



Essex County
Fire & Rescue Service

Productivity and Efficiency Plan

2025 -2026

Last updated 10 April 2025



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1. Introduction and Background

The purpose of this document is for Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (ECFRS) to set its productivity and efficiency plan for 2025/26.

A key objective of the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC), as stated in the 2024 to 2028 Fire and Rescue Plan, is to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

As part of achieving this, the PFCC has set a performance metric to deliver annual productivity and efficiency improvement of between 1.5% to 3% of the net budget.

[Read the Fire and Rescue Plan Here](#)

ECFRS has published a new Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2025-2030 which is effective from 1st April 2025. For each year of the CRMP, the Service will publish a Service Delivery Plan. This will demonstrate its activity and delivery against the Community Risk Management Plan. The activity within the 2025/26 Service Delivery Plan is reflected within the 2025/26 Productivity and Efficiency Plan.

[Read our CRMP document here](#)

The [National Framework](#) requires combined and metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) to produce and publish efficiency plans. The Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire require our Service to produce a plan that covers both planned efficiencies and increasing productivity.

As part of the Spending Review 2021, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Local Government Association (LGA) have agreed commitments that between 2021/22 and 2024/25, fire and rescue services (FRS) in England will:

- Create non-pay efficiencies of 2% per annum.
- Increase productivity by 3% in the period 2021/22 to 2024/25 (calculated on wholetime firefighter hours).

The Spending Review 2024 included a recommitment to these targets for 2025/26.

Our plan explains how our Service aims to deliver efficiencies and increased productivity.

2. Budget and Reserves

ECFRS has a net budget of £102.2m for 2025/26. A summary of the 2025/26 Revenue Budget is shown below. The budget for 2025/26 includes an increase in the council tax precept of £4.95 (5.99%) for a Band D property. The precept payable for a Band D Council tax property will increase from £82.62 to £87.57.

2025/26 Revenue Budget

	2025-26 Core Budget	2025-26 Earmarked Reserve	2025-26 Total Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000
Wholetime Firefighters	42,844	284	43,128
On-Call Firefighters	11,332	0	11,332
Control	2,142	0	2,142
Support Staff	20,717	0	20,717
Employment Costs	77,035	284	77,319
III Health Pension costs	2,600	0	2,600
III Health Pension Costs	2,600	0	2,600
Total Employment Costs	79,636	284	79,920
Support Costs	2,004	100	2,104
Premises & Equipment	12,490	0	12,490
Other Costs & Services	3,647	1,012	4,659
Financing Items	5,291	0	5,291
Non Pay Costs	23,432	1,112	24,544
Gross Expenditure	103,067	1,396	104,463
Operational income	(2,300)	0	(2,300)
Total Operational Income	(2,300)	0	(2,300)
Net Expenditure	100,767	1,396	102,163
Government Grants	(8,789)	0	(8,789)
Revenue Support Grant	(14,065)	0	(14,065)
National Non-Domestic Rates	(18,127)	0	(18,127)
Council Tax Collection Account	(300)	0	(300)
Council Tax	(59,487)	0	(59,487)
Total Funding	(100,767)	0	(100,767)
Contributions to/(from) Earmarked Reserves	0	(1,396)	(1,396)
Contributions to/(from) General Reserves	0	0	0
General Fund Deficit / (Surplus)	0	0	0

Further details of the 2025/26 budget can be found [here](#).

The table below shows a summary of our Service's useable reserves as per the 2025/26 Reserves Strategy.

Summary Table of Reserves

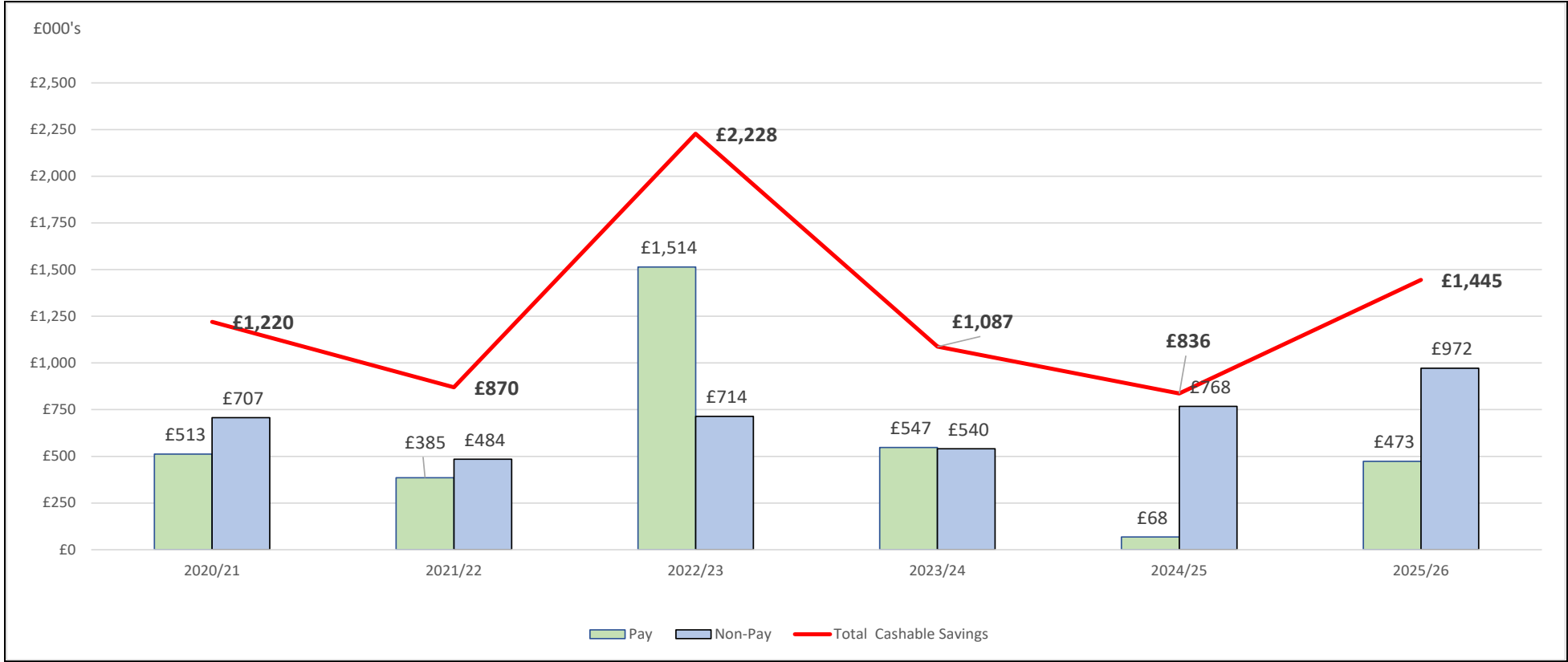
	Actual Balance at 31 March 2024 £'000s	Projected Balance at 31 March 2025 £'000s	Projected Balance at 31 March 2026 £'000s	Projected Balance at 31 March 2027 £'000s	Projected Balance at 31 March 2028 £'000s
General Reserves	4,157	4,157	4,157	4,157	4,157
Earmarked Reserves	6,232	4,880	3,484	3,284	3,084
Total General and Earmarked Reserves	10,389	9,037	7,641	7,441	7,241
Capital Receipts Reserves	13,290	13,609	12,307	7,307	2,307
Total Usable Reserves	23,679	22,646	19,948	14,748	9,548

The Capital Receipts Reserve is governed by regulations which means it can only be used for specific purposes. The 2025/26 Reserves Strategy can be found [here](#).

3. Efficiency

ECFRS tracks its cashable efficiencies through its Productivity and Efficiency Board. The table below shows the cashable efficiencies that have been included within each budget year since 2020/21.

Since 2020/21, our Service has consistently achieved higher cashable efficiencies than the NFCC Sector target of 2% Non-Pay Efficiencies per year. This target equates to £0.46m in 2025/26.



The 2024/25 budget included £0.8m of cashable savings. The progress of the realisation of these savings throughout the year is tracked through the Productivity and Efficiency Board. The Authority is on track to realise £0.78m (96.6%) of these savings identified.

In addition to those cashable efficiencies identified within the 2024/25 budget, further cashable efficiencies have been identified in year. This has been important to mitigate the additional financial impact resulting from the final operational staff pay award.

The table below reflects all of the 2024/25 cashable efficiencies.

Projected 2024/25 *		
2024/25 Budgeted Efficiencies	£0.78m	Realisation of Efficiencies against the £0.8m that was originally incldued within the 2024/25 budget.
2024/25 In Year Efficiency Plan	£0.8m	<p>These relate to additional in year cashable efficiencies which include:</p> <p>£0.5m relating to one off reduction in Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). This follows on from an external review of our MRP policy from CIPFA.</p> <p>£0.2m relating to 2 roles specificlaly held open with a view to doing things differently in these respective areas in the future. It is important to note that any general underspends in staff costs are not included within the efficiency plan.</p> <p>£0.1m relates to variety on smaller areas which include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Charging East of England Ambulance Service for use of 4 of our sites as a Response Post• Cashable Efficiency relating to People development courses which are now being carried out interally as oppose to using an External Provider• Replacement of an ICT Application (Workplace) with a more cost effective solution.
2024/25 Resource Reprioritisation	£0.3m	This reflects 5 budgetted roles which have been removed from the establishment within the financial year. The funding for these roles have then been used to provide resources required elsewhere within the service.
Cashable Efficiencies	£1.88m	

In the year, there was also £0.3m raised from the final sale of Surplus Day Crew Housing.

*Projection Based at Feb 25 as final year end figures where not available at the time of publication of the report. There is no material difference expected.

The 2025/26 budget includes £1.4m of cashable efficiencies which are:

- £0.4m relates to a saving in employment costs, due to a removal of 6 posts from the core budget.
- £0.8m in various non-pay budgets which include:
 - £0.3m Premises and Equipment for gas and electricity, based on price and forecast levels of consumption; internal decorations, based on property schedule of works; and IT maintenance, contracts & equipment, based on a zero-based budget exercise, to include savings delivered from contract renewals and cost avoidance, i.e. removal of workplace.
 - £0.2m Support Costs for departmental training, based on prioritisation of legislative requirements; mileage claims, to reflect the updated policy and anticipated volumes, and LGPS admin & early retirement costs, based on known commitments.
 - £0.2m Financing Costs for Minimum Revenue Provision, based on the capital programme (outside of saving achieved resulting from policy change); and Public Works Loan Board interest, based on a decrease in interest rates.
 - £0.1m Other Costs & Services for public liability insurance, based on the most recent contract renewal; and consultancy services expenditure linked to deliverables within the capital programme.
- £0.2m resulting from increases in operational income for interest received, based on interest rates and cash balances available for investment; and community safety and shared services income, based on service level agreements.

These cashable efficiencies have been necessary to ensure that the Authority can produced a balanced budget for 2025/26.

Transformation Plans

ECFRS governs its transformation programme through the Portfolio Management Board (PMB). The PMB is responsible for approving both the inclusion and prioritisation of projects in the portfolio of change. The activities within the portfolio of change are aligned to the 2025/26 Service Delivery Plan.

This board monitors the delivery of the change activity along with prioritising resources required across the projects. A benefits register is maintained for all projects within the portfolio which is reviewed regularly alongside the associated risks.

Following the completion of a project, the associated benefits that are to be realised are passed to the Productivity and Efficiency Board for monitoring.

Initiative	Category	Start Date	Expected Completion Date	Description	Anticipated Benefits
Station End Equipment	ICT	2024/25	2025/26	In 2024/25 we began the procurement of modern ESN compliant station end equipment. Roll out will progress during 2025/26 and will replace the existing aging technology.	Mitigating the risk of failing or irreplaceable equipment is the primary benefit of this work, however, there are other improvements that will benefit station staff and the public, including more appropriate alert tones.
Mobile Data Terminals	ICT	2024/25	2025/26	In 2024/25 we completed the procurement of new MDTs. Roll out will progress during 2025/26 and will replace the existing aging technology.	Mitigating the risk of failing or irreplaceable equipment is the primary benefit of this work. Reduced downtime for appliances and a decrease in ICT support costs are also anticipated.
Dynamic Cover Solution	ICT / Resourcing	2024/25	2025/26	In 2024/25 we have procured OHR's Dynamic Cover Tool. This will be implemented in 2025/26 and will support Control with more informed risk-based decision-making information.	The Service anticipates a reduction in operational standby moves. A part year benefit cashable efficiency of £50,000 is expected to be realised in 2025/26.
Workforce Management	ICT / Resourcing	2024/25	2026/27	In 2024/25 we initiated a project to replace our existing operation availability system. Procurement will complete in 2025/26, and delivery of the solution will begin. The solution will give the Service a full view of all operational response resources' availability and will significantly improve our planning and response capability.	The Service anticipates a reduction in actual additional shift work and pre-arranged out duty assignments. This system is being procured within 2025/26 and roll out to be commenced. It is expected to deliver cashable efficiencies of £150,000 per year, with this starting to be realised in 2026/27.
Finance System ERP	ICT	2023/24	2025/26	In 2024/25 the Service implemented a new Finance ERP and began the introduction of a new Expenses solution. Roll out of the Expenses module will complete in 2025/26 and will replace the current paper-based manual process.	Significant improvement in the end-user experience for staff submitting expenses claims, not only removing the paper-based approach, but moving from monthly expenses payments to weekly.
Telematics	Asset Management / ICT	2024/25	2025/26	In 2024/25 the Service initiated the Telematics Project to support management of Service vehicles. Procurement will complete in 2025/26 before moving into delivery.	<p>The Service anticipates financial savings may be possible through income generation from the disposal or reallocation of excess fleet assets.</p> <p>Through improved driver behaviour the Service anticipates a reduction in fuel and insurance costs.</p>
Microsoft Fabric	ICT	2024/25	2025/26	In 2024/25 the Service procured Microsoft Fabric, a cloud-based data reporting and analysis solution. This will be further exploited	The Service anticipates a reduction in licensing costs with a part year effect in 2025/26.

				during 2025/26 and will enable the removal of the Microsoft PowerBI Pro licenses.	
Condition Survey	Asset Management	2025/26	2025/26	A condition survey is to be carried out across the entire estate in 2025/26.	This will ensure a clear understanding of future works requirements are identified and risk assessed. This will allow for works to be prioritised and as such assist with the longer-term capital planning.
Operational Capacity Review	Resourcing	2025/26	2025/26	To undertake a time and motion study to further understand activities for when operational personnel are not attending an incident.	This is an enabling activity for the new CRMP allowing a further understanding of the available capacity of our resources.
Business Administration Review	Resourcing	2025/26	2025/26	To undertake an initial review by a third party on improving the efficiency and reducing cost of business administration functions.	Initial scoping indicates potential efficiency and productivity gains of up to 10%.
Operational Response Project	Asset Management / Resourcing	2025/26	2025/26	<p>The Response Project sets out to explore and deliver specific workstreams to increase the availability of appliances and operational resources across the county against the risks identified through the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).</p> <p>Workstreams include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a tiered availability system, making better use of on-call firefighters and supporting times of increased activity and protracted incidents • Reallocation of some second fire engines from on-call stations to provide better coverage across the county, or support training. • Alternative response to Automatic Fire Alarms • Development of a day shift duty system, enhancing global availability at peak times of the day. 	<p>This project will look to ensure that the Service has an optimum availability of 40 fire engines based on the data analysis and risk modelling within the new CRMP.</p> <p>Further workstreams may be developed as initial enabling work is undertaken during the first year of the CRMP.</p>

Income Generation

In addition to cross border support arrangements in place with neighbouring fire and rescue authorities, ECFRS generates more than £0.4m per year in Special Service Charging related income. This income primarily relates to the following activities, and all charges are reviewed annually.

- The cost of specialist staff to attend court
- The cost of the water section for inspecting and testing privately owned fire hydrants and dry risers
- The cost of workshop engineers undertaking work for other public bodies
- H&S Exec – Fire Engineering.

In 2025/26 the Service will also commence charging for Fire Investigation reports. It is anticipated that this could generate between £30,000 - £50,000 per year.

4. Collaboration

Our Service has an Emergency Service Collaboration programme with Essex Police and the East of England Ambulance Service (EEAST). The programme was established in 2017 when the PCC took on responsibility for the governance of the fire and rescue service. The PFCC's 2017 Local Business Case for Change identified up to £30.8m of benefits that could be achieved through collaboration over a 10-year programme, with an expectation that at least half of those benefits could realistically be achieved.

The collaboration programme is currently expected to achieve £20m of benefits by 2027, as is currently profiled and assured via the Essex Emergency Strategic Collaboration Board.

The PFCC tracks benefits from individual projects within the wider programme via project closure reports and annual reviews, reported to a bi-monthly Strategic Governance Board chaired by the PFCC. The PFCC receives a benefits tracker report at each meeting.

ECFRS has been updating its Partnership Register to ensure a detailed tracker is maintained to capture all partnership activities with other organisations that align with Services strategic goals. There are currently 23 different partners listed on the register, with 43 different activities.

The aim is to facilitate easier connections for relationship owners, enable informed resourcing decisions, and address an HMICFRS identified area for improvement by providing insights into the value of partnerships.

The initial base of the register can track and report metrics like the number of partner organisations, and in the future, benefits beyond just the current Collaboration Programme benefits and financial efficiency. It is managed by the Head of Collaboration, with asset owners updating their areas. Building on past initiatives like the Prevention Register, which has logged details of the partnerships, and the Police/Fire Collaboration Programme, which has tracked financial benefits, it aims to provide an amalgamated view for the organisation to identify the value of these partnerships and valuable partnership opportunities.

Monitoring and assurance will be conducted through an Assurance framework, tracking register use, connecting to the Service delivery plan, and linking benefits via the benefits register. Suggested KPIs include the number of partners, identifiable benefits, and financial efficiency.

Some of the key collaboration projects for 2025/26 are listed below:

Collaborative Activity	Collaborative Activity	Collaborative Partner	Description	Anticipated Efficiencies 2025/26
Prevention and Protection	Community Wellbeing Officer	EEAST	<p>The partnership has been an 18-month pilot which will see four CWO work across Essex to respond swiftly to non-injury falls at home. Without this service, residents who fall without sustaining injuries could face prolonged wait times for an ambulance.</p> <p>The CWO's can assess and assist patients as well as conducting tailored home safety checks.</p> <p>CWO visits to EEAST mobilisations has resulted in 94.3% of the visits being to our 'Gold' residents – our highest risk people.</p> <p>Following this successful pilot, EEAST has supported part funding the CWO roles for a further 18 months.</p>	£120,000 - £140,000 Cashable
Prevention and Protection	Co-responding	EEAST	Undertake a pilot with The East England Ambulance Service Trust to co-respond from two On-Call stations.	All training and equipment will be provided by EEAST, and there will be cost recovery for any responses from On Call crews. This will also increase productivity of On Call Crews.
Prevention and Protection	Tri Service Prevention Officers	Essex Police	Provide visibility and reassurance to rural communities; providing fire safety, community safety, and public health advice to build confidence in emergency services, prevent harm and improve outcomes for residents.	£150,000 Cost Avoidance
Prevention and Protection	Joint Education Team	Essex Police	<p>Delivery of community safety as well as fire safety messages to young people.</p> <p>The joint education programme brought together the previous separate Police & ECFRS teams to deliver a more efficient and</p>	£99,000 Cashable

			effective service to schools and young people reaching 130,000 children per year. Essex Police now fully fund two ECFRS Education Officers.	
Prevention and Protection	Firebreak courses	Essex Police	Creation of bespoke programmes to meet strategic government agendas, to improve the lives, and increase the confidence and self-esteem of the individuals who engage in the Firebreak programme.	£25,000 Cashable
Safeguarding	Shared Resource	Cambridge Fire and Rescue NFCC	Provide Cambridge with Safeguarding resources and support. Our Service also supports the Safeguarding Lead for the National Fire Chief Council (NFCC); this allows our Service to be at the forefront of adopting efficient and effective national good practice	£24,000 Cashable
Charging Policy	Fleet Maintenance and Servicing	EEAST	Maintenance and servicing of frontline ambulances	£240,000 Cashable
Shared Use of Estate	Office Space	PFCC	The PFCC occupies office space at the Fire Headquarters.	£63,000 cashable
Shared Use of Estate	Meeting Rooms	Essex Police	Meeting room bookings total around 1,000 hours per year	Currently no charge
Shared Use of Estate	Response Posts	EEAST	Use fire stations for parking, ambulance crew meal and rest breaks and re-charging of vehicles. This is in place at three fire stations. This will allow EEAST to rationalise its estate move to their new strategic estates Hub and Spoke model.	£18,000 Cashable
Council Tax Collection	Sharing Agreement	Essex County Council / Districts	To maximise council tax collections across the county and to reduce fraud and ensure compliance.	£67,000 cashable

Insurance Arrangements	Fire and Rescue Indemnity (FRIC)	13 FRA's	FRIC has been set up to provide indemnity for its members against risks normally fully covered by a traditional insurance company.	£250,000 cashable efficiency (based on comparable sized FRA who recently joined and used an external insurance provider)
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5. Productivity

In 2023/24 the Home Office launched the Firefighter Utilisation Survey with the intent capture wholetime firefighter activity across the sector consistently. The survey was conducted to track progress against the NFCC sector commitment of 3% productivity improvement of wholetime firefighters. The survey looked at 4 months data between 2022 and 2023.

Essex County Fire and Rescue has used this methodology to capture data back to April 2020 so that the Service has benchmark data. Every 3 months wholetime firefighter productivity is reported on through the Productivity and Efficiency Board. In preparation of this report, data is used from a number of differing sources. During 2025/26, further work is being undertaken to ensure that all key wholetime firefighter activities are identified so that this reporting continues to be as accurate as possible.

In 2025/26 an Operational Capacity Review is also being undertaken, which will involve a time and motion study to further understand activities for when operational personnel are not attending an incident. This is a key an enabling activity for the new CRMP allowing a further understanding of the available capacity of our resources.

In addition to time responding to incidents, wholetime firefighter productivity is currently measured against:

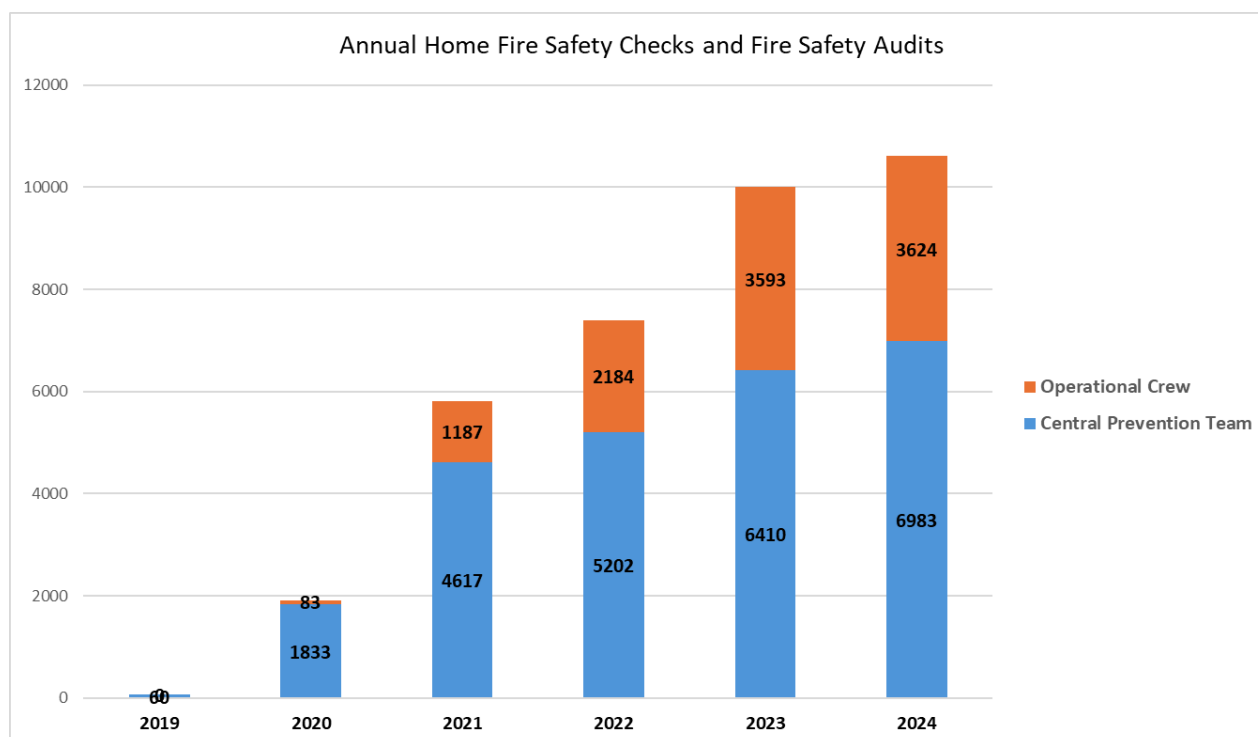
- Prevention activity including physical risk-based domestic Home Fire Safety Visits
- Local risk identification, management and recording activity including operational risk visits aligned to the FRS Act 2004 s7(ii)d.
- Learning and development activities to maintain firefighter role competence.

During the period from 2020/21 to 2024/25 Quarter 3, wholetime firefighter productivity increased by 6%, which is higher than the NFCC Sector Commitment. This increase has been in the following areas.

	Incidents	Training	Prevention & Protection
Productivity Increase	+2%	+3%	+1%

Home Fire Safety Checks and Fire Safety Audits

The Service has seen year on year increases in the number of Home Fire Safety Checks and Fire Safety Audits being undertaken, which is reflected within the graph below:



Over the duration of the new CRMP 2025-2030, the Service is looking to deliver over 100,000 home fire safety visits, prioritising those most at risk.

The 2025/26 Service Delivery Plan look to increase the number of home fire safety visits by 50%, with 80% to those most at risk of fire and harm.

To reduce the impact of the fire in the built environment, over the course of the CRMP, all wholtime operational colleagues will be level 2 fire safety trained, and all operational staff will have received fire safety training.

6. Procurement

ECFRS Procurement team operates under a Category Management approach which has been in place for 3 years. The structure of the team has changed recently and is now set up with a Category Manager assigned to the following three areas:

- ICT and People Services
- Property and Facilities Management
- Operational Equipment and Fleet

When going out to tender the Procurement team will always consider collaboration opportunities. This could take the form of carrying out a joint procurement, imparting lessons learnt and/or sharing of documentation. We seek to collaborate with not only other Fire and Rescue Authorities, but also other blue light and other local government organisations, which will include the 7 Force Strategic Police Collaboration.

Procurement will always assess the most appropriate route to market, considering time and value for money, often using a framework is the most efficient route.

Some of the benefits of using frameworks are as follows:

- Reduced procurement lead times;
- The use of frameworks is compliant with the Procurement Act 2023;
- Can offer better value of money due to the combined buying power of the public sector;
- Provides an opportunity for collaboration across the public sector;
- Many have pre-agreed terms and conditions; and
- Framework suppliers have already been checked and approved in line with the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023.

Frameworks that Essex regularly use include Crown Commercial Services, ESPO, YPO, Fusion 21 and KCS.

Procurement regularly meets with other Fire and Rescue Authorities, 7 Forces, bluelight commercial and local government to share best practice, review upcoming collaboration opportunities and look at efficiencies to achieve value for money when carrying out procurement activity.

We always seek to share and receive tender documents and specifications with other Fire and Rescue Authorities. For example, prior to going out to tender for the following projects we received documentation from other Fire and Rescue Authorities who have recently procured the same requirement:

- Incident Command Unit Vehicle
- RTC Rescue Equipment
- Planned Preventative Maintenance of Bay Doors
- Workwear

By the imparting of knowledge and lessons learnt, plus the sharing of documents Essex can strive to ensure that their tenders are carried out efficiently and look to achieve value for money in all the tender activities. Equally, we will share our own procurement documents and lessons learnt from tenders we have run with other Fire and Rescue Authorities to assist them with their upcoming procurements.

We have provided feedback to the NFCC on National frameworks to assist with the set-up of the next iteration of the framework.

In 2024/25, ECFRS have joined collaborated with the 7 Force Strategic Police Collaboration on the following contracts:

- Legal Services
- Electricity and Gas
- Water
- Multi-Functional Devices
- Waste Services

An important collaborative procurement in 2024/25 has been with the Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and Essex Police, for the award of the external audit contract to Ernst and Young. This arrangement has ensured that ECFRS has completed and published the audit of the 2023/24 financial statement ahead of the official statutory deadline. This has ensured transparency to the public of the Authority's financial performance and position, which is particularly important given the audit challenges and backlogs affecting local government authorities.

On a quarterly basis, the Procurement team report to the Service Leadership Team and PFCC on our collaboration activity and savings achieved. During FY24/25, it is projected that we will achieve £120,000 savings from cost avoidance and £55,000 from cost reductions.

For FY25/26 while the new Procurement rules are embedded, we expect to see savings from the introduction of a central register for bidder company information. For our Service it means we do not have to duplicate questions for each tender that are covered in the standard questions managed by the Cabinet Office, saving us time processing and checking. We will also see an increase in transparency information to be shared.