Fire statistics user survey 2012: summary of responses

Contents

1. Executive summary

In summer 2012, the Department for Communities and Local Government issued a survey inviting views on its publication *Fire Statistics Great Britain.* This included proposals to cease the production of nine of the annex data tables. It invited users to say which particular tables they use, what decisions are informed by the data, to say what would be the likely impact if various of the tables were no longer produced in the future, and to give views on whether any different outputs would be of particular value. It noted that all content would be prioritised in light of the feedback received.

This review of this publication was timely because:
   i)   the information collected on fire and rescue incident records changed substantially in 2009 with the switch over to electronic data capture, and with it, a revised and broader set of information recorded about incidents.
   ii) the publication has changed little over the last fifteen years
   iii) the Department intends to deposit as much as possible of the fire and rescue incidents data base with the Office for National Statistics and the UK Data Archive. This is to enable users to produce whatever outputs according to their interests, thereby allowing as much value from the data base as possible to be derived.

This document summarises the views expressed by respondents and it explains the decisions taken in light of the responses. Respondent's uses of Fire Statistics were predominantly of the following types:
   i)   analysis of detailed national data to identify patterns and trends relating to fire safety such as numbers of incidents of fire starting due to appliances, or spread of fire in buildings. Fire and rescue authorities also reported using wide-ranging information relating to their authority area, as well as being particularly interested in equivalent national data
   ii) sub-national comparison of high level data for benchmarking (such as numbers of fires and casualties, which is provided by the *Fire Statistics Monitor*). Fire and rescue authorities referred to comparison and discussion among 'family groups' of most similar authority areas

Overall, of the eighty five items of content, sixty seven will be retained, and of the nine tables proposed for discontinuation, three tables have been retained. Meanwhile some other sections of the commentary were dropped.

The reasons for discontinuation were because no compelling need for the information was identified and/or because access to record-level data is a more suitable solution enabling more in depth analysis and insights. This was specifically requested in a number of the responses. In a few cases the particular information was already published in the expanded set of data tables in the Fire Statistics Monitor. It is worth noting that the number of tables in the Fire Statistics Monitor has doubled in the last couple of years, and there has been and is no proposal to make any reductions to those outputs.

Fire Statistics Team
Department for Communities and Local Government
December 2012

2. Introduction

On 30 May 2012, DCLG Fire Statistics Team issued a survey inviting views on the content of its publication *Fire Statistics Great Britain*. (See Appendix 1).

This was sent to all those who sent to those who have responded to the wider user consultation form on the Department's website, which was widely advertised in Summer 2011. The survey was also signposted in the June 2012 edition of the Fire and Rescue Bulletin and was naturally brought to the attention of the Fire and Rescue Statistics User Group

The survey form listed all the elements of content of the publication and invited users to indicate which parts of the publication they used, what decisions were informed by the data, and what the impact would be if the data were no longer produced. It also asked for views on timetable, format and quality of data and for any other comments and suggestions on fire statistics.

3. Respondents

Twenty two responses were received. The types of organisations who responded, and the extent of their usage of the publication, were as follows:

	Using how much of the publication's content			
Organisation type	little	some	most	Total
Fire and Rescue Authority	4	6	4	14
Government	0	0	2	2
Industry representative body	0	1	1	2
Research	1	1	0	2
Safety campaign organisation	0	2	0	2
Total	5	10	7	22

Fourteen of the respondents (almost two thirds) were fire and rescue authorities. The responses of seventeen of the respondents (three quarters) indicated that they used significant proportion (more than a little) of the content of the publication.

The survey invited users to note whether or not they used each item of content in the publication, and fourteen of the respondents did so. However, among these, one respondent simply said yes to everything item of content but provided nothing in response to the questions of what the decisions the information informed, and nothing on the impact would be if the information were no longer available, both of which were integral parts of the survey form. Therefore this response was not included in the counts of those supporting the continuation of each individual item.

All but three respondents were happy for their comments to be quoted. In line with the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics, which requires

that individual responses are published unless anonymity has been requested[1], these are presented in the accompanying workbook. A list of respondents can be found in Appendix 2.

---

[1] Code of Practice for Official Statistics, Protocol on User Engagement, item 7(iv)

4. Changes to the content of future Fire Statistics GB publications

Outcome for content for which discontinuation was proposed

Content	Outcome	Explanation
15 (& fig 4.1)	Dropped	2 and 3 users respectively noted interest, but none cited any compelling need for the data
22a,22b	Retained	8 and 7 users respectively noted that these were of significant value for comparing among Fire and Rescue Authority areas
23a, 23b	Dropped	8 and 6 users respectively noted interested, but none cited any compelling need for the data. One user noted that data by fire and rescue authority was their interest. We would point to the Fire Statistics Monitor which contains twenty six tables of fire and rescue authority data. The primary purpose of this publication is to provide outputs with smaller categories and thus highlight such trends and patterns at national level.
24	Retained	8 users noted that these were of significant value for comparing among Fire and Rescue Authority areas. One further Fire and Rescue Authority user, the Chair of the Arson Prevention Board requested more data on deliberate fires, though without specific suggestions. As well as this table being retained, since Autumn 2012, fire and rescue authorities have been able to access the whole data set.
29,30 and 31 (and Fig1.10 and 1.11)	Dropped	4, 3, and 3 users respectively noted interest. This information is however already published in more detail (ie by fire and rescue authority area) in the Department's Fire Statistics Monitor

Having considered the reported uses, the following sections of commentary will also be dropped:

Maps– a selection of maps were included in the 2010-11 edition	Dropped	Four users, all fire and rescue authorities, noted that these had been found to be of value. It is proposed that local authority identifier will be included in the data set that fire and rescue authorities can download, so fire and rescue authorities can derive these, or indeed any such statistics or statistical maps of their choice.
Table 2.10 and 4.1	Dropped	5 and 3 users respectively noted an interest, but none noted a compelling use for these data.

Tables 3.4 and 3.5	Dropped	Four users noted an interest, but none made a convincing case for value that has been derived from the information. Following the inclusion of these for the first time in the 2010/11 analysis, correspondence was received querying what can be concluded when a large proportion was of the category 'unknown'.
Chapter 6	Dropped	False alarms attended are covered in the Fire Statistics Monitor.
Chapter 7	Dropped	Non-fire incidents – these are covered in the Fire Statistics Monitor.

5. Summary of comments, requests and suggestions

1. General comments:

The following responses from fire and rescue authorities were representative overall comments. They show that fire and rescue authorities primary need is for data for their own area, but that they also find benchmarking valuable:

1. "This information is used for comparison purposes as part of our reporting and planning functions

   The information is used to substantiate our detailed analysis which is undertaken for either tactical or strategic decision making

   We use elements of this information as part of our performance target setting process to ensure we compare local, our comparator group and national performance to drive continuous improvements in our targets."

2. "The Fire Statistics Great Britain annual report provides context and an accessible summary of fire and other emergency trends. The report is used to inform the development of strategies, targets and areas for further research. The document is also useful to support forward planning." And "We are satisfied that the provision of the "record level" data will allow the service to generate trends tables for the measures currently reported in these tables" (referring to those tables proposed for discontinuation).

3. "We mainly use this information to provide details of the national picture and trends and compare with our own position.

   It would not prohibit developments and decisions as we would use local data and other sources of information that we compile in our planning and decision making (tactical and strategic).

   We would also look at using to other sources of information that would provide necessary information (if available) that we need."

iv) "We find the data available from DCLG's Fire Statistics Team useful and informative." and "<fire and rescue authority name> has viewed and utilised the majority of tables and data sets contained within the Fire Statistics Great Britain. The frequency of use varies greatly and the value gleaned does vary but it is fair to say that the majority of data has proven useful for benchmarking or comparisons at some time over the last few years. The publication is viewed by persons at all levels of the organisation but the most regular of the users are the Statistics Team within the Performance Management Unit. The data is compared for trends and where we have highlighted common or contrasting performance we have spoken to other services in more detail to explore why we may be seeing variances across services. The learning taken from these discussions is used in reports at all levels of our organisation." And "The impact of losing this data would not be critical but would mean one less opportunity to compare and bench mark results."

v)   "The tables and charts within the report do identify key trends which are useful for understanding issues at a national level. However from a local perspective <fire and rescue authority name> concentrate on using local data and information sources in order to inform key decision making for Community Safety Activity and resource allocation."

vi)   "We find it useful to benchmark against other Services to understand our local statistics in comparison with other individual services"

The two safety campaign organisation respondents noted:

"We find statistical data on fires extremely useful for informing our campaigns and policy work"

"The Child Accident Prevention Trust recognises that fire statistics offer valuable insights, evidence and intelligence to inform prevention measures to improve fire safety in the home for children and families."

2. Access to fire and rescue incident data base

Many of the Fire and Rescue Authority respondents, including the four who reported using the Fire Statistics Great Britain publication little, noted that their need was for data on their own authority (the data base for which they held) and for other fire and rescue authority areas. As of Autumn 2012, fire and rescue authorities have been able to download an England data base of fire and rescue incident and casualty data. Several respondents requested this specifically. Access to record-level data enables exploration of the data, wide-ranging analysis and production of whichever measures of interest.

Two users who were not from fire and rescue authorities also expressed interest in analysis of the record-level fire incident and casualty data bases. One noted
"the complexity of the analyses we perform is such that we need to ask CLG to supply us directly with the relevant raw data, rather than us relying on what is available in the published statistics."
The user went on to highlight interest in the dynamics of fire growth, safety systems and building size, all of which will be possible from record-level access.

It is intended that record-level data sets will be deposited to the UK data archive and Office for National Statistics data labs in Spring 2013, thereby enabling analysis by all users.

3. Fires by appliance type

One respondent, the Association of Manufacturers of Domestic Appliance confirmed recent conversations about their use of table 21 (accidental fires by

source of ignition) and how variants on this would be very helpful informing their need to identify emerging fire safety issues.

Producer Response: An interactive table showing accidental fires in buildings and casualties has been developed and will be published with Fire Statistics Great Britain 2011-12. It has filters for country, year, type of building, power source, and whether the fire was limited to the item first ignited.

4. Analysis tool One fire and rescue authority respondent called for an analysis tool.

Producer Response: The Department has no plan to invest in developing such a tool. The Department is however enabling access to record-level data. Fire and rescue authorities will be able to collaborate in their use of this data.

5. Other comments

One respondent suggested the recording of additional information, specifically:

- Further breakdown of the category 'misuse of equipment or appliances', elaborating on circumstance of misuse.
- Inclusion of tenure for dwelling fires
- Inclusion of whether an residual current device was present in the consumer unit of dwelling fires

Producer Response: This consultation was to be primarily about the statistics which are produced from the information which is already collected. These suggestions for further information to be collected have been noted and will be suggested to fire and rescue authorities, whose backing is needed before further items are collected by Central Government from local authorities.

One user referred to the Cost of Fire estimates. These comments have been noted. However, these are a model and published as a research report and therefore as such are not official statistics and out of scope of this review.

Two fire and rescue authority respondents called for:

"More interpretation and analysis of factors influencing changes over time would make these data more valuable and useful, eg. what are the socio-economic, legislative, technological factors at play and what do these mean for forecasting?"

"… more data and analysis output regarding value for money, protection, prevention etc."

<u>Producer Response:</u> Protection and prevention information are published in the publication Fire and Rescue Operational Statistics[2]. The other elements are research questions that are beyond the scope of Official Statistics publications.

---

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/series/fire-and-rescue-authorities-operational-statistics

6. Responses to questions on users' experience of fire statistics

The UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice[3] requires producers of Official Statistics to "Publish information about users' experiences of statistical services, data quality, and the format and timing of reports."

The user survey therefore asked about users' experience of fire statistics publications which are produced by the Department, and for any further comments about the work of the Department's fire statistics team.

Just over two thirds of the twenty two respondents answered these questions. The answers given were as follows:

i) Data quality

Has the **data quality** of this publication (Fire Statistics Great Britain), and of the Fire Statistics Monitor[1] been sufficient to meet your requirements? If not, please tell us what changes would be needed to meet your requirements, describing the resulting impact/benefits of these proposed changes	Yes 12	No 3

The users that answered 'no' made the following comments:

i) One Fire and Rescue Authority queried whether non-fire incident false alarms should be reported alongside fire false alarms, rather than alongside non-fire incidents.

> Producer Response: Neither approach is wrong. The Fire Statistics Monitor reports false alarms with the total for non-fire incidents. This means that data for periods prior to 2009 are comparable. We intend to include non-fire incident false alarms by fire and rescue authority area in annex spreadsheet workbook 7.

ii) Another fire and rescue authority respondent stated:

> "The explanation of data quality applied to the production of the documents, seems quite reasonable. However, our concerns over data quality issues would be more to do with the validity of the data as it exists in IRS. For example, how much confidence is there over consistent interpretation of the questions answered via IRS. Also, the over-usage of categories such as 'Other' and 'Unspecified' would seem to detract from the data quality being returned in IRS."

> Producer Response: The numbers of incidents which fall in a category of 'Other' and 'Unspecified' is universally small, though they are not negligible as can be seen in the various output tables. It could affect comparison between fire and rescue authority areas, where detailed categories are

---

[3] http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html

analysed. However, in the context of statistics produced by the Department, these are at national level wherever detailed categories are involved.

One other user was unsatisfied because of the switch to Great Britain coverage, rather than UK.

> Producer Response: As noted in the introductory text of the *Fire Statistics Great Britain* publication, the new fire and rescue incident recording system with its switch to electronic data capture and transmission was implemented across Great Britain in 2009. Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service was invited to implement the new fire and rescue incident recording system at the same time as the rest of fire and rescue authorities across Great Britain. Should Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service start to transmit records to the data base held by this Department, the Department would then consider what UK data could be reported.

ii) Formats

Do the **formats** (publication and and accompanying spreadsheet data tables) of this publication (Fire Statistics Great Britain), and of the Fire Statistics Monitor[1] meet your requirements? If not, please tell us what changes would be needed to meet your requirements, describing the resulting impact/benefits of these proposed changes	Yes 15	No 2

Two Fire and Rescue Authority Respondents said 'no'. They stated:

> "We would prefer data down to [Fire and Rescue] Authority level. When we have compared ourselves to the National Picture in the past, the result isn't really meaningful. We try to compare ourselves to similar Service areas rather than the National stats as this gives us a better indication of how we are doing."

and
> " current excel spreadsheets are manageable as can save and make changes to aid further analysis but access to raw data would aid depth of analysis."

> Producer Response: As of Autumn 2012, fire and rescue authorities in England can now download an England data set to carry out their own analysis. This has facilitated resolution of both of these requirements.

On the presentation of the data other users noted:

> "Just one point - not keen in having subtotals within the body of the table - can be confusing if you don't know the data"

> "Data provided in spreadsheet or csv format are easy to use. Tables and figures in pdf have very restricted access and therefore are not that useful. A web link would be ideal for us to download raw data as and when required."

"The statistics are useful, format is user friendly and content/range generally good."

Producer Response: The layout and formats of the data will remain in spreadsheet in this edition. The feasibility of these developments will be examined.

iii) Timing

Does the **timetable** of this publication (Fire Statistics Great Britain - annually in November), and of the Fire Statistics Monitor[1] (twice per year in June/July and December/January) meet your requirements? If not, please tell us what changes would be needed, describing the resulting impact/benefits of these proposed changes.	Yes 10	No 6

Of the six users who responded that the timetable of publications did not meet their requirements, four were fire and rescue authorities. They wanted to be able to produce data themselves from the national data set at the earliest opportunity.

Producer Response: As of Autumn 2012, fire and rescue authorities in England can now download an England data set to carry out their own analysis.

Of the two other users, one noted simply "To have this a bit sooner would be more than welcome, although not if means less complete data." and the other noted "November is a long time after the data is collected so it would be useful if it could be made sooner."

Producer Response: The production of Fire Statistics Great Britain publication and data tables is a substantial project. The Department's fire statistics team prioritises producing headline data in the Fire Statistics Monitor publication by early July (it is worth noting that records are only received by May) before turning to this larger work from late Summer. The scope for further automation of the production of the publication is to be considered, which may mean that less cross-checking is required, thus that it might possible to publish some more data sooner.

iv) Other comments about user experience

Comments received in this box of the survey form have been noted in preceding sections.

Appendix 1 – Information provided with the User Survey

Review of the content of Fire Statistics Great Britain

Introduction

This publication contains detailed statistical outputs derived from records of incidents attended by Fire and Rescue Services. Its content has evolved very little for over fifteen years, and given the change of data collection system in 2009, it is appropriate that its content be reviewed.

The accompanying questions and list of tables is to invite comments. It has been sent to those who have responded to the wider user consultation form on the Department's website and which was widely advertised in Summer 2011. We hope that you will take the opportunity to tell us which particular tables you use, what decisions are informed by the data and what would be the likely impact if various of the tables were no longer produced in future. It is worth noting that record-level data bases will be available shortly through the Office for National Statistics's secure data lab. This will allow users to produce any output they like, as well as given the flexibility for exploratory analysis.

We would be grateful for responses by Friday 27 July 2012. This will enable views to be considered before work begins on the Fire Statistics Great Britain 2011-12 publication.

Background and proposals

The Incident Recording System collects a wider range of data than its paper-form predecessor, so different analyses may now be of higher value. The 2010-11 edition contained various new content including:
- statistical maps at local authority level showing rates of fire incidents and casualties
- a new chapter on non fire incidents including fatal and non-fatal casualties
- numbers of false alarm incidents attended by detailed reason

We are therefore inviting views on the value of all the outputs, and your views on whether any different outputs would be of particular value. (The attached sheet contains a list of all the tables, charts and maps in the 2010-11 edition of Fire Statistics Great Britain) A couple of examples are: numbers of fires by detailed property type (more detailed categories than table 18), and numbers of people rescued at incidents. We are also keen to update of the analysis on fires in timer-frame buildings which was published in August 2010, and new analysis of dwelling fires where alcohol or drugs were involved. We will prioritise all content in light of the feedback received.

Our initial analysis suggested that the case for retaining the following table may not be strong: tables 15, 22a, 22b, 23a, 23b, 24, 29, 30 and 31. We have therefore highlighted with a bold square to particularly draw your attention to consider what impact this may have if we decide to drop them. Many of this set of tables contain data for Fire and Rescue Authority areas. It is worth also looking at the twenty six tables in the Fire Statistics Monitor which contain data by Fire and Rescue Authority data. The number of tables in the Fire Statistics Monitor has doubled in last couple of years, and there is no proposal to make any reductions to those outputs.

Contact information
Please return completed forms to IRSHelp@communities.gsi.gov.uk. We would be grateful for responses by Friday 27 July 2012. If you would like to discuss, please contact Gavin Sayer (0303 444 2818) or Nazneen Chowdhury (0303 444 2144).

Fire Statistics Team
Department for Communities and Local Government
30 May 2012

Form

Appendix 2 – Respondents

Responses were received from fourteen fire and rescue authorities in England and Wales, and from: The Scottish Government, the Association of Manufacturers of Domestic Appliances, the Fire Industry Association, OHR Ltd, the Buildings Research Establishment, Electrical Safety Council, and the Child Accident Prevention Trust.

All but three respondents were happy for their comments to quoted. In line with the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics, which requires that individual responses are published unless anonymity has been requested[4], these are presented in the accompanying spreadsheet.

---

[4] Protocol on User Engagement, item 7(iv)

Appendix 3 – Summary of User Feedback - Summer 2011

1. Introduction

A fire statistics user registration form[5] was launched on 24 June 2011. It was noted in the introduction of the 2010-11 Fire Statistics Monitor which was published on the same day, and it was also sent to existing user lists.

The content requested by the form was:
1. to extend our lists of users ahead of UK Statistics Authority assessment to take place in Winter 2011-12
2. to improve our knowledge of which users use which data and for what purposes, including:
    a. whether they used i) high-level quarterly data and/or ii) detailed categories in annual analyses
    b. whether they were interested in i) national and/or ii) fire and rescue authority areas and/or iii) smaller areas
3. to ask about preferences for focus on calendar or financial year totals
4. to invite any other feedback or suggestions

2. Respondants

Forty two responses were received

Respondent type	Number of responses
Fire and Rescue Authority	16
Other public sector	4
Safety campaign charity	2
Fire technical consultant	4
Manufacturer of fire safety apparatus	5
Academic / research consultant	4
Other representative body	7
Total	**42**

3. Responses

The first section of the form asked which of a list of fire statistics topics were of interest. Thirty of the respondents said all topics.

Of the remaining twelve respondents, who selected particular topics of interest, the tallies for each topic of interest were as follows:

---

[5] Responses were requested by the end of September and results were analysed in autumn 2011. As of November2012, it can be accessed from:
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121108165934/http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/researchand statistics/firestatistics/firestatfeedback/

Incidents	9
Casualties	10
Dwellings	9
Other Buildings	9
Road Vehicle	4
Wildfires	4
Outdoor	4
Chimney	4
Listed Buildings	6
Accidental fires	7
Deliberate fires	7
All False Alarms	5
Malicious False Alarms	2
False Alarm Apparatus	3
Good intent false alarms	3
Staffing	3
Injuries	5
Fire Safety Order	4
Community Fire Safety	5

The second section asked about geographical areas of interest. Of the 35 respondents who answered, 80% were very interested in national totals and data for fire and rescue authority areas. A third of users were very interested in areas smaller than fire and rescue authority areas. Relating to this, *Fire Statistic Great Britain 2010-11* edition which was published in November 2011 contained some local authority district data and maps. Interestingly, in the subsequent review of Fire Statistics GB, only five of the 22 respondents to that more detailed survey of users expressed interest in the smaller area data.

User interest by geographical area

	National totals	Fire and Rescue Authority areas	Smaller areas
Very interested	28	28	12
Slightly interested	7	5	12
Not interested	0	2	11
	35	35	35

Asked whether users had a preference for more annual detailed analysis or quarterly updates of headline data, or a return to quarterly updates (as opposed to six monthly updates), 70% were keen for more detailed annual analyses, while 16% favoured more detailed analyses.

More annual detailed analysis or quarterly updates of headline data

	Annual detailed analyses	Quarterly updates of headline data
Yes	31	7
No/blank	11	35
Total	42	42

Users' other comments were exclusively on further statistics that would be of interest:

Statistics request	Response / action taken
Water and flood rescues and casualties (2 requests)	A chapter on non-fire incidents and casualties was published in Fire Statistics Great Britain 2010-11
Sprinkler / Fire suppression systems (3 requests)	A section on sprinkler operation and outcomes was included in Fire Statistics Great Britain 2010-12
Source of false alarm	A new table (23c) was included in Fire Statistics Great Britain 2010-11
Fires in flats	Some figures planned for one-off analysis for publication in 2013
Response times	New publication Fire and Rescue Incident Response Times was published on 4 July 2012
Construction type eg timber frame	Update of analysis published in Summer 2010 to be published on 13 December 2012
Construction site fires (2 requests)	Some figures included in analysis of timber-frame and other buildings to be published on 13 December 2012
Hazardous materials	Will be available to analyse in record-level data sets
Appliance make and model	Appliance makes have been coded are to be available in record-level data sets
Listed Building incidents – level of loss and causes	Some property categories will allow analysis via record-level data sets
Thatch	Will be available to analyse in record-level data sets
Access to raw data wherever possible, including IRS data	Fire and rescue authority can now access (as of autumn 2012). Wider access to follow in 2013