Business Fire Safety Strategy

2020 - 2023

County Durham and Darlington
Fire and Rescue Service

Safest People, Safest Places

Business Fire Safety Strategy

1.   Foreword

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) vision is to have the Safest People, Safest Places. Our core strength in achieving this is through our people who are proud to work for an organisation connected closely with its communities and who are genuinely committed to changing and saving people's lives.

The Services' strategic priorities are detailed in our Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) which explains CDDFRS' vision of "Safest People, Safest Places" and how we plan to achieve this. The Business Fire Safety strategy is part of a suite of documents which support the delivery of the IRMP and explain the interventions which will take place to support the achievement of our vision. The Business Fire Safety strategy includes how we will support and regulate our business community to achieve compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, how we will develop our staff to achieve compliance with the Competency Framework for Fire Safety Regulators and how we will use our data systems to identify and mitigate business risk.

The Government's fire reform agenda set a clear direction of travel to ensure services are efficient, accountable, transparent and reflective of the diverse communities they serve. This is underpinned by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) regime and the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England that sets out the overall strategic direction for fire and rescue authorities. Following our first inspection, it is evident that we need to make changes to our approach and our Business Fire Safety Strategy sets out how we aim to do this.

We expect the Authority to continue to face a very challenging financial climate going forward, as further cuts to government funding are made. This is exacerbated by restrictions on the amount of income we can raise through council tax and predictions of significant pressures on spending. As well as this, the unexpected nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has seen the Service make significant changes in the way we operate in order to keep our staff safe whilst continuing to deliver services to our communities. As we look to the future it's important that we do not pause with the delivery of our People agenda and we ensure we can find innovative solutions to engage with our workforce and continue to deliver quality training and supportive measures. The next three years are therefore likely to require further innovation and changes to the way we operate and deliver our services and the Business Fire Safety Strategy will help us achieve this.

2.   Where are we now?

Our business fire safety strategy is to work with businesses to provide support that enables them to be legally compliant and use enforcement action when necessary.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) found that many services were not doing enough to ensure businesses comply with fire safety regulations. Our inspection found that improvements are needed with training, quality assurance, business engagement and the use of enforcement powers.

The independent enquiry from the Grenfell Tower tragedy recommended that changes are made to the regulatory system. Although we do not have any high-rise buildings in the service area, we received additional funding to drive cultural change, improve the competence of our staff and respond to changes in legislation.

The Intelligent Regulatory Information System (IRIS) is a national data sharing programme and includes the Health and Safety executive and other fire and rescue services. Members of the programme are able to share enforcement data about business premises which they mutually regulate through a live database in order to deliver integrated, effective, proportionate and risk-based regulation. We will continue to support the programme to improve the data we use to identify premises to inspect and collaborate with our partners.

The fire safety competence framework outlines the training and qualifications required by our staff to audit buildings and fulfil our statutory enforcement duties. We are currently training our staff to be compliant with the framework.

A trial to charge for unwanted fire signals resulted in a 14% decrease of these incidents. In 2020, this was introduced on a permanent basis.

Our existing risk-based approach to delivering fire safety audits and other protection activities was modified in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. We introduced alternative ways of working through the delivery of desk-top audits which provide the opportunity to deliver business fire safety activities more effectively and efficiently in the future.

Our Medium Term Financial Plan establishes the budgets for revenue and capital expenditure over four-year period. The delivery of our day to day business fire safety activities is influenced by our MTFP and budget allocation for protection activity.

3.   Key Drivers

The key drivers which set the direction of the business fire safety strategy are:

- The reduction of fires in business premises and their associated injuries

- Reduction of risks to our firefighters by reducing the demand on the service

- Business and economic growth of our communities

- Introduction of new ways of working to address the areas of improvement required from our inspection by HMICFRS

- Our vision to reduce community risk and Safest People, Safest Places

- Statutory legislation and guidance

4.   Our Values and Behaviours

Through the professional, innovative and effective delivery of the business fire safety improvement objectives, we will deliver the outcomes of this strategy and support the achievement of our Integrated Risk Management Plan.

PROFESSIONAL   **INNOVATIVE**   **EFFECTIVE**

PIE represents our values and describes the service our customers should expect. Tis element of 'being the best' is the external key message around the service we provide

The 4C's communicates the behaviours we expect all our people to display at work. Delivery of the 4 C's across the service will lead to an organisation which displays the PIE values and fulfils the organisation aim of 'being the best'

THE 4 C'S

How We Approach Challenges
Our people should approach challenged with flexibility, enthusiasm, motivation, passion, determination & resilience.

How We Conduct Ourselves
Our people should conduct themselves in an honest, trustworthy, reliable, accountable, consistent and respectful manner.

How We Collaborate
Our people should be approachable, supportive, encouraging, inclusive and show that they value their own development and the development of others when collaborating and working with others.

How We Drive Change Across the Organisation to Make a Difference
Our people should drive change by being creative, resourceful, courageous, original, clear and focused.

5.   Where do we want to be?

We deliver a schedule of fire safety audits generated by our risk-based inspection programme. We want to demonstrate the effectiveness of the programme by reducing fires and injuries in business premises and striking an effective balance between working with businesses and using our enforcement powers.

The use of technology for other activities throughout the service has improved data quality, created capacity and made processes more efficient. We want to be innovative in our approach to the collection and use of data by using technology to increase our understanding of the risks to business premises.

The use of technology and development of applications also enables us to increase our efficiency by reducing our contact time with businesses. We want to maximise our engagement with businesses by collecting all relevant information to inform both operational risk planning and our fire safety audits during a single visit.

The annual assessment of fire and rescue services in England showed concern for succession planning, the retention of qualified inspectors and the availability of out of hours specialist support. We intend strengthening our delivery model in these areas following our inspection. We want to empower our staff by giving them the technology, skills and competence to make intelligence led decisions that reduce risk in business premises. We also want staff to take ownership of identifying new premises and extending the reach of our fire safety audits into business premises to enrich our risk-based inspection programme.

Our culture plays an integral part in enabling us to achieve our vision. Through the key objectives set within this strategy, we aim to support the creation of a positive, inclusive culture that encourages innovation and continuous improvement. We want our staff to demonstrate the behaviours and standard code of ethics required for fire safety regulators, which are:

- Respect for life, law, the environment and public good;
- Honesty and integrity;
- Accuracy and rigour;
- Responsibility for direction, conduct and communication.

Culture is at the heart of everything we do, and we understand that the actions we take and the decisions we make through this strategy form part of our cultural journey. We believe achieving the right culture will enable us to give the best services to our communities and be the best fire and rescue service.

6.   Key Principles

The delivery of our business fire safety strategy will be achieved by applying key principles which reflect our investment and trust in our staff.

- We commit to invest in our staff to improve their expertise, creating a more competent and professional service.
- We understand that improved skills and knowledge will increase the consistency of regulation and provide greater reassurance of the professionalism of our staff to businesses and members of the public.
- We understand that regulatory competence and effective development of our staff are essential to delivering effective regulation.
- We expect our staff to apply the NFCC behaviours and standard code of conduct for fire safety regulators in the delivery of business fire safety activities. these are:

    o We expect all our staff to have respect for life, law, the environment and public good. Our staff have a duty to obey all applicable laws and regulations and give due weight to facts, published standards and guidance and the wider public interest;
    o We trust our staff to uphold the highest standards of personal and professional conduct including openness, honesty and integrity;
    o Our staff have a duty to acquire and use wisely the understanding, knowledge and skills needed to perform their role or task when delivering business fire safety activities;
    o Our staff have a duty to abide by and promote high standards of personal conduct, communicate clearly and provide direction as appropriate, setting the example for others to follow.

- We will support our business community to help them reduce risk and improve safety through compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and will use enforcement where appropriate and in accordance with the Regulators' Code.
- To achieve our aim, the business fire safety strategy has four key improvement objectives, outlined below. Each objective has an action plan which will be monitored regularly and refreshed as progress is made.

7. Business fire safety delivery model

Why are we doing it?

The business fire safety landscape has changed significantly in recent years and the aim of this workstream is to ensure that business fire safety delivery is agile and capable to respond to the changing demands in the fire safety environment. Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety (Building a Safer Future) by Dame Judith Hackitt described that the regulatory system for high rise and complex buildings was not fit for purpose, and called for a more effective regulatory and accountability framework to drive a cultural change. The NFCC competency framework outlines the training and formal qualifications needed to carry out fire safety audits. The annual assessment of fire and rescue services in England described that services are not doing enough to ensure compliance with fire safety regulations, the use of enforcement powers has fallen below the expected standard and that there are missed opportunities to use data and technology. Introducing new ways of working will meet the needs of business communities, introduce a greater level of resilience and new technology will create capacity for the delivery of other activities.

How are we going to get there?

- We will restructure the business fire safety section and train emergency response staff to the Level 3 Certificate in Fire Safety to support effective succession planning for the business fire safety team.
- The accuracy of our data and business intelligence is essential to provide the foundation to effective decision making and inform our risk-based inspection programme. We will develop a software application to use with existing technology to improve the quality of data at source and train staff to collect risk information during an audit.
- We will collaborate with the North East region to share skills, knowledge, expertise and resources to meet the future demands of our communities.
- We will develop a communication strategy to maximise our engagement with local businesses, and have increased support for our Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups.
- We will assess the options of using alternative products to facilitate the management of business fire safety activities.

We will measure success by having an increased number of staff with formal qualifications to deliver fire safety audits using a business fire safety application to improve data quality. We will have a communication strategy to engage with the business community and our revised fire safety team structure will comply with the competency framework. Each year we will evaluate the effectiveness of our risk-based inspection programme and enforcement action for business fire safety regulation under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

8. The fire safety competency framework

Why are we doing it?

The competency framework provides a common approach to achieving and maintaining fire safety competence, and recommendations that HMICFRS will use to measure the expertise of our staff. A key requirement of the framework is that fire and rescue services should develop an implementation plan to comply with the recommendations. Our aim is to have sufficient staff trained and qualified to ensure that we can deliver fire safety audits at business premises identified by our risk-based inspection programme.

How are we going to deliver it?

- We will develop an implementation plan to establish the milestones and timelines to establish our adoption of the framework.
- We will achieve compliance with the competency framework through changes in how we deliver business fire safety, collaboration and the training of our staff.
- Staff will be assessed and registered with an independent professional body to enable them to audit higher risk premises, and we will deliver training on the code of ethics expected of them.
- We will introduce a staffing rota to non-uniformed fire safety officers to provide out of hours availability and will ensure that effective succession planning will provide equal opportunities for all staff to progress to the fire safety manager role.
- We will train all new operational staff to carry out audits in lower and medium risk business premises and provide ongoing development to maintain their competence.
- We will provide training for our central business fire safety team to the design technician level and collaborate with other fire and rescue services in the North Eats region to ensure that access to fire safety engineers is available when required.

We will measure success by having the appropriate standards of competency to enable the effective discharge of the statutory duties and compliance with the competency framework.

9. Primary Authority Schemes

Why are we doing it?

A primary authority scheme is a collaborative legal partnership between enterprises and local authorities and enables businesses to receive assured advice on meeting fire safety regulations through a single point of contact. This ensures that businesses are supported and enables them to invest with confidence knowing that the resources they devote to compliance are spent efficiently. Primary authority schemes make the local regulation of businesses operating at multiple premises more consistent, and through collaboration, enables a business to understand how fire safety legislation applies to them, how they can achieve compliance and whether the controls they have in place are acceptable.

A primary authority scheme would support local economic growth and improve the consistency of local regulation. The service would also develop specialist knowledge and expertise in this area and would be able to support service delivery through cost recovery.

How are we going to deliver it?

- We will evaluate the capacity within the fire safety team and follow the recognised process for entering a partnership with an enterprise through the Office for Product Safety and Standards.
- If capacity and a suitable partner are available, we will then agree arrangements and cost recovery payment details to formalise the legal agreement.

If appropriate, success will be measured by having considered and assessed the impact of a Primary Authority Scheme and applying to enter into a partnership with an enterprise. If capacity and a suitable partner are available, we would have an effective relationship established with a local business to provide advice on legal requirements and acceptable levels of control. The primary authority scheme would operate on an effective cost recovery basis.

10.   Risk based inspection programme

Why are we doing it?

The risk based inspection programme is used to direct the delivery of fire safety audits by operational crews and the central fire safety team to reduce the risk of fire amongst the business community. Multiple entry points into business fire safety data sets over a number of years has gradually eroded the accuracy of some premises information. It is essential this programme holds accurate data, uses multiple datasets to identify premises risk and systematically drives the delivery of fire safety audits to reduce risk. By enriching the quality of data within the programme, local risk will be identified with greater accuracy and fire safety audits will be delivered in a systematic and consistent manner.

The IRIS database will enable regulators to share information about businesses that they mutually regulate and will assist in the identification of higher risk business premises. As we move towards the use of IRIS, it is essential that we have accurate data to support proportionate and risk base regulation.

How are we going to deliver it?

We will carry out a cleanse of our existing data sets to provide a baseline for improved data quality.

We will increase the number of premises held within the programme to increase the reach of fire safety audits into business premises that have previously not been inspected.

We will collaborate with other enforcement agencies on the IRIS programme to share information on risk to inform our risk based inspection programme and support the application of joint enforcement action.

Success will be measured by having a greater quantity and more accurate premises data. We will also have introduced the IRIS programme into our processes for identifying higher risk premises. Each year we will evaluate the effectiveness of our risk-based inspection programme and enforcement action for business fire safety regulation under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

11. Governance and Measuring Progress

We will monitor progress of this strategy in the following ways:

Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)

We will develop a suite of appropriate Key Performance Indicators to help measure the progress of this strategy.

Benchmarking

We will consider the success of this strategy against the performance of other fire and rescue services through fire statistics performance data published annually by the Home Office.

Reporting Progress

Scrutiny of progress against the strategy will be undertaken by the Service Programme and Performance Board (PPB) who will receive regular reports from the Area Manager responsible for Community Risk Management.

Measuring Perceptions/ Sense Checking

We will seek feedback from our operational staff and community safety team to inform the success of this strategy. Their opinions and suggestions will be used to influence improvements.

Currency

We will provide a progress report to the PPB and update the delivery plan annually to ensure that it remains current.