

For Publication

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority  
Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group  
29 November 2018  
Item No. 12

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**REPORT AUTHOR: HEAD OF PROTECTION**

**SUBJECT: LIAISON WITH HM PRISON BEDFORD**

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Background Papers: None

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Implications (tick ✓):

LEGAL		FINANCIAL	
HUMAN RESOURCES		EQUALITY IMPACT	
ENVIRONMENTAL		POLICY	
CORPORATE RISK	Known	OTHER (please specify)	
	New	CORE BRIEF	

*Any implications affecting this report are noted at the end of the report.*

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## PURPOSE

To provide Members of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group with information in relation to the Service's liaison with HMP Bedford following an increase in the number of incidents requiring BFRS response.

## RECOMMENDATION

That Members of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group consider the report provided.

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### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 At the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge meeting held on 19 September 2018 members were advised that there has been an increase in the number of incidents attended at HMP Bedford and that as a result of concern over this the Service has taken certain actions. Members requested that a report be provided on the situation.

### 2 An overview of HMP Bedford

- 2.1 HMP Bedford is a Category B facility which holds more than 500 male prisoners. The total certified normal accommodation is 322 with an operational capacity of 485. The prison has been on its current site, situated close to the town centre of Bedford, since 1801 with modification and expansion in 1849 and 1992. A new fire alarm system was installed in 2002.
- 2.2 All prisons have, by design, restricted access and egress. This poses a number of difficulties to BFRS when attempting to deal with fire and rescue situations e.g. restricted personnel and appliance movements and difficulty and delay in accessing the scene of operations. The age of HMP Bedford and the expansions and modifications that have taken place add to these difficulties. The traditional brick and timber construction of the older parts of the prison presents additional risks in terms of the potential for fire spread. The behaviour from detainees can be unpredictable and may involve hostilities against fire and rescue service personnel. During night time hours the number of prison staff on site is low and this presents further difficulties in relation to the management of incidents.

### 3 The Incident Trend for HMP Bedford

3.1 In the five financial years 2013/14 to 2017/18 BFRS has attended a total of 74 incidents at HMP Bedford. This comprises 18 false alarms, 4 special services and 52 fires. Of particular concern is the significant increase in the number of fire incidents attended each year, as shown in Chart 1 below. It can be seen that this peaked in 2016/17. Of these fires only 5 were accidental in nature, with the rest having been deliberately set. This has included serious incidents including disorder in November 2016 which caused £1M in damage to two wings of the prison.

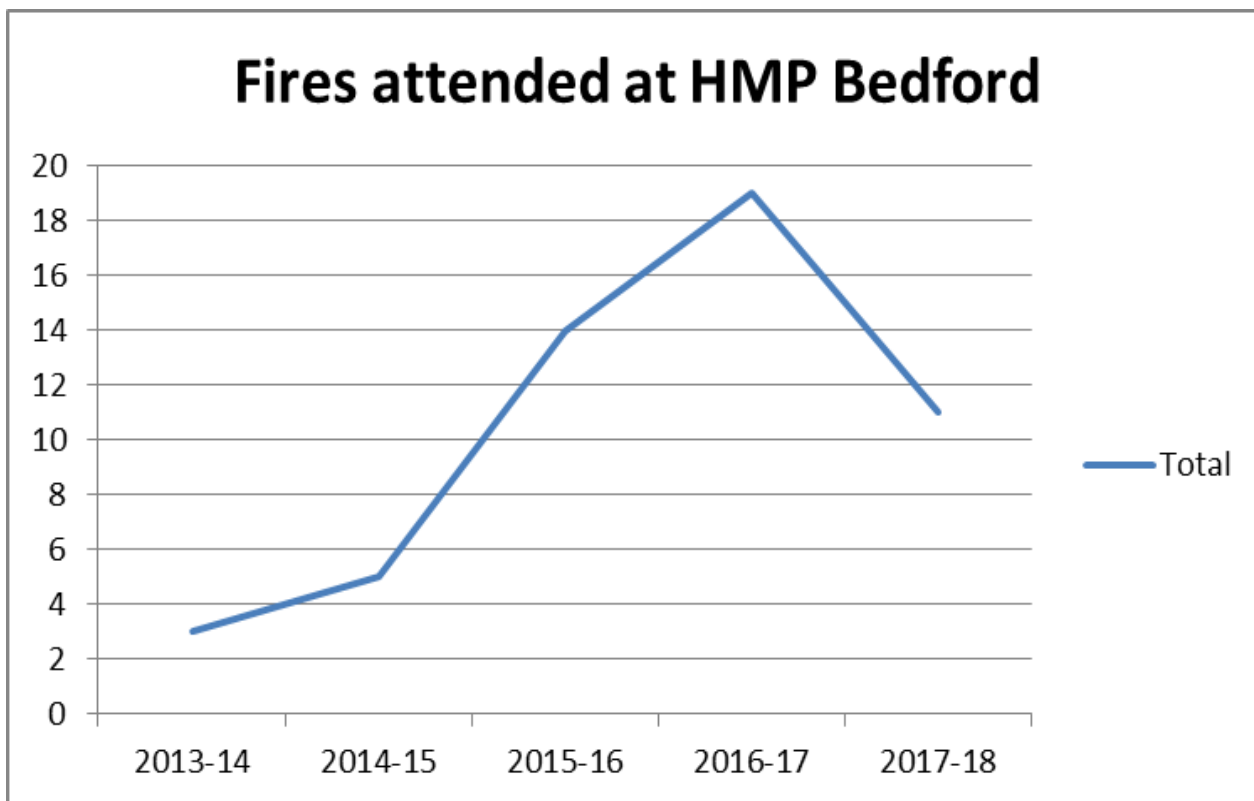


Chart 1 - Fires attended at HMP Bedford over the last 5 years

3.2 An analysis of our deliberate fire records found that 13 out of 14 of the rescues recorded over the last five financial years took place at HMP Bedford.

3.3 In May 2018 HMP Bedford was placed in “special measures” by the Government because of safety concerns. In September 2018 the Chief Inspector of Prisons triggered an "urgent notification" process at the prison regarding concerns over a lack of control in parts of the prison. The inspection found rates of assaults on staff to be high and living conditions to be poor and overcrowded.

#### 4 Pre-planning

4.1 Due to the nature of HMP Bedford and the risks it presents to both the occupants and firefighter safety, HMP Bedford is designated as a special risk. Regular visits take place for information gathering and familiarisation and BFRS holds Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI) and Site Specific Risk Plans (SSRP) relating to dealing with both minor and major incidents.

4.2 In the event of a fire, prison staff will evacuate prisoners in sequence depending upon the severity of the incident: by cell, by landing, by wing. Certain prison staff are trained to take immediate action to deal with fires using respiratory protective equipment and on site firefighting equipment.

4.3 In April 2017 it was considered necessary to write directly to the Deputy Governor of HMP Bedford regarding the need to ensure that up to date agreed response plans were in place. There is a Memorandum of Understanding between HMP Bedford and BFRS and this was reviewed in September 2017 and following internal review processes was sent to HMP Bedford in March 2018 for signature. BFRS is currently awaiting return of the document by HMP Bedford representatives. There have been a number of multi-agency exercises conducted to test emergency arrangements. However, in May 2018 our operational debrief process highlighted problems with prison staff being unaware of agreed procedures leading to operational difficulties in gaining access. The most recent exercise involving BFRS and prison staff took place in June 2018.

5 Other Actions

- 5.1 HMP Bedford is a Crown Premises and as such BFRS does not hold the statutory responsibility for enforcement of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order. This is the responsibility of the Crown Premises Fire Inspection Group (CPFIG). Given the nature of the premises, the prevailing conditions and the rise in the occurrence of incidents, it was considered appropriate to officially write to CPFIG and highlight this as a matter of concern. Our letter sent in October 2018 has been acknowledged by CPFIG Lead Inspector of Prisons and there is an intention for further dialogue around the systems and procedures they have in place for the investigation and monitoring of fires.

6 Recommendation

That Members of the Service Delivery Policy and Challenge Group consider the report provided.

**IAN EVANS  
HEAD OF PROTECTION**