Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority

Statement of Assurance 2025/2026

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 **What this report tells you**

This Statement of Assurance sets out how Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority ("the Authority") ensures that Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service ("the Service") is effectively governed, financially resilient and delivering its statutory responsibilities.

1.2 **Role of the Service**

The Service works to prevent fires and other emergencies, enforce fire safety legislation, respond to incidents and collaborate with partners to protect the communities of Tyne and Wear and improve public safety.

1.3 **Overall Assurance Position**

The Authority is satisfied that:

- The Service is effective, efficient and well governed.
- Financial management arrangements are robust and deliver value for money.
- Risks are appropriately identified, assessed and managed.
- The Service demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement.

1.4 **Independent Assurance**

Independent assurance is provided through inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), alongside internal and external audit activity. Collectively, these provide assurance that the Authority's governance, risk management and financial control arrangements are operating effectively.

1.5 **Public Assurance**

Residents, businesses and communities across Tyne and Wear can be confident that their Fire and Rescue Service is well managed, financially sustainable and focused on continuous improvement to keep people safe.

1.6 **Assurance Summary by Area**

The Authority has considered a wide range of evidence from internal assurance processes, independent inspection, audit activity, performance management arrangements and external scrutiny. Based on this evidence, the Authority is satisfied that effective arrangements are in place across all key areas of governance, financial management, operational service delivery and workforce management, as summarised below:

Area	Assurance Conclusion	Sources of Assurance
Governance	Effective	Internal Audit, External Audit, HMICFRS, Annual Governance Statement
Financial Management	Effective	External Audit, Budget Planning Framework, Financial Monitoring
Prevention	Effective	Performance Monitoring, Quality Assurance, Governance Oversight, HMICFRS
Protection	Effective	Risk Based Inspection Programme, Quality Assurance, HMICFRS
Response and Resilience	Effective	Operational Assurance, National Resilience Assurance Team, HMICFRS
People and Workforce	Effective	Workforce Governance, Employee Relations, Performance Reporting

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2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 This Statement covers the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. Its purpose is to provide assurance to the communities of Tyne and Wear, the Government and the wider public that the Authority has appropriate processes in place to fulfil its statutory duties, manage risk effectively and support continuous improvement.

2.2 In preparing this Statement, the Authority has had due regard to relevant legislation and guidance, including the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018. This Statement describes the Authority's approach to governance, performance, risk management, financial stewardship and operational delivery, and provides assurance on the effectiveness of these arrangements.

3. ABOUT THE SERVICE

3.1 **Area and Demographics**

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service covers a metropolitan area of approximately 1.1 million residents across the five local authority areas of Gateshead, Newcastle upon Tyne, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland, bordered by Northumberland to the north and County Durham to the south.

The area presents a diverse and complex risk profile, including urban density, areas of deprivation, significant transport infrastructure and industrial risks.

3.2 **Workforce**

The Service employs 882 staff, including 572 wholetime firefighters, 8 on-call firefighters and 33 Control staff. These are supported by 269 corporate staff providing expertise in finance, human resources, estates, fleet, ICT and business support.

Workforce capacity and skills are aligned to risk through structured planning, training and performance management.

The Service is further supported by volunteers who contribute to prevention, engagement and community resilience activities.

3.3 **Vision, Mission and Values**

The Service's vision, mission and values provide a framework for behaviour, decision-making and service delivery. These are reinforced through leadership, workforce engagement and monitoring of culture and inclusion, supporting a consistent and values-led approach across the organisation.

3.4 **Strategy and Community Risk Management Plan**

Strategic direction is set through Our Strategy, Our Future, and the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). The CRMP is the Service's plan for identifying and managing risks in the community.

These documents are underpinned by the Community Risk Profile (CRP), a detailed assessment of risks facing the area which ensures that resources are aligned to the most significant risks within the communities of Tyne and Wear.

Delivery against strategic priorities is monitored through governance arrangements, including the Programme Board, Performance and Improvement Board, Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and the Authority.

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4. LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

4.1 The Authority has appropriate arrangements in place to secure compliance with all relevant legislation, including:

- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007
- Equality Act 2010
- Modern Slavery Act 2015
- Policing and Crime Act 2017
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018
- Fire Safety Act 2021
- Building Safety Act 2022
- Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022
- Procurement Act 2023

4.2 Compliance is supported through a framework of policies, procedures, assurance processes, professional advice, audit activity and governance oversight. These arrangements ensure compliance with statutory duties, changes in legislation and national policy.

5. GOVERNANCE ASSURANCE

5.1 **Governance Overview**
The Authority is satisfied that effective governance arrangements are in place, providing leadership and accountability. Assurance is drawn from Member oversight, decision-making processes, performance management, audit activity and independent external scrutiny. These arrangements are consistent with recognised good governance practice and enable the Authority to respond proactively to risks and drive continuous improvement.

HOW THE AUTHORITY UNDERTAKES AND ASSURES ITS GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

5.2 **Governance Framework**
The Authority comprises 17 elected members, consisting of 16 councillors appointed by the five constituent local authorities and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Northumbria. It provides strategic leadership, scrutinises organisational performance, approves budgets and ensures compliance with statutory requirements.

The Authority's Standing Orders were reviewed during 2025/2026 to ensure continued alignment with good governance practice. Meetings of the full Authority and its committees are held regularly between June and March and are open to the public, with agendas and decisions published on Sunderland City Council's website at: www.committees.sunderland.gov.uk/committees

5.3 **Community Risk Management**
The Community Risk Management Plan 2024-2027 (CRMP) is informed by a comprehensive assessment of local risks and is subject to public consultation.

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It ensures that resources are aligned to community needs and priority risks, providing an effective framework for identifying, assessing and mitigating risk across prevention, protection, response and resilience activities.

The CRP 2025-2030 will inform the development of the next CRMP and support the review and updating of associated plans during the interim period. The CRP is evidence-based and explains the risks facing Tyne and Wear and how these risks shape the Service's activities.

5.4 **Performance Management**

Performance is monitored through structured reporting, with quarterly updates to the Performance and Improvement Board, the ELT and the Performance and Improvement Scrutiny Committee.

Year-end reporting, including the Compliments and Complaints Annual Report, provides transparency on service performance, achievements, and areas for improvement.

Statutory data returns to the Home Office and HMICFRS contribute to national statistics and strengthen transparency and accountability.

The Authority is required to submit returns and efficiency plans to Government, including the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to support monitoring against national productivity expectations.

The Service's Efficiency and Productivity Plan 2026/27 provides assurance that resources are being used effectively, performance is monitored, and value for money is demonstrated in line with national expectations. These arrangements strengthen transparency, accountability and oversight of service performance.

5.5 **Risk Management**

Risk management is embedded within planning, decision-making and performance processes, ensuring risks to service delivery and public safety are actively managed.

A Corporate Risk Register is maintained by the Authority. Risks are assessed by likelihood and impact, with clear ownership and mitigation. All strategic risks are subject to regular review, with mitigation actions in place and no risks exceed the Authority's risk appetite at year end.

5.6 **Internal Audit and Internal Control**

Internal audit assurance is provided by Sunderland City Council in respect of the Service's governance, risk management and internal control arrangements. The annual Internal Audit Plan was agreed in consultation with the Chief Fire Officer, Director of Finance, Estates and Facilities and the Head of Internal Audit and approved by the Governance, Risk and Audit Scrutiny Committee in February 2025.

During the reporting period, the following audits were undertaken:

- Financial Management – **Substantial Assurance**
- Data Retention Arrangements – **Moderate Assurance**
- Contract Monitoring – PFI Buildings – **Moderate Assurance**
- Transaction Testing – **Substantial Assurance**
- Business Continuity Arrangements – **Substantial Assurance**
- Partnership Arrangements – **Substantial Assurance**

Progress against audit actions is overseen by the Service Improvement Team and reported to the Internal Governance Board. The Head of Internal Audit's opinion concluded that there is substantial assurance that the Authority's governance, risk management and internal control arrangements are operating effectively.

5.7 **HMICFRS**

HMICFRS independently assesses fire and rescue services in relation to effectiveness, efficiency and people. The 2023-2025 inspection resulted in two Good judgements, eight Adequate judgements and one Requires Improvement judgement.

Progress against the 11 Areas for Improvement (AFIs) identified through the inspection is monitored through established governance arrangements, with updates reported to the Authority. The Authority is satisfied that appropriate arrangements are in place to respond to HMICFRS findings and that progress is being effectively managed by the Service to support continuous improvement.

5.8 **Information Governance and Cyber Security**

The Authority is assured that robust information governance arrangements are in place, aligned with UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. Oversight is provided by the Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) and supported by clear policies, mandatory training and the use of Data Protection Impact Assessments.

Statutory transparency requirements are met, including timely publication of information and compliance with Freedom of Information and Subject Access Request timescales.

Cyber security remains a key organisational priority. Arrangements are aligned with the National Cyber Security Centre's Cyber Assessment Framework and include strengthened technical controls, resilience testing, and staff awareness activity.

The Service also complies with the NHS Data Security and Protection Toolkit, reflecting the handling of sensitive personal and operational information. Physical security, access controls and data loss prevention measures are reviewed regularly to maintain the security of systems and information assets.

5.9 **Fire Standards, Ethics and Transparency**

The Service monitors alignment with Fire Standards issued by the Fire Standards Board, with progress overseen through governance processes to support statutory compliance and continuous improvement.

The Code of Conduct and Ethics sets standards of behaviour and reinforces the Service's values. The Service recognises the importance of continuous improvement and ensures appropriate support is available to employees.

The Authority has adopted best practice guidance set out in the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, publishing required information, including senior officer salaries, property information, registers and decisions of significant public interest. Information is available at: www.twfire.gov.uk/transparency

5.10 **Annual Governance Statement**

The Authority undertakes annual self-assessment against the CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016). The Annual Governance Statement and Local Code of Governance were approved in March 2026 and subject to external audit review.

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5.11 **Overall Governance Assurance**
Based on the evidence set out above, the Authority is satisfied that its governance, risk management and internal control arrangements are effective, proportionate and support compliance with statutory duties. No significant governance failures or control weaknesses have been identified during the reporting period.

6. FINANCIAL ASSURANCE

6.1 The Authority provides assurance that robust financial management arrangements are in place to safeguard public funds and ensure they are used economically, efficiently and effectively. These arrangements support the sustainable delivery of the CRMP and are aligned to statutory financial requirements.

HOW THE AUTHORITY UNDERTAKES AND ASSURES ITS FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

6.2 **Financial Governance**
Financial governance supports effective decision-making, organisational resilience and risk management. Oversight is provided by the Authority and the Governance, Risk and Audit Scrutiny Committee, with roles and responsibilities clearly defined in the Scheme of Delegation and Financial Regulations.

6.3 **Financial Reporting and Accounts**
The Authority prepares and publishes an Annual Statement of Accounts which provides a true and fair view of its financial position. The accounts are prepared in accordance with CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting and International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and are subject to Member scrutiny.

External audit has provided assurance on the Authority's financial statements and identified no significant weaknesses in arrangements for securing value for money. In-year financial monitoring ensures that expenditure is controlled, and emerging risks are identified and addressed promptly.

6.4 **Value for Money**
The Authority has appropriate arrangements in place to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources. Independent external audit has confirmed that no significant weaknesses were identified in the Authority's arrangements for financial sustainability, governance, or improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

6.5 **Medium-Term Financial Planning**
Robust medium-term financial planning arrangements are maintained through the Budget Planning Framework 2026/27 to 2029/30, which brings together the Revenue Budget, Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), Capital Strategy and Reserves Strategy into a coherent framework. The framework supports financial sustainability and resilience, considers funding pressures, known risks and affordability over a multi-year period, and aligns resources to strategic and operational priorities.

Financial risks are monitored in-year through budget monitoring, risk management processes and reporting to senior management and Members. These arrangements provide assurance that emerging financial pressures are identified and managed at an early stage, supporting effective decision-making and financial control.

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6.6 **Alignment with the CRMP**

The Authority is assured that financial planning and budget setting, as set out in the Budget Planning Framework are aligned with the priorities and risk profile contained within the CRMP. This ensures resources are directed towards identified local risks and operational priorities and that financial decisions support the effective and efficient delivery of services to the communities of Tyne and Wear, in line with National Framework expectations.

6.7 **Reserves and Financial Resilience**

The Authority maintains reserves to support financial resilience and manage identified risks. Decisions on the level and use of reserves are informed by the Budget Planning Framework and MTFS, supported by a financial risk-assessment undertaken by the Section 151 Officer, and are subject to Member scrutiny through the budget setting and monitoring process.

External audit confirmed that reserve levels are prudent, risk-assessed and in line with policy, and that reserves are being used appropriately to support capital investment and planned financial transitions rather than to fund ongoing structural deficits.

6.8 **Procurement and Ethical Supply**

The Authority is assured that procurement arrangements support value for money, transparency and ethical practice. A Procurement Strategy 2025-2028 is in place, aligned to relevant procurement legislation, including the Procurement Act 2023, and supported by professional oversight, delegated decision-making arrangements and formal approval routes for higher-value contracts. Independent assurance is provided through the Authority's achievement and maintenance of Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply (CIPS) Ethical Procurement and Supply Status.

The Authority meets its obligations under Section 54 of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and is satisfied that appropriate arrangements are in place to identify and mitigate risks within its operations and supply chains. The Modern Slavery Statement 2025/26 demonstrates transparency and compliance with legislative and national expectations.

6.9 **External Audit**

Forvis Mazars is the Authority's appointed External Auditor. External audit provides independent assurance over the Authority's financial management and governance arrangements, including the audit of the Statement of Accounts and review of arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The most recent audit concluded that the Authority has adequate arrangements in place to secure value for money, with no material weaknesses identified.

External audit findings are reported to the Governance, Risk and Audit Scrutiny Committee and considered alongside internal audit activity as part of the Authority's overall assurance framework. The external auditor also reviews the Annual Governance Statement as part of its value for money assessment, providing further independent assurance.

6.10 **Overall Financial Assurance**

The Authority has delivered its financial plans within agreed budgets, while continuing to secure efficiencies and value for money. It is satisfied that financial arrangements are effective, proportionate and support the delivery of statutory duties. No significant weaknesses were identified during the reporting period.

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7. OPERATIONAL ASSURANCE

7.1 Operational assurance is provided through structured governance, performance monitoring, internal assurance activity and external inspection across prevention, protection, response and resilience.

7.2 PREVENTION

7.2.1 Prevention arrangements focus on protecting life, reducing risk and improving community safety and wellbeing, with resources directed towards those most at risk. Activity is aligned to identified community risk and delivered in accordance with National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) guidance.

7.2.2 Activity is informed by the Prevention Plan 2026–2030 and integrated with wider health, safeguarding and crime reduction priorities through effective partnership working. Robust governance, performance monitoring and quality assurance arrangements provide assurance that prevention activities remain targeted, effective and responsive to community risks. The Prevention and Education Team received a Gold Award for Community and Customer Focus at the iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards in March 2026.

HOW THE SERVICE UNDERTAKES AND ASSURES PREVENTION ACTIVITY

7.2.3 **Use of Data and Effective Partnerships**
Prevention work is informed by a range of local and national intelligence sources, including health data, public referrals and internal intelligence. Participation in the Gateshead and North Tyneside Health and Wellbeing Boards helps ensure that interventions are targeted towards those most at risk. Partnership arrangements support effective referral pathways, information sharing and joint working, reinforced by staff guidance such as the seven-minute briefing and *When to Refer* card.

7.2.4 **Home Safety Visits**
A Safe and Well programme provides targeted home visits to individuals and households identified as most at risk. Visits are delivered by prevention and education staff and operational crews, who are trained to identify wider vulnerabilities and make appropriate referrals to partner agencies. An online Home Fire Safety Check provides an accessible route for residents to assess risk and request support.

7.2.5 **Safeguarding**
Safeguarding is embedded across all prevention activity. The Service applies NFCC Safeguarding Guidance, supported by mandatory training, referral pathways and partnership working. The Authority is assured through adherence to the Prevent Duty guidance, ensuring individuals at risk are identified and supported appropriately.

7.2.6 **Children and Young People**
Children and Young People are supported through structured education, engagement and early intervention programmes including school and community education, Fire Cadets, SafetyWorks!, and diversionary programmes such as the King's Trust and Phoenix Programme.

Activity is delivered in line with safeguarding requirements and addresses risks associated with antisocial behaviour, deliberate fire-setting and wider harm.

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7.2.7 **Road Safety**
Road safety interventions are delivered in response to identified local risks and in partnership with relevant agencies. Targeted campaigns such as *Drive to Arrive* and *Biker Down* address key risk groups, alongside specialist interventions delivered in partnership with Youth Justice Services and the Prison and Probation Service.

7.2.8 **Water Safety**
Water safety risks are addressed through targeted education, community engagement, specialist training and partnership working. The Community Responder Training Programme provides individuals with lifesaving skills, ensuring proportionate and effective interventions focused on higher-risk locations and groups.

7.2.9 **Physical and Mental Health**
Prevention activity supports public health outcomes. Through partnership initiatives including falls prevention, health screening and signposting, the Service contributes to early intervention, improved wellbeing and increased community resilience.

7.2.10 **Arson Reduction**
Deliberate fire risk is proactively managed through intelligence-led activity, education campaigns and targeted interventions. Partnership working and diversionary programmes support the reduction of deliberate fires and linked antisocial behaviour.

7.2.11 **Environmental Risk**
Environmental risks, including fly-tipping, waste accumulation and derelict properties, are addressed through partnership working and reporting mechanisms. These arrangements support identification and mitigation of risks that could lead to fire.

7.2.12 **National and Local Campaigns**
The Service actively participates in local and national campaigns to raise awareness of risks and reduce preventable harm. This includes seasonal and thematic campaigns such as Bonfire Night, road safety initiatives and national water safety campaigns, ensuring consistent public messaging aligned to emerging risks.

7.3 PROTECTION (FIRE SAFETY)

7.3.1 The Authority is assured that the Service fulfils its statutory duty to promote and enforce fire safety legislation through a proportionate, risk-based approach. A Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) that prioritises fire safety inspections based on higher-risk premises supports this approach. Operational crews support lower risk work and specialist officers focus on complex enforcement activity.

7.3.2 Protection activity is aligned to the Protection Plan 2026-2030, ensuring it is informed by identified risks and strategic priorities. Following the Grenfell Tower Fire, specialist capability has been strengthened through Building Safety Regulator arrangements and enhanced oversight of higher-risk buildings, providing further assurance of effective and robust regulation.

7.3.3 Collectively, these arrangements provide assurance that fire safety regulation is delivered consistently, proportionately and in accordance with statutory requirements.

HOW THE SERVICE UNDERTAKES AND ASSURES PROTECTION ACTIVITY

7.3.4 **Fire Safety Audits and Inspections**
The RBIP determines inspection frequency based on premises type, use and compliance history, ensuring activity is proportionate and focused on premises

presenting the greatest risk to life.

7.3.5 **Event Led and Intelligence Driven Activity**
Fire safety activity is supplemented by event-led interventions arising from incidents, cause for concern reports from Firefighters on station and the public and referrals from external partners.

7.3.6 **Business Engagement and Advice**
Using a data-led approach, the Service engages with businesses to raise awareness of emerging risks and reinforce compliance with fire safety legislation.

This includes participation in local and national fire safety campaigns and the delivery of assured advice through the Primary Authority Scheme (PAS). The PAS enables work with partner businesses to provide consistent, assured fire safety advice, supporting compliance and strengthening collaborative relationships.

7.3.7 **Building Regulations and Enforcement**
The Service fulfils its statutory duty to be consulted on fire safety provisions for relevant new developments and building alterations, ensuring fire safety considerations are addressed at the design and construction stages.

Fire safety legislation is enforced through an Enforcement and Engagement Policy, which supports a proportionate approach ranging from informal advice for minor breaches to prosecution where serious failings place relevant persons at risk.

Enforcement outcomes are recorded and published in the NFCC Enforcement Register in line with statutory and national requirements.

7.3.8 **Quality Assurance**
A structured programme of quality assurance is maintained with Fire Safety Inspectors and operational crews to ensure a consistent and proportionate approach across the RBIP, providing assurance over standards, decision-making and outcomes.

7.3.9 **Explosives and Petroleum Regulation**
The Service also fulfils its regulatory responsibilities for petroleum and explosives licensing through robust, risk-based inspection regimes that protect public safety.

7.3.10 **Unwanted Fire Signals**
Targeted activity to reduce unwanted fire signals improves operational efficiency, enhances public safety and supports businesses in meeting their responsibilities.

The Service's Unwanted Fire Signals Reduction Project received the Silver Award for Efficiency and Effectiveness at the iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards in March 2026.

7.3.11 **Fire Investigation**
Fire investigation activity identifies the cause and origin of fires, informing prevention and protection activity and supporting criminal investigations where appropriate. This work is delivered by trained personnel operating to NFCC competency standards and supported by regional mutual aid arrangements.

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7.4 RESPONSE (EMERGENCY RESPONSE/PREPAREDNESS)

7.4.1 The Authority is satisfied that effective and resilient emergency response arrangements are in place to meet statutory duties and respond to community risk across Tyne and Wear. Emergency response is delivered through a network of 17 strategically located fire stations and frontline appliances, supported by specialist and national resilience capabilities. These arrangements are risk-based, proportionate and aligned to the CRMP.

7.4.2 Operational preparedness is supported by structured governance, performance monitoring and assurance arrangements. Response performance, including response times, operational outcomes and organisational learning, is monitored and scrutinised through established governance forums, with any issues or emerging risks escalated through formal processes to ensure timely mitigation and continuous improvement. These arrangements provide assurance that the Service maintains operational preparedness and the capability to respond effectively to foreseeable risks.

HOW THE SERVICE UNDERTAKES AND ASSURES OPERATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

7.4.3 **Risk-Based Response and Operational Performance**
Emergency response arrangements are informed by the CRP and the CRMP. Incident data, operational intelligence and site-specific risk information are used to determine response models, resource deployment and pre-determined attendances.

Operational performance is subject to regular scrutiny through the Performance and Improvement Board and the Performance and Improvement Scrutiny Committee. Where performance data or operational intelligence indicates potential risk to response capability, this is escalated through governance arrangements and addressed through agreed improvement actions, providing assurance that response activity remains effective, proportionate to risk and compliant with statutory duties.

7.4.4 **External Inspection and Independent Assurance**
External assurance is provided through HMICFRS inspection activity. Findings, causes for concern and areas for improvement relating to emergency response are monitored through governance arrangements and inform improvement activity, training priorities and assurance planning.

7.4.5 **Operational Risk Information**
Robust arrangements are in place to manage operational risk information. Site-specific risk data is subject to validation and review processes and is readily available to operational crews to support safe and effective incident response. Governance arrangements ensure that risk information remains accurate, relevant and up to date. The introduction of new Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs), including a secondary demonstrable 4G-enabled MDT, together with associated software, has further strengthened resilience and improved access to critical risk information over the past 12 months.

7.4.6 **Incident Command and Interoperability**
Effective incident command arrangements are in place. All Incident Commanders are trained, assessed and their competencies are maintained in line with national frameworks, including the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP). JESIP is national guidance that supports effective joint working between emergency services.

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As a Category 1 responder, the Service maintains effective multi-agency interoperability. Learning from incidents, exercises and external inspection is reviewed through governance arrangements to ensure continued command effectiveness and interoperability.

7.4.7 **Fire Control and Mobilising**

Effective arrangements are in place for emergency call handling and mobilisation. Fire Control operates on a 24-hour basis and mobilises resources in line with defined response plans, policies and procedures.

Call handling and mobilisation activity is subject to governance oversight, with defined criteria used to categorise incidents and mobilise appropriate resources. Control operators are supported by structured training, competence assessment and the application of professional judgement where required, ensuring resources are deployed effectively and safely.

7.4.8 **Training, Competence and Operational Readiness**

Operational personnel are trained, competent and equipped to respond safely and effectively. Operational competence is maintained through structured licensing and skills maintenance arrangements aligned to National Occupational Standards (NOS). Skills matrices and competence frameworks are reviewed on a planned cycle to ensure capability remains aligned to operational risk.

Training delivery is subject to internal and external quality assurance arrangements. Risk-critical skills are refreshed and independently assessed at defined intervals with training programmes informed by National Operational Learning (NOL), Joint Organisational Learning (JOL) and inspection findings.

The Service's Training Centre is accredited to deliver nationally recognised qualifications, providing further assurance of training quality, consistency and resilience. The Service also undertakes exercises to ensure that training is embedded effectively across its operational workforce.

The Authority is assured that firefighter recruitment and apprenticeship programmes meet the requirements of the Department for Education's Education Inspection Framework. These programmes are effectively governed, well managed and subject to continuous improvement.

Leadership oversight, internal quality assurance and regular review processes provide confidence that apprentices develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours necessary to perform safely and effectively in their roles.

During the reporting period, Ofsted carried out an inspection in which the Service was graded as meeting the Expected Standard in three areas and the Strong Standard in two areas. Strong performance included 100% achievement rates and evidence that apprentices had rich opportunities to participate in activities that benefit the local community. Areas for further development were identified, including broadening the educational expertise of leaders and strengthening partnerships with local colleges.

7.4.9 **Firefighter Health, Fitness and Wellbeing**

The Authority recognises that firefighter health and wellbeing are integral to operational effectiveness. Structured health, fitness and wellbeing arrangements are in place, aligned to NFCC FireFit guidance. These arrangements are subject to governance oversight and provide assurance that operational staff are fit to undertake their roles safely.

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7.4.10 **Operational Assurance and Learning**

Operational activity is subject to formal assurance arrangements, including observation, debrief and review of incidents and exercises. Compliance with policy, operational guidance and incident command procedures are assessed, with trends and findings reported through governance structures.

Learning and positive practice are captured, analysed, shared and monitored through established assurance arrangements, including engagement with national learning platforms, supporting continuous improvement.

7.5 RESILIENCE, COLLABORATION AND NATIONAL RESPONSE

The Authority is satisfied that effective resilience arrangements are in place to support the Service's response to major incidents, disruption and national emergencies. The Service maintains robust arrangements across key areas, including local resilience and multi-agency response, mutual aid, national resilience capability, business continuity and Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH).

These arrangements are regularly tested through training and exercises to ensure they remain effective, up to date and aligned to identified risks, providing assurance of the Service's ability to respond to a range of local, regional and national incidents.

HOW THE SERVICE UNDERTAKES AND ASSURES ITS RESILIENCE AND NATIONAL RESPONSE

7.5.1 **Collaboration and Co-location**

The Authority is assured that co-location and shared estate arrangements support effective collaboration and value for money. These arrangements are underpinned by formal agreements, which are subject to regular review to ensure they continue to support operational effectiveness and partnership outcomes.

7.5.2 **Local Resilience and Multi-Agency Working**

The Service fulfils its statutory responsibilities as a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and plays an active role within the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum (LRF).

The Service contributes to community risk-assessment, emergency planning, training, exercising, and coordinated response arrangements. These activities are subject to established governance processes, providing assurance that multi-agency preparedness and response arrangements remain effective and aligned to local risk.

7.5.3 **Mutual Aid and National Response**

Robust mutual aid arrangements are in place with neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services and partner organisations. These arrangements enable the Service to both provide and receive additional resources and specialist capabilities, ensuring resilience during periods of sustained operational demand or major incidents.

The Service participates in national mobilisation and coordination arrangements through the National Coordination and Advisory Framework (NCAF), ensuring an effective contribution to, and access from, national support mechanisms when required. NCAF provides national arrangements for sharing resources during major incidents.

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7.5.4 **National Resilience Capability and Assurance**

The Service hosts National Resilience capabilities funded by the MHCLG and managed through the NFCC National Resilience Programme, under lead authority arrangements. These capabilities are subject to an assurance regime delivered by the National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT) providing independent oversight of operational readiness and compliance with national standards. The Service is required to demonstrate a high state of readiness across key areas including preparedness, mobilisation, response and post-incident arrangements.

Assurance is delivered through a rolling three-year cycle comprising remote assurance, operational exercises and assurance visits, ensuring all capabilities are assessed against each element within the required period. In 2026, NRAT assessed six national capabilities against 116 areas of assessment, demonstrating full compliance and identifying 16 examples of positive practice. This provides strong independent assurance of the Service's operational preparedness and capability.

7.5.5 **Business Continuity and Major Hazards**

The Service maintains robust Business Continuity Management (BCM) arrangements to ensure the continued delivery of critical functions during disruptive events. Business continuity plans are regularly reviewed, tested and validated through governance and assurance processes.

The Service also fulfils its statutory duties in relation to control of COMAH sites and other high-risk premises. External emergency plans are developed, maintained, and exercised in collaboration with multi-agency partners, providing assurance of preparedness to respond effectively to major industrial incidents.

7.5.6 **Overall Operational Assurance**

The Authority is satisfied that arrangements across prevention, protection, response, and resilience are effective, proportionate to identified risks, and supported by robust governance, scrutiny, and external assurance. There is clear assurance that statutory duties are being met, and that the Service is well prepared to respond to local, regional, and national incidents.

8. PEOPLE AND WORKFORCE

8.1 **Workforce Planning and Capability**

Workforce planning ensures the Service maintains a skilled and resilient workforce aligned to current and future risks. This is informed by the CRMP, organisational strategy and financial planning, supported by workforce data, succession planning and structured training arrangements.

8.2 **Culture and Inclusion (Public Sector Equality Duty)**

The Authority promotes an inclusive and ethical culture supported by values and behaviours. Workforce behaviour and culture are underpinned by the Service's Code of Conduct and Ethics.

The Service meets its Public Sector Equality Duty, with equality considerations embedded in decision-making. Progress is monitored through workforce data, engagement and governance oversight. The Service publishes its Annual Equality Data and Gender Pay Gap Report. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion performance, together with wider workforce matters, are reported through established governance routes including the People and Culture Board and People and Culture Scrutiny Committee.

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8.3 **Industrial and Employee Relations**

The Authority is assured that effective industrial and employee relations are maintained. The Service engages regularly with recognised representative bodies, including the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), GMB and Unison, with formal engagement facilitated through the Joint Consultative Forum (JCF).
The JCF meets regularly to consider workforce matters, policy development and organisational change.

These arrangements are supported by ongoing engagement between managers, employees and representative bodies, ensuring issues are addressed in a timely and consistent manner. Policies and procedures are applied fairly and in line with employment legislation and best practice, supporting workforce stability, engagement and organisational effectiveness, while ensuring that employee views are appropriately considered in decision-making.

8.4 **Health, Safety and Wellbeing**

Health, safety and wellbeing arrangements are in place to protect employees, the public and others affected by the Service's activities. These arrangements are aligned to the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and associated regulations, with clearly defined roles, responsibilities, policies and procedures. Risks are identified, assessed and managed through risk assessment processes, supported by incident reporting, investigation and learning.

Performance, incidents and emerging risks are monitored through established arrangements, providing oversight and accountability and informing continuous improvement. The Service promotes a positive safety culture, embedding health and safety considerations in operational decision-making, training and daily activity.

Employee wellbeing is supported through structured health, fitness and wellbeing programmes, including occupational health provision, mental health support and fitness standards aligned to national guidance, ensuring employees are physically and mentally prepared to carry out their roles safely and effectively.

8.5 **Workforce Governance**

The Authority is assured that effective governance arrangements are in place to oversee workforce matters and support strategic decision-making. Workforce-related performance, risks and issues are reported through established governance structures, including the People and Culture Scrutiny Committee and the internal People and Culture Board. These forums provide oversight of workforce strategy, organisational culture, employee relations, equality and workforce planning.

Decision-making is supported by policies, data and performance information, enabling Members and senior leaders to monitor progress, identify risks and drive improvement. Workforce risks are incorporated within the corporate risk management framework, ensuring alignment with organisational priorities and providing transparency, accountability and effective oversight of workforce matters.

8.6 **Overall People Assurance**

The Authority is satisfied that workforce arrangements are effective and support a skilled and professional workforce. Workforce planning, culture, equality, employee relations, health and safety, and governance arrangements collectively provide assurance that the Service maintains a competent and professional workforce. These arrangements support the delivery of statutory duties, promote a positive culture and enable continuous improvement. No significant workforce-related issues were identified during the reporting period.

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9. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND SERVICE DEVELOPMENT

9.1 During 2025/2026, the Authority continued to deliver a programme of improvement activity aligned to strategic priorities and supported by effective governance and oversight.

9.2 Several key projects were completed during the year, strengthening how the Service operates and responds to incidents. These included upgrades to the Control Room, implementation of a new incident recording system, improvements to training facilities, and the introduction of new operational equipment and systems. Collectively, these projects enhanced operational capability and supported high service standards.

9.3 The Service progressed longer-term programmes, including investment in training facilities, improvements to staff pay and workforce systems, and upgrades to ICT infrastructure. These programmes remain on track and are expected to deliver further benefits.

9.4 The Authority is satisfied with the progress made, and learning from delivery continues to inform future planning, governance and programme management.

10. CONCLUSION

10.1 The Authority is satisfied that it has had due regard to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018 and has met the expectations set out within it during the reporting period.

10.2 The Authority is satisfied that the Service has effective arrangements for governance, financial management, operational performance and continuous improvement. These arrangements support transparency, accountability, effective risk management and public safety.

10.3 Residents, businesses and communities across Tyne and Wear can therefore be assured that their Fire and Rescue Service is effective, well managed, financially sustainable and committed to continuous improvement. Independent assurance, including inspection, audit and external scrutiny, confirms that appropriate arrangements are in place to deliver statutory responsibilities and respond to future risks.

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