

Report of the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority (CFA) - 7 September 2015

1. Chairmen's Acknowledgement

The Authority gave thanks to Mr Max Winterbottom for his valued work and dedication in the role of Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Authority since 2005 and wished him well in his retirement at the end of September 2015.

2. Community First Responder Scheme Launch

The Authority received a presentation from the Deputy Chief Fire Officer who was pleased to announce that after much work between Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service (LFRS) and North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) and their respective trade unions the first National Joint Council approved Community Responder Pilot in the country had been agreed in Lancashire. On 24 August 2015, fire crews in Morecambe and Ormskirk formally started operating the pilot, which after 6 months would be reviewed with a view to extending the initiative to other areas across Lancashire.

Members viewed a video which had been produced for the launch of the Scheme which had received good media coverage and which was accessible from the following link: <https://vimeo.com/137256138>.

Firefighters would be mobilised by NWAS to 'Red 1' and 'Red 2' (serious and life-threatening) medical emergencies simultaneously alongside Ambulance crews if they were closer to a patient than an ambulance when the call came through. In the event of a fire call while on the way to a medical incident, the LFRS appliance would be redirected to respond to the fire. The crews involved in the Scheme had received a high standard of life support training and were able to respond using blue lights. The crews had additional medical equipment and carried oxygen in addition to the defibrillator already installed on all appliances.

Since the Scheme had commenced the Service had attended 45 calls across the 2 stations involved. Feedback so far had been very positive from both members of the public and NWAS staff. A formal report would be brought to Members at a future meeting for a decision on whether to extend the pilot.

3. Breaking and Entry Pilot

The Authority was advised that the Service was responding as part of another pilot in association with NWAS, replacing the Police when the Ambulance Service required access to a casualty given they did not have powers to effect an entry. This pilot involved all fire stations and had commenced 6 weeks ago.

The first quarter activity, which was reported recently to the Performance Committee under the Service's Key Performance Indicator for Preventing and Protecting, showed there had been 69 occasions during the first quarter of 2015/16 where the Service had gained entry. The Service's response time had been between 6½ – 8 minutes whereas the average Police response time had been 24 minutes. In addition the Service was entering in a way which better left the premises secure. On occasions the Service had arrived before the Ambulance Service therefore, should the community first responder scheme be rolled out across the Service this would complement that work very well.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the Service took a risk based approach and that there was a risk in doing both the pilots. There could be occasions when fire engines might be unavailable to attend a fire from the nearest station due to undertaking the additional activity and in these situations the fire engine would be despatched from the next nearest station. The benefits however, of responding to the additional activities outweighed this risk. Also as a consequence of this extra workload there would also be an increase in incident numbers which would be reflected in the Service's performance information.

4. Fire Related Prosecutions

Under this item Area Manager Phil Cox updated the Authority on the support the Service was giving to private rented sector landlords to ensure they were ready for the new regulations which made it compulsory for all landlords to fit smoke alarms in rented homes. The regulations were expected to come into effect from October 2015, subject to Parliamentary approval. Under the new laws, smoke alarms must be fitted on every floor of the property as well as carbon monoxide alarms in properties which burned solid fuels. Landlords must check the alarms were working at the start of every new tenancy with potential penalties for non-compliance of up to £5,000.

To support local landlords to improve the safety of their tenants a new dedicated business support plus section had been created on the Service's website. This explained what landlords needed to do to make their properties safer from fire risk, carbon monoxide and other hazards and provided completely free access to a comprehensive, fully mobile enabled and intuitive online fire risk assessment. This provided a one-stop-shop tool to assess risk, evidence precautions taken by uploading photographs and storing relevant certification and documents all in one place online. Registration on the site enabled private rented property landlords to access a limited number of free smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors that had been supplied to LFRS by the government. Members viewed the site which could be accessed via the following link: <http://www.lancsbusinessplus.org.uk/>. In addition the Service was running area business forums throughout Business Safety Week (7 – 14 September 2015) to publicise this and provide advice.

5. Community Fire Safety Reports

Under this item the Area Manager Ben Norman updated the Authority on the Services' response to a 4-storey building collapsed at Wood Flour Mills on Tunstall Road in Bosley, Cheshire on 17 July 2015 where, following explosions there were large fires at the scene and people reported missing. The Service provided assistance through its Urban Search and Rescue Team (USAR) based at Bamber Bridge and Chorley stations whose staff were mobilised to support Manchester Fire and Rescue Service at the major incident. The team consisted of a Station Manager, 10 USAR team members, specialist equipment and the canine unit. In Lancashire, the logistics were managed by a small incident room to ensure adequate cover and relief for the staff both in Cheshire and in Lancashire at the Bamber Bridge and Chorley stations. This was the largest USAR deployment in the country since the inception of national resilience arrangements. One of the main constraints was the surrounding dangers from burning silos and unstable structures. It was a real test of the resilience and operational planning arrangements. The team brought back a lot of learning which would be evaluated and which would inform future training policy thereby making any future responses more effective.

FRANK DE MOLFETTA
Chairman

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