

BFRS ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

OUR MISSION

Working together to keep Bedfordshire safe.

OUR VALUES

We've got your back

Every contact counts

We dare to be different

We are accountable

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.

FOREWORD

Welcome to our Annual Report for the financial year 2024/25, which reflects on the progress, challenges, and achievements of Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service during the past 12 months. This year has been a testament to the dedication, resilience, and professionalism of our teams as we have continued to serve and protect our communities.

The Service has faced complex incidents and operational demands, including our response to a natural gas leak in Bedford, which required extensive multi-agency collaboration and strategic management for a protracted time. Throughout this and other major incidents, our firefighters, control staff, and support teams have demonstrated unwavering commitment, ensuring the safety of residents and minimising disruption in difficult circumstances.

Our focus on continuous improvement has driven key developments in the Service. Our investment in people has been central to our progress; the launch of new career development pathways, the enhancement of contractual maternity pay, and our renewed commitment to inclusivity through community events and internal initiatives all reflect our determination to create a positive and forward-thinking workplace.

Our engagement with the community remains a cornerstone of our work. Initiatives such as the Vision Van continue to raise awareness of road safety, and our rebranded on-call firefighter recruitment campaign has helped to attract talent from a broader range of backgrounds. Public engagement events, from station open days to targeted fire prevention campaigns, have reinforced our mission to keep Bedfordshire safe.

Operationally, we have continued to modernise and adapt. The roll-out of advanced drone technology has enhanced our response capabilities, while the Fleet CCTV Project has improved operational efficiency and reduced costs. Our commitment to learning and improvement was further demonstrated through the publication of the Significant Incident Report for the London Luton Airport car park fire, ensuring that lessons from past events inform future best practices.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to every member of our Service, as well as our partners and the communities we serve. Your dedication and hard work are

at the heart of our success. As we look ahead to 2025/26, we remain committed to our people, collaboration, and excellence in everything we do. Thank you for your ongoing support, and I look forward to building on our achievements in the year to come.

Andrew Hopkinson,

Chief Fire Officer/ Chief Executive Officer

SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS

April 2024

A new virtual reality safety education tool had its first outing and was heralded a success. Students from Barnfield College in Luton got to experience the Vision Van following its completion, giving them the opportunity to learn about road safety in an engaging and creative environment.

Bedford Fire Station hosted the annual Spring Start-Up event, welcoming bikers from across Bedfordshire and neighbouring counties to promote road safety awareness. The event included demonstrations and educational sessions aimed at reducing motorcycle-related incidents.

Operationally, an ongoing trial of a roaming fire engine was extended and spent a period of time at Toddington Fire Station, gathering further insights into how this initiative could support emergency response times.

The Service also played a role in a nationwide effort to assist firefighters in Ukraine, donating essential equipment to support their ongoing emergency response work.

May 2024

Mental Health Awareness Week saw crews at Dunstable undertake a range of community-focused activities and alongside a qualified trainer, provide free mental health awareness courses for the public.

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service welcomed Assistant Chief Fire Officer Jim Davies as the new Director of Service Delivery. With extensive experience from London and Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Services, he brought valuable expertise to the team

The Service strengthened its community ties by donating a vehicle to the Airfield Volunteer Fire Service at the Shuttleworth Collection, improving their response capabilities.

Fire safety remained a key priority as BFRS partnered with the RSPB to educate visitors on preventing wildfires in Bedfordshire's nature reserves.

The introduction of advanced Thermal Enterprise drones at Harrold and Leighton Buzzard provided firefighters with enhanced capabilities for incident monitoring, search operations, and fire investigations.

The Service was recognised for its critical role in responding to an explosion, when a trial at the Old Bailey concluded on 19 April 2024. The trial saw an individual found guilty of causing an explosion in Sharnbrook in April 2023 and the verdict served as a reminder of the critical role played by emergency services in ensuring public safety.

June 2024

A significant structural change took place as the Service transitioned to a four-directorate model to improve operational efficiency and resilience and enabling a shift in focus towards transformation.

Volunteers' Week was marked by special recognition of Community Volunteers and Fire Cadets, highlighting their contributions to public safety campaigns

The introduction of accredited Mental Health First Aiders provided additional support to colleagues facing challenges, reinforcing the Service's commitment to wellbeing and inclusivity.

July 2024

Farmers working hard at harvesting benefited from fire safety advice throughout the season as part of a collaborative effort with the National Farmers Union. A range of engagement opportunities included farm safety events focusing on working at height, driver safety, basic first aid, and machinery safety.

As temperatures rose, the Service issued advice and guidance to the public through safety campaigns both in person and online, to ensure people in the community stayed safe and reduced their risk of fire and emergency.

The Service led a major multi-agency response to a natural gas leak in Cleat Hill, Bedford. The four-day operation required extensive coordination to ensure public safety, with Group Commander Rob Hulatt playing a key role in managing the

emergency response and coordinating a number of partners to ensure a resolution for residents.

A range of teams from across the Service found themselves in the heart of the community engaging with residents at the Bedford River Festival. The team from fire delivered a host of engagement opportunities, including demonstrations on what to do if you find yourself in trouble in water, hands-on opportunities in the Service's Vision Van, and information about career opportunities.

The Service hosted the LearnPro Group User Group Meeting 2024 at Kempston on 2 and 3 July with 130 visitors attending from other emergency services.

The month also saw eleven new on-call firefighters and a Fire Control recruit complete their training, with a pass-out parade at Kempston showcasing their skills in fire response, road traffic collision management, and trauma care.

August 2024

Fire stations across the county welcomed the public through their doors as part of the summer station open days. Local communities had the chance to meet crews, learn more about fire safety and the role of firefighters and also find out more about becoming an on-call firefighter. Stations across the county took part and alongside the community engagement, also took the opportunity to raise funds for charity with a total of more than £10,000 being raised through open days in 2024.

The Service continued its commitment to road safety through the launch of the new partnership strategy. Bedfordshire Road Safety Partnership gathered to mark the launch and pledged their commitment to working together to improve the safety of Bedfordshire's roads for all users.

News from The Fire Fighters Charity revealed charity clothing bins across the county raised £14,000 in the recent year, bringing the total raised by BFRS through clothing banks to £143,368.

Performance data released by the UK Home Office for 2023-4 showed the Service is handling 999 calls quicker and getting to fires faster. Operational colleagues worked extremely hard to improve response performance and it paid off; the Service recorded the largest annual reduction of all 44 English fire services for its average crew turnout times. An improvement was also seen in average call-handling times with the result being the average response time for primary fires reducing by 41 seconds, marking a significant improvement.

September 2024

Record-breaking rainfall resulted in the fire service working tirelessly alongside local councils, volunteers and community groups to respond to flood-related emergencies. North rural areas of Bedford and Central Bedfordshire bore the brunt of the extreme weather, with properties and businesses being hit, alongside a major road closure of the A421.

Fire Control also experienced one of the busiest days in the past decade, managing a huge number of flood-related 999 emergency calls from those who needed our help and giving expert advice to residents who found themselves impacted. The professionalism and dedication shown by all our staff during the autumn floods continues to highlight the commitment of the Service to delivering an excellent response when it is needed most.

The Service organised and hosted the first Women in Fire Service UK (WFS) Development Day for the eastern region at its headquarters, welcoming more than 100 fire and rescue staff. Workshops aimed at inspiring individuals to feel confident and competent in the workplace took place, with topics including feeling empowered in a predominantly male workplace, fire investigation search dogs, and incident command. The day was a roaring success and emphasised the Service's desire to foster a culture of learning, development and building a positive culture.

Training and development initiatives were expanded internally, supporting firefighters in developing their careers while ensuring the Service maintained its high standards in emergency response.

Community engagement efforts also increased, with targeted fire prevention initiatives in high-risk areas. The end of September saw the Service reach the end of the quarter and mark how it is giving the most vulnerable residents targeted support with home fire safety visits. As part of the newly implemented strategy for home fire safety visits, performance reports showed the Service not only exceeded overall visit targets but prioritised those most at risk.

Luton crews sent out a warning to the public about the risks of inconsiderate parking after experiencing delays in attending emergency incidents in parking hot spots.

A star-studded event saw 150 colleagues celebrate the Values Awards. Nominated by colleagues and with winners chosen by a panel of individuals from teams across the Service, the achievements of all filled the room with pride and

honour. The event also saw long service of both operational and support staff celebrated too.

The Service collaborated with blue light partners from across the border in Hertfordshire at a training exercise at Luton Hoo. The exercise, which saw about 50 operational colleagues take part, tested skills including navigating complex building, rescuing casualties in confined spaces, and breathing apparatus. The site is also a local significant site and the training enabled crews to experience the location and understand its complex layout, continuing our commitment to be prepared.

October 2024

Firefighters responded to a significant house fire in The Avenue, Aspley Guise, demonstrating quick action to prevent further damage.

The month also saw one of the most challenging incidents of the year - a major fire following an explosion at Cleat Hill, Bedford. Some 50 properties had to be evacuated and an operational and community response established in an environment that required specialist knowledge about natural gas pockets, gas monitoring, and ground strata being brought in to the multi-agency response. The response was marked by professionalism and resilience, with teams working in collaboration with partner agencies to ensure the impacted community had all the information it needed, whilst working together for a safe and timely conclusion.

One year on from a major incident at London Luton Airport involving a car park, the Significant Incident Report was released, sharing key findings and lessons to enhance future operations. The Service showcased its learning at national events and conferences, alongside completing dozens of visits to other fire services to ensure the lessons learned were maximized across the sector.

The fire service teamed up with colleagues from East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust as part of the national Restart a Heart scheme. A community event saw dozens of people trained in life-saving CPR, as part of our commitment to collaboration and public safety.

Six months' on from its first appearance educating young people about road safety, the Vision Van continues to deliver engaging experiences across the county.

November 2024

A rebranded on-call firefighter recruitment campaign was launched, featuring new promotional materials and a video showcasing the diverse backgrounds of

on-call firefighters. The campaign took a different approach to previous years, highlighting the other elements of life an on-call firefighter may have, including parenting, working from home, and sporting hobbies.

A house fire in Luton prompted the Service to run a photograph-led campaign in the media and on social media, to showcase the value of closing doors in your home and how this can prevent fire spread. Using to strong visuals meant the message was shared widely, further emphasizing the Service's commitment to home safety.

The Bedfordshire Fire Bike Team ran a specialised Biker Down course for the Triumph Motorcycle Club, incorporating advanced riding techniques alongside safety training.

The Service also hosted engagement events at Luton Fire Station, welcoming students from Barnfield College and Icknield Deaf Provision for interactive learning sessions.

December 2024

The Community Wellbeing Officer initiative received its second national award winning the Fire Magazine Excellence in Fire and Emergency Award for its success in supporting vulnerable communities. The first win in November saw the team scoop the Provider Partnership Working Prevention Award at the Celebrating NFCC Prevention Awards for its CWO scheme along with partners East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust, Essex and Cambridgeshire fire services.

The Service celebrated the pass-out of new wholetime firefighter recruits, marking the completion of their rigorous training before they headed out to join fire stations across the county.

A fleet CCTV Project was completed, demonstrating operational benefits, reducing insurance costs and environmental impact.

A joint Christingle service with Bedfordshire Police was held at St Mary's Church, Woburn, welcoming hundreds of families together for a festive gathering.

Bedford Red Watch spread festive cheer by visiting Bedford South Wing Hospital in December, handing out gifts and spending time with children and staff.

January 2025

The Service continued investing in career development with the launch of new progression schemes to support firefighters in building their skills.

A new recruitment video was released to showcase the diversity and teamwork in BFRS, forming part of a broader effort to attract new talent in 2025. It welcomed a range of colleagues from across the Service, to highlight the huge diversity in both people and roles, that can be found in a career at the fire service.

Luton Red Watch also promoted fire safety through the Register My Appliance campaign, engaging with residents about electrical safety.

February 2025

BFRS actively supported LGBT History Month with awareness initiatives and webinars, reinforcing inclusivity as a core value.

Electrical Safety Week was marked by community outreach, with Kempston Green Watch providing advice on fire safety and electrical hazards.

Luton and Toddington teams were recognised for their exceptional Home Fire Safety Visit performance, with Luton achieving an outstanding record of no overdue visits over 90 days.

March 2025

Colleagues and their families were celebrated at a Long Service Good Conduct and Chief's Awards held at Cranfield University. The family-friendly event welcome 100 people to celebrate 20 and 25-year-long service as well as individuals and teams receive a number of Chief's Commendations and Letters of Appreciation for professionalism, bravery and exceeding excellence whilst serving their communities.

A Bedford business was issued a caution for fire safety failures after a fire safety audit identified serious failings at the premises, including the absence of a fire risk assessment, lack of staff fire safety training and inadequate maintenance of the fire alarm and emergency lighting systems. The Service used the opportunity to remind businesses of their responsibilities under the Fire Safety Order and the support available to them in meeting their requirements.

Luton Fire Station's charity car wash raised £1,350 for charity.

The Service continues its commitment to road safety with the launch of the next season of Biker Down training for motorcyclists. This extremely popular scheme is run as a collaborative event monthly after many years of successful training.

KEY PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS 24/25

- **Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs) Project** implemented an improved and fully updated HFSVs system created and hosted by the Service, as well as created an automated link between databases. This eliminates the need for manual input, improves efficiencies and reduces opportunities for errors.
- **Vehicle CCTV Cameras Upgrade Project** procured additional CCTV cameras for fire engines to deliver improved CCTV data recording system in appliances with 360-degree coverage and efficient footage access. Some 37 of the vehicles with a five-camera system were upgraded to include a sixth camera to provide 360-degree coverage and remote footage review capability and those vehicles with no camera systems were kitted out. The changes achieved an insurance premium saving of £16k with a further potential £6.5k saving estimated by providing a remote access and download capability.
- **Road Safety Vehicle with Virtual Reality (VR)** – This Prevention road safety project developed a Virtual Reality vehicle with motion platform seats which enabled the service to utilise modern technology to engage, entertain and educate the young drivers of Bedfordshire. Virtual Reality videos are used to enhance the learning experience that we provide in various areas of road safety awareness. This project was delivered in collaboration with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner who part-funded, to enhance road safety provision across Bedfordshire.
- **Breathing Apparatus (BA) Replacement project** - BFRS replaced its old breathing apparatus sets and implemented the following new sets meaning the Service is operating with new cylinders, ancillary equipment and associated software systems that meet the latest legislation. This project also ensured the safety and wellbeing of our firefighters.
- **Finance System Upgrade** - delivered a system upgrade for Great Plains (GP) and Requisition Manager Finance Systems to a cloud-based, hosted solution, which is fully supported. This upgrade addressed issues identified in the previous version and delivered supported software, a more streamlined process, and enhanced reliability.
- **Review of Response Standards Project** – this project analysed, adjusted, consulted and then published key performance indicators that align closely to nationally understood definitions and criteria (e.g. primary fires instead of critical incidents) to provide clear and unambiguous reporting to FRA, the public and other stakeholders. It benchmarked BFRS against other English FRS to identify consistency and trends in reporting. It ensured that standards committed to in the CRMP are accurate and aligned to the agreed FRA reporting.

- **Community Wellbeing Officers (CWO) Project** extended the collaboration between the East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST) and BFRS by creating a new, temporary CWOs team, managed within BFRS Response. The CWO team delivered a blend of response and preventive intervention through a unified Emergency Medical Response Framework (EMRF). They provided preventive and protective interventions from falls and other lower acuity incidents to reduce emergency medical events in the home whilst also collating intelligence for BFRS regarding home environment safety checks and preventative fire measures.
- **Dwelling Fires Methodology Project** developed and implement the Dwelling Fires Risk Methodology and compared and contrasted the results to other assessment methods already used by BFRS to create a richer data picture and support better risk calculation.
- **Operational Estates Review Project** delivered the BFRS estates review and looked at ways to optimise our response model. The project identified key scenarios for further investigation which will help to improve the estate and minimise future spend whilst ensuring fire stations meet the design principles and specification recommended by National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC). It also analysed the optimal stations' locations, which will allow BFRS to improve first pump response times across all wholetime and on-call stations. Four options were identified as part of this project with outline business cases being created for review and agreement of next steps.
- **Neighbourhood Alert Decommissioning and HFSV Referral System Update Project** was delivered and allowed BFRS to decommission the Neighbourhood Alert System which had become obsolete. We redeveloped in-house the HFSVs referrals portal, which allowed the contract with the supplier to be terminated, saving £11,432 per annum.

HEADLINE INCIDENT STATISTICS FOR 2024-25:

Emergency calls received in BFRS Control	17,189
Incidents attended in Bedfordshire	8,534
Fires attended	1,604
False alarms attended	3,219
RTCs attended	513
Medical incidents attended	1,109

Percentage of primary fires mobilised to within 120 seconds	84%
Percentage of primary fires attended within 12 minutes	80%
Percentage of primary fires attended by second pump within 16 minutes	81%
Percentage of secondary fires attended within 20 minutes	97%
Percentage of RTCs attended within 15 minutes	82%
Fire-related fatalities recorded (pending confirmation from the coroner)	4
Primary fires attended	778
Secondary fires attended	813
Chimney fires attended	13
Accidental primary fires attended	547
Deliberate primary fires attended	231
Accidental fires attended	1,047
Deliberate fires attended	557
False alarms due to apparatus attended at non-domestic properties	7,31
HFSVs delivered	6,645
Fire safety audits and inspections	2,641