

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 10TH DECEMBER 2019
REPORT OF: CHIEF FIRE OFFICE AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE
AUTHOR: MARK CASHIN

SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CONSTITUENT AUTHORITIES CONCERNED WITH 10 MINUTE RESPONSE STANDARD

Purpose of the Report

1. To allow Members to consider recommendations from the constituent authorities concerned with the 10 minute response standard.

Recommended: That Members

- [1] consider the contents of the report and authorise the Chair, with the assistance of the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive, to prepare and send a suitable response to the Leaders of the constituent authorities.

Background

Recommendations from constituent authorities

2. All of the constituent authorities have passed motions entitled "Fighting fire in our Borough". The motions are similar, but not identical and are attached to this report as Appendix 1. Subsequently, the Chief Fire Officer has received letters containing the recommendations referred to in the motions. The recommendations that are the subject of this report are set out in the table below:

CONSTITUENT AUTHORITY	RECOMMENDATION(S)
Cheshire East Borough Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• That as part of ongoing fire service reviews, the current 10 minute target time for fire engines to respond to dwelling fires is expanded to include historic buildings, office buildings, industrial sites, schools, hospitals and other public buildings. [Recommendation 1]• Other Incident types such as Flooding, water rescue, rescue from Height and Incidents involving Hazardous materials are all included within the Cheshire 10 minute standard. [Recommendation 2]• That the Cheshire Fire and Rescue 10 minutes standard is inclusive of the call handling time – as advised by the home office, formerly department for communities and local government. [Recommendation 3]

<p>Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That as part of ongoing fire service reviews, the current 10 minute target time for fire engines to respond to dwelling fires is expanded to include historic buildings, office buildings, industrial sites, schools, hospitals and other public buildings. [Recommendation 1]
<p>Halton Borough Council</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That as part of ongoing fire service reviews, the current 10 minute target time for fire engines to respond to dwelling fires is expanded to include historic buildings, office buildings, industrial sites, schools, hospitals and other public buildings. [Recommendation 1] • Other Incident types such as Flooding, water rescue, rescue from Height and Incidents involving Hazardous materials are all included within the Cheshire 10 minute standard. [Recommendation 2] • That the Cheshire Fire and Rescue 10 minute standard is inclusive of the call handling time as advised by the Home Office, formerly Department for Communities and Local Government. [Recommendation 3]
<p>Warrington Borough Council</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That as part of ongoing fire service reviews, the current 10 minute target time for fire engines to respond to dwelling fires is expanded to include historic buildings, office buildings, industrial sites, schools, hospitals and other public buildings. [Recommendation 1] • Other Incident types such as Flooding, water rescue, rescue from Height and Incidents involving Hazardous materials are all included within the Cheshire 10 minute standard. [Recommendation 2] • That the Cheshire Fire and Rescue 10 minute standard is inclusive of the call handling time – as recommended by the Government. [Recommendation 3]

3. This report, therefore, covers three issues:

- Application of the 10 minute response standard to certain building types;
- Application of the 10 minute response standard to certain incident types;
- Arrangements for reporting of the 10 minute response standard.

Response Standards in Cheshire

4. The Cheshire 10 minute response standard was introduced on 1st April 2013. This is how it is expressed:

A blanket 10 minute response to life-risk incidents (dwelling fires and road traffic collisions) on 80% of occasions.

5. The 10 minute response standard replaced the complex Cheshire Standard that had been introduced in 2003 when a national standard was withdrawn. The table below shows how the Cheshire Standard was described.

Risk Level	Response Time
Very high	0 to 5 minutes
High	6 to 10 minutes
Medium	11 to 15 minutes
Low	16 to 20 minutes
Very low	within 21 minutes

6. The table was colour coded to sit alongside a risk map that was shaded with corresponding colours to compliment it. Well over half of Cheshire was considered to be 'Very low' risk with a standard of 'within 21 minutes'. The majority of the rest of Cheshire was rated as 'Low' or 'Medium' risk. The 'High' and 'Very high' risk categories only applied to a very small portion of the County. Accordingly, the standard that applied to about three quarters of Cheshire was significantly worse than 10 minutes. The Cheshire Standard was considered to be confusing. Performance was measured as it is today, i.e. response was measured from the time of the alert to the time of attendance (i.e. it did not include call handling).

Response Standards Nationally

7. There is no national response standard. Fire and rescue services have a range of response standards which are intended to reflect risk.

The Law and National Framework

8. Section 7 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires fire and rescue authorities to 'make provision for the purpose of-
 - (a) extinguishing fires in its area, and
 - (b) protecting life and property in the event of fires in its area.'
9. Section 8 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires fire and rescue authorities to 'make provision for the purpose of-
 - (a) rescuing people in the event of road traffic accidents in its area, and
 - (b) protecting people from serious harm, to the extent that it considers reasonable to do so, in the event of road traffic accidents in its area.'

10. Neither of these key sections of the Act mentions response standards.
11. The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2018 restates the requirement to respond to incidents, listing fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies. The section of the Framework concerned with 'Accountability' includes a few paragraphs about Transparency. They include a requirement for the fire and rescue authority to 'make their communities aware of how they can access data and information on their performance.' This is not expanded upon elsewhere in the Framework.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

12. The report relating to Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) contains a section headed 'Responding to fire and other emergencies'. The Service was rated as Good.
13. It is understood that HMICFRS has expressed concern about the marked differences between services, e.g. in how they have determined their response standards and their reporting of them. The HMICFRS will publish a 'State of Fire' document when all of the inspection reports have been issued from the first complete round of inspections. It is likely that this document will comment upon this issue, but it is not clear what guidance, if any, will be introduced. Such guidance would be a matter for the Government.

Home Office

14. There is no guidance from the Home Office concerned with reporting about response standards.

Information

Rationale for the 10 minute response standard

15. The 10 minute response standard is focused on incidents involving 'life risk', because these incidents are of greater importance than other incidents. Dwelling fires and road traffic collisions are highlighted in the 10 minute response standard because the majority of life risk incidents are dwelling fires and road traffic collisions. In practice if there is the possibility that an incident involves a life risk then an emergency response is made. This means that most incidents are treated to an emergency response.

[Recommendation 1]:

Application of the 10 minute response standard to certain building types

16. The fact that the Service is resourced to respond to meet the 10 minute response standard allows it to provide the same emergency response to fires in the kinds of buildings that are listed in the recommendation.

However, as explained earlier, the reason that the 10 minute response standard highlights fires in dwelling is because they involve the greatest risk to life.

[Recommendation 2]:

Application of the 10 minute response standard to certain incident types

17. The fact that the Service is resourced to respond to meet the 10 minute response standard allows it to provide the same emergency response to all life risk incidents. The incidents listed in the recommendation can involve life risk. However, as explained earlier, the reason that the 10 minute response standard focuses on dwelling fires and road traffic collisions is because these incidents involve the greatest risk to life.

Reporting Arrangements

18. Performance and Overview Committee receives regular performance information about the 10 minute response standard and about call answering and call handling at NW Fire Control which reports against standards which were recommended by the Chief Fire Officers Association (replaced by the National Fire Chiefs Council).
19. The Home Office reports on response times to fires only, separating performance into three components: call handling, crew turnout; and drive time. It breaks the fires down into various descriptions (e.g. primary, road vehicle) and provides average (mean) times for each. It also categorises the fire and rescue authorities, e.g. Cheshire is classed as a 'significantly rural fire and rescue authority', due to the different challenges that it considers are applicable to each category of authority. It does not report on other types of incident.
20. The latest Statistical Bulletin on response times published by the Home Office in January 2019, which deals with incidents from April 2017 to March 2018, provides a range of information about average times for the three components (mentioned in the paragraph above) as well as the overall response time. The detail that sits behind this Statistical Bulletin is not published, though it is held by the Service.

[Recommendation 3]

Arrangements for reporting of the 10 minute response standard

20. At this point officers do not think that it would be helpful to change the approach to reporting. It still seems appropriate that NW Fire Control is charged with managing and reporting on its performance. Including call handling in the time calculation would clearly have an impact upon performance against the 10 minute response standard. However, it would not improve our understanding of performance and it would presumably lead to the Fire Authority considering a reframing of the response standard. This would need to be consulted upon.

21. It is expected that the HMICFRS will comment on response standards and possibly on performance reporting in its State of Fire document. Presumably, if the HMICFRS does comment the Government/Home Office is likely to consider this issue sometime next year and could issue guidance or provide direction. This would provide a good basis to review the current arrangements.
22. In the meantime officers are focusing their efforts on improving the way that performance is analysed. There are a number of ways that this already happens, e.g. Performance and Programme Board (officers), Performance and Overview Committee (Members), Unitary Performance Groups (officers and Members) and Serious Injury and Fatal Fire Reviews (officers). Officers are also considering ways to make performance more accessible, e.g. through publication on the website.

Financial Implications

23. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Legal Implications

24. The report contains a number of references to the law. As mentioned already a change to the response standard will need to be consulted upon.

Equality and Diversity Implications

25. There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

Environmental Implications

26. There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE