

Submission – Covid-19 Response Review – Education and Home Affairs Panel
Fire and Rescue Service Association
13th May 2020

Further to the invitation from the Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel to provide comment on the COVID-19 response, please find some observations on our part.

While the remit of the Fire & Rescue Service Association (FRSA) is concerned with terms & conditions of service for its members, we are happy to offer comment on aspects that we have been party to. Early into the pandemic situation the FRSA made clear to the Chief Fire Officer that we would be willing to support the Island's response by operating outside of normal terms and conditions where required. This will enable the Minister and Chief Fire Officer to enact necessary powers should the crisis worsen. As yet, with the slow creep of the virus among the population, the envisaged additional workloads have not yet materialised but may do so in time.

The operational response of the Service to ensure business continuity and resilience for what is a relatively small Fire & Rescue Service, was quick to be implemented and recognised the need for the core business of emergency response would not suffer amid the pandemic. The use of Western Fire Station, normally served only by retained (on-call) staff, has proved essential to wholetime staff in maintaining day-to-day resilience.

An area however, that may warrant further inspection is the process of the Nightingale Hospital's inception. It is our understanding that the Service was not involved in the initial stages of planning for a building that would ultimately fall under Fire Precautions (Jersey) Law 1977 and for which it would require certification. The National Fire Chiefs Council recommend that such involvement with the local Fire & Rescue Service takes place at the earliest opportunity as key to reaching agreement on fire safety issues. It is then quite likely that the Fire Risk Assessment may have different measures in place to ensure patient fire safety. As it stands, the Nightingale will require a near permanent on-site fire service crew to satisfy the fire risk assessment, however responses to normal business will take this crew away from the site at times and that fire cover will be backfilled by primarily by on-call crews, which would not necessarily be immediate. The risk assessment may rate a fire at the Nightingale as high-impact but low-likelihood, although this situation sits awkwardly with the FRSA if the required fire cover cannot be fulfilled, as we understand, due to budgetary constraints alone.

Furthermore, as it has now been mooted that the Nightingale may need to be maintained passed it's temporary six-month timescale for coronavirus treatment into the next 12-18 months, the fire safety measures in place may need to be reconsidered, which may have been avoided if the Service was involved at the initial planning stages.

I trust you may find this information useful and should further areas of concern arise we can continue our communication.