



COVID-19: Strategic Intention: Non-emergency response activity

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Non-Emergency, Response Activity

Introduction

In adopting this strategic intention and the associated guidance, Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) should be aware of the current COVID-19 management measures in place, relevant to their respective government and local government areas.

The restrictions and the introduction of national lockdowns, regional and local measures based on transmission rates has understandably resulted in different approaches being adopted to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. These measures have direct implications for each FRS and whilst the measures adopted in areas may be somewhat similar, it will be for each FRS to determine the extent to which the transmission rates and local restrictions in their area impacts on their non-emergency response work.

The framework is in accordance with the broad principles set out in the NFCC strategic intentions for Prevention and Protection activities, all of which are available on the NFCC website. There are clear and consistent links to the strategic intention for Prevention and the advice and broad principles set out in that framework. In essence, an effective and consistent approach to eliminating and minimising risks is a core activity for all FRS staff activity.

With the current strain of the coronavirus reported by Government as up to 70% more transmissible than the previous strain. FRS should review their current risk assessments in light of this increased risk and the activities they are undertaking.

Delivering non-emergency response services

This document provides a strategic framework setting out considerations for FRS to safely carry out non-emergency Response activities which may have been disrupted due to COVID-19¹

Its purpose is to ensure that the management of activities protects the safety of both staff and the public and does so in accordance with current government and local guidance and by way of common sector specific risk assessment. It compliments existing FRS activities

¹ The purpose of this non-statutory guidance is to provide fire and rescue services with general advice to assist with a consistent, standardised approach across all services. The guidance does not constitute legal advice. Fire and rescue services' legal duties will remain those specified by law, in particular the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 during the COVID-19 pandemic, but if any fire and rescue services consider that difficulties arise in relation to compliance with those duties, they should take legal advice

and their associated risk assessments and decision-making processes; it does not supersede them.

Non- emergency response: duties

In order that Services can meet the requirement under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004² for each Fire and Rescue Authority to make arrangements for, extinguishing fires in their area, and protecting life and property in the event of fires in their area; rescuing people in the event of road traffic accidents in its area; protecting people from serious harm, to the extent that it considers it reasonable to do so, in the event of road traffic accidents in its area³.

It is for each FRS to consider a risk-based approach to undertaking non-emergency response activities, balancing the need to carry out our statutory duties and other work in support of Firefighter safety and to protect staff and the public from exposure to COVID-19.

In light of the latest Government information relating to the increased transmissibility of the strain of coronavirus which is reported as up to 70% more transmissible than the previous strain, FRS should review how this impacts on their current risk assessments.

The range of activities that this document relates to includes;

- Conducting Part 2, s.7 (2)d visits under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004; or equivalent in devolved administrations;
- Carrying out / refreshing Site-Specific Risk Assessments (SSRI);
- Safety Critical training activities and revalidations of such skills;
- Other duties of a non-emergency nature required in support of firefighter or public safety.

It will be for each Fire and Rescue Service to determine, subject to their own local risk assessments, Local Outbreak Control Plan, Government, Public Health and NFCC guidance exactly what and how they will carry out non-emergency response work.

It is advised that regardless of what Tier of control an area is under the increased risk of transmission of the coronavirus is significant enough to warrant a review of current arrangements and ensure on the most critical activities are carried out to discharge statutory duties and maintain safety critical activity in support of public and Firefighter safety.

A risk-based approach: non-emergency operational response

In order to continue to carry out non-emergency operational response activities, FRS should ensure that they can achieve this whilst minimising the risk to both Firefighters and other FRS staff as well as those in the communities. The lifting of or re-introduction of restrictions put in place due to COVID-19 may change a local services way of working and this should be factored into the application of this guidance.

The approach to response activity should take account of the specific risks and challenges of some specific types of premises such as student halls of residence, care homes and similar types of premises where the risk to FRS staff and the occupants may be increased. This should always be balanced against the risks and dangers of not carrying out an activity.

FRS should endeavour to undertake their full range of activities but continue to adopt a risk based approach to ensure the benefits of such response to non-emergency activities will be

² Legislation will vary for developed administrations.

³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/data.pdf>

balanced against the risk to staff and the public in terms of the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. With the current coronavirus strain reported to be significantly more transmissible than previous strains, FRS may seek, where possible, to delay or postpone activities where safe to do so or limit the number of staff engaged in an activity where possible and in addition, the continued use of data and digital means to minimise contacts with the public should be considered.

The risk assessment of non-emergency response activities is based upon:

- Restricting the spread of COVID 19;
- Minimise staff and public risk to COVID 19;
- Demonstrate that non-emergency response activity risks outweighs the COVID-19 risk

Getting back to work

This document provides a strategic framework setting out considerations for FRS to safely carry out operational, non-emergency response activities which may have been temporarily disrupted due to COVID-19⁴. Its purpose is to ensure that the management of activities protects the safety of both staff and the public and does so in accordance with current government and local guidance and by way of common sector specific risk assessment. It compliments existing FRS activities and their associated risk assessments; it does not supersede them.

Non-emergency response in areas covered by varying Covid-19, Levels⁵

The Government in England has introduced a set of criteria, or tiers in relation to Covid-19 that can vary from local area to local area.

Across England, most areas are under tier 3 or the highest tier 4 restrictions with each regional and local area placed within one of these tiers, reflecting the virus infection rates and a number of other factors.

For Devolved Administrations they will determine their own approach to rising infection rates although the broad principles set out here remain relevant. Some devolved administrations have effectively locked down their countries in an effort to restrict the spread of the virus.

Each FRS should consider their activity in relation to the Covid-19 tier in place across their area and may vary the level of activity that they assess can safely be carried out based on that assessment and in compliance with the specific government guidance.

Whilst Covid-19 tiers are a significant factor that may affect non-emergency operational response, there are other factors that FRS may wish to take into account in determining their position and as reflected in local FRS risk assessments. Regardless of what tier an area is under; the increased transmissibility of the virus is serious enough that FRS should assume that it may be present in their local area and review their existing arrangements to minimise spread.

⁴ *The purpose of this non-statutory guidance is to provide fire and rescue services with general advice to assist with a consistent, standardised approach across all services. The guidance does not constitute legal advice. Fire and rescue services' legal duties will remain those specified by law.*

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-covid-alert-levels-what-you-need-to-know>

When a national lockdown is in force this will supersede any local tier or alert levels. The Government in England has published guidance on the restrictions that apply during a Level 5, National lockdown⁶ with similar guidance issued by devolved administrations. Updated guidance has also been published for people whom may be vulnerable and required to shield during a national lockdown⁷.

Baseline risk assessment and guidance in support of the Strategic Intention

The existing guidance for [Covid-19: guidance for first responders](#)⁸ , [Working safely during coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#)⁹ as well as the range of [NFCC guidance documents](#) and risk assessment provide a good baseline of information to support local decision making and safe actions for FRS.

In considering non-emergency response activity that involves travelling to and entering premises, FRS should adhere to the latest guidance for first responders in terms of the appropriate PPE and infection control measures as well as calling ahead and confirming with the premises responsible person or manager if;

- If anyone at the premises is showing symptoms of COVID-19 such as a high temperature (greater than 37.8°C) or a new, persistent dry cough;
- If anyone at the premises has been tested and is confirmed as COVID-19 within the previous 14 days;
- If anyone at the premises is known to have been in contact with someone with COVID-19 in the last 14 days;

If the answer is yes to any of the questions above, then local managers should consider if attendance is still warranted and whether it could be delayed to another time or if an abridged approach can be employed that did not involve entering the premises.

If exceptional or necessary circumstances indicate attendance and entry to the premises is considered necessary, it should be subject to the risk assessments in place within each local FRS, the appropriate level of PPE and in accordance with the advice and guidance set out by Public Health England as a minimum (or as specified by Devolved Administrations health bodies) and mindful of other guidance and risk assessments available to FRS.

In all circumstances FRS staff must apply the Government advice relating to maintaining a safe distance for others (min 2 metres), considering the use of face coverings as a minimum and good hand hygiene.

The need to minimise and where possible avoid close contact with others remains a critical component of preventing transmission of the virus. The continued use of appropriate PPE for staff is a key factor in supporting continuing activity where safe or necessary to do so.

⁶ [National lockdown: Stay at Home - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁷ [COVID-19: guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-interim-guidance-for-first-responders/interim-guidance-for-first-responders-and-others-in-close-contact-with-symptomatic-people-with-potential-2019-ncov>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

Reducing Contact; minimising the risk of infection

Reducing contact between FRS staff or FRS staff and members of the public has the effect of reducing the opportunity for COVID to spread. There are measures that FRS can take to reduce contact, regardless of the situation:

- As far as possible make full use of digital technology;
- Use of telephone or email to make the initial contact, depending on urgency;
- Desktop assessments;
- Sending still images or video electronically;
- Use of video conferencing or similar live streaming;
- Electronic documents to replace letters;
- Enhanced website information;
- Reduction in staff numbers to carry out visits or other inspection activities (for operational crews);
- Reduction in time spent in high risk areas;
- Selection times for attending where there are fewer people in attendance.
- Discuss with premises managers prior to attendance what actions will be necessary to ensure social distancing and other infection control arrangements are achieved.

Buildings with a temporary change to simultaneous evacuation strategy

These will generally include purpose-built blocks of flats but may include other premises where a similar temporary measure has been implemented. These buildings pose a specific temporary risk and should, by using this suite of documents as a reference, continue to be regularly contacted/visited to ensure the fire risk is mitigated in accordance with the temporary measures. Please refer to the Covid-19 – Simultaneous Evacuation Addendum on the NFCC website.

Covid secure¹⁰ - Continuing non-emergency response activity

During periods of national lockdown or heightened tier levels, FRS should consider if continuing to carry out non-emergency response activity and visits particularly where sites present significant hazards to Firefighters is proportionate to the benefit of the activity. This should be set against the current significant increase in transmissibility of the coronavirus and potential for its spread.

In doing so consideration should be given to the recommended actions set out within the section on reducing contact: minimising the risk of infection on the previous page.

It should be noted that any premises that is legally open should be Covid secure and have appropriate measures in place to protect people working and visiting the premises. This should result in a safer workplace. However, it should be borne in mind that Covid secure also includes the expected behaviours of those working or visiting the premises and complying with the arrangements in place to mitigate the risk of virus spread.

Where it is found or reasonably believed that a premise is not Covid secure, FRS staff should avoid entering the premises or if already within a building, leave as soon and safely

¹⁰ <https://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/index.htm>

as possible. In these situations, the name and address of the premises should be reported to the respective enforcing body within each area.

Whilst national lockdowns remain as one of a suite of options for governments, where possible, it is anticipated that management of transmission of Covid-19 will be through Local Outbreak Control Plans and local measures. Given the increased transmissibility of the virus, some devolved administrations have already imposed national lockdowns and across England, large areas of the country are increasingly coming under similar restrictions.

It is expected that FRS will be engaged with other partners at local or regional levels to enact local outbreak plans which will allow a coordinated approach to how non-emergency response activity may be carried out safely.

Additional Guidance

- [NFCC Strategic intentions & guidance COVID-19](#)
- [Guidance for First Responders](#)
- [NFCC Prevention COVID-19 Strategic Intention](#)
- [NFCC Protection COVID-19 Strategic Intention](#)
- [HM Government Coronavirus Main Hub Page](#)
- [HSE Covid secure guidance](#)

Devolved Administrations Guidance

- [Coronavirus advice for Scotland](#)
- [COVID-19 Support for Wales](#)
- [COVID-19 in Northern Ireland](#)
- [Coronavirus guidance for Jersey](#)
- [COVID-19 support for Guernsey](#)
- [COVID-19 Updates in the Isle of Man](#)