



**Suffolk
Fire and Rescue
Authority**



Statement of Assurance

2014-15

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1. Statement of Assurance

This Statement of Assurance details the financial, governance and operational arrangements that Suffolk Fire and Rescue Authority had in place for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015. The Statement was produced in accordance with the [guidance](#) published by the Department for Communities and Local Government on 'Statements of Assurance for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England.'

I am satisfied that Suffolk Fire and Rescue Authority ensured that its business was conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money was properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. I am further satisfied that the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England have been met.

I am proud of the fire and rescue service we provide and of the people who work so hard to keep our communities safe.

On behalf of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Authority, I will continue to progress the matters identified under 'Future Improvements' and ensure that full and meaningful public consultation takes place on relevant matters arising from the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan. I am committed to continually developing the Service so that it can continue to provide an effective, efficient and resilient fire and rescue service for the people of Suffolk and those who visit our county.



Councillor Matthew Hicks
Cabinet Member for Environment and
Public Protection
Suffolk County Council

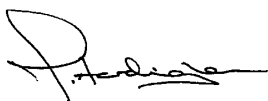


2. Introduction

As Chief Fire Officer of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service I am pleased to introduce our Statement of Assurance for 2014-15.

The Statement is a requirement of the 2012 [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#) and reinforces my commitment to provide you, the members of our communities, with clear information about how we manage public funds and assure the effectiveness of our financial, governance and operational fire service arrangements.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service provides a 24/7 emergency response service to deal with fires, road traffic collisions and a wide range of emergencies. Our people also deliver activities aimed at reducing fires and road traffic collisions, improving community safety and enforcing fire safety legislation. The services we provide help ensure that Suffolk remains a safe county. This means that deaths and injuries from fires and road traffic collisions are at the lowest level possible; fire-related crime is low; businesses are aware of their responsibilities regarding fire safety and people feel safe in their homes.



Mark Hardingham
Chief Fire Officer



3. Scope of Responsibility

Fire and rescue authorities carry out their functions within a defined statutory and policy framework. The key legislation and acts defining these requirements are:

- a. Local Government Act 1999
- b. Localism Act 2011
- c. Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- d. Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007
- e. Fire and Rescue National Framework for England
- f. Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- g. Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- h. Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

This annual Statement of Assurance must provide clear and accessible information. The Statement must enable communities, local authorities, central government and other partners to make an informed assessment of their fire service's performance. The Statement is also used as a source of information for the Secretary of State's biennial report, required by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

The Act is the principal legislation for fire and rescue services in England and Wales and imposes upon every fire and rescue authority a duty to provide a fire and rescue service that is: equipped to extinguish fires; protect life and property from fires; rescue people from road traffic collisions and respond to other emergencies. Services must also be able to receive and respond to calls for assistance; ensure that staff are properly trained and equipped and gather information to deliver a safe and effective service.

The Act also requires fire and rescue authorities to provide communities with fire safety education and advice to reduce deaths and injuries from fire. The Secretary of State is permitted by the Act to publish National Framework requirements that set central government's priorities for authorities and fire and rescue authorities are required to pay due regard to the Framework.

4. Financial Statement

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Authority has duties under the Local Government Act 1999 to ensure that public money is properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Service, being part of Suffolk County Council, adheres to the council's financial procedures for budget setting, budget monitoring, and the production of final accounts.

The county council's Chief Finance Officer prepares the Annual Statement of Accounts, which includes the fire and rescue service. The accounts detail the council's financial performance in accordance with the practices set out in the Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) code of practice. The final accounts are submitted to the Audit Committee for approval.

Suffolk County Council's Annual Statement of Accounts is examined by external auditors who provide independent assessment that the statement presents a true and fair view and that appropriate accounting and financial systems are in place. Their report includes a review of arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources.

The council's Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 March 2015 was externally audited in line with Audit Commission Act (1998) guidance. The Statement of Accounts for 2014-15 and external auditor's letter are published on Suffolk County Council's website: <https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/council-and-democracy/budget-and-finance/Statement-of-Accounts-2014-15-Audited.doc>.

The council's Audit Service provides an opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the council's system of internal control. The head of the Audit Service has provided substantial assurance of both financial and non-financial systems. This provides confidence in the effectiveness of internal control arrangements of the council.

CIPFA publish annual financial performance data for all English fire and rescue authorities, enabling comparison between authorities. This shows that Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is the lowest cost-per-head of population of any fire and rescue service in England, with an expenditure of £25.49 per head, compared to the average cost of £39.49.

Suffolk compares favourably to other authorities as far as expenditure is concerned. For example, the Service is in the lowest quartile in:

- a. Cost per head of population
- b. Cost per hectare
- c. Cost per incident
- d. Cost per fire station, fire appliance and incident
- e. Ratio of uniformed officers per fire station

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service's budget for 2014-15 was £22.348m with a confirmed full year spend of £21.698m. The budget for 2014-15 increased due to an inflationary rise from 2013-14, but this is not expected to continue in future years. Throughout the year the Service maintained its efficiency agenda and an underspend of £650,000 was realised at year end. This was due mainly to no ill-health retirements in year, firefighter vacancies on on-call fire stations and the Service no longer being required to make a planned provision to offset predicted increased firefighter pension costs. At year end the underspend was transferred to a reserve to support future public protection transformation work. This included reinforcing the Service's emergency vehicle and operational equipment renewals programme, fire station Private Finance Initiative (PFI) reserve fund and other improvements, all of which support important front-line 999 emergency services.

Revenue funding continues to support initiatives such as: increasing blue light collaboration, improvements to operational rescue capabilities and enhanced fleet, operational equipment and property provision.

As of 1 April 2014, £730,181 was held as reserve funding and this was increased at year end with a reserve of £1,099,449.

Total available capital funding for 2014-15 was £5.226m of which £2.2m was spent, predominately for the renewal of emergency vehicles, operational equipment for Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service and on the fire estates programme. Estates improvements included support for the refurbishment of Woodbridge Community Fire and Police and other such stations. £3.026m was carried forward and primarily relates to larger schemes in the fire estates capital programme which had been held back pending the outcome of the DCLG Fire Transformation Grant bid award. The fire and rescue authority was successful in its joint bid

and later received £4.93m in 2015-16 for future projects relating to property sharing with blue light partners. This will be spent alongside the carry forward sum.

The fire and rescue service budget is required to make additional savings of £1.75m by 2017-18 to meet the council's savings targets and reflecting further government grant reductions. To achieve this, significant changes to service delivery managerial arrangements and back office support have already been made. Work continued to identify further areas where additional changes might be made, subject to detailed risk analysis, formal consultation and agreement.

5. Governance

The fire and rescue authority for Suffolk is Suffolk County Council, which has 75 councillors. Most of the authority's daily business is discharged through the council's Cabinet. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Public Protection, which includes Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, is Councillor Matthew Hicks.

Suffolk County Council, as Suffolk Fire and Rescue Authority, is responsible for ensuring Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service operates in accordance with the law. It must ensure public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for and is used economically, efficiently and effectively. The fire and rescue authority also has a duty to continually improve the way its functions are carried out.

Governance principles adopted by the council follow those set out in the document: 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' produced by CIPFA and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives. The Suffolk County Council constitution sets out the commitment to good governance and describes the council's governance framework and processes. Suffolk's Constitution, which includes the Scheme of Delegation, is published on the council's website:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/the-council-and-its-committees/the-constitution/>

The council publishes its Annual Governance Statement through the Audit Committee. The Statement sets out the council's governance arrangements, which apply to and include Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service. The Statement is available via the link below:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/suffolk.gov.uk/Your%20Council/Finance/2015.06.17-Annual-Governance-Statement.pdf>

The Chief Fire Officer is a member of the council's Corporate Management Team and reports to the Chief Executive. In 2014-15 the Chief Fire Officer had additional corporate responsibility for the council's Community Safety, Trading Standards and Highways and Transport functions.

There are monthly 'Leadership Team' meetings between the Corporate Management Team and Cabinet, where policy development is discussed in advance of Cabinet and Full Council meetings.

A close working relationship exists between the Chief Fire Officer and Cabinet Member. Outside of informal day-to-day arrangements, this is conducted through weekly one-to-one meetings between the Cabinet Member and Chief Fire Officer. In addition there are monthly

formal written briefings for the Cabinet Member, supported by the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer.

Opposition party members are involved in fire and rescue service business through monthly written briefings and meetings with the lead member of the opposition party and regular informal briefings to the remaining parties.

A 'golden thread' links the county council and fire and rescue service governance and management arrangements:

- a. Suffolk County Council Leadership Team (Corporate Management Team and Cabinet) – CFO attendee
- b. Suffolk County Council Corporate Management Team – CFO attendee
- c. Public Protection Directorate Management Team (Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service, Trading Standards and Community Safety) – CFO Chairman
- d. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Strategy Group (senior fire officers at the following levels: Brigade Manager, Area Manager and equivalents) – CFO Chairman
- e. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Budget Management Team meeting, command, department, team and Individual meetings and Performance Agreements.

Leadership of the Service is facilitated through a wide range of communication channels and management arrangements. These include senior officer face-to-face visits and presentations, regular manager forums, weekly information bulletins to all staff, quarterly Chief Fire Officer Managers' brief, a Senior Managers Forum, the publishing of key messages and a regular Chief Fire Officer Blog as well as the use of the council's Intranet site and Fire SharePoint system for sharing important news and information. In 2014-15 fire stations and departments were visited and an update provided by a senior officer on relevant key issues, such as the financial and potential service delivery challenges and opportunities ahead.

Strategic policy development in 2014-15 was overseen by a Public Protection Policy Development Panel of councillors. This Panel provided a steering function, ensuring that the fire and rescue authority, was meeting the expectations and requirements set out in the National Framework, guiding the development of the annual Integrated Risk Management Plan and Statement of Assurance and reviewing the performance of the Service.

Political engagement with fire and rescue service representative bodies (Fire Brigades Union, Fire Officers Association and the Retained Firefighters Union) is managed through a Fire Service Joint Forum. This is a cross-party councillor group supported by the Chief Fire Officer and senior staff. It is chaired alternately by the Cabinet Member and a representative body chairman. The Joint Forum considers issues associated with fire and rescue service employee relations and policy development. The forum complements the comprehensive arrangements that support effective industrial relations management across the Service.

6. Performance and risk management

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service managers monitor and manage performance to ensure the best possible services are provided and that timely action can be taken where any performance issues are highlighted.

A Management Information System and Key Performance Indicators assist in the recording, presentation and management of performance. A report on performance is submitted in the form of the annual Fire and Rescue Service Performance Outturn Report, published on the

council's website. This is also routinely monitored by managers and the Cabinet Member, providing the opportunity to consider and discuss the Service's performance.

Risk management is carried out in line with the council's risk management arrangements. Risk is monitored and reviewed, scored and then recorded on the council's JCAD system. Control measures are developed to manage and mitigate risks. The highest strategic level risk risks are reported to the council's Corporate Management Team and Fire Strategy Group.

Some key areas of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service performance in 2014-15 are set out below:

Fires

In 2014-15 there were 785 primary fires (fires in buildings, vehicles and outdoor structures, or any fire involving casualties, rescues, or fires attended by five or more fire engines) which represents a reduction of 23 (2.8%) on the 808 attended in 2013-14. Primary fires have reduced in number by 387 (33%) from the 1,172 attended in 2010-11.

The number of accidental dwelling fires in 2014-15 was 319, an increase of 17 (5.6%) on the 302 recorded in 2013-14. However, over the longer term there has been a reduction in dwelling fires, which have fallen by 101 (24%) from the 420 attended in 2010-11. This is likely to be due to a number of factors; fire and rescue service prevention interventions are now well embedded, smoke detector ownership has increased over time, improvements in fire safety standards relating to home furnishings and electrical appliances and other similar developments.

There were 136 fires in commercial premises in 2014-15. A reduction of 20 (14.7%) on the 156 reported in 2013-14.

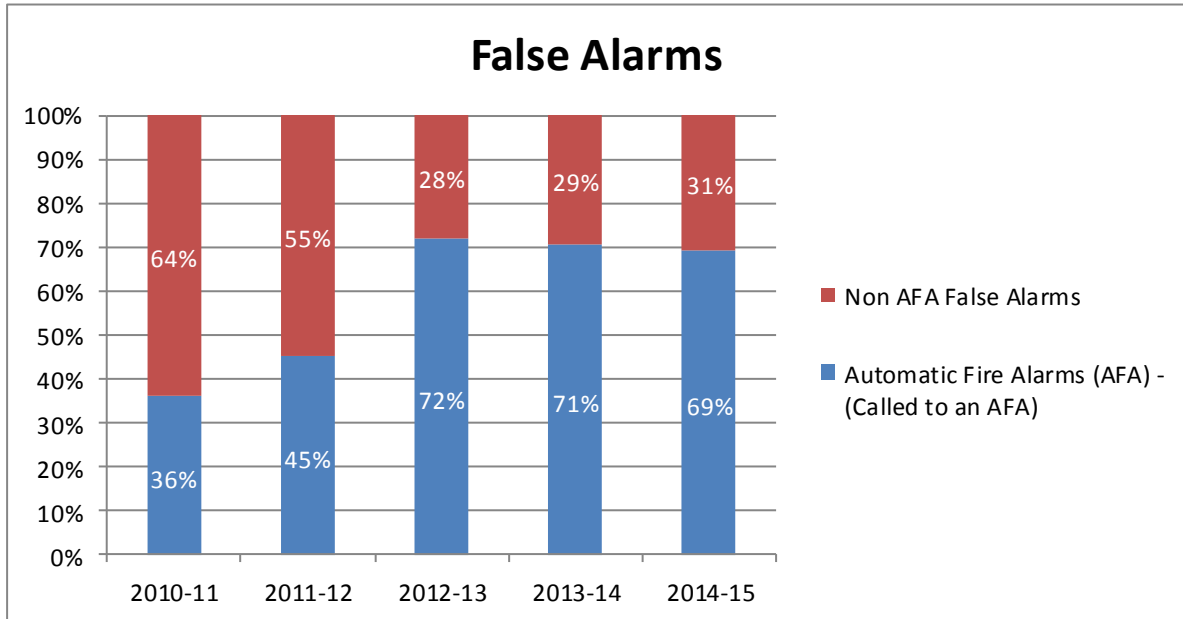
False alarms

In 2014-15 Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service attended 2,412 calls which later turned out to be false alarms. This is a slight reduction from the 2,443 attended in 2013-14. False alarms represented 50.4% of all calls attended in 2014-15.

False alarms may be classified as follows:

1. Those which are not related to Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) systems (31% of false alarm calls in 2014-15) but instead where a fire alarm system is manually activated or where a person raises the alarm via a 999 call. These include hoax calls and where people report an emergency in good faith but where it is later found there is no fire (good intent fire calls), and
2. AFA activations where there is no fire (69% of false alarm calls in 2014-15). These are emergencies raised by an AFA system where it is later found by crews there is no fire. The alarm may have activated because of insects or dust inside fire detectors, obstruction of optical smoke detecting beams or smoke from an outside source entering a building and activating the AFA system.

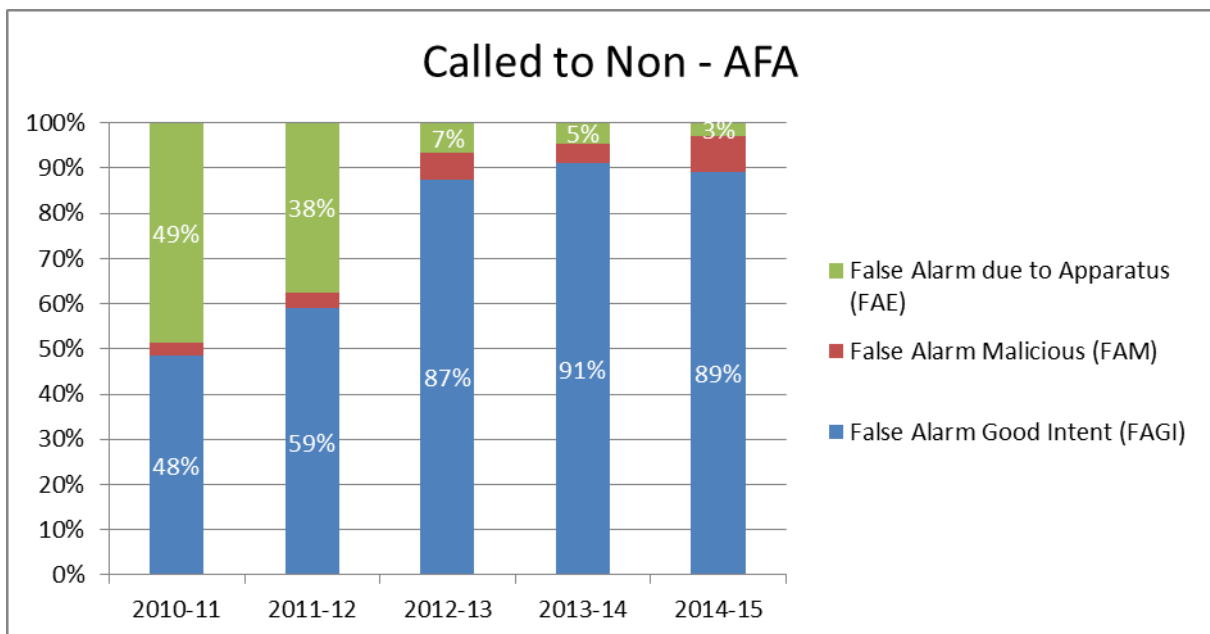
The chart below details the proportion of calls to each category.



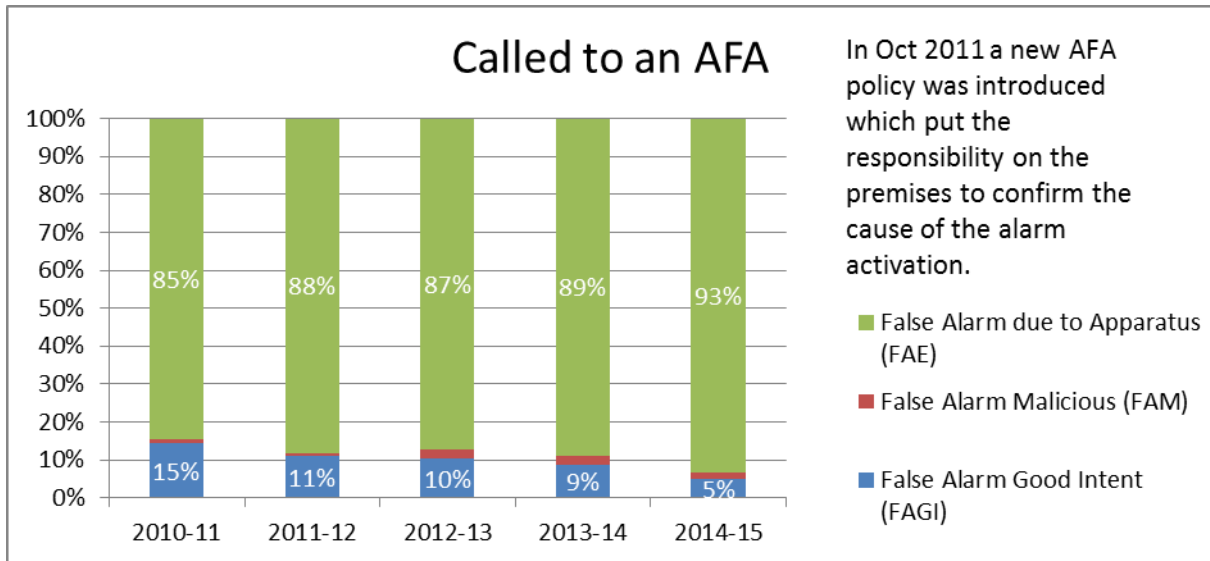
Within the 2 categories false alarms can be further broken down as follows:

- a) False alarms due to apparatus (faulty equipment/fire alarm system)
- b) False alarm malicious (including hoax calls)
- c) False alarm good intent (i.e. steam from a boiler seen by a person and mistaken for smoke).

The chart below shows the proportions of false alarms which are attributed to non-AFA related false alarms:



The chart below shows the proportions of false alarms which are attributed to AFA systems:



Only a very small % of AFA calls are found to be fires on arrival at the emergency. Where this is the case the call is later re-categorised as a fire. In 2013-14 approximately 3% of AFA calls were classified as fires and in 2014-15 this represented approximately 3.5% of all AFA calls.

Work continues to reduce the occurrences of AFA false alarms.

People killed or injured in fires

Compared to national levels, Suffolk continues to have a relatively low annual fire death rate with an average of 4.6 deaths per year over the period 2010-11 to 2014-15. In 2014-15 there were 4 fire deaths, a reduction on the 6 reported in 2013-14. However, the ambition remains to achieve zero fire deaths in Suffolk and the Service's focus has remained on delivering effective fire prevention and fire protection advice to make people safer from fire in their homes and when at work and providing an effective emergency response to fires where these do occur.

The average number of casualties in fires, over the period 2010-11 to 2014-15, averaged 38.6 per year. In 2014-15 there were 41 fire casualties, an increase of 7 (20.6%) on the 34 reported in 2013-14.

Road Traffic Collisions

The number of people killed or seriously injured on Suffolk's roads has significantly reduced over the last 12 years, evidenced by a decrease from 479 collisions (1994-1998 average) to 296 in 2010. This represented a 38% reduction over this period.

The average number of road traffic collision fatalities at incidents attended by Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service was 12.8 per year over the period 2010-11 to 2014-15. 316 road traffic collisions were attended in 2014-15 and there were 9 fatalities, a reduction on the 17 reported in 2013-14. Road traffic collision casualties averaged 181.2 per year over the same 5 year period. In 2014-15 there 185 casualties reported, which is a reduction of 10 (5.1%) on the 195 reported in 2013-14.

Road traffic collision prevention continues to be an important element of Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service's Prevention work and during 2014-15 the Service continued to work closely with stakeholders and agencies as part of Suffolk's Roadsafe Board.

Comparison of 2013-14 and 2014-15 incident statistics

Incident Type	2013/14 Adjusted Outturn	2014/15 Outturn	% Difference
Primary fires	808	785	-2.8%
Accidental dwelling fires	269	287	+6.7%
Fire in commercial premises	156	136	-12.8%
Fire deaths	6	4	-33.3%
Fire injuries	34	41	+20.6%
Road traffic collisions - killed and injured	212	194	-8.5%
False alarms attended	2,443	2,412	-1.3%

On-call firefighter availability

Every fire station in Suffolk is crewed by on-call firefighters, who solely crew 29 fire stations outside of the main towns of Ipswich, Bury St Edmunds, Lowestoft, Haverhill and Newmarket, where full-time firefighters are also based. Full-time firefighters provide an immediate response to emergencies where on-call firefighters normally respond from the station within approximately 5-6 minutes, subject to availability.

Overall - on-call fire station availability in 2013-14 was 88.34% and in 2014-15 was 84.43%, a reduction of 3.91%. Availability improves at nights and weekends, but during working weekdays it commonly reduces due primarily to the employment commitments of on-call firefighters.

On-call availability between January 2014 and January 2015 was 82.87% between 8am and 8pm (Monday to Friday), 96.09% between 8pm and 8am (Monday to Thursday) and 92.86% at weekends (Friday 8pm to Monday 8am).

The average availability of the Service's on-call fire engines between January 2015 and January 2016 was 83.5% between 8am and 8pm (Monday to Friday), 96.74% between 8pm and 8am (Monday to Thursday) and 93.58% at weekends (Friday 8pm to Monday 8am). This shows a slight improvement on the same period in 2014-15. This information will be subject to validation at year end.

Availability in Suffolk reflects a national trend linked to factors such as - the primary employment commitments of our firefighters during weekdays and the need for staff to travel further afield to secure employment. In addition, the economic environment impacts on the ability of primary employers being able to release staff for firefighting duties and on the self-employed who need to focus on their primary livelihood.

On-call availability is a key priority for the Service and work continued in 2014-15 to seek improvements through a number of initiatives and key pieces of work. This work will continue in future years.

999 emergency response times

At a national level there is a trend, which is reflected in Suffolk, in increased response times. This is attributed, in part, to traffic volume and congestion on roads, particularly in urban areas. Other local factors, such as the adoption safer driving techniques (drive to arrive) by fire engine drivers and local requirements requiring crews to dress in firefighting protective

clothing, as a safety measure, before turning-out also contribute to increased attendance times.

National data provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government, shows that the average response time to dwelling fires in England in 2014-15 was 7 minutes 45 seconds, an increase of 20 seconds from the previous year. This is a continuation of a general long term increase in response times to fires in dwellings (see link below).

[Fire and Rescue Response Times 2014-15 Statistical Release](#)

The national statistics show that average response times to primary fires in Suffolk, were 11.1 minutes in 2013-14 and 11.3 minutes in 2014-15. Response to dwelling fires was 9.7 minutes in 2013-14 and 11.1 minutes in 2014-15. To other building fires response times were 11.9 minutes in 2013-14 and 10.8 minutes in 2014-15. For road vehicle fires response times were 11.3 minutes in 2013-14 and 11.6 minutes in 2014-15. This data shows an increase in response times other than to other building fires, where times reduced in 2014-15.

For Suffolk, on average, for all incidents, in 2014-15 the first fire engine arrived in 9 minutes and 26 seconds from the time firefighters were first alerted to the call. The average time for on-call crewed fire engines to arrive at an incident was 11 minutes and 10 seconds. Full-time firefighter crewed fire engines arrived in 7 minutes and 8 seconds on average. At incidents where the first fire engine was supported by a second fire engine the average time for the first 2 fire engines to arrive at emergencies was 13 minutes and 22 seconds.

Response times in rural areas such as Suffolk are also significantly influenced by the availability of on-firefighters and work continued in 2014-15 to seek improvements to on-call availability and response times. This work will continue in the future.

Response standards

Prior to 2004, targets for response times to fires and other emergencies were based on a prescriptive framework of national standards. In 2004 fire and rescue authorities were provided with the freedom to develop local response standards to reflect local risk. In 2010-11 the fire and rescue authority agreed a revised set of performance standards for response to emergencies. The table below details performance against the agreed standards:

Performance Standard	Target	2013-14 Adjusted outturn	2014-15 Outturn	2015-16 (11 months to March 16)
Performance Standard 1 - Attend 80% of property fires within 11 minutes of alert (1 st fire engine)	80%	77.51%	64.81%	73.10%
Performance Standard 2 - Attend 80% of property fires within 16 minutes of alert (2 nd fire engine)	80%	78.37%	71.98%	78.21%
Performance Standard 3 - Attend 80% of Road Traffic Collisions within 13 minutes of alert	80%	77.45%	77.85%	74.84%

Note: 2015-16 information is based on the period 1/04/2015 to 29/02/2016 and taken from the Incident Reporting Forms (there were 432 outstanding reports in the period). This information will be subject to validation at year end.

Performance Standard 1 was measured against the 645 property fires that firefighters attended. To achieve the standard on 80% of occasions would have equated to 516 of those property fires being attended in 11 minutes. The performance of 64.81% means that the Service attended 418 of the property fires within 11 minutes.

CIPFA benchmarking data

Service performance against other fire and rescue services is measured primarily through CIPFA benchmarking data. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service is routinely shown as low-cost and high-performing.

The following charts are drawn from a more comprehensive benchmarking report that compares Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service to 44 fire and rescue authorities in England (where current data is available). The current data is drawn from the CIPFA profile for 2014-15.

Table 1 (below) shows Suffolk as the lowest cost per head of population fire and rescue service in the country. Suffolk's current cost is £14 below the national average (£39.49 per person) and this has reduced by £1.46 from the 2013/14 figure (£26.95).





Measure (comparison with all Fire Authorities)	
Efficiency - £ per head of population (average £39.49)	
Upper Quartile - HIGHEST £ COST 	£39.67 - £47.74
Mid to Upper Quartile 	£35.56 - £39.59
Mid to Lower Quartile 	£33.46 - £35.53
Lower Quartile - LOWEST £ COST 	£25.49 - £32.95 SUFFOLK = £25.49

Table 1 Efficiency - £ per head of population

Table 2 (below) shows Suffolk has the lowest cost in England per full time equivalent (FTE) member of staff. Suffolk's current cost per staff FTE is £16,390 below the national average of £43,208 per staff FTE.





Measure (comparison with all Fire Authorities)	
Efficiency - £ per Staff FTE (average £43,208)	
Upper Quartile - HIGHEST £ COST 	£47,164 - £63,190
Mid to Upper Quartile 	£43,859 - £47,127
Mid to Lower Quartile 	£39,647 - £43,586
Lower Quartile - LOWEST £ COST 	£26,818 - £38,718 SUFFOLK = £26,818

Table 2 Efficiency - £ per Staff FTE

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has reduced its costs in this area by £44.95 (approximately 0.2%) per FTE from the 2013-14 figure of £26,862.95. This shows a continued trend in cost reduction linked to a fall in firefighter, back office and senior manager numbers, over time, and efficiencies made in service delivery. This reflects a reduction in government funding over the period.

Table 3 (below) shows that Suffolk is in the lower quartile in terms of the average spend per Hectare of £49.53. This is £216.23 below the average (£256.76) spend per Hectare and is indicative of the comparatively large geographical area covered versus expenditure on the fire and rescue service.



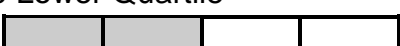

Measure (comparison with all Fire Authorities)	
Efficiency - £ per Hectare (avg £265.76)	
Upper Quartile - HIGHEST £ COST 	£242.09 - £2,519.77
Mid to Upper Quartile 	£158.33 - £236.49
Mid to Lower Quartile 	£91.45 - £157.49
Lower Quartile - LOWEST £ COST 	£28.89 - £87.89 SUFFOLK = £49.53

Table 3: Efficiency - £ per Hectare

Internal and external operational assurance

A range of internal and external audit, review and assurance arrangements have been established. Internal audits are overseen centrally and focus on fire station and functional areas and a review of operational performance at incidents.

The audit process was reviewed in 2014-15 and revisions made to ensure there was the correct focus on relevant key areas such as operational incident command and risk critical support functions, such as fire workshops, engineering and firefighter training.

Fire stations and departments are routinely audited every 3 years. However, more regular audits are carried out where a need arises in year. 14 internal audits were carried out in 2014-15 and the outcomes of these were reported to the Fire Strategy Group, which agreed appropriate actions and monitors progress and outcomes.

Significant emergencies attended are followed-up by a formal debrief at which the main agencies, partners, officers and crews are represented. This is an established process, designed to highlight notable practice, identify any issues arising and seek continual improvement. In 2014-15, 5 debriefs were completed and their outcomes were used to influence and improve the provision of training, equipment and standard operating procedures.

The Service's internal audit and review arrangements supplement the formal audits carried out by the county council's Audit Service, who undertake separate and independent audits to those described above. As Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service sits within the overall governance framework of Suffolk County Council the outcome of audits carried out across other council functions has a bearing on Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service's practices, policies and ways of working.

Following an Audit Service initial audit of the Fire Workshop function in September 2013, which was reported as 'ineffective', a follow-up review was undertaken in July 2014 to assess implementation of recommendations. The overall audit opinion following re-assessment was 'effective', however, recommendations for the implementation of further increased controls in some areas were made. Details of the audit were reported to the Audit Committee on 13 May 2015 and the recommendations were implemented.

Peer challenge

The Local Government Association (LGA) and Chief Fire Officers' Association work in partnership to provide fire and rescue services with the opportunity to access an external peer challenge service. Peer challenge is available once every three years and the most recent review in Suffolk was carried out in December 2013.

The Service produced a comprehensive self-assessment document in preparation for assessment against the review's key assessment areas. The self-assessment was then subject to a four-day on-site scrutiny by an external Chief Fire Officer, an elected member peer, an officer from the LGA and two external senior fire and rescue service officers.

The [peer challenge report](#) is available on the council's website. An extract from the report summary states that the Service '*is delivering good and cost effective outcomes for the community*' and that it has '*effective leadership from the newly-appointed Chief Fire Officer and the Cabinet Member...*' The outcome of peer reviews is used to inform future Service plans.

Plans will be made for the next peer review, scheduled from 2016. However, the format and focus for future assessment may change as responsibility for fire and rescue service national policy is currently under review.

7. Operational

There are 35 fire stations located in Suffolk's largest towns and villages. Four stations; Bury St Edmunds, Lowestoft South, Ipswich East and Ipswich Princes Street are crewed around the clock, seven days per week. Two additional stations; Haverhill and Newmarket, revert to on-call crewing in the evenings and at weekends. The remaining stations are solely crewed by on-call firefighters, who respond to the station when required.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service operate a fleet of 58 front-line operational vehicles, including 47 fire engines, and a range of equipment required to deal with foreseeable emergencies. The number and type of vehicles, and operational equipment operated, is kept under review to ensure this remains fit for purpose and appropriate for the use intended.

In 2014-15, Combined Fire Control staff answered 5,057 999 calls for Suffolk and mobilised crews to 4,780 emergencies. This included 2,412 false alarms, 822 secondary fires, 785 primary fires, 445 special service incidents and 316 road traffic collisions.

Operational uniformed roles in Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service are based on seven nationally recognised and defined roles, set out below:

- a. Firefighter
- b. Crew Manager
- c. Watch Manager
- d. Station Manager
- e. Group Manager
- f. Area Manager
- g. Brigade Manager

Non-operational support roles are established in line with county council policy and associated local pay and grading arrangements. 58 non-operational staff were employed in support functions. This number included both full-time and part-time staff.

Fire and Rescue National Framework for England

The Fire and Rescue National Framework was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in July 2012 and sets out central government's priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities. The Framework identifies the high-level expectations of Government but does not prescribe operational matters, which it considers are best-managed by local authorities in consultation with communities. The priorities in the Framework are for authorities to:

- a. Identify and assess foreseeable risks, making provision for prevention and protection activities and for appropriate response to operational incidents.
- b. Work in partnership with local communities and partners
- c. Be accountable to local communities

The fire and rescue authority has considered the expectations of the National Framework and ensured that these are being met in an appropriate manner.

Integrated Risk Management Planning

The Authority adheres to the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework in producing its Integrated Risk Management Plans. In November 2013, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Authority published its 2014-17 Integrated Risk Management Plan and carried out a formal consultation. The Plan set out the three-year programme to manage foreseeable risk across Suffolk. In accordance with requirements of the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework, the Authority reviews and evolves its Plan annually.

The Integrated Risk Management Plan details how foreseeable risks such as house fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies are effectively managed. These risks are identified using professional judgement and information about previous emergencies attended, supported by computer software; mapping information; national intelligence, planning information supplied by local authorities, and other relevant information from partner and other organisations. This data is brought together to enable the identification of resources and risk control measures so as to ensure the effective and safe delivery of services.

In 2014, following a three-stage consultation process, crewing arrangements at Felixstowe fire station changed from a five-day nucleus crewing model to solely on-call firefighter crewing. This implemented the final stage of the 2011 Integrated Risk Management Plan consultation outcomes.

Mutual aid arrangements and agreements

The fire and rescue authority is a signatory to the National Mutual Aid Protocol. The Protocol sets out the terms under which a fire and rescue authority may expect assistance from, or provide assistance to, another authority in the event of a serious national incident such as wide-scale flooding or terrorist attack.

Formal mutual aid arrangements are also in place with neighbouring fire and rescue authorities for Essex, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire. These arrangements provide for regular cross-border support and assistance in the event of a fire or other emergency incident.

The severe flooding events witnessed across the UK during the winters of 2013-14 and 2014-15 were testament to the effectiveness of the national mutual aid protocols.

The Authority has an agreement in place with Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority for the provision of a 999 Fire Control Service. The Combined Fire Control is based in Huntingdon and serves both counties. The arrangement is governed through a formal legal agreement and performance is managed through Executive and Operational Governance Boards, which met regularly in 2014-15.

The Service is an important partner in the Suffolk Local Resilience Forum, a multi-agency partnership of emergency responders and other organisations involved in supporting the emergency response in Suffolk. The Forum ensures that agencies work together to develop, agree and test the plans made to respond to and manage community risk in the event of an emergency.

The Service has continued to work closely with Suffolk Constabulary and the East of England Ambulance Service to seek opportunities for closer collaboration. In 2014-15 property sharing was taking place with Suffolk Constabulary at the four joint fire and police stations in Framlingham, Ixworth, Debenham and Elmswell and further sharing was planned around the use of Woodbridge and Clare fire stations. This was subsequently achieved in 2015-16.

Fire stations were also being shared with the East of England Ambulance Service at Brandon and Lowestoft South with further collaboration being planned for Lowestoft North and Bury St Edmunds fire stations. Subsequently, this was also achieved in 2015-16.

Health and Safety

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Authority recognise that fire-fighting and responding to other emergencies can be hazardous. Health and safety remains one of the priority areas in the fire and rescue service's annual [Service Plan](#) which is published on the council's website.

There is a clear structure within the county council and fire and rescue service to support the effective management of health, safety and wellbeing. The Chief Fire Officer represents the fire and rescue service at the council's Strategic Health and Wellbeing Board and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer chairs the fire and rescue service Health and Safety Committee. It is through these meetings that health and safety arrangements for the fire and rescue service are managed.

The role of Health and Safety Manager is a dedicated management post and associated roles and responsibilities are based on Health and Safety Executive guidance and Approved Codes of Practice.

'Safe systems of work' are established for operational incidents, training and general non-operational work activity. A library of operational procedures, containing key risk and control measures and supporting information, is also maintained to assist firefighters to resolve operational incidents effectively and safely and underpin training, assessment and development for all staff.

All staff are provided with health and safety training that is relevant to role. For example, senior managers attend the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health 'Directing Safely' course and uniformed middle managers complete the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health qualifications.

The Service closely manages health and safety performance, the number of accidents and near misses and these are reported to the Fire Strategy Group. Every near miss and accident is investigated by a manager.

In 2014-15, staff reported a total of 77 personal accidents, an increase of approximately 11% on the 68 recorded in 2013-14. There were 23 vehicle accidents compared to the 15 reported in 2013-14, a rise of approximately 35%. 5 personal accidents were reportable under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) in 2014-15. This is a fall of approximately 37% from the 8 recorded in 2013-15.

Staff also reported 100 near-miss events in 2014-15 compared to 111 in 2013-14. Near-miss events are circumstances where staff report a potential hazard e.g. impact, trip, slip or fall but where there is no subsequent accident or injury. The reporting of near-misses helps to reduce the risk of accidents and staff were actively encouraged to report these.

Of the 77 reported personal accidents during 2014-15, operational training accounted for 34%, a decrease of 10% on the previous year. The main causes were similar to 2013-14; swift water rescue, compartment fire behaviour training and station based training, where minor injuries such as abrasions, bruising and musculoskeletal injuries occurred. This decrease recognises the importance of keeping firefighters safe, whilst maintaining realistic operational training.

The remaining accidents in 2014-15 were made up of injuries due to attendance at emergencies (26% of all accidents, an increase of 3% on the 16 recorded in 2013-14) and routine activities, which accounted for 32% of accidents. This last figure represents an increase of 10% compared to the previous year. The remaining 8% of injuries occurred where firefighters were en route to emergencies.

Quality Safety Audits

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service forms part of the framework of fire and rescue service national and regional health and safety groups. The eastern region group, of which Suffolk is a member, has signed a Partnership Agreement for regular external Quality Safety Audit (QSA) and an audit of the Service's health and safety management arrangements was carried out between 24 and 26 November 2014. This identified a number of strengths and areas of good practice along with suggested areas for further development.

The report was presented to the Fire Strategy Group in 2014-15 for consideration and action and it was later distributed to the eastern region health and safety practitioners group in order that good practice could be shared with other fire and rescue services.

Business continuity

Business continuity plans are in place to mitigate the impact of an incident which may interrupt the delivery of services; for example, industrial or strike action by staff, flu pandemic, severe weather or fuel shortages. An audit of the fire and rescue service business continuity arrangements was carried out by the council's Audit Service in 2012 and the plans are reviewed by managers at regular intervals.

During 2013-14 and 2014-15, the business continuity plan for industrial and strike action was tested, on a significant number of occasions, due to national strike action by members of the Fire Brigades Union. The arrangements initiated by the Service, in accordance with the plan, ensured that an acceptable level of operational cover was maintained throughout the strike periods.

Training and development

Training is an essential part of providing a fire and rescue service. In December 2013 the external peer challenge identified the Service's training and development arrangements as 'excellent'. Training and development programmes for Firefighters through to Area Manager were identified as representing notable practice and shared nationally. The Service's Training Centre provides firefighters with realistic fire, road traffic collision, rail, chemical and other realistic emergency scenarios. These facilities underwent further development and improvement in 2014-15.

Training is provided to all firefighters and officers throughout the year. Courses are delivered to improve knowledge, skills and experience in key areas to ensure that staff can carry out their roles safely and effectively. In addition, the county council provide training in non-operational areas such as equality and inclusion, safeguarding, leadership and supervisory management, and ICT.

The Service's Training Officer develops an annual Operational Training Plan which provides the framework against which training is linked directly to the risks faced by firefighters.

Full-time firefighters complete an annual five day course where their competency is tested against a range of operational scenarios. In 2014-15, this training was delivered to all full-time firefighters and officers. The nature of the on-call firefighter role means that training cannot be delivered in the same way. However, as breathing apparatus training is considered to be the most critical aspect of fire-fighting operations in Suffolk, all on-call firefighters were provided with a one-day breathing apparatus training course and assessment at the Training Centre. This is repeated on an annual basis.

Further on-going training is provided to firefighters and officers in their normal place of work. This is managed and delivered either through supervisory officers or by training instructors from the Training Centre. Every on-call firefighter is provided with a minimum of two hours training time each week, with additional training provided as the need arises.

All fire engine and emergency vehicle drivers are regularly trained to the latest nationally-recognised emergency fire appliance driver training standards.

h. Prevention and Protection

Prevention

Prevention is about reducing risk by preventing deaths, injuries and damage to property and the environment from fire and other emergencies.

The Service delivers many different programmes that enhance community safety, including:

- a. Road safety education, including a new 'Firebike' safety scheme
- b. Working with disaffected young people
- c. Working with young people in education
- d. Promoting healthier lifestyles with young people
- e. Helping older people to live independently
- f. Thatch fire safety

Community Fire Volunteers, Prevention staff and firefighters carry out free Safer Home Visits for the most vulnerable people in Suffolk. They fit safety features in homes such as smoke detectors and provide advice on safety, security and wellbeing. Where appropriate, people are referred to partner agencies such as Adult Social Care and the Benefits Agency etc.

In 2014-15 there were 2,245 Safer Home Visits carried out. This is an increase of 251 (12.6%) on the 1,994 undertaken in 2013-14 but 81 (3.6%) below the 2,326 carried out in 2012-13. In 2014-15 there were 2,185 smoke detectors installed in homes, an increase of 4.3% on the 2,093 fitted in 2013-14 but 0.1% lower than the 2,597 installed in 2012-13.

In 2014-15 the Service's arrangements for Safer Home Visits to help better target and prioritise these to the most vulnerable people. The arrangements are to be kept under review so as to ensure the approach continues to operate effectively.

Protection

Protection is primarily about the enforcement of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Officers carry out audits of buildings to establish compliance with the law, as far as fire safety is concerned.

Premises are selected for audit on the basis of the risk they may present to those who work in or visit them. Buildings where people sleep, such as hotels and residential care homes, are considered higher risk and are audited more frequently. Premises are also audited on receipt of information regarding poor fire safety conditions or where there has been a fire.

The number of audits carried out in 2014-15 was 850, a reduction of 261 (23.5%) on the 1,111 audits undertaken in 2013-14 but an increase on the 711 audits carried out in 2010-11. This reduction in audits in 2014-15 is partly due to a reduction in the number of officers carrying out audit work and vacancies occurring in year.

There were no formal notices issued under the provisions of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (Articles 29, 30 and 31) in 2014-15.

9. Achievements in 2014-15

Full-time firefighter shift review

Changes were made to the full-time firefighter shift system on completion of extended trials in 2013-14 after consultation with staff and trade unions. A review of the revised arrangements will be carried out in 2015-16.

Fire appliances and operational equipment

Two replacement water carriers and a new operational support unit were delivered into Service. These enable the Service to respond effectively to fires in rural areas and provide an effective logistics capability.

Three new Unimog 4x4 vehicles were ordered to replace the 2 current Unimogs together with 3 water rescue vehicles. The new vehicles will be delivered in 2015-16 and be used to support and improve the Service's rural firefighting and water rescue and flooding capabilities.

New Thermal Image Cameras were procured and are now provided on front-line fire engines to assist firefighters to move safely around smoke logged structures and effect rescues. In addition, Positive Pressure Ventilation units were introduced as the first phase of a plan to include these more widely across the Service. The units help firefighters to ventilate structures affected by fire, reduce fire and smoke damage and assist with the control of fires.

Defibrillators were also procured and issued to all front-line fire engines. These are now helping firefighters to provide life-saving assistance to those in distress at the emergencies they attend.

Property collaboration

The Service continued to collaborate with Suffolk Constabulary and the East of England Ambulance Service following the development of shared facilities at on-call fire stations in Ixworth, Elmswell, Framlingham and Debenham.

Improvement works were agreed for the development of Woodbridge station as a shared Fire and police community station. In addition, feasibility studies were initiated to investigate the options for further property sharing in several other locations across the county. The next phase of this work should be agreed in 2015-16.

A successful bid was made for Department for Communities and Local Government grant funding, following the submission of a joint bid for £4.98m. The council subsequently received £4.93m grant funding. Separately, the Police, in partnership with Fire and Ambulance, also made a successful bid to the Home Office for innovation funding to the sum of approximately £400,000. The funding is supporting the programme of work to substantially improve and share property assets.

FireBike

The FireBike motorcycle initiative was launched in 2014-15, financed by the Copdock Classic Motorcycle Club; a charitable organisation.

The initiative is now enabling the fire and rescue service to cultivate the interest of motorcyclists in road safety as part of the campaign to reduce road risk in Suffolk.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service forms part of the Suffolk Roadsafe Partnership and works closely with colleagues within Suffolk County Council, in both the Road Safety Team and Highways and with Suffolk Police to promote road safety.

Spending and capacity review

Officers continued to review Suffolk's risk profile, obligations and resources in response to predicted Government grant reductions. The review reflected on historical and likely future demand, current and future infrastructure, demographics and budget profiling. This work was expected to continue through to 2015-16 and is considered critical for supporting the development of the 2015-18 Integrated Risk Management Plan.

Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP)

ESMCP is a Government project to replace the current Airwave radio communications system and provide the next generation communication system for the 3 emergency services and other public safety users. This system will be called the emergency services network (ESN) and will provide a resilient and integrated voice and broadband radio and data services.

In 2014-15 the Service established an ESMCP Programme Board to facilitate local preparedness for the implementation of the new ESN, expected to be available for use in the eastern region from December 2017. The Board worked closely with regional and national officers to ensure that the appropriate plans were being made for implementation locally.

Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP)

JESIP is a Government programme designed to improve the ways in which police, fire and ambulance services work together at major and complex incidents resulting in a more coordinated and efficient command structure at the scene of an emergency incident.

In 2014-15 JESIP training was provided to all flexible duty system officers and firefighters were provided with information and guidance on the new arrangements. The JESIP principles were also integrated into Standard Operating Procedures and staff development folders. The Service's preparedness was successfully verified through a multi-agency exercise carried out at the Service's Training Centre in year.

Work is continuing to ensure that the JESIP principles are fully embedded into the culture of the emergency services in Suffolk.

National Operational Guidance

The National Operational Guidance Programme is a partnership between the Local Government Association (LGA), the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) the Department for Communities and Local Government's Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser (CFRA) and the London Fire Brigade. The Programme is working with fire and rescue services to deliver new online operational guidance that is consistent, easily accessible and can be quickly revised and updated if necessary.

In 2014-15 the Service established a Programme Board to oversee the implementation of National Operational Guidance and to help contribute to the work taking place nationally and regionally. This work involved reviewing Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service's operational guidance notes, and related procedures, and identifying where these may need to change. Good progress was being made and the work will continue in line with the national programme timetable.

10. Future Improvements

The Service produces an annual [Service Plan](#) covering a three-year period. The plan sets out a range of tasks for delivery in 2015-17 and was published on the Council's website. The plan, which is updated annually, sets out improvements to services, some of which are summarised below:

Blue light integration

Following receipt of the £4.93m DCLG grant funding in 2015-16, for future projects relating to property sharing with blue light partners, a Joint Programme Manager was appointed and blue light governance arrangements established. Plans were developed for sharing facilities at Woodbridge fire station, to accommodate a Police Safer Neighbourhood Team, and feasibility studies for the co-locating of blue light partners in Felixstowe, Saxmundham, Stowmarket, Mildenhall, Stowmarket, Leiston, Beccles and Princes Street, Ipswich were initiated. Work was also later carried out at Clare fire station, where a drop-in facility for the Police was provided, and at Bury fire station, which now accommodates 2 Ambulances, paramedics and Ambulance teams.

Building work on the above projects is scheduled to commence in 2016-17, subject to the necessary approvals and planning consent. Other projects will be identified as collaborative opportunities arise.

Procurement – new vehicles and equipment

Three new Unimog 4x4 vehicles will enter service in the spring of 2016 and these will be configured to support rural firefighting, water rescue, flooding response and large animal rescue. Additionally, 3 new fire engines will be ordered to replace existing ageing water tenders. These will incorporate new firefighting technologies, such as 'Cold-Cut' fire suppression equipment, which will help firefighters to rapidly extinguish fires. The vehicles will also carry battery powered hydraulic rescue equipment to replace the current equipment which requires a remotely operated hydraulic pump and hydraulic hoses.

The current Mobile Data Terminals fitted to front-line fire engines will be replaced in 2016 with the latest equipment. These vehicle mounted computers will improve how firefighters access operational information, maps and procedural notes as well as providing data communications with the 999 Combined Fire Control.

A new style of workwear uniform, for operational personnel, will be evaluated. This will be issued in 2016.

Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service will continue to work with other services as part of a collaborative agreement on the supply of protective firefighting clothing. New and improved clothing is expected to be available for Suffolk's firefighters in 2017-18.

On-call improvement

Work will continue to improve on-call fire station availability. This work will include, but not be limited to:

- a) New on-call firefighter availability contracts will be implemented for new on-call firefighters in 2016-17.
- b) On-call firefighter training arrangements introduced in 2014-15 will be reviewed and revisions made, where necessary, to reflect staff views and operational needs. The aim will be to provide more flexible training for on-call firefighters.
- c) On-call fire engine crewing arrangements will be reviewed to ensure that fire engines can respond without delay, with the correct number of crew, to people in need, whilst ensuring firefighter safety is maintained.
- d) A strategic reserve will be established to help improve on-call and wholetime fire station availability levels. This will be a pool of firefighters who are available for deployment to stations across Suffolk where staffing levels may need supporting.
- e) New on-call firefighter recruitment arrangements will be implemented and a range of new initiatives will be considered in relation to this.

Organisational review

A review of roles and responsibilities at Group and Station Commander levels will be implemented in 2015-16. These arrangements will be kept under review and revised where necessary. Separately, a review of the wholetime duty system will be carried out with a view to identifying improvements and future options, which will be discussed with staff and trade unions.

Performance standards – speed of response

A review of emergency response standards will be undertaken with a view to outlining future options and approaches, which will be considered.

A new management Information System will be implemented in 2016 to help monitor and manage operational and other performance.

Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP)

A Programme Board was established to facilitate work at local level to support the ESMCP, a national Government led programme to replace the emergency services Airwave radio system

with a new Emergency Services Network (ESN). This work continues at national, regional and local levels with the aim of the new system being implemented in Suffolk in 2017-18.

Prevention activities

Further improvements will be made to safer home visits to better target these to the most vulnerable people.

The number of School Fire Liaison Officers was increased in 2014-15 to 13. School Fire Liaison Officers are firefighters who, additionally to their core role, provide a mentoring and support role for young children in a school, on a part-time basis. The ambition is to continue to increase the number of officers where this supports Suffolk's and young people schools.

Close engagement will be sought with a range of partners, including the County Council's Children and Young Peoples Services and Public Health, to support work with young people and their families. This will include seeking funding to support the Service's Firefighter Fit-and-Healthy initiative through a partnership with Public Health. This will help sustain the scheme, which operates at Bury and Lowestoft fire stations.

Arson reduction

Work will continue, in partnership with Suffolk Police, to seek to further reducing the risk of arson in Suffolk.

Sizewell C

Officers will continue to support the consultation exercise for the proposed Sizewell C power station development.

Spending and capacity review

Officers will continue to review Suffolk's risk profile and resources in response to the predicted Government grant reductions. This will support the development of the 2015-18 Integrated Risk Management Plan which will be subject to full staff and public consultation in 2015-16.

11. Links to key documents

[Fire and Rescue National Framework](#)

[Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Integrated Risk Management Plan 2014/17](#)

[The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#)

[Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999](#)

[Audit Commission Act 1998](#)

[Regulation 11 of the Accounts and Audit \(England\) Regulations 2011](#)

[The Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#)

[The Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)

[The Fire and Rescue Services \(Emergencies\) \(England\) Order 2007](#)

[The Localism Act 2011](#)

[The Health and Safety Act at Work, etc. Act 1974](#)

[Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Peer Challenge Report 2013](#)

[Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Plan 2014/17](#)

[Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service Response Standards](#)