

Investing in Safety

Delivering practical safety advice to school children is a key part of the Service's Community Safety work. So when our presentation facilities on the dangers of fire in the home needed replacing it was seen as an opportunity to be creative.

Working in partnership with Dreamit Design, a company involved in the British element of the 2008 Beijing Olympics closing ceremony, our Community Safety section designed an interactive bedroom set that travels "back in time" from the point of a major house fire to the moment the fire starts. Using audio and visual effects this set will be used to educate over 7,000 Year 6 pupils across County Durham and Darlington every year, at Children's Safety Carousels.

The set enables the operator to select and highlight individual potential causes of fires from

a range of scenarios built into the staging set. Once the children have identified a potential source of fire, the dangerous consequences are played out. The set also includes the latest safety videos and advice from the national 'Fire Kills' campaign; with props including an interactive bedroom door and special lighting effects to provide a graphic backdrop for life saving safety education.

The Carousel aims to teach children life skills through a practical, hands-on approach. The spectacle and interactivity of the new demonstration set will not only allow children to feel that they are fully involved in the presentation but also visually emphasises the key messages. The aim of the Carousel is not to remove hazards from day to day life but to ensure that children are aware of them and how to minimise the risks, thus resulting in reduced accidents and injury.

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Time to take command – Investing in state of the art training facilities

Command development training has been moved to a new level following a comprehensive review of systems, equipment and training methods. This culminated in a new state of the art Command Development suite, which was opened in February 2009.

The Command facility is at the fore-front of simulation technology, using “Hydra- Minerva” software, helping County Durham and Darlington to maintain its continued commitment to excellence. This purpose built facility, which cost over £100k to develop, principally targets incident command training, but also allows training on other subjects requiring decision making skills, such as business continuity planning or equality and diversity. Currently available to uniformed and non-uniformed personnel the ultimate aim is to involve

community partners as well, for instance Police, Ambulance and Local Authority partners.

As the first Fire Service in the north east region to invest in this type of Hydra-Minerva simulation system it was decided to launch the training with the Service’s supervisory managers, as they make risk critical command decisions on a daily basis. Principle officers and flexible duty officers were the next to benefit from this unique experience.

The new suite allows teams and individuals to respond to real-time incidents, dealing with resources, task allocation, safety considerations and incident command. The result is an environment as close as to the real thing as possible, with realism recreated in a safe, effective and controlled environment allowing experiences to be readily transferred across into the real life operational arena. Increasingly we are working with other

agencies and companies to deal with the immediate impact of incidents so it is vital that we all understand our roles and responsibilities.

The Command System Manager strongly believes the new Command training will “greatly enhance the skills of our operational managers to make risk critical decisions at incidents they are deployed to.” Command development Scenarios currently include fires and chemical incidents, with rescues from height, water and other specialist rescue scenarios coming on line shortly.

The Authority is committed to investing in and developing its people. The Hydra-Minerva simulation equipment is an example of County Durham and Darlington Fire Authority’s belief that the provision of first class training results in staff that are trained to the highest standards and fully equipped to make its communities safer:



Simulation Training

The need for a safe and effective operational response means that the Service needs to ensure that realistic and quality training always remains a high priority. With this in mind, a range of Fire Behaviour Training Units have been procured by the Learning and Development Section.

These are used to simulate the conditions and hazards faced by firefighters when responding to property fires in the County Durham and Darlington area. Realistic scenarios are used to demonstrate the signs and symptoms of backdraught and flashover conditions. Both of these can pose a serious threat to firefighters when attempting to rescue people from property fires. This investment in realistic training also provides our firefighters with a greater understanding of how and why fires develop. By doing so our firefighters are then able to confidently and safely deal with a range of fire related situations.

Assistant Learning and Development Manager, Adam Hall said "This facility allows us to prepare our firefighters for the potentially life threatening conditions they face whilst attending property fires as well as improving their skill of response to rescue situations".



Positive Action to improve workforce diversity

In June 2008 the National Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy was published. This document, intended to span 10 years, outlines a number of commitments and goals which every Fire and Rescue Service in the country must adopt.

The goals include ensuring that the workforces of Service's across the UK better reflect the communities which they serve, and that talented people from all parts of the community are encouraged to join and progress within the Service, reaching their potential, through fair and transparent recruitment, development, retention and promotion practices.

We know that our workforce does not currently reflect the make up of the local working population. For example, we know that the numbers of working age males and females is approximately 50% for each gender. We might therefore expect to see this mirrored in our organisation. However, in reality 86% of our overall workforce is male and 14% is female, and furthermore 96% of our fire fighters are male and 4% are female. The Authority is committed to improving the balance of its workforce and is undertaking a number of initiatives to make this commitment a reality including an approach known as "positive action"

What is Positive Action?

Positive Action is described as 'activities and promotion to an under-represented potential workforce for a particular vocation'. We are undertaking work to understand why particular groups of people do not consider the Fire Service as an employer of choice at this point in time and are developing approaches to remove any perceived barriers to people from all backgrounds joining the fire service.

Since January 2009, the Service has been in the process of delivering on a Regional Positive Action Plan. We have targeted our activity towards female and black and minority ethnic groups and the positive action has consisted of running a range of workshops and fitness events throughout the year in order to provide underrepresented groups an with insight into the role of a fire fighter.

We have shared information such as the personal qualities, skills and attributes required to become a successful fire fighter; what is involved in fire fighter training, and how the recruitment process operates.

We aim to welcome people from all walks of life into the Service as we become more representative of the communities that we protect.

Do you want to get involved? If you, or anyone you know is interested in supporting or partaking in the programme, please contact the Service on 0191 3324 319.





Summary of Accounts 2008/09

This information is a summary of the Fire Authority's Statement of Accounts and gives a brief overview of the Authority's financial position for the year ending 31 March 2009.

A full copy of the Fire Authority's Statement of Accounts is available on the website at www.ddfire.gov.uk or from the Treasurer on 0191 383 4430.

Financial Review

The Fire Authority planned to spend £29.424m in 2008/09 when it set its budget in February 2008. The actual expenditure, subject to audit, was £29.424m.

In addition, there was a deficit on the Fire Pension fund Account of £4.442m which has been met from a special government grant.

Cost of delivering Fire Authority services

The net cost of services, before accounting for transfers from reserves and other adjustments is shown below together with where the money came from to meet the actual expenditure.

Where the money was spent

Fire fighting and rescue operations	£28.736m
Community safety	£3.483m
Other	£0.304m

Where the money comes from

Council Tax	£15.640m
Government Grants	£1.684m
Business Rates	£12.100m

Balance Sheet

The Authority's balance sheet states the net worth of the Fire Authority which represents the value of assets less liabilities.

Assets owned by the authority include land, buildings, equipment and vehicles, as well as investments. Liabilities include sums of money owed to creditors. The value of assets less liabilities (excluding the Pensions liability) was £26.519m as at 31 March 2009.

Capital Expenditure

Capital expenditure represents money spent by the Authority on purchasing and upgrading assets such as buildings and vehicles. The benefits of this type of expenditure is spread over a number of years. During the year building improvements were made to both Consett and Darlington Community Fire Stations. The total capital expenditure for all schemes for the year amounted to £1.694m.









Building on our Success

Private Finance Initiative, New Stations to Improve Community Safety

The service is engaged in an ambitious PFI project to deliver two, state of the art, purpose built community fire stations in Bishop Auckland and Spennymoor. The projects are part of a collaborative scheme with Northumberland and Tyne and Wear Fire Authorities.

The two new stations will provide modern facilities for our fire fighters which will support them in continuing to provide the best possible service to the respective communities they serve.

Both stations will include a new community safety facility. The facility is aimed at providing a focus for local people to come and engage with the fire and rescue service to help prevent incidents and to assist us in identifying those most at risk in the community. This will allow us to proactively offer our help to prevent and reduce the number of injuries and losses due to fires and incidents.

We are working closely with a number of partner organisations, including Durham County Council, the Police and the NHS to deliver our shared goals and the new community stations will provide us with a platform from which we can reach out to the communities of Bishop Auckland and Spennymoor.

In addition to the community work, the new stations will also provide our crews with the most up to date work space and equipment to enable them to respond to incidents in the quickest, safest and most efficient manner. The stations are expected to be complete in June 2010. Draft designs for the new stations can be viewed on our website at www.ddfire.gov.uk

New Facilities

The provision of a new training centre will provide the Service with the opportunity to further improve the training facilities available to staff. Work is being progressed to build a new Training Centre that offers improved facilities for all types of training and which will build upon the reputation that the Service has for the provision of first class training for its staff.



Corporate Governance

The Combined Fire Authority (CFA) has continued to ensure that it has effective corporate governance arrangements in place. The following committees provide the Authority with a mechanism to scrutinise performance and management enabling recommendations to be made to the CFA.

Audit and Finance Committee (A&F Committee)

The committee has focused on ensuring that effective risk management arrangements are in place, and has made key recommendations in relation to progressing the Authority's revenue and capital budgets and efficiency requirements. The committee has considered recommendations from internal audit and management in relation to key governance issues such as financial control and the Corporate Governance Action Plan, providing an effective scrutiny of financial management and control during 2008/09.

To view the Authority's Annual Accounts and Governance Statement. Please visit our website at www.ddfire.gov.uk

Policy and Performance Review Committee (PPR Committee)

The PPR committee has undertaken a key role in scrutinising Fire Station and Section Performance during 2008/09. The committee has reviewed performance information and received presentations from 6 stations and sections. The Committee provides an effective

challenge function for the authority and gives Fire Authority members the opportunity to closely review targets and trends across all areas of performance.

Human Resources Committee (HR Committee)

The HR committee provides a forum for members to consider human resources issues in detail prior to consideration by the CFA. In 2008/09 the committee has focused on a number of important HR issues including equality and diversity, awards for health, employee and member development programmes and staff appraisals.

Standards Committee

The Standards Committee ensures that procedures are in place for the investigation of any complaints against Fire Authority Members and also discusses any letters of complaints from the public. In 2008/09, the committee did not receive any complaints that required investigation.





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
Council Offices.



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