



Northumberland
Fire and Rescue Service



Protection Strategy 2023-2026



Northumberland
County Council

Making Northumberland Safer

INTRODUCTION

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service's (NFRS) statutory responsibilities and priorities are detailed in our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2022-2026. The plan can be [found here](#).

To deliver our responsibilities we must assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks and put in place arrangements to prevent and mitigate these risks (*Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, 2018*). To assess risk, we define it as a 'combination of the likelihood and consequence of a hazardous event'. In the case of fire and rescue related risks, hazardous events are the emergency incidents that we attend. If we prevent or mitigate these risks, we can achieve our mission of 'Making Northumberland Safer'.

This mission is underpinned by the following aims:

Reduce the number of fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies in the community.

Reduce the number of deaths and injuries and mitigate the commercial, economic and social cost of emergency incidents.

Safeguard the environment and heritage sites (both built and natural).

Support communities to protect themselves from harm.

Provide value for money through the provision of a lean, efficient and resilient service.



Undertaking a robust, strategic approach to risk assessment is a vital element of understanding the potential risks to our community and is the cornerstone of our CRMP. This alongside our People Strategy, [found here](#), defines the direction of travel for NFRS in relation to how we develop and strengthen our workforce to ensure that our Prevention, Protection, Response and support capabilities are aligned and capable to prevent or mitigate foreseeable fire and rescue related risks.

The strategic approach highlighted in this document outlines how we ensure that the Protection activities contribute towards our mission of 'Making Northumberland Safer'.

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DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

Through the combined NFRS' prevention, protection and response capabilities, NFRS has arrangements in place to prevent or mitigate foreseeable fire and rescue related risks.

The NFRS Protection department is responsible for fire safety compliance in regulated premises and investigating the cause of fires across the communities of Northumberland.

Our Community Risk and Response Department play a key role in supporting us with the delivery of our duties. The Protection department also work closely with our colleagues in Northumberland County Council and a number of external agencies to deliver our key priorities and objectives.

Core Protection activities delivered: FIRE SAFETY

NFRS are responsible for the enforcement of fire safety law in all regulated premises within Northumberland. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 along with the Fire Safety Act 2021, Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022 and the Building Safety Act 2022 are the main pieces of legislation that apply.

Our Fire Safety Protection Officers are responsible for the delivery of fire safety regulatory activities in line with our risk-based inspection programme utilising our central database Community Risk Management Information System (CFRMIS), fire incident data on primary fires in commercial premises along with information on non-compliance from a variety of external sources including partner agencies and members of the public.

NFRS are also the enforcing authority for the Petroleum (Consolidation) Regulations 2014 under delegated powers from Northumberland County Council.

Our main responsibilities are to:

Enforce Fire Safety Law in all regulated premises within Northumberland.

Carrying out fire safety audits in line with our risk-based inspection program in support of our regulatory duties.

Carrying out post fire checks at any commercial premises following a primary fire within the premises.

Responding to and commenting on statutory consultations such as building regulations and licencing applications within agreed time scales.

Provision of fire safety advice and guidance to responsible persons and regulated premises.

Investigate and resolve complaints and concerns about fire safety deficiencies within regulated premises.

Monitor unwanted fire signals (UwFS) from automatic false alarms (AFA) in regulated premises and support Responsible Persons in identifying poor performance and help improve their management of AFA's.

Grant petroleum storage certificates, petroleum storage licences and audit premises certified for the storage of petroleum.

Within our CRR department, Wholetime Duty and Day Duty supervisory managers are trained to Level 3 Fire Safety Auditors standard to enable them to support the delivery of the Protection departments risk-based inspection program. As part of their planned station work, they carry out targeted audits at low and very low risk premises.

NFRS Protection team also have a small team of part time associate inspectors trained to level 3 fire safety auditors standard who support delivery of our risk-based inspection program carrying out audits at low and very low risk premises in other areas of the County.

FIRE INVESTIGATION

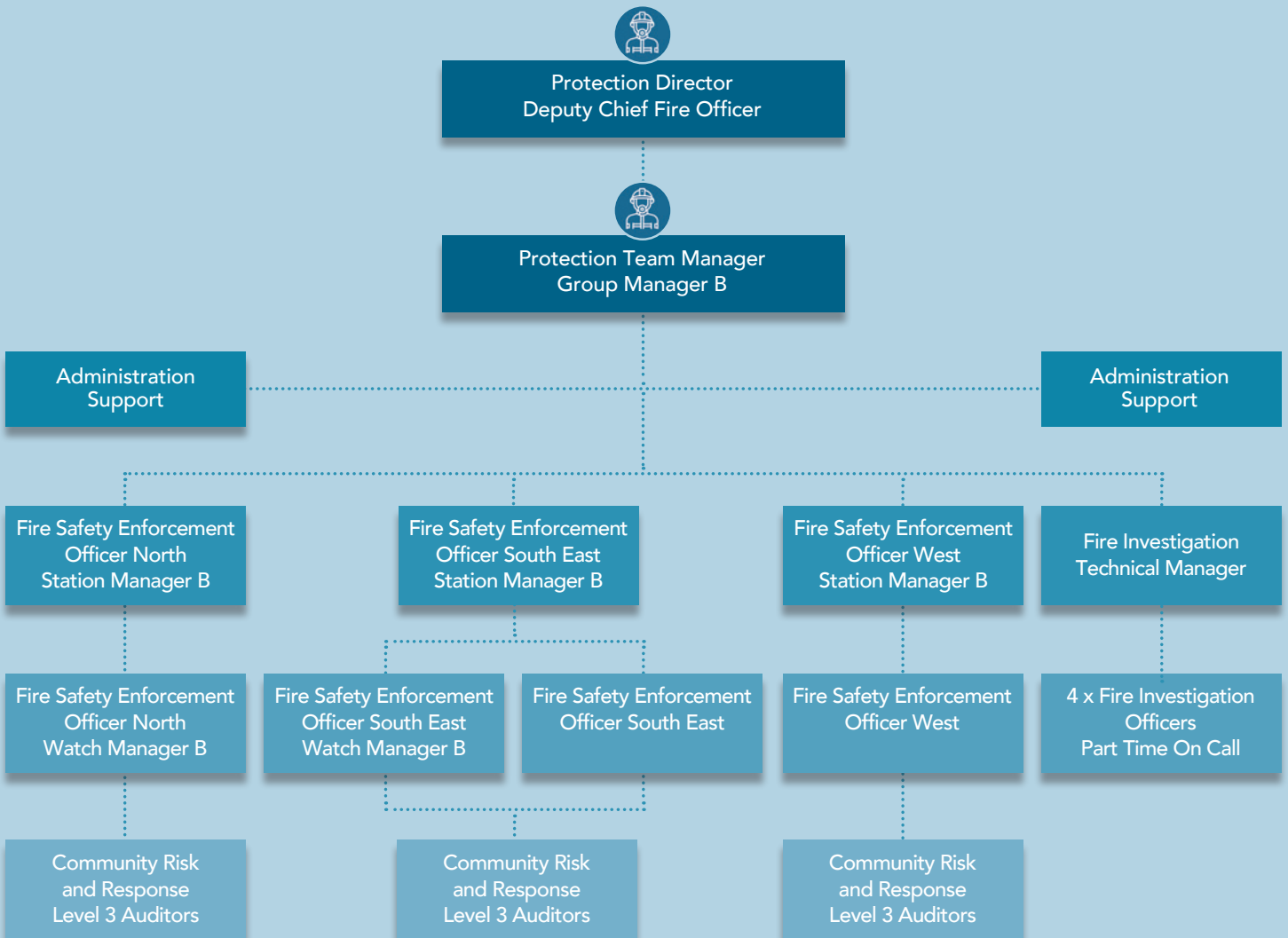
Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) has a duty to investigate the cause and origin of every fire we attend under the Fire and Rescue Services Act (2004).

The investigation may be completed by the crews who extinguished the fire, or by fire investigation officers from our specialist team who may also be called in to conduct complex investigations with partner organisations. The information gathered during the investigation may be shared with the wider Fire Service community and public, as this will assist in protecting our communities locally, nationally and internationally. We will investigate suspected non-accidental

fires in partnership with Northumbria Police, supporting any subsequent potential prosecution within the Criminal Justice System. We follow the 'Code of Practice for Investigators of Fires and Explosions for the Criminal Justice Systems in the UK (2nd Edition)' as well as forensic protocols established with Northumbria Police, linked to the 'Forensic Science Regulator's: Codes of Practice and Conduct'.

Our team also works alongside fire investigators hired by insurance companies, assisting in gathering the information required to allow claims to progress quickly. This work has led to the identification of goods that may be part of national recalls, as well as the discovery of previously unknown fire risks.

DEPARTMENT STRUCTURE





DEPARTMENT CHALLENGES AND RISKS

NEW LEGISLATION

One of the outcomes from the Grenfell enquiry has been the introduction of new legislation to ensure fire safety standards are established and maintained within regulated premises containing two or more domestic dwellings.

The new legislation is:

The Building Safety Act 2022

Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022

Fire Safety Act 2021

What are we doing in Protection?

NFRS will work with responsible and accountable persons to ensure the requirements of this new and all existing legislation are achieved to strengthen safety of residents across Northumberland where necessary. We will achieve this through education, inspection and where appropriate through enforcement.

PETROLEUM ACTION PLAN

The delivery of our Petroleum Action Plan has not yet been achieved due to a number of challenges both internal and external, the most significant of these being the COVID pandemic and a significant recent change in department personnel.

What are we doing in Protection?

We will continue delivery of our Petroleum Action Plan to support our continued improvement of petroleum regulation in Northumberland. The action plan was developed following a peer review carried out by London fire Brigade, its implementation was started during 2021/22 and will continue until complete.

FIRE INVESTIGATION FIRE STANDARD

On the 31st March 2022 a new Fire Investigation Fire Standard was released (FSD-PRO02), implementing this standard will require a great deal of time and resource. The

desired outcome of this Standard is "a fire and rescue service that delivers effective, efficient and valid fire investigations into the origin, cause and development of fire to continually improve the safety of its community and its employees".

What are we doing in Protection?

NFRS will continue to work to embed the new Standard within the Service and meet the requirements set out within it. We have identified what actions are required throughout the whole investigation process, to ensure that the information we gather can be used to its fullest potential.

INVESTIGATING SUSPICIOUS FIRES

The Forensic Science Regulator is requiring that any Service that conducts a fire investigation for the Criminal Justice System (CJS), needs to be accredited to ISO/IEC 17020:2012 (Conformity assessment – Requirements for the operation of various types of bodies performing inspection). If NFRS are not accredited, then they

would be unable to investigate any suspicious fires that may result in CJS proceedings.

MAINTAINING A COMPETENT WORKFORCE

The Protection Department staff are required to undergo a significant level of training and development before they can be deemed competent within their role, a typical development pathway takes up to five years to complete.

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) have published competency frameworks for Fire Safety Regulators and Fire Investigators. Both standards detail the competency requirements for key roles within each profession, this includes detailed levels of knowledge acquisition through qualification and experience along with requirements for minimum levels of Continued Professional Development (CPD).

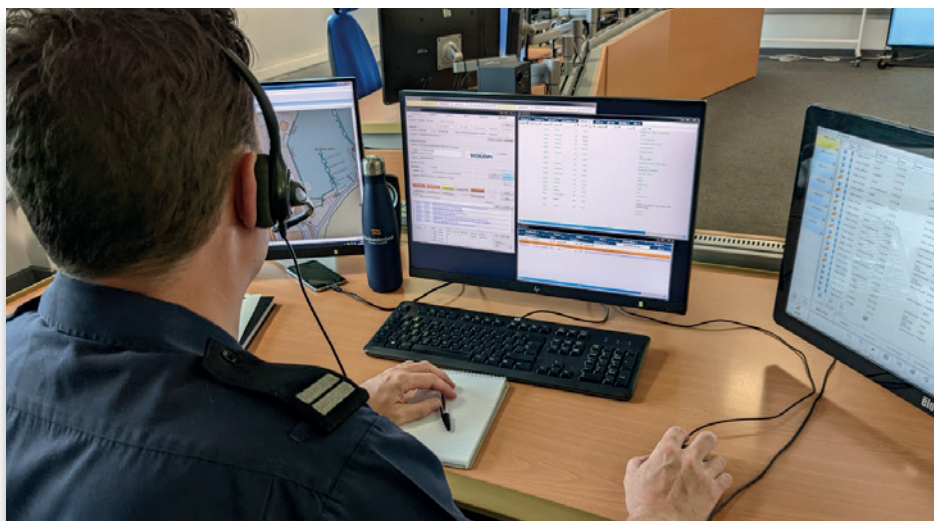
There is also a requirement for Fire Safety regulators involved in regulatory activity at high-risk premises to hold professional registration with the Institute of Fire Engineers (IFE) on the Contextualised Auditors Register.

What are we doing in Protection?

NFRS have adopted the NFCC competency frameworks and will develop all staff to the appropriate level of competence to perform their role.

The attendance and recording of CPD is mandatory for all Protection staff whose role requires it.

Succession planning and talent management are key requirements to ensure NFRS maintains the skilled and competent workforce required to deliver Protection activities. In order to achieve this, a review of the department staffing model will be carried out.



ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTIES

Financial uncertainty and the need to deliver efficiencies is not a new concept, the United Kingdom has been through some extremely challenging times over the last decade including ongoing Austerity following the global financial collapse, Brexit, the global COVID 19 pandemic and rising inflation fuelling a cost of living crisis.

What are we doing in Protection?

With our programme of continuous improvement, we will focus on delivering efficiency and effectiveness without compromising public safety.

By supporting innovative and more efficient ways of working we can drive change and help ensure we provide savings to the public in terms of time and money.

We will endeavour to recover reasonable costs associated with fire safety activities where possible; which include repeat attendances at false alarms, report extracts from fire investigations, issuing of petroleum storage certificates and costs associated with prosecutions.

We will actively seek opportunities to access additional funding through grants to help support delivery of

protection activities through the introduction of new technologies, staff training and the introduction of additional staff.

BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

The number of business premises across the vast area of Northumberland presents the protection department with challenges when engaging with responsible persons and providing access to fire safety advice and guidance.

What are we doing in Protection?

We will continue to develop close links with partner agencies seeking opportunities to deliver fire safety advice and guidance with them to the businesses and regulated premises they support.

We will continue to deliver advice and guidance through a variety of methods including NFRS Website, webinars, media campaigns and attendance at events. We will tailor sessions and advice to meet the need of specific groups and sectors.

We will aim to review the appropriateness of our engagements to ensure their effectiveness in reaching the desired target groups.

DEPARTMENT AIMS AND PRIORITIES

In line with the mission of *Making Northumberland Safer* and the NFRS aims outlines in the Community Risk Management Plan 2022-2026, the service's Prevention strategic aims and priorities are:

PROTECTION DEPARTMENT AIMS

Improve the safety of public and employees of the communities in Northumberland and support them to protect themselves from harm. *(NFRS Aim 4)*

Support the reduction in the number of fires and fire related deaths and serious injuries through the delivery of the risk-based inspection programme, regulation and investigation. *(NFRS Aims 1 and 2)*

Mitigate the commercial economic and social impact of emergency incidents by supporting the business communities of Northumberland in achieving high standards of fire safety. *(NFRS Aim 2)*

Deliver an effective and efficient Protection function to ensure value for money to our communities. *(NFRS Aim 5)*



PROTECTION DEPARTMENT CURRENT PRIORITIES

Delivery of Fire Safety Regulatory Duties required by new and existing legislation through a risk based approach targeting high risk premises, premises with poor fire safety performance and those involving sleeping risk. We will endeavour to work with responsible persons to achieve fire safety standards and where necessary utilise our statutory powers to require work to be carried out. *(CRMP Priority 1 and 3)*

Ensure the protection department continues to operate effectively to meet the needs of the service and the community. *(CRMP Priority 1 and 3)*

Engaging with Responsible Persons of premises to achieve compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. *(CRMP Priority 3)*

Reduce the burden of Unwanted Fire Signals from Automatic Fire Alarm systems on NFRS. *(CRMP Priority 3)*

Ensure petroleum sites within Northumberland comply with the requirements of their licence. *(CRMP Priority 3)*

Maintain competence through Continued Professional Development at all levels for Fire Safety and Fire Investigation personnel and those staff who support the delivery of these functions. *(CRMP Priority 3)*

Meet the criteria set out in fire standards, legislation and guidance ensuring NFRS have an effective and efficient Protection department. *(CRMP Priority 3)*

Review methods and effectiveness of communications and engagements to communities of Northumberland. *(CRMP Priority 3)*

DEPARTMENT KEY ACTIONS

To enable the successful delivery of our Protection priorities, we will:

Undertake and subsequently implement any recommendations resulting from a review of how the protection department operates and delivers its functions. *(CRMP Priority 1 and 3)*

Further develop and implement succession planning, talent management and continued professional development of protection personnel.

Implement the requirements of new and updated legislation. *(CRMP Priority 1 and 3)*

Further review of protection activities and delivery to achieve compliance with the Protection Fire Standard. *(CRMP Priority 1 and 3)*

Deliver a risk-based inspection programme to prioritise those at greatest risk. *(CRMP Priority 3)*

Continue to build partnerships to improve delivery of Protection activities. *(CRMP Priority 1 and 3)*

Implement and embed our Petroleum Action Plan as business as usual. *(CRMP Priority 1 and 3)*

Continue to support and develop the level 3 trained fire auditors' cadre to deliver our risk-based inspection programme targeting of low and very low risk premises with residential dwellings above. *(CRMP Priority 1 and 3)*

Expand the use of social media to communicate Protection activities. We will work with our communications team to increase the use of our social media platforms to educate and inform our customers on matters of fire safety and fire investigation. *(CRMP Priority 1 and 3)*

We will continue to strive to support any proposed or existing major development within the county to ensure we engage on matters of fire safety at an early stage through the provision of advice and support.



We will continue to monitor and analyse AFA data to understand and target resources and advice to business, where underlying trends are identified. Businesses that have frequent AFA actuations will be targeted by the service in order to work with them to reduce the impact on NFRS. Additionally, we will work with the NFCC to support campaigns and initiatives aimed at reducing AFAs. *(CRMP Priority 1 and 3)*

We will work closely with Trading Standards once an applicable item (for example white goods or an electrical appliance) has been identified as the cause of a fire. This will assist possible product recalls and identify new trends, linking in with the Fire Standard for Fire Investigation to communicate the findings of an investigation. *(CRMP Priority 1 and 3)*

We will work with Northumbria Police ensuring that the fire investigations we conduct, comply to their requirements for ISO17020 accreditation and the Forensic Science Regulator's Code of Practice and Conduct. *(CRMP Priority 1 and 3)*

HOW WE TRACK PERFORMANCE AND MEASURE SUCCESS

PERFORMANCE

Good performance management ensures NFRS effectively and efficiently discharges its duties under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and meets its responsibilities as detailed in the Fire and Rescue Framework for England 2018. As such, the Service has developed a Performance and Assurance Framework (PAF), overseen by a Strategic Performance Board (SPB). The PAF provides governance and scrutiny arrangements and ensures openness, transparency, and a cycle of continuous improvement. **The service measures and monitors performance across the following four key areas:**

- Service Provision
- Corporate Health
- Priority programmes
- Risk

To further support performance monitoring, a suite of core and service measures have been developed. Core measures assist in the monitoring of strategic performance, specifically performance relating to statutory responsibilities. Service measures are more operational in nature and generally measure how the Service delivers against its priorities.

Detailed performance reports are presented to each DMT monthly, and as appropriate. This is an opportunity for department heads to provide assurance to the organisation that performance is within agreed tolerance. Where performance is outside agreed tolerance, informed decisions will be taken on future action to address identified concerns. The PAF structure provides

robust governance and scrutiny arrangements, ensuring the organisation moves towards a strong performance culture.

EXTERNAL ASSURANCE

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) undertakes independent inspection of all fire and rescue services in England. HMICFRS inspect against three pillars as follows:

- Effectiveness:** How effective is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe from fire and other risks?
- Efficiency:** How efficient is the fire and rescue service at keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks?
- People:** How well does the fire and rescue service look after its people?

Underpinning the three pillars, are eleven diagnostics. HMICFRS provides a judgement on how a fire and rescue service is performing against each of these and will apply one of five judgements; outstanding, good, adequate, requires improvement or inadequate. NFRS' most recent inspection (2020/21) was carried out in 2021.

In addition to the full programme of inspections, HMICFRS can be commissioned to undertake additional thematic inspections, such as that undertaken for fire and rescue service response to Covid 19. All inspection reports can be **found here**.

It is the responsibility of the Policy, Risk and Performance Department to manage and coordinate inspections, provide a single point of contact or Service Liaison Officer (SLO) to work alongside the HMICFRS Service Liaison Lead (SLL), and to ensure the organisation is well prepared in advance of any inspection.





CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Continuous improvement is the ongoing improvement of products, services, or processes. To support this across the organisation, a bespoke methodology and Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) have been developed to monitor key areas for improvement, otherwise entitled 'priority programmes and projects'. The plan is updated monthly by department managers in conjunction with the Continuous Improvement and Inspection Manager.

The Service has agreed the core measure of the 'percentage of priority programmes and projects on target'. This ensures continuous improvement is measured and

monitored as an integral part of the PAF, and any risks will be recorded within the relevant risk register.

Continuous Improvement will also include bespoke, intensive assistance for issues identified as requiring more robust and detailed project management support. Such support will be time-bound and structured using an agreed terms of reference.

FIRE STANDARDS

The Fire Standards Board has been established nationally to oversee the identification, organisation, development and maintenance of Professional Standards for fire and rescue services in England. As described by the Fire Standards Board, National Professional

Standards are a key component of continuous improvement. They can form a point of focus against which performance can be measured and further improvement identified. In reference to HMICFRS, Fire Standards can identify 'what good looks like'.

It is the responsibility of the Area manager for Business Improvement to manage and coordinate the implementation of Fire Standards and provide a single point of contact (SPOC) for the Fire Standards Implementation Team.

The organisation will prioritise implementation of Fire Standards, and the Policy and Performance Team will monitor progress within the CIP and, therefore, the PAF.

Good performance management, and robust continuous improvement arrangements will be reflected throughout the suite of strategies developed to underpin the Community Risk Management Plan 2022-26.



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