



Norfolk Fire and Rescue Authority Statement of Assurance 2014

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.



Welcome to Norfolk Fire and Rescue Authority's Statement of Assurance 2014.

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 March 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 the Chief
Fire Officer:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nigel Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style.

.....
Nigel Williams



Signed on behalf of
Communities
Committee:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Smyth". The signature is written in a cursive style.

.....
County Councillor Paul Smyth
(Chair of Communities Committee)

Date: 11 March 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 South stations are wholetime but they are currently tidal crewed by 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 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 an extensive consultation exercise took place on NFRS's IRMP proposals in the autumn of 2013. It included meetings and events held with staff, partner agencies, and the public. The information gained from this consultation shaped the final version of the IRMP 2014-17 ([link](#)).

Our main IRMP projects are the construction of a new fire station (2011 IRMP) and the purchase of new fire vehicles (2014 IRMP). The new fire station at South Lynn became operational on 21 January 2015. The Service has bought ten new larger fire appliances of which four are operational. It is reviewing the technical specifications and proposed locations

for the six new compact fire engines and six new 4x4 lightweights.

In January 2015 the Council commenced a Strategic Review of the Fire and Rescue Service which will inform the future development of the Service.

Over the border mutual aid agreements

We work with Fire and Rescue Services in Suffolk, Cambridge and Lincolnshire, supporting each other by responding to emergencies along our shared borders and providing additional support at major incidents. We are able to provide them with national resilience specialist support through Urban Search and Rescue, mass decontamination, high volume pump, water rescue teams and tactical advisors and also the underwater search and recovery diving unit. In turn, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service provides us with specialist vehicle support for off-road animal rescue or forestry/heathland fires.

Health and Safety and other legislation

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service 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

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (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.

In 2013/14 NFRS was overseen by the Cabinet Member for Public Protection and held to account by Cabinet, the cross-party Fire and Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Panel and Full Council. In June 2014 the governance arrangements at NCC changed from a cabinet system to a committee system, thereby amending the reporting and scrutiny arrangements for the Service. Papers from both the Fire and Rescue Overview and Scrutiny Panel and the new Communities Committee

which now governs NFRS 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 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 2013/14 was £28.6 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 major projects, 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 indicators for NFRS are:

- Emergency Response Standards – how quickly we are able to get to an emergency.
- Availability of retained fire appliances – how many fire engines that are crewed by retained firefighters are ready and able to respond to an emergency.

- Accidental dwelling fires – the number of fires in people’s homes.
- Home fire risk checks – the number of fire safety visits we have carried out, usually with vulnerable people.
- Automatic false alarms – the number of times we respond to a fire alarm that turns out to have been a false alarm.
- Customer satisfaction – what people think of our service.
- Economic cost of fire – an estimate of the overall cost of fires to the county of Norfolk.
- Cost per head of population – the cost of running the fire and rescue service, per person.

In 2013/14 there was a reduction in the number of deliberate fires and the Service attended fewer automated false alarms. We increased the number of home fire risk checks and customer satisfaction levels remained high. We have been closely monitoring our Emergency Response Standards and the availability of retained fire appliances as we are not achieving the targets that we have set ourselves ([link](#)).

We regularly compare our performance against similar Fire and Rescue Services so that we can contextualise our own performance and also identify areas where we may be able to learn from others – see our 2013/14 benchmark report ([link](#)) and the national Fire Statistics Monitor report ([link](#)).

Future developments

Strategic Review of the Fire and Rescue Service

In 2014 the Service was assessed by an external team of peer assessors ([link](#)). This review found the Service to have strong political and managerial leadership, good overall performance, and effective community engagement. The peer team identified the need for the Service to develop a longer term vision and for strong leadership to be maintained through the County Council’s changes to governance arrangements and continued budget reductions.

To take the issues identified by the peer review into account County Councillors commenced a strategic review of the Service in January 2015. This will determine the longer term vision for the Service based on the resources that are likely to be available. As with all public sector services, it is anticipated that reducing budgets will continue to be an issue for the Service for the next few years. The strategic review will ensure that we can continue to provide an efficient and effective service that makes the best use of public money.