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# HM Fire Service Inspectorate

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## Local Area Inspection Argyll and Bute



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**Integrity, Objectivity, and Fairness.**



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## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Joe McKay, the Local Senior Officer for Argyll and Bute, East Dunbartonshire and West Dunbartonshire and those members of staff who provided us with information, helped us to organise visits, hosted us and contributed constructively to interviews. We also wish to thank the representatives of partner organisations who agreed to be interviewed.

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# 1\_ The Local Area Inspection Programme

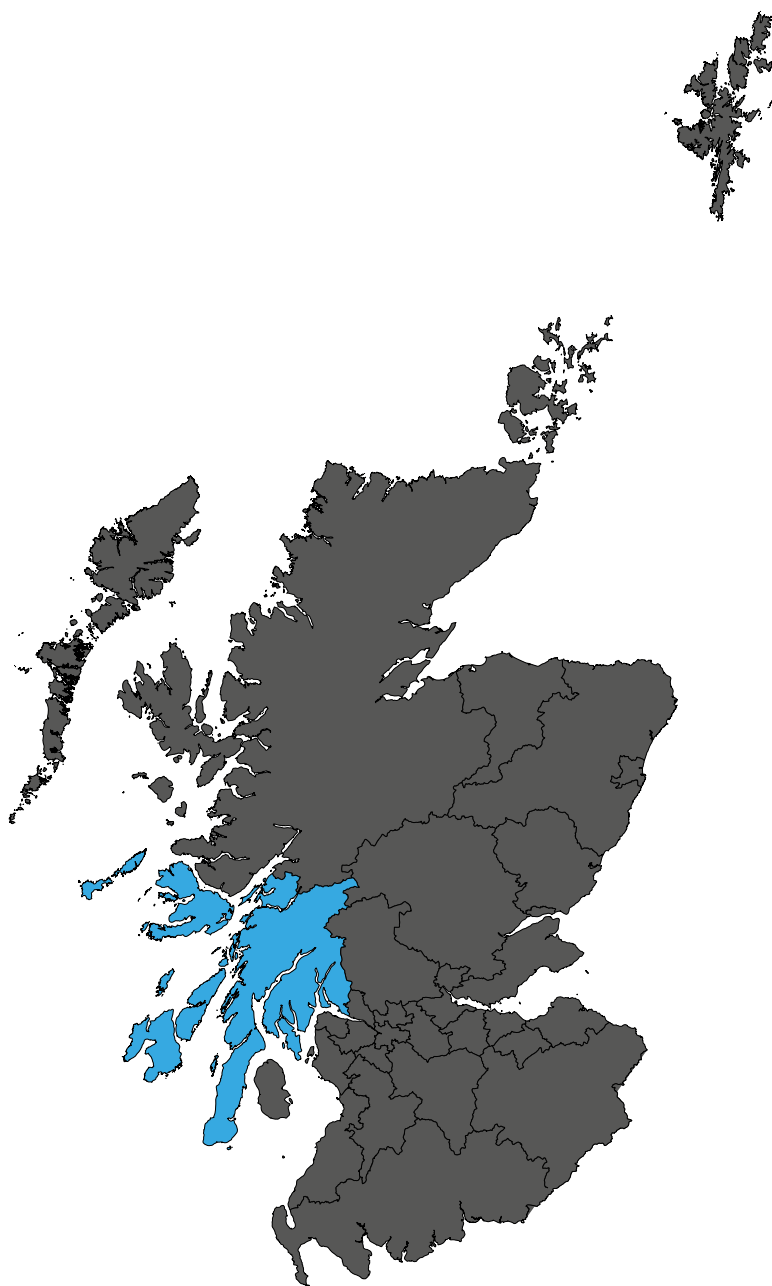
1. The Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2016 sets out how Scottish Ministers expect the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) to operate and how, in part, its effectiveness and efficiency are to be measured. The Framework sets strategic priorities for the Service to achieve. In a change to the previous Framework, the 2016 Framework devolves responsibility for developing performance measures to the SFRS, albeit subject to Ministerial approval. Subsequently, the SFRS Board approved a Performance Management Framework in 2018 (updated April 2021) to include 2020/21 corporate indicators.
2. The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 (the 2005 Act) requires the SFRS to appoint a Local Senior Officer (LSO) for each local authority area in Scotland for the purpose of carrying out its functions in that area. The LSO for Argyll and Bute also acts as LSO for the local authorities of East Dunbartonshire and West Dunbartonshire. The LSO reports to the Head of Service Delivery for the relevant SFRS Service Delivery Area (SDA) (in this case the West SDA). The SFRS is also required by the 2005 Act to have a Local Fire and Rescue Plan for each local authority area, which sets out the SFRS's priorities and objectives for that local area; why they have been selected; how the SFRS intends to deliver them, and (insofar as is practicable) outcomes by reference to which the SFRS's service delivery in the local authority area can be measured. The fact that the 2005 Act is structured in this way is a clear demonstration of the Scottish Parliament's intention that the SFRS's service delivery should be considered both at the national and local authority levels.
3. Inspections of SFRS service delivery within local authority areas that examine the development and delivery of Local Fire and Rescue Plans, help to provide assurance about the way in which the SFRS is meeting this intention. By undertaking inspections of SFRS service delivery within local authority areas, HM Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI):
  - can provide assurance to Scottish Ministers and the public, that the SFRS is making adequate provision for local service delivery, and that local areas have access to specialist national resources;
  - can make suggestions for improvement if necessary;
  - can take a detailed look at the nature and quality of service provision within local areas and can draw attention to significant matters and areas of good practice;
  - maintains a good level of awareness of the Service's functions and builds a record of how the Service is functioning; and
  - can gather intelligence that may inform, or cause to be undertaken, more strategic, thematic inspections of the SFRS.
4. The findings in our report follow the structure of the Framework. In adopting this approach we accept that there may be occasions when our observations could be reported against more than one of the strategic priorities contained in the Framework. We aim to ensure that our observations and text are allocated in the most appropriate place or places to give an understanding of our findings. There may however be occasions when it will be appropriate to repeat our observations against more than one priority.

5. During our local area inspections we look at a range of matters relevant to fire and rescue service delivery within the area being inspected, including any relevant issues arising from our thematic inspection work.
6. In our inspections we aim to visit as many service delivery locations as we can, and speak to managers and a range of uniformed and non-uniformed staff. We look at premises and equipment, and view a sample of records to enable us to understand the way in which business within the area is conducted. In this way we aim to cross-reference the SFRS's written plans and procedures, and what we are told about the local area by SFRS managers, with our own observations and discussions with local staff.
7. We do not, however, carry out our local area inspections as a comprehensive audit. The sampling methodology that we adopt cannot identify all potential areas for improvement or examples of good practice: we intend that it should be a proportionate activity that provides an overview of the area, comparable with other local area inspections that we have carried out or will carry out in the future. The SFRS has a programme of internal station audits that involve a detailed analysis of fire station activity and records. We do not want to duplicate that work, although we do take these audits into consideration within our inspection.
8. During our inspection of Argyll and Bute we visited all 39 fire stations in the area, speaking to the retained and volunteer duty system (RVDS) crews and two watches each at Helensburgh and Oban, the two wholetime duty fire stations in the area.
9. We met with the LSO and local managers with the following areas of responsibility:
  - prevention and protection
  - service delivery
  - training
  - health and safety
  - fire station supervision
10. We interviewed community safety staff, support staff and also engaged with representatives of Argyll and Bute Council.
11. In an attempt to gauge service users' opinion of the SFRS we contacted the 56 Community Councils within Argyll and Bute. Each was invited to complete a brief questionnaire which explored the relationship between the Community Council and the SFRS, sought awareness of SFRS local activity, and asked about views of service quality and suggested areas for improvement. We received seven responses which are discussed later in this report.
12. This report is a product of both our direct observation and interviews held with staff and partners of the SFRS, and reflects the circumstance at the time of our visits. Our fieldwork for this local area inspection was interrupted and constrained by the restrictions in place in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and consequently our visits were carried out over an extended time period between September 2020 and September 2021. Due to the continuing nature of the restrictions, we undertook some of our fieldwork remotely, using video conferencing technology. As part of our inspection activity involves an element of physical inspection, for example the condition of premises, equipment and vehicles, it was necessary for us to delay the publication of this report to allow the inspection team to conclude physical visits and face to face interviews (adhering to current guidance and taking appropriate measures to safeguard themselves and others present).

13. During the course of this inspection there was a re-structure within the SFRS which, in addition to the re-aligning of department functions, included some departmental name changes, for example Training and Employee Development (TED) changed to Training, Safety and Assurance. In this report we have retained the use of the pre re-structure names as these are either linked to descriptions used in the Fire and Rescue Framework or within the SFRS documentation we have referenced.



## 2\_ About The Area



**Figure 1: Scottish council area boundaries.**

14. Argyll and Bute is the area shaded in blue. It covers an area of around 6,909 km<sup>2</sup>. The area has the third sparsest population density of the 32 Scottish local authority areas, with an average population density of 13 persons per square kilometre. Argyll and Bute has 23 inhabited islands, more than any other local authority in Scotland, with around 17% of the population living on islands. It has a border with the local authority areas of Highland, Perth and Kinross, Stirling and West Dunbartonshire. In terms of the SFRS organisation structure, Argyll and Bute is within the West SDA.
15. Argyll and Bute is divided into 11 council wards each represented jointly by three elected members.

16. The population of Argyll and Bute at the end of June 2019 was 85,870<sup>1</sup>, making it the 27th highest populated of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland. This is a decrease of 0.5% from 86,260 in 2018. Between 1998 and 2019, the 25 to 44 age group saw the largest percentage decrease (-34.1%). The 65 to 74 age group saw the largest percentage increase (+38.6%). Around 1.6% of the Scottish population reside in Argyll and Bute. The percentage of the population aged 65 and over, at 25.9%, is more than the overall percentage for Scotland of 19.1% in that age band. The ethnicity of the population of Argyll and Bute as at the 2011<sup>2</sup> census was classified as 98.8% white (Scottish White: Other British White: Irish White: Other) and 0.6 % Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British, with a further 0.6% classing themselves as another ethnic group.
17. There are various operational risks in the area, including roads, railways, harbours and ferry ports; various commercial, industrial, military, and heritage risks.
18. There are 39 fire stations in Argyll and Bute. The locations are shown in Figure 2. Table 1 shows the fire station duty system, the resources based there and incident activity.



Figure 2: Location of fire stations in Argyll and Bute. Source: SFRS.

1 National Records of Scotland, Council Area Profiles - <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/stats-at-a-glance/council-area-profiles>

2 <https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/ods-web/area.html>

| <b>Fire station</b> | <b>Duty system**</b> | <b>Appliances</b>                   | <b>Activity*<br/>2019/20</b> |
|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Appin               | Volunteer            | Volunteer Support Unit              | 23                           |
| Ardfern             | Volunteer            | Volunteer Support Unit              | 8                            |
| Arrochar            | RDS                  | Rescue pump                         | 50                           |
| Bowmore             | RDS                  | Rescue pump                         | 99                           |
| Bridge of Orchy     | Volunteer            | Volunteer Support Unit              | 7                            |
| Bunessan            | Volunteer            | Volunteer Support Unit              | 12                           |
| Campbeltown         | RDS                  | Multi-pump                          | 249                          |
| Carradale           | Volunteer            | Volunteer Support Unit              | 8                            |
| Colintraive         | Volunteer            | Non-mobile                          | 0                            |
| Coll                | VDS                  | Volunteer Support Unit              | 0                            |
| Colonsay            | VDS                  | Volunteer Support Unit              | 11                           |
| Cove                | RDS                  | Rescue pump                         | 26                           |
| Craignure           | VDS                  | Rapid Response Unit                 | 26                           |
| Dalmally            | VDS                  | Volunteer Support Unit              | 13                           |
| Dunoon              | RDS                  | Multi-pump                          | 318                          |
| Garelochhead        | RDS                  | Multi-pump                          | 64                           |
| Gigha               | VDS                  | Volunteer Support Unit              | 2                            |
| Helensburgh         | Wholetime / RDS      | Multi-pump                          | 401                          |
| Inveraray           | RDS                  | Rescue pump                         | 69                           |
| Iona                | VDS                  | Volunteer Support Unit              | 47                           |
| Jura                | VDS                  | Volunteer Support Unit              | 1                            |
| Kerrara             | VDS                  | 4x4 vehicle                         | 0                            |
| Kilmeford           | VDS                  | Rapid Response Unit                 | 3                            |
| Lismore             | VDS                  | Volunteer Support Unit              | 5                            |
| Lochgilphead        | RDS                  | Rescue pump                         | 131                          |
| Lochgoilhead        | VDS                  | Volunteer Support Unit              | 6                            |
| Luing               | VDS                  | Volunteer Support Unit              | 3                            |
| Minard              | VDS                  | Rapid Response Unit                 | 7                            |
| Oban                | Wholetime / RDS      | Multi-pump, Water<br>Rescue, Height | 426                          |
| Port Charlotte      | VDS                  | Rapid Response Unit                 | 26                           |
| Port Ellen          | VDS                  | Volunteer Support Unit              | 33                           |
| Rothesay            | RDS                  | Multi-pump                          | 225                          |
| Salen               | VDS                  | 4x4 vehicle                         | 11                           |

| Fire station  | Duty system** | Appliances             | Activity* 2019/20 |
|---------------|---------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| Seil          | VDS           | 4x4 vehicle            | 2                 |
| Strachur      | VDS           | Volunteer Support Unit | 21                |
| Tarbert       | RDS           | Rescue pump            | 92                |
| Tighnabruaich | RDS           | Rescue pump            | 21                |
| Tiree         | VDS           | Volunteer Support Unit | 39                |
| Tobermory     | RDS           | Multi-pump             | 96                |

**Table 1: Argyll and Bute fire station information. Source: SFRS.**

\* This is the number of times that an appliance from the fire station attended an incident – it is not an indication of the number of turnouts. The IRS data on which the activity totals are based exclude mobilisations which did not result in a direct incident attendance, for example, stand-by or where the appliance was turned back.

\*\* Wholetime crewed appliances are dual crewed with the exception of height appliances.

### Employees<sup>3</sup>.

19. The SFRS has 471 staff posts in the area. 62 (13%) of the staff identify themselves as female.

### Incident statistics

20. Table 2 shows the number and type of incidents attended by the SFRS in Argyll and Bute over a period of four years<sup>4</sup>.

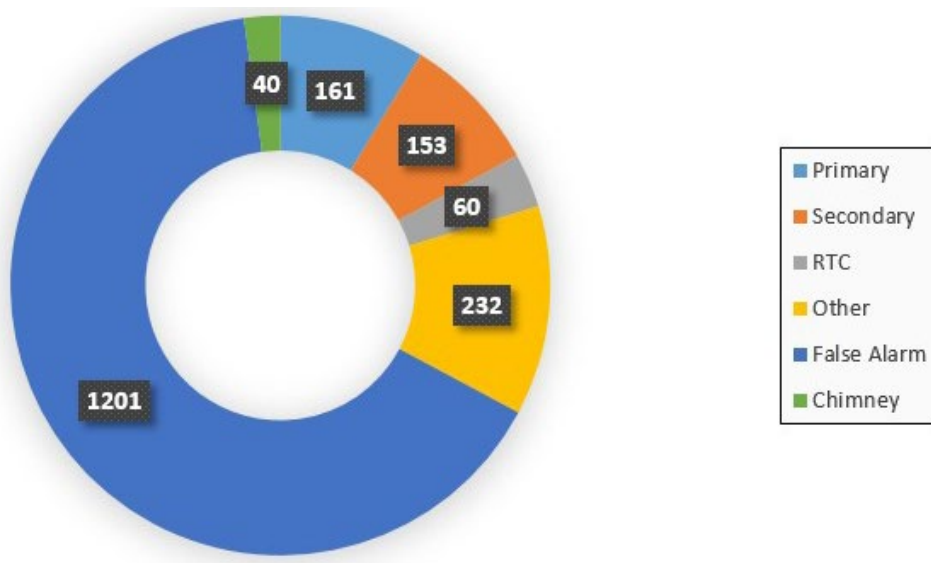
| Incident type                                | 2016/17      | 2017/18      | 2018/19      | 2019/20      |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Primary fire                                 | 150          | 188          | 174          | 161          |
| Secondary fire                               | 122          | 80           | 120          | 153          |
| Chimney fire                                 | 43           | 46           | 44           | 40           |
| Road traffic collision                       | 79           | 77           | 71           | 60           |
| Other non-fire incident                      | 208          | 228          | 261          | 232          |
| False alarm (including non-fire false alarm) | 972          | 1,117        | 1,176        | 1,201        |
| <b>Total incidents</b>                       | <b>1,574</b> | <b>1,736</b> | <b>1,835</b> | <b>1,847</b> |

**Table 2: Incidents in Argyll and Bute.**

<sup>3</sup> As at November 2019.

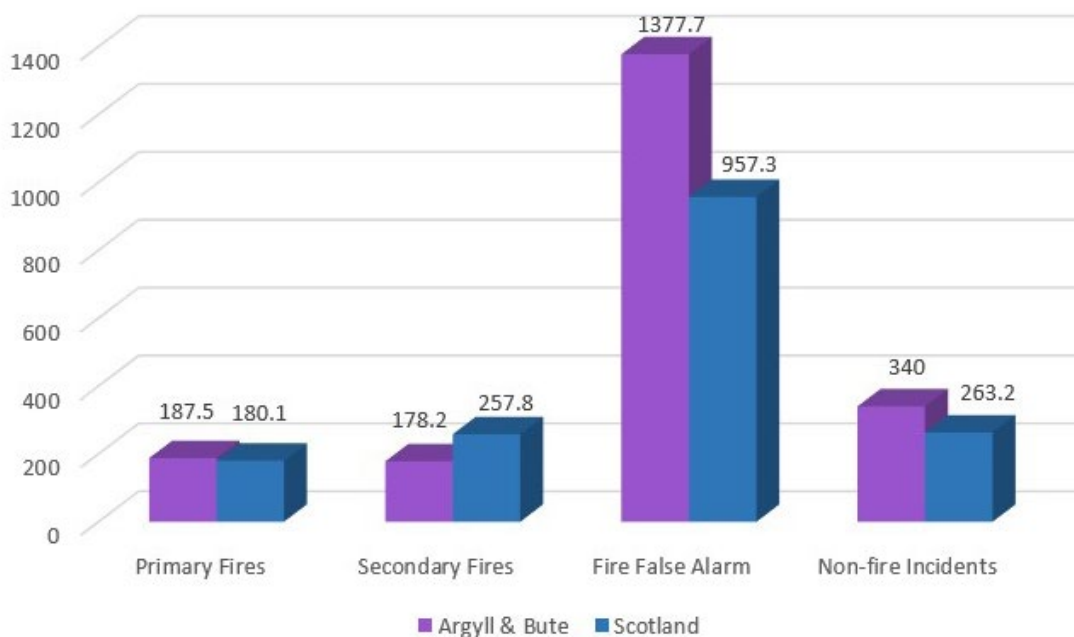
<sup>4</sup> SFRS, Fire and Rescue Incident Statistics (Scotland), <http://www.firescotland.gov.uk/about-us/fire-and-rescue-statistics.aspx>

Figure 3 below gives a visual reflection of the make-up of incidents within Argyll and Bute for the most recent available statistics, 2019/20.



**Figure 3: Argyll and Bute incidents 2019/20.**

21. Responding to false alarms represents 65% of all incidents attended by the SFRS in Argyll and Bute in 2019/20. Unwanted fire alarm signals (UFAS) from non-domestic premises made up 663 of these false alarms and therefore comprise 35.8% of all incidents.
22. The incident rates for 2019/20 are shown in Figure 4 benchmarked against the rates for Scotland. In Argyll and Bute the rates per population for primary fires, fire false alarms and non-fire incidents are higher than for Scotland, however, the rate for secondary fires is lower.



**Figure 4: Incident rates per 100,000 population 2019/20 Argyll and Bute and Scotland.**

## 3\_ Our Findings

23. As mentioned earlier in this report we structure our findings to be in line with the Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2016. The Framework sets the strategic direction for fire and rescue. Contained within the Framework are 10 strategic priorities for the SFRS. To aid the reader, we have replicated the text of those strategic priorities in Appendix 1.

### 3.1\_ Performance measures

#### **The Local Fire and Rescue Plan and Local Outcomes Improvement Plan**

24. The 2005 Act requires the SFRS to publish a delivery plan for the local authority area. The most recent Local Fire and Rescue Plan for Argyll and Bute was published in 2017 covering the period until 2021.
25. Nationally, the SFRS sets out a planning structure which defines how it expects its strategic aims will be achieved. The SFRS has a Strategic Plan which describes its strategic aims, from which the statutory Local Fire and Rescue Plans are derived. The local plans are further developed into local operating plans which describe local actions and targets. Ultimately these documents are used to generate Station Plans containing station actions and targets, which in turn can be used to populate the individual personal objectives for the staff based at fire stations.
26. Following the publication in October 2019 of a new national SFRS strategic plan 2019-22, there is a requirement to review local plans. A review has been conducted resulting in the production of the Argyll and Bute Local Fire and Rescue Plan Review 2020-2023. Stakeholder engagement conducted locally by the SFRS led local managers to the conclusion that the SFRS priorities within the 2020-2023 Local Fire and Rescue Plan for Argyll and Bute remain the same as the priorities in the previous plan.
27. The 2017 Fire and Rescue Plan for Argyll and Bute includes an explanation of the purpose and aim of the report, a range of background information relative to the local area. The plan also includes community planning arrangements, and how the SFRS seeks to ensure that its activity complements and supports the locality planning process as described within the community plan for Argyll and Bute, Outcome Improvement Plan 2013 – 23<sup>5</sup>. The overall objective of this partnership plan for the 10 years to 2023 is to ensure that Argyll and Bute's economic success is built on a growing population. To achieve this overall objective six long term outcomes have been identified:
- 1) The economy is diverse and thriving.
  - 2) We have infrastructure that supports sustainable growth.
  - 3) Education, skills and training maximises opportunities for all.
  - 4) Children and young people have the best possible start.
  - 5) People live active, healthier and independent lives.
  - 6) People live in safer and stronger communities.
28. The Outcome Improvement Plan states, 'to achieve each of the six long term outcomes will require significant commitment and effort by all partners and also from the whole of Argyll and Bute.' The SFRS's activities broadly support the outcomes in the Improvement Plan and the SFRS local plan is clearly aligned in particular to outcomes 5 and 6 above.

<sup>5</sup> Argyll and Bute Council.

29. The SFRS plan contains local fire-related priorities. The SFRS has national targets against which it measures performance; however, the local plan for Argyll and Bute contains no targets, either locally derived or SFRS national targets. The lack of targets has been the subject of comment in previous HMFSI local area reports. The SFRS nationally acknowledges this, stating that: ‘to avoid expressing desired results which are unachievable, uncontrollable or impractical the SFRS will only apply targets when it is appropriate to do so.’ Though the plan doesn’t contain numerical targets, when performance reports are submitted to the local authority for scrutiny those reports do contain targets against which changes in local performance can be measured. We discuss local scrutiny later in this report.
30. The Argyll and Bute plan 2017 identifies five local priorities.
- We will seek to reduce accidental dwelling fires and fire-related injuries within the home.
  - We will seek to reduce the impact of unintentional injury and harm.
  - We will seek to reduce the instances of fire-related anti-social behaviour.
  - We will seek to reduce the instances of fires within non-domestic property.
  - We will seek to reduce the instances of Unwanted Fire Alarms Signals.
31. Formal local authority scrutiny of SFRS performance is the responsibility of the Community Services Committee and is generally carried out four times per year. We remotely observed a meeting of this committee and listened to the LSO present his report on local area performance for a specific quarter across six key indicators. Four of those six indicators were showing a welcome year-on-year reduction. The LSO then responded to questions from some of the elected members before the committee noted the content of the report.
32. Community Councils in Scotland are voluntary organisations run by local residents to act on behalf of the local community. The response rate to our short questionnaire sent to Community Councils in Argyll and Bute was 12.5% (seven responses). In our experience a low return rate is normal.
33. The responses we received described having mostly an informal awareness of Service activity, usually based upon relationships with local station personnel and no formal contact with the SFRS. The majority of responses were very supportive of the Service and the dedication of the local crews and contribution they make to their local community. A small number of responses described having no contact with or information about the local Service. Respondents would welcome the building of relationships and to provide information to the community councils on activity, such as awareness of any preventative campaigns or other activity being undertaken. There was a willingness on the part of some Community Councils to assist and support local efforts in encouraging local recruitment.



## 3.2\_Protecting Communities: Risk, Prevention and Response

### Safety, Well-Being and Prevention

#### Prevention and Protection

34. There is a Group Commander and there are two Station Commanders responsible for the management of the Prevention and Protection function. One Station Commander primarily leads on Prevention and one on Protection.

#### Community Safety Engagement (CSE)

35. The CSE team of three in Argyll and Bute comprises of two Community Safety Advocates (CSAs) and one Community Firefighter (CFF), line-managed by a Watch Commander with the role of Local Area Liaison Officer (LALO). These personnel are part of the wider LSO area team.

36. The role of the CSE team is to reduce fires and work with partners to address other risks within the community, for example road safety, but it also extends to areas including youth employability awards such as the Ignite Programme. This CSE activity involves engaging with partners to identify vulnerable persons. Some examples of work undertaken are:

- work with young persons referred by social work or schools
- activity based on a CSE thematic action plan calendar
- talks to youth groups and other groups on request
- driving awareness training
- working with dementia support providers
- working with housing providers
- working with vulnerable persons groups

37. The team describe undertaking a lot of partnership working to address risks to the more vulnerable members of the community.

38. The ability to conduct this CSE activity was dramatically impacted by the restrictions put in place at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, the work of the FSE team described later, had to adapt to the inability to carry out face-to-face interaction and transition towards the use of virtual CSE and FSE intervention.

39. All members of the CSE team have a breadth of fire service experience and have been fulfilling their current role for varying periods of time. All team members describe having a good relationship with external and internal partners.

40. The LALO operates as liaison with Argyll and Bute Council and, although not co-located with council staff, as we have seen in other areas, does not believe that this is a disadvantage. The LALO regularly attends a number of themed multi-agency groups focusing on addressing issues such as anti-social behaviour, hoarding, and adult protection. CSE staff also routinely attend formal Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference meetings as we have seen in other areas, to address issues around high-risk vulnerable persons in the community. The lack of a formal tasking and co-ordinating daily or weekly information sharing meeting does not seem to hamper partnership activities



necessary to focus and co-ordinate activity, with good relationships reported between the SFRS and partners including Police Scotland, social services and housing officials.

41. There is clear evidence of referrals of vulnerable persons between the SFRS and partners.

### **Initiatives**

42. There are a number of community safety initiatives that have been delivered within the area, the following are some examples of these.
43. Argyll and Bute Fire Skills, this scheme provides training and development opportunities for young people aged 13-16 years identified predominantly by local secondary schools. The training and development is principally through Fire and Rescue Service-related activities. Young people are encouraged to develop and enhance their physical and mental capabilities to enable them to become more responsible, confident, active and safer members of the community.
44. Work has been undertaken with partners to identify cases of hoarding and associated mental health issues in order to provide fire safety advice and support through other agencies.
45. In the run up to bonfire night 2019, safety presentations were provided for both primary and secondary schools.
46. Operational crews are also involved in participating in initiatives, when operational commitments allow, such as dementia support, CPR awareness, and 'Biker Down' (emergency first aid course for motorcyclists).
47. As part of a national SFRS response to the Covid-19 pandemic a number of stations in the Argyll and Bute area have been participating in initiatives to support local communities. For example, personnel at Luing fire station have assisted with the delivery of food parcels to vulnerable groups in their local community. A number of stations have also been assisting the local authority shielding team by visiting persons, identified by the council, as potentially requiring assistance, for example the delivery of medical prescriptions.
48. In conjunction with the local health board and local authority some fire stations in Argyll and Bute were also facilitating Covid testing centres, where members of the community with symptoms could easily access a test.

### **Deliberate Fires**

49. A significant number of the incidents attended are deliberate fires which have increased again in number in the last reporting year<sup>6</sup>. The local Fire and Rescue Plan has a reduction in deliberate fire raising as a priority. The LSO team is addressing this area of activity through, for example, the delivery of diversionary and youth engagement activity which is regarded as an important, and successful, approach in tackling fire-related anti-social behaviour. Figure 5 shows the incidence of all deliberate fires over a five-year period.

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6 SFRS, *Fire and Rescue Incident Statistics (Scotland)*, - <https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/about-us/fire-and-rescue-statistics.aspx>

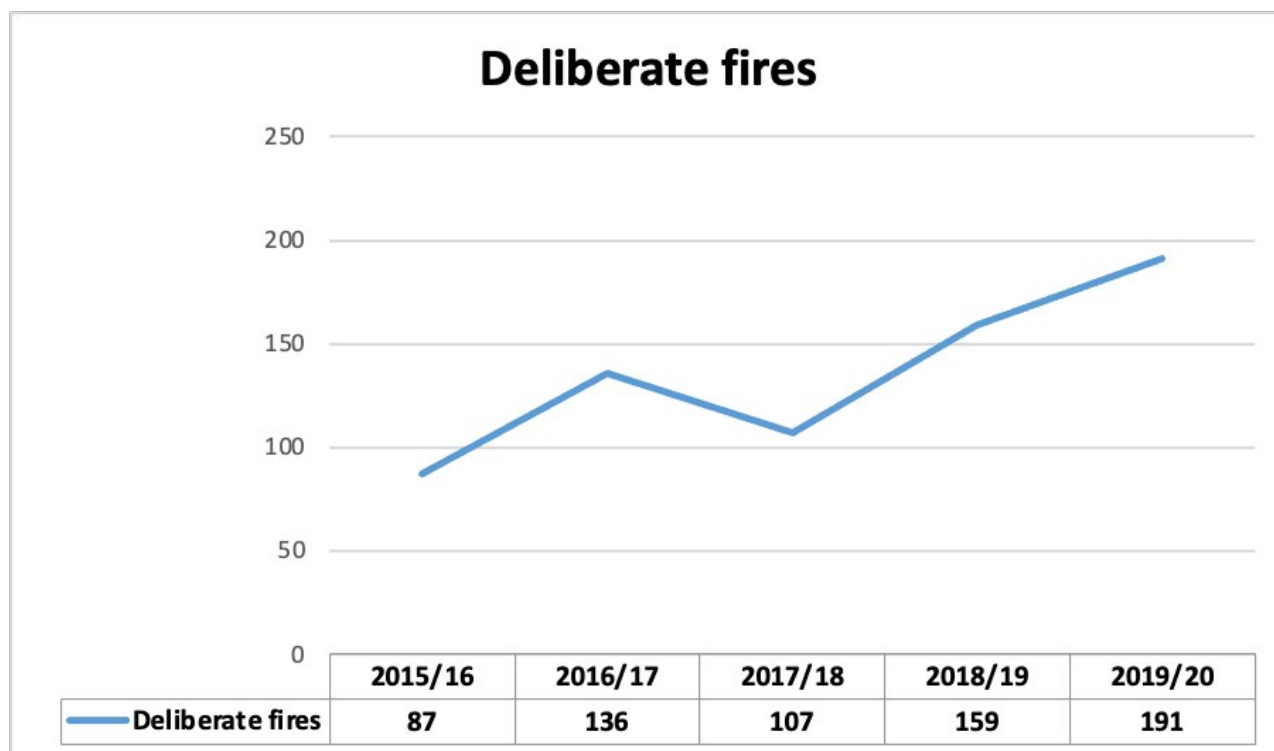


Figure 5: Deliberate fires Argyll and Bute.

### Domestic Fire Safety

50. Home fire safety visits are an established activity in promoting fire safety. Some of these visits are undertaken by fire station personnel, others are carried out by members of the Community Safety Engagement (CSE) team. The percentage of households receiving a home safety visit in 2019/20 was 3.6 and is above the Scottish average of 2.8. The number of visits made in Argyll and Bute has decreased in the last complete reporting year as shown in Table 3. As also shown in Table 3 there is a focus on visits to those classed as high risk. The ability to conduct this type of activity was dramatically impacted by the restrictions put in place because of the Covid-19 pandemic, with the focus on providing visits to high-risk and vulnerable persons.

| Year    | High risk | Medium risk | Low risk | Total <sup>7</sup> |
|---------|-----------|-------------|----------|--------------------|
| 2017/18 | 662       | 583         | 436      | <b>1,681</b>       |
| 2018/19 | 788       | 437         | 248      | <b>1,473</b>       |
| 2019/20 | 700       | 485         | 338      | <b>1,523</b>       |

Table 3: Home fire safety visits Argyll and Bute. Source: SFRS.

51. In conducting these visits there is an expectation that there will be a focus on households designated as high risk. Station personnel routinely described having an awareness of their local community and in particular those who may be described as vulnerable. The number of HFSVs that can be carried out is influenced by a number of factors, including the constraints on the availability of personnel to conduct the visit.

<sup>7</sup> This data is supplied by the LSO area. The SFRS national statistical publication shows lower totals for each year.

52. Of course HFSVs are only a measure of activity rather than outcome. Dwelling fire statistics are shown in table 4. Although regrettably there has been an increase of one fatal incident from the preceding year, there has been a welcome reduction in the number of non-fatal casualties from an almost similar number of fires.

| Dwelling Fires       | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20* |
|----------------------|---------|---------|----------|
| Accidental fires     | 77      | 85      | 84       |
| Fatalities           | 1       | 0       | 1        |
| Non-fatal casualties | 16      | 19      | 9        |

**Table 4: Dwelling fires in Argyll and Bute<sup>8</sup>.**

\*The statistics for 2019/20 are provisional, and revision typically increases counts by a small proportion.

### Fire Safety Enforcement (FSE)

53. Fire safety enforcement is undertaken by a team comprising of five; two Watch Commanders (enforcement officers) and three, Auditing Officers.
54. The area has an Enforcement Activity Overview document which is in addition to an Enforcement Delivery Plan 2020/21, which is based on the standard SFRS template, for carrying out fire safety audits in relevant premises. The local Enforcement Activity Overview document has been developed as a framework for outlining the fire safety (enforcement) approach for fire safety activities within Argyll and Bute. The Overview document has not been produced to replace the Enforcement Delivery Plan and includes mandatory elements of this latter plan.
55. The Overview document describes that in order to manage the considerable logistical challenges of such a widespread geographical region, the area has been divided into four sectors: Lower Argyll (Helensburgh – Inverary – Ardlui); Mid-Argyll (Oban); Kintyre and Islands; Cowal and Dunoon. Auditing activity overlaps the four sectors due to the widespread nature of risk premises. However, sectors act as an administrative area of responsibility, for the designated officer, for conducting post-fire audits or the handling of premises complaints. The Overview document describes that a flexible tandem audit strategy has been established for the area, where premises located within island communities are subject to a differing cyclic audit regime than that for similar premises types on the mainland. This tandem approach seeks to reflect the community value of a premises where the loss would be significant from a rural community perspective compared to the mainland. The seasonal use of some premises types, primarily in the hospitality sector, and therefore the carrying out of audit activity in these premises, is also factored into the plan. There is a focus on different premises types at different times of the year.
56. Overall the delivery of enforcement activity has been affected by the impact of the pandemic, with the halting of routine audits in the early stages of the restrictions. There is a target of 100 to 120 fire safety audits per year per person taking into account geographic and logistical challenges in the area.

<sup>8</sup> SFRS, *Fire and Rescue Incident Statistics (Scotland)*, - <https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/about-us/fire-and-rescue-statistics.aspx>

The enforcement delivery plan sets out that audits will be risk-based, with resources being directed and prioritised around four key areas:

- premises where the risk to life is greatest
- emerging intelligence e.g. through operational activity or partner communications
- a risk-based methodology outline by the Directorate
- post-fire audit and analysis

57. The above priorities are also set out within the Overview document. Due to the geographical layout and logistical challenges, an annual audit programme has been developed for island communities that includes an annual audit of all hotels and most other sleeping accommodations.
58. Local SFRS staff advised us that they believed that the majority of premises in the area providing sleeping accommodation have not been subject to a previous audit. A locally produced 'guidance pack' has been created to support dutyholders comply with the legislation and provide them with an 'aide memoire', which is specifically developed to reflect the guidance and benchmarks contained within the Scottish Government guidance 'Fire safety guidance for existing premises with sleeping accommodation'.
59. There is a belief amongst some of the personnel we met with that the FSE function is under-resourced to meet the target set by the P&P Directorate. The geographical size and the rurality of the Argyll and Bute area are also barriers to achieving the aforementioned national audit targets.
60. The SFRS has an emphasis on measuring FSE performance in respect of the number of fire safety audits undertaken. Like staff in other LSO areas, there is a substantial amount of fire safety work undertaken which does not involve completing an audit, for example: consultation work, such as public entertainment licences, which is important in respect of achieving public safety.

The numbers of fire safety audits completed are shown in Table 5.

| 2016/17 | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 331     | 185     | 220     | 282     |

**Table 5: Fire safety audits Argyll and Bute.**<sup>9</sup>

61. Of the 282 audits completed in 2019/20, 97.5% were broadly compliant. Premises types that are targeted for audit in the Local Area Delivery Plan also follow the guidance issued centrally by the SFRS. An annual audit is mandatory for certain premises such as care homes, while other categories of premises receive an annual audit only when risk and compliance level criteria are matched. The nationally reported figure for 2019/20 of audits completed is higher than the 252 audits stated as being completed in the performance data submitted by the LSO as part of the data request for this inspection. Going forward, there is an intention to increase the number of audits carried out. The local audit plan for 2021/22 sets a target of 537, with an additional unspecified number of thematic and other significant audits also being carried out. Over the preceding years the ability to complete audits has been impacted by a turnover of staff, whether through temporary promotion, permanent moves out of the area or retirements. These personnel moves have also been impacted by the time taken to appoint and train replacements. As can be

<sup>9</sup> SFRS, *Fire Safety and Organisational Statistics (Scotland)*.

expected, subsequently the number of audits completed by an officer new to the role will be less than a more experienced officer.

62. As part of our data request for this inspection we asked for a list of recorded relevant premises and were given information from the assessors list as at September 2020 which reported there were 13,117 recorded premises in Argyll and Bute. However, some premises on that list would not be subject to an audit, such as areas of land, communications masts etc. Lists of known premises can be extracted from the SFRS national Prevention and Protection Enforcement Database (PPED)<sup>10</sup> however not all relevant premises are recorded on this database. Due to the perceived limitations of PPED, as we have seen in other areas, staff maintain their own local lists.
63. Local staff describe their work as being concentrated on sleeping risk premises.
64. In common with other areas we have visited, enforcement staff interviewed did not have a high opinion of PPED. The 'audit due list' facility on PPED is considered problematic and staff maintain their own spreadsheet to monitor workflow. Staff were also of the view that new SFRS standard paragraphs used to compile letters to duty holders were of a poor standard. Due to the complexity of IT systems it was also said to be more time-consuming now to produce letters. FSE staff routinely carry out the administration tasks required when producing correspondence related to audits as there is no dedicated administrative support for this function. This was said to negatively impact productivity.

## Response and Resilience

### Appliances

65. The appliances allocated to Argyll and Bute area are of a varying age and condition. Despite the age of some, they are generally in a reasonable condition, although the high reach appliance at Oban which is due for replacement, was said to be unreliable. The area also has some of the newer style Rapid Response Units (RRUs); we say more about these vehicles later. Replacement of vehicles is outwith the control of the LSO; however, there is SDA engagement with the fleet function.
66. The availability and poor condition of spare appliances is reported as being an issue in the area: this is highlighted as a national issue in our report<sup>11</sup> on the Service's management of its fleet.
67. An issue raised at some stations was the recent re-configuring of lockers of some appliances. This work had been undertaken to remove breathing apparatus (BA) from within the crew cab and to reposition it within a locker in the rear. A consequence of this move has obviously been the loss of stowage space for other equipment, particularly hose. There are sound reasons why BA is being removed from the crew compartment, such as to improve FF safety. The SFRS intends that all new appliances will have the BA stowed in the rear of appliances in the future. However, it was felt by some crews that this change had been introduced with no consultation or consideration of the impact on the loss of the other equipment. Firefighters consider this to be an issue in areas where there are restricted water supplies and where there is a reliance on 'open water' pumping, sometimes over extended distances therefore necessitating additional hose which was previously available on the vehicle.

10 We identified issues with the premises records on PPED in two of our thematic inspection reports – 'Fire Safety Enforcement' and 'Performance Management Information Systems'.

11 HM Fire Service Inspectorate, *The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's management of its fleet and equipment function*, 2019.

68. To report defects on appliances, SFRS fleet services use an electronic 'defects portal' to report and record defects. As we have described elsewhere in this report the IT infrastructure in some Argyll and Bute fire stations does not always satisfactorily support digital working. A number of staff reported to us that minor defects were still present on appliances after they had been returned from servicing at fleet workshops. Some staff are continuing to use the old manual reporting process of recording a defect in the vehicle 'defect log' rather than using the electronic process, due to IT issues. We would suggest that for those fire stations affected, the LSO engages with staff, to ensure that defects are reported appropriately.

### **Recommendation 1**

The LSO should, for the stations affected, engage with personnel to ensure that vehicle defects noted are appropriately reported.

## **Equipment**

69. With some exceptions described below, personnel are generally satisfied about the level and quality of operational equipment supplied.
70. Observations were made regarding the poor quality and quantity of torches. Some staff do not have a personal issue; this is considered by SFRS staff to be a particular problem in the very remote areas of Argyll and Bute where there is either very limited or no public street lighting and the incident location may be some distance from the appliance scene lighting, where this exists. The Inspectorate is aware that a procurement exercise for torches was commenced in the autumn of 2020, and understands that torches are being issued to personnel.
71. When defective equipment is sent for repair, there is a perception amongst some staff that the time taken to repair and return is excessive.
72. Periodic testing of equipment is carried out by fire station personnel as part of their normal routine. These tests form an important part of ensuring that the equipment is safe to use, is functioning correctly, and is ready to be deployed at an incident. The SFRS has no single electronic asset management system for equipment and its testing. The process in use in Argyll and Bute is paper-based. For a number of fire stations we visited there was inconsistency and gaps in the recording of the testing of this equipment. This presents a risk to the organisation should there be an accident involving a piece of equipment and there is an incomplete record during its life cycle.

### **Recommendation 2**

The LSO should, in discussion with colleagues from Response and Resilience Directorate, devise and implement a more robust system for the recording of the testing of equipment until such time as a national system is available.



## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

73. The majority of personnel within Argyll and Bute have received their allocated new PPE as part of the national replacement programme. Personnel were broadly happy with the quality of the new issue. The majority of personnel we spoke to said that they rarely, or never used the foul weather PPE that they were issued previously. We found at some fire stations, particularly the volunteer duty stations, that the facilities for drying or storing PPE were limited. The storage of PPE was untidy and haphazard at some stations, which was not helped by the lack of suitable facilities. For example, at the time of our visit there was no dedicated storage for the water rescue PPE at Oban fire station.

## Respiratory Protective Equipment

74. A new national standard breathing apparatus set for firefighters was introduced in Scotland in early 2016. These sets are of a different make than those previously in use in the Service and are perceived by some personnel to be overly complicated to use, and in particular the testing regime was thought to be too complex. In a limited number of fire stations there are poor facilities for cleaning and servicing BA sets.
75. An issue frequently raised with us was the availability of spare BA cylinders or the ability to easily access re-charged cylinders. Normally there are only two spare cylinders per each appliance. Not every fire station has a BA compressor and to enable the re-charging of cylinders, personnel frequently use their own vehicles to transport cylinders back and forward to keep supplies replenished.

### Recommendation 3

The LSO should devise and implement a more robust system in order that BA cylinders can be charged and transported without recourse to staff using their own vehicles.

## Property

76. In May 2019 a safety alert was issued by the building and civil engineering industry's Standing Committee on Structural Safety (SCOSS) following a 2018 failure in a flat roof constructed from Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC). RAAC was used extensively in the construction of flat roofed schools and similar buildings from the 1960s and 1980s.
77. Following the alert and discovery of RAAC at McDonald Road Fire Station in Edinburgh during refurbishment there, work was promptly initiated to assess the entire SFRS estate to determine the extent of the risk. RAAC was discovered at Helensburgh Fire Station. The structural issues identified in the reinforced concrete roof at Helensburgh have not been found at other stations in the Argyll and Bute area, but they exist elsewhere in other SFRS properties.
78. In December 2019 a report was made to the SFRS Board outlining the scale of the problem and advising of the initial remedial action to provide temporary structural support for the affected roofs. Overall the situation with the roof of the affected stations will have a significant financial impact for the Service, beyond that already spent on temporary and investigative work. For some stations this will require an in-depth assessment of the cost benefit of repairing the roof against replacing the whole building. The Service, recognising that extensive remedial work may be required at other fire stations, has purchased some temporary modular buildings which can be relocated from

McDonald Road, when the work there is completed, to other sites. We see this as a good practical approach.

79. There is electronic reporting of property issues, with defects being notified to the SFRS's property managers who are then responsible for prioritising and instructing the work to be carried out, and monitoring the performance of the maintenance contractor.
80. Otherwise, the fire stations in the area are mostly in a reasonable state of repair, though some are in need of minor works and decorating. We were however, made aware of a number of defects that had been outstanding for some considerable time or that had poor or ineffective repairs undertaken. This is possibly due to the remoteness of some of the buildings and the inability to get the national maintenance contractor to attend on site within a reasonable timescale.
81. A defect of particular interest was to the fire alarm system at one fire station which Inspectors had personally noted existed on a previous visit to the station thirteen months earlier. We consider this to be unsatisfactory and it leaves the Service open to risk and reputational damage.
82. Capital and Revenue expenditure priorities on premises refurbishment and repair is a national matter, in consultation with LSO area staff. Whilst we cannot comment directly on the quality of work carried out, or the performance of the maintenance contractor, we believe that better communication of matters relating to building work would avoid negative perceptions. We have made similar comment on this issue in other LAI reports.
83. As we indicate elsewhere in this report, a number of the fire stations, particularly in the very remote areas have poor or very poor ICT facilities, either due to poor broadband connectivity and/or the number of PCs available for personnel to use.
84. From what we are told by local crews there are often issues around connectivity despite there being fast reliable broadband in the wider local community. In March 2021 the SFRS awarded a new £3 million four-year contract for the provision of its wide area network requirements, delivering connectivity across all SFRS sites, replacing an existing contract. The supplier is expected to complete the installation requirements by December 2021. Announcing the award of the contract it was said that this will be one of the largest SD-WAN deployments in the UK. It was also stated that the SFRS had stipulated that the user experience was a priority, especially at some of the more remote locations where providing service is more challenging. It is to be hoped that this will become a reality, as currently at some locations systems are so poor that personnel find the use of IT extremely frustrating. We look forward to seeing a positive impact from the implementation of this contract as we continue to monitor end user satisfaction levels during our future station visits, particularly in remote locations.

### **Operational Intelligence**

85. The SFRS has a statutory duty to obtain information which may be required by its personnel in carrying out their operational role. When information is created, either by collection as part of that duty or through the writing of an operational policy, such as a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for an incident type, it is made available to firefighters through a device within the cab of the fire appliance.



86. In April 2018 the SFRS introduced a national Operational Intelligence (OI) system. Separately, the provision of risk information was subject to a thematic inspection<sup>12</sup> by HMFSI. In our report we describe in detail the policies and process used for managing the collection and use of data, and the software and hardware used in the system.
87. As part of our data request for this inspection we asked for details of the premises for which SFRS now holds records and were provided a list of 270 records. The list can be expected to be dynamic as new records are created and existing records deleted. As could be expected, records of premises are predominantly concentrated in the larger towns.
88. The new system uses a demountable tablet computer device. Prior to the system going live in 2018, firefighters in Argyll and Bute used the legacy Strathclyde FRS system and the mobile data terminal (MDT) permanently installed in the appliance cab. A number of the appliances in the area do not have a docking station on the vehicle for the tablet, and as a consequence the tablet is connected to a wall socket in the station in order to charge it. This means that the tablet is unsecured, apart from the password required to open it, as an appliance docking station also has a lock. Personnel also have to remember to take it with them when mobilised.
89. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the information contained on the tablet device its operation is password protected. An issue that was raised with us at a number of remote stations was the difficulty around being advised of password changes. This was due to details of the changes being sent to the appliance mobile phone. In a number of areas mobile phone access is not functioning satisfactorily or in limited cases there is no appliance mobile phone. We would encourage the Service to devise a system which ensures that all stations receive this information correctly.
90. As part of our local area inspection we wanted to see how the new system was being used and the local processes for managing site specific data collection. As we ascertained in our thematic inspection, for the two wholetime stations one watch in each station has the responsibility of allocating the premises across the other watches to conduct visits. For the more remote areas the relevant RVDS Support Watch Commander is taking on responsibility for the collection and updating of the system. Where that post is, as yet unfilled, the work will be taken on once the post is filled. Until such time, personnel on alternative duties will be used to gather data where possible.
91. Training in the use of the new system is via an online package as part of the SFRS's Learning Content Management System (LCMS). We sampled some risk information for premises, to review the ease with which staff could retrieve the information and how familiar they were with the tablet device. In our sample we found varying levels of skill amongst fire station-based staff on the use of the new system. From our discussions with fire station personnel, more often than not, the tablet was only used for its mapping and hydrant locating capability. This was predominantly due to issues described in our thematic inspection and is primarily due to the lack of an automatic link to the mobilising system, therefore necessitating manual searching for risk information; which is time-consuming and at times not straightforward.

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<sup>12</sup> HM Fire Service Inspectorate, *The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's arrangements for the provision of Operational Risk Information*, 2019.

## Health and Safety

92. Until October 2020, health and safety reporting in the SFRS was carried out using the RIVO Safeguard system. The system was considered to be awkward to use by some staff who thought this was a factor contributing to a low reporting of near-misses. The system was not used by VDS personnel. If there was a need to record a health and safety issue it would be processed on behalf of volunteer staff by their Station Commander. In October 2020 the Service introduced a new electronic recording system called TASS (Think Act Stay Safe). There have been a number of technical ICT issues with the development of the system and although its use has commenced there are still some outstanding issues with it, which the Service hopes will be resolved shortly. In most cases, knowledge and, understandably due to the low numbers of events, use of TASS was limited. However, where knowledge of the system was expressed the view was that it was a better system than its predecessor.
93. Near misses are the type of safety-related events that can occur on the incident ground as well as in the station environment whilst not resulting in an injury: however we believe there is a lack of understanding among personnel about the importance of reporting near-misses, in particular from the incident ground. Near miss reporting is described by the Health and Safety Executive as a very important way of identifying problem areas. We have found this issue during a number of other local area inspections which we have carried out and reported on.
94. At a UK level the SFRS benchmarks well in relation to injury rates per 1,000 employees against other fire and rescue services. However, for Argyll and Bute there has been an increase in the number of health and safety events that have resulted in injury over the last three years, 1 August 2018 to 31 July 2020, from three to four<sup>13</sup>. As indicated above there are perceived to be issues affecting the recording of near misses. Despite the difficulties it is encouraging that near misses have been recorded – 12 over the last three years. Within this period there was one recorded act of violence against SFRS personnel.
95. During the same reporting period there were 12 accidents involving fire service vehicles.
96. We indicated in the introduction to this report that the SFRS has a programme of internal station audits. These audits are carried out as part of the SFRS's operational assurance policy. The station audits form part of the pre-incident audit arrangements of this policy. The SFRS has a central team whose focus is on all aspects of Operational Assurance, including audits, which can be either routine or thematic, concentrating on a particular subject area. Station audits are carried out by local managers at the following frequency;
- wholtime fire stations at least once per year
  - RDS fire stations at least once every two years
  - VDS fire stations at the discretion of the LSO
97. The reports for some of the RDS stations were outside of the frequency set out in the policy, with a limited number of RVDS audits being completed within the past three years, excluding any impact of the pandemic on timescales.
98. There is a performance reporting framework to report on audit outcomes. We reviewed the content of a limited sample of routine audit reports for the stations we visited. The reports were completed to a varying degree of quality, with some omitting detail of areas

<sup>13</sup> LSO data return.

of notable practice or areas for improvement, for the remaining reports these sections were completed. The standard audit forms include a section to be completed which sets out an action plan, including timescales, for the station management team. Of the 26 station audits reviewed, action plans were found in 21.

### **Incident Activity**

99. During the period of our fieldwork in April 2021 the VDS crew on the island of Coll responded to a significant and challenging fire at a local property and workshop which also resulted in a wildland fire caused by a running fuel fire from the workshop. Due to the scale of the incident, the Service mobilised supporting crews on the island of Mull who were brought over by the Tobermory RNLI lifeboat. Successful firefighting intervention prevented the fire from involving a number of further properties and fortunately there were no casualties. Inspectors were on the island the following week and were able to assess for themselves the aftermath of the incident and obtain an understanding of the whole community response to it. Post the incident local LSO managers visited the island to undertake a structured debrief and provide support to the crew.

### **Partnership**

100. Partnership working encompasses formal partnerships, stemming from Community Planning arrangements as defined in legislation, and informal partnerships at an operational level.
101. At a formal level the full Community Planning Partnership (CPP) is responsible for the overall development of the Community Plan and Argyll and Bute Outcome Improvement Plan (ABOIP). It does this by delegating responsibility for individual aspects of community planning to Area Community Planning Groups, Management Committee and CPP Chief Officers Group. There are 33 different organisations on the full partnership. Structurally sitting beneath the full CPP there is a CPP Management Committee; the LSO is Chair of this committee. The Management Committee is responsible for ensuring there is effective engagement, joint working, policy development, planning and prioritisation and performance management of the ABOIP.
102. The Area Community Planning Groups are tasked with ensuring there is effective community planning delivery at a local level.
103. For community planning purposes the area is divided into four community planning groups; Bute and Cowal; Helensburgh and Lomond; Mid Argyll, Kintyre and the Islands; Oban, Lorn and the Isles. Membership of these groups come from a variety of sectors; private; public and third sector.
104. Operationally, at a fire station level good partnership arrangements were described between the SFRS, Scottish Ambulance Service, and Police Scotland. For example SFRS personnel at some island based stations will assist when an air ambulance helicopter is landing locally, providing fire cover and assistance to the Ambulance crew. A view expressed by some SFRS crews is that there is scope to improve communication between SAS and the SFRS over incident details and location, particularly in areas where there are no street names or numbers.
105. As we indicated in the introduction to this report there are a number of Ministry of Defence (MOD) sites within the area, notably Royal Navy bases at Faslane and Coulport. The MOD has its own firefighters, provided by a private contractor, who would provide

the initial response to an incident. In recent years we are told that the interaction with MOD fire crews has fallen away. This has been recognised by both parties as unsatisfactory and during the time of our visits work has commenced to promote a closer working relationship and definition of roles should an incident occur. Familiarisation visits to the bases have been undertaken and two small scale on-site exercises have recently occurred, with another planned in the coming months. Site-specific operational plans and other information are also being drawn up in support of the SFRS's operational response planning. This desire to improve working relationships is welcomed.

## 3.3\_Evolving Role of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

### Service Transformation

106. Issues around transformation of the role of the SFRS are a consideration for firefighters. The perceived lack of information and uncertainty on future plans for the Service is unsettling for some staff. This is a situation that has persisted for some time and is the result of lengthy discussions, at a national and UK level, regarding terms and conditions and the role map of a firefighter. There have also been delays in finalising the terms and conditions of RVDS firefighters.
107. Fire station personnel are well sighted on the potential training that would accompany any expansion of role, given that completing training for their existing role is seen as difficult (due to factors described elsewhere in this report). This is particularly a challenge for RDS and VDS firefighters, most of whom have a short, finite opportunity for training, but it also extends to wholetime personnel, especially those who have specialist response skills such as water rescue. Broadly speaking, the majority of staff we spoke to were supportive of a change in role, particularly around emergency medical response, if the role is accompanied with training and the necessary equipment. A pilot project for co-responding to out-of-hospital cardiac arrest incidents was previously run within the SFRS and firefighters from Argyll and Bute took part. Work on the pilot was stopped whilst discussions were taking place with staff representative bodies.
108. Overall, the Service has an ambitious transformation programme which it believes is essential to meet the ever-changing risks faced and demands placed on it. In June 2019, the Service created a Service Delivery Model Programme Framework which comprises of a number of independent and interrelated projects that will contribute to delivering the vision and the proposed long-term benefits of transformation. The programme, which itself is too complex to discuss in detail in this report, contains a RVDS Strategy project. The declared purpose of this project is to maximise the use and associated benefits of on-call firefighters, ensuring the provision of an appropriate balance of prevention and protection and emergency response services to communities across Scotland. The work of the project is ongoing and being undertaken in three phases; the research work which is Phase One has concluded. Phase Two will identify and create a programme of improvement strategies and was expected to conclude in quarter four of 2020/21, this timeline has been reviewed and, due to the impact of Covid-19 and a change in the phasing of public consultations within the project, an updated completion date of July 2023 has now been set for Phase Two. With the final phase of scheduled to complete in 2026. However, as indicated there are a number of interdependent elements and these timescales may slip further.

109. The Phase One research was aimed at the following areas:

- the current RVDS arrangements within the SFRS
- the overall direction of the research with regard to:
  - improved attraction
  - improved recruitment and selection
  - enhanced retention
  - appropriate response models
  - framework for station duties
  - enhanced engagement

110. HMFSI hope that the outputs from this initial work will help to address some of the issues identified within this report. To help drive this work forward a new national team, supporting improvements to the attraction, recruitment, retention and working practices of RDS and VDS staff, has been created. There was a general lack of awareness of the project amongst Argyll and Bute RVDS staff. Hopefully as the work of the project progresses its profile will improve.

### **Modernising Response**

111. As part of the SFRS's transformation plans, new-style fire appliances, known as Rapid Response Units (RRUs), have been introduced at certain locations in Scotland. There are some of these appliances within the Argyll and Bute area. The introduction of these appliances has not been without its problems, with reports of technical issues with the ultra-high pressure (UHP) firefighting equipment. An issue frequently raised with us during our inspection was that the vehicles are designed to carry only four personnel. It was said that this restriction on the ability to carry additional personnel had had a negative impact on the stations with these vehicles. This is because often a five-person crew is beneficial for moving equipment, such as hose, especially given the prevalence of open water pumping in the area. Back up from another appliance may also take an extended time to arrive.
112. Another issue raised with us was the perceived lack of mobilisations and use of the RRUs when it was felt that their use could have had a positive impact on the response to the incident, particularly the specialist UHP equipment. We have witnessed this issue in other local areas and made comment on it.
113. As we have covered elsewhere in this report there is a pilot Volunteer Improvement Project (VIP) running locally. The personnel at the fire stations involved have welcomed the increase in appliance mobilisations. Not all, but some of these stations have an RRU. The Service has invested heavily in these vehicles and it is only right that this financial commitment is followed through and use made of their capability.
114. The Inspectorate is very supportive of the VIP and its aims. We understand that personnel at some fire stations were due to take part in the VIP. For reasons unknown to the crew this did not take place. We hope that the benefits of the increased use of VDS crews can be further rolled out to other stations in Argyll and Bute and more generally across Scotland.



## Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals

115. The SFRS Performance Management Framework (PMF) committed the Service to reducing UFAS by 15 percent between April 2017 and March 2020. While the local fire and rescue plan has a reduction of UFAS calls as a priority, and the area has a separate UFAS Reduction Plan, neither allocate a target to the scale of that reduction. Table 6 shows that UFAS calls have been increasing over the three years, 2017-2020.

| Year       | 2017/18 | 2018/19 | 2019/20 |
|------------|---------|---------|---------|
| UFAS calls | 582     | 630     | 663     |

**Table 6: UFAS calls Argyll and Bute<sup>14</sup>.**

116. Analysis from the UFAS Reduction Plan mentioned above indicates that primary schools accounted for 15% of the total number of UFAS incidents over the 2019/20 reporting year. This source of UFAS calls is similar to other LSO areas, as may be expected from an area with a prominent tourist sector, hotels made up another 12% of UFAS calls. Over the last three years false alarms due to apparatus were the main category of UFAS incidents, accounting for 94% of all alarm actuations.
117. Overall the number of UFAS incidents represented 36% of the total operational activity across Argyll and Bute during 2019/20 with the consequential negative impact on being able to carry out other activities, such as training or community safety work, combined with the unnecessary road risk whilst responding under blue light conditions. In an area with a large number of RVDS crewed appliances, the disruption caused to crews and potentially their primary employers, should not go unrecognised.
118. From 6 May 2020 the Service nationally introduced a new UFAS model response policy in an attempt to minimise disruption to emergency response during the Covid-19 pandemic. This new policy reduced the pre-determined attendance (PDA) response at automatic fire alarm (AFA) actuations to a single pumping appliance, with the exception of sleeping accommodation and other specific high-risk premises which continued to receive either a full or appropriately modified PDA.
119. Within the Service, the Prevention and Protection (P&P) function has committed to conducting a UFAS Stocktake Review – a detailed examination of the effectiveness of the SFRS’s UFAS arrangements. The Stocktake Review was conducted by the UFAS Working Group – a cross-directorate group. The Working Group’s report generated 20 recommendations. One of the key finding from the Stocktake Review is that the national target of 15% will not be met by some margin. At a meeting of the Service Delivery Committee of the SFRS Board on 17 September 2020, a report was brought forward outlining the SFRS’s approach for managing the implementation of the UFAS Stocktake Review recommendations. A UFAS Project Board is now in place, supported by two working groups. This national work is ongoing and an outcome is the publication of proposed options which have been subject to a 12-week public consultation running from 19 July to 11 October.
120. One of the FSE Enforcement Officers is designated as the local UFAS ‘Champion’ who is responsible for reviewing UFAS activity in line with SFRS policy, which defines actions to be taken at designated staged trigger points. The review will identify premises that have reached the trigger points, one of which, dependent on premises type, can ultimately lead to a managed reduction in the pre-determined attendance of appliances.

<sup>14</sup> Supplied by LSO in response to information request.

The Champion is also responsible for co-ordinating the work done by designated station 'Champions' in relation to UFAS. Station UFAS Champions are responsible for analysing data for their station on a seven-week cycle and ensuring that the correct intervention is applied.

121. The UFAS Reduction Plan proposes that local engagement activity will be carried out with the education and NHS sectors. These sectors have historically been a source of unwanted alarms.

#### **Recommendation 4**

The LSO should ensure the continued increase in local effort to reduce UFAS calls, including engagement with CPP partners within relevant sectors to explore the potential for support in addressing the issue.

## **3.4\_Governance, Accountability and Performance**

### **Effective Governance and Performance**

#### **Local Scrutiny Arrangements**

122. As mentioned earlier, reporting of performance is made to the local authority as part of the local scrutiny arrangements. There are 11 wards within Argyll and Bute. As mentioned previously for community planning purposes the area is also divided into four Area Community Planning Groups. Each area has a localised delivery plan. These planning groups routinely receive reports of relevant SFRS activity.
123. From our discussions with the Leader of Argyll and Bute Council and the Council Chief Executive, we concluded that officers of the Service are actively engaged with the Community Planning Partnership and that the Service is well engaged with strategic partners in playing an integral part in service delivery.

#### **People**

124. The Argyll and Bute area, in contrast to other areas in Scotland, has a substantial number of VDS Firefighters, crewing 64% of the area's fire stations and forming 58% of the Service's total number of VDS crewed fire stations. The work and commitment of the volunteers is to be commended, and from our discussions with partners of the Service, this is recognised and appreciated by communities across the area. The LSO has recognised outstanding service and achievement throughout the area giving credit to individuals for their commitment to excellence in supporting their local communities.
125. Similar to some other LSO areas, locally a VIP has been undertaken. The aims of the project are to support the reduction of unintentional harm and the resultant casualties in rural areas by changing the way in which VDS crewed appliances are utilised and mobilised.
126. The VIP, which has been running as a pilot project within Argyll and Bute, is looking at the benefits of mobilising Volunteer Units outwith their existing mobilisation area. Volunteer units not in an improvement plan only mobilise to incidents within their own station grounds, which is traditionally the very immediate vicinity of their village. The initial VDS stations involved in this project, which has been running for a number of years, are Dalmally, Appin, Craginure, Carradale and Bridge of Orchy.

127. The VIP seeks to tap into volunteers' desire to provide more support to the wider communities of Argyll and Bute. It has been identified locally that VDS Firefighters consistently demonstrate a desire to be utilised more frequently. Increasing the incident response activity can help to increase morale amongst personnel and helps with staff retention, which is important, particularly in areas where recruitment can be challenging.
128. Prior to the pilot, mobilisation protocols meant that even if a VDS unit was the closest to an incident it wouldn't necessarily be mobilised to the incident. The VIP allowed the selected volunteer units to be mobilised without backup to single-pump attendances or as part of the initial attendance to multi-pump turnouts. An evaluation of the pilot was undertaken which demonstrated that the pilot had a significant positive impact with both the crews and the communities involved.
129. Nationally the Service recognises that RVDS is an integral and vital part of the SFRS's operational response. In June 2019, the Service created a Service Delivery Model Programme Framework, the work related to this is ongoing and contains within it a RDS/VDS Strategy project. The declared purpose of this RDS/VDS Strategy project is to maximise the use and associated benefits of on-call firefighters, ensuring the provision of an appropriate balance of prevention and protection and emergency response services to communities across Scotland.
130. The RDS/VDS project will seek to create an overarching strategy to identify other initiatives and improvements that can be implemented to further support and strengthen the Retained and VDS duty systems. It is anticipated that the focus will be on, but not limited to, recruitment, retention, response models, station duties and enhanced engagement.
131. One fairly recent change aimed at improving this section of the Service has been the creation of the role of a RVDS support Watch Commander. In January 2019, the SFRS appointed the first 18 staff to these posts to act as support officer for RDS and VDS fire stations. There have been 2 further appointment rounds to take the number of posts to 54.
132. We see the introduction of the RVDS support Watch Commanders as a welcome positive step and we experienced the positive work of the postholders in Argyll and Bute.
133. The issues surrounding the RVDS are complex and include recruitment, retention and training, issues which have a link to crewing and availability. Given the relative importance of RDS and VDS firefighters, crewing almost 80% of SFRS fire stations, we continue to support efforts to create duty systems that can flexibly recognise the important role played by these firefighters in providing a service to their communities, while recognising that what will be a good solution for one community might not be appropriate for another.

### **Appliance Availability**

134. RDS personnel use an electronic system called Gartan to manage their availability. The system allows them to 'book' available or unavailable remotely, using a mobile phone. The system allows managers and Operations Control at Johnstone to monitor the availability of appliances. The availability of the RDS crewed pumps is shown in Table 7. Some of the issues influencing the low availability rate at some stations are discussed elsewhere in this report. In the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic; during the months of April and May 2020, the availability of RDS crew in the area increased. This was primarily due to the impact of the national 'lockdown', when many of the



businesses of the primary employers of RDS personnel were closed. As the restrictions facing businesses eased, the availability of personnel, particularly during the day time decreased again. We are advised that generally the availability for the year 2019/20 has improved compared to the previous year.

| Fire station   | Availability % |
|--|----------------|
| Arrochar   | 72.59          |
| Bowmore  | 99.05          |
| Campbeltown 1st appliance<br>Campbeltown 2nd appliance   | 97.65<br>88.66 |
| Cove   | 88.50          |
| Dunoon 1st appliance<br>Dunoon 2nd appliance             | 99.83<br>97.16 |
| Garelochhead 1st appliance<br>Garelochhead 2nd appliance | 82.00<br>35.25 |
| Helensburgh  | 47.21          |
| Inveraray  | 93.60          |
| Lochgilphead   | 78.44          |
| Oban   | 92.62          |
| Rothesay 1st appliance<br>Rothesay 2nd appliance         | 97.48<br>94.62 |
| Tarbert  | 93.99          |
| Tighnabruaich  | 94.26          |
| Tobermory 1st appliance<br>Tobermory 2nd appliance       | 98.65<br>83.40 |

**Table 7: RDS availability August 2019 to August 2020.**

135. Due to different contractual arrangements VDS personnel don't use the Gartan system and therefore there is no national reporting. The availability of VDS personnel is managed locally by the Volunteer Leader and Deputy. As with RDS personnel, volunteers are 'paged' to attend the fire station when responding to an emergency, however, Johnstone Control will not automatically know the availability of personnel.
136. Availability at some stations has been impacted by a shortage of crew. Some fire stations have vacancies for a number of personnel. As of 27 August 2020 there were approximately 39 RDS and 46 VDS posts vacant. Recruitment was paused at the start of the pandemic and recommenced, for RDS personnel only, in August. At that point there were 15 applications in progress, with 43 candidates in a holding pool for VDS entry.

137. We have raised the difficulties that are experienced with the recruitment of and initial entry process for RDS and VDS in a number of reports, most recently in our thematic inspection on RDS training<sup>15</sup>. Locally the system and process is perceived to be too restrictive, too lengthy, and not suited to the needs of remote rural communities. We were advised for example that the initial entrance courses in the legacy service were organised to run at a time of year that didn't impact those applicants who were busy, in their occupations in either agriculture or tourism. There was also said to be more local input and engagement in the process, so that local personnel could assist and support candidates going through the process. We are advised by the LSO that there is an intention to move towards a more localised recruitment process. The Inspectorate hopes that the previous perceived benefits of a local process will be explored and if appropriate incorporated into the new system. As mentioned elsewhere in this report the Service has a RVDS project and one of the strands of that work is a review of the recruitment process.

### Appraisal

138. We saw very limited evidence that personal appraisals are carried out for operational personnel. Where we did see them the overall quality was variable with some Watch Commanders placing more importance on the process and quality of the end product than others.

### Learning and Development

139. The SFRS has a standard training programme for firefighters for general maintenance of skills and knowledge. It is designed to be a blended approach of lecture or self-directed study, and practical 'hands-on' experiential learning. The programme comprises TFoC (training for competence) modules. There are 12 core modules, 12 standard modules, and 24 advanced modules. These modules apply to wholetime and RDS firefighters.
140. Due to competing demands on the time available to RDS firefighters and the finite time for their training, TFoC modules are applied to RDS firefighters in the following way.
- All 12 core TFoC modules should be covered annually.
  - All standard TFoC modules should be covered over a rolling three-year period.
  - Advanced TFoC modules that are relative to risks in their area should be covered on a three-year rolling programme. The decision on what advanced modules to cover should be made by the LSO on the basis of risk.
141. The SFRS submitted RDS and VDS training schedules as evidence for our inspection. The schedules include where relevant:
- all core TFoC modules over 12 months
  - all standard TFoC modules over three-years (plus an equality and diversity module)
  - various of the 24 advanced modules depending on local need
142. Part of this blended approach is delivered using the Learning Content Management System (LCMS) which is an online learning resource for firefighters. The system contains multi-media learning modules covering the skills based on the Maintenance Phase Development Planner (MPDP). The MPDP is a monthly programme but it doesn't fit with the wholetime shift cycle. Each subject has a series of e-learning tools, case studies,

<sup>15</sup> HMFSI, [The Training of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's Retained Duty System Personnel \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

interactive packages, and assessments to support learning. Some personnel are of the view that some of the LCMS modules and concluding assessments are of poor quality and don't support learning. Though there was an acknowledgement that there had recently been some improvement in the assessments, as they now indicated where incorrect answers are given.

143. Although specifically focusing on RDS firefighter training, we published in March 2020<sup>16</sup> a report which included an assessment of the elements of the MPDP. We concluded that the modules have been created by subject matter experts and provide a great deal of background information. This can make them overly complex and very text-heavy with content not always easy to understand, which can prove very difficult to digest, and even more difficult to recall, when taking the online test at the end of the session.
144. There are no training packages specifically written for VDS firefighters. When delivering training to volunteers, trainers will predominantly cover the core skill modules, however, when doing so the trainers will also carry out an element of summarisation, as the module contents are not always appropriate. There may be occasions when the content of advanced modules are covered, this will depend on local risk.
145. This training is normally recorded using the PDRPro system. PDRPro is an electronic system used by wholetime and RDS firefighters to record training and learning development, both from formal training and from continuous development obtained during incidents. The recording of training undertaken by VDS firefighters is usually done by their training officer, as it is recognised that doing this by individual volunteers is impractical due to lack of IT facilities at VDS fire stations where there is usually one laptop computer for the use of the whole crew. Performance monitoring of the completion of training records is the responsibility of the relevant fire station management team. The local training Station Commander also monitors station performance and provides the LSO management team with frequent reports.
146. During our visits, we discussed with personnel their overall view of the training. The majority believed that there was too much of a focus on theory, on completing training records, and insufficient 'hands-on' practical training. Oban fire station, unlike the majority of other stations in Argyll and Bute, has a purpose-built training facility, which pre-dates the creation of the SFRS. There is a confined space and 'hot fire' training facility as part of the training complex. The use of the 'hot facility' is controlled centrally by the TED function and local, suitably qualified, instructors are not able to use it to deliver training. The reason for this was said to be budgetary. Every time the equipment is used it requires setting up with the installation of wood panels, and cleaning out once these have been burnt during training. There is no local budget to pay for this set-up and clean-out. There was a high degree of local frustration that this facility was said to be under-used, there was the belief that there was scope to deliver more local training using local, rather than national TED instructors.
147. There was also frustration that the Oban facility doesn't have a dedicated appliance to support training at the facility. There have been occasions when the RDS pump has been removed from Oban Fire Station to be used at the facility to enable a course to be delivered. In such circumstances this would mean that there would be a delay in mobilising the RDS should it be required. A view was also expressed that frequency of some training was now less than it had been, particularly 'live fire' hot training, and is of

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16 Ibid.

poorer quality with the availability of courses not working effectively, with late notification in some cases. This can be a particular issue for RVDS personnel who may have to seek leave from their primary employment to attend training. We were advised that in the legacy service training was sometimes delivered during weekends which made it easier for RVDS personnel to attend.

148. Training is supported by area-based trainers whose priorities and activity is led through discussion with station-based Watch Commanders. Personnel at a number of fire stations were very positive in their view of these training officer visits. Part of the duties of these trainers is the moving of appliances for the purpose of repair or maintenance. In the case of unscheduled vehicle movements this causes the most disruption and can impact on the delivery of programmed training to station personnel. In 2019 HMFSI published an inspection report on the management of the SFRS's fleet function<sup>17</sup>. At that time we reported that there was no firm policy in place for vehicle movements in respect of maintenance and repairs. In some areas it was undertaken by mechanics or equipment technicians, in other areas it was operational staff. We recommended that the Service introduce national guidance on responsibility for the movement of vehicles for service and maintenance.
149. A variation in teaching techniques between trainers and delivery sites was also raised with us, where staff have received training in the same subject but at different training locations. There was said to be no standard, it being down to an interpretation of the training manual and the explanation for the difference depended on 'who you spoke to'. This was said to cause issues when doing trainee phased assessments.
150. There are specialist water rescue resources at Oban fire station as well as a high reach vehicle. Both of these capabilities require specialist training. Firefighters described finding it challenging to maintain specialist skills in the time available for training, particularly for the high reach vehicle which is crewed by RDS personnel. Firefighters providing the water rescue capability also stated that it was difficult to find a suitable local training venue to practise the full skills needed.
151. Effective use of LCMS and PDRPro systems relies on a suitable ICT infrastructure, both in provision of computers and adequate broadband connections, particularly when trying to stream training videos. As we have covered elsewhere in this report, there are issues at a number of fire stations that have insufficient numbers of fully functioning computers and good broadband speeds.
152. Similar to other areas of the Service there is a shortage of trained drivers at a number of fire stations in Argyll and Bute. There was also said to be a lack of available driver training courses. The Service is well aware of the driver training issues and has nationally tried to resolve the problems by outsourcing some of the provision, however, the procurement process was problematic and had to be re-run. In addition to outsourcing, the Service is generally looking to increase the number of driving instructors available, hopefully this may help resolve some of the issues. As may be expected, the time taken to qualify as an appliance driver is lengthy. In addressing driver training needs the Service will also have to consider and resolve the challenges of delivering courses to island-based personnel.

<sup>17</sup> HMFSI: [Inspection of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's Management of its Fleet and Equipment Function](http://www.gov.scot) (www.gov.scot)

153. An issue raised consistently was the negative impact on training created by a lack of scrap cars to train on. We were advised that the shortage of cars was due to a problem with the national supply contract. We have commented in previous reports about this contract and the supply of cars. We believe that for resilience, local areas should have the ability to source suitably prepared local vehicles, where available, when there are supply issues, such as those reported with the national procurement.

### **Recommendation 5 (National)**

The LSO should seek clarification from procurement colleagues and national TED regarding the current status of the national supply contract of scrap cars and what remedial action can be taken to allow local procurement of suitable vehicles when they are unable to be supplied through the national contract for whatever reason.

### **LSO Support Staff**

154. The Argyll and Bute area is supported by a team of support staff who, due to the impact of Covid-19, have been working from home. In the initial stages of the national lockdown home working was difficult for some due to ICT issues, however these were quickly rectified. Pre-Covid-19 the majority of staff were based at the LSO headquarters at Clydebank. In addition to the wider LSO area, the team also provide admin support to the areas of Glasgow City; East Renfrewshire; Renfrewshire; Inverclyde; and to Johnstone Operations Control.
155. The work of the team fluctuates in response to national and local need and priority. During the last 18 months the team has enhanced access to admin support in Argyll and Bute especially for RVDS staff who, due to modern digital technology, now enjoy greater access to admin support than ever before. The team has developed, in consultation with end users, guidance notes to assist uniformed staff to better navigate admin systems, which are said to have greatly assisted staff.
156. A recent national review of admin support has been carried out by the SFRS with a view to disseminate common and good practice across the Service. We are advised that it is estimated that across Scotland 95% of admin procedures have now been standardised. The team utilise a SharePoint landing page to host procedural documents. It is intended that this will provide easy access to the necessary forms and systems required by fire station staff to manage routine administrative functions, such as recording sickness or processing purchase orders. This single-access portal is particularly useful to those who are newly promoted or acting up in a role and have no previous experience in using these systems.
157. There is a good relationship with uniformed staff, a number of whom were particularly appreciative of the support provided by members of the team. However, similar to their operational colleagues, admin support in Argyll and Bute has a number of challenges from some national issues.
- IT software issues, especially poor broadband on island and remote communities, where communications sometimes have to be via phone calls.
  - Around 30% of the team's role is to process travel and accommodation requirements for visiting trainers or managers, and to arrange ferry transfers of appliances when required, which we are advised can be challenging due to the limitations of the travel providers systems.

- Staff felt that there would be benefit in raising the wider awareness nationally of the challenges experienced by island and remote area personnel and the difficulties in supporting these crews.

## Workforce

158. The management structure in Argyll and Bute comprises one LSO, three Group Commanders, and seven Station Commanders.
159. The majority of personnel we spoke to were positive of the station management in the area and felt able to raise issues or ask for advice if necessary. Although staff also stated that there had been limited station visits by supervisory staff, and that this pre-dated Covid-19 restrictions. Personnel also expressed a view that management above station commander level had a low profile in the more remote areas. More recently the LSO area management team have undertaken station engagement, with each station having received a visit from a team member, and the LSO conducting a number of face-to-face sessions with crews.
160. The biggest challenge in recent years for RVDS crews at some fire stations has been, and continues to be, the availability of crew. This has been primarily down to staff leaving the Service and the time taken in the recruitment of replacements. Some stations also have a number of trainee firefighters. Following initial training, it takes a period of time, usually three years, for a trainee to become designated as 'competent' in the role. During this three year period the trainee firefighters are unable to fully contribute to the crewing of the appliance because the SFRS's policies and procedure require certain functions to be carried out by 'competent' personnel only.
161. RVDS firefighters often have a principal employer and in some cases have their employer's agreement to leave their place of principal employment to respond to a call, thereby supporting safety in the local community. Employer's release can be an important factor for daytime RDS cover. Some personnel we spoke to felt that the support of primary employers went generally unrecognised by the SFRS and felt that steps should be taken to publically acknowledge the support given. In some other LSO areas primary employers of RDS firefighters are presented with a plaque, thanking them for their support.

### Recommendation 6

The LSO should examine ways in which the contribution and support of RDS primary employers within the area can be suitably recognised.



162. Argyll and Bute staff sickness, shown as total days lost, average days lost and absence percentage are shown in Tables 8 to 10. As can be seen the absence rate has been increasing for most employee groups, with some groups displaying a significant increase during the three-year period.

| Employee Group         | Total Days Lost | Average Days Lost | Absence %      |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Wholetime Staff (5WDS) | 342             | 4.96              | 9.21           |
| Retained Staff         | 1,835.5         | 9.46              | 18.55          |
| Volunteer Staff        | 93              | 0.4               | 0.58           |
| Flexi Duty Officers    | 14              | 0.74              | 1.05           |
| Day Duty Staff         | 14              | 0.78              | 0.95           |
| <b>Total</b>           |                 |                   | <b>2,298.5</b> |

**Table 8: Argyll and Bute 2018 staff sickness absence statistics.**

| Employee Group         | Total Days Lost | Average Days Lost | Absence %      |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Wholetime Staff (5WDS) | 243             | 3.47              | 5.52           |
| Retained Staff         | 1,963.5         | 10.02             | 13.9           |
| Volunteer Staff        | 525             | 2.29              | 3.44           |
| Flexi Duty Officers    | 29              | 1.71              | 1.1            |
| Day Duty Staff         | 53              | 2.04              | 2.63           |
| <b>Total</b>           |                 |                   | <b>2,813.5</b> |

**Table 9: Argyll and Bute 2019 staff sickness absence statistics.**

| Employee Group         | Total Days Lost | Average Days Lost | Absence %    |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Wholetime Staff (5WDS) | 239             | 3.85              | 0.97         |
| Retained Staff         | 1,939           | 10.26             | 16.79        |
| Volunteer Staff        | 602             | 2.84              | 5.04         |
| Flexi Duty Officers    | 22              | 1.47              | 0.97         |
| Day Duty Staff         | 160             | 7.62              | 8.11         |
| <b>Total</b>           |                 |                   | <b>2,962</b> |

**Table 10: Argyll and Bute 2020 staff sickness absence statistics.**

## Climate Change

163. Changes to the climate in Scotland has been in evidence over a number of recent years, with warmer wetter winters and longer periods of dry weather at other times of the year. The impact of this for the SFRS is twofold. Firstly as an emergency service the SFRS provides a response to incidents of both wildfire and flooding, and increases in these incident types requires the Service to adapt. For example increasing the amount and disposition of flood rescue equipment and boats; and the provision of enhanced or specialised wildfire equipment. Secondly, the SFRS is a key player in the Scottish Government's Climate Change Adaptation Programme. As part of this climate change work the SFRS has published a Climate Change Response Plan 2045<sup>18</sup>.
164. The plan outlines how the Service intends to respond to the Scottish Government's declared Climate Emergency. Part of the SFRS's response, is to reduce its own carbon emissions to a net zero target by 2045. In an attempt to achieve this, the SFRS aims to move its light fleet and vans to electric vehicles. A consequence of this is the need for vehicle charging points. There are plans for the provision of a charging infrastructure at some SFRS premises within the Argyll and Bute area. This requirement is paramount to the successful roll-out of electric vehicles throughout the area. We have been advised that at present some staff with fully electric vehicles in Argyll and Bute are finding that it can be challenging operating an electric vehicle within the area. These challenges can influence decisions around how journeys are planned and undertaken, particularly in order to visit remote and island communities.
165. The Service also has a policy of trying to reduce the energy consumption at fire stations. Oban fire station, along with eight other SFRS stations took part in a UK national energy-saving competition. Oban went on to achieve sixth place, saving £1,684 in gas and electricity bills between December 2020 and March 2021, through taking simple steps like turning down the heating and switching off lights in empty rooms.

<sup>18</sup> [climatechangeresponseplan2045.pdf \(firescotland.gov.uk\)](https://www.firescotland.gov.uk/~/media/Files/ClimateChangeResponsePlan2045.pdf)



## 3.5\_ Conclusions and Recommendations

166. Our impression of the SFRS in the Argyll and Bute area is predominantly positive about the commitment and quality of the staff there. The geography of the area presents the Service and its personnel with challenges.
167. There are strong local partnerships. SFRS staff and managers are seen as very active members who contribute to partnership aims, at a formal level and are also highly regarded by local communities.
168. Responding to false alarms, particularly UFAS calls is a significant problem for some Argyll and Bute fire stations. In our view this represents a considerable burden, and requires action beyond that already being undertaken locally.
169. The 2005 Act requires that the SFRS must have regard to this report and, having done so, must take such measures (if any) as it thinks fit in relation to the report. We are therefore confident that where we express a view on particular issues, the LSO will consider what we have said and will take it into account in forward planning.
170. We have identified a number of issues during the inspection. In order to assist the LSO in improving performance, we have included recommendations in the body of the report for the LSO to explore further. We list these recommendations below for ease of reading.

### Recommendations

#### **(N): = National Recommendation)**

1. The LSO should, for the stations affected, engage with personnel to ensure that vehicle defects noted are appropriately reported.
2. The LSO should, in discussion with colleagues from Response and Resilience Directorate, devise and implement a more robust system for the recording of the testing of equipment until such time as a national system is available.
3. The LSO should devise and implement a more robust system in order that BA cylinders can be charged and transported without recourse to staff using their own vehicles.
4. The LSO should ensure the continued increase in local effort to reduce UFAS calls, including engagement with CPP partners within relevant sectors to explore the potential for support in addressing the issue.
5. (N): The LSO should seek clarification from procurement colleagues and national TED regarding the current status of the national supply contract of scrap cars and what remedial action can be taken to allow local procurement of suitable vehicles when they are unable to be supplied through the national contract for whatever reason.
6. The LSO should examine ways in which the contribution and support of RVDS primary employers within the area can be suitably recognised.

## Glossary and Abbreviations

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| CFF               | Community Firefighter   |
| CSA               | Community Safety Advocate   |
| CSE               | Community safety engagement   |
| DACO              | Deputy Assistant Chief Officer  |
| Dual crewed       | An arrangement where more than one fire appliance is crewed by the same crew  |
| FSE               | Fire safety enforcement   |
| HFSV              | Home fire safety visit  |
| LALO              | Local Area Liaison Officer  |
| LCMS              | Learning content management system: an online learning resource for firefighters  |
| LSO               | Local Senior Officer: by law the SFRS has to appoint an LSO for each local authority area in Scotland                   |
| PPE               | Personal protective equipment   |
| PPED              | Prevention and protection enforcement database  |
| RDS               | Retained Duty System  |
| Relevant premises | Non-domestic premises to which fire safety law applies  |
| RVDS              | A term used to collectively describe RDS and VDS  |
| SDA               | Service Delivery Area (the SFRS is organised into three SDAs, North, East and West)                                     |
| SFRS              | Scottish Fire and Rescue Service  |
| TED               | Training and Employee Development   |
| UFAS              | A false alarm incident in non-domestic premises where the SFRS is called out as a consequence of a fire alarm operating |
| VDS               | Volunteer Duty System   |
| 2005 Act          | Fire (Scotland) Act 2005  |

# Appendix 1

## The strategic priorities in the Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2016

### Performance Measures

1. The SFRS must, in discussion with the Scottish Government, specify appropriate performance measures to support its Strategic Plan, for the delivery of outcomes relating to the strategic priorities and objectives set out in this Framework.

### Safety, Well-Being and Prevention

2. The SFRS should fully contribute to improving the safety and well-being of Scotland's communities and must continue to build on the successful focus on prevention. It should ensure that there is a clear process for working with partners to identify the risks faced by communities and individuals so that the SFRS can target activity on a risk-based approach and where it can most effectively improve safety and contribute to addressing inequalities within and between communities.

### Response and Resilience

3. The SFRS should work with other public sector partners to evolve a holistic and dynamic process of identification, evaluation and assessment of community risk and Best Value in order to prioritise and target its use of resources to ensure an appropriate response to incidents across Scotland and support improved outcomes for communities. As part of this approach, the SFRS should promote optimal command, control, communication and tri-service co-operation in response to incidents.
4. The SFRS should support effective multi-agency emergency planning and response arrangements including contributing fully to the work of Regional and Local Resilience Partnerships in assessing risk; and preparing, planning for, responding to and recovering from major and catastrophic incidents and threats. When working with other responders, the SFRS should play a key role in building community resilience and protecting both Scottish and UK critical infrastructure assets.

### Partnership

5. Community planning and partnership working with other services and communities should be embedded throughout the SFRS. Building on its existing Engagement Strategy, the SFRS should proactively seek collaborative opportunities and innovative ways of working in partnership with other blue light services/key stakeholders to improve outcomes for communities and should ensure effective stakeholder engagement in its approach to all its work including partnership working.

### Service Transformation

6. The SFRS should continue to ensure that the benefits of Fire Reform are fully realised, evidenced and tracked, and it should explore through Service redesign new and innovative ways in which it can improve the safety and well-being of communities throughout Scotland by building on the traditional roles carried out by the Service.

## **Modernising Response**

7. The SFRS should develop and implement dynamic, innovative and sustainable operating systems throughout Scotland which are fit for purpose and meet local needs (covering both the Retained Duty System and Wholetime firefighter work patterns).

## **Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals**

8. SFRS should develop a new approach to reducing unwanted fire alarm signals (UFAS) demand and road risk. This approach should involve the SFRS Board setting stretching targets to support the Service's Strategic Plan in relation to this priority.

## **Effective Governance and Performance**

9. The SFRS should ensure it has an effective approach to performance management to support robust scrutiny of the Service at national and local levels. This approach should be regularly reviewed and evaluated in pursuit of continuous improvement. The SFRS should also collect, produce and analyse data and other intelligence to promote the safety and well-being of communities, support operational efficiency and performance improvements (including its partnership contributions) and enable effective public reporting of performance.

## **People**

10. The SFRS should aim to be an employer of choice – maximising the effectiveness of its approach to workforce planning; promoting the safety, health and well-being of all staff; and being a learning organisation with opportunities for all. The SFRS should also seek to be an organisation that is more representative of the people and communities of Scotland that it serves.





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