams of Thames Valley Air Ambulance to our site at Marlow. This didn't require any significant adaptations to the site and incremental costs are again recovered on a cost recovery basis.

Asset Management and Investment in Technology

All equipment and appliance checks and inventories, and defect reporting, is carried out electronically. The Service has consistently invested in integrating systems to improve efficiency and productivity. The evaluation report on the business and systems integration (BASI) project can be found here - <https://bucksfire.gov.uk/documents/2020/07/wednesday-22-july-2020-full-agenda-and-papers.pdf> (pp. 207-228)

Resourcing

The Service utilises a system of voluntary bank shifts to resource our response model. This reduces the number of staff required as absences are covered by additional shifts as and when required, rather than over-crewing to cover potential absences. This is significantly more efficient, and the Service's most recent HMICFRS report highlighted that the expenditure per head of population per year was only £35.51, compared to the national average of £41.88.