



 **Norfolk** County Council

## Norfolk Fire and Rescue Authority Statement of Assurance 2014/15

### Purpose

Fire and Rescue Authorities must provide both local communities and the Government with an annual statement of assurance on financial, governance and operational matters. What this means is that Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) must demonstrate it is doing what the Government expects of it, as laid down in the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities 2012 and that it is delivering the local Integrated Risk Management Plan.



Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) is one of many services provided by Norfolk County Council (NCC). The County Council acts as the Fire and Rescue Authority, with this function carried out by its Communities Committee. The Committee reviewed and approved this Statement of Assurance at its meeting on 11 November 2015.

Through this Statement of Assurance the members of the Communities Committee and the Chief Fire Officer provide assurance to the people of Norfolk that we are satisfied that the Authority's financial, governance and operational assurance arrangements are adequate, operating effectively and meeting statutory requirements detailed within the Fire and Rescue National Framework 2012.



Signed by Norfolk Fire  
and Rescue Service:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roy Harold', written over a dotted line.

.....  
Roy Harold, Chief Fire Officer



Signed by on behalf of  
Communities  
Committee:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Smyth', written over a dotted line.

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County Councillor Paul Smyth  
(Chair of Communities Committee)

Date: 11 November 2015

## Introduction

### Norfolk's context

The type of fire and rescue service that is operated is influenced by the type of area in which it works. In Norfolk's case, some of the key characteristics considered are:

- 90 miles of coastline.
- 250 miles of inland waterways.
- 6,256 miles of roads.
- 10,567 listed buildings.
- 430 scheduled ancient monuments.
- 401,756 dwellings.
- 32,872 active businesses.
- Population of 870,100.
- 22.5% of the population aged 65 and over.
- Around a third of the county's population live in Norwich, Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn.
- 49% of the population live in areas defined as 'rural' making Norfolk the second most rural county in the country.
- 8,000 households where English is not the first language.

### Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service resources

There are 42 fire stations across the county. Of these, Carrow and Sprowston stations in Norwich are wholetime only which means they are staffed by firefighters on shifts 24/7. Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn and Earlham stations have both wholetime and retained firefighters. Gorleston and Kings Lynn stations are wholetime with a shared crew of wholetime firefighters from Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn respectively. Thetford station is both day duty crewed and retained. The other 35 stations are crewed by retained firefighters in market towns and villages.

Retained firefighters are staff whose main job is outside the Fire and Rescue Service but they are available on-call to respond to emergencies in their area.

The Service has an establishment of 904.6 posts, of which 287.8 are uniformed, 96.8 are non-uniformed and 520 are retained firefighters.

The Service has a variety of fire engines to tackle a range of different emergencies. For example, heavy rescue pumps are equipped to respond to road traffic collisions, large animal rescue and water rescue. The off-road 4x4 fire engines are used for flooding incidents, heathland/forest fires, and firefighting and rescues at height. Our fleet of specialist vehicles also includes an environmental protection unit, a control vehicle, a water foam unit, a driver training vehicle and an underwater search and recovery diving unit. The Service also hosts a team of Urban Search and Rescue (USAR)

personnel and vehicles that is trained to respond to national, regional or major incidents.

### **Responding to emergencies**

The type of emergency that the Service responds to is changing. The number of fires is falling and more of the day to day work done by the Service is taken up with responding to accidents on Norfolk's roads and automated fire alarms.

### **Legislative background and the National Framework**

Fire and Rescue Authorities have to work to a set of standards laid down in key Acts of Parliament, including the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, and also in the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

In the National Framework 2012 ([link](#)), Government has set out the key priorities for Fire and Rescue Services across England, as follows:

- Identify the risks in the local area and make provision for prevention and protection activities and respond to incidents.
- Work in partnership with communities and partners to deliver the service.
- Be accountable to communities for the service they provide.

The National Framework lists a number of more detailed activities that fire and rescue services must do in the areas of

prevention, protection, emergency response, risk and resilience.

The Service must also perform the duties outlined in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This includes, working as part of the Norfolk Resilience Forum to maintain and develop Norfolk's Community Risk Register, plan the response to major incidents and emergencies in the county and carry out multi-agency training exercises as part of the preparation of an effective response.

The National Framework was updated in 2014 with an additional section of firefighter fitness ([link](#)).

## **Operational Assurance**

### **Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)**

The IRMP sets out the issues that the Fire and Rescue Service will need to respond to over the next 3 years and how it will do it.

The IRMP is the single most important document for the Fire and Rescue Service as it shows what the Service will be doing and why. It is also one of the means by which the public can hold the Service to account.

In line with Government guidance and best practice, the Service consults with the public on the IRMP as part of the County Council's consultation on its budget proposals.

The 2014-17 IRMP ([link](#)) included two proposals that were publically consulted upon. These amounted to £1.105 million savings over three years:

- Stop supplying and fitting free smoke detectors.
- Purchase different, cost-effective fire vehicles for some stations.

As a result of consultation feedback we decided to look at alternative sources of funding for smoke detectors so that we could continue this work. We hold a small stock of smoke detectors which we continue to provide to those most at risk of a fire in their homes as part of a home fire risk check. In addition, a welcome sponsorship arrangement with Rotary Norfolk will provide £11,500 for the provision of smoke detectors in urban centres and market towns covered by the local Rotary groups.

In January 2015 we opened a new fire station at King's Lynn South (IRMP 2011) which improved our response cover in this area.

We have bought ten new larger fire appliances. We are currently reviewing our proposals for new 4x4 lightweight appliances as budgetary pressures mean we need to re-examine how we use our response resources.

In January 2015 we commenced a Strategic Review of the Fire and Rescue Service which resulted in a 2020 Vision for the Service. From this we developed our draft Integrated Risk

Management Plan 2016-20. You can read more about this at the end of this document.

### **Over the border mutual aid agreements**

The Service participates in a range of mutual aid schemes via the National Resilience Programme, which shares specialist response assets across the country. Alongside these wider arrangements, we have local agreements in place with neighbouring fire and rescue services (Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk) to ensure the fastest response to emergency calls and to share specialist assets. We work closely with other emergency services and this year hosted the first Home Office audit of joint emergency services interoperability.

### **Health and Safety and other legislation**

NFRS continually seek to comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and other applicable health and safety legislation. Active health and safety management at all levels in the Service combined with routine performance monitoring and review are at the core of maintaining safe working environments for Service staff and those we assist and support. This is achieved through a combination of operational performance review and periodic pre planned audit of the Service's health and safety management system via regional peer challenge using the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Quality Safety Audit tool kit. This helps the Service to ensure that it has the right equipment, training and practices in place to respond effectively and safely.

## Governance

### Democratic accountability

NFRS is one of many services provided by Norfolk County Council (NCC) which acts as the Fire and Rescue Authority. The County Council has a Constitution ([link](#)) which sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. It includes clear communication protocols and clearly defines roles and responsibilities.

On a regular basis, County Councillors review the performance of the Fire and Rescue service, its financial position and risks that have been identified. The County Councillors also play a key role in shaping the long term development of the Service.

NFRS is governed by the Communities Committee. Papers and minutes from the Committee are available on the NCC website ([link](#)).

### Governance Statement

NCC is responsible for putting in place effective systems for the governance of its affairs, ensuring services are delivered properly and legally and that any associated risks are managed. The Annual Governance Statement ([link](#)) is a review of this.

## Financial and Performance Management

### Finance

NCC is legally required to provide an annual report, the Statement of Accounts, on how it spends its money. As the Fire Authority, the Council includes in the Statement of Accounts details of the NFRS financial position. The accounts, along with the Fire Fighters Pension Fund Accounts, are audited to confirm their accuracy.

Following the signing of the Statement of Accounts and the conclusion of the annual audit, our external auditors write an Annual Audit Letter to the Council. The letter summarises the findings of the auditors and formally concludes the audit.

The latest Statement of Accounts and audit letters are available on the County Council's website ([link](#)). These confirm that the budget has been managed in accordance with the law and proper standards and that public money is being used economically, efficiently and effectively.

NFRS operates on a revenue budget which in 2014/15 was £27.4 million, 4.5% of the Council's overall revenue budget. This equates to £30.43 per head of population (excluding capital charges), which is much lower than the Family Group Fire and Rescue Services' average of £35.61 and the national average of £38.78.

If you would like further details about where the Service spends its money, such as expenditure on staff and expenses and where we spend over £500, this is available on the Council's Open Data website ([link](#)).

## Performance

The Service operates within the County Council's corporate performance framework and uses a dashboard of over 40 performance indicators to monitor and manage performance relating to service performance, management of resources and outcomes for local people. Some of the indicators are former national indicators that we can compare with other fire and rescue services and others are locally determined.

Performance is regularly monitored both within the Service and by County Councillors through the democratic process with data and reports published on our website ([link](#)).

The key performance indicators for NFRS in 2014/15 were:

- We responded to 7,285 incidents where 749 people were rescued and there were 63 fatalities.
- We aim to get to 80% of life risk incidents within our Emergency Response Standards (how quickly we should attend an incident) but we only achieved this on 78.7% of occasions. We will be setting new Emergency Response Standards as part our Integrated Risk Management Plan process once we have agreed our future budgets and response resources.

- Our retained fire engines were available and ready to respond to an emergency 81.4% of the time against a target of 90%. We know we have some stations where more firefighters are needed and we are actively recruiting in these areas. We are currently considering the future viability of stations where availability is low.
- There were 449 accidental dwelling fires in people's homes and we carried out 4363 Home Fire Risk Checks. These fire safety visits, usually with vulnerable people, are designed to help make people safer in their home.
- We attended 1415 automatic fire alarms that turned out to have been a false alarm- fewer than we attended in 2013/14.
- The economic cost of fire and other emergencies in Norfolk in 2014/15 was £187m, compared to £150m the previous year.
- We continue to be one of the lowest cost fire and rescue authorities in England at £30.43 per head of population (English average £38.58).

## **Future developments**

### **Draft Integrated Risk Management Plan 2016-20**

Our current challenge is how we can continue to provide a fire and rescue service with less funding. Our draft IRMP 2016-20 sets out how we plan to do this and is currently out to consultation. It includes proposals to reduce operational support and training budgets, reduce the number of retained firefighters, close two retained fire stations, reduce wholetime firefighter numbers and change the way we use our USAR service. If all proposals were to be implemented the maximum saving would be around £2.3m. Consultation closes on 14 January 2016 and feedback will be considered by County Councillors before making final decisions about which proposals to implement in February 2016.