



Annual Report 2014 - 2015

Cheshire West and Chester

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New law will save more lives

New safety laws which are expected to save dozens of lives a year have just been approved by the Government following a three-year campaign spearheaded by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.

The regulations – which make it compulsory for all landlords to fit smoke alarms in rented homes – came into effect on October 1st and follow a high profile campaign led by the Service and supported by the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA). "I am delighted that the Government recognised the strength of the case we put forward and the major improvements in public safety this simple step will bring about," said Mark Cashin, Cheshire's Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Chair of CFOA's Home Safety Committee.

While death and injuries from fires have reduced considerably in recent years, the majority of victims continue to be those who are most vulnerable, often living in private rented accommodation.

This change will improve the safety of families and stop dozens of people from losing their lives to fire each year.~

Staff from Cheshire have been working on the campaign for nearly three years, presenting evidence and research which was critical in persuading the Government to bring in the new regulations.

Under the new laws smoke alarms must be fitted on every floor of the property as well as carbon monoxide alarms in properties which burn solid fuels. Landlords must check the alarms are working at the start of every new tenancy with potential penalties of up to £5,000 if they don't comply.

To help landlords gear up for the new regulations the Government has provided Cheshire and other services with a number of free smoke and carbon monoxide alarms to give out to relevant landlords. Visit www.cheshirefire.gov.uk for more information.

Residents urged to stay Alert

Cheshire residents are being urged to sign up to a system which can give them vital information about major incidents and issues in their area.

The alert system is a completely free two-way community messaging system which allows people to receive key messages from the Service by text message, email or phone.

To register go to the Service's website - www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/MyAccount - and put in your home or work post code or that of a relative and choose the alerts you want. Topics include:

- major incidents and events
- news and safety messages
- fire safety news for local businesses
- news for the hard of hearing
- firefighter recruitment.

The secure countywide portal has been developed in partnership with Cheshire Constabulary so users can also register to get updates from them and other partners. It is part of a national Neighbourhood Watch network and meets strict Home Office guidelines on security and data protection. If people do not have internet access they can call 01606 868700.

Safety trends success

Fire chiefs have welcomed new figures which show continuing improvements in the safety of local communities across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.

During 2014-15 the Service attended a total of 7,281 incidents - 760 fewer than the previous year and 29% less than five years ago. Other safety trends over the last five years include:

- a 28% reduction in primary fires – those that involve buildings and vehicles, both accidental and deliberate
- deliberate fires down 57% from 2,438 in 2010-11 to 1,043 last year
- a 13% reduction in the number of injuries from accidental house fires
- 15% fewer fires in commercial and industrial premises
- a 46% cut in the number of automatic fire alarms attended – down from 2,303 in 2010-11 to 1,251 in 2014-15.

See pages 7 and 8 for more about the Service's performance.

Disco inferno

Firefighters battled round the clock to control a blaze in the iconic former nightclub – Mr Smith's.

It was just before 2am on Tuesday, April 14 when a call came in stating that a blaze had broken out at the site off Wilson Patten Street in Warrington.

Head of Service Delivery, Alex Waller, explained: "This was a huge and challenging fire to deal with. At the height of the blaze we had a total of 12 fire engines and 70 firefighters at the site working to bring it under control."

Three hydraulic platforms and the High Volume Pump were also used as firefighters worked through the night to try and salvage the former nightclub. Sadly, despite the efforts of the crews the roof collapsed and building was condemned by structural engineers. It is believed that the fire was started deliberately.

Mr Smith's gained fame in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a venue for ITV's The Hitman and Her dance music show hosted by Pete Waterman and Michaela Strachan.

Awards galore

It's been an award-winning year for the Service with accolades being received for a range of initiatives across the organisation.

The awards just kept coming as the Service fought off strong competition from both the public and private sector to claim the top spot at a number of prestigious events. The awards won included:

- The Business Intelligence team won the Management Today Analytics in Action Not-for-Profit sector award. (bottom right)
- The co-responder team from Nantwich was crowned Public Sector Team of the Year in the UK Heartsafe Awards.
- The Road Safety team won a number of awards including the Community Award in the national Fleetsafe Awards and the Prince Michael International Road Safety Awards. (top right)
- The Prevention team was given the data sharing award from the Local eGovernment Standards body.
- The High Sheriff of Cheshire gave an award in recognition of great and valuable service to the community. (left)
- The Incident Command Training Suite team won the Driving Efficiency

Through Technology category at the inaugural Local Government Chronical Awards. Chair of the Fire Authority, Cllr John Joyce, said: }It is great to be recognised in such a diverse range of fields. All of the awards won demonstrate the commitment of our staff, highlighting the excellent work carried out by both operational and support staff in protecting our local communities.~

Key course hits milestone

A lucky teenager has been awarded a set of driving lessons as part of the anniversary celebration of the emergency services' award-winning road safety course.

Patrick Roberts, 17, from Northwich was officially named as the 20,000th student to complete the hard hitting programme and was awarded BSM driving lessons in a presentation at the Service's Headquarters

'Think Drive Survive' was launched 15 years ago to help reduce the number of serious and fatal collisions involving young people in Cheshire. It is a joint initiative between the Service and colleagues at Cheshire Police and Highways England. Deputy Chief Fire Officer Mark Cashin said: "Through initiatives like this we have continued to drive down the number of people killed and seriously injured on our roads and provided a strong base for other joint work. We want young drivers and pre-drivers to take a hard look at their behaviour on the roads, and improve it." Each course features first hand accounts of road traffic collisions from emergency services officers, as well as emotive input from Denise Rogers whose son was tragically killed by a drunk driver and a convicted driver's insightful account of his part in a fatal RTC. 'Think Drive Survive' is a free course available to all young road

users whether they are a driver, soon-to-be driver, cycle or motorbike rider, passenger or pedestrian.

Please e-mail peter.shields@cheshirefire.gov.uk for more information.

Fundraising fantastic

Fire cadets from Cheshire have been busy fundraising for a trip of a lifetime to help villagers build a much needed, safe school for children in Nepal.

Working with the charity Classrooms in the Clouds (CitC), they will embark on a journey on foot through the Himalayas, to get to the village of Thulodhunga in Nepal to help with the school project.

Youth Engagement Manager for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, Nick Evans, said: "The aim of the trip, apart from building a school for the village, is to give each cadet a challenge as part of their personal development. The trip will raise awareness of cultural diversity. This trip was arranged before this year's devastating earthquake which has had such a massive impact on the country and people of Nepal. Thankfully none of our friends were hurt but what is clear is that the children and people of Nepal now need us probably more than ever."

Each Cadet needs to raise £3,250 for the trip. By initiatives as diverse as shaving their heads, jumping out of planes and spending a cold 24 hours locked in a fire engine they have raised a combined total of over £60,000.

If anyone would like to donate to the cadets going to Nepal then they should visit the Service's website.

Also if anyone is interested in becoming a Cheshire Fire Cadet or volunteer with one of the units then please call 01606 868700 and speak to Cadet Manager Vicki Wrest.

Are you a bright spark?

A new website for children has been launched in a bid to promote home and fire safety in a fun and engaging way. 'Sparkton', which was named by children at Thelwall Junior School in Warrington, is a place for young people to learn and play. Digital and Media Services Manager, Caroline Jones, said: "We wanted to have a site that children will enjoy playing on but at the same time learn vital safety tips. Firefighters and staff do a lot of safety talks to young people in schools and it is a great way of communicating important information as they will always go home and talk to their parents and siblings about what they have been told. We want Sparkton to be another tool the children can enjoy and have worked closely with a local school to make sure it is something they will use and learn from."

Anyone can go online to learn and play, testing their knowledge by playing games which include:

- Testing your road safety know-how
- Spotting the dangers
- Avoiding the hidden hazards in open water
- Dressing a firefighter for an incident

You'll find Sparkton on the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service website www.cheshirefire.gov.uk/sparkton

Developing our 2020 vision

New moves have been agreed by Cheshire Fire Authority to outline how it can continue to provide residents and businesses across its area with a first class fire and rescue service despite having to make major cuts in its budget.

The organisation has recently published 'Planning for a Safer Cheshire', a five year strategy which sets out the general approach it intends to take in responding to the major challenges it faces over how its frontline services will be delivered and managed in the future.

In addition, the Authority has just launched a formal consultation over the detailed proposals it is planning to carry out over the next financial year. Chief Fire Officer, Paul Hancock, said: "We have already made over £7 million in savings over the past four years but we know that the challenge over the next five years will be even harder as it becomes more difficult to maintain improvements in community safety at the same time as making the savings we need.

"However, the new strategy clarifies some of the stark choices facing the Authority and outlines the approach and principles it will adopt to ensure it does not compromise on its commitment to protecting local communities, reducing risk and maintaining firefighter safety."

The Strategy proposes that the Service's frontline services should continue to be provided on its current Cheshire boundaries rather than exploring options to merge with other fire and rescue services. For support areas of the organisation, however, it says there should be an emphasis on collaboration with Cheshire Constabulary and potentially with other organisations locally and regionally if there are opportunities to save money and improve services. The Strategy also says that the Authority will try to minimise the level of cuts it needs to make by making annual increases in its Council Tax of 1.99% and by maximising use of its reserves to limit the need for loans.

Fire Authority Chair Cllr John Joyce added: "The future may be daunting but we have a proven track record of enthusiasm, commitment and innovation which I am sure will help to continue these improvements and focus on our overall vision of 'a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires or other emergencies'."

The full strategy is available to download from the Service's website.

New Plans

Key proposals to develop the organisation, protect local communities and respond to emergencies are set out in the Authority's draft plan for 2016-17.

One of the main initiatives is to develop and implement a blue light collaboration programme aimed at reducing back office costs while ensuring the Service keeps its own identity and management arrangements.

Other key projects include:

- Apprenticeships - launching a new two-year firefighter apprentice scheme
- Health and fire safety - transforming the Service's Home Safety Assessments into Safe and Well visits and increasing the annual number of visits from 25,000 to 40,000
- Safety first - launching Safety Central, the Authority's new dedicated centre at Lymm
- Launch a pilot project with the North West Ambulance Service to mobilise resources to cardiac incidents in certain areas
- Staff engagement - implementing a staff engagement plan in response to the Service's fourth staff attitude survey
- Station management - implement changes designed to improve the efficiency of local station management and officers' out of hours arrangements
- Review the Service's Nucleus Duty System which operates at three stations
- Future plans - launching a comprehensive public consultation in September 2016 on options identified during the Authority's second major review of its emergency response services.

To see the full plan, visit www.cheshirefire.gov.uk where there is an online survey. Alternatively, email consultation@cheshirefire.gov.uk or 'phone 01606 868700.

New Views

Most residents want Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service to keep its own identity rather than merge with other organisations as it works to find major savings in its budget.

A detailed public survey carried out in 2014 to help the organisation develop its new five year strategy asked respondents to show their support for three options on how the organisation could be managed in the future.

The proposal for the Service to stay independent but work closely with other local authorities was preferred by 71%, with 15% preferring a merger of the Service and Cheshire Constabulary and 14% saying a merger of all fire and rescue services in the North West was their first choice.

As a result, the Fire Authority's new strategy says that frontline services should continue to be provided on its current Cheshire boundaries and that collaboration with Cheshire Constabulary and others will focus on saving money in back office and support areas.

The survey was carried out by an independent company and involved over 830 face to face interviews across the Fire Authority's area and mean that the results are an accurate reflection of public opinion to within +/- 3.4%.

Other key findings from the survey include:

- Overall satisfaction with the Service was 90% - with 10% of respondents saying they didn't have enough information to comment
- 97% of respondents were satisfied that the Service provided value for money and 90% would support a one-off larger increase in Council Tax if it improved and protected services
- 73% said they were very or quite well informed about what to do in the event of a major emergency while 72% said they felt well informed about the Service.

New Stations

The first of four new fire stations to be built as part of the Fire Authority's initial emergency response programme has been officially opened.

The brand new on-call community station in Brookhouse Road, Alsager is part of the programme which is aimed at improving overall response times, keeping the same number of fire engines but make savings by changing how some stations will be crewed in the future.

The new station in Alsager is based on the site of a former council depot and the £1 million project includes a dedicated community meeting room and has been designed to blend into the adjacent park.

Fire Authority Chair Cllr. John Joyce said: "It is exciting to see the first part of our ambitious programme become reality and this new fire station, along with the three due to be built in other parts of the county, will ensure we can continue to protect local communities across Cheshire."

A new team of on-call firefighters has been recruited and completed initial training. They will be shadowing other crews before becoming fully operational in 2016-17. The next stage of the emergency response programme will see new fire stations being completed at Penketh, Powey Lane near the M56 and near the motorway interchange at Lymm during 2016-17.

The station at Lymm will also include the county's first public safety centre where school children, carers, new parents and other visitors will be able to learn how to stay safe, well and independent by experiencing realistic scenarios in four innovative learning zones.

Total cost of the overall programme is around £16 million, with all of the money coming from Government grants or the Authority's own reserves so that it doesn't have to borrow and repay loans.

The organisation is working with contractors to ensure that any opportunities to train and employ local people during the construction are maximised.

Heroes with grimy faces

The Service, the Philip Barker Trust and Manchester Camerata worked with children from across Cheshire to create an inspirational performance that showed the

evolution of the firefighter and their duty to society.

Hundreds packed into Chester Cathedral for the performance entitled 'Heroes with Grimy Faces' - the name given by Sir Winston Churchill to Britain's firefighters during World War II.

The project involved more than 150 children from five schools across Cheshire. They worked to create the original piece that not only explored fire safety issues but also linked to the WW1 commemorations and the role of women in the service. Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Mark Cashin said: "The event was a great success and it was wonderful to see how the children had worked so hard to create a brilliant performance and a truly special event.

"Projects like this are all about education and enable us to promote safety in an innovative way, and by doing so have a positive impact on the lives of young people and their families. It is another way of helping us to reach our aim of achieving a Cheshire where there are no deaths caused by fire.

"It was a real privilege to work in partnership with Manchester Camerata and the Philip Barker Trust again to create this fantastic performance."

The cathedral was a powerful and dramatic backdrop to the narrative, which used music, drama and multi-media to bring the story to life, including a real fire engine and people dressed up as firefighters through the ages.

By royal command

Two members of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service were recognised in the Queen's Birthday Honours list.

Chief Fire Officer Paul Hancock has been given the Queen's Fire Service Medal (QFSM) which is awarded to members of the fire services in the United Kingdom and Commonwealth of Nations for distinguished service or gallantry.

CFO Hancock said: "I feel very honoured to receive the Queen's Fire Service Medal. It is a great privilege which reflects the hard work of Team Cheshire, and recognises the commitment of all staff across the organisation."

Watch Manager, Peter Shields has been given the British Empire Medal (BEM). This award rewards a sustained local contribution or innovative high-impact work. He said: "I've worked for the Service for nearly 29 years and I am honoured that the Service has nominated me for doing what I always do in my work. My family is incredibly proud that I have been given this award and my wife and two children enjoyed going with me to the presentation."

Summary of accounts 2014-15

Cheshire Fire Authority is the public body which manages the fire and rescue service on behalf of local communities. It is made up of 23 elected Members, with eight

appointed by Cheshire East Council, seven by Cheshire West and Chester, three by Halton Borough and five by Warrington Borough. The current political make up of the Authority is Labour (13), Conservative (8), Liberal Democrat (1) and Independent (1). The Authority is a separate legal body and has the power to set council tax and agree its own policies and procedures without needing the approval of these local councils. Its meetings are open to the public and are usually held at the Service's Winsford headquarters. Full details are on the website – www.cheshirefire.gov.uk Its key duties include: approving the annual budget; setting its council tax level and agreeing the numbers of staff and levels of equipment necessary to provide an effective service and approving the organisation's key policies, plans and strategies. It is also responsible for ensuring its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is properly accounted for and how it aims for continuous improvement. To demonstrate this it produces an Annual Governance Statement to accompany the Statement of Accounts. From 2013-14 the Authority has included this as part of its annual Assurance Statement. Both the Annual Accounts and the Assurance Statement are available on the Authority's website.

Accounts

The Fire Authority's accounts show how it uses its resources to deliver a fire and rescue service across Cheshire. The summary accounts below provide an overview of where the funds come from, how they are used and the financial position as at March 31st 2015.

Summary Revenue Account

The 2014–15 Fire Authority net revenue budget was £43m, with total net expenditure incurred of £42.5m resulting in an underspend of around £494k.

The Authority has a General Reserve of £7m. This has been assessed as proportionate to the risks facing the organisation and balances the current public sector financial position with the need to ensure there are sufficient funds to deal with major incidents. The Authority also holds earmarked reserves to meet specific needs. In line with the continuing financial pressure it faces, the Authority has developed a range of options to deliver future savings. Implementing some of these will take time, however, and it is recognised that the Authority's reserves will be needed to smooth the financial pressure over the next few years.

Summary Balance Sheet

The Summary Balance Sheet shows the 2014-15 end of year position and the most obvious point to note is the net liability of £460m. In other words, the Fire Authority has assets worth £71m, but has long term liabilities of £531m.

Most of the liabilities relate to expected future pension costs of £529m, compared to £446m in 2013-14. All local authorities are required to recognise this liability in their balance sheet even though it is not an immediate call on their resources, but instead is paid out over the life of existing and future pensioners. At present, all deficits on the Firefighters' Pension Scheme are funded by Government through a specific top up grant.

Summary Revenue Account 2014-15

Community Fire Safety	10,464
Firefighting and Rescue Operations	25,232
Corporate and Democratic Core	1,110
Non-Distributed Costs	240
Net Cost of Service	37,046
Other income, expenditure and adjustments	6,325
Amount to be met by Govt Grant and Local Taxation	43,371
Revenue Support Grant and Local Taxation	-19,285
Council Tax	-23,772
Net General Fund (Surplus)\Deficit	314
Balance on General Fund brought forward	-7,276
Balance on General Fund Carried Forward	-6,962

Summary Balance Sheet 2014-15

Long Term Assets	41,892
Current Assets	33,576
Long Term Liabilities	-530,930
Current Liabilities	-4,209
Total Assets less Total Liabilities	-459,671
Financed by:	
Unusable reserves	495,428
Earmarked Reserves	-28,795
General Reserve	-6,962
TOTAL NET WORTH	459,671

Focus on Performance 2014-15

Fire and rescue incidents attended by the Service continued to reduce during 2014-15, with annual reductions of 7% in all fires involving property of significant value, a 15% reduction in injuries from fires in the home and a 32% reduction in deliberate fire activity.

The Service attended 83% of house fires and road traffic collisions within its 10 minutes standard. There was a 15% reduction in the number of fire crews attending false alarms caused by equipment in businesses and commercial premises, following the implementation of a new attendance policy.

During 2014-15, staff carried out over 24,000 home safety assessments to higher risk households, home oxygen users and people referred to us from our partner agencies. National figures show that the Service targets a higher percentage of over-65s than any other service in England.

The following infographic highlights some of the key trends on different aspects of the organisation's performance over recent years.

Top performer

The Service has been praised by leading gay charity Stonewall as the North West's best performing public sector organisation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) staff.

The award was presented at an event in Manchester to recognise the achievements of the North West in the Workplace Equality Index, an annual list through which Stonewall benchmarks LGBT-friendly employers.

This award came after the Service reached 31st in the National Stonewall Top 100 list and was the highest placed emergency service in the UK.

Chief Fire Officer Paul Hancock said: "We are delighted to be recognised as a diversity leader among public bodies in the North West. This reflects a great deal of hard work by our elected Members, officers and staff who are committed to ensuring that all colleagues feel able to be themselves at work and help to make their communities safer."

As well as the best employer award, the Chair of the Service's LGBT staff network, Matt Maguire, was named North West Role Model of the year by Stonewall, for the work he has undertaken to raise the profile of LGBT issues within the fire and rescue locally and nationally.

Accepting the award Matt said: "For LGBT employees, knowing that the organisation and colleagues will support them to be themselves means they can focus on the job."

Sprinklers save local business

The Service is continuing to campaign to make the fitting of sprinkler systems a requirement in all new developments and businesses in Cheshire. This year alone, three local businesses have been saved thanks to sprinkler systems that either put the fire out or stopped it from spreading.

One such company was Mitras in Winsford. Thanks to its sprinkler system, a fire involving a machine and ducting was prevented from spreading enabling the business to be back up and running quickly.

Mitras Managing Director, Andrew Goodier, said: "I would encourage anyone in the manufacturing industry who doesn't have sprinklers to think very carefully about what they would do in a situation like this and how their business would survive a fire. We know the value of sprinklers here at Mitras. We are opening a new factory very soon and have already fitted sprinklers as standard."

Another of the companies saved by sprinklers, Jiffy Packaging, supported the Service to promote a national campaign for Fire Sprinkler week in March 2015. Damage to a Warrington shredding company was also dramatically reduced thanks to a sprinkler system.

The Service's Head of Prevention and Protection, Keith Brooks, said: "These cases show just how crucial an investment in a sprinkler system can be and I hope they encourage more businesses to install them."

Further details on the Service's website.

Drama on Chester Cathedral tower

Crowds gathered as crews carried out a dramatic rescue from the tower at Chester Cathedral

Two fire engines and the aerial platform from Chester, along with the technical rescue unit and fire engine from Knutsford were called to the tower at Chester Cathedral.

They had received a call about a casualty who had been carrying out building work on the tower and had fallen ill.

They secured the man to a stretcher and lowered him down to safety. He was handed into the care of paramedics.

Insightful visit

The Service threw open its doors to the public for a 'Full of Life' event at its Winsford Headquarters as part of the Chief Fire Officers' Association's (CFOA) Aging safely week.

Visitors were treated to a behind the scenes tour that showcased some of what the Service has to offer.

They also got the chance to see some dramatic live demonstrations of how firefighters tackle road traffic collisions. They also had the chance to have a look around both old and new fire engines and an opportunity to experience the Service's Incident Command Training suite.

Head of Prevention and Protection Keith Brooks said: "The event was a real success. It was a wonderful opportunity for us to showcase the work we do and pass on some potentially life saving advice."

As the majority of accidental house fires start in the kitchen everyone who came also received a 'Dirty Grills Kills' pack to take home with them.

Staying safe on the water

Chester firefighters worked hard to promote water safety across the city as part of Drowning Prevention and Water Safety Week.

Sadly the number of drownings start to rise in April, often peaking in July and August, which is why the Service supported the Chief Fire Officers Association's national campaign, to educate young people about open water. Firefighters went to Sandy Lane Swimming Park where they talked to people about the potential dangers and offered advice that could prevent tragic incidents in the county this year.

Chester Station Manager, Barry Williams said: "We want people to enjoy swimming however we also want people to do it safely. Sadly, each year people die swimming in open water. Firefighters and other emergency

services also risk their own safety to rescue people who get into difficulties on our waterways.

Our advice is to only ever swim outdoors as part of an organised open water swimming club. Don't let a cooling dip be the last thing you ever do. Please follow our advice to stay safe around water."

Cheshire West & Chester Unitary performance area profile

In the last three years, primary fires in Cheshire West and Chester have reduced by 13%. These are fires that involve property such as buildings and vehicles and include both accidental and deliberate incidents. The numbers of fire related fatalities and injuries remain positively low.

Also included in the primary fires category are accidental dwelling fires, which continue to decrease. Delivery of Home Safety Assessments continues to be focused on those households most at risk and this is backed up with publicity campaigns highlighting key safety messages, particularly around safety in the kitchen where around 50% of house fires start.

An 11% reduction in deliberate fire activity has been recorded over the past three years in Cheshire West and Chester. The most significant decrease has been in the number of small (secondary) deliberate fires which are often associated with anti-social behaviour.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's intelligence-led approach to identifying 'hotspot' areas has become more sophisticated and these problem areas are tackled with a range of arson and youth engagement initiatives.

Key statistics	2012-13	13-14	14-15
Primary fires per 100,000 population	116.5	103.8	101.6
Fatalities from primary fires per 100,000 population	0.9	0.0	0.0
Injuries from primary fires per 100,000 population	4.9	2.4	3.9
Deliberate primary fires per 10,000 population	2.8	2.2	2.3
Deliberate secondary fires per 10,000 population	10.8	12.7	9.9