



Chief Fire Officer's Report

2020/21



**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**
Making Northamptonshire Safer

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Welcome

The past year has been like nothing we have known. On 23 March 2020, the Prime Minister declared the first national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service was already planning for the worst and had declared a major incident, so that we could provide whatever support the community and our partners needed, while carrying on with business as usual.

During the year, we had to get involved in tasks we hoped we would never have to carry out.

Once the pandemic was declared, we had three strategic aims:

- Keep staff safe and well
- Maintain our core duties, including our 999 response
- Assist with the wider multi-agency response

Staff who were able to do so worked from home, activities were adapted to be done virtually or over the phone and some activity had to be cancelled altogether.

As an emergency service, many of our staff could not work from home and continued to come to the workplace to take 999 calls, respond to incidents, keep fire engines and equipment ready for use and carry out critical administrative functions that could not be done remotely.

Many staff also volunteered to carry out extra duties such as driving ambulances, working to support the mortuaries, deliver medicines to those who were shielding and a raft of other logistical roles, all to ensure that lives were saved and the most vulnerable were helped.

This last year has shown the Fire Service at its best and as the Chief Fire Officer, I am immensely proud of all my staff and the role they have played over the last year to keep people safe.



Darren Dovey
Chief Fire Officer



MAKING NORTHAMPTONSHIRE SAFER DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC



Working collaboratively

Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service declared a major incident in early March 2020, and initiated our own internal command structure, alongside playing an important role in establishing and supporting the wider multi-agency command structure with partners in the county to coordinate the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Responding to major incidents is a regular part of our role as an emergency service, so we were able to share our experience and assist in ensuring that the county's response to the pandemic was focused on saving lives and helping those who are most vulnerable in our community.

The emergency response structures remained in place throughout 2020/21, with regular meetings and information sharing at all levels.

We wanted to support the wider pandemic response where we could, so alongside our core

duties such as responding to 999 calls, we offered logistical support to other agencies, carrying out roles such as delivering PPE, equipment and supplies. We supported the ambulance service by providing volunteers to drive urgent care ambulances, we delivered medication and prescriptions to those who were shielding on behalf of local pharmacies and assisted both hospitals in Kettering and Northampton in moving the deceased from the hospital mortuaries to the temporary mortuary that was set up in Wollaston.



339

days / shifts
of mortuary support



1096

shifts
with EMAS



2959

pharmacy
deliveries

“We wanted to support the wider pandemic response where we could”



Impact on NFRS

The impact of the pandemic was felt across the entire service and in many ways.

Not every role could be undertaken from home, so we made the necessary changes to ensure the workplace remained safe to prevent the spread of infection.

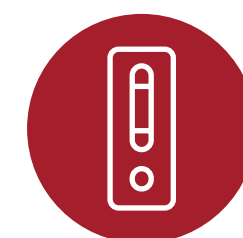
Meetings and training events were moved to virtual platforms where possible or made COVID secure where it was not.

At the peak of the first wave, there were 34 or six per cent of staff absent from work for reasons related to COVID-19. This number fell as we went through the year and stabilised at around one to two per cent.

Through the second wave, this reduced again to less than 1 per cent by March 2021. This shows the committed and professional way that our staff approached the pandemic, following the COVID security measures put in place at work and adhering to the Government's advice in their private life. This was so important, not only in protecting each other but in maintaining our service at such a critical time.

Delivering our core functions was our priority throughout the year - making Northamptonshire safer and doing this in a way that kept staff safe and well. As the pandemic evolved, we continued to adapt the way we did our business, always prioritising the most vulnerable.

- Fire Protection Officers carried out audits remotely, shifting the focus onto priority areas to support the pandemic response including those areas that continued to have a 'physical workplace' such as care homes, schools and industry, with in person visits where required
- Refined prevention work to support those at greatest risk, continuing to provide advice on the telephone and visits to people at highest risk from fire or arson threat (Home Fire Safety and Arson threat/danger checks)
- We maintained our response capability and our response standards through closer management of staffing levels and planning
- Our on-call staff ensured they maintained appliance availability while adjusting to working from home or being furloughed
- The service adapted its training, running a new recruits course in person, and moving training to virtual where possible
- Increased the profile of the Wellbeing support team, staff who are there to support their colleagues and provide a listening ear, signposting other services where needed. During such a challenging year, this has been essential



2077

lateral flow tests completed



835

Remote Audits



50+

staff able to work from home



1754

Home Fire Safety Visits
(87% face-to-face, remainder over telephone)

Our average appliance availability

2019-20



- Under 14
- 14-18
- Over 18

2020-21



- 14-18
- Over 18

Impact on incidents

It is too early to know whether any of the societal changes of the last 18 months will stay - will there be a shift towards more people working from home, more often? Until this becomes clear, it is not possible to gauge what the long-term impact of the pandemic will be on incident trends. However, it is clear when comparing this past year to the previous one, that there has been a COVID effect.

Less traffic on the road has seen a drop in our attendance at road collisions, similarly there have been fewer fires overall. As we continue to emerge from the third lockdown, however, there has been a spike in deliberate fires.

“will there be a shift towards more people working from home, more often?”



ABOUT US AND OUR COMMUNITY

About us and our community

Since January 2020, we have welcomed 60 new colleagues to the service: 20 new Wholetime firefighters, 28 new On-Call firefighters, two control staff and 10 new, headquarters based fire staff. We regularly recruit On-Call firefighters throughout the year and in late 2021 and early 2022 we will be recruiting Wholetime firefighters to replace those who are due to retire.

22
Fire stations



472
Firefighters and control staff



913 sq miles
Service area

753,000
Population



77
Fire staff





12187
Calls to control

.....



10.17
minutes
Average
response time

.....



1.40
minutes
Average call
handling time

.....



4846
Number of
incidents attended

1743 ▶
False
alarms



◀ **68**
Were
malicious

Fires attended:

938 Accidental
fires

527 Deliberate
fires

47 Chimney
fires

22 Unknown primary
& secondary

Total number of fires attended **1534**

Non fire incidents attended:

250
Flooding

164
Medical
co-responder

178
Assisting
other agencies

97
Effecting
entry

68
Animal
assistance

52
Hazardous
materials

352
RTCs

405
Other
call outs

Total
1566



COLLABORATION



Collaboration

We have continued to move forwards with our ambition to collaborate, where it makes sense to do so, despite the challenges of the last year.

As we share the same governance arrangements under the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, our focus of collaboration has been with Northamptonshire Police. We are sharing more buildings and have developed joint enabling services such as finance, estates management, ICT, HR and Fleet.

“support ongoing transformation and change”

Timeline of achievements

March 2020	Purchase of new HQ building at Darby Close, Wellingborough together with the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
April 2020	Appointment of Paul Bullen as the Assistant Chief Officer for Enabling Services to oversee the transformation and lead the functions
July 2020	Renovation work started on Darby House
October 2020 - March 2021	Recruitment, and appointment of Joint Heads of Department (HR, ICT, Facilities and Fleet)
March 2021	Move into new HQ, Darby House at Darby Close in Wellingborough to be co-located with Northamptonshire Police and the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

We now have a solid foundation for our joined up enabling services function. The next step is to explore where we might create more capacity and resilience, to support ongoing transformation and change.

Working with other partners

It has been a significant year of change for local government in the county. This has provided the opportunity for partnerships to be reshaped and refocused and we will continue to be a part of this in order to keep our communities safe and well. Our main links are into:

- Community Safety Partnerships – as part of the new ‘Community One’ Group in each of the new local unitary authorities. This regular meeting provides a partnership response to community safety priorities
- Safeguarding Boards
- Health and Wellbeing Boards
- ICAN programme (Integrated Care Across Northamptonshire)
- Local Resilience Forum (LRF)

We will be working proactively across these partnerships, supporting subgroups and project groups and setting up new information sharing agreements where work links into our role, for example, work around Frailty Escalation links very clearly to fire safety and our home safety visits.



Our year at a glance

April

As part of a Facebook live event during the national Drowning Prevention and Water Safety Week, White Watch at Wellingborough challenged the public to pick a name for their power boat. 'Captain Tom' was chosen from the 28 entries, as a fitting tribute to Captain Tom Moore's heroic efforts to raise money for the NHS.

May

NFRS supported the community resilience partnership response to the pandemic, by aiding in pharmacy delivery to those who were shielding. By May, more than 1,000 deliveries of essential medication were delivered to some of the most vulnerable people across the county.

June

NFRS was proud to be supporting the national Child Safety Week (1-7 June), a community education campaign run by the Child Accident Prevention Trust (CAPT). Throughout the week, we supported with messages, and social media videos, to help protect families across Northamptonshire.

July

Whilst schools were working hard to protect the children from COVID-19, the NFRS protection team were also contacting both primary and secondary schools across Northamptonshire to ensure they had the fire safety measures they needed, as they work to fit in with COVID-19 guidelines.

August

With the scorching sunshine and some restrictions still in place, local country parks were reporting increased numbers of 'staycation' visitors. NFRS prevention team sent out reminders to the public about being water and barbeque safe.

September

Aaron Childs, who is based at Mereway Fire Station, landed first place and Dean Keeber, from The Mounts third place, in the Cheshire Firefighter competition. Beating 89 other entries from six different countries, the NFRS team was also named Second Fastest team.

October

During International Control Room Week, NFRS marked the tremendous achievement of our four Watches, who provide 24/7 cover responding to emergency calls. During 2020/21, our control operators took a total of 12,187 calls, with an average call handling time of 1minute 40 seconds.

November

Post-Grenfell funding was spent in kitting every fire engine in the county with fire escape smoke hoods, to help keep people safer. In the event of a fire evacuation, the hoods can be placed over the head to help to stop the member of the public from breathing in the toxic gases.

December

NFRS joined forces with Crimestoppers to launch a new service called Firestoppers, which allows people to report information about deliberate fires anonymously. The initiative is jointly funded by NFRS and the Northamptonshire Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

January

Five firefighters helped to save the day by clearing away heaps of snow from the Corby vaccination centre following a blizzard. They cleared the car park and assisted patients who were stuck in their cars, making it safe for elderly residents to get their COVID vaccines.

February

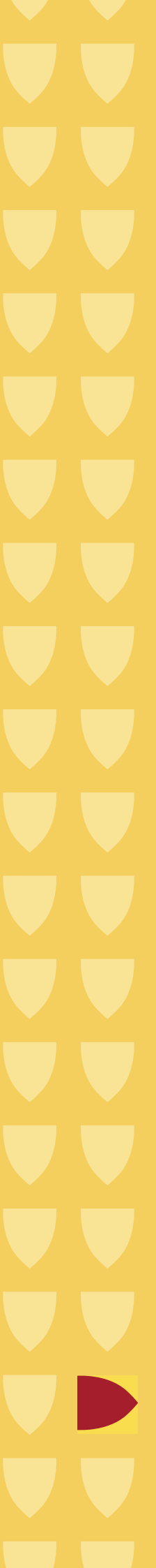
Into the second wave of the pandemic, we provided 22 NFRS personnel to support the countywide response by volunteering with East Midlands Ambulance Services (EMAS) to carry out support tasks such as driving urgent care vehicles and the safe moving and handling of patients.

March

NFRS teamed up with De Montfort University and with support from EMAS, to deliver essential practical scenario training to student paramedics. In a mock up multi-vehicle road traffic accident, students were able to test their medical skills in a safe environment.



**PREVENTION,
PROTECTION,
RESILIENCE,
RESPONSE**



Prevention

We have continued to prioritise the most vulnerable people in our community.

For 2020/21 our aim was to increase the number of Home Fire Safety Visits we delivered but instead we had to adapt for the COVID-19 pandemic and brought forward work to introduce a HFSV strategy. This included a new risk matrix and we now routinely triage people in order to identify those most at risk.

We have also adapted our support for young people. For example, in the absence of our usual drill nights for the cadets, we ran virtual sessions and conducted individual welfare visits for those who needed more support.

Safeguarding: Increasingly, we are making referrals to different agencies following our visit, in order to support the safety and wellbeing of the most vulnerable. 153 visits resulted in onward referrals last year, with nearly a third of these requiring multiple referrals.

“153 visits resulted in onward referrals last year”

Community Education

We found new ways to engage and educate during lockdowns, through Facebook Live and then as pupils returned to school, by offering virtual school talks to replace our face-to-face visits.

Protection

The team manages its work around a Risk Based Inspection Programme. During 2020/21, the plan was adapted to incorporate the restrictions and changes in place and as learning and recommendations emerged from the Grenfell Inquiry.

Full fire safety inspections were not possible during the periods of lockdown, as we were unable to carry out site visits. Instead the team switched focus to remote audits, completed over the phone or via video conference. Time has also been invested in ensuring the website contains relevant and user-friendly materials.



Resilience



COVID affected the way that we all lived and worked, and from the outset we knew that we needed to build organisational resilience in order to be flexible to whatever challenges the pandemic might bring. Staff were trained and upskilled in tasks and roles outside of their usual position and we increased communication to ensure staff were kept up to date with relevant national changes.

In such challenging circumstances, it was important to support our staff in order to maintain personal resilience and our Wellbeing Support Team have provided a point of contact. We have ensured COVID-secure working through appropriate risk assessment; adapting our working spaces; additional PPE and the variation of relevant policy and procedure through a new COVID alert process.

We have been an active member of the Local Resilience Forum throughout the pandemic with continuous attendance at the COVID-19 Strategic and Tactical Coordination groups. This has ensured that we are contributing to the wider community requirement and remain central to countywide COVID related processes and assist other services where needed.

Response



We continued to respond to 100% of calls, arriving on scene 10.17 minutes (average) after the time of the call and always providing an appropriate response. Alongside our partners, we assisted in the evacuation of more than 1,000 people from Billing Aquadrome in December 2020, after it became flooded during heavy rainfall.

In order to continue to provide an appropriate response, we needed to adapt.

- We created work bubbles where needed with covid secure risk assessments so staff could work safely and resiliently without unnecessary outside risk
- We focussed on the delivery of essential training for staff around risk critical activities in order to maintain capacity
- We introduced strict cleaning regimes and provided additional PPE in order to maintain the safety of our staff and so ensure we provided cover across all of Northamptonshire



FINANCIAL INFORMATION



Our budget and how we spend it

The financial year 2020-21 was the second time we were able to raise our own council tax precept. We set the precept at £61.97 for a band D property, which was a rise of £1.21 (1.99%) on 2019-20 levels.

Whilst good progress has been made in building reserves and financial stability, Northamptonshire is still funded at a much lower level than its peers.

Northamptonshire has the second lowest council tax precept for a Fire and Rescue Service in the country and at £61.97, it is significantly lower than the average for a fire authority of £75.

A public consultation carried out at the end of 2019 informed the PFCC's precept proposals, which were considered by the Police, Fire and Crime Panel in February 2019.

The 2020-21 budgets and funding for Fire were as follows:

Fire Funding	2020-21 (£m)
Revenue Support and Top Up Grants	5.080
Section 31 Grant	0.403
Pensions Grant	1.186
Business Rates	3.005
Council Tax Surplus	0.167
Council Tax	15.478
Total Income	25.319

Fire Funding	2020-21 (£m)
Local Funding Passed to the Chief Fire Officer	24.835
Capital Financing	0.125
Office of the PFCC	0.329
Contributions to reserves	0.030
Total Expenditure	25.319

Looking ahead to 2021-22, the Fire budget was set at £25.260m, which was less than in 2020-21. This is a challenge and whilst the service has been able to set a balanced budget for 2021-22, there is a need to find savings over the medium term.

This means that the service is working in a very tight financial environment, a fact highlighted by HMICFRS in their inspection report (initial visit November 2018).

We produce a Statement of Accounts each year and a detailed financial outturn, together with an assessment of reserves and a financial outlook will be contained within them. Copies of both the draft and the final audited accounts will be available on the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner's website by the end of August 2021.

The 2020-21 accounts will be subject to external audit and it is pleasing to see that to date positive and unqualified audit opinions have been received for both sets of accounts produced for Fire.





HMICFRS INSPECTION





This coming year will be an important one for both NFRS as an individual service and the fire and rescue service nationally as we recover from the pandemic. The Government will also publish a white paper on reform of the fire sector that aims to set out the future direction of the service, taking into account the lessons learnt from a range of different areas including the COVID pandemic, tGrenfell Tower fire and the Manchester Arena bombing. It will also look at how fire services can contribute more widely to public safety and wellbeing.

To compliment this, NFRS has published FIRE25, a document that aims to set the vision for the service for 2025, incorporating influences from both national and local changes.

The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner will publish a new Fire and Rescue Plan setting out the key strategic objectives for the service while NFRS will also update the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) that shows how we intend to deal with risk and utilise our resources to manage it between 2022 and 2025.

Response

Response will continue to develop the station plans to ensure risk is managed at a local level, through effective local engagement and partnership working.

Prevention

As a result of COVID-19, we will further develop our understanding of the most vulnerable members of our community. Prevention will continue to build on partnerships to ensure we are targeting our preventative work to those of greatest need and that we prioritise resources.

Protection

Protection has completely reviewed its risk-based inspection programme (RBIP), focusing on the highest risk premises across the county. We will not only build more capacity within the Protection team using post Grenfell grant funding, stations will also focus on inspecting houses of multiple occupation as part of their station plans.

Collaboration

We will continue to focus on exploring collaborative opportunities, but this will move towards targeted local work, following the example set by Op Unite in Daventry, where a targeted/partnership approach to local risk has made a real difference to local issues.

People

People continue to be at the heart of everything we do, not only our own staff but the public we are here to protect. We will embed the Code of Ethics across the organisation to ensure we continue to be the professional, trusted advocate we are all so proud to be.

It has been another challenging year for the service, and once again, I am incredibly proud of our achievements and of how all of our staff have come together to protect the public, not just in our role as a fire and rescue service, but also in the wider community response to the pandemic.

I thank everyone who works for Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service for their hard work and commitment in what has been an incredible year for all.





**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**
Making Northamptonshire Safer