



Norfolk Fire and Rescue Authority Statement of Assurance 2017/18

**Chief Fire Officer (Acting)
Stuart Ruff**

January 2019

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Fire and Rescue Authorities must provide both local communities and the Government with an annual statement of assurance on financial, governance and operational matters. This means that Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) must demonstrate that it is doing what the Government expects of it, as laid down in the [National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities 2012](#) and that it is delivering the local Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

This statement of assurance covers the period April 2017 to March 2018.

Norfolk's context

In Norfolk the Fire and Rescue Authority is Norfolk County Council which governs and operates the Fire and Rescue Service as a service in the Council's Community and Environmental Services Directorate. Our Chief Fire Officer is a member of the Departmental Management Team with the responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service and is a Director of Norfolk Safety CIC.

The type of fire and rescue service that is operated is influenced by the nature of area in which it works. In Norfolk's case, some of the key characteristics considered are:

- Increasing and ageing population
- Fifth largest county in England
- Second most rural county with one of the lowest population densities in England
- Relatively flat county prone to flooding and coastal tidal surges
- Changing emergency call profile- as well as fires we also attend a wide variety of incidents like rescues from water and road traffic collisions



898,000 population
24% aged over 65



1.7 persons per
hectare



90 miles of coastline
250 miles of inland
waterways



418,130
dwellings



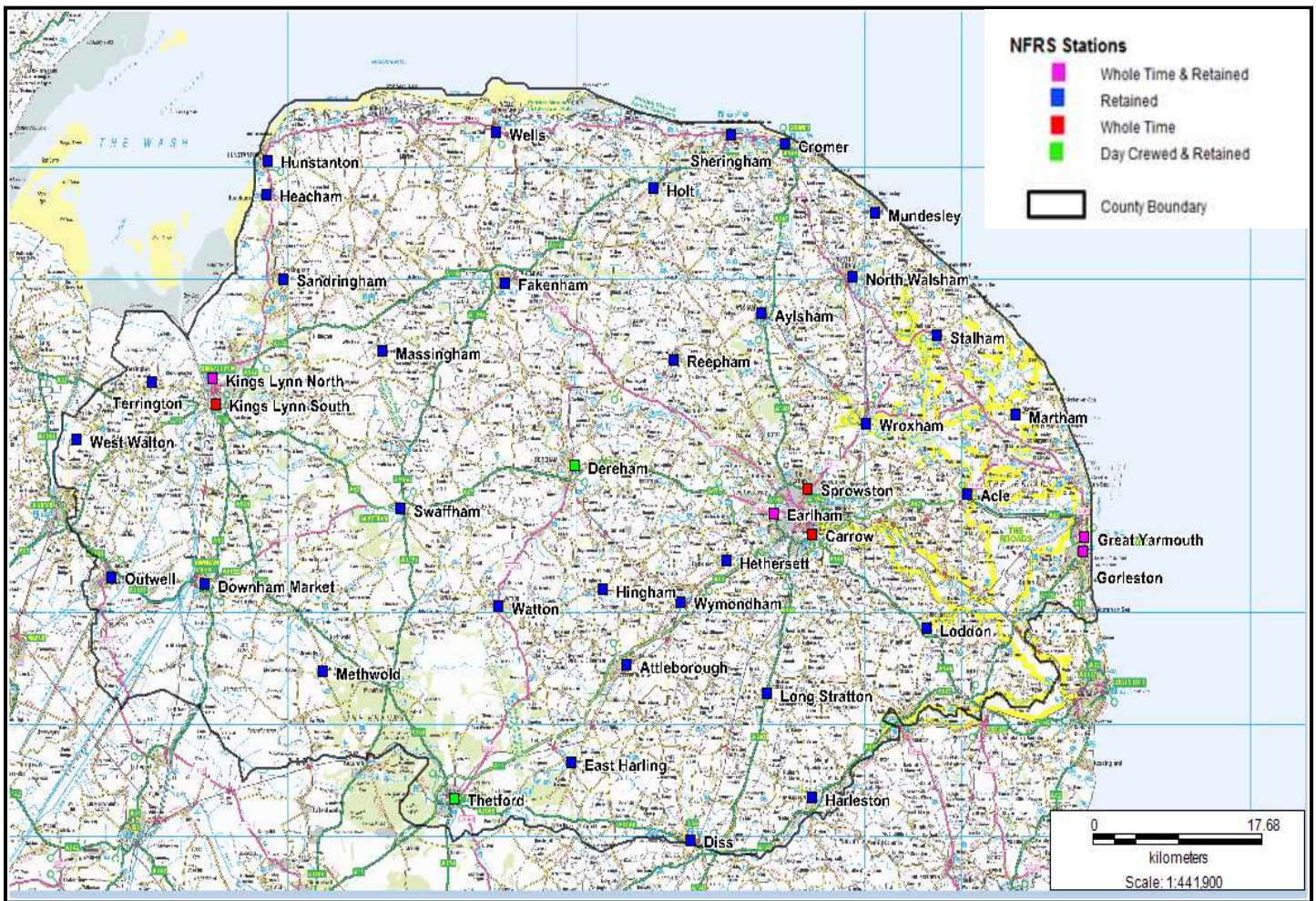
6,256 miles of roads



34,274 active
businesses

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service resources

There are 42 fire stations across the county. Carrow and Sprowston in Norwich, and King's Lynn South are wholtime stations crewed by firefighters 24/7. Six stations have a mix of wholtime and retained firefighters (Great Yarmouth, Gorleston, Earlham, King's Lynn North, Thetford and Dereham) and 33 stations are crewed by retained firefighters in market towns and villages. Retained firefighters are staff whose main job is outside the Fire and Rescue Service but they are available on-call to respond to emergencies in their area.



Firefighters
267 wholetime
439 retained



72 non-uniformed



25 control room

**Employee full time
equivalent at end of
March 2018**

The Service has a variety of fire engines to tackle a range of different emergencies. For example, heavy rescue pumps are equipped to respond to road traffic collisions and Technical Rescue Units attend large animal rescue and water rescue incidents. The off-road 4x4 fire engines are used for flooding incidents, heathland/forest fires, and firefighting and rescues at height. Our fleet of specialist vehicles also includes two environmental protection units, a control vehicle, a water foam unit, three aerial ladder platforms and a driver training vehicle. The Service also hosts a team of Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) personnel and vehicles that are trained to respond to national, regional or major incidents. We are also one of the few services that have a specialist team to respond to a terrorist threat should such an incident occur.

¹ Designed by Freepik and distributed by Flaticon

GOVERNANCE

National governance

In January 2016 responsibility for Fire and Rescue Services moved from the Department of Communities and Local Government to the Home Office. The Home Office are also responsible for policing and the move supports the Government's commitment to deliver greater joint working between the police and fire and rescue services. This commitment is further underpinned by the [The Policing and Crime Act \(2017\)](#), this legislation now places a statutory duty on emergency services to consider closer working where it represents best value. This act also introduced new provisions for a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to act as a fire and rescue authority for that area.

Democratic accountability

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service is one of the services provided by Norfolk County Council (NCC) which acts as the Fire and Rescue Authority. The County Council has a [Constitution](#) which sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. It includes clear communication protocols and clearly defines roles and responsibilities.

On a regular basis, County Councillors review the performance of the Fire and Rescue service, its financial position and risks that have been identified. The County Councillors also play a key role in shaping the long term development of the Service including approving the [Integrated Risk Management Plan \(IRMP\)](#).

NFRS is governed by the Communities Committee. Papers and minutes from the Committee are available on the NCC website ([link](#)). As a strategic document the IRMP is developed by Communities Committee and then recommended to Full Council for final approval at the same meeting as our budget is approved ([link](#)). In 2015 County Councillors undertook a strategic review of our Fire and Rescue Service which helped shape the proposals within our IRMP 2016-20.

Service management

The Chief Fire Officer is accountable to the Executive Director of Community and Environmental Services. Under the Council's scheme of delegated powers the Chief Fire Officer has authority to exercise the Council's functions relating to fire prevention, firefighting, fire safety, explosives and petroleum licensing and the functions conferred on the local authority under Article 25 of the Fire Safety Order 2005. In accordance with the law delegated decisions taken by the Chief Fire Officer are recorded and, to ensure transparency, are reported to Communities Committee.

The Chief Fire Officer is supported by a Senior Management Team comprised of senior officers from the Fire and Rescue Service. The team provides a formal decision making forum for the Service and a formal record of such decisions. It does not make decisions that fall within the responsibility of the Fire and Rescue Authority.

Governance Statement

Norfolk County Council is responsible for putting in place effective systems for the governance of its affairs, ensuring services are delivered properly and legally and that any associated risks are managed. The [Annual Governance Statement](#) is a review of this.

FINANCE

NFRS Budget

NFRS operates on a revenue budget which in 2017/18 was £27.297 million, 7.5% of the Council's overall net revenue budget. This equates to £31.90 per head of population, which is lower than our Family Group of similar Fire and Rescue Services' average of £37.10 and the national average of £36.10.

NFRS continues to operate within a challenging public services financial climate. Value for money continues to be a major driver in all spending and operational decisions.

Financial performance for the year resulted in a small overspend of 0.28% of budget.

We continue to be one of the lowest cost fire and rescue authorities in England at £31.90 per head of population (English average £36.10).

CIPFA Statistics 2017/18

Financial management

The Council's [Constitution](#) sets out the Council's decision-making framework, including delegation arrangements. The Constitution includes Contract Standing Orders and Financial Regulations which set out how decisions are made and the procedures to be followed. Updated Financial Regulations were approved by Council on 11 April 2016. All Responsible Budget Officers/ Management of NFRS are made fully aware of their duties with checks and oversight by the Fire Services Procurement Manager and Finance Officer.

The County Council is legally required to provide an annual report, the Statement of Accounts, on how it spends its money. As the Fire Authority, the Council includes in the Statement of Accounts details of the NFRS financial position. The accounts, along with the Fire Fighters Pension Fund Accounts, are audited to confirm their accuracy.

Following the signing of the Statement of Accounts and the conclusion of the annual audit, our external auditors write an Annual Audit Letter to the Council. The letter summarises the findings of the auditors and formally concludes the audit.

The latest Statement of Accounts and audit letters are available on the County Council's website ([link](#)). These confirm that the budget has been managed in accordance with the law and proper standards and that public money is being used economically, efficiently and effectively.

If you would like further details about where the Service spends its money, such as expenditure on staff and expenses and where we spend over £500, this is available on the Council's Open Data website ([link](#)).

Audit and review

In addition to auditing of the accounts, our Internal Audit team consult with the Budgeting and Accounting team to assess and plan audits of service areas with any potential volatility or recent poor performance. There have been no recent recommendations or outstanding actions from an audit perspective currently.

An independent peer review of Finance by the Local Government Association in 2016 identified four current critical financial issues for NFRS relating to:

- Fire fighter recruitment and future retirements
- Pensions, meeting the new scheme changes
- Capital investment
- Blue light collaboration

Recruitment and succession planning continues to be a focus for the service in all areas of the organisation. In particular, in 2017/18 further attention and resources were focused on addressing the challenges associated with securing staff to work within our Retained Duty System.

National changes made on firefighter pension schemes continue to give rise to a significant amount of work with their implementation and while work is ongoing the service is well advanced with those requirements with an established pension board

The concerns highlighted in relation to capital investment were addressed in February 2017 when the service was allocated over two million pounds in capital to buy new fire appliances, equipment and undertake property improvements. Research, planning and procurement have now been put into place to ensure we have a managed approach to this important area of service development.

Blue light collaboration continues to be a key enabler for NFRS and improving our service to the community. We continue to benefit from well-developed and positive relationships across the blue light services – this is demonstrated through an active programme of collaboration including joint estates, a plan to co-locate our control function with Norfolk Constabulary and helping paramedics to gain access to premises in a medical emergency.

Norfolk Safety Community Interest Company (CIC)

Norfolk Safety Community Interest Company (CIC) is a subsidiary company limited by guarantee of the County Council that operates in partnership with Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service. Norfolk Safety provides a range of risk management, training and development and other services to public bodies, third sector organisations and businesses.

The articles of association outline the composition of the Board of Directors, to include a Member of the Council, who are responsible for the operation of the Company. The Company has adopted quality assurance and health and safety policy standards consistent with the Council as appropriate to the activities of the Company. NSCIC is required to report annually to the Regulator on how they are delivering for the community and how they are involving their stakeholders in their activities. The company is subject to legislation and external audit. In relation to profits generated these are asset locked into community interest projects by the Board and Regulator (an independent statutory officeholder appointed by the Secretary of State).

Details on the composition of Norfolk Safety CIC and filed accounts can be found on Companies House website ([link](#))

PERFORMANCE

Performance management framework and scrutiny

NFRS operates within the County Council's corporate performance framework. A set of 'vital signs' for each service have been produced which provide transparency and assurance on the health of key services. The vital signs for NFRS are 'Emergency Response Standards (ERS)' and 'Percentage of time that retained (part-time) first fire engines are available to respond to emergencies'. These are regularly monitored by department management teams and County Councillors through the democratic process with reports published on our website ([link](#)).

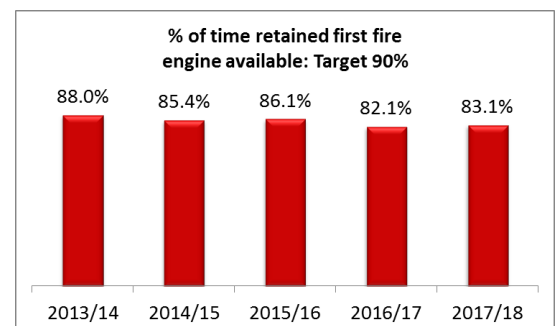
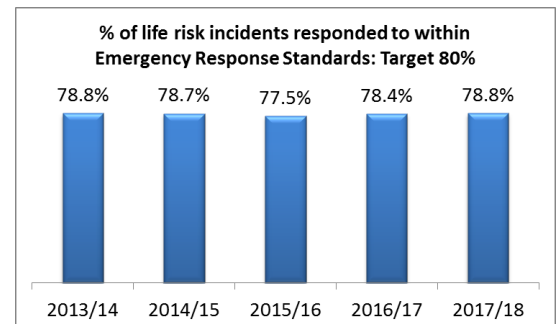
In accordance with the corporate performance framework, our Service Management Team monitor a broader dashboard of indicators and escalate issues to County Councillors if required. Some of the indicators are former national indicators that we can compare with other fire and rescue services and others are locally determined. An overview of our performance over the past 5 years can be found in the next section.

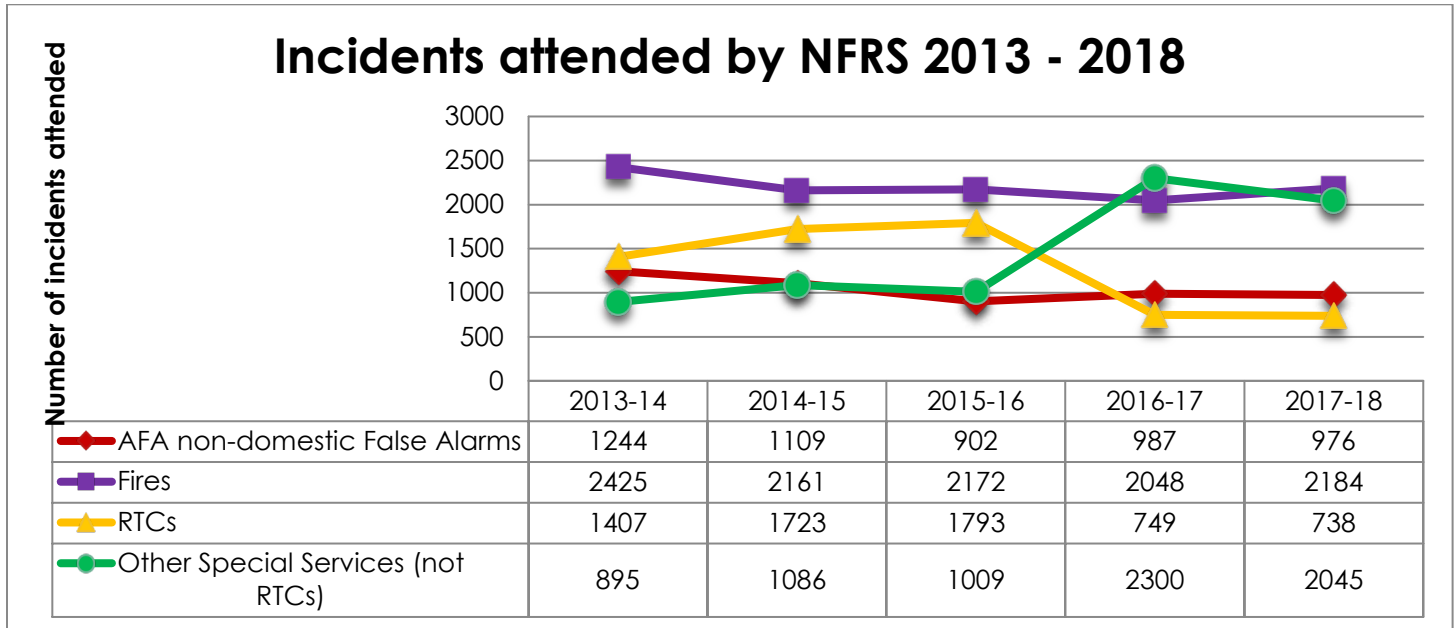
The Government collate [national statistics](#) about all fire and rescue services. In order to improve the transparency of our performance, and therefore our accountability, we will be increasing the amount of performance information we publish as open data on our website in December 2016.

Performance 2013/14 to 2017/18

Vital Signs

- We aim to get to 80% of life risk incidents within our **Emergency Response Standards** (how quickly we should attend an incident) and achieved this on 78.8% of occasions. We know that the changing nature and location of calls (fewer in urban areas and a larger proportion in rural areas) and a shortage of retained firefighters is affecting our ability to meet this target.
- Our **retained (part time) first fire engines were available and ready to respond to an emergency** 83.1% of the time against a target of 90%. This is an improvement on last year's figure of 82.1%. We know we have some stations where more firefighters are needed and we are actively recruiting in these areas.





- We attended 2184 fires – 136 more than last year. This included:
 - 430 **accidental dwelling fires** in people’s homes – 34 more than last year, resulting in two fatalities and 21 people being injured. This compares to two fatalities and 18 injuries in 2016/17.
 - 652 **arson incidents** – an increase of 40% compared to 2017/18.
 - 15 more **accidental non-domestic premises fires** (175 in total) – an increase of 9%. However, one person was injured.
- We attended a 1% decrease in non-domestic false automatic fire alarms against a backdrop of declining false alarms. We will refocus our efforts on reducing false alarms in 2017/18.
- We attended 738 **road traffic collisions** where we released 153 people from their vehicle. The reduction in our attendance at road traffic collisions can be attributed to a return to the mobilising criteria we used in 2012-13. This brings us in line with other fire and rescue services and focuses our support to the incidents where our specialist skills are most needed.
- We attended 2045 other **special service incidents** such as flooding, freeing trapped people or animals and calls to assist other agencies. This increase is partly explained by our pilot conducted with the East of England Ambulance Service where fire crews are mobilised to assist paramedics gain entry to premises in a medical emergency. This service has traditionally been undertaken by Norfolk Constabulary. The pilot will complete in 2017/18 when a decision will be made on whether to continue this service.

In 2017/18 we attended a total of 7,414 incidents where 756 people were rescued

97% of emergency response telephone calls are answered by our Control Room within 5 seconds

Protection and Prevention 2017/18

To help prevent incidents from occurring and to protect people and property when they do happen in 2017/18 we:

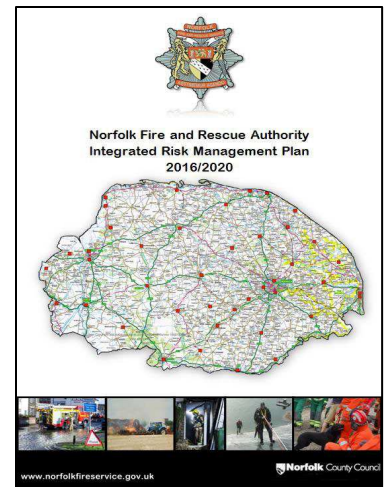
- Carried out 3,748 **Home Fire Risk Checks**. These fire safety visits, usually with vulnerable people, are designed to help make people safer in their home, whilst promoting and increase in smoke alarm ownership across our communities. We have trialling “Safe and Well” checks- a broader review of risks and safety issues in the home, including falls prevention, stop smoking and wider wellbeing themes in partnership with Public Health to target resources at greatest level of vulnerability to add value to each visit.
- Carried out 663 Fire Safety **audit visits of non-domestic premises** to ensure compliance with fire safety regulations.
- Carried out over 100 post fire investigations and audits, supporting business resilience, which includes enforcement and prosecutions for serious cases.
- Maintained **up-to-date files of the risks** at over 600 non-domestic premises so that if an incident did occur we would have the information that we need to deal with the event as safely as possible, thus reducing the risks for our firefighters and the public.
- Carried out Crucial Crew year 6 educations to 6,173 children, covering a wide range of safety themes, Road, Home, Water safety and first aid.
- Carried out over 200 separate educational community safety events targeted at Road, Water and Home Safety. Including targeted arson prevention events and audits.
- Carried out youth engagement ‘Leadership’ programmes to over 100 young people (16 – 25yrs), including work experience and community safety and projects, resulting in 3 of every 4 delegates moving on to employment, education or further education.
- Completed formal Fire Safety training through NFRS CiC to over 1,000 delegates across Our Business Sector, (First Aid, Fire Extinguisher, Fire Warden, Risk Assessments). All supporting an upskill in fire safety in both business and homes.

OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE

Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)

The IRMP sets out the risks and issues that the Fire and Rescue Service will need to respond to over the next three years and how it will do it. The IRMP is the single most important document for the Fire and Rescue Service as it shows what the Service will be doing and why. It is also one of the means by which the public can hold the Service to account.

In January 2015 we commenced a Strategic Review of the Fire and Rescue Service which informed the development of our Integrated Risk Management Plan for 2016-20. In line with Government guidance and best practice, we consulted with the public and stakeholders on the draft IRMP as part of the County Council's consultation on its budget proposals ([link](#)).



Full Council approved the [IRMP 2016-20](#) on 22 February 2016 when the County Council's 2016/17 budget was approved.

Collaborative working

We have an established record of working in partnership to deliver effective and efficient services. This includes:

- Fulfilling our duties outlined in the **Civil Contingencies Act 2004** by working as part of the Norfolk Resilience Forum to maintain and develop Norfolk's Community Risk Register, plan the response to major incidents and emergencies in the county, and carry out multi-agency training exercises as part of the preparation of an effective response.
- Participating in **over the border mutual aid agreements** via the National Resilience Programme, which shares specialist response assets across the country. Alongside these wider arrangements, we have local agreements in place with neighbouring fire and rescue services (Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk) to ensure the fastest response to emergency calls and to share specialist assets.
- Working with other Fire and Rescues Services to **improve interoperability**. We are part of the East Coast and Hertfordshire Control Room Consortium, a group of fire and rescue service that are working together to standardise control room practices so that we can support each other in the event of major incidents. We make use of national operational and tactical guidance. We will be changing our communication systems as part of the national emergency services mobile communications programme (ESMCP) to provide the next generation communication system for the 3 emergency services (police, fire and rescue, and ambulance).

- Increasing our **collaboration with other emergency services**. As part of our property collaboration strategy we have moved our Headquarters and now share premises with Norfolk Constabulary. We also share the Fire Station at Sheringham and Downham Market with them and have plans for three further shared Fire and Rescue/Police stations along with a shared Control Room. We continue to work with the Constabulary on a 'forced entry' trial where firefighters respond to incidents where there are wellbeing concerns for an individual and access needs to be gained rather than the Police. We have also recently participated in the National Emergency Medical Responder trials with the East of England Ambulance Service Trust to improve response times to cardiac arrest emergencies. The Ambulance Trust also shares space in 20% of our Fire Stations.

Training and development

We assure the quality of our operations by providing appropriate training and development for all staff and carrying out audits and reviews of working practices to make sure that they are safe, efficient and effective. This includes performance reviews of how well our officers and firefighters manage incidents when they occur with advice and further training provided if required.

To ensure our firefighters maintain their competency in fighting fires we have built a live fire training unit at Scottow Enterprise Park. The unit opened in August 2016 and enables our firefighters to train in live fire conditions.

In the context of the recommendations made in the [CFOA Firefit](#) review, together with the changes to the pension scheme meaning that operational staff will be working longer, the Service recognises the importance of effectively managing and promoting Firefighter fitness and welfare. Our Physical Training Adviser is working proactively with individuals and stations to embed a culture of fitness and wellbeing.

Health and safety and other legislation

NFRS continually seek to comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and other applicable health and safety legislation. Active health and safety management at all levels in the Service combined with routine performance monitoring and review are at the core of maintaining safe working environments for Service staff and those we assist and support. This is achieved through a combination of operational performance review and periodic pre planned audit of the Service's health and safety management system via regional peer challenge using the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Quality Safety Audit tool kit. This helps the Service to ensure that it has the right equipment, training and practices in place to respond effectively and safely.

In 2017/18 there were 7 reportable health and safety absences lasting more than 7 days – 3 less than last year

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Planned improvements to accounting, governance and operational assurance

In reviewing our financial, governance and operational arrangements we continue to develop the following improvements which will further strengthen our approaches and ensure that we are meeting our statutory obligations to best effect.

Accounting

Our Integrated Risk Management Plan 2016-20 sets out our plans for the next four years. This includes restructuring our service. A dedicated Finance Business Manager oversees our financial management, including that of our Community Interest Company to ensure that expected income growth and expenditure is correctly identified.

Senior Management

Following the departure of our Chief Fire Officer in 2017 an interim senior management team structure was established to manage the service. This structure will remain in place and will be subject to further review in 2018/19.

Operational Assurance

Wider collaboration and partnership working is an area we are heavily involved in and is expected to become more prevalent in future years and we will continue to identify and develop partnership opportunities that are legal, logical and improve community safety. The next major period of collaboration will see fire control co-locate with Norfolk Constabulary to create a Joint Operations Communication and Control room. The joint control room will improve the multi-agency command of incidents and improve the quality and speed of sharing critical information. The joint control room was planned to go live by the 1st April 2017, however, due to a delay in moving to a new version of our mobilising systems this is now planned for 2019/20

With an ageing workforce and a number of senior officers due to retire in the coming years, **workforce and succession planning** remains important. We will be looking at our plans for recruitment and retention of retained firefighters with a view to improving the availability of our emergency response resources.

AUTHORISATION

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Authority provide assurance to the people of Norfolk that we are satisfied that the Authority's financial, governance and operational assurance arrangements are adequate, operating effectively and meeting statutory requirements detailed within the Fire and Rescue National Framework 2012 and subsequent updates.

This Statement of Assurance was approved by the Authority at the Communities Committee meeting on 6 March 2019.

Margaret Dewsbury, Chair of Communities Committee
Stuart Ruff, Chief Fire Officer (Acting)