



**DURHAM FBU  
CRMP RESPONSE**

**CDDFRS  
2023-2026**

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## Introduction

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) recognises and supports effective risk management planning based upon the underlying principles of a risk based model. When this model is used to underpin the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), where a well-designed, evidence based, management of risk is implemented by a Fire Authority, which aims to protect and enhance the health, safety and welfare of firefighters and the public whom they serve, the FBU will always welcome and appreciate the value of this process.

However, we (the FBU) are conscious of the fact that the IRMP, or as is the case in County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), has moved towards an assessment based, not on risk, but on perceived demand and as a tool to mitigate Treasury based financial restrictions.

The FBU recognises that there have been substantial financial challenges for CDDFRS, brought about by successive governments continually underfunding the fire sector since 2010. The removal of government grants to fire and rescue services have had a significant impact on longer term planning, which has, in turn, affected areas including recruitment, leading to gaps in the workforce. Furthermore, restrictions on the amount of income the service can raise through council tax have also added to this financial pressure.

That being said, however, the prime focus of the FBU while responding to the CRMP consultation is safety; the safety of our members and the safety of the people of County Durham and Darlington.

CDDFRS's mission statement, 'Safest People, Safest Places', is an admirable aim and is supported by all members of the FBU. Whilst there are areas within the CRMP that look to achieve this aim, we have concerns over the cut to frontline roles that will undoubtedly put the health, safety and welfare of staff and the public at a greater risk.

We believe that at this time, it is imperative that the frontline receives greater funding, to help combat the health, safety and welfare concerns that have increased since 2010, instead of being cut further, causing untold damage to the

mental and physical health of firefighters, as well as the safety of the communities they serve.

## **Executive Summary**

The FBU acknowledges the work and continued consultation that CDDFRS have undertaken with FBU Officials and understands the financial constraints that have been implemented by successive Conservative Governments since 2010.

There are areas within this CRMP that we can support. The continued prevention and protection work that is carried out within local communities and the effects that this has had on the prevalence of primary domestic fires is something that all members of CDDFRS and the Fire Authority can be proud of.

We cannot, however, support the continued reduction in the number of staff crewing appliances and responding to safety critical incidents. We have major concerns regarding the CRMP recommended by CDDFRS and the impact that it will undoubtedly have on the safety of our members and the public of County Durham and Darlington.

It is stated in the foreword of the CRMP that CDDFRS's core strength is its people, and that both the CFO and the Chair of the Combined Fire Authority are proud that communities are safer than ever from the risks of fires within the home or a workplace and from a collision on the roads. Both of these statements, we believe, will be severely negatively impacted by the proposed cuts to the frontline.

Since 2010, we have seen a dramatic fall in the number of firefighters within CDDFRS which has had a major impact on the staffing of both Wholetime (W/T), Retained Duty System (RDS) and Specialist appliances across the county, as well as within the Control Room. This has led to insufficient staffing levels to crew appliances and respond to incidents, making it necessary for the service to lean heavily on the goodwill of firefighters to work extra shifts above and beyond their contracted hours. This reliance on staff increases the pressure on them to fill the gaps in crewing, knowing that not doing so will ultimately lead to appliances going off the run and not being able to respond to incidents. The pressure of knowing that if you don't take on an extra shift, that this could lead to a member of staff or a member of the public becoming seriously injured or ultimately lead to a fatality is causing serious psychological stress on employees with CDDFRS.

This stress is added on top of already high levels of physiological and psychological stress that being a firefighter subjects an individual to.

Furthermore, the reduction of appliances across the county carried out following the implementation of previous IRMP proposals, including the removal of W/T cover on a night at Seaham and Newton Aycliffe, and the removal of the second W/T pump at Durham, has led to what we believe are unacceptable extensions to response times. This is not only the initial response to incidents, but additional, necessary crews attending that can supply the correct weight of response for an incident to come to a safe and timely conclusion. Without the correct weight of response, firefighters will be put into situations where the moral pressure to act at incidents places crews at an intolerable level of risk, whilst they await additional appliances.

Another issue that a reduction in frontline crewing creates is mental ill health. Mental ill health issues within the fire service are already at an all time high, and are ever increasing. CDDFRS, although implementing services to help staff once mental ill health has become an issue for them, could be doing more to reduce the negative impacts of working within an industry such as the fire service, where the day to day duties take a major toll. This includes the correct staffing of appliances with the correct resources to deal with incidents and having the correct amount of appliances across the county.

It is also worth bearing in mind that CDDFRS has consulted the public regarding an increase in council tax, and stated that by the public agreeing to this it will allow the service to protect frontline firefighter posts ensuring that the FRS continues to deliver the best possible service to the communities of County Durham and Darlington. The information also stated that it will protect emergency response. If the people of County Durham and Darlington agree to the increase only for frontline services to be further cut and emergency response to be eroded this will reflect extremely poorly on CDDFRS and the Fire Authority.

## **Q1. We propose to crew all of our Wholetime fire engines with four firefighters**

As discussed within the Executive Summary, we cannot agree to the crewing of appliances across the county with four firefighters.

The FBU, both locally and nationally, is opposed to crewing fire appliances with four firefighters, we believe that a fire appliance should be crewed by a minimum of five firefighters (supervisory officer and four firefighters), the FBU has stated its opposition to crewing appliances with four in previous responses to the services IRMP's.

The most important and fundamental reason for the FBU to oppose the crewing of appliances with four is the health, safety and welfare implications for firefighters which vastly outweighs any financial reasons for doing so.

As stated within the CRMP, CDDFRS has crewed appliances with four firefighters for a number of years. However, up until recently this was only at stations where two W/T pumps were situated. Although not ideal, this did mean that a response to an incident would allow eight firefighters to respond at the same time and start emergency intervention without delay.

This model was then further changed to include stations where there is one W/T pump, a specialist appliance (primarily crewed) and/or a Tactical Response Vehicle (TRV) and an RDS appliance. This has allowed for an appliance responding with four crew members to be supplemented with a further two crew members making six in total for an initial, quick response. Again this is not an ideal situation and has negative health, safety and welfare implications.

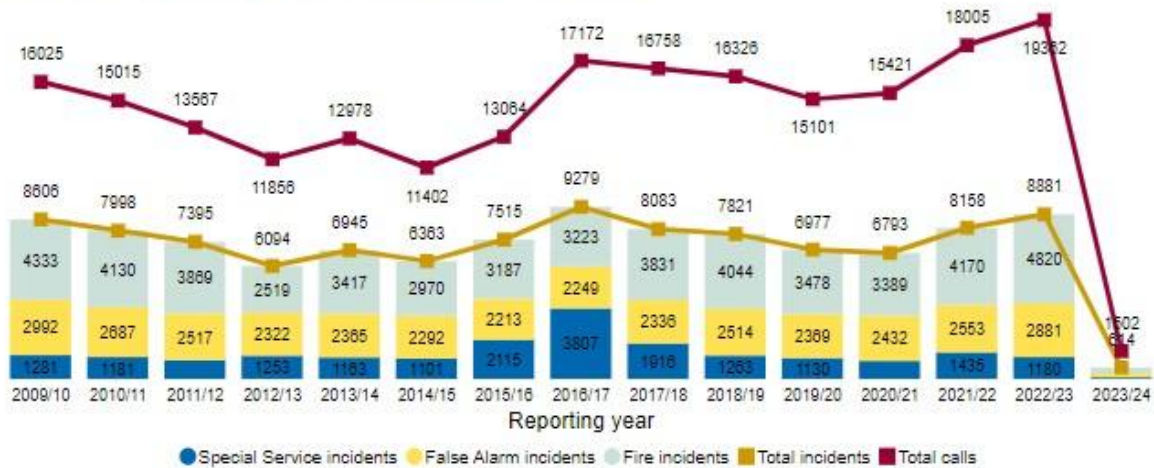
With this proposal, CDDFRS are looking to implement crewing appliances with four at all W/T stations, meaning that some appliances will only be able to provide an initial response to an incident with four crew members. This reduction, coupled with the lack of robust RDS crewing levels will leave crews and the public of County Durham and Darlington at an unacceptable increased level of risk.

As the following graphs demonstrate, there has been an increase in the number of calls taken and attended since 2020, with both the number of calls taken and the number of fires attended at a fourteen year high.

**Number of fires attended**



**Number of incidents attended and calls received**



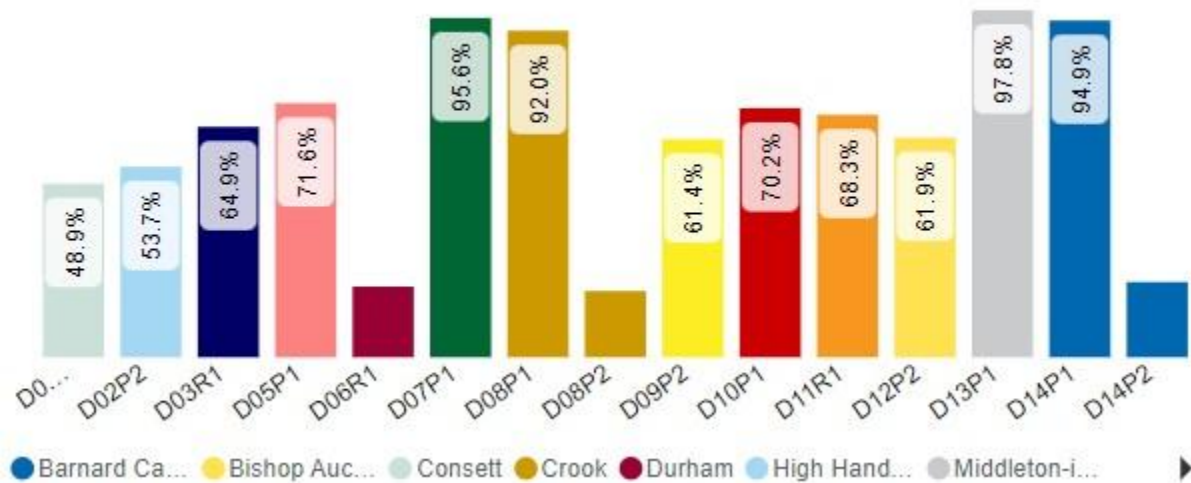
If you add to this the data from the RDS availability graphs for the year 2022/23 (on the next page), then it is clear that the response to incidents, across the entire county, is falling more greatly on W/T appliances within CDDRS, especially as the figures for RDS standalone stations are bolstered by W/T personnel keeping pumps on the run.

RDS recruitment and retention is not an issue that solely affects CDDFRS, other fire services across the country are facing similar issues. However, it is of great importance that this issue is taken into account when thinking about the reduction of crews across the entirety of CDDRS to crewing with four per appliance.

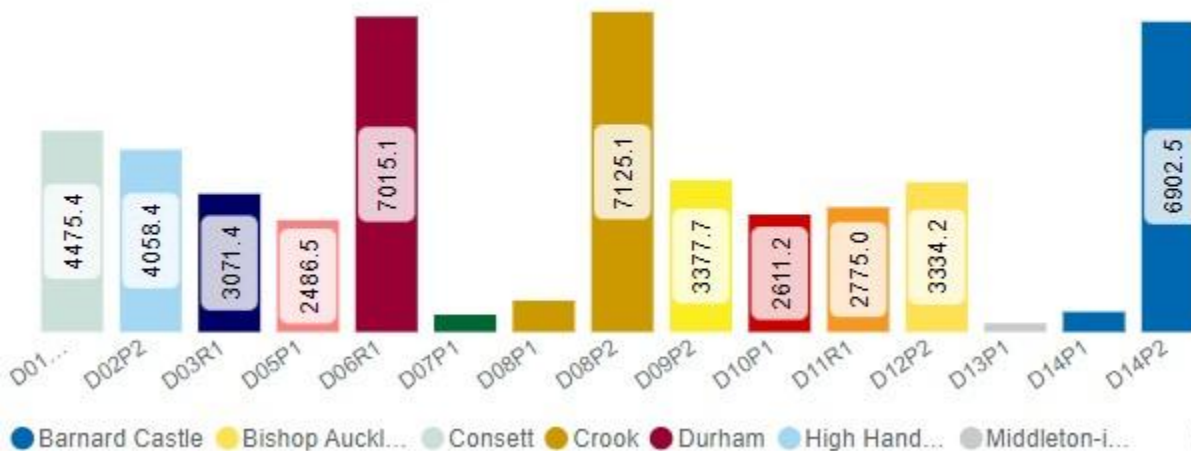


The number of appliances that we have within CDDFRS are being spread too thin, especially during daytime working hours, where RDS availability is at its lowest. W/T pumps are being utilised to cover RDS areas, increasing response times to incidents across the county. This in addition to the reduction of crewing levels will greatly increase the health and safety implications of responding to incidents.

% availability by callsign



hours off the run by callsign



One of the arguments put forward, within the CRMP, for the riding of four is that other services within the region carry out this practice. If we look at the geographical map of county Durham and Darlington it shows that generally,

stations are further apart than in Tyne and Wear FRS and Cleveland FRS, making travelling times longer between stations. Tyne and Wear also have eight two pump stations and Cleveland have five, compared to Durham and Darlington who have two. The weight of response of the first appliance and of subsequent appliances is absolutely crucial to firefighter and public safety and critical as to what can be achieved in the initial phases of an incident. If you respond to an incident with a crew of four, then the resources that provide that initial response will undoubtedly become stretched until further resources arrive. Attending a house fire or a road traffic collision will put those crews in positions where they are, increasingly, having to work outside of safe working practices.

An example of this would be when turning up to a persons reported trapped house fire. With only four personnel in attendance, the Officer in Charge will have to make a decision on whether to commit a BA team to the hazard area, to potentially save a life, under rapid deployment procedures (procedures that are in place for exceptional circumstances where immediately available resources are unable to deliver the full incident plan, but it may be possible to carry out immediate life-saving actions, or to take actions to prevent an incident escalating), or defensively tackle the incident until further resources are in attendance, increasing the likelihood of an injury to, or a fatality of, those reported trapped.

The implementation of four on a fire appliance may force incident commanders to use rapid deployment more commonly, and less as an exception, raising the risk to all involved in the incident exponentially.

As last summer (2022) showed, the increasing temperatures which are as a result of climate change, are having a large impact on the incidents that firefighters have to respond to. Last year there were a large number of incidents where crews were forced to deal with conditions that left them in danger of exposure to heat exhaustion and extreme fatigue. Data would suggest that these weather conditions are an ongoing trend and will become exacerbated in coming years. If firefighters are responding to incidents with smaller crews then they will have increased workloads. This will in turn mean that they will either have to push themselves to or beyond their limits to bring an incident to a successful resolution, or take longer to resolve the incident, basing this decision on health,

safety and welfare of crews, which may have a detrimental impact on the outcome of the incident.

OIC's and firefighters should not be put in the position of having to make these decisions, purely due to a lack of sufficient staffing.

Furthermore, we have not been provided with any evidence that a task analysis has been carried out by CDDFRS. This would show the determination of the correct initial emergency response required for foreseeable incidents within County Durham and Darlington. We believe that an initial response from a crew of four and the time necessary for a further supporting appliance to attend would not meet the criteria set out in these task analysis scenarios, due to our own work in these areas.

**Q2. We Propose to review the Risk Based Inspection Programme for business premises to ensure our proactive 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.**

The FBU recognises the need to review processes undertaken by CDDFRS. We support a review into the risk based inspection programme for business premises, as long as the implementation of the outcome of the review increases the health, safety and welfare for the employees of CDDFRS and the public of County Durham and Darlington.

### **Q3. Do you have any overall Comments about our Community Risk Management Plan and the approach to allocating our resources?**

The FBU believes that the decision in previous IRMP's to reduce the cover at Seaham and Newton Aycliffe to RDS only during the night does not provide enough resources in those areas for the risks posed. We would ask that both stations are returned to 2-2-4 shift systems to increase response standards for both areas. Both station areas are subject to increased standby cover, where pumps from other station areas cover the station when a pump is not available. This stretches the incident cover across the county and increases response times for the home station areas where the appliances have come from, due to reliance on RDS turnouts (where response times are longer than for W/T). There is a high rate of incidence at both these stations where this happens due to RDS pumps going off the run rather than because of ongoing incidents.

We also believe that the reduction of W/T appliances at Durham from two to one has had a significant impact on cover across the county. Due to the geographical and strategic nature that the second appliance at Durham held, the impact has been felt across the service, leading to resources at times being stretched to, and occasionally, beyond their limit. The fact that Durham's RDS cover is the lowest in the service, by a large margin, has meant that this reduction in appliances there has been felt greatly by crews in Durham and across the service.

Another issue to be addressed is the lack of robust RDS cover within the county. This lack of RDS cover means that there is a high incidence of W/T appliances having to carry out standby moves on station borders, meaning they are covering two or more station areas at the same time, for prolonged periods. It is imperative that this is improved to increase the health, safety and wellbeing of crews and the public. CDDFRS need to look at ways of improving recruitment and retention within the RDS if they are to provide the robust and resilient emergency response necessary to keep the communities of County Durham and Darlington safe.

Fire Control is another area of response that has become stretched within the last fourteen years. There are now far too few control operators to deal with an ever increasing workload. This is putting a large amount of pressure on them, causing increased stress and unhealthy working conditions. As has already been shown, the number of calls being taken has reached a fourteen year high. The

operators taking these calls work tirelessly to provide the necessary level of response and are often left feeling burnt out at the end of a shift, with an increased incidence of sickness amongst control staff. We believe that the control watches should be increased by a minimum of one crew member per watch, to spread the workload and improve health, safety and welfare.

## Conclusion

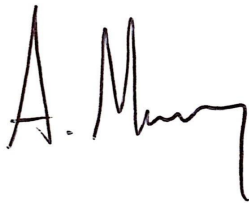
It is the belief of the FBU that this CRMP, whilst commendable in some areas, is ultimately putting the health, safety and welfare of the staff of CDDFRS and the public of County Durham and Darlington at greater risk.

We do not feel that there is any evidence of the risk analysis that has led to the conclusion that riding four on a crew is safe and suitable.

We firmly believe that there are aspects of these proposals which will subject an already understaffed and under-resourced service to a point where it can no longer operate within the boundaries of health and safety legislation or national fire service procedures. We further believe that this proposal will place firefighters and the public at an intolerable risk if agreed by the Fire Authority.

Given our view on the proposal to crew appliances with four, we cannot support this document and we would advise the Combined fire authority to reject this CRMP. We suggest that the service produces an alternative CRMP based around an evidence-based management of risk rather than as a cost reduction tool which will reduce the health, safety and welfare of staff.

Finally the FBU would like to remind all elected members that whilst this proposal has been written and designed by the CFO, their senior managers and advisors, it is only the elected members who can approve it. In doing so, elected members will be accepting ownership and responsibility for the contents of the document.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Murray', with a stylized, cursive script.

Andy Murray  
FBU Brigade Secretary



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**THE PROFESSIONAL VOICE  
OF YOUR FIREFIGHTERS**

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