

THE HIGHLAND AND ISLANDS FIRE BOARD
25 August 2006
Chief Fire Officer's Service Activity and Progress Report

Agenda Item	
Report No	

SUMMARY

The information attached provides an overview of the Service's activity for April, May and June 2006 in the following areas:

- Community Risk Management
- Performance Management
- Intervention
- Letters of Appreciation and Complaint

1. COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT

This section of the report outlines to members the Community Fire Safety (CFS) initiatives being progressed by the Service.

During this first quarter considerable resources have been committed to commence planning for the introduction of the Fire (Scotland) Act, Part 3. This section of the Act which comes into force on the 1st October 2006 will completely change the Service's approach to its legislative fire safety function, aligning it with the risk based approach adopted for other areas of service provision. Despite this considerable challenge, the Community Risk Management Department has continued to progress CFS activities as follows:

The main focus of activity continues to be the enhancement of safety within communities, with risk reduction initiatives for vulnerable groups a priority.

Our key risk reduction initiative remains the completion of Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSC) and in this area the Service has made considerable progress. Further to the last report to the Board, members should note that the final total for HFSC's completed during 2005/2006 increased to a notable 3038. In addition, personnel presented home fire safety talks to a total audience of 2750 people and delivered safety information to over 9000 households (2245 of these being as part of 'Hot Strike' initiatives targeting households in the surrounding area immediately after a fire). The personnel completing HFSC's have been able to offer constructive advice within all homes visited and it is our view that this programme will provide a positive contribution to reducing the number of emergency incidents the Service attends.

For 2006/2007 each station has been allocated targets defining the number of HFSC's to be completed in their areas. These targets have been developed in proportion to the number of vulnerable persons within each area, so ensuring Service resources are most effectively directed to areas which present the highest risk profile.

The effectiveness of the initiative to employ a Community Response Leading Firefighter on a temporary contract to co-ordinate CFS activities has proved most successful with a significant number of stations and Community Response Units now having been visited. In order that the remainder of stations can benefit from the enhanced instruction being provided, the temporary contract for this position has been extended for a further six months.

From information obtained during the completion of HFSC's it has been recognised that, during installation by electricians, some smoke detectors are located in positions which make them vulnerable to generating false alarm signals. Should false alarms occur, the effectiveness of smoke

detectors can be diminished as residents become complacent. In order to rectify this situation the Service has proactively contacted associations representing electricians who have indicated a willingness to issue amended guidance on the installation of smoke detectors to electrical contractors. This matter is now being progressed through CFOA with the support of all Scottish Fire Services.

The service has recently secured the services of a translation service for the Command and Control Centre to enable Control Operators to extract all necessary information from non-English speakers when they dial 999 and request the assistance of the Fire and Rescue Service. It is proposed that this initiative will be extended to allow operational crews to have direct access to this service.

To complement the above, the Service has developed in collaboration with Grampian Fire and Rescue Service, translation cards for front line appliances. These cards are used by the first attendance Incident Commanders to glean essential information from non-English speakers at an incident. The cards are presently being manufactured and will shortly be issued to all appliances. A total of 21 languages have been identified using information from our community partners and these are detailed below.

Translation Card Languages

Arabic	Bengali	Bulgarian	Cantonese	Estonian	French	Gaelic
German	Iraqi	Kurdish	Latvian	Lithuanian	Mandarin	Polish
Portuguese	Romanian	Russian	Spanish	Ukrainian	Urdu	English

2. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance Management is essential to the function of a modern Fire & Rescue Service. There are many definitions of Performance Management but, simply defined, it is about agreeing and identifying what needs to be done, setting objectives, monitoring performance against targets, identifying opportunities for improvement and making the necessary changes.

These targets are expressed as Service Plan outcomes and as Performance Indicators.

For any organisation to be successful it must be aware of what it is trying to achieve and have a clear vision and focus.

This vision and focus is expressed through the Service's Strategic Aims which are:-

1. Operate an integrated risk management approach for the delivery of services, covering both fire safety and operations.
2. Provide a Service committed to the highest levels of quality, demonstrating best value and sound corporate governance.
3. Ensure that the Service meets the requirements of health, safety, dignity and welfare, determined through full and inclusive consultation.
4. Support the development of our workforce so that their range of skills and abilities matches the needs of the Service and community, as identified by the Integrated Risk Management Planning process.

SERVICE PLAN PROGRESS

We currently have five Service Plan objectives which are, Modernisation, Consolidation, Partnership Working, IT & Communications and Improvement Inspections.

To achieve these objectives we have produced 23 detailed action plans and their progress is reported regularly at Service Support and Service Delivery meetings.

The Service is currently on target with 20 of these plans. The remaining 3 are IT related and have been superseded in priority by the introduction of the partnership with Fujitsu to provide an IT network to Retained stations and an intranet to the Service.

However, it is the Service's intention to reschedule the 3 IT actions for commencement September 2006.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Members are also reminded that, in recognition of their role in monitoring performance management, at the April meeting of the Board it was agreed that a detailed progress report would be presented to the Board bi-annually for member scrutiny.

3. INTERVENTION

Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service continues to deliver an efficient and effective service to the people of the Highlands and Islands whilst at the same time ensuring that local communities and visitors alike are informed of the dangers of fire and the actions that can be taken to minimise the risk of a fire occurring within their property.

Much of the population is receiving the message on fire safety especially in the home. However, there have sadly been 3 fire deaths within the reporting period, all of which occurred within residential accommodation. This disappointing statistic clearly indicates that the service must continue to deliver the fire safety message and do everything possible to reduce and prevent fires and emergency incidents occurring.

From 1st April, the Service responded to a total of 1,314 incidents with 2,689 mobilisations.

A selection of operational incident summaries is outlined below:

3 (a) Kyleakin, Isle of Skye.

On 14th April 2006 at 0352 hours, Fire Control received a call via the 999 network stating that a house was on fire at Meuse Lane, Kyleakin, and that people were trapped inside.

The pre-determined attendance of 2 appliances, 1 from Kyle and 1 from Broadford, was mobilised, as well as the nearest duty officer. On arrival crews were confronted with a well developed fire that had breached the roof and was issuing from the windows of the property. The Incident Commander immediately committed 4 firefighters wearing breathing apparatus with 2 firefighting jets. On entering the building crews were faced with a ferocious fire with an extreme amount of heat being produced. In spite of the difficult conditions, crews proceeded to search the property looking for the missing person and very quickly identified that the stairs to the first floor had been burned away. As a result one crew was withdrawn and made an entry to the first floor via a ladder to a first floor window.

The fire was extinguished using 4 firefighting jets and 6 sets of breathing apparatus. Seven people escaped from the property but regrettably one person lost their life as a result of the fire.

Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service worked closely with Northern Constabulary to investigate the cause of the fire. After the fire Kyleakin Community Response Unit played a major part in ensuring all homes in the immediate area of the incident received information regarding fire safety in the home.

3 (b) Milton of Culloden, Inverness

At 0458 hours on 5th May 2006, the Service Command and Control Centre received a 999 call from a passing motorist reporting a house on fire at Milton of Culloden, Inverness.

The Command and Control Centre mobilised the Pre Determined Attendance of two appliances and the duty officer. Very shortly after arrival the attending crews located and rescued a casualty from the premises and administered first aid until the removal of the casualty to hospital.

The fire was extinguished using 4 breathing apparatus sets and 2 high pressure hosereel jets. Unfortunately the rescued occupant of the premises passed away later that morning in hospital as a result of the injuries sustained.

3 (c) Glen Affric Chalet Park, Cannich

On 29th May 2006 at 2350 hours, the service received a 999 call reporting a caravan on fire at the above address with persons reported to be trapped inside.

One appliance each from Cannich, Drumnadrochit and Inverness and the duty officer were mobilised to the incident.

On arrival, the Incident Commander quickly established that a person was trapped inside the caravan and immediately committed 4 firefighters wearing breathing apparatus using 2 firefighting jets to search and locate the occupant who died as a result of the fire. It was later ascertained that the deceased person was living in the caravan whilst working in the area.

The Service conducted a joint fire investigation with Northern Constabulary to ascertain the cause of the fire.

3 (d) MacTavish's Kitchens, High Street, Fort William

At 0332 hours on the 2nd June 2006, the service received a call from the Police reporting smoke issuing from MacTavish's Kitchens on the High Street, Fort William. The pre determined attendance of two appliances from Fort William was mobilised to the incident. On arrival the Incident Commander observed a well developed fire within the kitchen area of the premises and immediately requested the attendance of a third appliance due to the severity of the fire. Crews wearing breathing apparatus were committed to the building in an attempt to fight the fire internally. Shortly afterwards, the Incident Commander requested further assistance by asking for another pumping appliance. Further Breathing Apparatus teams were committed to the building but it soon became apparent that the fire was spreading.

At this point due to the severity of the fire and risk of further spread, the Incident Commander made the decision to evacuate adjacent premises to ensure the safety of nearby residents. Shortly afterwards, the fire broke through the roof leading to the building becoming unstable. For safety reasons all breathing apparatus teams were withdrawn and firefighting operations continued from outside. To assist with the firefighting the Aerial Ladder Platform from Inverness was requested to provide a further firefighting platform and aerial observation.

The fire was fought externally with 6 main jets, 3 high pressure hose reel jets and a water monitor from the aerial ladder platform. At 0456 hours a further assistance message was sent requesting a fifth pump. The majority of the fire was extinguished by 0821 hours although some hot spots remained that required damping down. Due to the unsafe structure of the building, crews were unable to gain access to turn over the debris and extinguish the hot spots and the services of a council structural engineer were employed.

A fire service presence remained on scene until 2336 hours on the 4th June, some 69 hours after the initial call. The time committed at the scene of the fire required a substantial number of relief crews and flexibility of the personnel involved. Throughout the firefighting operation the service was assisted by a number of agencies to ensure the safety and welfare of personnel, and protection of the environment.

Scottish Water, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Hydro Board, WRVS, Northern Constabulary, Highland Council structural engineers and building contractors all worked closely with the Service and played a role in the successful conclusion of what was one of the largest property fires the Service has had to deal with in recent years

3 (e) **ATTACKS ON FIREFIGHTERS**

Nationally, there has been an alarming rise in the number of incidents reported where operational personnel have come under attack whilst carrying out their duties. The attacks have been both physical and verbal and have put the Health, Safety and Welfare of personnel at risk.

Safer Scotland has been promoting a safety campaign on behalf of the various public services to inform the public of the unacceptability of violence directed towards firefighters. The Highlands & Islands Fire & Rescue Service has participated in the campaign by distributing and displaying a "Work Related Violence" poster throughout the Service area.

The Service has established a contingency process to provide health, safety and welfare support for employees involved in traumatic or stressful situations.

A structured response in the form of Post Incident Counselling is available to all personnel depending on the individual's needs.

The process ensures that potential problems are identified and that the appropriate support is provided at the earliest opportunity.

For the reporting period there have been no recorded incidents.

For year 2005/2006 there was 3 reported incidents involving attacks on Fire and Rescue Service Personnel. These are outlined below;

i) Date of Occurrence 01.10.05 at 23.05 hours.

Personnel from Inverness were mobilised to bins on fire at Charleston Court Inverness. On their arrival they were met by about 10 attackers aged between 15 and 18 directing verbal abuse at Service personnel. Police attended the incident and the attackers dispersed.

ii) Date of Occurrence 20.10.05 at 02.30 hours.

Appliances returning to Inverness from Upper Kessock Street Inverness were stopped by a female member of the public walking down the middle of the road. The officer in charge left the appliance and approached the female who was under the influence of drink or drugs. The attacker directed verbal abuse at the officer. After asking her to move several times the officer assisted the attacker to the adjacent pavement. The officer requested the attendance of the Police. Prior to their arrival the officer was subsequently physically attacked resulting in bruising to his left eye. The attacker then entered the water within the harbour area of Inverness where she remained for approximately one and a half hours until removal by the RNLI.

iii) Date of Occurrence 29.03.06 at 19.23 hours.

Personnel from Dunbeath and Wick attended a property and were informed that there were still potentially people in the property. On arrival a fire was identified by crews on the first floor landing of the property with heavy smoke logging throughout. The fire was extinguished relatively quickly and a search of the property was instigated. The occupier was located on the settee within the ground floor living room. The occupier was brandishing a knife and when asked to leave the property became aggressive and threatening. Both crew members retreated along with the other breathing apparatus crews. The Police who were in attendance were informed of the circumstances and the occupier was subsequently arrested. The occupier was charged and the case is pending.

All the above incidents were reported to the Scottish Fire Service Inspectorate as part of a well established reporting system.

4. LETTERS OF APPRECIATION AND COMPLAINT

During the reporting period the Service received 25 letters of appreciation and 3 letters of complaint. The letters of appreciation related to all aspects of the work carried out by this Fire Service.

The 3 letters of complaint have been responded to satisfactorily.

Recommendation

The Board note the contents of this report

Signature

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Brian A. Murray". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

Designation: Chief Fire Officer

Date: 11 August 2006