

Essex Fire Authority

Report to the Constituent Authorities 20 April 2011

1. REVENUE GENERATION OPPORTUNITIES

The Corporate Communication, Media & Marketing department has been looking into the potential of a range of activities that will generate income whilst preserving the brand and reputation of the Service. In its recent public transformation survey, the Service asked the public whether it would find it acceptable for ECFRS to generate revenue from appropriate advertising and sponsorship arrangements, particularly with regard to fire stations carrying billboard advertising or some appliances being branded by sponsor organisations. Of the 1,500+ people responding, almost 70% demonstrated acceptance of the proposition.

The Authority has approved the initiation of a formal tender process for fire station sponsorship, fire appliance and billboard advertising. This will support the Service's strategic intentions to deliver a greater capacity for change with emphasis on innovation.

Contractual arrangements covering all commercial advertising and sponsorship will allow the Service to vet and approve advertising and the Advertising Standards Board rules in terms of content. Governance arrangements will ensure that advertising does not appose the ethos of Service business.

2. CORPORATE STRATEGY 2011-15

The Corporate Strategy is published and available at: http://www.essex-fire.gov.uk/images/efa/Agenda_Item_10_APPX_Corporate_Strategy_2011_v4_LR.pdf

3. FIRE COVER TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

Changes to Canvey Island and Brentwood fire stations are a priority to ensure that sufficient whole time personnel become available to fill the vacancies created across the Service as personnel retire throughout the transformation period. A comprehensive retained fire fighter recruitment advertising campaign has been launched. The Service utilised Community Payback to deliver printed flyers highlighting the employment opportunities.

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A list of whole time personnel wishing to transfer to Great Dunmow fire station is being compiled and a range of options for the potential crewing model to be applied here is being taken forward.

The day crewing change to Low Level Activity and Risk (LLAR) crewing system is a longer term project delivering its outputs towards the end of 2012/13.

Each of the projects and the overall programme is utilising local and central communications resources to ensure all stakeholders are communicated with and engaged in the programme.

4. OPERATIONAL INCIDENTS REPORT AND INCIDENTS OF NOTABLE INTEREST APRIL 2010 – JANUARY 2011

The Service has attended 15,067 incidents compared with 16,551 for the same period last year equating to a 9% reduction in activity.

The number of 'false alarms due to apparatus' (FADA - fire alarms actuating due to system faults) has marginally decreased over this period compared with the last year. As of 28 February 2011 the Service has implemented changes to its mobilising policy and no longer attends commercial premises for Fire Alarms Actuating without some correlating evidence of an incident. This will significantly reduce unnecessary mobilisations by approximately 2,400, which in themselves create a risk.

It is pleasing to report that the number of Road Traffic Collision (RTC) incidents continues to fall, from 1,058 in 2009/10 to 982 in 2010/11.

Incidents of notable interest

Incident No: 23316

Date: 29-10-2010

Time: 19:55

Details: High-rise flat fire

Address: George Tilbury House, Godman Road, Chadwell St Mary

Attendance: 2 x Grays, 2 x Orsett, 1 x Corringham, 2 x Basildon, 1 x Wennington (London Fire Brigade)

On the 29/10/10 at 19:55 fire fighters were called to a fire in a flat on the second floor of a High-rise block.

ECFRS received a number of calls alerting Control to the incident and in response mobilised a pre-determined number of appliances (PDA) consisting of four pumps and an aerial ladder platform. This is the normal attendance for this type of incident and delivers sufficient initial resources to implement a Safe System of Work at the incident where there is a high level of risk posed to fire fighters and the public.

Initial impressions suggested that there were two seats of fire in separate flats. However, it was later found that the fire was confined to the second floor flat only.

As is typical with high-rise fires several floors were affected by smoke. Service Control gave initial advice to residents that they should remain in their property and next to a window. This advice helped attending crews locate all occupants and as the incident progressed they were evacuated by our personnel. The local Emergency Planning Officer was placed on stand-by to arrange rest centres for the evacuees but the rapid intervention of crews preventing fire spread meant that they were not needed.

At 20:18 fire crews reported that everyone had been accounted for and there were not believed to be casualties. The Officer in Charge used eight pumping appliances and the Control Unit from Brentwood to manage the incident.

Crews worked under difficult and potentially dangerous conditions and by 20:43 the fire had been extinguished and 10 minutes later fire fighters began ventilating the affected homes using high pressure fans.

The incident was dealt with by 21:17. As a result one woman, believed to be in her late twenties, has been left homeless as the incident caused severe damage to her three bedroom flat. The woman was treated by the Ambulance Service paramedics at the scene but did not need hospital treatment.

The officer in charge stated, "When we arrived at the scene there were reports of two separate fires on the second and ninth floors. Fire fighters wearing breathing apparatus went inside and evacuated 50 people from above and below the affected floors and sheltered them in a downstairs lobby. Fire fighters performed extremely well and worked hard and quickly to extinguish the fire and prevented spread to other parts of the high rise block. The flat involved was extensively damaged."

High rise incidents are demanding on crews and resources. They also pose a risk to crews of backdraught and the effect of extreme fire fighting conditions. ECFRS has strict procedures for tackling these types of incident that are practiced regularly, it has recently reviewed guidance to crews in this respect and has refined safety procedures for the protection of crews. These are being reinforced through a series of programmed exercises across the County.

The picture below shows the extent of the smoke and fire damage to the flat involved. The light fittings have melted in the fire, which provides some idea of the heat faced by the crews. In the room on the right of the picture the smoke residue at the base of the skirting board shows the level of smoke. There would have been almost zero visibility for the occupant and the fire fighters. The wall area where the soot has been rubbed away is caused by the fire fighters sweeping the wall area in a recognised search procedure to look for door handles and switches.

A joint Police and Fire Service investigation was undertaken to establish the cause of the fire. This joint investigation determined the cause to be arson perpetrated by the resident of the flat in question. Police were subsequently able make an arrest.



Incident No: 20846

Date: 25-09-2010

Time: 16:12

Details: Thatched Cottage Alight

Address: Broad Street, Hatfield Broad Oak

Attendance: 2 x Harlow, 1 x Old Harlow, 1 x Stansted, 1 x Newport, 2 x Dunmow, 1 x Bishop Stortford (Herts)

Fire fighters were mobilised to a large thatched cottage alight.

On arrival the officer in charge reported that the roof of the cottage was well alight. Initially the fire was tackled by breathing apparatus crews using two hose reel jets and ladders to gain access.

As is normally the case with thatch fires, crews considered salvage operations early in their tactical plan. This is due to the high likelihood of roof collapse. Crews managed to remove from the cottage a significant proportion of the owner's belongings.

As the fire developed a complicated and carefully constructed tactical plan was deployed to fight it on several fronts.

Divisional Officer Stapleton, officer in charge, reported, "this is a terrace of three cottages and fire fighters are working hard to cut a break in the roof to contain the fire. Crews are putting all their efforts into preventing the spread and limiting the damage caused by this fire."

By 19:00 extra fire crews had been requested by the incident commander. Two fire breaks had been cut into the roof and salvage operations continued. Firebreaks involve the removal of the combustible material at a reasonable distance from the fire.

The crews extinguished the fire by 20:50 using four hose reel jets and one main covering jet, managing to contain the fire to the cottage where it had originated.

DO Stapleton later reported that, "crews battled hard and were able to contain the fire to the cottage where it started, saving the adjoining cottages. The cottage's roof has been devastated but it is thanks to their [the crews] hard work and professionalism that this fire did not spread and destroy the entire terrace."

Thatch fires are notoriously difficult to stop as there is a great deal of combustible material loosely packed and hard to get to; once the fire gains hold it spreads very quickly, particularly if there is a strong wind. Crews showed a high level of practical firemanship in dealing with this incident.

A thatched roof is usually covered with a wire mesh making access difficult. The Service are currently evaluating new tools that will enable fire fighters to get through this layer more quickly and to create fire breaks more efficiently.

The subsequent fire investigation highlighted the cause to be hot brands [embers] emitting from the chimney stack.

Incident No: 20424

Date: 20-09-2010

Time: 08:25

Details: Fatal incident

Address: Braintree Enterprise Centre, Springwood Drive, Braintree

Attendance: 1 x Braintree, 2 x Halstead, 1 x Colchester, 1 x Chelmsford

Fire Crews attended a particularly tragic scene in September of this year when they were called to a double suicide in Braintree.

The initial alarm was raised by a man arriving for work in one of the industrial units who noticed the abandoned car at the edge of a car park in Braintree.

In total five appliances and specialist officers were mobilised to the scene as it was believed that chemicals might be involved. The chemical was later found to be Hydrogen Sulphide.

On arrival Officers discovered the bodies of one male and one female in the car.

Crews were assisted at the scene by the Detection, Identification and Monitoring (DIM) vehicle from Kent Fire and Rescue Service. This unit carries specialist testing equipment which enabled crews to confirm the chemicals involved. ECFRS is currently in the process of acquiring its own DIM Unit and is in consultation with CLG on this issue. If successful the vehicle will provide DIM capability to the Eastern Region and will be crewed by Specialist officers from both Cambridge and Essex.

Fire fighters wearing gas tight suits removed the casualties from the car and dealt with the chemicals to make the area safe. ECFRS crews worked along side the Ambulance Hazardous Area Response Team (HART) to recover the bodies to a safe place. These are specially trained ambulance crews who provide the ambulance response to major incidents involving hazardous materials, or which present hazardous environments.

Once safety protocols were established the area was handed over to the police as a crime scene.

Before this incident ECFRS was aware of this way of committing suicide and had prepared by attending awareness sessions and sharing information through national bodies to develop protocols.

Councillor Anthony Hedley
Chairman