

The Home Office/National Fire Chiefs Council Industrial Action Business Continuity Survey

Background

Fire and Rescue Authorities are required under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the Fire and Rescue National Framework to maintain and test Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) in preparation for industrial action.

The governance for the survey and evaluation of Business Continuity arrangements of English Fire & Rescue Services during Firefighter industrial action is contained within a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Home Office and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). This process is discharged on behalf of NFCC by the Fire & Rescue National Resilience (NR) Team. The MOU was developed to ensure continuity of the monitoring, coordination and reporting process during national industrial action by firefighters when the Chief Fire & Rescue Advisor role was removed following the formation of the NFCC. The MOU has been in place since 2017 and is subject to periodic review.

Within the MOU there is a requirement for the assessment of FRAs BCPs annually and following formal notification or the anticipated likelihood of national strike action as per the arrangements laid out in the Home Office Industrial Action Concept of Operations. NFCC (NR) on behalf of Home Office evaluate FRA's BCPs against a range of criteria.

The outcomes of the survey process are utilised to inform Ministerial submissions in relation to Fire & Rescue Services ability to comply with the requirements Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the Fire and Rescue National Framework to maintain and test Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) in preparation for industrial action.

Current Position

The 2022 Industrial action business continuity survey was opened in August 2022. West Midlands FRS provided their submission and Initial evaluation was concluded in September 2022. West Midlands FRS were asked follow up questions in order to clarify a number of areas of their submission relating to testing and exercising of industrial Action business continuity plans, arrangements to maintain fire control arrangements. We also sought to clarify West Midlands planning assumptions for the number of personnel and fire appliances that would be available during IA.

Additional information was provided in respect of testing and exercising of the IA and Fire Control resilience however no information has been provided about personnel and appliances.

Without the requested clarity and detail in respect of staffing and appliances we are unable to complete the evaluation of the West Midlands plans. Consequently, we have been unable to confirm that West Midlands FRS have arrangements in places to maintain an effective emergency response in the event of firefighter industrial action.

Based on the gaps in the information provided West Midlands FRS arrangements for the provision of fire cover during industrial action are rated Red, High Risk.