



Norfolk Fire and Rescue Authority Statement of Assurance 2015/16

**Chief Fire Officer
David Ashworth**

January 2017

INTRODUCTION

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. This means that Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) must demonstrate that 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 (IRMP). The National Framework was updated in 2014 with an additional section of firefighter fitness ([link](#)).

This statement of assurance covers the period April 2015 to March 2016.

Norfolk's context

In Norfolk the Fire and Rescue Authority is Norfolk County Council which governs and operates the Fire and Rescue Service. Following a reorganisation at the County Council we are now part of the Public Safety Group in the Council's Community and Environmental Services Directorate. Our Chief Fire Officer is the Assistant Director for the Public Safety Group with responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service, Trading Standards, Resilience and Community Safety.

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

- Increasing and ageing population
- Second most rural county with one of the lowest population densities in England
- Relatively flat county prone to flooding and coastal tidal surges
- Changing emergency call profile- we are attending fewer fires and a wider variety of special service incidents like road traffic collisions
- Budget pressures as a result of increasing council costs, increased demand for services, inflation and a cut in Government funding



885,000 population
24% aged over 65



1.6 persons per
hectare



90 miles of coastline
250 miles of inland
waterways



408,045
dwellings



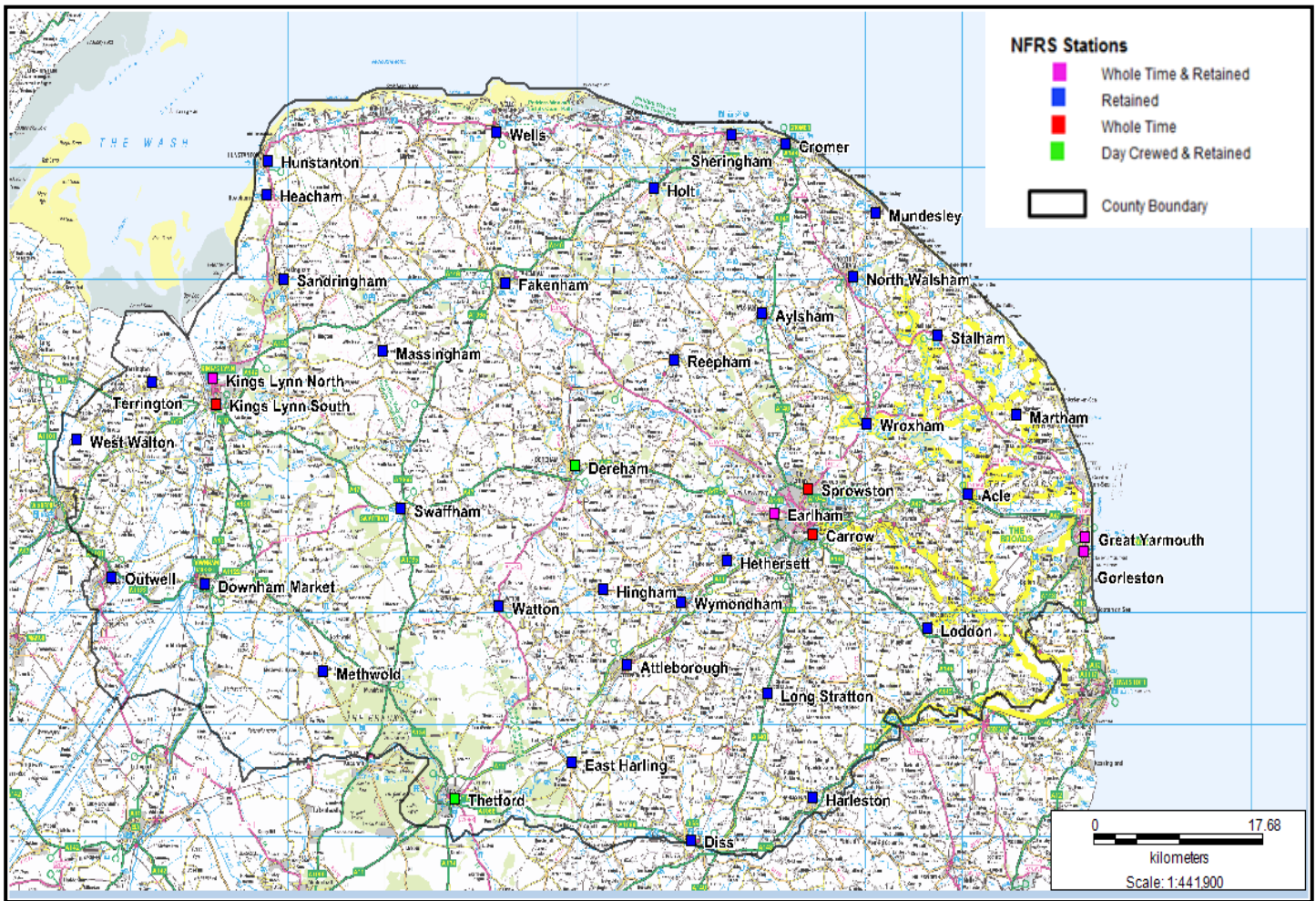
6,256 miles of roads



34,274 active
businesses

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service resources

There are 42 fire stations across the county. Carrow and Sprowston in Norwich, and King's Lynn South are wholetime stations crewed by firefighters 24/7. Six stations have a mix of wholetime and retained firefighters (Great Yarmouth, Gorleston, Earlham, King's Lynn North, Thetford and Dereham) and 33 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.



Firefighters

263.50 wholetime
470 retained



96.41 non-uniformed



23 control room

**Full-time equivalent
employees at end of
March 2016**

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 and Technical Rescue Units attend large animal rescue and water rescue incidents. 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 two environmental protection units, a control vehicle, a water foam unit, three aerial ladder platforms, 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 are trained to respond to national, regional or major incidents. We are also one of the few services that have a specialist team to respond to the increasing terrorist threat should such an incident occur.

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GOVERNANCE

National governance

In January 2016 responsibility for Fire and Rescue Services moved from the Department of Communities and Local Government to the Home Office. The Home Office are also responsible for policing and the move supports the Government's commitment to deliver greater joint working between the police and fire and rescue services. As part of the reform a new independent inspection regime will be introduced for fire and rescue services and legislation will give Police and Crime Commissioners the ability to take on responsibility for fire and rescue services where a local case is made ([link](#)).

Democratic accountability

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service 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](#) 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 including approving the [Integrated Risk Management Plan \(IRMP\)](#).

NFRS is governed by the Communities Committee. Papers and minutes from the Committee are available on the NCC website ([link](#)). As a strategic document the IRMP is developed by Communities Committee and then recommended to Full Council for final approval at the same meeting as our budget is approved ([link](#)). In 2015 County Councillors undertook a strategic review of our Fire and Rescue Service which helped shape the proposals within our IRMP 2016-20.

Service management

The Chief Fire Officer/ Assistant Director Public Safety is accountable to the Director of Community and Environmental Services who in turn reports to the Managing Director ([link](#)). Under the Council's scheme of [delegated powers](#) the Chief Fire Officer has authority to exercise the Council's functions relating to fire prevention, firefighting, fire safety, explosives and petroleum licensing and the functions conferred on the local authority under Article 25 of the Fire Safety Order 2005. In accordance with the law delegated decisions taken by the Chief Fire Officer are recorded and, to ensure transparency, are reported to Communities Committee.

The Chief Fire Officer is supported by a Public Safety Board comprised of senior officers from the Fire and Rescue Service, Trading Standards, Resilience and Norfolk Safety Community Interest Company. The Board provides a formal decision making forum for the Public Safety Group and a formal record of such decisions. It does not make decisions that fall within the responsibility of the Fire and Rescue Authority.

Governance Statement

Norfolk County Council 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](#) is a review of this.

FINANCE

NFRS Budget

NFRS operates on a revenue budget which in 2015/16 was £27.2 million, 4.5% of the Council's overall revenue budget. This equates to £31.19 per head of population (excluding capital charges), which is much lower than our Family Group of similar Fire and Rescue Services' average of £36.13 and the national average of £34.95.

NFRS continues to operate within a reducing public services financial climate and has to manage service delivery against budget reductions. Value for money continues to be a major driver in all spending and operational decisions.

Financial performance for the year resulted in a small underspend at 0.33% of budget.

We continue to be one of the lowest cost fire and rescue authorities in England at £31.19 per head of population (English average £34.95).

CIPFA estimates 2015/16

Financial management

The Council's [Constitution](#) sets out the Council's decision-making framework, including delegation arrangements. The Constitution includes Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations which set out how decisions are made and the procedures to be followed. Updated Financial Regulations were approved by Council on 11 April 2016. All Responsible Budget Officers/ Management of NFRS are made fully aware of their duties with checks and oversight by the Fire Services Procurement Manager and Finance Officer.

The County Council 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.

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](#)).

Audit and review

In addition to auditing of the accounts, our Internal Audit team consult with the Budgeting and Accounting team to assess and plan audits of service areas with any potential volatility or recent poor performance. There have been no recent recommendations or outstanding actions from an audit perspective currently.

An independent peer review of Finance by the Local Government Association in 2016 identified four current critical financial issues for NFRS relating to:

- Fire fighter recruitment and future retirements
- Pensions, meeting the new scheme changes
- Capital investment
- Blue light collaboration

Firefighter recruitment was identified as a potential issue due to the maturity profile of the frontline workforce. A number of new recruits have since been recruited and the service continues to manage its workforce profile as proactively as possible, whilst balancing the demands of the service.

National changes made on firefighter pension schemes has given rise to a significant amount of work with their implementation and while work is ongoing the service is well advanced with those requirements.

Concern with capital investment and medium term capital planning, funding of programmes and infrastructure asset replacement programmes was highlighted. Work is ongoing with regards to reviewing and assessing the changing needs of the service and making optimum use of current funding available. With no foreseeable injection of capital funding forecast, future programmes for NFRS will be demanding.

The Government has indicated its desire to see greater Blue light collaboration and until legislation or policy is confirmed, NFRS continues to develop positive partnership working arrangements with the Police, Ambulance and other FRA's.

Norfolk Safety Community Interest Company (CIC)

[Norfolk Safety Community Interest Company \(CIC\)](#) is a subsidiary company limited by guarantee of the County Council that operates in partnership with Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service. Norfolk Safety provides a range of risk management, training and development and other services to public bodies, third sector organisations and businesses.

The articles of association outline the composition of the Board of Directors, to include a Member of the Council, who are responsible for the operation of the Company. The Company has adopted quality assurance and health and safety policy standards consistent with the Council as appropriate

to the activities of the Company. NSCIC is required to report annually to the Regulator on how they are delivering for the community and how they are involving their stakeholders in their activities. The company is subject to legislation and external audit. In relation to profits generated these are asset locked into community interest projects by the Board and Regulator (an independent statutory officeholder appointed by the Secretary of State).

PERFORMANCE

Performance management framework and scrutiny

NFRS operates within the County Council's corporate performance framework. A [new framework](#) was introduced in October 2015 to provide greater assurance that the Council's resources are being used to best effect and to deliver demonstrable results to the people of Norfolk. A set of 'vital signs' for each service have been produced which provide transparency and assurance on the health of key services. The vital signs for NFRS are 'Emergency Response Standards (ERS)' and 'Percentage of time that retained (part-time) first fire engines are available to respond to emergencies'. These are regularly monitored by County Councillors through the democratic process with reports published on our website ([link](#)).

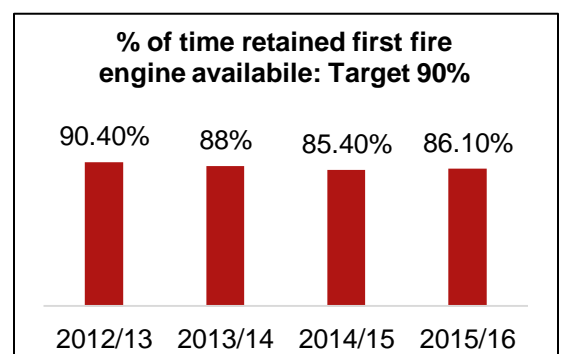
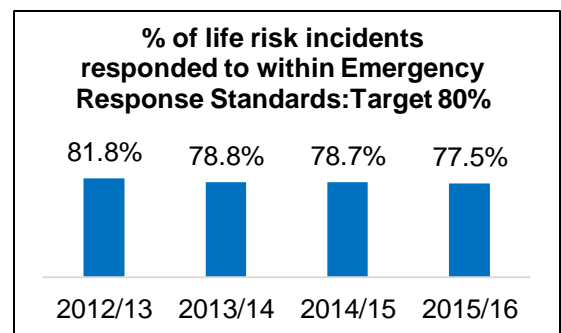
In accordance with the corporate performance framework, our Public Safety Board monitor a broader dashboard of indicators and escalate issues to County Councillors if required. Some of the indicators are former national indicators that we can compare with other fire and rescue services and others are locally determined. An overview of our performance in 2015/16 can be found in the next section.

The Government collate [national statistics](#) about all fire and rescue services. In order to improve the transparency of our performance, and therefore our accountability, we will be increasing the amount of performance information we publish as open data on our website in December 2016.

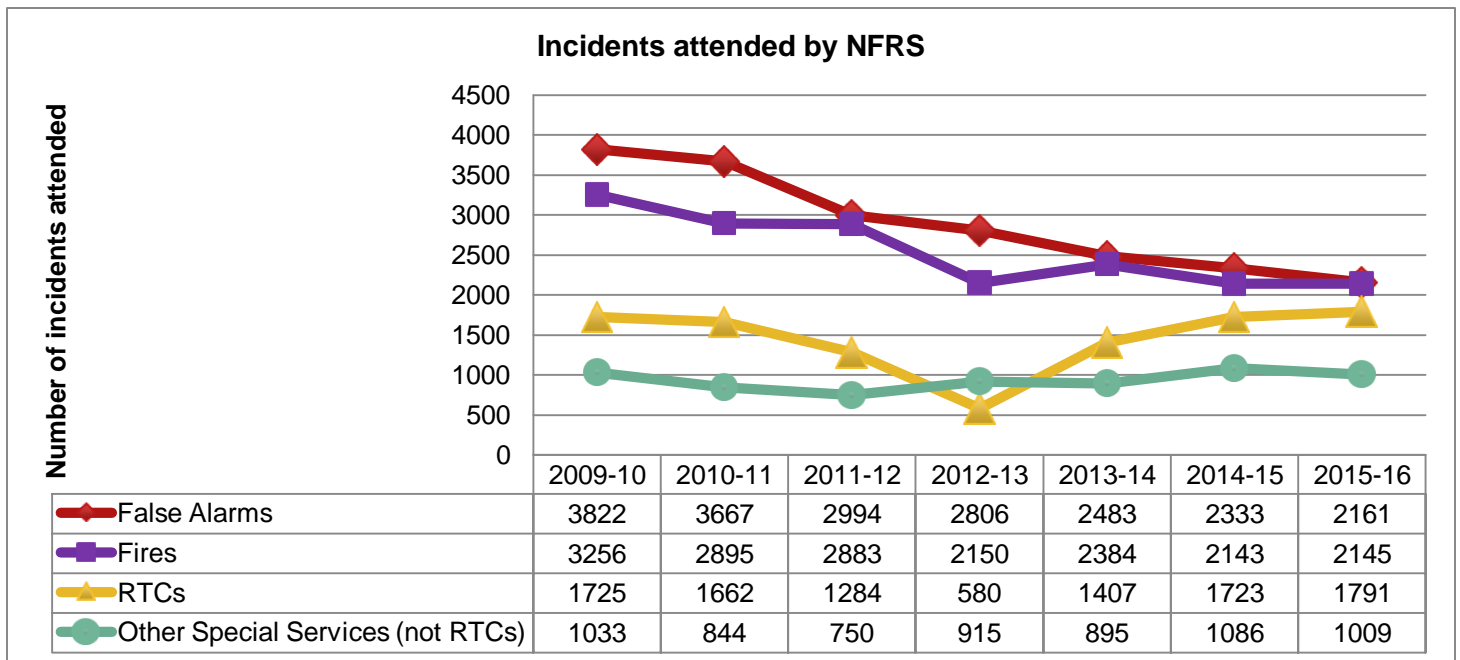
Performance in 2015/16

Vital Signs

- 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 77.5% of occasions. We know that the changing nature and location of calls (fewer in urban areas and a larger proportion in rural areas) and a shortage of retained firefighters is affecting our ability to meet this target.
- Our **retained (part time) first fire engines were available and ready to respond to an emergency** 86.1% of the time against a target of 90%. This is an improvement on last year's figure of 85.49%. We know we have some stations where more firefighters are needed and we are actively recruiting in these areas.



Incident attendance in 2015/16



- We attended 2145 fires – two more than last year. This included:
 - 450 **accidental dwelling fires** in people’s homes -one more than last year, resulting in five fatalities and 20 people being injured. This compares to four fatalities and 30 injuries in 2014/15.
 - 596 **arson incidents** – an increase of 10.2% compared to 2014/15.
 - 24 fewer **accidental non-domestic premises fires** (170 in total) - a reduction of 12.4%. However three people were injured and there were two deaths- a rare occurrence in accidental non-domestic premise fires.
- We attended 7% fewer **false automatic fire alarms** as a result of our successful policy of not attending automatic fire alarms in low risk properties unless we also receive a 999 call.
- We attended 1791 **road traffic collisions** where we released 227 people from their vehicle. We expect to attend fewer road traffic collisions in future as we have returned to the mobilising criteria we used in 2012-13. This brings us in line with other fire and rescue services and focuses our support to the incidents where our specialist skills are most needed.
- We attended 1009 other **special service incidents** such as flooding, freeing trapped people or animals and calls to assist other agencies.

In 2015/16 we attended a total of 7,106 incidents where 730 people were rescued

97% of emergency response telephone calls are answered by our Control Room within 5 seconds

Protection and Prevention

To help prevent incidents from occurring and to protect people and property when they do happen in 2015/16 we:

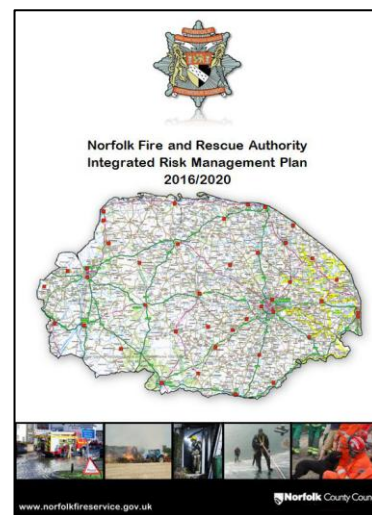
- Carried out 3,798 **Home Fire Risk Checks**. These fire safety visits, usually with vulnerable people, are designed to help make people safer in their home. In partnership with other agencies we are now trialling “Safe and Well” checks- a broader review of risks and safety issues in the home.
- Carried out 963 **audit visits of non-domestic premises** to ensure they complied with fire safety legislation.
- Maintained **up-to-date files of the risks** at over 600 non-domestic premises so that if an incident did occur we would have the information that we need to deal with the event as safely as possible, thus reducing the risks for our firefighters and the public.

OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE

Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)

The IRMP sets out the risks and issues that the Fire and Rescue Service will need to respond to over the next three 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 January 2015 we commenced a Strategic Review of the Fire and Rescue Service which informed the development of our Integrated Risk Management Plan for 2016-20. In line with Government guidance and best practice, we consulted with the public and stakeholders on the draft IRMP as part of the County Council's consultation on its budget proposals ([link](#)). The consultation period was from 30 October 2015 to 14 January 2016 and feedback can be found [here](#).



Full Council approved the [IRMP 2016-20](#) on 22 February 2016 when the County Council's 2016/17 budget was approved. We are now developing the detail of our three year IRMP Action Plan.

Collaborative working

We have an established record of working in partnership to deliver effective and efficient services. This includes:

- Fulfilling our duties outlined in the **Civil Contingencies Act 2004** by 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.
- Participating in **over the border mutual aid agreements** 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.
- Working with other Fire and Rescues Services to **improve interoperability**. We are part of the East Coast and Hertfordshire Control Room Consortium, a group of fire and rescue service that are working together to standardise control room practices so that we can support each other in the event of major incidents. We make use of national operational and tactical guidance. We will be changing our communication systems as part of the national emergency services mobile

communications programme (ESMCP) to provide the next generation communication system for the 3 emergency services (police, fire and rescue, and ambulance).

- Increasing our **collaboration with other emergency services**. As part of our property collaboration strategy we have moved our Headquarters and now share premises with Norfolk Constabulary. We also share the Fire Station at Sheringham with them and have plans for two further shared Fire and Rescue/Police stations along with a shared Control Room. We are currently working with the Constabulary on a 'forced entry' trial where firefighters respond to incidents where there are wellbeing concerns for an individual and access needs to be gained rather than the Police. We are also working with the East of England Ambulance Trust on a co-responding project to improve response times to cardiac arrest emergencies. The Ambulance Trust also share space in 20% of our Fire Stations.

Training and development

We assure the quality of our operations by providing appropriate training and development for all staff and carrying out audits and reviews of working practices to make sure that they are safe, efficient and effective. This includes performance reviews of how well our officers and firefighters manage incidents when they occur with advice and further training provided if required.

To ensure our firefighters maintain their competency in fighting fires we have built a live fire training unit at Scottow Enterprise Park with the new structure firefighting courses being run from the beginning of September 2016.

In the context of the recommendations made in the [CFOA Firefit](#) review, together with the changes to the pension scheme meaning that operational staff will be working longer, the Service recognises the importance of effectively managing and promoting Firefighter fitness. As such we will be employing a full time Physical Training Adviser who will not only implement the changes to annual testing arising from the review but will also work proactively with individuals and stations to embed a culture of fitness.

Our performance in 2015/16:

- We completed 233 assessments of incident command management
- 93.4% of operational firefighters were trained for full duties
- 97.4% of employees received an appraisal

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.

A review of the existing Health and Safety training policy and guidance is ongoing in order to provide a range of systems and process that adopt a reasonable approach to securing adequate information, instruction and training that is appropriate and proportionate to the health and safety responsibilities of each role across the Service.

In 2015/16 there were 16 reportable health and safety absences lasting more than 7 days – 3 more than last year

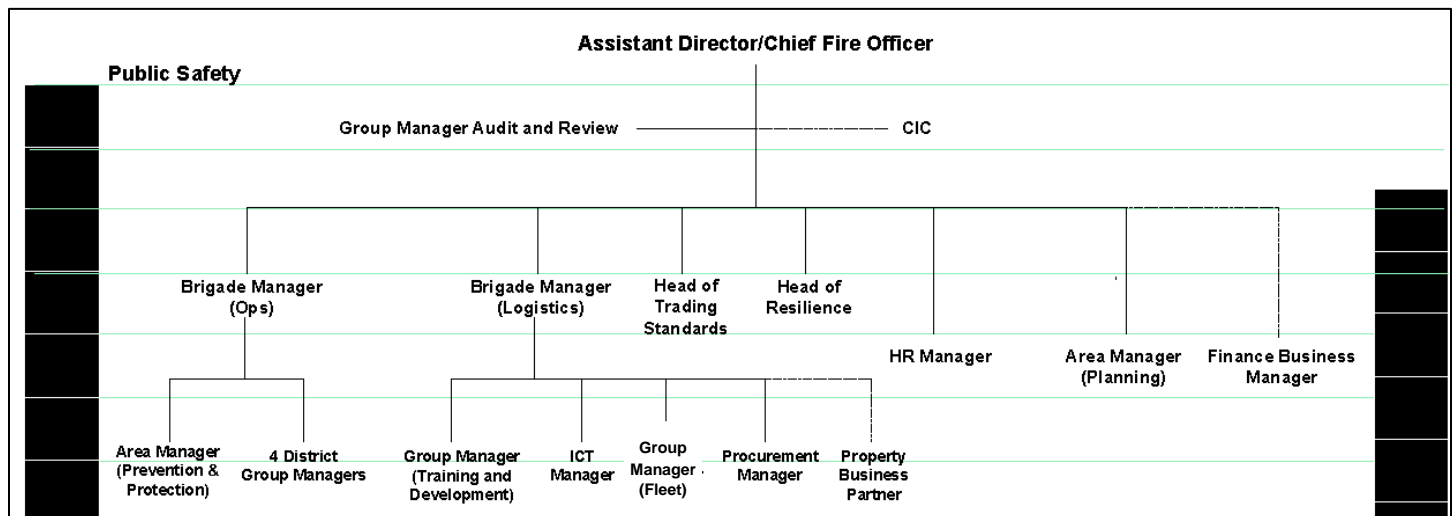
FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Planned improvements to accounting, governance and operational assurance

In reviewing our financial, governance and operational arrangements we have identified the following improvements which will further strengthen our approaches and ensure that we are meeting our statutory obligations to best effect.

Accounting

Our Integrated Risk Management Plan 2016-20 sets out our plans for the next four years. This includes restructuring our service. A dedicated Finance Business Manager will now oversee financial management, including that of our Community Interest Company to ensure that expected income growth and expenditure is correctly identified.



Governance

Our service restructure will create a **new Audit and Review team** by combining functions into one unit to strengthen and co-ordinate our approaches. We have also combined our Community Prevention and Protection units into one team.

In order to improve the **transparency of our performance and therefore our accountability** we will be publishing performance information as open data on our new website in December 2016. We also await further guidance on the new national inspection regime of fire and rescue that is being introduced by the Government.

Operational assurance

We will be developing our **IRMP Action Plan** to make changes that allow us to use our resources to achieve best operational effect. We have reviewed ways in which our Emergency Response Standards can be improved and from April 1 2016 Dereham fire station became day crewed.

Wider collaboration and partnership working is an area we expect to become more prevalent in future years and we will continue to identify and develop partnership opportunities that are legal, logical and save money. The next major period of collaboration will see fire control co-locate with Norfolk Constabulary to create a Joint Operations Communication and Control room. The joint control room will improve the multi-agency command of incidents and improve the quality and speed of sharing critical information. The joint control room is planned to go live by the 1st April 2017.

With an ageing workforce and a number of senior officers due to retire in the coming years, **workforce and succession planning** is becoming more important. We will be looking at our plans for recruitment and retention of retained firefighters with a view to improving the availability of our emergency response resources.

AUTHORISATION

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Authority 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 and subsequent updates.

This Statement of Assurance was approved by the Authority at the Communities Committee meeting on 25 January 2017.

Margaret Dewsbury, Chair of Communities Committee

David Ashworth, Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Director Public Safety