

Division(s):

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 SEPTEMBER

OXFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE – EMERGENCY RESPONSE STANDARDS REPORT FOR 2012-2013

Report by the Chief Fire Officer

Introduction

1. Since April 2005 Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service has had local Response Standards for attending emergency incidents in the County. Cabinet approved these standards on 22 June 2006. Additionally, the Chief Fire Officer was required to report annually on the Fire & Rescue Service's performance against these standards and bring forward any recommendations as appropriate.

Response Standards

2. Local Response Standards are as follows:
 - (a) 80% of all emergency incidents will be responded to within 11 minutes
 - (b) 95% of all emergency incidents will be responded to within 14 minutes
3. The above is measured by the time it takes to get the first fire engine to the scene from the time at which the fire station is first alerted.
4. In addition to the Response Targets for the first attending fire engine, OFRS sends sufficient numbers of vehicles and personnel to safely and effectively deal with the type of incident reported as determined by national and local risk assessments.
5. Despite the challenging nature of the standards, in the context of Oxfordshire as being both the most rural county in the South East and having over 50% of its inhabitants living in communities of 10,000 or less residents (as well as other specific factors identified below), OFRS continued to innovate and support the way it delivers its emergency response services in order to effectively manage its overall performance last year.
6. The following analysis breaks down the performance by month, district and fire risk area and explains the ways OFRS managed the identified pressures.

2012/13 Performance – Response Standards – Monthly Summary

Response Standards monthly summary April 2012 - March 2013

2012/13 by month	Total emergency incidents in scope	Incidents responded to <11mins	% response standards <11mins	Incidents responded to <14mins	% response standards <14mins
2012/04	306	245	80.07	286	93.46
2012/05	268	222	82.84	258	96.27
2012/06	255	208	81.57	239	93.73
2012/07	322	251	77.95	303	94.10
2012/08	280	237	84.64	270	96.43
2012/09	303	232	76.57	281	92.74
2012/10	267	215	80.52	247	92.51
2012/11	296	219	73.99	273	92.23
2012/12	291	219	75.26	263	90.38
2013/01	273	207	75.82	249	91.21
2013/02	273	200	73.26	249	91.21
2013/03	275	210	76.36	243	88.36
Totals	3409	2665	78.18	3161	92.73

Factors potentially affecting performance and associated risk mitigation

7. Below are factors that may potentially contribute to response standard levels and the mitigation already established and being implemented by Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service.
8. **Traffic:-** Increased traffic levels and the introduction of more widespread reductions in speed limits across the county have meant that the response of some fire engines proceeding to emergencies at certain times of the day has been impacted. As a result of these changes, the Service has reviewed which fire stations respond to which communities to ensure that the vehicles sent to an incident can provide the swiftest response.
9. For example, the access to the motorway is limited via the junctions within the county and the travel distance is dictated by where an incident is in relation to the junction. This has a direct impact on the attendance times for stations that respond to or via the motorway.
10. In addition, OFRS drivers are required to modify their driving dependent upon the risks (e.g. built-up areas, poor weather, night-time) to ensure that their

attendance is made in a safe and controlled manner, without endangering other road users.

11. The ultimate aim (as part of the introduction of the Thames Valley Fire Control Service) is to utilise an Automatic Vehicle Location System (AVLS) to ensure that the Service has comprehensive and 'real-time' information regarding the precise location of a fire engines and can mobilise the nearest every time, even when the vehicles are moving around the county. It is anticipated that this system will be in place by late 2014.
12. **Safety Policies:-** In relation to fire engines, all personnel are required to wear full personal protective equipment (PPE) prior to leaving the station (as opposed to dressing en route). This has added a short delay in turning out, but ensures additional safety whilst responding and the ability to deploy more quickly once in attendance.
13. **Weather:-** Following recent severe winters and significant flooding events, the Service continues to learn many lessons. Consequently, OFRS has reviewed its already well-established and well-rehearsed 'severe weather' procedures (along with other local emergency responders), specifically aimed at helping it to manage its response activities during such events. To date, this approach has ensured an effective response to all life threatening incidents during these periods of disruption – as well as the Service offering additional support to other OCC critical services where resources have allowed. Nevertheless, in both the winters of 2011/12 and 2012/13 attendance times have increased as a direct result of the severe weather.
14. **On-Call Stations:-** In the current economic climate (as people are having to do more to secure primary employment – and, subsequently, look to rebalance their work and home commitments) it has become increasingly more difficult to recruit and retain suitable personnel from the immediate vicinity of the county's 18 On-Call fire stations.
15. In response, OFRS has employed a number of initiatives in order to support the recruitment of on-call staff, as well as manage their on-going retention and cover any residual short-term deficiencies in their stations' emergency cover. For example, over the reporting period in question OFRS has:
 - Continued to develop the On-Call Support Officer network – focussing on recruitment, training and operational skills,
 - Used its full-time staff more flexibly fill short-term gaps – both individually and as a complete crew,
 - Worked with neighbouring fire & rescue services to provide mutual support in and around borders,
 - Provide managers and staff with the systems to help identify 'real-time' cover deficiencies in order to plan ahead and maximise crew availability throughout the day and week,

- Restructure of the Service to give more managerial resources both for day-to-day management of the on-call stations, as well as dedicated resources to assist in recruitment and retention,
- Widened the catchment area for recruitment to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of personnel available to crew the pump (albeit that this does have an effect on the time that it takes for these personnel to respond to the station and, in turn, increases the attendance time to an incident).

Reductions in Emergency Calls:-

16. As part of its integrated approach to community safety and well-being, OFRS continues to work closely with other services across the county council (such as Adult Social Care, Environment & Economy, Public Health – and Children, Education & Families), in order to focus its prevention activities on the most vulnerable and its protection work on both developing and established local businesses. Because of its on-going success in these areas, however, emergency calls have been steadily reducing in Oxfordshire as a result (see our Business Strategy 2013-15 and our Community Risk Management Plan 2013-18).
17. What this means in terms of the response standards, therefore, is that each remaining call that is responded to outside of our agreed response times accounts for a larger percentage of the overall performance totals.

Conclusion:-

18. Since the introduction of local response standards in Oxfordshire in 2005, the Service has continued to achieve good performance levels (within a few percentage points of the agreed targets) despite the challenging nature of the operating context that is outlined above in this paper.
19. To maintain this performance, local managers and the OFRS Senior Leadership Team (SLT) carry out regular reviews against the agreed response times, with the data being analysed to establish the reason(s) behind any under-performance. Where local station issues can be identified and addressed, these are managed locally and recorded. Where a more Service-wide or holistic approach is required, the issue is raised to SLT and specific reviews are undertaken. For instance, the Service recently carried out a full review of its pre-determined attendances for each of the stations' designated response areas - following changes to traffic management and revised county speed limits - to ensure that the most effective assets are mobilised to incidents (ultimately this will be superseded by AVLS, as detailed above).

RECOMMENDATION

20. **The Performance Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and comment in respect to the contents of this response standards annual report.**

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DAVID ETHERIDGE
Chief Fire Officer

Background Papers: Breakdown by district, area and station

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