Firefighter is Public Servant of the Year

Alan Middleton, Community Liaison Officer at Avon Fire and Rescue Service, won the prestigious Public Servant of the Year Award in December last year.

The award was for the fire cadets scheme that Alan developed at HMP Ashfield, a young offender institution holding 360 youths, aged between 15 and 18 years old. Alan taught basic firefighting skills, and coordinated sessions about avoiding accidents and drugs education as part of the fire cadets scheme. FRS asked Alan for an update on what had happened in the six months since he won the award. This is Alan’s response.

“It was a great honour for me to be crowned the Guardian Public Servant of the Year 2006. Winning the award has brought credibility to the scheme, and the interest from them has been tremendous. At the present time, 16 young offenders are being trained to demonstrate what can be achieved. They will travel to other prisons and demonstrate practical skills and give personal presentations, along with workshops to all interested parties. This will be the first step in rolling out the scheme nationwide.”

“Future plans for fire cadets include running five-day FireSkills courses inside the prison, and offering pre-release programmes for the young people about to be reintegrated into the community.”

“I will also be looking at piloting a national mentoring scheme. This idea was born when one of the young people taking part in fire cadets was about to be released, and he asked if I could find out if there was a cadet scheme in the area where he lived. It was very pleasing to know that this young person had taken to the scheme and wanted more. This comment also confirmed that fire and rescue service staff are good role models.”

“No reason why, when someone is released from prison, they cannot be put in touch with a firefighter, who will act as a mentor.”

“The current plan is that, a month before a young person is released from prison, a firefighter from that person’s home town will be identified as a possible mentor. The mentor will then come to the prison before the young person is released. This will ensure that when the young person returns home from prison, there will be a firefighter, whom they already know, ready to carry on the mentoring work.”

As Alan explains: “The ultimate goal has to be the rehabilitation of offenders, resulting in fewer young people reoffending, and therefore creating fewer victims.”

Further copies of this newsletter are available from:

frs@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Prepared by COI and published by Communities and Local Government. Printed in the UK, July 2007, on material containing 75% post-consumer waste and 25% ECF pulp. Product code: 09FHS00193/20

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Lincoln’s Incident Response Unit mobilised during July heatwave

Last July, Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) deployed an Incident Response Unit (IRU) to an air show at RAF Waddington. FRS explains how the decontamination facilities on the IRU were used to shower and cool down people suffering from heat stroke at the show.

Air show in Lincolnshire

The air show at RAF Waddington, staged over the weekend of 1-2 July last year, drew audiences of between 25,000 and 30,000 people on both days. High temperatures were predicted for the entire weekend.

Silver Command

The Silver Command structure, established on site for the duration of the weekend show, included personnel from the police, ambulance and fire and rescue services, the RAF, an Emergency Planning Officer and medical advisers.

A Silver Command team meeting at 12.43 on Sunday 2 July discussed the heatwave conditions predicted for that afternoon. Extreme temperatures, reaching 31 degrees Centigrade in the shade, were forecast.

Medical advice

The medical team on site advised that significant numbers of people on the second day of the show were likely to suffer from heat-related health problems, ranging from dehydration to heat stress or heat stroke. Medical teams on site had already dealt with double the expected number of injury and illness referrals on the first day of the air show.

Further medical advice indicated that an early application of a cooling fine water spray could not only halt the deterioration in the health of the casualties, but also reduce further distress and recovery time.

Reviewing the options

Silver Command discussed the best way to treat up to 200 predicted casualties, and the potential impact this would have on the local authority, ambulance service and primary care providers. Following a review of options, the Silver Commander from Lincolnshire FRS proposed using a single IRU mass decontamination appliance. The Watch Manager was the mass decontamination tactical advisor.

Treating the casualties

A doctor, a paramedic and a nurse from the on-site medical team undertook triage, treatment and ongoing monitoring of the casualties. Five FRS personnel assisted the medical team, working within the mass decontamination structure.

A total of 25 casualties were treated for heat-related illnesses during the afternoon. Twenty of these were ambulant casualties (5 children, 10 adults and 5 elderly people), who walked, fully clothed and unaided, through the mass decontamination unit.

At 13.00, an IRU from Lincoln was mobilised to the air show, with a support pumping appliance. The Watch Manager was the mass decontamination tactical advisor.

Mobilising the IRU

At 13.00, an IRU from Lincoln was mobilised to the air show, with a support pumping appliance. The Watch Manager was the mass decontamination tactical advisor.

At 18.00 the air show scaled down. No more casualties were being presented and the IRU returned to its base station.

Incident outcomes

The IRU deployment was successful on several levels. The provision of on-site treatment and care reduced pressure on the external local healthcare providers. By avoiding travel time, it reduced patient trauma and the associated stress involved in the transfer of casualties to local emergency departments. The nearest of these, in Lincoln, was eight miles away.

Successful inter-agency partnership working

The IRU deployment also increased awareness among emergency partners of the mass decontamination capability provided for the FRS by the New Dimension programme. This capability, funded by Communities and Local Government, is designed for use in a chemical, biological or radiological incident.

However, the decontamination equipment can have a valuable additional role outside such incidents. Using the IRU for immediate treatment at the air show halted further deterioration in the health of the casualties. Patient dignity was maintained while fulfilling an urgent humanitarian need.

Welcome to FRS 23

The new ministerial team at the Department for Communities and Local Government was announced at the end of June, as FRS went on to stress. The Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP is the new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. She is supported by John Healey MP, Minister for Local Government, who takes on the Resilience portfolio and will manage the Government’s contribution to recovery from the recent floods, and by Parmjit Dhanda MP, the new Minister for the Fire and Rescue Service.

In this issue, FRS looks at Exercise Winter Willow, which tested the UK’s ability to manage the effects of a major flu pandemic, and Alan Middleton, of Avon FRS, tells us what has happened in the six months since he won the prestigious Public Servant of the Year Award in December.

If you have any initiatives or good news that you would like to share with the whole of the Fire and Rescue Service, please email us at frs@communities.gsi.gov.uk.
Shabana, 26, from Bradford, was used as a case study for the Commission’s report Moving on up? Ethnic minority women and work, published in March.

The report, put together following a survey of employers, highlighted the work opportunities for Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black Caribbean women, their skills, ambitions and the barriers they face.

Shabana visited the Palace of Westminster for the launch of the report, where she discussed her positive experiences of work at the West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, which embraces diversity to the extent that a shalwar kameez and headscarf were introduced as part of her uniform.

Stephen Hesford MP and female Muslim comic Shazia Mirza also attended the event.

Shabana, who is based at Bradford Fire Station, was the first Asian woman to work in community fire safety outreach for the West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Her job now entails carrying out free home fire safety checks and giving fire safety talks to community groups. She is also working on a religious awareness course for the fire and rescue service.

She said: “I first joined to work on a regeneration project in the Leeds Road and Barkerend areas of Bradford, where the majority of families are Asian. They felt more at ease talking to a female Asian officer and it helped us engage more with the community.”

“I was made to feel very welcome when I joined the West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service in 2004. I love the job because it is so different and interesting.”

Maria Tanks, Equalities and Diversity Manager for West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, said: “Equality and diversity are key priorities for us. We are committed to employing a workforce which reflects the diverse community we serve and acknowledge that this will be accompanied by a wide variety of different cultures, religions and beliefs.”

“We worked with Shabana in designing her uniform to meet her religious needs, while still maintaining our corporate image.”

To read the report, visit the Equal Opportunities Commission’s website at www.eoc.org.uk

Community Fire Safety Officer Shabana Kosar has been selected by the Equal Opportunities Commission as a positive role model for Asian women.

Survey of serving and ex-firefighters

Look out for an opportunity to participate in a survey of serving and ex-firefighters.

CLG, with the support of key fire and rescue service stakeholders, has commissioned researchers ICM to ask firefighters – both currently serving and those who have recently left the Service – about their workplace experiences. The findings will help the Service to develop its policies and practical approaches to tackling key workplace issues such as recruitment, retention and career progression.

A questionnaire is going out to a sample of firefighters, inviting them to take part in the survey. The project guarantees confidentiality to all participants – no one who takes part will be identified.

For further information contact Mark Dunn at mark.dunn@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Equality and diversity update

National equality and diversity strategy

Communities and Local Government (CLG) is working with fire and rescue service partners to develop a new national equality and diversity strategy. The strategy will provide a clear vision of what is expected from the fire and rescue service in terms of employment practices, service delivery and community engagement over the ten-year period to 2018.

CLG has been running a series of stakeholder workshops since January to help inform the development of the new strategy, which will go out to consultation in the autumn.

Gender Equality Duty

The Gender Equality Duty came into force on 6 April 2007. As public authorities, all fire and rescue services must demonstrate that they are promoting equality for men and women and eliminating sexual discrimination and harassment. All Gender Equality Duty schemes should have been published by 30 April 2007.

The Duty will be enforced by the Equal Opportunities Commission until October 2007. After that, the race, disability and gender duties will be enforced by a new body, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights.

Equality and Diversity Awards

The former Fire Minister, Angela Smith, presented the awards at the close of the Fire and Rescue 2007 conference at the NEC, Birmingham. The next issue of FRS will have full details of all the Equality and Diversity Award winners.
Firefighters get to the heart of the matter

Firefighters in Tyne and Wear are proving just how big hearted they are as they welcome new automated external defibrillators (AEDs) aboard their fleet of fire engines—a first for a fire and rescue service in the North East. The new defibrillators are small and easily portable and can be used in extreme weather conditions.

The state-of-the-art AEDs are for use when a person suffers a cardiac arrest. A cardiac arrest causes the heart either to quiver—known as fibrillation—or to stop beating altogether. A defibrillator is a special machine that monitors the heart rhythm. It works by delivering a controlled electric shock through the chest wall to the heart to restore a normal heart beat after a cardiac arrest. Seventy per cent of cardiac arrests occur outside hospital and currently in the UK only 2–3% of these people survive. When someone suffers a cardiac arrest, their chances of survival drop by up to 14% with every minute that passes.

“Our firefighters are fully trained to carry out cardopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), which can double a person’s chance of survival, but using a defibrillator can increase the chances of survival by more than a third again,” said John Adamson, Corporate Support Area Manager, Tyne and Wear.

“Having defibrillators on board our fire appliances will provide a lifeline to those people who are suffering a cardiac arrest in an emergency. Often we find ourselves first at the scene of an emergency—and in some cases the shock of being involved in an accident can cause cardiac arrest. Having defibrillators close to hand will help us protect life—and contribute to the modern and effective service we are committed to delivering.”

Katharine Peel, Head of Emergency Life Support at the British Heart Foundation, said: “We welcome this move by the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, as the treatment of this emergency should not be regarded as just a matter for ambulance services, but the responsibility of the whole community. Research shows that early defibrillation, ideally within the first four minutes, can improve chances of survival. It makes absolute sense that firefighters—who might be the first on the scene—should be able to respond properly if circumstances require it. We strongly encourage this as part of an integrated approach with the local ambulance service.”

“A hundred firefighters in Tyne and Wear are now trained in using the new defibrillator. The first opportunity to use it came when a local man had a heart attack in his garden. Our firefighters were able to get there quickly and take the pads on the defibrillator and apply them to the man—within four minutes. The man regained a pulse and was able to walk back to the house.”

Telford firefighter Drew Perkins was on holiday in France when he struck up a conversation with a fellow caravanner at a site near Bordeaux.

“He told me about a new machine which educates the public. It is a touch-button interactive display which I thought we could use in Shropshire for fire safety education,” said Drew, who informed the community fire safety team at Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service in Shrewsbury on his return.

Community Fire Safety Officer Alison Teece took up the challenge to get funding for the AVI interactive kiosk, which resulted in £8,000 sponsorship from the Telford and Wrekin Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership.

“Research shows that early defibrillation can improve chances of survival.”

The kiosk will be launched in Telford as soon as it has undergone initial tests.

Touch-button fire safety

A chance meeting between a firefighter and a businessman on holiday in France has led to the introduction of an innovative fire safety education system for the people of Shropshire.

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“Assessment Development Centres do not assess the skills of an incident commander.”

This is a comment we often hear. Chris Millard, a member of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) project team at the Fire Service College, gives FRS FTS view.

“If we are talking about technical skills, this is true—the best place to assess the technical skills required to command incidents is in the workplace, or sometimes by simulation. It is also vital to assess that people know what they are doing—to ensure that they have the knowledge, skills and understanding which underpin operational competence.”

“But there is much more to commanding an incident than just applying technical skills.”

“Managing a difficult situation—such as a road traffic collision—requires a complex set of skills in dealing with casualties, the public, other agencies, the situation as well as the crew. A person in that situation must be calm and controlled, confident and able to communicate well, make decisions and solve problems quickly and safely.”

“Aside from knowing what to do, how the commander acts will make a difference to the management and outcome of the incident—the Personal Qualities and Attributes (PQAs) or behaviours a person brings to their role.”

“The Assessment Development Centre (ADC) will test, among other things, confidence and resilience, and specifically:

• emotional control • persistence • coping with pressure • handling challenges • overcoming barriers • assertiveness • confidence.

In terms of problem solving, the ADC tests cover:

• validating information • identifying patterns • predicting benefits and problems • adapting previous experience • predicting potential impact • recognising when further information is required • decisiveness • numerical analysis.

The situational awareness tests include:

• safety checking • breadth of awareness • monitoring changing circumstances.

Take a quick look at the rest of the PQAs—these should underpin all of your actions.

To help you further, the Behaviourally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS) will help you to see what effective behaviours you need to develop to perform well in your role.

See the BARS at www.ipds.co.uk