

Communities Committee

Item No.

Report title:	Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service – water rescue, flood and shipping activities
Date of meeting:	11 May 2016
Responsible Chief Officer:	Tom McCabe – Executive Director of CES
Strategic impact NCC, in its role as the Fire & Rescue Authority, directs NFRS to undertake a range of public safety & emergency management functions via the publication of the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). With the adoption of the 2016-2020 IRMP and Vision Statement, the Authority's strategic intent has been established, and NFRS is now moving to the planning & delivery of activity to meet that intent.	

Executive summary

The need has arisen because previous grant funding for a range of FRS activities is now coming to an end.

By law we do not have to provide a specialist water rescue and flooding service, and have been able to fund the provision through a specific Government grant and one off County Council Funding.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to consider whether NFRS should continue to provide water rescue and flood response capabilities for the period 2017-2020, at a cost of £150,000 pa

Members are asked to consider in relation to ship fires:

That in order to fulfil our statutory responsibilities for ship fires, on harbour and inland waters, in the short term, we participate in the national scheme. This would also allow us to support incidents offshore. There will be an additional cost of £12,000.

Members are asked to note that there is no longer any additional funding for these activities, and if they are to continue to be provided then alternative savings will need to be found and ask the Chief Fire officer to work up proposals of how these should be funded and agree these with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the committee with the details being reported back to committee as part of the finance monitoring report.

1. Proposal

- 1.1. The Committee is asked to consider the recommendations set out in the executive summary

2. Evidence

- 2.1. The Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 sets out the responsibilities of the Fire & Rescue Authority. These responsibilities include the power to direct the Authority's Fire & Rescue Service to undertake a broad range of discretionary activities (Part 2 Section 11 (2)):

"11 Power to respond to other eventualities

- (1) A fire and rescue authority may take any action it considers appropriate—
(a) in response to an event or situation of a kind mentioned in subsection (2);
(b) for the purpose of enabling action to be taken in response to such an event or situation.
(2) The event or situation is one that causes or is likely to cause—
(a) one or more individuals to die, be injured or become ill;
(b) harm to the environment (including the life and health of plants and animals)."

2.2. Flood Response

Fire & Rescue Authorities do not have a mandatory requirement to respond to flood emergencies.

However the public response to the recent budget consultation was as follows:

Do you agree or disagree that it is the role of Norfolk Fire and Rescue to provide a water rescue and flooding service?

- There were **594** responses received for this question.
- **388** people (**65.3%**) agreed
- **67** people (**11.3%**) disagreed

139 people (**23.4%**) told us that they did not know if they agreed or disagreed

In the 2007 tidal surge, NFRS had no flood response capability, and more than 40 flood rescue teams from other parts of the UK were requested to provide a response in Norfolk.

Subsequently, NCC as the Fire & Rescue Authority directed NFRS to develop a local flood response capability, and provided £250,000 of one-off funding and £34,000 pa of revenue funding to deliver this. DEFRA, as lead government department for flooding, then match-funded this amount, in return for providing a 5 year national response capability under a government sponsored mutual aid programme. Additional DEFRA grants were received to further enhance national resilience, through provision of a diving unit and mass casualty transport (32 x 15 person inflatable rafts, operated jointly with Lincolnshire & Humberside FRS). The 5 year national commitment is for the period 2011-2016 inclusive, and existing funding for refresher training and equipment maintenance will be exhausted by February 2017.

The national mutual aid scheme provides a common operating procedure and recognised standards to work against, providing surety to the Authority that NFRS is providing appropriate and adequate safety management systems. Flood response is an inherently dangerous activity, as exemplified by the tragic death of a firefighter from another County during a flood rescue training exercise. In that case, adherence to a national quality assurance framework was identified by the HSE and Coroner as a critical strength in the management of this activity,

and the actions taken by Norfolk firefighters who were also training at the same venue were praised.

When compared to the zero capability available in 2007, the funding provided by NCC and DEFRA meant that in the December 2013 tidal surge, Norfolk was able to provide 17 local teams, and only 12 more were requested under mutual aid, compared to the previous 40. Further mutual aid teams would not have been available had they been requested, as all available teams had been deployed and subsequent requests for help, from Essex & Kent, could not be met.

Subsequent to the 2013/14 floods, additional government grant funding has been made available from Cabinet Office and Department for Transport. However, these funds are only available to voluntary sector teams, and FRS cannot apply. We have supported a local volunteer team (NorLSAR) in submitting a successful funding bid, and are hosting them at Wroxham & Hethersett fire stations. Their team is incorporated into our mobilising systems and are fully integrated into the multi-agency flood response for Norfolk, as is the Hemsby volunteer inshore lifeboat. Local response currently therefore stands at 19 flood rescue teams – 17 FRS and 2 volunteer. Coastguard and flood warden teams provide complementary but different roles.

Equipment purchased in 2011 had a ten year design life, so there is no substantial capital cost anticipated within the life of the current IRMP. However, ongoing refresher training and equipment maintenance will be required if the equipment is to remain usable by competent teams.

Without continuation of funding, the 17 FRS teams will have to come out of service during 2017, as individual training certifications expire, leaving the only capability in Norfolk as the 2 volunteer teams.

2.3. Ship Fires

Fire & Rescue Authorities have a mandatory duty to respond to ship fires and other emergencies, when those incidents occur in harbours or inland waters. When a vessel is at sea, FRAs have the discretion to respond, and can recover their costs to do so. (FRS Act 2004, Part 2, Section 20). The definitions of inland waters and sea are set out by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency – locally, the Broads, Breydon Water and Yarmouth harbour are all categorised as inland waters. The techniques of ship firefighting are the same, but to operate at sea, firefighters require additional training in the use of helicopter transport (delivered locally in Norwich).

Until 2012, response to shipping emergencies was managed through a national mutual aid scheme (the Maritime Incident Response Group, or 'MIRG'), which included Lincolnshire & Suffolk FRS. Norfolk relied on our neighbours to support our management of these incidents. The responsible ministry, Department for Transport, discontinued support for MIRG in 2012, saving £400,000 pa nationally.

In 2014, Kent FRS was able to secure grant funding to create a replacement national scheme, known as Fire & Rescue Maritime Response (FRMR). This scheme provides a best practice operating model which satisfies safe systems of work requirements for shipping incidents. The nearest participating FRS to Norfolk are Kent and Humberside. The scheme has been activated twice since going live, both times for incidents off the Norfolk coast. We have been asked to join FRMR, to plug the gap in the southern North Sea, where a very large level of maritime economic activity is currently operating without the benefit of a local response capability. The grant funding has been used already, but our USAR team already has the required competencies to undertake rescue work at sea,

and we have been provided with the national bulk stock of equipment held over from MIRG. We have therefore been able to provide *technical rescue* services to FRMR at no cost to NCC.

Firefighting is a separate issue, as it will require local funding, and will also address a statutory function of the FRA. One of our own officers is a national expert advisor on shipping incidents. His expertise has been used to help prepare the national guidance for FRMR, he is providing the specialist input needed for USAR, and is available to do the same for any other local shipping requirements. Suffolk FRS have also asked to share a joint capability, utilising their officers with expertise developed under the previous MIRG scheme.

We have a statutory requirement to deal with ship fires in harbours or inland waters. The FRMR national scheme provides small teams with high levels of training. That is enough to contain an incident to allow a vessel to be brought into harbour, when it is then handed over to the local FRS to deal with under their statutory responsibilities. We therefore need to provide bulk training for firefighters covering our major ports (Gt Yarmouth and King's Lynn), whether or not we choose to fight ship fire offshore.

We cannot deliver this bulk training until the live fire training unit at Scottow is completed, and higher priority fire training issues have been dealt with. We will therefore not be able to provide a full local capability to manage our statutory responsibility until late 2017 at the earliest. The previous mutual aid scheme which supported us no longer exists, but we have been offered the option of joining its replacement, and are already benefiting from the legacy equipment, expertise and quality assurance system that it provides. If we participate, we can recover the variable costs of attending incidents offshore, but, more importantly, can rapidly establish an interim firefighting response to cover the gap in our local cover arrangements until bulk training can be done.

If approved, the proposal is that in the first phase, we train a small pool of 16 firefighters who volunteer for the training from the Gt Yarmouth area, who have relevant maritime experience, to provide a firefighting component to augment the USAR team in providing an FRMR response. This will provide the interim capability to manage shipping incidents until the second phase of bulk training is completed, and also give a nucleus of expertise on which to build that bulk capability.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1. **Flood Response** – annual revenue cost (gross) £150,000. This is offset by income generated from charges levied to assist police search activity, but this income is variable (£36,000 in 2015-16, £22,300 in 2014-15) and should not be relied upon when budgeting. **Shipping Fires** –we could use the national scheme to enable us to provide a full local statutory capability for a three year period (2017-2020) at a cost of £12,000. There is currently a risk that the national scheme maybe withdrawn and therefore to provide full local cover additional training costs have been estimated at £87,952 of the 3 year period.

4. Issues, risks and innovation

- 4.1. The Integrated Risk Management Process gives Fire & Rescue Authorities ownership of risk, and the choice of how to manage risk by deciding which roles it wishes its Fire & Rescue Service to undertake.

The public response to the recent budget consultation was as follows:

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The National Risk Register identifies an East Coast tidal surge as the single largest natural hazard faced by the UK, over and above the threats of inland flooding. The relevant DEFRA threat assessment categorises 30,823 properties in Norfolk as being at risk in a tidal surge flood. As Lead Local Flood Authority, NCC has a separate statutory role in the management of inland flooding, for which Norfolk has the 10th highest risk in England. Taken together, these coastal and inland risks make flooding the highest priority on the Norfolk Resilience Forum risk register. The frequency and severity of these two flood categories are very different, but the impact on the individual householder who is flooded out, and the training and equipment needed by rescue teams, are the same, regardless of whether the flood was caused by a thunderstorm inland, or a storm surge offshore.

Our current multi-agency flood response was described by independent observers as exemplary after the December 2013 tidal surge.

In the three years 2009-2012 NFRS attended 227 flood incidents and 66 rescues from water/mud/ice compared to 12 accidental fire deaths (Source – IRMP).

Officer Contact

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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