



NA H-EILEANAN AN IAR LOCAL FIRE AND RESCUE PLAN REVIEW 2023

Report by Chief Executive

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to apprise Members of a review carried out by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) into the current Local Fire and Rescue Plan for Na h-Eileanan an Iar, and to seek approval for the five Local Priorities which will form the basis of the next Local Fire and Rescue Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Comhairle welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's (SFRS) review of its existing Local Fire and Rescue Plan and the preparation of its new Plan. The contribution of firefighters to the wellbeing of the local community cannot be overstated and the Comhairle values the selfless service of our firefighters who put their own lives in danger to protect others.
- 2.2 The SFRS is required under the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, as amended by the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, to prepare Local Fire and Rescue Plans for each local authority in Scotland.
- 2.3 Local Fire and Rescue Plans set out the national and local operating context and outline the specific priorities for that area. In their preparation, due regard is given to the Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland and the SFRS Strategic Plan.
- 2.4 The publication of the new Strategic Plan 2022-25 in October 2022 now instigates a requirement to carry out a mandatory review of all Local Fire and Rescue Plans. This review provides SFRS with information on how well they are performing in Na h-Eileanan an Iar against the Priorities of the existing Local Fire and Rescue Plan: Promoting Personal Safety and Wellbeing; Non-Domestic Fire Safety; Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals; and, Emergency Response Preparedness and Community Resilience. An outline of progress against each of these Priorities is offered in section 6 of the Report and the Comhairle is invited to endorse SFRS' account of progress made.
- 2.5 Section 7 of the Report contains the Proposed Local Priorities that the SFRS has identified for the next Local Fire and Rescue Plan and recommendations are offered in respect of these Proposed Local Priorities. The Comhairle is invited to approve these recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 **It is recommended that the Comhairle endorses the review of the existing Local Fire and Rescue Plan carried out by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and approves the recommendations offered in respect of the Local Priorities proposed for the new Local Fire and Rescue Plan.**

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Appendix: Na h-Eileanan an Iar Local Fire and Rescue Plan Review, 2023

IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	None
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities	None
Corporate Strategy	Support resilient communities and quality of life
Environmental Impact	None
Consultation	Na h-Eileanan an Iar Local Fire and Rescue Plan Review 2023 - The closing date has been extended to 9 February 2024

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005, as amended by the Police and Fire Reform Act 2012, requires a Local Fire and Rescue Plan to be prepared for each Local Authority area in Scotland. The recent publication of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service's (SFRS) Strategic Plan for 2022-25 now triggers a review of all Local Fire and Rescue Plans, including for Na h-Eileanan an Iar.
- 5.2 Performance data gathered for 2020 to 2023 for the SFRS area indicates that incidences of fire have reduced but no clear trend is discernible in Na h-Eileanan an Iar. There has been no increase in non-fire incidents and SFRS has continued to participate in local Road Safety work to reduce the number of traffic collisions. The service has invested considerably in updating rescue equipment on strategic Fire Appliances across the Na h-Eileanan an Iar area. In addition, SFRS continue to engage with programmes to improve water safety for residents and visitors across the islands.
- 5.3 False Alarms represent 56% of calls to the Fire and Rescue Service in Na Eileanan an Iar but not all false alarms are categorised as 'unwanted' because they serve to highlight an area of proactive intervention.

EXISTING LOCAL FIRE AND RESCUE PLAN REVIEW

EXISTING LOCAL PRIORITY 1: PROMOTING PERSONAL SAFETY AND WELLBEING

- 6.1 Fire safety within the home remains a key prevention strategy for the SFRS. There are significant risk factors associated with an ageing and less mobile population in Na h-Eileanan an Iar and some ground requires to be recovered from the COVID-19 Pandemic in terms of the number of preventative Home Fire Safety Visits being carried out. Partnership referrals are becoming more important as the service seeks to prioritise Fire Safety education for those most at risk.
- 6.2 Incidences of outdoor wildfire remain constant and acquisition of an All Terrain Vehicle, dedicated 4x4 vehicle, Wildfire Specific PPE, and additional training will help improve the service response in this area.
- 6.3 Deliberate fires remain at a concerning level and proactive work in this area through High Risk Visits reduced during the pandemic and has not yet recovered fully. Partnership referrals continue as a valuable source of intelligence on potential deliberate fire events.

EXISTING LOCAL PRIORITY 2: NON-DOMESTIC FIRE SAFETY

- 6.4 The incidence of non-domestic fires remains constant, and the service continues to carry out Fire Audits in all high-risk premises such as Care Homes and Hospitals. Businesses are engaged routinely to highlight their duties under the relevant Fire Safety legislation. Post-fire Audits are carried out following any incident involving fire and non-compliance with Fire Safety legislation can lead to formal enforcement action.

EXISTING LOCAL PRIORITY 3: UNWANTED FIRE ALARM SIGNALS

- 6.5 Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS) where attendance by the service was caused by the unwanted activation of a fire alarm system cause disruption to the premises concerned, restrict the availability of the SFRS, place firefighters and public at risk during blue light journeys and increase the service's carbon footprint. From 1 July 2023, the SFRS will not attend a fire alarm callout to commercial premises (excluding sleeping premises like hospitals, care homes and hotels) unless a fire has been confirmed. Workplace dutyholders must now investigate a fire alarm before calling 999.
- 6.6 UFAS account for 18% of False Alarms in Na h-Eileanan an Iar, and False Alarms account for 55% of all calls (230 of 412). The new approach to UFAS should see this situation improve with less impact on core SFRS services, and less disruption for supportive employers who release firefighters for operational purposes.

EXISTING LOCAL PRIORITY 4: EMERGENCY RESPONSE PREPAREDNESS AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

- 6.7 To optimise preparedness and improve community resilience, the SFRS continues to prioritise risk management, offer training, work with partners and expand its Community Asset Register. SFRS recruitment in Na h-Eileanan an Iar, against the backdrop of an ageing population, has been impressive with 25 appointments and 10 in-process over the review period. Nevertheless, the availability of On Call Fire Stations can still be a problem due to demands from primary employment and family and community commitments.
- 6.8 Operational intelligence is routinely gathered and, where relevant, is available to Operational Crews attending premises in an Emergency Situation. SFRS' Community Asset Register contains a useful listing of non-SFRS resources which can assist with significant operational incidents.
- 6.9 SFRS continues to be a key partner in the Western Isles Emergency Planning and Coordinating Group, chairing the group through the pandemic and leading or assisting with incident planning, response and recovery.

PROPOSED NEW LOCAL FIRE AND RESCUE PLAN

- 7.1 A new Local Fire and Rescue Plan will now be developed, taking into account the requirements and outcomes of the previous Plan while developing a strategy to address existing and emerging local priorities. More effective engagement and working in partnership will reduce service demand while supporting the more vulnerable members within the Na h-Eileanan an Iar community. Partnership working against a background of continuous financial challenge will help manage, mitigate and reduce risk. Community Planning will be the key framework within which the SFRS operates going forward.
- 7.2 Building on the review of the existing Local Fire and Rescue Plan, which forms the subject of this report, the following priorities are proposed for the new Local Fire and Rescue Plan. A recommendation comment from the Comhairle is offered regarding each local priority and action, in bold italic font.

PROPOSED LOCAL PRIORITY 1: IMPROVING FIRE SAFETY IN THE HOME

- 7.3 Work with partners to make the most vulnerable members of our community safer from fire in the home.

Comhairle recommendation: Incidences of domestic fire are higher in the most deprived areas. Home Fire Safety Visits and corporate Fire Safety Events should be intensified in these areas. The focus should be on targeted prevention measures.

PROPOSED LOCAL PRIORITY 2: IMPROVING FIRE SAFETY AND RESILIENCE IN THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

- 7.4 Focus on the highest life risk non-domestic premises that have been affected by fire or are crucial to the infrastructure.

Comhairle recommendation: Preventative Fire Audits across non-domestic premises should be intensified with resources allocated to enforcement where required. SFRS should have a visible presence within the business community.

PROPOSED LOCAL PRIORITY 3: MINIMISING THE IMPACT OF UNINTENTIONAL HARM

- 7.5 Support for partners in Health and Social Care to reduce safety risks in the home, such as slips, trips and falls.

Comhairle recommendation: There should be a more holistic, cross-agency approach to home safety. A register of at-risk island residents should be maintained with joint visits by health and SFRS personnel to educate in personal safety and prevent incidences of harm. In sparsely populated rural areas, firefighters could support this activity in their own communities.

PROPOSED LOCAL PRIORITY 4: REDUCING UNWANTED FIRE ALARM SIGNALS

- 7.6 1 July 2023 changes to the UFAS protocol should drive down unnecessary callouts.

Comhairle recommendation: Any measures which reduce the burden on the service and supportive employers, and which enhances public safety and carbon reduction is supported. Education of dutyholders should continue to reduce the number of unnecessary callouts.

PROPOSED LOCAL PRIORITY 5: EFFECTIVE RISK MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

- 7.7 By understanding the unique risk of a dispersed island community, prepare, plan and respond to these risks safely and effectively, while strengthening community resilience for existing and emerging risks.

Comhairle recommendation: SFRS' delivery model in Na h-Eileanan an Iar must reflect the needs of sparsely populated rural communities. Appliances and equipment must be fit for purpose. Community Planning should be engaged to harness ideas on how communities and individuals can have greater responsibilities for their own wellbeing and safety, supported by SFRS resources. Asset, intelligence and expertise sharing will be crucial going forward.

Supplementary Comhairle recommendation: Adaptation to Climate Change should feature in the new Local Fire and Rescue Plan. Climate Change is driving an increased incidence of extreme weather events such as drought leading to wildfire and flooding leading to infrastructure damage, all of which imperil human life. The pressure on the SFRS will increase accordingly. Scenario Planning and Operational Exercises around extreme climate events should become part of the SFRS training programme and, where practical, low carbon vehicles should be procured for SFRS use.