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# HM Fire Service Inspectorate

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## Local Area Inspection West Lothian



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**Integrity, Objectivity, and Fairness.**

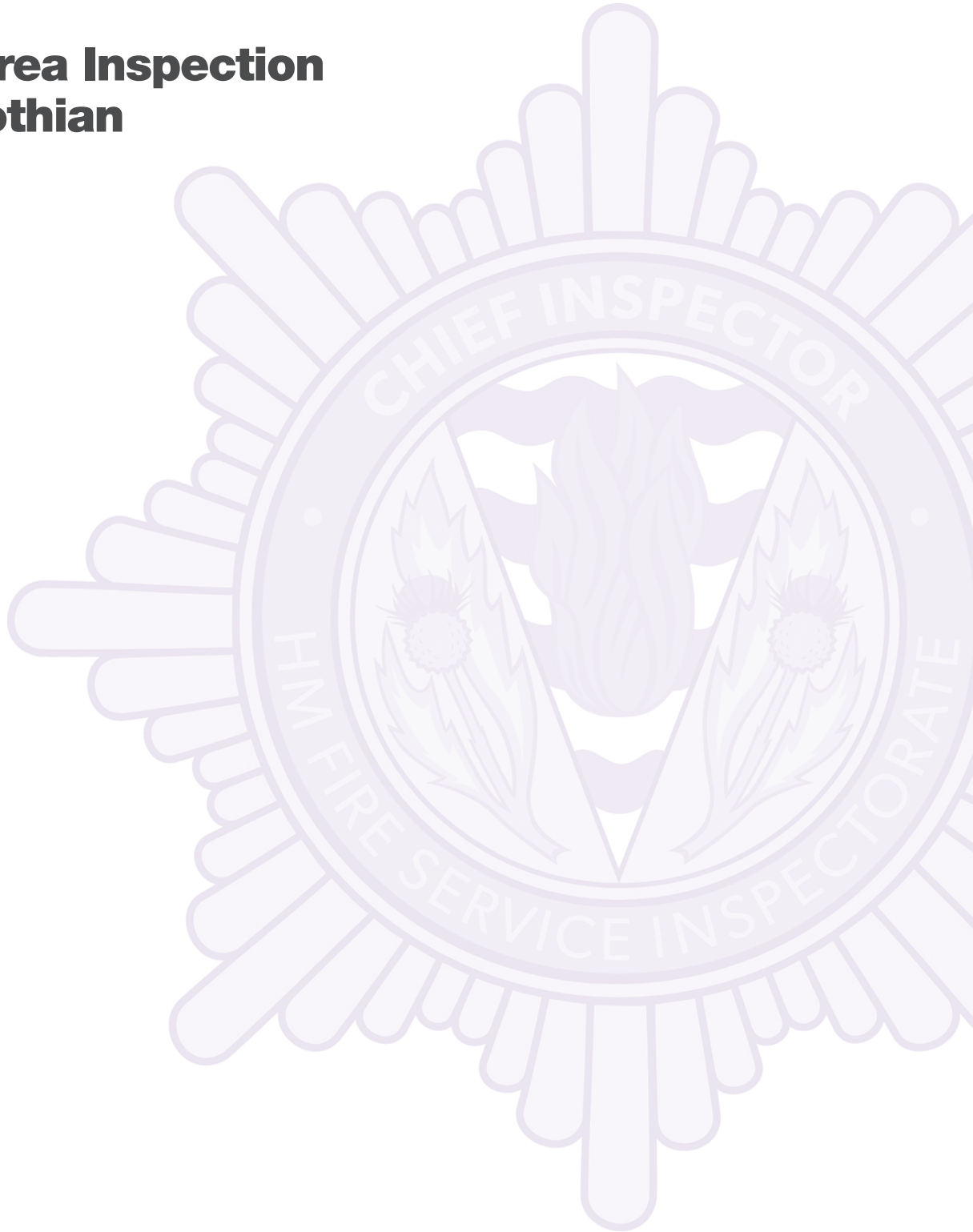


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## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Gary Laing, the Local Senior Officer for West Lothian and Falkirk, and those members of staff who provided us with information, helped us to organise visits, hosted us and contributed constructively to interviews. We also wish to thank the representatives of partner organisations who agreed to be interviewed and gave generously of their time.

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A quality assurance review of this report was kindly provided by Laura Paton of HM Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland. All the members of the inspection team contributed to the development of this report and the quality assurance reviewer provided a professional challenge to the contents, assumptions and conclusions made.

HM Fire Service Inspectorate, May 2016

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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 thematic work carried out in that area; and in our inspection report we give an opinion on the manner in which the SFRS is carrying out its functions in the above respects.

In our local area inspections we aim to visit as many service delivery locations as we can, and speak to managers and a range of uniformed and non-uniformed staff. We look at premises and equipment, and view a sample of records to enable us to understand the way in which business within the area is conducted. In this way we aim to cross-reference the SFRS's written plans, and what we are told about the local area by SFRS managers, with our own observations and discussions with staff on the ground.

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

Our report reflects the circumstance at the time of our inspection. 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 West Lothian is positive. Partnership working is well embedded. In particular the co-location of SFRS staff within West Lothian Council's Civic Centre, is seen as a great benefit by partners and SFRS staff.
- Though there are similarities in the content of the Local Plan for West Lothian to other Local Plans, the West Lothian Plan does contain local numerical targets for key indicators. There are benefits to be gained by the inclusion of locally-based targets in local plans to assist with local delivery.
- There are effective scrutiny arrangements in place and elected members' representatives described a very positive relationship with the LSO and his team. The level of engagement and openness in developing the local plan was praised in particular by elected members.
- There are daily tasking meetings of Community Safety partners where decisions are made on actions to take in response to incidents identified from the various logs by a Partnership Analyst. SFRS staff feel that access to a Partnership Analyst resource provides a valuable contribution to engagement work in the area.
- There are competing demands on the Local Area Liaison Officer (LALO) in the LSO area as a consequence of there being two local authorities to deal with.
- There is a strong commitment and enthusiasm toward the promotion of community safety work and a desire to extend the reach of this beyond traditional activity.
- Fire safety enforcement is being delivered in line with SFRS standards and procedures. There is good supervision of FSE work.
- Similar to other areas in Scotland, a number of the RDS stations are under complement, and this is contributing to difficulties with appliance availability, particularly during the day.
- There is a feeling amongst staff that there had been an over-abundance of new information and guidance since the formation of SFRS with a consequent impact on the ability to process it all, particularly within RDS personnel.



## 2 About the area

West Lothian contains large suburban residential areas to the West of Edinburgh; the towns of Livingston and Bathgate, and a number of smaller towns and villages.

The population in the West Lothian local authority area is around 175,000.<sup>1</sup> This is projected to rise by 11.7% by 2037 compared to an 8.8% projected increase for Scotland as a whole. Over 75 is the age group projected to rise by the most in the area. The estimated number of dwellings in 2014 was 77,186 of which 63% are private owned, 4% private rented and 33% social rented.

In addition to dwelling fire risk, there is a hospital and large retail complex in Livingston, a number of light industrial manufacturing and distribution warehouse sites and HM Prison Addiewell. The main transport arterial network of Scotland's central belt for road and rail pass through the area.

There are six fire stations in the West Lothian area. Bathgate, Livingston, Linlithgow, Broxburn, West Calder (Polbeth), and Whitburn. Bathgate and Livingston are two pump stations. Bathgate is staffed by wholetime and RDS firefighters. Uniquely within the LSO area, and more widely, one of Livingston's pumps is crewed by shift duty staff, the other is crewed by Day Duty firefighters, who are on duty 08:00 to 18:00 Monday to Friday and RDS firefighters outwith these times. Livingston Fire Station is also a base for Fire Investigation personnel, though they are not an LSO resource. The remaining four stations are all single pump RDS crewed.

Due to the area's location within Scotland's central belt, appliances will on occasion attend incidents outside the West Lothian area.

The LSO for West Lothian has a base at West Lothian Council's Civic Centre in Livingston. The Civic Centre was specifically designed to co-locate a number of community services including West Lothian Council administrative headquarters, Scottish Court Service, police and fire service, Scottish Children's Reporter, as well as health officials.

The LSO for West Lothian is also responsible for SFRS delivery in the Falkirk Council area and also has a base at Falkirk Fire Station. His team of Service Delivery and Prevention and Protection managers also operate from both these locations. Some SFRS staff available to the LSO, such as HR support, are shared with other LSO areas and are based remotely. By contrast with West Lothian, the risk profile within the Falkirk Council area presents different challenges due to the high number of COMAH<sup>2</sup> sites within the Falkirk Council area.

This LSO area is unique, being the only one in Scotland which covers areas which were previously within different predecessor fire and rescue services.

<sup>1</sup> National Records of Scotland, July 2015

<sup>2</sup> *Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations 2015* <http://www.hse.gov.uk/comah/>

## A look at some key statistics<sup>3</sup> for the West Lothian area

SFRS responded to a total of 3,263 incidents in the West Lothian area in 2014-15, a reduction of 38 or 1.15% on the previous year.

There were 156 accidental dwelling fire incidents in 2014-15, just over 5% reduction on the previous year. Based upon the rate of incidents per 10,000 population West Lothian's figures are lower compared to the figures for Scotland as a whole, and lower than the local authority comparator of Falkirk.

Fire fatalities and casualties have been reducing over the last five years. There were no fire fatalities during 2014-15, but 29 non-fatal casualties.<sup>4</sup> In comparison to the Scotland and the Falkirk figures, casualties per million population, West Lothian is higher.

There has been a downward trend for deliberate fires over the last five years with a total of 551 for 2014-15, 82% of these were secondary fires,<sup>5</sup> 46% of which involved refuse or bins.

Of the 3,263 incidents attended, 1,946 were false alarms, a reduction of 16 on the previous year. 80% of these false alarms were recorded as being caused by equipment failure within a fire alarm system. Historically, West Lothian's false alarm rate per 100,000 population has been higher than that of both Scotland and Falkirk.

There are just over 3,400 recorded premises in West Lothian which could be subject of a fire safety audit by SFRS. 239 audits were carried out in 2014-15, 35 of these were conducted in premises considered high or very high risk. This is a reduction on the number of audits conducted the previous year, however, of the 302 carried out in 2013, 177 of them were in high or very high risk premises.

There has been a reduction in reported firefighter injuries in the last five years, down from 31 in 2010-11 to 11 in 2014-15. Near miss reporting has improved from three cases in 2010-11 to six reported incidents in 2014-15. There were four reported cases of acts of violence against staff in 2014-15 compared to six in 2010-11.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics supplied by the SFRS including in the *West Lothian Performance Report 2014-2015*. Totals are provisional and may be subject to change as a result of quality assurance and review

<sup>4</sup> This includes casualties recorded as precautionary check

<sup>5</sup> 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 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 there is a danger that the plan becomes inappropriate at the local level. The West Lothian Plan follows the general format that the Service has established for these plans, but does contain local and national benchmarking data and targets within it, we welcome this development as it makes the plan more relevant to the local service and partner delivery.

The comments we make below are aimed at supporting the development of future plans and they should not be read as a criticism of the West Lothian management team nor of the specific plan authors.

Our impression of the West Lothian Local Plan is that it contains useful background information about the area and the incident activity of SFRS, but does not in itself contain conclusions on how best to address the issues.

Whilst there is incident activity for the three years preceding the Plan and trend comparisons with the Falkirk Council area and Scotland-wide totals, there is little in-depth analysis of these incident types and statistics, nor evidence of a risk-based approach to prioritisation of mitigation activity.

As mentioned above, the West Lothian plan does however contain numerical targets for key indicators. For example, *the aim to reduce accidental dwelling fires in West Lothian by 2% per year, which contributes towards the SFRS target of reducing Accidental Dwelling Fires by 10% per year, over a three-year rolling period.*<sup>6</sup>

The inclusion of targets within the Local Plan is a direct result of a consultation response on the draft plan from West Lothian Council. Targets were thought necessary to assist scrutiny panel members to exercise their scrutiny function. By developing specific local targets that contribute to national targets, rather than simply replicating national ones at a local level, these goals can therefore more accurately reflect local circumstances. We welcome this approach to partnership working and the organisational activity that should follow.

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<sup>6</sup> SFRS West Lothian local plan 2014-2017

In addition to the LSO area Local Plan for West Lothian there is a further sub-set of Multi-Member Ward Operational Plans for the eight wards within West Lothian. These ward plans, which are themselves part of station plans, are supported by ward level quarterly performance reports. This sub-set of information contains a breakdown of SFRS activity providing a greater depth of activity trends which are presented to the Council's Ward Local Area Committees.

We found when visiting stations in West Lothian that plans, whether national, local or ward based, were prominently displayed within stations so as to encourage ownership. In the case of Bathgate and Livingston stations individual watches were allocated to particular ward areas and provided with 'hot spot' mapping information of incident activity. These data are helping to provide a focus for locally developed intervention activity. We welcome this targeting and activity.

The West Lothian 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 West Lothian SOA 2013-2023 includes two fire-specific indicators, the number of accidental dwelling fires per 100,000 population and the number of deliberate fires per 100,000 population. The SOA doesn't assign targets to these specific indicators, though it does for others, but seeks to achieve continuous improvement for each against the 2012-13 baseline rate.

By inclusion in the SOA, these two indicators are for all the partners to achieve and not just for the SFRS. Equally, the SFRS would be expected to contribute to other targets (outcomes) within the SOA such as 'the number of people killed or seriously injured in road accidents'.

A reduction in the number of accidental dwelling fires is a national target for SFRS imposed by the Fire Framework 2013; 10% each year over a three-year rolling average. The Framework doesn't contain a target for deliberate fires, however, the rate of deliberate fires in West Lothian, both secondary and primary is higher than the rate for Scotland.<sup>7</sup> We consider the decision to include an outcome for deliberate fires within the SOA to be an appropriate response to a local issue.

The SFRS Local Plan contains a matrix to indicate how its seven priorities align to the eight priorities of West Lothian's SOA. This demonstrates how SFRS activities contribute to the wider outcomes of the Community Planning Partnership.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.gov.scot/stats/bulletins/01128>

## 3.2 Improved service outcomes and protecting frontline services

During our inspection we met with managers and staff from both the Prevention and Protection and Service Delivery functions. We also visited every fire station in the area where we had the opportunity to speak to firefighters. For the two stations where there is a mix of crewing between wholetime and RDS we met with firefighters of both duty systems. We also met with the HR and Health and Safety Business Partners and members of the support staff pool who are based in Edinburgh.

### Prevention and Protection

Community Safety Engagement (CSE) and Fire Safety Enforcement (FSE) is provided by staff who use bases at both local fire stations and at the Civic Centre in Livingston. CSE staff for West Lothian comprise a Local Area Liaison Officer (LALO) and two Community Firefighters. The LSO area has a total of four enforcement staff who work across the two local authority areas. Two of these enforcement officers are based at Bathgate Fire Station. There are no non-uniformed auditing officer posts within the LSO area.

The LALO, in common with other LSO areas, carries out the role for more than one local authority area, in this case Falkirk. This arrangement involves competing priorities for the LALO.

As we describe in more detail below there is strong partnership working within the area and the CSE staff expressed a very strong commitment and enthusiasm toward community safety activity. This is reflected in the good relationships described by partners such as police and local authority colleagues.

The enforcement activity within West Lothian, as with other LSO areas, is in part defined by SFRS's Fire Safety Enforcement Framework which sets out a risk-based hierarchy of premises type where audit activity will take place.

There are around 3,400 'known' premises in the West Lothian area which could be subject to a fire safety audit by SFRS enforcement personnel, of which around 90 are very high or high risk.

Enforcement staff have a personal target of 132 audits per year. The capacity of the staff in West Lothian also allows for medium and low risk premises to be audited and for a number of thematic premises audits to be conducted during the year in addition to those identified in the Framework. To generate these thematic audits, managers undertake a review of historic fire incident data in non-domestic premises to identify the percentage distribution of fires across building type. A percentage of thematic audits are then conducted within the various building types identified. The thematic fire safety work is more structured than in some other areas we have visited.

Fire safety audit work is allocated on the basis of available resources. It is our view that FSE resources should be allocated in relation to risk and workload, rather than audits being allocated relative to available resources. However, the LSO had managed, in the short term,

the additional capacity available to allow an experienced enforcement officer to take up a temporary development opportunity within an operational role.

We reviewed a single FSE case file for a property in West Lothian. We found the standard consistent with the standard generally prevailing within the SFRS.

Managers demonstrated an awareness of the importance in ensuring personal development of enforcement staff. Both for those new to the role and those already carrying out the function, who may have career development wishes in an operational role. Systems are in place to provide mentoring to new staff.

There is a good level of supervision and management by Prevention and Protection managers.

### **Service Delivery**

The building fabric of the fire stations are of varying ages and conditions, with some obvious property issues such as water ingress, however, all were generally fit for purpose. As a national organisation we recognise SFRS's building estate is large and therefore presents challenges in trying to appropriately prioritise building repairs ensuring the long-term protection of assets.


As could be expected, the level of operational activity varied across the stations, from an average over the past five years of almost 1,600 calls per year in the busiest station to 184 in the quietest.

For operational activity, Linlithgow and Bathgate stations are notable in that they are participating in a SFRS co-responding pilot with the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) in the response to Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest incidents. At the time of the inspection the pilot had only been in operation for just over two weeks. Firefighters at these stations have received enhanced training in life-support, through a joint partnership approach with the SAS, to improve their ability to deliver life-saving treatment until ambulance crews can reach the scene.

The crew members we spoke to were comfortable with participating in the pilot, although there were mixed views on how effectively the training had been implemented. We were advised that crews had raised, through the pilot implementation working group, the issue of the provision of additional equipment and whilst this equipment was eventually provided it did take time. Crews felt that a full assessment of the equipment needs should have been addressed before the pilot commenced. We feel this demonstrates the value created by having an implementation working group and acknowledge that, quite often, issues may only come to light within the operational environment.

There are established procedures for creating and updating operational risk information within the area. Each watch at Livingston Fire Station is allocated, on a rotating basis, a number of site plans from across the whole West Lothian area to review and update as required.





In addition to the risk information contained on the Mobile Data Terminals, a hard copy of the information is also kept on the appliances. Personnel described a preference of consulting the hard copy information.

Generally, operational crews are content with the progress of fire reform, though a number did express a view that the pace had slowed. There is a feeling of an over-abundance of new information and procedures and inability to process it all. This is particularly the case at retained stations where there is a finite time to complete all that is required during a training night. Some RDS personnel felt that there would be a benefit from providing guidance particularly tailored to the requirements and constraints of this duty system. We feel that this suggestion would be worthy of further investigation. We are aware of RDS managers reviewing new guidance issued, some of it quite lengthy, to establish which parts are relevant to their particular circumstances.

The comments we received from RDS personnel in West Lothian echo the comments we have heard from others around the country. There is substantial pressure on available time created by the requirement to use electronic systems such as the Learning Content Management System (LCMS) and PDRpro the training record system. This is exacerbated by slow connectivity and the limited number of computers available on station. Some personnel therefore update their training records in their own time at home. Predominantly there is a desire to use more of the allocated training night time for practical 'hands on' learning.

A 'total care package' is supplied by an external contractor to launder and repair Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). PPE is maintained to a good level.

Operational equipment is generally described by crews as being adequate, though there is a desire for access to more battery-powered rescue tools, these are not available on all appliances. Crews also raised the provision of better stowage of equipment on the appliances. Equipment stowage is related to the legacy service, in this case Lothian and Borders, specification for appliances at time of initial procurement. We agree that the current standard of equipment stowage is poorer than the current ways of stowing on new appliances. We recognise that the cost of any improvement may not be justified at this time and that improvement may be a long-term issue.

## **Workforce**

HR advice and support for managers on matters such as discipline, grievances and attendance management is provided by an East SDA resource based in Edinburgh.

Due to the staffing structure within the LSO area, there are no administrative staff based within West Lothian. Administrative support is provided by staff from the SDA pool based at Lauriston in Edinburgh. The complement of support staff for the East SDA is currently operating under the number originally planned for, and staff feel this is affecting the level of service they are able to deliver. An overall consequence of this is a general feeling of low morale amongst support staff.

Station-based operational staff generally described feeling well supported by Station Managers, though there was some comment regarding a previous high turnover of managers.

In RDS stations, particularly those that are running under complement, there is dissatisfaction regarding the general SFRS recruitment and selection process. The national process is seen as a barrier to recruiting and doesn't sufficiently allow local managers to become involved, particularly in promoting recruitment opportunities.

The operation of the recruitment process may have been acting as a barrier to maintaining crew numbers at retained stations in the past. SFRS has implemented a review of the retained service and has recently carried out a targeted recruitment campaign for RDS personnel in an attempt to address identified local staff shortages. It had also implemented changes to RDS recruitment, the aim being to streamline the process ensuring a shorter timescale from initial contact with the candidate to commencement of their training. There was limited awareness amongst RDS personnel of the project and we would encourage the LSO to help address the concerns of RDS personnel and publicise progress made to date. We would encourage SFRS to assist the LSO with as much information as it can. However, given the scale and number of systemic issues affecting this duty system, crews also need to be realistic in their expectations of the Service and the LSO.

## **Health and Safety**

Health and safety reporting is carried out using the RIVO Safeguard system. In the view of the East SDA Health and Safety advisor, generally the West Lothian area is performing well in regard to health and safety issues, except for an increase in vehicle accidents, predominantly low speed impacts with stationary objects. Overall, there has been a reduction in the number of firefighter injuries during 2014-15 compared to the previous year. Near-miss reporting has increased and accident rates are down.

Health and Safety advice, monitoring, and in the event of an incident, investigation is carried out across the East SDA by staff based at Lauriston in Edinburgh. There is a designated Health and Safety Liaison Officer (HSLO) within West Lothian, a flexi duty manager, who acts as a conduit for managing local issues. The Health and Safety Forum, which includes employee representatives within the Falkirk and West Lothian area, is being re-invigorated. This should help ensure that the profile of health and safety is maintained within the area.

## **3.3 More equal access to specialist resources and national capacity**

### **Capacity within the area**

A number of the RDS stations are currently running under complement and this is contributing to difficulties with appliance availability, particularly during the day. This situation is not unusual 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 improve general appliance availability across the country.



## **Specialist resources**

Although a national resource and not under the direct control of the LSO, West Lothian is one of the locations for SFRS's Fire Investigation capability. The Fire Investigation Unit is based at Livingston Fire Station where, at the time of our visit, work was about to begin on building new dedicated accommodation for the team.

Nationally, the Service has recently concluded a review of specialist equipment. The review highlighted the potential to allocate a high-reach appliance to Livingston.

The implementation plans from the review have yet to be finalised and are dependent on a number of factors.

Bathgate currently has an Incident Support Unit which, amongst other capabilities, is used to deploy the station's water rescue capability. Water rescue was part of the specialist review and the plan will be for Bathgate to continue to provide a water response, although the vehicle configuration will change in that a dedicated vehicle, with a permanently inflated boat will be provided.

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**

Personnel described a feeling of being well connected to the community, particularly RDS personnel. Community engagement activities undertaken ranged from youth diversionary work, such as the Cooldown Crew, to school visits and community events like gala days. West Lothian area has two Community Firefighters to assist in the delivery of community safety initiatives.

### **Working in partnership**

There has been a long-standing positive relationship between the Fire and Rescue Service and West Lothian Council and the CPP in relation to prevention activity and this has continued with SFRS. Fire service representatives have been based with other partners at the Civic Centre for a number of years, pre-dating the creation of SFRS.

As stated earlier, the Civic Centre is home to a number of community safety partners and, similar to the arrangement in other areas, there are daily tasking meetings at which issues are shared and practical solutions discussed by the partners.

The West Lothian Community Safety Partnership has the benefit of a Partnership Analyst to assist in delivering solutions to issues identified in the area. We were invited to observe one of the daily tasking meetings, where partners come together to decide on actions to take in response to incidents identified from the various logs by the Analyst. It is clear that opportunities were being positively exploited to expand the reach of SFRS to vulnerable persons by becoming involved in the response to incidents outwith the more traditional home safety agenda, such as prevention of financial harm.

Interviews we held with community safety partners and representatives from West Lothian Council were overwhelmingly positive about the contribution that SFRS makes to addressing community safety issues.

One area of partnership working that could be described as still in development is with the Third Sector. Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian (VSGWL), based in Bathgate, is a Scottish Government-funded Third Sector Interface organisation. Its task is to support and develop Third Sector activity within West Lothian. Members of the LSO's staff and VSGWL have been exploring ways in which the two organisations can collaborate to best utilise their respective strengths to deliver community safety initiatives to a wider audience and there have been positive initial developments.

### **Local scrutiny arrangements**

West Lothian Council's scrutiny committee – Services for the Community Policy and Development Scrutiny Panel – receives regular submissions and performance data from the LSO's team.

At the scrutiny meeting which we observed, quarterly statistics on SFRS activity were presented with comparison data for previous years and benchmarking the local performance to the overall Scotland data, and to the local authority comparator of Falkirk. Detail at local ward area was also contained within the performance report presented which allows for more localised scrutiny by elected members if desired. As indicated earlier, ward Quarterly Performance Reports are also scrutinised by Local Ward Committees.

From our discussions with the Council Leader and the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel, West Lothian Council is very positive about the level of engagement, openness and transparency of the Local Senior Officer. The Council is very satisfied with the performance reporting mechanism and level of detail provided to elected members, including at local ward level, citing these reports as a model of good practice. Overall, the good relationships that exist between both organisations at all levels are a by-product of the co-location, where there is daily contact with SFRS at the various levels.

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## 3.5 Overall conclusions

There are particularly strong local partnerships, in some respect this may be a by-product of the co-location of SFRS staff within West Lothian Council's Civic Centre. SFRS staff and managers were 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 West Lothian is similar to examples we have seen elsewhere.

Access to specialist resources is due to be improved in the area as a result of the specialist appliance review, although the implementation date has yet to be determined.

The 2005 Act requires that the SFRS must have regard to this report and, having done so, must take such measures (if any) as it thinks fit in relation to the report. We are therefore confident that where we have expressed a view on particular issues, SFRS will consider what we have said and will take into account in its forward planning. In relation to certain significant issues that we encountered in the course of this inspection we recommend as follows:

*The LSO should review the amount, relevance and way 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 needs local assessment.*

## 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.

CPP	Community Planning Partnership
CSE	Community Safety Engagement
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
VMDS	Vehicle Mounted Data System
2005 Act	The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005





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