



NFCC

Fire Central
Programme Office

Fire and rescue response to COVID-19

Research report

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Objective

To gain a timely insight into what fire and rescue services did to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic during the period March – September 2020 and to use this learning to inform future approaches.



Approach

- Ask independent researchers to interview CFOs and stakeholders
- All interviews carried out between 27 July and 7 September
- By phone, recorded
- Lasted c.40 minutes
- 47 out of 50 fire and rescue services
- 3 trade unions (FOA, FRSA and UNISON)
- AACE, LGA, NFCC and Home Office





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Findings



Themes

- Planning & the LRF
- Leadership
- Operations
- Fire Protection
- Fire Prevention
- Working from home
- Communications
- Data
- Role of the NFCC
- Tripartite Agreement



On-call firefighter experience – planning

- Planning assumptions were based on 20 per cent absence
- Resulted in new ways to bring in staff from retirement or convert on-call to wholetime, but in the end not needed
- More people at home, working or on furlough
- Led to increased availability of on-call firefighters
- At same time wholetime staff availability also remained high

“We had an embarrassment of riches”



On-call firefighter experience - logistics

- Issues for on-call payments for furloughed staff
- Variable approaches to paying on-call staff
- Innovations in training to maintain competence
- Changes to drill nights
- Introduction of virtual training



On-call firefighter experience – ambulance driving

- Ambulance driving
 - Examples of staff being trained to drive ambulances but not needed
 - In one service 19 on-call firefighters were driving ambulances for 3 months
- Maintaining competence and equity of driver standards
- Potential for a new type of on-call arrangement with wholetime firefighters 'on-call' as ambulance drivers when not on duty for FRS
- Better sharing of fire and ambulance estate to facilitate this



Key learning about on-call

On-call staff demonstrated the pride they have in their local community and this should be built on and sustained long term to retain and develop this part of the operational work force.



Recommendation 12 – On-call opportunities

The pandemic offers an opportunity for fire and rescue services to take a fresh look at the recruitment of on-call staff.

There is an extensive group of people now working from home who may never have previously considered becoming an on-call firefighter, they represent an untapped resource to bolster this part of the workforce.

The NFCC should start a conversation with employers to show how working from home can be integrated with availability for on-call firefighting and provide mutual benefits for staff development.





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Thank you

