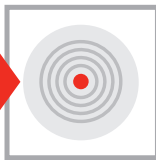


2020



Leading the way to a safer Essex

Setting out the Context for Change | 5 March 2015

Essex County Fire and Rescue Service sits at the heart of the communities of Essex, Southend and Thurrock and has always had strong trust and support from the public. We don't take this for granted and that's why, as we embark on a programme of significant change, we wanted to let you know how much we value this relationship and how we plan to keep you informed at every step along the way.

The aim of this document is to provide you with important information to help develop your understanding so that you can respond in an informed and meaningful way as we bring our ideas and plans to you for consultation over the coming months. We are keen you understand the context in which we work, what the future may hold and how we plan to develop a different focus to make our organisation fit for the future and strong to face the upcoming challenges. All this, while maintaining the best possible service to all of our communities throughout the County.

It was some 15 years ago that the UK Fire and Rescue Service began to focus resources on fire prevention and as a result, the number of incidents we attend fell by over 50 per cent between 2004 and 2014. But while our firefighters attended fewer incidents, demand for our protection and prevention services is increasing dramatically, so we need to look at new ways of working to address this growing imbalance.

Our Services

Our over-riding emphasis is on keeping the people of Essex safe. Essex County Fire and Rescue Service's delivery is focused on three key areas: Prevention, Protection and Response. We know that the public focuses on the service that is our response to incidents when they occur. The location of our 50 fire stations reflects past standards and much higher incident numbers. Response is our highest cost activity. We currently have 17 fire stations with permanent crews, five of which are crewed during the day, and 33 fire stations crewed by on call or retained firefighters who respond to a pager when an incident occurs.

In 2015, the Fire Authority will employ 1,543 staff including 733 wholetime firefighters, 514 retained firefighters, 34 control operators and 262 support staff. Around three quarters, or 76 per cent of our personnel are employed primarily to deliver our response service with 112 employees specifically engaged to undertake prevention and protection work.

The demand for our services has changed dramatically in the last 15 years, a pattern which is mirrored across the UK Fire and Rescue Service. In the ten years between 2004 and 2014, we saw a 50 per cent reduction in the number of incidents we attended. Numbers have continued to reduce and in 2013/14, we were called to just under 14,000 incidents or the equivalent of 38 per day compared with a little over 28,000 or 77 per day in 2004.

Around 40 per cent of these incidents are false alarms and many others require no action on our part

Essex County
Fire & Rescue Service

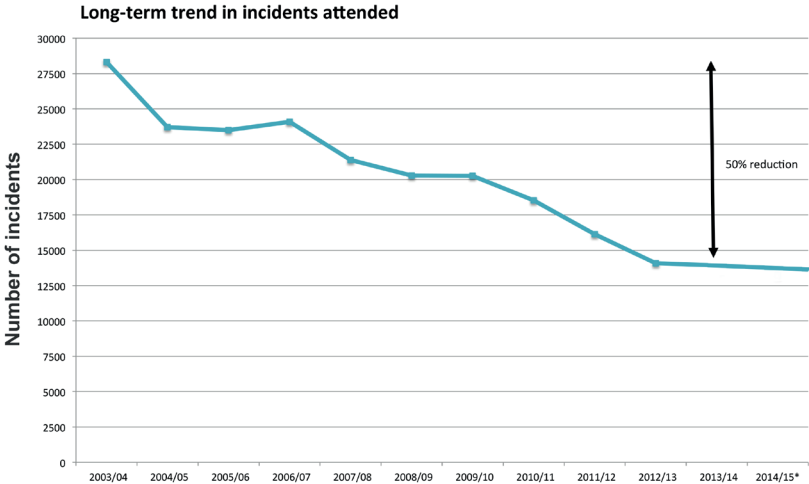
Our Values: Respect, Accountability, Openness and Involvement



when we arrive. This means that our 50 fire stations are only needed, on average, for 23 incidents each day. The biggest reduction in incident type over the past five years has been in fires which are 36 per cent down and false alarms by 38 per cent. That means our wholtime pumping appliances do not attend any incidents at all on 40 per cent of shifts.

This success in reducing incidents demonstrates the focus on prevention as a key part of our community safety approach in the preceding years. The Service delivers a diverse range of community safety activities including home fire safety visits, installing smoke alarms, pro-actively identifying vulnerable people in our communities and working with other agencies to keep them safe through safety campaigns and local interventions. Clearly community safety is not just about fires and, increasingly, the Service has focused on other areas of risk prevention such as working with schools and community partners on road and vehicle safety initiatives to keep people safe on our roads.

While we have seen significant success in this area of our service delivery, we are now finding that demand for our Prevention and Protection services is outstripping our capacity to deliver. Traditionally, most of our resource has been directed to our response activity and it can be challenging to direct that resource effectively in other areas of our work.



Our Community Focus

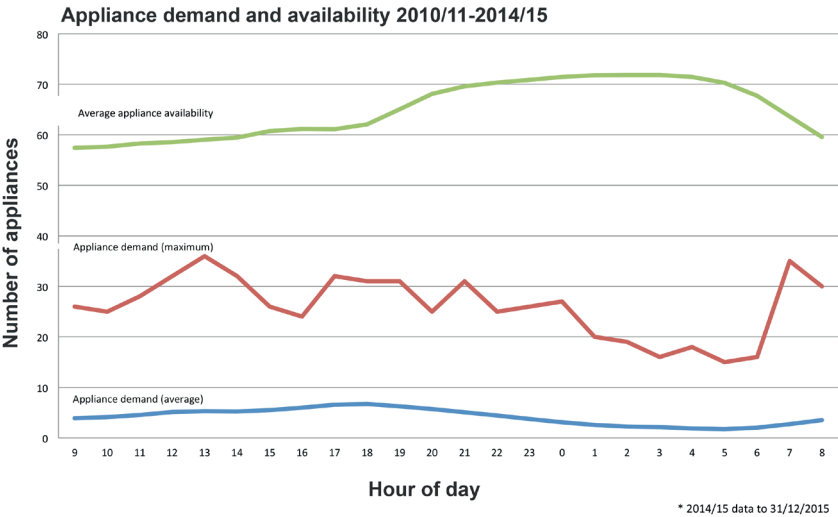
We believe that it is in everyone's best interests that we are able to prevent incidents occurring, rather than having to respond to them. Even where we are able to deliver life-saving interventions, there is a cost to those people involved be it damage to their property or health or the environment, or the associated psychological trauma of being involved in an incident. The UK has an ageing population and this presents a new challenge within our own communities. We know that those people who are most at risk of fire are those in the older age groups. The population of Essex is close to 1.74 million and the older population is expected to grow by 28 per cent by 2033. In addition to the impact of not having a smoke alarm – 12 per cent of households don't have a smoke alarm but 38 per cent of all fire deaths are in homes without a working smoke alarm – the biggest cause of fires in the home is kitchen fires caused by distraction while cooking. So, we need to do more to raise awareness and support people at risk of such incidents.

Our aim is to ensure we can direct our resources to where they are most needed in the immediate and long term to maintain the safety of our communities and minimise the risk to those most vulnerable who we hope to prevent ever needing our response services.

However, as with the UK Fire and Rescue Service (and identified by the outgoing Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor Sir Ken Knight in his report Facing the Future 2013), Essex County Fire and Rescue Service has not, as yet, seen a corresponding reduction in resources one might expect as a result of the decrease in demand for our response services. While the Service has taken some steps over the last ten years to change the way we crew our appliances and to deploy our response services more flexibly, this has not delivered the fundamental change to the way we deliver our services which we believe is now required.

The Service currently provides 74 frontline fire appliances to provide its response service across the County with between 55 and 70 of these available at any time. Yet even at our busiest times of day, we are only required to deploy on average five to seven to incidents at the same time. Even at times of significant demand, such as a major fire at a power station, we would only draw on around 30-40 of our appliances at any one time.

As the graph shows, we also see an increase in available resources during the night period between 6pm and 8am which coincides with our period of lowest demand. This is as a result of increased appliance availability when we have more of our retained firefighters able to respond. We need to consider whether we should alter the existing model for our response service to one that more accurately matches our resources to risk and demand.



Our Values

Essex County Fire and Rescue Service has a set of core values: Openness, Accountability, Involvement and Respect. The last few years have been challenging for our people with a major police investigation into historical abuse allegations and a difficult industrial relations climate which has seen national and local trade disputes with the Fire Brigades Union. Essex Fire Authority has taken the bold step of commissioning an independent review of the culture within the Service which will enable the Authority to identify underlying issues and how we can work to develop a more supportive culture aligned with these values.

Our firefighters care passionately about their role in the local community but are faced with reducing demand for their traditional services and a growing need to maintain their skills and motivation, while facing

uncertainty over the future. We want to design a Service that makes the best use of the significant skills and abilities of our people, while ensuring we have the right people in the right roles to meet the wide range of demands our communities place on us. We aim to do this through open and honest communication and engagement with our people and their representative bodies, working collaboratively using an innovative negotiation approach to find an agreed solution for the future of the Service. Through taking this open and collaborative approach, we hope we can avoid more damaging trade disputes and the impact they have on our people and the reputation of our Service.

Our Finances

As with all public services, Essex Fire Authority faces a challenging financial future. Commentators are clear that austerity is here to stay for at least the next five years and potentially much longer. While exact funding figures are not known, the Service expects to see a reduction in its funding between now and 2020 of up to £15m – that's up to 20 per cent of our current budget. It is important that we maintain our focus on service delivery and ensure we continue to meet the needs of our communities but we must also ensure that any future service delivery model is financially sustainable and offers value for money for the council tax payer. The Authority has a balanced budget for 2015/16 but needs to plan for funding reductions in the years that follow.

Politically, there is also an increasing focus on 'blue light' services and whatever the outcome of the General Election, it is expected that any new Government will begin a process of reform within the UK Fire and Rescue Service. This could involve local, regional or national mergers, or a move to place the Fire and Rescue Service under the governance of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Whatever direction this reform takes, it is clear that a focus on greater collaboration between emergency services will continue. Essex County Fire and Rescue Service aims to deliver changes within its own Service which will facilitate greater collaboration and ensure that the Service is an agile and desirable partner.

Feedback

Clearly this is an exciting and challenging time for us as we now enter into a period of review and planning to reshape our services for 2020 and beyond. Our approach will be to design an organisation that is: **Service Led, Community Focused, Values Driven and Financially Sustainable.**

We will continue to engage with you as our stakeholders throughout this period of transformation. We welcome your questions or comments on the future of the Fire and Rescue Service within our communities and how we can work together, *Leading the way to a safer Essex*. We will provide further updates and information on how you may get involved in the weeks to come. But if you have any immediate feedback, please let us know your views. We would be particularly interested in the things you think we should take into account in planning the future shape of our fire and rescue service in Essex.

Ways you can get involved

Send us your email details and we will make sure you receive all the latest news and information around the progress of our 2020 project as it happens. We can also bring you details of public meetings, surveys, phone ins and webinars as these are planned into our programme of consultation. Just Email: Mailbox.2020@essex-fire.gov.uk.



By Tel: 01376 570814



Through our website: www.essex-fire.gov.uk
or by Email: Mailbox.2020@essex-fire.gov.uk



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By Tweet: #TELECFRS