



Northamptonshire
Fire and Rescue Service

Chief Fire Officer's Report 2019

Making Northamptonshire Safer





Introduction

Welcome



2019 was a significant year in the history of our Fire Service and a year of firsts. After more than 40 years as part of Northamptonshire County Council, we became a stand-alone Fire Authority under the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC). This means that for the first time, the Chief Officers of the Service are in control of our own budget and can decide how to best spend our funding to make the community safer.

The Service's strategic direction is set out in the PFCC's first Fire and Rescue Plan and our own Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). Together these documents outline what we want to achieve and how we intend to do it. During 2019, we also received our first inspection from Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), read more about this on page 11.

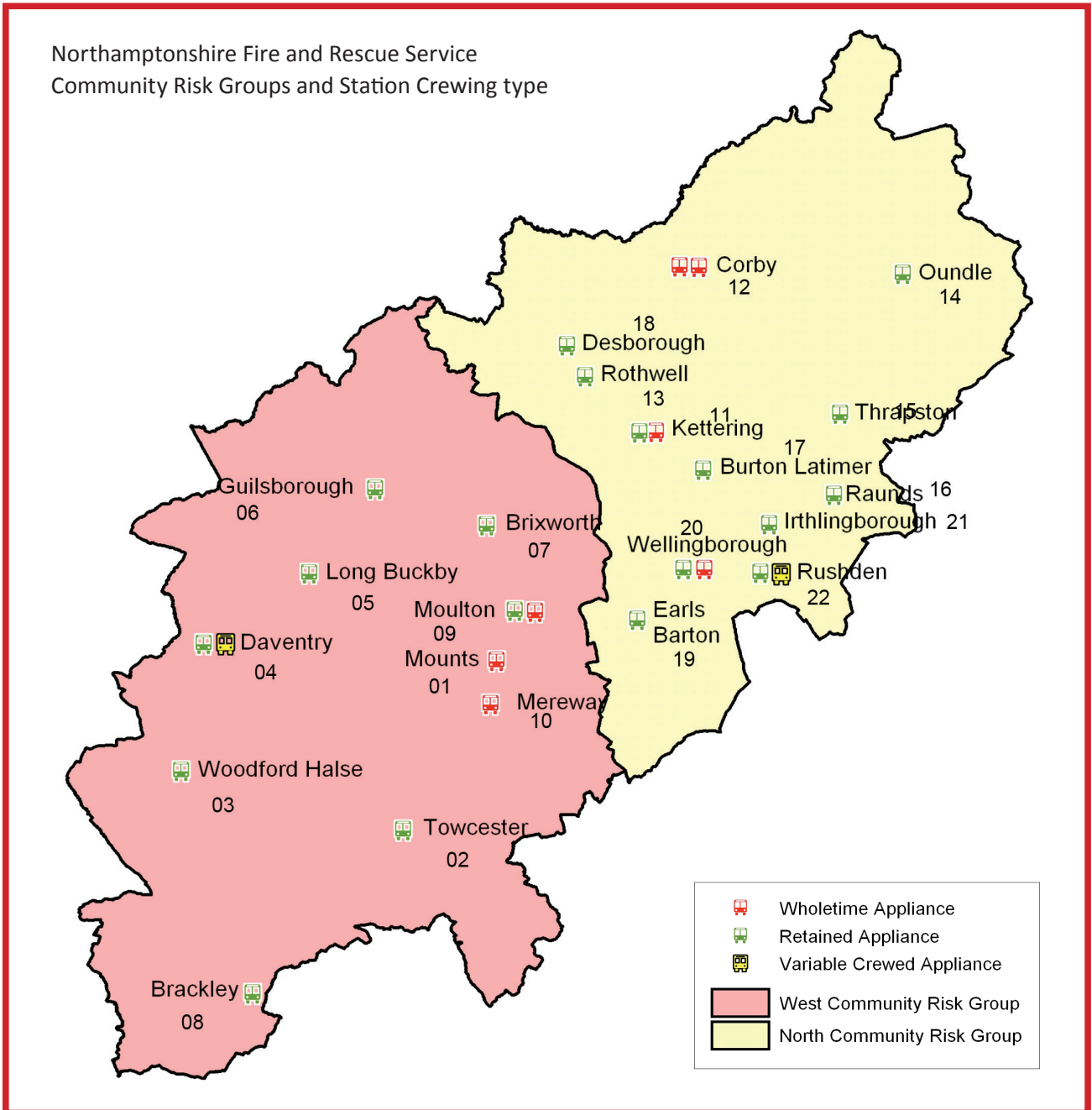
The priority in this first year under the new governance arrangements has been to improve the financial stability of the service and to focus on improvements in our core services. At the same time we have been working towards greater collaboration with the Police, particularly in the areas of estates and enabling services.

This report provides an overview of 2019 and a look forward to 2020 and beyond.

Darren Dovey
Chief Fire Officer

About us and our community

For the period January - December 2019





1769 fires

291 deliberate primary
449 deliberate secondary
151 non domestic
336 dwelling
1 fatality (primary)



**308
accidental
fires in
dwellings**



**141
flooding
incidents**



**244
medical
co-responder**



**attended
537 RTCs**
with 94 rescues
from RTCs



**809 full
Fire Safety
Inspections**



**1913
false
alarms**



**4169
Home Fire
Safety Checks**



**203
assisting
other
agencies**



**113
effecting
entry**



**62
animal
rescues**



**51
hazardous
materials**



**1 HMICFRS
inspection**



**92 FOI
requests**



**360 other
callouts**



Governance change

In January 2019, we changed our governance arrangements and Stephen Mold (the PFCC) became the Fire Authority. It was anticipated that this change would put us in a more stable financial position, and so allow us to plan more effectively.

In just 12 months, we have achieved the following:

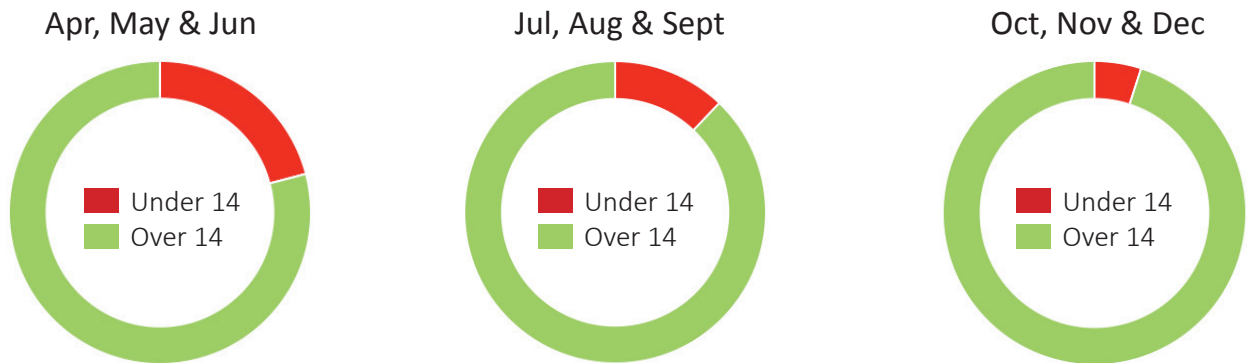
- Recruited into staff vacancies and created a small number of new posts in key departments—this has provided capacity across areas such as fleet, Information & Communications Technology, Prevention and Protection.
- Reviewed our capital spending requirements for the short to medium term, building plans which will invest in our fleet, equipment, ICT and property. Initially these plans will allow for recovery due to historical capital underinvestment.
- Twenty new firefighters will start their initial training in February 2020. In addition during the year we aim to increase the number of firefighter posts by 12 improving our capacity and resilience.
- We have focussed on improving the number of fire engines available in the county and reducing the response times—see opposite page.



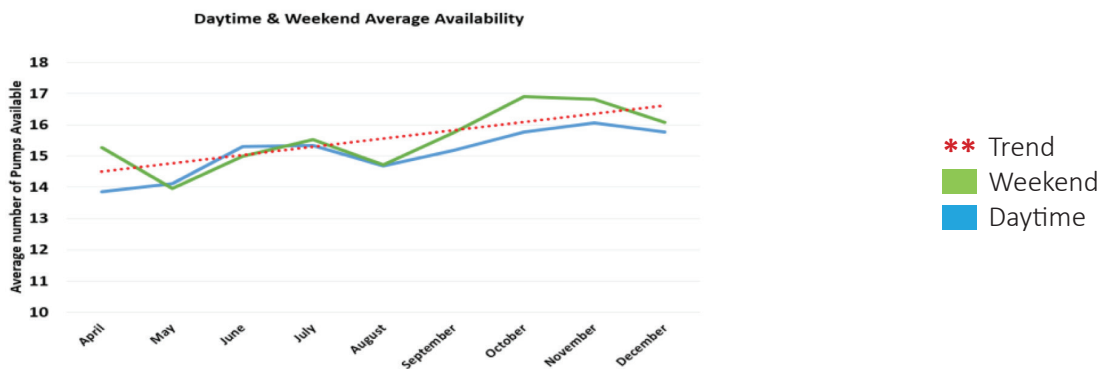
Availability

For the period April - December 2019

We have altered the way we monitor the availability of our fire engines, as a result we now have much more detail. We made this change in early 2019 and in March (within our IRMP) we outlined our intention to maintain a minimum of 14 fire engines. The result of these changes and of the improved outcome for Northamptonshire can be seen here:



We also stated that we would “Improve availability and resilience, particularly during daytime and weekend”. The data tells us that we are already showing an improvement:



These figures are based on the number of fire engines with a full crew, and so able to attend any incident type. In addition to this we have response vehicles and crews who would attend specific incident types.

Response times

We set our new response standard within our IRMP; an average of 10 minutes response time to all incidents, at the end of 2018, this was 11 minutes 15 seconds.



Our year at a glance

January 2019



The governance transfer from Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) to the Office of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner has provided (NFRS) with a more solid financial foundation to plan for the longer term

February 2019



Northamptonshire Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner, NFRS, Northamptonshire Police and NCC have formed a Strategic Roads Alliance with plans to make the county's roads and footpaths safer for everyone who uses them

March 2019



Firefighters receive a new, gold coloured personnel protective fire kit - the first major change the service has seen in 15 years. The light, modern design is aimed at protecting staff from heat penetration as well as maximising their freedom of movement to carry out rescue duties

April 2019



Police and Fire team up to tackle parking outside schools in East Northamptonshire. School staff had highlighted the dangers of parking inconsiderately and illegally, potentially delaying an operational response

May 2019



A major fire broke out at a business in Kettering. Eighteen fire engines were sent in the initial stages and the majority of firefighters on scene from the outset were on-call (62%). On-call firefighters are a valuable part of our resilience, helping enable us to respond to incidents of this size

June 2019



A campaign to highlight the risk of grass fires during warm summer months was launched, as we attended 378 fires affecting grassland, woodland and crops during the previous year

July 2019



More than 1,000 pieces of old personal protective fire kits, formerly used by NFRS, were donated to firefighters in Lebanon via the humanitarian charity Operation Florian

August 2019



We were represented at the Brighton Pride event, celebrating equality and inclusivity. We will be attending Northampton Pride in 2020, as the first Pride Parade through Northampton town centre will take place in July

September 2019



A recruitment campaign for new whole-time firefighters was launched, with demonstrations on operational equipment, entry requirements and information about the pathway to becoming a firefighter. As a result we have recruited 20 new firefighters who will start their training in Feb 2020

October 2019



The tradition carries on again this year with local residents visiting Long Buckby and Burton Latimer fire stations to carve their pumpkins and add them to the drill tower as part of community Halloween celebrations

November 2019



Our annual awards ceremony is held, offering us an opportunity to recognise staff achievements, celebrating long service and good conduct as well as awards for bravery and outstanding community engagement

December 2019



Firefighters from NFRS set up a training exercise involving a staged, high rise fire at an empty office block. Five fire engines and a drone were used in this training exercise in dealing with a fire in a tall building

Keeping you safe and making you aware: Risk, Prevention and Protection

Protection



Our Fire Protection team helps businesses understand their legal obligations under The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and also tackles the causes of false alarms and arson. During 2019, the team ran a successful recruitment process to increase the number of fire protection officers in the team by three. These new starters are currently working through their requisite training and will soon be undertaking inspections and helping to improve fire safety compliance within the county.

Case study - landlord prosecution

A landlord who owned a string of properties in Northampton was sent to prison after pleading guilty to 26 counts relating to breaches of fire safety law.

This was a significant piece of work for fire protection officers who raised concerns with the landlord about fire safety issues at his properties, including smoke detectors without power or covered with Sellotape. However, the owner did not engage with officers at the earliest opportunity to address the issues.

The landlord faced eight months in prison after he was handed separate prison sentences to run concurrently.

The fire service welcomed the result of the case as a strong message to other landlords that action will be taken if fire safety is disregarded.

Operational Learning



We have well-established mechanisms to capture learning from our operational response incidents: locally (debriefs) and nationally, within the sector (National Operational Learning Tool) and with our multi-agency partners (Joint Organisational Learning).

These identified learning outcomes enable the service to make continuous improvement through the development of Operational Guidance and Training.



Operational Risk Intelligence



We also have robust processes to capture detailed risk information on specific premises (Site Specific Risk Information – SSRI) within the county. We gather site information about identified hazards and known risks to support our operational response. This is necessary to ensure the health, safety and welfare of our staff, the public and to help mitigate the impact to communities and the environment should an incident occur. All SSRI information is available to fire crews on the incident ground. This information is also shared with other Fire and Rescue Services that border our county who may support our response.

Prevention

During 2019, we completed over 4000 Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSC). These visits are targeted to reach the most vulnerable and are part of a firefighters' role. In addition, we have a small team of dedicated staff who deliver these.

Case study - Home Fire Safety Check

We received a referral about X by a family member, because he needed a smoke alarm. His home was poorly maintained, cold and neglected. X said that since his wife had passed away he couldn't be bothered with anything. X was very clear he didn't want us to contact Adult Social Care.

During the initial visit, the Home Safety Team noticed that X had military service history and were able to have a conversation with him building some rapport and trust. X was shown literature for the Royal British Legion Services and after the discussion was happy to be referred to them.

X connected to other veterans – helping to prevent isolation. He accessed the Poppy Calls service for basic housing repairs. The Home Safety Team were concerned about the potential for carbon monoxide poisoning and so a referral was made to Care and Repair Northamptonshire. Winter Warmth measures were provided and the gas boiler was tested to check it was safe.

X stated "My son was worried about my safety and wanted you to come and fit alarms, you didn't have to do those extra things for me but they have made a difference I can't put into words."

How much do we cost and how do we spend it?

How do we compare?

HMICFRS have introduced a set of figures which provides the public with a possible financial comparator for Fire and Rescue Services. This is based on data about the county population and the number of operational firefighters, and so provides a figure for each Fire and Rescue Service. In Northamptonshire, our firefighter cost per person per year is currently £3,570 below the national average (2018/19).

As we became a stand-alone Fire Authority in 2019, for the first time we were able to raise our own Council Tax precept for the 2019/2020 financial year. We set the precept at £60.76 for a band D property, which was a rise of £1.76 (2.99%) on the precept inherited from Northamptonshire County Council at the time of the transfer to the PFCC. This has allowed the service a level of improved financial stability.

However, as a service Northamptonshire has the second lowest council tax precept for a Fire and Rescue Service in the Country, and at £60.76 it is significantly lower than the average for a Fire Authority of £74.

The amount of council tax you pay towards the Fire and Rescue Service is determined by your council tax band.

This means that the service is working in a very tight financial environment, a fact highlighted by HMICFRS in their inspection report (initial visit November 2018).

Income	2019/2020 (£m)
Revenue Support & Top Up Grants (20%)	5.0
Section 31 Grant (2%)	0.4
Pensions Grant (4%)	1.0
Business Rates (12%)	2.9
Council Tax Surplus (2%)	0.4
Council Tax (60%)	14.9
Total Income	24.6

Expenditure	2019/2020 (£m)
Local funding passed to the Chief Officer (82%)	20.1
Enabling services (15%)	3.8
Capital financing (0.5%)	0.1
Office of the PFCC (2%)	0.4
Contributions to reserves (0.5%)	0.2
Total Expenditure	24.6

Looking ahead to 2020/21



£25.3m

**2020/2021
budget**

Whilst there is still a tight financial forecast, our funding has been set for 2020/21.

HMICFRS Inspection

HMICFRS independently assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of fire and rescue services. We were inspected in November 2018, whilst still under the governance of NCC.

Overall we were graded as requires improvement. Below are the three inspection areas and the grades that were given against set criteria.

The HMICFRS inspection was based around three questions:	IRMP Strategic Objective		
1. How effective is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?	Keeping our communities safe and well	Effectiveness	Requires Improvement
		Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies	Good
		Preventing fires and other risks	Requires Improvement
		Protecting the public through fire regulation	Requires Improvement
		Responding to fires and other emergencies	Inadequate
		Responding to national risks	Requires Improvement
2. How efficient is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?	Making the best use of our resources	Efficiency	Requires Improvement
		Making best use of resources	Requires Improvement
		Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future	Requires Improvement
3. How well does the fire and rescue service look after its people ?	Keeping our staff safe and well	People	Requires Improvement
		Promoting the right values and culture	Good
		Getting the right people with the right skills	Inadequate
		Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	Requires Improvement
		Managing performance and developing leaders	Requires Improvement

The final report from HMICFRS was not published until June 2019 but we initiated improvement plans in January 2019. The change of governance provided a more stable financial footing and enabled us to put plans in place to start to address those areas considered as inadequate or requires improvement.

As a result of the inspection we re-structured the Service to ensure we had strategic oversight of the issues. In addition we immediately changed the way we monitor the number of fire engines available and formalised the reporting mechanisms to ensure better proactive and reactive management of fire engine availability. We recruited and trained more on-call firefighters and also better managed the number of existing staff who worked additional shifts, so improving our overall availability. See page 5 for the impact on our community outcomes.

We changed the way our staff are organised in order that they are able to be released to undertake “risk critical” training without impacting on appliance availability. We also put in place monitoring and audit processes to ensure that all staff were maintaining their competencies so that they were safe while undertaking their role.

The HMICFRS revisited the service in June 2019 and noted that the service had made “Significant improvements” since the original inspection, with a revisit due in March 2020. We will publish the outcome of this once known.

Moving forward

During 2019, we sought to stabilise the Service and set the foundations for recovery and investment. As we enter our second year as a stand-alone fire authority, we are set to build on this and have initiated a number of actions as outlined in our IRMP. These actions aim to improve community outcomes, as well as improving organisational performance.

Examples of these are below:

Response

We aim to increase our number of firefighter posts by 12 to bolster the availability of fire engines during the daytime and so reduce our average response times to under 10 minutes as well as improve our average number of fire engines available to 20.

Prevention

We aim to increase the number of Home Fire Safety Checks to 5000 per year, targeted at those most at risk from fire.

Protection

We will review our legislative fire safety inspection regime in light of the outcomes of the Grenfell enquiry.

Collaboration

We will continue to deliver joint community safety initiatives with our partners making a difference to communities across the county.

It has been a challenging year as we adapt and rebuild as an organisation. I am proud of the achievements we have already made, and of how all our staff continue to work together to protect the public.

I thank everyone who works for Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service for their hard work and commitment.





Stephen Mold

Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner
for Northamptonshire