

A brief history of the Felixstowe Volunteer Coast Patrol Rescue Service.

The vision of a private volunteer coast patrol was forced on the resort by the sudden unannounced withdrawal of the Felixstowe Coastguard Patrol Boat during 1996. Despite a wide campaign to 'save the boat' with FTC sending a delegation to see the Shipping Minister in London, the campaign failed leaving the resort and immediate area short of a vital sea rescue resource. So strong was local feeling that a group was formed to instigate a private patrol boat service which was backed by SCDC and FTC with SCDC funding insurance and fuel for the boat. An MOU was signed by all parties and the first private patrol with the refurbished RHIB named 'Guardian' took place on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1997 and was almost immediately tasked to two separate incidents at the resort. Over the past nineteen years the service has gone from strength to strength both being extremely successful and receiving numerous prestigious awards. To date it has handled 1,119 incidents involving 1,723 persons with 67 lives being saved. In this time our boats have covered some 56,497 miles on local routine patrols and rescues. The service operates under the strict guidance of the MCA Code of Practice for all open lifeboats. This applies to both the boats and to the crews SOP's and training. The service has been described by Coastguard as an outstanding marine volunteer organisation and received the Chief Coastguard Commendation in 2011. It has been a Suffolk Constabulary marine resource since 2000 and upgraded to the Marine Support Unit in 2008 when it was given direct Police Comms and a unique Police call sign. Its remit, is for public safety and counter-terrorism. It is also a SCC 'Suffolk Resilience' Emergency Cat 1-2 Response where its main responsibility is coastal flooding. The service instigated its own Emergency Flood Plan for Felixstowe which was utilised by Police during the 2013 East Coast Flood Emergency. The service is Felixstowe's own private sea rescue service and unique to Suffolk and indeed East Anglia. It is one of three similar organisations but is the only one not financially supported by a Local Authority. Despite having proved itself this registered Charity has failed to attract a main core sponsor which is why it always struggles to survive year on year.

Value for money - Expenditure

Is the service good value for money? The current Suffolk PCC says that that it is extremely good value for money and you cannot put a value on regular marine patrols. If we go back to 1999 our total expenditure was a mere £9,389 to cover 54 days of patrols. But by 2001 it had risen to £12,659 for 51 days of patrols. We predicted that in 2002 we would require £12-15,000 to cover 57 patrols when we handled 79 incidents involving 174 persons with a record 5 lives being saved. Future years continually saw an increase in work, culminating in 2005 being confirmed as the busiest sea rescue year on record showing an increase of 8%, added to which the year also saw three fuel price increases. Expenditure for 2006 included the additional cost of £8,150. for replacement engines (we renew these every 3-4 years), and a further 4% increase in incident figures. Now with the additional workload, vastly increased incident rates, the rising cost of maintaining the service infrastructures, this is how we come to the present predicted expenditure of say £18-20,000 to also help maintain the services 24/7 emergency call out status each year. The last three years have been confirmed by the MCA as being the busiest in the history of the UK's marine rescue services.