

# ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

## PRESS RELEASE

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### NEW THAMES VALLEY FIRE CONTROL SERVICE GOES LIVE

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) has joined forces with Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire and Rescue Services to establish a shared emergency call handling centre.

The Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS), which is based at RBFRS' headquarters in Calcot, Reading, answers 999 calls and mobilises fire engines on behalf of the three fire and rescue services to incidents across the Thames Valley, serving a combined population of over 2 million people. The new facility became fully operational on Thursday 23 April.

The TVFCS replaces the three fire and rescue services' individual Control rooms, which were in urgent need of updating following the termination of the Government's national FiReControl project in 2010<sup>1</sup>. After the FiReControl project came to an end, each fire and rescue service in England was able to apply for up to £1.8m Government grant money to undertake this work.

The three Thames Valley fire and rescue services chose to boost the value of this upgrade by working in partnership on plans for a joint Control centre to deliver increased resilience, efficiency and improved performance – which will also result in collective savings of over £1m a year for the next 15 years.

The TVFCS features the most up-to-date technology. This includes a new mobilising system, which enables control operators to identify the exact geographic location of an incident more quickly and, at the same time, pinpoint the precise position of each available fire engine and officer via GPS. This allows the quickest available vehicle to be used - irrespective of whether it is based in Berkshire, Oxfordshire or Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes - and consequently helps to improve attendance times.

Furthermore, every fire appliance across the three fire and rescue services has been fitted or upgraded with the latest Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs). These display incidents on a mapping system, enabling fire crews to see their location and that of the incident in real-time. MDTs also provide the crews with risk-critical information such as individual building design and details about any special hazards or unusual processes or manufacturing at a particular location.

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## ***MAKING BERKSHIRE SAFER***

Issued by Ellie Gray, Senior Corporate Communications Officer

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As a back-up for the TVFCS primary Control at Reading, a non-staffed secondary Control room has also been created and is being maintained at Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service's headquarters in Kidlington. In the unlikely event that the TVFCS primary Control fails or needs to be evacuated, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service will take 999 calls and mobilise resources on behalf of the TVFCS for the short period of time needed to transfer control staff to the secondary Control in Kidlington.

In total, the TVFCS cost in the region of £5.4 million, funded by the three Services' combined grants from central Government. Royal Berkshire, Oxfordshire, and Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authorities project that the TVFCS will achieve total savings of £15,871,672 by the end of 2024-25.

TVFCS programme senior user, Oxfordshire's Deputy Chief Fire Officer Nathan Travis said: "This has been a huge team effort across all three Services and, on behalf of the three Chief Fire Officers and Fire Authority members, I would like to thank all those who have been involved in the delivery of this partnership since its conception over four years ago - staff from the separate control functions affected by this change and staff past and present from within the Thames Valley fire and rescue services, as well as our supporting organisations, representative bodies and third party suppliers.

"Without the professionalism and support from all these people, this significant collaboration between the three fire and rescue services would not have been possible."

Area Manager Bryan Morgan, TVFCS programme senior responsible owner for RBFRS, said: "We are very pleased that the TVFCS is now operational and we look forward to it providing a more resilient, cost-effective and improved service to the people of the Thames Valley."

**ENDS.**

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<sup>i</sup> The national FiReControl project planned to replace fire and rescue services' individual Control rooms with nine regional Control centres across the UK. The project would have seen Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Buckinghamshire & Milton Fire and Rescue Services' separate Control functions move to a single south east regional centre in Fareham, Hampshire.

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