

Authority approves London Safety Plan

Members of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) approved the Second London Safety Plan on Thursday, 17 March 2005.

LFEPA Chair Val Shawcross said, "We are introducing major changes to make London safer and will focus harder than ever on our message that prevention is better than cure. The Second London Safety Plan builds on the successful community fire safety work our firefighters are already doing, which is making a real difference, and we will improve our emergency response to incidents across the capital."

Changes will now go ahead to improve the attendance times of second fire engines to emergencies across London by giving ten fire stations in outer London an additional fire engine. Meanwhile, a fire engine will be removed from ten inner London stations. On current figures, this means that over 1,000 more incidents a year will now get a second fire engine within around eight minutes. Manchester Square fire station will close because nearby stations can meet the demands for calls in the area.

Recent changes in the way fire brigades can plan fire cover now mean that fire engines can be sited where there is a risk to people instead of the risk to property dictated by the previous wartime standards. Detailed research using London Fire Brigade incidents over the last five years now means that fire engines can be sited where they are most needed.

Another major aspect of the Plan is to focus on fire safety, including carrying out 25,000 home fire safety checks in partnership with other agencies. The Plan includes new targets to reduce accidental and deliberate fires, fire deaths and hoax calls. Changes to staffing levels at stations with two fire engines, along with the withdrawal of the two fire engines at Manchester Square will lead to a reduction in



staffing levels of 180 posts, though no firefighters will lose their jobs. Over the last year the Authority has recruited extra firefighters to crew new vehicles and now has more firefighters than for a number of years.

Cllr Brian Coleman, Leader of LFEPA Conservative Group and Deputy Chair of LFEPA, said: "I am delighted we have agreed this risk-based safety plan which, in particular, recognises the additional risks that clearly exist in the suburbs. This Plan will ensure that all Londoners, wherever they live, have the fire service they deserve. The changes being made will bring the London Fire Brigade to the forefront of modern practice."

Mike Tuffrey, LFEPA Liberal Democrat Group member said: "The new plan builds on the work being done in partnership with the communities served by the London Fire Brigade to reduce accidental fires and deliberate arson attacks. We welcome this approach to fire safety alongside an improved response to emergencies across the capital."

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Translations:

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Translations
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The main proposals in the London Safety Plan

The Plan builds on the work already done by the Authority to make "prevention better than cure" and includes proposals to improve second fire engine attendance times to incidents across the capital significantly (by over 3.8 percentage points, which equals 1,000 incidents a year) by:

- moving ten fire engines
- creating more time for firefighters to work on community fire safety initiatives and continue training
- engaging in more activity with young people to steer them away from anti-social behaviour
- introducing further equipment to respond to major incidents



- reflecting the reduced sickness absence in the London Fire Brigade by reducing the number of firefighters employed at some fire stations
- trying out new services in pilot schemes such as help for cardiac arrest victims
- changing the Brigade's culture to make it a welcoming place to work for all of London's diverse communities
- closing Manchester Square Fire Station and withdrawing its fire engines.

What we've done to make London a safer city



What we've already achieved

We have achieved a lot in 2004. We:

- made good progress in modernising, according to the Audit Commission. They also said that no other fire and rescue authority has made better progress than us in delivering modernisation of the service
- increased our investment in community safety
- ran innovative projects with our partners to reduce arson
- began an ambitious programme of home visits to advise older and vulnerable people about how they could make themselves safer from the risk of fire. So far, more than 8,680 smoke alarms have been fitted and around 11,600 checks carried out throughout London.
- continued to add previously unknown high risk commercial properties to our inspection programme of commercial properties which were not known to us before
- successfully opened our new 999 control centre in the Docklands in April. This is where fire engines and other vehicle are directed to incidents
- made substantial investment (with the support of the government and the Mayor of London) in improving our ability to respond to catastrophic acts of terrorism and other disasters
- made good progress in developing a diverse workforce, including recruiting a record number of women and black and minority ethnic firefighters.

You told us what you think

The Authority sent out 14,000 copies of the Draft London Safety Plan's executive summary and action plan; copies of the full Plan (including appendices) were published on www.london-fire.gov.uk. An extensive consultation exercise took place over 12 weeks, reaching staff, Londoners and key organisations including London's boroughs, with views being taken by post and online. Representative bodies were also consulted. Over 4,000 responses were made to the Plan.

Responding to the consultation, Commissioner Ken Knight said: "Our excellent standard of response is one important way of dealing with the risk of fire and other emergencies, but we are now working successfully to reduce fires and fire deaths through prevention and protection activities. We are able to achieve this at the same time as improving the way we respond to incidents right across London.

"I want to reassure everyone that the Plan would improve the service across London and continue to provide the capital with the highest standards of emergency cover.

"All of the issues raised from the consultation are extremely important and have been addressed in finalising the London Safety Plan. I am confident that making these essential changes would bring about an improvement by reducing our response times overall and increasing the prevention work we need to do with the communities we serve."

Consultation facts

Over 500 questionnaires, nine petitions and 3,788 letters and emails were received. Findings from the consultation include:

- 68 per cent of questionnaire respondents agreed with the proposed response time targets for the first and second fire engine to arrive at incidents
- 47 per cent of all questionnaire respondents strongly or largely agreed with the proposal to close Manchester Square Fire Station, while 44 per cent largely or strongly disagreed with it.
- 85 per cent of questionnaire respondents strongly or largely agreed with the Authority's proposals to set standards that will apply to all emergencies the Authority attends.

However, concerns were expressed that:

- improving fire cover for outer London boroughs would reduce service standards in central London
- proposals are based on risk to the existing resident population and don't seem to take either the movement of people (commuters, visitors, shoppers) or planned population growth into consideration
- the Brigade's ability to respond to a terrorist incident would be affected
- the proposals don't take into account the time needed for firefighters to get to incidents in high rise buildings (tower blocks)
- the closure of Manchester Square Fire Station would reduce fire cover in central London.

What happens next?

Manchester Square Fire Station will be closed as soon as arrangements can be made, which may be by June. However, fire cover will be maintained for 999 callers by using the Authority's entire resources.

So that our capability to respond matches the risks better, the second fire engines will be removed from Acton, Bethnal Green, Clerkenwell, Dockhead, Euston, Greenwich, Islington, Kensington, Knightsbridge and Westminster fire stations, and will be relocated at Addington, Chingford, Finchley, Heston, Hillingdon, Leyton, Northolt, Sidcup, Sutton and Walthamstow fire stations.

As some of these transfers require building work at fire stations gaining an engine, these transfers will begin in June and be completed before the end of 2005/6. More details will be available in future issues of this newsletter.

From September 2005, the number of firefighters will be reduced by 128. There will be no cuts in the service, as these savings have been made possible by reducing sickness levels.

All of these changes will save £4.5m a year.



Your questions answered

As part of the consultation exercise, senior managers answered concerns about the Draft London Safety Plan. Here is a selection.

High-rise risks

Will people in high-rise buildings be more at risk because of moving fire engines?

The London Fire Brigade has extensive experience in dealing with fires and a range of incidents in high-rise buildings. There will be no change to current operational procedures: if a fire breaks out in a high-rise building, additional and specialist back up can be called on as and when it is needed.

Building Regulations and fire safety legislation ensure that fire protection is built into high rise properties. Protection is achieved in high rise buildings as the property is divided into compartments to stop the spread of fire and to ensure the structure can withstand fire. Sophisticated detection systems are installed: these can include sprinklers and water supply systems for the upper floors and protected vertical shafts so firefighters can reach upper floors and certain lifts can still be used.

If fire does break out the Brigade will still deliver an effective emergency response under the proposals. What the plan means is that some outer areas which also contain high rise buildings will now gain an improved service to reflect the needs of the

area. It will result in better overall emergency cover by improving the average attendance times for second appliances which would contribute to saving more lives.

Measuring effectiveness

What measures will be in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the proposals? How responsive will they be to changing risks?

The Authority will keep its effectiveness continually under review and is fully committed to securing continuous improvements in its performance. This will be integrated into the Authority's business and financial planning processes.

Progress toward achievement of our targets will be the way we show our proposals to be effective. These include fewer fires, fewer fire deaths, fewer false alarms and an improvement in response times for the second fire engine to arrive at incidents.

To meet these targets we will need to keep looking at where the risk is and aligning our prevention, protection and response resources to address it.

Risk mapping

Who designed the computer modelling programme? What checks have been done to make sure the results from

the computer modelling process are correct?

The computer models used (there are different ones) have been developed by operational research specialists ORH Ltd. (Operational Research in Health). ORH Ltd. has nearly 20 years' experience in developing and using computer simulation models for the emergency services. It has undertaken 350 studies in the UK and abroad. ORH specialises in modelling systems involving transport and access to improve cost-effectiveness and they have worked with the Authority to develop specific models to optimise response cover and the cover of risk. The initial phases of work with ORH Ltd. included the validation and calibration of the model using five years' incident data. The result of this validation work was that the model was within one per cent of each of the current key response times.

Catastrophic incidents

Will response to major catastrophic incidents be affected?

With support from the government, the Mayor and the London Assembly, the Authority has made substantial investment in recent years to improve response to major emergency or

catastrophic terrorist attack. The number of fire rescue units has been doubled from five to 10, and a range of new equipment and new vehicles are being introduced. This includes capabilities for mass public decontamination, chemical detection and identification equipment, enhanced chemical protection and extended duration breathing apparatus for our crews. More enhancements will be introduced in the coming year.

Shouldn't the fire engines be in central London where the incidents are more likely to happen?

Moving fire engine moves will not hinder our ability to respond to such incidents in central London. Our experience shows this extra capacity is best located in the areas immediately surrounding the parts of London most at risk – rather than actually within those areas. Effective arrangements are in place to ensure that sufficient resources can both be mobilised quickly – and sustained over a protracted period. The Metropolitan Police would take action to make sure that access for emergency vehicles to the site of a major emergency is protected.

Contact details

Safer London is published monthly by London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, which runs the London Fire Brigade and provides other emergency planning and safety services. We welcome feedback and would like to know how useful you find this publication. You can send your comments to:

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