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##### Chief Executive

##### Jim Wallace

Our Ref: KT/JMcK2

8 March 2013

Ms Kathryn Torney

www.theDetail.tv

Dear Kathryn

**RE: NIFRS Data - response to questions raised.**

Response to questions from Kathryn Torney of [www.TheDetail.tv](http://www.TheDetail.tv)

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| **Question.** | **Response.** |
| 1. The 2010/11 annual report states there is an average cost of £2,500 for each fire appliance to respond to an emergency incident – is this figure still correct? And is it correct to say that you usually mobilise around 63% of the total 999 calls you receive? | The 2011/12 average cost for each Fire Appliance to respond to an emergency call out was calculated at £2,797\*.  \* The ‘Average’ cost per annum is calculated by dividing the overall expenditure by NIFRS in any given year by the number of mobilisations in that particular year.  It is a calculation based on the premise that our total budget is used to support our Service Delivery. The average cost therefore will include fixed costs such as heat, lighting, fuel, staff costs etc.  While it allows us to assume an average cost for all incidents it is important to note that an incident could be 15 minutes at a small rubbish fire in a bin with 1 Fire Appliance in attendance to a protracted incident involving dozens of Fire Appliances lasting several hours or indeed days.  In 2011 we mobilised resources to 62.86% of all calls received.  In 2012 we mobilised resources to 65.78% of all calls received.  Non-mobilisation should not be confused with failure to respond. Non-mobilisation to a call could be for several reasons; e.g. multiple calls were received about the same incident or because our Regional Control Centre Personnel have been able to identify a ‘hoax’ call and therefore have not mobilised Firefighters to respond. |
| 1. There were no incidents attended at Rathlin Island over the two year period. Is there a need for the volunteer station there? | NIFRS has a statutory responsibility to ensure emergency fire and rescue service provision for everyone in Northern Ireland no matter where they live. Rathlin Island is no exception.  As there are a number of residents and businesses on the island, plus visitors, it is vital that NIFRS has a dedicated presence on the island to respond to fires and other emergency incidents. The provision of a Volunteer Station is suitable for this purpose.  The Volunteer Firefighters who live on Rathlin Island are available to respond to any emergency incident when required. NIFRS provides ongoing training to the Volunteer Firefighters to keep their skills current. Volunteer Firefighters have attended incidents on Rathlin Island in the past and are prepared to respond to incidents in the future.  Arrangements are in place for Firefighters from Ballycastle or other nearby Stations in the North Antrim area to be taken to Rathlin to work with the Volunteer Firefighters should the incident require this level of back up assistance. |
| 1. Can you explain the difference between ‘arson’ and ‘deliberate fires’? | NIFRS categorises the cause of fire in 2 ways – Accidental or Deliberate. PSNI use the term Arson as arson is a criminal offence and subject to PSNI investigation. NIFRS holds its own Deliberate Fire statistics and PSNI hold the NI Arson statistics.  A Fire Service Circular issued from the office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2006 regarding **The Investigation of Fires where the Supposed Cause is not Accidental** makes the following statement, ‘The terms 'malicious(**arson\***)' and 'doubtful' have been subject to differing interpretation, often leading to misunderstanding and occasionally attracting legal challenge. These terms should be avoided. Fire and rescue services may avoid the problems associated with these terms by recording such fires as 'deliberate'. This will not affect comparative analysis of data as the three categories 'malicious/ deliberate/ doubtful' are currently grouped together for analytical  purposes. |
| 1. Are response times included in the data you sent me for “simultaneous demand incidents”, as referenced in your last email? Or are these among the ‘blanks’ or ‘N/A’s? | Simultaneous demand incidents are those that occur in a station area when the resources from that station are already committed to another incident. The blanks and N/A’s do not specifically fall into this category. |
| 1. Can you explain two extremely long IA times involving Whitla station (incident number 29047121, standby, 3/10/2012, IA time 1,400 mins) and Downpatrick (incident number 31431121, 28/10/2012, major fire in a fast food outlet, IA time 1,397 mins).  I removed both of these figures from my overall IA time calculations and averages. | The method for Fire Crews booking in attendance at an incident has changed from a verbal message relayed from the Fire Crew arriving at an incident to the Regional Control Centre personnel who would have manually recorded the time to a ‘button-box’ type of transmission. It is highly likely that in the early stages of this change of system the Crews have omitted to transmit the appropriate status. |
| 1. You have given an explanation for the cap being applied to the IA data. However, your original response did not make any reference to the dataset being redacted or edited. Why not? | As I explained in my email, the level of data you requested was over and above anything requested before in a FOI enquiry. I only receive brief details of the request and there is usually no indication of the reason for such a request. It was my decision to reduce the amount of work in order to allow the query to progress.  In hindsight it may have been prudent to identify this at that juncture. Apologies for the confusion. |
| 1. You have said that your response standards apply only to dwelling and property fires. By my calculations (looking at CF, MF and SF IA time data and then removing road vehicle fires and outdoor fires) this comes to just 6,330 of the total 51,669 incidents during the years 2011 and 2012. Average response times per station for these callouts range between 1 – 4 minutes. How do you feel about these targets? And why do you just monitor response times to dwelling and property fires? | We monitor response times to “Dwelling Fires” as this is where the main risk to life is. In reality Fire Crews respond to all emergency calls with the same sense of urgency.  The average response times of between 1 – 4 minutes is well within our stated Emergency Response Standards (see below) of 6 minutes for the 1st Appliance within identified higher risk areas.  NIFRS Emergency Response Standards introduced on 1 April 2006 are:   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **Response Area** | **1St Appliance**  **Attendance Time** | **2ND Appliance Attendance Time** | | High | 6 minutes | 9 minutes | | Medium | 12 minutes | 15 minutes | | Low | 21 minutes | 24 minutes | |
| 1. My calculations show that the total incidents over the two years involved 168 fatalities and 4,974 rescues/casualties. Others may have escaped from incidents themselves so this is the minimum number of people affected. There were also 75 callouts which noted injuries to firefighters. | The Fatality figure is correct.  Sometimes a casualties’ or those rescued circumstances can change post incident and so there might be slight difference with the rescue/casualty figures. |
| 1. Over the two year period, fire crews in Northern Ireland attended an average of 70 callouts each day. On 65 days, crews attended 100 callouts or more. 2/5/2011 was the day the most callouts were attended – 411 incidents (311 of these were outdoor fires). | Late April /early May 2011 was an extremely busy time for NIFRS as we were experiencing an unprecedented level of spate conditions as a result of wildland fires (gorse, grass etc). In a 2 week period we tackled 1,977 gorse fires in total. |
| 1. Cause of fires was provided for 23,755 cases. The top causes were ‘deliberate’ (14,767), chimney fires (3,080), accidental (2,271), arson (1,605), electrical appliance (417), vehicle electrical (365), electrical (200), ‘cigarette etc’ (117), oil/chip pan (112), grill pans (87) and radiated heat (85). | As the causes of fires are investigated, these figures may change, however the figures shown are acceptable. |
| 1. There were a total of 4,166 special service calls attended by crews. | A Special Service call includes all types of rescue incidents NIFRS attends such as flooding, environmental, building collapse, rope rescue, hazardous material etc. This also includes road traffic collisions.  A Special Service call does not include Fires, these are categorised separately. |
| 1. The address with the most callouts was the Upper Newtownards Road in Dundonald – 286. Although 260 were false alarms. This is the address of the Ulster Hospital. Second was Grosvenor Road, Lower Falls – the address of the Royal Hospital – where 205 of 232 callouts were false alarms. | Due to Data Protection, NIFRS does not report specific addresses for incidents. We would prefer that individual addresses should be omitted from any public reports.  The below is an explanation of NIFRS Automatic Fire Alarm Policy. The majority of ‘false alarms’ at these hospitals is as a result of their Automatic Fire Alarm Systems.  Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) provides an emergency response to all 999 calls, including those triggered by Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA). Our job is to protect life and property from the danger of fire.  98% of all AFA calls are false alarms and NIFRS developed its ‘Unwanted Fire Signals’ policy in 2007 to help premises owners reduce the number of false alarms from their AFA systems. While reductions have been made in the number of AFA calls further reduction is still required and NIFRS is continuing to work with all premises that have AFAs to help reduce the number of false alarm calls from their AFA systems.  As part of the Unwanted Fire Signals policy NIFRS manages it’s response to AFA calls by mobilising only 1 Fire Appliance to an AFA incident. (Before the Policy was introduced in 2007 the Standard Response required 2 Fire Appliances to attend each AFA call). If it turns out to be an actual fire the Fire Crew can, if required, request additional resources to help deal with the incident. If it is a false alarm the Fire Crew will determine the cause and issue advice to the premises owner on how to reduce false alarm calls from their AFA system.  NIFRS directly targets those premises that have the highest rate of false alarms from their AFA systems and issues advice on how to manage the risks which cause false alarms. In addition, each of our Area Commands holds an information sessions for the business community and property owners on how they can reduce false alarms from their systems and to educate them about the consequences of these false alarms.  The most common causes of false alarms from AFAs include system faults, cooking fumes, contractors at work, cigarette smoke, dust and steam. |
| 1. 20,811 of the total callouts were false alarms with good intent. 1,396 were malicious false alarms. What does the fire service think of the cost of false alarms to the system – both time and money? | False Alarms with good intent are cases where a person/s have called 999 believing there to be a real fire or persons in danger. NIFRS will always respond to emergency calls where is it believed to be a genuine call and incident. That is our job in serving our community and we are proud of our record in responding to a wide range of emergency incidents every day across Northern Ireland.  Malicious false alarm calls or Hoax Calls are a complete waste of NIFRS resources and mean that a Fire Crew is temporarily unavailable to respond should a genuine emergency arise while they are out responding to what turns out to be a malicious false alarm/ hoax call. These incidents also put additional pressure on our Regional Control Centre personnel who answer the 999 calls and mobilise Fire Appliances to them.  Over the years NIFRS has worked hard with local communities and young people to drive down the number of the Hoax 999 Calls being made. Our statistics show that the number of hoax calls made, right across Northern Ireland, continue to fall year on year and we welcome this reduction.  Our Regional Control Centre personnel who handle all the emergency 999 calls are extremely well trained and in many cases are able to quickly determine hoax calls. By using Call Challenging and Call Management techniques our Regional Control Centre personnel are able to keep the mobilisations to these hoax calls down. Our statistics show that of these type of call received in the Regional Control Centre, in 2012 we only responded to 27% of calls.  We use a range of methods to tackle this problem including community education through our youth engagement and schools programmes, advertising, public relations, social media etc. We want to educate young people especially about the gravity and dangerous nature of making false calls.  The public should always remember that calls made from landlines and mobile phones are easily traceable and the person who owns the phone can be held responsible.  NIFRS will not hesitate to pursue prosecution through the normal legal channels and will inform the PSNI. |
| 1. The busiest fire station was Central with 3,596 callouts over the two year period – an average of almost five callouts a day. Meanwhile, the volunteers at Rathlin Island Station had none over the two year period. The next quietest station was Portaferry with 86 callouts over the two years – an average of one callout every eight and a half days over the two years covered by our request. | NIFRS acknowledges that due to their surrounding population densities some Fire Stations will be much busier than others. This is why we have a combination of Wholetime / Retained / Variable Crewed / Wholetime & Retained / Volunteer Fire Stations to enable us to deliver an efficient and effective fire and rescue service for everyone in Northern Ireland.  Through our Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) we are continually assessing our resources to make sure they are in the right place at the right time to respond to the needs to their community and where necessary we can and will make changes. |
| 1. The top 10 busiest fire stations are Central (3,596 callouts), Cadogan (3,127), Springfield (2,982), Knock (2,673), Northland (2,669), Westland (1,991), Crescent Link (1,692), Lisburn (1,691), Glengormley (1,639) and Newry (1,615). | These are Wholetime Fire Stations. Meaning they have Firefighters based on Station 24/7 ready to respond to emergency call outs. |
| 1. The IA (response) times were provided for 48,710 incidents. Six had no station names so that left me 48,704 to do my calculations on. The average IA time for all callouts (where IA time was provided) is 7 minutes, for fire incidents only the average is 8 minutes. The average response times for incidents based in high risk areas is 5 mins. | Our target is to meet our Emergency Attendance Response Times (average percentage figures calculated across combined High, Medium and Low risk levels) on 75% of occasions for both the 1st and 2nd Appliance.  NIFRS continually monitors its targets for Emergency Response Standards. These statistics are collated on a monthly basis and are reviewed and assessed by the Chief Fire Officer. In the vast majority of cases NIFRS does meet the Emergency Response Standard but where this is not the case each incident is investigated by the Area and District Command Team and issues as to reasons why the response times are not met are addressed. NIFRS will always endeavour to meet its Emergency Response Times and where we fail to do so we will take corrective action. |
| 1. Individual station’s average response times for all callouts range from 4 minutes at three Belfast stations to 18 minutes for Pomeroy and Newtownstewart crews. | Our current Emergency Response Standards were introduced on 1st April 2006 following a ‘Dwelling Fire Risk Assessment’ carried out as part of our Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). Areas of Northern Ireland are classified as High, Medium or Low risk based on a number of socio-demographic and historical factors. Emergency Response Standards were then assigned accordingly.   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **Response Area** | **1St Appliance**  **Attendance Time** | **2ND Appliance Attendance Time** | | High | 6 minutes | 9 minutes | | Medium | 12 minutes | 15 minutes | | Low | 21 minutes | 24 minutes |   Pomeroy and Newtownstewart would be classified as Low Risk areas and an 18 minute response for Pomeroy and Newtownstewart Crews is within our stated response standard of 21 minutes for the 1st appliance to attend a lower risk area.  Belfast is a high risk area and 4 minutes is within the 6 minute response time for the 1st appliance to attend a high risk area. |
| 1. Taking out the massive response times of around 1,400 minutes I have already mentioned, the next three longest response times were 110 minutes (Omagh Station), 102 minutes (Pomeroy Station) and 93 minutes (Strabane Station). All of these were outdoor gorse fires in March and May 2012. | During spate conditions, such as those experienced in March and May 2012 NIFRS resources are extremely busy dealing with several gorse fires at multiple locations at any particular time. Gorse fires can range from small isolated fires to larger more intense fires spanning several kilometres. Resources are committed using risk based analysis i.e. the risk to life is first followed by the risk to property, takes priority. NIFRS allocates its resources and implements its contingency plans to ensure emergency service cover across Northern Ireland. |
| 1. Of the 67 stations, the 30 stations with the slowest response times for all calls and all fire callouts were retained (part-time) crews. One was retained/variable. | That is to be expected given the fundamental difference between a Wholetime and Retained Fire Station. In a Wholetime Station Firefighters are based on Station 24/7 and respond immediately to any incident as required. Retained Fire Stations require the Retained Firefighters to quickly make their way to the Fire Station to meet the rest of the Crew and then respond to the call.  NIFRS has a policy that Retained Firefighters must live and work no more that 5 minutes from the Station they are assigned to so that they can respond to the Station within that time to respond to emergency calls. |
| **Other long waits I noted that you may wish to comment on:** |  |
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| * Incident number 32546111 – man trapped underneath a forklift and fallen tree. The IA time is listed as 87 minutes. Why did it take so long to reach this incident and did this affect the outcome of the man dying? | In reviewing the detailed logs for this incident, the 1st Appliance was actually in attendance within 15 minutes. The reason for not booking in attendance correctly is unknown.  The first message back from the incident when the Crew arrived indicated that the man was already fatal. |
| * 3/8/2012 – took 55 minutes to arrive at major fire at Holywood Leisure Centre. Caused by electrical fault. | Detailed logs show that a NIFRS resource was in attendance within 9 minutes. The 1st resource mobilised had not booked in attendance - reason unknown. |
| * 6/12/2012 – took 47 minutes to reach major fire at pub/wine bar/bar on Belfast’s Holywood Road. Accidental cause. | The 1st Appliance mobilised did not book in attendance in the appropriate manner. The 2nd Appliance mobilised was in attendance within 2 minutes. |
| * 14/12/2011 – major fire caused by a chimney fire. Took Antrim crew 44 minutes to reach terrace house in Tower Way in Antrim. 999 call made just before 5pm. | Antrim’s Appliance did not book in attendance in the appropriate manner. The first message from the incident after the initial investigations were within 20 minutes. |
| * 17/10/2011 – took 41 minutes to reach major fire in a bungalow in Newtownstewart which started accidentally in a meter box. Smoke alarm had alerted people. | This incident was in a remote part of Newtownstewart’s station area, however they should have booked in attendance correctly. A text note on the log of the call specifically indicates that the appliance failed to book in attendance at the address. |
| * 24/10/2012 – took 35 minutes to reach a fire in a house on Newtownhamilton Road in Armagh. There was one casualty. 999 call made at 7.12am. | This call was attended by the Retained Crews from Armagh Station. The incident was approximately 6.5 miles from the Station. |
| * Incident number 27971121. Took Northland crew 32 minutes to reach this major fire. Two people were injured including one who jumped from a window. The other treated for smoke inhalation. In the original data, the IA time was given as 7 mins. | The first appliance on the mobilisation list did not book in attendance properly. Resources were on the scene within 8 minutes.  Interesting to note that Regional Control Centre staff used Fire Survival Guidance to advise the occupants on safety until crews arrived. The crews then rescued persons using a ladder and provided oxygen to the casualties. |
| * 7/2/2011 – took 29 mins to reach major fire in bedroom of a detached house on ALLYDRUMMAN ROAD, LEITRIM, NEWCASTLE – caused by electrical appliance. 999 call made just before 1am. There were three casualties with smoke inhalation. Smoke alarm had alerted them to the fire. | The call to Ballydrumman Road, Leitrim was attended by retained firefighters from Newcastle. The distance to the incident was approximately 8.5 miles from the station. |
| * 9/9/2012 – took 25 minutes for Newtownstewart crew to reach fire in detached bungalow in Plumbridge. 999 call received at 11.27am. Was no smoke alarm fitted in the house. Accidental cause. Two casualties including a man who received burns to his face and upper body. He was taken to hospital. | The 1st Appliance was in attendance in 18 minutes. |
| * 13/11/2011 – took 42 minutes to reach RTC CLONTIGORA ROAD, KILLEEN, NEWRY. Call made at 7.43am. Attended by Newry crew who had to use cutting and spreading equipment to release a woman from the car. She was taken to hospital with neck and back pain. | This was a difficult incident for the Fire Crew to locate because the caller didn’t know where they were but could hear the traffic on the main A1 road. They could not give specific details as to their location.  Crews liaised locally with PSNI who used a helicopter to locate the car which was down a 6 foot slope off the Clontigora Road in South Armagh. |
| * 17/7/2011: Lisnaskea fire crew took 29 minutes to reach road traffic collision on AGHADRUMSEE ROAD, ROSSLEA, LISNASKEA. 999 call made at 2.23am. A man in his 20s was “heavily trapped”. He was removed using hydraulic gear and was taken to hospital in an ambulance suffering from cuts and bruises. | This remote incident was received by NIFRS second hand from Ambulance Control. The call did not come directly to NIFRS.  Fire crews attended the address which was passed on by Ambulance Control. The Fire Crew then asked NIFRS Regional Control Centre to re-contact Ambulance Control for further specific directions to the incident. |
| * 19/9/2012 – two trapped in one car RTA at BALLIEVEY ROAD, ., BANBRIDGE. 999 call made at 4.56am. Took Banbridge fire crew 28 minutes to arrive. One man released by fire fighters using cutting gear – he had neck and back injuries. The other male had “injury to ribs”. | The Appliance from Banbridge booked mobile at 05:03 hrs. It should have taken no more than 5-7 minutes to get to the location of the RTC. We can see no explanation on the log as to why the attendance time was so long and therefore we conclude it was a failure to book in attendance correctly. |