

Summary Report outlining the Service Response to Covid-19

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report provides Members with an overview and awareness of the planning and measures put in place to date, to enable Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 and continue to deliver its Services, whilst also assisting partners to support vulnerable individuals and communities within Shropshire.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to note the contents of the report and acknowledge the ongoing work associated with a response to Covid-19 locally, regionally and nationally.

3 Background

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) was informed of a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China. A novel coronavirus (SARS coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2)) was subsequently identified from patient samples.

On 29 January 2020, the UK's first two patients test positive for Coronavirus on the same day as UK nationals are evacuated from Wuhan. The aircraft arrived at RAF Brize Norton and the UK nationals were transferred to a specialist hospital in Merseyside for 14 days quarantine. It is worthy of note that this convoy utilised the major road network within the County to complete the patient transfer.

On 30 January 2020 the WHO declared a global health emergency with the first recorded UK death occurring on 28 February 2020 onboard the Diamond Princess Cruise ship.

On 16 March 2020, Prime Minister (PM) Johnson instigated daily press briefings, urging everybody in the UK to work from home and avoid pubs and restaurants to give the National Health Service (NHS) time to cope with the Pandemic. The rationale behind this advice was to encourage isolation of individuals to reduce the spread of the virus and “flatten the growth curve”, whilst at the same time investing in increased capacity within the NHS.

Between 18 and 23 March 2020, the Government introduced further measures to assist with maintaining capacity. These included:

- Closure of schools
- Order for all pubs, restaurants, gyms and other social venues to close
- Chancellor announces Government will pay up to 80% of wages for workers at risk of being laid off.
- PM introduces ‘Lockdown’ leading to Britons only going outside to buy food, to exercise once a day or to go to work if they absolutely cannot work from home.
- Introduction of fines for those failing to comply with ‘Lockdown’ measures.

As the pandemic continued to spread throughout the UK and the rest of the world, it became apparent that shortages of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) within the Health Sector was problematic. At the time of compiling this report a total of 175 NHS staff have died after contacting Covid-19 (20 May 2020).

The lifting of ‘Lockdown’ is dependent upon 5 tests, these being:

- Sufficient critical care capacity across the UK
- Sustained and consistent fall in daily deaths
- Rate of infection decreasing (R value)
- Testing and PPE to meet demand
- Adjustments to measures will not risk a second peak that overwhelms the NHS.

Following 49 days in ‘Lockdown’, PM Johnson announced the easing of the restrictive measures including:

- Unlimited exercise
- Actively encouraging those that are unable to work from home to return to the workplace.
- One to one contact with individuals outside of household in open space and social distancing measures in place.

Between 29 January and 20 May 2020 there have been 143,311 confirmed cases of Covid-19 across England and Wales and 30,866 Deaths.

4 Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Response

Since notification and awareness of the pandemic, the Service have undertaken significant work to ensure it is best positioned to continue to deliver its services and support partners to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 upon its communities.

The starting point was to gain intelligence from Health partners through actively engaging in Tactical and Strategic Co-ordination Groups, whilst also communicating what capabilities the Service possesses, that could be utilised to support partners.

Initial planning assumptions indicated that the Service should be planning for absence rates from Covid-19 that are aligned to Pandemic Flu planning assumptions, these being for 20% of the workforce to be absent at the peak of the pandemic and 80% of the workforce to be absent throughout the entire period. This would equate to approximately 100 people being absent all at the same time during the peak and up to 400 being absent at any time during the duration of the pandemic.

Attention in the initial stages focussed on resilience planning and the introduction of preventative measures, with focus being placed on two distinct areas of Service Delivery and Service Support. This work included:

Service Delivery-

- Operational resilience planning to ensure the Service maintain an effective emergency response to incidents. Inclusive of:
 - 4 stage resilience plan
 - Dynamic cover tool
 - Station in a van model
 - Staffing Cell
 - List of competent volunteers to support availability
 - Created resilience within our Incident Command capability.
 - Analysis of Government and Sector advice and creation of policy.
 - Review of attendance at incidents, inclusive of Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA).

- To mitigate the spread of infection, the Service implemented the following:
 - Suspension of multi station exercises
 - Postponed non-essential training courses
 - Minimised the movement of operational staff between stations
 - Postponed Safe and Well visits apart from high risk smoke alarm refits.
 - Suspended attendance at community events
 - Restricted access to critical areas such as operational stations and Fire Control
 - Alternative method of collecting risk information linked to 7.2(d)
 - Suspension of on-call drill sessions
 - Limited the number of riders at on-call locations to 5 (Social distancing principles)
 - Increased cleaning within operational areas

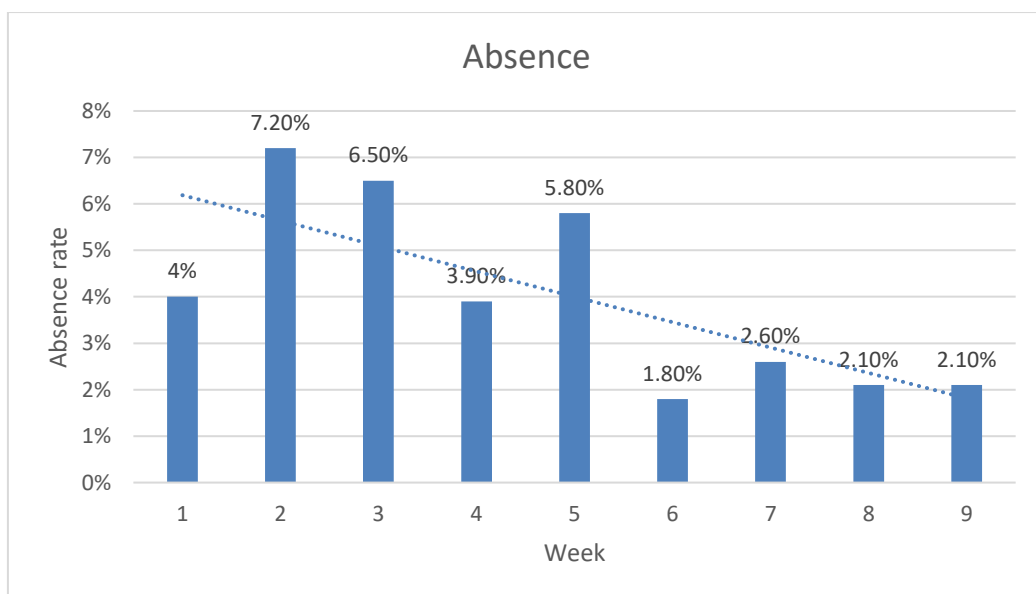
Service Support-

- Planning to enable Support Services to continue to operate effectively. Inclusive of:

- Identifying and implementing new methods of operating inclusive of the use of technology (Microsoft Teams)
 - Provision of mobile devices and access to agile working systems.
 - Regular communications with staff to ensure welfare during period of home working.
 - Relaxation of HR policies to enable staff to undertake secondary employment within critical worker roles such as Paramedic.
- To mitigate the spread of infection, the Service has implemented the following:
 - Increased cleaning provision within non-operational areas
 - Provision of hygiene information
 - Home working arrangements
 - Regular electronic communications to staff to provide updates regarding Service actions.

5 Current Performance

Throughout the Pandemic, the Service has monitored absence rates and also shared information with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Local Resilience Forum (LRF). The graph below shows performance since the reporting period was introduced on the 23 March 2020 (Week1).



Weekly absence rates from 23 March- 18 May 2020 (Covid-19 related absence)

It is pleasing to see that absence rates have remained significantly lower than the initial planning assumptions whereby, the Service were producing plans to deal with a peak absence of 20% at the same time. The highest absence rate throughout the period to date has been 7.2% which was during week commencing 30 March 2020, which was in line with escalation of response by Government in terms of 'Lockdown' measures and the rapid rate of rise in UK recorded cases.

There are several factors that could be attributed to this low absence rate. The first consideration is the rate of infection within the County. At present Shropshire has a lower rate of infection, when compared to urban areas of the region such as West Midlands. This will therefore transpire in its absence rates.

Further factors could include good compliance by our people in terms of following government advice around hygiene, social distancing and 'lockdown' measures. It would also be reasonable to state that the measures outlined within section 4 of this report have proved effective in terms of protecting staff and reducing the risk of transmission.

6 Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service Offer and Value to Partners

The Service has engaged with a wide range of partners throughout the response phase, predominantly through Tactical and Strategic Co-ordination Groups. This has enabled the Service to develop a detailed understanding of the wider impacts of Covid-19 on partners and allow Officers to identify where capacity and capabilities within the Service could assist county and regional efforts to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

Offers of assistance to partners include:

- Offer of support to Hope House Charity, undertaking face fit testing for staff (Protective masks)
- Offer to support Health partners with Fire Safety Advice for the re-purposing of buildings to increase capability and capacity, to deal with the pandemic.
- Offer of SFRS Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) practitioners and Mental Health First Aiders to support staff from partner agencies dealing with the effects of Covid-19.

Activity undertaken to support partners:

- Work locally and nationally to influence and amend data sharing agreements with NHS England and NHS Improvement, allowing data to be shared with Local Authorities in Telford and Wrekin and Shropshire. The objective being to identify and prioritise assistance and support to those vulnerable members of our communities.
- Allocation of a dedicated resource to work alongside military planning Officers to assist with the logistics and management of deaths due to Covid-19.
- Assistance with delivery of Personal Protective Equipment for primary and social care settings from a central storage point in West Mercia to nominated locations within Telford and Wrekin and Shropshire.
- Deployment of Service's Prevention team members to support Shropshire Council with Welfare Checks of vulnerable and shielding individuals.

It is pleasing that the Service have been able to assist a wide range of activity across the County, thus mitigating the impacts of the pandemic on partners and ultimately our communities.

In addition to the identified activities within this report, the Service continue to engage locally with Representative Bodies to ensure all activities are risk assessed appropriately, any additional training requirements are satisfied, any additional PPE is supplied, and all activities are managed appropriately. This approach ensures that the Service continues to ensure that the safety of its staff is paramount and also supports industrial relations.

The Service also continue to provide information to Government departments and the NFCC regarding assistance to partners, so any additional work is captured and recorded within any national reports, demonstrating the value the Service continues to add to its communities.

7 Ongoing work and next steps

Whilst new information and intelligence continues to be found in relation to Covid-19, the Service reacts through analysing and utilising national, regional and local advice. This approach ensures that the Service is able to identify risk posed to both it and its people and introduce appropriate control measures.

As 'lockdown' measures have been relaxed, the Service has tailored a response to the new guidance. To support this a series of corporate objectives have been created. These being:

- To make our workplaces safe
- To restore full service in a restricted environment
- To remain flexible and adapt quickly

To support the corporate objectives, three priorities have been identified:

- To return to a position where we can sustainably maintain operational competence
- To be able to effectively carry out a full range of protection and prevention activities
- To be able to meet the needs of the people plan

The next steps for the Service are to restore services within areas that pose significant risks such as maintaining a competent workforce and ensuring recruitment and succession planning processes are delivered to maintain appliance availability.

As part of the phased restoration of services, a focus will be placed upon prevention and protection services in the short term, to ensure the Service continues to support vulnerable people. A long-term view will include identifying and exploring alternative methods for delivering our services to ensure the Service continues to operate within a restrictive environment.

Learning has been and will continue to be identified as part of debrief processes and will be incorporated into identifying improved methods of operating.

To support restoration, a group of key stakeholders has been established and will seek to identify best practice to ensure Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service continue to deliver Services, support partners and contribute to minimising the spread of Covid-19.

8 Identified Revenue Funding

There is no additional revenue funding attached to this report at this time.

9 Capacity

There are no capacity issues linked to this report at present.

10 Collaboration / Partnership Working

The contents of this report outline how Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service work with partners and enhance a collaborative response to Covid-19.

11 Community Safety

There are no community safety issues as a direct result of this report, however, Community Safety and Prevention activity has been reduced to comply with Government guidance and modified as a result of the Service response to Covid-19.

12 Environmental

There are no environmental impacts arising from this report.

13 Equality Impact Assessment

An equality impact assessment is not required as part of this report.

14 Financial Implications

There are no financial implications within this report, however, additional activities undertaken on behalf of partners have additional cost attached. This will be coded against additional funding provided by Government to enable an effective response to the pandemic.

15 Health and Safety

There are no immediate health and safety impacts arising from this report, however, work continues to review and produce suitable and sufficient risk assessments that make reference to Covid-19 risk.

16 Human Rights (including Data Protection)

There are no human rights impacts arising from this report.

17 ICT

There are no additional ICT requirements at this time.

18 Legal Comment

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

19 Public Value / Service Delivery

The actions outlined within this report support:

Strategic Aim 1- To be there when you need us in an emergency with a professional and well-equipped team

Strategic Aim 4- To deliver a fire and rescue service, which provides value for money for our community now and into the future.

20 Reputation

There are no reputational impacts arising from this report.

21 Security

There are no security impacts arising from this report.

22 Training

Training requirements for alterations to ways of working and the introduction of additional activities have been factored into the Service response to Covid-19.

23 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this paper

24 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.