

Essex Fire Authority

Report to the Constituent Authorities 24 June 2009

ANNUAL REPORT – AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The past year has seen Essex County Fire and Rescue Service make considerable progress. In May 2008, we moved to our new headquarters site at Kelvedon Park near Witham. The move went extremely well – staff morale is high, we are realising the benefits of improved working methods and plans are now in place to make the site the centre for the Fire and Rescue Service in Essex. Once again, we have received a positive report from the Audit Commission, rating the Service assessment at the highest level whilst recognising that we continue to improve well in most areas.

We have also refreshed our Service Strategy this year. In doing so, we have worked with other services and employee groups to ensure that we not only reflect those internal areas that are priorities for us, but have also aligned our priorities to the wider role of the Fire and Rescue Service in delivering safer and sustainable communities.

We have seen a number of successes in our community safety areas. This is reflected in the positive impact that we are having on the communities of Essex. We have seen falls in the number of injuries from Operational-related incidents and the number of people who are killed and seriously injured on our roads. We continue to deliver a range of community safety activities targeted towards groups to support those with extra needs within the community. In particular, we ran our first Fire Break scheme in Essex for young people with learning difficulties. This was held as a great success and is testament to the commitment, ability and willingness of our personnel to reach out to all groups within the County.

In respect of operational delivery we have again been rated as high performing by the Audit Commission. We have, as stated within our Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) 2009–2012, reviewed a number of operational delivery arrangements within the County. We will implement the outcomes of these reviews over the next twelve months and realise the benefits from redirecting resources to ensure that we continue to deliver high-quality safety services at the lowest possible costs to taxpayers.

Our overall performance as a Service has improved considerably against our priorities over the past year. This is across all areas and is recognition of our continued journey toward being an excellent Fire and Rescue Service.

We have once again seen a wide range of operational incidents to which the Service has deployed resources. The variety is a reflection of the wide-ranging demands to which the Service responds. In particular, we have seen heavy flooding in the early part of 2009. We have attended a range of large domestic and industrial operations, chemical incidents, road traffic collisions and other rescue incidents. The Service continues to review its arrangements for meeting these demands and, as can be seen in the action plan detailed within this report, we are introducing a number of new appliances to ensure that, as a Service, we have the capacity to meet anticipated operational demands.

In common with all other companies and public services, we recognise that we are facing challenging times. The Fire and Rescue Service is not immune to the current economic climate and the pressures that this brings. Despite this, the Service has made clear in its Service Strategy an intention to work hard to meet the needs of our communities. We will ensure that we constantly challenge ourselves to ensure that we are making best use of our available resources. A key aspect of this is working well with our partners in Essex, Southend and Thurrock to ensure that together we are working to deliver safer and sustainable communities.

The full Annual Report can be found at http://www.essex-fire.gov.uk/images/efa/Annual_Report_2009-10_new_to_upload.pdf

OPERATIONAL INCIDENTS REPORT

We were provided with information about the number and type of operational incidents that the Service has attended from April 2008 to March 2009. Below are some accounts of particularly notable incidents.

Date: 5th April 2009

Incident: Fire in a Shop (Mad Dogs and Englishmen)

Address: London Road, Leigh-on-Sea

Firefighters from Leigh and Hadleigh were called at 1837 hours on Sunday 5th April 2009 to a fire at the rear of a shop called 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen' in London Road, Leigh-on-Sea. This was the first of fourteen calls.

The fire started at the back of the retail premises and quickly spread through the neighbouring shop used as motorbike retail and repair shop and motorbike clothing shop. The first crews in attendance under the command of Sub Officer Green quickly attempted to extinguish the fire at the rear and also to search the three flats that were above the shop for any persons that may have been trapped.

DO Wahl was quickly mobilised as the Incident Commander and on arrival his priority was to save life, and crews were committed in breathing apparatus for that purpose. However, a rapid spread of fire and smoke occurred which quickly changed colour and became pulsating giving signs of a flashover, so all crews were withdrawn. Conditions were such that, in the flats above, a decision was taken that any life that may have been present was now not saveable, and the priority changed to saving the remaining properties from the spread of fire. It subsequently became apparent that there were persons trapped in the flats above.

Fire fighting operations were hampered by a shortage of water and the presence of cylinders, the number of which was unknown. Jets were used on the front and back of the premises to extinguish the fire and prevent further spread. The Aerial Ladder Platform was used as a water tower and to relay information about the extent of the fire. A second Aerial Ladder Platform was used at the rear of the premises as conditions for crews had deteriorated hindering safe fire fighting. Some LPG cylinders exploded during the fire and crews also had the additional hazard of asbestos sheeting that was involved in the fire. Some salvage work was carried out to remove motorbikes but again crews had to be withdrawn due to the rapid fire spread.

The subsequent fire investigation found that a young child had started a small fire at the rear of the premises earlier in the day and this was believed to have been extinguished by the owner. However the investigation revealed this had not been extinguished properly and the fire had re-ignited spreading to the shop. Fire spread from within the motorbike shop had travelled through large openings between the premises and poor roof construction consisting of light timber roof trusses and roof sheeting. Fire loading consisting of furniture and fuel from the motorbike repair area added to the rapid spread of fire.

This was an extremely dynamic and challenging incident which was tackled with crews working extremely hard in all areas to prevent any further damage, with many crews wearing BA several times. This was a multi agency incident with good support from Police and Ambulance crews and the Local Authority that opened up a local school for welfare use by both members of the public and firefighting crews.

Due to the size of the incident relief crews were in attendance throughout the following day turning over and damping down together with assisting the fire investigation team.

The estimated cost to the Authority for attending this incident was £15,000. This is based upon the cost of firefighter and officer wages during the incident and also subsequent to it for fire investigation and debriefs arrangements. The costs do not include consumables such as fuel.

INCIDENT OF NOTABLE INTEREST

Date: 8th April 2009

Incident: Lorry and House on Fire

Address: Honeypot Lane, Tolleshunt Knights

A number of calls were received by the Service at 1430 hours to a fire involving a lorry and a house. Firefighters from Tiptree were unavailable at the time of the call so appliances were sent from Tollesbury and Maldon. Station Officer Martin Cable was the initial Incident Commander and on arrival was confronted with a well developed fire involving an HGV and a large detached 2-storey property.

After conducting a dynamic risk assessment collating the incident risk information, Stn O Cable requested a total of 6 fire appliances and began defensive firefighting operations. His aim was to contain the fire to the roof and

first floor and protect the attached garage and office area. The additional appliances were requested due to the size of the property and the fact that water supplies were both limited and not available in close proximity to the incident. In consultation with other officers on scene an Aerial Ladder Platform and Hose Laying Appliance were requested to assist with dealing with the incident. At this stage the fire was well developed in the roof and first floor of the property.

Assistant Divisional Officer Fearn arrived and following an operational briefing assumed command of the incident. Although the ALP was in attendance and the Hose Layer was en-route it was decided that these appliances should be returned to their home stations as they were no longer required. It was also at this time that the Command Support Vehicle and Rescue Tender were released from the incident and it was reduced to 4 pumping appliances. It was apparent at this stage that the property had been almost completely destroyed and was now structurally unsound which made any attempts to fight the fire internally unsafe.

At approximately 1730hrs the incident was reduced to 2 pumping appliances with a 2 pump relief requested as soon as possible after the wholetime shift change at 1800hours.

Assistant Divisional Officer Steve Reynolds attended the incident as Fire Investigation Officer and following the collection of incident details arranged with Essex Police Scenes of Crime to re-attend the following day to conduct a joint fire scene examination.

Due to the size and nature of the fire, reliefs were required at 3 hourly intervals until 1100hrs the following day when the investigation was concluded and the incident closed down.

The estimated cost to the Authority for attending this incident was £5,200. This is based upon the cost of firefighter and officer wages during the incident and also subsequent to it for fire investigation and debriefs arrangements. The costs do not include consumables such as fuel.

INCIDENT OF NOTABLE INTEREST

Date: 20th February 2009

Incident: Crane Driver Collapsed in Crane – 20m high

Address: Roxwell Road Chelmsford

Firefighters from Chelmsford were mobilised at 1233 hours on 20th February to a crane operator (64 year old male) who had collapsed at the controls of his crane, 20 m (60 foot) above a building site. Initial crews donned safe working at height equipment and accompanied paramedics up the vertical ladder to assist the casualty. Paramedic's administered first aid to the unconscious male and requested assistance to get him to the ground.

Divisional Officer Wilson had been informed as Urban Search and Rescue advisor and asked for the Service's USAR team to be mobilised at 1237 hours with their line access equipment. He also request Assistant Divisional Officer Povey to attend as the nearest rope rescue qualified supervisory officer.

Chelmsford fire station's Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP), which is part of the Pre Determined Attendance (PDA) for this type of incident, was pitched but was close to its operating limits as it had limited access to the building site; had the crane been 6 feet further away it is unlikely the ALP would have reached the casualty. The casualty was approx 15 stone and crews had very limited space and had an extremely difficult task to get him onto the ALP cage.

On his arrival ADO Povey took over as incident commander. With the ALP working on its limits the USAR team were instructed to get their LACE (line access for casualty extraction) equipment ready in case they were needed. However at 1337 hours the casualty was successfully lowered on the ALP cage to the ground and removed to hospital by ambulance. He was in a very serious condition.

The USAR crew did not get to work on this occasion but as mentioned had the ALP been unable to reach the casualty or the ALP had reached its operational limits then the USAR team had the capability to safely rescue the casualty by line.

This was a successful incident with crews following the correct hierarchy of control / rescue procedures adopting safe working at height equipment using the ALP and having a line rescue capability ready on scene in case it was needed.

The estimated cost to the Authority for attending this incident was £960. This is based upon the cost of firefighter and officer wages during the incident and also subsequent to it for fire investigation and debriefs arrangements. The costs do not include consumables such as fuel.

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY AWARD

Station Officer, Martin Trevillion received the above award in recognition of the work he has done with travellers and gypsies living in Basildon and also in creating a youth engagement centre at the Basildon Academy.

The 'Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Awards' scheme gives recognition to Fire and Rescue Service staff and other organisations in England, both individually and in teams who have shown exceptional commitment to furthering the aim of improving equality and diversity, ultimately to help reduce fires and fire deaths. The winners were announced at the annual Fire Conference at the NEC, Birmingham on 12 May 2009.

Station Officer Trevillion has worked closely with the gypsy and traveller communities living in Dale Farm, the largest such encampment in Europe. Through Martin's leadership Essex Fire and Rescue Service have established trust with the traveller community and improved its own understanding of cultural and other needs as well as significantly reducing the risk of fire in the encampment.

He also created the Linx Centre which is the country's first purpose built Firebreak, Young Firefighters and CDRP youth engagement centre. It was officially opened in January 2009.

Fire Minister Sadiq Khan congratulated all winners and entrants for trying to make a difference. He stated that these innovative and ambitious schemes are an inspiration for other Fire and Rescue Services to follow.

FIRECONTROL PROJECT CORRESPONDENCE

The Chief Fire Officer advised high levels of concern and negativity felt about and toward the FiReControl project. We were provided with an updated overview of recent correspondence between the CLG and the Chief Fire Officer, the areas of concern which do not appear to have been answered sufficiently are:

Regional Staffing Costs

The model used to identify the appropriate level of staffing for the Regional Control Centre has been based upon estimates using, as yet, untested assumptions. This predetermined staffing structure has not been tested for efficacy or resilience, to which it remains unclear whether it will or will not meet usage demand. For this reason the Authority have asked, if the staffing model proves to be inadequate and requires additional staffing, will the incurred costs be met by CLG.

CLG have stated that it is not possible for them to provide an open ended commitment to meet any staffing costs in excess of those identified within the modelling.

Rescheduling Impact

The more recent iteration of the Business Case and the subsequent further delays to this project has forced the cut-over dates closer to 2012. The Authority has always made it very clear that the Service will not consider transferring over to the Regional Control Centre during 2012 due to the impact that this may have on operational command and control.

Although the Service still waits for further confirmation as to any additional delays to the project it is a commonly held view that more will be announced. Once this is clear and it is possible to predict the minimum delay, this information should be used to inform an early decision on the future of the Service's Hutton site.

Meeting call handling targets

Meeting call handling targets is intrinsically linked with the appropriate levels of staffing required and the concerns which have been indicated above in the regional staffing costs. If as a result of the staffing estimate, the planned level of staff is not sufficient to meet the call handling targets and additional staff is required, the additional cost will not be met by CLG.

The Chief Fire Officer's letters to Shona Dunn Director of Fire & Resilience at the CLG and her responses can be found at:

http://www.essex-fire.gov.uk/images/efa/Agenda_Item_16_EFA-064-09_APPENDIX_1_FiReControl_Project_Correspondence.pdf

http://www.essex-fire.gov.uk/images/efa/Agenda_Item_16_EFA-064-09_APPENDIX_2_FiReControl_Project_Correspondence.pdf

http://www.essex-fire.gov.uk/images/efa/Agenda_Item_16_EFA-064-09_APPENDIX_3_FiReControl_Project_Correspondence.pdf

http://www.essex-fire.gov.uk/images/efa/Agenda_Item_16_EFA-064-09_APPENDIX_4_FiReControl_Project_Correspondence.pdf

Councillor Anthony Hedley
Chairman