



HM Fire Service Inspectorate

Local Area Inspection South Ayrshire



Integrity, Objectivity, and Fairness.

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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 (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 service provision;
- 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.



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 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 our 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 is conducted within the area. 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.

During this inspection we visited every fire station in South Ayrshire, speaking to retained duty system (RDS) crew members on their training night and the duty group at the time of our visit to the wholetime shift at Ayr Fire Station. We met with the LSO and with group managers and station managers across the following areas of responsibility: Prevention and Protection; Service Delivery; Training and Employee Development; Health and Safety; and fire station supervision. We also met with community safety staff, fire safety enforcement staff, support staff and FBU officials. Our partner meetings were with South Ayrshire Council, Police Scotland, the Scottish Ambulance Service, Ayr College, and Ayrshire Civil Contingencies. We also observed a meeting of the local authority Partnerships Panel.

Our report reflects the circumstance at the time of our inspection visits during April and May 2016. The SFRS is continuing to change and evolve; consequently material changes may have occurred since our inspection.

A summary of our findings

- Our overall impression of the SFRS's work in South Ayrshire is positive.
- The Local Fire and Rescue Plan for South Ayrshire follows the general structure that the Service has established for these plans and there is an absence of benchmarking and targets.
- The fatal casualty rate for South Ayrshire per accidental dwelling fire is considerably higher than the rate for Scotland as a whole, whilst the non-fatal casualty rate is the same.
- The three-year target contained in the local authority SOA for the reduction in the number of accidental dwelling fires per 100,000 population was met a year ahead of its target date.
- Partnership working is well embedded at all levels.
- There is a feeling amongst staff that there had been an over-abundance of new information and guidance since the formation of the SFRS in 2013, arising from the Service's need to create a single operating framework from the eight legacy service operating practices. This impacted on the ability to process it all, particularly for RDS personnel.
- The number of non-domestic premises in the area which fall within the SFRS's annual fire safety audit guidelines contributes to a manageable fire safety enforcement workload for the enforcement team.
- Within the LSO area, an Auditing Officer based at the Ardrossan fire station has been designated as UFAS (unwanted fire alarm signal) Champion and has been tasked with trying to reduce the number of UFAS calls. We think that the creation of a Champion and the enthusiastic proactive engagement activity and innovation being undertaken in South Ayrshire to address the problem of false alarms is a positive way forward.
- RDS firefighters form the majority of personnel within South Ayrshire – 116 out of 173 station based personnel at the time of our field work. Most RDS units are under strength and a recruitment campaign has recently concluded. There is a robust system for the monitoring of RDS appliance availability and this is generally good. However, there are particular problems with the availability of the appliance at Colmonell fire station during weekdays.
- The Local Area Liaison Officer (LALO) and other Community Action Team (CAT) members engage in a wide spectrum of partnership initiatives. Within the CAT there is strong commitment and enthusiasm toward the promotion of community safety and for broadening the reach of the SFRS, particularly in working with health and social care partners.
- There are a high number of automatic system generated revisits for Home Fire Safety Visits, placing an additional administrative burden on staff trying to contact householders and arrange revisits, often fruitlessly.
- There are fortnightly tasking meetings of Community Safety partners where decisions are made on actions to take in response to incidents and trend analysis of multi-agency data. This is facilitated by a Partnership Analyst.
- Although of varying ages, general fire station facilities are satisfactory. All have a level of IT provision, though there are issues around system connectivity. There are varying levels of provision of training and fitness equipment available.

- There are two systems to review and update local risk information. However, there is a level of uncertainty amongst personnel over the operation of these systems, and in RDS stations we found that reliance is placed on hard copy information in preference to the electronic Mobile Data Terminal system.
- Station audit reports, conducted under the SFRS's Operational Assurance policy, in our view, contain limited detail and evidence to support the judgments recorded.
- Although South Ayrshire is not a pilot area for the SFRS Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA) project, overall, most staff are positive about firefighters encompassing the wider public safety agenda, such as this type of medical emergency work, providing it is accompanied with suitable training, equipment and staff welfare provision.
- There is reporting of health and safety near-miss incidents. There is however a feeling amongst staff we spoke to that some near-misses had not been reported since the implementation of a new reporting procedure.
- Gaps had been identified internally within the PDRpro training recording system and monitoring of this had increased. A new recording system, rolled out in April this year, has resulted in improvement.
- In support of operational preparedness there is evidence of strong partnership working through Ayrshire Civil Contingencies team.

2 About the area

South Ayrshire covers 422 square miles on the south-west coast of Scotland. The area extends from Troon in the North to Ballantrae in the South and includes the towns of Ayr, Prestwick, Maybole and Girvan.

The population of South Ayrshire in 2014 was just over 112,500¹ which was a 0.3% decrease on the 2013 figure. Overall the population of South Ayrshire has fallen since 1988. This decrease is projected to continue with a 2.4% reduction by 2037, compared to an 8.8% projected increase for Scotland as a whole. This decrease will be across all age bands with the exception of two groups, 65-74 and over 75, both of which will increase. The over-75 age group is projected to rise by the most, which is the same for the rest of Scotland. The estimated number of dwellings in 2014 was 54,489.

The LSO for South Ayrshire is also responsible for SFRS delivery in the neighbouring local authority areas of North Ayrshire and East Ayrshire. In profile, the areas present similar challenges to the LSO and his team, with North Ayrshire having the added dimension of island communities.

There are five fire stations within South Ayrshire. Four of them, Colmonell, Girvan, Maybole and Troon are crewed by RDS personnel. Troon is a two appliances station; the other RDS stations have a single appliance. Ayr is a multi-appliance station crewed by a combination of wholetime and retained firefighters.

A look at some key statistics² for the South Ayrshire area

Appliances from South Ayrshire responded to a total of 1,887 incidents in 2014/15, an increase of 87 or almost 5% on the previous year.


There were 78 accidental dwelling fire incidents in 2014/15, just over a 9% reduction on the previous year. This is a rate of 14.3 fires per 10,000 dwellings, and is lower than the rate for Scotland as a whole, 19.6.

Tragically, there were three fire fatalities during 2014/15, and 24 non-fatal casualties³. In comparison to the Scotland rate of fatal casualties per 1,000 accidental dwelling fires, South Ayrshire, in 2014/15, was over four times higher than the national rate. Dwelling fire fatalities are relatively uncommon and therefore statistically the data can be volatile. For non-fatal casualties the rate was the same, at 167.

¹ National Records of Scotland, December 2015

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

³ This includes casualties recorded as a precautionary check.



There has been a reduction of just over 9% in deliberate fires with a total of 212 for 2014/15, 85% of these were secondary fires⁴, 52% of which involved refuse or bins.

1,049 false alarms were reported in 2014/15, an increase of 90 on the previous year. Seventy-eight per cent of these false alarms are recorded as being caused by a fire alarm system. The rate of false alarms per 100,000 population for South Ayrshire at 932 was higher than the overall rate for Scotland of 909. We comment later in this report on the steps the Service is taking locally to try to reduce calls from fire alarms.

Special service incidents are non-fire related incidents which the SFRS is requested to attend. The overall rate of these per 100,000 population is lower in South Ayrshire, at 184, than the rate for Scotland as a whole of 200.8. Although the overall rate is lower, there has been an increase since the previous reporting year, particularly in the category of 'effecting entry or exit' which has more than doubled. At the same time there had been a 15% reduction in road traffic collision incidents attended.

The rate of Home Fire Safety Visits conducted per 1,000 dwellings of 20.5 is below the Scotland average of 25.7, though the rate has increased since the previous reporting year.

⁴ 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).

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 key planning documents for the SFRS in each local authority area.

3.1 The Local Fire and Rescue Plan and Single Outcome Agreement

There are similarities in the way the 32 local plans of SFRS are structured, with the content being similar in many of them. Whilst easing the burden of plan production for the Service, if the framework is not appropriately customised then they may be of less relevance at the local level. The South Ayrshire plan follows the general format that the Service has established for these plans and there is an absence of benchmarking and targets.

The South Ayrshire Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) is a document created at local authority level which sets out that a number of 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 South Ayrshire SOA 2013-2017 includes fire-specific indicators, such as the number of accidental dwelling fires per 100,000 population, the number of dwelling fires where alcohol or drugs are suspected to be a contributing factor. The SOA assigns targets to indicators, seeking to achieve improvement of each against the data from the baseline year of 2012/13.

By inclusion in the SOA, these indicators are for all the partners to achieve and not just for the SFRS. Equally SFRS would be expected to contribute to other targets (outcomes) within the SOA such as outcomes relating to caring for older people: *‘People with disabilities, long term conditions or who become frail are supported to live as safely and independently as possible in the community’*.

The three-year target in the SOA for the reduction in the number of accidental dwelling fires per 100,000 population was met a year ahead of its target date.

3.2 Improved service outcomes and protecting frontline services

Prevention and Protection

There are two Group Managers within ENSA with responsibility for Prevention and Protection. Community Safety Engagement (CSE) is delivered throughout the ENSA area by a Community Action Team (CAT) based in Kilmarnock fire station. Fire Safety Enforcement (FSE) for South Ayrshire is delivered by staff who are based in Ayr fire station. Some staff also have the use of South Ayrshire Council premises.

The CAT is made up of four Community Safety Advocates and two Community firefighters. One of the Community Safety Advocates is seconded to a Telecare community alarm initiative which is operating in South Ayrshire. The CAT has administrative support.

There is one Watch Manager with the function of Local Area Liaison Officer (LALO). The single LALO is a main point of contact for the three local authorities within the LSO area. Although part of the community safety function the LALO has no direct line management responsibility for the CAT. This is an arrangement we have not seen elsewhere. Having no line management responsibility allows the LALO to concentrate on developing strong partnership relationships and developing initiatives. The LALO, in common with some other LSO areas, carries out the role for more than one local authority area, in this case both areas of North and East Ayrshire. This arrangement involves competing priorities for the LALO.

The CAT are, for the most part self-directed in dealing with their day to day workload and expanding their own partnership working.

There is a local Domestic Safety Plan 2015-16 covering the whole LSO area which aims to support SFRS's national prevention objectives. The plan details the incident activity for the LSO area, down to electoral ward level. The plan also describes the results of an analysis of the incident activity, for example, charting domestic fires by time of day and by most common cause. The plan concludes by setting out the prevention and protection approaches in response to the incident activity. We support the production of plans such as this as it contributes to enabling greater partnership and staff buy-in to meeting the goals set for the local area. We were, however, unclear of the level of awareness of the existence and contents of this plan amongst both partners and staff. We would therefore encourage the LSO and his team to raise awareness both internally and with external partners.

We discuss in greater detail below the partnership activities which encompass the work of the CSE staff, including the Telecare initiative. In addition to the work of the team, the shift duty personnel at Ayr also undertake regular CSE activity.

There are three Enforcement Officers (EO) and one Auditing Officer (AO) based in Ayr. One of the EOs principally deals with East Ayrshire. We are impressed by the attitude and motivation of the FSE staff.

A major focus of the SFRS national enforcement guidelines is the audit of premises that present a high risk to life safety. In South Ayrshire there is a comparatively low number of non-domestic premises which fall into the SFRS priority category for audit. The fire safety audit of these premises is therefore well within the capacity of the designated enforcement staff for South Ayrshire.

While there is a national enforcement framework which identifies the type and risk category of premises that should be audited, there is also a personal target for enforcement staff of 132 annual audits to be achieved. Staff who are categorised as within the development phase in the EO role have a slightly reduced target. Some fire safety audit work is undertaken outwith targeted premises in order to achieve personal targets.

We reviewed some FSE case file communications with dutyholders and found a good standard of work consistent with the processes generally prevailing within the SFRS. There is evidence of good engagement with agencies with an interest in fire safety, such as the Local Authority Building Control.


As was briefly mentioned earlier, in 2014/15 the false alarm rate per population in South Ayrshire was higher than the overall Scotland rate, and the local rate has increased since 2013/14. Calls originating from fire alarms are a major component of the false alarm rate. Within the LSO area, an AO based at the Ardrossan office is designated as UFAS Champion. This officer is tasked with trying to bring about a reduction in the UFAS rate across the LSO area.

SFRS has a policy for recording and managing UFAS incidents. The policy has been the subject of a previous thematic inspection⁵ by HMFSI. As our report highlights, the SFRS's policy has a number of staged triggers at which particular interventions would take place. These stages are reached when the number of false alarms for a particular premises exceeds the limit allowed by the policy over a defined period.

We were advised that the UFAS Champion is proactively directly engaging with dutyholders at an earlier stage than required under the SFRS policy. This earlier engagement is aimed at trying to stop the problem escalating and reaching a defined trigger point. South Ayrshire has a number of premises where, due to the nature of the function of the building or the processes carried out within them, present several challenges in managing the incidence of false alarms. We think that the creation of a Champion and the enthusiastic proactive engagement activity and innovation being undertaken in South Ayrshire to address the problem of false alarms is a positive way forward.

Fires which occur in derelict buildings can present difficulty and risk for firefighters, often linked to a building's state of disrepair. Also, because the buildings are uninhabited, fires can develop before they are reported and may consequently be large in size and therefore require more resources.

⁵ HMFSI *Managing Automatic Fire Signals*, <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0048/00486519.pdf>



We were advised of past action to reduce the risk posed by problematic derelict buildings, and we saw that there is an enthusiasm to progress a derelict property risk register within the ENSA area. Staff were well-sighted on the potential for fire safety legislation to apply to derelict buildings.

Service Delivery

The building fabric of the fire stations are of varying ages and conditions, with some having minor defects, although all are considered fit for purpose. The stations have varying levels of provision, from some to none, of on-site training facilities and fitness equipment. Some of the limitations are due to the station design and age. In the stations with no fitness equipment, a majority of firefighters we spoke to would like to see access to such equipment. Access to training facilities is covered further below.

All the stations are provided with IT equipment to allow personnel to carry out the various administrative functions relative to their role, such as recording training undertaken. As we have seen in other areas of Scotland, connectivity to central systems can be slow, particularly but not exclusively, in remote areas of South Ayrshire. The problems created by slow access are compounded for RDS personnel by the restricted time available to them and the understandably limited number of computers available on retained stations. The SFRS is generally aware of the issues related to IT systems and connectivity and has recently let a contract to improve its wide area network connectivity. The contract is expected to be completed by the end of the 2016/17 financial year.

The SFRS has a statutory duty to obtain information which may be required by its personnel in carrying out their operational role. We were advised that there is an established central procedure for creating and updating operational risk information (ORI) within the area.

For relevant risks within the Ayr area each of the five wholetime duty groups at Ayr Fire Station is allocated, from a central list, a number of premises to review and update risk information as required. Any amendments are then centrally uploaded to the appliance based Mobile Data Terminal (MDT) system. A separate system exists for the risks in the outlying areas covered by the retained stations. In practice we found that there is a level of uncertainty amongst personnel over the operation of these systems, and in retained stations we found that a heavier reliance is placed on hard copy information in preference to the electronic MDT system.

We have commented in other reports that, due to the importance of having access to accurate up-to-date risk information in supporting firefighter safety and effectiveness, out of date or incomplete ORI represents a risk to the SFRS.

Firefighters visit, where applicable, multi-storey flats to inspect the condition of any firefighting and fire safety installations present in the common areas. There are also established procedures for visits to any care homes within the station areas for the purpose of providing familiarisation of the premises for crew members.

Generally, operational crews are content with the progress of fire reform, although there had been a number of perceived teething problems. There were mixed views on the level of support being offered by managers to personnel. Overall there is a feeling of an over-abundance of new information and procedures and inability to process it all. This is particularly the case for the non-dual contract RDS personnel who have finite time to complete all that is required during a training night – they do of course benefit from the support given to them by their dual contract colleagues.

Although South Ayrshire is not a pilot area for the SFRS Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA) project, overall, most of the firefighters we spoke to were positive about their role encompassing a wider public safety agenda, such as this type of medical emergency work, providing it is accompanied with suitable training, equipment and welfare support.

A strong partnership already exists locally between the SFRS and the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS). SAS area managers advised us they would welcome the opportunity to explore how the SFRS would be able to provide greater support to the SAS, for example in incidents such as OHCA, particularly within remote rural locations, and also assistance with bariatric patients.

The level of operational activity varied across the stations, from an average over the past five years of 1,306 calls per year at Ayr Fire Station to 27⁶ at Colmonell.


Station based personnel we spoke to express a desire for more ‘hands-on’ practical training. A degree of practical training will always take place on-station depending on facilities available. It will also take place off-station, sometimes by arrangement, using locally available vacant premises or geographic features such as lochs, where training scenarios can be set up.

With the exception of Girvan and Colmonell, due to the travel distance, personnel from South Ayrshire will on occasion travel to the SFRS’s comprehensive training facility at Cambuslang, which is a distance of around 40 miles from Ayr. We were advised on a number of occasions by firefighters across South Ayrshire that the training courses delivered at Cambuslang fail to make best use of the excellent practical training facilities available there. In particular we were advised that it was often the case that the course could have equally been delivered locally without the need to travel to and from Cambuslang.

RDS firefighters have finite time to train each week and it is important that effective use is made of the time available. Therefore we would encourage the LSO to work with his colleagues within the SFRS Training and Employee Development (TED) department to review the delivery of training and ensure that, where possible, the most appropriate location is utilised.

During 2014-15 an internal audit of training recording was carried out across the LSO area. A focus of the audit was a review of record keeping on the Personal Development Recording (PDRPro) system and the use of the Learning Content Management System (LCMS). LCMS is an online learning resource for firefighters. The system contains multi-media learning modules covering the skills based on the Maintenance Phase Development Plan (MPDP). The MPDP

⁶ Station mobilisations which do not result in an attendance at an incident are not included in these figures.



sets out the training programme, usually over a three-year period, for the various elements to maintain competency in the firefighter's skills.

PDRPro is a web based recording system used by personnel, both wholetime and retained, to record training and learning development, both from formal training and from continuous development obtained during actual incidents.

SFRS has a Personal Development Recording System Policy which sets out the minimum recording requirements per person for both duty systems. The purpose of the above audit was to assess individual, group and station performance against the policy and to review local monitoring arrangements.

The audit found that the majority of wholetime personnel are achieving the necessary recording requirements, although there were a number of Crew and Watch Managers who were not. For RDS personnel, the majority of personnel, including Crew and Watch Managers, were not meeting the recording targets. Barriers exist, both electronic system based issues and a lack of time, for RDS personnel completing their training records.

In an effort to address the findings of the audit the West SDA TED team recommended a number of supporting actions, such as the creation of local training plans for RDS stations and the introduction of a local performance monitoring process. Some of the possible causal factors behind the findings will, to an extent, be outwith the direct control of the LSO, such as the system connectivity speeds and the RDS personnel's lack of time.

A new recording system was rolled out in April this year and an improvement of recording has been evidenced. To ensure ongoing monitoring of training records, a new reporting support process introduced by the LSO and his team that provides accurate details of completed modules is in place.

Incomplete training records expose a potential risk to the organisation and we would expect the LSO to continue to review and monitor their completion.

We indicated in the introduction to this report that SFRS has a programme of internal station audits. These audits are carried out as part of the SFRS's Operational Assurance Policy. The station audits form part of the pre-incident audit arrangements of this policy. SFRS has a central team whose focus is operational assurance, though local managers undertake audits, depending on organisational need. Audits can be either routine or thematic, concentrating on a particular subject area.

There is a performance reporting framework to report on audit outcomes. We reviewed the content of the most recent routine audit report we were provided with for the fire stations we visited. We feel that the reports do not always contain sufficient detail and evidence to support the judgements recorded. They also contain limited advice on the development and delivery of action plans to remedy any noted deficiencies.

Part of the process of reform of the fire and rescue service and the creation of SFRS has been the standardisation of policies, procedures and equipment. One major project for SFRS has been the introduction of a new standard Breathing Apparatus set for firefighters. Previously there had been four different sets in use in the legacy Services and eight different service contracts.

The introduction of the new set across the Service was completed in early 2016. The decision to introduce a new standard set has required all operational firefighters to have initial training in its use.

The set procured by SFRS has the capability to use telemetry to monitor the wearer's use of the set by exchanging data, such as cylinder pressure and 'time to whistle' electronically in conjunction with a compatible electronic entry control board. Such a system provides improvements to BA wearer safety and command and control effectiveness. Currently the SFRS has not implemented the telemetry functionality of the sets.

In South Ayrshire the new set has a different cylinder configuration from the sets previously used. The new single cylinder format has required adjustments to be made to the BA set cradles which form part of the rear seats in a fire appliance. The cradle is designed to hold the set behind the firefighter until it is required to be worn at an incident. We were advised by a number of firefighters that the new seating position created by the introduction of the new sets has made the riding position in the rear very uncomfortable, particularly over the extended journey distances which are prevalent in rural areas.

Workforce

Appliance availability is monitored centrally; in particular the availability of the RDS appliances is monitored centrally by a Station Manager whose function is primarily linked to the management of RDS station availability across the LSO area.

At the time of the inspection there are 173 station based operational firefighters, 116 of whom are RDS personnel. The RDS cadre of personnel is currently under strength and this can be expected to contribute to the issue of appliance unavailability. A recruitment campaign has recently concluded which will hopefully help toward addressing this problem.

Administrative support is provided by staff from the West SDA pool based at a number of fire stations in the LSO area. The complement of staff supporting the LSO area have mostly been working in the area for some time and are ex-Strathclyde Fire and Rescue staff. Generally, there has been limited change to the role that they fulfil, although there are some forthcoming changes planned to the level of support that they provide in the payroll function.

There has been an overall reduction in the number of office-based support staff since the formation of SFRS, and those remaining feel this is negatively affecting the level of service they are able to deliver. There is also some lack of clarity on what work will replace the payroll function when this work is moved.

Health and Safety

Health and Safety reporting is carried out using the RIVO Safeguard system. There is evidence that the RIVO system has been used to record near-miss incidents, which, although the numbers are low, is encouraging. There is however a feeling amongst staff we spoke to that some near-misses had not been reported since the implementation of a new reporting procedure.

Near-miss reporting is described by the Health and Safety Executive as a very important way of identifying problem areas. A simple and potentially anonymous system for reporting near-miss incidents can help highlight some of the less obvious hazards in a workplace, or identify areas where a problem is developing.

We would expect the LSO and his team to monitor the level of near-miss reporting within South Ayrshire, and to compare this with reporting levels historically and in other areas, and if there has been a recent reduction in reporting, then to investigate potential causes and take action as necessary.

3.3 More equal access to specialist resources and national capacity

Capacity within the area

Some of the RDS stations are currently running under complement and this is contributing to difficulties with appliance availability, particularly during the day. This is often linked to general societal changes where people no longer work within their local community or travel further afield, due to a lack of local primary employment, and are therefore not available to crew an appliance during week days. This situation is not uncommon and SFRS is well sighted on the matter, taking forward a project on the review of the RDS system, which may present some opportunities to introduce changes which could ultimately improve general appliance availability across the country.

Colmonell is a small rural village with limited local primary employment and where weekday crewing availability is a particular problem. We would encourage the LSO to explore all the options for improving crew availability. In line with SFRS policy this could include the preparation of a business case with different options. One option that was suggested to us is to expand the RDS recruitment catchment area and turnout times beyond those currently used for Colmonell.

Specialist resources

Ayr Fire Station has a water rescue and a high reach resource. The Service completed a national review of specialist equipment in early 2015. The review concluded that there would be no changes to the specialist resources currently based in South Ayrshire.

Nationally the Service has introduced changes to crewing models, including the introduction of resource based crewing. For some areas this has resulted in a reduction in the number of personnel on duty at any one time. Personnel at Ayr raised the issue of the impact on the water rescue capability due to potential changes to crewing levels at Ayr station.

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. This means that if a particular resource is required at an incident, it could be requested from neighbouring areas were it not available locally. This approach seems to us to be appropriate.

3.4_ Strengthened connection between SFRS and communities

Knowing the community

The personnel we spoke to described a feeling of being well connected to the community, particularly RDS personnel.

Home Fire Safety Visits are undertaken by both shift duty and CAT personnel. There is an annual target for the completion of visits. The SFRS standard Community Safety Engagement Toolkit (CSET) tool is used to record and report on visits. Concerns were expressed by shift duty personnel that the emphasis placed on community safety work negatively impacts on the time available for operational training. A particular concern is the time taken up trying, often unsuccessfully, to arrange visits.

The CSET toolkit contains a risk assessment section which is used to assess the level of household risk. The risk categories are High, Medium and Low. Premises within the High risk category receive a greater focus. We were advised that CSET automatically sets the risk category as High when the household has been referred for a visit by a community safety partner, for example social work, regardless of the actual risk. Furthermore, households assessed as High risk have an annual revisit frequency automatically generated by the CSET. We were advised that the automatic annual revisit frequency was not thought necessary and was creating an additional burden.

CSET is a national SFRS tool and we would encourage the LSO to investigate this matter and, if necessary, raise the issue with the SFRS Prevention and Protection Directorate.

Working in partnership

SFRS is represented at a fortnightly multi-agency tasking and co-ordinating group. At the meeting, partners come together to discuss emerging issues from incidents, identify appropriate action and co-ordinate appropriate responses. The LALO is involved, along with a number of community safety partners, in the development and implementation of a number of wide ranging initiatives relating to areas such as anti-social behaviour, domestic violence, driver awareness schemes, wilful fire raising and home safety with vulnerable persons groups.

The CAT has a good relationship with Health and Social Care partners and organisations such as Drug and Alcohol Partnerships. A current example of the partnership working within South Ayrshire is the South Ayrshire Telecare and Community Alarm Service. The SFRS has a member of staff seconded to work along with other partners, to support the installation and linking of smoke alarms to existing Telecare community alarm system clients. These systems are important in assisting potentially vulnerable individuals to continue to live safely and independently in their own home. In addition to increasing the capacity to install smoke alarms and undertake home fire safety visits, the secondment helps to promote safety more generally through provision of awareness raising, and training sessions to the staff of social care partners.

In support of operational preparedness there is evidence of strong partnership working through Ayrshire Civil Contingencies team. The SFRS has a designated civil contingencies officer formally embedded within the Ayrshire Civil Contingencies Team (ACCT), working one day per week from the ACCT office in Prestwick. Routine resilience preparedness planning and exercising takes place. At the time of our inspection extensive preparations, involving all partners, was underway for the Open Golf Championship at Royal Troon. The SFRS also has a part-time non-uniformed Civil Contingencies Officer who operates across the LSO area assisting in the co-ordination of civil contingency planning and exercising.

Local scrutiny arrangements

South Ayrshire Council's scrutiny committee for fire and rescue service issues – Partnerships Panel – receives regular submissions and performance data from the LSO's team. The scrutiny arrangements of the Council were revised following an Audit Scotland Best Value Review in 2014 on behalf of the Accounts Commission.

At the scrutiny meeting which we observed, statistics of SFRS activity in South Ayrshire for the period covering 1 April 2015 to 29 February 2016 were presented along with comparison data for previous years, and benchmarked with performance in East Ayrshire and North Ayrshire. Detail at local ward level was also contained within the performance report which allows for more localised scrutiny by elected members if desired.

From our discussions with the Council Chief Executive, Leader and the Chair of the Partnerships Panel, South Ayrshire Council is very positive about the level of engagement of the Local Senior Officer and the Service. The Council is very satisfied with the performance reporting mechanism and level of detail provided to elected members. Overall, the Service was described as being a key and a good community planning partner, providing good detail of user-friendly reports to committee and always willing to provide more. The Service interacts well with the Council's Community Safety Team.

3.5 Overall conclusions

There are strong local partnerships. SFRS staff and managers are seen as being open and engaging and willing to act to support partners' objectives where possible.

There are structures in place for local scrutiny of the SFRS, with elected members and Council officials satisfied with the performance reporting provided by the LSO and his team. The level of scrutiny within South Ayrshire is similar to examples we have seen elsewhere.

There is a robust data collection and performance monitoring process to assist with RDS appliance and personnel availability.

During 2014-15 an internal audit of training recording was carried out across the LSO area. For RDS personnel, the majority of personnel, including Crew and Watch Managers, were not meeting the recording targets. A new recording system was rolled out in April this year and an improvement of recording has been evidenced. We would expect the LSO to continue to review and monitor the completion of records.

South Ayrshire benefits from a well-established management team, with good local partnership relationships at a number of levels built up over time. We would encourage the LSO to consider the arrangements for succession planning to ensure continuation of these good links.

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, the LSO will consider what we have said and will take it into account in forward planning. In relation to certain significant issues that we encountered in the course of this inspection we would highlight the following:

- *We would encourage the LSO and his team to raise awareness both internally and with external partners of the Domestic Safety Plan.*
- *The LSO should review the level of reporting of health and safety near-misses within South Ayrshire and compare this to historical reporting and the experience elsewhere. Having done so consider whether there may be any contributing factors to a reduction in near-miss reporting.*
- *We encourage the LSO to explore the options to improve the availability of RDS personnel at Colmonell, potentially preparing a business case to increase flexibility.*
- *The LSO should review the amount, relevance and way that information is being received by the RDS stations in his area so as to determine if this is impacting upon the operational effectiveness of the personnel, given the limited time RDS staff under his command have to maintain their competence. We recognise that this may be an organisational-wide issue, but the effect would benefit from local assessment.*
- *The LSO should explore the benefits to be derived from using resources from outwith the area to carry out station audits. In so doing ensure that station audits provide findings that are recorded in suitable relevant detail, with measurable action plans which are linked to performance monitoring.*
- *The LSO should review the high volume of home fire safety visits generated by the automatic annual revisit schedule for partnership referral cases.*
- *The LSO should review the delivery of training to station based personnel and, in conjunction with Training and Employee Development personnel, ensure that courses are delivered at the most appropriate location suitable to the course content.*

Glossary and abbreviations

Throughout this report, at the risk of some repetition, we have minimised the use of abbreviations in the interests of readability. There are some exceptions, particularly where an abbreviation is used so widely within or outside the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service that spelling it out on each occasion would look unnatural. An example is ‘SFRS’ for Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. An explanation of abbreviations used can be found below.

AO	Auditing Officer
CPP	Community Planning Partnership
CSE	Community Safety Engagement
ENSA	East Ayrshire, North Ayrshire and South Ayrshire. The name of the LSO area – by reference to the local authorities within the LSO area.
EO	Enforcement Officer
FBU	Fire Brigades Union
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.
RDS	Retained Duty System
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	Telecare is a community alarm system designed to support the safety and independence of vulnerable people to enable them continue to live independently in their own home. The systems usually consist of monitoring equipment, such as a smoke alarm, movement or falls detectors. A help centre can be contacted automatically in the event of a problem.

UFAS	Unwanted Fire Alarm Signal
VMDS	Vehicle Mounted Data System
2005 Act	The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005



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