



This matter is being dealt with by: John Shuttleworth

Ext: 5555

Date: 20 October 2022

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

Clerk,
County Durham and Darlington
Fire and Rescue Authority
County Hall, Durham, DH1 5UL

The Rt Hon Simon Clarke MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Paul Scully MP
Minister of State (Minister for Local Government and Building Safety)

Dear Secretary of State and Minister of State,

Fire Funding for 2023/24

We are writing to you today to make the case for a fair funding settlement for the fire and rescue service and to ask for your help to avoid the Authority having to make cuts to frontline services that will increase the risk to the communities in County Durham and Darlington. Nationally fire and rescue services across England are facing significant inflationary pressures of around £145m in 2023/24 due to significant increases in utility costs, diesel and staff costs as a result of increases in the national living wage. These unavoidable pressures mean that Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) will have to make unacceptable decisions if these cost increases are not matched by increases in the funding available.

For County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service specifically we have lost in the region of £10M in government funding over the last twelve years, when inflation is taken into account. We are also disproportionately impacted by the council tax referendum limit due to the number of properties in council tax Band A and Band B across our area. This together with the high level of deprivation means that many residents are either exempt or qualify for discounts to their council tax bills. The Service is recognised by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services as being high performing, efficient and extremely productive but unless the funding position improves, we will see a significant reduction in performance and increased risk to the public.

If inflationary pressures are not covered by funding increases in the Local Government Settlement, the result will be a reduction in frontline wholetime and on-call firefighters with removal of fire engines and a resultant degradation in service. This will increase response times and risk and reduce the level of vitally important prevention and building safety inspection work.

We are seeking a settlement that delivers an increase in Settlement Funding that matches the rate of inflation to ensure our highly valued emergency service is still able to respond to incidents while maintaining our focus on prevention and protection post Grenfell. Over the last few years, the Service has also played a key role in supporting national resilience for either fire specific issues or multi-agency response, without sufficient funding this would no longer be possible going forward.

We are also seeking flexibility on the council tax referendum limit to allow a £5 increase on Band D council tax for all standalone FRAs. Last year this flexibility was offered to FRAs in the lower quartile of Band D precept levels however, this year all Services are facing similar inflationary pressures which require an increase in precept above the standard 2%. A £5 precept would raise in the region of £30m over and above a 2% increase. This is a relatively low sum in comparison with the overall level of council tax.

We are copying this letter to Rt Hon Edward Argar MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury and Members of Parliament for County Durham and Darlington.

Yours sincerely,



Cllr John Shuttleworth

**Chair of County Durham and
Darlington Fire and Rescue
Authority**



Stuart Errington QFSM

**Chief Fire Officer
County Durham and Darlington
Fire and Rescue Service**

Cc the Right Hon Edward Argar MP – Chief Secretary to the Treasury