

Business Fire Safety and Fire Investigation Strategy

2017/18 – 2019/20 (Version 3 – revised 2019)



Where are we now

The Service's strategy in relation to Business Fire Safety (BFS) has always been to work proactively with businesses, offering support and advice to enable them to be compliant with the relevant legislation, ensuring our communities are safe and using enforcement action where necessary.

In 2011 operational crews were trained to enable them to complete fire safety audits under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO) on premises classified as low to medium risk, while the central BFS team audited the high risk premises and provided more specialist fire safety advice. This increased the range and number of businesses we engaged with and has contributed to a 34% reduction of primary fires in non-domestic premises from 131 in March 2011 to 86 in March 2016.

Also, in 2011 the Service amended its policy on responding to automatic fire alarms (AFA) which involved our response being risk based on the type of premises and the time of day the call was received. This combined with proactive work with businesses from the BFS team has reduced demand on the Service from false alarms caused by AFAs by 35% from 1,104 in March 2011 to 713 in March 2016.

The Service has introduced a range of measures to ensure the quality of fire safety advice we provide to our business community is of a high standard and consistent, this includes using the ISO 9001 quality management system to ensure our practises are regularly reviewed, audited and externally quality assured. We have a legal agreement with 'Blackhurst Budd Limited' who specialise in fire safety and they provide the Service with professional training, legal advice and support through any enforcement action we may need to take under the RRO. We have also adopted the training standards set out in CFOA's fire safety competency framework for all officers transferring into the BFS central team. These measures have ensured a high level of professional advice to our business community and appropriate enforcement action being taken where necessary under the RRO to ensure the safety of the public.

In June 2017 the Grenfell Tower fire resulted in the deaths of 72 residents and led to a review of building regulations and a public enquiry into the tragic events around the incident. The final report into the review of building regulation, titled 'Building a Safer Future' was published by Dame Judith Hackitt in May 2018 with a series of recommendations to be considered. The public enquiry into the fire at Grenfell Tower has commenced and is expected to continue for some time.

For fire investigation (FI) we have an experienced FI Manager with a background in crime scene investigation and a team of flexible duty officers trained to degree level. We also have a qualified fire investigation search dog which is coming close to the end of his working life and a decision has been made to train another dog for his replacement. We have worked closely with the coroner to ensure the quality of our FI reports and evidence presented during inquests are of a high standard and we have contributed to several successful prosecutions through the criminal courts for arson. We work collaboratively within the region on FI which is formalised through our 13/16 arrangements and a memorandum of understanding.

There are many drivers to continue developing and delivering our business fire safety and fire investigation strategy, examples include:

- Reduction of community risk;
- Reducing operational demand on the Service and thereby reducing risk to our firefighters;
- Business and economic sustainability in the community;
- Improving efficiency and effectiveness through collaboration and partnership working;



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- Delivering on our statutory duties; (Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005);
- Providing intelligence through FI that supports decision making;
- Reduction of arson and crime through providing evidence for prosecutions;
- Providing value for money to the community of County Durham and Darlington.



Where do we want to be

The Service has historically always provided a highly professional and effective service to our business community and the main aim of this strategy is to ensure that with reduced central resources we continue to do so and fulfil our statutory duty under the RRO and the Fire and Rescue Services Act. We need to improve our organisational resilience to ensure specialist skills and knowledge are maintained and not lost and we need to continue to look for new ways to deliver high quality advice to the business community. To assist with this, we will expand the specialist knowledge and qualifications in legislative fire safety beyond the central team to enhance the delivery by our operational crews and provide greater support to the central team.

Although there have been no changes to date in legislation, Fire Service statutory duties or professional standards, it's clear that the tragedy at Grenfell Tower will result in significant change and the Service will need to remain flexible to adapt and change its service provision to meet any future risks and demands. In anticipation of this, the Community Risk Management structure was reviewed in 2018 to better align resources to risk and the new structure will need to be implemented and working effectively to meet demand.

We will use improved data and intelligence to profile our business risk and ensure the programme of BFS audits are targeted to maximum effect to reduce risk in the business community and reduce demand on the Service.

We have similarly high standards within our fire investigation team, but with the introduction of new national standards we must ensure our teams are correctly qualified and maintain competency. We will continue to support the development of FI policy and procedures at a national and local level which will ensure that we continue to provide high quality, credible evidence for any coroner's inquest or criminal prosecution and to feed business intelligence both internally and to our partner agencies.

The business fire safety and fire investigation strategy can be summarised into five key areas of focus which are outlined below and covered in the following sections of this document. Each year specific projects will be aligned to the delivery of this strategy and this document will complement the suite of strategies supporting the integrated risk management plan and the Service's vision of having the 'Safest People, Safest Places'.



How do we get there

We have identified five key areas of focus to deliver this strategy which are set out below.

Business fire safety delivery model

Why are we doing it?

Business fire safety audits and providing technical advice and support are a statutory duty for the Service. As well as conducting audits within businesses in the service area, advice and guidance provided by specialist business fire safety officers will help to drive down instances of fire in the workplace making the community safer, protecting jobs and supporting the local economy. Proactive work in the business community will help to maintain high safety standards reducing the need for enforcement and minimising the impact on local industries. Looking for new ways of working will ensure that the service can support the local community whilst demonstrating value for money and efficient and effective working practices. This will also help to reduce demand on core services.

How are we going to deliver it?

- We will develop a cohort of operational staff to an enhanced level for fire safety visits operational (FSVOP) to enable them to conduct a higher level of audit and provide additional support to district fire safety officers and operational crews.
- We will also train apprentices to SFJ L4 in fire safety to increase the spread of qualifications across the Service. This will increase the knowledge and skills within our operational crews, allowing the central business fire safety team to focus on providing more technical and specialist advice and auditing higher risk premises. Increasing the knowledge and qualifications across the operational crews will also provide a degree of resilience and succession planning to ensure that the service can continue to fulfil its statutory duties. Further training of staff at all levels will ensure that good practice can be disseminated and that the level of qualification for fire safety auditors remains in line with current and future national guidance.
- We understand the need to engage proactively with businesses, so we will continue to deliver seminars and support the business community. We will also explain and communicate the outcome of enforcement action to raise awareness of the importance of current legislation and guidance with a view to pro-actively maintain standards of fire safety in the business community and thus reducing demand on the Service.
- To ensure that the service can maintain the levels and competencies of personnel in line with national standards whilst demonstrating value for money, opportunities for regional / national collaborative training and exchanges of good practice will be sought where possible.
- Further exploration of innovative methods of delivery of fire safety functions will be explored to further improve the service to the business community.

How will we measure success?

There will be an increased number of staff across the Service who are qualified to deliver enhanced fire safety audits, this will also be measured by the high level and complexity of audits operational staff can conduct. There will be a reduction in operational demand in business premises measured through KPIs. Innovative delivery methods have been trialled and where effective, implemented into core service delivery. The service continues to demonstrate that it meets its legal obligations.



Legislative compliance

Why are we doing it?

As part of duty under the RRO, it may be necessary to lead and support legal proceedings if fire safety regulations are breached. To this end the Service needs to ensure that it can successfully defend itself and the Combined Fire Authority against legal challenge. Personnel also need to have the appropriate skills and training at the correct level in relation to legislation to maintain professional standards. Using collaborative working for legal advice, support and training, we will demonstrate value for money in our services. By focussing on legislative compliance, the service can ensure that it remains legally compliant whilst remaining flexible to changes in legislation.

How are we going to deliver it?

- We will review our legal partnership arrangements to ensure they continue to be effective and provide a valuable professional service.
- We will ensure that all relevant personnel receive appropriate training and guidance in relation to fire safety legislation and the legal process.
- We will debrief and record the outcomes for all significant business fire safety events to ensure that learning and experience is captured and retained. We will specifically record learning outcomes from the recent prosecution taken by the service in 2016/17 and ensure organisational learning is used to train current and future business fire safety officers in preparation for any further prosecutions that may be necessary.
- The increased knowledge, skills and qualification across the operational crews noted in the delivery model section above will increase resilience within the Service to deliver our statutory duty.
- We will respond to fire service circulars and information from the business community in relation to changes in fire safety legislation and where necessary make changes to processes and training to ensure that the service maintains compliance and relevancy.
- The current ISO 9001 standard will be maintained and developed in line with current and future guidance.

How will we measure success?

There will be an increased number of personnel across the Service with fire safety qualifications who will be able to demonstrate appropriate knowledge and understanding of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and related legislation. Operational crews can deliver higher risk and more complex fire safety audits under the RRO. Significant fire safety events will have been debriefed, recorded for future reference and learning outcomes actioned. The increased resilience within the Service will ensure we can continue to conduct business fire safety duties without loss of continuity as people leave or move around the Service. The Service can react quickly to changes in legislation and guidance and can demonstrate compliance with its statutory duties.



Fire safety audit risk profiling

Why are we doing it?

The Service has instigated and annually reviews its risk based re-inspection programme of business premises within the Service area in line with national and local risk profiling. This is used to direct the workloads of operational crews and the business fire safety central team. It is important to ensure that we use various sources of data and information to target our resources, which is key to ensuring that the Service can deliver fire safety work efficiently whilst remaining focussed on the premises at higher risk of fire. The use of an intelligence driven approach will ensure that we are not just making places safer but will also ensure that fire safety work remains effective in reducing risk. This work will help to reduce the number of incidents of fires reported in the workplace, improving safety for the public and reducing demand on front line operational resources. Using data to develop a business risk modelling tool to identify higher risk business premise types and risk profiles in addition to existing methods will help to ensure an appropriate and current priority for our inspection programme.

How are we going to deliver it?

- We will utilise national data and information, where appropriate, to help feed our re-inspection programme and to keep our premises risk profiling current and accurate. Local intelligence and operational data will also be used to influence our future inspection regime.
- We will work with key partners and other fire and rescue services to develop a business fire risk modelling tool to identify higher risk premises and business typing within the service area. This tool will be used to improve profiling of businesses and will allow the business fire safety central team to use greater data and intelligence to allocate workloads and direct operational personnel towards key themed audits based on risk. Ultimately, this should allocate and target resources more effectively, providing advice and interventions which improve safety and reduce operational demand in business premises.
- The current programme will be monitored to ensure that it remains relevant and timely, based on information and intelligence. Where necessary this will be amended to reflect any emerging risks or new guidance and maintain its effectiveness.

How will we measure success?

A local business fire risk modelling tool has been developed, is operational within the Service and being used to inform the planned workloads and audit programme. The more effective targeting of resources will reduce operational demand in business premises which will be measured through KPIs.



Fire investigation standards

Why are we doing it?

The Service conducts fire investigations at levels one to three as part of its statutory duty and has developed a recognised level of competence for all the investigators which has ensured that fire investigations are conducted both professionally and at a high standard. This has led to numerous successful convictions of perpetrators for fire crime. However, the service needs to ensure that it is compliant with current legal and national standards to protect it from challenge and to remain efficient and accountable when performing fire scene investigations. It is essential that relevant fire investigations are conducted in collaboration with the police to ensure consistency and efficiency in respect to investigation methodology and approach, this will include sharing of resources where appropriate to do so. It is also important to ensure that data and intelligence obtained from fire investigations is used to feed the fire safety audit programme and community safety preventative work.

How are we going to deliver it?

- From 1 April 2017, the new Code of Practice for investigators of fires and explosions for the Criminal Justice System in the UK will take effect. We will ensure the Service's fire investigation practises and procedures are compliant with this code of practise, this will include certifying all level 2 & 3 fire investigators in the Skills for Justice Level 5 certificate in fire investigation.
- We will work in collaboration with the police to introduce and then maintain the ISO 17020:2012 standard for investigation scene management.
- We will explore innovative methods of delivery for fire investigation as well as identify new equipment where appropriate to allow investigations to be more effective and efficient whilst remaining robust against legal challenge.
- We will also seek to maintain the Service's fire investigation search dog capability beyond the working life of our current dog. This resource will be offered out to other fire and rescue services as part of a national register to assist with the continued funding of this provision. We will explore further partnership collaboration arrangements in relation to FI and where possible, resources will be shared between partners to enable effective fire scene management whilst providing value for money.

How will we measure success?

The Service will be able to achieve and maintain accreditation with the ISO 17020:2012 standard for investigation scene management. All fire scene investigators will have successfully been trained, equipped and subsequently can demonstrate compliance with this standard. The current fire investigation search dog provision is maintained and a replacement dog has been acquired, trained and funding secured



Fire investigation development and collaboration

Why are we doing it?

It is important to work with other key partners such as the police and universities to ensure that the Service can maintain an early strategic viewpoint on good practice, innovation and the future direction of fire investigation. Working with universities will help the Service develop and deliver training courses and research that will allow us to become a national trailblazer in the field of fire investigation; influencing policy, practice and procedure. This in turn will raise the professional standards of fire investigation within the Service and allow continuous improvement. Furthermore, potential funding opportunities for collaborative working with academic bodies can be explored (such as knowledge transfer partnerships). Working in collaboration will also give the opportunity to offer personnel and resources nationally as part of mutual aid and to deliver accredited training. This has the potential of income generation and increasing the skills and experience of the fire investigation team.

How are we going to deliver it?

- We will continue to support the CFOA national fire investigation working groups and ensure that we continue to influence policy, procedure and the future direction of fire investigation at a national a local level.
- We will publicise our collaborative work to raise the profile of the Service and to gain national recognition as a leader in this field and as a certified provider of the Skills for Justice Level 5 certificate in fire investigation.
- The Service will continue to support the regional mutual aid agreement for the sharing of personnel and resources in respect of fire investigation which will allow for resilience and capacity whilst delivering value for money.
- Our relationship with the police will be strengthened in relation to joint investigations and investigation practice to manage demand on core service delivery and remain robust from legal challenge. We will offer resources, where appropriate, on the national level to gain experience and skills whilst raising the profile of the service in relation to fire investigation, for example use of the fire investigation search dog.

How will we measure success?

We are recognised nationally as a provider of quality fire investigation training and have delivered courses in the Level 5 certificate in fire investigation certified under Skills for Justice and have a series of academically accredited courses available for delivery. Evidence of quality of delivery of these courses is available with positive course evaluation and successful completion rates.



Measuring Progress

In addition to the specific measure under each of the five key areas of focus in this strategy, we will monitor progress 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.
- **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 Area Manager, Community Risk Management.
- **Measuring Perceptions/ Sense Checking**
 - We will regularly ask for feedback from our operational staff and the business fire safety team, to inform us of our progress with this strategy. Their opinions and suggestions will be used to measure and influence improvement.
- **Keeping it current**
 - We will provide a progress report and update the plan annually to ensure it remains current.



Priority Activities

Each of the key improvement objectives are underpinned by priority activities and prioritised over the next 3 years.

Business fire safety delivery model

1 = 2017/18

- Train a cohort of operational supervisory managers to an enhanced level for FSVOPs to enable them to conduct higher risk and more complex audits;
- Begin 24-month delivery of fire safety audit training to Skills for Justice Level 3 for the new apprentices and operational trainees.

2 = 2018/19

- Ensure the new Community Risk Management structure is established and working effectively;
- Train a cohort of operational supervisory managers to Skills for Justice Level 4 fire safety certificate to provide formal qualifications for FSVOPs and enable them to conduct higher risk and more complex audits;
- Continue the 24-month delivery of fire safety audit training to Skills for Justice Level 4 for the new apprentices;
- Further develop links to the business community focusing on the BME community and small businesses;
- Develop skills in the business fire safety team in relation to fire engineering and explore opportunities for regional and national collaborative training;
- Review the quality assurance process for FSVOP work to ensure quality of delivery is to a high standard.

3 = 2019/20

- Explore innovative methods to support our business community and improve our business fire safety delivery model.
- Continue to develop links to the business community focusing on the BME community and small businesses;
- Following the restructure of CRM in 2018/19 and the approval to include the project post on the permanent structure of the Business Fire Safety team a Green Book Business Fire Safety Officer will be recruited.
- Continue to develop Operational Fire Officers to Level 4 Certificate in Fire Safety standard.
- Support the Regional Fire, Fire, Fire collaboration work and explore opportunities for closer working.

Legislative compliance

1 = 2017/18



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- Revise the current practice notes in relation to enforcement action and specifically ensure learning from the RRO prosecution in 2016/17 is captured;

2 = 2018/19

- Identify and develop future members of the business fire safety team as appropriate via the service succession planning procedure;
- Review our legal partnership arrangements to ensure they continue to be effective and provide a valuable professional service;
- Respond to any changes in legislation, guidance or statutory duties anticipated from the review of building regulations and the Grenfell Tower enquiry.

3 = 2019/20

- Respond to any changes in legislation, guidance or statutory duties anticipated from the review of building regulations and the Grenfell Tower enquiry.

Fire safety audit risk profiling

1 = 2017/18

- Review the re-inspection programme using data from various sources to ensure that it is based on an intelligence led approach.

2 = 2018/19

- Develop a business fire risk modelling tool to support the effective allocation of workloads and audit risk profiling which will reduce risk in the business community.

3 = 2019/20

- Evaluate the effectiveness of the business fire risk modelling tool.
- Develop a business fire risk modelling tool to support the effective allocation of workloads and audit risk profiling which will reduce risk in the business community.

Fire investigation standards

1 = 2017/18

- Review and amend fire investigation practises and procedures to ensure compliance with the Code of Practise for investigators of fires and explosions for the Criminal Justice System in the UK.

2 = 2018/19

- Continue work to ensure compliance with the Code of Practise for investigators of fires and explosions for the Criminal Justice System in the UK;
- Certify fire investigators to Skills for Justice Level 5 in fire investigation practice;
- Recruit and train new fire investigators in line with succession planning procedures.



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3 = 2019/20

- Further explore evolving good practise, innovation and opportunities for collaboration in fire investigation and implement where appropriate;
- Review joint fire investigation MOU with Durham Police to comply with ISO 17020:2012;
- Recruit and train new fire investigators in line with succession planning procedures.

Fire investigation development and collaboration

1 = 2017/18

- Promote the Service nationally as certified centre to provide the Skills for Justice Level 5 certificate in fire investigation.

2 = 2018/19

- Continue to promote the Service nationally as a certified centre to provide the Skills for Justice Level 5 certificate in fire investigation;
- Review MOU with the Police for joint fire investigations.

3 = 2019/20

- Work with regional partners to develop and deliver innovative training sessions on Fire Investigation.

