

# County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service

## Statement of Assurance 2023-2024



Safest People, Safest Places

County Durham and Darlington  
Fire and Rescue Authority



## Foreword

Welcome to our annual Statement of Assurance. This document provides you, our communities, with the reassurance that in 2023/24 we met all our commitments to you as we strive to have the 'safest people and safest places' in every part of our Service area.

During 2023/24 the fire and rescue sector continued to face significant challenges and risks, including an increase in deliberate primary fires and the ongoing impact of high energy costs and inflation. As a result, we have implemented innovative ways to deliver our core functions, as well as continuing to develop our people and improve our leadership and culture.

We continue to support strong partnership working and to collaborate with our colleagues in the Police, Ambulance Service and neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services, as well as taking a leading role in the Local Resilience Forum (LRF). Our work with the LRF this year has led to stronger relationships with other organisations in fields such as health, transport and the voluntary sector.

During 2023/24 we continued to invest in our community safety activity through our emergency response crews and Community Safety Officers who carry out home visits to give safety advice and install smoke alarms. We also operate an innovative and productive business model where crews carry out fire safety audits of businesses which complements the activity of our dedicated Business Fire Safety Team.

We consulted with our communities on future ways of working from February 2024 for 12 weeks as part of the review of our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and listened to their views to help us decide how best to use our resources to meet the risks faced.

As Chief Fire Officer of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service and Chair of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority we are satisfied that, during 2023/24 our business has been conducted in accordance with proper standards and law and that public money was properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. Additionally, we are satisfied that the Authority has done everything within its power to comply with the requirements of the 2018 Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

Steve Helps  
Chief Fire Officer

Cllr John Shuttleworth  
Chair, Combined Fire Authority

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## Purpose

The Statement of Assurance confirms the adequacy of the arrangements of County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) in managing its financial, governance and operational obligations for the year 2023/2024. It also evaluates the adherence of the Service to the Fire and Rescue National Framework 2018.

### How do we make our judgements?

In looking at our obligations we have made a judgement on each based on the following:

Fully	The requirements of applicable legislation and guidance are being consistently met.
Substantially	Where legislation and guidance are not being met there is minimal risk to the Fire Authority discharging associated duties and powers for the provision of a fire and rescue service.
Partially	The requirements of applicable legislation and guidelines are being inconsistently applied exposing the Fire Authority to considerable risk in discharging the necessary duties and powers associated with the provision of a fire and rescue service.

## Financial Assurance

It is the view of CDDFRS that, at the end of the 2023/24 financial year, requirements associated with the appropriate management of financial matters were **fully met**.

### How did we show this?

The Fire Authority places significant importance in ensuring that its financial management arrangements are in line with the expectations of a public body.

An annual, independent audit is undertaken to review the Fire Authority's Statement of Accounts, which summarise the financial position of the Fire Authority at the end of the financial year and performance throughout the year.

During 2023/24, the Service undertook a range of "reasonable worst case" planning assumptions exercises based on differing levels of government funding, aligning them to fluctuations in the Medium-Term Financial Plan and highlighting possible options to the Fire Authority for their scrutiny.

The primary function of the external auditor is to express an opinion as to whether the Fire Authority's financial statements are free from material misstatement. However, the auditor also has responsibility for assessing whether the Fire Authority has reliable systems of control in place and the arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of its resources.

The draft 2023/24 Statement of Accounts is published on the Service website. [You can read the Statement of Accounts here.](#)

The accounts are subject to audit by independent external auditors who provide a view on the information contained in the accounts being 'true and fair'. The auditor also considers whether the Authority has demonstrated it has delivered value for money prior to signing the audit statement. The audit of the 2023/24 accounts is ongoing and is expected to be completed by September 2024.

Further information about how the Service implements financial controls can be found in our [Constitution](#).

# Governance Assurance

It is the view of CDDFRS that, at the end of the 2023/24 financial year, requirements associated with appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance were **fully met**.

## How did we show this?

### Our governance arrangements

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority is a combined authority created by the Durham Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1996.

Membership comprises of twenty-one elected councillors from Durham County Council and four from Darlington Borough Council. The Fire Authority is a legal body with statutory duties and responsibilities, including the scrutiny of the Service as a whole. The Fire Authority is responsible for setting the strategic direction, policies and priorities of the Service.

You can [find out more about the Fire Authority on our website](#).

### Our legal responsibilities

The primary legislation governing the Fire and Rescue Service is covered by the following:

- [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#)
- [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#)
- [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#)
- [Fire and Rescue Service \(Emergencies\)\(England\) Order 2007](#)
- [Localism Act 2011](#)
- [Police and Crime Act 2017](#)

The main legislative provisions which determine the functions of the Fire Authority include the following:

- Promoting fire safety
- Extinguishing fires and protecting life and property
- Rescuing people from road traffic collisions (and a large range of other risks determined through the Emergencies Order)
- Responding to other types of emergencies
- Entering into 'reinforcement' schemes with other fire authorities for mutual assistance

- Assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning, and in this regard to:
  - Put in place emergency plans
  - Put in place business continuity management arrangements
  - Put in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency
  - Share information with other local responders to enhance coordination
  - Co-operate with other local responders to enhance coordination and efficiency.

## **The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework**

The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England sets out the Government's priorities and objectives for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England. The National Framework outlines the high-level expectations although it does not require a detailed account of operational matters which are best determined locally.

The key priorities established by the Framework are:

- The identification and assessment of a range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks including those of a cross border, multi authority and/or a national nature;
- The provision for prevention and protection activities and the appropriate response to incidents within County Durham and Darlington;
- Collaboration with the communities of County Durham and Darlington and a wide range of partners both locally and nationally to deliver a fire and rescue service;
- Ensuring effective business continuity arrangements are in place which include the provision of national resilience assets;
- Being accountable to the communities of County Durham and Darlington for the service we provide through an annual Statement of Assurance.

[The full 2018 document can be found at the following link: \*\*Fire and Rescue National Framework for England\*\*](#)

The Fire Authority is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Fire Authority also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvements in the way in which its functions are exercised.

## **Management of Risk**

The National Framework requires the formulation of an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) which captures and publishes the Fire Authority's plans to meet current and future risks to our communities. To align the plan with the National Fire Chiefs' Council (NFCC) Framework the Service now describes the IRMP as a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP).

The framework provides that the Fire Authority must hold their Chief Fire Officer to account for delivery of the Fire and Rescue Service, and that the Fire Authority must have in place arrangements to ensure that their decisions are open to scrutiny.

When preparing the IRMP/CRMP we follow a process introduced by the Government to provide a modern, flexible approach to the provision of Fire and Rescue Services based upon locally identified need, aligned to risk and demand. The assessment of risk is the initial stage of the IRMP/CRMP process and requires quantitative and qualitative analysis of hazards and threats. The processes we have adopted use a combination of risk modelling software, historical data and professional judgement to make an assessment of impact and consequence with likelihood that an event will occur, ensuring that a thorough analysis has been completed. We take into account local community and risk information by creating Station Plans which feed into our risk management process. We outline our approach, the risks and the associated analysis in our Community Risk Profile (CRP).

The IRMP/CRMP delivers on our analysis of the CRP, which is aligned to our Service Strategies to effectively manage the risks identified over the period.

[You can read our current Community Risk Profile here.](#)

[You can read our current CRMP here.](#)

When setting the Service's strategic priorities, the Fire Authority refer to the IRMP/CRMP to ensure that our resources are directed to where the risk analysis tell us they are needed.

## **Organisational governance**

The Fire Authority, as a public body, places significant emphasis on ensuring that effective governance arrangements are in place.

Governance is concerned with how the Fire Authority manages its affairs on a day-to-day basis including business practices, standards of conduct and overall management procedures.

The Fire Authority operates in accordance with a Code of Corporate Governance that sets out the approach it takes to ensuring it operates in accordance with appropriate standards and frameworks. [The Fire Authority's Code of Corporate Governance is available to read here.](#)

To demonstrate how we have met our governance obligations the Fire Authority publishes an Annual Governance Statement that sets out the key governance issues that have been identified during the financial year. The Fire Authority works towards mitigating these risks as part of its approach to ensuring an effective governance framework is in place. [You can read our Annual Governance Statement here.](#)

The Fire Authority is committed to being fully transparent in accordance with the principles of good governance and legal requirements. [You can see our full transparency information on our website by clicking here.](#)



## Operational Assurance

It is the view of CDDFRS that, at the end of the 2023/24 financial year, the requirements associated with our operational functions were **fully met**.

### How did we show this?

#### Our services to the community

The primary legislation associated with fire and rescue services in England and Wales is the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 which sets out the statutory responsibilities of the Authority for providing a FRS that has the people, equipment and training needed to carry out the following core functions:

**Promoting fire safety (community safety and arson reduction)** – the provision of information, advice and encouragement on the prevention of fires, restricting the spread of fires in buildings and the means of escape from fires. We use our data and information from partner agencies to identify members of the public who are at the greatest risk from fire and we deliver Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSVs) to support them.

Additionally, we work closely with partner agencies such as Durham Constabulary, Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council to reduce deliberate fires and arson. These fires are often associated with anti-social behaviour so a partnership approach to their reduction is more impactful. We also carry out fire safety, road safety and water safety talks in schools and work with partner agencies to keep our communities safe, as well as social media campaigns.

**Fire safety regulatory enforcement (business fire safety)** – Our firefighters and fire safety officers undertake inspections of workplaces providing advice and guidance to owners and occupiers to enable them to be compliant with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, ensuring our communities are safe, using enforcement action where necessary.

**Emergency Response** – We respond to emergencies including fires, road traffic collisions, air and rail crashes, water rescues and flooding, hazardous chemical incidents and many other types of emergencies. Our firefighters regularly train, maintain and test equipment to ensure they remain ready to respond to emergencies at all times.

We also work closely with our partners such as Durham Constabulary, the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS), Teesdale and Weardale Search and Mountain Rescue (TWSMRT), local councils and our neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services as part of the Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Principles (JESIP) to ensure we can respond effectively and competently to any emergency.

Our operational performance is underpinned by high quality training for our staff and our Operational Assurance Group (OAG) monitors our performance and quality assures that we are responding effectively and competently to the range of incidents we may be called to attend.

The OAG exists to monitor, report and act on the outcomes from active monitoring and incident debriefs and this feeds into both national operational learning and joint organisational learning. Membership of the group is drawn from a cross-section of key

departments and is chaired by the Director of Community Risk Management, with the learning from debriefs routinely shared across the organisation.

In 2023/24 we have continued to undertake Operational Readiness Audits (OpeRA), where we assess the operational readiness of our stations across five areas (Prevention, Protection, Response, Efficiency and People).

A number of key performance indicators (KPIs) are used to monitor performance of our emergency response arrangements. Managers at all levels are accountable for managing the day-to-day performance of their fire stations overseen by their Divisional Teams and the Emergency Response Manager.

The Performance Board (PB) scrutinises performance and reports, by exception, to the Service Leadership Team (SLT). PB also reports to Members, who play a key role in scrutinising performance, through regular reports and presentations to the Performance Committee and the full Fire Authority.

### **Community & Business Safety (Prevention & Protection) Assurance**

All protection activities carried out by our operational crews are subject to quality assurance by the central Business Fire Safety team, as well as all Protection performance being reviewed at Section meetings with an overview provided to our Performance Board.

A comprehensive Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) exists to support our protection activities. The RBIP is underpinned by a full suite of guidance notes which instructs staff enforcing statutory fire safety legislation. We have taken account of our legal duties and guidance from the Fire and Rescue Services Act and the Fire Safety Order, Fire Safety Act 2021, National Framework, National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and Local Government Association (LGA) Circulars and any other relevant guidance.

The RBIP and Annual Audit Workload Programme are refreshed annually using intelligence gained from a range of sources including national guidance and statistical data, as well as local and national trends. As well as local intelligence gained from engagement with partners and post incident audits, we also utilise the specialist CFRMIS (Community Fire Risk Management Information System) software to inform the RBIP.

A well-established Operational Risk Information (ORI) inspection process and programme exists to capture important information on risks that firefighters may face when responding to emergencies. This information is made available via appliance mobile data terminals (MDT). Processes exist to ensure premises risks identified by fire safety inspectors are shared with Emergency Response managers for onward dissemination to our firefighters.

### **Health and Safety Assurance**

We have an established suite of key health and safety (H&S) performance indicators that enable us to closely monitor performance at all levels. The indicators cover areas such as personal and vehicle accidents, near misses and cause for concerns. Staff across the Service can access the information via SharePoint and the performance management software. The H&S Manager produces a quarterly H&S report which is reported to the Joint H&S Committee which is attended by the Representative Bodies.

In 2023/24 we continued to experience a low number of accidents to personnel. In addition, we can report that the majority of these accidents were of a very minor nature and did not require additional medical treatment or absence from work. We also experienced low numbers of vehicle accidents that were attributable to our driver's fault, with most of those occurring being of a minor nature, occurring during slow speed manoeuvres.

Learning outcomes from internal and external events identified through accident investigations, debriefs, active monitoring reports and stakeholder engagement are implemented via forums such as the OAG, PB and the Joint H&S Committee. Information is shared with staff via Organisation Learning Posts and H&S Newsflashes.

We have an established programme of proactive quarterly station inspections, undertaken jointly with the Representative Bodies, and internal audits led by the H&S Section to provide assurance on the effectiveness of our H&S management arrangements. Our OpeRA also provide a further level of quality assurance.

### **Training Assurance**

A suite of key training performance indicators enables us to closely monitor staff competence in the risk critical skills required for a firefighter's role. Our Divisional Management teams are responsible for quality assuring the competency levels of their staff and ensuring that the competency recording system is kept up to date. Outcomes of the quarterly audits are reported to the Emergency Response Managers for the North and South Divisions.

The OpeRA framework is used to provide assurance of the operational readiness of all our fire stations and includes dip-sampling of training records and also themed practical exercises undertaken at the Training Centre to further quality assure the competency of firefighters.

All internal and external delegates attending our training courses and development days are invited to complete evaluation forms. These are analysed by the Training Manager and used to inform improvements in delivery.

### **National Resilience**

National Resilience provides specialist capabilities, personnel and resources which enhance the ability of the sector to respond effectively to large-scale or critical incidents. Those incidents may be natural disasters, industrial accidents or terrorist attacks.

The Service host a High Volume Pump (HVP), a group of Detection, Identification and Monitoring (DIM) advisors and a Mass Decontamination Unit (MDU). We also have a type B flood rescue teams and two Flood Tactical Advisor declared on the DEFRA national flood rescue asset register. All of these assets are available at all times to support national resilience through the [national co-ordination advisory framework](#).

A key element of our preparedness is ensuring our staff are highly skilled and can safely and effectively deliver these capabilities, assured through a programme of local, regional and national exercise and training.

## Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a legal obligation to comply with the general equality duty. This incorporates nine protected characteristics age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

To meet our statutory obligations, when exercising our functions, we must aim to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

In addition to the general duty, all public sector bodies are required to meet specific duties which are incorporated into the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which requires us to:

- Publish diversity information annually to demonstrate our compliance with the general duty;
- Prepare and publish specific and measurable equality objectives.

We are committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in both the service we deliver to the community and the employment of our staff. EDI is about understanding and respecting differences and ensuring the right people receive the right services. We also understand that a diverse workforce with individuals who can offer different skills, experience and knowledge will benefit us as an organisation and ensure we are able to meet the needs of the diverse community we serve.

We have published our strategic commitment to EDI and our equality objectives in our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. This is a public declaration and commitment of how we plan to meet the duties placed upon us by equality and diversity legislation and best practice, in managing our staff and meeting the needs and wishes of our local population.

Our EDI action plan runs alongside the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and members of our EDI group are responsible for developing and implementing the action plan. [Further information about Equality, Diversity and Inclusion can be found here.](#)

Collecting and analysing equality data is an important way of developing our understanding about our employees and communities. [We produce an annual equality report](#) that shows how we comply with the general equality duty as well as publishing our [gender pay gap](#), both of which are available on our website.

## Our performance during 2023/24

The following tables provide an overview of our performance during 2023/24. [The latest statistics on fires, casualties, false alarms and non-fire incidents attended by all fire and rescue services in England are available online.](#)

<b>Service Performance Indicators*</b>	<b>2023/24</b>	<b>2022/23</b>	<b>Direction of travel from previous year</b>
PI 01 - Deaths Arising from Accidental Fires in Dwellings**	7**	1	Regressed
PI 02 - Primary Fires	963	1003	Improved
PI 03 – Number of Accidental Dwelling Fires	199	199	Same
PI 04 - Injuries Arising from Accidental Dwelling Fires	17	10	Regressed
PI 05 - Total Secondary Fires	2218	3730	Improved
PI 06A - Dwelling Fires Attended Within 8 Minutes (Target 70%)	69.1%	68.9%	Improved
PI 06B - Non-Domestic Property Fires Attended Within 9 Minutes (Target 70%)	67.9%	62.6%	Improved
PI 06C - Road Traffic Collisions Attended Within 10 Minutes (Target 70%)	69.8%	69.0%	Improved
PI 07 - Home Fire Safety Visits	18413	18382	Improved
PI 10a - Primary Fires in Non-Domestic Premises	104	135	Improved
PI 11a - Fire Control Calls Received and Mobilised within 90 seconds	83.2%	85.7%	Regressed
PI 14 - False Alarms Caused by Automatic Fire Detection	706	806	Improved
PI 17 - Number of Fire Safety Audits	1716	1927	Regressed
PI 42 - Proportion of Home Fire Safety Visits to High Risk People/Properties	98.2%	83.5%	Improved
PI 69 - Number of Accidents to Personnel	7	8	Improved
PI 70 - The Number of Hydrant Inspections	6220	6918	Regressed
PI 72 - Number of Vehicle Accidents (Caused by CDDFRS)	20	24	Improved

\*Figures correct at time of publication

\*\*Figures are accurate at time of publication but are subject to change if a fatality is confirmed at inquest at a later date.

## Our future plans

The post 2008 financial crisis period of austerity and the current economic conditions mean that to continue offering a first-class FRS to people living, working, visiting and studying in County Durham and Darlington we must be innovative and do things differently. This means collaborating with partners more, looking at ways we can enhance and broaden the traditional firefighter role, enhancing the way we recruit our people and further embedding our positive culture.

We will continue to monitor national policies on Fire Reform, in light of the change in government in July 2024. While in opposition, the current government announced that they aim to raise national standards, as well as reforming employment law, and we will work with the Home Office as plans develop.

[Details on our future plans which includes our consultation on the next 3-year CRMP can be viewed here](#)

## How we engage with our communities

You can get involved with the work of the Fire Authority by attending the public meetings that are held regularly by the Authority at our Headquarters. [You can find out more about the Fire Authority, its work and access documents from previous and future meetings on our website by clicking here.](#)

We value the views of our communities to ensure we are providing the service you need. We consult formally on the ways in which we propose to deliver services through the CRMP consultation document and this and more information about our plans and priorities can be found on our website: [www.ddfire.gov.uk](http://www.ddfire.gov.uk) You can also find us on social media by searching for @CDDFRS

### Access to information

CDDFRS is committed to being open, accountable and transparent and we constantly strive to develop a culture of greater openness and awareness.

More information on our arrangements in respect of access to data and information can be found on our website via the following link: [Access to Information](#)

### How to pay a compliment or make a complaint

We aim to make it as easy as possible for people to let us know their views. Through listening and learning we improve the quality of the services we provide and encourage and recognise good practice by our staff.

We want to hear from people if they:

- Would like to compliment us on a job well done;
- Have a suggestion on how we might improve services;
- Feel we have fallen short of their expectations;

- Feel we have fallen short of the standards we set ourselves in dealing with complaints.

There are several ways in which you can compliment, comment or complain about our services either:

Online via our website: [www.ddfire.gov.uk/contact-us](http://www.ddfire.gov.uk/contact-us)

By phone: 0345 305 8383

By post: County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service  
HQ,  
Belmont Business Park,  
Durham.  
DH1 1TW