



# Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service

## Community Protection Strategy 2017- 2020



## 1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Community Protection strategy is to identify how the activities of the Community Protection department within Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) will improve the safety, health and wellbeing of those who live in, visit or work in the county and how it will contribute to the wider service or partner agency objectives.

The strategy identifies key priority areas of activity and areas of work that aim to reduce high or intolerable risks and thus make the community safer. For each area it will identify the why, how and intended impact of the work. These priorities are supported by the high level objectives set out in the Community Protection Plan 2017-2020.

Work which underpins this is summarised at the end of this strategy with considerations on what improvements could be made leading up to 2020. Activities or improvements for the future that could provide even better services and meet the challenges set by financial pressures.

The strategy should be read with the recognition that on occasion day to day work does change. This is normal and we will remain flexible so that we are able to target the most vulnerable people and the greatest risks at all times.

The following identifies two significant areas that have potential to affect this strategy which may require it to be revised as outcomes are clearer:

1. The tragic events in the Grenfell Tower block fire (June 2017), required an immediate reaction to day to day work and prioritised activities. This incident has instigated a significant independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety by Dame Judith Hakkett. Whilst at the time of adopting this strategy the areas of consideration had been identified within the interim report the medium and long term changes that will need to be instigated as a result of the review are not known.
2. The change in governance from the Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) could create changes that are currently unknown.

## 2 OUR DUTY

Protection work significantly reduces the risk of fire in buildings where people live, work, shop and visit. Preventing fires or reducing their impact will directly contribute to the safety of both the occupants and users of a premises and also the fire service staff who respond to it in the event of an emergency.

NFRS has a duty to enforce fire safety standards in the majority of non-residential and a number of shared residential buildings in the county. This is imposed under The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, (FSO). We discharge this duty in two ways; by creating an environment in which businesses have the confidence to invest and grow and by identifying buildings for regular audit and inspection based on risk, this is the Risk Based Inspection Program (RBIP).

Action under the FSO includes providing a reactive response to concerns over risks to life, which are raised by the public, partner agencies and fire staff.

Through delegated responsibility from NCC, NFRS enforce the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 and the Fire Safety and Safety of Places of Sports Act 1987. This responsibility extends to include the management of the sports grounds Safety Advisory Groups (SAG), for designated grounds and venue which have regulated stands within the county.

The Fire Authority is also a 'Responsible Authority' under the Licensing Act 2003 and its work supports directly the licensing objective of 'Public Safety' but as an authority it is recognised that contribution can be made to the wider objectives too.

The national framework for Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) in England sets a clear objective for fire services to have strong partnership arrangements in place, so that we are able to deliver a service that meets the statutory duties and the requirements of the framework.

The RBIP and day to day activity is to be supported by good information, intelligence and understanding. Where appropriate, work and communication will be undertaken to ensure that both our objectives can be delivered better, providing an efficient and effective service and also to assist partners achieve their requirement and objectives.

### **3 RISK BASED INSPECTION PROGRAMME (RBIP)**

In order to ensure the most effective use of our resources, NFRS considers what factors would deem a premises to be high risk of fire, then uses these factors to plan when to inspect which premises. This helps build and inform the RBIP, with our sleeping risk premises; e.g. Hospitals, care homes, hotels and Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) remaining as the priorities for regular inspections. Fire Protection Officers (FPOs) inspect higher risk premises more frequently than those that present a lower risk.

When we identify fire safety issues we take a proportional approach to putting things right, based on national guidance. Minor issues can be dealt with by education and information but serious issues, which potentially put lives at risk, are addressed using the formal enforcement powers under the FSO and ultimately could result in a prosecution.

This also supports the services need to be cognisant of Better Regulation <sup>note 1</sup> and the aims to reduce regulatory burdens and to ensure that the regulation which remains is smarter, better targeted and less costly to business.

This assessment and planning is continuous, taking into account: changes to legislation, learning from national and local incidents and intelligence, all these can have an impact on where and when inspections should be concentrated. This may result in premises, which are deemed to be a low risk to life being prioritised due to an unacceptable potential loss, a good example of this are historical premises which may offer a low risk to life but a higher risk to a responding fire crew and/or a significant irreplaceable loss to the county's heritage portfolio and impact on the tourism to the county.

Note 1 – In 2014 The Better Regulation Delivery Officer, now the Office for Product Safety and Standards, produced a Regulators Code to which NFRS must have regard to when developing policies and operational procedures that guide their regulatory activities.

## **4 CROWDED PLACES**

Crowded places is a term which is becoming more commonly used, due to a number of incidents within the UK and the world. However, over the year's activity in relating to these areas has been a core part of the protection role, work within; sports grounds, premises which offer assembly and recreation e.g. pubs and clubs, and large scale events e.g. music concerts and town fairs.

A venues safe capacity, the number of people within a premises, is something that we have guidance to assess against and powers to enforce or control, if required. Whilst primarily this is under the FSO it is often in support of the overall licensing objectives, this can be by exercising our power to call or assist at licensing reviews.

The Community Protection Manager also manages the Police licensing team. As such the opportunity to work together and provide cross department promotion or intelligence gathering is on-going.

Counter Terrorism is an emerging issue that has affected the UK and we have proactively included training to the inspection team to provide an understanding of the subject and assist them in identifying and considering issues in their day to day work.

There is a clear link between to our powers around premises capacity and the potential impact of a terrorist incident. If a premises can effectively manage a number of people within a fire situation then the same procedures and management will aid in the event of a terrorist event, either within or in the vicinity of a premises.

## **5 UNWANTED FIRE SIGNALS (UFS)**

The UFS policy has successfully reduced the number of calls to and emergency responses by the Service over the period of time it has been in place. The FPOs actively assist by issuing advice to premises management to help reduce or eliminate issues that a premises is experiencing.

This activity has the direct effect of allowing emergency response resources to be ready to respond to real incidents and not drawing resources away to avoidable issues.

## **6 BUILDING A BETTER COMMUNITY**

The fire authority is a statutory consultee under Building Regulations for any premise which would be, when occupied, covered by the remit of the FSO. This provides an opportunity for the protection team to both comment and offer advice on developments with the aim to have safer buildings for the occupants and the fire service.

Whilst the fire authority is not a statutory consultee under the planning regulations we will actively meet with developers to help improve intended designs and proposals.

## **7 OPERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE**

Due to the work done and the access to physical buildings, fire strategies and design plans the team are able to identify issues and risks that a responding fire crew could be faced

with. These items are considered and, where appropriate, conveyed to the risk intelligence team and/or crews to contribute to keeping firefighters safe in the event of an emergency.

FPOs have access to site specific risk intelligence plans and as such they can review these as part of their legislative inspections and provide comments or updates as appropriate.

## **8 WORK UNDERPINNING ALL OUR ACTIVITIES**

So that we can effectively deliver our priorities the Community Protection department has a flexible and resilient distribution of staff across our service area. We have hubs in Northampton and Kettering which support protection activities throughout the county.

An out-of-hours' duty rota is in place to ensure that specialist fire safety advice and the capacity to undertake formal enforcement is available 24/7.

We are required by Government to submit annual returns and we also have a responsibility to contribute to reports for our internal oversight. To support this we monitor and review our activities regularly to; helping us identify how we are making a difference, react to local or national issues or trends. To support this we keep a record of what we do.

We maintain and periodically review a range of policies and procedures to support our work.

The officers actively undertaking audits and enforcement activity are trained to, and beyond, the levels within the Competency Framework for Business Fire Safety Regulators. Continuous professional development is a core requirement for the officers and will be undertaken in a number of forms.

## **9 KEY FOCUS AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

Improvements to the information and intelligence held by the department and wider service will continuously improve our ability to; assess the impact of our actions, be able to react with greater focus and understand and evaluate the risks within the county. We want to be able to use and reflect on our activities to be able to make positive decisions around the RBIP and day to day activities.

Actions:

- Ensure that appropriate reporting mechanisms are in place to review activity undertaken and develop our targeting to ensure that higher risks and more vulnerable people are positively affected by the work
- Develop the use of the information system to allow key data to be recorded in a usable format and by an effective means to minimise the impact on resources

Wider understanding of the fire safety requirements and the need to have appropriate designs will help build safer communities. So that resources can primarily target the higher risk we need to develop self-help opportunities and provide better signposting to national guidance for those within Northamptonshire.

This helps the public and organisations help themselves and provides a wider impact within the county whilst maintaining the capacity of the inspecting officers.

Actions:

- Promote our pre-planning guide to designers, developers and local authorities to ensure that the needs of NFRS are understood at the earliest opportunity and allow the development with the county to be of a suitable standard; this can be done via local forums, website, media and planned activities that invite the relevant persons to see and understand our needs first hand
- Improve the webpages for the Protection area to signpost visitors to current and recognised guidance that will assist them in their compliance; this will assist existing and new business within the county
- Develop self-help tools which will assist with frequently ask questions to assist the public and reduce the number of calls into the team
- Increase and develop the use of social media and reporting to highlight the work done by the team; if the activities and aims of the team are known, then this may cause organisations to take action in line with our targets - the more awareness the public has on the issues and risks being address will affect the information and intelligence of concerns that we receive form them

The effects of good fire safety is proven and the wider knowledge there is of the standards and needs of the team the better other NFRS staff can assist in improving standards and contribute to the team objectives.

Actions:

- Provide appropriate training and awareness to the wider service; crews, officers and control
- Improve the work and information sharing between the protection team and risk intelligence; this is so that both teams can both improve their risk knowledge and develop a joint understanding of needs