



HM Fire Service Inspectorate

Local Area Inspection East Renfrewshire



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Inspectorate**

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Paul Tanzilli the ex-Local Senior Officer for East Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde 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 and gave generously of their time.

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A quality assurance review of this report was kindly provided by Mark McCabe of Audit Scotland. All the members of the inspection team contributed to the development of this report and the quality assurance reviewer provided a professional challenge to the contents, assumptions and conclusions made. However, the Chief Inspector takes sole responsibility for the report, its contents and conclusions.

Published: October 2015

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1_ The local area inspection programme


The Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2013 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. We take the Framework as the starting point for structuring and prioritising our inspection programme. The Fire and Rescue Framework indicates that there should be strengthened connection between the SFRS and communities, which is itself underpinned by principles contained within the Christie Commission report on the Future Delivery of Public Services in Scotland (June 2011).

The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 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 reports to the Head of Service Delivery for the relevant SFRS Service Delivery Area (SDA) (North, East or West). The SFRS is also required by the Act to have a Local Fire and Rescue Plan for each local authority area, which will set 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 SFRS service delivery should be considered both at the national and local authority levels.

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:

- 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, and make suggestions for improvement if necessary
- can take a detailed look at the nature and quality of service provision, including working with partner organisations, within local areas and can draw attention to significant matters and areas of good practice
- can co-operate with other scrutiny bodies to provide collaborative, 'place-based' scrutiny of government service provision (the possible development of a place-based approach to Shared Risk Assessment is stated in the National Scrutiny Plan for Local Government 2014-15¹)
- maintains a good level of awareness of the Service's functions and builds a record of how the Service is functioning
- can gather intelligence that may inform, or cause to be undertaken, more strategic, thematic inspections of the SFRS.

¹ Local Government Scrutiny Coordination Strategic Group, June 2014
http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/local/2014/as_140603_scrutiny_plan.pdf



Our local area inspections are intended to be closely tied to the Fire and Rescue Framework. For this reason we have adopted a structure for them which follows the structure of the Framework itself:

- The Local Fire and Rescue Plan and Single Outcome Agreement
- Improved service outcomes and protecting frontline services
- More equal access to specialist resources and national capacity
- Strengthened connection between the SFRS and communities.

We look at a broad range of matters relevant to fire and rescue service delivery within the area being inspected, including any issues arising from thematic work carried out in that area; and in our inspection report we give an opinion on the manner in which the SFRS is carrying out its functions in the above respects.

In our local area 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 what we are told about the local area by SFRS managers, with our own observations and discussions with staff on the ground.

We do not, however, carry out our local area inspections as a comprehensive audit. The SFRS has a programme of internal station audits that involve a detailed look at station activity and records, and we do not want to duplicate that work. The sampling methodology that we adopt cannot be guaranteed to identify all potential areas for improvement: we intend that it should be a proportionate activity that provides an overview of the area, comparable with other local area inspections that we carry out.

A summary of our findings

- Our overall impression is that the SFRS is delivering satisfactory response and prevention and protection functions in East Renfrewshire, albeit in a relatively low-key operational context.
- Consistent with our Local Area Inspection report on Aberdeen City, we make some comments on the Local Plan and suggest some points which might support improvements in the next version.
- There is a low level of operational activity in the two fire stations, which reflects the character of the local area.
- Stations maintain the currency of station-based operational risk information, but there is a delay in inputting information onto the system at SDA level.
- The Service has a long-standing positive working relationship with the local authority and other local partners. More recently, relationships at a strategic level are perceived to be weaker.
- There are good community relationship arrangements but less community safety activity than within the other parts of the LSO area. This is a consequence of the relative needs of each area and is not a criticism of service delivery in East Renfrewshire.
- There are competing demands on the Local Area Liaison Officer (LALO) in the LSO area as a consequence of there being three local authorities to deal with: the SFRS may wish to consider whether resources in this and other similar situations in Scotland are adequate.
- Fire safety enforcement is being effectively managed and there is good engagement and communication with dutyholders.
- Specifically in East Renfrewshire, we see potential for Scrutiny Committee engagement to include Station Manager level.

2 About the area

East Renfrewshire contains suburban residential areas to the south of Glasgow, rural areas, the town of Barrhead and a number of villages. The population in the local authority area is around 90,000. There are around 38,000 dwellings of which 79% are privately owned, 8% privately rented and 12% socially rented. This indicates a relatively prosperous area compared with the Scottish average, and we would expect an associated low demand for SFRS services – which does seem to be the case.

There are two wholetime fire stations: at Clarkston and Barrhead, both crewing a single fire appliance. East Renfrewshire's location in the central belt means that there are substantial SFRS resources available from adjoining areas, and also that the appliances at Barrhead and Clarkston attend incidents outwith East Renfrewshire.

The LSO who has responsibility for the SFRS resources in the East Renfrewshire local authority area also has responsibility for other local authority areas, overall being responsible for East Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde (ERRI). The LSO and his managers for Service Delivery and Prevention and Protection, are based at Johnstone in Renfrewshire.

A look at some key statistics² for the East Renfrewshire area

During the period 2014/15, the appliance at Barrhead was mobilised 447 times, while at Clarkston, activity was 592 calls.

The SFRS attended 810 incidents in the East Renfrewshire area. This breaks down to 243 fires, 117 special services and 450 false alarms. 42% of the fires were primary fires with 58% secondary fires. 30% of special services attended were road traffic collisions. 74% of the false alarms were due to equipment failures.

Deliberate fires have fallen over each of the last four years with the total for 2014/15 sitting at 137, the majority of which were secondary fires³.

Accidental fires, at 106 for 2014/15, have remained relatively steady over the last five years. Of those which occurred in dwellings, there has been a modest increase in each of the last four years.

Fatal and non-fatal casualties⁴ are generally low. There were no fatal fire casualties over the five year period up to March 2015, although tragically there was a fatality in Barrhead at the end of May, after our inspection had concluded. There were four non-fatal fire casualties⁵ during 2014/15.

² Statistics supplied by the SFRS including in the Renfrewshire Performance Report 2014-2015. Totals are provisional and may be subject to change as a result of quality assurance and review.

³ Most secondary fires are outdoor fires. These include grassland and refuse fires (unless they involve casualties or rescues, property loss, or are attended by five or more appliances).

⁴ This excludes casualties recorded as a precautionary check-up.

⁵ *ibid.*

3_ Our findings

As discussed in the introduction to this report, we structure our findings to be directly referable to the Fire and Rescue Framework 2013. The Framework sets the strategic direction for fire and rescue in Scotland, and has sections on governance and accountability (including planning and reporting); protecting and improving local services; equal access to specialist support and national capacity; and strengthening the connection with communities. The way in which we report our findings follows this structure – with an initial discussion of the Local Fire and Rescue Plan and Single Outcome Agreement, which are the key planning documents for SFRS in each local authority area.

3.1_ The Local Fire and Rescue Plan and Single Outcome Agreement

In the report of our previous local area inspection of Aberdeen City⁶, we commented on the similarities in the structure of the 32 Local Plans and the absence of benchmarking and targets. Our comments here about the local plan for East Renfrewshire contain some similarity with the comments on Aberdeen City. And similarly, our comments should not be read as a criticism of the ERRI management team or the specific authors of this plan.

The East Renfrewshire Local Plan contains useful background information about the area and the incident activity of SFRS, but does not contain targeted conclusions. While there is incident activity for the preceding three years and a trend comparison with Scotland-wide totals, there is little analysis of incident types and statistics, nor evidence of a risk-based approach to prioritisation.

The local plan is supplemented by the East Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde Annual Operating Plan 2014-2015. That plan, which also covers the other two local authorities for which the LSO is responsible, does contain more in the way of projected outcomes and targets. There is, however, no acknowledgement of target-setting in the East Renfrewshire Local Plan, tailored to East Renfrewshire's specific needs and priorities, and therefore no indication of how the SFRS transposes its national targets to the specific local authority level.

We think the Local Plan would benefit from measurable performance indicators and comparisons against national performance, which in turn would lead to a rationale for local priorities. As we have previously reported, greater clarity could be achieved by structuring the Local Plan in two parts: the first discussing national SFRS priorities and targets, which the local area will be contributing to; and the second discussing what is specific to the local area, and what areas of service delivery will be prioritised locally to provide the most effective contribution to local and national outcomes.

As part of that, we think that the Local Plan should set out clear local performance targets that the SFRS can have its performance within the local authority area measured against. If an area has a very low activity rate in a certain activity type, it may make little sense to say that reduction of this activity type is a local priority.

⁶ Local Area Inspection Aberdeen City, HM Fire Service Inspectorate, 2015 <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00477241.pdf>

The East Renfrewshire Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) is a document created at local authority level which sets out how all agencies will work together in the area to deliver outcomes aligned to nationally agreed priorities and the principles of public service reform. SOAs take into account the contributions of various local and national bodies in arriving at these outcomes.

The East Renfrewshire SOA includes three fire-specific targets:

- reducing fire fatalities and casualties, by 5% a year
- reducing special service casualties
- reducing accidental dwelling fires, by 10% each year.

By inclusion in the SOA, these are multi-agency targets and not for the SFRS alone to achieve. Equally the SFRS would contribute to other targets (outcomes) in the SOA such as ‘Older people are able to live as safely and independently as possible in the community and have control over their care and support.’ (SOA Outcome 5.1)

The targets in the SOA are a straight transposition of three of the national targets imposed on the SFRS by the Fire Framework 2013. While the activity types targeted are an appropriate focus for East Renfrewshire, rather than replicating national targeted reductions at a local level, we think it more appropriate to establish local targets that reflect local circumstances. We do not mean that differences in a local area should be exaggerated for the purposes of a Local Plan, but where significant differences do exist, we think that the Local Plan should say ‘this is what is different about this area and this is what we are doing about it’.

3.2 Improved service outcomes and protecting frontline services

In the course of our inspection we met with managers from the Prevention and Protection⁷ and Service Delivery functions, spoke with staff who are responsible for carrying out community safety activities, and visited two duty groups on each of the two fire stations in the area, where we had the opportunity to speak with firefighters. We also spoke to other staff members such as the HR adviser and Health and Safety adviser, and to local trade union officials.

Prevention and Protection

Community Safety Engagement (CSE) and Fire Safety Enforcement (FSE) is delivered across the LSO area by teams based at Paisley Fire Station.

The FSE staff for the LSO area comprises a number of enforcement officers and one auditing officer. Staff work as a team across the LSO area with one enforcement officer functioning as a section head. Staff have a designated geographical responsibility but retain the potential to work across the whole LSO area when required. One enforcement officer has principal responsibility for FSE within East Renfrewshire. That person was previously located at Barrhead Fire Station, within East Renfrewshire, but then moved to be co-located with other FSE staff.

⁷ Prevention and Protection refers to the responsibility of the SFRS for Fire Safety Enforcement and Community Safety Engagement; Service Delivery relates primarily to operational response to incidents.

East Renfrewshire has relatively few non-domestic premises which are a priority for audit under national SFRS guidelines. The fire safety audit of these premises is well within the capacity of the designated enforcement officer for East Renfrewshire. While there is a national enforcement framework which identifies the type and risk category of premises that should be audited, the enforcement staff we spoke with advised that there is a personal target of 132 annual audits to be achieved. One consequence of this is that some fire safety audits within lower risk premises are being undertaken to achieve this personal target. This seems to us to be a poor use of resources.

We reviewed a small sample of FSE case files for premises in East Renfrewshire. We found the standard of documentation to be good, demonstrating good engagement and communication with dutyholders.


Enforcement staff highlighted a previous situation, now resolved, where line managers had little experience of Fire Safety Enforcement. Enforcement staff think that they cannot receive technical support from line managers who have had little or no exposure to Fire Safety Enforcement at practitioner level. A similar view was expressed during our previous inspection in Aberdeen City.

CSE staff comprise a LALO, community firefighters and a community safety advocate. The CSE staff demonstrate a strong commitment to working in community safety education and engagement. They advise that there is less community safety work carried out within East Renfrewshire than the other local authority areas within the LSO area. This is partly put down to the demographics and community profile. They describe having good relationships with partners such as social work, police and local authority colleagues.

The LALO has responsibility for engaging with three local authorities and we contrast this with some other LSO areas where LALOs deal with a single local authority. The requirement to service three local authorities, even from a simple logistical perspective, places an extra burden on the LALO, although this issue is not unique to the ERRI LALO.

In East Renfrewshire the LALO has weekly meetings with partners to exchange information. Information sharing is described as good, particularly through their new approach to community safety, Greater Results in Partnership (GRIP).

There is a focus on providing Home Fire Safety Visits to Telecare clients to offer advice and install linked alarms. This work is delivered as a result of partnership working and information sharing with the Telecare service provider. The CSE staff also undertake high-risk visits where station personnel have not been able to make contact. Statistics show that visits to high or very high risk areas has increased by 13% on the previous year. At a station level it is thought that it is sometimes difficult to reach the 'hard to influence' sector of the community. There is also a limited amount of frustration expressed on the time that it takes to contact members of the public trying to arrange a home safety visit. Crews describe having a reasonably positive relationship with the local community.



Both area CSE and station based personnel engage in youth-based activities, either through school visits and prevention work such as the 'Cut it out' programme or specific intervention initiatives such as the 'Fire Reach' programme. Staff think that this work has contributed to good community relations and the comparatively low level of anti-social behaviour directed at staff.

In our report on Aberdeen City we commented on what we thought was an inconsistency between practice and policy in respect of annual visits of station-based personnel to care home services. In East Renfrewshire we are advised that such annual visits take place.

Service Delivery

The two stations at Barrhead and Clarkston are around 50 and 45 years old respectively. In general the condition of the stations is commensurate with their age, though they are both still fit for purpose. The workload of these stations, detailed earlier in this report, is at a level which in our view is well-manageable by the single pump crew based at each station.

Whilst generally comfortable with the reform of the SFRS and the work they are doing, station-based personnel stated that they felt there had been a significant decline in time taken to procure, replace and repair equipment and PPE, including the turnaround time for laundry. Some equipment had been unserviceable for protracted periods awaiting repair. There is also a lack of clarity of where reserve stocks of PPE are now kept.

There are well-established procedures in place for creating and maintaining site-specific operational risk information (ORI). The currency and completeness of ORI compared favourably with other locations we have visited over the past two years and is to be commended. However, the vehicle-mounted data system does not reflect the work done at station level to keep ORI up to date due to delays at SDA level. We encourage the SFRS to address this and to review strategies for speeding up the process by which ORI is uploaded to the Vehicle Mounted Data System (VMDS).

Crews attend two visits at the Clydesmill training centre during every duty tour and the standard of instruction is said to be good. Some views were expressed that there is some scope to make fuller use of the facilities there.

Workforce

Staffing

Due to the staffing structure within the LSO area, there are no administrative staff based within East Renfrewshire. On the whole, operational staff were positive about working in the area, some having spent almost their whole career at a single station. There is some dissatisfaction regarding the general SFRS appointment and promotion process, particularly for those staff who have been acting-up for some time.

There is also a perceived unfairness on the variability in the grades of Watch Manager posts across Scotland, which has the potential to affect morale. Staff in the Watch Manager A role at single pump stations are reportedly disadvantaged when it comes to seeking a transfer to a Watch Manager B role at a multi-pump station. We appreciate that the skills required of a Watch Manager at a multi-pump station may differ marginally from the skills required at a single pump station, but we would encourage the SFRS to move on from marginal role differences so that there is no disadvantage perceived to attach to a posting to a single pump station.

Health and Safety

East Renfrewshire is performing particularly well within the LSO area, regarding health and safety incidents. The use of the Rivo Safeguard reporting system is well-embedded owing to its use in the former Strathclyde Fire and Rescue.

3.3 More equal access to specialist resources and national capacity

Capacity within the area

The capacity available from the two wholetime single pump fire stations in the area is adequate to deal with the relatively low, and reducing, number of calls received.

As a result of its position in the central belt, there are large numbers of resources available from neighbouring areas in the event of significant incidents taking place within East Renfrewshire.

Specialist resources

There are sufficient specialist resources available from neighbouring areas. The SFRS's policy on access to specialist resources is to maintain a geographical spread intended to reflect varying risk rather than by operational or local authority area and that approach seems to us to be appropriate in the case of East Renfrewshire.

3.4 Strengthened connection between SFRS and Communities

Knowing the community

Station staff feel well-embedded in their community and there is participation in CSE initiatives. Engagement with young people over a number of years has brought about a significant improvement in the service's relationship with them. Incidents such as abuse or missiles being thrown at firefighters are rare in the area. One of the stations uses Facebook as a means of community contact.

Working in partnership

Partnership working with Police Scotland and the Scottish Ambulance Service is described as being good.

The Service has a long-standing positive relationship with East Renfrewshire Council and the CPP. Recently, whilst operational partnership working remains strong, relationships at strategic level are perceived as weaker. This contrasts with the strategic level relationship between the local authority and Police Scotland which is seen as being much stronger.

Partner organisations recognise that there have been recent personnel changes at LSO and Head of SDA level but whilst that brings inevitable short term interruption, we believe that it also offers an opportunity for developing engagement.

The Service's participation in weekly partnership briefings helps to support cross-referrals and other joint working.

The Telecare work we referred to earlier is viewed by the Council as being an example of good practice in partnership working and something which the Council see themselves as being at the leading edge of. East Renfrewshire's elderly population is growing by about 4% per year and this type of work is seen as growing in importance and volume.

Local scrutiny arrangements

The Council's scrutiny committee – the Cabinet (Police and Fire) – receives regular submissions and performance data from the LSO's team. Elected members recognise that incident levels are low and may therefore not support numerical target setting.

At the Cabinet scrutiny meeting which we observed, quarterly statistics on SFRS activity were presented with comparison made to the same quarter in the previous year. We think that statistical reporting would benefit from the additional inclusion of current year trends, but we recognise it is for the Cabinet members to determine on what they think is appropriate.

In East Renfrewshire a single Station Manager supervises the two fire stations. Given this specific circumstance, it seems sensible for the SFRS attendees at the scrutiny meeting to include this Station Manager who will have local knowledge to deal with specific local queries.

The level of strategic engagement with the SFRS is seen by the local authority as an area that could be improved, and we think that the new LSO should prioritise this.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

East Renfrewshire is an area of relatively low operational activity for the SFRS. As such, community safety engagement and fire safety enforcement pose few challenges for the Service. It is positive to hear of improved relationships with the younger demographic of the community over time.

Structures are in place for local scrutiny of the SFRS, and the Service should remain sighted on the need to engage at local authority level as opposed to the broader ERRI area for which the LSO has responsibility. We think that it poses a challenge for a single LALO within ERRI to maintain meaningful engagement with three local authorities.

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 have expressed a view on particular issues, SFRS will consider what we have said and will take into account in its forward planning.

In relation to certain significant issues that we encountered in the course of this inspection we recommend as follows:

- 1) The SFRS should speed up the process for uploading operational risk information to the VMDS system.
- 2) The SFRS should ensure that Watch Managers are not disadvantaged in their career prospects or mobility within the Service when being posted to a single pump station.
- 3) The LSO for East Renfrewshire should prioritise the improvement of engagement with the local authority.

Glossary and abbreviations

An explanation of abbreviations used in this report can be found below.

CPP	Community Planning Partnership
CSE	Community Safety Engagement
ERRI	East Renfrewshire, Renfrewshire and Inverclyde. The name of the LSO area – by reference to the local authorities within the LSO area.
FRS	Fire and Rescue Service
FSE	Fire Safety Enforcement
LALO	Local Area Liaison Officer
LSO	Local Senior Officer: by law the SFRS has to appoint a LSO for each local authority area in Scotland
ORI	Operational Risk Information
SDA	Service Delivery Area. The SFRS is organised into three SDAs, North, East and West
SFRS	Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
SOA	Single Outcome Agreement: documents created by Community Planning Partnerships in each of the 32 local authority areas across Scotland, which include specific plans for the delivery of improved outcomes locally
Telecare	A support and assistance scheme involving alarm and monitoring equipment provided in a person's home and which communicates with a staffed monitoring centre.
VMDS	Vehicle Mounted Data System
2005 Act	The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005



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ISBN: 978-1-910349-08-3

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PPDAS50380 (10/15)