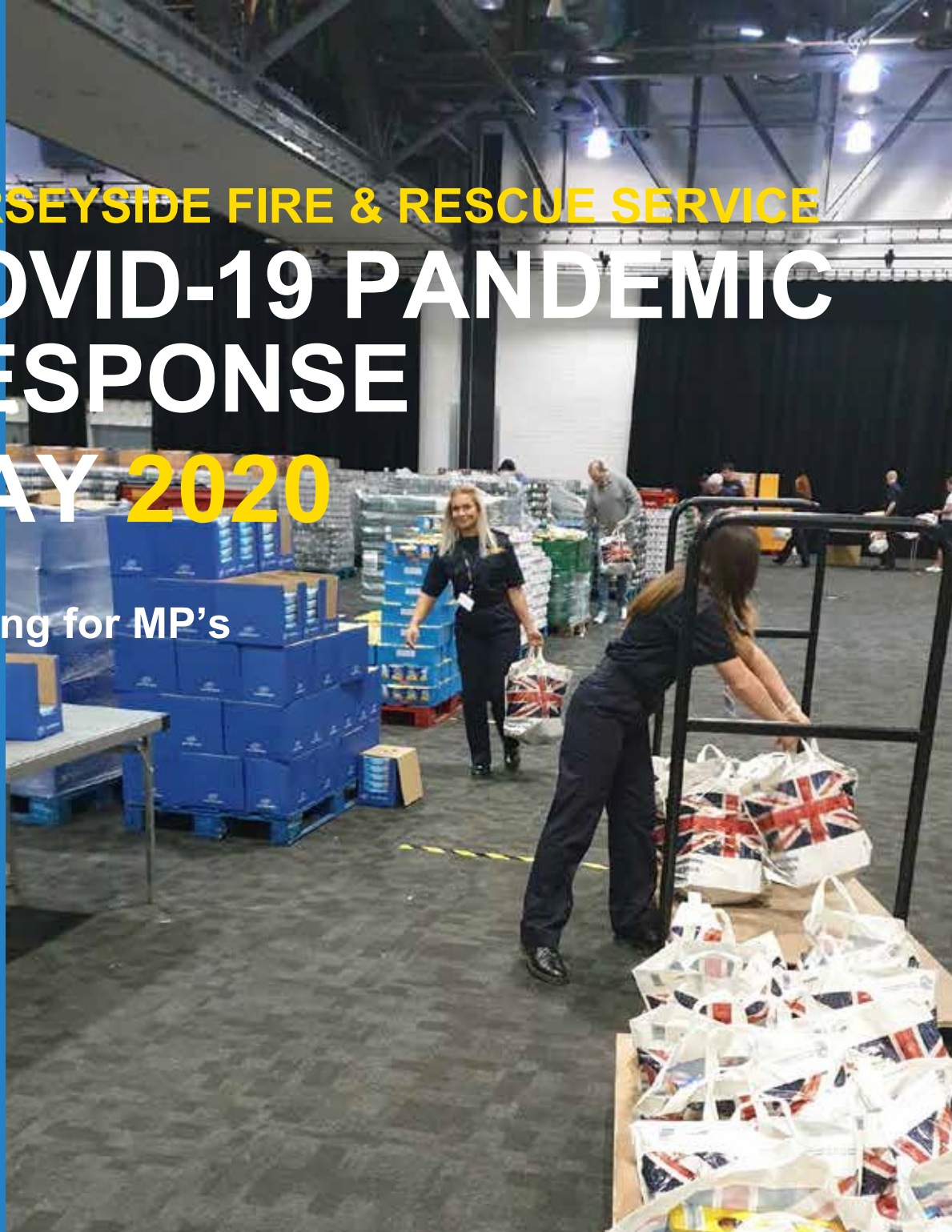


MERSEYSIDE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE MAY 2020

Briefing for MP's



RESPONSE To the COVID19 Pandemic

Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service's (MFRS) response to the COVID19 pandemic has been rapid and has involved every aspect of the Service. The events that have overtaken the country amid a global pandemic have left us facing a formidable challenges unlike any seen in this generation. 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.

The Service has prepared extensively for events such as these.

Once the effects of the pandemic became evident, our procedures were enacted to ensure we could maintain an effective operational service, protect staff, assist partner organisations and continue to protect the people of Merseyside.

This document provides information on the local, regional and national response, including work undertaken locally through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and the Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) to support local communities.

Our Chief Fire Officer Phil Garrigan was asked by the National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC) to lead on the national Fire Service response to the pandemic.

At the time of writing the current confirmed cases of COVID19 stands at 267k resulting in 37,460 deaths (28th May 2020).

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.

It has been clear from the outset that the Fire & Rescue Service (FRS) has had a part to play in how the country responds, recognising that it is well equipped and capable of supporting the joint endeavour, with people who are passionate about the protection of the public.

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

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.

MULTI-AGENCY RESPONSE

- The CFO for Merseyside was appointed as the COVID19 National Fire Gold lead and as a result he has overseen the actions of the fire and rescue service over this period.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.



NATIONAL FIRE GOLD GROUP: INITIAL ACTIONS

- 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 of PPE guidance in order to meet the requirements for the sector based on Public Health England (PHE) guidance
- the procurement of PPE on a national scale via the Procurement Hub, meaning the FRS have faced nothing like the PPE challenges faced elsewhere.
- securing 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) based on 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.
- 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

As Lead Authority 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 CO-ORDINATION - MERSEYSIDE

DCFO Nick Searle has taken up the Fire Gold Commander role within the Merseyside Strategic Coordination Group (SCG). 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.

THE STRATEGIC COORDINATION GROUP:


- determines and circulates clear strategic aims and objectives & 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.

The SCG sets strategy. This strategy is cascaded to the Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG) which in turn undertakes multi-agency tactical planning. 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. 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 resus dummies to all stations given the pressures faced by NWAS.
- Delivered the regional/NW plan to facilitate Face fit testing for North West Ambulance Service and Clinical Commissioners.
- Produced a range of temporary Service Instructions and guidance, many of which have been adopted as national guidance.

MFRS COVID-19 RESPONSE COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT



- 1,250** prescriptions delivered to those shielding by the end of April.
- 4,000+** screening calls made by the end of April to those shielding.
- Apprentices & other-duty staff supporting food packaging at M&S Arena food distribution hub.
- Continued 'nudge' campaigning for key prevention messages on social media.
- Letter of support sent to all retired MFRS employees over 70 and/or in a shielded group. This resulted in a no. of requests for delivery of essential items.
- Supported Tear Drops charity with delivery of essential supplies to vulnerable homes over 150 homes over 6 deliveries.
- Street Intervention Teams deployed to areas where young people breaching social distancing.
- 20 staff trained to support mortuaries across Merseyside now assisting with body movements.
- Joint prevention messages delivered for NFCC & Home Office Fire Kills campaign.
- Co-ordinated delivery of goods from LFC Foundation to NHS partners and paramedics.
- Developed associated temporary Service Instructions & Risk Assessments.
- Led multi-agency response to COVID-19 in Liverpool, including chairing Community Engagement & ASB Enforcement Group.
- MFRS crews conducted high visibility patrols as part of Operation Penny.

In addition to the above Community Risk Management (CRM) also:

- 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.
- Supported Violence Reduction Partnership with domestic violence messaging.
- Provided additional support for Critical Incident Debriefing for staff/volunteers carrying out support to mortuaries.



MERSEYSIDE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE: BUSINESS CONTINUITY

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 started to impact upon our communities and the Service as the Pandemic progressed. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) was asked 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. The Fire Strategic Business Continuity Group (BCG) was established on the 18th March. 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'

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.


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.

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.



MFRS CELLS - KEY MILESTONES: INFOGRAPHICS

MFRS COVID-19 RESPONSE OPERATIONS



Procedures put in place across the Service to ensure strict regime of social distancing and hygiene was followed.

Safe systems of work provided to protect staff & critical operational response services from the spread of COVID-19.

Change of shift arrangements put in place for stations, training school & workshops.

2 separate locations introduced for Fire Control to prevent cross contamination between Watches at shift change.

Reviewed PPE requirements & procedures for both existing PPE and new PPE specifically obtained for COVID-19 risks.

Degradation plans prepared, enabling the Service to provide a systematic approach to business continuity to maintain effective response arrangements in light of reasonable worst case staff absence.

MFRS COVID-19 RESPONSE WORKFORCE



Co-ordinated identification & central collation of all staff identified as Critical Workers in line with Government guidance.

All staff reviewed & contacted to provide advice in line with Government 'Stay at Home' guidance.

Shielding employees identified & line managers provided contact and support.

New working practices introduced using technology to facilitate virtual/socially distanced:

- medicals • recruitment interviews
- training sessions • appraisals
- capability & welfare meetings

950+ Critical Worker letters from CFO sent to staff & contractors to allow them to access school provision.

Worked with Strategy & Performance to establish a centralised database to record details of staff volunteering to carry out of other duties to support COVID-19 related activities.

Established testing of symptomatic employees & members of their households with symptoms to allow staff who are well & confirmed as negative to return to work promptly.

Reviewed all staff who have retired in last 3 years (operational) and last 5 years (control) to identify potential candidates for re-engagements...

80 employees contacted

25 pre-employment checks completed

Co-ordinated with training school for a planned 'return to service' training course.

Extensive consultation with Representative Bodies over introduction of new duties with Collective Arrangements 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

Temporary Service Instruction created to cover Agile Working Arrangements to support social distancing during COVID-19.

Implemented centralised recording of working arrangements for all support staff regarding home working and/or social distancing.

Workforce Guidance notes created & circulated to staff covering:

- annual leave & flexi whilst home working
- self-isolation • vulnerable staff
- critical workers

MFRS CELLS - KEY MILESTONES: INFOGRAPHICS

MFRS COVID-19 RESPONSE INFORMATION, COMMUNICATION & TECHNOLOGY



Introduced & rolled out Microsoft Teams and Skype to allow meetings to be held remotely, including daily Fire Gold meetings.

New working arrangements put in place & guidance issued for remote working.

Deployed telnet service desk & ICT engineers to work from home.

Working to improve communications on stations.

Implemented new process for fast issuing of ICT assets, allowing home working to be quickly facilitated for most staff.

Supported the Fire Control relocation.

Built & issued... 32 Surface Pro devices.
Repurposed... 20+ laptops.
Issued a mix of 20 standard phones & smart phones.

Developed & released a new app to allow staff to easily register for volunteering.

Provided tablets, laptops, VPN access, mobile phones & peripherals to staff to facilitate working from home. (rolled out to key workers initially)

Produced a range of user guides & FAQs for:

- Microsoft Teams • Skype • VPN
- Responsible use of VPN
- Data Protection when working from home

Identified & tested a solution for remote Authority meetings.

Increased mailbox sizes & mobile data limits to enable wider uninterrupted use of email on mobile/remote devices.

MFRS COVID-19 RESPONSE INTERNAL & EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS



Daily email briefings for staff and the Authority, prepared with the ACFO.

Publication of weekly newsletter round-up of COVID-19 related content. (started w/c 13th April)

Co-ordinated the CFO's appearance on the Roger Phillips radio show.

Edited & published videos regarding changes to operational & technical procedures in response to COVID-19.

Worked with Youth Engagement Team to ensure young people remain connected to the Service. This has been done via social media & new newsletter.

Responded to high level of media interest related to telecommunication mast incidents in Merseyside.

Supported major NFCC/Home Office initiative by producing infographics that have been used nationally.

Co-ordinated the use of the intranet Portal Forum for two-way communication with staff.

Published a range of COVID-19 temporary Service Instructions, ensuring they complied with existing processes, with governance adapted to meet the urgent need.

Ensured key communications messages for local residents disseminated as widely as possible using social media channels. Messages include:

- Water safety • Mental health • Fly tipping
- Domestic violence • Funeral services
- Support for the NHS • Home fire safety
- Controlled burning (eg garden waste fires)
- Support MFRS have provided to partners & communities (eg prescription deliveries)

THE ROLE OF THE MERSEYSIDE FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

Since the Coronavirus Act 2020 came into force on 25th March 2020 the Authority has moved on line in order to maintain democratic accountability.

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 applied to local authorities including MFRA.

As a result the Authority has utilised the ZOOM meeting platform to host briefings and youtube to live stream its Authority Meetings

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 our Merseyside MP's when confirmed.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Government has announced two tranches of funding for councils, each of £1.6B, totalling £3.2B. 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.

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 increases with some fire and rescue authorities receiving a six-fold increase. The total COVID19 grant monies received from the Government is £1.419m.

This will be used to:

- Enhance PPE requirements based on the additional work undertaken.
- Ensure that our Fire & Rescue Stations and other buildings are COVID 19 Secure.
- Offset the losses incurred due to the virus.
- Offset any additional costs incurred protecting our communities.

As we continue to respond to the challenges faced by our partners in health and social care we remain more committed than ever to the support of our communities as they seek to recover.

CFO Phil Garrigan



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