

For Publication

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority  
20 July 2022

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**REPORT AUTHOR:** CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

**SUBJECT:** BLUE LIGHT ESTATES STRATEGY

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For further information Chief Fire Officer  
Tel No: 01234 845017

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Background Papers: FRA Report - Tri-Service Estate Strategy – Proposed Core Principles 23 March 2021

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**PURPOSE:**

To provide Members with an update on progress to establish a Blue Light Estates Strategy between Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS), East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST) and Bedfordshire Police (BP).

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That Members:

1. **Note** the progress of this important collaboration initiative, and;
  2. **Approve** the content of the proposed Blue Light Estates Strategy for Bedfordshire between BFRS, East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST) and Bedfordshire Police (BP) with the Chairman and Chief Fire Officer as signatories.
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## 1. Background

- 1.1 The Estate is one of the key enablers for any organisation, especially our vital emergency services.
- 1.2 At a macro level, the 'blue light' estate portfolio within Bedfordshire has seen varying levels of under investment, meaning that existing buildings require additional investment and maintenance and many are considered not fit for purpose to enable the emergency services to operate in the most effective way, particularly in a post-Covid world.
- 1.3 Whilst BFRS, BP and EEAST have a successful track record of co-locating at several sites in recent years, these initiatives could arguably have benefited from a more strategic approach that considered the longer term needs of all 3 blue light partners.
- 1.4 In December 2019, the CFO (then DCFO) was able to secure an agreement in principle between BFRS, BP and EEAST to establish a blue light estates strategy for Bedfordshire that seeks to adopt a long term approach to invest in existing sites where they require it, or provide new accommodation which will deliver better opportunities to enable collaboration, improve service delivery and/or realise efficiencies.
- 1.5 Although delayed by the impact of the Covid pandemic, the three services reached agreement on a set of core principles that will govern the approach to estates collaboration within Bedfordshire into the long term and towards 2050 and beyond. Such an approach enables a focus to be placed on sharing buildings between police, fire and ambulance wherever mutually beneficial whilst protecting the right for each organisation to determine how it wishes to invest and develop its estate portfolio.
- 1.6 The outcomes from the ongoing BFRS Emergency Cover Review will provide a clear evidence base to enable the Authority to make informed decisions when considering investment in our estate portfolio to ensure our resources are in the right location to maximise effectiveness and efficiency of service delivery in pursuit of our mission to provide outstanding fire and rescue services that help make Bedfordshire safer.

## 2. 5 Core Principles

- 2.1 The vision for the blue light estate within Bedfordshire has to be to provide modern, flexible, fit for purpose and value for money accommodation for our vital emergency services, providing an improved working environment for staff that promotes and supports their health and wellbeing, is readily accessible and reassuring to our diverse communities and adaptable to both current and future demands placed on each organisation.

2.2 The 5 core principles which will guide future decision making are set out below:

- i. Have an estate in the right location, with enough flexibility to efficiently and effectively work alongside partner agencies to reduce running costs.
- ii. Have buildings of the right size to support an efficient and effective service, being highly visible to ensure public confidence and operational viability for all partner agencies to co-locate whenever possible.
- iii. Provide good quality buildings, with enough functionality and flexibility, to support the effective operation and delivery of the business, wellbeing of staff and to meet the diverse needs of our community.
- iv. Provide and maintain a sustainable estate in the right condition to support the effective operation and delivery and to minimise the potential for any disruption to the services.
- v. Deliver services and investments, ensuring value for money, at the right time and right quality and promote energy efficiency.

### 3 Progress Update

- 3.1 There has been interest from other public sector partners to expand the membership of the strategy beyond just blue light partners, particularly as organisations review their estates requirements and adapt to a world post COVID. The CFO has sought to reassure these potential partners that the door will be open to others joining but the priority is to secure signoff with the police and ambulance service first.
- 3.2 The CFO wrote to the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) in May seeking written confirmation that Bedfordshire Police were willing to sign up to the strategy. Despite advising of the deadline for presenting a paper to the FRA on 20 July, regrettably the OPCC has not provided this written confirmation so the draft strategy at Appendix A does not include BP as a signatory. The door remains firmly open to them, and other public sector partners, should they wish to join at a later stage.
- 3.3 The draft strategy at Appendix A is the text only version of the strategy to enable feedback from Members to be incorporated prior to the publication version being finalised.

4 Next Steps

- 4.1 Subject to the Authority giving their approval, a mutually convenient date will be arranged for the signatories to sign the strategy with appropriate media coverage. A steering group will be established to oversee the development of the prioritised delivery plan.

Recommendation

5.1 That Members:

1. **Note** the progress of this important collaboration initiative, and;
2. **Approve** the content of the proposed Blue Light Estates Strategy for Bedfordshire between BFRS, East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST) and Bedfordshire Police (BP) with the Chairman and Chief Fire Officer as signatories.

**ANDREW HOPKINSON**  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**