



Report to the Police Fire and Crime Panel – 13 July 2020

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service – COVID-19 Update

Report of the Staffordshire Commissioner

1. Purpose

To update the Panel on the response of the Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis.

2. Recommendation

That the Panel note the update on response to the Covid-19 crisis and make comment, or raise issues that should be addressed by the service, or by the Commissioner (as the Fire and Rescue Authority)

3. Introduction

This paper sets out to detail the work that Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service have been involved in delivering during the COVID19 pandemic period to date. This pandemic has impacted upon all areas of society and has meant that SFRS had to adapt quickly to new ways of working and Service delivery. The work has been complex and cut across numerous partner organisations and government departments locally, regionally, and nationally. SFRS have committed resources from across the whole of the Service area in order to support our communities to stay safe and to protect the NHS.

At the time of writing (1st June) the activities that SFRS have been involved in range from food parcel deliveries to the most vulnerable to storage and distribution of emergency Personal Protective Equipment for frontline Health care professionals and care workers. In addition deliveries of essential items such as hand sanitiser, and general household items, to community members have been completed by a range of staff from operational crews through to our community support officers.

The Fire Service have been delivering PPE out to Primary Care, Hospices and independent Hospitals since late March 2020, they have visited nearly 450 locations and delivered 142,280 masks, 114,700 aprons, 5,054 sets of eye protection, 190,730 gloves and 944 bottles of hand sanitiser helping keeping people safe and able to continue to deliver care.

Approximately 650 food parcels/deliveries have been made during this time and our teams have engaged with individuals to ensure that they remain safe during the lockdown period.

SFRS have also supported the national effort by conducting 618 vulnerable person visits at addresses where individuals who were identified as at most risk reside, we took the opportunity to provide home safety information at each of these visits.

As part Staffordshire County Councils response to COVID-19 an emergency PPE provision was established to support care providers across Staffordshire have access to PPE in emergency to ensure no care provider should go without access to PPE. The council set up 8 district hub locations in partnership with Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service to hold provisions to support care providers to ensure ease of access 24/7 as needed. To date the council has dispatched over 1 million items of PPE to support the response and over a quarter of this has been managed from providers attending fire stations to collect emergency PPE provision. Fire officers have worked hard to support these efforts ensuring the right PPE could be accessed by a range of providers and other care settings. These hubs have also supported recent emergency PPE packs to over 2200 Education and early years settings ready for the wider opening of these settings from the 1st June.

Although the lockdown has impacted upon the Service in terms of our prevention and protection initiatives SFRS have changed some of the working arrangements to ensure that we were still able to deal with prevention/protection on an immediate risk to life basis.

These include the changes to the way in which the safe and sound schools education program is being delivered. This is now an online teaching programme delivery safety awareness delivered via webcast where children can still interact with the deliverers.

On Line Safe+Sound facts and figures from weeks one and two

Week 1

Number of page visits from 6am - 3.15pm yesterday = 6,047

Number of people watching the live event = 1,272

Number of messages on the LIVE CHAT = 766

Top 3 viewing locations

Birmingham, Stafford, Keele (The top locations were 94.6% of viewing population)

Total minutes viewed = 19,073

Average watch time = 15 minutes

Week 2: (HALF TERM WEEK)

Number of page visits on the 13th May = 4,688

Number of people watching the live event = 1,458

Top 3 viewing locations

Birmingham, Stafford, Keele (The top locations were 95.7% of viewing population)

Total minutes viewed = 22,142

Average watch time = 17.2 minutes

Staffordshire Schools that we know are engaged (from Live Chat or feedback received);

- James Bateman
- St Marys
- TGS
- Forsbrook Primary

- St Wulstan's Catholic Prmy
- Longford
- St Marys in Norton
- St Johns Primary Stafford
- Our Lady of Grace
- Ball Green Primary
- St Marys in Norton
- Dosthill
- Landywood
- Our Lady of Grace
- Thomas Barns
- Churnet View
- Flash Ley

4. Background

Following a multi-agency strategic assessment meeting (SAM) instigated by the Civil Contingencies Unit on 4 March 2020 and Chaired by Public Health England (PHE) the service instigated its Incident Preplanning and Logistics Framework setting up a tactical planning cell to support the services response to the pandemic. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), NHS England, Public Health England, The Home Office (HO), The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and other Staffordshire Resilience Forum (SRF) partners through the Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) have provided guidance throughout the period which the Service has considered in terms of its ongoing arrangements to support its statutory duties.

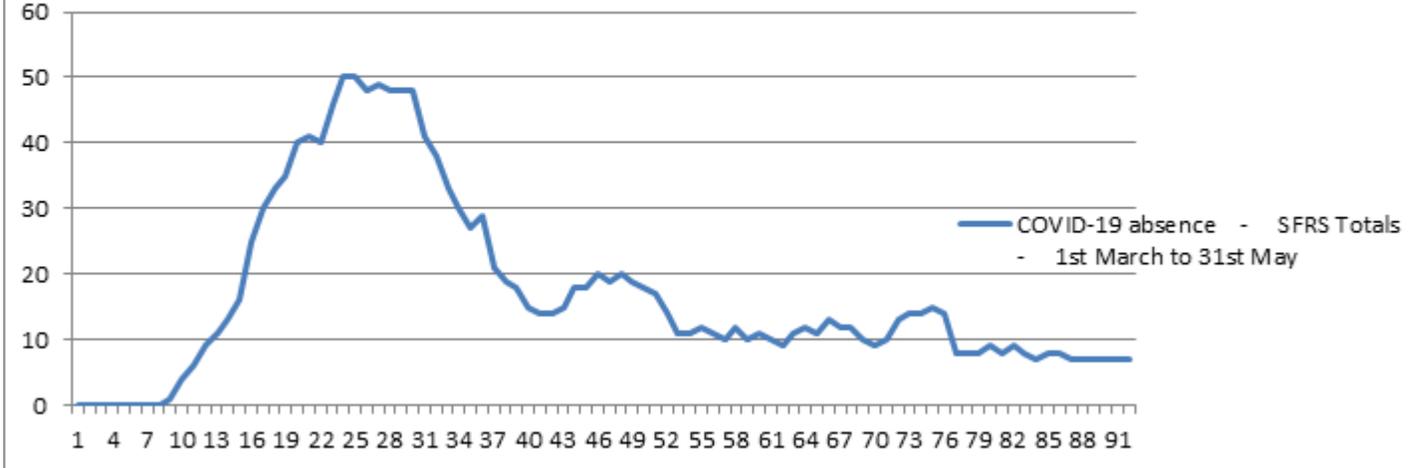
In line with Government implementation of the phases of contain, delay, mitigate and research, the Service aligned its implementation of its existing and ongoing revisions of the Business Continuity Plans to the NFCC Strategic intent to 'Delay' and 'Mitigate' the impact of COVID-19 across the UK in order to protect our communities.

It has to be recognised that there has been a significant impact upon SFRS from the work required related to the COVID19 pandemic. This additional work has been coordinated through the established pre planning and logistics framework within Service which has been chaired by the duty principle officer throughout the pandemic period. This ensures that strategic leadership is clear and that decision making is expedient.

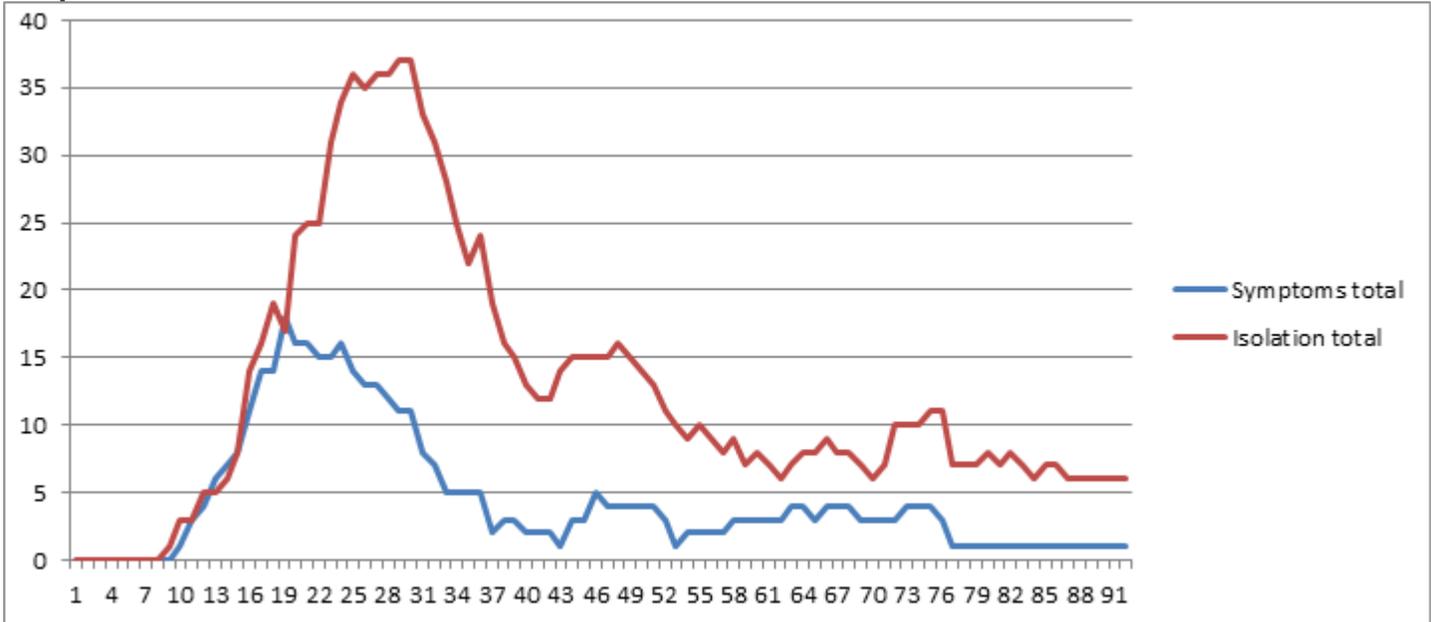
This cell covers a number of operational work-streams and the group were updated upon service availability and sickness due to COVID19 at each meeting, this information allowed the Service to understand and act upon the available resources throughout the pandemic period. The graphs below provide information regarding absence of Service personnel, which as you will see have remained fairly low throughout the duration of the pandemic to date. The actions that the service took early in the outbreak in terms of requiring people to work from home, closing down of the headquarters site, and to strictly adhering to social distancing guidance have had the positive impact upon sickness levels that the Service expected.

Graph 1

COVID-19 absence - SFRS Totals - 1st March to 31st May



Graph 2



The Fire and Rescue Sector has demonstrated that it is flexible in its approach and through negotiations at a national level via the NFCC has agreed to carry out tasks that are outside of the traditional role for the Fire Service in order to support the National effort. Outside of normal business and specifically relating to the COVID response, the NFCC LGA and Representative bodies agreed a set of principles under which the Service could provide support.

These principles as highlighted in the latest version of the tripartite agreement.

- Ambulance Service assistance: Ambulance Driving and Patient/Ambulance personnel support limited to current competence (Not additional FRS First or Co-Responding)
- Vulnerable persons – delivery of essential items
- COVID-19 – Mass casualty (Movement of bodies)

- Face Fitting for masks to be used by frontline NHS and clinical care staff working with Covid-19 patients
- Delivery of PPE and other medical supplies to NHS and care facilities
- Assisting in taking samples for Covid-19 antigen testing
- Driving ambulance transport not on blue-lights (excluding known Covid-19 patients) to outpatient appointments or to receive urgent care
- Driving Instruction by FRS driver trainers to deliver training for non-Service personnel to drive ambulances (not on blue-lights)
- The assembly of single use face shields for the NHS and care work front line staff
- Packing/Repacking food supplies for Vulnerable people
- Known or suspected Covid-19 Patients: transfer to and from Nightingale hospitals under emergency response (blue light) or through non-emergency patient transfer (not on blue lights)
- Non-Covid-19 Patients: Transfer to and from Nightingale hospitals under emergency response (blue light) or through non-emergency patient transfer (not on blue lights) – this includes recovering and recuperating patients no longer infected with Covid 19.
- Delivery of pre-designed training packages on Infection Prevention and Control, including hand, hygiene, PPE 'donning' & 'doffing' guidance and procedures; and supporting the care home staff testing by training care home staff to teach others or direct to care home staff

These Nationally agreed areas for consideration have led to a number of activities within Staffordshire being requested and as such from the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) perspective SFRS have been supporting partners in a number of ways which have been based on outcomes from the Strategic Coordination Group.

The Services response was as follows

- Risk assessments and guidance developed for all partnership activities
- Delivery of extra PPE and supplies to doctors surgeries by Business Support Team
- Chairing of the mutual aid/resource group and supporting the work of this group with a manager.
- Membership of the Vulnerable and Volunteers Group and through this allocating 20 staff, to contribute to proactively calling vulnerable members of our community to identify their needs
- Provision of hubs at eight fire stations for up to 24 hr access to supply emergency PPE for SCC health and care workers and storage of food parcels
- Storage of LRF/MHCLG PPE supplies for distribution to partners on request
- Provision of staff to support mortality management planning including offer of fork lift truck driver qualifications amongst fire staff and daily management of facility
- Provision of staff to carry out welfare visits to vulnerable persons
- Provision of staff and resources to support delivery of food parcels from fire stations on referral
- Additional use of community safety officers to provide weekly food parcels to persons following NHS hospital to home discharge. Individuals CSO are allocated to specific households for continuity and welfare.

- Preplanning for possible additional incident support to WMAS over and above bariatric rescues and gaining entry such as Aerosol Generating Procedures (AGP) and cardiac/falls response
- Re focus on FREC training, additional PPE/decontamination procedures and driver licenses/qualifications for potential support to WMAS relating to patient transfer
- Involvement in Recovery Co-ordinating Group (Rec CG) linked to Government guidance of return to new normal
- Consideration given to use of some fire stations as overflow from predetermined sites for wider public testing
- Consideration to face shield assembly and packing /repacking of food supplies
- Allocation of loggists for each SCG (twice per week)
- Working with PFI Facilities management to support community needs and any requests managed through Fire Service
- Considering bulk storage options for PPE on behalf of the LRF for any future second wave outbreak or mass fatality planning at fire service locations
- Working to enable any public donations of PPE and welfare in accordance with service and LRF policy guidance to support the LRF priorities
- Provision of body movement kits in advance of anticipated excess demand
- Visiting and delivering letters to 926 households who have not been able to be contacted at all in relation to shielding or have not registered via the national shielding helpline. This will confirm contact details , verify the household is still occupied by the vulnerable person(s) support registration to give access to additional support and enable a safe and well visit to be arranged if required

5. Financial Implications

The fire and rescue sector have been allocated with grant funding of just over £1 million from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in order for the Service to deal with the additional costs incurred as a result of the pandemic. This funding being part of the overall £3.2 billion allocated to support local authorities by MHCLG. During the year regular reporting against this grant will be provided to the Home Office with the first return issued in May 2020 forecasting additional costs of around £0.5 million to 30 September 2020.

Whilst funding to deal with the pandemic has been provided it is anticipated that there will significant financial implications into the medium term due to a reduction in council tax collection, a lower council tax base and also a reduction in funding from local business rates. Estimates will be incorporated into the scheduled updated of the MTFS in October which will be presented to the Panel.

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