

**LEICESTERSHIRE**  
**FIRE and RESCUE SERVICE**

# COVID-19

How we responded



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# COVID-19

## How we responded

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## Background

On 31st January 2020, 2 people in the UK were confirmed as having Coronavirus, a disease that had originated from Wuhan Province in China. By the end of February this had climbed to 23 people and by the 12th March over 200 people had contracted the disease, with 3 confirmed deaths. On this date, the UK Chief Medical Officer raised the risk to the UK from 'Moderate' to 'High' and government began to issue safety advice to the public.

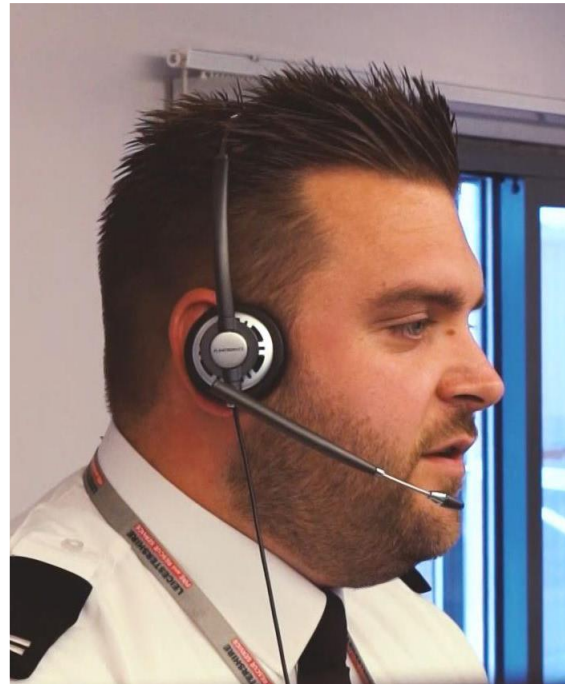
During this period, events were cancelled, travel was curtailed, panic buying ensued and cases began to rise. By 14th March, the number of confirmed cases had risen to 1,140 with 21 deaths. 4 days later and the death toll exceeded 100. Over the following days, schools were closed and the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the government would pay 80% of peoples wages in an effort to protect the economy. On 24th March the government announced its 'stay at home' message and so lockdown began. At the height of the pandemic, 1,172 people died in one day and now the total number of deaths in the UK are over 40,000.

Throughout this time, we continued to monitor the government's response to the pandemic and understand the impact it had on us as a service. We continued to deliver an effective fire and rescue service to our communities, keep our staff safe and meet the extra challenges that were put upon us by COVID-19.

This document lays out our response to the challenges and difficulties faced by our Service during the rise and initial fall of the pandemic. It shows the remarkable spirit and positivity of our staff to continue to deliver a first class service to our communities, despite having to work differently and more innovatively than ever before. It also lays out the extra work completed and looks at the lessons learnt in preparation for a second wave of the virus.

# How we continued to deliver an effective service?

As the pandemic progressed at its rapid pace, we had to keep pace to ensure that we were abiding by government guidance and best practice as recognised by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). This involved a range of activities including reporting on absence, enhanced cleaning regimes, ensuring supply chains continued and contingency planning to prepare for the worst, to name but a few. Over the next few pages, how we responded and our reactions are laid out to show how each strategy coped and excelled.



# Response

## **1. Absence reporting:**

- I. During COVID-19, our Geographical Support Team compiled information supplied by Fire Control on staff absence each day. This included all reasons for absence and specifically included numbers of staff confirmed, suspected of COVID-19 or self-isolating due to the virus. It also contained the numbers of incidents being attended by crews across the Service area.
- II. This report allowed us to spot any trends of sickness or in operational incidents and so would give us an early indication to allow us to react quickly and decisively, if required. During the period of 1st April – 30th June, we have had 58 members of staff who needed to self-isolate and 3 staff confirmed with the virus.

## **2. Incidents:**

- I. The number of incidents we attended during COVID reduced significantly, particularly during lockdown. In the period of April- June (inclusive) 2020 we attended 1,964 incidents compared to the same period in 2019 of 2,159. This is a reduction of 195 incidents. Our Fire Control centre received 4326 emergency 999 calls, which is 230 below the 3year average. Throughout this time our fire stations have continued to respond to the normal range and type of incidents.
- II. Fire crews were equipped with personal protective equipment (PPE) to allow them to remain safe . Fire-kit, worn by firefighters at incidents, is equipped with a pathogen barrier to protect the wearer from bodily fluids. They also have half face respirators which protect the face and respiratory system from air-born contaminants. These measures were already in place as a result of good decision making coming into effect when procuring PPE for staff prior to the pandemic.
- III. Fire Control staff were also instructed to ask COVID related questions of 999 callers. Any relevant information would then be relayed to crews on route to the incident, to allow them to take precautions and therefore maximise their safety. Any confirmed cases were logged by Control staff.

- IV. Fire crews have come into contact with COVID confirmed patients and those suspected of having the virus, in the course of attendance at incidents. Crews have taken the necessary and appropriate precautions, ensuring minimal contact and decontamination following such a case.
- V. Guidance was also issued to crews with regards to providing life-saving resuscitation with regards to PPE and procedures. Work done by our staff on this issue, led to a submission to National Operational Learning and a change in advice nationally from the NFCC.

### **3. Fire Stations and Fire Control:**

- I. Stations continued to function and provide an emergency response throughout the pandemic. The availability of all of our fire appliances was continually monitored daily throughout COVID-19.
- II. Availability of our On Call appliances increased, due to the increased availability to respond by our On Call staff due to the lockdown and furlough that was in place. The average availability figure for our On Call stations for this period was 85.3% compared to the 3year average previously of 61.4%. This increased availability allowed us to use On Call volunteers for other tasks to assist our community (more about this later on). Our Wholetime appliance availability also increased by 1.3% compared to the last 3 years.
- III. Stations put in place measures to prevent the potential spread of the disease, including risk assessments, signage and hand-gel. This included enhanced cleaning regimes at change of shifts and avoidance of unnecessary contact. Contingency plans were in place with our cleaning contractors to be prepared to carry out a 'deep clean' of stations, should the need arise. Communications via Service Matters and Vlogs enhanced messages to stations and encouraged them to guard against the virus.
- IV. Fire Control was effectively 'locked down', with no visitors allowed, in order to minimise risk to staff there. Contingency plans were also activated which saw Officers and former Control staff trained to take 999 calls and mobilise appliances should they be required. Again an enhanced cleaning regime kept staff safer.
- V. Contingency plans were reviewed with regards to Operational Degradation. This is a procedure which is put in place should there be a need for reduced crewing arrangements or reduced availability of appliances, due to the effects that the virus may have on our staff. This review ensured that the current procedure was fit for purpose and was completed very early into the pandemic (March 2020).
- VI. As per government and NFCC guidance, stations withdrew from external community safety work and other work involving contact with the communities, to protect both our staff and the public. However, the Chief Fire Officer was keen to keep public confidence in our Service and so a 'risk-based approach' to off station activities was

undertaken. This saw innovative and new ways of working being drawn up to continually support vulnerable people within the communities served by the Service (this is covered in more depth later).

- VII. Communications with stations and operational crews continued throughout with advice on PPE, guidance on cleaning following incidents and other matters. This was via line management meetings with the Area Manager Response holding weekly conference calls to help disseminate information and update Group and District Managers, who are in charge of stations. On Call colleagues were kept abreast of guidance issued by the NFCC with regards to furlough arrangements and how it affected their work with the Service. This meant that staff could continue their On Call work and availability, despite being furloughed.
- VIII. Throughout this time, and on matters pertaining to our staff, the Representative Bodies (FBU, FOA and UNISON) were consulted continually in meetings and conversations that were often held daily at the height of the pandemic. In a Staff Consultation meeting, the positive relationship that had grown during the crisis was praised by the Representative Bodies, who were entirely happy with their involvement in decisions and discussions throughout.
- IX. Firefighters continued to train during this period in order that they maintained their competencies in all areas. The Learning and Development Department (L&D) facilitated re-validation of current qualifications in Incident Command and Breathing apparatus. Other courses continued, such as recruit training for On Call (in house) and Whole-time firefighters (at the Fire Service College). This meant that essential qualifications were kept current and that firefighters were available at the earliest opportunity, should the effects of the pandemic escalate. Innovative and new ways of working were developed to train staff, and COVID-19 preventative measures were put in place to safeguard staff.





# Prevention

## 1. Community Safety

- I. In line with NFCC guidance at the outbreak of the pandemic, the Service had to make the difficult decision to withdraw from community safety activities, to safeguard staff and the public.
- II. Very soon, it was acknowledged that we needed to find innovative ways to continue to help our communities. A trial was set up over 3 stations to look at different ways of delivering Home Safety Checks (HSCs) to vulnerable people. 1 station carried out leaflet drops through letterboxes of houses they had identified as containing vulnerable people. This approach saw very little success and was quickly discounted as a way forward.
- III. A second station engaged by carrying out socially distanced HSCs – which saw them knocking on doors, then stepping back and speaking with the householder to deliver safety messages and answer any queries. Of course, at no time would they enter the house. This saw limited success, although it did allow social interaction with many people who had not seen or spoken to anyone since the start of lockdown. It also gave crews the ability to assess levels of vulnerability.
- IV. The most successful trial was with HSCs being carried out by telephone. Again the ability to deliver safety messages to householders and asking pertinent questions proved to be useful and the best way to deliver these checks. These checks were quality assured by our Community Educators who assessed firefighters as they worked. Once more, the social interaction proved very popular with crews reporting that they had engaged with people who had felt very isolated during lockdown.
- V. By surveying the householders following the visit / telephone call, we could then evaluate each method with the use of a survey tool. It was found that the most effective way of carrying out HSCs was by telephone. This method was then rolled out to other stations and through the Service. In 2019 we completed 1,757 HSCs in the period April – June, and in 2020 for the same period we completed 1,212. All of these are to identified vulnerable people who are either 65+ years of age or have a disability within the household. Of this total number, 917 were carried out by telephone. The total number this year is considered a small reduction from the last year under the circumstances and shows the speed of adaptation by our staff to continue delivery of these important checks. Our work in undertaking these checks was praised at a Community Safety Council GOLD meeting, by partner agencies who saw the value of these checks.
- VI. Our Service also received a certificate of recognition for '*outstanding contribution to the local community during the coronavirus pandemic*' from the Chief Executive of Leicestershire Cares.

- VII. As the Road Safety risk reduced due to lockdown and our schools programme ceased, our prevention department took the opportunity to re-launch our 'Cause and Effect' website, which is an on-line educational tool aimed at years 10-13 in education. This was publicised and communicated to local schools, who could use it as part of their lockdown school homework.
- VIII. Our Fire Cadets continued to meet virtually over Zoom, with a regular attendance of over 20 cadets. They helped to promote road safety messages via social media. Our Community Educators also delivered regular messages via social media with the most successful post being about 'sky lanterns' which reached 78,882 people and gained 780 shares.
- IX. We instigated a partnership with Leicester City Council dealing with dangerous waste or that which could be harmful or hazardous to residencies or people. This scheme allowed residents access to Waste Sites (which were closed due to lockdown), when they have been referred by ourselves or partner agencies. This followed a social media campaign about household bonfires and concerns raised by the Council. This was in regards to the number of complaints they received as a result of householders burning rubbish due to limited access to waste sites.
- X. A crew manager from the Road Safety Team was re-purposed and volunteered to assist with crewing ambulances for East Midlands Ambulance Service for patients requiring urgent care. Other members of the Community Education Team volunteered to assist with delivery of supplies and to help with face-fitting of masks to care workers.



# Protection

## 1. Fire protection

- I. Again, at the outbreak of the pandemic and following lockdown, engagement with businesses and premises owners proved very difficult. The fire protection team carried out follow-up audits over the telephone and requested documents to be provided via email. They carried out desk based assessments where this was possible. Because of these difficulties, we saw a large reduction in fire safety audits from 150 in 2019 to 20 in 2020, for the period of April – June. The team have also started to carry out virtual audits where possible and appropriate.
- II. Building regulation work has been ongoing throughout the pandemic with 144 consultations being received, along with Licencing work which saw us respond to 27 during the period April – June 2020.
- III. As a result of COVID-19, fire protection officers gave advice and guidance to care homes in case of staff issues during the pandemic and also carried out a full audit on a hotel identified as a convalescence premises for patients affected by COVID-19 who come out from hospital.
- IV. Fire protection officers continued to maintain their competencies in role during this period through continued professional development. This saw them attend over 284 hours of virtual training sessions and webinars.
- V. During the COVID period, there was national concern over the Leicester textile industry and the possibility that there were unscrupulous factory owners who were not abiding by the minimum wage law. As part of this work, fire protection officers were involved with partner agencies in carrying out audits of premises of concern.
- VI. The period of lockdown also enabled the fire protection department to also fully understand the Building Risk Review work that was part of the output of the Grenfell enquiry.

# How did we deal with the challenges we faced as a result of COVID-19?

## 1. Multi-agency working

- I. Our Service was heavily involved as a result of the multi-agency response of the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) Local Resilience Forum. They were coordinating the roles of all primary and secondary responders and our Service was integral in assisting in many ways. A Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) was formed, Chaired by a Deputy Police Chief Officer. Our Assistant Chief Officer (at the time), Callum Faint was chair of the Blue Light Cell within this Forum. *(see appendix for full structure)*.
- II. The SCG met regularly and their overarching objective was the preservation of life along with work to minimise the spread of COVID-19, protect the vulnerable, maintain and provide support for public services and to monitor the impact of the virus and respond appropriately to it. They would also work to maintain public confidence, work to restore normality and look at recovery following the virus.
- III. The SCG maintained the co-ordinated approach between all agencies and a monitoring and reporting system was set up to gauge the impact of the virus on a regular basis. This ranged from reporting on deaths, hospital bed capacity, mortuary capacity, availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and how each agency was affected or helping in various ways.
- IV. Beneath the SCG was a Tactical Co-ordinating Group (TCG) that was attended by a manager from our Service. This TCG looked at the practical application of actions arising from the SCG, including how each agency could assist and in what capacity. This joined up approach led to true multi agency working which benefitted the communities of Leicester.
- V. Feeding information and work both into and out of the TCG were various cells set up to deal with specific actions within our Service. Cells dealing with storage and delivery of PPE, how we were assisting other agencies such as EMAS, sourcing key worker accommodation or helping to deliver essential items to vulnerable people were all coordinated within this group. *(see appendix for structure details)*

- VI. With regular updates to our department heads and organisational leads through our Tactical Managers Team, a solid and effective provision of service and response was maintained, with this coordinated and multi- agency approach shared by all.
- VII. Our Senior Management Team (SMT) were also regularly updated with national information through regular updates from 'Resilience Direct', which is a secure platform for the sharing of information across organisational and geographical boundaries for emergency planning.
- VIII. A continual record of decisions made throughout COVID-19 by our SMT were kept in a contemporaneous note log-book.
- IX. Continuous engagement with our representative bodies was maintained throughout and ensured that they were on board with all the extra activities agreed at a national level. This was via regular, often daily meetings and telephone calls. This communication aided decision making and increased the speed at which the Service could react to an ever changing situation.

## **2. Business Continuity (BC)**

- I. Prior to lockdown, the Service Assurance department undertook 'Operation Hardcastle' which saw the whole department work from home for a day, to ensure that all computer systems could be accessed and communications lines remained uninterrupted. This was successful and gave confidence that should lockdown occur (at that point it was only a faint possibility) the Service could still run effectively.
- II. There was an immediate review of our Service policy and procedure for business continuity management and also a review of our Pandemic Infectious disease procedure. This ensured that they were fit for purpose and updated where necessary.
- III. Our supply chains were scrutinised and a stocktake was immediately carried out to ensure that essential items such as PPE, facemasks and hand sanitiser were continually available. Many of our supply chains failed and our support team worked incredibly hard to source alternative suppliers and remedy problems as they arose, to ensure the continued safety of our staff and our ability to provide an effective service was maintained.
- IV. Some essential items became unavailable and different and innovative ways of working were developed. As an example our normal suppliers of Breathing Apparatus (BA) cleaning fluid were unable to supply it and use of other fluid would invalidate their guarantee of the BA set. An effective working solution was developed by our staff in conjunction with the suppliers and the manufacturers of the BA sets.

- V. Our support departments devised ways to continually support and back up our operational fire stations. This ensured that in the event of a vehicle breakdown, our Workshops and mechanics maintained 24 hour cover throughout. Similarly, our Information Communications and Technology (ICT) department adjusted their ways of working to also maintain continued support throughout. This was essential as many of our staff were now working from home.
- VI. Our Business Continuity manager ensured that we shared information with our regional fire and rescue service partners to ensure 'best practice' was identified and maintained. He also made contact with the BC group of the NFCC and attended meetings held over Zoom. The information gathered was reported to SMT.
- VII. A stocktake and bunkering of our fuel stocks took place and the Service took advantage of the BP Free Fuel for Emergency Services scheme. This preserved our stock in the event of an emergency breakdown in fuel supplies. Arrangements were also in place to share these stocks with the Police, if required.
- VIII. Our station cleaning arrangements were reviewed and enhanced cleaning arrangements were put in place with our contractors, with the ability to deep cleanse and disinfect stations or service premises if required.
- IX. Our Estates department also carried out risk assessments of each Service station and premise and has continually reviewed these throughout the pandemic.
- X. Our ICT department purchased extra licences to enable staff working from home to be able to access computer systems. It also installed Zoom which very quickly took over from Skype as the preferred virtual tool for meetings. This allowed greater contact and communication between staff with meetings being held virtually during lockdown and continually since then. This has meant effectively that all departments within the Service have been able to function normally.
- XI. During COVID-19, our departments were encouraged to continue to recruit staff into vacant positions. This would give the resilience required should the pandemic worsen.

### **3. Health, Safety and Wellbeing**

- I. Our Health and Wellbeing group began very early on, at the start of March, to send out advice with links to NHS websites, about the pandemic and how to prevent the spread of the virus. They were also very quick to advise on information for staff who had travelled abroad and to the understanding of delays that may occur with being able to produce sick-notes.
- II. There were 16 Service Matters articles during the period of March to June covering all aspects of health and wellbeing. This included working from home, signposts to members of the Health and Wellbeing team and

AMICA (our out-sourced counselling service) and continued links to government and NHS Every Mind Matters sites on the internet. The team also regularly sent out emails to all staff to remind them of the help that is available and how to access it, should the need arise.

- III. Further practical advice included the wellbeing of staff who were working from home, back pain advice and even links to home-schooling sites to help when teaching children at home.
- IV. Our Employees site on SharePoint (our intranet) gives guidance and information on COVID-19 including links to our COVID passport. This was introduced as a wellbeing measure and staff were encouraged to complete it. It gave the employee the chance to highlight to their line manager any anxieties, worries or issues they may have in relation to COVID-19. This included information about their personal situation including any vulnerabilities, vulnerable family members, underlying conditions and also any adjustments that they felt were necessary in order to assist them in their role. This allows the line manager the ability to regularly review any issues with the employee. Although this is voluntary, almost 400 of our staff have completed a passport so far *(see appendix for an example)*.
- V. As mentioned previously, our Control Room was effectively 'locked down' allowing no visitors and no use of rooms shared by Control Staff. This prevented spread of the virus and, with an enhanced cleaning regime, helped to keep these vital members of staff safe. These measures were clearly successful as very little sickness occurred of the Control Room staff.
- VI. Very early on, prior to the national lockdown, staff were asked to screen visitors prior to them entering Service premises. This included asking pertinent questions about symptoms and their health. This would prevent spread of the virus into the workspace. Guidance on social distancing, following government and NHS guidelines were also communicated.
- VII. A page was set up on our intranet, SharePoint, to house all the health and safety information on COVID-19. This included all risk assessments including regional, local and those issued by the NFCC, key worker materials, information on how to book a test and processes introduced due to the virus.
- VIII. Our Health and Safety department also set up a COVID-19 reporting form which allowed them to monitor all personnel that had come into contact with anyone showing symptoms or were diagnosed as positive with the virus. Over 70 notifications have been made using this form and only 1 person has tested positive for the virus. This shows the protection offered by our PPE and operational procedures is effective.
- IX. Health and Safety department issued 2 'safety flashes' during COVID-19. This is an urgent message that is immediately sent out to all stations and requires both acknowledgement and action. The first was around the resuscitation of casualties and the second was issued with regards to safety hand sanitiser. They also issued NFCC guidance on the cleaning of stations and regularly reviewed risk assessments of Service premises.

- X. A 'suggestion box' was put onto our intranet site to encourage staff feedback and ideas to assist with dealing with the issues raised by the virus.
- XI. Risk assessments issued nationally by the NFCC for the tripartite agreement were reviewed regionally by a collaboration group of health and safety staff from across the local Services. Many of these were then reviewed further by ourselves to include localisms and were agreed by representative bodies at national, regional and local levels. Having these lines of communication in place ensured best practice and common working amongst firefighting staff regionally.





# What work did we undertake as a result of the Tripartite Agreement?

## 4. Tripartite Agreement

This was an agreement between the fire service national employers, the NFCC and the FBU for additional activities carried out during COVID-19. The agreement recognised that Fire Services may have the capability to assist other partner agencies to assist with the overall public sector response to the pandemic.

It identified activities and additional work that could be actioned and laid down requirements that needed consideration for these to happen. It also laid down expectations of management and union officials to work together to bring about these activities, whilst ensuring the safety and welfare of firefighters involved and considering any possible impact on core Service work.

The agreement included requirements for risk assessments to be completed, any additional necessary PPE to be provided, along with adequate training to be given.

Our managers constantly and regularly discussed all arrangements with representative bodies in order to facilitate and expedite any additional work.

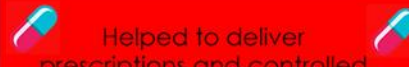
# How we have supported our communities during COVID-19



Provided staff to East Midlands Ambulance Service as Urgent Care patient transport workers



Helped to deliver prescriptions and controlled drugs to vulnerable people



Tested the face masks of local care workers, to ensure the safety of staff and service users



Delivered and stored Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)



Gave fire safety advice to care homes



Checked the COVID compliance of hotels and guest houses in Leicester



Made and delivered visors for the health and care sector

Delivered food parcels to households and food banks



Carried out home safety checks in new ways - via social distancing or telephone



Set up a waste referral scheme to remove waste that could be harmful



## Ambulance work

- I. As part of a regional working group with other Fire Services covered by East Midlands Ambulance Service (EMAS), we supported this agreement by supplying 12 of our staff to work with them. This group was made up of our On Call liaison officer, our Trauma Care instructor and volunteers made up of 2 day duties staff and 8 On Call members. These On Call members had been identified as being 'most at risk' of financial hardship as a result of lockdown, by our Geographical Support team. By offering them this work, it helped to ease the burden on the individual. This work is being undertaken again to understand how affected our On Call colleagues will be affected by the removal of the furlough scheme at the end of October 2020.
- II. The group were trained by EMAS as urgent care support workers and a Workforce Sharing agreement was put in place between our organisations. The firefighters would continue to serve under our contracts with the

agreement listing expectations of both organisations. All hours worked and payments made were under our COVID-19 code, allowing them to be logged. A regional risk assessment was completed and this was agreed locally.

- III. Our volunteers completed 81 shifts in total (April-July 20) and helped approx. 200 patients during this time. Our staff completed COVID-19 reporting forms if they came into contact with a patient who was positive or suspected of COVID-19. None of the volunteers contracted the virus, due to the excellent training and management system put in place.
- IV. Our On Call liaison officer carried out regular wellbeing phone calls with volunteers. Our Trauma Care instructor was able to use this as a networking opportunity to line up our training with that of EMAS and also to explore other areas of possible future collaboration.

### **COVID-19 Compliance Checks**

- I. The Chair of the Combined Fire Authority was asked by Leicester City Council (LCC) to assist with ensuring COVID compliance measures were in place within business premises in Leicester. This request was made in response to the significance that Leicester was the first city to go into 'local lockdown', which saw large parts of the centre remaining under lockdown whilst other areas of the country saw it relaxed.
- II. It was felt that our Service could positively contribute to the continued safety of our communities. This fell outside of the Tripartite agreement.
- III. Our Chief Fire Officer and SMT worked hard, alongside the Chair, to get this agreement ratified as part of the Tripartite agreement. After initial resistance and much work by our team, this agreement was finally granted by the NFCC, National Employers and the Fire Brigades Union.
- IV. The LCC requested that we help to give advice initially to Hotels and boarding houses and ensure that they are complying with COVID-19 regulations. This work was to help bring areas of Leicester out of lockdown. We initially completed 36 checks of hotels, hostels and boarding house in the affected areas.

### **Assembly of face shields**

- I. Early on, operational staff mainly at Eastern fire station sought approval under the Tripartite agreement to assist colleagues from the health community by assembling single use face shields.

- II. Using regional risk assessments, again reviewed and adjusted locally, crews were able to assemble over 1000 face shields by the end of April 2020. This was done during their shifts when they were unable to do community safety work, and whilst the trial was continuing at other stations of different ways to deliver HSCs.
- III. By the end of July, other stations and Fire Control staff had also begun to undertake this work. With more people involved, crews were able to assemble over 5,250 face shields by the end of June 2020. These have been distributed throughout the county to hospitals, care homes and surgeries.

### **Face fitting of face masks**

- I. Part of the TCG was the PPE cell. This identified that care and health workers required face fit tests in order to keep them safe in their roles. As part of the Tripartite agreement, our Service sought volunteers to assist with this. An agreement was made with NHS Midlands which stated the expectations and deliverables of each of our organisations.
- II. 15 volunteers were trained to use the machinery to enable them to test care workers. These volunteers were made up of On Call staff, day duty staff and staff from other departments who had volunteered to be repurposed.
- III. A risk assessment was in place and adjustments made to the testing machinery were made, to enable better social distancing to keep staff and workers safer.
- IV. During the period of April-June 2020, our staff face-fit tested 282 workers, whilst maintaining their own safety.

### **Delivery of essential items to vulnerable people**

- I. Through the TCG, our Service was asked to assist with the delivery of prescriptions and also of controlled drugs to vulnerable patients within the Service area. Due to the strict legal controls in place around certain medications, known as 'Controlled Drugs' a procedure required putting in place to safeguard and support our staff when carrying out these deliveries. This was in line with Home Office advice of 'Guidance for the safe custody of controlled drugs in transit'.
- II. This procedure was written and it contained responsibilities, records to be kept and how these deliveries were to be undertaken by our staff. It also saw an email account and telephone number set up for pharmacies to request deliveries, which could be done same day, next day or urgently (within 2-6 hours).

- III. The prescription deliveries were usually carried out by volunteers who were on modified duties and / or firefighters who were at stations with above the minimum amount of crew available. Fire cover and availability was not affected by this work.
- IV. Many of the food deliveries were delivered by Hinckley station, who teamed up to assist a local church to supply meals to vulnerable children in the local area. Food deliveries to food banks also took place.
- V. In total, we delivered 377 items (prescription or food) to vulnerable people within the county.

### **Storage and delivery of PPE**

- I. Southern station was quickly identified and used as a storage facility for PPE by the TCG PPE Cell. Due to its size and location, it was considered well suited for this task.
- II. Arrangements were in place for suppliers to drop off PPE at Southern station as well for the collection of items. This existed from April through the COVID period.
- III. Our staff were also involved with some of the delivery of items to NHS sites and care facilities and we made 35 deliveries during the period April- June 2020.



# How were we innovative?

## New ways of working required

It was clear from the outset of COVID-19 that we, as a Service, had to change the way we worked in order to continue delivering an effective service to our communities. This meant looking at all areas and considering new ways of delivery, communications, training and general day to day working and functioning of our staff, premises and systems. Below are just some of the innovative ways we found to work.

- I. Home working. Most of our support staff were able to work from home effectively and continued to deliver the same service throughout lockdown. The quick introduction of Zoom by our ICT department meant that communications could continue. Meetings still took place as planned and these were often found to be shorter and more efficient, due to the lack of travel involved. This also had an environmental effect as there were less miles travelled in Service or private vehicles. This reduction also sees financial savings made on fuel.
- II. Use of Vlogs. As a communication tool, the vlog was a popular way to pass information from senior managers to all staff. The short videos were seen as 'to the point' and preferable to long text or emails. It also gave a personal feel and allowed senior managers to recognise the great work being carried out by staff in all areas of the Service.

During the period of April – June, as well as these Vlogs, over 60 articles and messages were sent out through our Service Matters portal, often on a daily basis. We were very keen to ensure that all staff had the latest and most up to date information and advice available.

- III. Telephone Home Safety Checks. As previously mentioned in this report, after a trial and evaluation, these were found to be a new and innovative way to engage with vulnerable people. Not only were we keeping our staff safe (and in doing so prevent the spread of the virus), we were also able to engage people in the comfort of their homes where they felt safe. This allowed our home safety message to be put across, but also allowed us to ask pertinent questions to ensure the wellbeing of the householder. This also proved efficient, as an operational crew of 4 could engage 4 separate households at the same time, saving on travel costs and time.

Firefighters have also developed a link from our website to an application that allows the public to carry out their own Home Safety Check. By logging on, this app takes the reader through the different areas to help ensure that their home is safe, with questions throughout to enforce the appropriate messages. This has been

developed by Firefighters and taken on by the Service, showing the level of innovation and creativity that exists amongst all of our staff.

- IV. Fire safety audits. During the lockdown, and extended Leicester lockdown, most businesses were closed and our fire safety auditors struggled to locate responsible persons for the properties they intended to inspect. Where they could be contacted, fire safety officers began to liaise via the telephone and began to carry out a 'virtual audit' by telephone or Zoom. This meant that documents could be requested and emailed in for inspection. This was especially useful for follow-up visits that had been planned in prior to lockdown. These could be signed off as inspected by officers, providing the correct documentation or measures could be proved to be in place. Work on this is being extended.
- V. Training and maintenance of competence. Most training courses continued with COVID-19 measures in place. This was essential to keep our firefighters and staff competent in role. Our Breathing Apparatus (BA) re-validations have continued throughout with adjustments made to keeping crews together and attending together – to try to maintain a 'bubble' and prevent the potential spread of the virus. We have had to develop virtual assessments in our Incident Command re-validations, which again has ensured the continued certification and competence of all those safe to command. These re-validations have been developed by our Service using existing software linked to Zoom, which has enabled assessors to run realistic computer simulated scenarios and assess the candidate. Feedback is then given remotely. Work on this has extended to Command development days and to tactical and strategic group development days to help prepare officers with the pressures they may face in a likely situation.

This work has received wide-spread acclaim with interest shown by many other fire services. The concept has been widely shared, with many services using it as a template for their own command assessments. This acclaim has also come from international partners from the USA, who invited our Command Team to a webinar to discuss the concept worldwide.
- VI. Virtual reality (VR). Working with service providers, we have become leaders in the VR field receiving acclaim for how we are addressing the concept in the future of fire service training. During lockdown, we continued to develop and trialled a virtual fire investigation which saw trainee candidates attend an interactive and realistic scene which allowed them to test and document their findings. This allowed the training to go ahead in a completely safe environment and allowed the same type of training to be used for several candidates. Qualified investigators were able to look on and assess the candidate and give advice where required. With minor adjustments, it means that the same scene can be used many times and in many different ways, proving very efficient. At a recent seminar, Sir Thomas Windsor praised our use of VR and its future within the fire sector.

- VII. Recruitment. Prior to COVID-19 and lockdown, we had many vacant positions of our support staff and we also needed to run an On Call recruitment campaign. All of these recruitments were encouraged to continue and we found new ways of testing and interviewing potential candidates. With COVID-19 preventative measures in place, we have been able to recruit 35 people into the organisation during lockdown, with new and innovative ways being put in place. We now have 24 new support staff and 11 On Call firefighters recruited in this way. This gives a certain extended resilience to the organisation for the future and in case of a 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of the virus. Although the operational recruitment has forged ahead, the recruits will remain subject to a full medical examination by the Service, as soon as COVID-19 measures permit this to happen.
- VIII. Meeting with people. Our new Coalville Emergency hub has been developed over a period of the last year or so. This saw our old Coalville fire station developed into a station with facilities shared by the police and ambulance service – meaning they are now all under one roof. This fantastic collaborative work culminated in a grand opening during with COVID-19 safety measures in place. As well as limiting numbers and ensuring social distancing, temperature checks were taken and food was individually pre-plated for guests. By using innovative ways of working, the formal opening of the Emergency Hub continued, with all three emergency services represented. Agreements have also been reached and are in place for the use of the premises by each set of personnel.
- Loughborough station carried out its own Virtual Open Day in September, with crews carrying out multiple scenarios and lectures on fire, road and water safety. This was a great success and was streamed live over social media, receiving thousands of likes and shares. This new way to engage with the public has proved popular and is likely to be extended across the Service.





# How did we plan for Recovery?

The NFCC in their paper of 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020 summarised their 'Agreed Best Practice for Recovery from COVID-19'. In this paper they acknowledged that *'FRS's are faced with how they will begin the process of recovery to what will likely be the 'new normal' in a prioritised and safe manner.'*

It suggested that each Fire and Rescue Service should set up a Recovery Group to look into this. The Area Manager for Community Risk in our Service formed an Internal Recovery Group and would lead the first phase of the recovery process. They were tasked with 3 objectives:

- a) The returning of the Service Headquarters back into a functional building following the reduction of its capacity during the 'lockdown' period.
- b) The review of the performance of teams/departments against their plans and to highlight areas where the plans have been significantly impacted upon.
- c) Capture the lessons learnt from this exercise to ensure that the Service can understand and benefit from this experience.

The Tactical Management Team (TMT) were asked to deliver a). The department heads for Health and Safety and Estates delivered a risk based approach to bringing headquarters back on line, reducing the impact to staff and putting in place relevant safety measures. They also reported back to TMT and communicated their actions to staff, to facilitate their anticipated return to headquarters.

The recovery group compiled a list of actions that were unable to be progressed within each department due to the impact of the pandemic. These tasks were then brought to TMT for action, prioritisation and assistance where necessary. The third objective, to capture the lessons learnt and understand any benefits from how we have worked through the pandemic, saw a report compiled looking at particular areas, as follows:

- I. Home working – this was viewed as a generally positive experience by staff, with many reporting greater productivity. Although some staff did feel isolated and missed the social interaction of the workplace, many did appreciate the acceptance and encouragement of a flexible approach to working by managers. The financial benefits of not commuting and a reduction of the environmental impact of less travel, less printing were also seen as positives. The future benefits and impacts of home working is to be examined more in the future.

- II. Our Estate – with home working, our staff have been using our buildings differently, in particular our headquarters and learning and development centre. With virtual meetings and training now taking place, it has highlighted a need to review our estate in the future, in line with home working and innovation.
- III. Virtual training and meetings – seen as a real positive, this has meant the continuation of training and ‘business as usual’ has continued, chiefly through the use of Zoom through all departments. The negative aspects that may feature longer term may include the lack of personal interaction with colleagues although it was also noted that poor internet connection can also lead to personal frustration. Therefore, a further review along with the development and flexibility that IT solutions may bring, is required.
- IV. Fleet – working from home and virtual meetings has seen a reduction in the use of our vehicles. This has seen a reduction in our carbon footprint and financial benefits in reduced wear and tear on the vehicles and a reduction of fuel costs. This will be reviewed in the future.
- V. Innovation and creativity – this has featured throughout this report and was an important aspect considered by the recovery group. It noted that all staff have been extremely creative and have found ways to deliver most elements of their core functions. In many ways, they have identified new ways of working which will be carried forward in Service and department plans of the future.
- VI. Relationship building – the recovery group noted the particular development of a positive relationship with representative bodies, most notably the Fire Brigades Union. The continual 2-way communication through meetings and telephone / Zoom calls has been particularly beneficial to our staff and communities. This continues today.

They way staff have been able to feedback has also allowed relationships to prosper. A feedback suggestion box was opened, COVID passports allowed staff an opportunity, in confidence, to air any issues they had about the virus and regular meetings and 1-2-1s helped with this. The more common meetings of SMT and TMT allowed any feedback to be processed and where appropriate to be actioned in a timely manner. This work has all helped to build trust.

# Financial Impacts

The government gave fire and rescue services a grant to assist them in dealing with the impacts of the pandemic. This grant has reduced the financial burden on our Service and has allowed us to offset costs related to the pandemic against this. By setting up a cost centre and code for the COVID grant, this has allowed us to track additional spending and thus the financial cost of COVID.

Between April and June 2020, the additional costs were, as follows:

Reason	Cost
On Call additional costs - Response	£12,770
Wholetime overtime (inc Control) - Response	£41,759
Personal Protective Equipment	£24,337
Cleaning and decontamination supplies	£12,491
Other (PPE)	£11,757
ICT infrastructure and licencing	£55,493

We have also calculated our estimated loss of income as a result of the pandemic. This equates to approx. £40,750 and is made up of a loss of training income (£5,000), grants and community schemes (£5,000), subsidiary trading (£15,000) and other costs such as sales income, fire investigation reports and primary authority work (£15,750).

# Preparation for a second wave

The Recovery Group have been tasked with preparation for a second wave of the virus over the coming months. They have considered where we want to be as an organisation and any gaps that may exist. They have also considered how these gaps will be closed to ensure that we are in the best position possible, should the rising tide continue. Their task was split into parts as per the NFCC guidance, and is as follows:

- I. Humanitarian – our level of preparedness is good with many processes and arrangements in place still from the start of the pandemic. Gaps presently being worked on are suppliers of specialist items, training on ICT video conferencing and the appointment of a nurse into occupational health to ensure staff remain in date for their fitness testing.
- II. Infrastructure – again, existing arrangements are in place and are good. Stocks of PPE are currently healthy and will continue to be for a long period. Risk assessments of premises are under monthly reviews and ICT solutions for home working are working well.
- III. Economic – This has been reviewed and we have seen a reduction in external clients to our occupational health unit. There are also cost increases being seen for contractors due to demand and supply issues. Other issues include the recruiting of part time instructors into Learning and Development to help with training demand there.
- IV. Environmental – current arrangements are working well with existing arrangements continuing to offer reduced impact to the environment.
- V. Other – the group have considered the financial impact of a second wave, the testing of the Service degradation procedure, continued business continuity testing and the continued resilience of our response capability.

Our response was recently tested by 'Operation Petunia' facilitated by our business continuity colleagues. This virtual desktop training exercise saw members from across the organisation tested by 3 separate scenarios involving COVID-19 affecting our response capability. It highlighted further gaps in our procedures which are currently being closed. We believe that by the work we have completed, that our Service is in a good place to be able to deal with a second wave.