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*“In order to achieve
our vision of Safest
People, Safest Places
we continue to aim
to improve the services
we provide”*

Susan Johnson - Chief Executive

Foreword by Councillor Gordon Tennant, Chair of the Fire Authority and Susan Johnson, Chief Executive

Welcome to the 2008/9 annual report providing you with information regarding the Authority's performance and achievements. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority is committed to providing an efficient, effective and value for money fire and rescue service to the communities it serves.

In order to achieve our vision of Safest People, Safest Places we continue to aim to improve the services we provide in all of our areas of service provision including responding to fires and other emergencies, rescues from road traffic collisions and preparedness for and response to other serious incidents such as flooding and terrorist attack.

The Authority sets clear priorities and objectives through its Community Protection Plan which incorporates the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). The Authority has defined its contribution to the Sustainable Communities Strategies and Joint Strategic Needs Assessments for the County of Durham and the Borough of Darlington, and is delivering against the respective priorities set out in the two Local Area Agreements. Our focus on shared priorities has resulted in significant improvements in a number of areas including deliberate nuisance fires.

Working with our partner organisations we are able to reach the most vulnerable groups,

delivering community fire safety projects to reduce the number of fires occurring and preventing death and injury due to fire. It is therefore, saddening to report that the Authority experienced an increase in the number of fatal fire incidents in the past year. Within this summary report the Authority has detailed the measures it is taking to reverse this recent and sudden increase. We have made a 'call to action' to our partners as the many and varied circumstances surrounding fire deaths requires a multi-agency response. We are committed to reversing this trend to make our communities safer for everyone.

This report also summarises some of our key future initiatives. You can read about how our commitment to equality and diversity continues and how we are encouraging applications from under represented groups to ensure our workforce reflects the people we serve. We will continue to develop our own staff in order to ensure that we have a highly trained workforce equipped to deal with the many and varied risks facing our communities.

We are committed to making County Durham and Darlington the safest places in the UK. For further information on our work and initiatives, please visit our website at www.ddfire.gov.uk



Susan Johnson - Chief Executive



Councillor Gordon Tennant - Chairman of the Fire Authority

Working in Partnership with Durham County Council and Darlington Borough Council

The Local Government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities* signaled a step change in the way local public services are expected to work together. In particular there are new requirements in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 to ensure all partners engage in and deliver on a shared agenda for their communities.

From 2008 Local Authorities have a duty to consult partners, including Fire and Rescue Authorities, when compiling their long term (20 year) Sustainable Community Strategies (SCS). The short term (3 year) delivery mechanism for the SCS is the Local Area Agreement (LAA), which details an agreed set of priorities to match the needs of our communities. The area served by this Fire and Rescue Service covers the two Local Area Agreements which are led by the Local Strategic Partnerships for Darlington Borough Council and Durham County Council.

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority has a duty to cooperate with the principal Local Authorities in agreeing 35 priorities and targets in the LAA's to achieve improved performance and better outcomes for citizens.

The targets are drawn from a set of 198 national indicators agreed as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review process. These indicators cover Government expectations of local public services and are

intended to drive improvements in 'what matters' to local people in the places where they live. The Service involvement in developing and delivering the LAA's means that we are better placed to influence other partners and to ensure that collectively we are improving the quality of life, safety and wellbeing of our communities.

This new approach has resulted in a need for the Service to:-

- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing partnership arrangements;
- Determine the appropriateness of our level of involvement in delivering LAA targets;
- Evidence the extent of our value added contribution;
- Consider our own priorities, those of our partners and how to deliver those priorities in a way that represents value for money;
- Recognise the contribution we make to the overall Comprehensive Area Assessment and determine links to our own corporate assessment process;
- Determine those key delivery 'places' where we can work to best effect to achieve positive outcome.

For further information on how the Authority has prioritised the Service's involvement in delivering against the respective LAA priorities and other national indicators please visit our website. www.ddfire.gov.uk







New Community Safety Centre

Recent years have seen a major change in the way the Fire and Rescue Service engages with communities. The latest step in welcoming members of the public into our premises is the construction of a purpose built community facility, as part of an extension to Consett Fire Station.

The aim of the facility is to provide a Community Safety Centre that provides excellent facilities to assist the Service in making a difference in Derwentside. The Derwentside Young Firefighters Association (YFA) is benefiting from new lecture rooms and IT equipment which greatly assist with training and development of the young people.

From the outset the new Centre has been a great success with local community groups, creating a venue that is much more than just a meeting place for local people –

- The Centre is available for our partners and other groups, especially with a view to tackling strategic priorities and community safety initiatives within Derwentside.
- An ideal venue for the Derwentside Children's Safety Carousel in September, attended by over 1,500 local pupils
- Diversionary schemes are delivered from the YFA centre, helping to reduce nuisance fires and anti-social behaviour through focused education.



Task Force Formed to Tackle Fire Deaths

County Durham and Darlington lost four members of its communities to house fires within a very short period from December 2008 to February 2009, having previously seen an eighteen month period in which there were no fire fatalities within the Service area.

The Service established a Fire Fatalities Task Force to undertake a detailed analysis of the circumstances surrounding the deaths to determine what could be done to drive down the risk of fire deaths occurring in County Durham and Darlington

The Task Force identified nine key work-streams ranging from qualitative data gathering to developing risk profiles and considering focused communications and marketing to raise the profile of the risk of death from fire. The task force has called upon the resources of all staff across the organisation to assist in developing solutions that are targeted at reducing the risk of death from fire.

Initial work has been completed in relation to the nine workstreams and the next steps will involve progressing key initiatives and developing the work further to ensure that the Communities of County Durham and Darlington are safer.

Task Force - Workstreams

Key Features of Workstream

Combined Fire Authority Liaison	Ensuring that local elected members of the Fire Authority are fully aware of the issues relating to fire deaths in order that they can influence and communicate task force outcomes at a local level.
Project Development, Finance & Resources	Managing the task force to ensure that it delivers outcomes that will make a difference.
Quantitative Data Gathering and Analysis	Identification of data for all relevant incidents and analysis of trends and key information from historical data to help to inform future community safety strategy.
Qualitative Data Gathering and Analysis	Understanding of how incidents occurred and identification of the background to specific incidents to determine common factors.
Partnership Engagement	Raising the profile of the requirement for all partners to engage in prevention initiatives, promoting the added value of partnership working to reducing the risk of further fire deaths in County Durham and Darlington.
Operational Response and Impact of Economic Downturn	Evaluating the Service's response to operational incidents and determining the impact of the economic downturn and any increase in risk arising from this.
Risk Profiles, Standards and Performance	Development of the quantitative data work to better target specific risk profiles that may be at greater risk of a fire death.
Home Fire Safety Check & Marketing Strategy	Review of the strategy for undertaking home fire safety checks and determination of the marketing requirements for future strategy.
Communications	Determination of short term communication messages and a medium term community safety message linked to the outcomes of the other workstreams.

Promoting Safe Practice in County Durham and Darlington

As well as attending and training for all manner of emergency incidents, crews and managers at our operational fire stations are also firmly committed to proactively reducing fires and other incidents. A key component of this activity is offering Home Fire Safety Checks to residents.

A Home Fire Safety Check involves a member of the Service visiting a person's home to offer advice on what may start a fire; how to escape in a fire situation; and how to detect a fire's presence. If necessary the Service will fit smoke alarms on each level of the house.

Darlington fire station team have taken this approach a step further and introduced an extra dimension to the Home Fire Safety Check. In the knowledge that many accidental house fires occur in the homes of people who smoke, crews have

been working with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to identify smokers at risk. This new partnership will jointly promote smoking cessation and fire safety messages and is another example of the Authority's pioneering partnership work.

The Service also undertakes various other community safety initiatives throughout County Durham and Darlington. An example of this is the Fire Watch scheme which attempts to identify and reduce deliberate fire activity due to anti social behaviour. Crews undertake pro active patrols that identify potential problem areas before they develop into a larger incident requiring a full response from the Service. This approach demonstrates a Value for Money solution to preventing fires and ensures resources are deployed effectively.

Home Fire Safety Checks

Number of HFSC carried out in Darlington 2008/09 = **1895**

Number of HFSC carried out across County Durham & Darlington 2008/09 = **11,230**



Responding Effectively

Whilst the Service promotes prevention initiatives across County Durham and Darlington, it is also ready to respond if the need arises. We have fifteen strategically placed fire stations which are staffed by operational firefighters on either a whole-time or part time (Retained Duty System) rota or a combination of both and are delivered via six operational district areas:

Darlington

Darlington and Barnard Castle Fire Stations

Derwentside

Consett and High Handenhold Fire Stations

Durham and Chester-le-Street

Durham and Crook Fire Stations

Easington

Peterlee, Seaham and Wheatley Hill Fire Stations

Sedgefield

Newton Aycliffe, Sedgefield and Spennymoor Fire Stations

Wear/Tees

Bishop Auckland, Stanhope and Middleton-in-Teesdale Fire Stations



The Service uses a range of fire appliances and special support vehicles to ensure it can respond effectively in all emergency situations. The fleet consists of 27 front-line appliances plus a wide range of specialist vehicles which include two Ariel Ladder Platforms. During the year the Service went through a procurement process for seven new fire appliances and one special rescue unit at a cost of £1.3 million. The new vehicles will go into service from October 2009 and build on the Service's reputation for providing some of the most modern equipment for its firefighters. Please visit our website at www.ddfire.gov.uk to find out more information on our vehicles and equipment.

Service Attendance Standards	Target	Actual
	2008/09	2008/09
Dwelling Fires Attended 8 Mins	70%	72.8%
Dwelling Fires Attended 11 Mins	90.0%	93.3%
Road Traffic Collisions Attended 11 Mins	75.0%	87.6%
Road Traffic Collisions Attended 15 Mins	90.0%	97.0%
Non-Domestic Fires Attended 8 Mins	70.0%	82.8%
Non-Domestic Fires Attended 11 Mins	90.0%	96.8%

National Indicators

Description of indicator	Target		Performance		
	2008/09	2009/10	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
NI 33a) Deliberate Primary Fires per 10,000 population	15.3	10.6	13.9	15.9	9.1
NI 33b) Deliberate Secondary Fires per 10,000 population	45.8	23.3	58.7	44.8	17.8
NI 49i) Primary Fires per 100,000 population	315.0	270.0	306.3	316.6	75.2
NI 49ii) Fatalities in Primary Fires per 100,000 population	N/A	0.50	0.82	0.16	0.83
NI 49iii) Non-Fatal Casualties in Primary Fires per 100,000 population	N/A	7.00	10.05	9.91	5.67

NI 49i shows excellent performance and is well below target which supports the work the service has been engaged with to reduce the number of primary fires. We have responded to the fire deaths increase as shown in NI 49ii through the Fire Fatalities Task Force.

Service and Local Performance Indicators

Description of indicator	Target		Performance		
	2008/09	2009/10	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Accidental Dwelling Fires	439	380	485	463	410
Fatalities in Accidental Dwelling Fires	2	2	4	0	4
Non-Fatal Casualties in Accidental Dwelling Fires	26	24	36	35	31
Working Days Lost to Sickness (all staff)	6.30	6.30	6.3	7.20	6.97
Number of Home Fire Safety Checks Carried Out					

Service and local performance indicators have shown substantial improvements with fatalities being the exception. All indicators are subject to final audit and verification.

An Example of Our Response Capability

Just after midnight on Friday 15th August 2008 the Service received a call to a fire at the King's Head Hotel in Darlington's town centre, one of the largest fires within our Service area for a number of years. In total twenty five appliances and special appliances attended the fire with crews dispatched from eleven stations. The Service deployed both of its Aerial Ladder Platforms, for their high reach capability, as well as the Incident Command Unit and the Environmental Protection Unit.

At the time the fire had started there were 60 guests and three members of staff in the hotel. Fortunately, due to the hard work of fire crews and hotel staff, all persons were evacuated safely. The multi-agency approach taken by the Service ensured that traffic disruption was kept to a minimum, repatriation of a number of Chinese guests, effective cordons to enable the market to go ahead to reduce the impact on businesses.

Fire Safety interventions at the Kings Head helped to ensure people were able exit the building safely. Hotels and other commercial buildings continue to remain a key area of focus for our fire safety teams as we attempt to pro-actively prevent the risk of fires such as the Kings Head incident from occurring in the future.



How are we Performing?

We are constantly improving the services we provide to the communities of County Durham and Darlington and are subject to rigorous audit and inspection throughout the year by several regulatory authorities, including the Audit Commission, who since 2005 has carried out assessments of all fire and rescue authorities.

In 2008, the Audit Commission described County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority as Improving Well in the Direction of Travel assessment which demonstrates how well authorities have improved since the previous year: Performing Well in the Use of Resources assessment which examines the authority's financial management and its arrangements for achieving value for money, and Performing Well in the Service Delivery assessment.

These assessments have confirmed that the Authority has maintained high scores, and has improved significantly since the previous year in service delivery, and that County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Authority continues to be a high performing fire and rescue service.





This document is available in other languages, large print and audio format upon request.

If you would like a further copy of this Plan or wish to make comment, compliment or complaint on our performance or any aspect of our service then please feel free to contact us via our website www.ddfire.gov.uk; by telephone, 0191 3843381, by fax, 0191 3830907, by mini-com 0191 3847840; e-mail, ServiceHQ@ddfire.gov.uk or by writing to us at the address below.

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Alternatively, it can be viewed in local libraries,
Durham County Council and Darlington Borough
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