

**Working together
for a safer Scotland**



SCOTTISH
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Working together for a safer Scotland

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

Safety. Teamwork. Respect. Innovation.

Introduction

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service 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.

Local Fire and Rescue Plans set out our national and local operating context and outline our 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.

The publication of our 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 will provide us with information on how well we are performing in Nan Eilean Siar against our existing priorities as well as highlighting areas for continued improvement and opportunities for change against the growing needs of our communities.

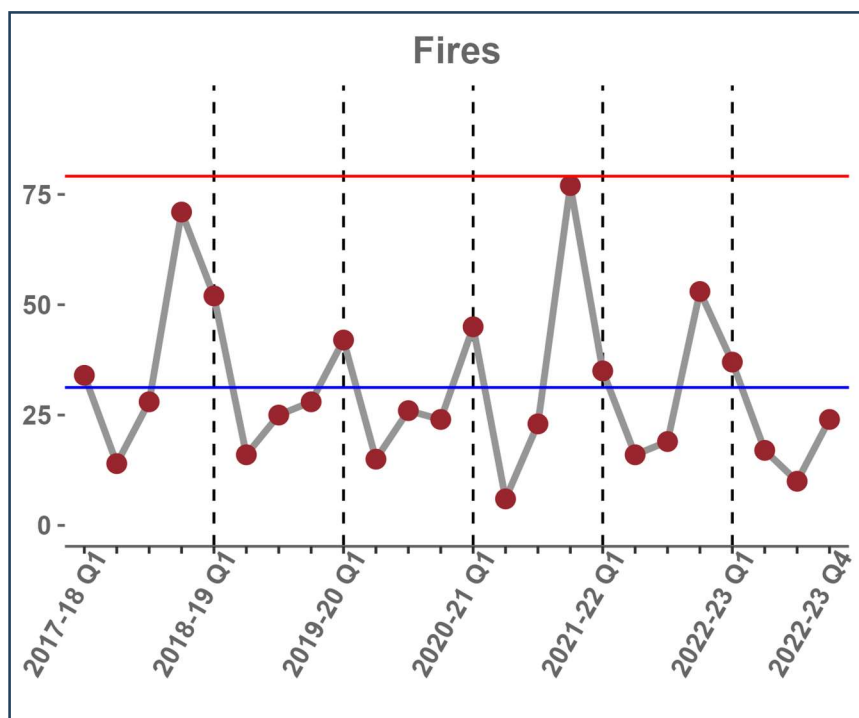
The information contained within this Review Report will contribute towards the development of a new Local Fire and Rescue Plan that is tailored to local need.

Performance Data – what the figures told us

Performance Data: Overall Operational Activity

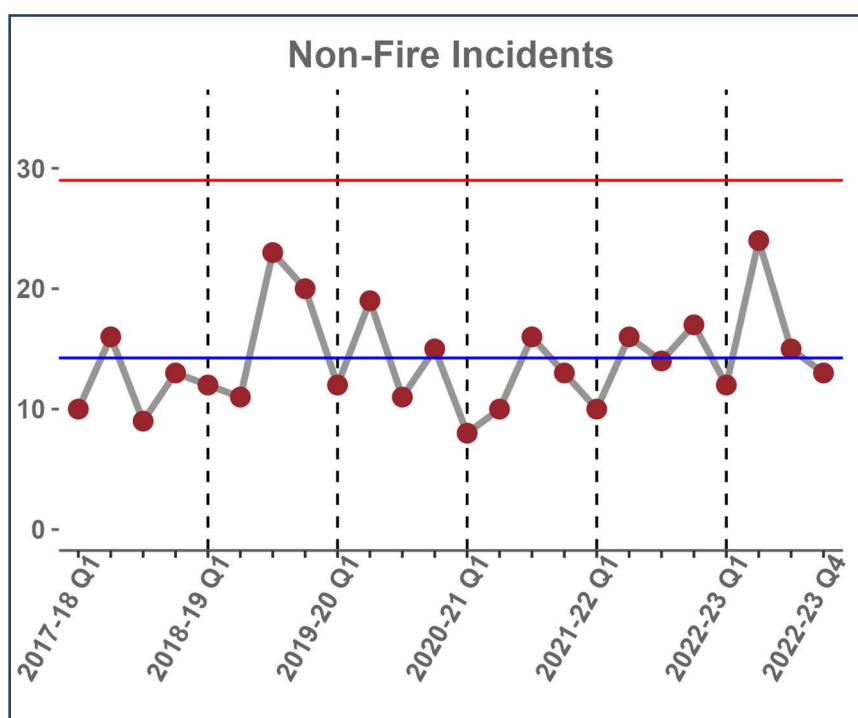
| Annual Activity Levels from 1 st April – 31 st March | | | | | |
|--|------------|------------|------------|--------------|----------------|
| | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 | 3-Year Total | 3-Year Average |
| Fires | 153 | 128 | 90 | 371 | 124 |
| Non-Fire Emergencies | 48 | 61 | 67 | 176 | 59 |
| False Alarms | 223 | 234 | 233 | 690 | 230 |
| Total Incidents | 424 | 423 | 390 | 1237 | 412 |

Over the reporting period of 2020/21 – 2022/23 Fire figures have consistently decreased. Overall annual Operational Activity levels have also decreased within the same period when non-fire emergencies and false alarms are included.



(This data includes Fires, Non-Fire Incidents and False Alarms)

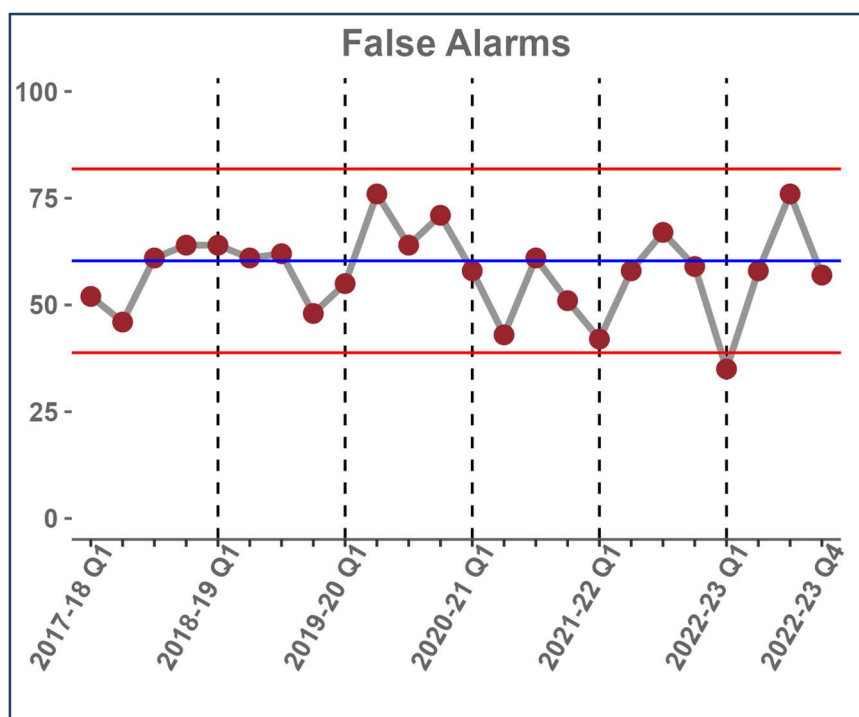
In this analysis, fire incidents in Na h-Eileanan Siar were subject to random variation since 2017-18. There appears to be a season pattern in the data, with Q1 for all years being above average. There is no clear overall trend in figures. This is consistent with national patterns and trends in fire figures.



Nationally, there has been an increase in non-fire incidents. However, in this analysis for Na h-Eileanan Siar, there is no clear trend, with each data point being within an acceptable range.

Although the data remains quite consistent SFRS have continued to actively participate in local Road Safety Groups to reduce the number of Road Traffic Collisions. There has been a large investment in updating rescue equipment on strategic Fire Appliances across Na h-Eileanan Siar and this roll out will continue into the new recording period.

SFRS has introduced the Partnership Approach to Water Safety (PAWS) group to the Islands and continue to embed and develop the concept to improve safety for both community members and visitors to the islands.



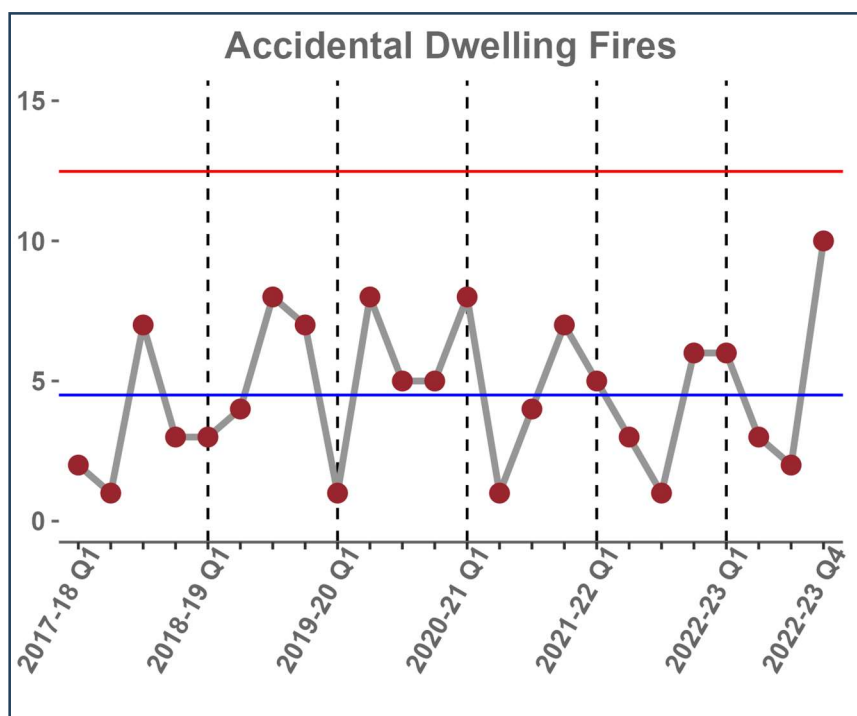
False alarm incidents have been subject to random variation in recent years. There are no clear overall trends or patterns in the data. This is consistent with national trends across Scotland. It is important to recognise that not all Fire Alarm Activations are considered “unwanted” as they do signal appropriately when required.

Currently False alarms of all types represent 56% of all calls in Na Eilean Siar.

Performance Local Priorities

Local Priority 1: Promoting Personal Safety and Wellbeing

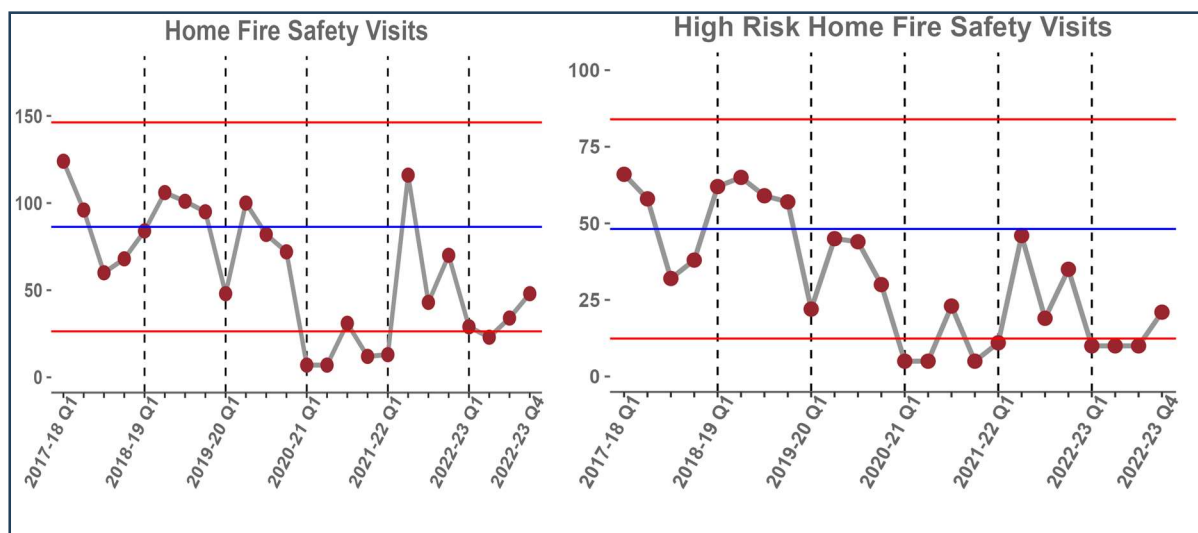
Fire safety within the home is a key prevention strategy for the SFRS. Locally, we continue to monitor our progress in reducing the number of accidental dwelling fires and their severity, and to provide guidance and where appropriate increase the presence of interlinked heat and smoke detection within homes.



Nationally there is a clear trend of decreasing accidental dwelling fires, however the significant risk factors of mobility and age are prevalent in the Western Isles. In this analysis for Na h-Eileanan Siar, there is no overall trend in accidental dwelling fires, with all data points falling within the expected range.

Since the release of the previous plan in 2017, the instances of accidental dwelling fires has remained relatively static with a slight increase in the last recording period of the present plan. It should be noted that due to the relatively small number of incidents in this category there is the potential for future fluctuation in this area however, we should recognise that our efforts have resulted in us continuing to be at the lower end of the comparator.

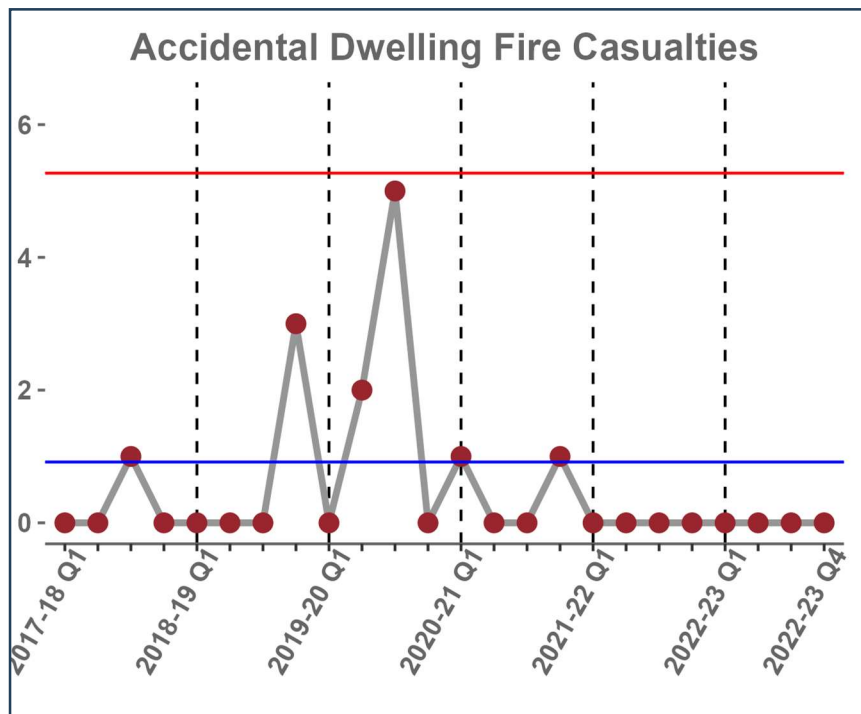
Na Eilean Siar local authority area remains one of the safest in the UK in regards to fires but small variations can present significant percentage changes due to the low activity data.



During the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020-21 there was a substantial decrease in Home Fire Safety Visits. This is shown by the data points between 2020-21 Q1 and 2021-22 Q1 being close to or below the lower control limits. There was a large increase in activity in 2021-22 Q1, with figures being above average for this quarter. This has since returned to figures below average for 2021-22 Q2 until 2022-23 Q4. This shows that current levels have not returned to levels seen before the pandemic. This is consistent with national trends.

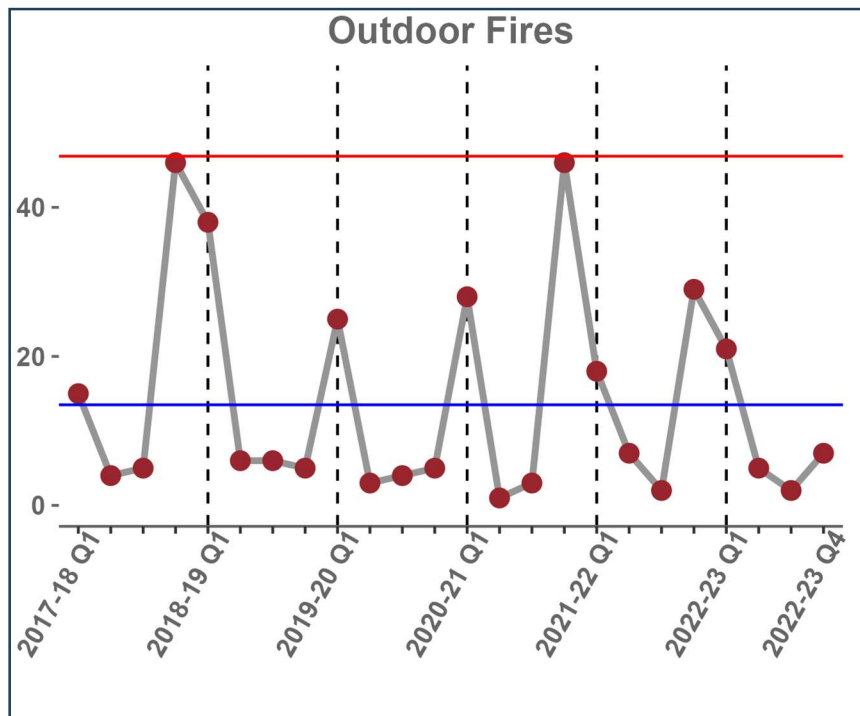
SFRS personnel on the Western Isles will continue to promote and conduct safety visits within the home, targeting those deemed to be most vulnerable from harm. Going forward an increase focus on partnership referrals will support our separation to identify the most vulnerable.

Accidental Dwelling Fire Casualties and Fatalities

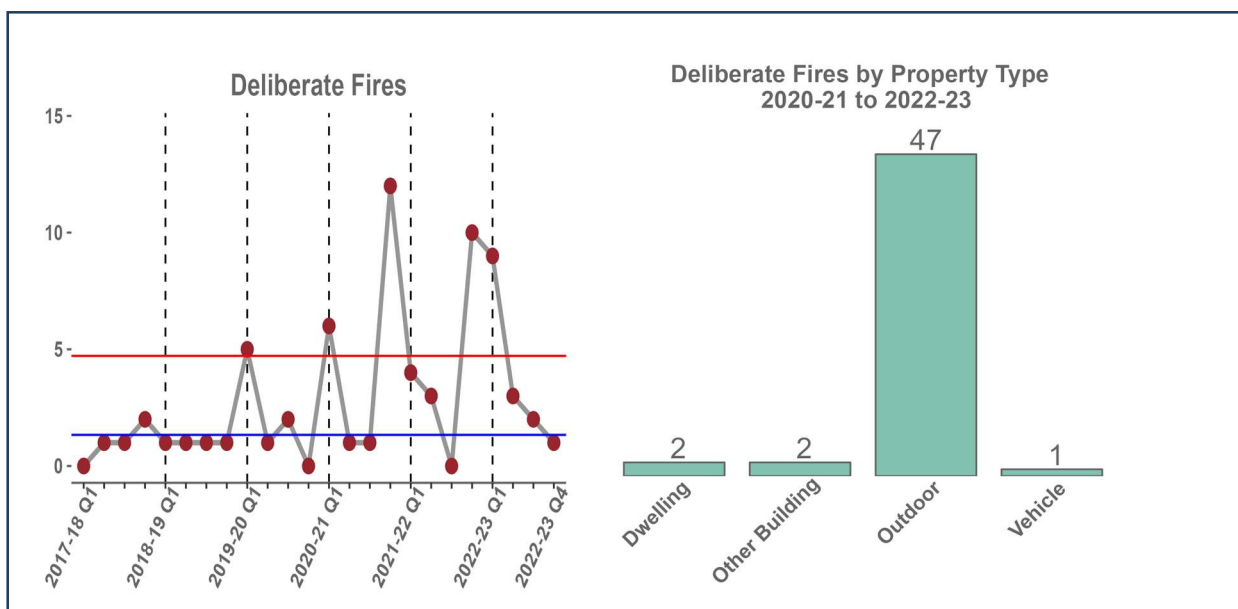


There have been no accidental dwelling fire non-fatal casualties (injuries sustained in house fires) in the last two years. With two recorded casualties in the last three years, this is a considerable improvement on the previous three years. This is shown in the chart above with all data points from 2020-21 Q1 onwards being on or below average, compared to the figures for 2018-19 Q4, 2019-20 Q2 and Q3 being above average and close to the upper control limit.

There have been no fatal casualties in accidental dwelling fires in the last six years, with the last fatalities in 2017.



There is no trend in the number of outdoor fires but there is a clear seasonal pattern in quarterly totals. This is consistent with national patterns and trends. The SFRS Wildfire Strategy will continue to be progressed the Na h-Eileanan Siar benefiting with the roll out of a All Terrain Vehicle and dedicated 4x4 vehicle, Wildfire Specific PPE and additional training to allow Firefighters to safely and efficiently deal with any predicted increase in Wildfires.

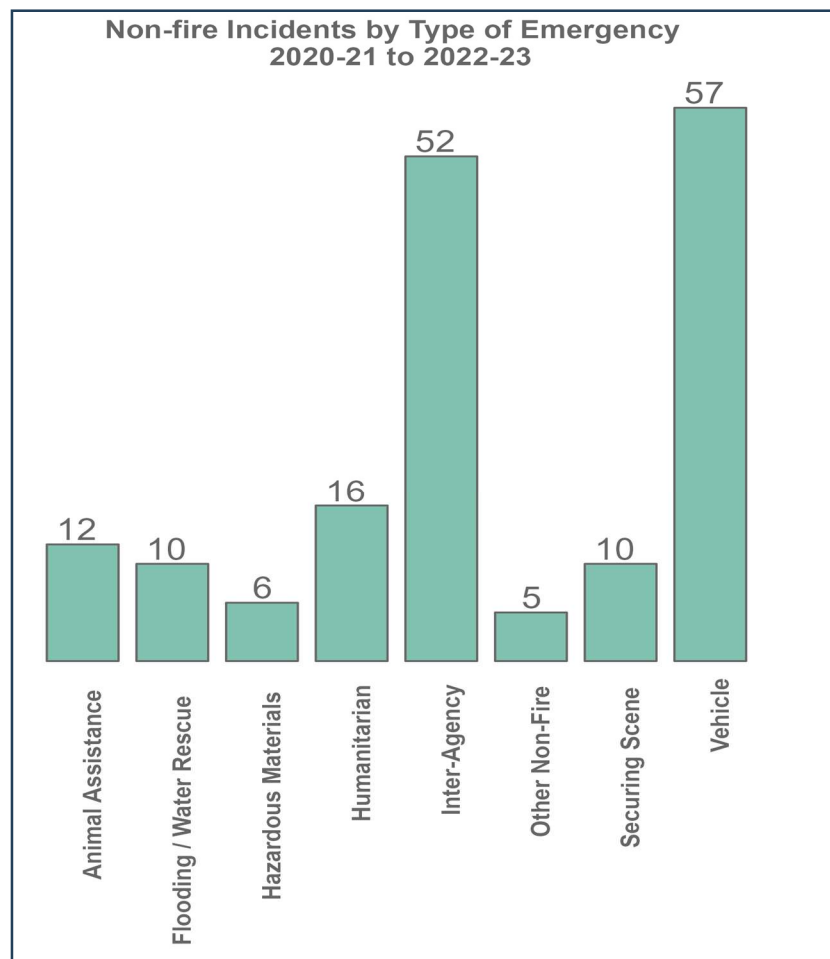


The seasonality we see in outdoor fires is also evident in deliberate fires as many of these incidents are recorded as deliberate. As can be seen from the following chart, the vast majority of deliberate fires are outdoor incidents.

Similar to overall Home Fire Safety Visit figures, visits that were considered high risk were affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Figures were already below average for all of 2019-20, before the pandemic. This decreased substantially in 2020-21, with most data points falling below the lower control limit. This increased in 2021-22 to fall within the expected ranges, but still below average. In 2022-23, most data points were below the lower control limit. This shows that the number of high-risk visits has not returned to levels seen before the pandemic. Overall patterns in Na h-Eileanan Siar are consistent with what has been seen nationally across Scotland.

Na eilean Siar were very successful in developing partnership activity that resulted in significant (among the highest in Scotland) numbers of partner referred high risk visits. This has not returned to pre 2020 levels as partners re-align priorities and changing staffing models.

Between 2020-21 and 2022-23, most deliberate fires took place in outdoor settings, with 47 incidents recorded in this property type. There were 2 deliberate dwelling fires, 2 deliberate fires in other buildings and 1 deliberate vehicle fire in this same time period.



Please note 'Humanitarian' includes Evacuation (no fire), Lift Release, Other Rescue/Release of Persons, Removal of Objects from People and Removal of People from Objects. 'Inter-Agency' includes Assist Other Agencies, Effecting Entry/Exit, Medical Responder and Suicide. 'Other Non-Fire' includes Advice Only, No Action (not false alarm), Stand By and Water Provision. 'Securing Scene' includes Making Safe (not RTC), and Spills and Leaks (not RTC). 'Vehicle' includes Road Traffic Collisions and Other Transport (no fire).

Between 2020-21 and 2022-23, there were 57 vehicle incidents, 52 inter-agency incidents and 16 humanitarian incidents.

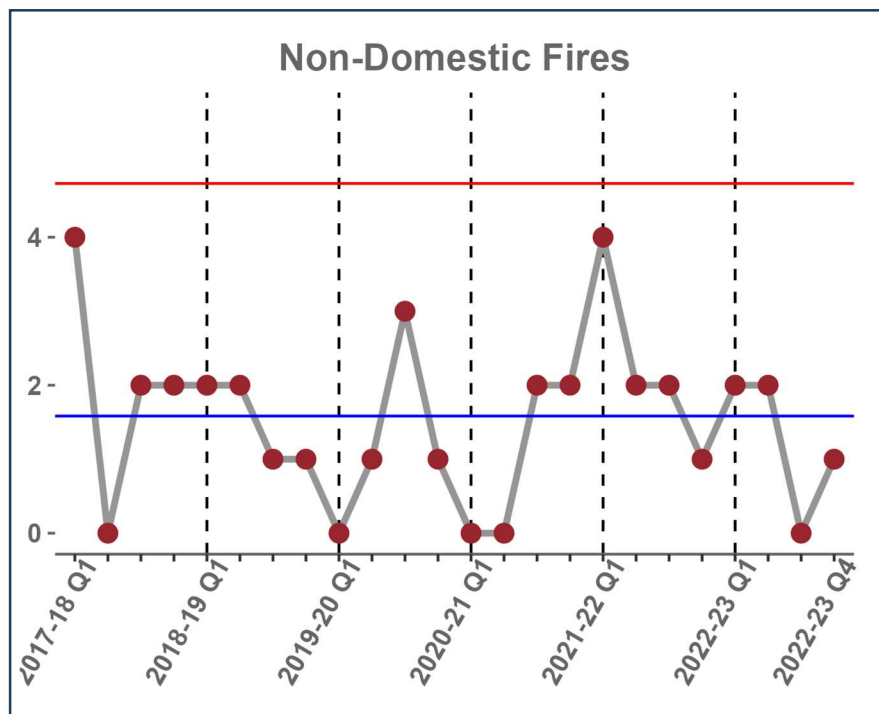
How we worked to improve our performance

SFRS personnel on the Western Isles have actively promoted and conducted safety visits within the home, whilst also supporting the community to comply with the new Smoke Detection legislation introduced in 2022.

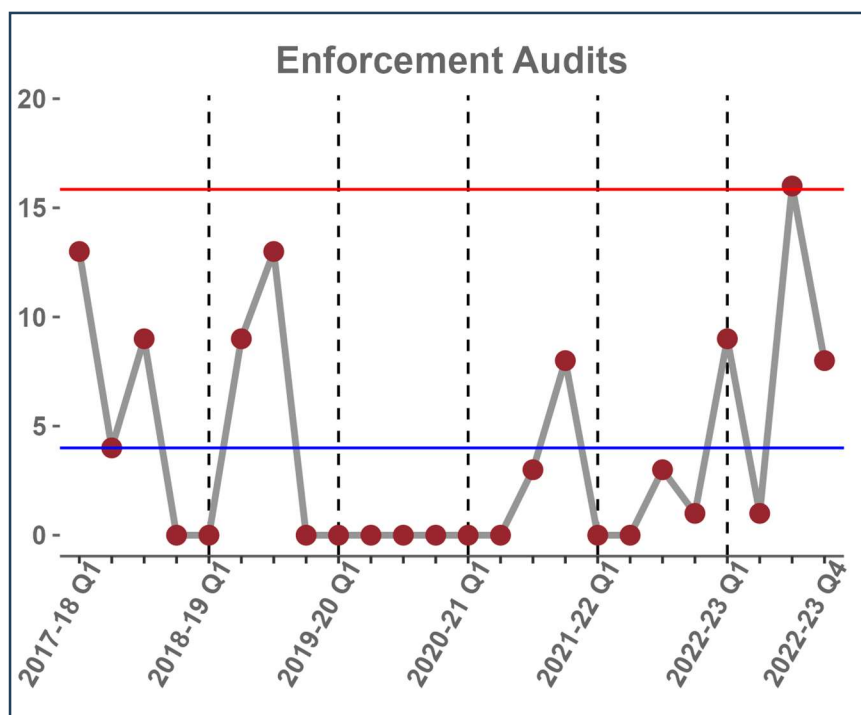
To achieve this SFRS have:-

- Promoted, prioritised and undertook Home Safety Visits to those who are deemed most vulnerable.
- Targeted our prevention activities to those who are deemed most vulnerable and at risk of harm.
- Working with partners to establish a robust information sharing and risk assessment methodology that will identify those most at risk.
- Working with partners and community members to provide support and guidance to enable and promote compliance with the newly introduced Smoke Detection legislation.
- Supporting the LOIP
- Participated in CPP Road safety groups
- Implementing our Post Domestic Incident Response after all reported fires and where appropriate

Local Priority 2: Non-Domestic Fire Safety



Nationally non-domestic fires have decreased substantially since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, with less than 5 each period we can't see a trend locally; all points are within the control limits.



Audit figures have remained within the expected limits since 2017-18, with the exception of 2022-23 Q3 which was on the upper control limit. Audit figures were low between 2018-19 Q4 and 2020-21 Q2 and have increased to figures around average since then. There is no overall trend. Nationally, audit figures dropped during the Covid-19 pandemic and have remained low since then.

How we worked to improve our performance

The SFRS continues to monitor fires within all relevant premises and will conduct post fire audits following any incident involving fire. When compliance of fire safety legislation is not met, this results in actions from advice to formal action being given and, will assist the duty-holder to meet their statutory duties. We conduct audits on premises types where fires are occurring and inform national audit profiling.

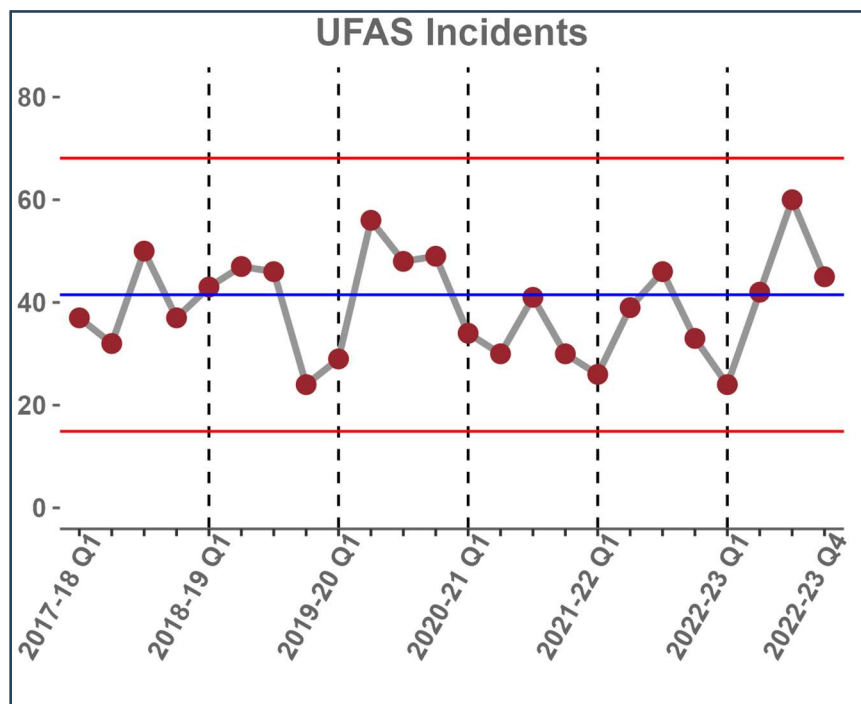
The Service continues to audit higher risk premises on an annual basis such as Care Homes and Hospitals. We work in partnership with the Care Inspectorate in Significant Case Reviews and with other partners to improve the safety of employees and visitors to commercial premises.

As a Service we will continue to adapt in the way we support business communities during and following the pandemic crisis. We will ensure that the people who reside, work in or visit the Outer Hebrides do so in the safest environment from fire.

To work toward achieving this SFRS are :

- Delivering the Fire Safety Audit Programme prioritising premises defined as 'high risk'.
- Engaging with, and supporting, the business community to highlight their duties under the relevant fire safety legislation.
- Responding to concerns raised over fire safety compliance in non-domestic premises.
- Identifying fire trends in particular building types and conducting thematic audits.
- Auditing fire safety measures of non-domestic premises which have had a fire

Local Priority 3: Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals



Whilst a small number of fire alarm signals generated are due to confirmed fire conditions being present, there are an even greater number of signals generated which when investigated have occurred when no fire conditions have been present. On such occasions these are known as 'Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals' (UFAS). This is defined as 'an event which has required an operational attendance by the Fire and Rescue Service due to the unwanted actuation of a fire alarm system'. In these instances, the signal may originate from a monitoring/call centre as a result of an automatic activation of the fire alarm system or a person activating the fire alarm system either maliciously or with good intentions believing a fire was occurring within non-domestic premises.

The impact of responding to UFAS incidents causes disruption to the premises working environment and to the range of activities the SFRS undertake. Unnecessary blue light journeys also create additional risks and hazards to firefighters and to the public whilst responding to UFAS incidents and have a detrimental impact on the environment through additional carbon emissions.

Therefore, from 1 July 2023, the SFRS stopped attending automatic fire alarm call outs to commercial business and workplace premises, such as factories, offices, shops and leisure facilities – unless a fire has been confirmed. Dutyholders with responsibility for workplace premises should now safely investigate a fire alarm before calling 999, as our control room operators require confirmation of an actual fire, or signs of fire, before sending the nearest resource. SFRS will treat any fire alarm as a sign of fire, other than from a single smoke detector.

This change does not apply to sleeping premises, such as hospitals care homes, hotels or domestic dwellings who will continue to get an emergency response.

Active and positive engagement with dutyholders to support them with reducing UFAS occurrences within their premises will still continue.

UFAS incidents were subject to random variation between 2017-18 Q1 and 2019-20 Q3. Figures decreased during the Covid-19 pandemic. This was when most offices were closed, and home working was encouraged so there was less opportunity for an unwanted signal to occur. This can be shown by the data points between 2020-21 Q1 and 2021-22 Q2 being below average. Since then, figures have returned to levels around average and stayed within the expected range. This pattern is consistent with national patterns in the data.

Between 2020-21 and 2022-23, most UFAs incidents occurred at incidents that were categorised as 'Other' with 177 incidents occurring at this property type category. This was followed by education properties (124 in total), public admin, security and safety properties (44 in total) and residential homes (42 in total).

Expected Outcomes from the Changes implemented in July :

- Reduce the unnecessary demand and impact on the public and business sector through lost working time including employers releasing On-Call staff to respond to such calls
- Reduce the road risk to staff and wider community
- Reduce carbon emissions through the reduction of blue light journeys
- Reduce the unnecessary cost of fire and rescue service response.

How we worked to improve our performance

False Alarms account for c55% of all calls in Nan Eilean Siar (230 of 412). This figure is approximately the same nationally. Across Scotland, Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS) account for 32% of those False Alarms while the figure in the Western Isles is approximately 18% of all False Alarms.

While this figure reflects well compared to national activity, it still means that a significant number of unwanted false alarms occur, diverting resources away from other activity, such as training, and creating a disruption for the supportive employers who release firefighters for operational purposes.

The change to Fire Alarm response in July 2023 will see operations control challenge fire alarm reports to determine if there is a fire - where a single detector only has activated. Other technological signs of fire will continue to attract the current response. This new procedure should further support local initiatives with duty holders aimed at minimising false alarm activity.

Working with our partners and communities Nan Eilean Siar in we will:

- Identify premises with high UFAS activity levels to determine if they comply with the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 and have appropriate fire safety management procedures in place.
- Engage with owners and occupiers to provide necessary support, advice and guidance for developing suitable action plans for UFAS reduction.
- Ensure robust call management and implementation of service policy for UFAS.
- Educate our frontline emergency response staff to identify problems, support responsible persons and provide feedback to our fire safety enforcement department.

Performance Indicators:

- Review the number of UFAS Incidents attended.
- Review the number of AFA Activations not attended.
- Review the number of AFA Activations resulting in a Fire.

Local Priority 4: Emergency Response Preparedness and Community Resilience

To ensure effective and efficient Operational Preparedness and assist with and improve Community Resilience SFRS continue to prioritise Risk management, appropriate Training , effective partnership working and expanding the Community Asset Register

How we worked to improve our performance

Recruitment

Recruitment in the Western Isles has significantly improved within the recording period of the current Local Fire and Rescue plan, with particular success in the past 18 months, with 25 successful recruitments and 10 individuals within the process to join. This success is directly related to the local On Call Support Watch Commander who was tasked with developing a recruitment strategy whilst rolling out the new Pre Recruitment Engagement Program and ensuring all stations are appropriately trained and effectively engaging with the process. SFRS have an active working group developing new process and procedure for recruitment and this has assisted greatly in improving Firefighter numbers within Community Fire Stations. Against a backdrop of an aging population SFRS recruitment has been very successful in the recording period of the Local Fire and Rescue Plan with firefighter numbers increasing by 20 across the 3 years. With the effect of Covid on recruitment and retention this number is hugely encouraging and positive.

Availability

SFRS nationally are facing unprecedented challenges with recruitment and retention and this has a noticeable and obvious effect on the availability of On Call Fire Stations. Although the Western Isles has been successful in recruitment within this period low availability within some station areas can still be experienced relating to demands from primary employment, family, community etc. Benbecula suffered from availability levels lower than expected and SFRS arranged a large scale, very successful recruitment event which has resulted in increased availability and an increase in local confidence and awareness.

Operational Intelligence

SFRS has completed all Operational Intelligence visits currently required for the area. These visits and the associated documentation identify local risks, document these, and make them available for Operational Crews should they attend the premise in an Emergency Situation. A continued rolling review will be carried out where premises are revisited to ensure records are up to date and appropriate. The risk register will also be reviewed, ensuring new risks are added where required.

Community Asset Register

This register has been expanded in the last 2 years and continues to be added to, improving the availability of additional, non SFRS resources, to assist with bringing Operational Incidents to a successful and safe outcome.

Training

Internal SFRS training has increased since the covid pandemic and operational preparedness has returned to pre pandemic levels. Breathing Apparatus, Incident Command, Cat C Driving, Safe Working at Height, ICAT, Animal Rescue etc along with additional training with key Cat 1 Responders to assist with Missing Person Searches locally has all been undertaken.

Exercising and Planning

SFRS continues to assist and participate in local and nation emergency planning and exercising work to improve and develop emergency response.

Western Isles Emergency Planning & Coordinating Group

SFRS continue to be a key partner within the Emergency Response environment, chairing the WIEPCG through the Covid Pandemic and a number of local emergencies where SFRS were either directly involved or assisted with planning, coordinating and recovery.

Conclusion

The new Local Fire and Rescue plan will be developed taking into account the requirements and outcomes from the previous plan whilst developing a strategy to effectively identify and target key local priorities and objectives identified from the Scottish Fire and Rescue Strategic Plan 2022 – 25 and the Local Outcome Improvement Plan, whilst acknowledging the current fiscal challenges.

A key approach to reducing demand is through effective engagement and by working in partnership to support our more vulnerable members within our communities. SFRS will continue to develop and expand the “Safe and Well” concept to reduce risk to these vulnerable community members, thus improving overall community safety.

As a national organisation the SFRS is also considering progressing the role of the firefighters to develop the organisation in an environment of continuous financial challenges. This presents opportunities for the SFRS to develop its role at a local level in the protection of our communities across the Outer Hebrides through the strengthening of existing partnerships, whilst seeking new partnership approaches to manage, mitigate and reduce risk.

To support the pursuance of efficiency savings, reducing service demand is essential to provide the means to utilise the totality of SFRS resources to maximum benefit. It is recognised however, regardless of how active the SFRS is in its prevention agenda, operational demand will still be present. It is therefore vital to ensure the SFRS can respond as and when such demand arises. The process of identifying and reviewing the range of risks within our communities will provide the basis as to how we will manage and respond to such risks to safeguard the safety of our firefighters and our communities.

The SFRS both nationally and locally overcame the challenges and impacts during Covid-19 by working together within our communities. This has been the scene setter for enhanced future collaborations.

As from 1 July 2023 the SFRS no longer attend automatic fire alarm call outs to commercial business and workplace premises unless a fire has been confirmed. This change in response is estimated to greatly reduce unnecessary call outs in order to free up our firefighters to attend real emergencies and to allow them to do more community safety prevention work and concentrate on attaining and developing operational skills

The review of the Local Fire and Rescue Plan has considered the progress that has been made to date and supports the development of key priorities for the next plan. Meeting the challenges in the new plan will not be achieved in isolation but through effective partnership working and as such, the new Local Fire and Rescue Plan will seek to compliment and contribute to the integrated approach to Community Planning within the Outer Hebrides.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the following priorities are taken forward in the new Local Fire and Rescue Plan for Na h-Eileanan Siar area, whereby they will be drawn down into further detail for action:

Priority 1: Improving fire safety in the home – with a focus on working with partners in making the most vulnerable members and communities of Na h-Eileanan Siar safer from fire in the home.

Priority 2: Improving fire safety and resilience in the business community – with a focus on targeting the highest life risk non-domestic premises, and commercial and business premises in Na h-Eileanan Siar that have been affected by fire or are crucial to the infrastructure.

Priority 3: Minimising the impact of unintentional harm – with a focus on supporting our partners in Health and Social Care, to reduce safety risks in the home, such as slips, trips and falls.

Priority 4: Reducing Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals – with a focus on monitoring the impact on the July 1st 2023 changes in response to Automatic Fire Alarms, continuing to educate duty holders on reducing UFAS incidents and attendances.

Priority 5: Effective risk management and operational preparedness – with a focus on understanding the risk profile of Na h-Eileanan Siar to prepare, plan and respond to these risks safely and effectively, and strengthening community resilience for existing and emerging risks.