

# **Estates Strategy**

2021- 2026

Draft v0.1

Please note – after approval of content, this document will be copy edited/ plain English, and professionally designed.

# FOREWORD

By Roger Hirst, Police Fire and Crime Commissioner, Jo Turton, Chief Fire Officer.

The Essex County Fire and Rescue Service Estates Strategy 2021-2026 provides the strategic forward looking vision, ambition and commitment for the fire estate over the next five years. It identifies our pledge to provide a fit for purpose, efficient and environmentally friendly estate that supports the work of the fire service at both a County and community level, keeping the workforce and people of Essex safe.

The nature of the fire service is ever evolving and the demands across our prevention, protection and response delivery is very dynamic. Engaging our communities, working in partnership with other agencies and supporting our people to be the best that they can be, requires our assets to be to the highest standards for today and for the future.

The fire service sector continues to respond to a broad range of emergencies with commendable skill and professionalism and the service remain committed to protecting local communities. Safety critical, essential public services benefit from having a modern estate that allow our firefighters and corporate support staff to respond to the needs of the public.

Whilst our estate will remain relatively static over the next five years, changes in technology are allowing us to work in a more agile way, with greater flexibility in how we deliver essential services. Thorough analysis and assessment of evidence-based performance leads to sound decision making which as a fire service ensures that we can provide a resilient, effective and value for money service to the communities of Essex.

As we continue to recruit new firefighters and deliver against the priorities of the Fire & Rescue Plan, it is a necessity that we continue to develop our estate in a way that allows us to utilise our workspaces to be effective and collaborative. We want our stations to be at the heart of our communities, engaging and accessible to the public so that we can maintain visibility and confidence.

The Government's Fire Reform agenda sets a clear strategic direction, focusing on being efficient, accountable, transparent and representative of the communities served. This is further underpinned by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. Essex County Fire and Rescue Services Estates Strategy represents a significant proportion of our financial investment. It is therefore crucial that our buildings and facilities provide our

employees with the most efficient, effective and productive environments to thrive, work, train and support them to achieve our vision.

Essex Fire and Rescue Service has adapted over the course of this last year, making significant changes in the way that we work to keep our people safe whilst continuing to deliver services to our communities. We are now focusing on new ways of working and the opportunities this brings in being able to use our estate differently. We are looking at innovative solutions to allow our people to continue to engage with one another in a much more flexible and agile environment.

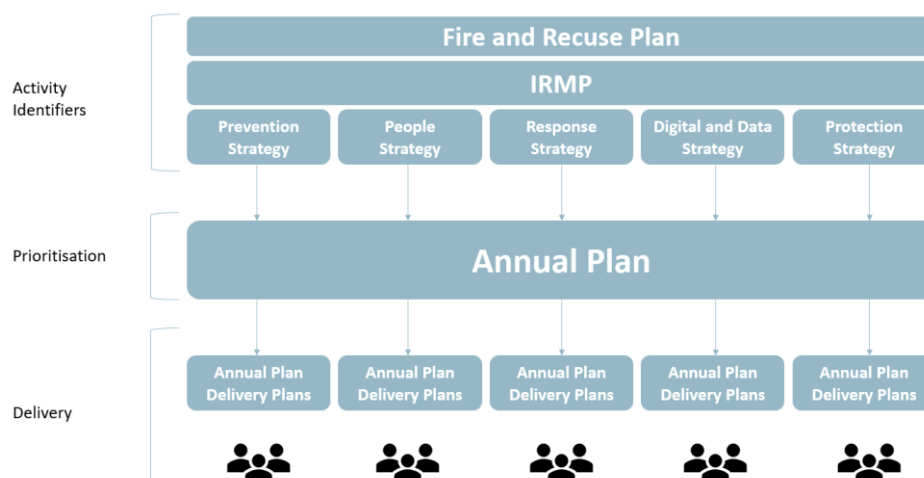
Our role – as Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner and Chief Fire Officer – is to be forward thinking custodians of the Essex Fire and Rescue Service estate, that is ready to meet the needs of the future. We are committed to providing value for money and investing in the right way that doesn't just focus on maintaining our buildings to the highest standard but also looks for new opportunities to collaborate, share and maximise the use of all of our facilities across Essex. We are confident that this strategy will deliver these requirements.

# OUR STRATEGY

Development of our Estates Strategy principles began in 2020. We have engaged with key stakeholders to understand their estate and facility needs over the coming years. Work has also been undertaken to understand the opportunities for a collaborative use of the estate with our partners as detailed within the direction set by the Emergency Services Strategic Collaboration Board. The outcome of this engagement has resulted in the following strategic objectives being recommended for the forthcoming Estates Strategy 2021 – 2026.

It is imperative that this strategy is aligned and integrated into the forward delivery of other key ECFRS strategies. There are many interdependencies and the fundamental ambition and focus of our estates strategy is about enabling our buildings and facilities to deliver the right working environments. The key strategies for alignment are:-

- **The Fire and Rescue Plan 2019-2024**
- **Essex County Fire & Rescue Annual Plan**
- **Integrated Risk Management Plan**
- **Digital and Data Strategy**
- **Medium Term Financial Plan**
- **People Strategy**
- **Response Strategy**



# THE CORE PRINCIPLES OF OUR ESTATES STRATEGY

- To support our commitment to communities to ensure we can provide the best possible protection to the public as we make changes to our estate. We will ensure we take account of operational and community risk.
- To create an effective collaboration programme with emergency services and other partners that will enhance our ability to achieve service benefits and stretch our property performance targets for the efficiency of the estate.
- To be progressive in our application of agile working to maximise operational effectiveness and efficiency. We will build on significant recent successes to implement agile working in its many forms across all our services, whether delivered by firefighters, officers, staff, or volunteers.
- To continue to provide accommodation that responds to the demands of a changing fire and rescue service, embracing the digital and cultural enablers that allow us to better use our physical footprint.
- To continue to drive improvements to the economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability of our estate, releasing much needed financial resources for reinvestment in the priorities of our fire and rescue service.
- It is essential that ECFRS is closely monitoring and linked into future public development plans so that it can identify and plan for future risk. It will also provide the opportunity to be at the forefront of being able to determine and identify what our potential future estates needs may be and therefore embedding ourselves into future population developmental plans.
- To ensure the property portfolio is appropriate and fit for purpose and able to meet the support and wellbeing needs of our workforce.
- We also want to ensure that our estate is meeting the environmental expectations of the future and recognising that we want to go green. Sustainability can no longer be considered as niche. Our workforce and communities expect us to be driving environmental improvements as a key objective.

# HOW WE WILL DELIVER OUR STRATEGY

To achieve these objectives, we will:-

- Utilise collaboration opportunities for land sharing in addition to the sale of assets to invest in the improvement of our buildings. We will start with those buildings with the greatest need, that deliver the best value and benefit for both the public and our staff.
- Keep a flexible approach to our portfolio. Our operational bases change to reflect need and opportunities for sharing and collaborating with partners in the locations where we need to be. We will own properties where it makes sense and will look to share with partners where we can.
- Address our high priority operational issues caused by poor condition of the estate and the associated deteriorating resilience.
- Implement a robust approach to the analysis of the priorities, costs, and benefits of our investments, ensuring that any opportunities to 'invest to save' are fully explored. This will be delivered through the governance of our investment programmes.
- Incorporate energy reduction technologies in line with the Environmental Strategy 2020 - 2030 and with investments to improve health and safety, security, equality, and diversity.
- Monitor the condition of the estate, identifying appropriate requirements to ensure the portfolio is fit for purpose. Identifying asset improvement and asset protection works separately to ensure that we are making best use of our resources.
- Maximise our approach within the Digital & Data Strategy to ensure that we are introducing new technologies that allow our estate to function in an agile, flexible and collaborative way.
- Develop a Roadmap that details the cost, timelines and resource requirements to deliver the Strategy and feed into our Reserves Strategy and Capital Programme.

The strategic objectives and principles that form the basis of our Estates Strategy will set out the investment and strategic workplan that is required across the estates portfolio to ensure successful delivery of the Fire and Rescue Plan. Crucially this work will be closely aligned to the Medium-Term Financial Plan and ensure a clear understanding of capital spend requirements over the course of the next five years. Asset Protection and Improvement budgets will be remodelled during the budget setting process.

# STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF OUR ESTATE



# WHAT HAVE WE DONE

Welcome to our Estates Strategy which is underpinned by a number of the services strategic documents and closely aligns to our Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). This strategy sets out how we intend to implement

our ambition for the management and development of our property assets across Essex County Fire and Rescue Service.

We have ensured that our buildings and facilities are in the right place and maintained to the right standard to manage risks in Essex, protect our communities, and respond to incidents, all against a backdrop of financial challenges. We do however recognise that the risks and demands in Essex, like the rest of our County, continue to evolve and change, which requires us to regularly review our priorities and activities so that we are proactive and responsive to our community needs.

Our Estates Strategy therefore cannot be a standalone plan and has taken into account the future needs of our people and the communities we serve. It is strongly aligned to deliver the life and ambitions of our Fire and Rescue Plan (FRP) and works to drive our Annual Plan, which includes areas like our continuous improvement work, change programmes and how we manage our budget.

It is the intention to maintain a static estate during the period of this strategy but to ensure that we both maintain our current standard assets that are in good condition and raise the standard of all sites to ensure that they are effective, efficient and meet the needs our people.

We have a number of wholtime stations that require modernisation and re-design in order to deliver practical, agile and efficient use of space. Equally we On-Call Fire Stations that require ongoing maintenance and in some circumstances a review of their longer-term structural longevity.

Whilst the review and plans are being commissioned for the work required to take place across our Fire Stations, we have also begun to review the longer terms needs of our other essential sites. For example, our Fleet Services Workshop site and our Training Facilities arrangements.

Our objective is to ensure that we are taking full advantage of the ability to look at co-location/shared services with other blue light partners as well as looking at a potential additional use of our current headquarters site based in Kelvedon.

The service will have converted all of our day crewed stations to on-call stations by the end of March 2022 and this in turn will release a number of day crewed houses. The capital receipts return from these houses will be used to invest in the objectives set out within this Strategy and beyond.

It is also important to us to ensure that in designing our estates strategy, we consider the environmental impact of both our existing and future assets. This will include reviewing the energy efficiency of our buildings and making improvements to reduce our carbon footprint. We already have a number of fire



stations with solar technology in use and we will shortly be embarking on a review of our property and fleet assets in collaboration with Essex Police to look at Electric vehicles and charging points.

## WHERE ARE WE NOW

- Currently as of September 2021 Essex County Fire and Rescue service holds 52 sites, just over 50 acres. They have a floor area of 199,388 m<sup>2</sup> and a running cost of over £5.1m per annum. The total asset value is just over £126m. All of our estate is freehold with the exception of Old Harlow Fire Station (81 m<sup>2</sup>).
- The service undertakes regular annual condition surveys of our Operational building assets and publishes a performance report every August. Furthermore, an annual survey is undertaken every five years by an external consultant. There is a backlog of maintenance works that has been identified which will be built into our capital programme over the next five years and beyond. Each site has a detailed asset protection plan which is assessed against core legislative standards. A Red-Amber-Green (RAG) floor plan identifies the condition and suitability of each area of each building.
- There are currently a number of asset improvement works that are underway, such as the provision of new (Breathing Apparatus) BA facilities, new training room facilities, new working at heights rig and a rebuild/modernisation of an on-call fire station in Shoeburyness.
- With a static estate, property assets are required to be held and maintained over a significant period of time, often decades. ECFRS has taken steps to ensure that asset replacements are well planned for to ensure that we continue to deliver against our strategic objectives and are in line with our IRMP.
- It is essential when managing a number of assets that require detailed information regarding their physical condition, occupancy, functional suitability, quality, environmental impacts etc that we use the latest technology to assist us. Currently all of our asset data is maintained through asset management software. This has proved to be very effective when applying maintenance schedules and bookings for example. We are now exploring location mapping which can be integrated with other key systems.
- The environment strategy is strongly aligned to our Estates Strategy as we recognise the need to be taking action now and into the future to

reduce our carbon footprint to net zero. key environmental performance indicator has been developed to ensure that we can monitor the impact of our actions and we are in collaboration with Essex Police to further explore how we can achieve this together.

- With the recent and prolonged period of change brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has enabled ECFRS to review how we work. It is evident that there is the ability to work differently and scope to further improve how we can create a more agile and flexible environment for our people. We have established a New Ways of Working (NWOW) Board that is regularly assessing and looking at new ideas as to how we utilise our workspaces more effectively and the outputs of this will be built into future planning of changes to our workspaces.

## OUR FUTURE REQUIREMENTS

It is recognised that whilst the below points outline the services future requirements over the next 5 years, each of these areas will require full business case evaluation and will be determined on financial viability.

- **Fleet Workshops.** Through our collaborative working with Essex Police, we have identified an opportunity to co-locate at the Essex Police Boreham site. This is an excellent opportunity to build a modern and fit for purpose facility that allows our staff to thrive in the workplace and operate in a safe environment with the latest technology and machinery. A feasibility study is being commissioned to consider the onward development of this plan.
- **Training Facilities.** Currently ECFRS training facilities are located at different sites across Essex, with hot fire training facilities based at the Ministry of Defence (MOD) site in Wethersfield. It is understood that we currently have a three-year lease remaining which is unlikely to be extended. It is our intention to look at the potential to relocate our training facilities to a more appropriate and centralised location. This will require a feasibility study to assess cost, timeframes and planning requirements.
- **Upgrading of Wholetime Stations.** Many of our wholetime fire stations require upgrading to ensure they meet the requirements of a modern-day fire station. This includes for example areas such as recreation rooms, training rooms and other key workspace areas that need urgent refurbishment and modernisation. This is key in enabling our people to work in a fit for purpose environment to be able to thrive and feel valued.

- **Partnering with other Blue Light Agencies.** We are committed to ensuring that our buildings and facilities are maintained to the highest standard. Equally we want to ensure that whilst we invest in our workplaces, we are maximising their usage. A number of our sites have been adapted to enable other blue light services to utilise the space we have in a functional way. We are now looking to extend these possibilities further to increase the number of shared and co-located facilities. This includes undertaking an assessment of shared electrical vehicle charging points to be strategically located across the estate as we move towards positively reducing our carbon footprint.
- **On-Call Stations.** It is acknowledged that we have a small number of on-call stations that have required significant ongoing maintenance to keep them maintained to a functional standard. However, we also recognise that in some circumstances this is not a sustainable solution due to their diminishing structural longevity. There is a need to look at what options are available in these circumstances in order that we secure a longer-term plan for continued use of the provision of services to their local communities.
- **Our business-as-usual investment programme.** We need to continue to invest in those assets that require significant maintenance and bring all of our buildings up to an equitable standard. We need to assess our current resources to ascertain how we now move at pace and start to deliver against our capital maintenance programme. This will all be aligned to our condition surveys and our overall strategic objectives.

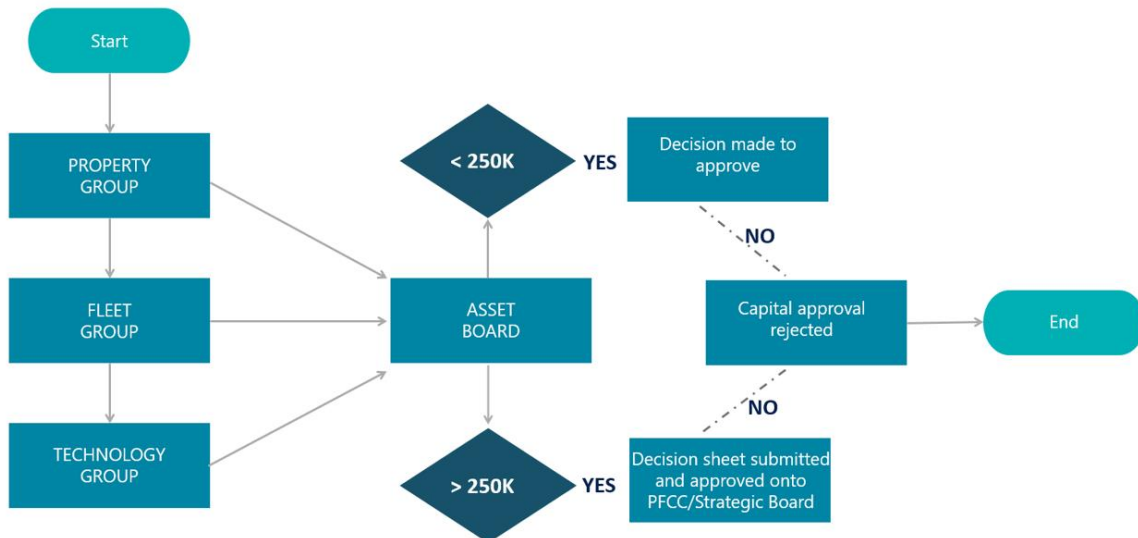
## GOVERNANCE

The delivery of the estates strategy will be overseen and monitored through a newly formed Strategic Estates Group (SEG). This is a decision-making forum, chaired by the Director of Corporate Services. SEG will report into the Asset Board for monitoring against the capital expenditure programme as well as requiring approval of new capital expenditure, in line with the ECFRS constitution and financial regulations. Furthermore, the Service Leadership Team (SLT) will also be updated, informed and engaged on delivery against the estates strategy. Scrutiny of our delivery will equally be challenged through SLT and the Police Fire & Crime Commissioner (PFCC) Performance and Resources Board (P&R). Large capital programmes affecting key strategic change will be required to be approved the PFCC Strategic Board, chaired by the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. The overall Estates Investment Programme for the period 2021-2026 are outlined in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and are referred to in the Treasury Management Strategy. Asset

Protection and Improvement budgets will be remodelled during the budget setting process.

## GOVERNANCE FLOW DIAGRAM

PROPERTY – FLEET – ICT – ASSET BOARD



## REVIEW

It is important that this Strategy is kept under review and that progress against delivery is reported on a quarterly basis. It is recognised that we are working in a dynamic environment and need to be dynamic to change when required. Changes to the strategy and any notable aspects affecting the delivery of the strategy will be reported through the governance structure in place.