



Assets & Assurance Strategy 2021-2024



County Durham and Darlington
Fire and Rescue Service

Safest People, Safest Places

Assets and Assurance Strategy

1. Foreword

Welcome to the Assets and Assurance Strategy for County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS).

Our Service, governed by the County Durham and Darlington Combined Fire Authority (CFA), is responsible for making sure that all our communities in County Durham and Darlington are protected as far as possible from the risks we face. As well as fire emergencies we are here to respond to many types of incidents such as water and animal rescues, flooding and road traffic collisions. Our protection and prevention work forms the foundation of what we do to minimise risk and together with our vital emergency response function we maintain services which are effective and resilient.

Our vision is to have the safest people and safest places and we will strive to achieve this by delivering a professional, innovative and effective FRS with our communities at the heart of everything we do.

To ensure we are accountable to you, we produce a series of documents which set out our plans for the future. Our Community Risk Profile (CRP) and Station Plans set out the risks we face. Our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) shows how we allocate our resources to tackle those risks and our Service Strategies show you the detail of how we will manage the challenges that our various Sections face.

You can find all our Service Plan documents on our website using the link below:

<https://www.ddfire.gov.uk/service-plans>

Every year we ensure that our services can be delivered within the budget we are set. Since 2010 we have had our government funding reduced and we expect to continue to face a very challenging financial climate in light of the current economic conditions, Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions on the amount of income we can raise through Council Tax. The next three years are therefore likely to require further innovation and changes to the way we operate, and the Assets and Assurance Strategy will help us to achieve this.

Our core strength is our people who are proud to work for an organisation connected closely with its communities and who are genuinely committed to changing and saving people's lives. We cannot provide our services without support from our excellent staff, and we would like to thank them for their continued hard work and dedication. Our partner organisations and neighbouring FRSs also deserve great credit for supporting and collaborating with us in the work that we do.

2. Where are we now?

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, we have the same obligations as any other employer to ensure the health, safety and welfare of our employees. Most employers approach this by focusing on making the workplace their employees work in a safe environment.

However, the operational environment or 'workplace' that our operational staff are often called to work in when responding to emergencies can be inherently dangerous and it is not always possible to control all the hazards and risks that may be present in each 'workplace' we are called to.

To ensure the health, safety and welfare of our operational staff in hazardous environments, we adopt a context and activity approach to mitigating the risks that our front-line responders might encounter. The 'safe person principle' involves selecting and developing the right people who have the right skills, abilities and attributes to recognise risks and remain safe whilst resolving the emergency.

A key element of the safe person principle is the provision and maintenance of vehicles, equipment and protective clothing necessary to deal with range of operational incidents the Service may be called upon to attend.

By using our limited resources wisely, we always seek to invest in providing our staff with the highest quality vehicles, equipment and protective clothing we can. We do this because we believe our staff are our greatest asset and investing in them in this way will help them to be professional, innovative and effective in everything they do and will support delivery of our strategic priorities. A 15-year Capital Replacement Programme exists to ensure major investments are managed over the medium term.

During 2020 and 2021, we have had been required to deal with COVID-19, a 'rising tide' business continuity event which has significantly affected the way in which we deliver our services. Many of the Service's existing business continuity plans focus on short term business disruptions, which typically last between 24 to 96 hours and whilst these plans identify the 'critical activities' and associated recovery plans, we recognise that the recovery from COVID-19 will be a long and complicated process.

The effect of COVID-19 as a long-term business interruption means that many of the business continuity plans that the Service has, and the scenarios the Service have planned and trained for were nullified by this type of event.

We were assessed by HMICFRS in July 2019 on how effectively and efficiently we prevent, protect the public against and respond to fires and other emergencies. It also assessed how well we look after our workforce. Additionally, in November 2020 were inspected on how we were responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The inspections identified areas where the Service can improve in the areas of assets and assurance. Therefore, this strategy has been developed to ensure improvement against HMICFRS's inspection criteria so that we can deliver on our commitment to the communities of County Durham and Darlington.

3. Key Drivers

The key drivers that have set the direction of this strategy are:

<p>The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and associated legislation, regulations and guidance, to protect our people in carrying out their duties.</p>	<p>Supporting change and continuous improvement through the principles of programme management.</p>	<p>Our values: Professional, Innovative and Effective describes the service our customers should expect to receive.</p>
	<p>The Service, through its Health and Safety Policy, has specifically committed to providing equipment, which is suitable for task, fit for purpose and suitably maintained.</p>	<p>A statutory duty to collaborate with Police and Ambulance as stated in the Policing and Crime Act 2017.</p>
<p>Recognising and aiming to exceed industry best practice improving our operational assets and procedures, whilst providing our workforce with the most up-to-date vehicles and equipment.</p>	<p>Actively seeking and supporting collaboration opportunities with key partners in the interests of efficiency, effectiveness or reducing risk to our communities and staff.</p>	
<p>Fire and Rescue National Framework and Civil Contingencies Act 2004 require us to consider business continuity to reduce, control or mitigate the effects of an emergency.</p>	<p>HMICFRS – Ensure we address areas of improvement relating to efficiency, effectiveness and people from our inspection and aim to become an ‘outstanding’ fire and rescue service.</p>	<p>Compliance with legislative requirements for the maintenance and testing of our assets.</p>

4. Our Values and Behaviours



5. Where do we want to be?

We want to be able to clearly demonstrate that we are aiming to 'be the best' fire and rescue service by establishing a culture of continuous improvement with sustained service development and improvement that translates into better service for the public.

Our Assets and Assurance Strategy sets out a framework for engaging our employees and developing systems and processes to enable the changes which are necessary to deliver our vision and strategic priorities.

Through the outcomes described in the Assets and Assurance Strategy, we aim to support the creation of a positive, inclusive culture that encourages innovation and continuous improvement. Culture is at the heart of everything we do, and we understand that the actions we take and the decisions we make through the Assets and Assurance Strategy form part of our cultural journey. We believe achieving the right culture will enable us to achieve our vision, give the best services to our communities and be the best fire and rescue service in the UK.

The strategy details an ambitious three-year programme that will be challenging but is designed to align activities with the improvements required to lead in a changing environment. The focus is on developing our internal capacity and capability to balance the challenges of providing high quality services to our communities with the efficiencies necessary to achieve our financial plans.

6. Key Principles

To support the delivery of this strategy we have adopted underpinning principles that we will apply to our improvement objectives.

These are as follows:

We will give our staff the best equipment, premises, appliances and personal protective equipment (PPE) to ensure we have the best staff to help us achieve our aim of being the best fire and rescue service in the UK;

We will ensure our employees have access to the best training and development in order to maintain competence and develop in their role;

We understand the importance of investing in the health, safety and wellbeing of all of our staff and will enhance our provisions in this area where required;

We will provide clarity on the decision-making levels, accountability and processes without unnecessary hierarchy, and empower operational staff to use operational discretion.

We will strive towards evidence-based decisions, to ensure a transparent and consistent approach;

We will ensure there is a clear route for staff to highlight new improvement and innovation opportunities to our Service;

We will embrace a culture of continuous improvement leading to continuous organisational improvement that translates into better service for the public;

We understand the importance of engaging staff in decisions and will listen and involve our people in improving our service;

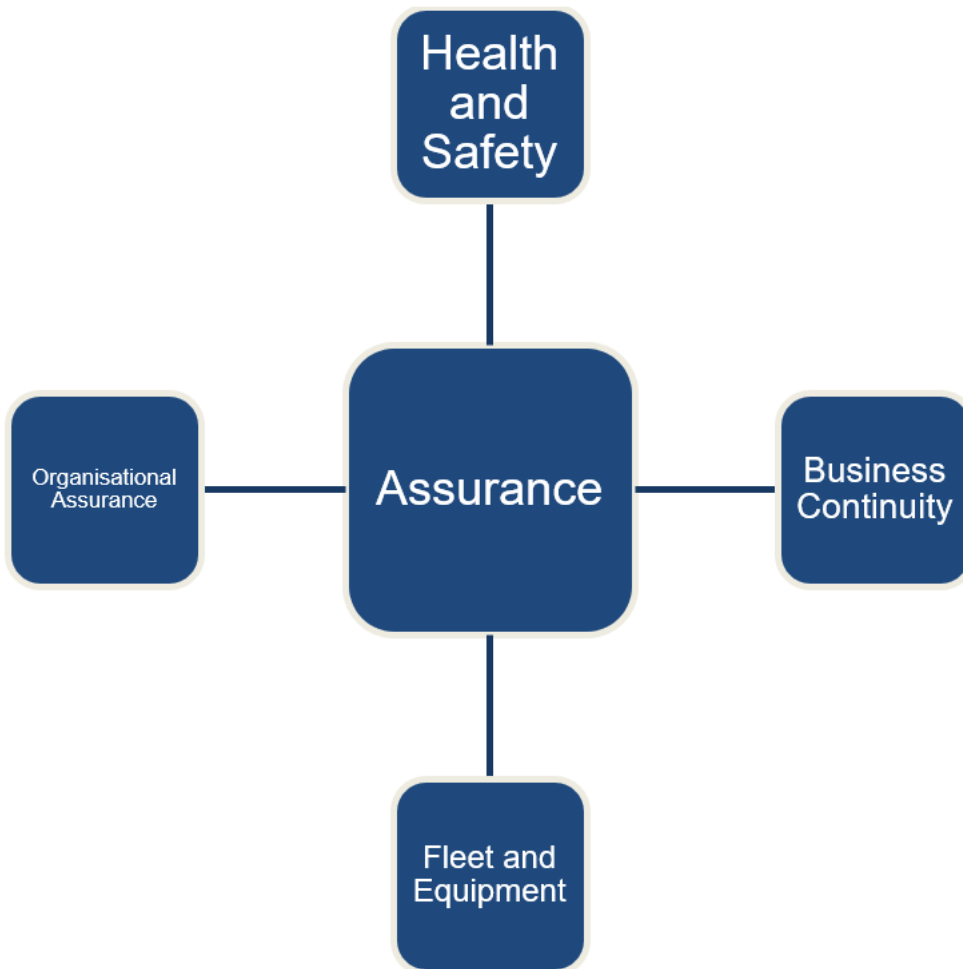
We will build trust across the Service, allow constructive disagreement and challenge to be seen as part of a positive culture;

We trust our staff to uphold the highest standards of personal and professional conduct including openness, honesty and integrity;

As leaders we will lead by example, articulating the values, behaviours and standards expected of the Service outlined in our frameworks.

7. How do we get there?

To achieve our Assets and Assurance Strategy there are five key workstreams. Each workstream will have an action plan which will be monitored regularly and refreshed as progress is made.



Health and Safety

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority recognise its duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Regulations made under it and accept its responsibilities for the health, safety and welfare of its employees and those who may be affected by their operations and activities.

The Chief Fire Officer representing the Fire Authority is committed to the prevention of all workplace risks that could result in accidents, dangerous occurrences, personal injury or ill health.

In order to achieve this objective we will comply with all statutory requirements and seek, so far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure that safe systems of work are in place and will provide the necessary resources to be able to implement the requirements of the Act.

Our aim is excellence in health and safety, by means of continuous improvement of standards, systematically removing the causes of accidents and ill-health. The Service Leadership Team (SLT) considers it to be a binding commitment that health and safety will rank as a fundamental feature of all service activities. The objective is to discharge all of our functions whilst seeking to reduce risks and hazards to the lowest levels, so far as is reasonably practicable, which will reduce and eliminate accidents and dangerous occurrences, to provide a safe and healthy work environment.

In order to underpin the aim of organisational excellence, this strategy has been devised to engage all staff and their representatives to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our health and safety management system, to deliver a safer and healthier work environment for all those engaging with us, and to encourage and enable a positive and sustainable health and safety culture.

We will ensure the health and safety of our workforce by:

- Aligning to the International Occupational Health and Safety Management Standard ISO 45001:2016 as a means of demonstrating the Service's commitment to globally recognised best practice and thereby enhancing further collaborations with new and existing partners, including those within and outside the Fire sector.
- Improve the health and safety culture within the Service by improving the leadership skills of the entire workforce. This will include developing health and safety education which inspires and empowers people to work safely to create a culture which enables people to support our commitment to an injury free work environment every day.
- Mitigating the risk to staff from exposure to contaminants at incidents and simulations, through improving our understanding and determining appropriate technical, procedural and cultural solutions.
- Continuously reviewing and improving our health and safety management systems to ensure we have effective systems in place, and they are adhered to throughout the Service.

Business Support and Improvement

To allow us to manage transformation and change efficiently and effectively, a structured programme management approach is needed. Programme management is the co-ordinated organisation, direction and implementation of a portfolio of projects and activities that together achieve outcomes and realise the benefits that are of strategic importance to the Service.

Programme management is a key success factor for us to transform to achieve strategic change. This will also enable better use of resources through project prioritisation and integration.

This workstream also aims to develop and support continuous improvement as a gradual ongoing change which is focused on increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Service. This will be achieved by promoting improvement of service processes, reviewing and evaluating existing working practices and the development of new processes leading to continuous organisational improvement.

We will ensure consistent business support and improvement across the Service by:

- Developing an overarching consistent approach to programme management;
- Supporting delivery of key projects as a result of the IRMP process, Service strategies, or are identified to address gaps identified by HMICFRS inspections;
- Providing challenge and scrutiny to the Service's improvement projects, ensuring their effective delivery in line with the IRMP and Service's vision;
- Supporting continuous improvement activities across the Service, embedding this philosophy in the culture of the workforce to support the Service to get better all the time.

Organisational Assurance

Assurance is part of our corporate governance and aims to provide accurate and current information to all stakeholders about the efficiency and effectiveness of our policies and operations, and the status of our compliance with our statutory obligations. Our internal audit process will provide evidence to stakeholders that our services are following guidelines, rules and expectations set out in both legislation and policy.

This workstream will be dedicated to continuous improvement of services to all customers both external and internal. To do that we all need to know what 'good looks like'. Then we need to test it and share learning so that we can keep improving and re-challenge what good looks like.

In July 2017, HMICFRS extended its remit to include inspections of England's fire and rescue service. They now assess and report on the efficiency, effectiveness and people of the 45 fire and rescue services in England. We will incorporate the HMICFRS criteria into our assurance processes.

We will ensure effective assurance by:

- Designing and delivering assurance processes for the whole organisation to measure us against the expectations of the public as detailed in the HMICFRS inspection framework;
- Operating consistent, rigorous and open systems to debrief and evaluate operational performance and make operational improvements by using this learning to improve our operational response and incident command;
- Understanding and implementing any learning from national events or from dissemination of good practice including National Operational Learning (NOL) and Joint Organisational Learning (JOL);
- Aiming to establish a culture of continuous improvement across the Service which produces sustained service development and improvement that translates into better service for the public.

Business Continuity

Fire and rescue authorities must have effective business continuity arrangements in place in accordance with their duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. Within these arrangements, fire and rescue authorities must make every endeavour to meet the full range of service delivery risks, national resilience duties and commitments that they face. The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018 further clarifies these business continuity plans should not be developed on the basis of armed forces assistance being available.

We consider National and Community Risk Registers and undertake planning and preparation to ensure we have the capability to operate our critical business functions during emergency events. These events can include natural disasters, a business crisis, pandemic, workplace violence, or any event that results in a disruption of our business operation.

During March 2020, the need for this advance planning was drastically highlighted with the pandemic outbreak of Covid-19 in England. This resulted in the implementation of business continuity plans across the whole Service. The ongoing implementation and review of this unprecedented worldwide outbreak will support us to improve our business continuity planning throughout the life of this strategy.

We will ensure robust business continuity of our Service by:

- Thoroughly reviewing and evaluating all business continuity activities prior to, during and following the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure all learning is used to improve our business continuity arrangements, the fire sector and other stakeholders;
- Aligning to a nationally recognised Business Continuity Standard as a means of demonstrating the Service's commitment to recognised best practice and thereby enhancing further collaborations with new and existing partners, including those within and outside the Fire sector;
- Improving the business continuity culture within the Service by improving the leadership skills of the entire workforce. This will include developing business continuity education which inspires and empowers people to prepare, implement and review business continuity arrangements to support service delivery;
- Continuously reviewing and improving our business continuity framework to ensure we have an effective business continuity cycle in place, and it is adhered to throughout the Service;
- Continuously reviewing and improving our business continuity arrangements to ensure we continue to meet our duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018.

Fleet and Equipment

We aim to continue to provide the best vehicles, equipment and PPE we can afford to enable our staff to respond and support the range of emergency incidents and other services we provide in ways that are professional, effective and efficient. Any investment will support collaboration and the national procurement agenda wherever there is a clear business case to do so.

All assets will be specified, procured and maintained under the principles of protecting the front line, improving firefighter safety, providing value for money, adopting the whole life cycle approach to asset management, engaging with end users, utilising innovative new technologies, supporting national procurement and NFCC research and development, and actively pursuing collaboration opportunities with partners.

Whole Life Cycle Approach

In order to ensure legislative compliance and support our efforts to deliver maximum value from our limited resources, we are keen to continue our efforts to fully adopt the 'Whole Life Cycle' approach to managing our operational equipment assets. This cycle supports sustainable fleet management with the aim to reduce our environmental impact.

The Whole Life Cycle approach is illustrated below:



Our Operational Vehicle and Equipment Group (OVEG) framework and processes bring together key stakeholders with an interest in the provision of the highest quality vehicles,

equipment, uniform and PPE to maximise both quality and value for money. This aims to ensure that decisions to review, monitor and approve procurement of assets are consulted and challenged and support our vision.

We aim for the forefront of firefighting technology, setting standards that will be recognised nationally, whilst investing in our people through the procurement of the most up-to-date, effective and efficient assets available. Where possible we will collaborate, including through NFCC national research and development, to identify, develop and evaluate new and innovative vehicle and equipment technologies to continue to improve our effectiveness, value for money and firefighter safety.

We will ensure appropriate fleet and equipment by:

- Continuously reviewing and developing the operational vehicles and equipment framework and processes to improve decision making, support the whole life cycle approach and ensure our fleet and equipment meets the needs of the IRMP;
- Investigating and exploiting new and emerging technologies to reduce the risks to communities and staff identified in our community risk profile; and improve efficiency and effectiveness of the Service;
- Ensuring we continue to deliver a cost effective, fit for purpose, sustainable procurement strategy;
- Actively engaging, supporting and evaluating the benefits of collaboration opportunities, with emergency services and key partners, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Service.

8. Measuring Progress

We will monitor progress of this strategy in the following ways:

Role of the Fire Authority and Service Leadership Team (SLT)

Both Members of the Fire Authority and SLT believe in this strategy and that it will help to deliver the Service's vision in respect of its people. Leading by example, our Members and SLT will set the standard for what is expected of all staff in enabling this strategy to be delivered by 2023.

Role of our Staff

This strategy will only be successful if all staff within CDDFRS support it, making the vision of what the Service will look like from an assets and Assurance perspective, a reality. In supporting this strategy, employees will not only assist in enabling the actions outlined but they will also demonstrate their support through their behaviours.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)

We will develop a suite of appropriate Key Performance Indicators to help measure the progress of this strategy.

Reporting Progress

Scrutiny of progress against the strategy will be undertaken by the Performance and Programme Board (PPB) who will receive regular reports from the Head of Assets and Assurance.

Measuring Perceptions/ Sense Checking

We will regularly ask for feedback from our staff to inform us of our progress on elements with the Assets and Assurance Strategy through our engagement sessions, range of leadership forums and through meetings with our representative bodies. Their opinions and suggestions will be used to influence improvement.