

Integrated Risk Management - FAQs

We have seen and received many comments on our current consultation on our plans to change how we respond to incidents. We believe that healthy debate and discussion would be helped by the following clarification on some of the issues raised.

1. Why don't you fight the cuts?

The Chief Fire Officer's post and that of the Assistant Chief Fire Officers are politically restricted. This means they are unable to comment on political decisions, including austerity measures.

Senior officers and Fire Authority Members work tirelessly to try to get more funding for our Service through regular engagement with key stakeholders such as local and national government. This both ensures that they are fully aware of the impact that funding changes have on our service and provides them with the opportunity to influence future funding decisions.

As these efforts have not yet been successful we need to deal with the reality of our situation and deliver a legally required balanced budget based on the money that we receive.

All fire and rescue services must have a balanced budget based on the funding they receive. We receive Government Grant Funding as well as a share of the business rates and our council tax precept collected via the 5 local authorities in our area.

Since 2010 our Government Grant funding has been significantly reduced. In addition, our ability to increase our income from Council Tax has been limited by Government imposed council tax increase freezes and caps.

This has seen us manage and anticipate a reduction in our spending power of around £11.3m or 19% from 2010/11 to 2021/22.

2. How many fire engines will be lost if the proposals are introduced?

None. We have 24 fire engines in our service now, and there will be the same number if the proposals are fully introduced. The proposal is not cutting fire engines, it is merely ensuring that our fire engines are positioned where they are needed and staffed in a flexible and sustainable way.

3. What changes will the proposals make to the availability of your fire engines?

As we have stated the number of our appliances won't change. However some of our fire engines will be staffed differently to respond to anticipated levels of risk and demand. This will allow us to be more flexible – so in times of high demand, such as Bonfire Night, we can increase the level of staff to respond to the greater number of incidents we will need to attend.

4. How many firefighters will lose their jobs due to the proposals?

None. We are proposing that 70 posts are removed from the establishment over three years. That's the number of posts we can appoint to. These posts will be removed through the natural

retirement profile. In fact, the rate of people who are leaving us due to retirement is why we have recently recruited for the first time in 8 years, and why we intend to recruit again next year.

78 firefighter posts and 4 posts from our Control room will be removed, totalling 82. However the proposals also includes an additional 12 on-call firefighters, which is why the number of posts removed from the establishment is 70.

5. You need to save £3.69m – these proposals will only save £3.32 – where are the other savings coming from?

Our IRMP has three separate elements called reviews. The Response Review is only one of these. The other two workstreams are looking at exploring further opportunities for collaborative working with emergency services and partners and examining our ways of working, considering opportunities for further efficiency and effectiveness;

6. You have already introduced several IRMP measures, how much has been saved already?

Over this time we have reduced our staffing establishment by 384.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) posts. If the current proposals are approved and implemented, the total reduction will be 458.5 FTE posts. Of this 256 are firefighter posts (a reduction of 36.36% from 2010/11), and 202.5 'back office' posts (37.49% reduction from 2010/11).

7. Why are only frontline services being cut?

This is our Response Review, and the first of our IRMP proposal papers to be brought to Fire Authority. Papers from the other workstreams will follow in time.

In all of our IRMP proposals we have worked to minimise impact on our firefighters, fire engines, stations and our communities. We have reviewed every aspect of our business, protecting the frontline service as far as possible. Previously, we have focused on efficiencies and savings in our back office activities as well as a number of specialist departments within the organisation.

However in order to deliver an effective and sustainable fire and rescue service we do need support functions, each of which contribute to the delivery of our legal duties and the work of our frontline firefighters.

We previously undertook an Organisational Management Review in 2017, which saw several posts removed, including one Assistant Chief Fire Officer post along with several senior and other management roles.

8. Are you only making these proposals due to financial pressures?

The proposals are being driven by our need to balance our budget. However, the proposal to relocate some of our fire engines to areas with greater risk is based on our analysis of incidents over the last 8 years

9. Do you have concerns regarding the additional response time of up to 17 seconds?

Our analysis of the impact on response times was modelled on our busiest times. Therefore we believe that our attendance to incidents during our less busy times will see an even smaller increase to our response times. Our response times are some of the fastest in the country and we believe that whilst there will be these slight increases this will not compromise our ability to keep our communities safe. We are currently the second fastest responding fire and rescue service to

dwelling fires in the UK and we do not believe the proposed changes will affect this position. We will also continue to work on new ways which can enhance our speed of response.

10. Will Wallsend and Hebburn community fire stations still have fire engines based at the station on a night time?

Yes. Detailed analysis confirmed that they have the lowest levels of demand of all our full time stations for our most serious incidents. Therefore the proposals will see cover being provided by a fire engine from Tynemouth and one from South Shields Community Fire Station that will be based at Wallsend and Hebburn during the night. We will also have the added resilience and flexibility of on-call firefighters who can support those stations when required.

11. Are you introducing a 3 shift pattern?

No. We are proposing to keep the existing shift system but with an 8 hour day shift and a 16 hour night shift. Our analysis suggests that the night shift should not start any later than 5pm. On occasions of known or unplanned higher demand throughout the year we are proposing to introduce a flexible shift where we can increase the number of firefighters and fire engines available.

12. How are these proposals affecting firefighters now?

They aren't. We are just starting the consultation and we would encourage as many people as possible to get involved, either in the online survey or attend one of the consultation events. Please go here to find out more: <http://www.twfire.gov.uk/>

If agreed by our Fire Authority in February 2019 the proposals contained within the Response Review would be introduced over the next three years. We would also engage in negotiations with firefighter representatives on the introduction of the proposals and aim to implement proposal one in April 2019.

13. Why can't you use your reserves?

We recently published our reserves policy on our website. However, at 31st March 2018 our Total Reserves were almost £28.5m. Currently most of our reserves (£24.5m or 86%) are allocated to meet a key specific financial risk and cannot be used for any other purpose. Our earmarked reserves are held to a) help prevent an increase in the revenue budget (£16.5m); b) to support service delivery requirements (£4.5m) and c) to help fund our Capital Programme (£3.5m). We plan to use £17.5m in the next 4 years which will leave us with £11m by the end of the 2021/22 financial year. They cannot be used to address an ongoing revenue budget gap.

14. What is the breakdown of operational to corporate staff?

We have 518 firefighter posts plus control staff, fire safety, P&E etc. station managers and above at 152 = 670 posts. For corporate (Green book) staff we have = 190 posts.