



# **Bedfordshire**

## Fire and Rescue Service

**BEDFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

### **Medium-Term Financial Strategy**

**2024/25 – 2027/28**

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Appendix 1 Medium-Term Revenue Plan (MTRP)  
(not attached to this version, see Appendix 1 of the 2024/25 budget report)

Appendix 2 Savings/Efficiencies/Income

(not attached to this version, see Appendix 2 of the 2024/25 budget report)

Appendix 3 Medium-Term Capital Programme

*(not attached to this version, see Appendix 3 of the 2024/25 budget report)*

## 1. Introduction

This is Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority's (BFRA) Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). It is a four-year strategy which is refreshed annually and covers the financial years 2024/25 to 2027/28 and seeks to build upon the work undertaken in developing previous MTFS. It contains the Authority's agreed plans for both revenue and capital expenditure and the planned sources of funding to support that expenditure. It also explains the Authority's supporting strategies for matters such as council tax levels, efficiency savings, the use of reserves/reserves strategy and capital funding.

In addition, the plan also seeks to provide the strategic context for these financial plans, linking them to the national and local context and the Authority's corporate objectives and medium-term strategic priorities.

BFRA has been a precepting body since 2004/05 and is required by the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended by the Local Government Act 2003, to set a budget requirement and levy a tax on local council taxpayers each year. The Authority is also required to maintain adequate reserves to cope with unforeseen commitments.

In common with many other authorities, each year since becoming a precepting authority, BFRA has experienced a pressurised financial situation which has necessitated robust and effective medium-term financial planning and the taking of some difficult decisions, in order to present acceptable and affordable budgets.

This year has seen the continuation of the harsh economic climate. However, BFRA continues to rise to the economic challenges that it faces, whilst at the same time endeavouring to continue to improve the quality of the service it provides to the communities it serves.

The Authority has a planning process which aligns its financial planning with its strategic and integrated risk management planning processes, the key outcomes of which are captured in the Authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). The financial implications of the CRMP are thus fully integrated into the annual budget plan and MTFS. Both the CRMP and MTFS cover a rolling four-year timescale and are revised on an annual basis. This MTFS has therefore been developed to ensure that resources are adequate and appropriately directed to deliver the aims, objectives and key priorities of the Authority.

The Authority's corporate risk management process, which identifies key organisational risks and puts into place controls to manage these risks, also plays a major role in determining the outcomes of the planning process. This includes an annual assessment of the potential financial impact of such risks, which in turn is used in determining the most appropriate level of financial reserves for the Authority.

## 2. National Context

Service planning, and therefore financial planning, must take place with due regard to the national policy context for the fire and rescue service and economic and public expenditure plans.

Emergency services play an essential part in serving our communities and keeping them safe. Whilst the police, fire and rescue and NHS ambulance services all have distinct frontline roles, it is clear that close collaboration between them can provide real benefits for the public and help each service better meet the demands and challenges they face.

The Prime Minister's announcement on 5 January 2016 that responsibility for fire and rescue policy had transferred from the Department for Communities and Local Government to the Home Office again demonstrates the Government's commitment to closer collaboration between police and fire and rescue services.

In April 2017 the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) was formed. The NFCC is made up of senior representatives from all fire and rescue services across the UK. The NFCC provides clear, professional advice to government (including devolved administrations) and the wider sector on matters such as professional standards, operational guidance, research and sharing best practice, while supporting the whole of the UK FRS.

As part of the reform agenda, the remit of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary was expanded to include inspection of Fire and Rescue Services. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) undertook their first inspection of BFRS in 2018. The Authority's first review took place in the first tranche of inspections in 2018.

A thematic inspection of the Service's response to the Covid-19 pandemic took place in late 2020 with two further full inspections in 2021 and 2023. The links for these can be found via the below:

<https://hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/publications/>

The Service has maintained an action plan to address any Areas for Improvement identified by HMICFRS in the latest inspection report and these are regularly monitored and scrutinised by the FRA.

The following sections cover in broad outline the national context within which the budget and other aspects of MTFs have been framed.

## 2.1. National Statutory and Policy Context:

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 represented the most comprehensive reform of the statutory framework for the service for more than fifty years and brought about far-reaching changes to the way in which individual fire and rescue authorities plan and deliver their services. Amongst the most fundamental of these was the replacement of the previous prescriptive standards of fire cover with a framework for local integrated risk management planning, a duty to engage in preventative community safety work and the provision for a National Framework (last revised in June 2018) to provide clarity for Fire and Rescue Services on the Government's expectations.

In addition, a range of Statutory Instruments have been introduced over recent years, which between them impose new duties on the Service, including the requirement to respond to emergencies other than fire, such as road traffic collisions, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) incidents, serious flooding and major search and rescue incidents. The new responsibilities are not limited to response, but also extend to the need for the fire and rescue service to play a key role in civil contingency planning.

### Fire Reform Agenda

In May 2022, the Government published a consultation white paper "Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service" seeking views on their ideas for reform, building on lessons from independent inspection, concerning national reports and the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. It laid out the Government's vision for fire reform and was built on their ambition to strengthen fire and rescue services.

In December 2023, the Home Office published its response to the White Paper, which can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-our-fire-and-rescue-service>

The government's vision for fire reform is centred around three main themes:

- People - improving systems, flexibility and culture.
- Professionalism - helping fire professionals to best serve their communities.
- Governance - strengthening oversight and leadership.

## People

The Government has outlined plans to help fire professionals to further develop their skills and ensure that everyone could thrive in their work. This included clarifying the role of fire and rescue services, unlocking talent and improving representation within services.

### *Talent and inclusion*

The Government intends to build on existing progress to provide effective leadership of the sector and building capability, embedding values and nurturing talent within services.

### *Pay and Role*

The consultation laid out the Government's fundamental position that the role of the fire and rescue service in England is clear - laid out comprehensively in legislation across three key acts of Parliament that address fire, community safety and civil contingencies. While the law may be clear, the Government's view is that its implementation is hampered by cumbersome pay and conditions machinery and a lack of clear accountability for fire operations and resources. The system needs to be flexible to enable chief fire officers to make local level decisions about staffing, whilst working productively with unions.

In the first instance, the Government have set out their intention to support fire and rescue authorities and unions to critically review the National Joint Council's (NJC) own mechanisms, operations and transparency.

## Professionalism

Proposals in the Professionalism section of the White Paper centre around the creation of an independent body for fire professionals. These proposals will build on the important and ongoing work of both the Fire Standards Board (FSB) which has developed a strong suite of Fire Standards ranging from operational matters to culture and ethics, and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), who will have an enduring and important role in future.

## *Creating a College of Fire and Rescue*

A College of Fire and Rescue is proposed to strengthen the development of individuals and the overall professionalism of fire and rescue services, setting the direction on data, research, leadership, ethics and professional standards. It was also proposed that a College could be given powers mirroring those of the College of Policing, to help it drive change.

## *Raising standards*

The White Paper proposed creation of a statutory code of ethics, the case for which is bolstered by inspection findings of HMICFRS and serious lapses of integrity in parts of our fire and rescue services. In matters of integrity and elsewhere, the Home Office wants to see professional standards which drive consistency and drive-up performance and professionalism.

The Home Office will place future responsibility for professional standards with the College of Fire and Rescue and will create powers to place elements of professional standards such as a code of ethics on a statutory basis when parliamentary time allows.

## Governance

The White Paper opened debate on strengthening or simplifying fire governance. It indicated that single point accountability allows for better link up between services, more efficient use of resources and clearer accountability to the public. The current process of submitting business cases for governance transfers can be complex, costly and time consuming. The White Paper also confirmed the intention to deliver on the HMICFRS's recommendation that chief officers should be afforded operational independence, similar to their policing counterparts.

## *Governance change*

The White Paper outlined the value of single point accountability in fire and the Home Office is committed to supporting moves towards this. They will not, however, take forward the mandatory transfer of FRA functions to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), Mayors or single elected individuals at this stage.



The Home Office will encourage PCCs and Mayors who want to take on fire governance functions, where the areas are co-terminus, to step forward, in order to enable the Home Office to assess readiness and support change.

### *Operational Independence*

The proposals in the White Paper set out plans to clarify the responsibilities of fire authorities and chief officers. The aim is to create a framework that complements existing structures while providing greater clarity and transparency in the division of responsibilities. At all times, the fire and rescue authority will be responsible for their fire service. The chief officer is effectively responsible for operationalising the authority's strategic directions. Operational independence would provide chief officers with the ability to make decisions on practical and management issues.

The government is seeking to legislate, at the earliest opportunity, to give chief officers operational independence. The Home Office will also take action to make the responsibilities of the fire and rescue authority and the chief officer clearer, with regard to a clearer separation of strategic and operational planning requirements and the governance of services.

## **2.2 National Financial Context:**

The public sector will receive their final funding in 2024/25 of the current Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Jeremy Hunt, is expected to make announcements regarding the next CSR over 2024.

Nationally, the public sector is facing funding pressures, with some local authorities issuing Section 114 notices (facing financial pressures, therefore only essential spending).

## **3. Local Context**

### **3.1 The Authority's Area:**

Bedfordshire occupies a geographically central position within the UK. It has exceptional links to London with the presence of key transport infrastructure including the M1 and A1 roads, three major rail routes and London Luton Airport.

Bedfordshire has a growing and ageing population of over 704,736 (2021 census) people, with a workforce of over 250,000. It has one of the most diverse populations in the country, over a relatively small geographical area.

The county is, in land use terms, largely rural and agricultural, including major areas of outstanding natural beauty. Most people (over 70%) live in its larger towns including the two major towns of Luton and Bedford but also in a number of smaller market towns. These towns lie within often picturesque rural settings which also includes many villages that add to the area's diversity of places to live, work and play.

Over recent years the local economy, like many throughout the UK, has moved from traditional manufacturing and heavy industry to one based more upon the service industry. These industries include logistics and air transport, higher education, research and development, tourism and hospitality, creative and cultural businesses, construction, and business services.

Bedfordshire has two successful universities; the post-graduate Cranfield University, and the under-graduate University of Bedfordshire, together with strongly performing further education colleges based in Bedford, Luton and Dunstable. There are a number of significant and internationally linked research locations at these universities and also at Colworth Science Park, Cranfield Technology Park and the Millbrook Vehicle Proving Ground.

There are on-going major transport infrastructure improvements and developments to the road system within the county and continued growth at London Luton Airport; a key deliverer in the business passenger market and handling circa 16 million passengers a year in total.

There are also iconic visitor attractions in the county, such as Woburn Safari Park, Whipsnade Zoo and Center Parc's fifth UK village at Woburn.

From April 2009 local government within the county has been through three unitary authorities - Bedford Borough Council, Central Bedfordshire Council and Luton Borough Council. The Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority (BFRA) comprises elected Members from each of these unitary authorities, whose numbers are proportional to the populations they represent: 3 Members from Bedford Borough Council, 5 Members from Central Bedfordshire Council and 4 Members from Luton Borough Council.

### **3.2. The Authority's Strategic Priorities Objectives:**

The achievement of the Authority's objectives and targets within a rapidly changing and complex environment requires a robust strategic and business planning process which must in turn guide the development of the medium-term revenue and capital expenditure plans, targeting financial resources to support day-to-day activities as well as planned investment.

Such effective business planning is also essential in order to embed a Service-wide culture of providing the best quality service through the most efficient means and ensure that efficiency measures can be used to free up existing resources, enabling them to be redirected to new and emerging priorities.

BFRA continues to rise to the economic challenges that it faces, whilst at the same time endeavouring to continue to improve the quality of the service it provides to the communities it serves. In the prior years the Authority has:

- Changed the shift system at all of our wholetime fire stations.
- Changed the shift system at 1 of our 2 day crewed fire stations.
- Restructured Enabling Function teams
- Made significant ICT investment to enable working from home across the service in response to the Covid Pandemic including increased Cyber security
- Introduction of a new Mobilising system, the first in the country to utilise a fully cloud based system.

The production of the Service's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) is facilitated by the Strategic Assessment and considers a wide range of factors and issues, many of which are complex and played out over a longer timeframe, whilst others are less complex but more volatile requiring close monitoring.

The annual CRMP process enables the development of more detailed plans across the Service and in particular the programme of strategic improvement projects / actions for the forthcoming year and medium-term beyond and play a vital role in guiding and prioritising proposals for expenditure in the annual budget setting and medium-term financial planning process.

The Service planning processes and current medium-term CRMP led to the development of six aims (see below). Our Mission is: **Working together to keep Bedfordshire safe.**

For us, delivering on our mission means focusing on the following six strategic commitments:

**We are:**

**PREVENTING** ... fires and other emergencies from happening.

**PROTECTING** ... people and property when fires happen.

**RESPONDING** ... to fires and other emergencies quickly and effectively.

**We will do this by:**

**ENGAGING** ... and building closer relationships with our communities and businesses

**INVESTING** ... in our people to be the best they can be, to serve you better.

**MAKING** ... every penny count, using our resources in an environmentally sustainable way

Please refer to the CRMP for further detail.

The budget also financially and strategically supports the Service's Values, including new 2024/25 budget bids. The Values are:

- We've got your back – striving to keep us all safe, while being supportive and inclusive.
- We are to be different – we are bold in our approach, we welcome challenge and are open to innovative ideas
- Every contact counts – making a positive difference each and every time, with respect and professionalism.
- We are accountable – we are transparent, trustworthy and responsible for our actions.

### 3.3. Government Funding Settlement:

The Government's provisional settlement was announced on 18 December 2023, with the final settlement figures to be confirmed on the 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024. The settlement figures are detailed below in Table 1.

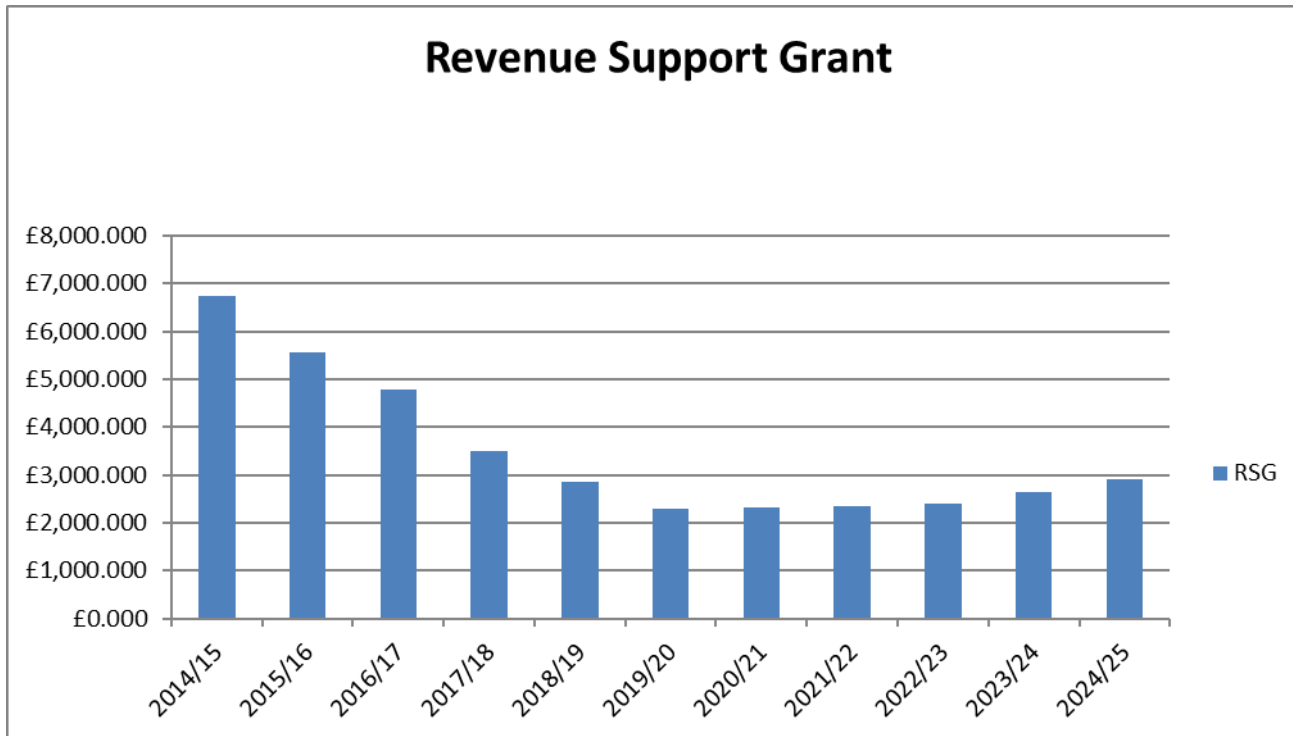
Table 1: Settlement Funding Assessment split

	<b>2023/24 £m</b>	<b>2024/25 £m</b>	<b>£m Variance</b>
Revenue Support Grant (RSG)	2.649	2.823	0.174
Business Rates baseline funding	6.164	6.465	0.301
<b>Settlement Funding Assessment (prior to new Pension Grant)</b>	<b>8.813</b>	<b>9.288</b>	<b>0.475</b>
<b>Employers Pension Grant</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.726</b>	<b>1.726</b>
<b>Settlement Funding Assessment including 2024/25 Employers FF Pension Grant</b>	<b>8.813</b>	<b>11.014</b>	<b>2.201</b>

As detailed above, the funding increase between 2023/24 and 2024/25 is £0.476m over both grant and business rates income.

The chart below details the Revenue Support Grant income since 2014/15. These reductions have been visible in the Medium Term Revenue Plan and have of course led to increased savings and efficiencies.

Chart 1: Revenue Support Grant from 2014/15 to 2024/25



The Authority's Business Rates Baseline Funding Level (BFL) has been assessed at £6.465m by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) for 2024/25, which includes a forecast share of local business rates estimated at £2.600m (the Government's estimate of the Authority's 1% share of locally collected business rates). As our business rates expected to be locally collected/allocated (the 1% share) are lower than the baseline funding level of £6.465m, we are therefore a 'top up' authority and will receive the payment of £3.865m from central government (to get back to the £6.465m baseline funding level). There is much volatility with business rates income and associated discounts and grants to compensate, particularly since Covid and the various support provided by Government to businesses. Any variances will be monitored and reported as part of the in-year budget

monitoring reports. There will also be the impacts from the valuation appeals; the Chancellor has confirmed that there will be a business rates revaluation taking place in 2023.

The Service will also increase links with the Unitary Authorities to better understand their business rates positions and how this will impact the in-year funding position of the Authority. With material re-distribution in 2023/24, this further understanding would be beneficial.

The split of this between local authorities is shown below in Table 2.

Table 2: Local Business Rates income.

Authority	2024/25 £000	Section 31 Grant £000
Bedford	876	276
Luton	654	272
Central Beds	1,382	449
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,912</b>	<b>997</b>

The above figures are fed into the MTRP. As are the Section 31 Business Rates Grants currently forecast at £997k in total from the three Unitary Authorities for 2024/25. In addition, there is annual Government S31 funding (multiplier compensation).

As previously reported, the Authority in future years will be subject to fluctuations of the Business Rates collected in Bedfordshire. If business rates income increases, the Authority will receive a share of this, if it decreases the Authority will be impacted by this. There are mechanisms in place within the funding scheme that offer protection, called safety nets, should an authority be considerably adversely impacted.

The detailed split of the Authority's total funding and local council tax is shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Detailed income split

	2023/24 £m	2024/25 £m	Change £m
<b>Budget Requirement (£m)</b>	<b>34.748</b>	<b>39.829</b>	<b>5.081</b>
<b><u>Funded by:</u></b>			
Precept Requirement (£m)	25.043	26.312	1.269
Central and Local Government Funding (£m)	9.863	13.078*	3.215*
Collection Fund surplus/(deficit) incl spreading of prior year	(0.389)	(0.117)	0.272
Funding Guarantee (new for 24/25)	0	0.515	0.515
Services Grant (new from 23/24)	0.231	0.041	(0.190)
<b>Funding Total (£m)</b>	<b>£34.748</b>	<b>£39.829</b>	<b>£5.081</b>
Tax Base (Band D equiv. properties)	228,807	233,427	4,620
Band 'D' Council Tax	£109.45	£112.72	£3.27

\*Includes the new Employer FF pensions grant, that was previously not part of settlement funding, so shown in 2024/25 separately for the first time.

The above income lines are further explained below:

- The Government Grant funding for 2024/25 is as per the funding settlement figures provided by the DLUHC, with the exception of the local business rates. For business rates, as noted below, the more up to date local authority information is used.
- The Precept Requirement is the total of council tax income to the Authority.
- The local business rates for 2024/25 are the figures provided by the three local authorities that are being finalised and reported in their NNDR 1 returns.
- Council Tax Taxbase, is the Band D equivalent number of properties. For six years there was a lower figure than in 2012/13 and prior years due to the changes in the benefits system, which has reduced the taxbases. This reduced council tax income was offset by the Council Tax Support funding that was separately identifiable in 2013/14 but from 2014/15 has been included in the general Government funding calculations. The taxbase in 2020/21 was higher for the first time than the 2012/13 levels.
- The S31 grants have been updated, for both the locally collected and the Government S31 grant where known/confirmed.

#### 3.4. Other Revenue Grants:

In addition to the formula funding, the Government provides specific revenue grants. For the two grants listed below, these are forecast to be £119k in 2024/25.

- *Firelink* - £79,199.72 is for the wide area radio system in England, Wales and Scotland for the fire and rescue service. This grant is reducing over the medium term and the cost will have to be picked up by the service.
- *New Dimensions* - £40,175.69 is a grant to cover local costs associated with hosting and maintaining skills associated with national resilience vehicles and importantly to support the provision of a specialist capability to respond to Marauding Terrorist Attacks (MTA).

As well as the above, a one off pensions administration grant will be received in 2024/25 at £79,553.18.

#### 3.5. Capital Programme:



As anticipated, there is no Government funding or bidding round for capital in the 2024/25 budget. This was the position for the 2016/17 to 2023/24 financial years too. The Authority, in 2012/13 and before, used to receive an annual capital grant of £1m, with a bidding process for funding in the years 2013/14 to 2015/16.

The Authority's base budget revenue contributions to fund capital commenced in 2012/13 to support capital expenditure funding in future years. There is now a budgeted base budget revenue contribution of circa £1.0m per annum (with fluctuations) from 2024/25 onwards towards capital expenditure. This is with the assumption that capital grants are not forthcoming in future years. If capital funding becomes available, there will be a direct reduction in revenue contributions.

The Capital Programme, as per the approved timetable, has followed the same robust challenge/scrutiny route as the revenue budget. The Corporate Management Team has also reviewed and assessed the bids made, approving the schemes that are attached at Appendix 3 as the 2024/25 Capital Programme.

Key items of note in the proposed 2024/25 Capital Programme of £1.149m are:

- Investment in ICT including computers and uninterrupted power supply (UPS) for business continuity
- Investment in improvements and modernisation of our buildings, including environmental initiatives and EDI works

#### 4. **The Medium-Term Revenue Plan**

##### 4.1. **Overview and Key Features of the Revenue Budget Strategy:**

The Medium-Term Revenue Plan (MTRP), attached at Appendix 1 of the 2024/25 budget report, sets out the Authority's revenue budget strategy for the next four years and the predicted impact on council tax. It captures all of the revenue budget implications of the forecasts and assumptions set out throughout this document, including the impact of the capital budget on revenue.

A key feature of the Authority's overall revenue budget strategy is the decision to set a budget for 2024/25 which involves a forecast 2.99% council tax increase across all four years of the Medium Term Plan. These council tax increases are combined with strategies for council tax, efficiency savings and the use of reserves, which together are aimed at delivering significant and sustainable savings over the four year period and beyond, whilst supporting continuing improvements in the quality of service in line with the Authority's strategic priorities.

## 4.2 Components of the Medium-Term Revenue Plan:

To summarise where the budgets are allocated per department, please see the summary table below (based on 2023/24 budget with high level updates for 2024/25).

As you would expect for an operational emergency service, the bulk of the budget is held within the staffing budget of the Head of Response. The table below splits our salary and non-salary budgets for a high level overview.

Title	Area	2023/24 Original Budget		
		£ Salaries	£ Non Salaries	£ Total
<b>Total Strategic Management</b>	<b>Management</b>	<b>1,070</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>1,378</b>
<b>Total Head of Response</b>	<b>Operational</b>	<b>17,872</b>	<b>876</b>	<b>18,748</b>
Head of Training and Assets	Training	2,747	389	
	Technical/Workshops		387	
	Corporate Support		284	
<b>Total Head of Training and Assets</b>		<b>2,747</b>	<b>1,060</b>	<b>3,807</b>
Head of Prevention and Protection	Partnership Working	2,237	(60)	
	Prevention		137	
	Protection		10	
<b>Total Head of Prevention and Protection</b>		<b>2,237</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>2,324</b>
Head of Information Communications Technology	ICT	1,196	1,912	3,108
	Business Improvement Team			
	ICT Projects			
<b>Total Head of Information Communications Technology</b>		<b>1,196</b>	<b>1,912</b>	<b>3,108</b>
Assistant Chief Officer	Income, Capital & Year End	2,249	195	
	Corporate Support		2,397	
<b>Total Assistant Chief Officer</b>		<b>2,249</b>	<b>2,592</b>	<b>4,841</b>
Head of Strategic Support and Assurance	Media & Comms	855	16	
	Organisation Assurance		120	
<b>Total Head of Strategic Support and Assurance</b>		<b>855</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>991</b>
Head of Human Resources	Human Resources	1,251	271	
	Occupational Health		63	
<b>Total Head of Human Resources</b>		<b>1,251</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>1,585</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>29,476</b>	<b>7,305</b>	<b>36,782</b>

2024/25 Budget per FRA doc

Base adj	2,832
Capital & Transf.	(1,477)
Inflation	1,387
Budget Bids	260
Tranforamtion Fund	45

Budget Requirement for 2024/25

**39,829**

The following sections give a brief explanation of each of the main components of the MTRP:

#### 4.2.1 *Base Budget*

The net revenue budget for running the Service in 2023/24 was £36.782m. After adjusting for an amount of £2.034m, which was a contribution from reserves to balance the budget, this decreased the budget requirement to £34.748m.

For the 2024/25 budget, the net revenue budget is £39.834m, with a budgeted contribution of £0.005m from the Transformational reserve decreasing the budget requirement to £39.829m.

#### 4.2.2 *Impact of Pensions Funding Changes*

The majority of firefighters pension costs are paid for from the pension account (that is separate from the BFRA's budget), which is funded by a combination of employers' and employees' contributions with Government paying the balance. The level of the employers' contributions is set by the Government Actuary Department and applies uniformly across all Authorities. The BFRA is still responsible for injury retirements and the initial contribution towards ill-health retirements. The employers FF pension contributions will increase from April 2024 and be met by additional grant (a second employer pensions grant)

The employer pension contributions for non-operational staff are based on annual lump sum payments as well as % employer contributions.

#### 4.2.3 *Forecast Variations*

This component of the budget includes a variety of estimated or predicted impacts. The items for increases investment interest decrease/increase are self-explanatory and the figures given represent estimates based on information currently available. The Revenue Implications of the Capital Programme represent the cost of capital borrowing (minimum revenue provision, loan, interest repayments, running costs) on the revenue budget.

The item on non-uniform incremental drift relates to increases in pay for non-uniformed staff as a result of increased 'time served' which results in their moving up the 'spinal column points' within their salary scales.

Of particular importance are the items on efficiency savings. As noted at the start of this Section, the Authority's efficiency savings strategy is a core component of the MTRP. The efficiency savings for each of the four years are shown as two types: Transformational Efficiencies/Savings which relate to far-reaching organisational changes, normally associated with significant strategic projects; and Budget Manager Process Efficiency Savings which relate to incremental cost reductions and improvements in ways of working for which all senior managers are set annual targets across all non pay-related budgets. Further details of the Authority's efficiency savings strategy are given in Section 4.3 below.

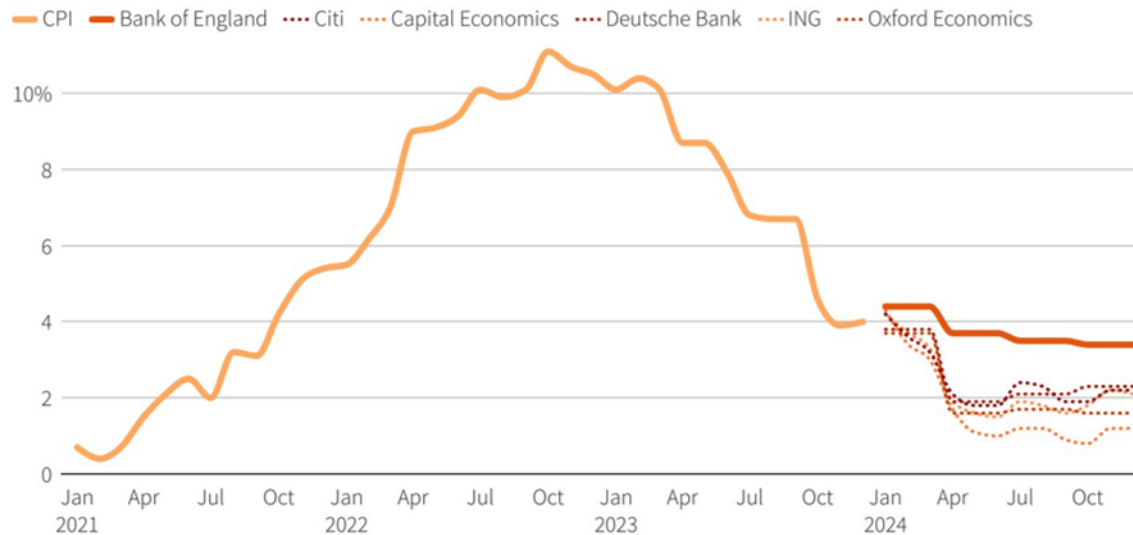
#### 4.2.4 *Inflation*

The graph below shows the latest inflation forecast position:

# Inflation

## UK inflation forecast to fall below 2% by May

Economists have cut their forecasts for UK consumer price inflation since the start of the year, and now expect CPI to return to its 2% target far sooner than the Bank of England predicted in November.



Note: Citi, Capital Economics and ING forecasts are monthly. Others refer to calendar quarters.

Source: ONS, BoE, Citi, Capital Economics, Deutsche Bank, ING, Oxford Economics | Reuters, Jan. 17, 2024 | By David Milliken

## WHY HAS INFLATION BEEN FALLING?

British consumer price inflation peaked at 11.1% in October 2022, driven by surging European gas prices after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February that year, as well as by higher food prices and lingering disruption from the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, oil and gas prices have fallen while food prices are increasing less quickly.

*Staff Pay:* Direct employee costs amount to circa 82% of the revenue budget and as a result the annual pay awards in the latter years of this current budget setting process have a significant impact on future expenditure levels. Specifically for 2024/25, with pay forecasts at 3.5% for non-uniformed officers and uniformed officers from 2024.

This budget will fund wholetime and retained operational staff, emergency fire control operators and full-time and part-time support staff pay awards. All of the Authority's pay awards are determined by national negotiating bodies and, other than through the Employers' representatives on the negotiating team, the BFRA has no direct influence on the outcome and, therefore, the use of estimates for budget projections is required.

*Prices Inflation:* This includes all non-pay items, from indirect employee costs such as recruitment, insurance, occupational health and health and safety related provision and operational training, through to premises, transport, supplies and services. There is a separate line for an inflation provision for gas, electricity, water and diesel.

#### 4.2.5 Budget Pressures

This line of the MTRP refers to proposed items of new or additional expenditure brought forward by managers during the process of budget setting, which have been approved for taking forward into the budget. These projects (after the number of the business case template used for submission) and all have been subject to rigorous scrutiny. The bids below have been shared with FRA Members in detail as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Members budget workshop:

- Additional Occupational Health Nurse 0.6FTE £10.3k
- DBS background checks for all staff £14k
- Crimestoppers FRS Speak up Service £2k
- Consultancy support for HR Systems £6k (one year only)
- Additional Service Medical Adviser capacity £11k
- Senior Data Analyst (part funded post captured in income) £56k
- Cyber Security Analyst (ICT shared service post 50% BFRS) £30k
- Prevention activities out of hours/overtime £20k
- Cadets £18k
- 360 personal reviews/development £20k one year, £35k for full repeat in 2027/28
- ICT contracts £60k
- Project Management Office £165k

#### 4.2.6 *Estimated Net Revenue Expenditure*

This line of the plan shows the sum total of each of the above expenditure elements and thus represents the total budgeted revenue spending on the Service.

#### 4.2.7 *Contributions to/from General Reserves*

As a precepting authority there is a requirement under the Local Government Act 1992 for BFRA to hold reserves in order to meet any unforeseen emergencies and manage uneven cash flows. The Authority undertakes a thorough risk assessment in order to identify the required level of reserves each year. Details of the amounts and nature of Reserves which the Authority has decided to hold are given in Section 4.4.

#### 4.2.8 *General and Earmarked Reserves, below*

This line of the MTRP shows how the Authority plans to use the Transformational Reserves, as per the strategy, in years 2024/25 to 2027/28. This strategy is supported by the Authority's efficiency savings plans and the proposed council tax strategy over the four years of the MTRP and is aimed at smoothing the impact of the uncertainty in formula grant in 2024/25 to 2027/28, thereby allowing adequate time for longer-term efficiency savings measures to deliver sustained reductions to base budget requirements, whilst maintaining levels of service delivery.

#### 4.2.9 *Collection Fund*

A council tax Collection Fund deficit or surplus can arise for a local authority (a billing authority) when the actual amount of council tax collected by the Authority is less or more than the amount calculated based upon the number of properties (taxbase) and level of council tax set. This can arise due to a number of reasons including an under or over-estimation of the taxbase and non-payment by householders. Similarly, this is applicable to Business Rates too where estimates at the beginning of the year on collection can lead to surplus or deficits forecast at the year end.

For 2024/25, the respective estimated Collection Fund position of each of its constituent authorities (Bedford, Central Bedfordshire and Luton) has resulted in a net collection fund deficit of £117k for this Authority. This is detailed on an individual authority basis in Table 4 below.



Table 4: 2023/24 Collection Fund estimated outturn

<b>Authority</b>	<b>Council Tax £ (surplus)/deficit</b>	<b>Business Rates £ (surplus)/deficit</b>	<b>Net £ (surplus)/deficit</b>
Bedford	(66,942)	(29,131)	(96,073)
Luton	(274,155)	16,569	(257,586)
Central Beds	119,000	351,769	470,769
<b>Total</b>	<b>(222,097)</b>	<b>339,207</b>	<b>117,110</b>

For a combined fire authority, any collection fund deficit or surplus will represent the combined ‘net’ result of its share of each of its constituent authorities’ estimated year-end Collection Fund position.

#### 4.2.10 *Financed By*

This element of the Plan shows the detail of the separate sources of revenue funding required to meet the estimated budget requirement for each year of the Plan, ie from where the Authority’s revenue income comes. The detailed split of funding is shown earlier in the MTFs in Table 3.

#### 4.2.11 *Calculation of Band D Council Tax and Percentage Increase*

The taxbase used in the MTRP projections represents the number of Band D equivalent properties in the three constituent local authorities that BFRA precepts upon (ie Bedford, Central Bedfordshire and Luton). The taxbase for 2024/25 has been set at 233,427 Band D equivalent properties, based on the information that has been supplied by these authorities. The split per authority is shown in Table 5 below. This is an increase of 2.02% compared to the 228,807 taxbase in 2023/24.

The estimated increases of future years’ council taxbases are included within the MTRP, currently at c.1.5% each year.

Also shown is the percentage increase in council tax projected for each year of the MTRP. As explained previously, these equate to 2.99% for 2024/25 and each year until 2027/28.

Table 5: Taxbase – Band D Equivalents

<b>Authority</b>	<b>2024/25</b>
<b>Bedford</b>	63,712
<b>Luton</b>	56,224
<b>Central Bedfordshire</b>	113,491
<b>Total</b>	<b>233,427</b>

### **Scenario Planning**

Different scenarios have also been considered and are included below. These are in addition to the figures shown in Appendix 1 to the Budget Report.

- (i) Transitional Support to the forecast Business Rates reset in 2026/27

The forecast in the MTRP at Appendix 1 to the Budget Report includes a hard Business Rates reset, therefore no transitional support. There may be transitional support and if this is the case, the reduction of £918k of income captured in Appendix 1 for 2026/27 could be smoothed, for example, by 50% support in 2026/27 (other arrangements could also be actioned by Government).

Based on the transitional support of 50% in 2026/27, the income and use of Transformation Reserve results in the following:

	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
Financed by:	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s
Revenue Support Grant (RSG):	2,823	2,908	2,954	3,001
Now rolled into RSG (separated here as first year) Employers FF Pension Grant (previously netted off against expenditure via Home Office returns)	1,726	1,778	1,806	1,835
Business Rates 1% Share from Unitary Authorities	2,947	3,120	3,170	3,220
Business Rate Top Up and S31 grants	5,582	5,746	4,765	5,065
Collection Fund Surplus/(Deficit) - net Business Rates and Council Tax	-117	0	0	0
Transitional Support for the Business Rates reset in 2026/27 at 50%	0	0	491	0
Council Tax	26,312	27,503	28,706	29,980
Services Grant	41	41	41	41
Funding Guarantee Grant (assumed one off for 2024/25)	515	0	0	0
	<b>39,829</b>	<b>41,095</b>	<b>41,933</b>	<b>43,143</b>
Band D equivalent Tax base	233,427	236,908	240,094	243,473
% change on Band D's	2.02%	1.49%	1.34%	1.41%
Leading to an average council tax (Band D) of	112.72	116.09	119.56	123.14
% increase	<b>2.99%</b>	<b>2.99%</b>	<b>2.99%</b>	<b>2.99%</b>
<b>Use of Transformational Reserves Summary</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>2025/26</b>	<b>2026/27</b>	<b>2027/28</b>
	<b>£000s</b>	<b>£000s</b>	<b>£000s</b>	<b>£000s</b>
<b>Total Earmarked Reserve for Budget Setting</b>	<b>1,836</b>	<b>2,161</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>166</b>
Contribution to/from Transformational Earmarked Reserves	-5	-1,781	-515	442
FRA approved allocation of forecast 2023/24 underspend 50% here and 50% to pay earmarked reserve (released 25/26)	330	0		
Reduction of General Reserve from £2.6m to £2.4m in 20/21, with potential to reduce to £2.1m in 2026/27	0	0	300	0
Net Balance Transformational Earmark Reserves	<b>2,161</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>608</b>

## (ii) Impact of Borrowing for the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) work

As noted elsewhere in the budget pack, expenditure associated with the outputs from the ECR work has not been included. For example, the levelling and rebuild of a large station could result in capital expenditure of up to £15m. This could partly be offset by using reserves, such as the Collaboration Reserve, partly by using internal funds (our over borrowed position) and partly by selling some assets such as houses (the Authority has seven) or for example a strip of land. However, should approval be given by the FRA for a significant capital estate investment, the likely scenario is that borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) would be undertaken. This could for example be a revenue impact of £60k for a £1m loan. So based on a £10m loan this would be circa a £600k annum revenue pressure. This new revenue cost would cover both interest payments and the Minimum Revenue Position (MRP, setting aside the £ to pay back the loan. This is based on forecast PWLB rate of a 50 year loan).

Based on this scenario, including item (i) above too, the impact would be limited in 2026/27 but post the potential transition funding of the anticipated Business Rates reset, would materially impact in 2027/28 onwards (of course depending on loan date, build dates etc). If there was no business rates reset, so not the £980k reduction currently forecast, the revenue implications of a £10m loan would be met by this non reduction of business rates income.

<b>Financed by:</b>	<b>2024/25 £000s</b>	<b>2025/26 £000s</b>	<b>2026/27 £000s</b>	<b>2027/28 £000s</b>
Revenue Support Grant (RSG):	2,823	2,908	2,954	3,001
Now rolled into RSG (separated here as first year) Employers FF Pension Grant (previously netted off against expenditure via Home Office returns)				
Business Rates 1% Share from Unitary Authorities	1,726	1,778	1,806	1,835
Business Rate Top Up and S31 grants	2,947	3,120	3,170	3,220
Collection Fund Surplus/(Deficit) - net Business Rates and Council Tax	5,582	5,746	4,765	5,065
Transitional Support for the Business Rates reset in 2026/27 at 50%	-117	0	0	0
Council Tax	0	0	491	0
Services Grant	26,312	27,503	28,706	29,980
Funding Guarantee Grant (assumed one off for 2024/25)	41	41	41	41
	515	0	0	0
	<b>39,829</b>	<b>41,095</b>	<b>41,933</b>	<b>43,143</b>
Band D equivalent Tax base	233,427	236,908	240,094	243,473
% change on Band D's	2.02%	1.49%	1.34%	1.41%
Leading to an average council tax (Band D) of	112.72	116.09	119.56	123.14
% increase	<b>2.99%</b>	<b>2.99%</b>	<b>2.99%</b>	<b>2.99%</b>
<b>Use of Transformational Reserves Summary</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>2025/26</b>	<b>2026/27</b>	<b>2027/28</b>
	<b>£000s</b>	<b>£000s</b>	<b>£000s</b>	<b>£000s</b>
<b>Total Earmarked Reserve for Budget Setting</b>	<b>1,836</b>	<b>2,161</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>-434</b>
Contribution to/from Transformational Earmarked Reserves	-5	-1,781	-515	442
FRA approved allocation of forecast 2023/24 underspend 50% here and 50% to pay earmarked reserve (released 25/26)	330	0		
Emergency Cover Review (ECR) related new borrowing, example of interest and MRP on £10m loan	0	0	-600	-600
Reduction of General Reserve from £2.6m to £2.4m in 20/21, with potential to reduce to £2.1m in 2026/27	0	0	300	0
Net Balance Transformational Earmark Reserves	<b>2,161</b>	<b>381</b>	<b>-434</b>	<b>-592</b>

### (iii) Impact of different pay awards

Pay awards may vary from the opted forecast in Appendix 1 to the Budget Report at 3.5%, 3%, 2% and 2% for the years 2024/25 to 2027/28. The Authority has prudently again supported the Pay/Pensions reserve to assist in the short term in pay awards are

higher than budget, but as per the scenarios above would put a pressure on the revenue budget. Different pay award modelling has also been completed by the Treasurer.

### **4.3 Efficiency Savings Strategy**

An efficiency saving occurs when the cost of an activity is reduced, but its quality and effectiveness remains the same or improves. BFRA continues to focus on becoming more efficient - finding new ways to deliver highest quality services at lowest possible cost.

The Authority's MTRP for 2024/25 to 2027/28 shows the level of budgeted efficiency/ savings planned for each of the four years, which form an integral part of the overall revenue budget strategy. In addition, the Authority's efficiency savings/initiatives during 2023/24 are mainly on track to deliver an underspend which will be used, subject to the approval of the FRA, to contribute to the Collection Fund deficit Reserve.

As well as making significant savings in previous years, from 2010/11 to 2023/24 nearly £8m has been reduced from budgets through budget scrutiny and savings/efficiencies, the Authority's plans for 2024/25 and beyond include making additional significant efficiency savings through:

- Further operational and non-operational reviews
- Efficiency improvements from investments in ICT
- Procurement savings from new contracts
- Collaboration savings
- Income generation

#### **4.3.1 Financial Business Continuity Plan**

The Authority has a Financial Business Continuity Plan. The savings/efficiencies/income presented in Appendix 2 to the Budget Report, have been generated and proposed following an exercise with our Corporate Management Team proposing options based on levels 1 to 3. Level 1 easy to action/do, level 2 with some difficulty and level 3, hard to do and will take time (for example, consultation, staff impacts, risks etc). The items proposed in Appendix 2 come from level 1 and some of level 2.

Predominantly level 3 items are the items in the business continuity plan and will be continually reviewed to ensure current, if some need adding or removing and to progress further with items identified that require this. This workstream will form part of the Transformation Programme.

#### 4.4. **General and Earmarked Reserves:**

As a precepting authority there is a requirement under the Local Government Act 1992 for BFRA to hold reserves in order to meet any unforeseen emergencies and manage uneven cash flows. The Authority undertakes a thorough risk assessment in order to identify the required level of reserves each year. The Treasurer has the duty to report on the adequacy of reserves (under section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003), particularly when the authority is considering setting its budget requirement.

The required level of reserves for the period 2024/25 is outlined within the Reserves Strategy and financial strategy.

General Reserves are a working balance to help cushion the impact of uneven cash flows and avoid unnecessary borrowing and as a contingency to cushion the impact of unexpected events or emergencies. The Authority's General Reserves are detailed in the Reserves Strategy at Appendix 5 to the 2024/25 Budget Report.

Earmarked Reserves, in accordance with the Local Authority Accounting Panel (LAAP) Bulletin 77, can be set up where there are known or predicted requirements. As is common with most other Fire and Rescue Authorities and public sector bodies, BFRA has set up a number of earmarked reserves which have been separated out from General Reserves. These are also detailed in Appendix 5, the Reserves Strategy.

The General Reserve of £2.4m, at c.6% of net revenue expenditure, is in line with the current overall average Combined Fire Authority average. As the S151 Officer I am comfortable with the level of reserves and do not deem it too low or high.

In addition, the Authority has separate ear-marked reserve for the Capital Receipts Reserve. Project carry forwards are also classed as ear-marked reserves at the year end stage.

The Transformational Earmarked Reserve that was specifically set up for budget setting purposes is estimated to total £1.836m at 31 March 2024. As detailed in the MTRP, it is forecast that this will be allocated to offset the budget gap over the medium term and to invest in transformation initiatives.

## 5. The Medium-Term Capital Programme

### 5.1 **The Capital Programme**

Maintaining and improving the BFRA's infrastructure requires considerable resources and, for asset management purposes, this is broken down into three categories of investment, for each of which a comprehensive Asset Management Plan is produced; namely:

- Land and Buildings
- Fleet and Operational Equipment
- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)

For each category of investment a separate programme of projects exists which spans a four year period. Because of the nature of the types of projects included in the programmes it has been the practice for some time to phase plans over a medium-term timeframe in order to show the way some schemes run over several years.

In line with best practice the land and buildings programme is developed so as to meet ongoing maintenance demands as well as to support the development of land and buildings investment and its subsequent management.

The fleet and operational equipment programme reflects the need to maintain a comprehensive fleet of vehicles with acceptable asset lives, equipped to the correct standard to meet current and planned service delivery requirements.

The ICT programme contains projects designed to develop and maintain the communications and technological infrastructure, to support both operational and organisational needs.

Traditionally IT, vehicles and operational equipment have either been leased or funded from revenue and hence did not feature in the Capital Programme, but are the subject of revenue bids for funding. Following the introduction of the Prudential Code, work was undertaken to review the cost effectiveness of leasing compared with long-term borrowing and a number of previously leased items are now being included as part of the four year Capital Programme. Discussions regularly take place with our treasury and leasing advisers, Capita Treasury Solutions, to ascertain for our specific Authority at that point in time, what the optimal funding options are.

All proposed schemes are assessed against set criteria to establish the extent to which they support the strategic objectives and Authority's priorities.

The Authority has implemented an asset management process that ensures all its assets are procured, maintained and disposed of in an efficient and effective way to provide value for money to the council tax payer.

The buildings programme for 2024/25 onwards has been developed on the basis that at present there are no further plans to change the type or location of fire stations and therefore the bulk of investment in premises is directed towards enhancement and the provision of new facilities for training and enhanced national resilience. However, it is an area that may change due to joint working/collaboration.

Historically, vehicles and equipment for frontline response and community fire safety have followed certain levels of specification and requirements. Following a comprehensive review of the emergency response fleet, a number of innovative changes are being made to the current fleet. These changes will deliver a fleet of vehicles aligned to the emergency response required to be mobilised to the identified risk profile of Bedfordshire.

The Capital Programme for 2024/25 is fully funded by revenue contributions, utilisation of unearmarked capital reserve and forecast income from vehicles sales.

It is unknown how fire and rescue authorities will be funded for capital expenditure in the next Spending Review period.

## 6. Other Considerations

### 6.1. **Key Budget Assumptions and Uncertainties:**

#### ***2024/25 Budget Process- Assumptions/Uncertainties***

##### Current Assumptions:

- One year settlement for 2024/25 (is the last year of the current Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR))
- The tax base will increase by circa 1.5% annually, or as advised by the Unitary Authorities.
- Grants will continue for the two employer FF pension contribution increases (new one from April 2024) and meet the Authority's costs
- That the council tax referendum limit will continue @ 3% for 2025/26 to 2027/28
- Based upon demonstrable need that the FRA will approve the 2.99% council tax precept increase in all years.
- Collection Fund positions as per local authority partners.
- All longstanding grants received in 2023/24 will continue in 2024/25 onwards. This includes, New Dimensions, Fire link (with reductions), MTA.
- Green Book pay award 3.5% April 2024, followed by 3%, 2% and 2% in the years 2025/26 to 2027/28.
- Grey Book pay award as above.
- Business rates reset in 2026/27 (with no transitional support in Budget Report Appendix 1, but scenario in a para above covers this)



- Fire Grant/Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) funded – *Potential large funding risk here.* MAIT funding (built in some annual costs of £10k p/a from 2026/27 as indicated recently).
- That CPI will fall in line with fan chart projections.
- That the Minimum Funding Guarantee will be for 2024/25 only (as per advice received)

#### Uncertainties:

- Pay awards
- The continuation of inflationary pressures and if costs will reduce or remain at current level.
- Continuation of the Minimum Funding Guarantee
- What, if any, allocation will be given to Authorities to deliver efficiencies/savings/productivity.
- How much Prevention and Protection Grant will be received in future years
- As above, how much of the Employer Pension Grant at £1.7m will be included as part of the settlement/CSR from 2024/25 onwards. It could be subject to reduction in the following years. And if the new grant from 2024/25 will cover increased employer pension costs.
- If the Services Grant of £38k will continue at this level (was £430k when introduced in 2022/23 then £231k in 2023/24).
- FF pensions – impact from the Remedy, Matthews and associated costs (internal resourcing, payment to Administrators), immediate detriment costs and other pension related matters.
- The government Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme will remain open for bids in future years to help fund environmental works to service properties. Our Capital programme forecasts a successful funding bid for 2026/27 & 2027/28.
- Impact from recent new CSR from 2025/26.
- Impact from delayed formula funding review (year unknown).
- Recruitment profile/establishment/retirements – associated recruitment/training costs.
- New savings/efficiencies in the medium term.
- Collaboration (PCC, Ambulance (servicing, co-responding, falls/Community Welfare Officers, bariatric funding), Police etc) – and associated costs/savings/investments.
- Medium term property strategy (Emergency Cover Review, One Public Estate, HQ, workshops, sharing etc)
- Contingent Liabilities/Assets included in the Statement of Accounts.
- EU directives/legislative changes/post Brexit impacts such as supply chain and cost increases.
- Implications arising from the Day Crewing and Retained pensions.
- Strike expenditure potential over the course of the four year MTRP.
- Interest and inflation rate fluctuations.
- Outcomes of Retained Duty System project (budget increase/decrease)
- Outcome of Grey book pay review – broadening the role, pay award.

- Outcome of Emergency Cover Review Project.
- Outcome of contaminants work both locally and nationally and potential additional expenditure here.

## 6.2 Equality Impact:

The challenging economic environment in which the Service is operating means that it is sometimes necessary to make difficult and unpopular decisions. A number of the major changes included within the Authority's strategic priorities for the medium-term and thus supported by financial provision within this MTFs, particularly those associated with transformational efficiency savings, will be of this type. The Authority recognises that equality legislation does not prevent it from making these decisions but gives an opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion and to ensure such decisions are based on robust evidence and taken in accordance with the Public Sector Equality Duty.

The Authority, therefore, ensures that robust equality analysis is carried out, paying due regard to the impact on our community and staff, where policies, procedures and practices are changing. Decisions, where appropriate, will also be informed by the wider context to ensure particular groups are not unduly affected by the cumulative effects of different decisions. All decisions will be documented through equality impact assessment ensuring fairness, transparency and accountability. This information will be published in line with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

## 6.3 Data Quality:

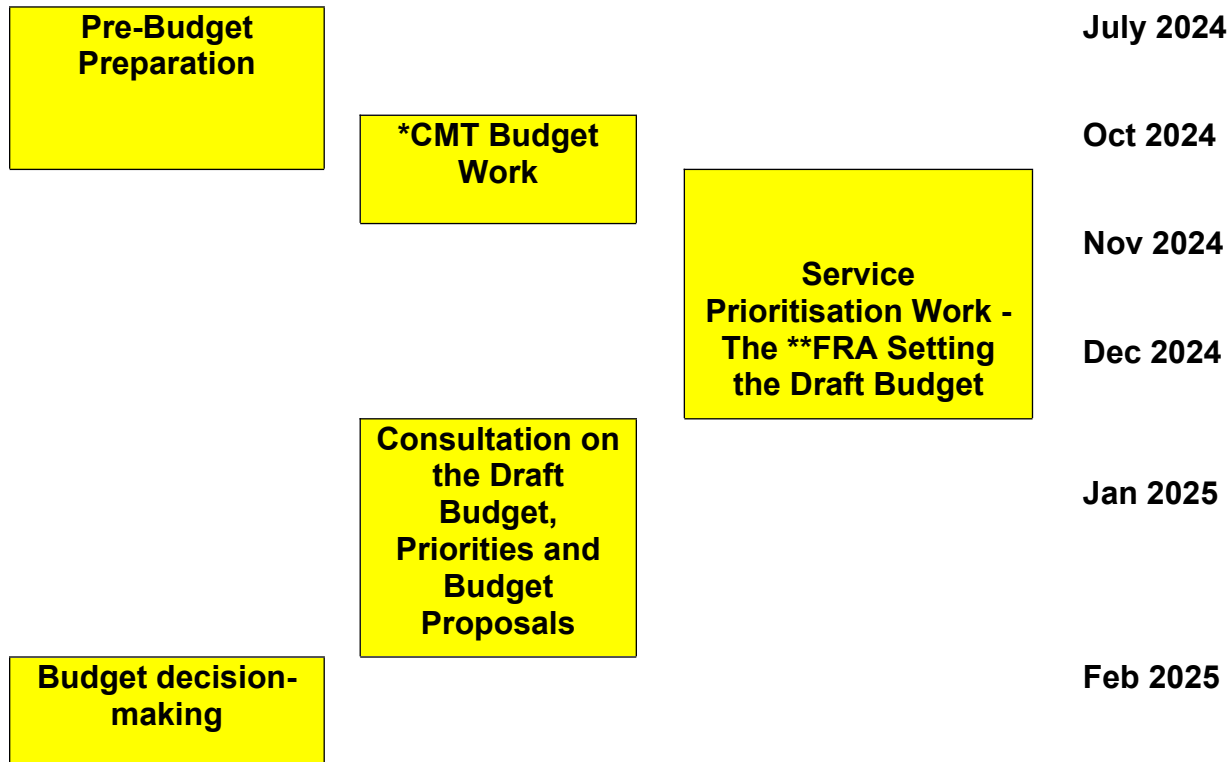
The Authority is committed to achieving and maintaining fit for purpose, quality data enabling sound decision making and informed planning. This is vitally important with key documents, such as this MTFs and the Authority seeks to continually improve the quality characteristics of such data with particular emphasis on accuracy, validity, reliability, timeliness, relevance and completeness.

Systems for assurance and validation of our data are in place, for example Performance Indicators are supported by data proformas which include descriptors, data sources, and change control. A data issues log is maintained that considers severity, impact and mitigation. The Authority's Business Improvement Programme incorporates process re-engineering to assure our data at the point of entry following the 'record once and use many times' principle, delivering new ways of working and business systems where appropriate. A new national Digital, Data and Technology Committee commenced in January 2023 chaired by the Chief Fire Officer who is the NFCC national lead for DDaT.

#### 6.4. Budget Setting Process for Future Years:

The summary diagram below shows the key stages that will be followed by the Authority in setting future year's budgets. In order to ensure proper process and timescales, it incorporates budget planning from July, setting a draft budget in December for consultation, followed by a final budget set in February.

Diagram 1: The budget setting timetable



\*CMT= Corporate Management Team    \*\*FRA= Fire and Rescue Authority