



Bedfordshire
Fire & Rescue Service

**Productivity and Efficiency
Plan
2024-2025**

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INTRODUCTION

The National Framework sets a requirement that combined and metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) produce and publish Efficiency Plans.

For 2024/2025 the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire requires all FRAs, regardless of their governance type, to produce plans that not only cover their planned efficiencies, but also plans for increasing productivity.

As part of the ongoing Spending Review, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Local Government Association (LGA) have agreed that between 2021/2022 and 2024/2025, Fire and Rescue Services in England will create non-pay efficiency savings of 2% and increase productivity by 3%. Fire Productivity and Efficiency Plans (P&E Plans) will help the NFCC, LGA and Home Office to collate evidence and assess progress against the agreed targets at a national level.

To support transparency and ease of accessibility, the 2024/2025 Fire P&E Plans should be published as separate documents rather than as part of a Fire and Rescue Authority's Medium Term Financial Plan.

It is a requirement that the Fire P&E Plans are signed off jointly by the relevant Section 151 Officer and the Chief Fire Officer.

Section 1: Primary Information

Budget

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority (BFRA) agreed a net budget of £39.8m for 2024/2025. This can be broken down into the following major headings:

Employee	£32.9m
Premises	£1.1m
Transport	£0.8m
Supplies & Services	£3.4m
Other (including Capital Financing Costs)	£1.0m
Agency & Contracted Services	£0.6m
Unidentified Savings/Use of Reserves	£0m
Net Budget Requirement	£39.8m

The budget will be met from:

Precept Requirement	£26.3m
Central and Local Government Funding	£13.0m
Collection Fund surplus/(deficit) including spreading of prior year	(£0.1m)
Funding Guarantee (new for 2024/2025)	£0.5m
Services Grant (new from 2022/2024)	£0.1m
Total	£39.8m

Further details are contained in our Budget setting report and Medium Term Financial Strategy, and can be found here: [Finance and Budgets | \(bedsfire.gov.uk\)](https://bedsfire.gov.uk/finance-and-budgets).

Reserves

As a precepting authority there is a requirement under the Local Government Act 1992 for Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority to hold reserves in order to meet any unforeseen emergencies and manage uneven cash flows.

The Authority currently anticipates holding the following reserves at 31 March 2024:

General Reserve	£2.4m
Earmarked Reserves: Collaboration/Estates £2.4m Transformation £2.1m Earmarked £1.6m	£6.1m
Capital Funding Reserve	£2m
Total	£10.5m

Further details on our reserves are contained in our Budget Book and Medium Term Financial Strategy, and can be found here: [Finance and Budgets | \(bedsfire.gov.uk\)](https://bedsfire.gov.uk/finance-and-budgets).

Precept

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority elected to increase the precept in 2024/2025 by 2.99%, setting a Band D council tax of £112.72.

This increase reflects the need to:

- Meet inflationary pressures.
- Maintain an appropriate emergency response model proportionate to the risks in our community.
- Deliver against both the community fire safety and fire protection strategies.
- Set aside sufficient funds to contribute to the capital programme to ensure our estate and equipment meet needs in the future.

Efficiency

BFRS is always looking for new and innovative ways to achieve efficiency savings across all areas of service delivery, to provide the best value for money to the taxpayers of Bedfordshire.

For the year 2023/2024 Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service realised the following efficiency savings:

Efficiencies – 23/24	£000's
Bringing cleaning contract back in-house	40
Change of procurement frameworks	9
Removal of the residential element from firefighter recruits' course	42
Bringing compartment fire behaviour training back in-house	15
Use of crew commander instructors	13
Wholetime recruitment system efficiencies	4
Collaborative leadership training	2
Income from workshop activities	7
Delivery of NFCC emergency response driver training courses	57
Communications team income from supporting national projects	15
Apprenticeship provision	30
Cross-border charging	5
Total	239

Furthermore, over the period of our 2019-23 CRMP further efficiencies have been achieved which includes:

- Savings through collaborative work with Blue light partners.
- Savings through joint Procurement such as Firefighters Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Road Traffic Collision cutting equipment.
- ICT connectivity improvements via network and Wi-Fi upgrades
- Savings in the Service Vehicle Replacement Programme through improved asset management and maintenance.
- Rationalisation of licenses, subscriptions, and insurance.
- Efficiencies from electronic recording of equipment maintenance.
- Collaborative firefighter apprenticeship schemes.
- Shared ICT services with Cambridgeshire

Efficiency Plan

Efficiencies currently forecast within the non-pay revenue budget for the 2024/2025 financial year include:

Forecast efficiencies	£000's
More effective use of staff networks budget	7.5
Efficiency review of water rescue capability	21
Inhouse apprenticeship delivery	13
More efficient printing solution	28
Data analyst efficiency	14
Comms team subscription/efficiency savings	8
Internal restructuring/efficiencies	32
Conversions of grey book posts to green book roles	15.5
ICT hardware review	3.5
Total	142.5

This meets the target of non-pay efficiencies of 2% projected across FY 2024/2025

Other proposals include the sharing of on-call firefighter training courses with regional partners, a shared pager procurement across the Eastern region and other options, that do not yet have figures against them.

There are strategic objectives within our 2024/2025 CRMP action plan that are expected to deliver additional efficiencies. The scale of these are yet to be scoped though. They include:

- The launch of an electronic platform to capture, process and record learning from operational incidents.
- The rollout of a fire-data warehouse, that will see protection work be far better targeted at the areas of greatest need.
- We will deliver additional capacity within our occupational health department to reduce sickness absence and support wellbeing.
- We will develop the business cases for four new station build projects. This will reduce the maintenance costs of our ageing estate while ensuring our response is in the right locations to meet the challenges of twenty-first century Bedfordshire.

Section 2: Secondary Information

Collaboration

BFRS has embedded the Local Resilience Forum into the service and leads on interoperability across Bedfordshire. This includes innovative partnerships with other agencies to deliver the best outcomes for the communities of Bedfordshire.

The partnership falls-response team with East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST) has evolved into a formal Community Well-being Officer (CWO) team being established. This sees BFRS staff responding to falls on behalf of EEAST while being able to offer safety advice and identify those at most risk within the home, contributing to both organisations shared aims.

Several stations now undertake emergency medical response on behalf of EEAST, offering a co-responding service to the most serious medical calls within the county. This aims to give the best patient outcomes that can be achieved.

BFRS has now taken on the lead from Bedfordshire Police for effecting entry to premises for EEAST. This sees crews supporting ambulance colleagues gain entry to access serious medically affected patients or those unable to let crews in themselves. This also generates referrals for high-risk home safety visits.

BFRS has entered into a memorandum of understanding with Bedfordshire Police to support search operation for high-risk missing persons. This regularly sees BFRS assets committed to locating some of the most vulnerable people within our community.

The Service works with Bedfordshire Police who provide our Data Protection Officer (DPO) advice and support of GDPR compliance.

BFRS shares its estate with partner agencies, as blue-light hubs, where facilities are shared with police and ambulance colleagues. In addition to this, BFRS workshops are one of a series of vehicle repair facilities available for EEAST to keep their fleet on the road and respond to incidents.

BFRS maintains a drone capability, available twenty-four hours a day. This facility is available to our cross-border partners in Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire and to other partner agencies such as police within Bedfordshire.

The Service was a founding member of the Fire and Rescue Indemnity Company (FRIC) that now has 14 Fire and Rescue Service member. FRIC provides risk protection products for Members' core risks including vehicle fleet, liability and property

Return on Investment Projects

As a partly rural service, BFRS is reliant upon on-call firefighters. In common with the rest of the UK, the recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters has become increasingly difficult.

BFRS is undertaking a fundamental review of our On-Call system to ensure that it remains an efficient and effective use of resources. The programme focuses upon recruitment, selection, development, and retention of On-Call staff and takes in reviews of induction, initial training, role capabilities, remuneration, employment contracts, mobilising, and resilience of appliances. We recognise the need to continue to review and invest in the On-Call system to ensure its sustainability longer term.

The implementation of two on-call support officers has seen a tangible increase in recruitment, retention, and availability of our on-call staff. Improvements have been recorded in the last quarters, but need to be seen over a longer timescale to evaluate the full impact they are having. Other investments in support to BFRS on-call teams should see measurable benefits in 2024/2025.

The Service is investing across our estate to reduce energy costs and support low and zero carbon technology. BFRS has a plan to roll out LED and sensor lighting systems across all estates, starting with sites of heavy usage.

BFRS has a number of flat roofs across our estate portfolio. The service is finalising plans to work with the support of the government's public sector decarbonisation scheme to update flat roofs incorporating better heat insulation and the fitting of photovoltaic cells where suitable. Together, these measures are projected to reduce our long-term energy costs.

Through our fleet strategy, the Service is committed to reducing its carbon footprint by replacing Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) cars and combo size vans from 2023 with hybrid or fully electric alternatives. The Service has now replaced 7 vans with electric vehicles, with a further 5 planned for 2024/2025, leading to a reduction in fuel expenditure.

Charging Policies

Our focus in recent years has been to support collaborative projects with a priority of delivering the best community outcomes. We are a trusted partner that can, and does, support regional and national partners during emergency incidents.

We have arrangements in place across our neighbouring Fire and Rescue services to deliver the quickest and most suitable response. We have a process in place for mutual charging with Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and are working to introduce charging arrangements with Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service during 2024/2025.

Additionally, BFRS already charges for a range of non-statutory special services such as lock ins, lock outs, domestic flooding, and lift rescues, and we have established procedures to handle calls of this type via Fire Control and generate invoices as required.

The Service has supported several deployments out of the county of Bedfordshire of our declared national operational assets and we have recovered costs in line with the NFCC Guidelines on FRS Charging for Mutual Assistance.

Asset Management and Investment in Technology

We have developed a Digital Data and Technology Strategy covering the period 2023-2027, delivery of the strategy commenced in 2023 and we will continue to build on this in 2024/2025:

- Site Specific Risk Information - we will introduce a Digital Solution for the collection of Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI).
- Digitising fire engines – upgraded and additional devices on all frontline appliances, increasing the ability for simultaneous activity and thereby productivity.
- E-Forms – The Service continues to digitise forms using Officer365 tools. Examples of E forms already implemented include authorisation to recruit, Health and Safety Active Monitoring form, and People Impact Assessments.
- Prevention Activity Recording – In 2024/2025 we will be replacing our Prevention Activity Recording database with a new solution that will have a more user-friendly front end and will enable more efficient and effective reporting of data.
- Enhancements to Mobile Data Terminals (MDT) – to ensure security, speed, and access to risk information at the point of need and in preparation for ESN project improvements. We have already introduced GPS and Satnav features

on the rear mobile data terminals and are utilising e-forms in the delivery of Home Fire Safety visits.

- CCTV on Service vehicles – The Service has CCTV systems on vehicles to reduce accident and injury costs, also a deterrent for anti-social behaviour and spurious claims. These systems are in the process of being upgraded, the new systems can be securely accessed remotely allowing the Health and Safety Team to quickly access footage as part of an investigation. Previously they would have had to travel to the Fire Station where the vehicle is based and remove the CCTV system hard drive.
- Training delivery – We will invest in our people, with blended learning, so our workforce has the appropriate skills to use the digital tools we have invested in. We will support our colleagues in the training department so relevant training will be incorporated in the content management system (LearnPro). This will be complemented with virtual and classroom-based training and 121 training.
- Digital Emergency Evacuation Boards – As part of response to the recommendations made by the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, we will be launching our Digital Emergency Evacuation Boards that will enable the Service to record fire survival guidance (FSG) information in fire control and display it simultaneously at the bridgehead and in any incident command units.
- Equipment and appliance checks, inventories, and defects – The Service has implemented an asset tracking system replacing paper-based processes. The system enables users to track all BFRS equipment very quickly across all sites, eliminating the cost of replacing 'missing' assets. Paperwork has been eliminated and user effort reduced. A full audit trail of all activity, including a digital user signature is readily available. Digital solutions are also in place for ICT and building defect reporting ensuring that faults and defects can be tracked.

Resourcing

Resourcing the service is achieved through the Community Risk Management Plan. This examines the risks to the communities of Bedfordshire and how, as a fire and rescue service, it plans to respond to them. This is regularly reviewed to ensure we have the right resources in the right place, to meet the needs of those communities.

As part of this process, BFRS is undertaking a review of all its operational capabilities to streamline the response, avoid duplication of training and resources, and ensure attendance targets are met. Initial reviews of water rescue capabilities have seen a rationalisation of the assets available, to best meet the risks posed by climate change relevant to the area's most at risk.

BFRS has recognised the fire control room as an area for reinforcement. To add additional layers of resilience and to free up capacity in other areas of the service, a control capability team is being established. This additional resource should allow capacity for key upgrades to be made and support other areas of the service's daily running.

BFRS deploy firefighters across the county to support on-call availability using a pool of “strategic reserve” staff. This sees them being paid to add additional resilience to the availability of on-call resources at key times of the day.

Under trial currently is an additional pumping appliance, crewed flexibly, that can be deployed anywhere within the county, to improve our emergency response coverage. The results of this trial will be examined and fed back into the service's next CRMP process.

Procurement

We are involved in both national and regional procurement projects as well as undertaking our own local procurement activities. In all instances we seek to maximise the benefits offered by existing frameworks to deliver savings, both cashable and non-cashable, and to maximise the commercial advantages offered by collaboration where it is feasible to do so. Some examples include:

- We have utilised various Fire Specific National Frameworks such as provision of supply and delivery of emergency response equipment and associated services.
- Specifically, we have used the national framework for pre-hospital emergency medicine, respiratory protective equipment for our replacement Breathing Apparatus (BA) project.
- We secure our Firefighter’s Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) using the national PPE framework.
- In 2024/2025 we will be ordering 5 new rescue pumps through the national framework for emergency response vehicles.
- We have utilised non-fire frameworks, such as Crown Commercial Services for support vehicles, G-Cloud for software support, YPO for mobile data and telephony, Health Trust Europe for IT related services, and ESPO for vehicle charging infrastructure.
- BFRS are part of the Eastern Regional Group, responsible for aligning requirements and involvement in regional procurement activities such as fuel cards.
- We have worked with Northamptonshire’s Police and Crime Commissioners Office to develop an Estates and Facilities framework.

The Productivity and Efficiency Board will determine how best to capture and measure efficiencies achieved through our procurement processes in 2024/2025 so that cost savings can be reported in a consistent and accurate manner.

Contract values are steered by the budget allocated. Contract Managers are then responsible for ensuring the contract is fulfilled and remains within its value. Steps are being put in place to track spend data against each supplier to allow independent oversight of spend across the service through the procurement team.

Local Initiatives

A new volunteer scheme has been implemented and recruitment of volunteers has commenced to offer an expanded service to:

- Provide a Home Visiting Fuel Support service to help vulnerable people to gain control of their fuel and utility management, reducing the risk of detriment from winter warmth issues including hyperthermia or heating their homes in an unsafe manner. These visits also generate Home Fire Safety Visit (HFSV).
- BFRS utilises volunteers to deliver Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs) to provide increased capacity to the Prevention Team. The visits made by volunteers have a nominal value-added calculation of £100 per visit. It is anticipated that in 2024 this together with the event value added and the savings on overtime will provide a value of circa £25k and growing exponentially as more volunteers are recruited and trained.
- BFRS has set the target to recruit and maintain 20 volunteers for 2024/2025.

BFRS's Prevention strategy focuses on increasing the numbers of referrals for HFSVs including focus on high-risk people. In 2023/2024 partner referrals have overtaken other sources of referral. This has been achieved by:

- Provision of a dementia specific support service in Bedford with £82k Council funding.
- Engaging with new Local Authority and voluntary sector organisations to establish new formalised referral routes.
- Creation of a formal referral relationship with 17 Primary Care networks within Bedfordshire, via information sharing agreements and memorandum of understanding.
- Agreeing a new partnership with Anglian Water for mutual referrals for HFSVs and for entry onto Utility Priority Services Register of vulnerable people.
- A new collaboration with a large Housing Association has been formed in which their Housing Officers have been trained and provided with the HFSV PowerApp and are conducting HFSVs on behalf of BFRS. It is anticipated that this will provide a value added figure of £16k – £20k in 2024/2025.

Productivity

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue is pursuing the sector wide Spending Review (2021/2022-2024/2025) period target of improving the productivity of wholetime firefighters by 3%.

In the main, the productivity of Firefighters within Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) will be measured upon successful delivery and quality of:

- Operational incidents
- Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSV),
- Fire Safety Audits/inspections.
- Operational training and exercising activity including those activities linked to new work areas in support of other agencies.

BFRS report key performance data to the Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority on a quarterly basis, with further local performance indicator utilised to compare the productivity of Firefighters on different section and duty systems.

Performance reporting information can be found here: [Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk)

We are investing further in Microsoft PowerBi performance management dashboards and a current project is underway to improve the accessibility of our performance data for colleagues across the organisation.

Although BFRS work hard to reduce the number of fire and other emergencies that occur in our community, we have also expanded our operation footprint over the last years by supporting our blue light partners to undertake activities to better serve the people of Bedfordshire. Examples include emergency medical response on behalf of East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST), effecting entry for medical intervention, searching for vulnerable missing persons, bariatric rescue, and collaborative drone partnership. These new areas of work have seen BFRS mobilisations to 'Special Services' increase from 1,659 in 2020/2021 to a projected number of 2,772 in 2023/2024.

In February 2023 BFRS introduced our HFSV application to streamline data collection and administration, through process mapping we have found a 15 minute reduction in Firefighter time spent on data entry. For the HFSVs in 2024/2025 we anticipate a reduction of circa 1700 hours of Firefighter time, time which can be refocused on operational training and other activities.

BFRS continues to make improvements in how we work productively to deliver HFSVs to the most vulnerable members of our communities. In 2022/2023 45% of our HFSVs targeted at vulnerable persons (Age 65+ and/or disabled), 2023/2024 we increased this proportion to 65%. BFRS has set the ambitious target for 2024/2025 to target 71% of all HFSVs for those who are over 65 and/or disabled.

Additionally, we have seen increases in referrals to support services which have a wider socio-economic benefit to the community:

Referral to support service	2022-23	2023-24 projection	Increase
Alcohol	1	22	2,100%
Falls & frailty	102	381	274%
Smoking cessation	7	40	471%
Safeguarding	209	291	39%

All BFRS operational Firefighters engage in protection work. Station based personnel are utilised to undertake basic fire safety checks in low-risk simple non-residential properties. The Service uses a Microsoft PowerApp to administer the basic fire safety checks to minimise administration time.

Additionally, we have a cohort of approximately 40 operational Firefighters who have volunteered to undertake a level 3 Fire Safety certificate and development programme to deliver fire safety audits through station-based activity.

The Service adopts flexible approaches to Wholetime Firefighter standby arrangements utilising pre-arranged and reactive measures to maximise our operational crewing across our On-call appliances. As part of this process Wholetime Firefighter standbys are allocated prevention, protection, and equipment maintenance activities to undertake on behalf of the On-call section to maximise their productivity whilst on a detached duty.

The Service now supports Wholetime day-duty staff (watch and crew managers) undertaking hybrid working to operate from On-call stations to provide operational cover and improve emergency cover whilst maintaining their core functional activities.

BFRS is committed to reducing attendances to false alarms due to apparatus and the service revised its policy in 2017 with the aim that no BFRS attendance would automatically be made to commercial premises during the hours where it is reasonably expected that they are occupied, unless a fire situation is confirmed. Further work is underway to review the approach to dealing with unwanted fire signals taken by the protection team, including enforcement of the Fire Safety Order and through business engagement.

In 2023/2024 Quarter 3, 200 attendances to False alarms due to apparatus in non-domestic premises, but Fire Control used call challenge and decided not to mobilise on another 201 instances where no mobilisation was made. This equates to 50% reduction in resource use, reducing disruption to more productive application of crews' time.

Productivity Plan 2024/2025

Next year we will:

- Continue to focus our HFSVs to be delivered to those most vulnerable in our communities, focussing our Firefighters to deliver more high vulnerability outputs per 100 visits.
- Continue to expand and develop our cohort of station-based fire safety regulators to deliver more fire safety audits utilising operational personnel.
- Through our protection strategy undertake business engagement activities to target those types of premises generating high volumes of unwanted fire signals.
- Create a new Control Enhancement Team to maximise the availability of appliances and resources and offer resilience to the Fire Control room / Major Incident room.

Transformation

The Service/Authority is also launching a Transformation Team for 2024/25. This will involve a multitude of workstreams and initiatives, led by the Assistant Chief Officer, with monitoring of progress against the plans by the Fire and Rescue Authority.

Signed by:

Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive

Andrew Hopkinson

28th March 2024

**Assistant Chief Officer and Section
151 Officer**

Gavin Chambers