

ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24



Bedfordshire
Fire & Rescue Service



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OUR MISSION

Working together to keep Bedfordshire safe.

OUR VALUES



WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE
WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK
EVERY CONTACT COUNTS
WE DARE TO BE DIFFERENT

OUR CORE CODE OF ETHICS

- PUTTING OUR COMMUNITIES FIRST**
We put the interests of the public, the community, and service users first.
- INTEGRITY**
We act with integrity including being open, honest, and consistent in everything that we do.
- DIGNITY & RESPECT**
We treat people with dignity and respect, making decisions objectively based on evidence, without discrimination or bias.
- LEADERSHIP**
We are positive role models, always demonstrating flexible and resilient leadership. We are all accountable for everything we do and challenge all behaviour that falls short of the highest standards.
- EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**
We continually recognise and promote the value of EDI, both within the FRS and the wider communities in which we serve. We stand against all forms of discrimination, create equal opportunities, promote equality, foster good relations, and celebrate difference.

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FOREWORD

Welcome to our Annual Report for the financial year 2023/24 which seeks to highlight our progress and achievements over the past year.

As we reflect on the last 12 months, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service has faced both remarkable challenges and significant milestones. One of the biggest moments was the major incident in a car park at London Luton Airport. This fire was one of the largest in recent decades with more than 100 firefighters from multiple services coming together to tackle a fire of immense complexity and scale. The swift actions and professionalism of our crews prevented further infrastructure loss, and their early recognition of structural risks undoubtedly averted an even greater disaster. It was a testament to the training, teamwork, and dedication of colleagues.

Our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) launched in April 2023 and serves as our strategic blueprint. Developed through close consultation with our communities, it sets a clear path for how we will continue to mitigate risks, respond to challenges and enhance safety. Already, we have seen measurable improvements in our ability to serve Bedfordshire's diverse population as a result.

National data shows the Service became quicker at handling 999 calls and got to fires faster. As a result of the hard work by colleagues, the Service has improved its response to primary fires and now sits at 18th in the national tables – a marked improvement for Bedfordshire.

In addition to operational achievements, we have remained committed to strengthening our Service with key projects delivered including the implementation of new breathing apparatus and enhancements to data management systems, which allow us to operate more efficiently and effectively. The roll out of the Vision Van – an immersive virtual reality road safety education tool – has already had a transformative impact on young drivers by providing a unique, engaging experience.

I want to express my heartfelt thanks to all colleagues, from operational firefighters and control room teams to support staff and partners. It is through their hard work, resilience, and unwavering commitment that we continue to meet the demands placed upon us, often under incredibly difficult circumstances.

As we move into 2024/25, I am confident the Service is well-positioned to navigate the future. Our dedication to continuous improvement and our focus on collaboration will ensure we remain at the forefront of fire and rescue services, both locally and nationally. Thank you for your continued support, and I look forward to working with you all as we build on the successes of this year.



Andrew Hopkinson,
Chief Fire Officer



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MONTH BY MONTH HIGHLIGHTS

April 2023

The Service's new Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) was launched, setting out the key challenges and risks facing our communities and how we intend to meet and reduce these over the next four years.

May 2023

It was great to chat to attendees of the Bedfordshire Young Farmers Rally about working in hot weather.

Deaf Awareness Week saw us film and share short videos with a member of the deaf community and a British Sign Language Interpreter to highlight some of the ways we can help keep people safe in their own homes.

A team of 12 firefighters from fire and rescue services in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire went on a two-week trip to Kenya to train firefighters on the equipment most recently donated and pass on valuable skills and experience to help them on their firefighting mission.

June 2023

A national failure of the 999 emergency system tested the fire service's control room backup systems. Along with our blue light colleagues, we engaged with the public to provide guidance and were able to resume normal service within a few hours.

Pensioners popped into Leighton Buzzard Fire Station for its first ever Brew with the Crew in June, which was a roaring success.

The Fatal Four aspects of driving (speed, not wearing seat belts, mobile phone use, and drink/drug driving) were addressed with students as part of a simulation road traffic collision at Bedford College attended by Dunstable Red Watch.

Firefighters from Dunstable White Watch took to TikTok during Home Fire Safety Week to engage with the community about the most important things to do each night before bed to stay fire safe.



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July 2023

More than 500 applications were received for the wholtime firefighter recruitment campaign.

The Service's Staff Values Awards were held in Cranfield to honour colleagues.

For World Drowning Prevention Day, events included a water rescue demo by Bedford Blue Watch.

August 2023

HMICFRS published its latest inspection report into the Service.

We opened up fire stations throughout the summer for open days.

Thousands of pounds was raised for The Fire Fighters Charity following car washes at stations.

We were thrilled to welcome 15 new on-call firefighter recruits

September 2023

Firefighters from Luton Fire Station and safety officers attended the Eid Festival at Wardown Park to promote fire service careers.

The new FRS Speak Up anonymous reporting service launched as part of the Culture Action Plan, allowing staff to report workplace issues confidentially via phone or online 24/7.

During Business Safety Week, we promoted new legislation and guidance on building fire safety and risk assessments.

The High Sheriff of Bedfordshire, Russell Beard, visited Fire Control, Workshops, and the Training Centre to learn about our technologies and capabilities.



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October 2023

More than 100 firefighters responded to a car park fire at London Luton Airport – noted as one of the biggest fires in Service history.

During Black History Month, the Service and the Asian Fire Service Association held an event at Pavenham Golf Club to honour black women's contributions to history and community.

Crews from Luton, Bedford, Dunstable, Stopsley, and Leighton Buzzard battled a major fire at an industrial laundry unit in Leagrave.

A team of five firefighters participated in the National Breathing Apparatus Challenge, simulating a property fire scenario.

Luton crews highlighted issues with parking in town centre streets during fire calls.

The Have A Go Day at Ampthill Fire Station offered the public a chance to try firefighting and explore becoming an on-call firefighter.

Sandy Fire Cadets participated in Burns Awareness Day, learning about treatment for burns and scalds.

The latest firefighter apprentices completed their final assessment. They were assessed over three areas and between the nine apprentices, they achieved 18 out of a possible 27 distinctions.

Potton and Sandy hosted Fright Nights on Halloween, where local families engaged in activities and learned about flammable costumes.

Luton cadets visited the UKIM Madina Masjid to discuss fire safety and recruitment.

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service was recognized by Bedfordshire Police for their response to an armed siege in Bedford in November 2022.

Crews participated in Exercise Hawk at Cranfield Airport, simulating a plane fire with trapped passengers.



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November 2023

The Community Safety Team engaged with young people at the Preparing for Adulthood Festival in Bedford.

Firefighters successfully rescued one person from a fire in a flat on London Road, Luton.

Kempston Red Watch and the Prevention Team joined the Festival of Lights at the Bunyan Centre hosted by the Bedford Indian community.

Crew Commander Angela Beresford represented the Service at the National Service of Remembrance in London, while local crews observed a minute's silence and attended other events.

Crews participated in an exercise at the Luton DART terminal, supported by Luton Rising, Bedfordshire Police, East of England Ambulance, and London Luton Airport.

The Service co-hosted a medical check and home safety event in Luton with Lea Vale Medical Group.

During Road Safety Week, crews discussed speeding with the local community.

December 2023

The Service launched a Winter Warmth campaign in December to advise the public on safe home heating, carbon monoxide awareness, and fuel poverty.

During Electrical Fire Safety Week, the Service promoted "Charge Safe" to raise awareness about the risks of lithium batteries in e-scooters and e-bikes.

The Service's Christingle event at St Mary's Church in Woburn brought together staff, families, and stakeholders for a festive celebration.

A consultation was launched to update response standards to align with Government reporting practices.

A festive Brew with the Crew event at Pottton Fire Station provided over 60s with home fire safety advice and support from crews.



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January 2024

In early January, the Service responded to Storm Henk, which caused severe flooding across Bedfordshire, affecting properties, roads, and rail networks. Emergency support was provided by blue light teams, local councils, and volunteers, particularly in Central Bedfordshire and Bedford Borough. Fire Control also faced high call volumes during this period.

Firefighters upgraded their equipment with new MSA breathing apparatus and TAIT radios.

The HMICFRS inspectorate resolved its cause of concern about assurance of firefighter fitness testing following publication of its 2023 inspection report.

A new team of Community Wellbeing Officers (CWO) began working with the East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust, responding to falls calls across Bedfordshire as part of a pilot project.

In Faldo Road, Bedford, firefighters rescued two adults, three children, a cat, and a dog from a house fire.

A recruitment drive for Fire Control was launched, featuring a Q&A and social media takeover, where control room staff answered public questions and shared a video about a typical day in the control room.

February 2024

The Service shone a light on the positive impact that apprenticeships make to individuals, the wider economy, and to us as a Service as part of National Apprenticeship Week.

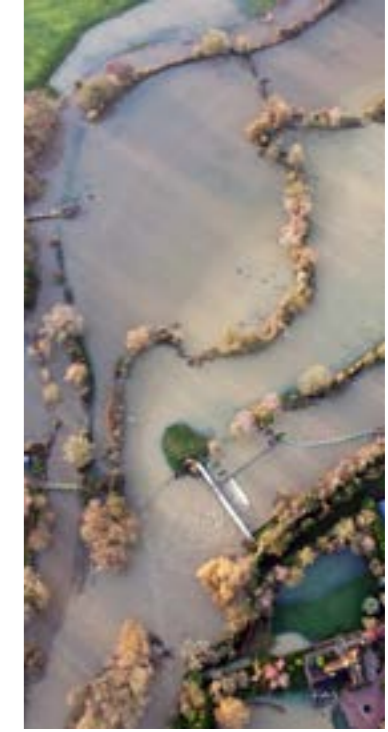
Colleagues increased awareness about safety at a Dementia Awareness Event in Luton in collaboration with The Medics Primary Care Network.

March 2024

A new BFRS virtual community panel was launched, inviting individuals to join and provide feedback through surveys, focus groups, and other engagement opportunities.

An electronic Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) system was implemented, aligning with Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations.

A new batch of wholtime firefighters completed their six-week conversion course, culminating in a certificate presentation on 15 March.



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PERFORMANCE

Response performance

An initial analysis of the Home Office published data for primary fires indicates notable improvements in average call handling and average crew turnout times. Looking at the first resource to arrive at primary fires, the average response time from time of call reduced from 615 seconds in 2022-23 (which ranked us 22nd of the 44 English services) to 574 seconds in 2023-24 (which ranked us 18th). This reduction of 41 seconds was driven by reductions in both average call-handling times and average turnout times.

This increase in performance can be directly link to the hard work and dedication of everyone linked to Service Delivery and success and outcomes of the following projects:

- 🔥 Luton pump trial identified importance of turnout times
- 🔥 Control enhancement team and configuration work with Motorola
- 🔥 On-call liaison watch commanders, ensuring pump availability, which is now the highest it's been in five years
- 🔥 Roaming pump trial

However, there is still more to do. We will see the delivery of station end equipment, which we hope will address a time delay from time of send to time of alert at some stations. There is also completion of the banded contracts work for on-call colleagues and annualised hours, reducing the time fire engines are unavailable.

Response standards

During 2023/4, Members supported changes to the Service Operational Response Performance standards, following a consultation with the public and key stakeholders.

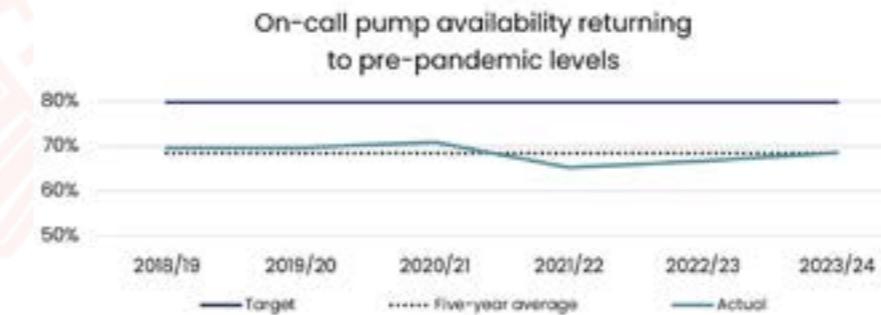
The team reviewed data measures and definitions across the sector and compared the Service's measures with comparable fire services and those who measure similar performance expectations. A multi-platform consultation explained the changes and sought feedback from the public and partners. This included an animation, video content and online questionnaire.

The changes have ensured we align to similar standards as other Services and allow us to better measure our performance when compared to other Services with similar risk profiles, budgets, and resources. The end of year performance report shows all attendance measures are green with the exception of primary fires which is amber. This is the best performance against these standards in five years.



On-call project

The introduction of two on-call liaison watch commanders set out to improve crewing of on-call fire engines. They have worked hard and been well received by colleagues, with availability for the full year delivering the best figures since availability peaked during the pandemic lockdown and are comparable with the pre-pandemic levels.



Work has taken place to identify the priority list of the 11 on-call stations and provide better insight into what is required to maintain availability.

Work will continue under the newly formed Service Delivery Team to finalise work on banded contracts linked to the NJC pay award and annualised hours, which will be released to coincide with changes to contract.

Response host and deliver Community Wellbeing Officers

The Community Wellbeing Officer (CWOs) Project was commissioned to support further collaboration between the East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST) and the Service. This collaborative approach was driven by a shared commitment to

maintaining the trust and confidence of the public in our services. It also reinforced the BFRS commitment to effective prevention, protection, and response activities, helping to keep safe the vulnerable people within Bedfordshire. The CWOs operate in pairs, with one of them continuing the previously established Falls Team model which involves a nurse. The CWOs are based at Ampthill and Pottton and report to the respective station commanders. They also conduct home fire safety visits on behalf of the Service and are performing very well.

London Luton Airport major incident

More than 100 firefighters from not just Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service, but also Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, London and London Luton Airport Fire Service worked hard to tackle a fire in Car Park 2 of London Luton Airport. The initial attending crews from Bedfordshire quickly recognised the warning signs of building collapse leading to a successful evacuation of the building. Given the significant structural collapse witnessed by crews the early recognition of the risk of collapse almost certainly saved lives.

The scale of the fire in Car Park 2 at London Luton Airport presented a significant challenge to the responding fire crews. The fire spread quickly to several vehicles and a combination of the wind spreading the fire through the open sided car park and the impact that running fuel had on the spread of the fire made the loss of the car park inevitable. Recommendations are being made and learning shared both regionally, nationally and internationally.

PREVENTION

Road safety

The Community Safety Officer Road Safety is supported by part time Road Traffic Collision (RTC) Reduction Officers. The team has been working hard to ensure collaborative working and educational events have continued. These include:

The delivery of 10 Biker Down courses run from April until September, with 115 people taking part. The course involves education on the science of being seen, what to do at the scene of a collision, basic first aid, which includes helmet removal and CPR and the final module that is delivered by BCH Policing and educates riders on road traffic law.

- 🔥 BikeSafe riding assessments
- 🔥 HBAM Slow Riding course
- 🔥 Bedford River Festival
- 🔥 Station open days

The Team have also been working in partnership with National Highways and supported large events including:

- 🔥 Silverstone F1
- 🔥 Moto GP
- 🔥 Motorcycle Live

VISION launch

In March 2024 BFRS launched 'Vision'. A road safety educational resource to engage predominantly with young drivers. The vehicle has four motion platform seats for people to sit in whilst experiencing a virtual reality road safety educational film.

The team continues its collaborative work as part of the Road Safety Partnership, working together to reduce KSI's on Bedfordshire Roads. Partnership courses that BFRS support include the Motivational Observational Reactional Education (MORE) course, which is aimed at young drivers between the ages of 16 and 30 and is free to those living within Bedfordshire.



Project APEX

The road safety team supported the launch of Project Apex supporting National Highways in collaboration with the National Police Chiefs' Council. The course is aimed at improving road safety for young motorcyclists

Events attended and campaigns facilitated:

- 🔥 Spring Start Up – Powered 2 wheelers
- 🔥 Brake road safety week
- 🔥 Don't drink and drive campaigns
- 🔥 Seatbelt safety campaign
- 🔥 Speed awareness campaign
- 🔥 Brake road safety week
- 🔥 Don't drink and drive campaign



Water safety

There are yearly National educational campaign weeks that BFRS support. These include:

- 🔥 #BeWaterAware NFCC campaign,
- 🔥 RLSSUK Drowning Prevention week and RLSSUK
- 🔥 #Don'tDrinkAndDrown week.

BFRS will also respond to local events if appropriate as part of a multi-agency approach, which has included:

- 🔥 Be Water Aware Campaign in April
- 🔥 Drowning Prevention week in June
- 🔥 Don't drink and Drown campaign



Annual community events

The Prevention Team and operational stations have supported local water events including:

- 🔥 Bedford River Festival
- 🔥 Leighton Linslade Canal Festival
- 🔥 Forest of Marston Vale Family Funday

Bedfordshire Drowning Prevention advisory group

The Service is key stakeholders in the collaborative group, which is Chaired by the Service and includes local authority representatives. Since the last report, representatives from the Environment Agency and various town councils now attend the meetings. The group aims to provide standard water safety messaging across the three authorities and discuss any local issues.

Areas where the group has supported include:

- 🔥 New throwline boards in known areas of risk in two areas along Bedford river.
- 🔥 Improved water safety signage in areas of known risk.
- 🔥 Joint attendance at community events.

BFRS also organised a large partnership educational event for World Drowning Prevention Day on 25 July 2023.



Youth development and fire cadets

The youth officer has supported a variety of young person interventions this year including;

- 🔥 26 SAFE (Safety Awareness and Fire Education) referrals - intervention for children and teenagers who set fires.
- 🔥 StayWise - fire safety sessions for all Year 2 primary classes, delivered by operational crews and supported by CSOYD/ station admins.
- 🔥 Fire Cadets (Bedford, Sandy, Leighton Buzzard and Luton).
- 🔥 Early intervention - bespoke sessions that reduce risk and improve outcomes for children and teenagers.
- 🔥 Partnership engagement - working productively with other prosocial organisations in Bedfordshire.

The Service has updated its SAFE Policy and reviewed risk assessments.

Internal quality assurance of the StayWise Year 2 visits took place, with the launch of a new evaluation form which is identifying positive feedback.

Early intervention

Bespoke sessions have been tailored for the educational need for each intervention. The input, resources and interactive activities draw from a range of sources including the CSOYD's broad experience of teaching and delivering interventions, the latest research in fire safety education and the NFCC guidance.

Examples of interventions this year include:

- 🔥 King's Oak Primary School: two reception classes - fire safety, safe and unsafe play (60)
- 🔥 Little Monkeys' Nursery: early fire safety messaging for children, support for staff (20)
- 🔥 The Almonds Pre-School: early fire safety messaging for children, stay and play (20)
- 🔥 Priory Primary School - a morning of input and workshop activities delivered to reception and year one, to test and gather feedback on age-related resources (60)

Vulnerable/SEND:

- 🔥 1:1 mentoring sessions for a child - disengaged with education, vulnerable (1)
- 🔥 Session for two siblings in own home - ADHD/dyspraxia/anxiety (2)
- 🔥 1:1 mentoring session linked to Police PREVENT case, child - autism (1)
- 🔥 Bedford College - Home fire safety workshop for 15- to 17-year-olds with SEND needs (40)

- 🔥 Cardinal Newman School (SEND provision) - aspirational careers presentation and visit from Luton crew (20)
- 🔥 Castle Newnham School - 1:1 mentoring for pupils with vulnerabilities, low inspirationally, lack of positive role models (2)
- 🔥 Co-working with Y11 pupil to film a 'field fires' interview for her school assembly (reach 200)
- 🔥 Visits to several residential homes such as Benjamin UK - delivery of house meeting (20)
- 🔥 Two visits to primary-aged young carers alongside Richard Burton of Leighton Buzzard (50)



Partnership engagement

The Service has engaged with local authorities in and out of Bedfordshire, police and other agencies including housing associations, schools, children's homes, foster parents, to support SAFE cases and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities. Amongst other activities, we delivered safety awareness sessions and provided learning resources which included posting fire safety leaflets, selecting and recommending StayWise resources. Examples include:

- 🔥 CHUMS session undertaken with 11 young carers
- 🔥 Safety Squad co-teaching/cross partnership (May 2023)

Fire Cadets

The total number of drill sessions undertaken by each of the four units was approximately 40. The Cadet units have managed to support a significant number of community events including:

- 🔥 Spring Start Up – a biker's safety event at Luton Station in April (LB/L)
- 🔥 Cadet Activity Day in April (all units)
- 🔥 Sandy Big Lunch – King's coronation and fundraiser in May (S)
- 🔥 Community celebration and parade for the King's coronation in May (L)
- 🔥 Drill and presentation to the Mayor of Luton and ACFO in May (L)
- 🔥 Lord-Lieutenant's Annual Service of Thanksgiving in May (B/LL Cadet)

- 🔥 Meeting dignitaries at the civic celebrations for Luton Town FC in May (L)
- 🔥 Flitton Potato Race fundraiser in June (B)
- 🔥 Bedford Community Fire Station Open Day in June (B)
- 🔥 Luton Station charity car wash in June (L)
- 🔥 2023 Cadet Awards at headquarters in July (all units)
- 🔥 Leighton Buzzard Open Day in July (LB)
- 🔥 Leighton Buzzard Carnival in July (LB)
- 🔥 Sandy Fire Station Open Day in September (S)



Cadet Training

Cadets have participated in a range of training sessions to support their personal resilience and development including:

- 🔥 Development of Cadet Voice to get the opinions of our young people to support the cadet programme manual handling
- 🔥 Code of Conduct
- 🔥 Hazards and Risks
- 🔥 Health & Safety Induction Checklist (FSHS35)
- 🔥 First aid refresher – one full day

Volunteers' Week

Volunteers' Week is the perfect occasion to show our appreciation to volunteers for the time and effort they give. We sent all volunteers a personalised Volunteers' Week card noting their individual help and to say a big 'Thank You' on our social media.

The volunteer programme continues to grow. This year, volunteers have been out and about at different events with Community Safety Team staff, sharing safety messages and encouraging vulnerable people to book home fire safety visits. They've also accompanied on home visits, building up their valuable home safety knowledge, and are now supporting the Prevention quality assurance programme with follow-up phone calls.

Wider community partnerships: vulnerable groups

The Service has continued to develop relationships with a range of NHS partners and Primary Care Networks across the county to ensure that reach with those most at risk continues to expand.

A particular focus has been working with ESOL groups in Bedford, training young people and adults for whom English is an additional language, in understanding the role of the fire service and keeping safe at home (168 participants)

The Bedford Borough Council Dementia Partnership enabled the Service to deliver 186 home fire safety visits to people impacted by memory problems or dementia. A further 403 contacts were made throughout the Dementia Safety First project through organisations across the community

The Service continues to deliver Safe at Home, a Luton-based child accident prevention service, led by Flying Start & Early Years Alliance (EYA) in association with Public Health (655 contacts across the year)

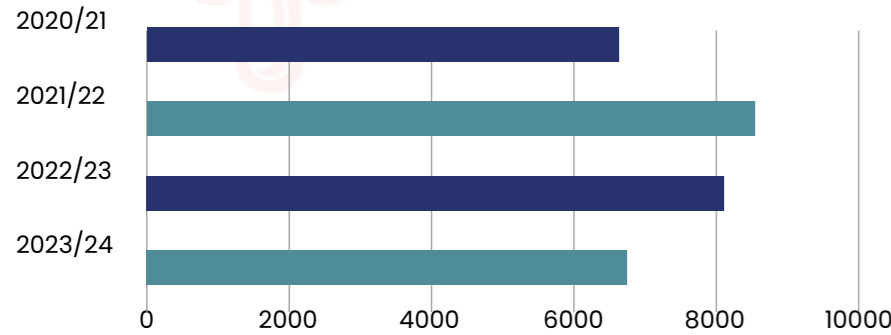
Links with 33 groups were established through events, talks and training, such as the Macular Society, Breathe Easy, Central Bedfordshire Council Assessment and Review, and Young Adult Independent Living Teams



Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSV)

Delivery of Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSV) has contributed to a significant reduction in the annual number of accidental fires in the home in Bedfordshire. Our HFSV is fully aligned to the national NFCC Person Centred Framework guidance. In addition, we support community health and wellbeing services by making referrals to specialist services for falls and frailty, alcohol consumption, crime prevention, smoking cessation, and difficulties meeting fuel costs. We also work with other public sector organisations, such as housing providers and health services to exchange relevant information about people who need support and make sure they receive a visit from the person best placed to help them.

Delivered visits



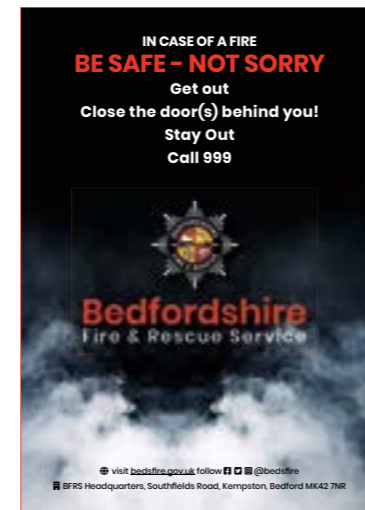
HFSV are a contributing factor in keeping the number of primary accidental dwelling fires below average and 6,768 HFSVs were delivered in financial year 2023/24. When comparing 2023/24 data with the year before, accidental dwelling fires have decreased by 7 per cent.

HFSV mobile power app

February 2023 saw the launch of the home fire safety visit mobile app. This enabled HFSVs to become completely digital and has provided many benefits including a reduction in the use of paper, enhanced confidentiality as paper cannot be left unattended, a substantial increase in the number of referrals we make to partner agencies and compliance with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Person Centred Framework requirements. By completing visits in this way, we can now see who our most vulnerable people are giving us the information to create a re-visit programme.

Safe and Well Rebranding

In line with NFCC guidance, a decision was taken by the Service in November 2022 to rebrand from Safe and Well Visits to Home Fire Safety Visit. In 2023, the Service launched the information booklet it gives people during HFSVs. It is an interesting and comprehensive guide that pulls together all the information from the HFSV into a handy guide that can be read again and again.

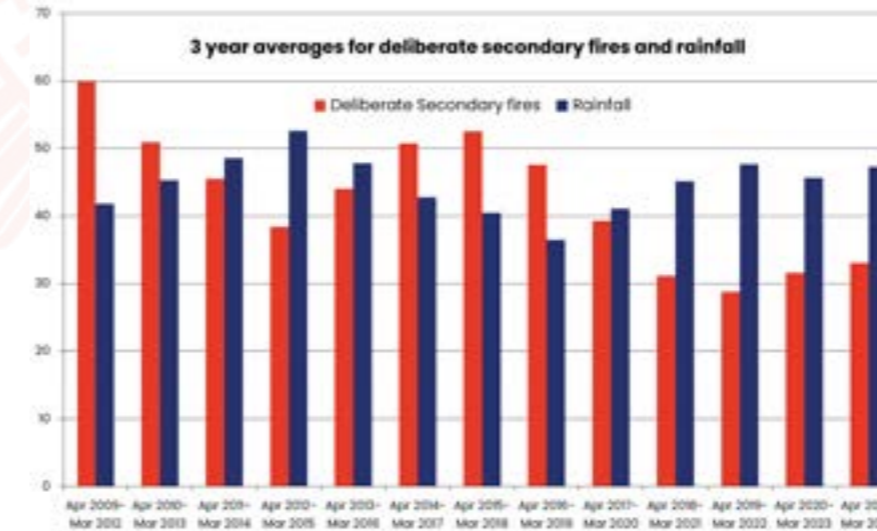


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Arson

When comparing 2023/24 data with the year before there has been a 31 per cent reduction in deliberate fires. Nobody came to harm as a result of any of the primary other outdoor fires, primary road vehicle fires, or deliberate secondary fires.

There is a direct correlation between rainfall and deliberate secondary fires, three-year averages below:



Safeguarding

Through investing in colleagues, enhancing systems, and improving governance, the Service has made significant strides in its safeguarding protocols.

- The Service has maintained a 100 per cent feedback commitment, providing timely feedback to all individuals who submit referrals.

- During autumn 2023, the Service dispatched three representatives from the Prevention team to the NSPCC's training centre to secure specialised qualifications in advanced child safeguarding.
- In winter 2023, the overarching safeguarding policy was updated to incorporate the enhancements derived from the NSPCC training, recent developments in sector-specific guidance, and national best practice.
- The Service revised all training modules, including tailored sessions for duty group commanders.

As a result of the advancements made, there has been a substantial increase in referrals compared to the previous year, with an overall surge of 48 per cent, notably including a 107 percent rise in referrals related to children.

The safeguarding priorities for 2024/25 centre on ongoing investment in the training and professional growth of colleagues, along with guaranteeing the effectiveness and efficiency of referral systems and processes.

Year-on-year progress would not have been possible without the invaluable support of safeguarding partners, meaning the Service is more prepared than ever to safeguard and assist the most vulnerable individuals.

Named Lead: Robert Hulatt

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PROTECTION

BFRS is the enforcing authority for the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO). The Fire Safety Order requires anyone in control of a premises (the 'responsible person') to carry out a fire risk assessment to determine what steps they need to take to reduce the risk from fire and make sure people can safely escape if there is a fire.

To ensure the safety of Bedfordshire's built environment, Protection work includes shaping the design of new buildings, inspecting current buildings, collaborating with stakeholders to promote fire safety, and influencing national policy. As the built environment in the county evolves rapidly, our activities play a crucial role in protecting residents, firefighters, the economy, our heritage and the environment.

Work this year has focused on training and upskilling frontline firefighters, supporting businesses and partners, delivering high quality regulation, improving responses to consultations and enhancing quality assurance process and records.



Key achievements and progress in 2023-2024:

- 🔥 We have made significant investments in training and development activities, utilising national Protection uplift funding to work towards qualifying and developing 40 operational staff to undertake fire safety audits on stations
- 🔥 We have recruited a dedicated enforcement support officer to manage, lead on and quality assure prosecution cases where it is deemed appropriate following identification of serious non-compliance with legislation
- 🔥 We have implemented a business engagement plan to inform and educate business owners through face-to-face engagement, email marketing, social media and online thematic presentations
- 🔥 We have reviewed and implemented a new procedure to reduce the number of false alarms we attend. This includes call challenging, education and enhanced monitoring
- 🔥 We successfully developed and promoted three fire safety advisors into the more advanced fire safety inspector role, ensuring the team is equipped with the correct knowledge and skills for inspections of higher risk premises
- 🔥 We have renewed the memorandum of understanding with Essex FRS for use of a fire safety engineer to ensure we respond to statutory building regulations for complex premises and that the work of the fire engineering design technician is quality assured
- 🔥 We are using our internally developed database of business premises, called the Fire Risk Data Warehouse, to ensure resources are targeted to premises at highest risk, using a data-led approach.

Protection Activity

Protection work can be broadly categorised into two types: reactive demand-led work, whereby Protection work is undertaken in response to an external trigger, and proactive pre-planned work, which aims to promote or enforce compliance with the FSO and reduce fire risk in the community. This proactive pre-planned work is known as the Risk Based Intervention Programme.

The Risk Based Intervention Programme will encompass the following activities:

- 🔥 Fire safety audits designed to ensure that all high-risk premises are audited at an appropriate interval, carried out by specialist fire safety staff
- 🔥 Fire safety audits targeting an appropriate sample of medium and low risk premises, carried out by operational crews and specialist fire safety staff
- 🔥 Fire safety checks targeting an appropriate sample of mostly medium and low risk simple premises
- 🔥 Targeted business engagement activity designed to promote compliance with the FSO
- 🔥 Work to support to BFRS site specific risk information gathering process.



Demand led work includes:





- 🔥 Ongoing prosecution case management and enforcement
- 🔥 Statutory Building Regulations consultations
- 🔥 Other statutory consultations with enforcing authorities
- 🔥 Work in support of the Building Safety Regulator
- 🔥 Responding to complaints or concerns regarding fire safety standards in premises (including from other enforcing authorities)
- 🔥 Post-fire investigations and inspections of regulated premises
- 🔥 Targeted work designed to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals attended by BFRS
- 🔥 Responding to requests for fire safety advice.

Audits and Inspections

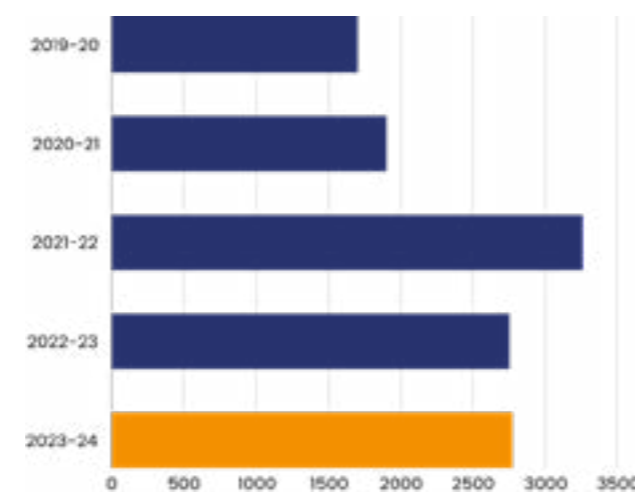
As the enforcing authority, the Service undertakes a range of planned and reactive inspections of premises (normally buildings or parts of buildings) to which the Fire Safety Order applies. The Fire Safety Order applies very widely and there are more than 26,000 premises within the county of Bedfordshire where this is the case.

All fire safety audit and inspection work is carried out by personnel with the appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding in line with the National Fire Chiefs Council Competence Framework for Fire Safety Regulators.

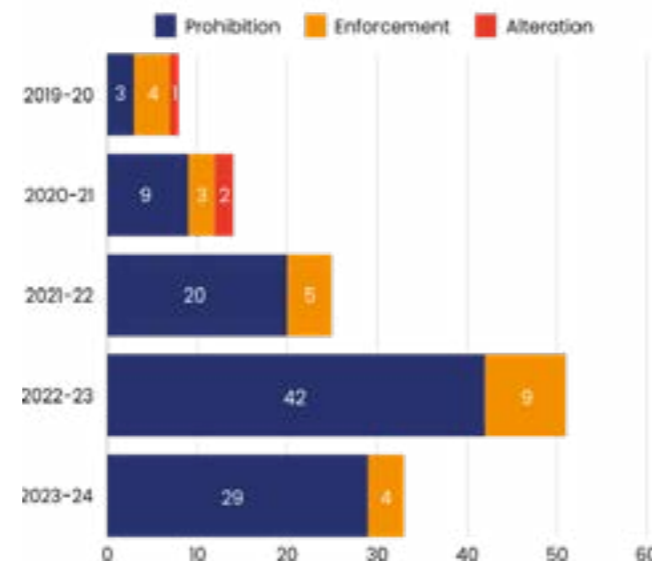
Audits and inspections can be categorised as follows:

-  **High-risk premises** – All Bedfordshire premises identified in this category are inspected at specified intervals by competent fire safety inspectors
-  **Medium Risk Premises** – These premises are sampled and inspected by competent fire safety advisors
-  **Low Risk Premises** – These premises are sampled and checked by suitably trained operational personnel
-  **Building complaints** – Complaints we receive about fire safety standards from other agencies and the public are followed up by a competent fire safety regulator.

Audits and Inspections



Statutory Notices Served



Formal Enforcement Action

Protection activity can sometimes reveal the Fire Safety Order has been contravened. There are times this non-compliance is minor and times where it is more serious and there is an immediate danger to life.

BFRS supports business owners so they can comply and grow. The Service takes a fair approach and ensures we communicate clearly and transparently to achieve the best outcome. We always act in accordance with the Regulator's code.

When we identify serious non-compliance or an immediate danger to life, we may take formal action, which may take the form of a formal notice. These notices are legally binding, and it is an offence not to comply with them.

Prohibition notice – served where the risk is considered so serious that use of the premises needs to be prohibited or restricted until specified matters have been remedied.

Enforcement notice – served where there is a clear breach of the law, where the degree of risk of harm is significant, and where a remedy needs to be secured within a set period of time.

Alterations notice – served where there is a serious risk (or there would be with a change to the premises) and may require that before any changes are made details of the proposed changes must be submitted to the fire authority.

During 2023/24 BFRS continued to respond to all building complaints from members of the public and other agencies, as well as identification of 'dangerous conditions' by operational personnel. BFRS also proactively took part in multi-agency inspections with departments in the local authorities, including in houses of multiple occupation (HMO), in which we support the local authority as the lead agency.

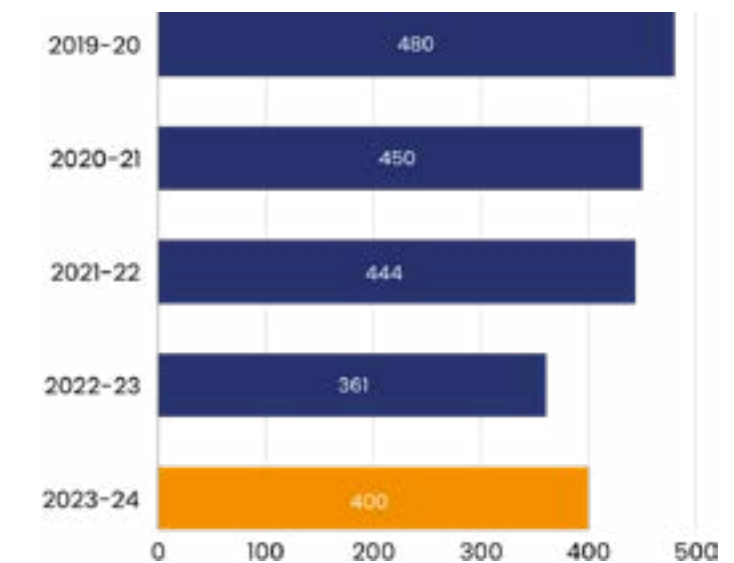
Risk-based interventions were the primary source of formal enforcement actions. We issued a total of 29 prohibition notices to restrict use of a premises to make it safer.

Statutory Consultations

In England and Wales, the Building Act 1984 and its Building Regulations apply to new buildings and to building work such as the erection, extension or material alteration of an existing building. Fire safety requirements are set out in Building Regulations and guidance on meeting the requirements is given in Approved Document B (Fire safety). The building control authority or approved inspector are responsible for checking for compliance with these requirements and undertake statutory consultation with the fire and rescue service as part of that process.

In 2023/24 BFRS made responses to 400 Building Regulations consultations. This is a slight increase on the previous year. BFRS also responds to other consultations including those relating to licensing, care standards, and Ofsted inspections. In 2023/24 BFRS responded to 121 such consultations.

Building Regulations



FINANCE

A financial summary of 2023/24

The Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) is a precepting authority – this means that its net cost, after receipt of government grant, is met by a proportion of local business rates and council tax via the unitary authorities of Bedford, Central Bedfordshire and Luton.

The FRA is acutely aware, particularly in the current economic climate, of the need to keep any increase in council tax to the minimum, always bearing in mind the need to adequately fund the fire and rescue service. Resources must, therefore, be enough to enable this emergency service to be fully operational throughout the year. For the 2023/24 budget, the FRA was able to keep its council tax increase for a Band D property of £5 (£109.45 in 2023/24 up from £104.45 in 2022/23).

A financial commentary of 2023/24

The settlement figures for 2023/24 were the fifth single year settlement. This and future years settlements are likely to remain difficult. The Authority has continued to be proactive in identifying changes to ensure continuity and development of professional services whilst delivering the required efficiencies, and the planning process covers a range of financial scenarios that may emerge in the next few years. The ability to mitigate risks and realise opportunities is directly impacted by the resourcing and budgetary make-up. Current budgetary plans and assumptions determine the speed at which the Service will deliver action plans. More information is available on the BFRS website.

Future financial settlements. The financial priorities are to:

- 🔥 Deliver a balanced sustainable budget that provides value for money, aligns resources to risk and supports the delivery of the CRMP.
- 🔥 Be innovative in developing and delivering the efficiency plan whilst maintaining a prudent level and utilisation of reserves. The medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) is a document that sets the Authority's financial strategy for the next four years. It focuses on the immediate year's revenue budget and capital programme, but also sets the scene for future years. It covers national events such as the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and then breaks down how this impacts locally on the Authority. The MTFS details the reserves policy, planning assumptions behind the budget figures and other considerations that must be considered when setting the strategy, such as inflationary pressures, the tax base, efficiencies and shared services.

Revenue budget:

For 2023/24 the FRA approved a revenue budget requirement of £34.748m, of which around 80 per cent of these costs are for employees.

2023/24 year-end contribution to reserves:

The unaudited year-end contribution to reserves was £531k. The underspend was predominantly due to increased income from Treasury investments, grant income, income generated from providing training courses and sales. These income items were offset by some overspends in areas such as inflationary pressures on pay, supplies and services.

Capital budget:

The capital programme highlights spending on assets such as fire stations and fire engines. Each year the Authority draws up a rolling four-year programme of capital projects. The capital projects budget approved for 2023/24 totalled £2.258m, funded by contributions from the revenue budget and reserves utilisation. Projects included:

- 🔥 Investment in vehicle feet, to maintain effective, economic and efficient fire engines
- 🔥 Investment in IT
- 🔥 Investment in equipment
- 🔥 Investment in the modernisation of buildings

Reserves:

The general reserve balance as at 31 March 2024 was £2.4m. This is following work undertaken over the last few years to establish specific earmarked reserves, which as at 31 March 2024 totalled £4.057m. The year-end revenue budget underspend of £531k has been allocated 50 per cent to the Transformation reserve and 50 per cent to the pay and pension reserve. This is in line with the MTFS, which takes into account the back loaded, and on-going government funding reductions to fire and rescue services.

The capital receipts reserve as at 31 March 2024 was £242k.

**Note: These figures (£) are yet to be externally audited as of August 2024.*

A full explanation of the 2023/24 finances are held within the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts. The annual accounts are subject to external audit each year, the Service's external auditors are KPMG. The link below will take you to the relevant page on the Service's website, please see the Statement of Accounts section: <https://www.bedsfire.gov.uk/finance-and-budgets>

NB; The Fire and Rescue Authority has a responsibility to publish a statement of assurance on an annual basis which sets out the approach taken to ensuring appropriate arrangements are in place in terms of governance and operational delivery, which is covered in the Annual Governance Statement, that is within the Statement of Accounts.



Where does the money come from and where is it spent?

Expenditure	£	£m
Employees	31,020,825	31.0
Supplies & Services	4,624,393	4.6
Premises	1,681,692	1.7
Capital Financing & Other	1,172,334	1.2
Transport	799,969	0.8
Total	39,299,213	39.3

Income	£	£m
Council Tax & Business Rates	-27,333,032	-27.3
Central & Local Government Funding	-9,969,378	-10.0
Fees, Charges, Investment & Other	-2,528,081	-2.5
Total	-39,830,490	-39.8

	£	£m
Surplus	531,277	-0.5

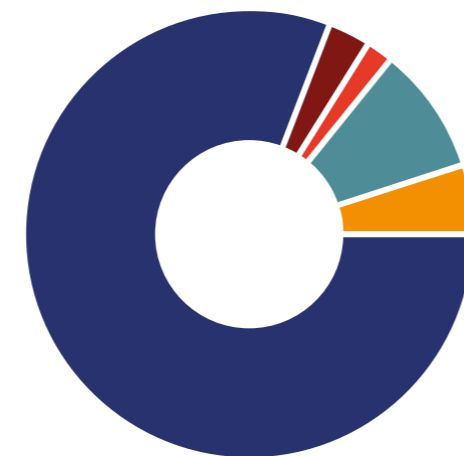
79% EMPLOYEES

11.8% SUPPLIES & SERVICES

4.3% PREMISES

3% CAPITAL FINANCING & OTHER

2% TRANSPORT



68.7% COUNCIL TAX & BUSINESS RATES

25% CENTRAL & LOCAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

6.3% FEES, CHARGES, INVESTMENT & OTHER



HUMAN RESOURCES

Twenty-five employees from across the Service received their Long Service & Good Conduct Awards in 2023/2024.

This was another busy year for the Resourcing Team, at a time when the recruitment market is highly competitive and roles remain increasingly hard to fill. During this time, the Service received a total of 1,095 applications for advertised roles across the Service of which more than 22 per cent were from minority ethnic applicants. The team also appointed to 24 support roles (green book), two Fire Control posts, 12 wholtime firefighters, 19 on-call firefighters and ran a process to appoint at strategic management level to an assistant chief fire officer vacancy. All this recruitment activity inevitably resulted in pre-employment checks, contracts of employment and other onboarding activity for the HR Operations Team, which also made process and system changes to improve efficiency and provide accessible people data for managers.

The Service coordinated a wholtime firefighter campaign that attracted 501 applicants, culminating in a pool of 76 successful candidates. Of these, 12 joined the Service as a wholtime firefighter in February 2024 with a further 20 anticipated to join between September 2024 and November 2025.

The Service also conducted a survey to understand why applicants from our under-represented groups on our "register your interest" list did not proceed to apply for the wholtime firefighter role and whether the current negative media coverage surrounding UK FRS in relation to values and culture impacted their decisions. The number one reason was

a change in circumstances, and the negative media was not highlighted as an issue.

This year, the team has focused on improving processes and finding innovative ways to promote the Service as an employer of choice, supported by an inclusive culture. Key highlights include:

- 🔥 An online authorisation process for recruitment.
- 🔥 A photo shoot to showcase support staff and attract a diverse workforce.
- 🔥 Reviewing the on-call recruitment process.
- 🔥 Exploring options for a new on-call campaign to increase the number of applications.
- 🔥 Developing a succession planning process for all support roles.

A member of the team observes Ramadan which is a month of fasting. In support all members of the team participated in the Ramadan fasting challenge, which received positive feedback across the Service. In future the Service will provide others the opportunity to participate.

The Employee Relations Team has continued with the cycle of regular review and implementation of organisational policies, ensuring they are proactively developed in line with legislative change. The Service has increased in-house people management training and one-to-one case support to increase the skills and confidence of managers, so they are able to better support employees.

The Occupational Health Team has continued to provide support to employees and managers dealing with a wide range of absences and medical conditions. This includes all new employees to the Service, by ensuring they are fit and safe to carry out their roles; as well as ensuring potential recruits who participate in recruitment and selection processes are fit to perform the practical elements of the assessment process. The OH Team has also continued to work closely with the Trauma Risk Incident Management (Trim) team to support colleagues exposed to traumatic incidents through their work as part of the overall Wellbeing strategy designed to support and improve employee mental health.

The Payroll Team has successfully devised and implemented new allowance schemes to streamline some processes and create efficiencies.

The HR Operations Team continues to keep up to date with the complex landscape for occupational pension schemes, ensured employees have been kept informed of developments within their relevant pension schemes and regularly provided advice and guidance. Both the HR Operations and Payroll Team have worked with pension providers to ensure the necessary pay and career information for individuals is accurate in relevant systems to ensure the correct pension can be applied in response to the legislative changes introduced by central Government in 2023.

Empowering – equality and diversity

The focus areas for equality, diversity and inclusion activity were embedding the EDI steering group and refreshing the EDI Action Plan. A diagnostic tool has been used to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Positive action and cultural awareness training has been revised to support employees’ development and awareness.

Having a representative workforce continues to be a Service priority and also remains a sector-wide significant challenge.

The Service continues to actively engage with under-represented community groups, including, where appropriate, positive action initiatives, and will continue to work to improve community representation to better reflect the diversity of the county for those we serve. Positive action, recruitment and engagement activity continues and is designed to promote services provided as well as promote career opportunities available in the Service. This includes providing attendees opportunities to ‘have a go’ at practical activities performed by operational firefighters.

Full details of performance in relation to the attraction, recruitment and selection of under-represented groups is published in the Public Sector Equality Duty report available on BFRS website. [Link to follow](#)



TRAINING, LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT

The Training Centre Team supports the Service to ensure it has the right people (promotion), with the right skills (training, driving, incident command, development) to deliver the CRMP.

The Training Centre Team won the Team of Year Award at the BFRS Values Awards 2023.

The first cohort of the internally run Operational Firefighter Level 3 Apprenticeship completed their end point assessments in October 2023. They were assessed over three areas, and between the nine apprentices they achieved 18 out of a possible 27 distinctions.

Training Centre continue to support the next cohort of apprentices, as well as transferees and new on-call trainees and has completed the following in 2023/24;

- 🔥 Delivered two on-call modular training courses to assist in delivering the Service’s priority of improving on-call availability
- 🔥 Delivered a bespoke 6-week wholetime recruits course for existing on-call firefighters in development to move to the wholetime duty system
- 🔥 Designed a new on-call recruits course to supplement the on-call modular which is to be piloted in summer 2024.

Following the roll out of the Tactical Firefighting Module A course in 2023/24, the Tactical Firefighting Module B course has been rolled out to assess all Service breathing apparatus (BA) wearers. Assessment data and trends has subsequently been used to

inform course design on this year’s Tactical Firefighting Module A, and station BA trainer refreshers to ensure a continuous loop of learning and improvement in BA wearing. Training instructors have been busy delivering Service-wide training to support the go live of new MSA BA sets, as well as delivery of the BAU safety critical training to operational staff.

The design, delivery and development of training is in line with the Quality Management System (QMS) ISO 9001:2015, which is due to be reaccredited in 2024 and work is ongoing to prepare for audit.



The incident command team has been busy delivering the Skills for Justice (SFJ) Level 3 Award in Initial Incident Command, as well as refreshers, revalidations and been involved in a number of Local Resilience Forum (LRF) exercises. As an SFJ Awards Approved Centre, the Service has been audited in 23/24 to ensure it continues to meet the required standard.

Between September and October, the Service formed part of a regional exercise team and delivered 14 days of regional Marauding Terrorist Attack exercises. BFRS assets took part in seven of the days. A total of 935 blue light responders participated in the exercises with 341 being from the FRS.

The team welcomed a new trainer in August who has been delivering a range of new courses for all colleagues that include: Manual Handling, Mental Health First Aid, Effective Leaders Course (in collaboration with Cambridgeshire and Hertfordshire fire services), Maximising your Time to Minimise your Stress, Managing Meetings, as well as designing new courses to deliver in 2024/25.

Professional Behaviours and Cultural Awarenesses courses have been delivered throughout the Service and the Corporate Management Team (CMT) undertook a programme of development with Cranfield University.

The Driver Training team continues to train, support and revalidate blue light drivers as well as supporting the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). BFRS driver training team has delivered the upskill course pilot for the NFCC, the first national NFCC Emergency Response Driver Training Instructor Course and CPD days in Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire.

Promotion gateways and operational recruitment has been running throughout the year with gateways delivered at all levels.

The Service facilitated Institute of Fire Engineers (IFE) exams during October 2023 and March 2024 to support operational staff into future roles.

In November the Service launched the process for a new development centre for support staff, to help identify development to enhance their career pathway and support them in their personal growth.

In September 2023 all group commanders, area commanders and brigade managers and equivalent professional support staff completed 360-degree feedback and received 1:1 feedback.



PROJECTS & PROGRAMMES

As of 31 March 2024, BFRS has 20 projects in green status, three in amber and one in red status.

One project is in red status (National Operational Guidance Project), with three others in amber: clothing project, station end equipment project, and fleet system replacement project. The red status is due to issues with some released packs that needed remediation. The amber status mainly reflects extended timelines. The Projects Team is working to resolve these issues and re-baseline delivery plans.

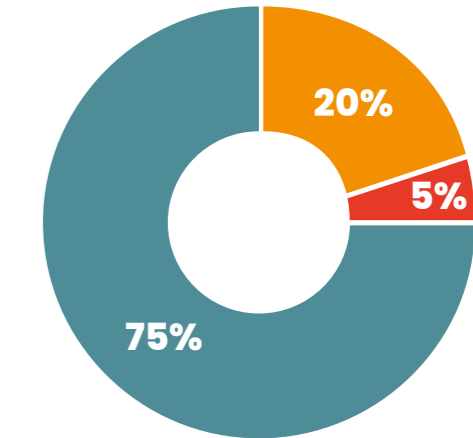
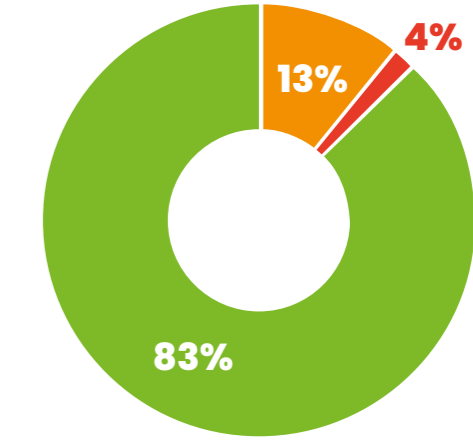
Most active projects (83 per cent) are on track to meet objectives on time, as shown here:

The majority of CRMP action tasks (75 per cent) have been fully completed, shown here:

Projects	Count of RAG status
Red	1
Amber	3
Green	20
Total	24

Colour code	Project status key
RED	Outside of agreed targets.
AMBER	Some issues. May not meet targets.
GREEN	No issues. On course to meet targets.

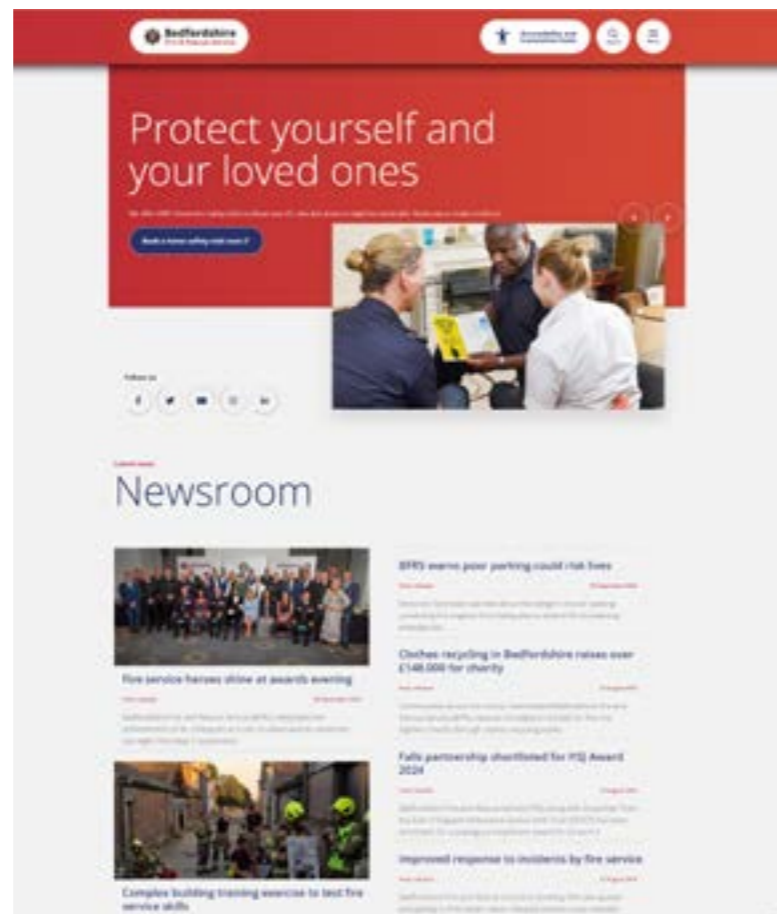
RAG Status	Count of RAG status
Red	2
Amber	8
Complete	30
Total	40



High-level summary of key project milestones achieved during 2023/2024

Several projects were successfully delivered and implemented in 2023/24:

- The command support review project improved the use of technology on the fire ground, enhancing command support processes and situational awareness.
- The appraisals module on PDR Pro replaced paper-based processes with an online solution, improving performance management and aligning with NFCC leadership guidelines.
- The GIS, Risk, Workload Modeller, and Web Map project delivered powerful tools for scenario modelling.
- Phase two of the corporate KPI data hub added automated reporting across business areas, enhancing performance monitoring.
- The rural water tenders project enhanced RWT deployment with new RTC equipment.
- The website upgrade project improved user experience and security.
- The Luton pump trial evaluated the strategic repositioning of a fire appliance, leading to a decision not to proceed with a permanent move.
- The pension data service project ensured accurate monthly pension reporting for both FPS and LGPS schemes.
- The iTrent web recruitment and onboarding modules streamlined paper processes onto a central platform.
- The operations assurance station audits tool was implemented on PDR Pro, with further tools in development.



Several projects also achieved major milestones:

- The GP upgrade project upgraded the finance system and ensured compliance with ICT requirements.
- The breathing apparatus replacement project was successfully implemented, enhancing firefighter safety and ensuring compliance.
- The review of response standards (KPIs) aligned BFRS reporting with CRMP targets, leading to updated standards.
- The home fire safety visits project improved risk assessments and data quality.
- The Protection Fire Risk Data Warehouse (FRDW) project delivered valuable tools for fire safety audits.
- The road safety vehicle virtual reality project advanced the use of modern technology in road safety education.
- The roaming pump project commenced a trial of mixed crewing, with data collection ongoing.
- The CCTV project upgraded vehicle cameras, with the rollout nearing completion.
- The community wellbeing officers project successfully deployed a new team in collaboration with EEAST.

BFRS also continued work on ongoing projects, including the station end equipment, NOG, on-call improvements, fleet system, MDTs phase three, and Emergency Service Network (ESN) projects. The replacement mobilising system project faced setbacks, leading to project closure activities.



Work began on several new projects:

- The station dashboard project aims to provide real-time data for station management.
- The emergency cover review programme explores options for station upgrades, new stations, and other improvements.
- The iTrent promotional gateway project is digitalising the promotion process.
- The dwelling fires methodology project applies NFCC guidelines for fire risk calculations.
- The 101C/AMP system project will replace outdated prevention software.
- The posting amendments form project is digitalising HR processes.

Future projects and programmes

Several corporate projects were temporarily put on hold due to resource constraints, including the fire control resilience, Cloud Guardian migration, and fuel monitoring system projects, which are expected to resume in 2024/25.

Looking ahead, BFRS is preparing to tackle additional projects and programmes that align with its strategic objectives for the next financial year.

Cyber Security

In June 2023, BFRS started the next level of cyber standard improvements by completing an audited assessment against the NCSC, Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF). This is a three-year programme to attain the baseline and enhanced profile alignment. These standards improve and continue to improve the cyber security posture for BFRS.

In December 2023 and March 2024, BFRS re-accredited against the Cyber Essentials standard and Cyber Essentials Plus standard, respectively.

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EVERY CONTACT COUNTS
WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK
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