

MERSEYSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY			
MEETING OF THE:	AUTHORITY		
DATE:	15 OCTOBER 2020	REPORT NO:	CFO/049/20
PRESENTING OFFICER	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER		
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	DEB APPLETON	REPORT AUTHOR:	DEB APPLETON
OFFICERS CONSULTED:	STRATEGIC BUSINESS CONTINUITY GROUP		
TITLE OF REPORT:	COVID-19 MFRS UPDATE		

APPENDICES:	APPENDIX 1	COVID-19 MAY UPDATE REPORT
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Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of the activity that has taken place in Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority (MFRS) since the last COVID-19 update in May 2020.

Recommendation

2. That Members note the content of this report.

Introduction and Background

3. Members will recall from the first COVID-19 update report in May that on 18th March a decision was taken by the Chief Fire Officer to implement the Service's pandemic business continuity plan. Shortly after this on the 20th March the Government began to introduce a series of lockdown measures, which have impacted upon our communities and the Service as the pandemic has progressed during the intervening months.
4. The Chief Fire Officer has ensured that the delivery of the Fire and Rescue Service to the public of Merseyside has been maintained throughout the Pandemic, whilst wherever possible, supporting partner agencies. This has included the safe return to work during August of all staff who were shielding and working from home, with managers returning first to prepare for their teams' return.
5. The MFRS Strategic Business Continuity Group, chaired by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer has continued to meet throughout the lockdown and during the easing of lockdown measures, with the frequency of meetings altering during the period to reflect the return to work and changing demands of the pandemic. At the time of writing, in September, these meetings are again increasing to respond to the rise in local cases of COVID-19.

6. The Service has continued to provide leadership at a national and local level throughout the pandemic with the Chief Fire Officer chairing the monthly National Fire Chiefs Council COVID-19 Committee and the reconstituted weekly Fire Gold Meetings introduced to oversee the response phase of the pandemic. The Chief Fire Officer meets weekly with the Home Office and monthly with the Fire Minister Stephen Greenhalgh to update on the pandemic and the role of the Fire and Rescue Service.
7. With the Deputy Chief Fire Officer performing the role of Vice Chair of the Strategic Coordinating Committee (SCG) of the Merseyside Resilience Forum. This has ensured that not only has the Service been in a position to influence nationally and locally, it has been able to provide a wide range of much appreciated support to partner organisations, which is outlined below.
8. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer, with the support of the Strategic team has continued to ensure that the Service has maintained our core operational and community functions throughout and that we remain equipped to deal with all eventualities, whilst protecting the wellbeing of our staff.
9. The Home Secretary Priti Patel visited Merseyside personally to see first-hand the work that we have been doing, and commented on the extensive contribution the Authority has made in response to the pandemic nationally.
10. Members will recall that a designed COVID-19 update was produced for the period up to May (Appendix 1). Since that last update to the Authority considerable work has taken place to respond to and aid recovery from the pandemic. The actions delivered by each of the business continuity Cells/departments up to September is outlined below. This information will be incorporated into the original designed report to produce a revised version for publication.

Operations – Recovery Phase

The Operations Cell:

- Developed content for the Return to Work manuals for staff.
- Completed risk assessments to ensure that MFRS work places are COVID-19 secure
- Developed guidance and direction to enable Service Delivery to safely commence the increase in Prevention, Protection and Preparedness activities by Protection, Prevention, Preparedness and Response personnel.
- Reviewed, updated and enhanced previous internal Operational guidance relevant to COVID-19
- Monitored the COVID-19 impact on operational staff and took action to address potential contamination risks through early adoption of additional hygiene arrangements and testing of staff.
- Continued to deliver and developed a procedure and capability to complete face-mask face fit testing for NWAS and Clinical Commissioning Groups.

- Contributed to the national Tripartite work – a senior manager was embedded within the national working group supporting all activity agreed at the Tripartite group.
- Developed remote training – core training normally conducted at the TDA was revised with any subject capable of being carried out remotely being completed, including targeting individuals who required refresher training on the risk critical areas.
- Upgraded and enhanced e-learning to include all staff e-learning modules
- Provided support to NFCC in the review of the driving training national guidance to ensure it was fit for purpose and provided safe control measures which enabled critical training to take place.
- Developed protocols for Prevention, Protection, Preparedness and Response to address the impact of Local Outbreak Plans.
- Reviewed Business Continuity Plans to reflect learning from the pandemic and to consider an effective MFRS BC response if a key fire station was to be closed
- Reviewed guidance for working in other people's homes - Interim Service Instructions and associated risk assessments for station based Prevention and Protection activities have been produced
- Returned Fire Control staff to work at SHQ
- Continued a review of respiratory protective equipment (RPE) and Breathing Apparatus requirements along with PPE procedures for both existing PPE and new PPE specifically obtained for the COVID-19 risks.
- Reviewed guidance and produced risk assessments to enable the re-commencement of Equality Diversity and Inclusion training on stations.
- Continued to prepare 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.
- Continued to provide SCG membership along with the Emergency Services Cell and Recovery Co-ordination Group.
- Maintained existing transport and Workshop provision for servicing and maintenance of the MFRS fleet.
- Continued the provision of administration for the Strategic Business Continuity Group and Operations Cell.
- Published the following further COVID-19 specific Service Instructions:
 - COVID19 SI 0017 Assisting Ambulance Service during COVID-19 Pandemic
 - COVID19 SI 0018 SOFSA Activity by Operational Crews
 - COVID19 SI 0019 Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI) Visits

National Resilience (NR) – Lead Authority

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

As part of the recovery elements MFRS has:

- Rescheduled NR training courses to ensure national Key Performance Indicators requirements are maintained
- Provided weekly summary reports to Home Office Departmental Operations Centre regarding National FRS status to sustain business as usual and national resilience
- Liaised with NFCC stakeholders in the compilation of data as part of the national hub
- Undertaken business continuity information gathering across the sector
- Produced a dedicated NRAT recovery plan
- Conducted workforce assessments and impact analysis as part of NRAT business continuity requirements

Community Risk Management – Recovery Phase

Prevention

Fire Service Direct and the Prevention Team continues to support prescription deliveries for the shielded group to date over 6000 screening calls and 4000 prescriptions delivered. The Prevention teams have completed the following work:

- Supported partners to address rises in domestic abuse during COVID-19.
- Area Manager (Prevention) was co-opted onto the Local Outbreak Management Board (Knowsley)
- Group Manager (Prevention) was co-opted onto the Merseyside Health Intelligence Cell.
- Two MFRS fire appliances (Liverpool City) were branded in support of Test and Trace for Liverpool City Council/Liverpool CCG
- Street Intervention Teams continued to be deployed across Merseyside in support of social distancing and Merseyside Police's 4E model.
- Officers and Senior Managers recommenced supporting normal partnership Board arrangements including Safeguarding and Community Safety Partnerships.
- All Prevention Directorate staff have been strategically located across the MFRS Estate to ensure that workplaces remain COVID Secure limiting the impact on service delivery.
- Area Manager (Prevention) supported the consultation and review of interim Service Instructions and associated risk assessments for the re-introduction of station based activity (HFSC/Simple Operational Fire Safety Assessments/Site Specific Risk Information).
- Prevention Managers worked towards COVID Secure delivery of MFRS Youth Engagement provision from September 2020.

- Prevention Lead Officer led the multi-agency campaign for Sefton coastal areas throughout July and August 2020.
- Youth Engagement senior managers continued to provide information and guidance to children and young people following consultation across Merseyside in respect of COVID-19.
- Group Manager Prevention and Corporate Communications delivered joint prevention messaging for NFCC & the Home Office Fire Kills campaigns.
- Continued “nudge” campaigning for key prevention messages on social media platforms.
- Coordinated the delivery of goods from LFC Foundation to a number of volunteer groups including the Whitechapel Centre.
- Group Manager Prevention supported wellbeing briefings.

Protection – Recovery Phase

As part of the Government response to COVID-19 MFRS’ Protection department adopted a risk-based approach to their work. They carefully followed NFCC guidance to ensure that the correct balance of COVID-19 versus Fire Safety was achieved whilst securing the health and wellbeing of staff. Their work during the Phase One Recovery period included;

1. NFCC Guidance and MFRS Service Instructions

- Adopted NFCC Strategic Intentions COVID-19 – Protection (Issued 27th May 2020)
- COVID-19 Service Instruction 0003: Protection Activities (Reviewed and Amended)

2. Delivery of Core Functions

Audit and Inspection, Licensing, Planning and Building Regulations

- Introduced a temporary Risk Based Desktop Appraisal procedure for auditing premises (this ceased on the return to normal audit activity).
- Resumed auditing retail premises, licensed premises and high rise residential buildings, taking necessary COVID-19 precautions to reduce exposure, which included asking the responsible person to provide electronic documents prior to audit.
- Facilitated a Peak Hours Inspection campaign on licensed premises in early July when pubs received permission to reopen.
- Continued to complete licensing consultations from local authorities.
- Continued to provide a Building Regulations consultation service, initially from remote locations and more recently from a COVID secure location at SHQ.
- Introduced a procedure for triaging fire safety complaints.
- Provided businesses with Fire Safety advice specific to the pandemic.
- Protection Response Officers continued to respond to complaints and incidents when requested by Ops Response.
- Continued to update the National Enforcement Register and respond to data requests from NFCC.

Enforcement Activity

- Resumed follow up visits at premises with 'In Force' Prohibition and Enforcement Notices.
- Undertook regulatory compliance investigations as a result of recent serious fires.

High Rise Inspections and Building Risk Review

- Commenced with audits and gathering of information on high rise residential buildings as part of the Building Risk Review project (BRR)
- Our officer seconded to Liverpool City Council has maintained effective partnership working.
- Organised and facilitated a high rise reassurance campaign at Beech Rise and Willow Rise in Kirkby following issues identified with the external wall systems.

3. Other Protection Activity

Transformation Project

- Prioritised project work to assist with the delivery of our functional plan, this work included the development of new Service Instructions, Protection guidance and intranet Portal page development.
- Working from a newly developed retention schedule, a team was established to reorganise and refresh the Protection department files and folders. This also including hard copy files and building plans located on districts.
- We utilised Microsoft Teams to maintain effective communication, and also for sharing draft documents with working parties. This has enabled us to continue our work to develop a new Protection Information Management System (PIMS) with the Systems Support team.

Primary Authority Scheme

- Resumed our Primary Authority partnership work and continued to set up new partnerships with businesses.

Training

- Provided socially distanced Protection training to the latest firefighter recruit course.
- Protection staff continued to maintain CPD through online webinars and podcasts.

4. Measures to ensure COVID-19 Security and Business Continuity

- Provided each location with sufficient PPE and hygiene facilities.
- Provided staff with IT equipment and VPN access to facilitate remote working.
- Utilised additional available office space at multiple locations to ensure staff can maintain social distancing with the limitation of sharing common facilities.

Workforce - Recovery Phase

The Workforce Cell:

- Created a Workforce Role Assessment Tool to support line managers with a consistent approach in assessing each non-uniformed role in terms of the split of duties that are required to be completed from the workplace and those that can be completed effectively via home working, as part of the phased three-stage return to work approach.
- Developed return to work discussion guidance to aid line managers in having individual discussions with staff members over returning to the workplace.
- Workforce Guidance Notes have been created and circulated for staff, supporting guidance issued by Government covering:
 - Quarantine & Travel Corridor Exemptions
 - Test & Trace Guidance
- Established internal MFRA Test & Trace team to manage the identification of workplace close contacts in accordance with PHE directions.
- Arranged individual consultations with the medical team for with every member of staff who was shielding as we moved towards end of shielding period.
- Extensive consultation has taken place with Representative Bodies over:
 - Return to work guidance
 - Risk assessments

Strategy and Performance – Recovery Phase

ICT

- Procured additional devices and continued to roll them out to key staff to maintain working from home
- Procured peripherals for the return to work of staff who were working from home (eg headsets, docking stations etc.)
- Completed an extensive ICT “moves and changes” programme to facilitate the return to work by 3rd August of staff who had been shielding or working from home
- Developed an approach to embedding the use of mobile devices that can be used for future agile working arrangements
- Implemented the use of Microsoft Teams on fire stations to enable video calling/conferencing/training
- Worked with Democratic Services to implement a remote Authority meeting solution for the 21st May Authority meeting.
- ICT continues to pursue a Microsoft Teams solution for the Conference Suites.

Customer services/catering

- Continued to provide pre-packed lunches to key workers whilst the SHQ and TDA canteens were closed
- Reopened SHQ reception and SHQ and TDA canteen facilities on 6th July ensuring COVID secure arrangements were implemented. Cashless payment was introduced at the TDA at the same time (this was already in operation at SHQ)
- Developed COVID secure arrangements for meetings, visitors, mail delivery, conference facilities and catering and published these in the staff guidance and as a Service Instruction

Corporate Communications

- Continued to publish the COVID-19 newsletter to update staff on developments
- Designed promotional material (e.g. posters) as part of making the Authority's premises COVID secure
- Weekly returns were sent to NFCC detailing COVID-19 related additional activities carried out by the Service (e.g. delivering prescriptions to vulnerable people)
- Continued to support National Fire Chiefs Council/Home Office initiatives by producing infographics that have been used nationally
- Participated in the Merseyside Resilience Forum Communications Cell
- Worked with the Health and Safety team to design and publish several tailored versions of staff workplace COVID-19 related guidance:
 - SHQ
 - Vesty buildings
 - Training and Development Academy
 - Stations

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Restarted face to face ED&I Essentials training on fire stations following the delivery of virtual Unconscious Bias training during lockdown.

Estates, Finance, Facilities Management, Logistics, Legal & Procurement (including PPE and Building & Vehicles sub-cell/s) - Recovery Phase

The recovery work by the cell(s) identified two main goals: -

1. *To make the premises and service vehicles COVID-19 as safe as possible (based on all relevant advice and guidance) in order to allow employees to return to their place of work and for MFRS to deliver all of its services to the local community.*

2. *Ensure the required PPE & other equipment necessary to maintain a COVID-19 safe working environment was available to employees as and when required through the normal internal ordering process(s)*

1. **To make the premises and service vehicles COVID-19 as safe as possible.**

The Building & Vehicle sub-cell met on a regular basis during June & July. The cell considered Government, NFCC, and other guidance for achieving COVID-19 secure buildings for staff to return to work. Some of the work undertaken is as follows:

- Review of the building cleaning requirements and if required, entered into discussions with the cleaning contractor to agree additional cleaning hours or cleaning priorities.
- Put in place suitable arrangements for deep cleans following a notification of a possible or confirmed case of COVID-19
- Looked to accommodate 100% of the workforce returning to the workplace by:
 - producing drawings to show how the required desk spacing across the whole authority estates would be facilitated, this included
 - implementing desk spacing to ensure 2mtrs separation where possible or ensure the use of back to back or side to side working
 - ordering additional furniture as required
 - relocating staff to maximise usable space - this involved moving circa 200 staff.
- Installation of hand sanitiser dispensers across the whole estate
- Installation of COVID-19 signage across the whole estate
- Reviewed the air conditioning systems
- Reviewed the occupancy levels for meeting rooms, lifts, break out spaces and conference rooms.
- Reviewed contractors' working methods to ensure they adhere to the Government and MFRS guidance
- Procured and installed additional outside seating at locations
- Reviewed gym cleaning, gym occupancy levels and gym equipment layout.
- Worked with the Catering manager to facilitate the re-open the work canteen with changes to food ordering, payment methods and the seating plan to enhance a safe COVID-19 arrangement
- Phased return of the workforce to monitor and amend any arrangements as required
- Issued guidance on occupancy levels and conditions of use of Authority vehicles by staff
- Ensured direction was provided on what PPE to use in vehicles and when, and ensure relevant cleaning products are held in each vehicle

2. Ensure the required PPE & other equipment necessary to maintain a COVID-19 safe working environment was available

- As part of the original ask about preparing for COVID-19 the PPE sub-cell had already established (based on Government and NFCC guidelines) the relevant type of PPE required in order for employees to continue to work and serve the community for Response, Prevention and Protection activities.
 - In addition, the work of the Building & Vehicle sub-cell had established what was required in terms of cleaning and other materials for employees to work COVID-19 safely within the office and other premises.
 - The PPE cell in the Recovery stage concentrated on confirming the consumption rates of PPE and other equipment on a weekly basis by taking weekly stock takes.
 - The PPE cell also ensured sufficient suppliers had been identified and lead-in order times were known.
 - The cell established critical stock levels in order to ensure orders for stock replenishment would be made in plenty of time.
 - All the PPE and other equipment required to maintain a COVID-19 safe working environment was placed on the Service's internal ordering system to allow employees to order the relevant PPE, cleaning solutions and other equipment as and when required.
11. As a result of the pandemic, the work of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services was paused at the beginning of the pandemic, but the Inspectorate has since been commissioned by the Home Secretary to carry out a COVID-19 inspection which took place (virtually) in Merseyside during week commencing 28th September. The outcomes of this inspection are expected in the form of a letter to the Chief Fire Officer (with no graded judgement) in November.
12. The inspection has been designed to explore:
- What is working well and what is being learnt;
 - How the fire sector is responding to the COVID-19 crisis;
 - How fire services are dealing with the problems they face; and
 - What changes are likely as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
13. In the interests of ensuring that lessons are learnt from the initial phases of the pandemic, both a business continuity exercise and debrief were carried out in September with findings being fed back into business continuity plans for use in the future.

Equality and Diversity Implications

14. An Equality Impact Assessment has been created in relation to the Service's COVID-19 work and consideration is given to any differential impact on protected groups of the activities we have undertaken.

Staff Implications

15. During this challenging time, staff have been engaged with about the Service's initial response, recovery and renewed response arrangements through a series of internal communications methods, the Portal Forum, a staff survey and management contact, plus Occupational Health support. Indications are that staff have appreciated that level of communications and found that useful, but where any concerns or issues have been raised, they have been fed back into the Strategic Business Continuity group and the debrief to inform future actions.

Legal Implications

16. The Authority continually reviews and assesses the implications on the Authority further to legislative changes which are continually reviewed and assessed with actions put in place accordingly.

Financial Implications & Value for Money

17. All costs associated with COVID-19 have and are expected to be contained within the £1.4m grant received from MHCLG.

Risk Management, Health & Safety, and Environmental Implications

18. Extensive work has been undertaken throughout the period to prepare risk assessments related to the activities and changes that have taken place during the pandemic. These have been published on the Authority's website in line with the requirements of the Government's COVID Regulations.

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

19. A thorough risk-based approach to the pandemic has meant that Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service has continued to deliver effective emergency response services and where prevention and other services were paused to reduce risks to our communities, the staff in those teams (and many other employee volunteers) provided invaluable support to partner organisations.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

