

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: PERFORMANCE AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE
DATE: 11TH SEPTEMBER 2024
REPORT OF: HEAD OF OPERATIONAL POLICY AND ASSURANCE
AUTHOR: SM MALCOLM JONES

SUBJECT: NORTH WEST FIRE CONTROL – ANNUAL
REPORT 2023-24

Purpose of Report

1. To inform members about the performance of North West Fire Control (NWFC) during the year 2023-24 (1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024).

Recommended: That

- [1] Members note the performance information relating to NWFC.

Background

2. This report is based on NWFC quarterly performance reports, and data generated from the Service's Organisational Intelligence Team.

Information

Report Content

3. The key performance measures contained within this report offer a review of NWFC's call handling performance, costs of service against demand, training and exercising, and business continuity.

Call handling performance - call challenging

4. Control Room Operatives (CROs) are trained to challenge specific call types and ask additional questions to identify whether CFRS attendance is required. These include Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs), animal rescues, bonfires and gaining entry incidents. The average percentage of calls challenged, but not mobilised to was 47% for the reporting period.
5. Following the introduction of the Right Care, Right Person (RCRP) approach by Police forces nationally, a new call challenge procedure has been introduced into NWFC. RCRP is a national scheme to ensure that members of the public in mental health crisis are provided with the right care, responded to by the right

person with the right skills, training and experience to best meet their needs. When calls are received at NWFC in relation to RCRP, CROs will direct the caller to the most appropriate agency. A new 'Concern for Welfare' call handling script has been created to ensure we respond to these calls in the right way. Under the RCRP scheme, Police will still always respond to incidents involving violence to partner agencies, including fire related incidents and children.

6. A breakdown by quarter of the number of calls that have been challenged and their subsequent outcomes is presented in Table 1.

Quarter	Number of Call Challenges	Number of Mobilisations	Number of Non Mobilisations	%
Q1	7818	4247	3571	46%
Q2	8932	4623	4309	48%
Q3	9988	5254	4734	47%
Q4	8631	4445	4186	48%
Total	35369	18569	16800	47%

Table 1 – Call Challenge Data

Call handling performance - time to answer emergency calls

7. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) provide a guideline target that 95% of emergency calls should be answered in 10 seconds or less. This has been adopted by NWFC.
8. Performance for all CFRS calls is shown in the table 2 below.

	Average call answer time (Secs)	% of Calls answered in 10 seconds
Q1 2023-2024	6.9	83.63%
Q2 2023-2024	5.7	87.73%
Q3 2023-2024	6.1	86.52%
Q4 2023-2024	5.4	89.05%
Average	6.3	86.73%

Table 2 – 10 Second Performance Data

9. Initially in the first quarter a significant proportion of the calls failed to meet the 10s standard with some 16.37% of calls taking longer than ten seconds to answer. However, performance improved and by the final quarter 10.95% took longer than the allotted ten seconds with an overall average of 86.73% of calls meeting the expected standard.

Call handling performance - time of call answer to time of alerting the first resource

10. The performance standard assesses the time taken for a control room operator to mobilise the first resources to the incident after answering a 999 call. This requires them to ascertain the location from the caller, input details in the mobilising system and select the most appropriate resources to send. The target for this is 90 seconds. Performance is shown in the table 3.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Average
Average life risk incidents	90	90	94	96	93
Dwelling Fires	72	74	72	74	73
Special Service Calls – RTC's	108	105	112	112	109

Table 3 – 90s Performance Data

11. The data shows an overall average of 93 seconds for 2023-24. This is in line with the 2022-23 period which recorded an average of 92.5 seconds.
12. The average call handling time for dwelling fires was 73 seconds; a 2.25 second improvement from the previous year.
13. The average call handling time for RTCs was 109 seconds as opposed to 109.5 seconds the previous year. It is important to note that the 2021-22 average was 118.
14. It is also important to note that it is more difficult to handle some types of 999 calls than others; e.g. a dwelling fire is usually quicker as the 999 caller can often provide a postcode, whereas a caller ringing from an RTC may be unsure of their exact location on a motorway or rural road.
15. The Service and Members monitor these performance metrics on a quarterly basis through the health report presented to the Performance and Overview Committee.

Cost of Service

16. Table 4 presents the number of emergency call activities for each FRS. The table also contains the percentage for the year.
17. The cost of the service provided by NWFC is paid for in proportions agreed by the FRS's when NWFC was established.

Service	Number of Calls	Percentage	Annual Percentage of Cost per FRS
Cumbria	7615	7.7%	8.8%
Cheshire	14034	14.3%	19.8%
GMC	47047	47.8%	43.35%
Lancs	29759	30.2%	28.05%
Total	98455	100%	100%

Table 4 – North West FRS Activity

New technologies and delivery of projects

18. New Mobilising System – The existing mobilising system is coming to its end of life in 2026. CFRS are working in collaboration with NWFC and the other regional Fire and Rescue Services toward the procurement of a new mobilising solution. CFRS are embedded in all aspects of the project that will ensure a mobilising system to meet the needs of a modern Fire and Rescue Service. We are planning to award the final contract during October 2024.

Fire Survival Guidance

19. Following the Grenfell Tower Inquiry a number of recommendations were made for Fire Control rooms to improve the way they shared information with Firefighters at incidents involving large numbers of callers trapped within a building. This includes the location and status of multiple callers who may be located on different floors or flats within a building and the advice they provide them with to make their own escape or await rescue by Firefighters. This is known as Fire Survival Guidance (FSG).
20. The method by which NWFC share Fire Survival Guidance (FSG) with Firefighters at an incident has been digitally enhanced to improve its operational capability. The digital solution uses SharePoint and was initially created by Merseyside FRS and adopted by Greater Manchester FRS. It is designed to clearly communicate to Firefighters the location and status of trapped 999 callers a large scale incidents.

21. CFRS has adopted an improved system, developed in coordination with Lancashire FRS, that allows two-way communications to be utilised to update the system as a live document. This enhances the commander's and Fire Control's ability to make decisions based on the most accurate information in real time.
22. To date the stations that will lead on use of the new SharePoint FSG, (Congleton and Alsager) have received on station presentations, familiarisation and tabletop/walkthrough sessions. These sessions were followed by three individual training exercises in our command training suite.
23. The go live date with NWFC is October 1st 2024.
24. The implementation of an improved FSG system was also an Area for Improvement (AFI) identified during our last HMICFRS inspection.

Training, exercises and debriefs

25. NWFC has introduced a new Operations Manager role within their Organisation Improvement Team. The purpose of this role is to act as a signal point of contact for CFRS for actions concerning exercises and to ensure services are fully supported in their exercise requirements.
26. NWFC has supported CFRS in several exercises. This included ten major exercises at COMAH sites and / or in conjunction with the Local Resilience Forum.

	Exercise name	Date	Theme
1	Exolum/Backford	23/01/24	COMAH
2	Argent	29/02/24	COMAH
3	Civic Flame	26/03/24	CFRS/LRF
4	Halton 18	30/05/24	COMAH
5	Uniper	11/06/24	COMAH
6	Paddock	04/09/24	LRF
7	Urenco Peony	23/10/24	ONR
8	ICoNiChem	17/10/24	COMAH
9	Veolia	27/11/24	COMAH
10	Ecolab Cheshire 78	11/12/24	COMAH

Table 5 – CFRS/NWFC Combined Exercises

Business Continuity

27. The NWFC business continuity plan has been reviewed and refreshed in the 2023-24 period along with our business continuity and disaster recovery group terms of reference.
28. NWFC will be invited to participate in the annual CFRS Crisis Management Team Exercise in October 2024.

Financial Implications

29. New mobilising system – approximate cost estimate for new mobilising system is £18M. This will be paid across the 10-year life of the system and the CFRS contribution will be as per table 4 of this report. Other costs include legal and procurement advice during the project for which the current estimate is £250,000. CFRS contribution to this cost has yet to be finalised.

Legal Implications

30. None resulting from the information in the report. An agreement for services exists between the Authority and NW Fire Control Ltd. There is also a co-operation agreement which was entered into by the four fire and rescue authorities when Fire Control was set up. These documents provide a framework for managing the relationships that need to be maintained.

Equality and Diversity Implications

31. None

Environmental Implications

32. None

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