

8 February 2010

Dear Chief Officer

DEAR CHIEF OFFICER (SCOTLAND) LETTER 2/2010: Incident Recording System (IRS) – Deadlines for incident records required for the new timetable for national statistics

Introduction

1. Communities and Local Government issued English fire and rescue service circular 1/2010 on 2 February. The circular sets out:
 - the timetable to which Fire and Rescue Services are expected to supply records for the production of National Statistics;
 - the timetable for subsequent closure of National Statistics data bases;
 - information relating to National Statistics publications; and
 - an update on the IRS Quality Assurance Guide.
2. As IRS is a national system, the CLG circular has been slightly amended in order to enable it to be issued in Scotland as this Dear Chief Officer (Scotland) Letter, the contents of which should be brought to the attention of the following personnel;
 - Fire and Rescue Service staff with responsibility for quality assurance of IRS incident records, and for signing off incident records as 'published';
 - Fire and Rescue Service staff responsible for data, statistics and performance indicators;
 - Fire and Rescue Service Heads of IT;
 - Additionally, for Fire and Rescue Services whose staff use their FRS's own systems for recording (rather than national website www.irs.fire.gov.uk), staff with responsibility for transmission of IRS records to the national IRS data store
3. For further information on the contents of this DCOL you could contact Gavin Sayer; Head of Fire Statistics Team at CLG on 0303 4442818 in the first instance.

4. Fire and Rescue Incident Statistics are classed as National Statistics and will be subject to a full assessment within the next two years by the **UK Statistics Authority** (<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/index.html>), the new statutory body accountable directly to Parliament.
5. Much improved timeliness of national statistics is one of the key benefits on which the investment in the new fully electronic Incident Recording System was based. Improved timeliness also benefits Fire and Rescue Services, with data available for benchmarking sooner.

Timetable for the supply of data

6. Under the old largely paper-based Fire Data Report system which ended in March 2009, it was possible only to publish provisional national data after nine or more months. The time elapsed to publication has decreased slightly over the past year, and will reduce to around three months after the end of each quarter.
7. Timeliness is fundamental to the value of data. In order to allow the prompt publication of provisional national statistics, incident records will need to be received within one month of the end of each quarter, as per table 2. Experience has shown that a further intermediate deadline midway through each quarter is required. Prompt QA and sign-off of records make queries quicker to resolve. We continue to recommend that every record should normally be recorded and quality assured within two weeks.
8. An extra month has been added to the timetable until this Summer (2010), as per table 1.

Table 1 – Interim delivery timetable to October 2010

Incidents during	To be received by
September - December 2009	end February
January - March 2010	end May
April - June	end August
July - September	end October

Table 2 – Ongoing incident record delivery timetable from November 2010

Incidents during	To be received by
October - mid November	mid December
mid November – end December	end January
January - mid Feb	mid March
mid Feb - end March	end April
April - mid May	mid June
mid May – end June	end July
July - mid August	mid September
mid August – end September	end October

9. Delivery will continue to be monitored actively with feedback being provided regularly to Services. Feedback on data quality will also be provided periodically.

Closure of records

10. After revisions arising from the Death Certificate matching exercise are made, all records for that financial year will be considered to be closed. The timing of Death Certificate matching exercise is expected to be 6-12 months after the end of the financial year. The timing is dependent on the outcome of discussions regarding regulations relating to access to death certificate data under the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007.
11. Changes will not normally be made to the National Statistics databases and outputs after closure. It is therefore recommended that amended records are not submitted after notice of closure of National Statistics databases in order to prevent inconsistency with finalised published statistics.

National Statistics Publications and IRS ‘CoP’ Discussion Forum

12. UK Statistics Authority rules require the month of publication of Official Statistics to be pre-announced months in advance on their website www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/people-places/fire-and-rescue/fire-and-rescue-services/index.html.
13. Much improved timeliness of outputs is not the only change. The content of these publications is set to evolve further. Several new incident data tables were added to the December 2009 Monitor, as well as FRA area population statistics. In the future, further data tables will be provided in spreadsheet format, particularly for the annual Fire Statistics UK publication.

14. Suggestions of what further tabulations would be useful would be most welcome, preferably by adding to the discussion thread on the IRS Community of Practice ('CoP') web forum. This was set up to facilitate exchange of views on anything relating to the IRS using the 'share it, solve it' principle. It has over 190 members and is a key tool in the Review of the IRS, and for the IRS more generally. Registration is online at www.communities.idea.gov.uk/. For assistance, email firestatsprojectoffice@communities.gsi.gov.uk.
15. The databases on which Fire and Rescue Service and CLG draw should always be consistent.
16. In addition, incident summaries and reports of the records in the national IRS database can be examined via the web access <https://www.irs.fire.gov.uk/>. This can be used by any Fire and Rescue Service whether or not staff use this system (or their FRS's own IRS system) for entry of incident details. For a log-in, contact the IRS Helpdesk (IRSHelp@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

IRS Quality Assurance Good Practice Guide

17. This document was produced over summer 2009 drawing on the experience of FRS through a consultation questionnaire and follow-up conversations. The guide was circulated as a full draft to IRS contacts in FRSs on 8 October 2009 inviting comments. These are being considered and a final version circulated and placed on the Communities of Practice web forum shortly.

Yours Faithfully

Graeme Fraser