



SCOTTISH

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Working together for a safer Scotland

# HIGHLAND AREA

## Local Fire and Rescue Plan Review 2017

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

On 1 April 2013, the 8 legacy Fire and Rescue Services in Scotland and the Scottish Fire Service Training School combined to form The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS). On the creation of the new organisation, the reform of the fire and rescue service in Scotland officially commenced and over the coming months and years the SFRS established itself as a successful national organisation delivering an effective emergency intervention capability but also being a key partner in Community Planning at a local level with the overarching aim to reduce inequalities and deliver positive outcomes for all communities across Scotland through a focus of prevention, protection and safety.

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Framework 2013 was published by the Scottish Government and this provided the strategic direction for the SFRS. The Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 as amended by The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 stated that SFRS had to produce a three year strategic plan which had regard to the Framework document and would set out how the organisation would deliver its statutory functions.

Following the approval of its first strategic plan, SFRS was legislatively required to prepare a Local Fire Plan for each Local Authority area and in 2014, the first Highland Local Fire Plan was published for the period 2014 to 2017.

This plan set out the priorities and objectives for the SFRS with the Highland area including the mechanisms and processes in place to allow the Local Authority to scrutinise the performance outcomes of those priorities. The first Local Fire Plan was required to support the Highland Single Outcome Agreement but at the same time also have regard to the Fire and Rescue Framework and the SFRS Strategic Plan 2013 – 2016.

In 2016, a new Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland was published and the currency of the first SFRS Strategic Plan came to an end. A new three year Strategic Plan for 2016 – 2019 was developed taking account of the new Framework and this new plan was subsequently published in October 2016.

In line with legislative requirements, the introduction of the new SFRS Strategic Plan 2016 – 2019 has triggered a formal review of the current Local Fire Plan for Highland.

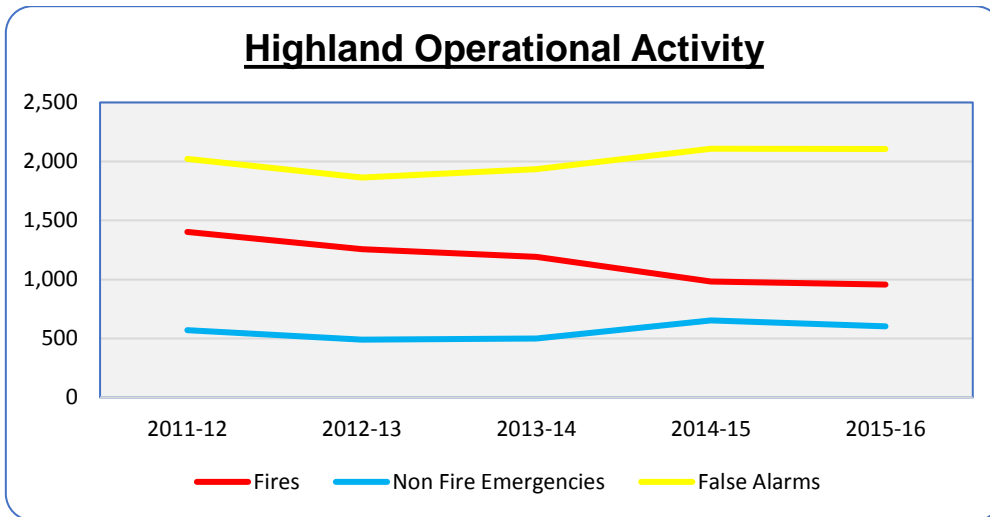
This document will provide a summary of the SFRS performance in Highland over the past 3 years and the life of the current Local Fire Plan in relation to the priorities set, namely:

- Local Risk Management and Preparedness
- Reduction of Accidental Dwelling Fires
- Reduction in Fire Casualties and Fatalities
- Reduction of Deliberate Fire Setting
- Reduction of Fires in Non Domestic Properties
- Reduction in Casualties from Non Fire Emergencies
- Reduction of Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals

## 2. OPERATIONAL ACTIVITY IN HIGHLAND

Over the past five years there has been a total of 18,644 emergency incidents in Highland which is an average of 3728 incidents per year that SFRS resources have responded to.

Overall, the number of incidents attended has reduced by 8.2% over the period, with a marked decrease in the number of fires attended but an increase in the number of Non Fire Emergencies and False Alarms attended.



	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Fires	1,403	1,258	1,192	983	957
Non Fire Emergencies	570	490	501	653	603
False Alarms	2,021	1,864	1,936	2,108	2,105
<b>Total Incidents</b>	<b>3,994</b>	<b>3,612</b>	<b>3,629</b>	<b>3,744</b>	<b>3,665</b>

Diagram 1 – Highland Operational Activity

When comparing 2011/12 with 2015/16, the ratio of fires to incidents reduced by 9% whilst the ratio of Non Fire Emergencies and False Alarms increased by 3% and 6% respectively.

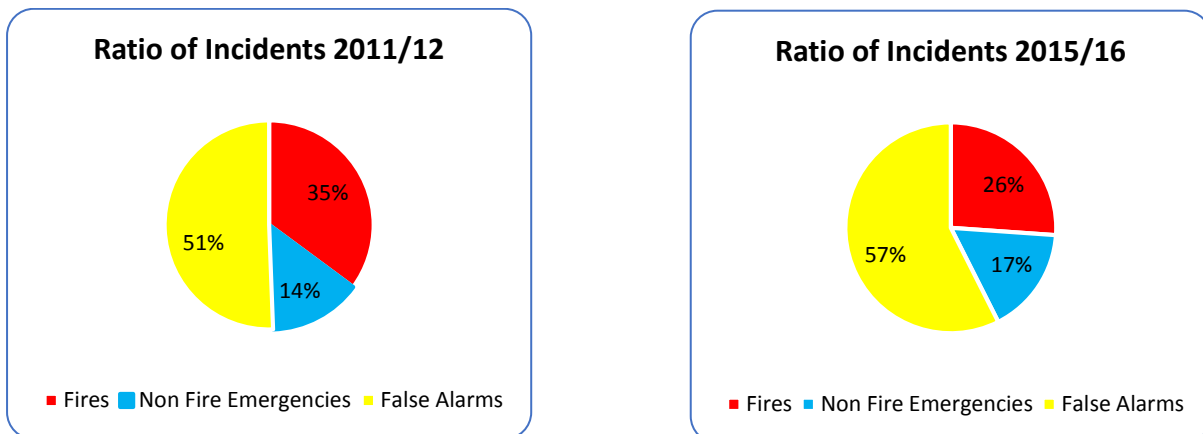


Diagram 2 – Ratio of Incidents

In terms of the priorities identified within the Local Fire Plan and as detailed in the bullet point listed in section 1 above, the Local Senior Officer is scrutinised on the performance against these objectives by the Highland Council Communities and Partnership Committee.

The table below provides an overview of progress within Highland using a 3 year rolling average.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Status
Reduction in Accidental Dwelling Fires	144	161	122	●
Reduction in Fire Casualties	42	38	26	●
Reduction in Fire Fatalities	1	5	5	●
Reduction in Deliberate Fire Setting	219	160	123	●
Reduction of Fires in Non Domestic Premises	87	70	103	●
Reduction of Non Fire Emergency Casualties	183	144	159	●
Reduction of Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals	889	1003	931	●

● Reduction of 10% or more	● Reduction of up to 9%	● No Reduction
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Diagram 3 - Three Year Rolling Average Performance

### 3. REDUCTION OF ACCIDENTAL DWELLING FIRES

Over the past 5 years in Highland from 2011/12 to 2015/16, there have been a total of 690 accidental dwelling fires which is an average of 138 per year, with a peak of 161 in 2014/15 and a low of 122 in 2015/16. The last year has seen a decrease of 25% on the previous year and over the 5 year period there has been a decrease of 11% which exceeds the Scottish Government target of reducing the number of Accidental Dwelling Fires by 10%.

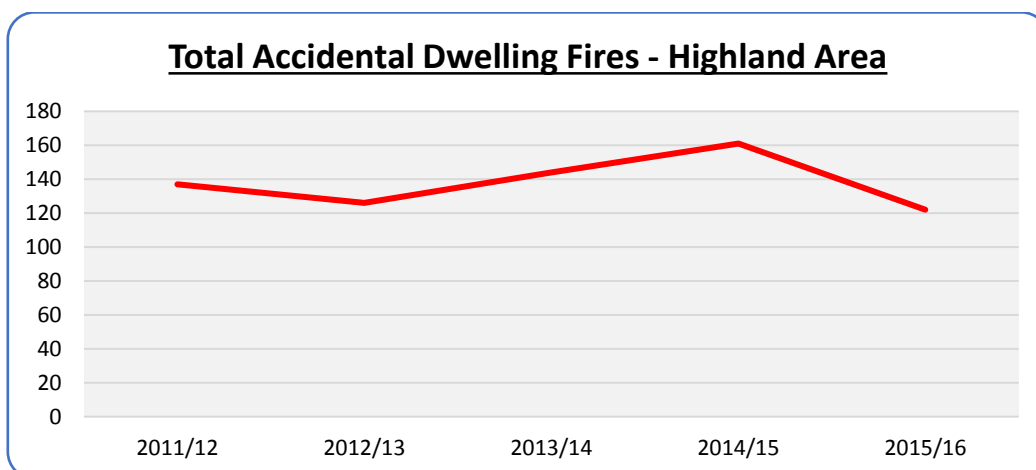


Diagram 4 – Total Accidental Dwelling Fires by Year in Highland

Further analysis of the data identifies that 50% of accidental dwelling fires started in the kitchen due to cooking activities, with the next most common room being the living room at 14.9% followed by the bedroom at 9.1%.

The graph in diagram 5 below identifies that the highest number of accidental dwelling fires occur at the traditional meal times of lunch time (1300 to 1400) and tea time (1700 to 1800) with an increase immediately before and a decline immediately after. This absolutely aligns to cooking being the greatest risk activity in terms of cause of fire.

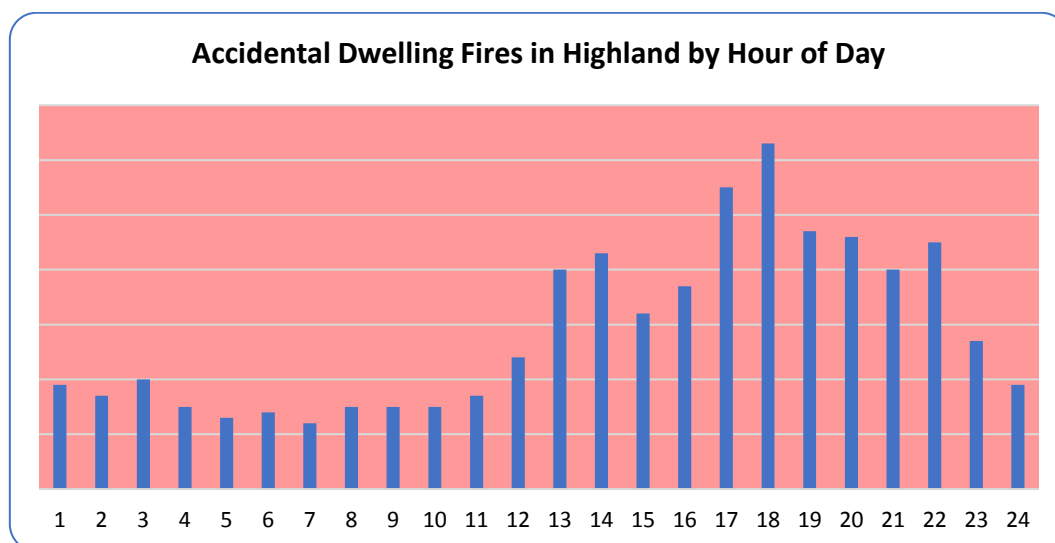


Diagram 5 – Accidental Dwelling Fires in Highland by Hour of Day

The damage to properties resulting from fire has become less over the previous five years with almost three quarters of fires at 73.3% only resulting in damage up to 5m<sup>2</sup> and 27.4% resulting in no damage at all. The graph in Diagram 6 below clearly shows a decline in the number of fires with greater damage and an increase in the number of fires in the no damage category.

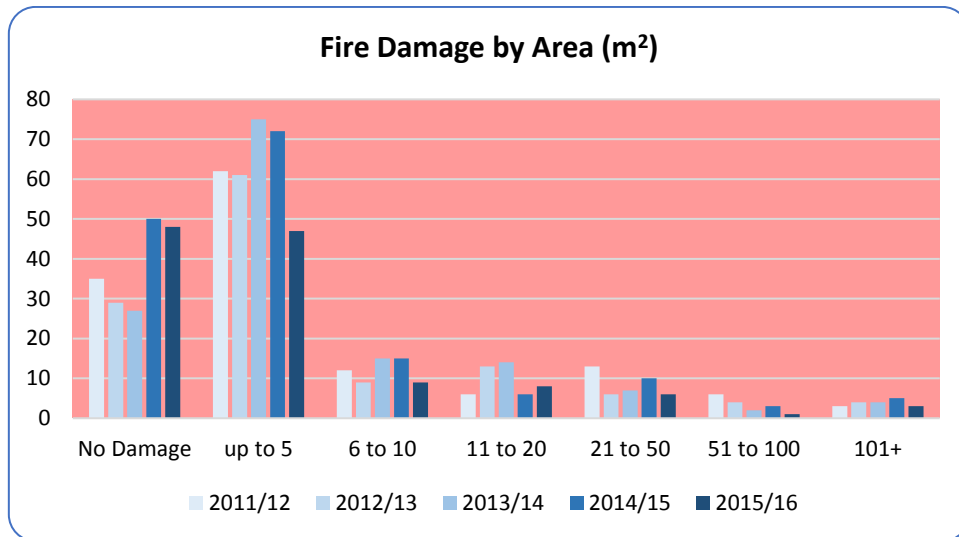


Diagram 6 – Accidental Dwelling Fire Damage in Highland by Area in m<sup>2</sup>

The reduction in damage to domestic properties as a result of fire is due to the fact that more homes than ever are fitted with smoke detectors as well as the occupants having a greater awareness of what to do in the case of fire. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has promoted the delivery of free Home Fire Safety Visits where specific safety advice and guidance is provided to the occupier(s), including where necessary the fitting of free smoke detectors.

The early detection and subsequent early notification of the incident to the fire and rescue service allows for a rapid intervention before the fire can take hold and consequently the damage resulting from the fire is decreased.

For the reporting period and across all 32 Local authority areas in Scotland, Highland has the second lowest incidence of Accidental Dwelling fires per 10,000 head of population.

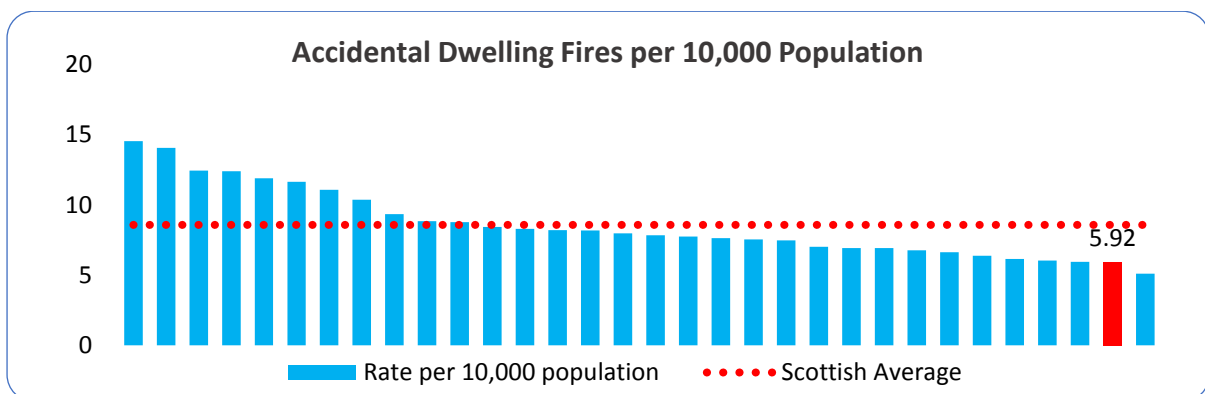


Diagram 7 – Accidental Dwelling Fires per 10,000 population

#### 4. REDUCTION IN FIRE CASUALTIES AND FIRE FATALITIES

Over the past 5 years in Highland there have been a total of 176 fire casualties and 14 fire fatalities. The chart below provides an overview of the data and it can be seen that there has been a significant decline in casualties and a slight increase in fatalities. Over the last reporting year the number of fatalities has remained static and the number of casualties has reduced by 31.6%.

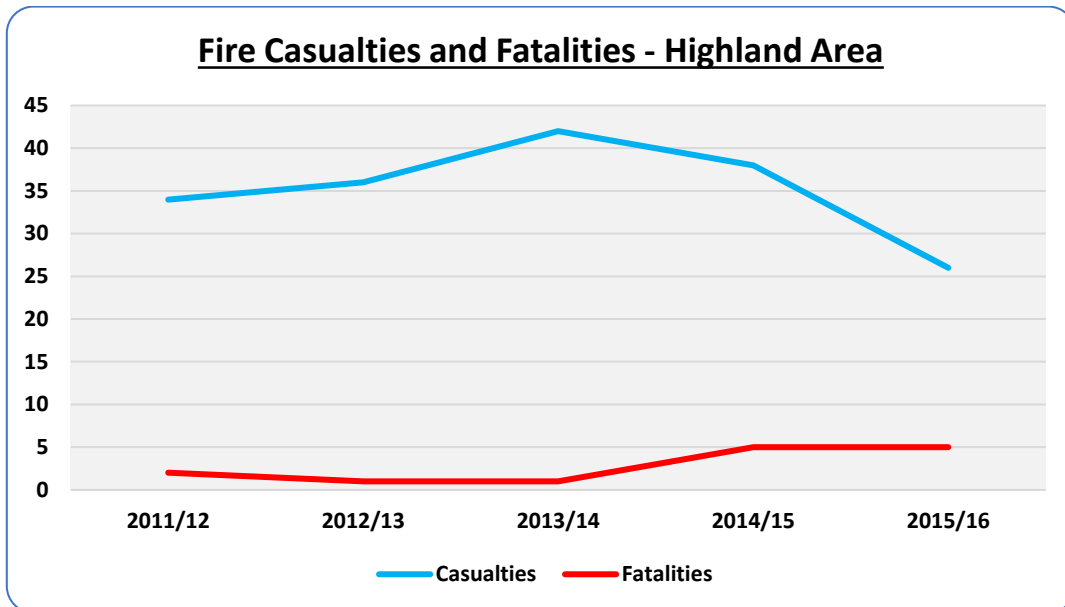


Diagram 8 – Fire Casualties and Fatalities in Highland

Of the recorded fire casualties and fatalities, 83% of fire casualties and 93% of fire fatalities were as a result of fires within domestic premises. Additional analysis identifies that over the 5 year reporting period, the majority of casualties were within the 50 to 59 and to 60 to 69 years age brackets with fatalities more common in the age brackets of 60 and upwards and this is in line with the national statistic that persons of pensionable age and above are more likely to lose their life as a result of a fire within their home.

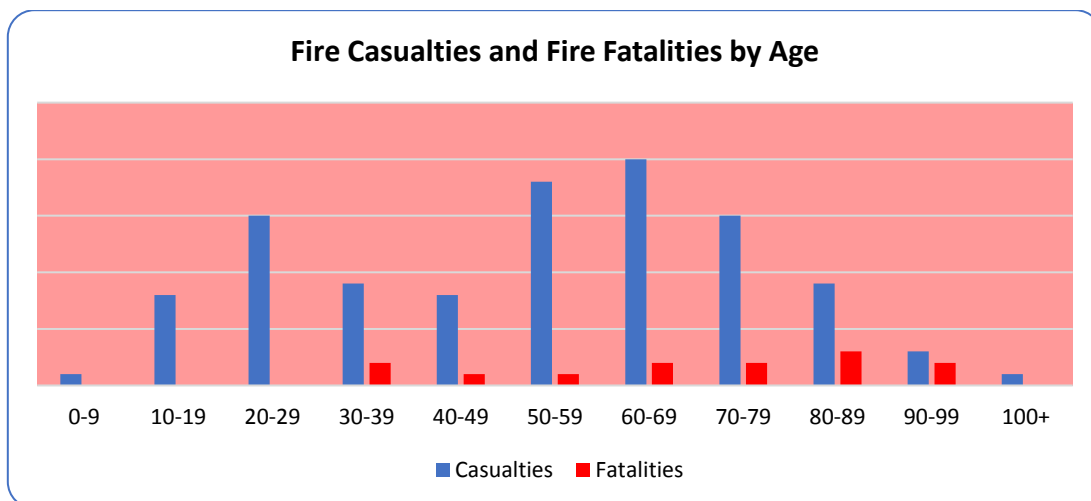


Diagram 9 – Fire Casualties and Fire Fatalities by Age



In terms of gender, there is almost an equal split with males accounting for 52.5% of fire casualties and 58% of fatalities. Of those categorised as a casualty, the majority required only first aid on scene (51.2%) or a visit to hospital with suspected minor injuries (42.4%). Only 6.4% of casualties required hospitalisation with suspected serious injuries.

This information suggests that the delivery of Home Fire Safety Visits resulting in improved early detection of a fire in the home combined with a knowledge of what to do when a fire is discovered, allows the occupants to escape before the fire takes hold. The number of casualties is reducing as is the severity of the injuries.

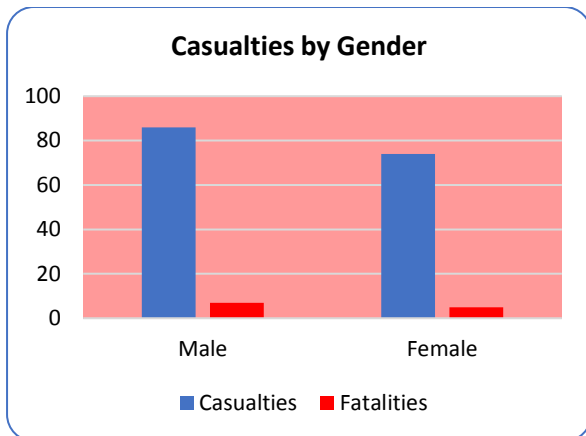


Diagram 10 – Casualties by Gender

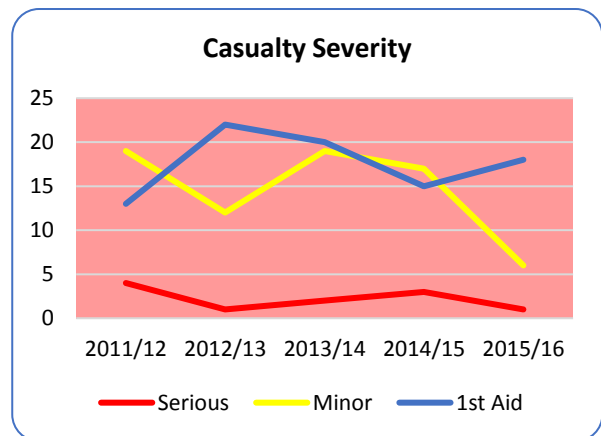


Diagram 11 – Extent of Injury

In terms of the national averages for fire casualties, the figure for Highland sits slightly above mid table at position 11 out of 32 when compared to all the Local Authorities within Scotland.

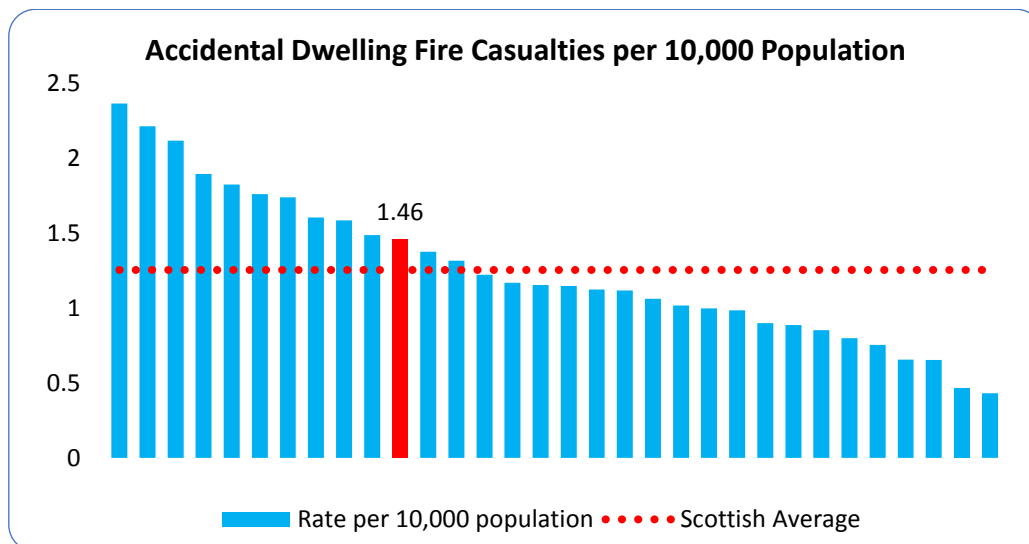


Diagram 12 – Accidental Dwelling Fire Casualties per 10,000 population



## 5. REDUCTION IN DELIBERATE FIRE SETTING

Within the Highland area the greatest number of deliberate fires is within the non refuse category which unsurprisingly includes wildfires. The primary category relates to any insurable property such as buildings and vehicles, whilst the refuse category is self explanatory.

In 2013/14 the number of deliberate fires in Highland peaked at 219 due primarily to a very busy wildfire season through April and May. Since then, the number of deliberate fires in Highland has reduced by 43.8%. This reduction has been delivered through focussed prevention activities and the application of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Seasonal Safety Calendar where known risks and themes are targeted at specific times of the year when they are most prevalent.

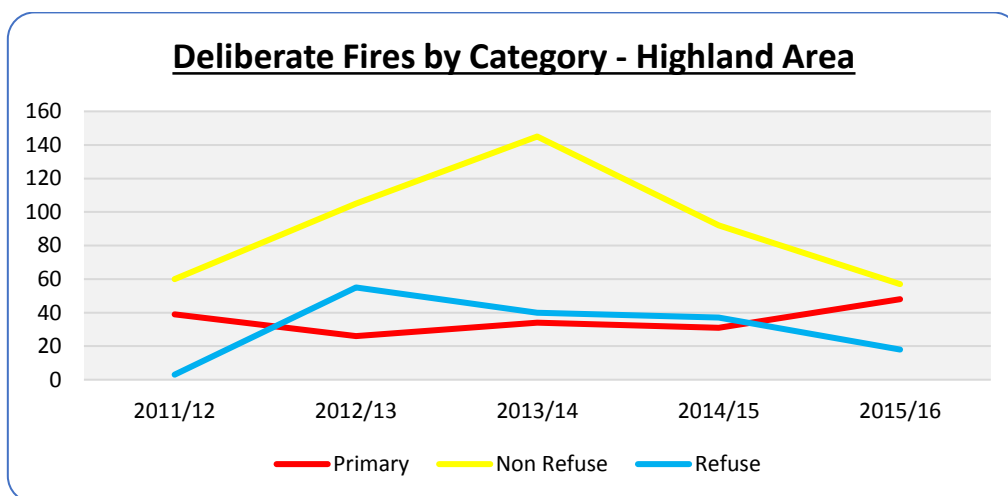


Diagram 14 – Deliberate Fires by Category

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service also works closely with land owners and land managers through the Scottish Wildfire Forum to provide advice and guidance during the muirburn season. The benefits of this prevention activity combined with the responsible and diligent approach adopted by persons working the land has seen a significant decrease in the number of wildfires as can be seen in diagram 14 above.

The detail in diagram 15 below, demonstrates that over the 5 year period the activity in relation to primary deliberate fires remains reasonably static with only a slight increase over the summer months.

In contrast, the secondary deliberate fires see a very definite spike in activity in March, April and May which coincides with the wildfire season before tailing off before another spike in the late autumn which coincides with the lead up to and during bonfire night where traditionally the Fire and Rescue Service has its busiest period of the year. These patterns are common year on year and this helps to inform the prevention activities and partnership working undertaken at a local level with the overall objective of reducing the number of incidents.

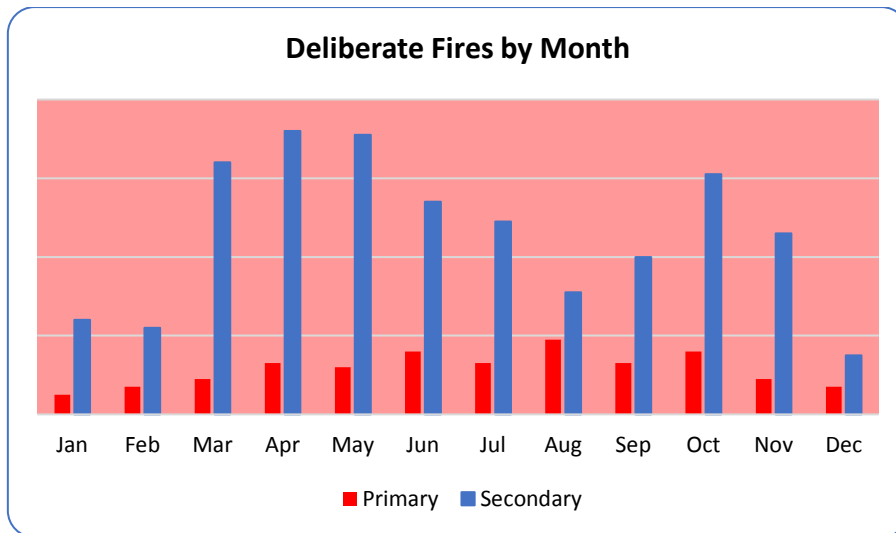


Diagram 15 – Deliberate Fires by Month

In terms of the national averages and when compared to all 32 Local Authorities in Scotland, Highland sits well below the national average in both the deliberate and non deliberate non refuse categories as detailed in diagrams 16 and 17.

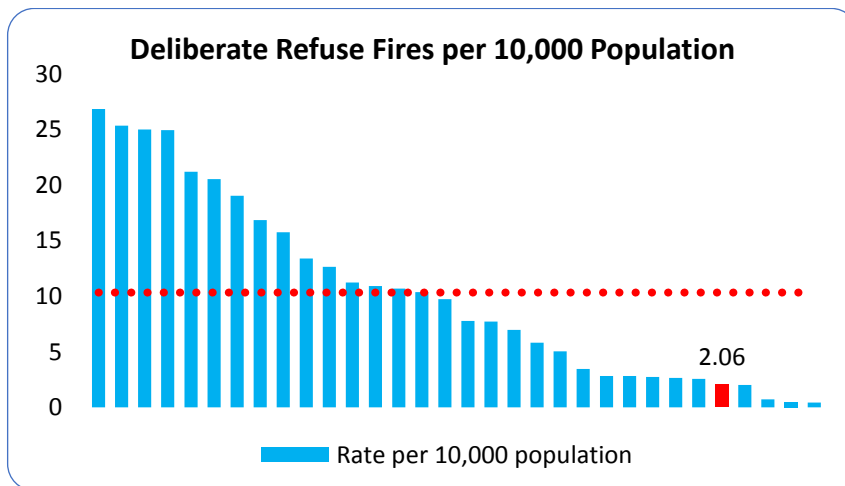


Diagram 16 – Deliberate Refuse Fires by 10,000 population

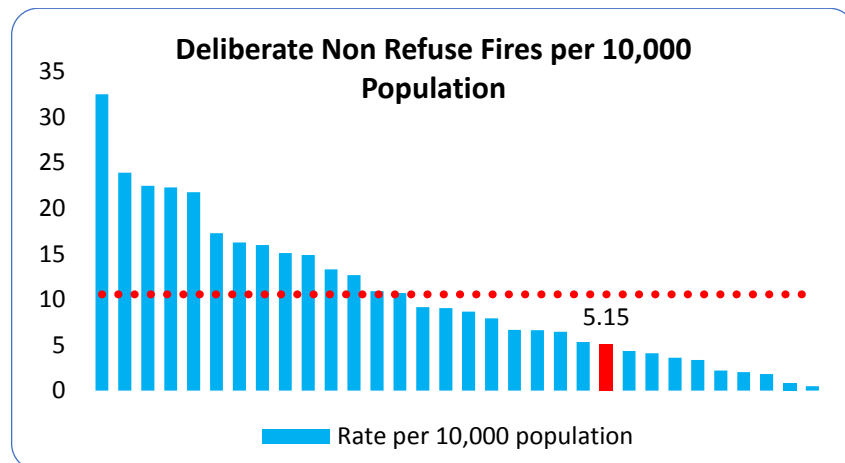


Diagram 17 – Deliberate Non Refuse Fire by 10,000 Population

## 6. REDUCTION IN FIRES IN NON DOMESTIC PROPERTIES

Within Highland over the last 5 years, the number of fires in non domestic premises has remained reasonably static with a low of 70 in 2014/15 and a high of 103 in 2015/16. Over the 5 year period the overall increase was 17%.

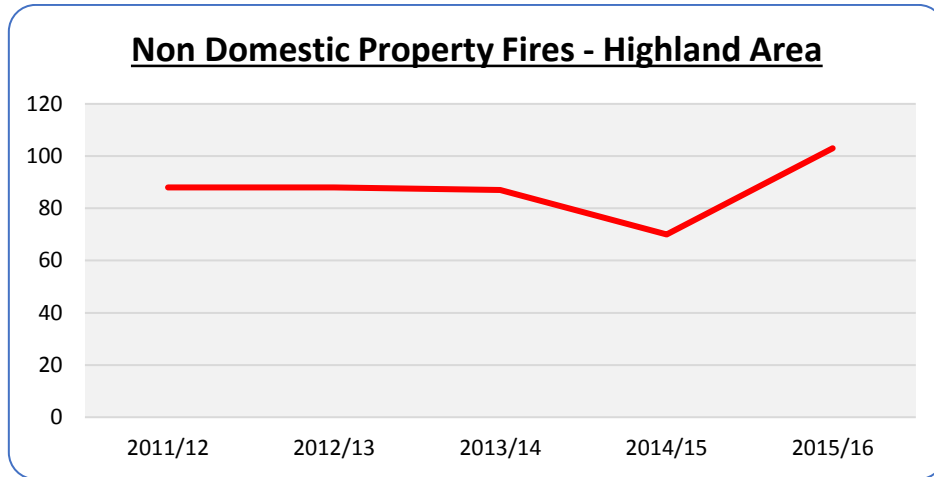


Diagram 18 – Non Domestic Property Fires – Highland Area

Non domestic fires accounted for 2.3% of the total incidents and 7.5% of the fires attended by SFRS within the Highland area over the reporting period. Of those fires, the majority at 86.5% were recorded as accidental with 13.5% recorded as deliberate. The rate of deliberate fires although low has remained relatively constant and on a downward trend. Over the first 4 years the accidental fires were on a general downward trend but in the last reporting year there has been an increase.

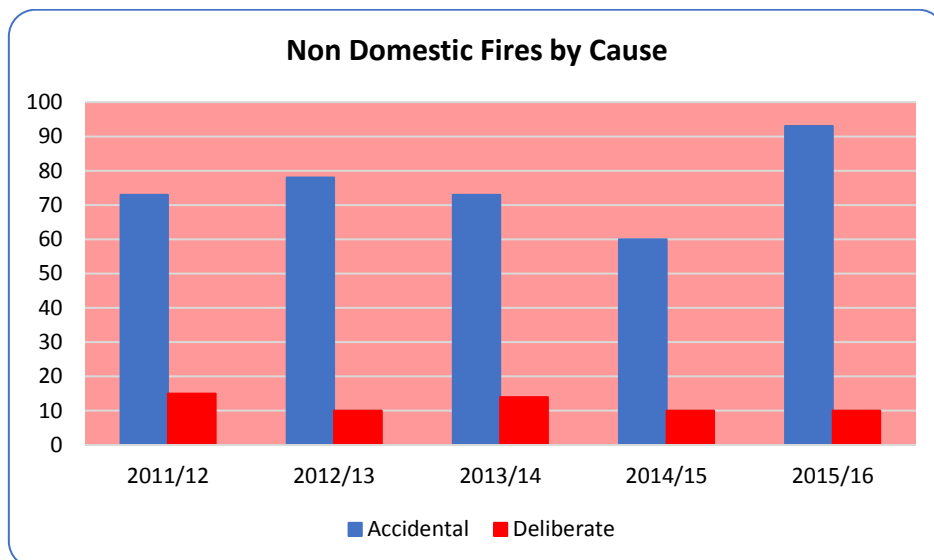


Diagram 19 – Non Domestic Fires by Cause

Of the reported non domestic fires, 78.4% of them involved a premises associated with the business or service sectors. Fires within these types of premises can have a significant impact on local economies, particularly where production or the provision

of services is disrupted or even halted with the consequential impact on employment and supply of raw materials.

Business and service sector premises normally come within the scope of Part 3 of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 as amended and are classed as 'Relevant Premises'. Relevant premises are subject to routine Fire Safety Enforcement Audits to ensure compliance with the law and in line with the SFRS Fire Safety Enforcement Strategy.

Within, Highland, the rate of Non Domestic Fires per 10,000 population is below the Scottish Average and Highland is placed 19 out of 32 (with 1 being the poorest and 32 the best) when compared to the other local authorities in Scotland.

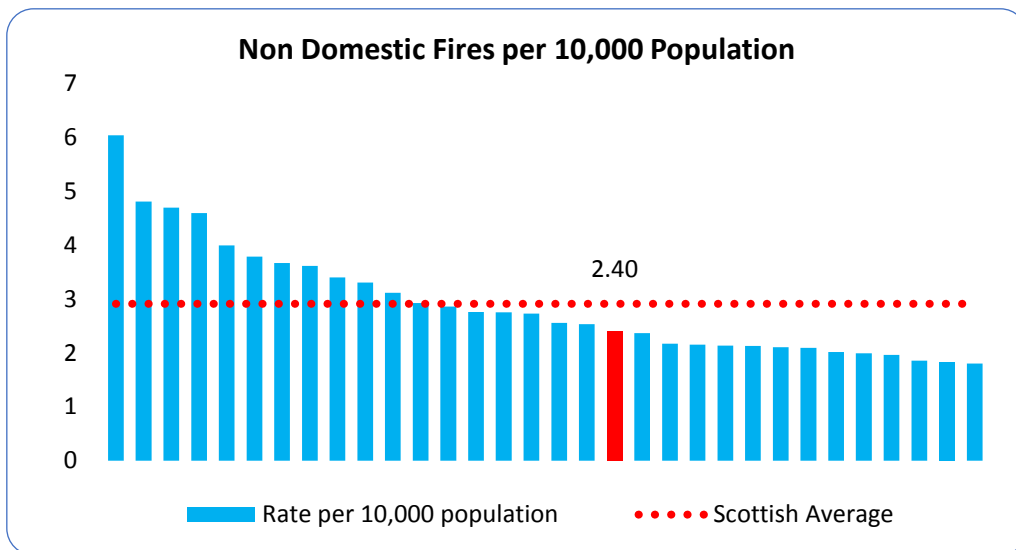


Diagram 20 – Non Domestic Fires per 10,000 Population

## 7. REDUCTION OF CASUALTIES IN NON FIRE EMERGENCIES

Non Fire Emergencies (NFE) or Special Service incidents formed 15.1% of the operational responses within Highland over the 5 year period. The number of fatalities in this category has remained relatively static however the number of casualties increased over the first 2 years and reduced over the next 3 years. As the averages are calculated over a 3 year rolling average this indicator is considered green.

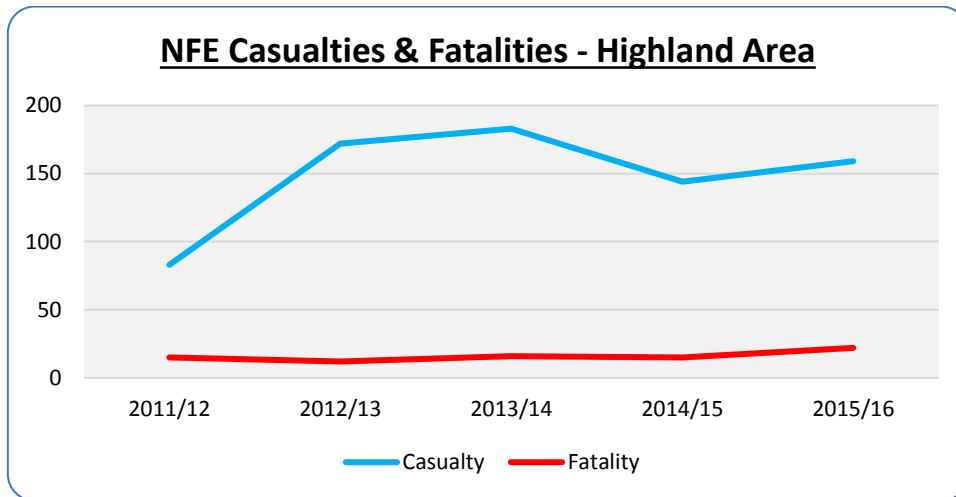


Diagram 21 – Highland Area Non Fire Emergency Casualties and Fatalities

The type of incidents within the NFE category that SFRS attends is changing when compared to the previously more traditional incidents. For example, more commonly, the service is being called upon to assist the Scottish Ambulance Service to gain entry to premises and/or to assist with the lifting and moving of patients. With the increase in activity of this type combined with the overall general increase in NFE incidents and by the very nature of the work, the number of casualties responded to increases.

NFE incidents can take many forms ranging from flooding response, forcing entry, chemical incidents, rescue of persons from machinery or height, animal rescue and many more, however still by far the most common incident type within the NFE category is Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs), which accounted for 36.7% of all NFEs attended by SFRS personnel across Highland. Of all NFE incidents in Highland 85% of casualties and 80% of fatalities are as a result of RTCs.

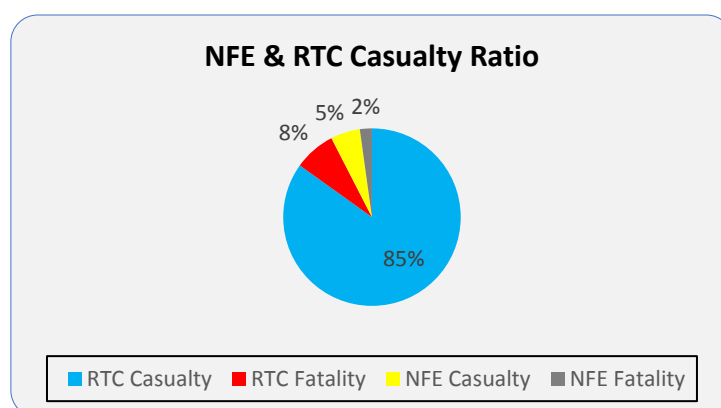


Diagram 22 – NFE & RTC Casualty Ratio

When considering averages per 10,000 population, Highland sits above the national average for the number of NFE incidents, NFE casualties and NFE fatalities.

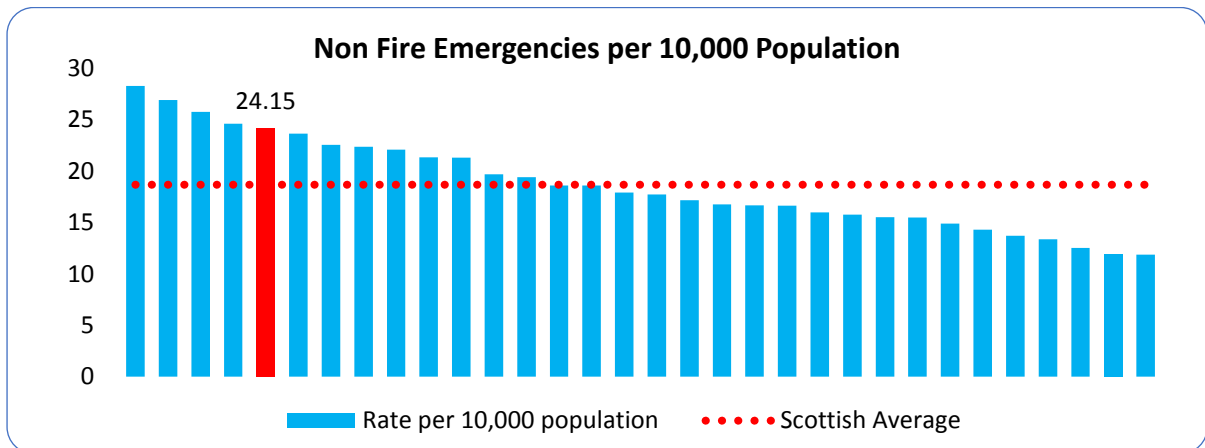


Diagram 23 – Non Fire Emergency Incidents per 10,000 Population

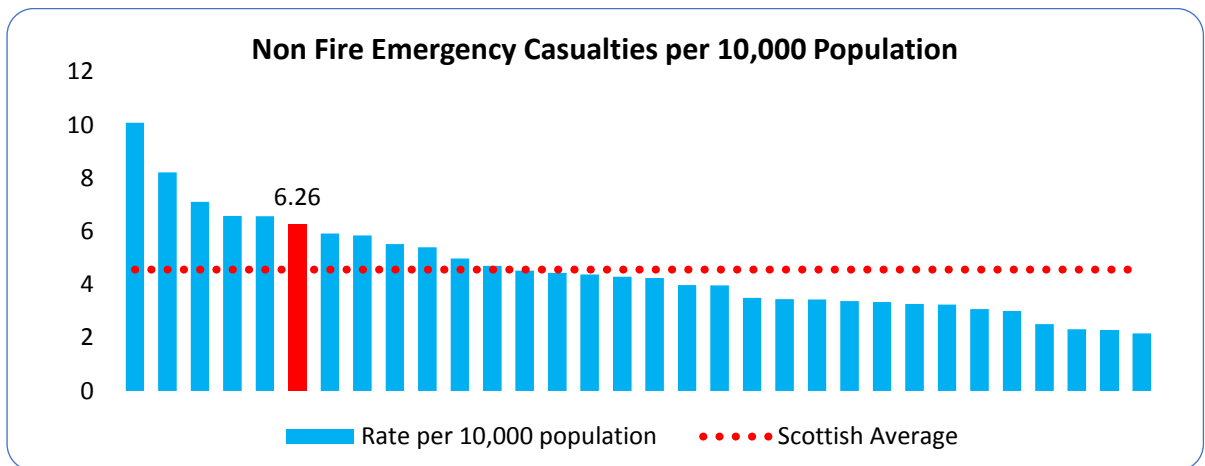


Diagram 24 – Non Fire Emergency Casualties per 10,000 Population

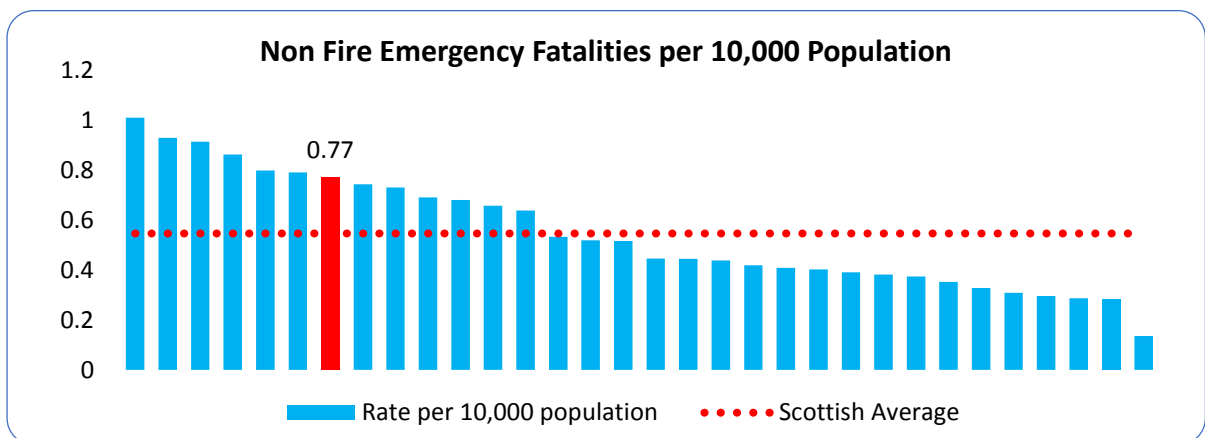


Diagram 25 – Non Fire Emergency Fatalities per 10,000 Population



## 8. REDUCTION OF UNWANTED FIRE ALARM SIGNALS

Over the 5 year reporting period, within Highland there have been a total of 10034 false alarms attended by SFRS which equates to 53.8% of all incidents. Of all false alarms, the majority at 45.9% have been Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals (UFAS). A UFAS incident 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'***.

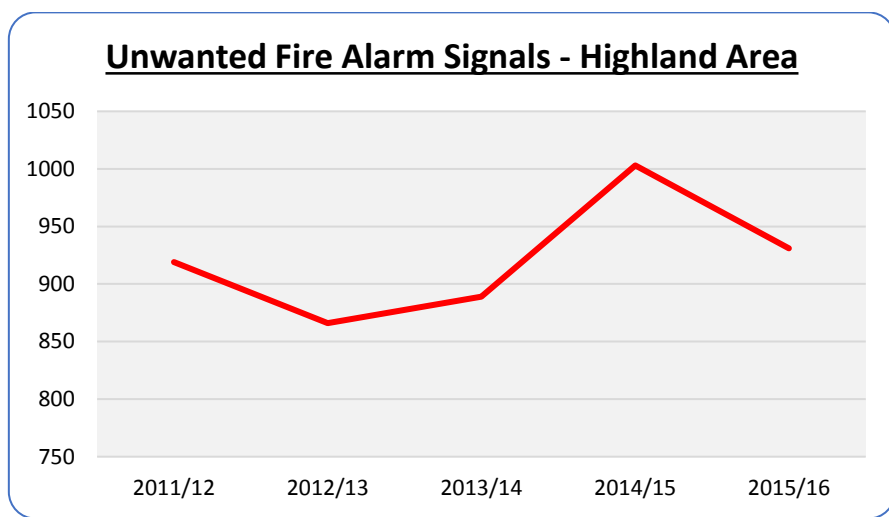


Diagram 26 – Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals in Highland Area

The number of UFAS incidents in Highland has fluctuated over the reporting period with a low of 866 in 2012/13 and high of 1003 in 2014/15. There has been an overall increase over the 5 years of 1.3%, however the last reporting year saw a 7.7% decrease in reported incidents.

Further analysis of the data identifies that the majority of UFAS incidents (71.4%) occur between the hours of 0700 and 1900 which is the times when most buildings are occupied and thereby confirms that it is predominantly the actions or indeed the inactions of humans that are the greatest cause of UFAS incidents in Highland.

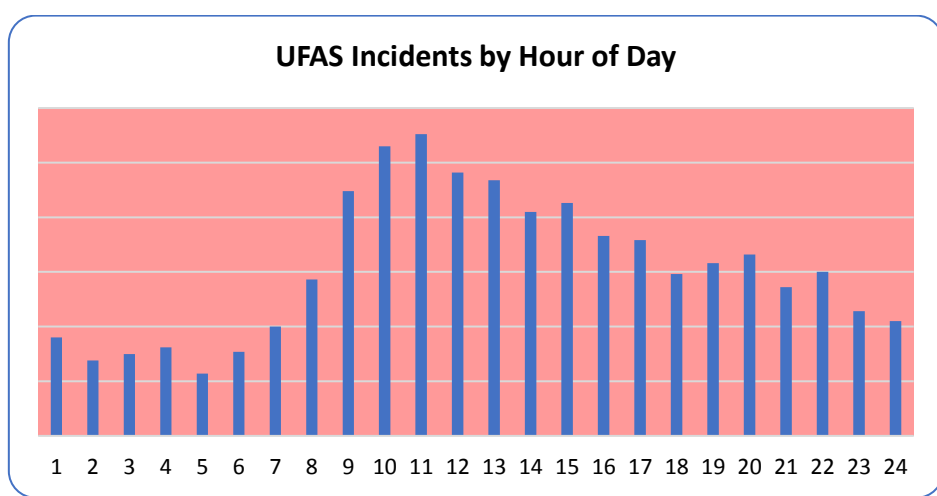


Diagram 27 – UFAS Incidents in Highland by Hour of Day

When the direct cause of each UFAS incident is examined, the most common causes of alarm activations are faulty systems (38%), accidental, careless or testing alarms (24%), ingress of contaminants (20%) and cooking (14%). The causes are broken down further within diagram 28 below.

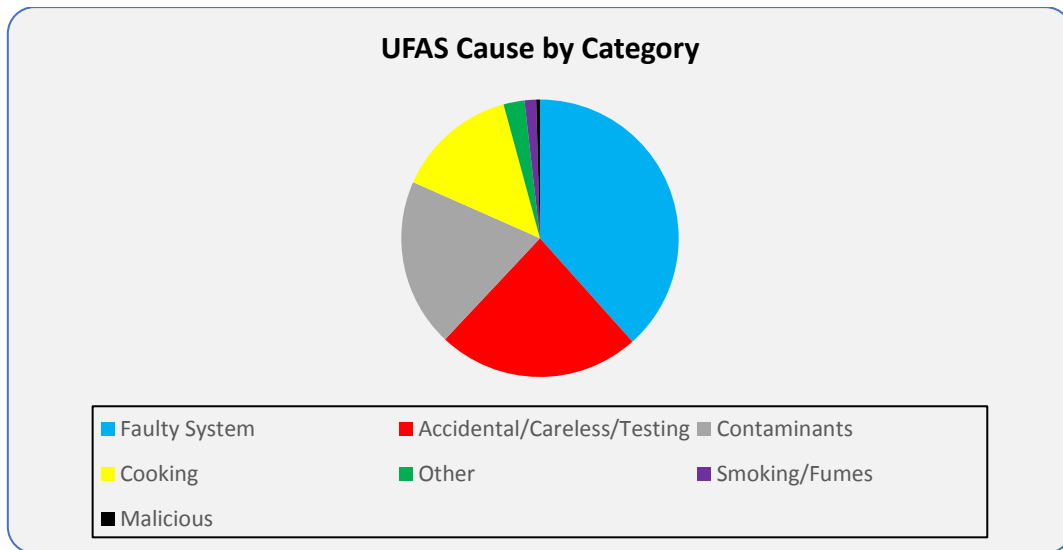


Diagram 28 – UFAS Cause by Category

Diagram 29 below provides an overview of the top 15 property types for UFAS incidents in Highland for 2015/16.

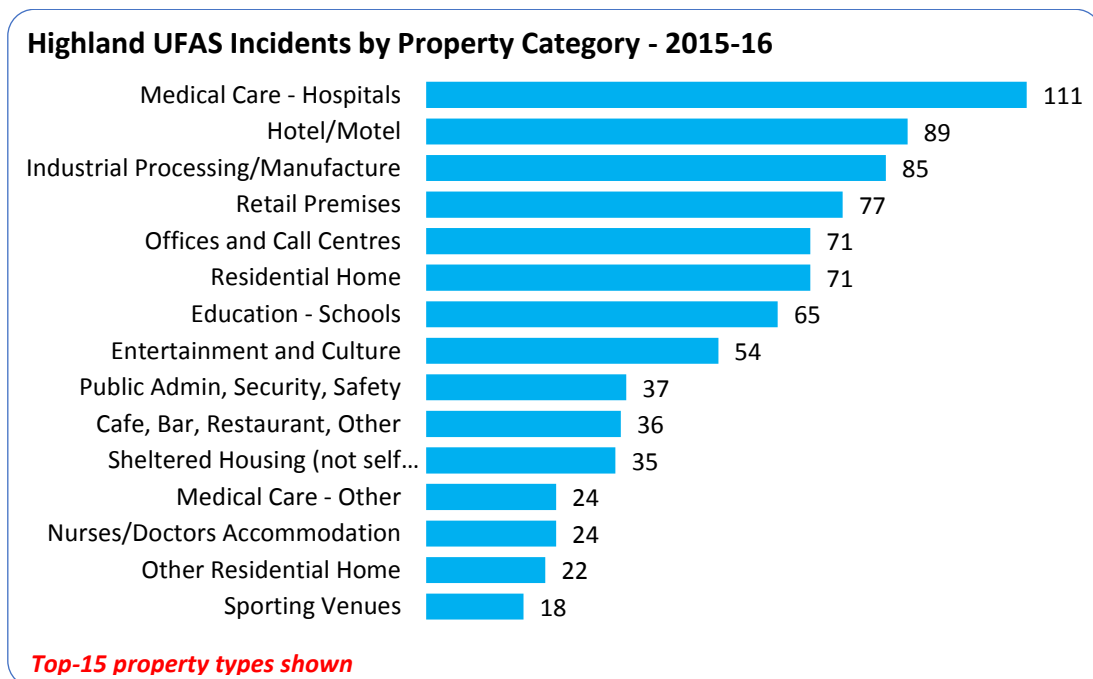


Diagram 29 – Top 15 Property Types for UFAS Incidents (Highland) 2015/16

When comparing Highland with the other 31 local authorities in Scotland, with regards the number of UFAS incidents per 10,000 population, the Highland area sits below the national average and at point 23 out of 32

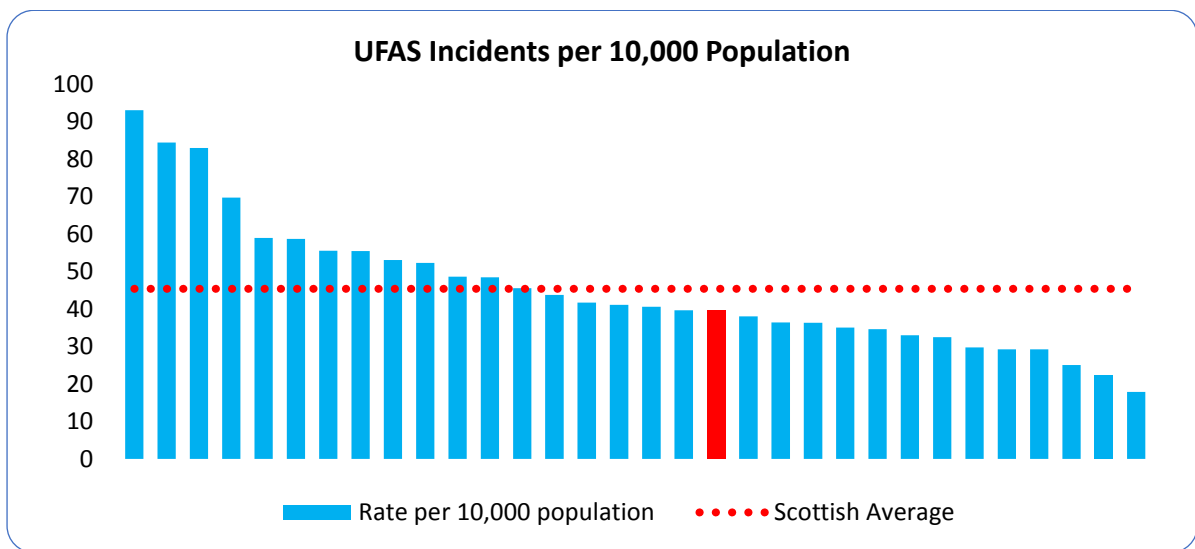


Diagram 30 – UFAS Incidents per 10,000 Population

## **9. ENGAGEMENT – WHAT OUR STAKEHOLDERS TOLD US**

As part of the review of the Local Fire Plan, as well considering the data available via SFRS systems, it was also important to consider what our stakeholders wanted to tell us.

The SFRS developed a consultation process called 'My Citizen Space' which could be accessed in hard copy or electronically and where anyone could leave comments against 5 main headings, namely:

1. What are our key strengths?
2. How well are we performing locally?
3. What matters most to our communities?
4. What are our challenges and opportunities?
5. What can we do to improve locally and nationally?

The link to the online feedback was shared with all Community Planning partners, all Community Councils and all Highland based voluntary agencies through the Highland Third Sector Interface. In addition the link was promoted through the SFRS website as well as local and national social media feeds.

The response within Highland was excellent with 45 of the 205 or 22% of responses received relating to the Highland area.

In addition to the 'My Citizen Space' feedback, local managers have also been engaging with their communities with a multi agency approach. In order to gain a better understanding of the needs of the communities served, Community Planning Partners in Highland decided to have a series of roadshows to assist with developing the Highland Local Outcome Improvement Plan, where people could attend and provide feedback on what their communities needed. SFRS elected to use this opportunity to also seek feedback on the Local Fire Plan and use the information gained to inform the next Local Fire Plan. A series of 9 events were planned across Highland and at the time of writing of this review, 4 of those events have taken place at Wick, Portree, Fort William and Aviemore. Further events are planned for Alness, Dornoch, Nairn and Inverness (x2) which will be completed by the end of May 2017.

The text below provides a summary of the information received.

### **What Are We Doing Well?**

#### **Local Stations**

Within the local communities the firefighters are viewed as being resilient, committed, dedicated and adaptable. The local teams are well respected and continue to engage well with the communities and partners, carrying out the prevention role to a high standard.

## Operational Response

The units attend incidents within acceptable timescales with good knowledge of local area and the associated risks. Highly trained team players, the crews respond to all incident types in a professional, safety conscious and considered manner.

### **What can we do better?**

Improving response times, recruitment and levels of training in the Retained Duty System and Community Response Units attracted the most comments in this section.

Retaining existing personnel in local stations was also a concern.

Many stakeholders recognised the financial challenges the service faced and the sharing of facilities to reduce costs was suggested to decrease overheads.

Respondents stressed their concerns at the perceived centralisation of services, with most comments relating to the relocation of Operations Control to Dundee.

A number of stakeholders requested a more local Fire Service which is transparent, accessible and accountable.

### **What can we do in a different way?**

Looking at alternative crewing options/levels and relocation of full time operational staff to existing RDS stations were options offered for consideration.

Improving community safety with comments relating to empowering and developing knowledge of vulnerable persons within communities. This improvement could come from improving partner information sharing, raising community awareness and increasing targeted Fire Safety input to vulnerable groups etc.

A single telephone number to raise concerns about community members, regardless of nature of anxiety, was suggested frequently.

## 10. ENGAGEMENT – WHAT THE INSPECTORATE TOLD US

To support this formal review the outcomes from Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate's (HMFSI) Local Area Inspections that examine the development and delivery of Local Fire and Rescue Plans, have also been considered.

By undertaking inspections of our service delivery within local authority areas, HMFSI can provide independent assurance to Scottish Ministers and the public that adequate provision for local service delivery is being made, there is equal access to specialist resources, service provision and partnership working is of sound quality and strong scrutiny arrangements are in place. This allows them to maintain a good awareness of how well we are functioning and build intelligence to inform future inspections.

By the end of the period 2016/17 it is planned that SFRS service provision will have been examined in nine local authority areas. These areas were Aberdeen City, East Renfrewshire, Western Isles, West Lothian, Dundee, South Ayrshire, Scottish Borders, Moray and Glasgow City. Once prepared, these inspection reports are published by HMFSI on their [website](#).

On examining the published Local Area Inspection Reports, we noted that HMFSI generally felt there was a need to identify unique characteristics for each local area and provide clearer use of risk-based evidence to identify and shape priorities across our Local Plans. They would also like to see a stronger emphasis made on specific local priorities and contribution supported by appropriate level of local performance measures. Local priorities and measures should be balanced against our national needs as well as aligned to the collaborative partnership working requirements of Local Outcome Improvement Plan delivery.

It should be noted that the Highland area will be subject to an inspection by HMFSI over the summer of 2017. The anticipated timeline for the inspection is commencement in May and completion in August with the publication of the report to follow afterwards.

## 11. CONCLUSIONS

Over the past 5 years, the overall operational demand on SFRS across Highland has reduced. There has been a decline in the number of fire incidents, however the number of Non Fire Emergencies and False Alarms have increased.

SFRS staff based in Highland have succeeded in delivering a reduction in incidents across the Accidental Dwelling Fires, Fire Casualty, Deliberate Fires and Non Fire Emergency Casualties categories in line with the objectives of the Local Fire and Rescue Plan for Highland 2014 – 2017. These reductions are encouraging to note and it is essential that the focus that has delivered this success is maintained to ensure the continued and ongoing safety of our communities.

Unfortunately, the Fire Fatality and Non Domestic Fires categories have seen an increase in incidents and the only successful way to reduce these figures is to actually prevent the incidents occurring in the first place. This will require an approach based on prevention, education and in the case of the Non Domestic Fires it may also be an enforcement approach where necessary.

There is a clear pattern in the circumstances of those that tragically lost their lives as a result of fire and it is essential that SFRS and all partners must learn from this. We need to further develop information sharing processes to allow the most vulnerable in our communities to be identified and to offer appropriate intervention and prevention activities not just from a fire safety perspective but from one of collective community safety.

With regards to reducing Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals, this has been cyclical with decreases one year followed by increases another, however over the 5 year period the activity has remained relatively static. UFAS incidents accounted for more than half of the operational activity of the firefighters and fire appliances across Highland and this places a significant strain on the organisation not just from a financial perspective but also from the perspective of maintaining operational resilience.

In 2004, the Department for Communities and Local Government estimated that the average cost of every UFAS incident was £1,970. Over the 5 year reporting period there were 4608 UFAS incidents in the Highland area which equates to a demand on the public purse in the region of £9,077,760. The significant financial savings that can be made if these incidents are reduced is clearly evident, not to mention the reduction of risk from fewer blue light journeys and a reinvestment of the firefighters time to undertake meaningful work such as training or community safety activities.

In summary, there have been many successes in reducing operational interventions, however it is essential that we do not become complacent and we must continually seek to reduce operational demand through an approach of **prevention** and **partnership** which will ultimately deliver safer and more resilient communities.

## **12. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Taking account of the data presented within this review combined with the comments and suggestions from the communities we serve, it is recommended that the following priorities are included within the new Local Fire and Rescue Plan for Highland 2017-2020.

Priority 1 – Domestic Fire Safety and Unintentional Harm

Priority 2 – Non Fire Emergencies

Priority 3 – Deliberate Fire Setting

Priority 4 – Non Domestic Fire Safety

Priority 5 – Unwanted Fire Alarm Signals

Priority 6 – Operational Resilience and Preparedness