



Item No. on Agenda

Report to the Police Fire and Crime Panel

26th October 2020

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service COVID19 Update

INTRODUCTION

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.

Since the last update to the panel in June 2020 the Service have continued to be fully involved in all aspects of the multi-agency commitment and have participated in both the strategic coordination group and the recovery coordination group in order to influence and support the ongoing Local Resilience Forum approach.

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. As the service has progressed through the pandemic period these meetings have been scheduled on an “as required” basis and following each Government announcement regarding significant changes to guidance.

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. This tripartite agreement is now in its 13 version and is constantly being developed to include additional work that the sector are being asked to undertake in certain areas. The tripartite approach has meant that whenever a new activity is considered it follows an agreed process related to risk assessing the activities prior to launching them.

Therefore, for existing Covid-19 activities or when a new Covid-19 activity is introduced, the use of the Tripartite developed national risk assessments provided for each activity is viewed as best practice and any necessary local variations will be agreed through the local health and safety structures. SFRS have been fully involved in the development of these national risk assessments and have acted as a critical friend during the development stages.

As the restrictions for the national lockdown were eased many business starting trading and workplaces opened. The fire safety teams supported business reopen safely and gave advice on how to make premises safe and Covid compliant. Particular focus was given to the hospitality sector, but high risk building audits were also carried out. Over 80 building audits were carried out by telephone and advice was given but also over 20 full audits were undertaken.

Additionally, building consultations, licencing and follow up inspections were carried out. Ongoing developments in the national shielding scheme saw a reduction in the number of clinically extremely vulnerable people who were isolating. There continued to be a demand

across the county for support in various forms to be provided to vulnerable residents, the support mechanisms to communicate with and provide support to these people continued. There is ongoing activity to ensure that there are arrangements in place should the shielding scheme be reinstated, or local lockdown measures are introduced. In addition the prevention teams have continued to deliver services to the most vulnerable and have delivered over 900 (923) full safe and well visits, and 975 telephone or short visits which include the alarm drop off as described in the previous update.

In terms of recovery and restoration the service have undertaken a number of tasks which are detailed below:

The restoration and recovery work-stream was established early on 5th May to sit within the existing SFRS COVID-19 tactical cell. At this time the UK was still subject to the national lockdown measures imposed on 23rd March. The primary focus of the LRF remained the response effort through the various other extant work-streams. SFRS has attended virtual bi-weekly meetings of the NFCC Business Continuity Group to receive and share best practice with the sector. Following the release of the initial HM Government 'Working Safely During the Coronavirus Outbreak' guidance, the restoration and recovery cell worked with key stakeholders, in particular the Health & Safety Department to produce a series of four premises risk assessments covering HQ, all station, JETS and CCU. In addition to this, a bespoke SFRS workplace guidance document was created, in pursuit of 'Covid Secure' status for SFRS premises (published 17th June). This was some weeks prior to the release of sector-specific guidance from the NFCC.

The necessary signage and equipment (hand sanitiser stations, high-level disinfectant, safety screens etc) were procured and distributed to all sites to be used in conjunction with the workplace guidance. Following implementation of the above guidance and control measures, staff were encouraged to return to the workplace from 6th July.

A 'Roadmap of Restoration' was published and shared with staff, outlining the key organisation milestones in returning to a 'new normal' (subject to the continued decline in case numbers within the community). This allowed some return of prevent and protect activities during the intervening period.

The Business Continuity Plan has been continually updated in light of learning and best practice throughout. A series of service-wide alert levels were shared with staff, with delivery group leads and department heads asked to write their own specific actions for their areas of responsibility, to allow the service to flex its approach to service delivery in response to an increase or decrease in case numbers.

A Restoration subgroup was established through the LRF to report multi-agency impacts as a result of the easing of lockdown restrictions. This operated for several weeks and was then mothballed as it was agreed that all items at that time could be dealt with under normal business for the organisations concerned.

In addition to the activities described above SFRS have continued to provide weekly reporting on additional activities carried out under the tripartite agreement to the NFCC. SFRS personnel have continued the twice-weekly LRF pulse reports (now weekly as of 28th Sep) for the purposes of informing the SCG. In addition to this the service has continued to report to the NFCC on PPE and consumables and this information has been reported to the Home Office on PPE consumables and testing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Police Fire and Crime Panel note:

- a) The work that SFRS have delivered during the COVID19 pandemic to date

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