



## **Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority Community Safety Committee**

**Minutes of the meeting held at Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service Joint Headquarters - Sherwood Lodge, Arnold, Nottingham, NG5 8PP on 6 January 2023 from 10.00 am - 11.12 am**

### **Membership**

#### Present

Councillor Jason Zadrozny (Chair)  
Councillor Robert Corden  
Councillor Nicola Heaton  
Councillor Nick Raine  
Councillor Dave Trimble)  
Councillor John Lee (Substitute for Councillor Nigel Turner)

#### Absent

Councillor Nigel Turner

### **Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:**

Bryn Coleman, Area Manager for Prevention and Protection  
Andy Macey, Area Manager for Response  
Mick Sharman, Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer  
Catherine Ziane-Pryor, Governance Officer.

## **12 Apologies for Absence**

Councillor Nigel Turner (Councillor John Lee substituting)

## **13 Declarations of Interests**

None.

## **14 Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 07 October 2022 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

## **15 Service Delivery Performance Update**

Andy Macey, Area Manager for Response, and Bryn Coleman, Area Manager for Prevention and Protection, presented the report which informs members of the performance of the Service between 01 September 2022 and 30 November 2022.

The following points were highlighted and members' questions responded to:

- a) a total of 2,592 incidents were attended during this reporting period. The high numbers can partly be attributed to the dry, hot summer. Incident numbers have since stabilised, but the overall annual attendance rate is expected to show an increase of up to 11% higher than the previous year;
- b) the report provides details of incident type during the past five years, including incidents by district attendance and priority ranking;
- c) whilst the key Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) target for attending an incident is eight minutes, performance during this period, averaged 7.57 minutes;
- d) with the exception of Southwell Fire Station, achieving 70% availability, all other On-Call stations provided and availability of 80% or higher, with Hucknall, Misterton and, Newark, and Worksop, achieving 99.5%, 96%, 95.6%, and 98.6%, respectively;
- e) the disappointing availability of 80% against a target of 85% within the Southwell Area is an ongoing issue, although overall, the Service continues to achieve on or above the 85% availability target;
- f) it is noted fire stations not included in the list are Whole-Time crewed and therefore operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, without On-Call staff, and that with the exception of Retford, on-call stations, generally only maintain one appliance;
- g) call numbers to 999 rose considerably during the summer months when the target of 96% of all calls being answered within seven seconds was not achieved. This was not only due to the volume, but also added complications in identifying with the caller, the precise location of some of the more rural incidents;
- h) with the high demand on the Service, mobilisation system availability also decreased, but has since returned to 98%. The new system is due to be implemented in 2024;
- i) the Service has now completed 36.5% of the target 13,000 Safe and Well Visits (SWV), with 4745 completed between 1 August and 30 November 2022;
- j) the multi-partner Safety Zone programme, which includes fire safety, was targeted and delivered to staff and pupils at a total of 25 schools where the overall demographic of pupils is considered to be at higher risk of being involved some way in in an emergency incident;
- k) the Fire Prevention Team has successfully engaged some of the harder-to-reach citizens, including home-schooled young people and their families, on issues including tackling behaviours around deliberate secondary fires;
- l) the Service also participated in multiagency road safety interventions, such as the Biker Down and New Driver Awareness Day, which included hazard awareness and the use of virtual reality goggles to illustrate the impact of alcohol and substance misuse on ability and perception;

- m) 763 of the 1,200 annual target for Fire Safety Audits were completed by 30 November 2022. This resulted in 266 informal action notices, with 29 formal notices issued;
- n) all managers are very proud of the significant increase inspections undertaken as a result of improved efficiency and increased productivity of the Fire Safety Inspection Team;
- o) 287 business safety checks been undertaken so far this reporting year, which is slightly down on previous years. This is mainly due to the number of supervisory managers yet to complete the required broad scoping qualification and productivity will increase once officers fully qualified and able to work independently;
- p) it should be noted that the Fire Safety Inspection Team also undertake other work such as post-fire inspections, enforcement notices, building regulation consultations, licensing consultations and consultations with agencies such as OFSTED and the care Quality Commission;
- q) Although the target was set to reduce Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFSs) by 3% per year, there is been 10% increase with 3,107 recorded so far this reporting year. This may be partly due to the restrictions on businesses operating during lockdown in previous years and work is ongoing to address the main causes;
- r) the Joint Audit and Inspection Team (JAIT) continues to work well with City Council and has conducted 16 building inspections, totalling 1855 flats, and 23 building re-inspections, totalling 1498 flats. A further 25 buildings in excess of 18 meters in height are yet to be inspected, along with 272 buildings below 18 meters. The number of buildings requiring inspection increases constantly, particularly with the increasing number of developments within the City. This is proving a significant impact on the volume of required work;
- s) it is anticipated that the Building Safety Act will be fully implemented by October this year, and will require multidisciplinary teams which are similar to that already operating in Nottinghamshire as JAIT. The National Fire Chiefs' Council is assisting the Health and Safety Executive in developing an efficient best practice model, which is likely to include working at a regional level, or with at least one neighbouring county Service. It is proposed that as Nottingham and Leicester cities have the most high-rise (over 18 meter) buildings in the region, teams will be based in each city. Funding from Central Government has been provided for one Fire Safety Inspector to be seconded to the Nottingham team to support this work. It is anticipated that the secondment post will be drawn from one of the two current fire safety officers working within JAIT. JAIT will continue to function and the support of the additional multidisciplinary team is welcomed;
- t) following the Grenfell Tower incident, Fire Safety England legislation comes into effect on 23 January 2023, requiring additional measures with statutory duties applied to those responsible for buildings, including alerting the Service to areas of non-compliance, such as a non-functioning fire alarm, to enable the Service to adapt its response as appropriate if an incident occurs;
- u) with regard to the evacuation of high buildings, it is noted that this element of work forms part of the standard firefighter training package across the county. This includes the rural stations which are some distance from any high-rise properties, to ensure that

these crews are capable and can be called on if necessary, which may include cross county boundary working.

Members of the committee commented:

- v) with regard to the numbers of UwFSSs, the Service needs to consider statistics prior to the pandemic for a true reflection of any quantity or trend variation;
- w) it's a concern that high-rise development within the City is an ongoing growth area and that further resources will be needed by the Service, with regard to Fire Safety Inspections to ensure that the Service's statutory obligations are met.

**Resolved to note the report.**

## **16 Reductions in Unwanted Fire Signals**

Prior to consideration of this item, the following question was posed to the committee from representatives of the Fire Brigades Union:

The Service is proposing a non-attendance of fire appliances between the hours of 07:00 and 19:00 at hospitals, although the majority of calls to these properties turn out not to be fires, the complexity and size of the buildings can cause the determination and location of the fire to take a considerable amount of time. If there is no fire service attendance at these properties, that have sleeping risk and immobile patients then should a fire break out that is not tackled immediately, then the consequences could be devastating. There are very little to no financial saving to making these changes and the FBU believe this will ultimately lead to further cuts to the Service in the future. Is the Fire Authority prepared to risk the lives of the public, just to reduce the number of turnouts per year?

To which the following formal response was provided by the Chair:

As part of the Service's Futures25 Efficiency Programme, the Service committed to changing and reducing demand on response resources, this is also supported by a commitment in the Services Community Risk Management Plan, to reduce false alarms by 10%, by 2025. The commitment and drive to reduce the Service's attendance at false alarms will assist the Service resource to risk, further enabling the Service to proactively prioritise activities that keep people safe. Responding to unwanted fire signals that are generated by automatic fire alarms, accounts for approximately 35% of all incidents attended, hospitals are the biggest contributor to false alarms. Attendance at false alarms places a significant impact on the Service's resources, diverting valuable time and resources from other preventing, protecting and responding activities.

Hospitals are well run and professionally managed facilities, with good levels of fire protection. Arrangements for fire safety and the care of patients is the responsibility of the hospitals Responsible Persons. The Service is committed to continually supporting health care professionals and hospital fire safety advisors ensure that hospitals are as safe as possible, by continuing to support and offering advice on both fire prevention and protection best practices. In the event of any uncertainty or a fire, hospitals should call the fire service and not rely on automatic fire alarms as a method of alerting the fire service, a direct call ensures the Service can assess the situation and send the required resources in a timely manner. The Service will work

with hospital Responsible Persons to ensure that they are prepared for the changes, ensuring that procedures are in place and appropriate to the type of building.

The Chair agreed that it was important that issues such as this are raised.

Mick Sharman, Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer, resented the report and highlighted the following points:

- a) the Service has a clear commitment to reduce UwFSs by 10% by 2025. The report outlines the current call challenging policy, including listing premises which are exempt from call challenging (to gain confirmation that the attendance of the service is required). It is noted that local crews continue to assess risks within their area;
- b) during 2021/22, the Service responded to 3,480 UwFSs, which is a rise of 11% from the previous year, and represents roughly a third all responses;
- c) the breakdown of false alarm origins is outlined in the report and includes apparatus, good intent, and malicious action, with apparatus fault consistently being the most significant cause of the UwFS;
- d) alarm receiving companies contact the Fire Service by an automatic process which does not generally provide any information beyond that an alarm has been triggered. It is only following the emergency response attendance that the incident can be referred to as an unwanted fire signal;
- e) the service works with premises owners and responsible person's to reduce UwFSs , but this is often proving challenging and requires dedication of time by fire prevention officers who could be focusing on other prevention work;
- f) some issues are resolved following contact by Fire Prevention Officers, but, illustrated in figure 1 within the report, some of the main challenges continue to be blocks of single domestic premises, shared accommodation and sheltered accommodation. In previous years, UwFS from hospitals had outstretched the number of other types of false alarm, but following dedicated liaison work by Fire Prevention Officers, these are significantly reduced, but remain a concern;
- g) the response to UwFS has a significant impact on the Service, including engaging resources which would otherwise be available to attend emergencies, undertake prevention and protection activities and/or training;
- h) Nationally, fire services apply different approaches within the guidance issued by the National Fire Chiefs Council, by which some Services will not attend any automatically triggered signals, some have a reduced exemption list, and some operate a call challenging system during working hours, and have introduced charging for repeat UwFS offenders;
- i) analysis has provided valuable information regarding identifying a variance in the way in which some crews may have recorded incidents in the Incident Reporting System (IRS). On some occasions there had been an incident which triggered alarms, but was

resolved prior to the arrival of the Service. Although no action was necessary, the alarm system responded as intended, so this must not be considered an UwFS;

- j) NFRS is proposing a blended approach to reduce UwFSs, whereby if alarm apparatus is causing an issue, the Fire Prevention Team will intervene and raise the issue with the building management, under the leadership of Area Manager Coleman. Where an UwFS is identified as called in by good intention or a malicious act, the Fire Prevention Team will again intervene where possible with guidance, education and support;
- k) it is proposed that future reporting through the IRS will provide further detail determining how the incident was identified when reported, which will help identify trends which can then be addressed;
- l) there is potential for the Service to charge for attending what turns out to be an UwFS. This Service is not intending to charge for infrequent UwFS attendances, only persistent offenders, as enabled by the Localism Act;
- m) 10% of UwFSs originate from hospitals, with 96.5% found to be UwFSs, only 3.5% of these incidents were found to be fires, none of which has spread beyond the item first ignited and did not require the attendance of the Service. Hospitals are professionally managed and generally have good procedures in place. In addition there are generally a lot of staff on site during the working day, who will be available to check the nature of the incident and if necessary, confirm that the attendance of the Service is required. This could mean that the Service does not respond to automatic fire signals, unless followed up by a 999 call, between the hours of 7am and 7pm. Between the hours of 7pm and 7am the Service would attend regardless of any incident confirmation, due to the sleep risk;
- n) if a 999 call is placed confirming the Service is required to attend for a known incident, then 5 appliances will immediately be dispatched. Additional training will be required of hospital staff, but the Service can support this;
- o) the drop in the number of UwFS from hospitals is a result of their upgraded alarm system, and whilst numbers are predicted to plateau, there are still concerns that calls will increase as the system degrades over time unless hospitals take alternative action, such as further capital investment in the systems;
- p) hospitals are complex environments but are well managed by professionals and safe places with regard to fire safety. This is supported by evidence gathered from the Service over time, following attendance;
- q) consultation is ongoing and discussions have taken place regarding the proposed approach, including with NHS England. Concern has been raised with the proposal to do things differently, but similar proposals are in place with other fire services across the country;
- r) there is a potential risk that unscrupulous business owners will disable fire detection systems to prevent being charged for an UwFS, but the inspection processes are robust and inspections take place prioritising premises identified as being most at risk;

- s) it is unlikely that hospitals will wholly agree with the proposals, but at best it is hoped the Service can reach a mutual understanding with which hospitals, at best, can be comfortable.

Committee members commented as follows:

- t) a recent serious fire at County Hall, may have resulted in the loss of the building and possibly life, if the Service hadn't responded so promptly. Further information, including details of the consultation with the hospitals is required prior to members being asked to make a decision on recommendation 1 in the report;
- u) further liaison needs to take place with the affected stakeholders before a recommendation is proposed, not following a decision by the committee;
- v) the additional time waiting for a second phone call to confirm an incident could cost lives;
- w) from personal experience of having been in hospital for 18 months, the vulnerability of patient's can't be underestimated. There may be several staff on duty with an award, but it might require three people to move one patient;
- x) hospitals need to consider the proposal, and may suggest different timeframes;
- y) whilst not adverse to call challenging, the additional administration costs, including for tracking UwFSs and charging, needs to be covered by the penalty income;
- z) members of the committee are not experts on fire and are happy to take advice, but further detail is required before any decision can be considered;
- aa) hospitals contain chemicals and vulnerable, non-mobile patients, while also being hugely underfunded and staff are run off their feet. This is an additional life and death responsibility pressure for staff;
- bb) building managers need to take responsibility, but it is a concern where businesses are under financial pressure, they may remove or disable fire detection systems to prevent UwFS and the resulting charge. These potential risks resulting from the proposals need to be assessed;
- cc) consultation needs to be thorough and meaningful and the responses listened to and taken into consideration;
- dd) within figure 1 of the report, it is evident that hospitals are doing well in reducing UwFS. Should the service not just continue to support hospitals with this reduction;
- ee) with the potential ramifications of a decision of this level, initial consideration by this committee and then a recommendation made to the full Fire Authority for a decision to be made by the Authority should be considered;
- ff) a thorough consultation needs to take place, the responses listened to, and recommendations for a decision should preferably be made within this municipal year prior to changes in membership.

**Resolved to:**

- 1) support the consultation with appropriate stakeholders (including trades unions) of the proposal not to routinely attend automatic fire alarm calls at hospitals, between 07:00 and 19:00, which is reported back as soon as is possible;**
- 2) note the changes to future Unwanted Fire Signals performance reporting;**
- 3) support consultation and policy development to enable the Service to financially charge Unwanted Fire Signals persistent offenders.**

**17 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary And Fire and Rescue Services, Areas for Improvement**

Mick Sharman, Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer, presented the report which provides the committee with an update on the Service's response to the 2021 inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services.

The Service was extremely pleased with the results across the board but 4 areas for improvement (AIFs) were identified, of which the following 2 fall within the scrutiny remit of this Committee:

- AFI 2 – the Service should assure itself that its risk-based inspection programme prioritises the highest risks and includes proportionate activity to reduce risk;
- AFI 4 – the Service should ensure that, when responding to a 999 call, mobile data terminals are reliable to allow staff to access risk information.

The report outlines measures in place to progress work to address the two improvement areas identified, with a further update report to be submitted to the May meeting of the Committee.

**Resolved to:**

- 1) note the 'Areas for Improvement' delegated to the Committee for scrutiny and monitoring;**
- 2) agree the approach of the Chief Fire Officer for addressing the 'Areas for Improvement';**
- 3) note the actions undertaken to date.**