



Safest People, Safest Places

Safer, Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

24 February 2025

Community Risk Management Plan Consultation

Report of Ben Cairns, Director Community Risk Management

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide the Safer, Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee with background to the Fire Authority's Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) for 2025-2028. The Committee will be provided with a presentation setting out details of the plan and consultation process.

Background

2. The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires the Secretary of State to prepare a Fire and Rescue National Framework. The Framework sets out priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities who must have regard to the Framework in carrying out their duties.
3. The Framework refers to the requirement for fire and rescue authorities to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan, this term has been replaced with the title Community Risk Management Plan to align with the National Fire Chiefs Council's Community Risk Management Planning Fire Standard.
4. The Framework directs fire and rescue authorities to:
 - be accountable to communities for the service they provide;
 - identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks their areas face;

- make appropriate provision for fire prevention and protection activities and the response to fire and rescue related incidents;
 - develop and maintain a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse;
 - collaborate with emergency services and other local and national partners to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the service they provide.
5. Specifically, the National Framework states that we have a statutory responsibility to include a several areas within the CRMP. These duties are summarised below:
- Reflect up-to-date risk analyses of all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect the area of the authority;
 - Demonstrate how prevention, protection and response activities will best be used to prevent fires and other incidents and mitigate the impact of identified risks on its communities;
 - Outline required service delivery outcomes including the allocation of resources for the mitigation of risks;
 - Set out its management strategy and risk-based programme for enforcing the provisions of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (RRO) 2005;
 - Cover at least a three-year time span and be reviewed and revised as often as is necessary;
 - Reflect effective consultation throughout its development and at all review stages with the community, its workforce and representative bodies and partners; and
 - Be easily accessible and publicly available.
6. The Service's CRMP is a three-year strategic plan. This is currently reviewed annually to assess the effectiveness of existing arrangements. Following this review an annual CRMP Action Plan is developed.

CRMP Content

7. The CRMP contains profile information regarding the Service area, performance data, governance arrangements and how the Service identifies, manages and responds to risk in County Durham and Darlington.
8. Linking directly to the Community Risk Profile (CRP) and Station Plans, the CRMP sets out the key risks found and what proactive and reactive measures will be in place relating to each identified risk.
9. Each of the main Strategies (Community Safety and Arson Reduction; Business Fire Safety; Emergency Response and Resilience; People, Estates, ICT, Assets and Assurance; Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change, Equality Diversity and Inclusion) and the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) is directly referenced with regard to how they are affected by risk.
10. An overview is provided of what we have introduced following last year's consultation together with the proposed options for Year 1, 2 and 3 of the 2025-2028 CRMP period.

11. In 2024-2027 we consulted on and delivered the following:

We said	We did
<p>Monitor the crewing of Wholetime fire engines</p>	<p>In July 2023, the Service implemented the crewing of the wholetime fire appliances at five fire stations the crewing of wholetime fire engines, with four firefighters.</p> <p>Throughout 2023 and 2024, we monitored the operational activity and operational performance of each of the five fire stations. We found no operational performance or health and safety issues reported that were directly attributable to the implementation of this action.</p> <p>We have also conducted a review of our response times 12 months prior to implementation, and 12 months following implementation, the results of which highlights that the Service's response times were maintained. We will continue to monitor this activity in the coming year through our normal assurance processes.</p>
<p>Implement the findings following the review of the Risk Based Inspection Programme.</p>	<p>The review produced an updated Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) with an increased focus on premises types that have been identified through national research as a higher risk. These premise types include care homes, hotels, hospitals and residential buildings over four storeys tall.</p> <p>The new RBIP implemented by our Service on 31 March 2024, has increased the number of premises in our Service area classed as higher risk from 40 to 734. Many of these premises now classed as higher risk have not been inspected for several years. We have developed a three-year plan to ensure all these premises receive an inspection. Once inspected all higher risk premises will receive a reinspection at least, every three years thereafter.</p>
<p>Continue to monitor the staffing arrangements and application of Targeted Response Vehicle's (TRV's).</p>	<p>The TRV and its staff operate independently at low impact low risk incidents. In doing so they increase the availability of front line fire engines. This is especially effective between 4pm and 9pm. They also support the wider operational capability either through provision of equipment and/or personnel at high impact incidents.</p> <p>Other supporting roles include enhancing operational cover at on call stations, standby cover at wholetime stations as well as forming part of our Business Continuity arrangements. The TRV is comfortable in</p>

	<p>dealing with varying terrains and is used for assisting in flood conditions, at wildfires and during other such spate conditions or complex incidents.</p> <p>More recently the TRV and staff have been utilised alongside partners for anti-social behaviour collaboration initiatives aiming to reduce unwanted deliberate and nuisance fire setting in hot spot areas.</p>
<p>Continue to explore opportunities and evaluate changes introduced through collaboration projects</p>	<p>Over the past year our Service has been involved in several collaboration projects.</p> <p>We are working in collaboration with three other FRSs Cleveland, Hereford & Worcester and Shropshire to integrate a new Fire Command and Control system that will save us approx. £1.9m over the 7-year contract. The joint system increases resilience and fallback arrangements including the handling of each other's calls during spate conditions or day to day business disruption.</p> <p>Other benefits include the reduction of carbon footprint through sharing of telephone lines, freeing up of technology infrastructure by moving to a cloud-based approach as well as improved cyber security.</p> <p>We have reviewed the Community Safety Responders roles in Weardale, signing a new agreement with Durham Constabulary. They now focus on a dual role of Community Support Officer and On Call Firefighter, with performance indicators reported through the Collaboration Board.</p> <p>We have signed an agreement with Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority (TWFR) whereby experts in Data Protection from TWFR assist County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority with meeting its responsibilities to the Information Commissioners Office and its legal duties arising from the Data Protection Act 2018.</p> <p>We continue to collaborate on our Service Estate with partners from Durham Constabulary and North East Ambulance Service and are pursuing further collaboration on other schemes.</p>

Medium Term Financial Plan

12. The Service has faced considerable financial pressures including a reduction in central government grants, increases in NI employer contribution costs, cost pressures arising from rapidly increasing inflation which is resulting in demands for higher pay awards. The financial pressures faced by the Service are compounded by uncertainty surrounding the level of government funding from 2026/27 onwards.
13. Our 2024/25 annual budget is £35.4M and to set a balanced budget for 2025/26 it will be necessary to continue to closely monitor our spend and income from central government. The Authority has one of the lowest level of reserves of all English fire and rescue authorities therefore using reserves to balance the budget is not sustainable on an on-going basis.
14. Historically, we have received an equal amount of our funding from direct government grants and Council Tax. However, over time this has changed, with 62% of our funding now being received from Council Tax, increases which are subject to strict limits without going through a very expensive referendum process. The Government have determined a band D Council Tax increase limit of £5 on fire and rescue authorities for 2025/26. Reliance on Council Tax also brings with it challenges in an area such as ours where a significant number of the properties are in Council Tax band A and B. A 1% increase in Council Tax raises an additional £218,000 for the Authority whereas in other areas 1% raises significantly more. To further illustrate the problem a 1%, pay award costs us over £298,000 per year and other inflationary pressures are adding significant costs to the Service.

Our Plans

15. In 2025/26 the following options will be considered
 - Review the newly implemented Service Risk-Based Inspection Programme;
 - Continue to explore opportunities and evaluate changes introduced through collaboration projects.
16. In 2026/27 the following options will be considered
 - Implement any changes to the Service Risk-Based Inspection Programme identified by the review in 2025/26;
 - Continue to explore opportunities and evaluate changes introduced through collaboration projects.
17. In 2027/28 the following options will be considered
 - Continue to explore opportunities and evaluate changes introduced through collaboration projects.

Consultation

18. The consultation for 2025/26 will begin on 19 February 2025 and will run for 12 weeks closing on 14 May 2025. To ensure that a wide range of views can be gathered the Communications and Engagement Team will lead on all consultation activity, with the assistance of crews and other departments. The consultation questions are set out at paragraph 24 of this report.
19. The consultation questions will be available to the public to answer in two formats, via an online survey created on Smart Survey and via a questionnaire style booklet.
20. A Communications and Engagement Plan has been created to assist with the consultation process. Various methods of communication will be utilised to ensure a meaningful consultation is carried out. Following an evaluation of the 2024/25 communications strategy, a wider emphasis on in-person engagement will take place. Three Station Open Days will take place during the consultation period and an Open Day at the Service Training Centre.
21. Social media will be a key component in promoting the online survey. The Service have a large following on Facebook and TikTok and a growing following on Instagram, LinkedIn and via our WhatsApp channel. Increasingly we will aim to promote and use WhatsApp, TikTok and stories, to connect to people quickly and efficiently in a landscape where people want their news faster and more concise than ever before.
22. Internal communications are an important aspect of our consultation, with our own staff being encouraged via The Bulletin, Chats with the Chiefs, everyone emails and at Leadership Forums to take part in the consultation and have their family members take part also. Posters with QR codes will be displayed around Service stations, Headquarters, Service Training Centre and Workshops.
23. A range of other communication methods will be utilised such as: working with the press to issue releases, visits to schools and universities, leaflet drops, work with social justice partners Teakisi and posters displayed in busy areas.

Consultation Questions

24. At the Strategic Planning Day on 21 November 2024 the Combined Fire Authority (CFA) considered the range of options which could be put to the public. Based on the feedback from this day and the Service analysis it is suggested the following questions be put to the public: The public are asked, do you agree for each of the following questions.

Investing in our communities:

“The effect of an accidental fire in the home is devastating for both individuals and communities. We know that there are several factors that mean some people are more at risk from a fire within their home. For instance, people’s lifestyle choices, such as smoking or drinking alcohol or those living with physical or medical illness

often present a greater risk with many of these people known to or engaging with other agencies. Our priority is to reduce the number of accidental fires in the home. To achieve this, we need to identify new and innovative ways to share information and train other agencies to reduce the risk.”

Q1 We will invest further with partner agencies to increase our access to people vulnerable from fire and other emergencies.

Investing in our communities:

“County Durham and Darlington suffers from some of the highest numbers of deliberate fires across England. We recognise the negative impact these fires have on our communities, not to mention the time we spend dealing with them. We work with a range of partner agencies to identify opportunities where we can have a positive impact. We know that deliberate fires are often linked with anti-social behaviour or crime and therefore we remain committed to working with our partners to both reduce them and investigate them with a view to supporting prosecutions.”

Q2 We aim to reduce the impact that deliberate fires have on our communities through targeted interventions and prevention activity.

Investing in our people:

“We know that our people are our greatest asset and therefore deserve the right support so they can be their best. Our focus is to have a fit, healthy and highly trained workforce that help us deliver our commitment to you “safer people, safer places”. This starts by recruiting the right people, providing them with support so that they can flourish and an environment which is welcoming, supportive and caring. We want to see our staff develop and reach their potential across all sections of the service”

Q3 To ensure we provide the best service to the public we will invest in our people by promoting our approach to recruitment, retention and staff well-being.

Investing in our On-Call Firefighter Response:

“County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service covers approximately 939 square miles including a large proportion of rural areas. We use on-call firefighters to provide cover in our rural areas and increase our response in more urban areas. Through this approach we remain one of the fastest responding fire and rescue services in England. We can only do this with the right people, in the right places at the right time. Therefore, it remains a priority to explore all opportunities to continually improve our response model. This will include investing time and resources in our people, our infrastructure and technology to provide the best service to our communities”

Q4 We are committed to continually improving our on-call response model.

Investing in our future:

“County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service considers the challenges we and society face today and those in the medium to longer term. Responding to these challenges is complex and requires commitment, planning and investment. We recognise the impact we have on the environment and have developed an Environmental, Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy which sets out how we aim to reduce our impact. Legislative changes together with our own aims means we will continue to invest in our estates, fleet and equipment whilst exploring technological solutions to meet our vision.”

Q5 To meet the challenges of the future and reduce our impact on the environment we will invest in our buildings, equipment and technology.

Recommendations

25. Members are requested to:

- (i) **Consider and note** the content of the CRMP and consultation which will be presented at the meeting.