

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	AUTHORITY		
DATE:	21 MAY 2020	REPORT NO:	CFO/020/20
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	CFO PHIL GARRIGAN	REPORT AUTHOR:	
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TEAM		
TITLE OF REPORT:	MERSEYSIDE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE'S RESPONSE TO COVID19 AND THE LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF COVID19 ON MFRA		

APPENDICES:	
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Purpose of Report

1. To update Members on the actions taken by the Service in response to the COVID-19 (C19) pandemic.
2. The report details the actions taken in response to the pandemic from a national, regional and organisational perspective.

Recommendation

3. That Members;
 - a. note, the work that has been undertaken nationally in support of the fire & rescue service.
 - b. note, the work that has been undertaken locally through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) in order to support our communities.
 - c. note, the work that has been undertaken by the Service in order to maintain business continuity and protect our staff.
 - d. note, the financial implications related to C19.
 - e. note, the legal implications related to C19.

Introduction and Background

4. The C19 Pandemic is an unprecedented national crisis.
5. The scale of the pandemic has tested the capacity of the public sector to protect the public, particularly those who are most vulnerable and isolated.

6. At the time of writing the current confirmed cases of C19 stands at 219k resulting in 31,855 deaths (11th May 2020). These figures will have increased by the time the report is considered by the Authority.
7. The key objectives for the FRS during the Pandemic period have been to
 - (1) ensure that its operational response provision remains resilient and effective.
 - (2) that it supports the broader public sector response to the Pandemic, particularly in relation to supporting Local Authorities and NHS and Ambulance Trusts whose services are subject to exceptionally high levels of demand, and
 - (3) maintains to the highest standards possible the health, safety and welfare of all its staff.
8. It has been clear from the outset that the Fire & Rescue Service (FRS) has had a part to play in how the country responds, and that it is well equipped and capable of supporting the joint endeavour, with people who are passionate about the protection of the public.
9. The subsequent actions we have taken have been taken in order to minimize loss of life and to maximize the welfare of the public, whilst ensuring the protection of our own staff.

National, Sector Specific and Local Governance

10. As the gravity of situation began to emerge MFRS have played a pivotal role in the sectors response, leading the sector through the operational challenges associated with business continuity; taking enabling actions to secure and sustain operational capabilities; whilst influencing the activities that the FRS are currently undertaking on behalf of their communities at the highest levels.
11. The CFO for Merseyside was appointed as the C19 National Fire Gold lead and as a result he has overseen the actions of the fire and rescue service over this period.
12. There is an agreed national framework for managing the local multi-agency response to emergencies. Command, control and coordination are important concepts in a multi-agency response. Single agencies have often used the gold, silver and bronze control structure. In a large-scale, multi-agency coordination situation, this control structure is convened at strategic, tactical and operational levels.
13. The purpose of control at a national level is to manage coordination across government departments and between multiple local strategic coordinating groups (SCGs). The SCG at a local level may request support from regional or national resources.

14. Given the nature and severity of the pandemic the CFO sought the involvement of the sub-national and national tiers, while allowing for local determination based on local challenges.
15. The CFO subsequently established and chaired a National Fire Gold Group, developing a strategic intent with detailed strategic objectives which could be referenced at a local level.
16. The groups initial actions included,
 - the identification of key fire and rescue service personnel as 'critical workers' which has ensured the continuity of services to the public over the period.
 - the creation and national application of Personal Protective Equipment requirements for the sector based on PHE guidance
 - the procurement and assurance of PPE on a national scale via the Procurement Hub, meaning the FRS have faced nothing like the PPE challenges faced elsewhere.
 - agreement to test fire and rescue service staff through the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) 'key Worker' test centres, ensuring an immediate return to work for some staff and their families.
 - the provision of C19 funding for the sector from Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on the basis of discussions with the Home Office.
 - the coordination of national trade union discussions which have resulted in tripartite agreements being reached which underpin the activities being undertaken by fire and rescue service staff in our communities.
 - the removal of 'burdens' during the period to allow services to focus on the support they are providing to the public.
17. The CFO, as NFCC C19 Committee Chair will also support the recovery phase as and when the country is able to return to a new normal.

National Resilience – Lead Authority

18. As Lead Authority role for National Resilience MFRS has;
 - established reporting arrangements to ensure workforce planning is effective and resilient
 - established reporting to ensure that Control Rooms are effective and resilient

- monitored and managed sickness reporting to respond to Ministerial scrutiny
- monitored, repatriated and re-distributed Personal Protective Equipment to those most in need across the sector
- liaised directly with Home Office on continuity arrangements and reassurance.

Strategic Coordination – Merseyside

19. DCFO Nick Searle has taken up the Fire Gold Commander within the Merseyside Strategic Coordination Group (SCG).
20. The purpose of an SCG is to take overall responsibility for the multi-agency management of the emergency and establish the policy and strategic framework within which lower levels of command will operate.
21. The SCG
 - determines and promulgates clear strategic aims and objectives and reviews them regularly
 - establishes a policy framework for the overall management of the event or situation
 - prioritises the requirements of the tactical tier
 - formulates and implements media and communication plans, possibly delegating this to one responding agency
 - directs planning and operations beyond the immediate response in order to facilitate the recovery process
 - The SCG does not have the collective authority to issue executive orders to individual responder agencies. Each organisation retains its own responsibilities and command authority, operating in the normal way.
22. The SCG sets strategy. This strategy is cascaded to the Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) which in turn undertakes multi-agency tactical planning..
23. TCG representatives cascade their agency requirements and actions to the organisational silvers who carry out the detailed single agency planning and maintain the command and control of deployed resources.
24. On the basis of these discussions the following actions have been taken

Operations

- Prepared guidance and risk assessments to cover additional work required to be undertaken by MFRS personnel to support partners in the response to the COVID-19 Pandemic at national, regional and local levels
- Procured and distributed defibrillators to all Senior Officers, and new CPR training dummies to all stations.
- Delivered the regional/NW plan to facilitate Face fit testing for NWAS and CCG partners

- produced a range of temporary Service Instructions and guidance, many of which have been adopted as national guidance.

Community Risk Management

- Fire Service Direct and the Prevention Team supported prescription delivery for the shielded group – over 4000 screening calls and 1250 prescriptions delivered by the end of April.
- Sent a letter of support to retired MFRS employees in the over 70s and or shielded group to offer the Services support which resulted in a number of requests for delivery of essential items.
- MFRS apprentices and other-duties staff members supporting food packaging at the M&S Arena (food distribution hub).
- A cohort of 20 staff were trained to support mortuaries across Merseyside NHS Trusts and are now assisting with body movements.
- Supported the St Helens based charity Tear Drops in the delivery of essential supplies to 150 vulnerable homes (6 deliveries).
- Allocated lead officers to each of the four sub-groups within the Humanitarian Cell (Shielded Group, Health Intelligence, Social Care and Vulnerable Persons).
- Provided the Death Management Strategic Lead reporting to SCG.
- GM Prevention and Corporate Communications delivered joint prevention messaging for NFCC & the Home Office Fire Kills campaigns.
- Supported Violence Reduction Partnership with domestic violence messaging.
- Leading the multi-agency response in Liverpool to COVID-19, chairing the Community Engagement and ASB Enforcement Group. This included Operation Penny; MFRS Crews to conduct high visibility patrols.
- Deployed the Street Intervention Teams based on intelligence around where young people may be gathering in breach of social distancing regulations.
- Continued “nudge” campaigning for key prevention messages on social media platforms.
- Provided additional support for Critical Incident Debriefing for staff/volunteers carrying out support to mortuaries.
- Development of associated temporary Service Instructions and Risk Assessments.
- Coordinated the delivery of goods from LFC Foundation to NHS partners and Paramedics.

Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service – Business Continuity

25. On 18th March a decision was taken by the Chief Fire Officer to implement the Service’s pandemic business continuity plan.
26. Shortly after this on the 20th March the Government began to introduce a series of lockdown measures, which started to impact upon our communities and the Service as the Pandemic progressed.

27. The ACFO was tasked to ensure that the delivery of the Fire and Rescue Service to the public of Merseyside was maintained throughout the Pandemic, whilst wherever possible, supporting partner agencies.
28. The Fire Strategic Business Continuity Group (BCG) was established on the 18th March.
29. The following Strategic Intent of the group was agreed

‘To ensure that the Service supports the delay and mitigation of the impact of COVID 19 on our communities’

30. In order to achieve this intent, Fire Gold set the following strategic objectives to;
 - Maintain the health safety and welfare of all MFRS staff, in order to minimise the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon the community and maintain public confidence.
 - Protect the public through maintaining effective mobilising and response to all emergency life risk incidents.
 - Maintain effective communication networks, ICT and key infrastructure to support critical services and information to staff.
 - Develop a risk based approach to minimise the impact of the COVID-19 virus on preparedness, prevention and protection activities.
 - Ensure that the MFRS response is coordinated and integrated with other responding agencies, promote shared situational awareness and joint understanding of risk.
 - Ensure effective business continuity, and recovery arrangements are in place throughout MFRS.
31. A Business Continuity (BC) governance structure was implemented to ensure that these objectives could be achieved. The structure once established ensured that priorities could be identified, they could be clearly allocated and accounted for, prevented duplication and ensured that tasks were clearly understood, resourced correctly and discharged in a timely manner.
32. It was immediately decided that internal communications with our workforce and external communications with the public would be a priority of the BC group. A daily internal update was immediately implemented with a communication going out from the ACFO daily at 1500 hours for the first three weeks.
33. The BC meeting was chaired daily at 1100hrs by ACFO Mottram and attended by the lead and deputy for each of the cells for Operations, CRM, Workforce, ICT & Communications, Legal, Finance, estates, logistics and a fire representative from the Merseyside Resilience Forum (MRF) SCG and TCG.

This was facilitated by a command support team provided by the Preparedness function.

34. Each of the cell leads identified key personnel and formed their own teams which also met daily in order to discharge the work related to the Pandemic as quickly and efficiently as possible to drive forward progress.
35. As the COVID 19 situation has progressed and BC has established a rhythm the situation, meetings and communications have deliberately become less frequent as the urgency and number of challenges has reduced.
36. It should be noted however that over approximately five weeks an incredible amount has been achieved to gain control over the situation, some 150+ actions have been discharged – numerous temporary instructions, training packages, risk assessments and collective agreements with representative bodies have been introduced and in excess of a 100 COVID 19 related communications to staff and the public.
37. This has been made possible by outstanding teamwork and the individuals within these structures working extremely hard and diligently to ensure that their colleagues are as safe as possible and that the public continues to get the very best service we can provide.

An example of each of the cells key milestones are as follows

Operations

- Provided safe systems of work to protect staff and critical operational response services from the spread of COVID-19.
- Procedures on social distancing were put in place across the Service to ensure a strict regime of social distancing and hygiene was followed.
- Reviewed personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements and PPE procedures for both existing PPE and new PPE specifically obtained for the COVID-19 risks.
- Split Fire Control to work at two separate locations (SHQ & T&DA) to prevent cross-contamination between watches at change of shift
- Change of shift arrangements put in place for stations, TDA & Workshops.
- Prepared degradation plans which enable the Service to provide a systematic approach to business continuity to maintain effective response arrangements in the light of reasonable worst case staff absence due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Workforce,

- All staff were reviewed and contacted to provide advice in line with the Government 'Stay at Home' Guidance. Shielding employees were identified and line managers provided contact and support.

- Coordinated the identification and central collation of all staff identified as Critical Workers in line with Government Guidance.
- Over 950 Critical Worker letters from CFO were drafted and sent to staff and contractors to allow them to access school provision in order to maintain their critical role.
- Implemented centralised recording of working arrangements for all support staff regarding home working and or social distancing in work.
- Reviewed all staff who have retired in last three years (operational) and last 5 years (control) to identify potential candidates for reengagement. Eighty employees contacted and pre-employment checks were undertaken on 25 who were identified to make up 1st tranche of potential reengaged staff. Co-ordinated with TDA for a planned 'return to service' training course.
- Workforce Guidance Notes have been created and circulated for staff supporting guidance issued by Government covering:
 - Self-Isolation
 - Vulnerable staff
 - Critical workers
 - Annual leave and flexi whilst home working
- A temporary Service Instruction was created to cover Agile Working Arrangements to support Social Distancing during COVID-19
- Established testing of symptomatic employees or members of their households with symptoms to allow those staff who are well and confirmed as negative to return to work promptly.
- Extensive consultation has taken place with Representative Bodies over the introduction of new duties with Collective Agreements either in place or in draft for:
 - Support for Ambulance Services
 - Supporting mortuary services with mass casualties
 - Delivery of Essential Items to vulnerable people
 - Face fitting of masks
 - Delivery of PPE
- Working with Strategy & Performance to establish a centralised database to record details of staff volunteering to carry out other duties to support COVID 19 related activities.
- To support social distancing new working practices have been introduced utilising technology as necessary to facilitate virtual/socially distanced:
 - Medicals
 - Recruitment interviews
 - Training sessions
 - Appraisals
 - Capability and welfare meetings

Information, Communication and Technology (ICT)

- Introduced and rolled out Microsoft Teams and Skype, to allow meetings to be held remotely; including the daily Fire Gold meetings.
- Implemented a new process for the fast issuing of ICT assets allowing home working to be quickly facilitated for most staff.
- Deployed the telent Service Desk and ICT engineers to work from home.
- Facilitated working from home for key workers initially and, later, other members of staff by providing tablets and laptops, VPN access (to access the MFRS network), mobiles phones and peripherals.
- Putting in place new working arrangements and guidance for remote working.
- Working to improve communications on stations.
- Supported the Fire Control relocation.
- Identifying and testing a solution for remote Authority Meetings.
- Developed and released a new app to allow staff to easily register for volunteering.
- Built and issued 32 Surface Pro devices, repurposed 20+ laptops and the issue of a mix of 20 standard phones and smartphones have been achieved.
- Increased mailbox sizes and mobile data limits to enable a wider uninterrupted use of e-mail on mobile/remote devices.
- Produced a range of guidance for staff including user guides and frequently asked questions (FAQs) for:
 - Microsoft Teams
 - Skype
 - VPN
 - Responsible use of VPN
 - Data Protection when working from home or remotely

Internal and external communications:

- Daily email briefings for staff and the Authority prepared with the ACFO.
- Publication of a weekly newsletter round up of COVID 19 related content from week commencing 13th April.
- Coordinating the use of the intranet Portal Forum for two way communications with staff
- Editing and publishing video footage regarding changes to operational and technical procedures in response to COVID 19.
- Working with the Youth Engagement Team to ensure young people on the Princes Trust programme remained connected with the Service through social media and a new newsletter.
- Publishing a range of COVID 19 temporary Service Instructions ensuring they complied with existing processes, with governance adapted to meet the urgent need.
- Supporting a major National Fire Chiefs Council/Home Office initiative by producing infographics that have been used nationally.
- Coordinating the Chief Fire Officer's appearance on the Roger Phillips radio show.

- Ensured key communications messages for local residents were disseminated as widely as possible using social media channels. Including messages relating to:
 - Water safety
 - Mental health
 - Domestic violence
 - Funeral services
 - Support for the NHS
 - Controlled burning (eg garden waste fires)
 - Fly tipping
 - Home safety during lockdown
 - The support MFRS has provided to partners and communities (e.g. prescription collection for shielded people)
 - Responding to a high level of media interested related to telecommunications mast incidents in Merseyside

Legal, Finance, Estates, logistics

- Created a “basic payroll” BACS file and authorised additional staff access to it, as a contingency if key payroll staff not available through sickness in order to ensure all staff could be paid.
- Assisted our suppliers by early payment of invoices, created flexibility around contract performance and penalties to assist them with cash flow challenges in light of business restrictions due to COVID19
- Determined the premises cleaning requirement in light of Public Health England/Government guidelines for managing COVID19 risk, including increasing cleaning at shared facilities with NWAS.
- Facilitated working from home flexibility for finance/procurement staff Further to the implementation of legislation a review on the impact on MFRS facilities and activities was undertaken and any necessary adjustments executed including but not limited to social distancing requirements in communal spaces.
- Revised fire safety and fire marshals ask for SHQ in light of closure of SHQ reception and home working for most fire marshals
- Created unique cost centre to capture all additional costs associated with COVID19 and advised all the relevant employees.
- Liaised with the Authority’s insurers in respect of MFRS response to the pandemic to ensure that the Authority and staff are protected.
- Provided advice on the legal implications to the Authority including committee meetings.
- Created a PPE sub-cell: - To manage and ensure current and future stock based on demand of all PPE & Cleaning products to protect staff.
- Facilitated face mask fit test for ambulance and social care staff through procurement of Kits and solution to allow MFRS staff to deliver this test.

Equality and Diversity Implications

38. All activities undertaken in response to COVID 19 have reflected government guidance.
39. All staff were reviewed and contacted to provide advice in line with the Government 'Stay at Home' Guidance. Shielding employees were identified and line managers provided contact and support.

Staff Implications

40. Coordinated the identification and central collation of all staff identified as Critical Workers in line with Government Guidance.
41. Over 950 Critical Worker letters from CFO were drafted and sent to staff and contractors to allow them to access school provision in order to maintain their critical role.
42. Implemented centralised recording of working arrangements for all support staff regarding home working and or social distancing in work.
43. Staff communications were established and continue to be updated regularly
44. Staff wellbeing has been of paramount importance throughout

Legal Implications

45. The Coronavirus Act 2020 came into force on 25th March 2020 which set out the main provisions for the response to the pandemic and empowered rights upon relevant bodies to assist with the response and allow local governments to ensure democracy remains.
46. The Coronavirus Act actioned the postponement of elections until May 2021 including local elections, elected mayor of local authorities, Police Crime Commissioner and powers to postpone certain other elections and referendums. This was followed by the introduction of The Local Government and Police and Crime Commissioner (Coronavirus) (Postponement of Elections and Referendums) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 Elections which directed the postponement of by elections, local polls and referendums.
47. The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 ('Remote Meetings Regulations') were made under s.78 of Coronavirus 2020 and came into force on 4th April 2020 which apply to local

authorities including MFRA, the details of which are contained within report CFO/022/20.

48. The Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 amended the approval of the statement of accounts for the financial year beginning in 2019 from 31st July until 30th November
49. At this stage despite the impact and response being provided to the pandemic it is not anticipated there will be a delay in the annual assurance statement due in December.
50. Currently MFRA's IRMP is operative until 2021. However, Officers have scheduled meetings in May to discuss the timescales and feasibility of when the 2021-24 IRMP may be published. The progress of which will be reported to Members.
51. The duty of care owed to employees by MFRA has not diminished despite the impact of Covid19 however Officers have ensured that all practices and processes have been maintained and appropriate measures put in place further to legislative changes and/or Government advice to mitigate the current circumstances
52. Officers have ensured MFRA's insurers have been consulted on any additional practices in the response to the pandemic to ensure both employees and MFRA are fully protected.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

53. The Government has announced two tranches of funding for councils, each of £1.6B, totalling £3.2B.
54. The first allocation was based on the formula that determines Government support for local authorities' annual budgets (including fire and rescue authorities) and this takes into account factors such as deprivation and population density. The Authority received a £0.355m grant. The grant came with no conditions and its aim was to support the Service in meeting the pressures on its services from COVID19.
55. The second £1.6b allocation was based on population. The Government announced "Fire" was to receive a specific 3% or £48m share, and the Authority received £1.064m, a three-fold increase on the first tranche. Whilst the three-fold increase is welcomed, the Authority received one of the lowest increased with some fire and rescue authorities receiving a six-fold increase.
56. The total COVID19 grant monies received to date from the Government is £1.419m.

57. The Home Office has top-sliced £6m off the 3% specific fire share referenced above, and they have stated that they will make this available to fire and rescue authorities in order to support any significant costs incurred as a result of taking on additional duties during the coronavirus outbreak. These duties include providing support to the Ambulance Service, supporting Coroners with excess deaths, and additional support to the highly vulnerable.
58. Officers intend to submit a bid to the Home Office for a share of the £6m they held back, to reflect the work the Service is undertaking in the areas the Home Office has identified.
59. The Service has spent or committed £1.135m, the main areas of spend are: -
- procuring PPE and other equipment & supplies, £0.265m,
 - Offsetting the loss of external contributions, £0.045m from the LJL airport towards Marine 1,
 - Loss of income; TDA commercial income loss £0.300m; Prince's Trust income £0.125m; SHQ canteen £0.080m.
 - Increase in St Helens new build cost due to extended build period £0.250m
 - Additional direct and indirect employee, £0.065k,
 - Additional cleaning and FM costs, £0.005k.
60. The impact of COVID19 is expected to continue throughout the year and beyond. Therefore, additional costs are expected to be incurred on similar expenditure heads to those in paragraph 6 above. Also, it is not clear if the Government will provide any further additional funding so any grant balance left at the year-end would be carried forward to cover any COVID19 costs in future years as the impact of the virus is expected to continue beyond this financial year.
61. The likely longer term impact of COVID19 on future Government comprehensive spending reviews and associated grant support for the Authority is unknown.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

62. All activities undertaken have been risk assessed
63. All PPE guidance reflects or improves on the Public Health England guidance suggested for the period of COVID19
64. All procedural guidance has been provided to minimise any risk to staff.

Contribution to Our Mission: *Safer Stronger Communities – Safe Effective Firefighters*

65. The key objectives for the FRS during the Pandemic period are directly aligned to the Services Mission
1. ensure that its operational response provision remains resilient and effective.

2. that it supports the broader public sector response to the Pandemic, particularly in relation to supporting Local Authorities and NHS and Ambulance Trusts whose services are subject to exceptionally high levels of demand, and
3. maintains to the highest standards possible the health, safety and welfare of all its staff.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- MFRA** Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority is the physical and legal entity. When writing reports MFRA is the “object”.
- MFRS** Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service is the service provided by MFRA. When writing reports MFRS is the “action”
- E.G.** You are employed by the Authority (MFRA). The job you do forms part of the Service (MFRS) provided by the Authority (MFRA).
If in doubt use MFRA.