

TO: Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority

FROM: Chairman Overview and Scrutiny Committee

PRESENTING OFFICER(S): Chairman Overview and Scrutiny Committee
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DATE: 22 October 2020

UPDATE ON THE CAMBRIDGESHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE RESPONSE TO THE ONGOING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic including Member involvement.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 The Fire Authority is asked to note the detail within the report.

3. Risk Assessment

- 3.1 **Economic** – there is a requirement to monitor the cost burden that COVID-19 has placed on CFRS, to minimise the impact on overall service delivery.
- 3.2 **Political** – there is requirement for CFRS to deliver its statutory duties under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 whilst ensuring its support to the local COVID-19 response, alongside partners, is appropriate.
- 3.3 **Social** – there is a requirement to focus our response to COVID-19 around people to ensure the health and wellbeing of our staff and support to the wider public in terms of the service we provide.
- 3.4 **Legal** – CFRS has maintained its legal requirements under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, Civil Contingencies Act 2004, Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and Human Rights Act 1998.

4. Background

- 4.1 On 23 March 2020 the country was placed in lock down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report highlights key actions undertaken by the Service prior to and during lock down in ensuring the safety and welfare of our staff as well as continuing to provide our statutory functions to the public. Member involvement is detailed at Paragraph 6 below.

4.2 Pre COVID-19

Highlighted as a significant risk on the National Risk Register, work in conjunction with partners had been undertaken to plan for pandemic flu and the impact it could have within Cambridgeshire. The Pandemic Flu Plan is authored and reviewed by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Local Resilience Forum (CPLRF) Risk Group.

4.3 Early COVID-19 (two weeks leading up to lockdown)

To ensure strategic oversight, daily business continuity (BC) meetings were established to monitor the national picture and align the organisation to the response requirements of COVID-19. Activities completed during this initial phase included;

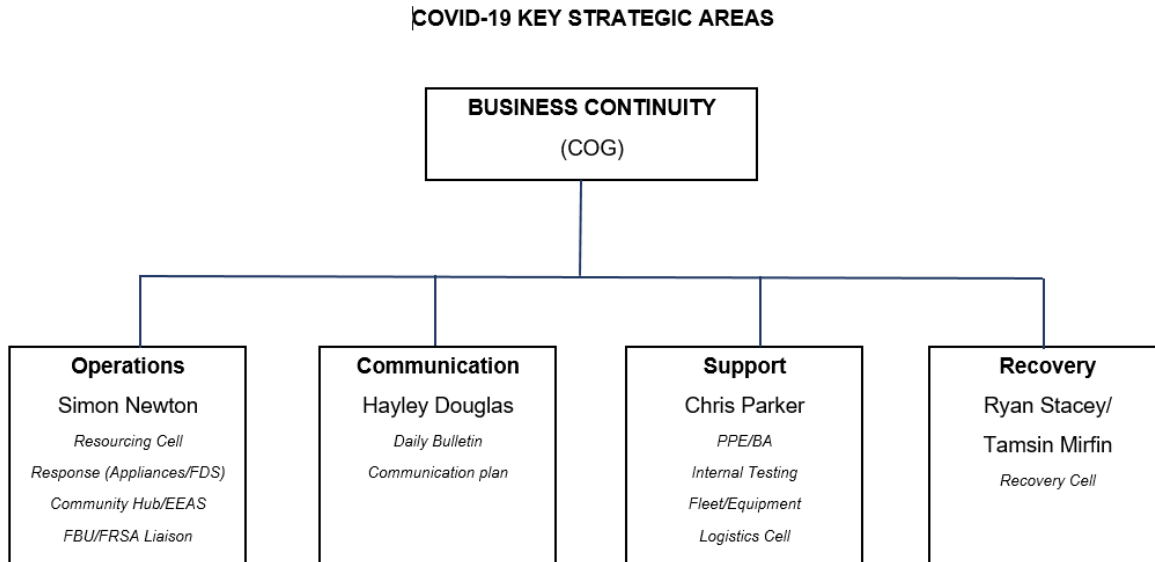
- **Station/Premises Lockdown** - reduced personnel attending our sites to operational personnel only across all our fire stations. For risk critical tasks authorisation was granted for contractors or internal personnel.
- **Home Working** – where possible, home working was introduced for all support staff across the Service.
- **Health and Safety** - COVID-19 risk assessments for all tasks and premises were completed.
- **Securing supply chains for Personal Protection Equipment (PPE)** - The support cell worked to ensure the supply chain for equipment and PPE was available, this included support and purchase of PPE for the CPLRF.
- **Crewing of Operational Appliances** - we reduced crewing to a maximum of four riders on each appliance to help maintain social distancing and limit the impact should a positive test have occurred. Where possible we used additional appliances to transport further personnel to the scene on whole time fire stations.
- **Establishment of Community Hub** - we engaged directly with the Community Hub to supply human resources, where required, to support activities such as checking on vulnerable people across our communities and fitting facemasks for clinical care settings.
- **Support to East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST)** - through the Tripartite Agreement we arranged for operational staff to be seconded to EEAST to drive ambulances and provide specialist driver training for staff.
- **Establishment of other links to CPLRF Sub Groups** - we developed links into other key working groups such as the Multi-Agency Information Cell (MAIC - sharing of updates and issues for all local partners and provide support as required). We chaired the local business continuity sub group for partners to enable updates to be shared about what local continuity plans had been instigated.
- **Organisational Recovery Planning** - this was initiated during the response phase of the pandemic, allowing us to monitor organisational impact and improve efficiency of re-instigating activities during the recovery phase.

4.4 During COVID-19 (23 March 2020 onwards) - Response

During lock down we changed our initial response structure to align our response with strategic areas of responsibility. This enabled a more efficient

and effective way of working. These groups then fed directly into the BC meetings which were held daily in the early stage and later moved to twice weekly (currently).

Business Continuity Response Structure



Business Continuity Cell - the overarching strategic cell that took information from the Tactical Co-Ordinating Group (TCG), Strategic Co-Ordinating Group (SCG), CPLRF Sub Groups, Public Health England (PHE) Guidance and National Guidance. This allowed for key strategic decisions to be made in relation to the organisational response to COVID-19.

Resources Cell - the resources cell managed all resources (both human and physical) to ensure we could maintain our statutory duties under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 by:

- Gaining and sharing of information across the Service.
- Liaising with the MAIC to understand local impacts and outbreaks.
- Provide returns to the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) on the impact COVID-19 was having on CFRS.
- Engagement and consultation with representative bodies.
- Active engagement and support to the Community Hub.
- Formulate a strategy document to follow should the impact become unmanageable and we could not sustain our full crewing models. This included the use of retired or personnel who had left the Service as well as a reduction in number of appliances being crewed.

Support Cell - the COVID-19 support cell is responsible for the gathering and promulgation of information to ensure continuance of a timely supply of specialist COVID-19 PPE and related products for an unknown period of time, all key products and services across the Service and the timely receipt and delivery of same. It also ensured that, where permissible and reasonably practicable, business as usual is maintained and any potential risks and issues are acted up. The cell has;

- Ensured there is a hub of knowledge in relation to COVID-19 specialist PPE and consumables.
- Maintained contact with other agencies in relation to specific advice in relation to COVID-19.
- Maintained contact with key suppliers to review their BC arrangements.
- Ensured sufficient amounts of PPE items are available through identification of optimum stock levels over the period of this pandemic.
- Complied with and supported Government, NFCC and other agencies reporting requirements on status of specialist PPE and products and associated costs incurred.
- Identified lessons learnt as a result of the BC activities in relation to contracts and procurement function and wider service in relation to supply of goods and services to learn from in the future.
- Identified and quantified risks associated with the recovery phase in relation to the procurement of goods and services including external training.

Recovery Cell - the overarching recovery cell was formed to report back on the recovery work streams and give strategic oversight to five of the recovery sub groups which are; service improvement, economic, structures, business recovery and people and culture.

4.5 Highlights during COVID-19 Response

- **Impact on IRMP** - we have seen limited to no impact on our IRMP measures for response times and other areas within the IRMP such as the delivery of the new turntable ladders, the Huntingdon move to St John's and the ICCS and Mobilisation Projects.
- **On-Call and Wholetime Recruits Course** - we have delivered (as planned) our initial 2020 recruits course for 16 personnel joining the wholetime group. We were also able to deliver our On-Call planned recruits course in May. Our second cohort of 15 wholetime recruits has also joined the Service supporting our succession planning and to maintain our establishment.
- **Assessment Processes** - we have been able to deliver (as planned) all of our promotion processes including a wholetime transferee process, again allowing individuals to seek development and promotion across all ranks from Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) to Firefighter (FF).
- **Community Hub** - as part of the Community Hub we used On-Call colleagues as well as professional support staff to provide support to the requests from the Hub. This included visiting 356 homes of extremely clinically vulnerable members of the community, as well as fitting face masks (PPE) in clinical care settings.
- **East England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST) Support** - our driver training team were seconded to provide 24 driving assessments to allow ambulance staff to drive non blue light ambulances. We also seconded 10 of our On-Call personnel to drive ambulances to approximately 2260 emergency calls over the eight week secondments. We also seconded one wholetime FF back to EEAST as a paramedic (previous role before becoming a FF to support their COVID-19 response for 12 weeks).

- **Staff Engagement** – through our daily bulletins and staff surveys we have ensured consistent and transparent communication through our response to COVID-19.
- **Testing Arrangements** – We have a single point of contact for employee testing. We also have access to the employers’ portal which allows us to gain priority tests for our staff and their families as required. We have seen approximately 100 personnel (including family members) sent for testing since the start of lock down.
- **Staff Wellbeing** – We have formulated a people and culture recovery sub group that focuses heavily on employee health and wellbeing. Letters on the subject of mental health and wellbeing, including signposting of where to find support, were sent to all employees and letters to those employees with children were sent (to the children) thanking them for supporting their parents whilst they were working from home. A wellbeing section on the intranet was created with links to support services/information and helplines. The Occupational Health Unit has seen all personnel who returned from shielding before they returned to work. We now have COVID-19 secure workplaces to allow staff, who wish to do so, come back into the workplace in a safe and secure manner.

5. Transition to Recovery

5.1 As the national guidance relaxed lock down measures, CFRS started to transition its response to recovery. This group has developed a recovery strategy with a focus on risk assessments and engagement with the representative bodies and staff to ensure areas of the business were turned back on safely and securely.

5.2 **Recovery Focus** – the current areas of focus for the recovery group are;

Crewing - how we return safely to the principles of our wholetime shift pattern.

COVID-19 Secure Workplaces - ensuring all of our premises are COVID-19 secure in line with national government guidance (for example, risk assessments, individual premises COVID-19 secure assurance document, hand sanitisers, floor stickers and one way systems).

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) COVID-19 Inspection - preparation for the COVID-19 inspection in October 2020; the self-assessment for HMICFRS also went before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the submission process. Please see Paragraph 6 below.

Community Fire Safety/Technical Fire Safety - these core activities have been ongoing throughout COVID-19 and have been delivered by our Community Safety and Fire Protection Officers respectively. New ways of working have been identified and are being considered as we turn these activities safely back on for our operational crews.

Training (Operational Training, On-Call Drill Nights) - On-Call drill nights have been turned back on for some time but core training courses delivered by Training Centre are now also back to business as usual. This includes the use of off-site training venues with associated risk assessments.

Economic Recovery Costs - CFRS was given a COVID-19 government grant of circa £750,000; we have tracked our spending and at the time of writing this report have utilised the amounts in the table below to support our COVID-19 response.

1	Personal Protective Equipment	£271,780.14
2	Cleaning and contamination supplies	£111,158.75
3	Other protective equipment	£59,753.80
4	ICT infrastructure and licencing	£86,823.00
5	Other costs excluding protective equipment	£13,788.38
6	Fleet and equipment	£5,185.00
TOTAL SPEND TO DATE		£548,489.07

5.3 Recovery Summary

We have continued to engage with staff and representative bodies to listen to feedback, ensuring we capture positive ways of working (driven by working differently during COVID-19) and areas of learning that we can continue to review and action to improve the service delivery.

The senior leadership team are fully embedded into the wider local COVID-19 response groups and actively monitor data produced by PHE ensuring oversight of transmission rates within the districts of Cambridgeshire. This active monitoring will enable us to react to any change in local risk across the county in a timely manner, ensuring the safety of our staff.

5.4 Lessons Learnt

Feedback has been sought via two staff surveys during COVID-19 and a wider lessons learned document developed by leaders of the work stream groups. Highlights from this feedback and areas of improvement include;

- Improvement to virtual meeting software and the hardware available at stations to improve communication.
- Enhancement in remote working arrangements, for example more laptops available for staff working remotely.
- Development of a single strand of communication to limit a large amount of communication coming from different areas of the Service.
- Streamlining the mechanism for procuring and understanding the importance of pre planning for PPE and equipment that has enabled us to safely respond throughout COVID-19.
- The importance of engaging with the Business, Performance and Intelligence team earlier, to help support reporting in an automated way.
- Information Governance and Data Protection to be considered as part of all decision making processes.
- Automation of processes to allow a more efficient and effective way of working via our in-house Service Transformation and Efficiency Programme (STEP).

5.5 Changes to Ways of Working post COVID-19

Below are some examples of how we will utilise our response to COVID-19 to learn and improve our ways of working across key areas of the service.

Prevention and Protection Activities

- Enhanced information sharing with key partners - there are many areas where this will continue. The COVID-19 response has meant we have been able to access more granular data that can be used to overlay and support our existing data sets to inform our understanding about vulnerability across our communities.
- Considered use of technology - accepting that some prevention and protection work is most effective when delivered face to face such as interventions and high risk safe and well visits, we will continue to review effective technological alternatives for some of our initiatives.
- Enhanced regional working - a good example of this is our Area Commander for Prevention, Protection and Resilience chairing the Eastern Region Prevention Committee. Being aligned regionally has allowed the sharing of risk assessments when returning operational staff to undertaking prevention/protection activities.

People

- Working from home/remote working - not underestimating the importance of face to face connections, providing this flexibility increases efficiency and reduces the impact on the environment.
- Virtual meetings - continue the use of Skype, Teams and Zoom as ways of holding team meetings when face to face is not required.
- Training - continue to use webinars to further support training delivery and support our operational crews. Further use of this technology could see us hold webinars as a way of training external businesses.
- Changing the way we deliver our Combined Fire Control (CFC) initial training course. Changing the initial course which had a large impact on the control room from seven to three and a half weeks, focusing more heavily on emergency call handling and getting them engaged and on to watches in CFC quicker.
- Continued focus on staff wellbeing - we will continue to invest time and resource in improving the support we offer to **all** our employees.

6. Member Involvement

- 6.1 Throughout our COVID-19 response Members have been updated on key decisions and progress through regular internal communications and Officer updates with the Fire Authority Chairman.
- 6.2 In August 2020 the Service received notification that HMICFRS had been commissioned to inspect the response by all fire and rescue services to the COVID-19 pandemic. A pre inspection requirement was to fill out a self-assessment based on our COVID-19 response. On behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillors McGuire and Gardener met (virtually) with Area Commander Parker to provide feedback on the self-assessment content, prior to submission.
- 6.3 On 23 September 2020, a Member seminar was held to provide the wider Authority with details of COVID-19 activities and the related HMICFRS inspection. This was an opportunity not only to provide the then available

information but for Members to discuss the content whilst also gaining assurance the Service was meeting its (legal) obligations during the pandemic.

- 6.4 CFRS was inspected and the Fire Authority Chairman interviewed during week commencing 5 October 2020. It is anticipated that the Authority will receive a letter, with an ungraded assessment, detailing the opinion of HMICFRS on the Service response to the COVID-19 pandemic before the end of the calendar year.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Source Documents	Location	Contact Officer
Business Continuity Plan	Stored on CFRS ICT System DMS#593753	Area Commander Chris Parker
Strategic Resource Planning Strategy	Stored on CFRS ICT System DMS#592187	Group Commander Stuart Smith
Recovery Strategy	Stored on CFRS ICT System DMS#593461	Head of Service Transformation Tamsin Mirfin
COVID-19 Secure Workplace Strategy	Stored on CFRS ICT System DMS#597996	
Business Continuity Meeting Agenda and Action Log	Stored on CFRS ICT System DMS#591023	Executive Assistant Caz Lee
CPLRF Pandemic Flu Plan	Stored on Resilience Direct	Area Commander Chris Parker
COVID-19 Lessons Learnt	Stores on CFRS ICT System DMS#592340	Head of Service Transformation Tamsin Mirfin