

**Tyne and Wear Fire
and Rescue Authority**



STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE

2023/2024



CONTENTS

Section	Title	Page
	Foreword	3
1	Introduction	5
2	Equality, diversity, and inclusion	5
3	Our people	7
4	Governance	10
5	Financial	14
6	Operational	17
	Prevention	17
	Protection	20
	Emergency Response	22
	Resilience	27
7	Future improvements	30
8	Glossary	32

FOREWORD

By producing this Annual Statement of Assurance, we aim to provide an easy and accessible way for you, the communities of Tyne and Wear, the Government, local authorities, and our partners, to make a valid assessment of our performance during the year.

In line with legislation governing how Fire and Rescue Authority's provide their services, the [Fire and Rescue Service National Framework for England 2018](#) requires Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority (hereby referred to as 'the Authority') to produce this Statement.

This Statement focuses on our governance, financial and operational activity that took place between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 and provides a comprehensive overview of how we maintain high standards of service and fulfil our statutory duties.

The culture of the fire and rescue service nationally has been a focus this year. We want to reassure the communities of Tyne and Wear and beyond that, poor behaviour is not tolerated within Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (hereby referred to as 'the Service'). The Service was one of 10 fire and rescue services selected by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to be inspected as part of an evidence gathering exercise to inform a thematic report. The HMICFRS published the [Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services](#) report on 1 August 2024. Whilst no service received a specific report on the inspection, the verbal feedback received did not identify any significant matters for our Service. The Service will be reviewing the recommendations in the HMICFRS thematic report in the current year.

In 2022, work began to commission a cultural review to better understand how we create the best possible work environment for all employees. The cultural review provided an opportunity for our employees to feed information to a completely independent organisation. Alongside the HMICFRS feedback and employee survey, the cultural review is helping to inform how we continue to improve.

We continue to embed our updated Code of Conduct and Ethics following the introduction of the National Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services. The Service values diversity in all forms and discrimination and bullying have no place. We continue to work to ensure that our organisational culture is welcoming to people from all walks of life and to make everyone feel like they belong.

As part of our statutory duty, we have produced a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). Our CRMP outlines the key challenges and risks facing our communities. It also explains how we intend to meet and reduce those risks in our protection, prevention, response and resilience activities to prevent and/or mitigate fires and other incidents.

Our CRMP 2024-2027 was presented to the Authority in December 2023, and it was approved following formal consultation and engagement work. We are currently working on implementing the CRMP proposals, which include increasing the number of fire cadet branches, launching a new inspection team to support the Building Safety Regulator (BSR), and further improving our operational training facilities, with an increased focus on prevention and productivity.

This integrated approach to risk aims to keep the 1.1 million residents of Tyne and Wear safe, as well as those who work and visit the area. Through the work we conduct, our objective is to prevent incidents from happening but when they do occur, we will respond quickly to emergencies in order to minimise their impact on people, businesses and the local economy. Our excellent response remained high throughout the year.

As Chair of the Authority and Chief Fire Officer, Chief Executive and Clerk to the Authority (CFO) of the Service, we are satisfied that during 2023/2024, our business has been conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards and that public money was properly accounted for and used efficiently and effectively.

The systems and processes in place, many of which have been scrutinised by internal and external agencies, are sufficiently robust to assure our governance, financial and operational arrangements.

We want to reassure the communities of Tyne and Wear, the Government, local authorities, and our partners that their fire and rescue service has been and continues to operate effectively, efficiently, and with a commitment to fair and equitable practices that support our workforce and the communities of Tyne and Wear.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'PT'.

Councillor Phil Tye
Chair
Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Peter Heath'.

Peter Heath, KFSM
Chief Fire Officer, Chief Executive and
Clerk to the Authority
Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service

1. INTRODUCTION

The [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#) establishes the Authority and outlines its statutory responsibilities, including providing a fire and rescue service equipped with the necessary resources and training to carry out its core functions. This Act serves as the primary legislation governing the Service, with the Government being responsible for producing the [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England](#).

The Fire and Rescue National Framework sets out the Government's priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities in England and emphasises the importance of local determination of operational matters in partnership with communities.

The priorities in the framework include:

- Making appropriate provision for fire prevention and protection activities, as well as for responding to fire and rescue-related incidents;
- Identifying and assessing the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks their areas face;
- Collaborating with emergency services and other local and national partners to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the services provided;
- Being accountable to communities for the services delivered; and
- Developing and maintaining a professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse workforce.

This statement describes how we meet the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework while fulfilling our legal obligations. It outlines our approach to ensuring our governance, financial, and operational arrangements work effectively, including our strategies for prevention, protection, response, and resilience.

2. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Being a public body, it is our duty to comply with the [Equality Act 2010](#) and in particular our responsibilities under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)¹ This statement demonstrates our commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (ED&I), as well as to our workforce.

What we Value

We are dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for those who live, work, and visit Tyne and Wear by ensuring that the public is treated fairly and with respect, while also considering the needs of individuals with different requirements.

We make sure that:

- The Services provided by us or on our behalf are accessible and free from discrimination.
- Our employees are supported in delivering accessible and non-discriminatory services.

We are dedicated to fulfilling our responsibilities under the PSED when designing and delivering services and in employment practices by promoting:

- The elimination of discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.

¹ S.149 of the Equality Act 2010.

- Advancement of equality of opportunity.
- Building positive relations between individuals sharing a protected characteristic² identified in the Equality Act 2010 and those who do not.

Statement of Intent

We are committed to advancing and promoting ED&I within our service and the wider community. Our commitment to ED&I is an integral aspect of our strategic plans, intended to equip our employees and managers with the knowledge and behaviour necessary to uphold our core values. Our ultimate goal is to create a Service that is fair, respectful, and representative of the diverse community we serve.

In line with the PSED, we rigorously evaluate how our policies and decisions affect individuals with protected characteristics, aiming to eliminate or reduce any disadvantages experienced by these individuals. This involves taking proactive measures to address their specific needs, recognising that these needs may differ from those of the general population. We are committed to encouraging the active participation of these individuals in all aspects of our Service activities.

To enhance that we have a thorough understanding of our workforce and the communities in Tyne and Wear, we gather and analyse equality data. This data-driven approach helps us make informed decisions, and identify, and address potential inequalities.

We conduct comprehensive equality and risk impact assessments to make sure that any proposed decisions or procedural changes do not have a negative impact on any stakeholder or the outcomes of our service delivery. In line with our equality objectives, we:

- Provide mandatory ED&I training annually to all of our employees.
- Complete Equality Impact Assessments to facilitate discussion, refine proposals and assess the impacts of our policies, projects, events and decision-making processes.
- Offer a sign language training programme for firefighters.
- Support Women in the Fire Service events.
- Engage with and actively participate in the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) ED&I workstreams.
- Continuously improve our understanding of our workforce by collaborating with managers to review and enhance our equality data.
- Support our employee network groups³ and their involvement in our decision-making processes. This includes organising awareness raising sessions, lunch and learns, signing up for charter marks and committing to the White Ribbon Campaign, Positive Allies Charter Mark and Endometriosis Friendly Employer.
- Maintain an Inclusion Forum and People and Culture Board to provide strategic direction, advice, guidance, and oversight to positive action, projects, priorities, and programmes related to ED&I.
- Support local initiatives to eliminate inequality and promote ED&I, including Pride, the Mela and Ramadan.
- Publish our annual [Equality Data and Gender Pay Gap Report](#).

By adhering to these principles, we aim to create an inclusive and equitable environment that reflects the diversity of our community and supports the well-being and development of all our employees.

² Protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion and belief; sex and sexual orientation.

³ Employee Network Groups are Disability, LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer), Gender, Multicultural, and Diversity of Thought.

3. OUR PEOPLE

Culture

Our [vision, mission, and values](#) shape expectations at every level of the Service. We are committed to building a positive culture through regular employee engagement, monitoring ED&I, and delivering community-centred services to create a fully inclusive and diverse Service.

Our Code of Conduct and Ethics plays a key role in setting the direction of the Service and influencing its culture. We recognise the need for continuous improvement in our Service culture and in providing further support.

Reports on matters relating to employee matters, key performance indicators, targets, and, ED&I are considered by the Authority's [HR Committee](#), and internally by the People and Culture Board. These forums are also responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Service's Code of Conduct and Ethics.

The 2021/2022 HMICFRS inspection revealed that some employees still feel unable to speak out. As a result, the Service commissioned a cultural review to better understand how to create the best possible work environment for all employees.

The cultural review provided opportunities for employees to provide information to two completely independent organisations. The review consisted of:

- The first organisation conducted focus groups with employees across the Service, from different roles, stations and departments. This was entirely independent of the Service, and they produced a report with recommendations based on the feedback from the focus groups, and interviews.
- The second organisation created and distributed an employee survey. They independently analysed the survey results and produced a report with recommendations that were presented to the Service.

Following the recommendations, work has begun to address some of the areas highlighted for improvement, including:

- **Creating an environment to thrive**
We have created development pathways and career conversations to support the continuous development of our employees.
- **Improving our openness and transparency**
To provide further assurances around fairness and transparency, we have introduced several new elements to our promotion process.
- **Remodelling how we review employee feedback**
We have changed how we receive, process and utilise employee feedback.

In March and April 2024, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and other managers visited different watches or departments to share the main findings from the culture review, specific to each watch or department. The data presented was anonymous and prompted open and confidential discussions about the culture review findings. Feedback from these meetings has been collated and an improvement plan developed.

Organisational learning and development

Our employees are incredibly important to us, and we strive to have a diverse, flexible, highly skilled and agile workforce. Our people are our greatest asset. We are committed to nurturing a professional, resilient, skilled and diverse workforce. Our [People and Organisational Development Strategy 2021-2025](#) supports this goal. The Learning and Development department is focused on ensuring that all employees can perform their roles safely, confidently, effectively and efficiently in line with Service training policy, identified role maps, National Operational Guidance (NOG), and fire and other professional standards. The department aims to promote excellence across the Service in both operational and non-operational areas, with the belief that learning and development are key to improving our performance.

Organisational learning is centered on the learning culture and how effectively learning and development are facilitated Service-wide to achieve our strategic goals and priorities. Our learning approach was recognised by HMICFRS in 2021/2022, who stated, "*The Service has made good improvements with skills and training*". Building on this positive assessment, we continue to embrace the National Operational Standards and the NOG Programme, which set out the standards for professional and operational competence.

All employees undergo regular Performance and Development Reviews (PDRs) with line managers, during which their performance is reviewed and measured against key annual objectives within their role. Employees also have the opportunity to request development interventions during these PDRs to address their development needs. Our employees also undertake a 'career conversation' to discuss their career aspirations with their line manager, helping to identify future leaders and those who are ready for development opportunities for career progression.

The Learning and Development department works collaboratively and inclusively to promote high standards of performance, behaviour and continuous improvement, ensuring employees and their performance is the best it can be. This is achieved by supporting employees to acquire, maintain and continuously develop the professional and technical skills required for their role. Creating the right learning environment and investing in appropriate resources is fundamental to our training and education success. Blended learning and digital technology are integral to our learning and development delivery model.

We have introduced 'Development Pathways' which provide a recognised and standardised route of leadership and management development for both our operational and non-operational employees. This offers development opportunities for individuals identified in their career conversation to ensure they are upskilled in the relevant key areas to enable them to carry out their roles effectively. The Development Pathways are based on the NFCC Core Learning Pathway and the NFCC Leadership Framework, utilising the NFCC Leadership Development Programmes at all levels. The Development Pathway outlines leadership development, management development and role-related development interventions for employees.

The Learning and Development department continues to emphasise the importance of obtaining and evaluating feedback across all learning events. New and innovative ways of gathering, recording, evaluating and utilising feedback from all events have been embedded, supporting the training and learning cycle. Furthermore, we will continue to utilise feedback from both internal and external sources to inform our learning culture, assess our performance, and reflect on our effectiveness.

Embedding evaluation into the continuous training and learning cycle will support the Service in identifying further improvements and help evaluate the effectiveness of learning and development interventions against the achievement of our strategic goals and priorities.

We utilise apprenticeships across the Service and currently deliver with three apprenticeship standards as an employer-provider: Level 3 Operational Firefighter, Level 3 Emergency Contact Handler and Level 3 Community Safety Advisor. At present, we have 77 apprentices across the organisation including four Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) apprentices, Management, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Heavy Vehicle Technician and learning and development. The apprenticeships utilised to date have focused on developing the knowledge, skills and behaviours of not only individuals but also those around them. The department supports each apprentice from day one, providing guidance and support to develop their knowledge and skills in their role.

The apprenticeship provision offers high-quality training and conducts an annual self-assessment to ensure that it consistently recognises best practices and makes improvements for the upcoming year. The provision is inspected against the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework and complies with the Apprenticeship Funding Rules as set out by the Department for Education.

Health, Safety, and Wellbeing

We understand and acknowledge our responsibilities for the health, safety, and welfare of our employees and others who may be affected by our activities.

We are committed to meeting the requirements outlined in the [Health and Safety at Work Act](#) and associated legislation. We have a policy statement of intent and a policy outlining health and safety roles and responsibilities in place.

We develop and review procedures to improve our health, safety, and welfare arrangements in line with legislation and relevant guidance sources.

The Service has an ongoing programme of health and safety training, including the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) Managing and Working Safely training courses commensurate with an employee's role. Our health and safety training procedures cover a range of training options to enhance employee competence and promote a positive health, safety and welfare culture.

We submit detailed quarterly reports on health, safety and welfare to the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Board.

We have established procedures for reporting and investigating accidents and incidents. When necessary, we report incidents to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in accordance with the [Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations \(RIDDOR\) 2013](#).

Our Wellbeing and Trauma Support function, along with the Occupational Health Unit (OHU) offers essential mental health and wellbeing services, and trauma support to operational personnel following traumatic incidents/events.

We also provide medicals, health screenings, and advice and guidance on all health related matters. Additionally, our fitness advisor designs fitness programmes for firefighters and new recruits and oversees the gyms at each property location.

4. GOVERNANCE

Organisational governance

The Authority is a legal body with statutory duties and responsibilities, including the scrutiny of the Service. It is responsible for setting the strategic direction, policies, and priorities of the Service.

The Authority is made up of 17 elected members, 16 of whom are appointed by the five constituent councils of Tyne and Wear in accordance with Schedule 10 of the [Local Government Act 1985](#). The Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria also joined the Authority in 2017.

The Members of the Authority are responsible to the residents of Tyne and Wear for the running of the Service. The main legislative provisions, which determine the functions of the Authority, include the following:

- Promoting fire safety.
- Extinguishing fires and protecting life and property.
- Rescuing people from road traffic collisions (RTCs) 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.
- Assessing the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning, and in this regard to:
 - Putting in place emergency plans.
 - Putting in place business continuity management arrangements.
 - Putting 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.
 - Sharing information with other local responders to enhance coordination.
 - Co-operating with other local responders to enhance coordination and efficiency.

Further details about the purpose and function of the Authority, its members, and their allowances can be found [online](#).

The Authority operates a [constitution](#) comprising of standing orders, which provide a framework to regulate its business.

The Chair and Vice Chair of the Authority are elected annually⁴ by the Authority at the Annual Governance Meeting (AGM) of the Fire Authority, held each June.

Fire Authority meetings are open to the public, take place monthly between June and March, and are supported by a committee structure. Sunderland City Council's Democratic Service provides the secretariat function for these meetings, and reports can be viewed on the council's [website](#).

The Authority's legal duty to monitor the Service's operational performance is achieved through the scrutiny of data and information at Fire Authority and committee meetings.

⁴ NB: unless they resign, cease to be a member of the Authority or become disqualified, act until their successors become entitled to act as Chair or Vice Chair.

Main committees

- [Governance Committee](#)
- [Policy and Performance Committee](#)
- [Human Resources Committee](#)

Ad hoc committees

- [Appointments Committee](#)
- [Disciplinary Appeals Committee](#)
- [Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee](#)
- [Emergency Committee](#)

Our strategic goals include:

- **Service Effectiveness** - We will target our fire prevention and protection activities to those at greatest risk from fire, delivering a first class emergency response that provides value for money.
- **Efficiency** - We will deliver a robust financial planning approach and align budgets and resources appropriate to the risk, never compromising on public safety and achieving value for money.
- **People** - We will develop and maintain an inclusive workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible, and diverse.

Our strategic priorities include:

- **An All Hazards Approach to Firefighter Safety** - Provides an all hazards approach to firefighter safety, focusing on raising awareness and training on hazard and risk recognition and perception, thus allowing commanders to train to respond to the wide range of incidents they encounter. This builds on the Safe Person Concept.
- **Inclusion** - Further diversification of the workforce to ensure we reflect our whole community to have clear, fair and transparent routes to both employment and progression and to have a positive culture where everyone is valued and takes pride and ownership of their actions and behaviour.
- **Digital and Data** - To enable the effective use of technology to improve delivery of all our services, which will allow us to offer a wide range of improvement activity, along with transformational ways of working and robust governance and cyber resilience for the 21st Century.

These goals and priorities collectively aim to promote efficiency and service improvement by driving innovation in the utilisation of our resources.

Risk and Resource Model

The resources we have in place are based on an assessment of risk across the Service. We conduct a strategic risk assessment to ensure that fully understand of our current and future challenges. We assess both existing and potential risks to the communities of Tyne and Wear to identify how we can best use our resources to reduce those risks. The information gathered and analysed is detailed in our [Community Risk Profile 2023-2026](#).

The Fire and Rescue National Framework requires the formulation of an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), to document the Authority's plans to address current and future

risks to our communities. Following the NFCC Framework, the Service now refers to the IRMP as CRMP. Our [CRMP 2024-2027](#) outlines how we will reduce risk of fire and other emergencies. The plan was developed using intelligence, insight and a comprehensive understanding of current and future risk in Tyne and Wear and nationally.

The CRMP 2024-2027 was published following extensive consultation. The consultation took place over an eight week period from 12 December 2023 to 6 February 2024 and collected opinions on the proposed changes. Residents, businesses, stakeholders/partners and employees were invited to provide feedback on the proposals via an online survey and in person events. A total of 528 responses were submitted.

Our CRMP outlines how the Service will fulfil its statutory responsibilities. The plan focuses on community safety, identifying and mitigating risks effectively and efficiently by targeting resources. To ensure that our planning remains current, key strategic risks are regularly reviewed, and analysed and new and emerging risks are considered through horizon scanning.

Industrial and Employee Relations Management

We actively participate in political and employee engagement with representative bodies such as The Fire Brigades Union (FBU), GMB, and Unison. We manage this relationship through the Joint Consultative Forum (JCF), which meets monthly to discuss matters related to Service-employee relations and policy development. This forum complements our daily arrangements that support effective industrial/employee relation management.

Performance

We are committed to providing an effective and efficient service to residents, businesses, and the communities we serve. Our performance is regularly monitored internally, providing the ELT with oversight of service delivery.

We have a set of key performance indicators, which are reported quarterly to the Performance and Improvement Board, [Policy and Performance Committee](#) and the Authority. Performance information and associated reports are accessible on the [website](#).

We are responsible for providing regular data returns to the Home Office, which serves as the basis for official and national statistics published by the Home Office. Statistics for trends in fires, casualties, false alarms, and non-fire incidents attended by fire and rescue services are published quarterly [online](#) by the Home Office. Our performance is compared with other fire and rescue services in England.

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services

We underwent two full HMICRFS inspections in [2018/2019](#) and [2021/2022](#), and received a 'Good' grade across the three pillars of inspection: Effectiveness, Efficiency, and People.

In April 2024, the Service underwent a third full inspection that lasted 10 weeks. The Inspectorate has replaced the overall graded judgements at pillar level with graded judgements for 11 diagnostic inspection questions. We are currently awaiting the final report and graded judgements for this inspection.

In December 2023, the Service was one of 10 fire and rescue services visited as part of a thematic inspection focusing on the handling of misconduct cases in fire and rescue services in England. The findings of the thematic inspection were collated into the [Standards of behaviour: The handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services](#) report that was published on 1 August 2024.

Internal Audit

Sunderland City Council provide our Internal Audit function and deliver an audit programme of work that oversees key areas of our business. Internal auditing involves examining evidence independently to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the Service's governance, risk management and control processes.

The annual internal audit plan is flexible allowing Internal Audit to respond to emerging and changing risks during the year. The audit plan incorporates sufficient work to enable the Head of Internal Audit to give an opinion on the adequacy of the Service's control environment.

The 2023/2024 audits were conducted in alignment with the Authority's risk profile, providing independent assurance on our control environment. The Governance Committee approved the [Internal Audit Annual Plan 2023/2024](#) on 6 March 2023.

The findings of the [Internal Audit Annual Report 2023/2024](#) were presented to the Governance Committee on 31 May 2024. The report concluded that *'sufficient audit work was completed within the year to enable an opinion on the Authority's internal control environment, with no high or significant risk issues being identified'*. The work undertaken confirmed that the Authority continued to have a good internal control environment.

Information Governance and Data Transparency

We are committed to full transparency in accordance with good governance principles and legal requirements. We adhere to the [Local Government Transparency Code 2015](#) by publishing necessary [transparency](#) information, including senior officer salaries, property, registers and decisions of significant public interest.

Our Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) oversees information risk across the Service, supported by a Data Protection Officer (DPO) and Information Governance Advisor. We ensure that employees are aware of their data protection responsibilities, especially regarding safeguarding and the sharing of information.

We maintain a [freedom of information](#) publication scheme, with the Information Governance Advisor handling requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Additionally, we have established an Information Governance Framework to further enhance our practices.

We aim to comply with our responsibilities as outlined in the [GDPR](#) and UK legislation related to the protection of personal data, including the [Data Protection Act 2018](#). Additionally, we implement extra security measures to safeguard health and children's data.

Our [privacy notice](#) explains the reasons for collecting data and how personal information is used.

We operate a corporate complaints policy that ensures complaints from service users, the public, partners and other stakeholders are recorded, investigated, and resolved within 28 days.

We participate in the [National Fraud Initiative](#) as required by the Cabinet Office under statutory authority outlined in Part 6 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

To ensure fair and transparent operations, we operate counter fraud and whistleblowing arrangements.

5. FINANCIAL

The overall Service budget is funded from four main sources: council tax, business rates, Government funding and service income. We follow financial procedures for budget setting and monitoring, and the production of our final accounts.

Annual Statement of Accounts

Financial assurance is provided through the publication of the annual statement of accounts, in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting and the requirement of International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). Our financial statements are subject to annual review by independent auditors as directed by the [Audit Commission Act 1998](#).

The Finance Director is responsible for ensuring the right controls are in place so that financial assets are properly managed, financial reports are accurate, and the annual statement of accounts are prepared in accordance with statutory requirements.

The [Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015](#) require the unaudited accounts to be published annually by 31 May and the audited accounts to be submitted for approval by 31 July. The Authority, despite its best efforts, has not been able to publish its statement of accounts (subject to audit) for the year ended 31 March 2024 by the statutory deadline of 31 May 2024. This is due to a number of factors, including the delay in the 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 statement of accounts being audited, which have only recently been concluded.

The [Unaudited Statement of Accounts 2023/2024](#) and [Inspection Notice](#) were published on our [website](#) on 28 June 2024. The accounts were shared with Governance Committee for comment and presented at the Governance Committee on 16 September 2024.

Meetings have been held with the auditors and they are unable to provide a date of when the accounts will be signed off. It is unlikely to be within this calendar year. As noted in the Inspection Notice, the public can inspect the accounts and raise objections to the external auditor in accordance with the provisions of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

The [unaudited Statement of Accounts 2022/2023](#) were noted by the Governance Committee on 30 June 2023, as the statutory timescale of 31 May 2023 could not be achieved because of the lateness of the necessary pension disclosures which have an impact on the accounts. The [audited Statement of Accounts 2022/2023](#) were noted by the Governance Committee on 26 February 2024.

Annual Governance Statement

The Annual Governance Statement is a requirement under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and forms part of the Annual Statement of Accounts. It outlines the systems and processes that ensure the Authority's resources are used in accordance with the law and provides best value for taxpayers. It provides assurance on the governance arrangements and the effectiveness of the internal control environment operating within the Authority.

The arrangements are reviewed annually, and any identified improvements are included in an action plan to further strengthen the Authority's already strong governance arrangements. The [Annual Governance Statement 2023/2024](#) was noted by the Governance Committee on 26 February 2024 and approved by the Authority on 11 March 2024.

The Authority follows a [Code of Corporate Governance](#), which adheres to the CIPFA Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework. The Code was updated and approved by the Authority on 11 March 2024.

External Audit

Mazars are the appointed External Auditors for the Authority and are responsible for the completion of the following assurance activities:

- Audit of the financial statements.
- Providing an opinion on the Authority's accounts.
- Drawing a value for money conclusion and detailed commentary.

In line with auditing standards, the External Auditor prepares an Audit Completion Report in which they give their opinion on whether the financial statements provide a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority as of 31 March 2024, and its income and expenditure for the financial year. There have been delays in completing audits due to resource constraints and the 2023/2024 report has not been issued yet

The Auditors Annual Report for 2022/2023 covering the year ending 31 March 2023 was presented to the Governance Committee on 31 May 2024 and to the Fire Authority on 24 June 2024. The [Auditors Annual Report](#) includes the auditors work, findings, and opinions on the Authority's accounts as well as the value for money conclusion..

The [Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/2025 to 2027/2028](#) provides an analysis of our forecasted financial position over the next four years. It establishes approaches that direct and reinvest limited resources in addressing our strategic priorities, achieving value for money in the use of those resources, and assisting the budget-planning framework for the preparation of the [Revenue and Capital budgets](#), which are approved annually by the Authority.

The [Reserves Policy 2020/2021 to 2024/2025](#) provides transparency to stakeholders about the purpose and level of earmarked reserves held by the Authority and the financial commitments and risks that they address. The [Reserves Policy 2024/2025 to 2027/2028](#) was presented to the Authority at their meeting on 24 June 2024.

In line with the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice, we produce an annual Treasury Management Policy and Strategy Plan. This plan supports the provision of services and functions through the management of the Authority's cash flow, and levels of affordable debt and ensures the Capital Programme is sustainable and deliverable, taking into account the wider resources available to the Authority.

Procurement

Our [Procurement Policy 2021-2024](#) outlines our strategic approach to achieving value for money through the effective procurement of goods and services. Procurement arrangements are integrated within the fire service and supported through our procedural guidance. Clear procurement and financial regulations are put in place to safeguard against unethical behaviour. We strictly adhere to a comprehensive procurement process to uphold ethical standards.

The Procurement team has obtained the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) Corporate Ethical Procurement and Supply status, demonstrating the Service's commitment to ethical sourcing and supplier management. We are listed on the CIPS corporate ethics register and utilise the corporate ethics mark to signal to suppliers,

customers, potential employees and other stakeholders that we uphold ethical values in our sourcing and supplier management practices.

Employees handling competitive tendering are either fully CIPS qualified or working towards this qualification. Each year, they undergo an Ethical Procurement and Supply test to maintain CIPS registration/qualification. Fully qualified members of the team must complete a minimum of 30 hours of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training and are awarded Member of the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (MCIPS) Chartered Status. Due to the high level of qualifications, competence, and achievements, the Service has been registered as achieving Corporate Ethical Procurement and Supply status.

To ensure fair, open, and transparent processes, any procurement requirement exceeding £10,000 over the contract term, is handled by the Procurement Team in line with the standing orders. Delegation reports are created for contracts exceeding £20,000 and must be approved by the CFO before award.

The Procurement Services Manager and the team provide advice and clear guidance on the procuring of goods and services. There is a robust system of scrutiny, including competitive and formal procurement with advertising of opportunities in line with the Public Contracts Regulations (PCR2015). Delegations and reports on contract spending above £500,000 are prepared for approval by the Authority.

Modern Slavery Statement

Our [Modern Slavery Statement 2023/2024](#) sets out compliance with the requirements of Section 54 of the [Modern Slavery Act 2015](#). The statement details the steps taken by the Authority during the financial year to safeguard against the presence of modern slavery and human trafficking within business activities and the supply chain.

6. OPERATIONAL

The primary legislation governing fire and rescue services in England and Wales is the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#). This outlines the statutory responsibilities of the Authority in providing a fire and rescue service with the necessary personnel, equipment and training to perform key functions.

We comply with a range of other legislation and regulations and the key legislative requirements that govern our operational activities, which are listed below:

- [Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974](#), and associated regulations.
- [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#).
- [Regulatory Reform \(Fire Safety\) Order 2005](#).
- [Fire and Rescue Services \(Emergencies\) \(England\) Order 2007](#).
- [Localism Act 2011](#).
- [The Coroners \(Investigations\) Regulations 2013](#).
- [Policing and Crime Act 2017](#).
- [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018](#).
- [Fire Safety Act 2021](#).
- [Fire Safety \(England\) Regulations 2022](#).

PREVENTION

Our Prevention and Education department is divided into two main segments: prevention and strategy work, and safety and education programmes. The work of the department is supported by employees from across the Service and volunteers, who work alongside partner agencies to identify those most at risk from fire. We also play a significant role in promoting overall health and wellbeing, as well as reducing crime.

Prevention and Strategy

We use local and national data to make informed decisions about how and where we deliver our prevention activities. Our Safe and Well Targeting Strategy uses data from sources such as Exeter⁵ data from health partners, public referrals, and internal data to identify those most at risk from fires. By participating in local Health and Wellbeing Boards, we have improved the targeting of our prevention work. Additionally, we have a Vulnerable Persons Procedure in place to identify those most vulnerable to fire risk.

In 2023/2024, we conducted 20,762 [Safe and Well Checks](#), targeting individuals most vulnerable to fire. These checks involved home visits conducted by members of the Prevention and Education department or operational personnel. During the visits, residents are educated about fire safety in the home, security, as well as the prevention of slips, trips, and falls. We also supply safety devices such as smoke detectors, kitchen heat alarms, and fire retardant bedding.

Our Prevention and Education department and operational employees are trained to identify broader issues and when necessary, residents are referred to partner agencies such as Adult Social Care or other support networks. Last year, we made over 630 such referrals to other agencies. Our Safe and Well visits are quality assured to maintain the highest standards of service. Additionally, households can complete an online Home Fire Safety Check using the Safelincs system.

In Sunderland and North Tyneside, the Service is funded to conduct falls assessments and provide falls prevention equipment to those in need. This has resulted in over 2,223 falls assessments being conducted and the distribution of over 3,000 pieces of equipment.

We also collaborate with public health teams from North Tyneside Council to offer free health checks during our Safe and Well Checks. As part of this scheme, our employees conduct blood pressure and atrial fibrillation tests, targeting residents who do not regularly visit their GP for routine health checks. These tests can help identify early signs of health issues, where early detection can be lifesaving.

We participated in a project with Improving Performance in Practice (iPiP) to undertake a study called 'Identifying and Protecting Pregnant Women from CO Exposure'. Funding was secured to conduct this study. Employees visited women identified by local hospitals to be involved in the study who may be at risk of exposure and worked with 43 participants, generating information that protected some high-risk residents.

We collaborate with key partners to offer training, reinforce referral pathways and share risk information aimed at preventing fire fatalities. To support this work, we have developed a seven-minute briefing and a 'When to Refer' wallet-sized information card.

⁵ Open Exeter gives access to patient data held on the National Health Application and Infrastructure Services (NHAIS) platform. The NHAIS platform (sometimes known as the Exeter system).

Safety and Education

We are committed to delivering a wide range of education and engagement programmes that aim to improve the lives and opportunities of young people and our communities. As an active member of [StayWise](#), we contribute to an online repository providing educational resources for teachers and community safety practitioners to use when delivering key safety messages.

Through the combined efforts of our employees and volunteers and the use of online platforms, we promote [home safety](#), [water safety](#), and [road safety](#) messages. We actively support local and national campaigns to raise awareness of risks and reduce preventable deaths. We also engage in various community activities focused on seasonal risks such as Bonfire Night, National Motorcycle Safety Week, Global Road Safety Week, NFCC Be Water Aware, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution Respect the Water and the Royal Life Saving Society UK Drowning Prevention Week.

We have developed a new road safety initiative, Drive to Arrive -Young Drivers Roadshow, to engage students and educate them about the dangers of the 'fatal four'⁶. This initiative provides practical tips for safer driving and ways to avoid common dangers. We have hosted six events in colleges and universities with 549 participants in attendance. In September 2023, we launched the Pre-Driver Programme, a classroom-based initiative for 15 to 17 year olds. We have completed five sessions with 58 students in attendance.

We have also developed The Drive To Arrive – Clearway (DTAC), a comprehensive intervention programme focusing on individuals who have committed serious driving offences. This programme encourages pro-social attitudes and goals for the future, aiming to help people develop new skills to reduce or stop their offending while increasing their knowledge of driving laws. This programme will be delivered in conjunction with the Prison and Probation Service.

We have delivered seven 'Bikerdown' motorcycle safety training sessions, reaching 131 bikers. Our tutors provided practical skills and advice on avoiding crashes, as well as on providing lifesaving first aid to those involved in a motorcycle accident.

We also administer the Community Responder Training Programme to train individuals in using a throw bag, a crucial piece of lifesaving equipment for water emergencies. We have collaborated with Newcastle City Council to install several throw bag boards accessible by dialling 999. Since July 2018 have conducted training at 18 venues and have trained 45 staff members in the use of throw bags. Each venue receives annual refresher training. We have been informed of 10 people being rescued by individuals who had received training; the last rescue took place in August 2023. The boards have also been accessed by the public and partners on three occasions to support water rescues with the last being in July 2024.

Our interactive safety centre, [SafetyWorks!](#) provides realistic, interactive educational experiences for schoolchildren and vulnerable adults, to gain knowledge about a wide range of safety focused learning activities to make communities safer. By delivering these activities, we can help make people safer, in their homes and within their communities. We collaborate with partners such as Nexus, local authority road safety teams, the Royal National Lifeboats Institution, Northern Powergrid, Northern Gas Networks, and Northumbria Police. In 2023/2024, Safetyworks! welcomed 6,341 visitors.

⁶ The 'fatal four' are offences prioritised by the police in the National Police Chiefs' Council road policing strategy, to reduce the numbers of people killed and seriously injured on the roads. The fatal four offences are 1. Speeding, 2. Drink and drug driving, 3. Driving while distracted and 4. Non-wearing of seat belts.

One of our core objectives is to reduce the number of deliberate fires through targeted interventions. To support this, we raise awareness through our Safer Summers and Darker Nights campaigns and work with partner agencies, including Northumbria Police and local authorities, to identify issues and promote our anonymous reporting service [Firestoppers](#). Our ReportIT tool allows us to report fly-tipping and refuse build-up directly to local authorities to ensure prompt collection and reduce the risk of ignition.

We offer a range of early intervention programmes to address individuals involved or at risk of a fire starting or fire-related Antisocial Behaviour (ASB). Our Diversionary Activity teams deliver the [Prince's Trust Team Programme](#) and the [Phoenix Programme](#).

The Prince's Trust Team delivers a structured 12-week programme to young people aged 16 to 25 who are currently Not in Education, Employment, or Training (NEET). The programme equips participants with skills and experience to enhance their employability and improve their quality of life. The teams deliver this programme in three areas across Tyne and Wear Sunderland, Washington, and South Shields. We delivered the TEAM Programme of Employability and inter-personal skills to 71 young people who are NEET. A number of these young people have secured full time work or study opportunities after successfully completing the course.

The Phoenix Programme offers a personal development course for young people aged 10 to 16 who may have been involved, or are at risk of being involved in ASB or crime. The programme uses firefighter-training activities and search and rescue scenarios to help participants develop resilience, teamwork, and enhance their communication skills. It aims to promote positive attitudes and behaviours. The programme provides alternative education provision directly to schools, offering support to young people who are involved in ASB and may face exclusion from mainstream education. The Phoenix team collaborates with 16 community partners, including local authorities, community groups and schools, to deliver programmes to 90 children and young people.

In September 2023, in partnership with Northumberland Fire and Rescue Services (NFRS), we applied for Home Office Safer Streets 5 funding. The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria supported the application, and our bid was successful. This allowed us to expand the Phoenix Programmes work and provide customised education packages to young people involved in, or on the fringes of committing ASB.

We currently operate four [Fire Cadet](#) Branches that provide training and development for young people aged 11 to 17. These branches are located in South Tyneside, North Tyneside, Newcastle, and Sunderland, and follow the NFCC National Fire Cadets model, with cadets working towards the completion of the Cadet Award. In addition, to fire service activities, the cadets have the opportunity to visit other organisations, such as the Northumbria Police's Marine Unit, airport fire service, and the Highways Agency.

Safeguarding

We adhere to and apply the NFCC's Safeguarding Guidance for Children, Young People, and Adults in our policies, procedures, and training. Safeguarding training is part of the Service's induction process and is included in the supervisory and middle manager development course. Advanced safeguarding training is provided to employees who interact directly with the community or have specific safeguarding responsibilities. This includes operational personnel, Flexi Duty Officers (FDOs), Fire Safety Officers/Auditors, Prevention and Education employees, and Control Room Operatives. Safeguarding training is completed every three years or annually for employees involved in diversionary activities. Within this training cycle, 682 employees have completed the training.

We also adhere to the [PREVENT Strategy](#), which is part of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy [CONTEST](#). This strategy aims to prevent individuals from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. We have a Prevent Policy that aligns with our safeguarding procedures, and we work during our engagement activities to fulfil our prevention role and support partners in local efforts to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.

We collaborate with various partners, including the police, health, social care and voluntary services, to identify and support vulnerable members of the community. We work with Adult and Children Safeguarding Boards in the five local authority areas, as well as the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to determine the most appropriate action to be taken.

PROTECTION

Our Fire Safety department aims to enhance the safety and wellbeing of the communities of Tyne and Wear by minimising risks and incidents. This is achieved through engagement with businesses and offering guidance to ensure compliance with fire safety regulations, as well as petroleum and explosives legislation. We also strive to ensure that buildings are constructed, maintained, and protected from the risk of fire and other emergencies.

We use data and business intelligence to identify buildings that are most at risk from fire, including hospitals, care homes, high-rise buildings, and buildings licensed for storage of explosives or petroleum. By working with local authority departments such as Building Control, Licensing, and Environmental Health, we can maximise our interventions and improve our data.

For the department to fulfil its role effectively, it is essential to have the necessary resources and highly trained, competent personnel. Fire safety personnel are warranted to carry out their duties and adhere to the qualification standards outlined in the NFCC Competency Framework. Additionally, all operational personnel are trained in fire safety awareness and our Senior Officers/FDOs are warranted and trained in fire safety engagement.

In 2023/2024, the fire safety department undertook:

- 1,558 Fire safety audits
- 689 Building Regulation consultations
- 140 Building Regulation related queries
- 422 Licensing consultations
- 113 Arson reduction activities
- 349 Cause for concerns
- 178 Post fire activities
- 221 Referrals from OHC/OHCV
- 129 Explosive queries/issues/revocation
- 77 Follow up notices
- 30 Petroleum queries/issues/revocation
- 431 Desk based queries
- 27 Prohibition notices served
- 8 Enforcement notices served

Risk Based Inspection Programme

We have a Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) for non-domestic premises. This process helps to identify and target premises with known specific risks or are likely to have potential fire compliance issues. All premises, including multi-occupied residential buildings, are inspected based on our assessment of risk. Approximately 35% of the department's

workload is focused on the RBIP, and this work is supported by operational personnel who also conduct compliance visits. The remaining workload is considered reactive and consists of referrals from operational personnel, partner agencies and the public.

Fire Safety Audits

We conduct fire safety audits, and the details are recorded on our internal system. The outcome of any non-compliant audit is communicated to the Responsible Person by letter or email. This communication outlines any necessary actions to improve the overall fire safety provision at the premises. Internally, we have a quality assurance process in place to ensure consistency in our approach to fire safety and the application of outcomes. Fire safety audits are supported by a feedback process that seeks input directly from the audited premises. This information is used to inform and develop future auditing processes.

Enforcement and Engagement

We provide fire safety advice and support for businesses to comply with fire safety regulations. At times, we have to enforce the law by implementing a formal enforcement procedure and, if necessary, prosecute. We have robust, legally compliant processes in place to ensure public safety is maintained. Our [Enforcement and Engagement Policy](#) sets out the action, that may be taken to ensure compliance is achieved. This policy ensures that Inspectors act in an equitable, practical, and consistent manner.

To ensure compliance with the [Enforcement and Safety Information Act 1988](#), we publish and update the NFCC enforcement register with all enforcement actions taken on premises. [Enforcement notices](#) are published on the register for a minimum of three years.

Primary Authority Scheme

The Government's [Primary Authority Scheme](#) (PAS) is a means for businesses to receive tailored advice and guidance through a single point of contact. Currently, have 23 [PAS partners](#) through this scheme. These partnerships are predominantly with businesses in retail, housing, hospitality, and leisure sectors and are managed by two dedicated officers.

Unwanted Fire Signals

Unwanted fire signals place a demand on our resources, operational personnel and the fire safety team. We have implemented processes in our Fire Control to challenge responses to automatic fire alarms. We operate an Unwanted Fire Signals Group, which focuses on the effective management of fire detection and warning systems. Our fire safety team works with Responsible Persons at the premises, with emphasis on the effective management of fire detection and warning systems to reduce instances.

Fire Investigation

Fire investigation is an integral part of our prevention and protection activities. A dedicated Fire Investigation Manager oversees the work of our Fire Investigation Officers. All Fire Investigation Officers are provided with specialist training in line with the NFCC Fire Investigation Competency Framework, and their outputs are peer reviewed. Our Watch Managers and Crew Managers are trained in basic fire investigation, and all operational personnel are given fire investigation awareness suited to their role.

The purpose of fire investigation is to determine the origin, cause and development of a fire. All fires attended are investigated to establish the cause. Investigation outcomes set future prevention and protection activities and assist in the prevention and detection of crime. Fire Investigators collaborate closely with NFRS and Northumbria Police to achieve these goals. Where necessary, fire investigation details are shared with the police, HM Coroner, insurers, Trading Standards, stakeholders and other fire and rescue services to help identify dangerous products and practices.

In 2023/2024, the Service undertook 103 formal tier 2 fire investigations, which predominantly supported criminal investigations conducted by the police.

Arson Reduction

Our Arson Liaison Officer collaborates with our Service Delivery Station Managers and local partners to reduce the risk of arson and maintain public safety. This includes offering advice and guidance to the owners of vacant or derelict buildings. We identify vulnerable buildings through the proactive work of operational firefighters, information from Northumbria Police and actual fires in vacant buildings. Our advice covers the building owners' responsibilities under the fire safety regulations, methods for improving buildings and grounds, and removing combustible waste to reduce the risk of arson. We also assist partners in legal action against building owners to ensure compliance with minimum standards. This support involves operational data, such as the number of incidents and the associated costs. During 2023/2024, 18 arson reduction letters were issued to the premises' Responsible Persons.

Building Safety Regulator

Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy, the Government and the public sought reassurances about the safety of high-rise residential buildings. This led to significant initiatives for the Service, including the creation of the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) Department in October 2023. This department has a dedicated team implementing the new Higher-Risk Residential Buildings (HRRBs) inspection regime post-Grenfell. It is staffed with a Regional Manager, three Inspecting Officers and a Fire Engineer (currently vacant) to apply the new legislation and guidance, together with the HSE, for all HRRBs that meet the [criteria](#), and is fully funded by the Home Office.

The BSR department provides fire safety and fire engineering advice to support the Building Safety Regulator. This new Regulator is led by the HSE and supported by Fire and Rescue Authorities, Building Control, other regulatory bodies and the NFCC. The Regulator operates on a regional basis, and our team works throughout the North East Region covering Tyne and Wear, Cleveland, Durham and Darlington and Northumberland. The team is involved in all stages of high-risk building safety compliance.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The nature and scope of emergency incidents to which we respond have changed in recent years, along with the risk profiles and the needs of the communities we serve. Our operational personnel respond to a wide and diverse range of emergency incidents including:

- Extinguishing fires and protecting life and property when a fire occurs.
- Rescuing trapped casualties from RTCs using specialist-cutting equipment. Our operational personnel hold an Immediate Emergency Care (IEC) qualification, allowing them to provide a greater level of care to casualties.
- Conducting water rescues from the Tyne and Wear Rivers and other inland waterways, led by the Swift Water Rescue Team (SRT) and supported by the fireboat moored on the River Tyne. We also conduct on ice, mud, and other unstable ground.
- Preparation for incidents involving chemicals, biological agents, and gases. We can decontaminate operational personnel and the public in the event of an incident.

- Conducting specialist rescue of people or animals from inaccessible places like cliffs, bridges cranes, and confined spaces using rope rescue techniques. We also respond to incidents with railways, aircrafts, and other incidents that involve fire or rescue.
- Hosting National Resilience assets, which means we are extremely resilient within our area and assist other fire and rescue services across the country who may need assistance with specialist equipment or operational personnel.

During 2023/2024, our crews responded to 16,827 incidents. These included:

- 6,282 fires
- 592 fires in domestic premises
- 174 fires in commercial premises
- 336 road traffic collisions
- 3,565 special service calls
- 263 incidents of flooding
- 4,964 automatic fire alarms

Our operational response is supported by 17 fire stations and 573 firefighters. We have 25 appliances, two primary staffed Aerial Ladder Platforms (ALPs), and other specialist assets strategically located across our sites to ensure the highest standard of response to incidents. Our 17 stations are staffed by firefighters who work different shift patterns based on local risk. We operate:

- 14 Wholetime Stations
- 2 Day Crewing Stations
- 1 On Call Station

In our CRMP 2022 (incorporating our Integrated Risk Management Plan 2021-2024), we changed the shift arrangements at Birtley Community Fire Station in 2022. In November 2023, another change was made, changing the shift arrangement at Birtley Community Fire Station to Day Crewing. After the CRMP 2024-2027 consultation outcome, a Day Crewing shift arrangement was implemented in June 2024, at Wallsend Community Fire Station.

Our crews are involved in a variety of prevention activities and regularly visit homes, schools, community venues and commercial premises to understand and manage risks. To ensure an effective and safe response to incidents, operational personnel collect risk information for specific premises. The information captured is uploaded and accessible via Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs), which help ensure the safety of individuals and the effective management of an incident. We produce detailed guidance and have robust arrangements in place to ensure that the risk information we hold is relevant, accurate, and up to date.

We develop pre-determined attendance requirements based on risk information from sources such as incident data and site-specific risk information. Additionally, we review our performance to ensure we meet our statutory duties, which includes how quickly we respond to incidents. Our performance is internally scrutinised by the Performance and Improvement Board and by the Authority's Policy and Performance Committee. We continue to be one of the fastest responding fire and rescue services in the country.

Incident command is an integral part of our assessment procedures, with commanders regularly assessed through live and simulated exercises. As a Category 1 responder under the [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#), we have a duty to act as part of the multi-agency response

to civil emergencies. All commanders are trained in the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#), for an effective multi-agency response to incidents.

In 2023/2024, we collaborated with the [Connor Brown Trust](#) to install emergency bleed kits outside all 17 fire stations. These kits are protected by a code given out by 999 call handlers to the public. The kits contain tourniquets and other safety items to stem catastrophic bleeding until emergency services arrive.

Fire Control

Our Fire Control manages emergency call handling and resource mobilization. They provide end-to-end call and support management for incidents, allocating resources to respond to emergencies and adjusting resource allocation as necessary. This dynamic 'mobilising' allows our Fire Control to increase or decrease resources to ensure incidents are attended promptly, with the right people, skills, and equipment to deal with the incident as efficiently and effectively as possible. The Service is in the process of replacing the Fire Control Room Mobilising System along with updating the telephone lines to a digital platform.

Operational training

We ensure that operational personnel receive comprehensive training to perform their duties safely and effectively in compliance with Section 7 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. Our instructors hold nationally recognised teaching and assessing qualifications. Training covers core risk-critical skills that they must undertake ensuring acquisition, maintenance, and assurance. The Operational Training department ensures all training delivered is NOG compliant and adheres to relevant fire standards and legislation.

Skills such as breathing apparatus and incident command are independently assessed at agreed intervals for key disciplines. Breathing apparatus refresher training takes place annually in dedicated "hot fire" conditions, with all eligible personnel required to attend. All personnel with a command role, from acting Crew Manager to the CFO, are required to complete incident command validations biennially.

Our firefighters undertake trauma training in IEC delivered by a seconded Paramedic from NEAS, which provides vital life-saving skills for treating trauma casualties and improves outcomes for incident casualties. This training, like all others adapts depending on new information from National Operational Learning (NOL), Joint Organisational Learning (JOL) and outcomes of inquiries.

For example, after the Manchester Arena Inquiry, emergency services made changes to enhance their preparedness for multiple and mass casualty events. The inquiry found critical gaps in trauma knowledge and training among responders, as well as issues prioritising the most critically injured individuals during crises. This led to the introduction of the Ten Second Triage (TST), a triage tool for first responders to use when there are more casualties than responders at a mass casualty incident. Its objectives include identifying the most severely injured victims, prioritising those in urgent need of life-saving interventions and assisting incident commanders in making evacuation decisions.

Following awareness training, the Service implemented TST, effective from 15 April 2024, and will focus on embedding this practice through future training, testing and exercising, as well as incorporating it into the IEC syllabus.

Our Brigade Training Centre is a recognised centre for Skills for Justice training and is accredited to deliver Level 3 courses in various areas such as:

- Breathing Apparatus Instructor;
- Road Traffic Collision Instructor;
- Tactical Ventilation Instructor;
- Compartment Fire Behaviour Instructor, and
- Up to Level 4 Incident Command qualifications.

Our training undergoes strict internal and external quality assurance to assure the quality of training and assessment.

We arrange annual training days for operational personnel to cover areas identified by NOL, JOL, and operational assurance. This allows us to tailor our training to take into account good practice, new guidance, equipment, and techniques.

Our Vehicle Training School (VTS) provides in-house Large Goods Vehicle (LGV) training to firefighters, followed by an Emergency Fire Appliance Driving (EFAD) course, enabling students to drive safely whilst operating blue lights and sirens on the way to an incident.

The VTS provides training for firefighters to drive special appliances, such as the ALP, Special Rescue Tender, Incident Command Unit, hook lift appliances, Moffett Mouny forklift trucks, Targeted Response/Forward Command Vehicles and the Enhanced Logistical Support Vehicle. FDOs receive officer response driving commensurate with their role. We ensure that all driving qualifications are refreshed within the required timeframes as per legislation.

We engage external training providers to ensure our SRTs are trained to the required standards of the Rescue Boat Code, guaranteeing proficient water rescue provision. Our working from height instructors undergo annual assurance by an external body to ensure compliance with current guidelines. Additionally, we collaborate with external training providers to train our Animal Rescue leads, keeping them updated with the latest information, which is then cascaded down to the crews.

Trainee firefighters undergo foundation training at the Brigade Training Centre and partake in a Level 3 Operational Firefighter Apprenticeship. Apprentice firefighters undergo an end-point assessment and our pass and distinction rates exceed the national average.

The quality assurance and validation of training ensure that operational personnel are trained and competent to meet various demands placed on them, taking into account local threats and risks.

Firefighter Fitness

We have a full time Health and Fitness Advisor to assist our operational personnel to attain and maintain the required fitness standards through fitness testing every six months. Our fitness testing procedure aligns with the NFCC Fire Fit guidance. To ensure operational personnel are fit and supported in their roles, they receive:

- Access to gym facilities at all stations and time to undertake physical training daily while at work, including the Chester Treadmill Walk Test every six months.
- Health monitoring by the OHU and associated fitness support/bespoke programmes.
- Health surveillance assessments every three years and access to a vaccination programme.
- Access and support for individualised fitness and health programming for personnel returning from periods of sickness absence including tailored support in areas such as weight management, injury prevention, and injury recovery.

National Fire Standards

The National [Fire Standards](#) set professional expectations for fire and rescue services in England, serving as a benchmark for good practice. These standards are crucial for HMICFRS Inspectors to measure the performance of fire and rescue services. Implementing and embedding these standards is a key part of our continuous improvement approach. Our Business Improvement department oversees this work and supports the Service to monitor progress and compliance.

National Operational Guidance

We adhere to the NOG framework in our operations to ensure our practices align with the highest standards of safety, efficiency, and effectiveness. By adhering to NOG, we aim to provide consistent, effective responses to emergencies, while prioritising the safety of our personnel and the communities we serve. Our commitment to NOG includes:

- **Training and Development** - Ensuring all personnel are trained according to NOG training specifications, incorporating the latest operational techniques and safety practices.
- **Operational Procedures** - Regularly reviewing and updating operational procedures to reflect NOG guidance, ensuring they are embedded in our daily practices.
- **Risk Management** - Implementing risk management strategies aligned with NOG principles to minimise risks to our personnel and the public.
- **Continuous Improvement** - Engaging in ongoing assessment and refinement of our practices based on NOG updates, incidents debriefs, and lessons learned from both NOL and JOL.

We will conduct a strategic gap analysis and periodic audits to ensure our operations comply with all NOG specifications. To maintain transparency, we report our compliance status and improvements to the NFCC, the NOG implementation team and the regional NOG forums.

We understand the importance of accountability in maintaining high standards. Therefore, we assign responsibilities that clearly define roles and responsibilities within the Service for the implementation and oversight of NOG compliance. In cases of non-compliance, corrective actions are promptly taken to ensure continuous improvement. The ELT have strategic oversight of all areas of non-compliance.

Operational Standards

National Occupational Standards are embedded within the Service and we have assurance processes in place to ensure that operational personnel have the necessary skills, knowledge, and understanding to meet the demands placed upon them.

In 2023/2024, the Operational Standards team assessed all 63 watches, focusing on various standards. These assessments included tabletop exercises in four key areas, RTCs, fires, hazardous materials, and confined space incidents. All aspects of performance were observed, assessed, and assured. These assessments aligned with national and local learning objectives to assure the operational efficiency and effectiveness of personnel.

Assessment outcomes were reported to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), providing them with the necessary information to be assured of the operational personnel's understanding of current policy regarding appliances, equipment, competence, and compliance.

Where learning and improvements were identified these were detailed in an action plan for each watch. Watch officers were given 90 days to address the areas for improvement. The improvement actions were documented on internal training platforms and were subject to assurance by the Operational Standards department.

The Operational Standards team was formed temporarily to analyse compliance with National Occupation Standards. In May 2024, the team disbanded, and their work continued as business as usual.

Operational Support and Assurance

Our Operational Support and Assurance team ensures that activities in the operational environment and the necessary safety measures are evaluated, monitored, and reviewed. Officers regularly attend incidents and training exercises to observe operational performance and assure compliance with NOG and our incident management policy and procedure.

Any observations noted as good practice or areas for development are captured by the Operational Support and Assurance team and learning is shared locally, regionally, and nationally. The Operational Assurance Working Group (OAG) coordinates this work and identified trends are progressed for training consideration.

Joint Organisational Learning

JOL is an electronic data-sharing platform for emergency services to collaborate to promote joint learning and improvements in the way in which we work together. Through the NOL and JOL websites, we learn, share, and act upon lessons identified, notable practice, and information notes linked to NOG and JESIP. We are committed to improving and regularly share our operational learning to improve the levels of safety for all emergency responders and our partner organisations.

RESILIENCE

Partnership Working and Collaborative Arrangements

We collaborate with a range of organisations to provide the best service for our communities, and keep a partnership register with details of our partnership agreements. The register is regularly reviewed to ensure compliance with current laws, regulations, and recognised good practice. Our partnerships with other service providers and organisations bring various benefits including improved training, shared learning, and operational efficiencies and support for emergency response.

Colocation

We encourage co-location with our blue light sector colleagues at a number of our sites to improve community outcomes and to maximise spatial occupancy across our estate. The Service occupies 20 sites with Northumbria Police and the North East Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust operating from six of those, including our new carbon-neutral tri-station in Hebburn, which opened in April 2024.

In addition, we host selected public sector and charitable trusts at our sites, including the North of Tyne Mountain Rescue, Northumberland Bloodbikes, the Great North Air Ambulance Service, HM Prison and Probation Service, the Salvation Army and Sunderland City Council (City Alarm and Emergency Centre).

Northumbria Local Resilience Forum

We are a representative member of the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum (LRF) a statutory multi-agency partnership ensuring that local authorities, emergency services, the

Environment Agency and other services including utility companies fulfil their duties under the [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#).

This forum enables planning to be in place in preparation for emergency response and recovery arrangements for any local and in some cases regional major incidents, disasters, or emergencies, which may impact the communities of Tyne and Wear and parts of Northumberland.

In collaboration with LRF partners, we fulfil our duties by supporting the assessment of risk to inform and maintain emergency plans and business continuity arrangements. We contribute by sharing information to inform the Community Risk Register and aid the preparation of multi-agency plans and documents.

A service representative chairs the LRF Risk Group and the LRF Training and Exercising Group, and are at the forefront of local and regional risk-based decision making, with both groups working synergistically alongside each other. The chairs of these groups represent the Service at the LRF Assurance Group and contribute to the LRF Strategic Board, which is chaired by our CFO.

We work with partners nationally to support the Government's counter-terrorism strategy [CONTEST](#). A number of employees are trained as National Inter-Agency Liaison Officers (NILOs) and work with the police, ambulance service, military, and other Government agencies to share intelligence and support the resolution of operational incidents.

Mutual Aid Arrangements

Sections 13 and 16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, legislates for neighbouring fire and rescue authorities to make formal agreements to provide assets, resources and command support to each other, in the event of a serious incident. We have 13/16 arrangements with NFRS and County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service. Additionally, we have Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and Service Level Agreements with Northumbria Police and the North East Ambulance Service.

We maintain a partnership register that enables us to arrange mutual aid and MOU's with a variety of other category 1 and 2 responders and voluntary organisations. We have reviewed and updated a number of these over the last twelve months, to reflect changes to local risks, partner agency priorities, and the release of national guidance.

For example, we recently revised our Search and Rescue MOU with Northumbria Police. This MOU covers the use of the Un-crewed Air Support Unit (UAS or drone) and canine search capability. We also made updates to our National Resilience arrangements for our HDIM capability and our role as a National Resilience Training Delivery Partner. Additionally, we reviewed our Major Incident Declaration Protocol in collaboration with blue light partners and other responder agencies.

National Resilience

We host several National Resilience assets including Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) capability including a canine search team, Hazardous Materials Detection, Identification and Monitoring (DIM), a Mass Decontamination Unit (MDU), Enhanced Logistics Support (ELS) and a Flood Rescue capability, which also incorporates our SRT. Additionally, we self-fund our own High Volume Pump (HVP) capability and a UAS or drone.

As a signatory of the National Coordination and Advisory Framework [\(NCAF\)](#) National Mutual Aid Protocol, we offer incident support outside of the Tyne and Wear area. This agreement establishes the terms under which we may provide or request assistance to

resolve an incident. The National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT) coordinates out-of-area deployments. ELS is our most recent addition, bringing our National Resilience capabilities to seven.

JESIP

The JESIP concept provides a multi-agency framework designed to allow partner agencies a greater degree of interoperability when responding to emergencies. We implement these principles when working with partners to manage incidents requiring a multi-agency response. We can demonstrate our commitment to the application of the JESIP principles through qualitative assurance metrics such as online learning, incident command training, and our participation levels at multi-agency exercises and incidents.

The adoption of JESIP is monitored and assessed through competency based training delivery and exercise provision, to ensure we are making advancements in the area of interoperability. We have a dedicated training facilitator, focused on the implementation of JESIP across the Service, collaborating with other emergency service agencies and our wider LRF partners to embed JESIP both regionally and nationally.

The Service is represented on the Emergency Services Coordination Board (ESCB) and our CFO is the NFCC strategic lead for JESIP. We are currently leading the JESIP Embedding and Assurance Programme (JEAP) as part of Recommendation 45 of the Manchester Arena Inquiry, Volume 2.

The Service is leading the sector nationally on JESIP and several of the Manchester Arena Inquiry recommendations, having produced the 48 recommendations applicable to UK fire and rescue services and are being monitored by the NFCC. We are responsible for reporting on progress nationally, directly to the Home Office.

Risk and Business Continuity Management

Business Continuity Management is an essential part of our emergency preparedness arrangements and a legal requirement as a Category 1 responder. It ensures that we have suitable contingency arrangements in place to address a wide range of potential business interruptions.

Business Continuity Plans (BCP) safeguard the Authority from adverse events and business interruptions and help facilitate a rapid and controlled recovery of critical functions during and after such events. BCPs undergo regular review and testing within each department and function within the Service, as part of an annual testing schedule coordinated by our Business Assurance Manager, supported by the wider Risk and Resilience team.

Over the past twelve months, our main focus for business continuity has been on revising our Industrial Action Strategy and stress testing our plans for Service-wide strike action. This work has taken into account 'minimum service levels' recently introduced by the Government.

Control of Major Accident Hazards

Under legislative requirements set out in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, the [Control of Major Accident Hazards \(COMAH\) Regulations 2015](#), and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, we have a statutory duty to provide an effective and resilient COMAH function.

In Tyne and Wear, there are five upper tier COMAH sites. We have substantial emergency response arrangements in place to ensure we can safely manage these premises, and our COMAH team produces comprehensive external emergency plans to assist emergency services in the event of an incident at any of these locations.

Recent work has included collaboration with manufacturing colleagues in the private sector, with the Service anticipating the acquisition of our sixth Upper Tier COMAH site (Envision), which is expected to be the largest Lithium Ion manufacturing and storage facility in Europe.

7. FUTURE IMPROVEMENTS

In addition to the core operational effectiveness work of the Service, the prevention of fires and other emergencies through risk management, education, prevention, protection, response, and resilience; the Service also focuses on efficiency and looking after our people as set out in our strategy; TWFRS 2025.

All projects, priorities and improvement actions included in this Service Annual Operating Plan directly contribute to the achievement of the TWFRS Strategy 2025, and/or to the improvement of the efficiency and effectiveness of the Service.

A number of support activities are also included within department objectives in addition to plans to support implementation of our latest CRMP.

Those six overarching objectives are:

- **Enhanced Firefighter Safety**
With further development of, and investment in, our operational training facilities, including the continued development of an 'all hazards village' at our Training Centre. We will deliver replacement breathing apparatus, PPE, a new Hydrant Management System and a number of other projects all aimed at maintaining and enhancing the safety of our firefighters.
- **Investment in Technology**
We will continue to invest in technology to enhance efficiency and safety and support risk management. This includes replacing our server infrastructure, virtual reality to support fire investigation, and making further improvements to the HR system. We will continue to review cyber resilience arrangements and continue an operational communications programme, including a new mobilising system.
- **Investment in People, Inclusion, and Workforce Diversification**
We will strive to increase the diversity of our workforce to reflect the community we serve and enhance inclusion across the Service. We will do this by driving improvements to how we recruit, include, and retain staff from minority groups. We will continue to invest in our staff, and seek and make improvements to the employee experience.
- **Develop our Estate Portfolio**
We will continue to invest in our owned estate portfolio. This includes continuing the development of our Tri-Service station in Hebburn; and planning a new Safety Education Centre. We will also install electric vehicle charging points at selected locations across our sites, and continue to reduce our impact on the environment.
- **Effective use of Resources and Value for Money**
We will provide a modern, effective and efficient Service, managing our budget to provide value for money. We will make investments where appropriate to provide a modern, fit for purpose response, using resources economically. Investment and value for money are a major part of all project considerations.

Our CRMP presents how we aim to do business in the next three financial years, outlining how we are reviewing our resources to meet the changing needs of our community and adapting to evolving risks.

- **Drive Continuous Improvement and Enhance Assurance across the Service**
We will maintain our focus on a continuous improvement culture throughout the Service. We will support continuous improvement in the Service by engaging in audit, inspection and peer review activities, and adopting learning and good practice.

We will continue to implement improvements identified in previous HMICFRS inspections, internal audits and assurance reviews. We will work closely with the NFCC to embed Fire Standards. Continuous Improvement and enhancing assurance is a major part of all project considerations.

The progress of the projects and supporting activities contained in the Service Annual Operating Plan 2024/2025 are monitored and scrutinised by the Performance and Improvement Board every month. Strategic projects are tracked using a milestone tracker.

The Performance and Improvement Board monitors progress against annual department plans every quarter and provides updates to the ELT.

In addition, the information and data captured in this report, our quarterly performance reports and reports to the Authority and its committees help us to report on performance and progress against our plans.

GLOSSARY

AAT	Association of Accounting Technicians
AGM	Annual Governance Meeting
ALP	Aerial Ladder Platform
ASB	Anti-Social Behaviour
BCP	Business Continuity Plan
BSR	Building Safety Regulator
CFO	Chief Fire Officer
CIPFA	Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
CIPS	Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply
COMAH	Control of Major Accident Hazards
CRMP	Community Risk Management Plan
CRP	Community Risk Profile
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DIM	Detection identification and monitoring
DPO	Data Protection Officer
DTAC	Drive To Arrive – Clearway
ED&I	Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion
EFAD	Emergency Fire Appliance Driving
ELS	Enhanced Logistics Support
ELT	Executive Leadership Team
ESCB	Emergency Services Coordination Board
FBU	Fire Brigades Union
FDO	Flexi Duty Officer
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulations
HMICFRS	His Majesty’s Inspectorate for Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
HVP	High Volume Pump
IEC	Immediate Emergency Care
IFRS	International Financial Reporting Standards
iPiP	Improving Performance in Practice
IOSH	Institution of Occupational Safety and Health
IRMP	Integrated Risk Management Plan
JCF	Joint Consultative Forum
JESIP	Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme
JEAP	JESIP Embedding and Assurance Programme
JOL	Joint Organisational Learning
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer
LGV	Large Goods Vehicle
LRF	Local Resilience Forum
MASH	Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub
MCIPS	Member of the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply
MDT	Mobile Data Terminals

MDU	Mass Decontamination Unit
MOU	Memorandums of Understanding
NCAF	National Coordination and Advisory Framework
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NFCC	National Fire Chiefs Council
NFRS	Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service
NILO	National Inter-Agency Liaison Officer
NOG	National Operational Guidance
NOL	National Operational Learning
NRAT	National Resilience Assurance Team
OAG	Operational Assurance Working Group
OHU	Occupational Health Unit
PAS	Primary Authority Scheme
PCR	Public Contracts Regulations
PDR	Performance and Development Reviews
PSED	Public Sector Equality Duty
RBIP	Risk-Based Inspection Programme
RIDDOR	Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations
RTC	Road traffic collision
SIRO	Senior Information Risk Owner
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SRT	Swift Water Rescue Team
TST	Ten Second Triage
UAS	Un-crewed Air Support Unit
USAR	Urban Search and Rescue
VTS	Vehicle Training School