

Review of Winter Resilience

Response of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service to the Hampshire County Council Policy and Resources Select Committee Review

Context

As an emergency service Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service has a statutory duty to maintain satisfactory arrangements for carrying out fire and rescue activities at any time of the day or night and in any weather. Because of this we have well developed and established plans for dealing with severe weather and with enforced reductions in resources. We also have a very clear and common command structure with all staff knowing their particular role within our response to any emergency. As a result of this we were able to react positively and very swiftly to the severe snow of December 2009 and January 2010 by implementing pre-existing plans and by establishing a Major Incident Room and putting a clear command structure in place. Operationally the periods were comparatively quiet from a fire and rescue perspective with reduced numbers of fires and serious road traffic collisions in particular. The main priorities of HFRS during the snow were to:-

- ensure our continued operational capability throughout the period
- render humanitarian assistance
- assist other partner agencies where possible and where this would benefit the communities of Hampshire

Key Questions.

1) What impact did the recent winter weather have on the services provided by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service?

HFRS maintained its operational capacity throughout both of these spells of severe weather. Operationally both spells were comparatively quiet with greatly reduced numbers of fire and rescue incidents, though with an increase in First Responder calls. Our principle area of activity throughout this period was in providing 4x4 vehicles and drivers to partner agencies and others to assist them with access to trapped motorists and isolated communities etc.

The partners we assisted with such provision were Hampshire Constabulary, South Central Ambulance, Southern Electric (in restoring power lines to isolated communities), and Hampshire County Council (with the provision of meals on wheels to vulnerable people in the Fareham area).

The impact on our resources was managed by a pre-existing Severe Weather Plan and by the early establishment of our Major Incident Room working closely with the Adverse Weather Office.

The significant potential issues for us were;

- Unavailability of staff due to them being unable to get to work. This did not prove to be a significant issue as only a small number of staff were affected in this way.
- Inability of large fire appliances to make progress through the heavy snow and poor driving conditions. As operational activity was low this again did not prove to be an issue with all fire and rescue incidents attended as normal
- Lack of availability of 4x4 vehicles for our own operational use as they were being utilised by partner agencies. Again, as operational activity was low and

these off road vehicles are most commonly busy during summer months for grass and heath-land fires this did not prove to be the case.

2) What information was provided to the public about how to access your service during the winter weather and in what format?

We did not provide any additional or different means of contacting us during the severe weather. However we did release a number of press statements with weather related safety messages. As an emergency service it was our considered view that we should not offer any alternative routes to the 999 service as this could lead to delay and confusion.

3) Looking at the period 1 December 2009 to 31 January 2010, what aspects of service delivery worked well for Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service?

The Severe Weather Plan and establishment of the Major Incident Room meant that we were able to both continue with business as usual as well as respond to the severe weather. We were also able to assist several partner agencies in ensuring that they were able to continue to serve the communities of Hampshire. We also found that the willingness, determination and enthusiasm of all of our staff meant that we could continue relatively unaffected by the severe weather.

4) Have you made any changes (or do you intend to make changes) to the way you plan for severe weather as a result of this experience, and if so how?

As part of our normal protocols we have carried out a full scale debrief of our activities during the severe weather and have also contributed to the multi-agency debrief. As a result we do have areas for improvement that we will be acting upon.

- We would like to establish Memorandums of Understanding with a number of partner agencies establishing protocols for use of resources in the event of future severe weather events. Although we were able to react we feel it would be beneficial to have arrangements in place in advance so that all partners know what can be provided and under what circumstances so that we are all better prepared and able to react faster to future events.
- We will also be purchasing snow chains for all of our major pumping appliances to ensure that we maintain full availability and readiness during any future events.

5) Reflecting back on the period in question what would be your 3 priorities for action and how could these be implemented?

- Memorandums of Understanding between the key partner agencies to be established. This could be driven by either the multi-agency debrief or by this review.
- Further development of the Severe Weather Plan to incorporate the role of the Adverse Weather Office and to ensure that the Major Incident Room has access to all of the information that is available. We will task an HFRS officer with carrying this out.

- Improved liaison with South Central Ambulance Service to ensure maximum use is obtained from our various resources. Although we were able to assist with resources including Co-Responders and 4x4 vehicles it was felt that these were not always used as effectively as possible and there could be improvements in this area. We will liaise with South Central Ambulance to address this.

6) Please provide an analysis of the complaints, comments and feedback Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service received from the public between 1st December 2009 and 31st January 2010, identifying the key issues raised.

We did not receive any complaints regarding our service during the severe weather. We have also not received any formal comments or feedback from the public.