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Steve Helps
Chief Fire Officer
County Durham & Darlington
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3 March 2023

Dear Steve,

Community Risk Management Plan 2023-2026

As chair of the Council's Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I would like to thank you for presenting the report on consultation of County Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Authority's Community Risk Management Plan for 2023-2026 (CRMP) at its meeting on 27 February 2023.

Following consideration of the report the Committee agreed that the comments and issues raised by members be compiled into a formal consultation response to the questions posed therein as well as agreeing additional comments for submission to the service.

Question 1

We propose to crew all of our Wholetime fire engines with four firefighters – Do you agree with this proposal?

The Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee recognise that the Service has to make considerable financial savings in 2023/24 and therefore needs to look at how it provides services to County Durham residents in the future. Since 2019 the majority of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service fire engines have operated with four firefighters and this practice is operated by many Fire and Rescue Services safely within the country. Members of the committee sought clarification in relation to: the safety of crews operating with four firefighters; that resulting job losses would be dealt with via vacancies not being filled and natural wastage; the continuation of the award winning apprenticeship programme and the continuation of the cadet programme in the county.

Resources

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Following confirmation by the Chief Fire Officer that the safety of crews would not be affected, that job losses would be dealt with as outlined above, the continuation of both the apprenticeship programme and the cadet programme at viable stations, Members of committee agreed with the proposal that the Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service going forward, crew all Wholetime fire engines with four firefighters.

Question 2

We propose to review the Risk Based Inspection Programme for business premises to ensure our pro-active protection and enforcement activities are aligned to identified risks, to maintain the reduction of non-domestic fires and ensure the continued safety, from fire, of employees and visitors to these premises – Do you agree with this proposal?

Members of the S&S OSC congratulate the Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service for the number of Fire Safety Audits (FSAs) undertaken, which is more than three times the England rate for FSAs per 100 known premises and was recently highlighted in the recent inspection by the HMICFRS, stating that they were ‘impressed with the service’s productivity rates’ noting the high rate of FSAs – 6.1per 100 known premises compared to the average England Fire Rescue Service rate of 1.7.

The members of the committee also praised the Service for their current active targeting of the Risk Based Inspection Programme ensuring that the right businesses are inspected and the required safety improvements made with the approach adopted by the service resulting in no reported fatalities in business premises since 2013 and the latest national figures for non-domestic fires per 100,000 population puts the Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service as the third best performing in England.

The Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that in order to continue with this success it was appropriate for County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service to review their current approach against the proposed national methodology. This will allow the service to ensure that resources are focused on activities where they will have the greatest impact (high risk premises) and reduce risk in local communities.

Question 3

Do you have any overall comments about our Community Risk Management Plan and approach to allocating our resources?

The following additional comments were made by members of the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Home Fire Safety Visits

The committee congratulated the service for the prevention work undertaken as a result of Home Fire Safety Visits and commented how important it was to ensure going forward that these visits continue to be face to face particularly in relation to vulnerable people within the county.

Targeted Response Vehicles (TRVs)

Members of the Safer and Stronger Communities OSC recognised the role that TRVs play by responding to call outs for smaller fires and it was suggested that, as there is an issue with arson across the East of the county, would the service consider locating a TRV in the

East of the county to respond to secondary fires and maximise the availability of front-line fire appliances.

In addition, members of the committee were reassured by confirmation that a robust risk assessment was undertaken prior to the deployment of TRVs to ensure the safety of the responding crew and that this was the most appropriate response to the incident.

Consultation questions

A member of the committee was concerned that members of the public may have difficulty in understanding the consultation questions particularly in relation to question two without more information being provided and it was suggested that the Service consider making the questions simpler and more accessible. Whilst acknowledging that the consultation documents have already been published, the Committee suggest that consideration be given to the production of an easy-to-read version for future consultations.

As suggested at the Committee's meeting, details of the consultation have been circulated to Committee Members to provide an opportunity for an individual response.

To conclude, I would like to thank you for engaging the Committee with your consultation and continued support with the Committee's work programme. If you require any further information, please contact Stephen Gwilym, Principal Overview and Scrutiny Officer.

Yours sincerely

Joyce Charlton

ClIr Joyce Charlton
Chair of the Safer and Stronger Communities
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Cc

ClIr Craig Martin, Chair Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board
ClIr Chris Lines, Vice Chair Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Management Board
ClIr Phil Heaviside, Vice Chair Safer and Stronger Communities OSC
ClIr John Shuttleworth, Portfolio Holder for Rural Communities and Highways
Helen Lynch, Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Michael Turnbull, Democratic Services Manager