



Northumberland
Fire and Rescue Service



Community Risk and Response 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 Community Risk and Response (CRR) activities contribute towards our mission of 'Making Northumberland Safer'.

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DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

The CRR department is responsible for ensuring we are fully prepared for, and we can effectively respond to, a wide range of emergency incidents 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Based on evidence and our thorough understanding of risk, our professional firefighters respond from the correct locations, with the correct resources to save life, reduce harm and protect the communities of Northumberland. Furthermore, we play a key part in responding to major incidents and humanitarian crises across the UK or around the world.



Working collaboratively with other agencies, organisations and partners the Community Risk and Response department helps to deliver our important protection and prevention work. This improves public safety and delivers the best possible outcomes

for the most vulnerable residents in Northumberland.

To ensure we provide an effective response to fires and other emergencies across Northumberland, our community fire stations operate the following duty systems:

COMMUNITY FIRE STATIONS DUTY SYSTEMS

Wholetime Duty System

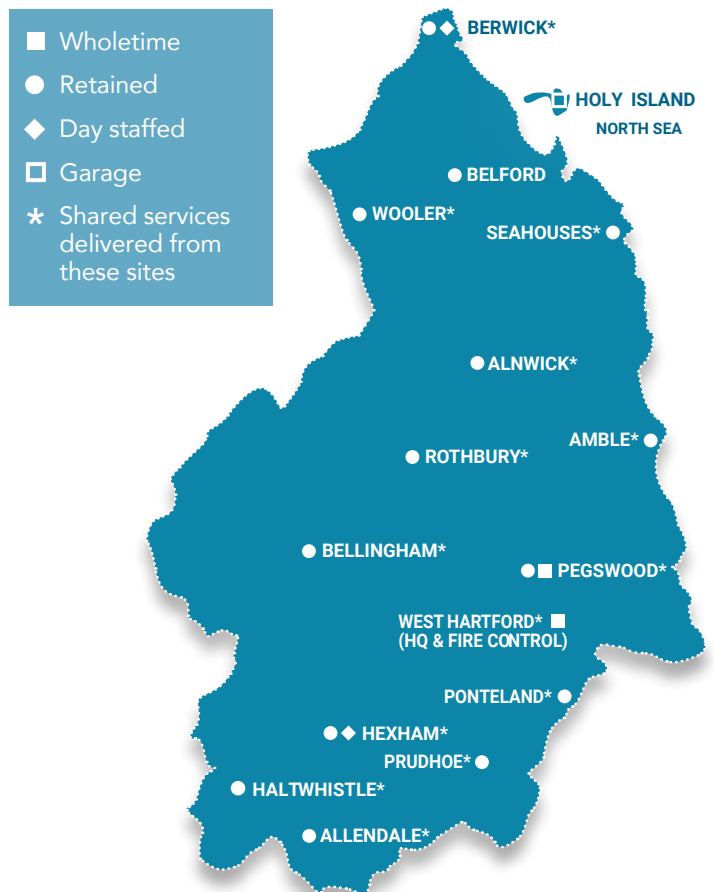
The service has two 'wholetime' community fire stations located in the largely urban southeast part of the county. Here firefighters work two x 10-hour day shifts, and two x 14-hour night shifts. Cover is provided by 4 shifts, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 per year.

Day Staffed Duty System

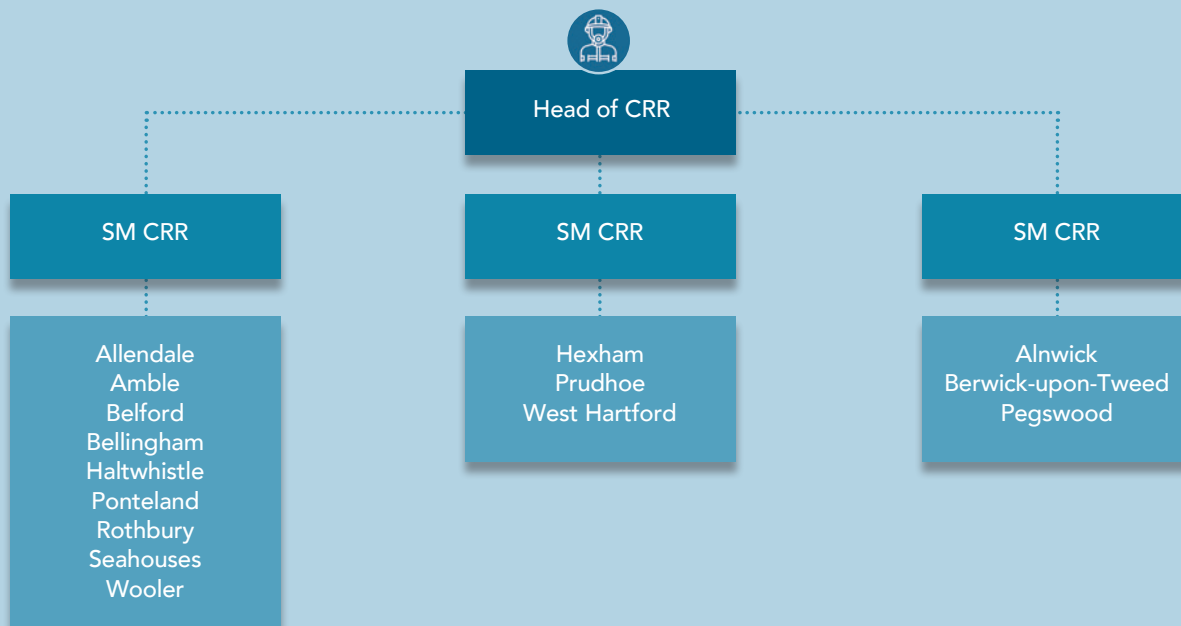
The service has two 'day staffing' community fire stations each with two shifts. Here firefighters work 10-hour day shifts at the station between 08:00 and 18:00. The same firefighters then respond to pager alerts during the night from 18:00 to 08:00. This is a continuous shift pattern for four consecutive days.

Retained Duty System

When there are incidents in rural areas, firefighters who live or work within eight minutes of the station respond to a pager alerts. Albeit, not full time, these firefighters will also undertake regular training and deliver essential prevention and protection work within their communities.



DEPARTMENT STRUCTURE



DEPARTMENT CHALLENGES AND RISKS

FUTURE FUNDING AND THE COST OF LIVING

Over a decade of austerity has had a significant impact on funding for the fire and rescue service. Additionally Brexit, the Covid Pandemic and the future funding of firefighter’s pensions have created financial pressures.

Furthermore, this is the third year in a row that services have received a one year funding settlement, leaving long term budget planning challenging. The rise in the cost of living and energy have also impacted the fire and rescue service, its estates, and its people.

What are we doing in Community Risk and Response?

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.

Ongoing professional analysis of the current, emerging and future risks within our communities will identify smarter ways of utilising our assets including fire stations, fire appliances and operational personnel.

RECRUITING AND RETAINING ON-CALL FIREFIGHTERS

On-call firefighters (Retained Duty System (RDS) firefighters) play a critical role in how NFRS safely responds to fire and other emergencies.

The difficulties with the recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters are recognised nationally and are cited in several pieces of research.



Most of the rural areas within Northumberland, and around the country, are sparsely populated which can make recruitment within these areas difficult. Therefore, there is a need to develop more flexible and innovative approaches to attract potential candidates.

What are we doing in Community Risk and Response?

The service has increased its capacity and capability to recruit and train more on-call firefighters. We have made a conscious effort to increase the number of on-call trainee firefighter training courses we deliver each year.

This change in our recruitment strategy, along with the recruitment cycle now being continuous, will mean our overall number of on-call firefighters will continue to increase to meet our retirement and leaver profile. In order to improve the

recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters, we have committed a large amount of time, effort and resources to developing various recruitment initiatives. Which include:

Investment in recruitment materials.

Introducing ongoing on-call recruitment campaigns.

Increased our catchment areas from five to eight minutes from the station.

Offering more flexible and attractive on-call employment contracts.

Introduction of an enhanced disturbance fee.

Facilitating a regular on-call recruitment and retention staff forum.

The recruitment of additional on-call support officers.

Furthermore, we have made significant improvements to our website in order to promote the role of on-call firefighters, and to gauge interest in key areas. We now have a dedicated link on the website where potential candidates can express an interest in the role. This not only promotes the role, but it also allows us to forward plan and align potential candidates to where we need them most. In 2022, we had a total of 245 submissions of interest, which is a huge increase on anything we have previously received.

Our improved recruitment strategy will ensure the overall number of on-call firefighters increases to meet our retirement and leaver profile. However, we will continue to develop more flexible and innovative approaches to recruitment and retention.

IMPROVING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The benefits of equality, diversity and inclusion are well known. These include more productivity, increased collaboration, better employee engagement and a positive culture. We stand together against all forms of bullying, harassment, and discrimination. We create equal opportunities, foster good relations, promote equality and celebrate differences.

As a service we understand the communities of Northumberland, and we will continue to improve equality, diversity and inclusion to better reflect them.

What are we doing in Community Risk and Response?

We will continue to ensure prospective employees see us as an employer of choice, where inclusive recruitment practices and a range of diverse roles exist. Having an inclusive

culture is at the heart of our service, and we pride ourselves on being a welcoming and supportive place to work. This will support our journey of ensuring we are a very attractive employer for the widest variety of people from all backgrounds.

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT, EMERGING, AND FUTURE RISK AND VULNERABILITY WITHIN OUR COMMUNITIES

Our ever-changing environment and diverse communities create a variety of existing and new risks. We have large towns, new housing developments and rural areas that contain remote communities.

We have miles of waterways and a large National Park which covers 410 square miles. We have motorways, dual carriageways and miles and miles of country roads. We have major railways, large industrial estates, shopping centres, farming, cultural shows and events and much more. As well as the local risks, our firefighters and resources form part of the regional and national response to major emergencies.

The role of our service within the community and the role of our firefighters is evolving. We are responding to a greater variety of emergencies than ever before such as climate change related incidents (e.g. flooding / wildfires), medical emergencies and incidents related to terrorism.

What are we doing in Community Risk and Response?

Reducing risks and preventing incidents is an integral part of the service we provide to the public.

We are using data, evidence, foresight and our professional experience to identify emerging and future risks that we may face. Our research and data help us understand



who's most at risk from fire and other emergencies, and when and where they happen.

We are also successfully working with partners and a range of agencies to share information and creating a greater understanding of where the greatest risk and vulnerability exists in our communities. We are investing in new technology, equipment and vehicles to ensure that when we respond to emergencies, we provide an effective, efficient and professional service.

Northumberland has an ageing population, with the proportion of over-65s rising from 20% to 25.5% of the population in the last decade. Strong partnerships with colleagues and organisations in other sectors help us to identify and support people who are at higher risk from fires and other emergencies.

ENSURING WE HAVE SAFE EFFECTIVE AND PROFESSIONAL FIREFIGHTERS

We provide our firefighters with the equipment, training and relevant guidance which will enable them to respond to emergencies in a safe and professional manner.

Through our community prevention and protection work, we have seen a significant reduction in the number of emergencies we attend.

The unintended consequence of this reduction is that the skills and experience of our firefighters and officers has the potential to reduce

There is also considerable public, peer and legal scrutiny around how our firefighters react and perform at emergencies. Emergency incidents are hazardous environments therefore the safety our firefighters and officers are paramount.

What are we doing in Community Risk and Response?

Practical and theoretical training are the essential components used to ensure our firefighters and officers respond to emergencies with the right knowledge and skills. This is achieved through realistic training sessions and scenarios, tabletop and live exercises and learning from previous emergencies.

We will work hand in hand with our Training Assurance and Safety (TAS) department to determine local and national community risks and align our training to them accordingly.

We will maintain and develop robust processes and procedures that build upon National Operational Guidance (NOG), and fire standards. This will enable us to upskill our firefighters and officers and ensure they respond to emergencies in safe, effective, and efficient manner.

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 Community Risk and Response strategic aims and priorities are:

COMMUNITY RISK AND RESPONSE AIMS

Reduce the risk to life and property by continuously planning, preparing, and training for emergencies, so that when we respond we do it safely, efficiently, and effectively.

(Contributing to aims 1, 4 & 6 outlined in the CRMP)

Reduce the risk to life and property by continually developing and improving our risk based, data and intelligence led response standards

(Contributing to aims 2, 5 and 6 outlined in the CRMP)

Ensure we reduce risk to life and property and identify those most vulnerable in our communities by ensuring our prevention, protection and response work is inextricably linked.

(Contributing to aim 1 outlined in the CRMP)

Continue to support a positive, inclusive culture that encourages innovation and continuous improvement.

(Contributing to aim 1 outlined in the CRMP)

Continue to work together, to promote leadership and a positive culture to make NFRS a great place to work for our people and for the benefit of our communities.

(Contributing to aim 1 outlined in the CRMP)



COMMUNITY RISK AND RESPONSE PRIORITIES

To continue to work towards reaching our target operating model for the number of staff with the appropriate skills to support or response strategy.

*(Links to TAS department strategy)
(Contributing to aims 1, 4 & 6 outlined in the CRMP)*

To continue to support the recruitment and retention of on-call staff to ensure the on-call system is sustainable and effective for the future.

To maintain and support staff competency in line with the skills required to maintain an effective emergency response.

*(Links to TAS department strategy)
(Contributing to NFRS Priority 01)*

To ensure firefighters, officers and control room staff have access to accurate and up to date risk information when responding to a range of incidents. *(Links to protection and prevention strategy)* *(Contributing to aims 1, 4 & 5 outlined in the CRMP)*

To continue to learn from operational incidents which will improve firefighter safety and deliver a more effective service to the public.

*(Links to TAS department strategy)
(Contributing to aims 1, 4 & 6 outlined in the CRMP)*

To continue to support equality, diversity, inclusion and wellbeing across community risk and risk response and the whole organisation.

(Contributing to aims 1, 4 & 6 outlined in the CRMP)

To further enhance and develop the work to reduce the risk to operational firefighters from contaminants. *(Links to TAS department strategy)*

(Contributing to aim 1 outlined in the CRMP)

DEPARTMENT KEY ACTIONS

The key programmes and projects for the next 12 months are:

RESPONSE AND EMERGENCY PLANNING

Continue to use data, intelligence and evidence to develop a new set of response standards.

Improve our business continuity arrangements to ensure a strong response position is maintained for spate conditions during events such as extreme weather, staff absence, fall back mobilising and major/critical incidents.

Continue to develop policy and procedures which are derived from National Operational Guidance.

responder agencies within the LRF to ensure a common understanding exists.

In line with our responsibilities as a category one responder under the Civil Contingencies Act, we will play a full and active part of Northumberland's Local Resilience Forum (LRF).

The LRF's main responsibilities are to ensure that local risks are assessed, and that preparedness and recovery arrangements are in place to deal with the range of potential emergencies that could affect the county.

We have fully embedded the principles that underpin the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP) and work together via the LRF to ensure a common understanding and shared situational awareness exists across all category 1 and 2 responder agencies.

GATHERING SHARING AND UPDATING RISK INFORMATION

We will undertake incident pre-planning and the gathering of operational risk information to enable:

The prevention of injury and ill health of firefighters and other emergency responders.

Management and mitigation of risks in the community.

Continual improvement in the provision of accurate, relevant and timely operational information available to firefighters and officers.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

We will work closely with our key partners to ensure that we fully understand each other's capabilities and limitations. We will look to identify opportunities and innovative ways of enhancing the services we provide to our communities.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

We will through research and development constantly review our operational resources considering emerging issues, equipment and practices against national and international best practice. We will look at advances in technology to enhance our operational capability and ensure firefighter safety. We will review our operational assets, fleet, estates and equipment ensuring they are aligned to our risk profile. We will further enhance and develop the work to reduce the exposure and risk to operational firefighters from contaminants.

COLLABORATION AND INTEROPERABILITY

In line with our responsibilities as a category one responder under the Civil Contingencies Act, we will play a full and active part in Northumberland's Local Resilience Forum (LRF).

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We have fully embedded the principles that underpin the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme (JESIP). We will work with all category one and two

INVESTMENT

Where possible we will look to make efficiency savings that can be utilised to invest in new systems, processes, vehicles, and equipment to enhance our emergency response capabilities.

SKILLS AND COMPETENCE

We will continue to develop our systems and processes to support the skills and competence of operational staff, control room staff and officers.

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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