

Airbus supports Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue in data connection to Emergency Services Network

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) provides emergency response, prevention and protection services across the county as well as in support of neighbouring communities.

Bedfordshire covers an area of approximately 123,500 hectares and has a population approaching 620,000. The area consists principally of rural landscape, incorporates a number of market towns, special risks including London Luton Airport, a significant road and rail network, is growing as a national distribution hub, and has a number of large industrial sites and warehouses.

Formerly, BFRS shared a Command and Control system but were in a position of needing their own. To add to the complications, BFRS didn't have a SAN H connection to the Airwave network and procuring one as a short-term measure was not a viable option.

In 2019 BFRS began a procurement process for a replacement integrated command and control system and in summer 2020 the decision to implement the Motorola cloud based control system was made.

As a part of the control system replacement project, BFRS had to find a new way of connecting the new mobilising system to the Airbus SAFEcommand Mobile Data and Incident Command systems installed on their in-vehicle ruggedised MDTs and in Incident Command Units.

When considering the choice of bearers, Emergency Services Network (ESN) coverage in Bedfordshire was found to be good. ESN would also give extra assurances such as prioritisation over commercial customers and increased data performance in comparison to Airwave.

The increased data performance of ESN was important to BFRS who had a very clear strategy to continue to digitalise the incident ground and appreciated the increased data requirements that would bring.

Having recently implemented Panasonic CF33 ESN approved devices this would provide BFRS with the ability to insert a SIM directly avoiding the use of a router in the appliance and making the MDT and Airbus SAFEcommand solutions truly mobile. Something that was again key to the vision of digitalising the incident ground.

After consultation with Airbus, the Home Office, and with other suppliers, the decision was made to go directly to a connection with ESN.

BFRS and Airbus began a programme of configuring and testing connections between mobilising and Airbus SAFEcommand solutions and scheduled a go-live date of 01/11/21. BFRS worked with the Home Office's Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) to install and configure the back end to enable this part to be seamless with Airbus.

On 01/11/21 November 2021 BFRS transitioned to ESN Connect integrated into their live mobilising system, used operationally alongside Airwave. Initial data is really promising and BFRS are already seeing improvements over Airwave for throughput of data and increased message delivery reliability.

Technical learning from this piece of work is being fed back into ESMCP to aid in future work with emergency services.

Having a clear goal and a capable and committed project team in place allowed both projects to happen in 16 months and allowed BFRS to maintain current ways of working. Providing right people at the right time was vital. Throughout both projects, the early adopter support received by BFRS was invaluable in helping make their transition a success.