HM Fire Service Inspectorate

Local Area Inspection Midlothian

Integrity, Objectivity, and Fairness.

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Stephen Gourlay the Local Senior Officer for Midlothian, 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.

The Inspection team members were:

Simon Routh-Jones CBE, QFSM, Chief Inspector (Retired March 2021)

Brian McKenzie, Assistant Inspector

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Steve Harkins, Inspection Officer (Secondee from the SFRS)

A quality assurance review of this report was provided by: Rick Taylor, Assistant Inspector.

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. Robert Scott QFSM was appointed as the Chief Inspector from 1st April 2021.

Published May 2021

Contents

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 in May 2019) to include 2019/20 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 Midlothian also acts as LSO for the local authorities of East Lothian and the Scottish Borders. 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 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, and 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 following the structure of the Framework, there will be occasions when our observations could be reported against more than one of the strategic priorities contained within 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. But there may 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 work.

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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 areas 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 carry out. The SFRS has a programme of internal station audits that involve a detailed look at fire station activity and records, and we do not want to duplicate that work, although we do take these into consideration within our inspection.

8.	During our inspection of Midlothian we visited the two community fire stations in the area, speaking to the retained duty system (RDS) crew on their training night and two of the watches at Dalkeith, the sole wholetime duty fire station.

9.	We met with the LSO and local managers with the following areas of responsibility:

- Prevention and protection
- Service delivery
- Training and employee development (TED)
- Health and safety
- Fire station supervision

10.	We interviewed community safety staff and support staff, and engaged with representatives of Midlothian Council.

11.	To gauge service users' opinion of the SFRS we contacted the 16 Community Councils within Midlothian. 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 two 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 inspection. The SFRS is continuing to change and evolve, consequently material changes may have occurred since then. 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) is now Training, with some elements of previous responsibility now located within the People and Organisational Development Directorate. 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.

13.	The fieldwork for this local area inspection was disrupted by the impact of restrictions imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and was therefore carried out periodically over an extended period during September 2020 and January and February 2021.
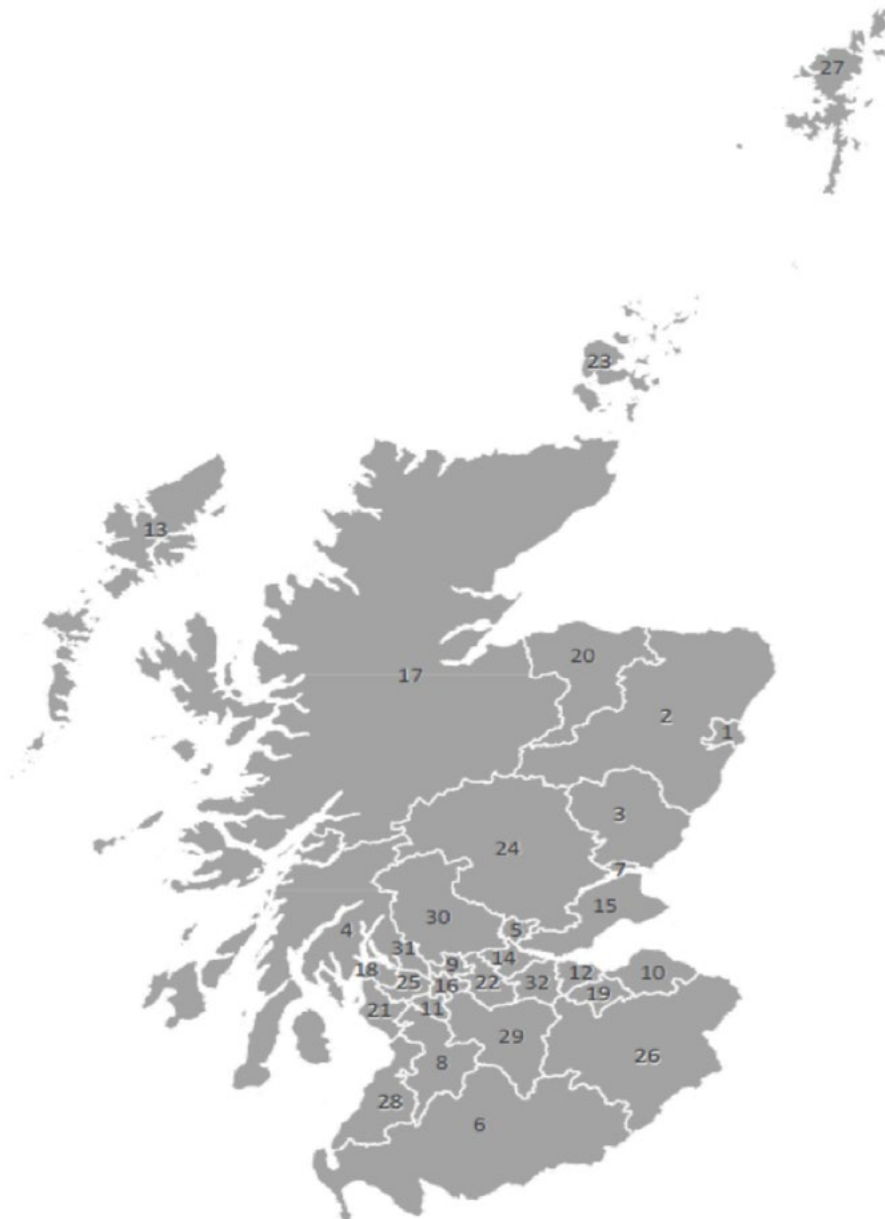
2_About the area

Figure 1: Scottish council area boundaries

14. Midlothian is the area numbered 19 on the map in Figure 1. It covers an area of around 353 km^2. It has a border with the local authority areas of the City of Edinburgh, East Lothian and Scottish Borders. In terms of the SFRS organisation structure, Midlothian is within the East SDA.

15. Midlothian is split into six council wards each represented jointly by three Councillors.

16. The population of Midlothian at the end of June 2019 was 92,460[1] making it the 25th

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

most populated of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland. Over the year to mid-2019, Midlothian was one of the council areas which experienced the highest percentage growth in its population (1.2%). Around 1.6% of the Scottish population reside in Midlothian. The percentage of the population aged 65 and over, at 18.8%, is less than the overall percentage for Scotland of 19.1% in that age band. 19.4% of the Midlothian population was aged 15 and under. The ethnicity of the population of Midlothian at the 2011[2] census was classified as 99% white (Scottish White: Other British White: Irish White: Other) and 1% Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British.

17.   There are various operational risks in the area, including, roads, railways, various commercial, industrial, military, and heritage risks.

18.   There are two community fire stations in Midlothian, Dalkeith and Penicuik. The locations are shown in Figure 2 which is a map of the whole LSO area. Table 1 on page 6 shows the fire station duty system, the resources based there and incident activity.

SCOTTISH FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE
SERVICE DELIVERY AREA **EAST**

MIDLOTHIAN, EAST LOTHIAN AND SCOTTISH BORDERS

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Ordnance Survey 100054002

KEY
LSO HQ ■
Wholetime ●
Wholetime & RDS ●
RDS ●

'M' on a station symbol denotes a multi-pump station.
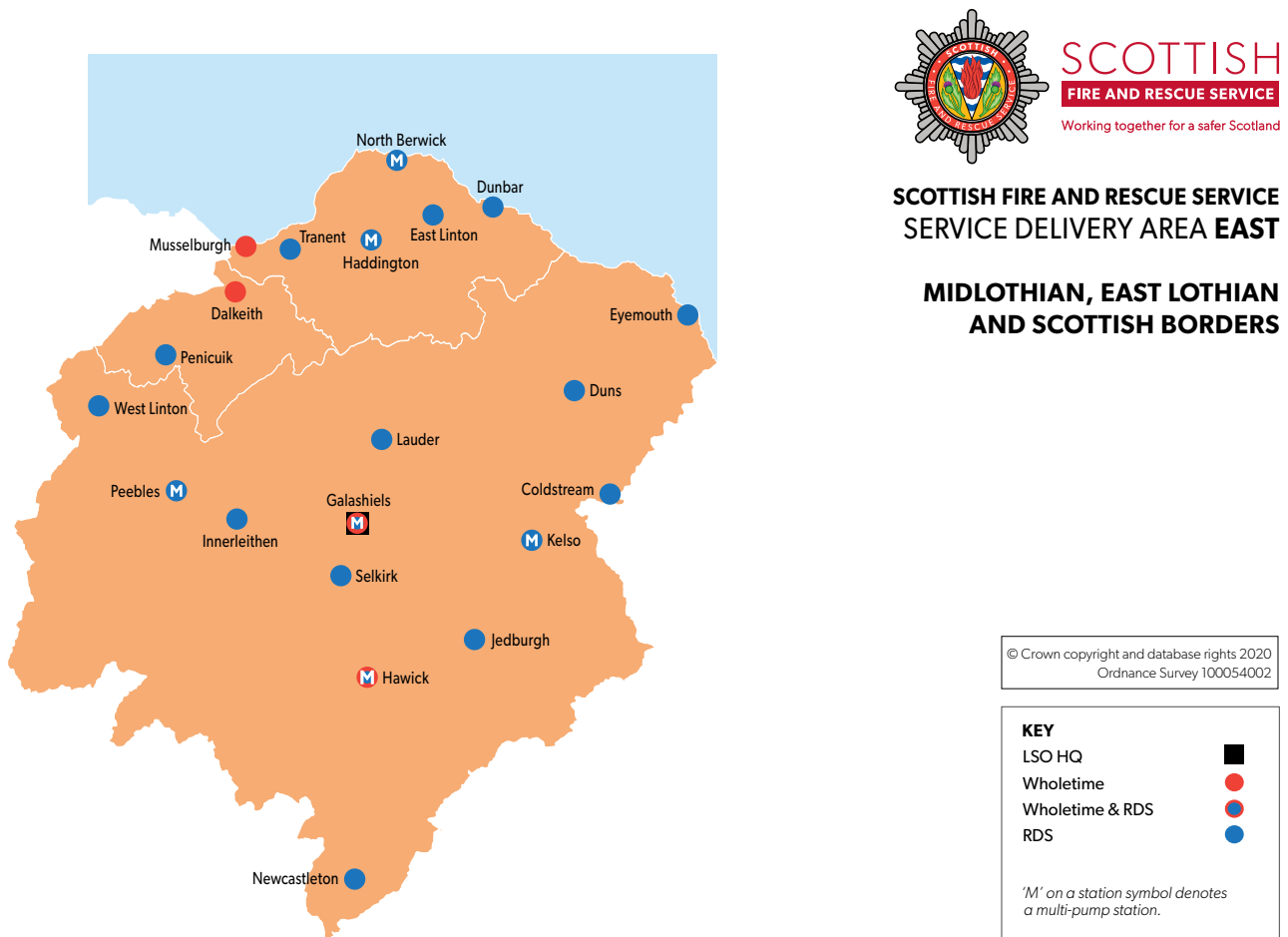
Figure 2: location of fire stations in Midlothian. Source: SFRS

2   Midlothian.pdf (scotlandscensus.gov.uk)

Fire station	Duty system	Appliances	Activity* 2019/20
Dalkeith	Wholetime	1 rescue pump	817
Penicuik	RDS	1 rescue pump	210

Table 1: Midlothian fire station information. Source: the 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.

19. **Employees**[3]. The SFRS has 51 staff posts in the area, three (6%) of the staff identify themselves as female.

Incident statistics

20. Table 2 shows the number of incidents attended by the SFRS in Midlothian over a period of four years[4]. As can be seen there has been a significant reduction in the number of primary and secondary fires in Midlothian. Whilst there has also been a national reduction in both these incident types, the scale of the reduction in Midlothian is greater than the equivalent figures for Scotland as a whole. Primary fires has seen a 24.4% reduction in Midlothian compared to 9.8% for Scotland. For secondary fires the reduction is 38% for Midlothian against 10% for Scotland as a whole.

Incident type	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Primary fire	205	211	169	155
Secondary fire	371	391	317	230
Chimney fire	9	7	4	6
Road traffic collision	39	42	29	37
Other non-fire incident	123	146	134	149
False alarm (including non-fire false alarm)	667	659	641	685
Total incidents	**1414**	**1456**	**1294**	**1262**

Table 2: incidents in Midlothian

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3   As at November 2019.

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

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21. Figure 3 gives a visual reflection of the make-up of incidents within Midlothian for the most recent available statistics, 2019/20.
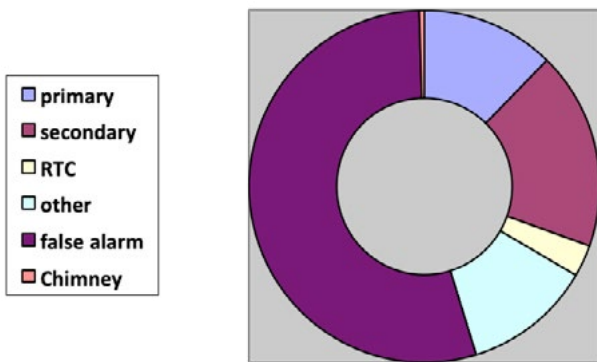

Figure 3: Midlothian incidents 2019/20

22. Responding to false alarms represents 54% of all incidents attended by the SFRS in Midlothian in 2019/20. Unwanted fire alarm signals (UFAS) from non-domestic premises made up 386[5] of these false alarms and therefore comprise around 30% of all incidents.

23. The incident rates for 2019/20 are shown in Figure 4 benchmarked against the rates for Scotland. In Midlothian the rates per population for primary fires, secondary fires, false alarms, and non-fire incidents are all lower than the equivalent rate for Scotland.
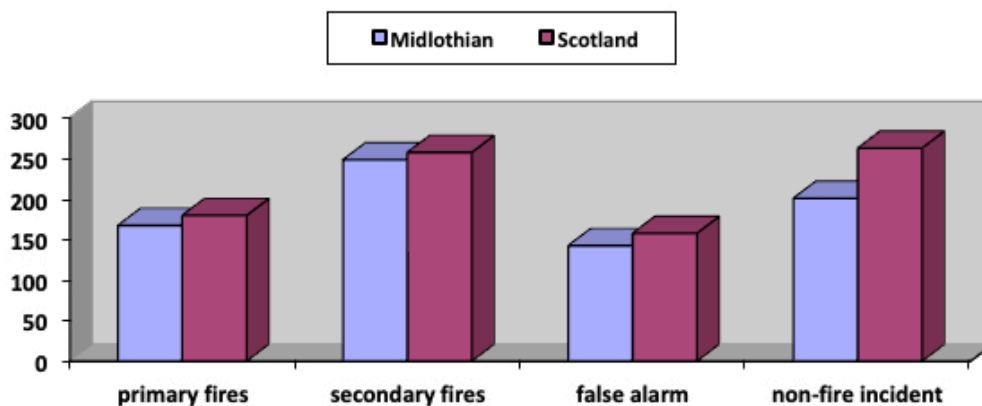

Figure 4: incident rates per 100,000 population, 2019/20 - Midlothian and Scotland

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5   SFRS, *KPI report April 2019 – March 2020*

3_Our findings

24. 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

25. 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 Midlothian was published in 2018.

26. 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. There are no formal Station Plans in Midlothian as we have seen in some other local authority areas, though similar to other LSO areas, the 'SFRS seven-week cycle audit report' is used to set targets and monitor performance of the five wholetime watches at Dalkeith Fire Station. There is a station work routine for each wholetime watch. The work routines include amongst other things, appliance checks and breathing apparatus tests at the commencement of the shift, training and staff development, community safety engagement activity, equipment testing/operational intelligence and readiness, premises health and safety, fitness training and station administration. Some of these activities have a designated target to achieve, for example, within community safety activity each wholetime watch is set a target of undertaking four Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs), prioritising high risk, per shift (28 per cycle within the seven week cycle). There is a system in place in order to monitor and report on watch performance, the 'seven-week cycle audit report' referred to above.

27. Following the publication in October 2019 of the national SFRS strategic plan 2019-22, there was a requirement for the Service to review local plans. A report was issued following this review. The review report concluded that the priorities in the 2018 Midlothian Community Fire and Rescue Plan are fit for purpose. The report recommended that the priorities of the local plan for 2018, discussed further below, are to be included in a new Local Plan for 2021.

28. The 2018 Fire and Rescue Plan for Midlothian includes explanatory and background material for the area, community planning arrangements, and alignment with the community plan for Midlothian. The 'Single Midlothian Plan 2020 – 2021'[6] (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan) is based on two key principles of 'People' and 'Place' and has four priority themes for the work of the council and its partners; reducing the gap in learning outcomes; reducing the gap in health outcomes; reducing the gap in economic circumstances; and reduce Midlothian carbon emissions to net zero by 2030.

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6   Midlothian Council

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29. The local authority also has 13 neighbourhood plans which outline the priorities for these areas. The SFRS local plan highlights the extent to which social deprivation affects the communities of Midlothian. The ambition, stated in the local plan, is to work in partnership to improve community safety and enhance the well-being of those living in Midlothian whilst tackling issues of social inequality.

30. As mentioned above the SFRS plan contains local fire-related priorities. The SFRS has national targets against which it measures performance, however, the Local Plan for Midlothian contains no targets, in line with the SFRS policy not to include targets in Local Plans. The rationale for this is that the SFRS will only apply targets when it is appropriate to do so to 'avoid expressing desired results which are unachievable, uncontrollable or impractical'. Although there are no targets within the Local Plan, the local contribution towards national performance targets is measured, and reported upon through the scrutiny arrangements discussed later.

31. The 2018 Midlothian Local Plan identifies five local priorities.

     ■ As part of a Community Partnership approach, we will make people safer in their homes.

     ■ We will promote Community Resilience whilst contributing to improved outcomes for people involved in non-fire emergencies.

     ■ Together with our Community Partners, we will contribute to making roads in Midlothian safer.

     ■ As part of a Community Partnership, we will challenge anti-social behaviour.

     ■ In partnership, we will aim to reduce the occurrence and impact of Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals.

32. In addition to the SFRS local area plan there is a sub-set of three thematic delivery plans which provide a level of detail on each subject area. These are, a local enforcement delivery plan; a prevention and protection plan; and a Training and Employee Development action plan.

33. Formal local authority scrutiny of SFRS's performance is the responsibility of Midlothian Council's Police and Fire and Rescue Board, which generally meets four times a year. If possible HMFSI will observe a meeting of the council committee responsible for scrutiny as part of our inspection. Unfortunately, due to the impact of the pandemic we were unable to do so. However we have since reviewed the minutes of the meeting held in August 2020. From the minute of the meeting it appeared to operate in a similar way to other scrutiny arrangements we have observed across Scotland, where the LSO presents a paper updating elected members on local performance.

34. 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 Midlothian was 12.5% (two responses). In our experience a low response rate is not unusual. It is our understanding that Police Scotland provide regular updates for Community Councils, and it was suggested to us by the local authority that the LSO may wish to do similar.

35.   The two responses we received both described having a very strong and positive relationship with the Service. A view stated was that the Service was always willing to contribute in any way it could to the well-being and safety of local communities, particularly during the challenges created by the impact of the pandemic. There was a suggestion that the Service could perhaps attend, on an annual basis, a meeting of the Midlothian Federation of Community Councils.

3.2_Protecting Communities: Risk, Prevention and Response

Safety, Well-Being and Prevention

Prevention and Protection

36.   There is a Group Commander and a Station Commander responsible for the management of the Prevention and Protection function.

Community Safety Engagement (CSE)

37.   The CSE team in Midlothian comprises, one Community Safety Advocate (CSA), line managed by a Watch Commander with the role of Local Area Liaison Officer (LALO). There is a LSO area Prevention and Protection Plan which provides an overview of all Prevention and Protection objectives and activities. The Plan underpins priorities contained within each of the three local authority fire and rescue plans.

38.   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 also extends to areas including youth engagement, helping to provide early support and prevention to young people. This CSE activity involves engaging with partners to identify and work with vulnerable persons. Some examples of work undertaken are:

   ■ work with young persons through schools and the local community based youth project Y2K

   ■ activity based on a CSE thematic action plan calendar

   ■ talks to youth groups and other groups on request

   ■ safety education at the Risk Factory to P7 pupils

   ■ driving awareness training

   ■ Alzheimer and financial inclusion partnerships

   ■ working with housing providers

39.   The team describe undertaking a lot of partnership working to address risks to the more vulnerable members of the community. The ability to conduct this activity was dramatically impacted by the restrictions put in place at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition to the measures put in place to contain the spread of infection the team were impacted by administrative challenges created by a lack of access to ICT equipment such as mobile phones and laptops. Due to the pandemic the CSE team have been developing social media-based community safety campaign material to overcome the challenges of educating young people when access to schools is limited.

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

41. The LALO has been temporary in post since December 2019, is responsible for managing the activity of the CSE team and liaises with local community safety partners of the Service including the local authority. On occasion this liaison will also include the other local authorities within the LSO area. There is currently no co-location arrangement with Midlothian Council as we have seen in other areas, but this is not seen by the LALO as a disadvantage. There was, however, a previous co-location arrangement on a part-time basis.

42. The LALO attends a number of multi-agency groups focusing on addressing issues such as anti-social behaviour, hoarding, youth engagement and adult protection. The LALO is also proactive in developing initiatives with partners to address specific issues such as 'Drivewise' to reduce instances of Road Traffic Collisions (particularly amongst young drivers), Midlothian Surestart to reduce harm to single parents and their children, and with Alzheimers Scotland, to reduce the risk of harm to vulnerable adults.

43. The CSA liaises with various partners on a weekly basis and proactively develops new referral pathways for HFSVs, with the majority of routine HFSVs carried out by operational fire crews. The LALO attends, currently in a virtual capacity, formal Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference meetings, to routinely share and update partners on relevant operational activity. Good relationships are reported between the SFRS and partners including Police Scotland, social services and housing officials.

44. Part of the core work for the CSA is working with partners to deliver the Y2K youth engagement project. Y2K seeks to provide early support and prevention activities to young people involved in or at the risk of becoming involved in anti-social, offending and risky behaviours. The engagement and contribution made by officers from the Service is highly valued by those involved with the project.

45. Although there is no analytical capability available within Midlothian, the LALO has access to intelligence from partners such as Police Scotland which assists in planning CSE activities and coordinating multi agency activities to identify vulnerable persons. Statistics around the numbers of referrals and instances of 'safeguarding' interventions are reported to the scrutiny committee.

Initiatives

46. As well as the initiatives mentioned previously, 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.

47. Work has been undertaken with Midlothian Rural Crime Partnership, as well as with British Transport Police tackling rail-side vandalism. The Service locally receives referrals through Youth Justice partners.

48. There were plans to deliver locally the 'Biker Down' (emergency first aid course for motorcyclists) initiative. Operational crews would, under pre-Covid circumstances, also be involved in participating in initiatives, when operational commitments allowed.

Deliberate fires

49. A significant number of the incidents attended are deliberate fires, although there has been a welcome decrease in the last two reporting years[7]. The local Fire and Rescue Plan has a reduction in deliberate fire raising as a priority. There are a number of initiatives within Midlothian area aimed at reducing deliberate fires. Partnership work with Police Scotland and schools in the area was aimed at tackling fire related anti-social behaviour. Figure 5 shows the incidence of all deliberate fires over a five-year period.
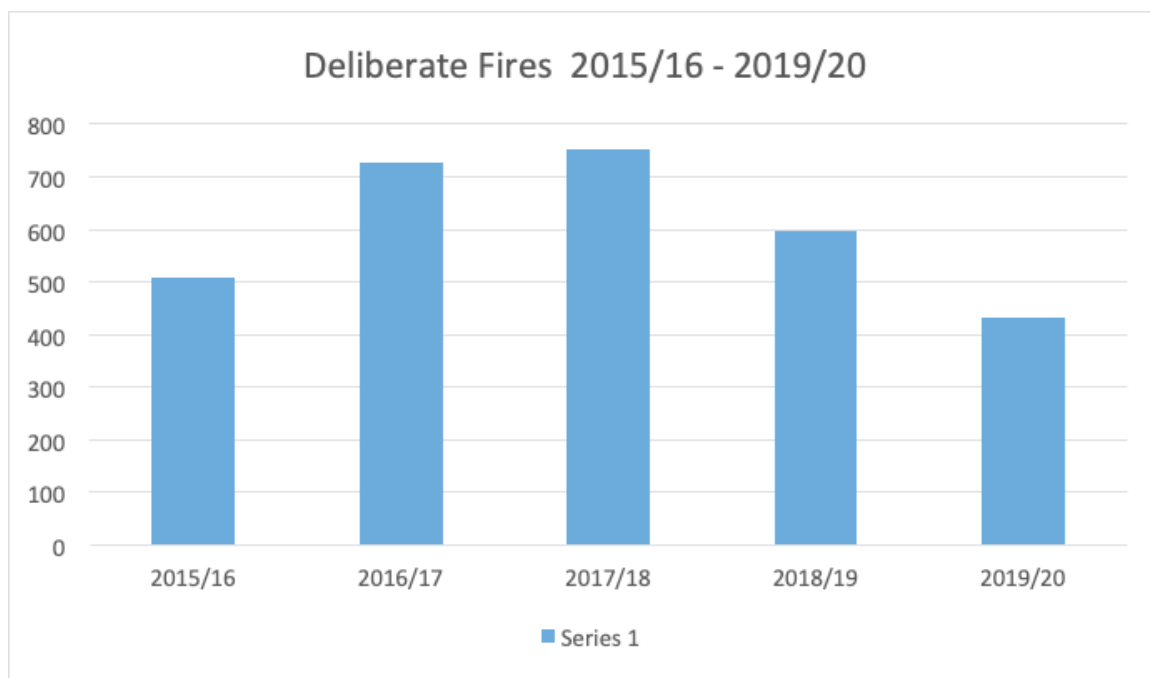

Figure 5: deliberate fires in Midlothian

Domestic fire safety

50. Home fire safety visits are an established activity undertaken predominantly by fire station personnel. The percentage of households receiving a home safety visit in 2019/20 was 2.5% and is slightly below the Scottish average of 2.77%. The number of visits made in Midlothian has decreased marginally in the latest complete reporting year. As can be seen in table 3 there is a focus on those classed as high risk which is commendable, as these visits are usually harder to achieve.

	High risk	Medium risk	Low risk	Total[8]
2018/19	788	344	151	**1,283**
2019/20	782	301	193	**1,276**
2020/21*	294	90	48	**432**

* year to August 2020

Table 3: home safety visits Midlothian

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

8   This data is supplied by the LSO area. The SFRS national statistical publication shows lower totals for each year.

51. Fire station personnel are set a target, contained within station work routines, of visits to complete during each shift and the seven-week shift cycle. The expectation is that there will be a focus on households designated as high risk. 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.

52. Of course HFSVs are only a measure of activity rather than outcome. Accidental dwelling fire statistics are shown in table 4. The overall very slight reduction in HFSVs has coincided with an increase in accidental dwelling fires. However, despite the increase in the number of fires it should be noted that the number of non-fatal casualties has remained below the figure in 2017/18. When comparing the rate of non-fatal casualties per 1,000 fires, 2019/20 is still below the rate in the two preceding years.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20*
Accidental fires	60	52	71
Fatalities	0	1	0
Non-fatal casualties[7]	14	8	10
Rate of non-fatal casualties per 1,000 fires	233.3	153.8	140.8

Table 4: accidental dwelling fires in Midlothian [9]

*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 one Watch Commander (Enforcement Officer) dedicated to the Midlothian area, although this officer is part of a team comprising four Watch Commanders across the whole LSO area who will work across the three local authority areas depending on need.

54. The area has an enforcement delivery plan 2019/20, which is based on the standard SFRS template, for carrying out fire safety audits in relevant premises. There is a target of 132 fire safety audits per year. The 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

55. Due to the impact of the pandemic, audits undertaken since the restrictions were introduced have been conducted as 'virtual audits' and do not involve a visit to the premises. The relevant premises dutyholder being audited will be asked to provide documentation, such as the written results of their risk assessment, which will be reviewed by the Enforcement Officer.

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

56. 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 an amount of fire safety work undertaken which does not involve completing an audit, for example, local authority consultation work which is important in respect of public safety. Good relationships were described between the SFRS and the local authority building control and Environmental Health Officers. Joint visits to premises have been undertaken, for example, pre-registration visits to HMO premises. There was however, no local contact with the Care Inspectorate in respect of care premises.

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

2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
97	95	138

Table 5: Fire Safety audits - Midlothian [10]

58. Of the 138 audits completed in 2018/19, 94.9% were classed as broadly compliant. Premises types that are targeted for audit in the local area delivery plan 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 2018/19 of audits completed is higher than the 136 audits stated in the performance data submitted by the LSO as part of the data request for this inspection.

59. As part of our data request for this inspection we asked for a list of recorded relevant premises and were given information which reported there were 6,734 recorded relevant premises in Midlothian on the Assessors list. However some premises on that list would not be subject to an audit, such as phone boxes, areas of land etc. If premises not for audit were removed from the list then the approximate number of relevant premises reduces to 5,074. Lists of known premises can be extracted from the SFRS national Prevention and Protection Database (PPED)[11], however, not all relevant premises are recorded on this database.

60. The Enforcement Officer described having autonomy to target activity in addition to that of the Framework priorities. Thematic audits have been undertaken locally, for example, within the primary school estate. Post fire audits have also been conducted.

61. In common with other areas we have visited, enforcement staff do not have a high opinion of PPED. Although access to procedural guidance is available on PPED and thought to be useful. In common with our experience from other LSO areas PPED is considered problematic and staff maintain their own spreadsheet to monitor workflow and to keep copies of documents. Letters issued to dutyholders use a mix of the SFRS standard paragraphs and common terms. The standard of communication is similar to that seen in other LSO areas, with some letters incorporating specific useful information for the dutyholder.

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10   SFRS, *Fire Safety and Organisational Statistics (Scotland)*

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

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62. Local management support and relationships are said to be good, with regular 'virtual meetings' due to the restrictions created by the pandemic. However nationally, it was felt that more information could be provided when new and revised guidance documents are published.

Response and Resilience

Appliances

63. The poor condition of spare appliances was reported as being an issue in the area: this is highlighted as a national issue in our report[12] on the Service's management of its fleet. Also mentioned in that inspection report and brought up by local staff during our fieldwork is that, in some cases, during an appliance changeover, all existing equipment cannot be securely stowed on the spare appliance due to differing locker configurations.

Equipment

64. With some exceptions described below, personnel are generally satisfied about the level and quality of operational equipment supplied.

65. An issue that was raised with us was the perceived poor quality of radios on the incident ground. It is regularly raised in our local area inspections, and often highlighted during incident debriefs, that incident ground communications are reported to be problematic. The Service, in recognition of this, has initiated a project to look at the procurement of new digital fire-ground radios. In our previous report on command and control[13] we reported that the Service's research, development and innovation function hoped to form a user intelligence group (UIG) to complete a thorough specification of requirements and testing for the new procurement.

> **National Recommendation**
>
> The SFRS should complete its plans to procure a replacement digital radio capability as soon as practical.

66. Observations were made regarding the poor quality and quantity of torches, with there being no personal issue supply. Again this is an issue often raised with us in local inspections. The Inspectorate is aware that a procurement exercise for torches was commenced in the autumn of last year, but is unaware of the outcome of that process. HMFSI is at the early stages of conducting a thematic inspection of the Service's management of its operational and protective equipment, and is likely to consider, amongst over things, the arrangements around the acquisition of new torches and radios.

67. When defective equipment is sent for repair, there is a perception that the time taken to repair and return is excessive.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

68. Personnel within Midlothian have received new PPE as part of the national replacement programme. The personnel we spoke to were happy with the quality of the new style issue and the arrangements for cleaning and repair.

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

13   HM Fire Service Inspectorate, *Command and Control: aspects of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Incident Command System*, 2020

Respiratory Protective Equipment

69. 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 legacy service and are perceived by personnel to be overly complicated to use, and in particular the testing regime was thought to be too complex. The set was also said to be heavier than the previous set.

Property

70. 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 to the 1980s.

71. Following the Alert and the discovery of RAAC at McDonald Road fire station in Edinburgh during refurbishment work there, work was promptly initiated to assess the entire SFRS estate to determine the extent of the risk. Around this same time, minor works roofing projects were also being initiated at both Liberton (Edinburgh) and Dalkeith fire stations. RAAC was discovered in each station, and the planned works were suspended. A direct consequence of the suspension of this planned work is that Dalkeith fire station is continuing to suffer from water ingress. The structural issues identified in the reinforced concrete roof at these three stations have been found in other SFRS properties.

72. 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 some 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.

73. At the time of writing a final decision regarding any future changes to Dalkeith fire station has yet to be agreed, but the LSO will be fully engaged in the assessment of options.

74. 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.

75. RDS personnel considered the facilities at Penicuik fire station to be good, which is perhaps a benefit from having been upgraded by the legacy service when it operated as a day-crewed station for a period of time. There was however said to be an issue with the appliance bay door which has been reported.

76. Capital and Revenue expenditure priorities on premises refurbishment and repair is a national matter, in consultation with LSO area staff.

Operational Intelligence

77. 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.

78. In April 2018 the SFRS introduced a national Operational Intelligence (OI) system. Separately, the provision of risk information was subject to a thematic inspection[14] 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.

79. As part of our data request for this inspection we asked for details of the locations within Midlothian for which SFRS now holds records and we were provided a list of 56 records as at August 2020. The list can be expected to be dynamic as new records are created and existing records deleted.

80. The new system uses a demountable tablet computer device. Prior to the system going live in 2018, firefighters in Midlothian used the legacy Lothian and Borders FRS system and the mobile data terminal (MDT) permanently installed in the appliance cab.

81. 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. There is a SharePoint planner for managing the programming of visits. The premises are distributed across the watches and there is a process of rotation to ensure that each watch will get an opportunity to visit the premises on successive visits.

82. Training in the use of the new system is via an on-line package as part of the SFRS's Learning Content Management System (LCMS).

83. From our discussions with crews more often than not, the tablet was used primarily for its mapping capability. This was predominantly due to issues described in our thematic inspection. Which are 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. A lack of a connection to the appliance printer was also highlighted to us as an issue.

84. Once an OI record is approved on the system, a revalidation date is automatically generated, depending on factors defined in Service policy, such as premises type and risk level. We reviewed the data we were provided as part of our request and noted that the revalidation visits for 16 premises were beyond the date defined by the system. In a number of cases considerably beyond the date due. Revalidation visits have been impacted by the pandemic restrictions. We understand that the revalidation process is now done 'virtually'. Where revalidation has been carried out in this way we would expect the record to be updated accordingly.

Recommendation
The LSO should ensure that any overdue OI records are identified and action taken to have them reviewed and the system updated accordingly.

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14   HM Fire Service Inspectorate, *The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's arrangements for the provision of Operational Risk Information,* 2019

Health and Safety

85.   Health and safety reporting has been carried out using the RIVO Safeguard system. Generally, the system is considered very awkward to use by staff who think this is a factor contributing to a low reporting of near-misses. The Service has introduced a new electronic recording system called TASS (Think Act Stay Safe). There were a number of technical ICT issues with the development of the system but it is our understanding that these have been resolved and TASS is now in use as the new recording system.

86.   Near-misses are the type of events that occur on the incident ground as well as on-station; however we believe there is generally a lack of understanding among personnel Service-wide about the importance of reporting near-misses, particularly from the incident ground. Near-miss reporting is described by the Health and Safety Executive as a very important way of identifying problem areas.

87.   At a UK level the latest available statistics indicate that the SFRS benchmarks well in relation to injury rates per 1,000 employees against other fire and rescue services[15]. For Midlothian the number of health and safety events that have resulted in injury over the last three years has been variable, as shown in table 6. There have been relatively low numbers of near-misses reported. The number of vehicle accidents have remained at a relatively low level over the three years with a reduction of 50% in the last complete reporting year 2019/20.

88.   The issues above regarding the reporting and understanding of near-misses; firefighter injuries; and the TASS event recording system will be among the areas of interest in our forthcoming national Operational Health and Safety Thematic inspection.

2017-18	4
2018-19	2
2019-20	4
Total	**10**

Table 6: the number of injuries to firefighters over the last 3 years

2017-18	1
2018-19	4
2019-20	2
Total	**7**

Table 7: the number of reported near-misses over the last 3 years

2017-18	2
2018-19	4
2019-20	2
Total	**8**

Table 8: the number of SFRS vehicle accidents over the last 3 years

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15   SFRS, *Health, Safety And Wellbeing Annual Report 2018-19*

Partnership

89. Partnership working encompasses formal partnerships, stemming from Community Planning arrangements as defined in legislation, and informal partnerships at an operational level.

90. At a formal level the Community Partnership Board has oversight of Community Planning, supported by a number of thematic and sub-groups. The SFRS is a statutory partner, and the LSO is a member of the Board. The work of the Partnership is to implement the Single Plan for Midlothian by bringing together statutory public bodies; the voluntary and private sectors; and local communities to deliver a shared 'plan'. With a view to bringing about improvement in meeting the differing needs of local populations. With an overall purpose of reducing outcome gaps within populations and between areas, promoting preventative approaches that reduce demand for public services.

91. Operationally, at fire station level good partnership arrangements were described between the SFRS, Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS), and Police Scotland. Although not concluded by the time we finished our inspection, SAS and the SFRS are in the final stages of making arrangements to co-locate a permanent ambulance and crew at Penicuik Fire Station. This new collaboration is being viewed positively by the RDS crew and seen as a further enhancement to current good partnership working to serve the community. The British Red Cross Fire and Emergency Support Service vehicle is kept at Dalkeith fire station, although there is reported to be little interaction with the crew of the Red Cross vehicle.

92. One of the initiatives delivered locally with partners is 'Living Safely in the Home' (LSITH). LSITH is an initiative led by the SFRS in partnership with the Midlothian Enhanced Rapid Response and Intervention Team (MERRIT) and Midlothian Council. The focus of the initiative is on providing a more holistic approach to the assessment of risk within the home across the Midlothian area. The project aims to reduce unintentional harm in the home by targeting the most high-risk groups, namely the elderly over 65's and the under 5's. Those in potential need of assistance provided through the project were identified if, during a HFSV, an occupant of the property was identified as being in the over 65 age category and or confirmed that someone in the household had any long-term health or mobility issues. Where this was the case, a further conversation would be offered, participation in the conversation was only carried out on a consensual basis, the aim of which being to create referrals to MERRIT where there was an identified risk from falls in the home.

93. The project was carried out as a pilot within Midlothian and evaluated in August 2017. That evaluation concluded that: 'There is clear evidence that the development of a more holistic approach to home safety can enhance the quality of health and social care provision and contribute towards positive outcomes…' Included within the evaluation recommendations was that there should be a continuation of the project. Due to ongoing national negotiations regarding any changes to the role of a firefighter this work is being carried out in a reduced capacity on a voluntary basis by personnel and is still generating referrals.

94. As part of a sector and community-wide response to the impact of the pandemic personnel from SFRS have been involved in supporting local communities by delivering safety advice, food parcels and volunteering information in coordination with Dalkeith and Woodburn Resilience Group.

3.3_Evolving Role of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Service Transformation

95. Issues around transformation of the role of the SFRS are a major consideration for firefighters. The perceived lack of information and uncertainty on future plans for the Service is unsettling for staff.

96. 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 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 Urban Search and 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.

Modernising Response

97. As part of the SFRS's transformation plans new, smaller, fire appliances have been introduced at certain locations in Scotland, but there are none within the Midlothian area.

Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals

98. The SFRS Performance Management Framework (PMF) committed the Service to reducing Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (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, it doesn't allocate a target to the scale of that reduction. Table 9 shows that UFAS calls have increased slightly in the latest complete reporting year. Although the increase is slight we consider that there should be a continuing focus of local effort to reduce the number of calls.

Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
calls	363	377	386

Table 9: UFAS calls Midlothian[16]

99. Currently UFAS calls account for 30.5% of calls in Midlothian. From 6 May 2020 the Service introduced a new interim 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.

100. In order to manage data relating to UFAS calls the SFRS designed and introduced a UFAS database system. A common comment made by station management teams was that the system was not automatically linked to the Incident Recording System (IRS) and there was therefore a time-lag between the two systems. This time-lag was the reason given for some local commanders maintaining their own manual records for ease of reference when updating the official record. The UFAS database was also seen

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16   Supplied by LSO in response to information request.

as being not entirely 'user friendly', with for example, drop-down options not being presented in alphabetic order and being case sensitive, making finding options difficult. This has the potential for inaccurate option selection for ease of completion, contributing to inaccurate data. It is our understanding that during the course of our inspection the SFRS terminated the use of the UFAS database. Local monitoring is undertaken for incomplete IRS records.

101. Local engagement activity has been carried out within a number of sectors including education, and NHS Medical Centres. There is a desire to work with the local education authorities across the LSO area to introduce call filtering, which has been successfully introduced in other local authority areas, such as Dumfries and Galloway. Historically both education and health sectors have been a source of unwanted alarms. As we reported in our inspection of the City of Edinburgh, an initiative, 'Take 5', has been delivered in partnership with NHS Lothian to NHS staff aimed at reducing UFAS incidents. Although there is only one NHS building in Midlothian staff here have received input on it. The initiative encourages all staff to 'Take 5' prior to undertaking workplace activity; to consider what they're about to do and how it will affect the fire alarm system. For example, taking five moments prior to cleaning the floor with a steam cleaner. The initiative was highlighted by the Service as an area of good practice nationally.

102. More generally SFRS fire safety enforcement staff are involved in a process of engagement with dutyholders of premises where SFRS UFAS trigger points for action have been met. One of the Enforcement Officers is designated a UFAS Champion for the whole of the LSO area, who is responsible for reviewing UFAS activity in line with the 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.

Recommendation

The LSO should assess the effectiveness of UFAS preventive work and take steps to improve the local effort to reduce the number of UFAS calls and appliance mobilisations.

3.4_Governance, Accountability and Performance

Effective Governance and Performance

Local scrutiny arrangements

103. As mentioned earlier, reporting of performance is made to the local authority as part of the local scrutiny arrangements. There are six wards within Midlothian. Each area has a Midlothian Council neighbourhood plan. The Service actively participates in the Council's community planning arrangements.

104. From our discussions with the Chair of the Council Scrutiny Committee and with senior Council officials, we concluded that the Service is well engaged with strategic partners in playing an integral part in service delivery. The Council feel actively involved in the development of the local area plan, and likewise the Service takes the opportunity to comment on Council plans, such as the Council's winter plan.

People

Appliance availability

105. A wholetime fire station's establishment is based on the Service's crewing level policy, with resilience built in for absences. In practice there are occasions when there are more than the required personnel on duty and other times where there are not enough. The SFRS's has a five watch duty system based on a 10-week, continually repeating, shift cycle. The five watch duty system is designed to predict as far as practicable, where surpluses and deficiencies will occur, and realign resources accordingly.

106. In the 10-week cycle a typical firefighter would not be able to provide their full quota of contractual hours. Therefore, they can be required to work a number of additional shifts to make up their additional hours. Each firefighter therefore has, in order to fulfil their contractual hours, to work a number of additional hours (which can be between 10 and 150 hours depending on the roster per annum) to cover for organisational shortfalls (these are generally termed 'Orange' Days). There are also days during the standard shift pattern (up to four) where, due to there being a surplus available, staff may be told not to report for work (generally termed 'Purple' Days). Where this is the case, staff are provided with a minimum of 48 hours' notice.

107. To ensure the duty system and wholetime firefighter availability operates effectively, the SFRS has a national Central Staffing section, based in Johnstone. Central Staffing is responsible for arranging the number of wholetime firefighters on duty at each fire station. This is done by the management of leave, controlled use of overtime, the use of the additional (Orange) days and under pre-Covid circumstances the use of detached duty staff. Detached duty involves personnel temporarily working from a fire station other than their home station to make up a crewing shortfall. Due to the Covid control measures introduced appliance crews are now considered a 'bubble' separate from other personnel and consequently there is no use of personnel from outwith that bubble.

108. The view of the personnel we spoke to was that the five-watch duty system and central staffing process are not working efficiently.

109. There are occasions when appliances are unavailable. This can be the result of training commitment, scheduled maintenance, vehicle defect and crew shortages. The Dalkeith appliance has maintained a very high availability throughout last year.

110. The availability of the RDS crewed pump is shown in table 10. Issues influencing the availability rate are discussed elsewhere in this report. In the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic; during the months of April, May and June 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.

Fire station	Availability %
Penicuik	91.83

Table 10: RDS availability 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2020

111. As part of the SFRS transformation process, the SFRS has created the role of a Retained Volunteer Duty System (RVDS) support Watch Commander. In January 2019, the SFRS appointed 18 staff to these posts to act as a support officer for RDS and VDS fire stations. There has been a further appointment process which led to the appointment of another 18 posts. At the time of writing a third phase is due to deliver 18 more posts in January 2021 in a number of areas across the country, giving a total of 54 posts. The posts are being allocated to geographic clusters of fire stations, with the type of support provided varying across the country as dictated by the LSOs.

112. One of these posts covers the Midlothian area, with the postholder appointed in January 2020. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, he has been unable to fully develop the role over the past year. He is responsible for the following RDS fire stations located within the Midlothian and Scottish Borders area; Peebles, Innerleithen, West Linton and Penicuik (which is the only RDS station within the Midlothian area).

113. The LSO designated priorities for support for this cluster of stations include monitoring and assisting with maintaining appliance availability.

114. The RVDS WC will, if necessary, locate at a particular fire station in order to cover for shortages of personnel to maintain daytime appliance availability. At the time of our inspection, a number of hours had been added to appliance availability in Midlothian through this activity. When working at the station, the postholder will also assist RDS stations with the completion of routine administration tasks, equipment related functions, training and development of trainee firefighters, the recording of operational risk information and assisting with arranging HFSVs.

115. Overall, there has been a positive reaction to the creation of this post among the Midlothian RDS personnel affected.

Appraisal

116. We saw evidence that personal appraisals are carried out for wholetime operational personnel. The overall quality was variable.

Learning and Development

117. 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.

118. 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 3 year period
- advanced TFoC modules that are relative to risks in their area should be covered on a 3 year rolling programme. The decision on what advanced modules to cover should be made by the LSO on the basis of risk.

119. The SFRS submitted a RDS schedule for training at Penicuik as evidence for our inspection. The RDS schedule includes:

- all core TFoC modules over 12 months
- all standard TFoC modules over 3 years (plus an equality and diversity module)
- nine of the 24 advanced modules

120. 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). Each subject has a series of e-learning tools, case studies, interactive packages, and assessments to support learning. Some personnel were of the view that some of the LCMS modules and concluding assessments were of poor quality and didn't support learning.

121. Although specifically focusing on RDS firefighter training, we published in March 2020[17] 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. This issue was raised with us in Midlothian, for example, trauma casualty training was delivered using a total of 161 slides in a PowerPoint presentation.

122. This training is 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. Performance monitoring of the completion of training records is the responsibility of the relevant fire station management team. As with other LSO areas, personnel felt that too much time was spent recording training on PDRPro.

123. During our visits, we discussed with personnel their overall view of the training. RDS personnel felt particularly well supported in their training needs, this is very encouraging. The majority of wholetime staff believed that there was insufficient 'hands-on' practical training, particularly in their USAR capability, with refresher training in the use of some equipment not being delivered. Re-accreditation timescales were described as unachievable by local training staff. New personnel at Dalkeith were said to have not received any training in USAR.

124. The ability of Dalkeith personnel to train in USAR was said to be further hampered by the fact that the USAR equipment they would be expected to use, is stored at another station making it harder to get hands-on experience with the tools and equipment. Inspectors noted with interest that Dalkeith USAR personnel provided a response to the fatal rail derailment in Stonehaven in August last year, which we believe demonstrates the importance for adequate skills maintenance. Generally the availability of courses was also said to be problematic, including USAR instructors courses.

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17   HM Fire Service Inspectorate, *Training of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's retained duty system personnel 2020*

125. There is a TED operating plan for the LSO area. Training is supported by area-based trainers whose priorities and activity is led through discussion with station Watch Commanders. There has been a high turnover of members of the training team and it is currently working under-strength, which is having an impact. A further problem created by the turnover of training staff is that not all new staff have the necessary instructors' qualifications. This therefore restricts the immediate support they are able to provide to stations and trainees and also places an additional burden on other fully qualified instructors. The SFRS has a National Training Strategy 2020-25[18]. Importantly as part of its key themes the Strategy identifies the need *'to ensure that those delivering training are suitably trained and experienced in the subjects that they are delivering'* and *'that knowledge management and succession planning are key components of the development and delivery plans for training.'*

126. Local trainers have responsibility for supporting designated stations. These station responsibilities have been altered recently to remove the need for trainers to cross between different geographic Covid tier areas. The support that trainers have been recently able to provide has been impacted by the pandemic, where routine training visits to stations has been suspended, with support being provided over the phone or by email. Although outside of the Midlothian area, we were encouraged by the proactive initiative undertaken by a RDS Commander at a station in another part of the LSO area to use video technology to deliver remote training to the station RDS personnel. We feel that this type of training delivery activity should be further explored and where possible rolled out further to other RDS stations in the wider LSO area, particularly given the continuing impact of the pandemic.

Good Practice

Although not within Midlothian, but the wider LSO area, we consider that use of video technology in the delivery of training is an example of good practice and worthy of being rolled out further to other stations.

127. Local training personnel recognise that the pandemic has created a large backlog in the delivery of training and assessment and have concerns how this will be addressed.

128. There is a rolling three-year programme of training and assessment for skills such as incident command competency, which is also affected by the shortage of appropriately qualified area-based trainers and the recent high turnover of training staff.

129. A variation in teaching techniques between trainers and delivery sites was also raised with us, particularly for new recruits. We have mentioned this issue in other local area reports.

130. Similar to other areas of the Service there is a shortage of trained drivers at Dalkeith fire station. An engagement process was undertaken locally to identify operational personnel who could undergo the training to become drivers. To address the national shortage the

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18   SFRS Training Strategy 2020-2025

Service had earlier initiated a procurement process to retain the services of an external supplier of Large Goods Vehicle driver training. The initial procurement process was ultimately cancelled with the result that the Service's own driver trainers were challenged meeting the demand. HMFSI understands that a further procurement will be undertaken following a successful business case being put forward by the TED Directorate. Generally speaking there was a high degree of frustration amongst personnel regarding this matter which is putting pressure on the existing drivers and has the potential to affect appliance availability. It was also felt that the re-validation frequency for driving was also having an impact on the ability to deliver training.

National Recommendation

The SFRS should progress the planned procurement of additional driver training capacity in order to deliver an increase in driver training provision to help resolve the shortage of drivers.

LSO Support Staff

131. The Midlothian area is supported by a team of support staff, the majority of whom, prior to the pandemic, were based at the SDA Headquarters at Newbridge. The team is currently homeworking as per Scottish Government guidelines, however members are available via email, Skype/MS Teams and by phone to support LSO areas. Two team members attend Newbridge each Monday on a rota basis to deal with tasks that cannot be undertaken from home. The team has a shared remit including the LSO area and support to the wider East SDA, with work fluctuating due to need and priority. The team is slightly understrength due to having a team member on secondment, however a recruitment process, which was said to be very slow, has been undertaken. A temporary staff member should be in post in the near future to cover this secondment. Recruiting staff to work at Newbridge has been problematic in the past due to the lack of public transport links to the site.

132. A recent national review of admin support has been carried out with a view to disseminate good practice across the Service in support provided. A recent positive development is the creation of a 'landing page' on the East SDA SharePoint site. 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. Relevant staff are provided an email link to the 'landing page'. The link to this page was communicated to all personnel from Watch Commander to LSO level prior to the team moving to homeworking last March, to provide guidance in case the team were not immediately available. The LSOs are also provided with a monthly update from the Team Leader to advise of any changes to processes or other workloads.

133. There is a good relationship with uniformed staff, a number of whom were particularly appreciative of the support provided by members of the East Admin support team. However, similar to their operational colleagues, admin support in the Midlothian has a number of challenges from some national issues:

- IT software issues, especially lack of compatibility between systems
- time taken to get permissions to access systems
- lack of training in new systems when introduced

Workforce

134. As explained earlier the LSO area covers three local authorities, as a result the management team have responsibilities covering more than just the Midlothian area. The management structure for the Midlothian area comprises one LSO, two Group Commanders, and three Station Commanders.

135. The majority of personnel we spoke to were positive of the station management in the area and expressed the view that they felt supported. There were also views expressed regarding the general remoteness of management beyond LSO level and a feeling of low morale.

136. The only RDS station in the area is exposed to the same challenges as other RDS crews over recruitment and retention which can impact on availability, although currently the Penicuik crew are performing well at almost 92% availability.

137. Midlothian operational staff sickness absence percentage and average days lost per person are shown in tables 11, 12 and 13. As can be seen the rate has generally been increasing.

Year	Average Days Lost per person	Absence %
2016/17	11	3
2017/18	23	6
2018/19	11	3
2019/20	24	6

Table 11: Midlothian wholetime staff sickness absence statistics

Year	Average Days Lost per person	Absence %
2016/17	11	3
2017/18	21	6
2018/19	29	8
2019/20	9	2

Table 12: Midlothian RDS staff sickness absence statistics

Year	Average Days Lost per person	Absence %
2016/17	0	0
2017/18	0	0
2018/19	0	0
2019/20	0	0

Table 13: Midlothian Flexi Duty staff sickness absence statistics

3.5_Conclusions and Recommendations

138. Our impression of Midlothian area is positive about the effort made to deliver a community-focused service and the quality of the SFRS staff there. With staff displaying an enthusiasm to deliver more in supporting the community.

139. There are strong local partnerships. SFRS staff and managers are seen as contributing well to partnership aims, such as the reduction of unintentional harm and particularly the youth engagement work.

140. HMFSI recognises that this is a local area inspection, however, the majority of recommendations we have identified are national in nature. From what we have seen and from our interviews with partners we believe that the SFRS is working well in Midlothian. With central national progress on the issues we have mentioned within the report and the recommendations we have made, there can only be further improvement in service delivery within the area.

141. 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.

142. 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 on page 29 for ease of reading.

List of Recommendations

(N) = National Recommendation

1. (N): The SFRS should complete its plans to procure a replacement digital radio capability as soon as practical.
2. The LSO should ensure that any overdue ORI records are identified and action taken to have them reviewed and the system updated accordingly.
3. The LSO should assess the effectiveness of UFAS preventive work and take steps to improve the local effort to reduce the number of UFAS calls and appliance mobilisations.
4. (N): The SFRS should assess the availability of USAR Technician and Instructors courses and address any deficiency in order to ensure the maintenance of USAR personnel competency.
5. (N): The SFRS should progress the planned procurement of additional driver training capacity in order to deliver an increase in driver training provision to help resolve the shortage of drivers.

Good Practice

Although not within the Midlothian, but the wider LSO area, we consider that use of video technology in the delivery of training is an example of good practice and worthy of being rolled out further to other stations.

Glossary and abbreviations

CSA	Community Safety Advocate
CSE	Community safety engagement
DACO	Deputy Assistant Chief Officer
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
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
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.

Integrity, Objectivity, and Fairness.