

# Lancashire Combined Fire Authority Planning Committee

Monday, 5 February 2024, at 10.00 am in the Main Conference Room,  
Service Headquarters, Fulwood.

## Minutes

<b>Present:</b>	
<b>Councillors</b>	
S Clarke (Chair)	
J Singleton (Vice-Chair)	
G Baker	
M Dad BEM	
N Hennessy	
J Hugo	
F Jackson	
P Rigby	
J Shedwick	
B Yates	

<b>Officers</b>
S Healey, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (LFRS) J Charters, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (LFRS) S Brown, Director of Corporate Services (LFRS) L Barr, Member Services Officer (LFRS)
<b>In attendance</b>
M Hoyle, Fire Brigades Union

19/23	<b>Apologies for Absence</b>
	Apologies for absence were received from County Councillor David O'Toole.
20/23	<b>Disclosure of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests</b>
	None received.
21/23	<b>Minutes of Previous Meeting</b>
	<b>Resolved:</b> - That the Minutes of the last meeting held on 20 November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

22/23

## ECR Implementation

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented the report.

Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) was required to review emergency response arrangements periodically to ensure that provision remained effective and commensurate with its dynamic risk profile. This process was a robust assessment of historic data and emergent risk and was delivered in the format of an Emergency Cover Review (ECR).

The changes identified in the ECR 2022 reflected the most effective and efficient use of resources for the whole of Lancashire. The Authority agreed all the proposed changes on 19 December 2022 which would result in LFRS:

- Maintaining all 39 fire stations and 58 fire appliances;
- Maintaining its outstanding response standards;
- Creating an increase in overall firefighter jobs by eight.

An ECR implementation plan was developed with five key workstreams, with updates on the workstreams detailed as follows:

### **1. Introduce more resilient and flexible crewing arrangements**

The Service had hoped to introduce more flexible crewing arrangements if agreement could be reached with trade unions. However, the proposed flexible whole-time duty system was not agreed by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). The Service subsequently proposed a trial of flexible rota management and leave arrangements; however, an agreement could not be reached. Therefore, changes of duty systems at some stations would still take place but with the re-introduction of the 2-2-4 whole-time duty system as opposed to flexible whole-time.

Engagement sessions had taken place with all the members of staff affected. Implementation of the changes to crewing arrangements were led by people's preferences in terms of the duty system they wished to work, subject to the skill requirements and the demands of the Service. Members of staff permanently employed on Day Crewing Plus (DCP) stations were offered a role at an alternative DCP station, or a position at their current station depending on their preference with some members of staff securing promotion opportunities. Following engagement with staff affected by the ECR, the Service had collated the preferences of staff who would be displaced and had informed them of their new postings upon implementation of the ECR changes.

A training needs analysis had been completed and training was underway to meet the needs of the Service and staff, although it was anticipated that there would be some short-term challenges around the availability of some of the Service's special skills until the training was completed. For example, training around bariatric rescues, where, in some circumstances, the next nearest resource would be mobilised and/ or detachments considered.

Property alterations at Morecambe, Fleetwood and Skelmersdale had been agreed which would support and accommodate the increase in staff at those stations.

Station engagement sessions had been held with staff at those stations to communicate the changes to them.

Implementation of the change of duty systems and establishment numbers was planned for 1 March 2024. All changes, with the exception of Penwortham, would take place at the same time as follows:

- Morecambe, Fleetwood and Skelmersdale (changing from DCP to 2-2-4 Wholetime) increasing establishment numbers from 14 to 24;
- St Annes (changing from DCP to Flexible Day Crewing) reducing establishment numbers from 14 to 13;
- Hyndburn, South Shore and Lancaster (remaining 2-2-4 Wholetime) reducing establishment numbers from 28 to 24;
- Darwen, Rawtenstall, Nelson and Bispham (remaining DCP) reducing establishment numbers from 14 to 13;
- Fulwood, Bacup, Ormskirk and Leyland (remaining Flexible Day Crewing) reducing from 14 to 13;
- Penwortham will remain as DCP whilst the Preston area review is carried out, the establishment number will reduce from 14 to 13 in line with other DCP stations.

With the resultant changes, there would be an overall increase in wholetime members of staff by 8 with 12 additional supervisory manager positions as below:

<b>Role</b>	<b>Current Total</b>	<b>New Total</b>	<b>Difference +/-</b>
Watch Manager B (WMB)	31	28	-3
Watch Manager A (WMA)	12	24	+12
Crew Manager (CM)	89	92	+3
Fire Fighter (FF)	370	366	-4
	502	510	+8

Due to the increase in overall establishment numbers, plus a significant increase in Crew and Watch Manager opportunities arising as a result of the ECR, the Service delivered an additional supervisory talent gateway promotion process. Following this process, the Service had filled the majority of posts recognising that, at a small number of stations, there might be some interim acting up arrangements pending further development.

County Councillor Hennessy thanked the Officers and staff involved for their work on the ECR and asked if the required efficiencies had been made even though the original proposed arrangements had changed due to non-agreement by the FBU. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the FBU did not support the DCP duty system and the number of stations facilitating DCP had reduced from 11 to 7 (eventually 6), however the FBU would not agree an alternative flexible wholetime system, and consequently, the Service had reverted to the 2-2-4 Wholetime system with 24 members of staff which equated to 1 less member of staff per watch, ensuring cost efficiencies. The Dynamic Cover Tool (DCT) and overtime would assist to effectively manage the reduction of staff, and the FBU were prepared to

discuss the possibility of flexible leave arrangements.

In response to a query from County Councillor Hennessy, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that Watch Managers joined crews on appliances deployed to incidents.

## **2. Optimise emergency cover through dynamic cover software**

The dynamic cover software was now in use in LFRS, both within the Command Support Room at Service Headquarters and through the mobile devices of all Flexi Duty Officers. The software had been used successfully during a number of large-scale incidents and periods of high incident activity, to move resources according to the risk.

The next phase of this project was to embed the software and its use at North West Fire Control (NWFC). A standalone facility had been installed on the Lancashire pod at NWFC so that Control Room Operators could familiarise themselves with the software. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer highlighted that LFRS was currently the only Service in the North West using the software and further work would take place with NWFC to embed the software into their core business.

In response to a question raised by County Councillor Hennessy as to which officers were supporting NWFC with the establishment of the DCT, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed that Watch Manager, Chris Archer, and Group Manager, Tom Cookson, from the Response and Emergency Planning Team provided the link between LFRS and NWFC.

## **3. Strengthen our response to climate change emergencies**

### **Investing in Four Fire Appliances with Off-Road Capabilities**

The Service had concluded a procurement process and had awarded a contract for the first large fire appliance with off-road capabilities to Angloco. It was anticipated that this appliance would be delivered to LFRS during quarter 3 of 2024/25.

The Service would now undertake a procurement process to invest in a smaller off-road equivalent. The procurement of a smaller off-road fire appliance was anticipated to be quicker, and the ambition was for it to be in Service within the next 12 months. Both vehicles would then be evaluated prior to the potential purchase of two further vehicles (one large and one small).

### **Introduce Flood Water Incident Managers and Flood Water Tactical Advisors**

Eight flexi duty officers had been trained as Flood Water Incident Managers. These officers would be informed of any incidents within the water or large area flooding, and they would either attend the incident or provide advice remotely depending on the nature of the incident. Two Flood Water Tactical Advisors were yet to be trained as this was a nationally run accredited course and LFRS was awaiting availability.

In response to a query raised by County Councillor Rigby in relation to training Flood Water Tactical Advisors in flood risk knowledge specific to Lancashire, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the Service had fully trained Swift Water Rescue Technicians across the county situated in areas of risk along with a

number of Flexi-Duty Managers trained in specialist capability. In the event of a major incident, resources could be drawn from across the country through national resilience arrangements which supported resilience at national level. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer added that flood arrangements were reflected in the Service's wildfire arrangements which included expertise within the Service and individuals trained for national deployment.

#### **4. Strengthen firefighting and rescue capabilities in high-rise and commercial buildings**

##### **Introduce a 45m Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP)**

The Service's largest ever ALP was currently in build and should be delivered during quarter 1 of 2024/25. There would then be a period of familiarisation and training for operational crews prior to the appliance going on the run at Preston.

##### **Invest in two Additional Water Towers**

The new appliances were due for delivery during quarter 3 of 2024/25. Similar to the new ALP, there would be a period of familiarisation and training prior to the appliances going on the run, which were anticipated to be located at St Annes and Lancaster. Due to the current state of the motor industry globally, some delays had been encountered, particularly around vehicle parts which had caused a delay in the manufacturing of these vehicles.

#### **5. Broaden on-call firefighting capabilities to strengthen operational response**

##### **Aerial Ladder Platform (ALP) Driving**

On Call staff at Hyndburn were now trained to drive the ALP to incidents and they had already successfully utilised this skill on a number of occasions by driving the ALP to incidents. On Call staff at Morecambe had completed driver training in November 2023 and were also now trained to drive the ALP to incidents which went live in December 2023.

##### **Command Support Unit (CSU)**

The CSU went live on 1 November 2023 and was crewed by On Call staff from Bolton-le-Sands and Carnforth. The CSU had attended two significant incidents since its introduction with both being large commercial building fires. The first incident was in Longridge with the second being the Supaskips incident in Lancaster where it had provided an effective command support resource over a prolonged period.

##### **On Call and Specials Review**

The On Call review was progressing and had identified several additional options to strengthen operational response. These items alongside the implementation of the Specials Review, would see On Call staff being developed to support a number of specialist appliances in the future. The Service was currently exploring options around potentially training the On Call staff at Lancaster in the swift water rescue specialist skill.

County Councillor Shedwick commented that he welcomed the development of On-Call staff in swift water rescue and to drive the ALP to incidents.

	<b>Resolved:</b> that the report be noted and endorsed.
23/23	<b>Annual Service Plan</b>
	<p>The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented a report on the Service's Annual Service Plan and Strategic Assessment of Risk for 2024/25.</p> <p>The Annual Service Plan continued to provide Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) with the platform to highlight the priority activities and projects the Service intended to deliver over the coming year; leading improvements and innovation in the sector with some of the best firefighting equipment and training facilities in the country and a highly skilled and motivated workforce.</p> <p>The Annual Service Plan was built around the Service's 5 corporate priorities as detailed in the Community Risk Management Plan. As in previous years, detailed under each corporate priority was a series of priority activities and projects with a brief description of each item to give further clarity and context as now considered by Members, these were: -</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Valuing our people so they can focus on making Lancashire safer; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an organisational culture where diversity is encouraged and valued;</li> <li>• Deliver tailored learning and development opportunities;</li> <li>• Encourage and listen to employee voice;</li> <li>• Invest in training and technology to improve health and safety;</li> <li>• Service headquarters and training centre masterplan; and</li> <li>• Upgrade fire station facilities.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Preventing fire and other emergencies from happening; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest in improvements to our home fire safety check service; and</li> <li>• Deliver targeted fire prevention activity.</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Protecting people and property when fires happen; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen our fire safety inspection programme to meet evolving standards; and</li> <li>• Transform fire protection and business safety.</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Responding to fire and other emergencies quickly and competently; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement our emergency cover review which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Introduce more resilient crewing arrangements;</li> <li>○ Review emergency cover in Preston;</li> <li>○ Optimise emergency cover through dynamic cover software;</li> <li>○ Strengthen our response to climate change emergencies;</li> <li>○ Strengthen firefighting and rescue capabilities in high-rise and commercial buildings; and</li> <li>○ Broaden on-call firefighting capabilities to strengthen operational</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ol>

response.

- Invest in our training centre;
- Drill tower replacement programme; and
- Invest in our fleet and operational equipment.

5. Delivering value for money in how we use our resources;

- Create a new rota management team;
- Review productivity and efficiency;
- Drive efficiencies through digitisation;
- Introduce Microsoft Power BI dashboards; and
- Collaborate with other public services.

In response to a comment from Councillor Hugo regarding counselling services offered by LFRS for staff, and a query in relation to EDI, as to whether there was a system available for staff to report bullying and mental health, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that culture and values within Fire and Rescue Services was a priority for the HMI, and as recommended in the national culture and values report, the Service had introduced an anonymous reporting line. The Service had introduced 'Safe Call' which enabled staff to call and anonymously report a complaint, however, it was difficult to further investigate some complaints without contact details, but multiple complaints or patterns could be recognised and acted upon. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that the Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) process had been reviewed to ensure it was fit for purpose and the Service made sure that all processes offered, continually evolved in relation to mental health. The Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provided staff with counselling and support for a variety of issues which could also be used in conjunction with the Occupational Health Unit and an individual's medical practitioner.

Councillor Hugo queried whether managers were proactive and would encourage or guide staff towards support services if they became aware of any personal problems or issues with mental health. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer confirmed that, in those circumstances, a manager would have exploratory conversations with staff and actively direct them towards accessing support. Additionally, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed that managers were trained, through the Leadership and Development Programme, to effectively handle such scenarios.

In response to a query from County Councillor Hennessy in relation to including employee support services in the Annual Service Plan, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer explained that existing services and procedures were not included in the ASP as the report provided information regarding forward planning for the Service which identified requirements for continual progress.

County Councillor Shedwick expressed confidence in the Service and that the Watch Managers and Station Managers knew their crews well. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that the last item on the agenda would mention good practice in policies and procedures, and the early identification of personal employee issues.

In response to a question from Councillor Hugo, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer

explained that in the event that an employee was suspended, they would receive written correspondence which would direct them to access support services, the EAP, and where appropriate they would be referred to Occupational Health.

Councillor Hugo enquired about the Service's response to climate mitigation. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that, through an annual planning day involving the Service Management Team, the Service identified environmental priorities alongside the work of the Safety, Health and Environment Department which would review a 25-year plan around the Carbon Reduction Management Plan. This plan would be presented to Members through a future committee.

Following a request from County Councillor Hennessy for further information regarding HFSCs and aligning with national principles and products, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the NFCC had a variety of products that included Staywise, which was an education prevention programme aimed at children of school age, and a dashboard which filtered HFSC needs through a series of questions which the Service could refer to. LFRS would continue to develop ways of improving HFSC referrals and visits through future work.

In response to a request from County Councillor Hennessy for an example of evaluating ways to develop the Service to take account of emerging trends, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer referenced the Strategic Assessment of Risk and the Evaluation Framework that the Service had developed. Through the Evaluation Framework, patterns could be identified with prevention work put in place which would then be evaluated for effectiveness.

County Councillor Hennessy requested further information regarding the development of a new recruitment and workforce planning tool to which the Deputy Chief Fire officer responded that work would take place with ORH Ltd (developers of the Dynamic Cover Tool), to explore the data from the Service to create a workforce planning tool for on-call. The tool could then provide an analysis for each station of the officer in charge skill, drivers, availability etc, and intelligently evaluate the best resourcing / future planning arrangement. Members noted that an update would be provided to a future committee.

**Resolved:** That the Planning Committee noted and endorsed the Annual Service Plan for publication.

24/23

**Strategic Assessment of Risk**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented a report on the Service's Strategic Assessment of Risk for 2023/24.

Risk in Lancashire would always remain dynamic: it changed over time, differed by area and demographic, and needed different interventions to reduce the likelihood of the risk occurring or to lessen its consequences. These risks were identified in the Strategic Assessment of Risk (SAoR) which was refreshed annually and was also informed by the Lancashire Resilience Forum Community Risk Register. Through its risk management framework, the Service continually assessed changing risk and prioritised its response framework.



The Strategic Assessment of Risk reflected the knowledge and experience of a variety of specialist departments and utilised Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) Incident Recording System (IRS) data to derive a data driven methodology that highlighted the incident types that posed the greatest risk to the county of Lancashire and the individuals who lived and worked within it. The SAoR drove both Service and district level response to risk and enabled LFRS to tailor the Service's prevention, protection and response activities to the identified risks.

This year's document built on previous iterations as LFRS sought to continually improve its risk management processes. Revisions had been made to the Service's local Risk Assessment, resulting in some movement in the ranking of its highest risk incident types. The Service had also sought to identify more clearly how it responded to the strategic risks identified, e.g., the Service's response to the emerging threat of climate change and advances in technology.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained to Members that the report was split into the demographics of Lancashire, the high-level summary of emerging risks, and the individual risk assessment process for each of the incident categories. The Risk Methodology was used to help NFCC develop a product for national Community Risk Management Plans. He drew Members attention to Page 47 Built Environment and the emergence of composite fencing where lessons taken from local incidents had been shared with NFCC to inform national learning. The report also detailed risks relating to: Emerging Technology (including electric vehicles and energy storage systems), and Hydrogen as an alternative fuel; and Climate Change (wildfires, flooding, and health). It was noted that the health section would be moved to follow the demographics section. Pages 53 – 55 of the agenda pack presented data analysis that fed into the risk methodology used and how the Service resourced to risk. From page 57 – 59 the report covered local and national risks that informed the National Risk Register (NRR), with regional identified risks delivered through the Lancashire Resilience Forum (LRF) of which the Deputy Chief Fire Officer was temporary Chair. Page 62 of the report onwards detailed the risk assessment methodology used and the risk associated against the 32 incident types calculated against likelihood and consequence. Members noted that in the trend column of the table on Page 66, the arrows were pointing in the wrong direction which could be amended in the final version of the report.

In response to a comment from County Councillor Hennessy regarding the risk of volcanic eruption on page 60 of the agenda pack, the deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the risks identified were national risks to the UK.

Councillor Baker queried problems with hydrogen as an alternative fuel as the issues with using lithium-ion batteries had recently emerged. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer responded that the information received from the NFCC lead officer, was that the government energy preference was lithium-ion electric vehicle technology with the need for investment in infrastructure to support it. Whilst globally, many bus operators were shifting towards hydrogen-fuel cell technology, there were potential hazards and LFRS would monitor local and national developments in this regard.

Members queried and discussed the level of risk connected to Lithium-Ion batteries. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that there were inherent risks

associated with Lithium-Ion batteries, through the lifecycle but particularly at disposal. Members were informed that Lithium-Ion batteries which were damaged through careless disposal or Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) could cause fires. A large amount of work had taken place nationally and locally to educate the public about the safe disposal of the batteries and the linkage between inappropriate disposal and subsequent waste fires. Regarding the issue of vehicle fires which involved Lithium-Ion batteries, the Service ensured operational crews that dealt with those incidents had the correct equipment, training, PPE, and procedures to manage them. Ongoing national research would further inform the mitigation of vehicle fires through a range of methods, including the adaptation of operational procedures and equipment.

County Councillor Singleton commented that the process of waste collection was due to change in the near future and asked if LFRS were involved the Lancashire Waste Partnership. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer stated that the Service could be indirectly linked through prevention and community safety work, however, the subject would be raised specifically with the Prevention Team.

In response to a question from County Councillor Yates concerning the Service's input into a planning application for a Hydrogen Plant in Salmesbury, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that LFRS was a statutory partner for planning, and Fire Protection Teams would be involved with any substantive application. Although he was unable to comment on the Service's involvement with that particular application, he could check for that information.

County Councillor Rigby thanked officers for a fabulous report.

**Resolved:** That the Planning Committee noted and endorsed the Strategic Assessment of Risk for publication.

25/23

### **Consultation Strategy - Annual Review**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented the Consultation Strategy report. The Authority had a consultation strategy which provided a framework through which it could seek public opinion on major change issues.

Each year the Planning Committee reviewed the strategy, as now considered by Members, to assure continued compliance with guidance or legislation and to incorporate learning from any public consultation exercises undertaken.

The review concluded that the strategy continued to be legally compliant and in line with good practice.

The strategy was also implemented to good effect during the public consultation on the Community Risk Management Plan in 2021 and the Emergency Cover Review proposals in 2022.

It was noted that the alterations had been made to legal implications in the report which amended the wording on pages 97-98 of the agenda pack to avoid confusion post Brexit.

In response to a query from County Councillor Hennessy regarding online involvement in consultations, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer believed that social media and online engagement had made a big impact with a marked increase in the number of responses received and quality of feedback.

**Resolved:** That the Planning Committee noted and endorsed the consultation strategy.

26/23

## **Blue Light Collaboration Update**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the report updated on progress of the Blue Light Collaboration Board (BLCB). He attended the Strategic Board and Area Manager, John Rossen who attended was involved at tactical level.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the progress against the five key workstreams, which were effectively managed through the Strategic and Tactical Collaboration Boards, as follows: -

### **1. Missing Persons (missing from home)**

Significant support had been provided to Lancashire Constabulary (LanCon) with the Service's aerial drone assets, supported by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Furthermore, the Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) had supported other organisations, including the Environment Agency (EA).

On average, per year, the Service received around 200 drone requests from LanCon which were mostly for Missing Person searches. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer had conversed with the Assistant Chief Constable and discussions had commenced with LanCon in relation to LFRS recharging for some services, given the on-call nature of its drone team and each deployment having a budgetary impact for the Service. It was noted that LanCon did not have a 24-hour drone team in operation. Nationally, an MoU was being developed between the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and EA to better co-ordinate future drone activity.

Additionally, the Service provided an underwater search capability with assistance recently requested by HM Coastguard. LFRS had responded and the underwater deployment immediately de-escalated the incident, which had significantly reduced the number of resources required from several agencies, for what would normally be a protracted incident.

### **2. Estates and Co-location**

This was a long-term workstream which might deliver significant efficiencies and effectiveness where co-location sites were identified.

A set of principles were being developed to identify high level areas of opportunities. Blue Light partners were currently reviewing their strategic property asset plans to identify areas for co-ordinating future development plans over the next 5-10 years.

All Blue Light partners were included in the discussions and options in relation to

Preston area provision.

### **3. Community First Responder**

A trial had commenced in 2023 that involved LFRS staff volunteering as Community First Responders (CFR) to support North West Ambulance Service (NWAS). LFRS staff volunteers would undertake an initial CFR training programme at LFRS Training Centra and once qualified, they could shadow existing CFR practitioners to develop their clinical abilities and build confidence in their newly acquired skills.

Five LFRS staff volunteers were now responding to life threatening emergencies in their communities from the workplace and administering first aid in the initial vital minutes before NWAS colleagues arrived. During 2023, the Service responded to more than 80 CFR incidents including unresponsive/ collapsed, not breathing, cardiac arrests, seizures, strokes, and choking. It was noted that a member of staff from the Community Fire Safety Team, when acting as a CFR, performed first aid when he responded to a case of cardiac arrest which kept the woman alive until an ambulance arrived, saving her life.

The Service was expanding its support to NWAS on this successful, life-saving initiative and 10 Flexible-Duty Officers (FDOs) were progressing through the onboarding process with NWAS.

### **4. Leadership Development**

Learning and Development leads from the Blue Light partners were considering leadership development collaboration opportunities.

An analysis of leadership development was ongoing between the three organisations with the Services currently exploring an additional mentorship programme for command and control.

### **5. Command Units**

The aim of this project was to establish and deliver additional collaborative uses of the command units in LFRS to support effective multi-agency working amongst emergency responders. The key objectives were to improve operational effectiveness and in line with LFRS' mission; 'Making Lancashire Safer'.

The new Command Support Unit (CSU) was listed in this years' Service Plan and sought to upgrade not only the vehicles but to take advantage in recent technological advances to support operational incidents. On-Call firefighters from Carnforth and Bolton-le-Sands crewed the CSU.

As part of the agreed capital vehicle replacement project, two new larger Command Units (CUs) would also be hosted by Fulwood and Blackburn Fire Stations. The CUs featured state of the art technology with 5G and Starlink connectivity, Tesla satellite, computer terminals, and a briefing room. Members were informed that the vehicle would be taken to a future CFA Meetings for them to peruse.

It was expected that the initial benefits to be realised would be technological advances that would further develop information sharing and situational awareness aligned to improving and embedding the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP). Further scoping and development would be overseen by the Blue Light Collaboration board to ensure opportunities for joint working were effectively co-ordinated and delivered.

In response to a question from County Councillor Hennessy regarding the difference between Police and Fire Service debriefs following incidents, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that he could not comment on police debriefings. However, he assured that LFRS debriefed following every incident when Officers would make comments via an iPad app and information would be collated by the Operational Assurance Team where any trends would be noted. Where there was a more protracted incident full, structured and command debriefs took place. He would raise the subject of debriefing at the next collaboration board meeting to encourage the exchange of any beneficial practices between the Service and the Police.

Following on from the question raised by County Councillor Hennessy, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer added that, following multi-agency incidents, the Service typically debriefed through the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) alongside the Police. Furthermore, that the debrief approaches tended to differ in style with both having merits; LFRS approach was to ask questions that related to specific themes and aimed to elicit a detailed response, whereas his experience of the Police technique was more focussed on what had, and what had not, worked well, and any changes which were needed.

County Councillor Rigby felt that drones were rightly located at LFRS but did not agree with recharging for drone use as he felt that it could cause a threat to life if not used due to costs. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the Police had a Drone Team although they were not available 24 hours per day unlike the LFRS Drone Team, who were. LFRS had chosen to fund for drones, and although the Service supported the Police, drone response for Police incidents was their statutory responsibility and not that of LFRS. The Service would continue to support the Police, however, LFRS needed to manage its resources, budget, and statutory work. Ultimately, recharging for drone use was a Member decision. County Councillor Dad agreed that the drone service needed to be provided to the Police but also understood that the costs needed to be recovered because of their statutory responsibility. County Councillor Hennessy and County Councillor Singleton agreed with the decision to recharge for drone usage as LFRS had chosen to invest from its own resources.

County Councillor Shedwick commented that the Fire Service continued to do its fair share of the work in terms of collaboration.

The Chair thanked officers for a brilliant report and commended the advanced technology in use by the Service.

**Resolved:** That the Planning Committee noted the report.

27/23

## HMICFRS Update

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided an update on His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) activity.

HMICFRS had commenced Round 3 inspections in early 2023. The three pillars of effectiveness, efficiency and people remained the same as Round 2 as did the 11 diagnostics under each pillar which the inspectorate graded judgements against.

Early engagement with the Service's liaison lead, Dominic Mika had taken place with Chief Fire Officer, Justin Johnston and Area Manager, Tom Powell (Service Liaison Officer). Dominic would start to be introduced into the Service over the coming months in the build up to LFRS' inspection which was anticipated would take place around late spring / early summer 2024.

HMI Michelle Skeer, recently retired Chief Constable of Cumbria Constabulary, held meetings with the Chair of the Authority, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Trade Union officials, and staff from Employee Voice Groups on the 4 December 2023. In addition, further meetings were due to take place in 2024 with the inspection estimated to take place in spring/summer.

The Organisational Assurance Team within the Service Improvement Department continued to track progress against the Service's previous inspection, monitor national themes and prepare LFRS for its Round 3 inspection. The Organisational Assurance Team were undertaking reality testing with departments and had installed station-based reality testing aligned to HMICFRS inspection framework. Fourteen station-based audits had taken place and there was growing interest from other fire and rescue services as to how the Service carried out these preparedness visits.

HMICFRS had published twelve Round 3 inspection reports on fire and rescue services (FRS), with three more due to be published in Spring. HMIC Andy Cooke's 2023 State of Fire and Rescue report would be published in Spring and would cover findings so far and wider impacts on FRSs.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer highlighted to Members that, on Page 104 of the agenda pack, only 11 FRSs inspected were included in the report in error, instead of the 12 inspected. A summary of the gradings for eleven FRSs inspected so far in Round 3 was detailed in the report.

### **Misconduct within fire and rescue services**

HMICFRS thematic inspection of the handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services was continuing at pace with seven in-depth service inspections completed and three more ongoing and due to be completed by the end of January 2024. HMICFRS were combining this detailed evidence with the data provided by all English services in the autumn data return; the staff survey they conducted in all services in November via their research partners, Crest Advisory; and the survey and interviews that Crest were conducting with people that had left fire and rescue services. HMICFRS would be combining and triangulating all the evidence to identify key findings and any recommendations to the sector, with the report to be published in June 2024.

### **Values and culture in fire and rescue services**

Values and culture in fire and rescue services remained a focus for HMICFRS and LFRS had already been working proactively in terms of promoting its values and engendering an organisational culture where all employees could thrive. LFRS submitted its report on the progress the Service was making regarding the HMICFRS and National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) recommendations in relation to values and culture in December 2023.

### **HMICFRS Autumn Data Collection**

LFRS submitted the Autumn data return in November 2023. HMICFRS requested a very in depth return in relation to the "Misconduct" and "Complaints" section in comparison to previous data returns.

Councillor Hugo referenced the sad case of the Headteacher who took her own life while waiting for a negative OFSTED report following an inspection and asked if the HMICFRS provided support to those Services that received negative results. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated that it was difficult, as a senior leader, not to take negative results personally. A hot debrief was delivered by inspectors at the end of each inspection which was delivered in a tactful way and there were opportunities during the inspection to challenge findings.

In response to a query raised by Councillor Hugo as to whether support was available from the NFCC for those senior officers that had received negative results, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the Chief Fire Officer, as Deputy Chair of the NFCC, had been supporting some FRs and helped improve gradings. The NFCC would offer support where needed.

In response to a request for an update on reality testing from County Councillor Hennessy, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that reality testing had been carried out across 16 stations and was due to take place across departments. Some trends had been identified which were being addressed ahead of the next inspection. At the last inspection in 2021, the Service had received a grading of 'good' across all areas, however, there were 5 areas of improvement that had been identified which had been the focus of improvement. In respect of people and the ECR, the Service had continually developed its communication with individuals to keep them updated and involved with any changes that could affect them.

County Councillor Hennessy asked for an update on the request from the HMICFRS for an in-depth return to the "Misconduct" and "Complaints" section of the Autumn data return submitted by the Service in November 2023, in comparison to previous data returns. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the Service would carry out a standard data return but on the most recent occasion, HMICFRS had requested a more detailed return with many more questions around issues related to people. LFRS typically experienced low-level grievances as a result of Watch Managers and Station Managers, recognising concerns and addressing them with the help of Human Resources.

**Resolved:** that the report be noted and endorsed.

**Sickness Absence KPIs**

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer presented the report. He advised that further to performance information being shared with Members at the quarterly CFA Performance Committee, Members had requested that the Service conduct a review of the Staff Absence Key Performance Indicator (KPI) suite to provide options for change given a notable shift in absence levels in the post Covid era. The aim was to ensure that Service KPIs remained fit-for-purpose, appropriate to the operating environment and continued to provide effective methods by which Service performance was reported.

Recent reports to Members had provided both local and national context which drew comparative data from within the sector and from other external data organisations to inform discussions on the matter.

The Measuring Progress report incorporated three measurements for Staff Absence KPIs:

- i) KPI 1.2.1 Staff Absence Wholetime
- ii) KPI 1.2.2 Staff Absence On-Call
- iii) KPI 1.2.3 Staff Absence Greenbook

Calculations to inform KPI 1.2.1 and 1.2.3 were based around the cumulative number of shifts lost due to sickness divided by the total average workforce strength for that staff, commonly termed the number of days lost per shift/day per full-time equivalent (FTE)/employee.

The calculation for KPI 1.2.2 differed slightly due to the nature of the On Call duty system and measured the percentage of contracted hours lost due to sickness for all on-call contracted staff.

The Wholetime and Greenbook KPIs had both been 'in exception' (beyond the standard set) every quarter since quarter 1, 2022/23, so six reported quarters thus far. Prior to quarter 1, 2022/23, the KPI combined Grey Book and Green Book absences (formerly as KPI 4.2.1), and the only time it was not in exception was during June and July 2020, which was within the Covid Period, where different reporting conditions existed. Conversely, the On-Call KPI had not been in exception at any point over the same period and there were no proposed changes to this KPI.

The current standard for both the Wholetime and Greenbook KPI was 5 days/shifts lost per Full Time Employee (FTE). Pre-Covid, the Service reported meeting the target, however, since Covid, there had been a significant rise in absence levels.

An XpertHR report published in 2022 identified that, despite many organisations had introduced and updated hybrid working policies; 50% of organisations reported an increase in total absence rates.

An XpertHR report published in May 2023, reported that whilst there was a decrease in absence rates as the effects of Covid subsided, rates remained high. The same report also identified that whilst many respondents mentioned a lesser



impact from Covid on sickness rates, they also noted that the return to work seemed to have brought new challenges – from lower immunity to general sickness such as cold and flu, and an increasingly stressed workforce. Responses to the research were received from 172 organisations, with a combined workforce of 220,204 employees.

The Service had experienced similar issues with an increased number of staff being absent due to respiratory infections than was previously seen, as well as high levels of absence attributed to muscular skeletal conditions and mental health.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) survey – ‘Health and Wellbeing at Work’ conducted from March to April 2023 found that the average level of employee absence rose to 7.8 days per employee. This was the highest level reported for over a decade. It also marked a considerable increase (two days per employee) compared with the low levels of pre-pandemic absence reported in 2020 (5.8 days from data collected in October/November 2019).

As in previous years, average absence levels were considerably higher in the public sector (10.6 days per employee) than in other sectors, particularly private sector services (5.8 days), although the upsurge in average levels of absence was observed across all sectors.

The Service benchmarked itself against National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) data and pre-Covid, reported top quartile performance in relation to absence levels. During the year ended March 2023, the Service reported top quartile performance in relation to absence levels at an absence rate of 8.29 days lost, across a range of 6.33 to 21.06 days lost in other fire and rescue services. The current trajectory of performance across quarter 1 and quarter 2, 2023/24, indicated that whilst performance was just below top quartile, should current absence rates continued, the out-turn at March 2024 would be 8.32 days lost.

Research indicated that several measures could support attendance at working which included:

- Having an Absence Management Policy;
- Training for managers on having difficult conversations with staff in relation to absence;
- Return-to-work interviews;
- Employee assistance programmes;
- Wellbeing initiatives;
- Mental health training;
- Availability of Counselling;
- Referrals to occupational health;
- A HR Business Partnering Model.

The Service currently had all these measures in place and was exploring what other options were available to assist employees to remain in work and return to work earlier.

Reflective of the position of attendance levels across the country and the sector, it was proposed to amend the Service’s KPI to 8 shifts/days lost per employee/FTE.

This would still be top quartile across the sector and reflective of public sector performance whilst at the same time providing challenge and a driver for improvement.

The Chair stated that if the KPI standard was raised to 8 days per annum, staff would believe they could take 8 days sickness absence and asked for the national average number of days taken as sickness absence. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer advised that, as referenced on page 108 of the agenda pack, the national average for absence levels across other fire and rescue services was between 6.33 and 21.06 days lost so LFRS compared favourably with an average of 8.29 days lost.

County Councillor Dad thanked officers for a good report and stated that he concurred with the Chair that if the KPI standard was raised by 3 days, staff would take those days as sickness absence as he felt that some individuals took absence days that weren't needed. County Councillor Yates agreed with the Chair and County Councillor Dad, and added that he did not agree with the Service dropping its standards. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that, in the case of firefighters, if they experienced a physical injury or a respiratory illness, they could not attend work, however, other roles had the opportunity to work from home. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer further explained that the KPI standard was for performance measuring purposes only and would not be reported to staff as a sickness absence allocation. The current KPI target was unachievable, and it would be reviewed periodically with a view to a gradual return to previous target levels as and when performance improved.

County Councillor Shedwick commented that he was confident that the Service adhered to the measures to support attendance as outlined on Page 109 of the agenda pack.

County Councillor Hennessy thanked the HR team for their work gathering the evidence. She commented that she understood the national position following Covid-19 and agreed with the uplift of the KPI standard to a more realistic target which could be reviewed in future.

County Councillor Singleton agreed to approve the proposed recommendations as outlined, as the revised target would be realistic and achievable. This was supported by Councillor Hugo who recognised the complexities involved with the physical injuries of firefighters.

**Resolved:** That the Planning Committee noted the content of the report in relation to the three KPIs and approved the proposed changes to two, those being:

- i) Staff Absence Wholetime (KPI 1.2.1) be uplifted from a standard of no more than 5 shifts lost per annum, to a new standard of no more than 8 shifts per annum.
- ii) Staff Absence Greenbook (KPI 1.2.3) be uplifted from a standard of no more than 5 shifts lost per annum, to a new standard of no more than 8 shifts per annum.

29/23	<b>Date of Next Meeting</b>
	<p>The next meeting of the Committee would be held on <b>15 July 2024</b> at 10:00 hours in the main Conference Room at Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Fulwood.</p> <p>Further meeting dates were noted for 18 November 2024 and agreed for 03 February 2025.</p>

**M Nolan**  
**Clerk to CFA**

**LFRS HQ**  
**Fulwood**