

2021



LOCAL FIRE AND RESCUE PLAN

WESTERN ISLES

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Introduction

It is my pleasure to introduce the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's (SFRS) Local Fire and Rescue Plan 2021-23 for Na H-Eileanan an Iar, also known as the Outer Hebrides and the Western Isles. This sets out our priorities for improving community safety, whilst helping to address inequalities and enhancing the overall wellbeing of the communities of the Western Isles. In developing this plan, we have been mindful of the range of activities the SFRS might have to undertake in the Western Isles on any given day. These might include fitting a smoke alarm in the home of a vulnerable person, visiting a school to educate young people on the dangers of fire, rescuing someone involved in a road traffic collision or dealing with large wild fires similar to those experienced in recent years.

The role of the SFRS is changing to meet some significant future challenges such as social change, climate change and terrorism. The plan therefore outlines how we aim to meet the challenges ahead while delivering on making the Western Isles safer through improved outcomes. This includes how we will go about broadening our safety role in the community. To do this, we will build on our proven track record in prevention work and focus our attention on reducing the wider safety risks associated with unintentional harm. This is mainly driven by social changes such as an ageing population, so protecting these types of vulnerable people from harm in the home, such as slips, trips and falls is a priority for us in this plan.

Since March 2020 we have faced an unprecedented challenge in the form of a global pandemic. In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, we dramatically changed how we worked so that we could continue to deliver an emergency service whilst keeping our staff and the public safe. The pandemic is expected to have a lasting effect on society and this will change the way in which we deliver services in the long-term. The full implications are not yet known and this makes it difficult to make any far-reaching plans with certainty. As such we will keep the priorities of this Plan under regular review to ensure it remains relevant and appropriate.

The SFRS does not operate in isolation and this plan supports the crucial role of Community Planning in helping to deliver the vision, priorities and outcomes of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (CPP) through the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) and Locality Plans. All community partners must work closely together to ensure we tackle inequalities and improve the wide range of outcomes for our communities of the Western Isles. Building on our successes through partnership working, we believe that we can make the communities of the Western Isles safer and more secure, and therefore contribute towards the vision of being a great place to live, work and visit. The Plan will be subject to regular review. This will allow us to be reactive to local needs and the changing circumstances of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

Iain M Macleod

Local Senior Officer, Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland (WIOS)

National Context

Scottish Ministers set out their specific expectations for the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in the Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2016. This provides the outline we should follow to ensure our resources and activities are aligned with the Scottish Government's Purpose and national outcomes.

Our [Strategic Plan 2019-22](#) has been designed to meet these national expectations. Set against a complex and evolving backdrop our Strategic Plan encapsulates our mission, values and our strategic outcomes and objectives.



To ensure we can prevent the worse from happening or to be fully prepared to respond should we called, we need to be aware of any new changing risks which threaten the safety of communities or the workforce. When developing our most recent plan, cognisance was given to: our changing population and the forecasted rise in over 75s; doing what we can to balance social and economic inequality; climate change and the devastating impact the inclement weather can have on peoples' lives and livelihoods; and the threat of terrorism.

Our Strategic Plan is supported by a three-year Strategic Plan Programme which provides details on all the activities we intend to carry out to successfully achieve our ambitions. The

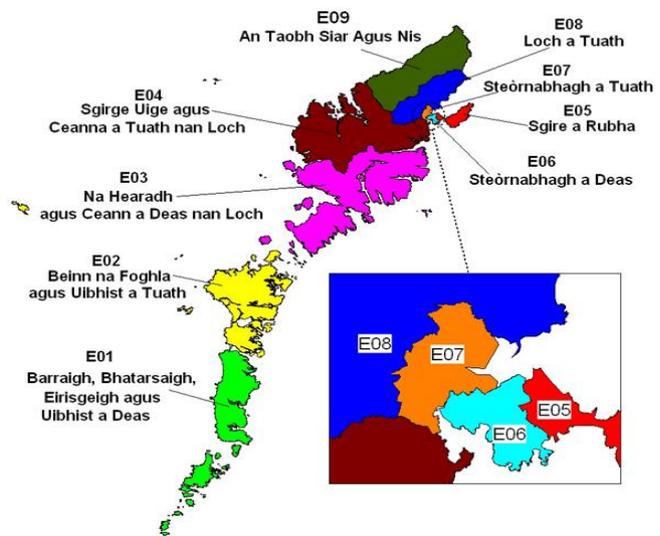
Programme informs our Annual Operating Plan, which provides specific detail on the actions we carry out each year, and from which our performance is scrutinised.

This Plan is a statutory Local Fire and Rescue Plan. It sets local direction to meet the strategic outcomes and objectives outlined above. It also demonstrates how we will contribute to Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs).

Local Context

Na H-Eileanan an Iar (The Western Isles; also known as The Outer Hebrides), are located to the north-west mainland of Scotland with a total population of 26,900 (mid-year estimates for 2016 from the Office for National Statistics) which is the third smallest Local Authority population in Scotland.

The main Islands are Lewis, Harris, North Uist, Benbecula, South Uist, Eriskay and Barra. The length of the islands measure approximately 130 miles from the Butt of Lewis in the North, to Barra in the South – over a third of the length of mainland Scotland – and cover an area of over 3000 square kilometres.



The traditional industries are crofting, fishing and weaving. The Outer Hebrides' location and geography present major social and economic challenges and while transport infrastructure and services, within and to and from the islands, have improved greatly in the last twenty years, significant challenges remain in terms of logistics and cost of living. Population sparsity, depopulation and demographic imbalance present further challenges.

Prevention of, and response to emergencies is provided by the crews of fourteen Retained Duty System Fire Stations (RDS) located throughout the islands led by a local Group Commander and supported by a team of officers and staff.

When the need occurs, additional specialist resources including Prevention and Protection (P&P – Fire Safety Enforcement and Community Safety and Engagement), Training Safety and Assurance (TSA), Operations, Finance, Human Resources and Organisational Development (HROD), Fleet and Asset Management are directly available to the Local Senior Officer. These national resources are designed to provide support to local function.

The Outer Hebrides presents a unique and diverse range of risks for the Fire and Rescue Service to protect and respond to. The main risks are geographical - coastal waters and coastline, expanses of crofting and moorland, isolated communities and inclement weather; and infrastructure related – ferry and air terminals, oil and gas depots and a mixed category roads network, plus schools, hospital and care facilities. In addition, there exists commercial activity that includes the whisky industry, weapons testing establishments, marine commerce and light engineering industry. The response to, and recovery from major emergencies as defined within the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 will continue through our participation in the Western Isles Emergency Planning and Coordinating Group (WIEPCG) which in turn links into the Highland Local Resilience Partnership. In times of severe weather, the local co-ordinating group is at the forefront of ensuring the safety of residents of the Western Isles, in many ways independent of outside assistance; this places SFRS at the very core of response and resilience in the Outer Hebrides. These arrangements include the emergency plans and agency specific operational orders and procedures and are intended to facilitate

an effective joint response to any emergency. These emergency plans are written in response to identified hazards and are recorded in the Highland LRP Community Risk Register.

The value of this integrated planning approach has never been more apparent than during the response to the Covid-19 pandemic which has been the principle focus for all service providers. The demonstrable support to the vaccination process alone demonstrates the value of integrated planning and cohesive activity for all Category 1 responders.

As a statutory partner in The Community Justice (Scotland) Act 2016, The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (CYPA) and GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child) provide a unique foundation to support the development of not only youth engagement activities but also can provide SFRS with links to our most vulnerable citizens.

The provision of community safety information and adjusting what, when and how we will communicate with communities is an important aspect of our work. The effective use of the media can support communities through targeted or generic safety information to the promotion of events across the Hebrides. Whenever possible we will deliver joint safety messaging along with our partners.

Performance Scrutiny

The Na H-Eileanan an Iar Local Fire and Rescue Plan is the basis on which SFRS performance is measured. This is done via the governance arrangements of Comhairle Na Eilean Siar, specifically the elected members of the Housing and Communities Committee. This Committee meets formally five times a year and SFRS report directly to the committee on alternate dates (alternating with Police Scotland). To ensure performance monitoring is consistent with our strategy we will work with our managers, staff representatives and wider partners to develop a comprehensive set of performance measures against the outcomes, priorities and objectives outlined in this Local Fire and Rescue Plan.

These measures will form the basis of our future performance reports, which will enable us to continue to provide relevant, accurate, timely and consistent data and information to maintain effective scrutiny and challenge both at national and local levels.

The Local Senior Officer, or their deputy will attend the Housing and Communities Committee and provide an update on progress against this plan, overall performance, and any other matters deemed relevant to the delivery of Fire and Rescue matters in the Outer Hebrides.

Local Priorities

1. Promoting Personal Safety and Wellbeing

Background:

Prevention of unintentional harm is a main tenet of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. In the context of this Plan, unintentional harm, or injuries because of fires in the home, slips, trips and falls all impact on the health and wellbeing of the communities of the Western Isles.

The SFRS has a statutory duty to promote fire safety under Part 2 (Section 8) of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 (as amended) to include provision of information and publicity aimed at preventing fire and reducing deaths and injuries, restricting fire spread and advising on means of escape from buildings in our communities. Therefore, this will remain as a central pillar within this priority but will actively consider how it can contribute to other risks in the community. With an ageing population and the desire to live longer and independently in your own home, the SFRS will look at how it can contribute to this by looking at 'home safety' in the broader context. This can only be achieved through effective collaboration with partners and we will do so through the priorities contained within this Plan, aligned to the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP).

The SFRS will work with partners on the Western Isles, ensuring that a robust referral process is established in line with the LOIP. This will ensure that the people who are most vulnerable from risk are provided with the necessary support to reduce that risk. SFRS personnel on the Western Isles will continue to promote and conduct safety visits within the home, targeting those deemed to be most vulnerable from harm.

We will achieve it by:

- Promoting, prioritising and undertaking Home Safety Visits to those who are deemed most vulnerable.
- Targeting our prevention activities to those who are deemed most vulnerable and at risk of harm.
- Working with partners to establish a robust information sharing and risk assessment methodology that will identify those most at risk.
- Supporting the LOIP.

Performance Indicators:

- The number of accidental dwelling fires.
- The number of accidental dwelling fire casualties and fatalities.
- The number of Home Safety Visits measured against the backdrop of risk.
- The number of Home Safety Visits referred to SFRS by partners.

Expected Outcomes:

- The Western Isles to offer attractive opportunities that improve the qualities of life wellbeing and health for all our people.

2. Non-Domestic Fire Safety

Background:

Non-domestic fires tend to involve businesses - the backbone of the Islands economy. Ensuring businesses are better protected and more resilient to fire, and can continue to contribute to the local economy is a key priority for us during these tough economic times, exacerbated by the pandemic from March 2020.

The SFRS has a statutory duty under Part 3 of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 (the Act) to provide advice and enforce fire safety regulations in most non-domestic premises. Approximately 147 non-domestic premises in WIOS are covered by the Act, which requires the duty holders to meet certain responsibilities in relation to maintaining safe business environments.

Our approach of educating and advising duty holders on how to build and maintain safe business environments, combined with enforcing our powers to ensure compliance is working effectively, means that in WIOS we have the lowest rates of non-domestic fires in the whole of Scotland.

We aim to build on this success by operating a risk-based fire safety audit programme, which is intelligence led and focusses our resources on auditing premises with high life risk and where there is greater likelihood of fire, most fatal fires occur at night when people may be less vigilant and at their most vulnerable. These will also include buildings important to our heritage and critical to our local infrastructure. This priority directly contributes to the broader aims of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP) – “A prosperous, well-educated and healthy community enjoying a good quality of life”. As key partners in the Partnership, SFRS will contribute directly to the pursuance of this vision.

We will achieve it by:

- Delivering the Fire Safety Audit Programme prioritising premises defined as 'high risk'.
- Engaging with, and supporting the business community to highlight their duties under the relevant fire safety legislation.
- Responding to concerns raised over fire safety compliance in non-domestic premises.
- Identifying fire trends in particular building types and conducting thematic audits.
- Auditing fire safety measures of non-domestic premises which have had a fire.

Performance Indicators:

- The number of non-domestic fires.
- The number of completed Fire Safety Audits measured against anticipated targets.

Expected Outcomes:

- Businesses and duty holders better understand their responsibilities regarding fire safety legislation.
- Non-domestic premises are safer and therefore the people who reside, work and visit them are consequently safer.

3. Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals

Background:

An Unwanted Fire Alarm Signal (UFAS) is an incident where an automated fire alarm system activates due to something other than a fire and results in the mobilisation of SFRS resources. Incidents of this type, which are entirely avoidable, commonly arise due to incorrect positioning of detectors, poor maintenance or poor management.

Emergency calls initiated by UFAS account for a high percentage of all incidents attended by SFRS. In the Western Isles, UFAS events were accountable for approximately 40% of SFRS mobilisations annually.

The SFRS aims to reduce the impact of UFAS on service delivery and ensure that our resources are available for genuine emergencies. Additionally, evidence suggests UFAS has a detrimental impact on businesses, economy and our RDS firefighters and can sometimes prejudice the safety of occupants, who may not react correctly when the system responds to a real fire, if they have already experienced many false alarms.

As a result of this, the reduction of UFAS has been identified as a priority in this Local Plan. Following public consultation nationally the following recommendations were presented and subsequently approved by the SFRS Board

- Call challenge all AFAs from non-domestic premises, unless exempt. No response is mobilised, if questioning confirms there is no fire, or signs of fire.
- Implementation of the preferred option is delayed until April 2023, and,
- The COVID-19 interim response to AFAs will remain in place until go live of the preferred option. (The interim response is a single fire appliance to AFAs of certain property types).

By adopting this change to its response, it's estimated that the Service will reduce UFAS by 57%. This additional capacity will provide opportunities for reinvesting into areas that would deliver greater value, such as upskilling staff, training and more prevention work.

Implementation of the preferred option will commence through a carefully planned and managed approach from January 2022 onwards, and this will involve working closely with stakeholders directly affected by any changes.

Local Senior Officer led engagements will aim to provide duty holders with support and guidance on considerations for fire protection, limiting false alarms, training staff and other relevant measures.

Nationally, duty holders will be fully supported by the SFRS, through a programme of sector specific fire safety seminars.

We will achieve it by:

- Identifying the cause of all UFAS and engaging with owner / occupiers of the premises to consider how to prevent further events.

- Monitoring and identifying premises with high UFAS activity and subsequently applying the SFRS UFAS Policy where appropriate
- Contributing to the ongoing analysis of UFAS activity and support preventative measures and initiatives being developed nationally.

Performance Indicators:

- Reviewing the number of attendances at non-domestic premises and the type of premises generating Unwanted False Alarm Signals across the Outer Hebrides.
- Evaluating the outcomes of occupier's demand reduction plans to review progress and identify and share good practice.
- Reviewing our attendances at UFAS incidents to ensure our attendances are based on an assessment of risk and demand.

Expected Outcomes:

- Disruption of local businesses and the impact on SFRS as a result of UFAS on the islands will be reduced.
- Improved safety of SFRS personnel and the community.

4. Emergency Response Preparedness and Community Resilience

Background:

The ability to respond to emergencies effectively while promoting community resilience is a key area of work for SFRS. In the rural context, considering the operational service on the islands is provided Retained Duty System (part-time firefighters). This means that the service is provided 'by the community, for the community'. The SFRS will continue to prepare for, and respond to major emergencies. The scope of such preparations may include responding to adverse weather events, natural disasters, chemical incidents or major transport incidents. It is essential that we have enough staff with the right skills in the right place at the right time to deliver our services when communities need them.

To achieve the above it is essential our Firefighters possess the skills, knowledge and expertise to respond to incidents which, by their nature can be varied in both their type and complexity. A key aim for the service is to develop resilience within our communities and as our role broadens so does the variety of incidents we support.

To ensure we are best placed to provide the broadening role, it is essential that the service continues to explore, develop and exploit opportunities to enhance community wellbeing and safety.

We will achieve it by:

- Ensuring appropriate numbers of staff are recruited, developed and equipped to fulfil the purpose of meeting our current risk profile while being adaptable to changing circumstances.
- Ensuring all known local risk information is obtained, communicated and tested.
- Working locally with partner organisations to ensure effective emergency response plans are developed for identified local risks including local business continuity plans.
- Fulfilling our statutory duties in relation to the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 by way of our contribution to WIEPCG, Highland Local Resilience Partnership and North of Scotland Regional Resilience Partnership.
- Explore and adopt innovative ways of delivering our core services as well as expanding our contribution to the safety of the population.

Performance Indicators:

- Monitoring RDS Establishment levels.
- Attending WIEPCG and other resilience working groups.
- CPR life-saving awareness skills delivered to communities.
- Operational Risk Visits completed.

Expected Outcomes:

- Assist and support the community to attract people to maintain a sustainable population
- Keeping our staff and members of the public safe should an incident occur.
- Reducing the financial burden and disruption caused to our communities when emergencies occur.

- Proactively helping the wider community by contributing to preventing emergencies, planning to mitigate their effects when they occur, and by adding value through focus on prevention and protection.

Review

To ensure this Local Fire and Rescue Plan remains flexible to emerging local or national priorities a review may be carried out at any time but will be reviewed at least once every three years. The latest review has contributed to the development of this updated document but within the same strategic planning period. A review may also be carried out if the Scottish Minister directs it or if a new Strategic Plan is approved. Following a review, the Local Senior Officer may revise the Plan.

Contact Us

We are fully committed to continually improving the service we provide to our communities and recognise that to achieve this goal we must listen and respond to the views of the public and our partners.

We use all feedback we receive to monitor our performance and incorporate this information into our planning and governance processes in order to continually improve our service. We are proud that the majority of feedback we receive is positive and we are keen to hear examples of good practice and quality service delivery that exemplifies the standards of service that we strive to provide for the communities of Scotland.

If you have something you'd like to share with us or you would like more information, you can get in touch in a number of ways:

Write to:

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