



Chief Fire Officer's Annual Report

2021/22



**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**

Making Northamptonshire Safer





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Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service

Fire stations

22 

Located across the county

Staff

 540

On 31 March 2021

'Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service has continued to improve the way it delivers services to the public'

Full-time operational staff

254 

On-call operational staff

200 

Fire control staff

18 

Fire staff

68  

Fire protection staff

12 

Fire prevention staff

17 

HR, Fleet, Estates, Finance, Digital and Technology shared with Police

Shared Communication team with OPFCC



Welcome

This report is my last as Chief Fire Officer (CFO) for Northamptonshire as I am to retire in October 2022 having served for six and half years as the CFO with this service, and 35 years in total with the fire and rescue service.



My time as CFO in Northamptonshire has been one of unprecedented events. When I took over as CFO in 2016, the Service was in the grip of a financial crisis brought about by both national austerity measures and also the financial situation within Northamptonshire County Council, of which we were then a part. This led to poor outcomes at our first Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection in 2018 and made it impossible for us to plan for the future and to continue to improve as

a service.

At the beginning of 2019, Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) transferred its political governance from the county council to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC), Stephen Mold. This was undoubtedly the biggest change the Service had been through since its formation in 1974, effectively turning itself from a department of the county council into a standalone Fire Authority for the first time.

In the three years since, the country has been through the COVID pandemic, where NFRS not only had to continue to deliver its core services but also support the wider county response to the emergency; had its second HMICFRS Inspection and dealt with an unprecedented number of emergency incidents due to the driest year and hottest summer on record.

'NFRS not only had to continue to deliver its core services but also support the wider county response to the emergency'

This report will provide more detail on the last three years and these events. Despite the turbulent background, Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service has continued to improve the way it delivers services to the public and I firmly believe that I leave this Service in good shape to meet the challenges of the future.

Darren Dovey
Chief Fire Officer

Finance

Since January 2019 when we transferred to PFCC governance, our finances have been subject to significant positive change and although there remains more to be done, we have made huge progress and have moved to a position where our finances are more robust, reflect our needs and priorities and have enabled the change.

The annual budget for 2018/19 was £22.6M and had remained at a similar level for many years, we had no reserves and there had been little to no capital investment. Comparing ourselves to others, we had the second lowest council tax, the second lowest government grant and the lowest reserves in the country by some margin.

Our priority was to establish a financially stable organisation with resources available to deliver operational priorities, capital and transformational investment, professional support, resilience and capacity to act as an enabler for the strategic direction of the service.

Through good financial governance and lobbying of the government, we have achieved and exceeded the financial stability plans we set ourselves. We have a three-year balanced budget which, at £27.1M, is £4.5M more (almost 20%) than it was at the time of the governance transfer.

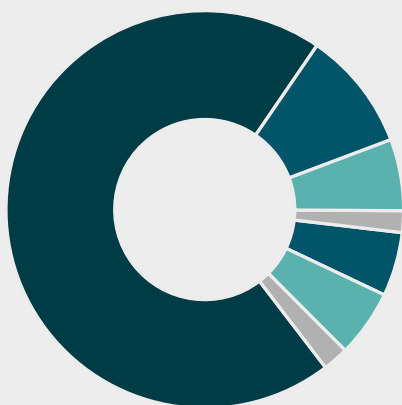
‘With our financial plans in place and a stable financial position we are much better placed to adapt to them and deliver good services to the county’



We have a capital programme with essential operational equipment being replaced and have built our reserves to £5.7m by the end of the three year plan.

Whilst it is likely that these and more financial challenges will continue across all public sector services in the coming years, with our financial plans in place and a stable financial position we are much better placed to adapt to them and deliver good services to the county.





Total Income for Fire **£27.1m**

Where the money comes from

In 2022/23, NFRS will receive funding of £27.1m, which is 7.25% (£1.8m) higher than 2021/22. This increase has been supported by the government to enable NFRS to establish a resilient base budget.

Of this amount, around 63% (£17.2m) comes from local council taxpayers, almost 11% (2.8m) from local Business Rates and 26% (£7.1m) from central government grants.



69.8%
Firefighters and staff



9.8%
Support Services



5.8%
Estates and Facilities



1.8%
Transport



5.3%
ICT



5.5%
Supplies and Services



2.0%
Capital Financing



‘We have achieved and exceeded the financial stability plans we set ourselves’


2077 
lateral flow
tests completed

50+ 
staff working
from home

835 
remote audits

339 
days of
mortuary support

1754  
home fire safety visits

2959 
Pharmacy Deliveries

1096 shifts with 
East Midlands Ambulance



COVID Pandemic

When the COVID pandemic struck in 2020, NFRS like everyone else had to quickly make sense of what this meant for us not only in terms of delivering our core services but also in how we could play a wider part in keeping the county – and the country – safe and supported.

I am proud to say that everyone within the service gave their all to ensure that when people needed us, we were there to help. As a service, we managed to assist with some of the difficult but necessary tasks in the wider effort by working in the mortuaries, driving ambulances, and delivering medicines to those who were vulnerable and unable to leave home.



The pandemic lasted longer than most of us could envisage, however some of the new ways of working we have adopted during that time have helped us move forward as an organisation. We are now able to provide effective, flexible and agile working for those whose roles allow it, while making the best use of technology to hold efficient meetings and training events. These are now a permanent feature of our working lives and bring many benefits.

‘we have performed well during the pandemic’

Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services confirmed that we have performed well during the pandemic as part of the COVID specific inspection in 2021.



HMICFRS COVID inspection
www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/

Performance

The number and type of incidents we attend changed during the pandemic, as lockdowns reduced incidents across the board and also resulted in faster than usual attendance times when many worked from home and schools were closed.

During 2021/22 we have seen incident numbers return to pre-pandemic levels. These numbers are still lower than 10 years ago but the reduction has now levelled off.

As we moved into 2022, we were again inspected by HMICFRS and I am proud to say that the results of that inspection bore out the hard work that everyone has put in across the Service. NFRS was rated as 'Good' in 8 out of 11 areas inspected, which makes us the second most improved service in the country. While there is more work to do around our culture and diversity, this has provided a solid foundation on which to move forward and shows that our efforts to improve how we keep people safe have had an impact.

HMICFRS Report

www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk



‘a solid foundation on which to move forward and shows that our efforts to improve how we keep people safe have had an impact’





Fires

Primary and Secondary

Overall, the number of fires has fallen over the last decade. Fires in buildings are down, due in part to more targeted prevention work. The number of fires in the open fluctuates dependent on how hot or dry the summer is.



RTCs

The number of road traffic collisions has remained stable, despite the increase in vehicles on the road.



Special Services

Everything else

Special Service calls fluctuate year-on-year and are affected by factors such as adverse weather, but the overall trend is up



False Alarms

Includes good intent, malicious calls and faulty apparatus.

Attendance at false alarms has fallen, despite the increase in the number of alarms being installed. This is due to our robust call challenging policy and assistance given to businesses by our Protection Team.





1210
protective risk
inspections

4222
home fire
safety visits

Prevention and Protection

Our prevention work has continued to develop and move into new areas over the last three years. As well as delivering our core fire safety messages and Home Fire Safety Visits, we have increased our work in road safety as part of the Northamptonshire Safer Roads Alliance, and lead the county's Water Safety Partnership, ensuring that water safety becomes a key part of our offering.



We work extensively in partnership working to tackle arson and deliberate fires with Northamptonshire Police. This partnership has helped us target arson hotspots and assist in reducing anti-social behaviour.

Our Prevention Team has been bolstered by increasing the size of our Home Safety Team, including adding a Complex Case Officer who liaises with other partner organisations to get help for the most vulnerable.

We also added a second youth officer increasing our ability to work with young people. This has supported us as we continue to carry out extensive youth engagement work, both through the Emergency Services Cadets - the only tri-service (Fire, Police, Ambulance) cadet scheme in the country – and through partnerships with a range of other organisations to provide help and assistance and opportunities to young people.

Our Protection Team provides help and advice as well as enforcing fire safety legislation. The Team was restricted in what it could deliver during the pandemic. However this gave us the opportunity to revamp our Risk Based Inspection Programme, taking into consideration new fire safety legislation and making use of new government grants aimed at increasing our capacity, so that we can focus on the highest risk premises.

‘Our Prevention Team has been bolstered by increasing the size of our Home Safety Team’

We have also increased the strength of The Protection Team by three, and upskilled staff to a higher level using the grants made available after the Grenfell Tower fire.



Response

Our work is not just about fires. We respond to a wide range of emergencies, including road traffic collisions, floods, water rescues, hazardous materials incidents, terrorism and medical co-responding. We also assist other agencies such as the police and ambulance service where we have equipment or specialist skills they require.

As I write, the summer is breaking records and is now officially the hottest since 1976 and the driest year on record. For us, this has meant we have been the busiest for many years, especially in relation to fires in the open – regrettably, many of them started deliberately.

Staff from right across the service once again responded magnificently to the challenge, with our Control Room taking record numbers of calls and firefighters dealing with fire after fire, all with the full support of the rest of the organisation.



‘We have been fortunate to be able to increase the number of wholetime firefighters by 12.’

We have been fortunate to be able to increase the number of wholetime firefighters by 12. Over the last three years, we have had intakes of 20 and 18 wholetime firefighters replacing those who have retired, 14 of whom were apprentice firefighters, the first time we have recruited in this way. In addition we continue to recruit around 40 on-call firefighters each year.

Continued to recruit
40
on-call firefighters

A week in Summer

2021

Week commencing August 9

Calls to control

248

39 of which are calls were repeats to incidents

Vehicle standby moves for strategic cover

5

RTCs

4

Total incidents

204

Primary Fires

16

Secondary Fires

20



2022

Week commencing August 7

Calls to control

802

423 of which are calls were repeats to incidents

Vehicle standby moves for strategic cover

51

RTCs

11

Total incidents

328

Primary Fires

26

Secondary Fires

108

Collaboration, Interoperability and Partnerships

Collaboration, interoperability and partnerships have been at the heart of our journey over the past three years.

NFRS plays a full part at a strategic level in partnerships such as the Community Safety Partnerships, Health and Wellbeing Boards, The Local Resilience Forum and a range of local delivery boards. This ensures we deliver services where they are most needed and are aligned with our partners in doing so.

We are also making the best use of our estate by modernising it and by sharing as much as possible between Fire and Police.

Our shared Enabling Services with Northamptonshire Police have given us the expertise, capacity and resilience required in areas such as HR, Finance, Estates, Digital and Technology and Fleet and Supplies. Our shared Communications Team with the OPFCC has dramatically improved the way we communicate both with staff and the public, keeping them informed and providing safety awareness and information.



‘effective partnerships and delivers joint initiatives such as Safer Streets with the Police and OPFCC.’

Joint Operational Planning is now embedded within our Joint Operations Team (JOT), where Police and Fire staff work together to plan for events such as the British Grand Prix at Silverstone to ensure frontline crews have the information they require to resolve operational incidents safely.

Our Prevention Team has a network of effective partnerships and delivers joint initiatives such as Safer Streets with the Police and OPFCC, joint arson prevention through the Arson Task Force and the unique Tri-Service (Fire, Police, Ambulance) cadet scheme.

We also work closely with other agencies to ensure that the most vulnerable children and adults in our county are safeguarded against harm. Our Protection Team works seamlessly with the Police Licensing Team to ensure we are speaking with one voice on licensing issues.

Major Changes

Change really has been a constant for Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service over the last three years.

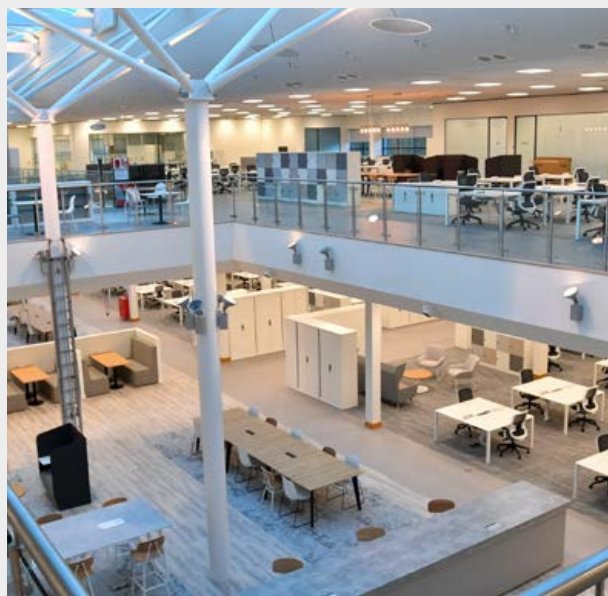
We moved to new headquarters at Darby House in Wellingborough in 2021, which has provided us with an up-to-date, modern facility, shared with Northamptonshire Police and the Office of the Police Fire and Crime Commissioner (OPFCC).

The service has also invested in new personal protective equipment for firefighters, with new firekit, RTC jackets and respirators for all.

Eight new, state-of-the-art fire appliances were added to the fleet to replace ageing out-of-date ones and the service has started a programme of equipment replacement to ensure our firefighters have the right tools for the job.

8

**new,
state-of-
the-art
fire
appliances**



2022 will also see the delivery of a new high reach appliance, a 42 metre aerial ladder platform that will enhance our high rise firefighting and rescue capability.

‘42 metre aerial ladder platform that will enhance our high rise firefighting and rescue capability’

Major investments in upgrading facilities on fire stations and ICT are now planned, making further improvements to the service in terms of facilities and efficiency and productivity.



The Future

The next five years is likely to be another period of great change within the fire and rescue service both nationally and locally. The Government’s White Paper “reforming our fire and rescue service” aims to sets out an aspirational direction of travel for the sector.

This could offer opportunities for NFRS locally and give us the opportunity to diversify into a wider community safety agenda aimed at helping the most vulnerable in our county. It would also ensure that the Service adapts to the new post-Grenfell building safety and fire safety legislation.

The summer of 2022 has also shown that the service will need to continue to adapt our operational response to the effects of climate change.

‘Summer of 2022 has shown that the service will need to continue to adapt our operational response’

All of this means looking at the capabilities required for the future in terms of vehicles, equipment and PPE, while at the same time having more flexible working practices so that we can increase capacity at times of seasonal high demand.

The incidents of the future are likely to require different skills and therefore having a more diverse, well developed and trained workforce will be essential to delivering this more diverse range of services.



And finally

It has been an interesting and challenging six and a half years as Chief Fire Officer, to say the least.



Reflecting on that time, I am amazed at how great is the change we have been through, particularly in the last three years and I am also immensely proud of how staff across the whole of the service have risen to the challenges we faced and how very much we have achieved.

I believe that I am leaving Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service in a much stronger position, and in good shape to deal with the new challenges that inevitably await in the future.

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read "Darren Dovey".

Darren Dovey
Chief Fire Officer



**NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**