

**Tyne and Wear Fire  
and Rescue Service**



## **Efficiency and Productivity Plan 2025/26**

**April 2025**



## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The National Framework sets a requirement that Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) produce and publish annual efficiency plans. There is a specific ask from the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire that in 2025/26, FRAs produce plans that cover their efficiencies and productivity initiatives in 2024/25, and their intentions for continuing efficiencies and productivity into 2025/26 onwards.
- 1.2 As part of the 2021/22 Spending Review, the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Local Government Association (LGA) proposed that Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) in England could deliver 2% of non-pay efficiencies and increase productivity of wholetime firefighters by 3% for each year of the Spending Review period. The 2025/26 Productivity and Efficiency Plans will help the NFCC, LGA and Home Office to collate evidence and to assess likely progress at a national level against the agreed Spending Review goals.
- 1.3 It is a requirement that the Productivity and Efficiency plans are signed off by the relevant Section 151 Officer. Plans should be sent to the Home Office and published on FRA websites, in a format that is easy for the public to access, by 30 April 2025.
- 1.4 This 2025/26 Efficiency and Productivity Plan has been prepared in line with the letter and guidance issued by the Home Office in February 2025.

## **2. Financial information**

### **Budget**

- 2.1 The 2025/26 Revenue Budget was approved by the Fire Authority on 24 February 2025.
- 2.2 A high-level summary of the revenue budget approved by Fire Authority is shown in Appendix A.

### **Reserves**

- 2.3 Earmarked Reserves are estimated to total £18.243m as at 31 March 2025. This was the position when the Fire Authority approved the budget on 24 February 2025 but may be subject to change when the 2024/25 Statement of Accounts is finalised.
- 2.4 Estimated reserve movements to 2027/28 are presented in Appendix A.
- 2.5 In addition to the earmarked reserves, the Authority has a General Fund of £4.072m. The review as part of the budget examined if the level of the General Fund balance was set at an appropriate amount, taking into account the financial risks being faced by the Authority. The financial cover provided is 6.17% of the Authority's Net Budget Requirement, and this is considered reasonable and justifiable by the Director of Finance, Estates and Facilities.

### **Precept**

- 2.6 The Fire Authority made the decision to use the £5 Band D precept flexibility to support the 2023/24 revenue budget due to the estimated cost pressures as a result of estimated pay awards and inflation.

- 2.7 The £5 Band D precept flexibility was available in 2025/26 and the Authority made the decision to raise council tax the maximum £5. This increase was necessary in order to set a balanced budget for 2025/26. Without the increase, savings would have had to be made to front line services which would have also seen previous CRMP actions implemented having to be reversed (and a weakening of the response provision of the service) when demand for services is increasing.

### Efficiency

- 2.8 Although a balanced budget has been set for 2025/26, this has been set on the basis of estimations and assumptions regarding pay awards and inflation. If actuals are higher than estimates there will be an in-year gap which will have to be managed through reserves and in year additional savings / efficiencies.
- 2.9 Savings and efficiencies are also required in order to release funding for investment in priority activities. This has been the case for the latest CRMP 2024-2027 approved by Authority in the March 2024 meeting where a full-time operating fire station has been changed to a day crewing model so that the savings made can be re-invested into additional rope and water rescue services where demand has significantly increased.
- 2.10 The 2025/26 budget also included the estimated Medium Term Financial Strategy position for the period 2025/26 to 2028/29. This outlined an estimated gap of £3.476m over the medium term, although this is showing a worst-case scenario. This is indicative and the context is that the Authority will always produce a balanced revenue budget and take the necessary steps to ensure this is achieved.
- 2.11 The Authority is therefore looking at efficiencies in order to bridge the potential budget gap outlined above to avoid utilising limited reserves in order to balance the budget in future years and to release funding for investment in priority activities. There are a number of areas being explored by the service both achieved and potential developments which are detailed in this Plan.

### Efficiency plan

- 2.12 The completed Efficiency Plan is attached in Appendix B and shows that the 2% efficiency target has been achieved historically and will continue to be achieved. In 2025/26, the target is expected to be achieved through a variety of initiatives including increased income, procurement savings and the initiation of the Unwanted Fire Signals project. The service has a strong track record of achieving efficiencies through procurement activity and carrying out reviews of all areas of its service.
- 2.13 The Plan shows planned efficiencies of over £1.9m (9.9%) for 2025/26 in addition to those disclosed for 2024/25.
- 2.14 Regular quarterly reviews of the budget are reported to Authority throughout the financial year and updates on the Efficiency and Productivity Plan are now embedded and included in those budget monitoring reports for 2025/26 for Members' awareness and comment.
- 2.15 The Efficiency Plan produced has strictly followed the template that was provided by the Home Office.

### 3. Productivity plan and activities

- 3.1 This section outlines the service developments and working practices throughout the Authority to show how it will make efficiencies and to continue to increase productivity for 2025/26 and beyond.
- 3.2 The processes are already fully embedded into the service as it has had to make efficiencies of well over £25m since 2010/11 in order to manage funding reductions during the long period of austerity. To put this into context, the Authority was the second worst affected of all FRAs when comparing funding reductions since 2010/11 and has improved productivity of its workforce significantly over this period as it has had to reduce staffing numbers (both operational and support staff) and yet has still maintained and improved service levels and outputs.

#### Collaboration

- 3.3 The Service takes collaboration very seriously and has numerous examples of joint working with other blue light services. One of the success stories of the Authority is its partnership working and co-location of the majority of our property portfolio where collaborative arrangements are well established and are being constantly reviewed and developed. This ensures joint working can flourish and that reasonable income can be generated for parts of our stations that are no longer required operationally. The Authority generates around £0.5m per annum from those arrangements.
- 3.4 The Service has also developed a new carbon neutral Tri Station at Hebburn which is now operational (opened mid-April 2024) and will house our North East Ambulance and Police colleagues in a purpose built integrated operational tri station. The commitment to collaborate is therefore fully embedded by the service even in its capital projects. This will also help to generate additional income from this new arrangement from May 2024, as the Authority has funded the total cost of the new building.
- 3.5 Some further examples of collaboration are outlined below:
- Shared CCTV footage is available in Fire Control from Newcastle and Sunderland Council;
  - Joint working with local authorities and Northumbria Police to regulate sale and storage of fireworks;
  - In collaboration with North Tyneside and Sunderland councils, the Service delivers falls prevention advice and provide equipment for residents within those local authority areas. This is usually conducted at the same time as delivering our own Safe and Well checks. This generates an income through cost recovery for the staff time and equipment issued for every engagement that meets the agree criteria in those authority areas;
  - Canine search and rescue capability is covered by Search and Rescue MOU with Northumbria Police whereby a high percentage of canine training and exercising is provided free of charge;
  - The NFRS SLA has been in place now for over 15 years. We provide fleet and operational equipment maintenance as well as PPE & uniform for NFRS
  - Regional collaboration for the BA compressor maintenance contract on the national framework which resulted in a 39% saving on the annual contract spend;

- PPE is procured through a collaborative national framework; and
- Tyres are procured through the NEPO regional contract.

### Asset management and investment in technology

3.6 The Service has invested in the following areas since 2024:

- New telephony system with Microsoft Teams integration to support agile working. This also attained financial savings of over £8k per annum;
- New bespoke firefighter competency recording system for managing and maintaining role specific competencies;
- New system for managing and maintaining hydrants across the region;
- Upgraded the existing control room mobilising system to support new digital 999 calls; and
- Ongoing investment into a new control room mobilising system to go live in November 2025.

3.7 The Service has also conducted the Exploration of AI (Artificial Intelligence) with the aim to assess whether the latest innovative changes in AI can enhance productivity, decision-making, innovation, and communication across the Service and possibly the wider communities.

3.8 Additionally, the Service has continued to work towards its sustainability ambitions with investing in more sustainable ICT equipment which will reduce our carbon footprint along with reduced energy consumption.

3.9 The Service has a number of other ongoing projects that will generate long-term efficiencies.

### Resourcing

3.10 Some examples are outlined below:

- Control Support have the resilience to cover short term absence, which eliminates the need for shortages to be filled by overtime;
- Operational firefighters and P&E personnel undertake safe and well visits;
- Operational firefighters and P&E personnel undertake community engagement and schools' education activities;
- Operational firefighters and P&E personnel undertake community open days hosted on community fire stations;
- Operational firefighters, P&E and RNLI personnel delivering water safety and awareness training
- Operational firefighters undertake fire safety compliance checks in a number of premises, known as operational health checks (OHCs), allowing inspection frequencies of those premises to be extended, providing greater capacity for the fire safety department; and
- Operational crews undertake mental health first aid training to enable support and provide welfare to staff on station.

### Income generation

3.11 The Service is currently further developing its trading company to generate additional income from training activities to external organisations.

## Other

- 3.12 Operational Risk Information is gathered by Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service to ensure that it fulfils its obligations under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. This data is collected using an inspection process known as a Site-Specific Risk Information (SSRI) inspection. TWFRS have an annual quota which is populated with the identified premises within the service area, and these are resourced using data collected to deliver the CRMP.

## Outcome-based activities

- 3.13 The Service currently hosts eight national resilience assets: • urban search and rescue capability • mass decontamination capability • marauding terrorist attack response capability • hazmat detection, identification and monitoring capability • high volume pumping capability • swift water rescue team and flood response capability • canine search unit capability • tactical advisor capability. In addition to these, the Service is utilising both an advantageous location in the north of the UK and a much-improved internal training and response model in order to incorporate the ninth and final asset, meaning the Service will host the full suite of assets, an Enhanced Logistics Support (ELS) asset. This is a dedicated logistics appliance which will provide support to other services both regionally and nationally in the event of any large scale or major incidents, which require the coordination and deployment of multiple resources.
- 3.14 The Service established a productivity working group to consult with other Fire and Rescue Services and Blue Light Partners to enable us to review current practices, recording methodology and use of automation tools and dashboards and look at any areas of best practice or improvements to enable service delivery to become more efficient and productive.

## Workforce capacity

- 3.15 CRMP 2024-27: in an effort to evolve the Service's operational response, increasing effectiveness and identifying efficiencies one action approved was to introduce a day crewing shift system at Wallsend Community Fire Station and reinvest the released resources efficiently and effectively by increasing our water rescue capability by having a fire boat and water rescue available at all times. A second action was to rationalise staffing levels across the service to enable us to increase our availability to respond to line rescue incidents, building collapses and large vehicle crashes. This will see an additional two specialist appliances available 24/7 from our existing establishment. This is in addition to our previous CRMP 2021-24 which saw an additional 54 posts introduced into the Service.
- 3.16 Unwanted Fire Signals (UwFS) are calls made to the Service, usually as part of an automated system, which did not originate from a genuine fire. Attending these calls takes front-line staff away from other vital activities such as training, safe and well visits, fire safety activities as well as attending more important incidents. The Service already has a Risk Based Attendance Policy that puts the emphasis on the premises in investigating the cause of an alarm properly. The introduction of an amended Policy following a project commenced on 1 April 2025 and is already seeing a reduction in responses, with significant annual savings anticipated.



- 3.17 The Services Risk Based Attendance Policy (RBAP) extends the “call challenge” hours to 06:00 to 20:00 hours, seven days a week, including bank holidays for all commercial premises without a sleeping risk, unless a backup call is received confirming a fire or physical signs of fire exists, or the premises has an exemption in place. This has seen a reduction in attendance to these premises.

### Meeting the 3% productivity target

#### Training

- 3.18 The table below outlines the training, inspections and audits completed by Service Delivery in 2024/25 which is a result of increased productivity of our firefighter establishment:

	Activity	Staff Trained
T1	43	525
T4	42	511
IEC	17	160
EFAD REF	56	56
ALP REF	2	2
EFAD Initial	12	24
LGV Initial	25	25
Moffett Initial	2	4
Prime Mover Initial	5	8
Moffett Ref	1	1
Prime Mover Ref	9	15
Trailer Training	2	3
ALP Initial	1	2
LGV Assessment	2	2
Palfinger Lorry Loader & Hoist Operator	2	5
24 Monthly Assessment	3	33
SFJ End Point Assessment	4	41
Level 1 Acting Crew Manager	2	15
Phase 2 Development 12-month assessment	5	25
Level 1 Incident command CMMI	1	9
Initial trainee BA Phase	1	23
Supervisory & Middle Manager Development	7	20
Supervisory commander development Course	5	35
IOSH Managing Safely Initial	5	20
IOSH Refresher	6	29
Trauma Support refresher	1	5
Trauma Support initial	0	0
Mod 2 Initial	2	22
SFRBO Assessment	0	0
RYA Practices & Responsibilities	2	6
Team Commander	1	6
MOD 3 Instructors practical assessment	1	2
Rescue from Vehicles in Water	0	0
Rescue 3 online assessment/ conference	0	0

MOD 4 Re-certification	4	22
Coastal Skipper	2	12
MOD 2 Biannual dip	5	28
Advanced Powerboat	2	12
RYA Powerboat Level 2 instructor	0	0
VHF Radio	2	14
Sea Survival	2	14
MOD 4 instructor planning day	3	6
MOD 4 instructor CPD day	0	0
MOD 3 Instructor planning day	1	4
MOD 3 Instructor CPD	0	0
MOD 3 Biannual Dip	5	44
Mod 4 Instructor Training	0	0
Mod 3 Instructor R3 Practical Assessment	0	0
UKRO Training	0	0
Level 1 exercises		14
Level 2 exercises		12
COMAH exercises		3
Command Validations	84	84
USAR Timber Shoring Initial	8	22
MDU Instructor prep	1	2
MDU Initial Acquisition	2	16
USAR Core Block	0	0
USAR Phase 2	0	0
USAR Confined space	6	47
USAR Confined Space Supervisor Course	0	0
USAR chainsaw operator initial	0	0
USAR hot cutting initial	0	0
HVP Hose Support Training	6	45
HVP initial Training Module 1	1	6
HVP initial Training Module 2	1	6
National Resilience Enhanced Logistics Support Instructor	0	0
USARi	0	0
Enhanced Logistics Support Operator	0	0
USAR SWAH /LACE	14	71
MPV Operators course	0	0
ROPE CPD	1	4
Rope Rescue instructing	5	14
Rope Rescue Initial	1	4
Rope Rescue Watch Inst Initial	1	1
Rope Rescue Service Inst Initial	1	1
Rope Rescue Watch Inst Ref	2	5
Rope Service Inst Annual Validation	1	4
Biker Down	7	7
Road Traffic Collision Instructor	0	0
Multi Agency JESIP commander	0	0
HGVi	0	0



Large Animal Rescue responder accredited inst	1	1
SSRIs (target 310)		363
Fire safety OHC		764
Fire Safety OHCV		794

#### Procurement

- 3.19 A rolling report is generated identifying spend increases which is shared and investigated with departments, this results in either consolidation of spend across a reduced number of suppliers and/or the release of a tender opportunity. When undertaking a tender opportunity, a review of options is undertaken such as collaboration opportunities, utilisation of national frameworks etc.
- 3.20 The procurement team have a saving target which they have a strong track record of achieving. This results in cashable savings which can be reinvested back into the service each year.
- 3.21 Examples include Microsoft licenses and breathing apparatus, both procured utilising national frameworks.

#### **4. Efficiency and Productivity Plan and Activities**

- 4.1 The Efficiency and Productivity Plan for 2025/26 must be signed off by the Authority's Section 151 Officer, in accordance with Home Office requirements.
- 4.2 The Authority's Director of Finance, Estates and Facilities, who holds the S151 role, has therefore signed below to approve this Plan on behalf of the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority and will put arrangements in place to regularly monitor progress throughout 2025/26.



Michelle Ronan  
Director of Finance, Estates and Facilities

Dated: 6 May 2025

# APPENDIX A: PRIMARY INFORMATION

BUDGET (£000)			
Revenue Expenditure	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Direct Employee	38,169	47,519	46,459
Indirect Employee	740	842	790
Premises	2,767	2,596	2,671
Transport	381	410	408
Supplies and Services	2,458	8,995	9,520
Capital Financing	2,193	2,812	2,796
Other	18,859	7,737	10,550
<b>Total</b>	<b>65,567</b>	<b>70,911</b>	<b>73,194</b>
Income	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Actual Received from Precept	27,890	28,720	30,657
Local Government Finance Settlement	29,438	34,653	35,325
Other Grants	0	0	0
Income Raised Locally	8,239	7,538	7,212
<b>Total</b>	<b>65,567</b>	<b>70,911</b>	<b>73,194</b>

RESERVES (£000)					
	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028
General Reserves	4,072	4,072	4,072	4,072	4,072
Earmarked Revenue Reserves	26,853	18,243	13,458	10,125	3,739
of which MRP reserve	0	0	0	0	0
Earmarked Capital Reserves	1,610	0	0	0	0
Other Reserves					
of which revenue	0	0	0	0	0
of which capital	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>32,535</b>	<b>22,315</b>	<b>17,530</b>	<b>14,197</b>	<b>7,811</b>

## APPENDIX B: EFFICIENCY DATA (£000)

	Actual 2023-24						Actual 2024-25		Forecast 2025-26	
Opening Revenue Expenditure Budget (Net)	57,171		70,069		65,982					
Less Total Direct Employee Costs	47,531		57,882		46,459					
Non Pay Budget	9,640		12,187		19,523					
Efficiency Target (2% of non-pay budget)	193		244		390					
<b>Efficiency Savings</b>	<b>Recurrent</b>	<b>Non-recurrent</b>	<b>Recurrent</b>	<b>Non-recurrent</b>	<b>Recurrent</b>	<b>Non-recurrent</b>				
<u>Direct Employee</u>										
Reduction in Prevention/Protection/Response Staff	326				319					
Reduction in Support Staff					47					
<u>Indirect Employee (e.g. training, travel etc.)</u>										
All Indirect Employee Costs										
<u>Premises</u>										
Utilities										
Rent/Rates	90									
Other Premises Costs										
Shared Premises										
<u>Transport</u>										
Fleet										
Fuel										
Other Transport Costs										
<u>Supplies and Services</u>										
National Procurement Savings										
Local Procurement Savings		120		1385		150				
Other Technology Improvements										
Decreased Usage										
<u>Capital Financing</u>										
Revenue Expenditure Charged to Capital										
Net Borrowing Costs										
<u>Other</u>										
Income	50		250		30					
CRMP			1600							
<b>Total Efficiency Savings</b>	<b>586</b>		<b>3,235</b>		<b>546</b>					
Efficiency Savings as a Percentage of Non-Payroll Budgets	303.94%		1327.23%		139.84%					
Efficiency Savings Target	2.00%		2.00%		2.00%					
Over/(Under)	301.94%		1325.23%		137.84%					