

NEW FIRE STATION COMES TO SOUTH CONNEMARA

Galway Fire and Rescue Service's second Irish-speaking brigade, which covers South Connemara, has opened its doors on the Aran Islands, and is the first new station there in over 15 years, writes Paul Duffy, Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officer with Galway Fire and Rescue Service.

Galway County Council's newest fire station – An Cheathrú Rua Fire Brigade – which covers South Connemara, is Galway Fire and Rescue Service's second Irish-speaking brigade, and joins Inis Mór Fire Brigade on the Aran Islands.

The opening of the new station follows the publication of the Report of the Galway City and Western Environs Fire Review Group, which included a pilot risk-based assessment of fire cover and an analysis of historical incident data. So, a decision was taken in late 2014 by Galway County Council to establish a new fire station in South Connemara, which is the first one in over 15 years.

The project team set up of new brigade from scratch and had it operational within 12 months. The station was to provide cover to a large area of South Connemara, and provide support to the existing stations in Clifden and Galway City and the Aran Islands.

The project consists of the following:

- Providing a new fire station building
- Providing the necessary appliances and equipment
- Recruiting and training a crew
- Making the brigade fully operational

The development of the station's infrastructure was to run concurrently with the training of the crew and



CFBT Training at Clifden Fire Training Centre.



Wildland Training at An Cheathrú Rua.



Crew on a training mission with Irish Coastguard

preparations for operational readiness. As funding for the project was limited, a new build was not deemed possible.

Existing suitable building options in a number of towns in Connemara were examined, and eventually with the assistance of Údarás na Gaeltachta, a suitable existing industrial building was identified in An Cheathrú Rua and a Long-term lease was agreed.

Tobin Consulting Engineers was appointed to lead the development of the building conversion, while Finna Construction was appointed as the main contractor. Consisting of an appliance bay (capable of taking two appliances and a jeep), a watch room, a muster bay, ablutions, canteen/lecture room, office, stores and an indoor training area, the station was completed in late November 2015.

APPLIANCES AND EQUIPMENT

Two second hand class B appliances in excellent condition were sourced in the UK and refurbished by Sidheán Teo Ltd in An Spidéal whose premises are only approximately 25 minutes from the new station. A 4x4 jeep was relocated from another station as part of a fleet upgrade programme.

Considerable money was spent on providing a complete set of equipment for the new brigade including breathing apparatus, crash rescue, hazmat, working at height and other equipment. One of the key challenges was providing adequate communications as the area is a notorious radio black spot with traditionally poor mobile phone coverage. Significant work was done by West Region Fire Communications Centre and Telent Ltd in the provision of a reliable solution and a Tetra digital radio system was also provided as a back-up system.

After initial public information sessions in February 2015 attended by in excess of 100 people, the nine-person crew for the new station was recruited and commenced recruit induction training on 13 April 2015 at Clifden Fire Station. This was followed by their breathing apparatus (BA) initial wearer training at Bray Fire Training Centre in Wicklow and compartment fire behaviour training back in the CFBT centre in Clifden.

Other training including incident command training and

a sub-station officer course was completed in Galway City and An Cheathrú Rua. Given the historically high level of gorse and forest fires in their station ground, the crew also underwent wildland firefighting training in An Cheathrú Rua provided by Northumberland Fire Service from the UK. In total the crew completed a total of 100 days (20 weeks) of training over an intensive 10 month period as summarised in Figure 4 below.

With their training complete the crew began their operational proving and pre-incident planning phase on 10 December 2015.

PRE-INCIDENT PLANNING PHASE

One of the critical aspects prior to declaring the station and the new Brigade operational was to compensate for their lack of experience and to educate them and their families in how the retained fire service works in reality.

On 10 December 2015 the crew began their two-month operational and pre-incident planning phase. This entailed operating the station as a normal retained station in every respect and mobilising the crew to 48 realistic test-calls by day and night.

These included building fires, vehicle fires, chimney fires, road traffic collisions, aircraft incidents and other tertiary calls, often working alongside An Garda Síochána, the National Ambulance Service and the Irish Coast Guard. During this period the crew also completed almost 50 pre-incident plans for the majority of significant buildings in their area.

Following an operational review in early February 2016, and almost a year to the day since the first public information sessions were conducted, An Cheathrú Rua Fire Brigade became operational on 21 February 2016.

The nine-man crew includes an assistant station officer, a

KEY ELEMENTS OF GY 22 TRAINING COURSES

- *Recruit Induction*
- *Road Traffic Collision*
- *Heavy Transport Crash Rescue*
- *National Incident Command System*
- *Emergency Medical First Responder*
- *Pump Operator*
- *Emergency Fire Appliance Driver*
- *Breathing Apparatus Initial Wearer*
- *Advanced Breathing Apparatus*
- *Hazardous Materials/CPC Wearer*
- *Working at Height*
- *Wildland Firefighting*
- *Aviation Incidents*
- *Compartment Fire Behaviour Training*
- *Electrical Incident Safety*
- *Liquefied Petroleum Gas Incident Safety*
- *Critical Incident Stress Management*
- *Pre-Incident Planning*



Breathing Apparatus (BA) Training at Bray Fire Training Centre.

sub-station officer, two driver mechanics and five firefighters. The station fire ground covers an area of 550sq meters and has a population of approximately 9,200.

The new station also serves a number of significant facilities including Rosaveel Harbour, Connemara Airport, TG4 and Radio na Gaeltachta. The crew's first call-out on 3 March 2016 involved the rescue of a pregnant lady from a road traffic accident. Since then the Brigade has been alerted to over 65 incidents.

In order to support the officers of the new brigade, all incidents are reviewed immediately on receipt by an operational officer who monitors the response to the incident and additional support can be provided if required (in addition to the normal RSFO system). This support system was reviewed after six months of operations.



The first day of training at Clifden Fire Station.



The nine-man fire station crew of An Cheathrú Rua Fire Brigade.



The station locations of Galway Fire and Rescue Service.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: The entire project has been a great success and great credit is due to the crew and their families. The local community is also to be commended for the support and understanding they have shown.

Throughout the project the new crew has been supported and encouraged significantly by the officers and crew of Clifden Fire Brigade. The crew has also been supported by Galway Fire and Rescue Service instructors, Galway City Fire Brigade, HQ staff including the Brigade Mechanic, and personnel of the West Region Communications Centre.

Outside the fire service significant assistance was provided by Galway Civil Defence, Rosaveel Coastguard Unit, An Garda Síochána (An Cheathrú Rua), An Cheathrú Rua Ambulance Station, Rosaveel Harbourmaster and staff, Aer Aran Islands, the ESB and Flogas.

The funding for the project was provided by Galway County Council and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, which funded the appliances and the building refurbishment costs.

The station was officially opened by the Cathaoirleach of Galway County Council, Cllr Peter Roche, and attended by the Minister of State for Gaeltacht Affairs, Sean Kyne TD and over 200 invited guests.