

**As Station Commander for Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, Clive Allen is used to getting calls to attend road traffic incidents, building fires and animal rescues, and in January 2021 he responded to Cambridgeshire Community Services NHS Trust's (CCS) plea to help launch our first large-scale Covid-19 vaccination centre in Cambridge.**

**Here the 56-year-old explains how the ability to reassure people and put them at ease has been integral to both roles and how he found stewarding so rewarding, he subsequently trained to be a volunteer vaccinator.**

“When CCS enlisted the help of the fire service to assist with setting up some of their large-scale vaccination centres, I jumped at the chance!

“The Grafton Centre was the nearest centre to me and on day one, myself and four or five of my colleagues went along as stewards to help get the centre up and running.

“It was absolutely brilliant because initially the vaccine was offered to people aged 80 and over and for many of them it was the first time they'd been out of the house for months!

“They were full of gratitude, and many were so happy to see us they wanted to come and shake our hands and hug us which they obviously couldn't do!

“The hardest part was trying not to talk to people for too long because although we were happy to stand and chat, we were conscious we needed to get them in and out of the centre and vaccinated as quickly as possible.

“My experience as a firefighter definitely helped as I knew how to organise and manage people to get the best out of them.

“For the next few months, I carried on stewarding alongside my regular job and one day we were asked if anybody wanted to volunteer to be a vaccinator and I was one of the first to put my hand up!

“As a firefighter, I never thought I'd have the opportunity to vaccinate anyone, but I did all the training which included attending a practical day at the fire service headquarters that was led by a paramedic.

“It's alright having the qualifications but quite different when you're actually going to be putting a needle in someone's arm! The realisation hits home that this is real and you're going to be dealing with people's fears and questions, as well as the physical side of actually having to inject somebody.

“My first vaccinator shift at the Grafton Centre was a real baptism of fire! I'm used to dealing with people who are very nervous and putting them at ease, so I found vaccinating and talking to people easy.

“When the fire service arrives, it's often the worst day of someone's life, things have gone badly wrong and we're there to put it right, so the ability to use soft skills to reassure those who were nervous was very useful. For me, the biggest hurdle was learning the IT system to ensure I was booking people in correctly and not making mistakes.

“I never thought I'd be part of something like this but rolling out the biggest vaccination programme in NHS history has been a real learning experience for everyone and the sense of pride from volunteering during a pandemic that's affected the whole world is quite different from anything I've experienced in my life.

“Hopefully we’re coming out the other end now and it’s nice to know I’ve played a small part in putting everything back together again and it’s something I hope to be able to share with my grandchildren in the future.”