

Call-outs to fire service have fallen by a third

The funding and structure of Suffolk's fire service should be more in line with the falling number of incidents it responds to, it has been claimed.

In the last six years the number of incidents dealt with by Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service has dropped by a third, but the number of firefighters has fallen by only 16 and the on-call roster cut by four.

In 2006 there were 241 full-time firefighters and 452 on-call firefighters, and together they dealt with 8,275 incidents across the county.

But last year the 225 full-time and 448 on-call firefighters dealt with 5,354 incidents – a drop of 2,921 or 35%.

A report published last month by Sir Ken Knight, the country's former chief fire and rescue adviser, said services in England could save up to £200million a year if they were operated more efficiently.

Sir Ken said there had been a national 40% reduction in call-outs and incidents in the last decade and accidental deaths from fires in the home had reached an all-time low.

He said: "Despite these changes, no similar significant change in the make-up or cost of the service has taken place. Fire and rescue authorities do now need to transform themselves to reflect the entirely different era of risk and demand they now operate in."

Last night the TaxPayers'

Elliot Furniss
elliott.furniss@archant.co.uk

Alliance said fire chiefs needed to look at how they use staff and other resources in light of the reduction in incidents.

Matthew Sinclair, chief executive of the Alliance, said: "The huge reduction in the number of call-outs is welcome. Fire chiefs must examine how they are deploying both resources and staff to make sure they are being used as efficiently as possible.

"It's absolutely vital residents are kept safe but also that they are getting good value for money."

But Andy Vingoe, chairman of the Suffolk branch of the Fire Brigades' Union, said the county's service was already "cut to the bone".

He said Sir Ken had spent time in Suffolk while writing his report and many of the recommendations he had made were already being implemented in the county.

He said: "Sir Ken looked at what we have been doing because the cost (of running the service) has gone down over 10 years and most of his report is based on what we have done in Suffolk.

"We are absolutely cut to the bone and are one of the cheapest brigades in the country.

"A huge factor in all of this is the amount of fire safety work that we do. That work is done by the very same firefighters you now want to cut."

The fire service's response

Mark Hardingham, Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service deputy chief fire officer, said: "There has been a significant reduction in the number of firefighters and 999 control staff in Suffolk that, to an extent, reflects the recent reduction in the number of fire calls.

"The service now has 213 full-time firefighter posts, and will potentially reduce this further to 209 in 2014. This is a reduction of over 20%.

"Of course, the role of a firefighter is much more than just

responding to 999 emergencies. The reduction in fires, deaths and injuries is in no small part due to the significant amount of emergency prevention work that firefighters carry out in local communities.

"The number of on-call firefighters in Suffolk has remained stable for many years. This supports the approach in Sir Ken's report where he recognises on-call firefighters as a very efficient way to provide a fire service where the risk is relatively low."

Grateful Judy's world record bid



■ Judy Sykes has already raised £5,000 for the Woolverston Wish Fund. Here Kerseys solicitors present a cheque from Red Nose Day activities. Front, from left to right, is Jessie Caldwell, committee member from Woolverstone Wish, with Kerseys managing Partner Anthony Wooding and Judy Sykes
Picture: CONTRIBUTED

An Ipswich woman is calling for people to help break a Guinness World Record in aid of the hospital which treated her for cancer.

Judy Sykes wants people to dress up as fairies on Sunday, June 23 to raise money for the Woolverstone Wish Fund. The charity is raising money to refurbish the chemotherapy outpatient clinics and day unit in the Woolverstone Wing at Ipswich Hospital.

The 57-year-old, from Hadleigh, was treated at the hospital for six months after being diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma, a cancer of the lymphatic system, in November 2011. She was given the all-clear in June last year.

"The staff at the day unit at Woolverstone were amazing," Mrs Sykes, a residential conveyancing secretary at Kerseys Solicitors in Ipswich, said.

"But they kept falling over themselves because of the lack of space."

The world record attempt is taking place at the Cornhill.

She needs 787 people to turn up to break the record.

To find out more, call Sharon Wragg at Kerseys on 01473 407114.

IN BRIEF

Thieves seize bike from back garden in overnight raid

FELIXSTOWE: Detectives are urging witnesses to come forward after a bike was stolen from the back garden of a home.

Thieves seized a ladies blue Reebok mountain bike from a house in Graham Road, Felixstowe between midnight and noon on Wednesday, June 5.

The bike had silver lettering on the frame.

Witnesses and people with information are now being sought by officers.

Call police on 101 to help.

Yacht towed to marina after losing rudder

WOOLVERSTONE: Thames Coastguard were called after a 36ft yacht lost its rudder while sailing.

Berserker, which had nine people on board, contacted Thames Coastguard at 12.20pm on Saturday asking for assistance.

The Harwich RNLI all-weather lifeboat was despatched to tow the yacht back to the Woolverstone Marina in the River Orwell.

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Ex-special constable jailed for sex attacks

A former Suffolk special constable has been jailed after he admitted sexually assaulting a young girl.

Idefonso Valdez pleaded guilty to four assaults on a child aged under 13 when he appeared before Ipswich Crown Court.

The 41-year-old, of Stanley Street, Lowestoft, was sentenced to 32 months' imprisonment.

A sexual offences prevention order lasting until further notice was also made against Valdez.

Valdez accepted he had touched the girl's breasts and made inappropriate sexual contact with her on other occasions.

He had left his role as a voluntary police officer before committing the offences.

Simon Gladwell, representing Valdez, said: "He is genuinely remorseful about what he's done, not because of what will happen to him, but because of the impact it has undoubtedly had on (his victim)."

Valdez was sentenced to 12 months' imprisonment for two of the offences, and 32 months for the remaining two counts, to run concurrently.