

The Highland and Islands Fire Board

Minutes of Meeting of the **Integrated Risk Management Planning Working Group** held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 13 March 2008 at 12.00 noon.

Present

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| Representing the Highland Council | Mr R Durham Mr D Bremner Mr D Fallows |
| Representing Comhairle nan Eilean Siar | Mr N M MacLeod |
| Representing Orkney Islands Council | Mr A Drever |
| Representing Shetland Islands Council | Mr A Duncan |

Officials in attendance:

Mr B Murray, Chief Fire Officer
Mr T Wood, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Mr H Henny, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Mr J Donaldson, Area Manager Operations Support
Mr T Johnston, Area Manager, Community Risk Management (CRM)
Mr A MacAllister, Head of Corporate Services, Fire & Rescue Service
Mrs R Moir, Assistant Clerk
Mrs L Lee, Clerk's Office

In attendance for items 1 to 3 only:

Mr A Kidd, Group Manager CRM/IRMP
Ms F Cossar, CRM/IRMP data analyst
Mr I Smith, Temporary Deputy Commander, South
Mr A McKinley, Group Manager, Training and Development - Delivery

Mr R Durham in the Chair

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr D Flear and Mrs H Carmichael.

2. Modified Attendance to Premises Fitted with Automatic Fire Alarm Systems

There had been circulated Report No. IRMP1/08 dated 29 February 2008 by the Chief Fire Officer recommending the piloting, for a period of six months, of a revised Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) policy which would reduce the number of "blue light" journeys by more than half, but which would maintain the number of fire vehicles attending.

Members were advised that the current response to an AFA was as follows:

Current Response to AFAs:

Category 1

(AFA with a back up call from the premises indicating there is no fire):

1 vehicle - blue light response

Category 2

(AFA with no back up call):

Full pre-determined attendance - all vehicles on blue light response

Category 3

(AFA with a back up call from the premises indicating that there is a fire):

Full pre-determined attendance - all vehicles on blue light response.

Members were provided with detailed data illustrating the current position and recent trends regarding AFA calls. Due to the increased number of businesses now installing AFA systems, the number of call-outs generated by AFAs had increased significantly in recent years, with around 99% of the 1,677 Category 2 calls received in 2006/07 proving to be false alarms. The effects of the increased number of AFA Category 2 call-outs included:

- increased risk to fire crews and to members of the public through the more frequent movement of heavily laden vehicles travelling at speed through sometimes congested and narrow streets - tragic events elsewhere in the country clearly illustrated these dangers
- the diversion of essential resources, potentially reducing the available Service response should a genuine call arise
- disruption to work routines, in particular to training and Community Fire Safety (CFS) activities
- demoralising effect on staff
- an adverse impact on employers of retained personnel who released their staff for operational duties.

The Working Group was then apprised of a number of options which had been considered by the Service in seeking to minimise the above risks, whilst maintaining an appropriate level of response, and was advised that the following appeared to provide the most practical way forward:

Proposed Response to AFAs:

Category 1 – 1 vehicle travelling at normal speed, no blue lights

Category 2 – full pre-determined response, but with only the first (or nearest) vehicle using blue lights, other vehicles travelling at normal speed but contactable by the first vehicle should a fire be discovered, and able to change to blue light response if necessary

Category 3 – full pre-determined response, all vehicles using blue lights (no change from current practice).

The Area Manager Operations Support drew a number of points to Members' attention, including:

- the Board as an employer had a duty to decrease risk to its staff
- whilst not removing road risk entirely, the proposed response above would reduce the number of blue light vehicle movements by around 50%
- this level of call-out was sufficient to allow blue light driving skills to be maintained
- the system could be easily managed by Control Staff
- the Unions had been consulted on the proposals and consultations with staff and Unions would continue.

Members were assured that any future development of the policy in the Highland and Islands area would be carried out on the basis of evidence.

Members expressed general support for the proposed response to AFAs, and, an assurance having been given that refresher training for blue light skills was part of the planned training strategy, the Working Group **AGREED** to recommend that the Board agree:

- i. the implementation of a pilot project using the proposed response as set out in the report, for an initial period of six months, as part of the Board's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP); and
- ii. that the Area Manager for Community Risk Management monitor and review the effectiveness of the pilot and report with further recommendations to the Working Group.

3. Introduction of Additional Community Safety Advocates

There had been circulated Report No. IRMP2/08 dated 29 February 2008 by the Chief Fire Officer detailing the work undertaken by Community Safety Advocates (CSA)s and recommending the appointment of four additional CSAs on a fixed term basis.

Members were advised that, across the Service area, domestic fires had reduced by 13% in the two years since the delivery of Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSC) had been adopted as a priority. Over 10,000 HFSCs had been carried out in that time. A core number of personnel had been trained and were now in place to support the delivery of HFSCs.

The Working Group was provided with detailed data showing how the Service was performing against its target of carrying out 40 HFSCs per 1,000 residences, per year. Performance varied across the Service area and within stations. In particular, the data highlighted that, within a station or Community Response Unit (CRU), certain individuals could be identified who consistently met or exceeded their HFSC targets. Providing additional support to these individuals would make the best use of their skills and aptitudes and would be an effective way for the Service to meet its HFSC targets.

It was therefore proposed that an additional four CSAs be employed on a fixed term basis, to be funded through the Community Fire Safety (CFS) budget. There would be a reduction in the targeted number of HFSCs that retained stations would be expected to carry out based on risk and capacity. Retained staff would continue to undertake general CFS duties and deliver CFS advice in the form of Hot Strike campaigns following fires. The CSAs would be able to increase the total number of HFSCs carried out, as they would be able to work unaccompanied (within the terms of lone working policies). It was proposed that

the additional CSAs would be strategically based and operate as a Service wide resource.

In discussion, Members supported the proposals on the basis of “spend to save” and suggested that a 2-year fixed term contract be offered, rather than the 12 months proposed in the report, with a view to attracting a wider pool of applicants. Previous recruitment had brought forward good candidates, and it was hoped that the further recruitment would expand the CSAs’ skills base . There was an important role for CSAs in liaising with other bodies, to enable those at risk to be identified and assisted.

Arising from discussion, the Area Manager, CRM, advised Members that the recent bid for European funding to support the Bi-lingual CSA had proved unsuccessful, but that the Service was continuing to fund the post from internal sources meantime. A further bid for European funding, for a three year period, would be submitted in the summer. Pending the outcome of this decision, the bilingual post would be considered as one of the four positions recommended for approval.

The Working Group **NOTED** the role that all CSAs played in enhancing safety within communities, and **AGREED** (a) that, prior to the meeting of the Board on 22 April 2008, the Chief Fire Officer explore the possibility of offering the four proposed CSA posts for a fixed term period of 24 months rather than 12; and (b) to recommend that the Board approve the appointment of four additional CSAs on a temporary basis, to be funded through the existing Community Fire Safety budget.

4. Sustainability Review for the Period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007.

There had been circulated Report No. IRMP3/08 dated 29 February 2008 by the Chief Fire Officer presenting performance and demographic information for existing stations and Community Response Units (CRU) undertaking intervention and prevention roles, for the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007. The report had been prepared as part of the Sustainability Review, which was part of the Board’s Risk Review Framework. Supplementary information was tabled.

The Area Manager CRM briefly reiterated the Board’s decisions regarding the actions to be taken by the Service with regard to sustainability. He then gave a presentation on the data and methodology to be used in assessing stations/ CRUs:

Methodology:

Sustainability Review - Stage 1

Using data collected from 2006/07 as a benchmark, each station/CRU would be assessed on its performance against the following criteria:

- **Contract Availability:** a station with 1 appliance required that the crew could, between them, provide a minimum of 672 hours of cover per week (ie – 4 persons x 24 hours); a station with 2 appliances required a minimum of 1344 hours, etc.
- **Crew Confidence Levels:** a minimum of 4 persons was required in order to be able to respond to an incident
- **Turnout Times:** the time taken from alerting crew to the moment the vehicle left the station

- **CFS targets:** all stations/CRUs had been allocated a budget for CFS activities; the percentage of budget spent corresponded to the level of CFS activity undertaken and therefore provided an indicator as to whether these targets were being achieved.

Sustainability Review - Stage 2

Following on from the information analysed in Stage 1, Stage 2 information had also been produced with a view to identifying performance and to assist in developing managed solutions for items highlighted. The information included:

- Incident Frequency
- Type of Incidents
- Incident Time of Day
- Establishment History (whether the station/CRU had historically experienced recruitment/retention difficulties)
- Demographic Profile (data taken from census returns and used to provide an estimate of the size of the pool of people living sufficiently close to the station, of employment age, who would therefore in theory be available to join a crew)
- Other appropriate information – Employment Profile (data used to provide an estimate of the number of people likely to be employed in jobs distant from the station/CRU, and therefore subtracted from the total of those theoretically available to join a crew).

Other factors which could be looked at under Stage 2 included: the number of personnel who had attended appropriate incident command training courses, training attendance records, the number of Breathing Apparatus (BA) wearers who had attended refresher training within the required period of time, and the number of vehicle drivers. Members were also updated on the current challenges associated with the BA refresher training. Members were also apprised of the procedures for declaring a vehicle “off the run” – ie, where a station or unit was aware that crew confidence levels could not be provided for a limited period of time, the Control Room was notified so that, should an incident arise, an alternative vehicle would immediately be sent.

The Chief Fire Officer stressed that the worth of staff was fully recognised; however, now that information was available, the Service and Board were duty bound to address any issues highlighted by the data. Stations had been advised of the findings of the Stage 1 performance information via 4 quarterly reports and it was intended that, following the distribution of the Sustainability Review analysis, further discussions be held internally with stations/CRUs to develop action plans and find managed solutions for identified performance issues over the coming year. The position would continue to be monitored and a further Sustainability Report brought to Members after March 2009. For any stations identified as having unresolved issues, there would be an important role, prior to March 2009, for all Local Authority Members, whether or not appointed to the Fire Board, to engage with communities to assist in promoting solutions. The Convener clarified that the previous arrangement within Highland Council, whereby that Council had appointed Members to the Board on a broadly geographic basis, no longer operated, as, following the May 2007 Local Government elections, Highland Council had agreed to appoint Members to the Board on the basis of political representation. The way forward in Highland would

therefore be, as currently happened in the Islands Authorities, to develop effective communication between Local Authority Ward Members and the Board. This would be facilitated by the Convener in his role as the Champion for Community Engagement.

Members having welcomed the information provided, expressed support for the IRMP process and commented that a number of stations in each of the reported areas were meeting their targets, the Working Group **NOTED** the content of the report and the information given and **AGREED** to recommend to the Board that it agree:

- i. the proposed methodology for the Sustainability Review of all stations/CRUs, (Stages 1 and 2 above refer);
- ii. that a further Sustainability Report be produced for its consideration after March 2009;
- iii. given that, following investigation and prior to March 2009, it could prove necessary for the Service to take immediate action to change the role of a limited number of individual stations/CRUs, that any such changes made by the Service be reported in the first instance to the Convener and the Members of the IRMP Working Group, and thereafter to the Board; and
- iv. to assist in progressing managed solutions to sustainability issues, communicating with communities where appropriate.

The meeting ended at 2.35 p.m.