

Report title: ESSEX COUNTY FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT 2021/22	
Report to: Essex Police, Fire and Crime Panel	
Report author: Police Fire and Crime Commissioner Fire and Rescue Authority, Roger Hirst	
Date: 22 March 2022	For: Noting and comment
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County Divisions affected: All Essex	

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service's (ECFRS's) progress in delivering the priorities set out in the Fire and Rescue Plan 2019 – 2024 and the Integrated Risk Management Plan 2020-2024, based on data and other information for the period July 2021 to September 2021.

The more detailed report attached at Appendix 1, produced by the Essex County Fire and Rescue Service and scrutinised at the monthly Performance and Resources Board chaired by the Authority, provides highlight and exception reporting against service priorities.

2. Recommendations

That members of the Panel note and comment / seek clarity as appropriate on the content of the report and attached appendix.

3. Context / Summary

To put into context the circumstances in which these levels of performance were achieved:

- ECFRS attended 3,996 incidents in Quarter 2 of 2021/22, the lowest number of total incidents attended in the second quarter over the last four fiscal years. This is mainly due to a 33% (-476) decrease in fires compared with Quarter 2 of 2020/21. Whilst primary, secondary and tertiary fires all reduced in Quarter 2, the total reduction is attributed predominantly to a 46% (-402) decrease in secondary fires, especially those involving grassland, woodland and crops.

This is likely due to the unsettled weather, including spells of heavy rain and suppressed temperatures, that the county experienced during July and August.

- Conversely, this year saw the highest number of attendances to special services incidents in the second quarter for the last four years; an 8% increase compared with the same period last year. Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs), effecting entry / exit, flooding and assisting other agencies continue to account for the bulk of special services. RTCs increased by 18.6% (from 253 to 300), flooding rose by 6% (from 128 to 148) and assisting other agencies increased by 15.6% (from 128 to 148). The Service also saw increases in other special services incidents compared with the same period the previous year, most notably:
 - A 133.3% increase in medical (first responder) incidents (albeit from the low baseline of three to seven)
 - A 100% increase in hazardous materials incidents (from seven to 14)
 - An 80.8% increase in other rescues / release of persons (from 26 to 47)
 - A 53.3% increase in incidents (that are not false alarms) requiring no further action (from 30 to 46)
- The Safeguarding team received 114.8% more referrals in Quarter 2 of 2021/22 than in the same period the previous year (up from 122 to 262). This correlates with evidence from partners, particularly in social care, that the pandemic has increased vulnerability in our communities. It also reflects enhanced partnership working with Essex Police and the East of England Ambulance Service Trust (EEAST) now that working relationships with these partners are well established. Referrals from the NHS have also increased by 250% since the start of the year due to the increased partnership working undertaken during the pandemic.
- ECFRS attended 1,776 false alarms in Quarter 2 of 2021/22, 169 more than during Quarter 2 of 2020/21. This comprised of a 36% increase in malicious calls, followed by a 17% increase in false alarms due to apparatus and a 5% increase due to good intent. The number of unwanted fire signals attended in every month of the quarter also increased compared to both the previous quarter and the same time the prior year. The Fire Protection Department continues to work closely with the owners of buildings triggering frequent calls and continues to improve its relationships with the business community by working with the Chamber of Commerce and also through the employment of a Business Engagement Officer.

Highlights with regard to performance during Quarter 2 include:

- The number of Accidental Dwelling Fires (ADFs) attended during the quarter was 10.7% lower than during the same period the previous year, at 167 compared with 187. In addition, the percentage of ADFs where a smoke alarm was present and worked was consistently significantly higher during Quarter 2 of 2021/22 than during the same period the previous year, with an overall total of 67% compared with 58%.
- Within the overall reduction in fires, there was an 18.4% reduction in primary deliberate fires (from 103 to 84) and a 12.8% reduction in secondary deliberate

fires (from 94 to 82). The Service is currently in the process of implementing Firestoppers throughout Essex in order to reduce deliberate fires across the county still further.

- There was a notable increase in the number of Safe and Well Visits completed by stations, at 342 compared with just 15 in the same period the previous year. Furthermore, 98% of Safe and Well Visits were delivered within 28 days of referral against a target of 90%. The number of Home Safety Visits completed by stations also increased by 12% over the quarter, continuing the trend from Quarter 1. Assuming that personnel levels remain stable, visit numbers are expected to continue to increase across delivery teams going forward. In addition to this, the Essex Centre for Data Analytics (ECDA) has recently completed and handed over to ECFRS a piece of work that will increase ECFRS's understanding of at-risk groups, which will inform its Home Fire Safety activity and the targeting of interventions going forward.
- The Service continues to deliver its commitment to increasing diversity within the workforce. Compared to March 2021, ECFRS diversity metrics indicate that a larger percentage of the workforce (both whole-time firefighters and across all employee groups) self-identified as female and / or originating from an ethnicity minority as at 30 September 2021. In addition, 36% of the new wholetime firefighter intake who declared their sexual orientation identified as other than heterosexual. During Quarter 2, the Asian Fire Service Association reviewed the Service's recruitment practices and confirmed that the commitments made by ECFRS are being met and that there is evidence of good practice being followed. The AFSA also found that the Service is building key relationships with external groups and organisations and is embedding systemic change in its systems and processes. The AFSA made 25 recommendations which are being progressed by the Service.
- There was a sizable increase in the number of employee relations cases closed in Quarter 2 compared with Quarter 1 (from 13 to 46), with the average time taken to close cases improving by 37 days and the oldest case length reducing by 40 days. The HR team continues to carry out regular case reviews to ensure that the learning from them is captured.
- 99% of Freedom of Information (FoI) requests, Subject Access Requests (SARs) and Environmental Information Regulation (EIR) requests were closed within 20 working days against a target of 90%. The seven complaints received in Quarter 2 were all closed within 20 working days, against a target of 90%.

In terms of areas for continued focus:

- Despite the overall reduction in the number of incidents attended during the quarter, the average time to attend potentially life-threatening incidents remained above the target of 10 minutes.
- Total pumping appliance availability ranged from 72% to 76% against a target of 94%, with total availability being at lower levels for every month in the quarter than during the same period last year. Whole-time and day crew pumping appliance availability was consistent at 91% to 92% against a target of 98% (compared with 94% to 97% during the previous year), whilst on-call availability ranged from 64% to 69% against a target of 90% (compared with 71% to 78% the previous year). Availability levels are now being interrogated

in greater detail by the Service in order to understand better – and therefore address – causation factors.

- Against a backdrop of a long-term trend of reductions in road traffic collisions, it has provisionally been reported that there were 237 people killed or seriously injured in RTCs on the roads of Essex, Southend and Thurrock during Quarter 2 of 2021/22, an increase of 20.9% (+41) compared to the same quarter in the previous year. Within this, there was a 13.3% increase in fatalities (from 15 to 17) and a 21.5% increase in serious injuries (from 181 to 220). Analysis undertaken by the Safer Essex Roads Partnership (SERP) indicates that high speed continues to be a factor in the majority of RTCs. Certain at-risk groups and vehicle types also feature frequently. The SERP has an ambition to achieve zero road deaths and serious injuries on the county's roads by 2040, with an intermediate target of halving the number of deaths and serious injuries by 2030. The Partnership is currently developing a strategy and communications plan to deliver this. Meanwhile, the Service participated in various RTC reduction events during Quarter 2, as detailed on pages 56 – 57 of Appendix 1.
- The Service did not meet its targets in terms of the number of audits of high and very high-risk premises identified within its Risk Based Inspection Programme during Quarter 2, primarily because these audits can only be carried out by qualified inspecting officers holding a Level 4 diploma. 14 inspecting officers achieved this qualification in late 2021, which will significantly increase capacity to complete these audits going forward.
- ECFRS attended 1,776 false alarms in Quarter 2, 10.5% (169) more than during the same period in 2020/21. The Service also attended 326 unwanted fire signals, 16% (45) more than during the previous quarter and 29.9% (75) more than during the same period the previous year.
- The coronavirus pandemic continued to impact on attendance. The easing of restrictions led to higher infection rates, which contributed to 4.8% more people taking sick leave during Quarter 2 compared with the previous period. Time recorded as self-isolating, or otherwise absent from work due to reasons connected with Covid, contributed to the total amount of available working time lost to sickness being above the target of 5% in all areas except Support, with Control reaching 10%. The impact of this was successfully managed through the invocation of business continuity arrangements and plans, including re-training staff in other roles who had previously worked in Control to provide cover if required. The HR service continues to review sickness cases on a weekly basis to ensure that referrals are made to Occupational Health in a timely manner and that supervisors are assisted to manage individual cases and support employees back to work successfully.
- 18 more employee relations cases were opened in Quarter 2 compared with Quarter 1. While attendance cases continue to form the bulk of these, grievance cases rose most significantly, from four to 13 (an increase of 225%). No recurring trends have been identified in the caseload, with grievances being triggered variously by changes in working arrangements, dissatisfaction with policies and procedures and issues with working relationships.
- The majority age band for whole-time firefighters has risen from 36 – 45 as at the end of March 2021 to 46 – 55 as at the end of September, while the

majority age group in Support roles rose from 46 – 55 to 56 – 65. This signals the need for the Service to retain its focus on succession planning, particularly in these areas.

4. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Essex County Fire & Rescue Service Quarter Two Performance Report
2021 - 2022