



Northumberland
Fire and Rescue Service

Protection Strategy



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Preventing. Protecting. Responding.

INTRODUCTION

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) statutory responsibilities and priorities are detailed in our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2022-26. 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.



Making Northumberland Safer.

PREVENTION OVERVIEW

The Protection Department, supported by Community Risk and Response (CRR), delivers two key functions of NFRS; these are:

FIRE SAFETY

The Fire Safety Inspecting Officers within the Protection Team are responsible for the management and enforcement of NFRS’s duties under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

To be successful the Protection Department will target resources flexibly between the risks identified through the Community Fire Risk Management Information System (CFRMIS), the incident information relating to Non-Residential fires and ‘active’ information on non-compliance received from partner agencies.

Our main responsibilities are to:

- Provide advice and support on fire safety requirements for commercial premises and the communal areas of domestic dwellings
- Carry out fire safety audits in line with our risk-based inspection program and following a primary fire at any commercial premises.
- Monitor unwanted fire signals (UwFS) from automatic False Alarms (AFA) in non-residential and other residential premises to identify poor performance and management of fire alarms.
- Respond to and investigate complaints and concerns relating to fire safety in non-domestic premises.
- Carry out statutory consultation on behalf of Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service on building regulations, licencing and planning applications.
- Grant petroleum storage certificates, petroleum storage licences and carry out audits of premises certified for the storage of petroleum.
- Respond to Safety Advisory Group (SAG) event applications on matters of Fire Safety and attend SAG’s when required.
- Provide support and mentoring to our CRR based Level 3 trained auditors.

Our Community Risk and Response staff, who are trained to Level 3 Fire Safety Auditor level, support the delivery of NFRS’s risk-based inspection program. They carry out targeted audits of low and very low risk premises within their station areas as part of their planned station work.



The Protection Department also utilise Associate Inspectors to assist with the delivery of the risk-based inspection program across the county. These inspectors are employed on a part-time basis and are trained to a minimum of Level 3 Fire Safety Auditor standard. They carry out audits at low and very low risk premises in support of our risk-based inspection program.

FIRE INVESTIGATION

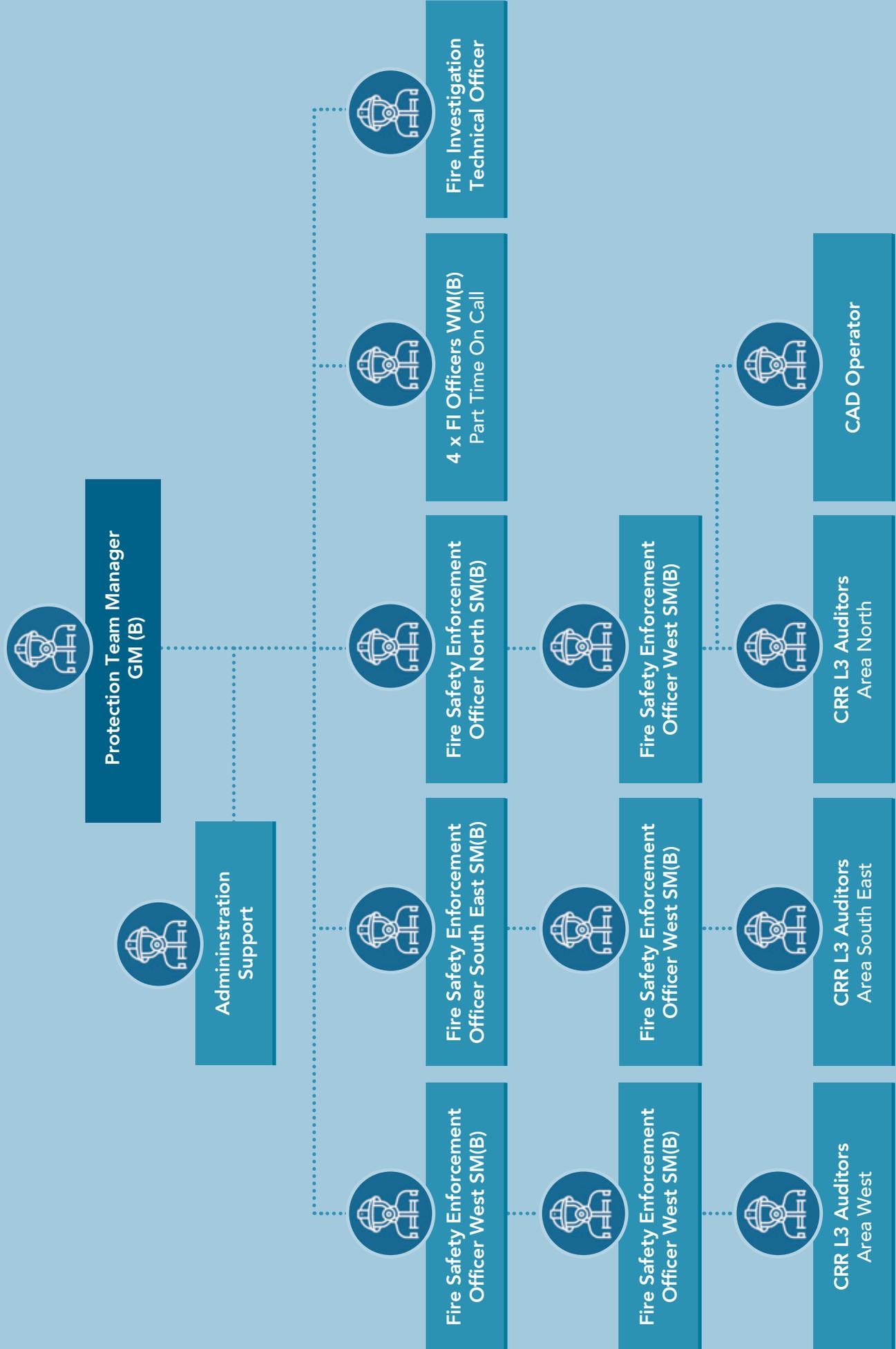
NFRS has a team of highly skilled Fire Investigation Officers who are called in to conduct complex investigations with partner organisations, in order to determine the cause of a fire.

At suspected crime scenes, they work alongside Northumbria Police Crime Scene Investigators (CSIs), the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency, to identify the origin and cause of fires. Evidence gathered during fire investigations may be called upon to support prosecutions within the Criminal Justice System.

At accidental fire scenes, 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.

Sharing this information with the wider Fire Service community and public assists in protecting our communities locally, nationally and internationally. Our team follows national guidance as set out in 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. Our officers also have to maintain their CPD as set out in the NFCC Competency Framework for Fire Investigation (2nd Edition).

DEPARTMENT STRUCTURE





DEPARTMENT CHALLENGES AND EMERGING RISKS

IMPLEMENTING THE PROTECTION FIRE SAFETY STANDARDS

The Protection team has undergone a change of personnel over recent years due to the retirement of some senior members of the team, including the department head in November 2021. These changes have resulted in the requirement for a significant amount of training and development to be undertaken by our staff to ensure they are competent in their role.

Fire Safety staff who perform an enforcement role must be qualified to the Level 4 Diploma in Fire Safety standard. Currently five staff hold this qualification and the remaining three are on a development pathway to achieve the qualification.

Once qualified there is a requirement to participate in continued professional development, with staff being required to complete 75 hrs of CPD in a three-year cycle. Once one cycle of CPD is complete, staff are eligible to apply to join the NFCC Contextualised Auditors Register. Membership is strongly encouraged for all enforcement staff involved in the auditing of High-Rise and High-Risk premises, and the enforcement of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 in relation to these premises.

IMPLEMENTING THE FIRE INVESTIGATION FIRE STANDARD

On the 31st March 2022 a new Fire Investigation Fire Standard was released (FSD-PRO02). 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. It has a competent and resilient capability to undertake fire

investigations, either through direct employment or in collaboration with other services. It works with interested parties so that investigations are consistently conducted in accordance with the relevant legislation, guidance and codes of practice and conduct."

NFRS will work to embed the new Standard and meet the requirements set out within it.

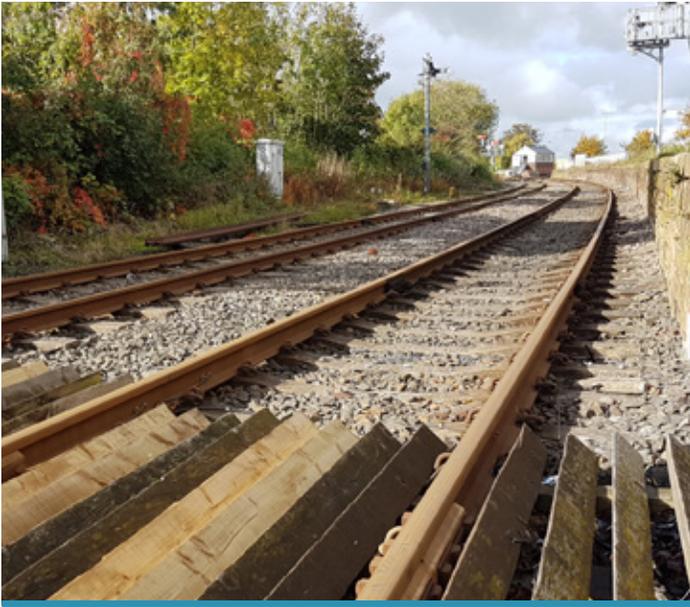
FUNDING UNCERTAINTIES

NFRS currently receive grant funding to support fire safety improvements across Northumberland via the Protection Policy and Reform Unit of the National Fire Chiefs Council. This money is used to fund training for staff engaged in protection activities; one full-time and six casual fire safety posts, alongside other projects.

The provision of grant funding has been confirmed for 2022/23, however the amount is not yet known. Once the amount NFRS is to receive is confirmed, a review of current grant funded arrangements will be carried out to identify spending for 2022/23. The future provision of this funding is not guaranteed, and its payment is reviewed on an annual basis. The withdrawal of this funding will present a financial challenge to the delivery of Protection activities within NFRS.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW LEGISLATION

The Building Safety Bill is currently going through parliamentary process and will most likely receive Royal Assent this year. Once this bill is enacted, a review of its requirements will be conducted, along with its impact on NFRS. An action plan will be developed to support the implementation of any identified actions.



(Ashington to Blyth rail link), which will connect the South East of the county to central Newcastle.

The re-opening of the Northumberland Line will deliver 18 miles of upgraded track and six new stations, five located in Northumberland at Ashington, Bedlington Station, Bebside, South Newsham and Seaton Delaval. The scheme is planned to be completed by Winter 2023.

SUPPORTING NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHUMBERLAND

There are currently two significant development projects in progress within Northumberland that the NFRS Protection department is supporting through consultation and direct advice; these are:

The Northumberland Line Development

NFRS continue to work with partners throughout the development of the Northumberland Train Line

The British Volt Gigaplant Development

British Volt is building the first Gigaplant in the UK at a site in Northumberland, where it will build sustainable low carbon battery cells. Once full capacity is reached in 2027, the Gigaplant will produce cells for around 300,000 electric vehicle battery packs per year.

NFRS started consulting and engaging with partners at a very early stage, with the first virtual online meeting taking place in January 2021. Since that time, we have engaged in regular virtual and on-site meetings with significant stakeholders.

NFRS will continue to provide support to these projects throughout the planning, development and construction phases. We will also actively seek to provide any future major projects within Northumberland with relevant fire safety advice to support the effective implementation of fire safety management and strategy.



DEPARTMENT PRIORITIES

PROTECTION AIMS

The Protection team are supporting the mission of Making Northumberland Safer and the aligned NFRS aims through:

Ensuring that the Authority's statutory fire protection duties are discharged efficiently and effectively, and ensuring our regulatory functions comply with the Better Regulation Executive's five principles of good regulation.

The following five principles of better regulation provide the basis for NFRS's risk-based, proportionate, and targeted approach to enforcement which will help create a positive relationship between NFRS and business owners:

Targeted – resources will be focused on higher-risk enterprises, reflecting local need and national priorities. Our aim is to create a 'level playing field' for businesses to ensure that non-compliant responsible persons are identified, and compliant businesses and consumers are protected.

Proportionate – enforcement action will reflect the level of risk to the public and the seriousness of the possible offence. This should increase compliance without creating unfair burdens on businesses.

Consistent – advice to business will be reliable and robust. Where circumstances are similar, inspecting officers will act in similar ways. Improved access to expert advice about regulatory issues that businesses can trust will give them more confidence to invest and grow.

Transparent – businesses must be able to understand what is expected of them and what they can anticipate in return. This should build trust between inspecting officers and the regulated, increasing efficiency and improving outcomes.

Accountable – activities will be open to public scrutiny, with clear and accessible policies, and fair and efficient complaints procedures. This will allow businesses and communities to shape the services they receive.

PROTECTION PRIORITIES

Work with Responsible Persons of premises to achieve compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 by delivering the risk-based inspection program and prioritising those at greatest risk.

Reduce the burden of Unwanted Fire Signals from Automatic Fire Alarm systems on NFRS by working closely with those responsible at premises where these occur, in order to identify causes and trends to help them better manage their risk.

Respond to statutory consultations on Building Regulations, Licencing and Planning within 15 working days.

Continue to **implement** the outcomes of the petroleum peer review through our petroleum action plan.

Support the maintenance of competence through Continued Professional Development at all levels for Fire Safety and Fire Investigation personnel.

Support the delivery of the Level 3 audit program by CRR staff.

Support the implementation within NFRS of any relevant future recommendations from the Grenfell Enquiry.

Implement any fire safety or fire investigation duties or responsibilities within NFRS required by the enactment of new/updated legislation.



PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS DELIVERED TO REDUCE RISK



Undertake a review of Protection activities across the organisation utilising the NFCC Fire Standards Implementation Tool

We will undertake a review of Protection activities and how we deliver them across our service using the NFCC Protection toolkit to support this. This will help NFRS identify areas of strength and areas for improvement within our protection activities to support our continued improvement plan and delivery our service values.

Expand the delivery of the Level 3 Fire Safety Auditors Qualification

We will continue to expand the delivery of the Level 3 Fire Safety Auditors qualification to include all of our Community Risk and Response supervisory managers. Upskilling our CRR managers will enable them to carry out fire safety audits in support of NFRS's risk-based inspection program.

The training of CRR supervisory managers to this level will also provide them with an increased knowledge of building construction, which will support safety at operational incidents.

Carry out targeted fire safety audits at commercial premises after a fire

When a fire occurs at a commercial premises the protection team will carry out a fire safety audit to review fire safety management arrangements and to establish the level of compliance with their statutory responsibilities.

Where deficiencies are identified, we will take proportionate action to ensure that the Responsible

Person makes any necessary improvements to meet their legal obligation. If the failings are significant, we may take statutory action to require the responsible person to make improvements.

Train and Develop our Protection Staff

All officers who carry out auditing in high risk/rise premises and enforcement work will be trained to Level 4 Diploma in fire safety standard and required to meet the Protection Fire Standards CPD requirements of 25hrs per annum over a three-year cycle.

Once one cycle of post-qualification CPD has been complete, they will be eligible to apply for membership of the NFCC Contextualised Auditors Register.

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.

Develop the use of Associate Fire Safety Auditors

We will continue to develop the use of Associate Fire Safety Auditors across Northumberland. These auditors are qualified to Level 3 Fire Safety Auditor standard as a minimum and provide a flexible and cost-effective way of carrying out fire safety audits of simple premises which are not currently covered by our station-based Level 3 Auditors.

This will support the delivery of our risk-based inspection program and our vision of "Making Northumberland Safe".

Continue delivery of our Petroleum Action Plan

Following the peer review carried out by London Fire Brigade, we developed an action plan to support our continued improvement. The action plan was developed following the peer review report and the implementation of it was started during 2021/22 and will continue through 2022/23. Once the action plan is complete, the arrangements for fulfilling our legal duties as the Petroleum Enforcement Authority for Northumberland will be aligned to business-as-usual activities.

Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA) in commercial premises

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.

Consider the Impact of new legislation on Protection activities

We will monitor the development of the Building Safety Bill (BSB) to maintain an awareness of its content and requirements. Upon its enactment, we will implement any legislative requirements, as appropriate.



Develop tools to engage and educate

Where identified, we will inform the Responsible Persons of relevant premises of the requirement for Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEP). The provision of information, advice and guidance will enable them to complete a PEEP for any person using the premises who is identified as needing one.

PERFORMANCE AND ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

Good performance management and assurance ensures Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service 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 National Framework for England (Home Office 2018)**.

The service has developed a Performance and Assurance Framework to ensure that it is evidence and intelligence led, and this is overseen by a Strategic Performance Board. This provides the opportunity for the service (and fire authority) to:

Be transparent and accountable to their communities for their decisions and actions.

Have scrutiny arrangements in place that reflect the high standard communities expect from an important public service (Fire and Rescue Service National Framework, 2018).

For further information on our Performance and Assurance Framework, and on our Continuous Improvement Plan, please see our Policy, Risk and Performance Strategy ([link to be added](#))



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