

**The Highland and Islands Fire Board
Integrated Risk Management Planning Working Group**

Minutes of Meeting of the **Integrated Risk Management Planning Working Group** held in Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Harbour Road, Inverness on Friday, 6 November 2009, at 11.40 a.m.

Present:

Representing the Highland Council: Mr R Durham
Dr A Sinclair
Mr D Fallows

Also in attendance: Mrs L Munro
Ms I Campbell
Ms M Smith
Mr J Ford

Representing Comhairle nan Eilean Siar: Mr I MacKenzie

Representing Orkney Islands Council: Mr A Drever

Representing Shetland Islands Council: Mr A Duncan

Officials in attendance:

Mr T Johnson, Temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Mr S Hay, Acting Area Manager, Community Risk Management
Ms L Lee, Clerk's Office

Mr R Durham in the Chair

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Flear, Mrs H Carmichael and Mr D Fallows of the Highland Council.

All other Board Members also having been invited by the Convener to attend the meeting, apologies for absence were also intimated on behalf of Mr D Mackay, Mrs M Paterson, Mr E Hunter, Mrs P Munro, Mr D Henderson, Mr J Gray, and Mr R Balfour of the Highland Council; Mr N M MacLeod, Mr C Nicolson and Mr P Carlin of Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar; Mr B Leslie of Orkney Islands Council; and Mr A Cooper of Shetland Islands Council.

2. Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Risk Review – Stage II(a)

As agreed at the Board meeting in September, there had been circulated Report No. IRMP6/09 dated 28 October 2009 by the Chief Fire Officer setting out the IRMP Risk Review Stage II(a) Sustainability Report.

In speaking to the report, the Temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer (TACFO) advised that the IRMP Risk review was continuing, with the Stage II(a) information having been produced to facilitate performance improvements internally, and with stations being informed of their performance levels against appropriate targets and in relation to other stations' performance on an ongoing basis. Where a station's combined sustainability score was a cause for concern, the reasons behind this were investigated – each station was different.

Crew confidence levels were being taken as a significant indicator of sustainability. For health and safety reasons, a minimum crew of 4 was required to attend an emergency incident. To provide cover 24/7, an establishment level of an absolute minimum of 6 was required, but experience had shown that, for the majority of stations, to allow an appropriate work/life balance for crew members to be maintained, a figure of nearer 10 -12 was desirable. The message was being taken to Communities that local people were needed to serve as retained fire fighters if appropriate levels of service were to continue into the future.

Members' attention was drawn to Appendix 2 of the report, which showed how often stations had failed to turn out to an emergency incident, current establishment levels, and the amount of time a vehicle had been booked "off the run" and the reasons for this. Figures for the past 6 months which showed a failure rate of >10% were investigated, with previous history being taken into consideration in the overall reporting / performance improvement process. As a general comparison it could be noted that there was a correlation between the stations with a >10% failure rate and low establishment numbers.

In explaining the graphs in the circulated papers, the TACFO cautioned that a low number of incidents could skew figures when these were given in percentage terms – a failure rate of 1 would appear as 50% should there have only been 2 incidents. For all stations the public expectation was that a response to an emergency incident would be provided.

Consideration of the relationships between stations – e.g. how back-up appliances were mobilised and relocated following a call-out, in order to provide continuing cover should there be another incident in the same area – would be considered under Stage III of the process (item 3 refers). However, it was foreseeable that, where there were several stations exhibiting performance concerns in a restricted geographical area, there was the potential for this to cause difficulties. Data was being continually updated to provide a sound basis on which to base recommendations arising from Stage III of the process.

In response to questions raised and suggestions made, information given to Members included that:

- whilst it was theoretically possible for a crew of 3 to attend an incident which was already being responded to by a crew of 6, this could cause severe safety concerns if the crew of 3 arrived first, or if the appliance, whilst responding or on the return journey, was redirected to another incident
- retained fire fighters were required to live within 5 minutes of the Fire Station; picking up fire fighters en route was unreliable and could become extremely complex and was therefore not encouraged; however, if the

nearest alternative appliance was some distance away and there were no other recruits, the 5 minute requirement could be extended, if this provided the best cover considering potentially extended response times from other stations

- the TACFO would investigate the reasons why the Boat of Garten CRU had only been called out twice although there had been a high number of wildfire incidents in the area
- helicopters were not considered a practical solution to reaching remote properties: it took time to scramble the crew, weight restrictions often applied, and finding a landing site could be difficult – on balance it was likely that an appliance would reach the incident more quickly than a helicopter; this did not provide best value, particularly when the significant additional costs were taken into consideration
- a long term view was required in relation to recruitment of unemployed people and young people Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET); considerable investment was made into training fire fighters and consideration had to be given as to whether a potential recruit would remain in the Fire Service for a reasonable length of time
- the minimum age for a recruit was 18 and usual retirement age would be before the 65th birthday, due to the physical demands required to undertake fire fighting.

Members also commented on the possible impact of adverse weather conditions on turn-out times, and drew attention to the commendable fact that there were 56 crews which had never failed to turn out.

For information, the TACFO updated Members on the progress of the visits to those stations named in Stage II of the Risk Review process. The TACFO and the Convener had already visited Eigg, Muck, Torridon and Minginish, holding community meetings. These had been well attended and positive and had given rise to a number of new applications which were now being processed. Flotta and Foula were to be visited on 18 November. Members would be kept apprised of progress. Area Commanders and District staff were also visiting the stations as appropriate.

The Working Group **NOTED** the report and the information given.

3. IRMP Risk Review – Stage III

The TACFO reminded Members of the decisions taken by the previous Board at its meeting on 24 November 2005 and endorsed by the current Board on 14 September 2007, which had shaped the direction that the IRMP Risk Review had taken to date:

“Members were unwilling to see sustainable stations closed on the basis of the Fire Services Emergency Cover computer model data (FSEC) but, without prejudice, accepted that consideration could be given to:

- a) changing the role of stations where these were unsustainable (e.g. where not enough recruits could be found or where appropriate cover could not be provided)
- b) changing the role of stations on the basis of identified risk;

- c) relocation of resources from multi-pump stations;
- d) the creation of new retained stations; and
- e) increasing revenue expenditure above current levels.”

Matters had progressed since 2005 and the TACFO now sought direction from the Board as to how the IRMP review should be further developed to inform the coming 5 years. Examples of areas for consideration included:

- Operational considerations – the ability to respond to expected incidents and to larger incidents, resilience in spate conditions (floods etc.)
- Changing Community Risk – the reduction of risk within communities

The TACFO gave a presentation outlining the items which might be considered during the Risk Review Stage III. The presentation illustrated the geographical areas which could be reached by an appliance in varying timescales, together with the distribution of incidents (fires and Road Traffic Incidents). Main stations required to remain in the centres of population, but, for more rural areas, the decision was less clear-cut – factors such as the size of the potential recruitment pool, the area risk profile, and the length of time for the nearest appliance to arrive were important considerations.

The distribution of intervention resources should also consider future developments – e.g. a major expansion of domestic and business properties was proposed along the A96 corridor between Inverness and Nairn. Resulting from this it might prove beneficial to consider the relocation of resources in the Inverness area.

The FSEC model identified areas of high fire risk (residences with lone pensioners and rented accommodation), and could be used to predict the impact of repositioning of resources in terms of frequency of lives saved. For example, it was possible to assess the impact of hypothetically moving the second appliance at Invergordon to Alness.

Resilience (response to major incidents) was also an important consideration, as distances between stations in the Board's area could be large. To maximise use of resources, stations should be positioned to provide a network of cover in a radial pattern, but, due to some settlement patterns, such as along the linear North East Coast of Highland, this was not always possible. Siting of stations at the end of a peninsula provided the least support to a network.

To date, efficiency savings had funded work to reduce fire risk such as Home Fire Safety Checks and road risk reduction measures, as well as promoting youth engagement to help change future attitudes. However, if this valued area of work, which contributed significantly to reducing risk, was to continue into the future, detailed consideration would be required during the budget setting process.

From the Fire Scotland Act, the Service was also being asked to consider the provision of an appropriate response to additional types of incidents (e.g. water rescue activities, new dimensions response, rescue from height etc) and in the majority of cases, additional resources had not been allocated. A balance might therefore need to be found which considered how stations in low risk areas could be maintained whilst striving to provide improved resources in areas of higher risk. IRMP data would help inform decisions in this regard.

The Service would also need to assess the numbers of staff required to support the delivery of an effective and modern fire and rescue service. A large element of this would be the numbers of staff required to provide effective training.

Given the above, it would be useful to expand the 2005 framework informing the direction of IRMP work, to include the following additional areas:

- f) levels of changing (increasing) risk;
- g) the long term sustainability of stations and their respective performance levels;
- h) the most appropriate intervention resource allocation, which should also include a resilience element; and
- i) allocation of other resources to reduce risk, whether external (in the community) or internal (staff development).

A number of points were then made in discussion, including that:

- the suggested additions seemed appropriate, but it would be useful for Members to have additional time and further information in order to consider the implications fully
- the role of Members was to consider information identified through the IRMP review, but to make decisions taking into account the wider political perspective. This would include consideration of the impact on communities of decisions taken by other public bodies, including the Health Service
- it was important for the Board to be represented on the Community Planning Partnership in each Local Authority area
- it was desirable that sprinkler systems should be incorporated in the design of all social housing, but this was not required by buildings regulations and appropriate funding would need to be secured.

The TACFO advised that a high priority would be given to effective communication and explanation of the Stage III process to stations. The aspiration was to grow the Service on the basis of evidenced requirements. In response, Members, whilst supporting these aims, cautioned that the current economic climate could impact adversely on progress.

The Working Group **NOTED** the information given and **AGREED** that a report on the expanded proposals for the 2005 framework be submitted to a future meeting for consideration.

The meeting ended at 1.40 p.m.