



GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Meeting of the GOVERNANCE
COMMITTEE to be held in the Fire
Authority Rooms at the Fire and Rescue
Service Headquarters, Nissan Way,
Barmston Mere, Sunderland on **FRIDAY 30
JUNE 2023 at 10.30am**

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6.	Statement of Accounts 2022/2023 (Subject to Audit)	23
	Report of the Finance Director (copy attached).	
	Please note that Appendix B – Draft Statement of Accounts – will be published separately.	

7. **Information Governance Improvement Update** 91
- Joint report of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority), the Finance Director and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority (copy attached).
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- Joint report of the Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority), the Finance Director and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority (copy attached).

**Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation)
Order 2006**

The following is not for publication as the Committee is likely to exclude the public during consideration thereof as it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information). (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraph 3).

PART II

10. **Minutes** 167
- Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 6 March 2023, Part II (copy attached).

CHRIS LOWTHER
Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (Clerk to the Authority)

22 June 2023



GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE held
in the Fire and Rescue Service
Headquarters, Barmston Mere on
Monday 6 March 2023 at
10.30am.

Present:

Mr M Knowles in the Chair

Councillors Bell, Flynn, Keegan and Ord together with Miss G Goodwill.

In Attendance:

Joanne Greener (Mazars)

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Mr Cook and Councillor Dodds.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Flynn and Keegan declared an interest in item 9 '2022/2023 Corporate Risk Management Review' as the Hebburn Tri Station was sited in their local authority area.

Minutes

14. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Governance Committee held on 31 October 2022 were agreed as a correct record subject to the inclusion of Miss Goodwill's apologies.

Internal Audit Plan Report 2023/2024

The Head of Internal Audit submitted a report presenting the proposed Internal Audit Plan for 2023/2024 for the Committee's consideration.

The Head of Internal Audit advised that the Plan covered the key risk areas of the business over a period of years and the scope of the work was driven by an assessment of risk in consultation with the Chief Fire Officer and Finance Director. There was also contingency time built in for any unplanned work and follow up.

The planned audits for 2023/2024 were: -

- Contract management arrangements for the new fire station at Hebburn
- Health and Safety Arrangements
- Financial transaction testing
- Inspectorate report actions
- Compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation
- Cyber Security Arrangements

In addition to this there would be some audit work on the Lead Authority's key financial systems and a draft report and, if necessary, a proposed action plan would be forwarded to the appropriate manager at the conclusion of each audit. The Chief Fire Officer and the Governance Committee would be updated on progress against the audit plan approximately halfway through the year.

The Key Performance Indicators which would be used to measure the performance of the service throughout the year were attached at Appendix 2 of the report.

Councillor Bell queried if the time allowed for each audit was realistic and whether any time remaining once an audit was completed would be transferred to another area.

The Head of Internal Audit explained that the time allowed for each audit was discussed with the Chief Fire Officer and Finance Director and there was a high level of confidence in this due to the efficient management of work areas. He went on to say that the time allowed for the Contract Management audit was related to the fact it was a key project and had been rated Amber at the last audit; if the audit took less time than planned then the additional days would not necessarily be transferred to another audit if that could be covered in the scheduled period. Over time it evened out as some audits could take, and had taken, longer than planned but these had been accommodated and managed by the Internal Audit Service.

DCFO Heath commented that in addition to Internal Audit, the Service was coming to the end of the first year of the internal Service Assurance programme which would provide a framework to judge to what degree the Service was doing what it should be.

The Chair summarised that the Committee had considered the plan and were assured by the continued improvement work being carried out.

15. RESOLVED that the proposed Internal Audit Plan be noted.

New Member Code of Conduct and Ethics

The Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive (the Clerk to the Authority) and the Personnel Advisor to the Authority submitted a joint report setting out the new proposed Member Code of Conduct and Ethics (“the Code”).

The new Code would replace and expand upon the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority’s existing Member Code of Conduct and would encompass the ethical principles set out in the new Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services. The Ethics Code sets out five ethical principles: -

- Putting our communities first
- Integrity
- Dignity and respect
- Leadership
- Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

The principles were designed to help improve the organisational culture and workforce diversity of the Service. The new Member Code of Conduct and Ethics would form part of the Authority’s Standing Orders and would complement the Employee Code of Conduct and Ethics.

Miss Goodwill asked if the new Code made many changes from the previous version and who would be responsible for checking behaviour.

ACFO McVay advised that firefighters were bound by the Core Code of Conduct and it was down to employees to monitor each other. There were also forms to report Member behaviour.

Councillor Flynn noted that he was not aware of any issues and as an institution, relationships seemed to work. All local authorities had their own code of conduct and that did help to concentrate and focus the mind of Members. ACFO McVay said that historically, the Fire Authority Members’ Code of Conduct reflected the local authority model but this now included the Core Code from the Fire and Rescue Service perspective.

Councillor Ord suggested that it could be useful for Members to have some guidance on what to do if they found themselves in a difficult situation with a member of staff. DCFO Heath noted that this was something that could happen and he would take that forward as one of the inputs for Member training.

Mr Knowles emphasised the importance of the culture of the organisation being one of co-operation and trust and was pleased to see this being included as part of the training programme.

16. RESOLVED that new Member Code of Conduct and Ethics be endorsed.

Treasury Management – Third Quarterly Review 2022/2023

The Finance Director submitted a report on the Treasury Management Performance for the third quarter of 2022/2023.

The Authority's Treasury Management function continued to look at ways to maximise financial savings and increase investment returns to the revenue budget whilst maintaining a balanced risk position. It was highlighted that Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) rates had gradually risen since the start of the financial year but continued to be extremely volatile. The Lead Authority had acquired £50 million of new borrowing during the financial year to support the financing requirements of their Capital Programme. These rates were considered opportune at the time and would benefit the revenue budget of the Fire Authority over the longer term.

It was noted that the Authority's interest rate on borrowing was very low, currently 2.54%, and as such the Authority continued to benefit from this low cost of borrowing and from the ongoing savings from past debt rescheduling exercises.

Treasury Management Prudential Indicators were regularly reviewed and the Authority was within the limits set for all its Treasury Management Prudential Indicators for 2022/2023. The statutory limit under section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 2003, which was required to be reported separately, (also known as the Authorised Borrowing Limit for External Debt) was set at £52.816 million for 2022/2023. The Authority's maximum external debt during the financial year to 31 December 2022 was £33.235 million and was well within this limit. Details of all of the Treasury Management Prudential Indicators were set out in Section 2 of Appendix A.

The Committee was advised that the Authority had achieved a rate of return on its investments of 1.74% which was matched to the benchmark rate. The Bank of England base rate had been increased to 3.50% in December 2022 and had been increased further to 4.0% in February. The Finance Director advised that it was predicted that interest rates would peak at 4.50% in May 2023 before gradually falling back to 2.5% by September 2025. The Authority had almost £28m of investments and £10m of borrowing.

The regular updating of the Authority's Authorised Lending List was required to take into account financial institution mergers and changes in institutions' credit ratings since the previous report. The updated Approved Lending List was shown at Appendix C for information.

Councillor Flynn commented that the Committee were aware of the potential pay rises which would be forthcoming in the near future and felt that people would be surprised that the Authority would receive no assistance from the Government to fund this increase.

Having considered the report, it was: -

17. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) the Treasury Management performance for the third quarter of 2022/2023, be noted; and
- (ii) the Lending List Criteria at Appendix B and the changes to the Approved Lending List at Appendix C be noted.

Treasury Management Policy and Strategy Statement 2023/2024, including Prudential 'Treasury Management' Indicators for 2023/2024 to 2026/2027

The Finance Director submitted a report to inform the Committee on the Treasury Management Policy and Strategy (including both borrowing and investment strategies) proposed for 2023/2024 and to note the Prudential 'Treasury Management' Indicators for 2023/2024 to 2026/2027 and to provide comments to the Authority on the proposed policy and indicators where appropriate.

Members were reminded that the Local Government Act 2003 required the Authority to:

- 'have regard to' the CIPFA Prudential Code and the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice to set Prudential Indicators (including specific Treasury Management Indicators) for a minimum period of three years to ensure that the Authority's capital investment plans were affordable, prudent and sustainable. These were detailed at Appendix 1;
- adopt a Treasury Management Policy Statement (detailed in Appendix 2); and
- to set out its Treasury Management Strategy Statement comprising the Authority's strategy for borrowing and the Authority's policies for managing its investments and giving priority to the security and liquidity of those investments (set out in Appendix 3).

The Finance Director advised that there were no major changes being proposed to the overall Treasury Management Strategy in 2023/2024, which maintained the careful and prudent approach adopted by the Authority in previous years. Areas that informed the strategy included the extent of potential borrowing included in the Authority's capital programme, the availability of borrowing, and the current and forecast world and UK economic positions, in particular forecasts relating to interest rates and security of investments.

The Authority's treasury management practices were subject to regular review to ensure compliance to the agreed treasury management strategy and that the strategy adapted to changing financial markets as appropriate so that the Lead Authority, on behalf of the Authority, could take a view on the optimum time to carry out further borrowing or debt rescheduling.

Members were referred to Page 77 of the agenda and were advised that the Authorised Limit for External Debt for 2023/2024 had been set £54,607,000, therefore the Authority could not exceed this limit. In addition to this, the Operational

Boundary for External Debt had been set at £49,607,000. Members were advised that this limit acted as an early warning but it was not anticipated that levels of debt would reach anywhere near the Operational Boundary.

The Treasury Management Statement was affirmed on an annual basis and there were no proposed changes from the previous year's statement and as this continued to be based on low risk and prioritising the security of investments.

The Finance Director highlighted that interest rates had reached their highest level since November 2008 and the Authority took advice from its treasury advisors and Bank of England predictions but the situation could change quickly depending on the economy.

Miss Goodwill asked about the sharp increase which was seen in the Borrowing element of the Authorised Limit for External Debt. The Finance Director advised that this would not be actual borrowing but rather represented what could be required if the Authority was in a worst-case scenario situation. It was a legal requirement to set this limit and it had to be realistic and based on all possible scenarios.

18. RESOLVED that: -

- (i) The proposed Annual Treasury Management Policy and Strategy for 2023/2024 (including specifically the Annual Borrowing and Investment Strategies) be noted and endorsed; and
- (ii) The draft Prudential 'Treasury Management' Indicators 2023/2024 to 2026/2027 be noted and endorsed.

Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation Order) 2006

19. RESOLVED that in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information). (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraph 3).

(Signed) M KNOWLES
In the Chair



TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Item No. 4

MEETING: GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 30th June 2023

SUBJECT: INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT – 2022/2023

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF INTERNAL AUDIT

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To consider the performance of Internal Audit for 2022/2023, areas of work undertaken and the internal audit opinion regarding the adequacy of the overall system of internal control within the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service.

2. Description of Decision

- 2.1 The Governance Committee is asked to consider and note the Internal Audit Annual Report.

3. Key Performance Indicators

- 3.1 The Internal Audit service measures its performance in terms of Efficiency, Quality and Client Satisfaction. Performance during the year is shown in Appendix 1. Where possible, performance specifically relating to the Fire and Rescue Service is included. All KPIs for 2022/23 were achieved.

4. Summary of Internal Audit Work

- 4.1 The findings of the 2022/23 audits have been taken together with the findings of audits from the previous two years to form an opinion on each of the identified key risk areas, and an opinion on the adequacy of the overall system of internal control for the Authority. The detailed analysis of these opinions is provided at Appendix 2.

- 4.2 As a result of the audits carried out, a number of actions have been agreed to improve internal control. The numbers of actions agreed are shown below:

Categorisation of Risk	Definition	Number of Actions
High	A fundamental control weakness which presents material risk to the audited body and requires immediate attention by senior management.	0
Significant	There is a control issue which could have a significant impact on the achievement of the aims and objectives of the organisation, or which presents a significant risk to the organisation's reputation. Prompt management action is required to remedy the situation.	0
Medium	There is a control weakness within the system, which presents material risk to the area or service being audited, and management attention is required to remedy the situation within a reasonable period.	15
Low	There is a minor control weakness or non-compliance within the system and proportional remedial action is required within an appropriate timescale.	9

- 4.3 The work undertaken did not identify any matters material to the overall internal control environment of the Authority.

5. Compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards

- 5.1 Internal Audit continues to comply with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards through the standards being built into audit working practices. This was confirmed during a review of Internal Audit by the external auditors, Mazars in December 2018.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 This report provides assurance that sufficient audit work was completed within the year to enable an opinion on the Authority's internal control environment, with no high or significant risk issues being identified.
- 6.2 Using the cumulative knowledge and experience of the systems and controls in place, including the results of previous audit work and the work undertaken within 2022/23, it is considered that overall, the Authority continues to have a good internal control environment.

Background Papers

Internal Audit Plan 2022/2023 - Governance Committee 7th March 2022.

Appendix 1

Internal Audit - Overall Objectives, Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) and Targets for 2022/23			
Efficiency and Effectiveness			
Objectives	KPI's	Targets	Progress
1) To ensure the service provided is effective and efficient.	1) Complete sufficient audit work to provide an opinion on the key risk areas identified.	1) All key risk areas covered over a 3-year period	1) Achieved
	2) Percentage of draft reports issued within 15 days of the end of fieldwork.	2) 90%	2) Achieved (100%)
	3) Percentage of audits completed by the target date (from scoping meeting to issue of draft report).	3) 85%	3) Achieved (86%)
Quality			
Objectives	KPI's	Targets	Progress
1) To maintain an effective system of Quality Assurance.	1) Opinion of External Auditor	1) Satisfactory opinion	1) Achieved
2) To ensure recommendations made by the service are agreed and implemented.	2) Percentage of agreed high, significant, and medium risk internal audit recommendations which are implemented.	2) 100% for high and significant. 90% for medium risk	2) High and significant – No such actions (N/A) Medium – Achieved (98%)
Client Satisfaction			
Objectives	KPI's	Targets	Progress
1) To ensure that clients are satisfied with the service and consider it to be good quality.	1) Results of Post Audit Questionnaires	1) Overall average score of better than 1.5 (where 1=Good and 4=Poor)	1) Achieved (Average score for last 12 months is 1.0)
	2) Results of other Questionnaires	2) Results classed as 'Good'	2) None undertaken
	3) Number of Complaints / Compliments	3) No target – actual numbers will be reported	3) No compliments or complaints received

Internal Audit Coverage

Key Risk Area	Audits undertaken 2022/23	2020/21 Audit Opinion / Assurance	2021/22 Audit Opinion / Assurance	2022/23 Audit Opinion / Assurance	Overall Opinion from Previous 3 years work
Corporate Governance	No audit work planned.		Corporate Governance Arrangements - Substantial		Substantial
Service / Business Planning, IRMP	Use of Emergency Vehicles			Use of Emergency Vehicles - Substantial	Substantial
Financial Management	Financial transaction testing on payroll and accounts payable.	Financial Transactions Testing on Payroll and Accounts Payable – Substantial Business Development/Income Generation - Substantial	Financial Transactions Testing on Payroll and Accounts Payable – Substantial Reserves Strategy – Substantial	Financial Transaction Testing – Payroll and Accounts Payable - Substantial	Substantial
Risk Management	Use of Emergency Vehicles Fire Safety			Use of Emergency Vehicles - Substantial Fire Safety - Substantial	Substantial
Procurement and Contract Management	No audit work planned.	Contract Management Arrangements, PFI Buildings - Moderate			Moderate

Appendix 2

Key Risk Area	Audits undertaken 2022/23	2020/21 Audit Opinion / Assurance	2021/22 Audit Opinion / Assurance	2022/23 Audit Opinion / Assurance	Overall Opinion from Previous 3 years work
Human Resource Management	No audit work planned.	Workforce Planning - Substantial			Substantial
Asset Management	No audit work planned.	Contract Management Arrangements, PFI Buildings - Moderate			Moderate
ICT	No audit work planned.	ICT Systems Development - Substantial			Substantial
Fraud and Corruption	Financial transaction testing on payroll and accounts payable.	Financial Transactions Testing on Payroll and Accounts Payable - Substantial	Financial Transactions Testing on Payroll and Accounts Payable - Substantial	Financial Transaction Testing – Payroll and Accounts Payable - Substantial	Substantial
Information Governance	Compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation.	Compliance with General Data Protection Regulation - Substantial	Compliance with General Data Protection Regulation - Moderate	Compliance with General Data Protection and Regulation – Moderate	Moderate
Business Continuity & Contingency Planning	Business Continuity Arrangements			Business Continuity Arrangements - Substantial	Substantial

Appendix 2

Key Risk Area	Audits undertaken 2022/23	2020/21 Audit Opinion / Assurance	2021/22 Audit Opinion / Assurance	2022/23 Audit Opinion / Assurance	Overall Opinion from Previous 3 years work
Performance Management	No audit work planned.		Performance Management Arrangements – Substantial		Substantial
Payroll	Financial Transactions Testing on Payroll.	Financial Transactions Testing on Payroll - Substantial	Financial Transactions Testing on Payroll - Substantial	Transaction Testing on Payroll - Substantial	Substantial
Partnership Working	Partnership Arrangements			Partnership Arrangements – Substantial	Substantial
Project Management	No audit work planned.		Project management arrangements - Substantial		Substantial



TREASURY MANAGEMENT – ANNUAL REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE 2022/2023

REPORT OF THE FINANCE DIRECTOR

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To report on the Treasury Management performance of the Authority for 2022/2023 in line with best practice as prescribed by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management (2011).

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Sunderland City Council, as lead authority, performs the treasury management function on behalf of the Authority through a Service Level Agreement arrangement.
- 2.2 This report sets out the annual borrowing and investment performance for the financial year 2022/2023 in accordance with the requirements of the Treasury Management Policy Statement and Treasury Management Strategy approved by the Authority on 14th March 2022. The Treasury Management Strategy comprises a Borrowing and Investment Strategy which set out the Authority's strategy for borrowing and its policies for managing its investments (which gave priority to the security and liquidity of funds over yield of those investments).
- 2.3 The Treasury Management Policy Statement and Strategy complies with best practice, including the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's 'Statutory Guidance on Local Government Investments' updated in February 2018 and also incorporates the recommendations included in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management, updated in December 2017.

3. Review of Performance 2022/2023 – Summary

Cost of Borrowing

- 3.1 The performance of the Authority's Treasury Management function continues to contribute financial savings that are used to provide funding to support future years' capital programmes and help to support the Authority's revenue budget. The average rate of the lead authority's borrowing at 2.55% compares very favourably when benchmarked against other authorities and has helped to keep

the revenue cost of the Authority's borrowing low in comparison. Section 4 of the report sets out more details of the Authority's Borrowing Strategy, for members information.

- 3.2 Whilst the impact of the pandemic on the financial markets has subsided, this has been replaced by the global fallout of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and heightened tension between China, Taiwan and the United States. Unprecedented pressure on household incomes linked to soaring energy prices and food bills, which haven't been offset by wage growth, has added to tensions in the economy.

Rate of Return on Investments

- 3.3 The Authority has benefitted from the fact that its investment income has been matched to the benchmark rate of 2.24% instead of the average Money Market Fund return that has been used in previous years but which has been adversely impacted by the Covid pandemic. The investment policy continues to reflect the priority to 'protect' the funds of the Authority first and foremost. More details are set out in Section 6 of this report in respect of the Authority's Investment Strategy and Performance. The rate of return has also improved significantly from the very low position assumed when the revenue budget was drawn up for 2022/23.

Treasury Management Prudential Indicators

- 3.4 The Authority has not exceeded any of its Treasury Management Prudential Indicators during 2022/2023. These indicators help to control the day to day Treasury Management activity which is closely monitored to ensure limits set each year by the Authority are not exceeded and which means capital expenditure can be appropriately financed and is affordable within the constraints of the revenue budget.
- 3.5 It is also very important that the Authorised Borrowing Limit for External Debt for the Authority, which is a statutory limit which must be set each year under section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 2003, is not exceeded. This limit was set at £52.816m for 2022/2023 and the highest level reached by the Authority of £33.235m during the year was below this limit. More details of all of the Prudential Indicators are set out in Section 5.

4. Borrowing Strategy and Performance – 2022/2023

- 4.1 The basis of the agreed Borrowing Strategy was to:
- continuously monitor prevailing interest rates and forecasts;
 - secure long-term funds to meet the Authority's future borrowing requirement when market conditions were favourable;
 - use a benchmark financing rate of 3.00% for long-term borrowing (i.e. all borrowing for a period of one year or more);
 - take advantage of debt rescheduling opportunities as appropriate.
- 4.2 The Borrowing Strategy has been regularly reviewed by this Committee throughout the year and was updated where necessary to reflect changing

circumstances. The Borrowing Strategy for 2022/2023 was based upon the views of the Lead Authority's Finance Officer, supplemented with market data, market information and leading economic forecasts provided by the Authority's treasury management adviser, Link Asset Services.

- 4.3 The strategy for 2022/2023 was to adopt a pragmatic approach in identifying the low points in the interest rate cycle at which to borrow, and to respond to any changing circumstances to seek to secure benefit for the Authority. A benchmark financing rate of 3.00% for long-term borrowing was set for 2022/2023 in light of the views prevalent at the time the Treasury Management policy was set in March 2022.
- 4.4 Interest rate rises in 2022/2023 were originally expected to be small and gradual but by August 2022 it had become clear that inflation was moving up towards 40-year highs and the Bank of England (BoE) would need to take action. The Base Rate started April 2022 at 0.75% but has risen by between 0.25% and 0.75% at each of the last eight meetings of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), reaching 4.25% on 23rd March 2023 in an attempt to combat ongoing inflationary pressures in the economy, even at the risk of hampering growth, without pushing the economy into recession.
- 4.5 Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation surged during the year, peaking at 11.1% in October 2022 and any hopes for significant falls from this level will largely depend on movements in the gas and electricity markets as well as supply-side factors impacting food prices. Whilst most commentators expect the CPI measure of inflation to drop back towards 4% by the end of 2023, as at February 2023 the rate was 10.4% which is over five times the BoE target of 2%.
- 4.6 Link Asset Services originally expected a gradual rise in PWLB rates over the course of 2022/2023, reflecting an easing of Covid restrictions and the anticipated return to normality. However the escalating conflict in Ukraine, other geo-political tensions, the fallout from the government's huge fiscal loosening plans announced by the then Chancellor and spiralling inflation meant volatility in the financial markets continued. 50-year PWLB interest rates started the financial year in April 2022 at 2.42% (inclusive of the 0.20% discount available to Local Authorities) and rose steadily until reaching a peak of 5.51% on 28th September 2022. From then rates fell to 3.58% at the end of November 2022 before gradually rising to end the financial year at 4.41%.
- 4.7 The table overleaf shows the average PWLB borrowing rates for each quarter in 2022/2023.

2022/2023	Qtr 1 (Apr - June) %	Qtr 2 (July – Sept) %	Qtr 3 (Oct – Dec) %	Qtr 4 (Jan – Mar) %
SONIA Overnight Rate	0.89	1.55	2.75	3.77
1 year	2.32*	3.27*	4.16*	4.48*
5 year	2.58*	3.25*	4.38*	4.22*
10 year	2.84*	3.41*	4.44*	4.31*
25 year	3.08*	3.79*	4.67*	4.70*

2022/2023	Qtr 1 (Apr - June) %	Qtr 2 (July – Sept) %	Qtr 3 (Oct – Dec) %	Qtr 4 (Jan – Mar) %
50 year	2.81*	3.52*	4.20*	4.39*

* Rates take account of the 0.20% discount to PWLB rates available to eligible authorities from 1st November 2012.

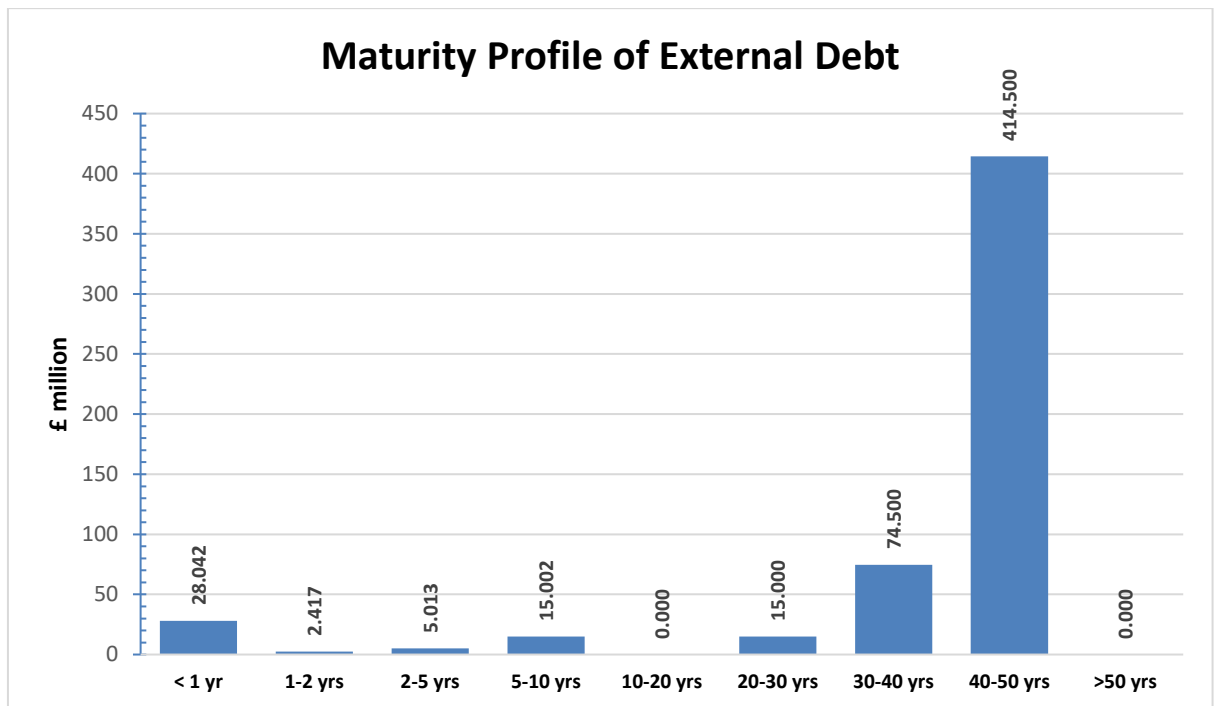
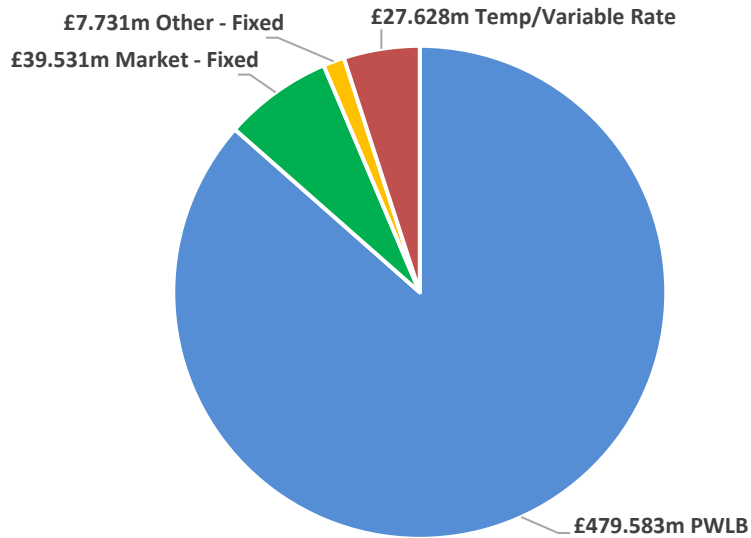
- 4.8 In line with discussions with the Authority’s Treasury Management adviser, Sunderland City Council took advantage of low borrowing rate troughs that have occurred and which will benefit the revenue budget over the longer term. £50 million of new borrowing was taken out during the financial year as the rate was considered opportune. The new borrowing is summarised in the following table:

Duration	Date of the transaction	Start	Matures	Rate %	Loan Amount £m
48 years	02/08/2022	09/08/2022	09/08/2070	2.79*	50.0

*rate takes account of the 0.20% discount to PWLB rates available.

- 4.9 The Treasury Management Strategy for 2022/2023 included provision for debt rescheduling but also stated that because of the proactive approach taken by the Authority in recent years, and because of the very low underlying rate of the Lead authority’s long-term debt, it would be difficult to refinance long-term loans at interest rates lower than those already in place.
- 4.10 The lead authority’s borrowing portfolio position (of which the Authority forms a part £10.760m) at 31st March 2023 is set out below.

Borrowing Summary at: 31 March 2023		
	<u>Principal</u>	<u>Ave rate</u>
<u>Fixed</u>		%
PWLB	479,583,333	2.46
Market – Fixed	39,531,020	4.41
Other – Fixed	7,731,391	0.00
	<hr/> 526,845,744	<hr/> 2.57
<u>Variable</u>		
Temporary/Other - Variable	27,627,962	2.24
	<hr/> 27,627,962	<hr/> 2.24
TOTAL BORROWING:	<hr/> 554,473,706	<hr/> 2.55



5. Prudential Indicators – 2022/2023

- 5.1 All external borrowing and investments undertaken in 2022/2023 have been subject to the monitoring requirements of the Prudential Code. Under the Code, Authorities must set borrowing limits (Authorised Borrowing Limit for External Debt and Operational Boundary for External Debt) and must also report on the Authority’s performance for all of the other Prudential Indicators as follows.

- 5.2 The statutory limit under section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 2003 (known as the Authorised Borrowing Limit for External Debt) was set by the Authority for 2022/2023 in total as £52.816m which is detailed as follows:

	£m
Borrowing	38.359
Other Long-Term Liabilities	<u>14.457</u>
Total	<u>52.816</u>

The Operational Boundary for External Debt for 2022/2023 was set at £47.816m as follows:

	£m
Borrowing	33.359
Other Long-Term Liabilities	<u>14.457</u>
Total	<u>47.816</u>

- 5.3 Both the Authorised Limit and the Operational Limit include an element for long-term liabilities relating to PFI schemes and finance leases. These have been brought onto the Authority's Balance Sheet in compliance with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).
- 5.4 The Authority's maximum external debt in 2022/2023 was £33.235 million and is within the borrowing limits set by both of these indicators.
- 5.5 The table below shows that all other Treasury Management Prudential Indicators for the lead authority have been complied with during 2022/2023.

Prudential Indicators		2021/2022	
		Limit	Actual (max)
P9	Maturity Pattern	Upper Limit	
	Under 12 months	50%	6.74%
	12 months and within 24 months	60%	0.44%
	24 months and within 5 years	80%	0.99%
	5 years plus	100%	93.68%
	A lower limit of 0% for all periods		
P10	Upper limit for total principal sums invested for over 365 days	£75m	0

- 5.6 The Lead Authority is currently within the limits set for all of its TM Prudential Indicators.

6. Investment Strategy and Performance – 2022/2023

- 6.1 The general policy objective for the Authority is the prudent investment of its treasury balances. The Authority's investment priorities in order of importance are:
- The **security** of capital;
 - The **liquidity** of its investments and then;
 - The Authority aims to achieve the **optimum yield** on its investments but this is commensurate with the proper levels of security and liquidity.

6.2 The Annual Investment Strategy has been fully complied with in 2022/2023.

6.3 At 31st March 2023 the Authority had outstanding investments of £27.514 million. The table below shows the return received on these investments compared with the benchmark SONIA (Sterling Overnight Index Average) rate, which the Authority uses to assess its performance.

		2022/2023 Return %	2022/2023 Benchmark %
In-house Funds	Managed	2.24	2.24

6.4 All investments placed in 2022/2023 have been made in accordance with the approved Investment Strategy and comply with the Criteria and the Approved Lending List set by the Authority on 14th March 2022.

6.5 The investment policy is regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure it has flexibility to take full advantage of any changes in market conditions to the benefit of the Authority. As reported during the year, the rate of return available on investments has remained at very low levels.

6.6 Due to the continuing high volatility within the financial markets, particularly in the Eurozone, advice from our Treasury Management adviser is to continue to restrict investments to shorter term periods.

6.7 As Members will be aware, the regular updating of the Authority's Authorised Lending List and Criteria is required in the light of financial institution mergers and changes in institutions' credit ratings. The Lead Authority Finance Officer has the delegated authority to vary the Lending List Criteria and Lending List itself should circumstances dictate, on the basis that changes be reported via the Finance Director to the Authority and the Governance Committee retrospectively, in accordance with normal Treasury Management reporting procedures. Changes made during 2022/2023 have been reported to Members previously.

7. Recommendation

7.1 The Committee is requested to note and comment upon the Treasury Management performance of the Authority for 2022/2023.



STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2022/2023 (SUBJECT TO AUDIT)

REPORT OF THE FINANCE DIRECTOR

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide members with an opportunity to review and question the draft Authority's Statement of Accounts for 2022/2023 (Subject to Audit) – (Appendix B), alongside the Finance Officer's Narrative Statement and the Annual Governance Statement that are both required to be published separately to the Accounts in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. Both of these statements are also included within the Authority's Statement of Accounts in line with best practice.
- 1.2 To provide members with details of the Statement of Accounts process and the key dates for the 2022/23 financial year in which local electors can challenge the accounts in accordance with the revised statutory timescales which have been impacted by the government's late decision to revert back to 31st May deadline after a very short consultation where most local authorities requested the government to change the deadline to 30th June 2023. The Authority's Accounts subject to audit are however later than the statutory deadline unfortunately and a separate Notification was issued on the Authority's website on 30th May 2023 to explain the reasons for the delay. This is detailed in **Appendix A** to this report for information as this is a requirement of the Regulations.
- 1.3 To provide members with the Letters of Assurance required by the external auditor as part of the final accounts process and specifically to approve the contents of the Letter of Assurance from those charged with Governance (**Appendix F**) and, to note the Letter of Assurance from those charged with discharging management processes and responsibilities (**Appendix G**).
- 1.4 It should also be noted that work continues on the Statement of Accounts 2022/23 and any changes will be tabled as necessary at the meeting (should this prove necessary) to ensure the best set of financial statements are presented for external audit.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Authority has to comply with the financial reporting requirements set out in the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, which are listed below for information. In summary local authorities must commence the public inspection period on or before the first working day of June 2023.

This means the draft unaudited accounts must be published by 31 May 2023 at the latest. The statutory period for the publication of the audited accounts has also been moved from 31 July 2023 to 30 September 2023 in accordance with revised government guidelines which were confirmed very late despite general opposition and views that the deadlines should have remained unchanged from the previous year mainly based on the fact some Authorities still hadn't had their 2021/22 Accounts signed off by the external auditor.

The Relevant Finance Officer (RFO) must certify that the accounts for 2022/2023 present a true and fair view of the financial position by no later than 31st May 2023 - **this has had to be amended to 30th June 2023 for this Authority despite best endeavours.**

There is also a set of requirements that the RFO must observe as follows:

The RFO must publish (including on the Authority's website) the following:

- The (certified) Statement of Accounts and an accompanying declaration that they are unaudited and subject to change;
- The Annual Governance Statement (in draft, if the Authority has not formally approved the Statement);
- The Narrative Statement;
- A statement that sets out:
 - The period for the exercise of public rights which must include the first 10 working days in June – however this has been amended to include the **first 10 working days of July 2023 and a Notification to the public published on 30th May 2023 on the Authority's website informing them of this revised date;**
 - Provide details of the manner in which the notice of intention to documents should be given;
 - The name and address of the auditor;
 - The provisions of section 26 and 27 of the Local Audit and accountability Act 2014;
- The RFO must also commence the period for the exercise of public rights and notify the auditor of the date on which the period commences. This period must be a single period of 30 working days, and as stated above, **must now include the first 10 working days in July for the 2022/2023 Statement of Accounts which is later than the statutory deadline.**

2.2 The requirement for the accounts, once audited, to be approved by members of this Committee would usually have been by 31st July 2023 however the government has amended the timescales so that the audited accounts can now be approved **by 30th September 2023 (for 2022/2023).**

2.3 The following requirements must also be observed:

- Following conclusion of the period for the exercise of public rights, the accounts must be:
 - Considered by members (Committee or meeting as a whole)
 - Re-confirmed by the RFO on behalf of the Authority that the Statement of Accounts present a true and fair view before the accounts are approved.
 - Approved by the same Committee or meeting
 - Signed – this must be by the person who presides over the meeting where the accounts are considered and approved.
- The approved and audited accounts, approved Annual Governance Statement, and the Narrative Statement, must be published (including on the Authority's website);
- An Authority must publish (including on the Authority's website) that the audit has been concluded and that the audited Statement of Accounts has been published. This must be by **30th September 2023**.

2.4 Quality checks continue on the accounts right up until the time they are received by this Committee for information in order to ensure that the draft Accounts subject to audit reflect the most accurate and best set of accounts possible. Any such changes will be tabled at the meeting.

3 Statement of Accounts 2022/2023 (Subject to Audit)

- 3.1 The draft financial statements for 2022/2023 subject to audit (**Appendix B**) are to be certified by the Finance Officer in accordance with the regulations.
- 3.2 Members should note that the Narrative Statement prepared by the Finance Officer is included within the Statement of Accounts and as members know this provides a very helpful summary of the main financial issues for the financial year 2022/2023 for the Authority and is there to help put the accounts, which are very complex by nature, into context. This has also been separately set out in (**Appendix C**) in accordance with the requirements.
- 3.3 Members, should they wish, are able to ask questions on the Authority's accounts and Narrative Statement at this stage before the audit has commenced, although there will be a further opportunity in September when the audited 2022/2023 accounts are to be formally considered for approval in accordance with the revised regulations.
- 3.4 In accordance with the requirements, the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), has to be published whether it has been approved or not by the Authority. A copy is attached in (**Appendix D**) to this report but simply replicates the AGS scrutinized by this Committee in May and approved by the June Authority meeting.

- 3.5 The statement required from the Authority that details 'the period for the exercise of public rights' is set out in Appendix E to this report.
- 3.6 The certified Accounts and the required Statements and Notices will be published on the Authority's web site on Friday 30th June 2023 (which are delayed when compared to the regulations which stipulated 31st May 2023 as previously explained).

4. Recommendations

- 4.1 To note the draft and unsigned Statement of Accounts 2022/2023 (subject to audit) and the separate Statements, which are set out in more detail in Appendices B to D of this report, in compliance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.
- 4.2 To approve the contents of the Letter of Assurance from those charged with Governance (Appendix F) and,
- 4.3 To note the Letter of Assurance from those charged with discharging management processes and responsibilities (Appendix G).

Delay in publishing the Authority's Statement of Accounts (Subject to Audit) : Year Ended 31 March 2023

Publication of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority's (TWFR) Statement of Accounts (Subject to Audit) 2022/2023

The Authority, despite its best endeavours, is not in a position to be able to publish its Statement of Accounts (subject to audit) for the year ended 31 March 2023 by the reverted statutory deadline of 31st May 2023.

This is due to a number of factors, which include:

the fact that the previous year's Accounts for 2021/22 have not yet been signed off by the external auditor (because of a very long delay in resolving an issue in respect of pension disclosures in respect of the Local Government Pension Scheme for 2021/22 which will, if not corrected, materially affect the accounts). The issue has just recently been resolved nationally and the new pension data and disclosures have now been received from the Actuary but these will have a significant impact on the accounts which once amended will need to be re-audited before they can be signed off by our external auditor. This will not be possible by 31st May 2023.

the fact the Authority has only just received the required pension data and disclosures for the current accounting year 2022/23 which means the deadline for the accounts of 31st May 2023 simply cannot be achieved.

The Finance Department despite best endeavours has worked extremely hard in challenging circumstances to complete the work but has had extra work to carry out in respect of the audit of the 2021/22 accounts which has caused a delay in the preparation of the 2022/23 accounts, which has been unavoidable, and finally,

the fact the government reverted the timescales of the unaudited accounts for 2022/23 back to 31st May 2023 deadline at very short notice despite a consultation that they carried out earlier in the year where the Local Government Association and the majority of local authorities (including this Authority) requested an extension to 30th June 2023 in order to reflect the amount of work involved in achieving the earlier timescales after the impact of the pandemic. Despite the overwhelming request to extend the deadline to 30th June (a month earlier than the 31st July 2022 deadline for 2021/22 accounts) the government insisted on adherence to 31st May 2023.

Implications

The delay in publishing the unaudited accounts for 2022/23 will mean that:

- 1. the Public Rights to inspect the accounts and accounting records for 2022/23 will be delayed** as these will not be available from the first working day in June 2023 as required by Sections 25 and 26 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 ('the Act') that provide local government electors with the right to inspect

- and make copies of the statement of accounts, accounting records and all documents relating to those records, for the financial year ended 31st March 2023.
2. **the Publics Rights to question the auditor and to make objections at audit in respect of the Authority's unaudited accounts for 2022/23 will also be delayed** as a result of the late publication of the accounts, as under section 26 of the Act, a local government elector may question the auditor about the accounting records for the financial year ended 31 March 2023 and, under section 27 of the Act, a local government elector may make an objection to the auditor which:

- concerns a matter in respect of which the auditor could make a public interest report under section 24 of the Act; or
- concerns an item of account in respect of which the auditor could apply for a declaration that the item is unlawful under section 28 of the Act.

These rights as explained are delayed and will be made available once the Authority publishes its unaudited accounts for 2022/23.

The Authority therefore plans to release a further separate Notice when this is possible but it is expected to be before 30th June 2023.

The situation set out above are covered by Regulation 10, paragraph (2) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/234)

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2015/234/regulation/10>

In summary this Notification explains, as per Regulation 10 (2) (a), that we are not yet able to publish our unaudited 2022/23 Statement of Accounts in line with publication date of 31 May 2023, as per Regulation 10 (1). The Authority is continuing to work hard on the accounts to ensure the required work is completed as soon as possible and that the draft Statement of Accounts 2022/23 (subject to audit) will be published as soon as possible.

Once the accounts are published, revised dates will be provided to the public when they can inspect the accounts and question and raise objections to the external auditor in accordance with the provisions of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

Dennis Napier
Finance Director
Service Headquarters
Nissan Way
Barmston Mere
Washington
Sunderland
Tyne and Wear
SR5 3QY

Date: 30 May 2023

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

NARRATIVE STATEMENT – 2022/2023

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service



Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service serves a resident population of 1.147 million¹ spread across five districts of Gateshead, Newcastle, North Tyneside, South Tyneside and Sunderland in the North East of England. The population density of the Tyne and Wear area is comparable to that of other Metropolitan areas of the country, (Greater Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire, West Midlands and West Yorkshire), and accounts for 43% of the North East's population in just 6% of the total land mass. The area covered by the Service is 538 square kilometres and borders with the Counties of Durham to the south and west, Northumberland to the north and with the North Sea coast line to its eastern boundary.

In addition to Tyne and Wear's two major cities, Newcastle and Sunderland, the area boasts two large football stadiums, numerous museums and art galleries, three universities and a number of higher education colleges. The county has a range of well-developed transport links including the Metro light railway system, the UK's eleventh busiest international airport, an international ferry terminal, two major ports, and Newcastle Central Railway Station which acts as a major staging point on the east coast mainline railway and cross country networks.

Traditional employment areas of shipbuilding, coal mining and heavy industries have declined significantly over the last 35 years, giving rise to a changing risk profile, and changes in unemployment rates. Today, many of the traditional industries have been replaced by modern industrial developments and service based organisations, although manufacturing remains a sizeable sector (producing almost a quarter of the area's GDP). Some of the largest employers in the area include Nissan Motor Manufacturing (UK) Ltd, Virgin Money, Greggs, Proctor & Gamble, The Sage Group, Nestle and Barbour & Sons.

Vision and Purpose

The Vision Statement of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority '**Creating the Safest Community**' is reflected by its Mission Statement '**To save life, reduce risk, provide humanitarian services and protect the environment**'.

To achieve this Vision, the Fire and Rescue services provided must:

- be **well managed** - employees are expected to manage the areas for which they are responsible within budget;
- aim for **excellence in service provision** taking account of stakeholders' views; and
- work in **effective partnership** with the communities we represent, and external organisations.

¹ Source – ONS 2021 mid-year estimate

The Authority also recognises that all employees need to have a clear understanding about the working practices and the core values required for long term success. Everyone within the Authority has a responsibility for ensuring these values are implemented and upheld.

The Authority publishes an Annual Report to highlight its successes over the previous 12 months, including its performance against national indicators and the opinions of external inspectors, as well as outlining details of the improvements introduced to meet the Authority's vision of "Creating the Safest Community".

The latest Annual Report includes a summary of the Statement of Accounts, designed to encourage more people to take an interest in the Authority's financial position in an easy to read format. Further details can be found on the Authority's website at www.twfire.gov.uk.

Performance

The Fire Authority is responsible for Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service and is required by law to publish certain performance indicators annually in the local press. These show the statistical performance of the service but cannot provide any indication of the true quality or scope of the service delivered every day to the citizens of Tyne and Wear. It is also important to note that the Service remained effective and fully operational throughout the pandemic although some of our key performance indicators were affected. More detail about the work the service carried out to help our communities during 2022/2023 is also set out later in this summary for information.

Summary of Performance

The Authority's key strategic priority is to prevent fires, deaths and injuries from fires and other emergencies. In order to achieve this goal, wide ranging community safety services, legislative fire safety services and operational response services are provided to the public of Tyne and Wear. The primary focus is to prevent fires and other emergencies from occurring, whilst also ensuring that if they do occur, every attempt is made to limit their impact.

The primary mechanism for achieving this is through the Authority's Strategic Community Safety Plan, which is focused on improving overall community safety through more effective and efficient use of resources to drive down incidents and respond to them more effectively.

In addition, the Authority continues to work with local schools, businesses, residents and community groups with the overall aim of reducing the risk of injuries and death from fire. The main thrust of community safety, however, is targeted Home Safety Checks, or Safe and Well visits, which involve Community Firefighters and Prevention and Education staff visiting homes to deliver fire safety advice and practical support, such as installing smoke detectors. During 2022/2023, the Service carried out 21,078 Safe and Well visits (12,037 in 2021/2022) and attended a total of 18,729 incidents (17,922 in 2021/2022).

Service Led Priorities

Service led priorities, as defined by the Government, are no longer required to be reported nationally but allow continuity of performance reporting. The table below sets out the performance over the last three years:

	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Performance Indicator			
Average Response time of all incidents (mins)	6.00	5.53	5.44
Number of fatalities from all fires	1	2	10
Number of fatalities in accidental dwelling fires	0	2	10
Number of injuries from accidental dwelling fires (excluding precautionary checks)	38	26	34
Number of accidental fires in dwellings	501	463	470
Number of false alarms due to automatic fire detection from non-domestic properties	1,371	1,461	1,539
Number of primary fires	1,632	1,738	1,825
Number of deliberate fires	4,362	6,211	6,380

The Authority has a long track record of reducing fires but, sadly, in 2022/2023 there were ten deaths attributed to fire. On a pleasing note, average response times reduced slightly to 5 minutes 44 seconds.

The service will continue to strive to work towards the reduction of zero fire deaths. The service has experienced both increases and decreases in local indicators during 2022/2023. More detail on performance can be found on the Authority's website.

Performance Improvement

Through the delivery of goals, priorities, strategies and plans, the Service is able to ensure that front line services work towards the overall Vision and Mission of the Authority. Frameworks and processes allow the services provided to be monitored and scrutinised to provide continuous improvement.

Performance Action Groups (PAG) address performance at a district and service level and continue to meet to monitor performance and identify areas for improvement by directing resources and establishing priorities with effective delivery of initiatives and projects.

Efficiency and the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)

Following the end of the Four Year Grant Funding Settlement covering 2016/2017 to 2019/2020, the Authority has had no formal requirement to produce a formal Efficiency Plan in order to secure Government funding.

All Fire and Rescue Authorities however are expected to set out budget efficiencies made during each financial year by the Home Office. The principles that were used to develop the Efficiency Plan, which set out the Authority's detailed approach to the delivery of savings needed to address the reductions in funding over this four year period, have been maintained for the purposes of setting out each year the level of efficiency savings the Authority has achieved, which totalled £3.712m in 2022/2023 (£4.711m for 2021/2022). These savings have not only helped to balance the budget but have also been re-invested into priority areas of the Service identified by the IRMP process.

The Authority continues to identify and make budget efficiencies each year to assist with its overall spending plans.

Funding Context and Financial Planning

Financial Outlook for the Authority

In February 2023, the Government confirmed the Local Government finance settlement for 2023/2024. The Authority's Core Spending Power (CSP) has increased by 5.99% rising to 7.32% when the council tax £5 Band D was accepted, less than the national average increase for all standalone Fire and Resuse Authorities of 9.4%.

The Service Delivery Grant, which according to the Government was one-off funding for 2022/2023, has been retained although reduced to £0.604m from £1.072m. Although welcomed, it is not certain if this grant will remain a permanent feature of future grant settlements.

The Government continued to assume that the Authority can grow its Council Tax base by 0.79% in 2023/2024 and would increase its precept by at least 2.99% with additional flexibility of a £5 Band D increase equivalent to a 5.72% increase in council tax without any growth in the Tax Base. This continues the Government's policy of shifting some of the funding of Local Government services directly on to the council tax payer through assumed annual council tax increases.

The Government have assumed that there will be no Business Rates detriment to the income yield expected in 2023/2024 despite the continued adverse trading conditions post COVID-19 and the significant impact of the cost of living crisis on businesses. The assumption is that income will reduce to £3.965m for 2023/2024 compared to £4.088m in 2022/2023 (when actual income in 2021/2022 was only £2.270m).

The key elements of the Authority's settlement for 2023/2024 are:

- An increase in the Government's Core Spending Power of £3.892m or 7.32% with a council tax £5 Band D increase;
- An increase in the Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) of £1.521m or 5.78%; and
- Confirmation of the Revenue Support Grant element of the settlement. This includes core revenue grant funding allocations of Formula Grant and previous Council Tax Freeze Grants. Only the Revenue Support Grant will increase by 10.1% in line with inflation continuing the government's policy of providing at least inflationary increases for public sector services.

This improved position however needs to be taken in the context of past settlements as there are still funding inequities in the current system which still need to be addressed. It is disappointing that these will not be amended as part of the government's proposed changes to the funding system. The fact that this is a further one year Finance Settlement with one-off funding included also means that it will make budget planning more difficult compared to a clear and transparent three year settlement that would have been much more helpful to the Authority in planning its services.

The Authority published a revised Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), covering the period 2023/2024 to 2026/2027 and this can be found on the Authority's website (13 February 2023 Authority meeting; Item 6). This aims to:

- provide an analysis of the financial position likely to face the Authority over the medium term taking into account the National Economic context, the potential local funding position, internal spending pressures and commitments and the revenue implications of the capital programme; and
- set out the medium term financial position which the Authority is likely to face and to update the Budget Planning Framework for the preparation of future Revenue and Capital Budgets in the next four year period to 2026/2027.

This MTFS projects a funding gap of £2.920m by the end of the four year period. The current financial climate over the medium term remains unclear with only another one year 2023/2024 financial settlement being provided by the government.

Despite the more optimistic projection for public sector resources, the Authority is facing inflation at its highest level for more than a decade, along with the continuing economic implications from Covid, the war in Ukraine and EU exit all having an adverse impact on the economy. The Authority is also facing not only the uncertainty of its level of resources but concerns over both price and wage inflation, as costs are increasing significantly above the government's projections used in the CSR21.

The financial aim of the Authority therefore continues to be one of remaining sustainable so that it can continue to work effectively and efficiently and to collaborate with partners, other blue light and public sector organisations, residents and communities to deliver positive outcomes on its key service priorities to the communities it serves and will always manage service capacity within its available resources.

Although the financial context continues to be challenging and uncertain the Authority has a proven and strong track record of meeting its financial obligations and maintaining its financial sustainability. Over the past ten years the Authority has always delivered an outturn (actual position) within its original budget. An Authority wide approach to the budget, which is service priority driven and set over a medium-term planning horizon, ensures that this continues to be the case.

COVID-19 Pandemic

During 2022/2023, the after effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to have an impact on service delivery especially with regards to delivery lead times and delays in some of the planned Capital Works.

As the Authority continues in the recovery phase, new ways of working have been adopted by many departments and more agile ways of working will continue to be a feature of a flexible approach to providing services in the future.

Financial Performance of the Fire Authority 2022/2023

Revenue Expenditure and Income Summary

The estimated net revenue expenditure for 2022/2023 to be met from Government Grants and local taxpayers was approved by the Authority at £51.487million*. This meant that the precept, at the Band D level of Council Tax, after allowing for Revenue Support Grant and National Non Domestic Rates receipts, was set at £87.35 for 2022/2023. This represented a 1.99% increase in Band D, below the Government's 2% referendum threshold level. The following table summarises the financial position for the year:

	2022/2023	2022/2023	2022/2023	2021/2022
	Original Estimate	Revised Estimate	Actual Outturn	Actual Outturn
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Community Safety	6,156	6,396	5,162	4,604
Fire Fighting and Rescue Operations	46,312	46,344	31,202	30,609
Corporate and Democratic Core	212	212	177	139
Non Distributed Costs	(494)	(494)	89	12
Net Cost of Services	52,186	52,458	36,630	35,364
Interest Payable	258	258	1,491	1,860
Contingencies	2,291	2,201	0	0
Interest on Balances	(41)	(41)	(994)	(59)
Pension Interest Cost and Expected Return on Pension Assets	(620)	(620)	25,260	19,230
Net Operating Expenditure	54,074	54,256	62,387	56,395
Capital Financing:				
Reversal of Capital Charges and Impairments	(4,479)	(4,479)	(4,221)	(3,651)
Minimum Revenue Provision	1,574	1,574	1,652	1,570
Revenue Contribution to Capital Outlay	250	250	4,922	2,784
Total Net Operating Expenditure	51,419	51,601	64,740	57,098
Contribution to/(from) IAS 19 Pension Reserve	(85)	(85)	(10,450)	(7,520)
Contribution to/(from) Collection Fund Account	0	0	(1,298) *	119
Contribution to/(from) Accumulated Absences Account	0	0	(91)	129
Contribution to/(from) Earmarked Reserves	152	(30)	(1,847)	170
Net Budget	51,486	51,486	51,054	49,996
Resources:				
Revenue Support Grant and General Grants	(9,263)	(9,263)	(9,263) *	(8,989)
Top Up Grant	(11,457)	(11,457)	(11,457) *	(11,457)
Business Rates and Collection Fund Precepts and Collection Fund	(3,858)	(3,858)	(3,615) *	(3,256)
Local Council Tax Support Scheme Grant	(25,836)	(25,836)	(24,708) *	(25,334)
Service Delivery Grant	0	0	0	(826)
Section 31 Non-Specific Grants	(1,072)	(1,072)	(1,072)	0
	0	0	(939)	(134)
Total Resources	51,486	51,486	51,054	49,996
(Increase) / Reduction to General Balances in year	0	0	0	0
Opening General Fund Balance	(4,089)	(4,089)	(4,089)	(3,943)
Closing General Fund Balance	(4,089)	(4,089)	(4,072)	(4,089)

* In the accounts, the Net Budget Requirement for 2022/2023 of £51.054m is made up of Total Resources of £51.487m, as set out in the estimates in the above table, adjusted for a difference in government Settlement Funding Assessment (SFA) grant funding of £0.076m, an amendment required under the Code in respect of the Collection Fund Account of £1.298m, section 31 non-specific grant income of (£0.939m), and a debtor for section 31 non-specific grant income of (£0.003m).

The variances between the Estimates and Actual Outturn 2022/2023 on Firefighting and Rescue Operations and the Return on Pensions Assets are compensating variances arising from the actuarial valuations on the Pensions Assets which can, and invariably do, change between budget and outturn stages. The key comparator for actual expenditure against budget in the above statement is the "Net Budget" figure which, as explained above mainly relates to the adjustments required in the Collection Fund.

Comprehensive and detailed budget monitoring is carried out monthly during the year and is supplemented by formal budget monitoring reports which are made quarterly to the full Authority. These reports detail the outcome of the review of budgets and spending forecasts for both capital and revenue expenditure and also includes a review of certain other key financial items, including Treasury Management and Prudential Indicators. Again, this process reflects strong and robust financial management in 2022/2023, continuing the Authority's sound track record in this regard.

The Revenue Budget Outturn position for 2022/2023 was reported to the Fire Authority on 26 June 2023 and showed a net overall underspend of £1.914m, at £49.573m compared with an original budget of £51.487m.

It is important for Members to understand the continued positive drive the Authority has made during the financial year to achieve this level of savings, with a number of initiatives and delays in filling corporate roles as the Authority made adjustments to accommodate the higher than expected pay awards for all of its staff.

- Improved financial management is embedded throughout the Authority, with increased financial awareness and tighter budgetary control achieving a net delegated budget savings of £0.116m across the full service;
- Employee budgets are set based on assumptions relating to staff turnover and vacancy levels, firefighter pension scheme membership and the numbers of operational staff who are at the development stage in their roles. As the year progresses, employee costs reflect the actual position on all of these factors which, in reality, can vary considerably against the budget assumptions made.

We have experienced significantly higher levels of corporate staff vacancies than the budget assumed over most of this financial year, which was anticipated to ease during the latter stages of the fiscal year. This factor shows staff vacancies were 14% on average across the year which has created a saving of almost £1.4m. Whilst this is a one-off saving provided the posts are filled, the service is to review the roles and necessity of some of the longer dated vacant posts to ensure they are needed.

The pay award for corporate staff was agreed at a flat cash increase of £1,925 per employee which equated to a 7% increase for Tyne and Wear and the pay award from July 2022 for firefighters was agreed at 7%. At the end of the financial year, some of the contingency budget set aside for potential costs when the budget was established for 2022/2023 has not been required. This has been reallocated to fund the increased pay awards.

- Members will be aware that during the 2022/2023 financial year, two further Trainee courses were completed bringing 42 additional staff into operational crews. This has

reduced overtime costs and has also contributed towards the additional underspend on the overall employee budgets highlighted;

- The Authority has also had to manage and contend with significant budgetary pressures caused by the very high levels of inflation which, although have reduced a little, continues to be an ongoing issue. However, the increase in interest rates has had a positive impact on the budget and this has helped to fund some of the budget pressures benefitting by almost £1m excess interest received because of the high interest rates experienced across the financial year, which could not have been anticipated when the budget for 2022/2023 was approved; and
- All aspects of the Authority's finances continue to be reviewed and a more commercially based approach to income generation is carefully and sensibly applied where appropriate to ensure Best Value is achieved for the Authority. Increases in income above budget during the year help to show this is continuing to be a success and income generation is expected to increase in future years as a result.

These summaries help to show members that all areas of the budget continue to be monitored, challenged and proactively managed to ensure the Authority achieves Best Value from its limited resources and helps the revenue budget become more sustainable.

The table below shows the actual outturn for 2022/2023 as compared with the original and revised budget positions as reported to the Fire Authority in June 2023.

	Original Estimate (For Information)	Revised Budget	Outturn	Variance to Revised Budget
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Expenditure				
Employees	45,819	48,387	46,197	(2,190)
Premises	2,844	2,852	2,537	(315)
Transport	1,051	1,051	1,138	87
Supplies and Services	8,270	8,315	8,575	260
Contingencies	2,291	0	0	0
Support Services	15,030	15,030	14,914	(116)
Capital Financing	939	939	898	(41)
Total Expenditure	76,244	76,574	74,259	(2,315)
Income				
Grants and Contributions	(8,837)	(8,837)	(8,697)	140
Receipts	(170)	(170)	(371)	(201)
Fees and Charges	(1,125)	(1,161)	(1,306)	(145)
Interest Earned	(41)	(41)	(994)	(953)
Recharge Income	(14,736)	(14,736)	(14,608)	128
Reserve Appropriations	152	(142)	1,290	1,432
Total Income	(24,757)	(25,087)	(24,686)	401
NET BUDGET	51,487	51,487	49,573	(1,914)

While the budget figures above are presented on a cash basis, the Statement of Accounts is prepared on an accruals basis, which also has to comply with statutory requirements and International Accounting Standards. This is the main reason why the two sets of figures differ, as the information is presented on two different bases, however the financial underspend compared to the budget reported to members for 2022/2023 is fully reflected within the Statement of Accounts.

The main budget variations are detailed below:

- Employee costs (£2.190m net underspend) – the main reason for the underspend relates to the level of operational and corporate vacancies and the higher number of operational staff in development. Along with these, savings have been made on employer pension costs, arising from the impact of temporary staffing arrangements, transitional movements between pension schemes, and employees opting out of the pension scheme altogether.

Operational overtime costs continue to be a significant budget pressure, particularly working with the increased vacancy levels experienced. The savings in salaries and pensions have accommodated these increased costs however. Overtime continues to be very closely monitored, with actions considered and taken to control expenditure as appropriate.

- Premises (£0.315m net underspend) – as reported at third review, a refund in respect of Business Rates was expected to be received before the end of the financial year. The Authority has now received this one-off refund of £479,000 which has helped to absorb the overspend on electricity and gas charges of £113,000 incurred during the financial year. Energy charges are being closely monitored with information from Sunderland City Council and increased tariffs have been accommodated in the budget for 2023/2024.
- Transport (£0.087m net overspend) – increased fuel costs during the first part of the financial year have had an impact on the transport budget in addition to an increased cost for outside contractors and an increase in travel across the service.
- Supplies and Services (£0.260m net overspend) – as reported at third review, work has been carried out by the PFI providers resulting in an increase in the unitary charge payment for the full year and future years due to the rise in utility charges. The PFI smoothing reserve will be utilised next year to help fund these additional costs.
- Contingencies – an adjustment has been made in the final quarter of the year to reallocate the full contingency budget to partly finance the firefighters pay award.
- Support Services and Recharges (£0.012m net overspend) – there has been an in year change to the staffing model recharges for the USAR National Resilience responsibilities.
- Income (£0.206m overachieved) – the year end position shows an increase in total income received against the revised budget.

Reductions in income from Princes Trust Courses, Contract Income from Primary Authority Scheme arrangements and under-recovery of catering income due to reduced sales have been offset by additional income from training courses, a one-off PFI Authority Support repayment, additional secondment income, and income from sale of equipment.

- Interest Received (£0.953m overachieved) – the budget was significantly reduced in 2022/2023 and set at £0.041m due to a drop in interest rates to 0.5%. At Third Review, it was estimated that the Authority would receive a total of £0.500m for 2022/2023 due to an increase in the bank base rate, but rates have continued to rise during the final quarter of

the financial year, resulting in interest received of £0.994m in total. The budget set for 2023/2024 reflects the improved interest rate position, although this very high level is not expected to be a long term gain.

- Reserves and Provisions Appropriations (£1.432m decrease) – underspends against budget have reduced the need to draw down from Reserves in year. Adjustments have also been made to reflect the IFRS Employee Benefit accounting entry and the Council Tax and Business Rates Collection Fund balance required for 2022/2023.

Members agreed to appropriate the surplus funds of £1.914m to a new Mobilisation Smoothing Reserve to support a business critical new system that is required. This was expected to be a capital programme issue where borrowing could have been considered, but is now a revenue budget cost pressure which will need to be accommodated within the Authority’s existing resource. The Authority has no firm understanding of the increased costs of this solution at this initial stage but expects costs of the revised system to create a cost pressure of at least £500k per annum on an ongoing basis. The Smoothing Reserve will therefore help bridge the gap for this additional cost until the savings from the end of the PFI Contract in 2028/2029 can be accessed.

The total resources at the end of the financial year included within the Authority’s Statement of Accounts was £51.054m, £0.432m less than that set out in the budget of £51.487m for 2022/2023:

- As part of the finance settlement, the Authority received slightly less government grant funding of £0.076m and a year-end accounting adjustment of £1.298m was required to the Collection Fund, resulting in an decrease in overall resources of £1.374m compared to the budget figures for 2022/2023.
- The Authority received Section 31 non-specific grants of £0.939m and the year end NNDR returns from the District Councils notified the Authority that its share of section 31 grant from Government will be £0.003m and a debtor for this grant funding has been raised in the accounts.

Injury Pension Grant Repayment (Firefighter Pension Scheme)

The long term pension liability of £8.639m is being repaid at £0.500m a year. The table below reconciles the position shown in the statutory accounts and the true position as shown in the reserves statement:

	Statutory Accounts			True Reserve Position		
	Balance as at 31 March 2022 £'000	Net Transfer * £'000	Balance as at 31 March 2023 £'000	Balance as at 31 March 2022 £'000	Net Transfer * £'000	Balance as at 31 March 2023 £'000
Capital Developments Reserve	4,582	13,424	18,006	7,901	16,244	24,145
Transformation and Reform Reserve	9,680	(9,180)	500	13,000	(12,500)	500
Injury Pension Adjustment	0	0	0	(6,639)	500	(6,139)
	14,262	4,244	18,506	14,262	4,244	18,506

Accounting for Pensions

International Accounting Standard 19 (IAS19)

The Authority's accounts continue to be compliant with International Accounting Standard 19 which is a complex accounting standard. It is based on a simple principle, however, namely that an organisation should account for retirement benefits when it is committed to giving them, even if the actual payment of those benefits will be many years into the future. Inclusion of the pension fund assets and liabilities in the accounts does not mean that the legal title or obligation has passed from the Pension Fund Administrator to the employer. Instead, it represents the employer's commitment to increase contributions to make up any shortfall in attributable net assets, or its ability to benefit (through reduced contributions) from a surplus in the Pension Fund.

The last actuarial valuation of the Firefighter's Pension Scheme (FPS) was at 31 March 2020. This has been rolled forward to reflect the position as at 31 March 2023, in particular allowing for service accrued between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2023 and known pension and salary increases that would have applied.

A triennial actuarial valuation of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) was carried out at 31 March 2022.

The Authority continues to comply fully with this Standard and the Accounting Policy 1.10 in the Statement of Accounts and the Notes to Core Financial Statements provide more details of the necessary disclosures required for this very complex area of the accounts.

The net overall impact of IAS19 accounting entries is resource neutral in the accounts and, in reality, as the Authority is making the necessary pension deficiency payments to address any assessed shortfall in the pension fund by the Actuary over time, the Balance Sheet net worth is in effect being distorted by future years' deficits which are being fully addressed by the Authority.

The financial health of the Authority is consequently being affected by the accounting requirements in respect of IAS19. However, the Pension Fund Reserve Deficit, as assessed by the Actuary as at 31 March 2023, is being addressed by the Authority in line with Government regulations. The Authority can meet the assessed deficit with planned and agreed future years contributions based on independent actuarial advice.

Arrangements for Funding and Accounting for Firefighter Pensions

From 1 April 2006, revised arrangements came into effect for funding firefighter pensions, with Fire and Rescue Authorities administering and paying firefighters' pensions through a local firefighters' pension fund. Together, employee and employer contributions meet the accruing pension liabilities of currently serving firefighters, meaning that Fire and Rescue Authorities meet all of the costs of employing a firefighter, including the cost of future pension liabilities, at the time of employing them.

Ill-health retirement costs are paid by the Authority from its pension fund. Employer payments towards the future cost of ill-health retirements come from a combination of a flat rate employer contribution applicable to all authorities and from an individual charge payable by the relevant Authority where an ill-health retirement occurs. The Authority has invested in health awareness and intervention measures through its Occupational Health Unit and it is pleasing to report that there have been only three firefighter ill health retirements since 2009/2010 to date.

Employee and employer contributions are paid into the pension fund each year, with the fund being topped up by annual Government grant if the contributions are insufficient to meet the cost of pension payments. Any surplus is recouped by the Government. The pension fund is ring-fenced to ensure accounting clarity. As such, a Pensions Fund Account and Net Assets Statement

are reported as separate supplementary financial statements within the Authority's Statement of Accounts.

Immediate Detriment

Immediate Detriment is where a member has been transitioned to the Firefighter Pension Scheme 2015 (FPS2015) and has retired or is due to retire and cannot access their legacy pension (Firefighters Pension Scheme 1992) prior to remedying legislation being put in place in October 2023.

On 8 October 2021 the Local Government Association (LGA) and Fire Brigades Union (FBU) agreed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the Immediate Detriment Framework (MOU and IDF) to enable Fire Authorities to process immediate claims.

After the Authority initially adopted the MOU and IDF, this process was paused due to government guidance not to process immediate detriment cases due to uncertainties and risks to the authority and the pension member. These risks according to the government relate to the interaction between remedy and tax legislation.

Although government guidance is not to process immediate detriment claims, it is the Fire Authority who ultimately needs to make this decision.

On 13 February 2023 the Authority recommenced immediate detriment for members coming up to retirement, and members who had retired within the last 12 months. This decision was in part due to the growing threat of High Court legal action.

The remedying legislation is due to be in place in October 2023.

Balance Sheet Position

The Balance Sheet shows the value at the balance sheet date of the assets and liabilities recognised by the Authority. The net assets of the Authority (assets less liabilities) are matched by reserves held by the Authority. The following table summarises the balance sheet position:

	Balance at 31 March 2022	Balance at 31 March 2023
	£'000	£'000
Non-current assets	86,568	88,867
Net current assets	42,889	39,252
Long term liabilities and provisions	(993,049)	(717,717)
Net Assets / (Liabilities)	(863,593)	(589,598)
Represented by:		
Usable reserves	40,908	39,061
Unusable reserves	(904,501)	(628,659)
	(863,593)	(589,598)

Assets are items of worth measurable in terms of money (value). Non-current assets are fixed assets that yield benefit to the Authority and the services it provides for a period of more than one year. Current assets are those that may change in value on a day-to-day basis.

Liabilities are amounts due to individuals or organisations which will have to be paid at some time in the future. Current liabilities are usually payable within one year of the balance sheet date and are included in 'net current assets' above.

Provisions are sums set aside to meet liabilities or losses which it is anticipated will be incurred but the amount and / or the timing of such costs are uncertain.

Reserves are sums set aside to meet possible future costs where there is no certainty about whether or not the costs will actually be incurred. Not all reserves can be used to fund services and these are reported in two groups; 'usable' and 'unusable' reserves. Usable reserves, such as the General Fund and earmarked reserves, are those where members will be involved in deciding on the levels maintained and their use. Full details of the Authority's Reserves and their specified use are outlined in the Reserves Policy published on the TWFRS website. Unusable reserves, such as the Revaluation Reserve and the Capital Adjustment Account, are technical accounting requirements and are therefore not cash reserves, which is why they are classified as unusable.

The Authority is a going concern due to the fact that, whilst recognising that it has a negative net worth of £589.598m on its Balance Sheet, most of the 'deficit' relates to the pensions deficiency of £688.580m which must be disclosed as part of the international financial reporting standard IAS19 (Accounting for Pensions) requirements.

The fact that all pension costs would never be incurred in one year (as implied by IAS19), coupled with the fact that the Authority is addressing this potential deficiency in accordance with pension regulatory requirements by making additional annual pension deficiency payments, means the Balance Sheet Net Worth is effectively being distorted by this reporting standard.

If this element is removed, the Authority has a 'real' net surplus of £98.982m. The Authority also has assets worth £88.867m and cash backed reserves of £39.061m which support the view that the Authority's Balance Sheet and finances are in fact healthier than implied by the published accounts.

Capital Expenditure and Income and Major Acquisitions, Capital Works and Disposals

Capital Expenditure

In February 2022, the Authority approved a capital programme for 2022/2023 of £12.655m which was subsequently revised to £19.427m during the year.

Actual capital expenditure at the end of the financial year was £5.025m, financed from a combination of revenue contributions of £0.250m, earmarked reserves of £4.612m, external contributions of £0.076m and Section 31 grant of £0.087m. The main reasons for the variation in spending of £14.402m have arisen due to the following:

- Expenditure on a number of projects planned for 2022/2023 of £13.472m slipped in to 2023/2024:
 - Delays in the genous security system due to a new tender, this will be complete early in 2023/2024;
 - Delayed progress on the PFI element of the security upgrade programme but a new contractor is finishing of the gates and will be complete early in 2023/2024;
 - Outstanding legal costs that will need to be paid for the MRU development;
 - A payment withheld for the Fire Behaviour Units until technical issues are resolved;
 - Stage payments for Hebburn Station will be made in 2023/2024 now that the build has started;
 - Delayed progress on Information Screens due to other priorities;
 - DCS/LifeX and Telent Mobs Hardware Refresh will continue in 2023/2024 as multi year projects;
 - Continued delays on the national government led Emergency Services Mobile Communications Project in to future years;

- Delayed delivery of operational equipment and slippage to cover purchase of a new pump;
 - Purchase of Foam and Firefighting Equipment pending a decision on the type of foam that will be purchased;
 - Remaining PPE will issued early in 2023/2024;
 - Delayed replacement of the small fleet pending further consideration of options; and
 - Final stage payment for the ten remaining new appliances due early 2023/2024 before they can become operational.
- Net underspend of £0.163m across a number of schemes completed during 2022/2023.
 - Addition of £0.045m required to the upgrade to the Dispath Communication Server (DCS) / LifeX required to support the Emergency Services Network (ESN).
 - Members will recall that the Capital Programme for 2022/2023 was set with an additional £0.850m for a number of business critical, invest to save schemes, that were slipped from 2020/2021. Plans for the two projects, repairs to Barmston Mere Training Centre and relocation of Safetyworks have continued to be impacted and as a result the £0.850m funding for these schemes will need to be reviewed in 2023/2024.

Authority's Current Borrowing and Capital Borrowing Provision

The Capital Programme report, incorporating the Prudential Indicators and the Treasury Management Strategy, was submitted to the Authority meeting on 14 February 2022, which detailed the 2022/2023 borrowing limits for the Authority. All borrowing is undertaken by the Lead Authority (Sunderland City Council) on the Authority's behalf.

The specific borrowing limits set each year relate to two of the Prudential Indicators required under the Prudential Code, which was introduced from 1 April 2004.

- Authorised Limit for External Debt for 2022/2023 of £52.816 million;
- Operational Boundary for External Debt for 2022/2023 of £47.816 million.

The Lead Authority administers all of the Authority's borrowing through its Consolidated Advances and Borrowing Pool (CABP). The above two statutorily required Prudential Indicators are monitored on a daily basis and neither limit has been exceeded during 2022/2023. The highest level of external debt incurred by the Authority during 2022/2023 was £33.235m on 1 April 2022. This includes borrowing debt of £10.778m, injury pension liability of £6.639m, and £15.819m in relation to the Authority's long term liabilities (consisting of its PFI Schemes commitments and finance leases) which forms part of both borrowing limits in order to comply with IFRS accounting requirements.

Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

The Authority entered into a contract on 28 March 2003 to provide facilities at six new Community Fire Stations, a Service Headquarters and a new Technical Services Centre. These PFI facilities are located on more effective sites, designed and located to meet the Authority's strategic objectives. Improved community outcomes are being delivered through better engagement with communities through these facilities and the scheme has enabled a major redesign of service delivery. The contract expires on 2 May 2029 when all of the facilities will become the assets of the Authority.

In June 2009 the Authority also entered into a separate and collaborative PFI contract with Northumberland FRA and Durham and Darlington FRA to provide a new Community Fire Station at Tynemouth. The North East Fire and Rescue Authority (NEFRA) contract expires in May 2035.

The Authority's costs of both schemes are included within its financial statements and are regularly reviewed, challenged and monitored to achieve the lowest unitary charge cost possible to the Authority.

Estates and Facilities Asset Plan

The Authority is delivering the current Estates and Facilities Asset Plan in conjunction with the Lead Authority and its external service providers.

The key activities are:

- Continue to implement the findings and recommendations of a service wide Access Audit using a prioritised phased approach to ensure all our buildings and facilities comply with The Equalities Act 2010 and are accessible to all.
- Commissioned a comprehensive Stock Condition Survey (SCS) to inform and drive future capital investment.
- Completed a detailed service wide building and asset review that is resulting in the disposal/remodelling of surplus assets and the generation of both capital receipts and revenue savings. The review has primarily focussed on the identification of surplus assets, leases and license reviews and a re-evaluation of all third party business arrangements within the premises portfolio.
- Continue to explore collaborative and co-location opportunities with partner agencies. To date we have North East Ambulance Service (NEAS), Northumbria Police, Great North Air Ambulance Service, The Army, Northumbria Community Rehabilitation Company, RNLI, North of Tyne Mountain Rescue, The Princes Trust and Northumbria Blood Bikes, and a number of other smaller third party partners operating from our locations.

The Authority has limited earmarked reserves to assist in implementing the Estates and Facilities Asset Plan over the medium to long term.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

In 2021/2022, the HMICFRS carried out its second full inspection of the Service, which, like the first inspection in 2018/2019, continued to look at how effectively and efficiently the Service prevents and protects the public from, and responds to, fires and other emergencies, as well as examining how well we look after our people.

TWFRS was graded as 'Good' once again in all three key areas listed below, as it was in 2018/19, although the criteria to achieve 'Good' was much more challenging:

- How effective we are in keeping people safe from fire and other risks;
- How efficient we are in keeping people safe from fire and other risks;
- How well we look after our people.

The Inspection which was formally announced in July 2022 also identified fewer Areas For Improvement (AFI's) across all three pillars of inspection although the Authority is not complacent and will use the inspection report to support the continuous improvement agenda by addressing all of these areas for improvement.

Financial Statements

The Statement of Accounts shows the Authority's final accounts for 2022/2023. They have been prepared in accordance with the 'Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022/2023' and are based on International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), known more commonly as the Code. The Code constitutes 'proper accounting practice' under the terms of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, and the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Certain financial statements are required to be prepared under the Code of Practice as follows:

1. **Statement of Responsibilities**

This discloses the respective responsibilities of the Authority and the Finance Officer.

2. **Movement in Reserves Statement (MiRS)**

This statement shows the movement in the year on the different reserves held by the Authority, analysed into 'usable reserves' (i.e. those that can be applied to fund expenditure or reduce local taxation) and other non-usable reserves.

3. **Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement**

This statement shows the accounting cost in the year of providing services in accordance with generally accepted accounting practices, rather than the amount to be funded from taxation. Authorities raise taxation to cover expenditure in accordance with regulations; this may be different from the accounting cost. The taxation position is shown in the Movement in Reserves Statement.

4. **Balance Sheet**

The Balance Sheet shows the value at the Balance Sheet date of the assets and liabilities recognised by the Authority. The net assets / (liabilities) of the Authority (assets less liabilities) are matched by reserves held by the Authority.

5. **Cash Flow Statement**

The Cash Flow Statement shows the changes in cash and cash equivalents of the Authority during the reporting period.

6. **Notes (including a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information)**

The Notes to the financial statements have three significant roles. They:

- Present information about the basis of preparation of the financial statements and the specific accounting policies used;
- Disclose information that is required by the Code that is not presented elsewhere in the financial statements; and
- Disclose information that is not presented elsewhere in the financial statements but is relevant to an understanding of them.

7. **Supplementary Statements**

Firefighters' Pensions – Fund Account, Net Assets Statement and Notes

These statements summarise the transactions and the net assets relating to the Firefighters' Pension Fund, which are required to be reported separately within the Statement of Accounts for the Authority.



Dennis Napier
Finance Director

Dated: 30 June 2023

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2022/23



1 Scope of responsibility

- 1.1 Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards. It is also responsible for ensuring that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Authority has a duty under the Local Government Act [1999] to make arrangements to enable continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised.
- 1.2 In discharging these responsibilities, the Authority must put in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.3 A key component of the Authority's governance framework is its local Code of Corporate Governance, which is reviewed annually and developed in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy / Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (CIPFA / SOLACE) 2016 *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework*.
- 1.4 This statement sets out how the Authority has complied with the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, regulation 6(1) (a) and (b); which requires the Authority to prepare and publish an Annual Governance Statement.

2 The purpose of the governance framework

- 2.1 The Authority's governance framework comprises of systems, processes, culture and values by which it is directed and controlled and its activities through which it is accountable to, engages with and leads the community. This framework enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services and value for money.
- 2.2 The system of internal control is a significant part of the governance framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Authority's objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised, the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.
- 2.3 This statement describes the key elements of the Authority's governance framework, which brings together legislative requirements, governance principles and management processes.

- 2.4 The Authority's governance framework has continued to be in place for the year ending 31 March 2023 and up to the date of approval of this statement.

3 Applying the principles of good governance at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority

- 3.1 The Authority's local Code of Corporate Governance brings together in one document all the governance and accountability arrangements it has in place. This Code was updated and submitted to the Authority for their approval in July 2022. In preparing this Statement, the CIPFA/SOLACE framework is used as a benchmark by which to measure against.
- 3.2 The narrative below includes key examples of how the Authority has adhered to its governance commitments set out in the core principles of the Code. The Authority has a broad range of strategies and policies in place, and therefore this is not intended to be an exhaustive list.
- 3.3 **Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating a strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.**

The Authority's constitution acts as a framework to support decision-making and ensure all legal, financial and statutory requirements are met and are supported by standing orders, financial regulations and a scheme of delegation.

Under the supervision of the Monitoring Officer, the Authority adheres to the legislative requirements and integrates the key principles of good administrative law – rationality, legality and natural justice in their procedures and decision-making processes. The Authority is transparent about how decisions are made and recorded and ensures appropriate legal, financial and other professional advice is considered as part of the decision-making process. Value for money is measured and the results considered prior to making decisions.

The leadership sets a tone for creating a climate of openness and respect and fosters a culture based on shared values, ethical principles and good conduct. The Authority operates two codes of conduct, one for Members, and a new Code of Ethics (introduced in October 2022) for staff. These codes define the standards of behaviour expected by Members and staff, work between Members and Officers, the Authority, the fire service, its partners and the community. Standards of behaviour are defined and communicated through these Codes, protocols and other policies and procedures. The Code of Conduct for Members is monitored by the Monitoring Officer and overseen by the Governance Committee. The Code of Conduct for staff is monitored by the Human Resource Department. Any allegations of wrongdoing are thoroughly investigated in accordance with the relevant disciplinary policies and procedures.

The Authority has arrangements to maintain registers of Members' personal and business interests and a register of gifts and hospitality. Records are held by the Monitoring Officer on behalf of Members. The Human Resources department records these details for staff on behalf of the Chief Fire Officer.

The fire service's recruitment policy, induction and training processes incorporate personal behaviours with ethical values. Core values are embedded and the People Board considers matters relating to equality, diversity and inclusion issues. The annual equality data and gender pay gap report was presented to the HR Committee on 3 October 2022.

Procurement and financial regulations are clear and used to protect processes that could be influenced by unethical behaviour. A full procurement process is adhered to which ensures these ethical standards are upheld.

An anti-fraud and corruption policy manages the risk of fraud and corruption and takes preventative steps and outlines the arrangements for confidential and anonymous reporting / whistleblowing (via Safecall), promotes detection and provides a clear route for investigation and prosecution, where fraudulent and / or corrupt activities or behaviour have been identified. Whistleblowing arrangements are being used, and the Authority responds appropriately. These arrangements have assisted with the maintenance of a strong regime of internal control.

A new, standalone Whistle Blowing Policy, and a Whistle Blowing Procedure, were developed in 2022/23, for implementation in May 2023.

When working in partnership Members and staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities, both individually and collectively, in relation to the partnership and to the Authority or the fire service. There is clarity about the legal status of the partnership and representatives or organisations understand and make clear to partners the extent of their authority to bind their organisation to partner decisions in an ethical way.

3.4 Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.

Authority and committee meetings are open for the public to attend. The Authority's Annual General Meeting took place on 27 June 2022.

The Authority ensures that all major decisions are captured, documented and published on Sunderland City Council's website (the Authority's secretariat). Community Risk Management Planning (CRMP) decisions and significant decisions are also reported on the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) website.

The Authority publishes data in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 and has adopted the Information Commissioner Office model Publication Scheme, which ensure that up-to-date information relating to the structure, activities, finances, plans, policies, performance and governance of the Authority and the fire service is published, increasing democratic accountability.

The Reserves Policy is published providing transparency to stakeholders about the purpose and level of the reserves held by the Authority. In addition, the audited Statement of Accounts, Annual Governance Statement, Narrative Statement and external auditor's reports are published annually on the TWFRS website. A commitment to openness is also shown through the distribution of strategic documents including the TWFRS Strategy 2025 and key performance information.

A variety of methods are used to engage with the public including directed communication using social media channels, This includes promoting awareness campaigns about fire, water and road safety and anti-social behaviour reduction.

Community safety policies and procedures outline the Authority's approach to engaging with the community, in particular minority and vulnerable sectors of society. The fire service operates a safeguarding policy and procedure to refer vulnerable people to partner agencies where additional support is required.

Staff frequently conduct engagement with householders and businesses through a range of prevention and protection activities including Safe and Well visits and fire safety audits. Engagement with young people is conducted via the fire service's interactive learning centre Safetyworks!, the Princes Trust Programme, Phoenix Programme and the Juvenile Firesetters Education Programme (JFEP), boxing hub, Fire Cadets and educational visits to schools.

Public consultation and engagement arrangements are in place to invite the views of stakeholders prior to developing and implementing key changes. During 2022/23, the Authority carried out informal consultation to support the development of the new Community Risk Management Plan 2024-27. The Authority carries out a statutory business rate and council tax consultation each year.

Staff engagement is carried out by a range of methods, including Executive Leadership Team listening events, all staff engagement sessions, and an 'Ask the CFO' email address. Staff are encouraged to contribute to feedback via team and department meetings, and through the line management structure.

The fire service proactively engages with representative bodies, which include the Fire Brigades Union, GMB, and Unison. This relationship is managed through the Joint Consultative Forum, which considers issues associated with staff relations and policy development. This forum complements the daily arrangements that support effective industrial relations management.

The fire service has a compliments and complaints policy and procedure in place and is able to respond effectively to any compliment or complaint in timely manner. This process is managed and monitored internally and reported quarterly to the Corporate Governance Board, annually to the Executive Leadership Team and to the Governance Committee.

The Authority recognises the role it plays in supporting partnership working across Tyne and Wear and the contribution of partners in assisting it to deliver its own objectives. The fire service's vision, strategy and strategic plans (such as the CRMP), and priorities are developed through robust mechanisms, and in consultation with staff, the community and other key stakeholders.

The Authority has formal partnership arrangements in place with Sunderland City Council to provide specialist support services. Other arrangements with emergency service partners demonstrate clear and appropriate governance accountabilities. The fire service operates a partnership register, which provides a framework for staff involved in or considering new partnership arrangements and assists in reviewing existing arrangements.

3.5 Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.

The Authority's purpose and intended outcomes for service users is communicated, both within the fire service and to external stakeholders. The TWFRS Strategy 2025 explains how the fire service intends to deliver high quality services that meets the needs of its communities now and in the future. The strategy presents a clear vision, strategic goals, and priorities for a five-year period.

The CRMP 2022-24 drives continuous improvement and innovation in the fire service, ensuring that services are planned, designed and delivered in a way that balances efficiency and community risk. The CRMP process is used to improve community outcomes, strengthen prevention, reduce costs, reduce incidents and manage the risk in our communities. The CRMP is based on the analysis of extensive data and information, local intelligence, and a comprehensive understanding of local, regional and national risks.

The Community Risk Profile 2020-2023 (CRP) provides a comprehensive and forward-looking assessment of the risks in the communities of Tyne and Wear. The CRMP 2022-24 contains actions, which ensure that risks, including those identified in the CRP, are appropriately addressed and resources are targeted at these risks.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021/2022 to 2024/2025, and the annual budget process, ensures that financial resources are directed to the Authority's priorities. The MTFS and the Efficiency Plan are key to delivering value for money.

Budget monitoring remains robust at both strategic and service levels via the production of regular financial monitoring reports for both Capital and Revenue budgets. These reports, as well as being scrutinised by budget managers, are reported to the Executive Leadership Team and quarterly to the full Fire Authority.

Annual department plans are in place and are supported by risk / business continuity planning. All departments prepare and monitor a suite of key performance indicators (KPIs) to review service standards and promote continuous improvement of corporate services.

Equality impact and risk assessments are carried out to ensure that any changes to procedures do not affect any stakeholders adversely and service delivery outcomes are not affected. Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) are also beginning to be utilised.

The Authority's governance arrangements also extend to cover the wholly owned trading subsidiary "TWFRS Ltd".

3.6 Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.

The MTFS includes actions to ensure the financial sustainability of the Authority and the budget planning processes ensure budgets are prepared in accordance with objectives, strategies and the MTFS. This involves input from both the fire service

and Authority Members and shows how the resources will be deployed over the next few years to deliver agreed outcomes and agreed priorities.

Collaboration with partners and agencies is an important aspect of the Authority's work including prevention and protection, responding to incidents and use of resources. The fire service has a successful record of blue light collaboration, including co-location at a number of sites, joint training and exercising and improved operational and preventative activities.

The monitoring of staff availability, incidents, the workforce and budgets ensures that issues are identified and appropriate interventions agreed. The risk management policy sets out the process to identify and control exposure to uncertainty, which may impact on the achievement of the Authority's objectives or activities. A Corporate Risk Register is in place and is reviewed regularly to ensure that risks are appropriately managed.

National Fire Standards, National Occupational Standards and National Operational Guidance are overseen by the appropriate business areas, which ensure they are integrated into the fire service.

The fire service operates a performance management framework. Performance reports are produced and reported to Executive Leadership Team, the Policy and Performance Committee and full Fire Authority quarterly, for scrutiny and transparency.

Arrangements are in place for compliance with health and safety requirements. Health and safety policies and procedures detail roles and responsibilities and accident and investigation reporting internally and to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences regulations 2013 (RIDDOR). The fire service has participated in the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Achievement Awards, consistently achieving the gold award, which demonstrates high health and safety standards

3.7 Principle E: Developing the Service's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.

The Authority ensures the necessary roles and responsibilities for effective governance are identified and allocated so there is accountability for decisions made. This is done through the Constitution and the Scheme of Delegation, which outlines the roles of Members and officers, which includes statutory roles of Chief Fire Officer, Finance Director and Monitoring Officer.

The fire service manages the performance of its staff through effective policies, procedures and working practices. To ensure the fire service meets the needs of the community staff have the skills, knowledge and experience they need to perform well. Robust recruitment and selection processes and detailed job profiles support this.

Induction processes are in place for Members and staff. These include an introduction to the fire service, values and codes of conduct and the requirements of the role. The Authority operates a Members learning and development programme

to improve Member knowledge, skills and abilities in their individual or collective roles in meeting the Authority's strategic objectives.

The health and wellbeing of the workforce is achieved through a range of measures including HR policies and guidance documents, flexible working, a fitness advisor and the work of the occupational health unit who provide counselling, physiotherapy, trauma support and wellbeing at work initiatives. The fire service were awarded the 'Better Health at Work' gold award.

Appropriate training is conducted for operational and non-operational staff; ensuring staff acquire, maintain and develop appropriate technical and professional skills required for their roles and to support the achievements of the Authority's strategic objectives. Staff are required to perform their roles safely, confidently and effectively in accordance with Service training policy and in alignment with identified role maps, National Operational Guidance, National Occupational Standards and competency frameworks for operational staff.

A team of officers regularly attend incidents, training and exercises to carry out a performance and review role, observing aspects of operational performance and feeding back improvement actions. Information gathered to verify and measure compliance with standard operating procedures and incident management systems is recorded.

All staff participate in the annual Performance Development Review (PDR) process where they and their manager discuss and set expectations about personal objectives and how they align to corporate goals. PDRs support staff to understand how they are performing and what opportunities are available for training and career progression.

The fire service achieved the Investors in People Gold Award status, which benchmarks the effectiveness of its leadership and management practices.

3.8 Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.

The Authority's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Public Service Organisations. The Finance Director is the designated Chief Finance Officer in accordance with Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 ensuring lawfulness and financial prudence of decision-making, and is responsible for the proper administration of the Authority's financial affairs.

Financial management supports the delivery of services and transformational change as well as securing good stewardship. There are comprehensive budgeting systems in place and a robust system of budgetary control, including quarterly and annual financial reports, which indicate financial performance against forecasts. The Authority's Statements of Accounts are subject to scrutiny and the External Auditor delivers an opinion annually on whether the Authority is providing value for money. There is regular reporting of non-financial performance against targets and priorities to the Executive Leadership Team and to Members via the Fire Authority and Committees.

Under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) (Part 1. Para 2(1) (C)) and The Fire and Rescue Services Act [2004] there is a duty for all Category 1 Responders to prepare plans to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that the fire service can perform its core functions in an emergency.

The fire service use a robust and transparent five stage framework to identify, assess, treat, report and review risk that utilises the right tools, methods and processes to manage risk in a transparent way. This framework conforms with the risk management legislation outlined within the Civil Contingencies Act [2004] and its supporting guidance, namely, The Principles of Effective Response and Recovery in addition to aligning with the ISO31000 international standard of risk management.

The Authority aligns with ISO22301 for Business Continuity and arrangements are in place to ensure that critical services can continue in the event of disruption and are subject to regular review, development and testing. Business continuity plans were in operation during the Covid pandemic and activities have been co-ordinated with partners through the LRF to support the multi-agency response.

Management arrangements ensure that recommendations for improvement made by the Internal Auditor and the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), as well as self-identified improvements are monitored and progress regularly reported on.

Policies for anti-fraud and corruption and whistleblowing are in place, which confirms the Authority's commitment to operating in a fair and transparent manner. The Authority participates in the National Fraud Initiative. A new, standalone Whistle Blowing Policy and Procedure has been developed in 2022/23 and will be implemented in May 2023.

Policies are in place to manage the handling of data including adherence to data protection legislation, Freedom of Information requests, data quality, storage and retention and information security. Where appropriate information sharing protocols have been developed and agreed with partners.

Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability.

The Governance Committee operates in accordance with guidance provided by CIPFA, oversees, and reviews the adequacy and effectiveness of the governance arrangements and internal control environment.

Reports and minutes of the Authority and its committees are publicly available on Sunderland City Councils website (the Authority's secretariat). Reports follow a structured format, which ensures that key information is presented in a clear and consistent manner to aid decision-making.

The Authority publishes information relating to salaries, business interests and performance data. Members and officers declare relevant interests in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK. These declarations enable the Authority to identify and report any related party transactions The Annual Pay Policy Statement is approved and published in accordance with the Localism Act 2011. Members' salaries are paid in accordance

with the Independent Remuneration Panel decisions and reported on the TWFRS website.

The Procurement Services Manager provides advice and clear guidance on the procuring of goods and services. There is a robust system of scrutiny, which includes competitive and formal procurement with advertising of opportunities in line with the Public Contracts regulations (PCR2015). Procurements are awarded on the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) principle. Reports on significant (£500,000 and above) procurements are prepared for approval by Fire Authority.

The Annual Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement are subject to scrutiny and approval in accordance with the Authority's Constitution. The Annual Statement of Accounts provides clear information on income and expenditure and demonstrates the stewardship of public money for the year. The statutory deadline for submission of accounts for audit is 31 May, however this is currently being challenged and could move to June / July. The Annual Governance Statement provides transparency on the governance arrangements and the planned improvements for the coming year. The External Auditor provides an opinion on the Statement of Accounts, which is published on the Authority's website. The Authority acts on recommendations and, where necessary, takes corrective action.

The Authority maintains an Internal Audit service, provided by Sunderland City Council. An independent periodic review of its effectiveness is undertaken which concluded that it operated in accordance with professional standards. Internal audit work is planned on the basis of risk. The work of Internal Audit provides assurance that key risks are being managed. The Authority acts on recommendations and where necessary, takes improvement action.

Processes are in place to ensure that recommendations from HMICFRS and regulatory bodies are actioned.

4 Review of effectiveness

4.1 The Authority has responsibility for conducting a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control, at least annually and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer leads the review of the effectiveness.

4.2 The effectiveness of the governance framework draws on evidence and assurances from the work of the Authority and its committees, statutory officers, the Executive Leadership Team, the work of Internal and External Audit and other review agencies and HMICFRS. The process applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework is set out below:

4.3 The Authority

4.3.1 The Authority's Constitution sets out how it operates, how decisions are made and the procedures, which are followed to ensure these, are efficient, transparent, and accountable. Member training sessions are organised throughout the year to discuss matters in more detail and in an informal environment

4.3.2 The Annual General Meeting of the Authority takes place in June of each year. The format and structure of its democratic decision process is re-affirmed, and approval

is given to the powers and make-up of the Governance Committee, Policy and Performance Committee and Human Resources Committee. The terms of reference and responsibilities of these committees form part of the Authority's Standing Orders.

- 4.3.3 In addition to the above committees, there are a further three committees and a sub-committee, which meet on an ad-hoc basis to discuss specific matters as and when they arise. They are the Appointments Committee, Disciplinary Appeals Committee, Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee and an Emergency Committee.
- 4.3.4 The Authority and its committee structure monitor the effectiveness of the governance framework through the consideration of regular performance, financial and strategic risk management reports. The Authority and its committees receive regular feedback from senior officers on the delivery of services and the achievement of objectives and targets. The Chair of the Authority, Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Director oversee the review and sign off the Annual Governance Statement.

4.4 **Governance Committee**

- 4.4.1 The Governance Committee considers the effectiveness of the Authority's governance arrangements, risk management arrangements, control environment and anti-fraud and corruption arrangements and seeks assurance that action is being taken on risk-related issues identified by the auditors and the HMICFRS on corporate governance matters.
- 4.4.2 The committee receives and considers Internal Audit's Annual Plan and Annual Report and the reports and opinions of External Audit, including the Annual Audit Letter and monitors management action in response to the issues raised.
- 4.4.3 The committee has a responsibility to ensure internal control systems are effective and that policies and practices are compliant with statutory requirements, other regulations and guidance. This committee satisfies themselves that the Authority's assurance statements properly reflect the risk environment, drive any actions required to improve it, and will make recommendations or comments to the Authority as appropriate.
- 4.4.4 The committee is responsible for the ethical framework of the Authority and promotes high standards of conduct, working closely with the Monitoring Officer to deal with complaints about Members conduct.
- 4.4.5 The Governance Committee aligns with the core functions of an audit committee, as identified in CIPFA's *Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities* and undertakes an assurance and advisory role.

4.5 **Statutory Officer roles:**

- 4.5.1 The Authority appointments the following statutory officers:
- The Head of Paid Service (Chief Fire Officer) has overall responsibility for the management and operational activities of the fire service and:

- Provides professional advice to the Authority and its committees; and
- Ensures a system for recording and reporting Authority decisions, together with the Monitoring Officer.
- The Chief Finance Officer (Finance Director and s151 Officer) has overall responsibility for the financial management of the Authority and:
 - Ensures that the financial position of the Authority is monitored throughout the year and consideration is given to financial implications when taking decisions and with the support of External Audit that financial processes are complied with.
 - For advising both senior managers and elected members on all financial matters in line with CIPFA's document Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010). The Authority's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA statement.
 - The post holder is professionally qualified and has many years' experience within Local Authority finance.
- The Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for:
 - Ensuring compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations, and the lawfulness and fairness of decision-making.
 - Reporting on matters they believe are, or are likely to be, illegal or amount to maladministration;
 - Matters relating to the conduct of Members and Principal Officers; and
 - The operation of the Authority's constitution.

4.6 The Executive Leadership Team

4.6.1 The Executive Leadership Team are responsible for the development and maintenance of the governance environment by:

- providing clear direction to the fire service and senior managers;
- providing information from various sources to inform governance arrangements, e.g. performance reports, financial and risk management arrangements and;
- contributing to the completion and review of the Annual Governance Statement;

4.7 Financial Planning

4.7.1 The MTFS provides the financial strand linking the budget-planning framework for Revenue and Capital budgets with Authority and fire service goals and priorities over a rolling 4 year period. The MTFS is presented to Fire Authority as part of the Revenue Budget report and published papers are made available to the public in February of each year on Sunderland City Councils' website.

4.7.2 The budget planning framework and draft budget is scrutinised and approved by Authority as part of a well-embedded budget cycle process each year culminating with final approval in February by Fire Authority. This process ensures that a realistic and affordable budget is approved in accordance with the advice of the Finance Director (Section 151 Officer), who provides assurance to members that the budget is prudent, affordable and sustainable.

- 4.7.3 The Authority approved a balanced budget for 2022/23 on 14 February 2022. Monitoring of expenditure against the budget is carried out throughout the year and Executive Leadership Team is regularly kept informed of the position. Formal quarterly reports are also provided to Authority where the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme are scrutinised and actions approved by members of the Authority as considered necessary. The fire service reported an estimated underspend of £0.700m for the financial year 2022/23, the detail of which is set out in the quarterly budget monitoring report made to Authority in January 2023. The final position however will not be known until the outturn report is finalised and reported to members in June 2023.
- 4.7.4 The Authority continued to ensure it had good arrangements for managing its finances and achieving value for money throughout the year. The financial planning process and the need to provide best value services is well embedded and understood across the Authority by Members and staff. A financial services team, managed by the Head of Financial Services who reports directly to the Finance Director maintains the correct competencies and ensures that the Authority and the Executive Leadership Team receive appropriate financial information to support the key decisions and objectives of the fire service.
- 4.7.5 The proposed Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2022/23 (including both borrowing and investment strategies) proposed for 2022/2023 and the Prudential 'Treasury Management' Indicators for 2022/2023 to 2025/2026 was presented to the Governance Committee in March 2022 for scrutiny before it was fully approved by the Authority.
- 4.7.6 The Treasury Management Policy and Strategy and its Prudential Indicators, which are regularly monitored and formally reported to Governance Committee quarterly, ensure that the Authority's proposed Capital Programme is sustainable, affordable and achievable within the total resources envelope available to the Authority and also helps inform the MTFS.

4.8 Financial Management Code

- 4.8.1 In October 2019, CIPFA issued a new Financial Management Code. The purpose of the Code is to support good practice in financial management and to assist authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. It contains a set of minimum standards for financial management for local authorities, including fire authorities.
- 4.8.2 A detailed review has been undertaken by the Finance Director, which concluded that the Authority's arrangements comply with CIPFA's Financial Management Code.

4.9 Performance Management

- 4.9.1 There is a system of performance management embedded within the Authority's management structure and processes. The TWFRS Strategy 2025 sets out the Authority's key objectives, which are reflected in the annual departmental plans and KPIs. These plans are monitored by the Business Improvement Team, managed by

the Senior Leadership Team and key outcomes reported to the Executive Leadership Team and Authority regularly.

- 4.9.2 The Operational Standards Programme, introduced in 2021/2022 has provided substantial assurance. Areas for improvement identified were fed back to the crew and incorporated into future training programmes. A new programme of Operational Standards 2022/23 has seen a continuation of station visits, support to phase II firefighters, and development of leadership pathways for supervisory commanders.
- 4.9.3 The performance management framework is under review, with the aim to improve the management and reporting of corporate performance.

4.10 Risk Management

- 4.10.1 The Governance Committee received a progress report regarding the management of corporate risks on 6 March 2023, to ensure independent scrutiny of the corporate risk register. The Chair noted the good practice of critically evaluating the register (min no.31/21 refers) which provides assurance to the committee that risk is being managed appropriately.
- 4.10.2 The corporate risks facing the Authority were reviewed on 9 March 2023 by the Executive Leadership Team as part of their ongoing management of risk and there is currently one risk that is categorised as intolerable on the register, namely:
- 01/20 Risk that the impending Remedy for Age Discrimination in Pension Schemes results in detrimental Financial and workforce impacts for the Service.
- 4.10.3 The Executive Leadership Team continue to monitor this risk closely and apply the appropriate mitigation whilst reporting progress to the Governance Committee and Authority as part of the annual cycle of committee meetings for independent scrutiny and information, discussion and challenge respectively.

4.11 Business Continuity

- 4.11.1 The Service ensures business continuity arrangements remain fit for purpose by undertaking regular reviews and updating individual business continuity plans as appropriate. Specific plans are also created and reviewed as required (i.e. Covid-19) to ensure the delivery of critical activities during any business interruption. The programme of testing and exercising of business continuity plans underpins the business continuity management system.
- 4.11.2 Throughout 2022/23, the Service faced the additional risk of industrial action. To ensure the Service was prepared for this, the TWFRS Emergency Management Group was activated on 14 July 2022, and extensive work was undertaken to ensure suitable and sufficient business continuity arrangements were in place to provide a fire and rescue service in the event of a strike. This work included developing a new Concept of Operations, and Logistics Cell.

4.12 Internal Audit

4.12.1 Internal Audit is a key source of assurance for the Annual Governance Statement and operates in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. Internal Audit review the effectiveness of the Authority's governance arrangements, including the system of internal control, and reports on its adequacy. Internal Audit follow an audit plan based on an assessment of potential risks for the various systems and procedures.

4.12.2 The Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23 was noted and agreed by Governance Committee at their meeting on 7 March 2022 and set out the proposed plan of work for the Authority. The following audits took place during the year, and gave overall assurance levels of substantial (risk levels are low) or moderate (risk levels are acceptable):

- Business Continuity Arrangements (Substantial assurance confirmed);
- Partnership Working (Substantial assurance confirmed);
- Information Governance and compliance with GDPR (Moderate assurance confirmed).

4.12.3 In addition to the above, audit work was also undertaken on the Lead Authority's key financial systems, which are used by the Authority. Systems audited covered during the year included:

- Accounts Payable and Payroll (Transaction Testing) and substantial assurance was confirmed.

4.12.4 The Governance Committee were updated on progress against the audit plan at their meeting in March 2023.

4.13 External Audit:

4.13.1 External audit is undertaken by Mazars, a limited liability partnership appointed by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited for this purpose. The Annual Audit Letter gives independent assurance of the Authority's financial control and Value for Money arrangements (including financial resilience and the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the Authority's arrangements).

4.13.2 The External Auditor has yet to issue their opinion on the Authority's Financial Statements for the year ending 31st March 2022. Particulars of the auditor's findings in respect of the audit of the accounts will be included in their detailed draft Audit Completion Report once issued to the Governance Committee, where it is expected to provide assurance of an unqualified audit opinion on the accounts and detailed on the Authority's arrangements for achieving value for money.

4.13.3 Mazars are expected to issue an unqualified opinion on both the Authority's financial statements and Value for Money Conclusion although the audit completion date is still unknown because it has been affected by a LGPS pension valuation issue that will impact upon the accounts for 2021/22. Past audits have not provided any issues of concern and this is the expected outcome for 2021/22

4.14 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection

4.14.1 The Authority was first inspected by HMICFRS in 2018/19, and again in 2021/22, and judged as Good for all three areas of inspection:

- Effectiveness – our emergency response and services we provide to the public
- Efficiency – how we manage our finances and how efficient we are
- People – our culture, training and how we treat our people

4.14.2 The third round of full inspections is scheduled for 2023/24.

5 How the Authority addressed the governance improvement actions from 2020/2021

5.1 The Annual Governance Statement 2021/22 contained 9 improvement actions, comprising of four actions new actions identified during the 2021/22 annual governance review and five legacy actions.

5.2 Progress against these actions was reported to the Executive Leadership Team on 2 May 2023, where five were noted as complete and four actions remain to be completed. These actions are listed below:

- Action ref 60 2019/20 - Information Asset Register (IAR) and recording system to be reviewed, supported by new technology and further training. (*complete*)
- Action ref 7 2021/22 - Arrange for the provision of anti-fraud and bribery training for TWFRS Members, managers and staff. (*complete*)
- Action ref 67b 2020/21 - Roll out training on Corporate Governance for SLT including information asset management. (*complete*)
- Action ref 2 2022/23 - Develop a structured management development programme for the Senior Management Group. (*complete*)
- Action ref 4 2022/23 – Review, and where appropriate, update the All Personnel Code of Conduct. (*complete*)
- Action ref 43 2018/19 - Review and streamline policies and procedures, to include PIA & EIA and support training, to align to new strategic planning framework. (*partially complete*)
- Action ref 8 2021/22 - Further guidance and training required for staff on Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) to improve staff understanding of and compliance with PIA requirements. (*partially complete*)
- Action ref 1 2022/23 - Develop a Communications and Engagement Strategy that sets out how the Service will continue to effectively engage with internal and external stakeholders. (*complete*)

- Action ref 3 2022/23 – Review and improve the Service’s Information Governance approach and develop an Information Governance Framework (*partially complete*)

5.3 Appendix A provides a concise high-level summary of the action taken during 2022/23 to progress these actions.

6 Opinion on the Governance Framework

6.1 The review of the effectiveness of the governance framework shows that the arrangements continue to be fit for purpose and reasonable assurance can be given that the framework is operating adequately in practice.

6.2 No review can provide absolute assurance; this statement is intended to provide reasonable assurance that there is an ongoing process for reviewing the governance framework and its operation in practice.

6.3 Whilst the governance framework is considered adequate a couple of issues have been identified that need to be addressed to further enhance the Authority’s governance arrangements and are outlined in section 7.

7 Governance matters identified for improvement during 2023/24

7.1 The review of the effectiveness of the Authority’s governance framework has identified no additional actions for 2023/24. This is due to the continued and focussed improvements to corporate governance monitoring, and better awareness of corporate governance amongst managers in the Service.

7.2 There are three improvement actions for completion during 2023/24, all of which are legacy actions carried forward from the 2022/23 action plan.

7.3 The Corporate Governance Board and Governance Committee have responsibility for ensuring the delivery of the actions needed to improve the Authority’s governance framework.

8 Assurance summary

8.1 The Authority recognises that good governance provides the foundation for the delivery of good quality services that meet the needs of stakeholders and ensures that public money is well spent. This review confirms the governance systems and monitoring arrangements in place for 2022/23 are working effectively.

8.2 The Authority is satisfied that appropriate governance arrangements are in operation and remains committed to enhancing these via the delivery of the action plan for 2023/24.

8.3 To the best of our knowledge, the governance arrangements, as defined above and within the Authority’s Local Code of Corporate Governance, have been effectively operating during the year 2022/23 with the exception of the outstanding actions at 5.2. We pledge our commitment that over the coming year we will take steps to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps

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will address the need for improvements that were identified and will monitor their implementation and operation during the year and as part of our next annual review.

Cllr Phillip Tye

Chris Lowther

Dennis Napier

Chair of the Fire Authority

Chief Fire Officer and
Chief Executive

Finance Director
(S151 Officer)

Date:

Date:

Date:

Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 - Annual Action Plan

Ref	Area for improvement	Lead Officer	Responsible Officer	Actions Status
1 2022/23	Develop a communication and engagement strategy that sets out how the fire and rescue service will continue to effectively engage with both internal and external stakeholders.	AM Data, Digital & Safety	Media and Communications Manager	Action Complete The Communication, Engagement and Consultation Strategy has been consulted on with Senior Management Group, and appropriate amendments made. The final version was published in June 2023. The Strategy sets a clear direction for internal and external engagement, and will be supported by an internal and external communication, engagement and consultation plans – being developed in 2023.
2 2022/23	Develop and deliver a structured management development programme for the Senior Management Group.	HR Director	Organisational Development Manager Organisational Development Advisor	Action complete A structured management development programme was initiated in 2022 and five sessions have now been delivered with a further three, where specific topics have already been assigned, scheduled for delivery. Sessions are delivered on average every 6 to 8 weeks with content designed around topical subjects which address specific areas of leadership and management; and provide opportunity for learning and growth for TWFRS leaders. Work is currently being undertaken to publish this on the Organisational Development pages on the intranet. The Service has implemented the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Supervisory Leadership Development Programme in 2023, with all those participating in the initial rollout phase now inducted and progressing with the programme. In October 2022, a business case to commence the NFCC Middle Management Development Programme was agreed. This course is currently in development by NFCC and the Service will roll this out once a launch date is confirmed and training material is available.
3 2022/23	Review and improve the fire and rescue service's information governance	HR Director	Information Governance Advisor	In progress A new Information Management Framework has been developed, based upon all elements of the information life cycle and includes

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	approach and develop an information governance framework.	AM Data, Digital & Safety	HR Services Manager Head of ICT Head of Data, Information and Safety	essential sign posting to our updated procedures relating to information governance. Benchmarking has been undertaken against the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) accountability tracker and in accordance with Fire Standards Board (FSB) criteria for information governance related Fire Standards. This is to ensure our policy content aligns to statutory requirements. There will be further review of this benchmarking following additional guidance due to be published by the FSB in relation to compliance with Fire Standards. Several policies and procedures were approved by ELT, and the overarching Framework will be reviewed and approved at the July 2023 ELT meeting.
4 2022/23	Review and where appropriate update the All Personnel Code of Conduct.	HR Director	HR Director	Action complete The Service's Code of Conduct was reviewed and refreshed to incorporate the national Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services in England. The national Core Code of Ethics was developed in partnership with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), Local Government Association (LGA) and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) to support a consistent approach to ethics, including behaviours, by fire and rescue services in England. An e-learning package has also been developed for staff to complete to support the implementation of the Service's new Code of Conduct and Ethics.
7 2021/22	Arrange for the provision of anti-fraud and bribery training for TWFRS Members, managers and staff	HR Director	Head of Learning and Development Multimedia Technician	Action complete An e-learning package for the Service anti-fraud and bribery training has now been launched and is available for all staff to complete. In addition, to further support the roll out of this training, a counter fraud framework has been drafted and is now in the consultation phase prior to publication.

				The Monitoring Officer has confirmed that Members receive training from their 'home' councils so there is no further action required in respect of Member training.
8 2021/22	Further guidance and training required for staff on Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) to improve staff understanding of and compliance with PIA requirements.	HR Director	Information Governance Advisor HR Services Manager	<p>In progress In line with current Information Commissioners Office (ICO) guidance the Service has moved from the Privacy Impact Assessment requirements to incorporate the Data Protection Principles in to a Data Protection Impact Assessment.</p> <p>The Data Protection and GDPR policy is now published and a new DPIA template is in use. A trial of the revised DPIA process was carried out successfully on the refresh of the Body Worn Video Cameras policy.</p> <p>A DPIA guidance document is under consultation to support the completion of the screening questions/DPIA. DPIA requirements is explained within the e-learning package, additional 1 to 1 training/support is available as required.</p> <p>A request for an extension for this action to August 2023, to accommodate approval route for publication and delivery of the training.</p>
43 2018/19	Review and streamline policies and procedures, to include PIA and Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and support training, to align to new strategic planning framework.	HR Director	Information Governance Advisor HR Services Manager	<p>In progress A revised process for developing and reviewing Service Policy and Procedure is now fully implemented which includes EIA. The Service has adopted a DPIA which covers the requirements of a PIA, in line with the ICO guidance. DPIA requirements and guidance is incorporated within the overarching Information Management Framework (noted in action 3 of this action plan) and further training is to be delivered (as noted in action 8). The Service is in the process of rolling out PIA training and templates</p>

				Proposed completed date of August 2023 to accommodate the appropriate review of all required policies and procedures.
60 2019/20	Information Asset Register (IAR) and recording system to be reviewed, supported by new technology and further training.	HR Director AM Data, Digital & Safety	Information Governance Advisor HR Services Manager Head of ICT	Action Complete A new IAR template is now in place that also includes the Record of Processing Activities (ROPA) to ensure we have a lawful basis for processing. Guidance documentation and training for Information Asset Owners (IAO) and administrators has been produced and delivered. All IAOs are currently carrying out data mapping exercises within their teams on the new IAR template to inform the final identification and allocation of information assets across the Service. Microsoft 365 functionality is being explored to effectively manage IARs and enhance the control of IARs within the Service eg. retention automation
67 2020/21	Roll out training on corporate governance (CG) for the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) including b) info asset management.	HR Director	Information Governance Advisor	Action Complete An initial Information Asset Owner training session was delivered to the SLT in February 2023 by the Information Governance Advisor, with follow up individual training sessions conducted with Department Heads. These one to one sessions will continue on a rolling basis to maintain and develop knowledge for IAOs. In addition, an Information Governance e-learning package was produced and has been launched to all staff in early 2023.

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority

Statement of Accounts 2022/2023 – Important Notification - regarding the Changes to the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (as amended 2023)

This Notification applies to the audit of all local government bodies including the Fire Authority (and also to other bodies within the scope of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015) for the two financial year ending 31st March 2023.

Background Information

In response to a recent consultation process held in February 2023 the government has decided to further amend the [Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015](#) ('the Regulations) for the financial year 2022/2023 in respect of the timetable for publishing the Authority’s audited statement of accounts and other required information which is issued at the same time as the audited financial statements which includes the Narrative Statement and the Annual Governance Statement. The date the audited accounts must be published is now 30th September 2023.

The 2023 Amendments have also changed the common inspection period which under the 2015 Regulations is now to revert back to their original date which includes the first 10 working days of June and that the accounts subject to audit have to be published by 31st May 2023.

The amended publication timetable for the 2022/2023 Accounts

The new publication timetable is outlined in the table below:

	Original Timetable applicable before Statutory Changes	Revised Timetable	Authority Timetable
Draft financial statements subject to audit	31 st May 2023	31st May 2023	30th June 2023
Final audited financial statements	31 st July 2023	30th September 2023	30th September 2023 (subject to external auditor confirmation)

Although the revised timetable for 2022/23 allows more flexibility to the external auditor, there was no additional flexibility for the Authority. The regulations make it clear that authorities can publish both draft and audited accounts before the revised deadlines set out above if they are able and so wish.

The Authority regrettably however made the decision to publish its accounts and financial statements subject to audit later than the statutory deadline because of specific challenges with its previous years accounts (2021/22) which are yet to signed off by the external auditor as a result of changes to Local Government Pension Scheme data and disclosures which had a material impact on the accounts.

What this means for public inspection rights

Although the common inspection period has been reverted back to 31st May by the 2023 Regulation amendments, public inspection rights set out in the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 now also revert back to the fact the first 10 working days in June must form part of the 30 day inspection period.

This means that to comply fully with the Regulations the period for the inspection of public rights commences is on the day after the Authority has published its draft accounts, the Annual Governance Statement, the Narrative Statement and the Statement by the s151 officer that the accounts published are unaudited and subject to change.

For this Authority the following arrangements have been put in place:

The Authority is to publish the following documents, as required by Regulation 15(2) of the 2015 Regulations, on Wednesday 30th June 2023:

- The draft statement of accounts (subject to audit);
- A declaration signed by the Finance Director (the Authority's S151 Officer) that the accounts are unaudited and subject to change;
- The Annual Governance Statement; and
- The Narrative Statement.

In line with the 2015 Regulations, the period of public inspection will be revised in accordance with the Authority's revised timescales and the period of public inspection will now commence on Wednesday 30th June 2023 and will end on Thursday 10th August 2023.



Mr C Waddell
Mazars LLP
Salvus House
Aykley Heads
Durham
DH1 5TS

Date: 30th June 2023
Our ref:
Your ref:

Dear Cameron,

Audit of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority - Financial Statements for the year end 31 March 2023 - Understanding how those charged with governance gain assurance from management

I am writing with reference to your correspondence dated 7th June 2023, in relation to “Assurances from the Governance Committee as the body charged with Governance”, which seeks relevant assurances from those charged with governance required by external auditors under the International Auditing Standards. These assurances are provided below, representing Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority’s formal response from those charged with governance, which, for the purposes of the financial statements, is the Governance Committee.

As in previous years, the Governance Committee has considered the nature and extent of any significant internal and external operational, financial, compliance, fraud or other risks facing the Authority which might have an impact on the financial statements. These risks have been addressed in both the planning process for the audit of the financial statements (where officers and auditors have discussed key risks) and, to the extent that it is necessary, in the production of the financial statements.

The process for the production of the Annual Governance Statement should also mean that all key risks which would relate to the financial statements have been considered. In response to your correspondence please find responses to your questions below and also the completed Appendix 1, as requested.

Specific assurances:

1) I exercise oversight of management's processes through receiving reports as the Chair of the Governance Committee and discussions with key officers. I am aware of the following arrangements:

- ***undertaking an assessment of the risk that the financial statements may be materially misstated due to fraud or error (including the nature, extent and frequency of these assessments);***

This responsibility is exercised through the effective functioning of the Governance Committee, the constitution and operation of which follows CIPFA guidelines.

The Finance Director of the Authority is the designated Finance Officer in accordance with Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972. The Section 151 Officer attends all meetings of the Governance Committee to discuss and review findings of Internal and External Audit reviews and the level of adequacy of management's response. The Governance Committee also consider the Annual Governance Statement and the actions taken and proposed in relation to improving governance and internal controls.

The Committee reviews the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Internal Audit Plan and is able to comment on areas proposed for review and also receives updates from the work that they have carried out. The Authority's Corporate Risks are regularly reported and reviewed by the Committee and the Authority's Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy ensures that fraud risk or related concerns are escalated through to the appropriate level, or to this committee, if appropriate. Ad-hoc meetings between the Chair and the Finance Officer also take place where necessary and additionally the Chair has full and independent access to the internal auditor, who he meets separately as required. Roles and responsibilities of members and officers are clearly set out in Codes of Conduct, the Scheme of Delegation, the Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy, and in the Risk Management Strategy and Policy Statement. These also describe the relevant registers, declarations and escalation processes to be complied with.

The Governance Committee declares that it has no knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged fraud that could affect the Authority in relation to the 2022/2023 financial statements.

- ***identifying and responding to risks of fraud in Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority, including any specific risks of fraud which management have identified or that have been brought to its attention, or classes of transactions, account balances or disclosures for which a risk of fraud is likely to exist;***

The Authority has an Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy which is regularly updated and approved by the Committee. The Committee reviews the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Internal Audit Plan, which includes the Counter Fraud Work Programme for the year. The Counter Fraud Work Programme is based on a Fraud Risk Assessment for the effective deployment of resources and includes both reactive and proactive work. The Committee receives regular updates on progress against the Counter Fraud Work Programme with any areas of suspected fraud identified, together with any necessary control measures to be implemented to mitigate the risk of further fraud. Updates are also presented on the implementation of the control improvements.

The system of internal control is a significant part of the Governance framework within the Authority and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Authority's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically. Internal management control arrangements are in place which should identify and prevent fraud risks from occurring and detect them if

they do occur. The Authority participates in the National Fraud Initiative and subsequent investigations.

- ***communicating to employees its view on business practice and ethical behaviour (for example by updating, communicating and monitoring against Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority's code of conduct) and communicating to you the processes for identifying and responding to fraud and error;***

Written procedures are in place covering financial and administrative matters which are communicated to staff through the induction process, through management and are available on the Authority's intranet site. These documents are regularly updated and set out the standards of conduct that are expected, the policies and procedures which should be followed and what to do if staff have concerns that these arrangements are not being complied with. Internal Audit carries out a programme of work which includes assessing the level of compliance against the Authority's key policies and procedures. Key procedures include:

- Codes of conduct;
- Whistle Blowing Policy;
- Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy;
- Health and Safety Policy;
- Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy;
- Corporate Risk Management Strategy;
- Procurement Codes of Practice;
- Partnerships Procedure;
- Treasury Management Strategy;
- Functional budget management schemes.

The Governance Committee met five times during 2022/2023 with an Internal Audit Progress report being submitted to one of these meetings. The Progress report sets out the work done to identify fraud and the results of this work and the progress against the targets set. Private meetings are also held between the Head of Internal Audit, the External Auditor and members of the Governance Committee to discuss the detail of any significant investigations into suspected cases of fraud and corruption.

2) How do you oversee management processes for identifying and responding to the risk of fraud and possible breaches of internal control? Are you aware of any breaches of internal control during 2022/23?

I oversee management processes for identifying and responding to the risk of fraud and possible breaches of internal control through the receiving of reports as the Chair of the Governance Committee and I also have discussions with key officers and independent access to key officers should I require it.

I am aware that arrangements are set out in the Authority's Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy. This sets out how concerns should be reported and who to, what people who suspect fraud should and should not do and what the person who receives the concerns should and should not do.

I am not aware of and have not been made aware of any breaches of internal control during 2022/2023.

3) How do you gain assurance that all relevant laws and regulations have been complied with? Are you aware of any instances of non-compliance during 2022/23?

I am not aware of any actual, suspected or alleged frauds. The Committee is aware that all Authority matters are reviewed for their legality to ensure Authority expenditure, services and actions are within the law. As such this Committee has reassurance that legal advice is sought where appropriate and that all reports to Authority and members must be reviewed by the legal services section of Sunderland City Council and that legal representation from the Council is made at all Authority meetings in accordance with the Authority's Constitution.

Fire Authority reports are vetted by or on behalf of the Monitoring Officer (Deputy Clerk of Sunderland City Council) to ensure compliance with all legal requirements and there is legal representation at Authority meetings. In addition, the Monitoring Officer and senior members of the Council's Legal Services also have access to reports. As part of their job description, solicitors are required to keep up to date with new and emerging legislation which affects local government. To assist in this role, the team subscribe to an electronic legal update service and various legal publications and regularly attend relevant training courses. As a member of the Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors and Northern Secretaries Group, information is shared with other fire and rescue services, both regarding new legislation and case law and the approach and application of existing legal requirements.

In respect of new legislation or developments in case law, briefing notes or reports are prepared as appropriate and policies and procedures developed in conjunction with officers from the relevant areas of the Fire Service.

Regular team meetings are held within Legal Services both at "service area" level and senior management team level, at which any concerns regarding the Authority's compliance with legal requirements could be raised and addressed.

The Lead Authority's Internal Audit Team carries out audits of the Authority's corporate legality arrangements, with the objective of providing assurance that the arrangements in place ensure that the Authority remains within the law as it carries out its business, paying due regard to relevant legislation, statutory requirements and case law. The last review carried out, in summary reported that there were no issues or concerns raised and the audit gave full assurance of the legality arrangements in place. The audit concluded that the controls evaluated were well designed, appropriate in scope and applied consistently and effectively.

In addition, I am further reassured by the fact that the Authority's Monitoring Officer has carried out a self assessment of the legal service which covers the Authority's corporate legality arrangements that informs the Annual Governance Statement and has confirmed that there were no issues to raise and this provides me with the assurance that the Authority has arrangements in place to ensure that it remains within the law as it carries out its business, paying due regard to relevant legislation, statutory requirements and case law.

On behalf of the Governance Committee I declare that I have no knowledge of and have not been notified of any non-compliance with laws and regulations that could impact on the 2022/23 financial statements other than those that will be properly disclosed in the 2022/23 financial statements.

4) Are you aware of any actual or potential litigation or claims that would affect the financial statements?

I am not aware of, nor have I been made aware of, any potential litigations or claims that would impact on the financial statements for 2022/23, other than those fully disclosed in the financial statements in accordance with the relevant and applicable accounting standards.

5) Have you carried out a preliminary assessment of the going concern assumption and if so have you identified any events which may cast significant doubt on Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority's ability to continue as a going concern?

The Authority is a going concern, which was reaffirmed in the report from the Finance Officer presented to the Governance Committee held on 27th May 2022 and the Committee has no reason to believe that any events would impact on this position. I am aware that the only significant financial issue in respect of over claimed pension top up grant was resolved with the agreement from the Home Office and is being effectively managed over an agreed timescale. This means the Authority's resolution has in effect helped to strengthen the financial resilience of the Authority by successfully negotiating a long term repayment plan which is being accommodated each year within the Revenue Budget.

The fact the Authority also shows long term assets worth over £86.6m and cash backed reserves of almost £40.9m would support this view. Whilst recognising that the Authority has a reported negative net worth of almost £867.3m, most of this relates to the pensions deficiency of almost £965.5m which must be disclosed as part of the international financial reporting standard IAS19 requirements.

The fact all pension costs would never be incurred in one year (as implied by IAS19) and that the Authority is addressing the potential deficiency over a 21 year period in accordance with requirements by making additional annual pension deficiency payments, means the Balance Sheet Net Worth is effectively being distorted by this reporting standard.

When this accounting requirement is 'removed' the Authority has in fact a real net worth of over £98.2m. The Authority is also extremely well managed and prudent in its approach to all financial matters which is reflected in the strong Balance Sheet presented to this Committee as part of the Statement of Accounts for 2022/23.

Yours sincerely,

Geoff Cook
Chairman of the Governance Committee

No.	Questions for those charged with governance	Those charged with governance response
1	Are you aware of any instances of actual, suspected or alleged fraud during the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023?	No - There were no breaches of control at the Authority during 2022/2023.
2	<p>Do you suspect fraud may be occurring within Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Have you identified any specific fraud risks within Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority? ➤ Do you have any concerns that there are areas within Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority that are at risk of fraud? ➤ Are there particular locations within Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority where fraud is more likely to occur? 	<p>A fraud risk assessment is in place and is regularly updated which covers all appropriate parts of the Authority. This covers areas of fraud risks, sets out the individual risks, a score for the risks and tests that are carried out to identify potential fraud taking place. A programme of proactive counter fraud work is undertaken every year by Internal Audit which did not identify any areas of concern.</p> <p>The Authority also takes part in the National Fraud Initiative which has not identified any areas of concern.</p>
3	<p>Are you satisfied that internal controls, including segregation of duties, exist and work effectively?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If not where are the risk areas? ➤ What other controls are in place to help prevent, deter or detect fraud? 	<p>Internal controls regarding segregation of duties are in place and the results of Internal Audit work have not highlighted any material concerns, in fact most of their work carried out has provided 'substantial assurance'. An adequate opinion on the system of internal control has therefore been reported to the Governance Committee for the year.</p> <p>The Authority has an Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy and supporting documents in place which are available to all staff on the Authority intranet and included in the induction process.</p> <p>Other controls in place include a robust budget management framework carried out within the Authority's own Finance Team. This is supplemented by support from Sunderland City Council, the Authority's lead authority which provides most of the key financial used by the Authority. Appropriate controls and checks are thus provided from the City Council which includes verification checks</p>

		<p>on the Authority's key support systems such as Payroll, BACS payments and Accounts Receivable and Accounts Payable which are aimed at identifying fraud or errors. The majority of Authority payments are through the Supplier Relationship Management system which ensures authorisation of payments by an approved authorised officer.</p> <p>There has been a significant amount of work undertaken across the Authority to raise awareness of Information Governance issues and encourage staff to keep information secure.</p> <p>The Authority also has put arrangements in place to address the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations that came into force on 25th May 2018 and has also ensured all staff are suitably trained and aware of these requirements which are fully embedded across the service.</p>
4	<p>How do you encourage staff to report their concerns about fraud?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What concerns about fraud are staff expected to report? 	<p>This is undertaken by officers of the Authority. A Whistle Blowing Policy is in place and is on the Authority's intranet which gives details of how staff can raise concerns. Staff are encouraged to raise concerns about any areas where controls are not being complied with, where there is significant non-compliance with policies and procedures, or where there are concerns regarding corruption or potential financial loss.</p>
5	<p>From a fraud and corruption perspective, what are considered to be high risk posts within Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How are the risks relating to these posts identified, assessed and managed? 	<p>The Internal Audit Fraud Risk Assessments identifies potential fraud risks in specific areas which would cover any specific risks in relation to individual posts. Counter fraud checks would be designed to test these risks to identify any potential fraudulent activity.</p>
6	<p>Are you aware of any related party relationships or transactions that could give rise to instances of fraud?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How do you mitigate the risks associated with fraud related to related party relationships and 	<p>No</p> <p>The Authority has robust procedures in place to ensure all related party transactions are identified and, where appropriate, are fully</p>

	transactions?	disclosed in the Statement of Accounts. The Authority has an established Partnerships procedure and maintains and updates its Partnership Register regularly. Internal practices and processes carried out as part of the closing of accounts timetable also have specific tasks and detailed analysis of all member and chief officer interests and related party transactions which are reviewed and collated to form notes in the statement of accounts. All member interests are also documented and held by democratic services within each of their Authority's for scrutiny and also help to inform the process. Reviews by senior management also help inform the control process.
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No.	Questions for those charged with governance	Those charged with governance response
7	<p>Are you aware of any entries made in the accounting records of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority that you believe or suspect are false or intentionally misleading?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Are there particular balances where fraud is more likely to occur? ➤ Are you aware of any assets, liabilities or transactions that you believe were improperly included or omitted from the accounts of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority? ➤ Could a false accounting entry escape detection? If so, how? ➤ Are there any external fraud risk factors, which are high risk of fraud? 	<p>No</p> <p>Internal controls and internal check mitigate the risk, as does appropriately qualified and experienced staff involved in the preparation of the accounts.</p> <p>All areas are subject to a risk review and reports from internal and external audit help identify and report their findings in areas where risk is high. The SAP system makes false accounting unlikely because of the way it is designed and is fed by the bank reconciliation and feeder systems that have separate controls and reconciliation processes in place to maintain the integrity of the financial system.</p> <p>Strong and robust budgetary control and financial practices are in place across the Authority.</p> <p>Areas that are identified as high risk are reviewed more regularly by internal audit as part of their risk based approach to auditing.</p> <p>Legal and financial review is carried out across the fire service spectrum of activity.</p>
8	Are you aware of any organisational, or	No – The Medium Term Financial

	<p>management pressure to meet financial or operating targets?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Are you aware of any inappropriate organisational or management pressure being applied, or incentives offered, to you or colleagues to meet financial or operating targets? 	<p>Plan, the budget planning process and the Annual budget, along with the agreed cash limits approach is reviewed and monitored during the year to review achievement and adherence to approved budget levels agreed by members and the Fire Authority. Actual performance and any actions necessary are reviewed by management and reported to members who receive formal Authority quarterly reports during the year.</p> <p>The Authority also publishes its proposed efficiencies, IRMP actions and cost pressures and its budget and forecast positions and is therefore open and transparent about its finances which are reflected in its MTFS published annually by the Authority. It must also report performance against its MTFS to members of the Authority annually.</p> <p>As a consequence of all of these controls in place within the Authority there are no inappropriate pressures or incentives being applied.</p>
9.	<p>What arrangements has the Authority put in place in response to the Bribery Act 2010?</p>	<p>Arrangements were already in place before the introduction of the Bribery Act 2010 and continue to be applied, e.g. existence and promotion of the anti - fraud and corruption policy, whistle blowing policy, codes of conduct, financial procedure rules, procurement procedure rules, disciplinary procedures; the existence of effective audit service. In response to the introduction of the Bribery Act 2010 these arrangements were reviewed in light of the Act to ensure they continued to be 'adequate procedures' and fit for purpose. The Authority's Admin Procedure 3.20 Code of Conduct was updated in Section 9.6.2 to include the implications of the Bribery Act 2010. The Authority's executive leadership team reaffirmed its commitment to zero tolerance to bribery. An assessment was made of the risk to the Authority regarding bribery. Procurement arrangements, i.e. procurement procedure rules, were reviewed to ensure appropriate due</p>

		diligence is carried out in respect of suppliers seeking to contract with the Authority and contract terms and conditions address the subject of bribery.
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Mr C Waddell
Mazars LLP
Salvus House
Aykley Heads
Durham
DH1 5TS

Date: 30th June 2023
Our ref:
Your ref:

Dear Cameron,

Audit of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority - Financial Statements for the year end 31 March 2023 - Understanding your management processes and arrangements

I refer to your correspondence dated 7th June 2023 in respect of the above management arrangements and processes in place within the Authority in order to provide you with the necessary assurances from management which you require under International Auditing Standards. The assurances are provided below, representing Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority's formal response from management in this respect.

As Finance Director and Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer) of the Authority, on behalf of management I have considered the nature and extent of any significant internal and external operational, financial, compliance, fraud or other risks facing the Authority which might have had an impact on the financial statements. These risks have been addressed in both the planning process for the audit of the financial statements (where myself and other senior officers with yourselves have identified and discussed key risks faced by the Authority) and, to the extent that it is necessary, in the production of the financial statements.

The processes and arrangements in place and adhered to by senior management in the production of the Annual Governance Statement also show that all key risks which would relate to the financial statements have been fully and appropriately considered. In response to your correspondence please find responses to your specific questions and Appendix 1, has also been completed as requested.

Specific assurances:

- 1) I can confirm the areas set out below show that appropriate management processes are in place:**

- ***undertaking an assessment of the risk that the financial statements may be materially misstated due to fraud or error (including the nature, extent and frequency of these assessments);***

A risk management assessment is carried out and updated regularly (but at least annually) and this helps to ensure that all risks are identified and then addressed appropriately. The review of risks is reported formally to the Governance Committee throughout the year.

Along with the Executive Leadership Team, I ensure that arrangements are in place within the Authority that achieve the effective and efficient use of resources, policies and procedures are in place so that the Authority is effectively managed, and internal control mechanisms are put in place and operating effectively within the Authority to help mitigate against all identified risks. These ensure the financial statements are not materially misstated each year.

As Finance Director and Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer, I attend all meetings of the Governance Committee to discuss and review findings of all Internal and External Audit reviews and ensure members are kept informed through the regular reporting mechanisms in place. The Committee receives and approves the accounts on behalf of the Authority and, as such, is kept informed of all issues and risks that could impact upon the financial statements and operates within the guidelines recommended by CIPFA. Management also consider and inform the Annual Governance Statement and the action plan, in order to further improve the governance arrangements in place, to achieve value for money in its use of resources, and to further improve the internal control environment.

Management also receive the independent Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Internal Audit Plan and can comment on areas proposed for review. The Authority's Corporate Risks are regularly reported and reviewed by management within the Authority and the Authority's Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy ensures that fraud risk and/or related concerns are escalated through to the appropriate level as appropriate. Ad-hoc meetings between the Chair and myself also take place, where necessary, to discuss matters as they arise. Roles and responsibilities of members and officers are clearly set out in the Codes of Conduct, the Scheme of Delegation, the Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy, and in the Risk Management Strategy and Policy Statement. These also describe the relevant registers, declarations and escalation processes to be complied with.

I would declare on behalf of management that I have no knowledge of any actual, suspected or alleged fraud that could affect the Authority in relation to the 2022/2023 financial statements.

- ***identifying and responding to risks of fraud in the Authority; including any specific risks of fraud which management have identified or that have been brought to its attention, or classes of transactions, account balances, or disclosure for which risk of fraud is likely to exist;***

The Authority has an Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy which is regularly updated and is also approved by the Governance Committee. Regular reviews and achievement of the annually reviewed audit plan are discussed with me, but importantly, reported separately to the Committee. It is important that the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Internal Audit Plan, which includes the Counter Fraud Work Programme for the year, is established independently in accordance with best practice.

The Counter Fraud Work Programme is based on a Fraud Risk Assessment for the effective deployment of resources and includes both reactive and proactive work. I receive regular updates on progress against the Counter Fraud Work Programme with any areas of suspected fraud identified, together with any necessary control measures to be implemented to mitigate the risk of further fraud. Updates are also presented on the implementation of the control improvements and all findings are reported to members as appropriate.

The system of internal control is a significant part of the Governance framework within the Authority and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Authority's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically. Internal management control arrangements are in place which should identify and prevent fraud risks from occurring and detect them if they do occur. The Authority engages in numerous fraud prevention and identification activity, including corporate processes, such as participating in the National Fraud Initiative.

- ***communicating to employees its view on business practice and ethical behaviour and communicating to those charged with governance the processes for identifying and responding to fraud and error;***

Written procedures are in place covering financial and administrative matters which are communicated to staff through the induction process, through management and are available on the Authority's intranet site. These documents are regularly updated and set out the standards of conduct that are expected, the policies and procedures which should be followed and what to do if staff have concerns that these arrangements are not being complied with. Internal Audit carries out a programme of work which includes assessing the level of compliance against the Authority's key policies and procedures. Key procedures include:

- Codes of Conduct;
- Whistle Blowing Policy;
- Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy;
- Health and Safety Policy;
- Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy;
- Corporate Risk Management Strategy;
- Procurement Codes of Practice;
- Partnerships procedure;
- Treasury Management Strategy;
- Functional budget management schemes.

The Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy sets out the approach used to identify potential fraud and the resources available. The Governance Committee met five times during 2022/2023 with an Internal Audit Progress report submitted to at least two of these meetings. The Progress reports set out the work done to identify fraud and the results of this work and the progress against the targets set. Private meetings are held between the head of internal audit, the External Auditor and members of the Governance Committee to discuss the detail of any significant investigations into suspected cases of fraud and corruption.

I am aware that arrangements are set out in the Authority's Anti Fraud and Corruption Policy. This sets out how concerns should be reported and who to, what people who suspect fraud should and should not do, and what the person who receives the concerns should and should not do.

During 2022/23, I was not made aware of any breaches of control.

2) How do you gain assurance that all relevant laws and regulations have been complied with? Have there been any instances of non-compliance during 2022-23?

I am not aware of any actual, suspected or alleged frauds other than those (if any) reported to management and members as part of the regular updates on the Counter Fraud Work Programme. I am aware that all Authority matters are reviewed for their legality to ensure Authority expenditure, services and actions are within the law. As such we have appropriate legal arrangements in place headed by the Monitoring Officer (Deputy Clerk of Sunderland City Council) who reports to Chief Fire Officer and his Senior Management Team, and has direct access to report to me as required. This gives reassurance that legal advice is sought where appropriate, that all reports to Authority and members must be reviewed by the legal services section, and that legal representation is made at all Authority meetings.

In addition, Authority reports are vetted by or on behalf of the Monitoring Officer to ensure compliance with legal requirements and there is legal representation at Authority meetings. In addition, the Monitoring Officer and senior members of Legal Services have access to reports which are considered by the Executive Leadership Team. As part of their job description, solicitors are required to keep up to date with new and emerging legislation which affects local government. To assist in this role, the team subscribe to an electronic legal update service and various legal publications and regularly attend relevant training courses. As a member of the Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors and Northern Secretaries Group, information is shared with other fire and rescue services, both regarding new legislation and case law and the approach and application of existing legal requirements.

In respect of new legislation or developments in case law, briefing notes or reports are prepared as appropriate and policies and procedures developed in conjunction with officers from the relevant areas of the Fire Service.

Regular team meetings are held within Legal Services both at "service area" level and senior management team level, at which any concerns regarding the Authority's compliance with legal requirements could be raised and addressed.

Internal Audit services are provided by our Lead Authority, Sunderland City Council, which carries out audits of the Authority's corporate legality arrangements, with the objective of

providing assurance that the arrangements in place ensure that the Authority remains within the law as it carries out its business, paying due regard to relevant legislation, statutory requirements and case law. The last review carried out, in summary reported that there were no issues or concerns raised and the audit gave full assurance of the legality arrangements in place. The audit concluded that the controls evaluated were well designed, appropriate in scope and applied consistently and effectively.

In addition, I am further reassured by the fact that the Authority's Monitoring Officer has carried out a self assessment of the legal service which covers the Authority's corporate legality arrangements that informs the Annual Governance Statement. This confirmed that there were no issues to raise and this provides me with the assurance that the Authority has arrangements in place to ensure that it remains within the law as it carries out its business, paying due regard to relevant legislation, statutory requirements and case law.

3) Are you aware of any actual or potential litigation or claims that would affect the financial statements?

On behalf of Management I declare that I have no knowledge of, and the Authority is not on notice of any non-compliance, with laws and regulations that could impact on the 2022/2023 financial statements other than those that will be properly disclosed in the 2022/2023 financial statements. All contingent liabilities are discussed and identified and/or updated and reviewed annually in order to reflect the known position as at the balance sheet date.

4) What controls do you have in place to: identify; authorise; approve; account for; and disclose, related party transactions and relationships? For any new related parties (i.e. any not already disclosed in your year end 31 March 2022 audited financial statements) please provide a list of them, explain the nature of these, and whether you have entered into any transactions with these related parties during the year to 31 March 2023.

On behalf of Management I declare that I have no knowledge of any such related party transactions that require further disclosure from those previously declared.

The Authority has robust procedures in place to identify and record any related party transactions in respect of its members and senior chief officers included within the statement of accounts which has taken place during the year and is informed by the robust formal year end process of signed declarations outlining all detailed related party transactions and relationships which apply to all individual Members and Senior Chief Officers. Various sources of information held and recorded by the Authority also help to inform the robust procedures in place including its formal Committee protocols (whereby members must declare at meetings they attend any interests of a personal nature (where they can not vote on that item) or of a prejudicial nature where they will have to leave the meeting for that item); the Authority's Constitution; and the detailed policies and procedure rules and financial regulations of the Authority that are required to be observed which are also in place to ensure any related party transactions are identified, fully disclosed and recorded, properly considered and accounted for as necessary.

Yours sincerely,

Dennis Napier

Finance Director

No.	Questions for management	Management response
1	<p>Are you aware of any instances of actual, suspected or alleged fraud either within Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority as a whole or within your own department during the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023?</p>	<p>No - there were no breaches of control at the Authority or in my own department during 2022/2023.</p>
2	<p>Do you suspect fraud may be occurring within Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority or your own department?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Have you identified any specific fraud risks within Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority / your own department ? ➤ Do you have any concerns that there are areas within your own department or Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority that are at risk of fraud? ➤ Are there particular locations within Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority where fraud is more likely to occur? 	<p>A fraud risk assessment is in place and is regularly updated which covers all appropriate parts of the Authority. This covers areas of fraud risks, sets out the individual risks, a score for the risks and tests that are carried out to identify potential fraud taking place. A programme of proactive counter fraud work is undertaken every year by Internal Audit which did not identify any areas of concern for either the Authority or my own department.</p> <p>The Authority also takes part in the National Fraud Initiative which has not identified any areas of concern.</p>
3	<p>Are you satisfied that internal controls, including segregation of duties, exist and work effectively?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If not where are the risk areas? ➤ What other controls are in place to help prevent, deter or detect fraud? 	<p>Internal controls regarding segregation of duties are in place and the results of Internal Audit work have not highlighted any material concerns. An adequate opinion on the system of internal control has been reported to the Governance Committee for the year.</p> <p>The Authority has an Anti Fraud and Corruption policy and supporting documents in place which is available to all staff on the Authority intranet and is included in the induction process.</p> <p>Other controls in place include a robust budget management framework carried out within the Authority's own Finance Team. This is supplemented by support from Sunderland City Council, our lead Authority which provides most of the key financial systems used by the Authority. Appropriate controls and checks are thus provided from the City Council which includes verification checks on the Authority's key support systems such as Payroll, BACS payments and Accounts Receivable</p>

		<p>and Accounts Payable which are aimed at identifying fraud or errors. The majority of the Authority payments are through the Supplier Relationship Management system, which ensures authorisation of payments by an approved authorised officer.</p> <p>There has been a significant amount of work undertaken across the Authority to raise awareness of Information Governance issues and encourage staff to keep information secure.</p> <p>The Authority has arrangements in place to address the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations that came into force on 25th May 2018 and has also ensured all staff are suitably trained and aware of these requirements which are fully embedded across our service.</p>
No.	Questions for management	Management response
4	<p>How do you encourage staff to report their concerns about fraud?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What concerns about fraud are staff expected to report? 	<p>This is undertaken by officers of the Authority. A Whistleblowing policy is in place and is on the Authority's intranet which gives details of how staff can raise concerns. Staff are encouraged to raise concerns about any areas where controls are not being complied with, where there is significant non-compliance with policies and procedures, or where there are concerns regarding corruption or potential financial loss.</p>
5	<p>From a fraud and corruption perspective, what are considered to be high risk posts within your area of responsibility?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How are the risks relating to these posts identified, assessed and managed? 	<p>The Internal Audit Fraud Risk Assessments identifies potential fraud risks in specific areas which would cover any specific risks in relation to individual posts. Counter fraud checks would be designed to test these risks to identify any potential fraudulent activity.</p>
6	<p>Are you aware of any related party relationships or transactions that could give rise to instances of fraud?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How do you mitigate the risks associated with fraud related to related party relationships and transactions? 	<p>No</p> <p>The Authority has robust procedures in place to ensure all related party transactions are identified and, where appropriate, are fully disclosed in the Statement of Accounts. The Authority has a well established Partnerships</p>

		<p>procedure and maintains and updates its Partnership Register regularly. Internal practices and processes carried out as part of the closing of accounts timetable also has specific tasks and detailed analysis of all member and chief officer interests and related party transactions which are reviewed and collated to form notes in the statement of accounts. All member interests are also documented and held by democratic services within each of their Authority's for scrutiny and also help to inform the process. Reviews by senior management also help inform the control process.</p>
No.	Questions for management	Management response
7	<p>Are you aware of any entries made in the accounting records of the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority that you believe or suspect are false or intentionally misleading?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Are there particular balances where fraud is more likely to occur? ➤ Are you aware of any assets, liabilities or transactions that you believe were improperly included or omitted from the accounts of the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority? ➤ Could a false accounting entry escape detection? If so, how? ➤ Are there any external fraud risk factors, which are high risk of fraud? 	<p>No</p> <p>Internal controls and internal check mitigate the risk, as does appropriately qualified and experienced staff involved in compiling the accounts.</p> <p>All areas are subject to a regular risk review and these are formally updated and reported to the Authority's Corporate Risk Management Group. Reports from internal and external audit also help strengthen the risk process by identifying and reporting their findings in areas where risk is considered high. The SAP system makes false accounting unlikely because of the way it is designed and is fed by the bank reconciliation and feeder systems that have separate controls and reconciliation processes in place to maintain the integrity of the financial system.</p> <p>Strong and robust budgetary control and financial practices are in place across the Authority.</p> <p>Areas that are identified as high risk are reviewed more regularly by internal audit as part of their risk based approach to auditing.</p> <p>Legal and financial review is carried out across the whole range of fire service activity.</p>
8	<p>Are you aware of any organisational, or management pressure to meet financial or operating targets?</p>	<p>No – The Medium Term Financial Plan, the budget planning process and the Annual budget, along with an</p>

	<p>➤ Are you aware of any inappropriate organisational or management pressure being applied, or incentives offered, to you or colleagues to meet financial or operating targets?</p>	<p>agreed cash limits approach, which is reviewed and monitored during the year to review achievement and adherence to approved budget levels agreed by members and the Fire Authority. Actual performance and any actions necessary are reviewed by management and reported to members who receive formal Authority quarterly update reports during the year.</p> <p>The Authority also publishes its proposed efficiencies, IRMP actions and cost pressures and its budget and forecast positions and is therefore open and transparent about its finances which are reflected in its MTFS published annually by the Authority. It must also report performance against its MTFS to members of the Authority annually.</p> <p>As a consequence of all of these controls in place within the Authority there are no inappropriate pressures or incentives being applied.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>What arrangements has the Authority put in place in response to the Bribery Act 2010?</p>	<p>Arrangements were in place before the introduction of the Bribery Act 2010 and continue to be applied, e.g. existence and promotion of the anti - fraud and corruption policy, whistle blowing policy, codes of conduct, financial procedure rules, procurement procedure rules, disciplinary procedures; the existence of effective audit service. In response to the introduction of the Bribery Act 2010 all arrangements were reviewed in light of the Act to ensure they continued to be 'adequate procedures' and fit for purpose. Admin Procedure 3.20 Code of Conduct includes all of the detail in this regard and section 9.6.2 deals specifically with the Bribery Act 2010. The Authority's executive leadership team reaffirmed its commitment of zero tolerance to bribery. An assessment was also made of the risk to the Authority regarding bribery. Procurement arrangements, i.e. procurement procedure rules, were reviewed to ensure appropriate due diligence is carried out in respect of suppliers seeking to contract with the</p>

		Authority and contract terms and conditions address the subject of bribery.
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MEETING: GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 30 JUNE 2023

SUBJECT: INFORMATION GOVERNANCE IMPROVEMENT UPDATE

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE (THE CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY) THE FINANCE DIRECTOR AND THE PERSONNEL ADVISOR TO THE AUTHORITY

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Governance Committee with an overview of issues identified within the Information Governance (IG) function in the last 12 months, and a progress update on the improvement activities undertaken to address these.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Due to a change in the line manager and some internal assurance activity that was undertaken last year, it became apparent that there was a performance issue that needed to be addressed within the IG function. The issue related to inadequate progress by the previous Information Governance Advisor to complete a range of tasks as well as inadequate record keeping and a lack of transparency.
- 2.2 During September 2022 the Service built a clearer picture of which IG responsibilities had not been completed and which tasks and functions needed to be addressed urgently and in what order. There was also a lack of instructions or guidance available to process regular IG tasks (such as processing Freedom of Information requests), in order to provide confidence and assurance that the Service is complying with its legal duties.
- 2.3 The Service engaged with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), initially to confirm a matter of non-compliance that has since been closed, and then subsequently for advice. The ICO has been supportive and helpful in providing general and tailored advice about how to address improvements. The ICO has also confirmed in writing that they currently have no issues of concern with the Service and they are supportive of our approach to improvement.
- 2.4 The internal assurance report was completed in August which helped inform an action plan of immediate improvements and activities that needed to be undertaken. As the previous post holder left the organisation, an urgent,

temporary appointment was made to the post of IG Advisor effective from September 2022. To address the backlog of business as usual tasks and implement administrative systems to ensure short term efficiency and effectiveness the following was implemented:

- logging and processing of Freedom of Information Act requests
- logging and processing Subject Access requests
- logging Image release requests
- logging and assessing data breaches
- backdating of records relating to these requests.

A further process for permanent recruitment into the IG Advisor concluded and was successful in appointing in February 2023

- 2.5 It was clear that the IG related policies and procedures also needed to be reviewed and updated before they could be properly implemented and the related training updated and launched. This resulted in previous training being paused to allow improvements to be implemented.

3 CURRENT POSITION

- 3.1 An immediate review of all Information Governance policies, procedures and guidance is underway and almost complete thus ensuring compliance with the Service policy and procedure guidance, Information Commissioner Officer Guidance and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

- 3.2 The following new policies and procedures were approved and published in January 2023:

- Data Protection and General Data Protection Regulations Policy
- Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations Policy and Procedure
- Data Subject Access Request Policy and Procedure

And in June 2023 a further two were approved and published:

- Digital Information Release Policy and Procedure
- Data Breach Policy and Procedure

- 3.3 The backlog of business as usual tasks and implementation of administrative systems is now completed including - logging and processing of Freedom of Information Act requests; logging and processing Subject Access requests; logging Image release requests; logging and assessing data breaches, alongside the backdating of records relating to these requests.

- 3.4 New Microsoft forms have been created with guidance for users to submit requests for information. These were launched on the Service intranet and

external website January 2023. The use of Power BI has been incorporated into the IG functions to ensure transparency and compliance reporting.

- 3.5 The Information Governance E-Learning package was created and launched to all staff in January 2023, to be completed by end of March 2023. 91% of the workforce has completed the package.
- 3.6 Progress with the improvement action plan continues to be monitored by the Information Governance Task and Finish Group on a weekly basis. The Group is chaired by the ACFO in her role as SIRO.
- 3.7 The Information Governance Advisor is also utilising the online Accountability Tracker published by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) to measure our progress towards compliance with the ICO's Accountability Framework ([Accountability Framework | ICO](#)), and this will continue to be monitored by the Task and Finish Group.
- 3.8 Progress will be reported regularly to the Corporate Governance Board, the Service Improvement and Transformation Board and, when requested, to ELT. Progress will also be monitored separately as part of the compliance monitoring of the Fire Standard on Data Management, which encompasses IG as well as broader issues.

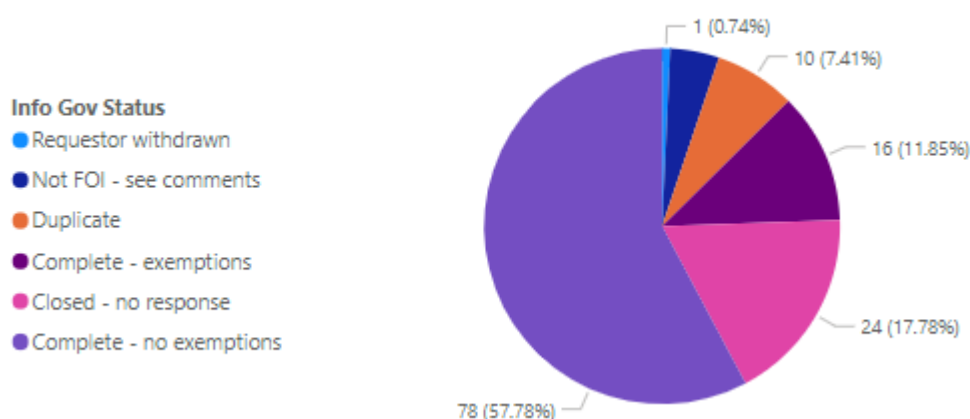
4 INTERNAL AUDIT

- 4.1 Compliance against the GDPR was audited by Sunderland City Council during Q4 2022/23 and a 'Moderate' level of assurance was awarded.
- 4.2 The scope of the audit consisted of:
 - Reviewing the results of compliance checks undertaken by the DPO
 - Ensuring appropriate advice is given in the case of poor compliance
 - Reviewing the action by the DPO to confirm that appropriate action has been implemented by the Service

5 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS

- 5.1 The Freedom of Information Act 2000 provides access to information held by public authorities. It does this in two ways:
 - Public authorities are obliged to publish certain information about their activities; and
 - Members of the public are entitled to request information from public authorities.
- 5.2 During 2022/23 135 requests were received.

FOI Requests by Info Gov Status



94 requests were complete. 68 were completed within 20 working days. All requests received during quarters 3 and 4 have been completed within 20 working day. 43 information requests were not fulfilled. These requests were submitted whilst the previous post holder was in position, upon the new post holder taking up the role, she contacted the individuals / organisations who submitted these requests and they either no longer required the information or did not respond to our follow up contact.

6 SUBJECT ACCESS REQUESTS

- 6.1 The Data Protection Act 2018 allows for right of access to review and verify the lawfulness of the processing of your own personal data.
- 6.2 7 data subject access requests were received all completed within the 30 calendar day timescale.

7 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 The risks connected with IG are identified, monitored and managed through the departmental Risk Register for the HR Department (as the host department) and the Risk Management and Assurance Database (RMAD).
- 7.2 The extensive monitoring of the progress with the action plan, together with the scheduled Internal Audit work, will provide an ongoing and up to date assessment of the management of IG related risks.
- 7.3 The Information Governance is a complex area of law with significant compliance requirements on public bodies such as the Service. There is an ongoing challenge to try to ensure that the Service employs sufficient staff with sufficient specialist knowledge, and to provide such staff with supervision, support and cover for planned leave. This raises a number of options for the future resourcing and location of the IG function which will need to be considered once the improvement work has reached a suitable stage.

8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no financial implications in respect of this report.

9 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no equality and fairness implications in respect of this report.

10 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Endorse the contents of this report
- b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:



MEETING: GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 30 JUNE 2023

SUBJECT: ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2022/2023

**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE (THE CLERK
TO THE AUTHORITY) AND THE FINANCE DIRECTOR**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) is required to include an Annual Governance Statement within its Annual Statement of Accounts. The Annual Governance Statement contains details of the most recent review of governance arrangements and sets out areas for improvement during the course of the following year.
- 1.2 The Authority must approve the Annual Governance Statement each year prior to adopting the Statement of Accounts. Once approved by the Authority, the Chair of the Authority, Chief Fire Officer and Finance Director are requested to sign the Annual Governance Statement.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Authority conducts an annual review of its governance arrangements to ensure they remain effective and up to date. The purpose of this report and accompanying appendices is to present Members with the draft Annual Governance Statement and updated Code of Corporate Governance following the 2022/23 annual review.
- 2.2 The Authority is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. It also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 2.3 In addition, the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 stipulate that the Authority must, each financial year:
 - a) conduct a review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control.
 - b) prepare an annual governance statement.

- 2.4 By undertaking a review of internal control systems, the Authority is able to critique the effectiveness of its governance arrangements to ensure appropriate mechanisms are in place to safeguard financial, operational and risk management. The Authority is responsible for putting in place a sound system of control, which includes the arrangements for the governance of its affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, including arrangements for the management of risk.
- 2.5 A key component of the Authority's governance framework is its Code of Corporate Governance, which was developed in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy / Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (CIPFA / SOLACE) 2016 *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework*. This framework assists the Authority in developing and shaping an informed approach to governance, aimed at achieving the highest standards in a measured and proportionate way by demonstrating compliance with the principles:
- A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.
 - B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.
 - C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.
 - D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of intended outcomes.
 - E. Developing the Authority's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.
 - F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.
 - G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.

3 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW METHODOLOGY

- 3.1 The Authority's governance framework comprises of systems, processes, culture and values by which it is directed and controlled. This framework enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services and value for money.
- 3.2 The effectiveness of the Authority's governance arrangements are monitored and evaluated throughout the year, with activity undertaken including:
- Scrutiny and challenge by the Authority and its committees, which are responsible for monitoring and reviewing the Authority's governance arrangements.
 - Strategic direction and oversight by the Executive Leadership Team who are responsible for governance and internal control arrangements and meet monthly to steer the activities of the fire service and provide regular finance, risk and performance reports to the Authority and its committees.

- Quarterly meetings of the Corporate Governance Board to identify, discuss and instruct action on emerging governance issues.
- Evidence obtained from other sources:
 - Annual Member questionnaires, which provide a self-assessment of compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance / CIPFA/SOLACE principles of good governance.
 - Annual Department Head self-assessments, which review compliance with the Code of Corporate Governance / CIPFA/SOLACE principles of good governance. The self-assessments were reviewed and authorised by the respective Area Manager / Director and Principal Officer.
 - Consideration of risks identified in the corporate risk register.
 - The Head of Internal Audit's opinion on the internal control environment (the Annual Audit Plan and Report).
 - The External Auditor's review of the effectiveness of governance arrangements (Annual Audit Letter).
 - CIPFA Financial Management Code: assessment of compliance.
 - Review and assurance from Inspectorates and other external bodies.

4 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW OUTCOME

- 4.1 The review of the effectiveness of the governance framework shows that the arrangements continue to be fit for purpose and assurance can be given that the framework is operating effectively in practice but this is subject to the implementation of the outstanding and new improvement actions.
- 4.2 Three actions from the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 remain outstanding and have been carried forward for completion during 2023/24 and are detailed in Appendix A.
- 4.3 No new improvement actions were identified during the annual governance review 2022/23, for action during 2023/24.
- 4.4 The Authority's Code of Corporate Governance has been reviewed and updated for 2023. The updated Code can be viewed in Appendix B.

5 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Statement of Assurance is intended to provide good assurance that there is an ongoing process for reviewing the Authority's governance framework and its operation in practice.
- 5.2 Based on the evidence examined the governance framework has continued to be in place for the year ending 31 March 2023 and up to the date of approval of the 2022/23 Statement of Accounts.
- 5.3 The review has not identified any weaknesses that would need to be highlighted in the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 and subject to the completion of

the four outstanding improvements action during 2023/24, the Authority's governance and internal control systems are considered effective.

- 5.4 The Authority will continue to be proactive in its approach to monitoring the effectiveness of its governance arrangements by carrying out a comprehensive review each year.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 There are no financial implications in respect of this report. The work provides an assessment of the Authority's systems of internal control and risks identified are included within the corporate risk register.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no financial implications in respect of this report.

8 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no equality and fairness implications in respect of this report.

9 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Note and comment on the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2022/23.
- b) Note the revised Code of Corporate Governance 2023.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

None

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2022/23



1 Scope of responsibility

- 1.1 Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards. It is also responsible for ensuring that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Authority has a duty under the Local Government Act [1999] to make arrangements to enable continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised.
- 1.2 In discharging these responsibilities, the Authority must put in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.3 A key component of the Authority's governance framework is its local Code of Corporate Governance, which is reviewed annually and developed in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy / Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (CIPFA / SOLACE) 2016 *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework*.
- 1.4 This statement sets out how the Authority has complied with the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, regulation 6(1) (a) and (b); which requires the Authority to prepare and publish an Annual Governance Statement.

2 The purpose of the governance framework

- 2.1 The Authority's governance framework comprises of systems, processes, culture and values by which it is directed and controlled and its activities through which it is accountable to, engages with and leads the community. This framework enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services and value for money.
- 2.2 The system of internal control is a significant part of the governance framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Authority's objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised, the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.
- 2.3 This statement describes the key elements of the Authority's governance framework, which brings together legislative requirements, governance principles and management processes.

2.4 The Authority's governance framework has continued to be in place for the year ending 31 March 2023 and up to the date of approval of this statement.

3 Applying the principles of good governance at Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority

3.1 The Authority's local Code of Corporate Governance brings together in one document all the governance and accountability arrangements it has in place. This Code was updated and submitted to the Authority for their approval in July 2022. In preparing this Statement, the CIPFA/SOLACE framework is used as a benchmark by which to measure against.

3.2 The narrative below includes key examples of how the Authority has adhered to its governance commitments set out in the core principles of the Code. The Authority has a broad range of strategies and policies in place, and therefore this is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

3.3 Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating a strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.

The Authority's constitution acts as a framework to support decision-making and ensure all legal, financial and statutory requirements are met and are supported by standing orders, financial regulations and a scheme of delegation.

Under the supervision of the Monitoring Officer, the Authority adheres to the legislative requirements and integrates the key principles of good administrative law – rationality, legality and natural justice in their procedures and decision-making processes. The Authority is transparent about how decisions are made and recorded and ensures appropriate legal, financial and other professional advice is considered as part of the decision-making process. Value for money is measured and the results considered prior to making decisions.

The leadership sets a tone for creating a climate of openness and respect and fosters a culture based on shared values, ethical principles and good conduct. The Authority operates two codes of conduct, one for Members, and a new Code of Ethics (introduced in October 2022) for staff. These codes define the standards of behaviour expected by Members and staff, work between Members and Officers, the Authority, the fire service, its partners and the community. Standards of behaviour are defined and communicated through these Codes, protocols and other policies and procedures. The Code of Conduct for Members is monitored by the Monitoring Officer and overseen by the Governance Committee. The Code of Conduct for staff is monitored by the Human Resource Department. Any allegations of wrongdoing are thoroughly investigated in accordance with the relevant disciplinary policies and procedures.

The Authority has arrangements to maintain registers of Members' personal and business interests and a register of gifts and hospitality. Records are held by the Monitoring Officer on behalf of Members. The Human Resources department records these details for staff on behalf of the Chief Fire Officer.

The fire service's recruitment policy, induction and training processes incorporate personal behaviours with ethical values. Core values are embedded and the People Board considers matters relating to equality, diversity and inclusion issues. The annual equality data and gender pay gap report was presented to the HR Committee on 3 October 2022.

Procurement and financial regulations are clear and used to protect processes that could be influenced by unethical behaviour. A full procurement process is adhered to which ensures these ethical standards are upheld.

An anti-fraud and corruption policy manages the risk of fraud and corruption and takes preventative steps and outlines the arrangements for confidential and anonymous reporting / whistleblowing (via Safecall), promotes detection and provides a clear route for investigation and prosecution, where fraudulent and / or corrupt activities or behaviour have been identified. Whistleblowing arrangements are being used, and the Authority responds appropriately. These arrangements have assisted with the maintenance of a strong regime of internal control.

A new, standalone Whistle Blowing Policy, and a Whistle Blowing Procedure, were developed in 2022/23, for implementation in May 2023.

When working in partnership Members and staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities, both individually and collectively, in relation to the partnership and to the Authority or the fire service. There is clarity about the legal status of the partnership and representatives or organisations understand and make clear to partners the extent of their authority to bind their organisation to partner decisions in an ethical way.

3.4 Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.

Authority and committee meetings are open for the public to attend. The Authority's Annual General Meeting took place on 27 June 2022.

The Authority ensures that all major decisions are captured, documented and published on Sunderland City Council's website (the Authority's secretariat). Community Risk Management Planning (CRMP) decisions and significant decisions are also reported on the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) website.

The Authority publishes data in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 and has adopted the Information Commissioner Office model Publication Scheme, which ensure that up-to-date information relating to the structure, activities, finances, plans, policies, performance and governance of the Authority and the fire service is published, increasing democratic accountability.

The Reserves Policy is published providing transparency to stakeholders about the purpose and level of the reserves held by the Authority. In addition, the audited Statement of Accounts, Annual Governance Statement, Narrative Statement and external auditor's reports are published annually on the TWFRS website. A commitment to openness is also shown through the distribution of strategic documents including the TWFRS Strategy 2025 and key performance information.

A variety of methods are used to engage with the public including directed communication using social media channels, This includes promoting awareness campaigns about fire, water and road safety and anti-social behaviour reduction.

Community safety policies and procedures outline the Authority's approach to engaging with the community, in particular minority and vulnerable sectors of society. The fire service operates a safeguarding policy and procedure to refer vulnerable people to partner agencies where additional support is required.

Staff frequently conduct engagement with householders and businesses through a range of prevention and protection activities including Safe and Well visits and fire safety audits. Engagement with young people is conducted via the fire service's interactive learning centre Safetyworks!, the Princes Trust Programme, Phoenix Programme and the Juvenile Firesetters Education Programme (JFEP), boxing hub, Fire Cadets and educational visits to schools.

Public consultation and engagement arrangements are in place to invite the views of stakeholders prior to developing and implementing key changes. During 2022/23, the Authority carried out informal consultation to support the development of the new Community Risk Management Plan 2024-27. The Authority carries out a statutory business rate and council tax consultation each year.

Staff engagement is carried out by a range of methods, including Executive Leadership Team listening events, all staff engagement sessions, and an 'Ask the CFO' email address. Staff are encouraged to contribute to feedback via team and department meetings, and through the line management structure.

The fire service proactively engages with representative bodies, which include the Fire Brigades Union, GMB, and Unison. This relationship is managed through the Joint Consultative Forum, which considers issues associated with staff relations and policy development. This forum complements the daily arrangements that support effective industrial relations management.

The fire service has a compliments and complaints policy and procedure in place and is able to respond effectively to any compliment or complaint in timely manner. This process is managed and monitored internally and reported quarterly to the Corporate Governance Board, annually to the Executive Leadership Team and to the Governance Committee.

The Authority recognises the role it plays in supporting partnership working across Tyne and Wear and the contribution of partners in assisting it to deliver its own objectives. The fire service's vision, strategy and strategic plans (such as the CRMP), and priorities are developed through robust mechanisms, and in consultation with staff, the community and other key stakeholders.

The Authority has formal partnership arrangements in place with Sunderland City Council to provide specialist support services. Other arrangements with emergency service partners demonstrate clear and appropriate governance accountabilities. The fire service operates a partnership register, which provides a framework for staff involved in or considering new partnership arrangements and assists in reviewing existing arrangements.

3.5 **Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits.**

The Authority's purpose and intended outcomes for service users is communicated, both within the fire service and to external stakeholders. The TWFRS Strategy 2025 explains how the fire service intends to deliver high quality services that meets the needs of its communities now and in the future. The strategy presents a clear vision, strategic goals, and priorities for a five-year period.

The CRMP 2022-24 drives continuous improvement and innovation in the fire service, ensuring that services are planned, designed and delivered in a way that balances efficiency and community risk. The CRMP process is used to improve community outcomes, strengthen prevention, reduce costs, reduce incidents and manage the risk in our communities. The CRMP is based on the analysis of extensive data and information, local intelligence, and a comprehensive understanding of local, regional and national risks.

The Community Risk Profile 2020-2023 (CRP) provides a comprehensive and forward-looking assessment of the risks in the communities of Tyne and Wear. The CRMP 2022-24 contains actions, which ensure that risks, including those identified in the CRP, are appropriately addressed and resources are targeted at these risks.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021/2022 to 2024/2025, and the annual budget process, ensures that financial resources are directed to the Authority's priorities. The MTFS and the Efficiency Plan are key to delivering value for money.

Budget monitoring remains robust at both strategic and service levels via the production of regular financial monitoring reports for both Capital and Revenue budgets. These reports, as well as being scrutinised by budget managers, are reported to the Executive Leadership Team and quarterly to the full Fire Authority.

Annual department plans are in place and are supported by risk / business continuity planning. All departments prepare and monitor a suite of key performance indicators (KPIs) to review service standards and promote continuous improvement of corporate services.

Equality impact and risk assessments are carried out to ensure that any changes to procedures do not affect any stakeholders adversely and service delivery outcomes are not affected. Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) are also beginning to be utilised.

The Authority's governance arrangements also extend to cover the wholly owned trading subsidiary "TWFRS Ltd".

3.6 **Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.**

The MTFS includes actions to ensure the financial sustainability of the Authority and the budget planning processes ensure budgets are prepared in accordance with objectives, strategies and the MTFS. This involves input from both the fire service

and Authority Members and shows how the resources will be deployed over the next few years to deliver agreed outcomes and agreed priorities.

Collaboration with partners and agencies is an important aspect of the Authority's work including prevention and protection, responding to incidents and use of resources. The fire service has a successful record of blue light collaboration, including co-location at a number of sites, joint training and exercising and improved operational and preventative activities.

The monitoring of staff availability, incidents, the workforce and budgets ensures that issues are identified and appropriate interventions agreed. The risk management policy sets out the process to identify and control exposure to uncertainty, which may impact on the achievement of the Authority's objectives or activities. A Corporate Risk Register is in place and is reviewed regularly to ensure that risks are appropriately managed.

National Fire Standards, National Occupational Standards and National Operational Guidance are overseen by the appropriate business areas, which ensure they are integrated into the fire service.

The fire service operates a performance management framework. Performance reports are produced and reported to Executive Leadership Team, the Policy and Performance Committee and full Fire Authority quarterly, for scrutiny and transparency.

Arrangements are in place for compliance with health and safety requirements. Health and safety policies and procedures detail roles and responsibilities and accident and investigation reporting internally and to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences regulations 2013 (RIDDOR). The fire service has participated in the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) Achievement Awards, consistently achieving the gold award, which demonstrates high health and safety standards

3.7 Principle E: Developing the Service's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.

The Authority ensures the necessary roles and responsibilities for effective governance are identified and allocated so there is accountability for decisions made. This is done through the Constitution and the Scheme of Delegation, which outlines the roles of Members and officers, which includes statutory roles of Chief Fire Officer, Finance Director and Monitoring Officer.

The fire service manages the performance of its staff through effective policies, procedures and working practices. To ensure the fire service meets the needs of the community staff have the skills, knowledge and experience they need to perform well. Robust recruitment and selection processes and detailed job profiles support this.

Induction processes are in place for Members and staff. These include an introduction to the fire service, values and codes of conduct and the requirements of the role. The Authority operates a Members learning and development programme

to improve Member knowledge, skills and abilities in their individual or collective roles in meeting the Authority's strategic objectives.

The health and wellbeing of the workforce is achieved through a range of measures including HR policies and guidance documents, flexible working, a fitness advisor and the work of the occupational health unit who provide counselling, physiotherapy, trauma support and wellbeing at work initiatives. The fire service were awarded the 'Better Health at Work' gold award.

Appropriate training is conducted for operational and non-operational staff; ensuring staff acquire, maintain and develop appropriate technical and professional skills required for their roles and to support the achievements of the Authority's strategic objectives. Staff are required to perform their roles safely, confidently and effectively in accordance with Service training policy and in alignment with identified role maps, National Operational Guidance, National Occupational Standards and competency frameworks for operational staff.

A team of officers regularly attend incidents, training and exercises to carry out a performance and review role, observing aspects of operational performance and feeding back improvement actions. Information gathered to verify and measure compliance with standard operating procedures and incident management systems is recorded.

All staff participate in the annual Performance Development Review (PDR) process where they and their manager discuss and set expectations about personal objectives and how they align to corporate goals. PDRs support staff to understand how they are performing and what opportunities are available for training and career progression.

The fire service achieved the Investors in People Gold Award status, which benchmarks the effectiveness of its leadership and management practices.

3.8 Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.

The Authority's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Public Service Organisations. The Finance Director is the designated Chief Finance Officer in accordance with Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 ensuring lawfulness and financial prudence of decision-making, and is responsible for the proper administration of the Authority's financial affairs.

Financial management supports the delivery of services and transformational change as well as securing good stewardship. There are comprehensive budgeting systems in place and a robust system of budgetary control, including quarterly and annual financial reports, which indicate financial performance against forecasts. The Authority's Statements of Accounts are subject to scrutiny and the External Auditor delivers an opinion annually on whether the Authority is providing value for money. There is regular reporting of non-financial performance against targets and priorities to the Executive Leadership Team and to Members via the Fire Authority and Committees.

Under the Civil Contingencies Act (2004) (Part 1. Para 2(1) (C)) and The Fire and Rescue Services Act [2004] there is a duty for all Category 1 Responders to prepare plans to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that the fire service can perform its core functions in an emergency.

The fire service use a robust and transparent five stage framework to identify, assess, treat, report and review risk that utilises the right tools, methods and processes to manage risk in a transparent way. This framework conforms with the risk management legislation outlined within the Civil Contingencies Act [2004] and its supporting guidance, namely, The Principles of Effective Response and Recovery in addition to aligning with the ISO31000 international standard of risk management.

The Authority aligns with ISO22301 for Business Continuity and arrangements are in place to ensure that critical services can continue in the event of disruption and are subject to regular review, development and testing. Business continuity plans were in operation during the Covid pandemic and activities have been co-ordinated with partners through the LRF to support the multi-agency response.

Management arrangements ensure that recommendations for improvement made by the Internal Auditor and the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), as well as self-identified improvements are monitored and progress regularly reported on.

Policies for anti-fraud and corruption and whistleblowing are in place, which confirms the Authority's commitment to operating in a fair and transparent manner. The Authority participates in the National Fraud Initiative. A new, standalone Whistle Blowing Policy and Procedure has been developed in 2022/23 and will be implemented in May 2023.

Policies are in place to manage the handling of data including adherence to data protection legislation, Freedom of Information requests, data quality, storage and retention and information security. Where appropriate information sharing protocols have been developed and agreed with partners.

Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability.

The Governance Committee operates in accordance with guidance provided by CIPFA, oversees, and reviews the adequacy and effectiveness of the governance arrangements and internal control environment.

Reports and minutes of the Authority and its committees are publicly available on Sunderland City Councils website (the Authority's secretariat). Reports follow a structured format, which ensures that key information is presented in a clear and consistent manner to aid decision-making.

The Authority publishes information relating to salaries, business interests and performance data. Members and officers declare relevant interests in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK. These declarations enable the Authority to identify and report any related party transactions The Annual Pay Policy Statement is approved and published in accordance with the Localism Act 2011. Members' salaries are paid in accordance

with the Independent Remuneration Panel decisions and reported on the TWFRS website.

The Procurement Services Manager provides advice and clear guidance on the procuring of goods and services. There is a robust system of scrutiny, which includes competitive and formal procurement with advertising of opportunities in line with the Public Contracts regulations (PCR2015). Procurements are awarded on the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) principle. Reports on significant (£500,000 and above) procurements are prepared for approval by Fire Authority.

The Annual Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement are subject to scrutiny and approval in accordance with the Authority's Constitution. The Annual Statement of Accounts provides clear information on income and expenditure and demonstrates the stewardship of public money for the year. The statutory deadline for submission of accounts for audit is 31 May, however this is currently being challenged and could move to June / July. The Annual Governance Statement provides transparency on the governance arrangements and the planned improvements for the coming year. The External Auditor provides an opinion on the Statement of Accounts, which is published on the Authority's website. The Authority acts on recommendations and, where necessary, takes corrective action.

The Authority maintains an Internal Audit service, provided by Sunderland City Council. An independent periodic review of its effectiveness is undertaken which concluded that it operated in accordance with professional standards. Internal audit work is planned on the basis of risk. The work of Internal Audit provides assurance that key risks are being managed. The Authority acts on recommendations and where necessary, takes improvement action.

Processes are in place to ensure that recommendations from HMICFRS and regulatory bodies are actioned.

4 Review of effectiveness

4.1 The Authority has responsibility for conducting a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control, at least annually and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer leads the review of the effectiveness.

4.2 The effectiveness of the governance framework draws on evidence and assurances from the work of the Authority and its committees, statutory officers, the Executive Leadership Team, the work of Internal and External Audit and other review agencies and HMICFRS. The process applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework is set out below:

4.3 The Authority

4.3.1 The Authority's Constitution sets out how it operates, how decisions are made and the procedures, which are followed to ensure these, are efficient, transparent, and accountable. Member training sessions are organised throughout the year to discuss matters in more detail and in an informal environment

4.3.2 The Annual General Meeting of the Authority takes place in June of each year. The format and structure of its democratic decision process is re-affirmed, and approval

is given to the powers and make-up of the Governance Committee, Policy and Performance Committee and Human Resources Committee. The terms of reference and responsibilities of these committees form part of the Authority's Standing Orders.

- 4.3.3 In addition to the above committees, there are a further three committees and a sub-committee, which meet on an ad-hoc basis to discuss specific matters as and when they arise. They are the Appointments Committee, Disciplinary Appeals Committee, Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee and an Emergency Committee.
- 4.3.4 The Authority and its committee structure monitor the effectiveness of the governance framework through the consideration of regular performance, financial and strategic risk management reports. The Authority and its committees receive regular feedback from senior officers on the delivery of services and the achievement of objectives and targets. The Chair of the Authority, Chief Fire Officer and the Finance Director oversee the review and sign off the Annual Governance Statement.

4.4 **Governance Committee**

- 4.4.1 The Governance Committee considers the effectiveness of the Authority's governance arrangements, risk management arrangements, control environment and anti-fraud and corruption arrangements and seeks assurance that action is being taken on risk-related issues identified by the auditors and the HMICFRS on corporate governance matters.
- 4.4.2 The committee receives and considers Internal Audit's Annual Plan and Annual Report and the reports and opinions of External Audit, including the Annual Audit Letter and monitors management action in response to the issues raised.
- 4.4.3 The committee has a responsibility to ensure internal control systems are effective and that policies and practices are compliant with statutory requirements, other regulations and guidance. This committee satisfies themselves that the Authority's assurance statements properly reflect the risk environment, drive any actions required to improve it, and will make recommendations or comments to the Authority as appropriate.
- 4.4.4 The committee is responsible for the ethical framework of the Authority and promotes high standards of conduct, working closely with the Monitoring Officer to deal with complaints about Members conduct.
- 4.4.5 The Governance Committee aligns with the core functions of an audit committee, as identified in CIPFA's *Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities* and undertakes an assurance and advisory role.

4.5 **Statutory Officer roles:**

- 4.5.1 The Authority appointments the following statutory officers:
- The Head of Paid Service (Chief Fire Officer) has overall responsibility for the management and operational activities of the fire service and:

- Provides professional advice to the Authority and its committees; and
 - Ensures a system for recording and reporting Authority decisions, together with the Monitoring Officer.
- The Chief Finance Officer (Finance Director and s151 Officer) has overall responsibility for the financial management of the Authority and:
 - Ensures that the financial position of the Authority is monitored throughout the year and consideration is given to financial implications when taking decisions and with the support of External Audit that financial processes are complied with.
 - For advising both senior managers and elected members on all financial matters in line with CIPFA's document Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010). The Authority's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA statement.
 - The post holder is professionally qualified and has many years' experience within Local Authority finance.
 - The Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for:
 - Ensuring compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations, and the lawfulness and fairness of decision-making.
 - Reporting on matters they believe are, or are likely to be, illegal or amount to maladministration;
 - Matters relating to the conduct of Members and Principal Officers; and
 - The operation of the Authority's constitution.

4.6 The Executive Leadership Team

- 4.6.1 The Executive Leadership Team are responsible for the development and maintenance of the governance environment by:
- providing clear direction to the fire service and senior managers;
 - providing information from various sources to inform governance arrangements, e.g. performance reports, financial and risk management arrangements and;
 - contributing to the completion and review of the Annual Governance Statement;

4.7 Financial Planning

- 4.7.1 The MTFS provides the financial strand linking the budget-planning framework for Revenue and Capital budgets with Authority and fire service goals and priorities over a rolling 4 year period. The MTFS is presented to Fire Authority as part of the Revenue Budget report and published papers are made available to the public in February of each year on Sunderland City Councils' website.
- 4.7.2 The budget planning framework and draft budget is scrutinised and approved by Authority as part of a well-embedded budget cycle process each year culminating with final approval in February by Fire Authority. This process ensures that a realistic and affordable budget is approved in accordance with the advice of the Finance Director (Section 151 Officer), who provides assurance to members that the budget is prudent, affordable and sustainable.

- 4.7.3 The Authority approved a balanced budget for 2022/23 on 14 February 2022. Monitoring of expenditure against the budget is carried out throughout the year and Executive Leadership Team is regularly kept informed of the position. Formal quarterly reports are also provided to Authority where the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme are scrutinised and actions approved by members of the Authority as considered necessary. The fire service reported an estimated underspend of £0.700m for the financial year 2022/23, the detail of which is set out in the quarterly budget monitoring report made to Authority in January 2023. The final position however will not be known until the outturn report is finalised and reported to members in June 2023.
- 4.7.4 The Authority continued to ensure it had good arrangements for managing its finances and achieving value for money throughout the year. The financial planning process and the need to provide best value services is well embedded and understood across the Authority by Members and staff. A financial services team, managed by the Head of Financial Services who reports directly to the Finance Director maintains the correct competencies and ensures that the Authority and the Executive Leadership Team receive appropriate financial information to support the key decisions and objectives of the fire service.
- 4.7.5 The proposed Treasury Management Policy and Strategy 2022/23 (including both borrowing and investment strategies) proposed for 2022/2023 and the Prudential 'Treasury Management' Indicators for 2022/2023 to 2025/2026 was presented to the Governance Committee in March 2022 for scrutiny before it was fully approved by the Authority.
- 4.7.6 The Treasury Management Policy and Strategy and its Prudential Indicators, which are regularly monitored and formally reported to Governance Committee quarterly, ensure that the Authority's proposed Capital Programme is sustainable, affordable and achievable within the total resources envelope available to the Authority and also helps inform the MTFS.

4.8 Financial Management Code

- 4.8.1 In October 2019, CIPFA issued a new Financial Management Code. The purpose of the Code is to support good practice in financial management and to assist authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. It contains a set of minimum standards for financial management for local authorities, including fire authorities.
- 4.8.2 A detailed review has been undertaken by the Finance Director, which concluded that the Authority's arrangements comply with CIPFA's Financial Management Code.

4.9 Performance Management

- 4.9.1 There is a system of performance management embedded within the Authority's management structure and processes. The TWFRS Strategy 2025 sets out the Authority's key objectives, which are reflected in the annual departmental plans and KPIs. These plans are monitored by the Business Improvement Team, managed by

the Senior Leadership Team and key outcomes reported to the Executive Leadership Team and Authority regularly.

- 4.9.2 The Operational Standards Programme, introduced in 2021/2022 has provided substantial assurance. Areas for improvement identified were fed back to the crew and incorporated into future training programmes. A new programme of Operational Standards 2022/23 has seen a continuation of station visits, support to phase II firefighters, and development of leadership pathways for supervisory commanders.
- 4.9.3 The performance management framework is under review, with the aim to improve the management and reporting of corporate performance.

4.10 Risk Management

- 4.10.1 The Governance Committee received a progress report regarding the management of corporate risks on 6 March 2023, to ensure independent scrutiny of the corporate risk register. The Chair noted the good practice of critically evaluating the register (min no.31/21 refers) which provides assurance to the committee that risk is being managed appropriately.
- 4.10.2 The corporate risks facing the Authority were reviewed on 9 March 2023 by the Executive Leadership Team as part of their ongoing management of risk and there is currently one risk that is categorised as intolerable on the register, namely:
- 01/20 Risk that the impending Remedy for Age Discrimination in Pension Schemes results in detrimental Financial and workforce impacts for the Service.
- 4.10.3 The Executive Leadership Team continue to monitor this risk closely and apply the appropriate mitigation whilst reporting progress to the Governance Committee and Authority as part of the annual cycle of committee meetings for independent scrutiny and information, discussion and challenge respectively.

4.11 Business Continuity

- 4.11.1 The Service ensures business continuity arrangements remain fit for purpose by undertaking regular reviews and updating individual business continuity plans as appropriate. Specific plans are also created and reviewed as required (i.e. Covid-19) to ensure the delivery of critical activities during any business interruption. The programme of testing and exercising of business continuity plans underpins the business continuity management system.
- 4.11.2 Throughout 2022/23, the Service faced the additional risk of industrial action. To ensure the Service was prepared for this, the TWFRS Emergency Management Group was activated on 14 July 2022, and extensive work was undertaken to ensure suitable and sufficient business continuity arrangements were in place to provide a fire and rescue service in the event of a strike. This work included developing a new Concept of Operations, and Logistics Cell.

4.12 Internal Audit

4.12.1 Internal Audit is a key source of assurance for the Annual Governance Statement and operates in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. Internal Audit review the effectiveness of the Authority's governance arrangements, including the system of internal control, and reports on its adequacy. Internal Audit follow an audit plan based on an assessment of potential risks for the various systems and procedures.

4.12.2 The Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23 was noted and agreed by Governance Committee at their meeting on 7 March 2022 and set out the proposed plan of work for the Authority. The following audits took place during the year, and gave overall assurance levels of substantial (risk levels are low) or moderate (risk levels are acceptable):

- Business Continuity Arrangements (Substantial assurance confirmed);
- Partnership Working (Substantial assurance confirmed);
- Information Governance and compliance with GDPR (Moderate assurance confirmed).

4.12.3 In addition to the above, audit work was also undertaken on the Lead Authority's key financial systems, which are used by the Authority. Systems audited covered during the year included:

- Accounts Payable and Payroll (Transaction Testing) and substantial assurance was confirmed.

4.12.4 The Governance Committee were updated on progress against the audit plan at their meeting in March 2023.

4.13 External Audit:

4.13.1 External audit is undertaken by Mazars, a limited liability partnership appointed by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited for this purpose. The Annual Audit Letter gives independent assurance of the Authority's financial control and Value for Money arrangements (including financial resilience and the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the Authority's arrangements).

4.13.2 The External Auditor has yet to issue their opinion on the Authority's Financial Statements for the year ending 31st March 2022. Particulars of the auditor's findings in respect of the audit of the accounts will be included in their detailed draft Audit Completion Report once issued to the Governance Committee, where it is expected to provide assurance of an unqualified audit opinion on the accounts and detailed on the Authority's arrangements for achieving value for money.

4.13.3 Mazars are expected to issue an unqualified opinion on both the Authority's financial statements and Value for Money Conclusion although the audit completion date is still unknown because it has been affected by a LGPS pension valuation issue that will impact upon the accounts for 2021/22. Past audits have not provided any issues of concern and this is the expected outcome for 2021/22

4.14 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Inspection

4.14.1 The Authority was first inspected by HMICFRS in 2018/19, and again in 2021/22, and judged as Good for all three areas of inspection:

- Effectiveness – our emergency response and services we provide to the public
- Efficiency – how we manage our finances and how efficient we are
- People – our culture, training and how we treat our people

4.14.2 The third round of full inspections is scheduled for 2023/24.

5 How the Authority addressed the governance improvement actions from 2020/2021

5.1 The Annual Governance Statement 2021/22 contained 9 improvement actions, comprising of four actions new actions identified during the 2021/22 annual governance review and five legacy actions.

5.2 Progress against these actions was reported to the Executive Leadership Team on 2 May 2023, where five were noted as complete and four actions remain to be completed. These actions are listed below:

- Action ref 60 2019/20 - Information Asset Register (IAR) and recording system to be reviewed, supported by new technology and further training. (*complete*)
- Action ref 7 2021/22 - Arrange for the provision of anti-fraud and bribery training for TWFRS Members, managers and staff. (*complete*)
- Action ref 67b 2020/21 - Roll out training on Corporate Governance for SLT including information asset management. (*complete*)
- Action ref 2 2022/23 - Develop a structured management development programme for the Senior Management Group. (*complete*)
- Action ref 4 2022/23 – Review, and where appropriate, update the All Personnel Code of Conduct. (*complete*)
- Action ref 43 2018/19 - Review and streamline policies and procedures, to include PIA & EIA and support training, to align to new strategic planning framework. (*partially complete*)
- Action ref 8 2021/22 - Further guidance and training required for staff on Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) to improve staff understanding of and compliance with PIA requirements. (*partially complete*)
- Action ref 1 2022/23 - Develop a Communications and Engagement Strategy that sets out how the Service will continue to effectively engage with internal and external stakeholders. (*complete*)

- Action ref 3 2022/23 – Review and improve the Service’s Information Governance approach and develop an Information Governance Framework (*partially complete*)

5.3 Appendix A provides a concise high-level summary of the action taken during 2022/23 to progress these actions.

6 Opinion on the Governance Framework

6.1 The review of the effectiveness of the governance framework shows that the arrangements continue to be fit for purpose and reasonable assurance can be given that the framework is operating adequately in practice.

6.2 No review can provide absolute assurance; this statement is intended to provide reasonable assurance that there is an ongoing process for reviewing the governance framework and its operation in practice.

6.3 Whilst the governance framework is considered adequate a couple of issues have been identified that need to be addressed to further enhance the Authority’s governance arrangements and are outlined in section 7.

7 Governance matters identified for improvement during 2023/24

7.1 The review of the effectiveness of the Authority’s governance framework has identified no additional actions for 2023/24. This is due to the continued and focussed improvements to corporate governance monitoring, and better awareness of corporate governance amongst managers in the Service.

7.2 There are three improvement actions for completion during 2023/24, all of which are legacy actions carried forward from the 2022/23 action plan.

7.3 The Corporate Governance Board and Governance Committee have responsibility for ensuring the delivery of the actions needed to improve the Authority’s governance framework.

8 Assurance summary

8.1 The Authority recognises that good governance provides the foundation for the delivery of good quality services that meet the needs of stakeholders and ensures that public money is well spent. This review confirms the governance systems and monitoring arrangements in place for 2022/23 are working effectively.

8.2 The Authority is satisfied that appropriate governance arrangements are in operation and remains committed to enhancing these via the delivery of the action plan for 2023/24.

8.3 To the best of our knowledge, the governance arrangements, as defined above and within the Authority’s Local Code of Corporate Governance, have been effectively operating during the year 2022/23 with the exception of the outstanding actions at 5.2. We pledge our commitment that over the coming year we will take steps to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps

will address the need for improvements that were identified and will monitor their implementation and operation during the year and as part of our next annual review.

Cllr Phillip Tye

Chris Lowther

Dennis Napier

Chair of the Fire Authority

Chief Fire Officer and
Chief Executive

Finance Director
(S151 Officer)

Date:

Date:

Date:

Appendix A – Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 - Annual Action Plan

Ref	Area for improvement	Lead Officer	Responsible Officer	Actions Status
1 2022/23	Develop a communication and engagement strategy that sets out how the fire and rescue service will continue to effectively engage with both internal and external stakeholders.	AM Data, Digital & Safety	Media and Communications Manager	Action Complete The Communication, Engagement and Consultation Strategy has been consulted on with Senior Management Group, and appropriate amendments made. The final version was published in June 2023. The Strategy sets a clear direction for internal and external engagement, and will be supported by an internal and external communication, engagement and consultation plans – being developed in 2023.
2 2022/23	Develop and deliver a structured management development programme for the Senior Management Group.	HR Director	Organisational Development Manager Organisational Development Advisor	Action complete A structured management development programme was initiated in 2022 and five sessions have now been delivered with a further three, where specific topics have already been assigned, scheduled for delivery. Sessions are delivered on average every 6 to 8 weeks with content designed around topical subjects which address specific areas of leadership and management; and provide opportunity for learning and growth for TWFRS leaders. Work is currently being undertaken to publish this on the Organisational Development pages on the intranet. The Service has implemented the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Supervisory Leadership Development Programme in 2023, with all those participating in the initial rollout phase now inducted and progressing with the programme. In October 2022, a business case to commence the NFCC Middle Management Development Programme was agreed. This course is currently in development by NFCC and the Service will roll this out once a launch date is confirmed and training material is available.

<p>3 2022/23</p>	<p>Review and improve the fire and rescue service's information governance approach and develop an information governance framework.</p>	<p>HR Director AM Data, Digital & Safety</p>	<p>Information Governance Advisor HR Services Manager Head of ICT Head of Data, Information and Safety</p>	<p>In progress A new Information Management Framework has been developed, based upon all elements of the information life cycle and includes essential sign posting to our updated procedures relating to information governance. Benchmarking has been undertaken against the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) accountability tracker and in accordance with Fire Standards Board (FSB) criteria for information governance related Fire Standards. This is to ensure our policy content aligns to statutory requirements. There will be further review of this benchmarking following additional guidance due to be published by the FSB in relation to compliance with Fire Standards. Several policies and procedures were approved by ELT, and the overarching Framework will be reviewed and approved at the July 2023 ELT meeting.</p>
<p>4 2022/23</p>	<p>Review and where appropriate update the All Personnel Code of Conduct.</p>	<p>HR Director</p>	<p>HR Director</p>	<p>Action complete The Service's Code of Conduct was reviewed and refreshed to incorporate the national Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services in England. The national Core Code of Ethics was developed in partnership with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), Local Government Association (LGA) and the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) to support a consistent approach to ethics, including behaviours, by fire and rescue services in England. An e-learning package has also been developed for staff to complete to support the implementation of the Service's new Code of Conduct and Ethics.</p>

<p>7 2021/22</p>	<p>Arrange for the provision of anti-fraud and bribery training for TWFRS Members, managers and staff</p>	<p>HR Director</p>	<p>Head of Learning and Development Multimedia Technician</p>	<p>Action complete An e-learning package for the Service anti-fraud and bribery training has now been launched and is available for all staff to complete. In addition, to further support the roll out of this training, a counter fraud framework has been drafted and is now in the consultation phase prior to publication.</p> <p>The Monitoring Officer has confirmed that Members receive training from their 'home' councils so there is no further action required in respect of Member training.</p>
<p>8 2021/22</p>	<p>Further guidance and training required for staff on Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) to improve staff understanding of and compliance with PIA requirements.</p>	<p>HR Director</p>	<p>Information Governance Advisor HR Services Manager</p>	<p>In progress In line with current Information Commissioners Office (ICO) guidance the Service has moved from the Privacy Impact Assessment requirements to incorporate the Data Protection Principles in to a Data Protection Impact Assessment.</p> <p>The Data Protection and GDPR policy is now published and a new DPIA template is in use. A trial of the revised DPIA process was carried out successfully on the refresh of the Body Worn Video Cameras policy.</p> <p>A DPIA guidance document is under consultation to support the completion of the screening questions/DPIA. DPIA requirements is explained within the e-learning package, additional 1 to 1 training/support is available as required.</p> <p>A request for an extension for this action to August 2023, to accommodate approval route for publication and delivery of the training.</p>

43 2018/19	Review and streamline policies and procedures, to include PIA and Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and support training, to align to new strategic planning framework.	HR Director	Information Governance Advisor HR Services Manager	In progress A revised process for developing and reviewing Service Policy and Procedure is now fully implemented which includes EIA. The Service has adopted a DPIA which covers the requirements of a PIA, in line with the ICO guidance. DPIA requirements and guidance is incorporated within the overarching Information Management Framework (noted in action 3 of this action plan) and further training is to be delivered (as noted in action 8). The Service is in the process of rolling out PIA training and templates Proposed completed date of August 2023 to accommodate the appropriate review of all required policies and procedures.
60 2019/20	Information Asset Register (IAR) and recording system to be reviewed, supported by new technology and further training.	HR Director AM Data, Digital & Safety	Information Governance Advisor HR Services Manager Head of ICT	Action Complete A new IAR template is now in place that also includes the Record of Processing Activities (ROPA) to ensure we have a lawful basis for processing. Guidance documentation and training for Information Asset Owners (IAO) and administrators has been produced and delivered. All IAOs are currently carrying out data mapping exercises within their teams on the new IAR template to inform the final identification and allocation of information assets across the Service. Microsoft 365 functionality is being explored to effectively manage IARs and enhance the control of IARs within the Service eg. retention automation
67 2020/21	Roll out training on corporate governance (CG)	HR Director	Information Governance Advisor	Action Complete An initial Information Asset Owner training session was delivered to the SLT in February 2023 by the Information Governance Advisor,

	for the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) including b) info asset management.			with follow up individual training sessions conducted with Department Heads. These one to one sessions will continue on a rolling basis to maintain and develop knowledge for IAOs. In addition, an Information Governance e-learning package was produced and has been launched to all staff in early 2023.
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MEETING: GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE 30 JUNE 2023

SUBJECT: COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE (THE CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY) THE FINANCE DIRECTOR AND THE PERSONNEL ADVISOR TO THE AUTHORITY

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Governance Committee with an overview of the compliments and complaints received by Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.
- 1.2 During 2022/23, 158 compliments and 18 complaints were received; the volumes of both are minor in comparison to the 77,925 'official' interactions recorded with the public for this period. The attached report provides an overview of the compliments and complaints received.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Service is committed to providing the highest quality of service to the communities of Tyne and Wear and recognises feedback as an essential component of continuous improvement. Feedback offers critical reflection of performance against standards and may describe activities undertaken to an exceptional standard or identify areas for improvement.
- 2.2 Whilst the Service strives for operational excellence, there may be occasions when it does not deliver to the standards expected and welcomes views about performance, allowing the opportunity to investigate and correct circumstances of underperformance and learn from the outcomes in order to improve the quality of service provided.

3 COMPLIMENTS

- 3.1 The recording and dissemination of compliments provides an opportunity for the Service to hear about the experiences of service users and the views of the public.
- 3.2 During 2022/23 the number of compliments increased by 183%, rising from 86 2021/22 to 158. The increased submission of compliments is due to the increase in staff awareness of the reporting process through internal promotional activities such as the corporate governance bulletin, compliments and complaints intranet page, news articles and the designated email.

3.3 The compliments received illustrate the breadth of the work undertaken by staff, with the main topics of compliments received are around on duty conduct, emergency response, partner agency feedback and prevention activities.

4 COMPLAINTS

4.1 The complaints process allows for expressions of dissatisfaction to be reported and investigated identifying any instances of substandard performance or conduct, the analysis of which can support potential areas for improvement.

4.2 Of the 18 complaints received for 2022/23, 11% were upheld following investigation. The highest number of complaints received (6) were related to on duty staff conduct, however none of those complaints were upheld following a thorough investigation.

4.3 Effective Complaint Handling training sessions continued throughout 2022/23, with 20 members of staff undertaking the training. 72 members of staff have completed the training in total since May 2021, including the Executive Leadership Team.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT

5.1 There are no risks associated in respect of this report.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no financial implications in respect of this report.

7 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no equality and fairness implications in respect of this report.

8 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Members are recommended to:

- a) Endorse the contents of this report.
- b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

**Tyne and Wear Fire
and Rescue Service**



**Compliments and
Complaints Annual
Report 2022/2023**

Executive Summary

This report will provide an overview of all compliments and complaints received by Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. The compliments and complaints procedure and policy was refined in 2022, with new guidance and processes issued for registering and monitoring complaints. The process is now fully embedded within the Service, and is now standard practice for all staff.

TWFRS receive feedback by many different methods, and the compliments process is now embedded across the Service. This provides an option for service users and members of the public to provide direct feedback to staff they have interacted with, and allows the Service to recognise the members of staff where we are notified of exemplary service. The number of compliments recorded in 2022/23 was 158; a 187% increase on the previous year, which indicates both staff and members of the public are aware of methods available to register compliments.

Complaints received in 2022/23 had decreased from the previous reporting period, with 18 complaints being received and investigated. Two complaints were not for TWFRS and were in relation to other Fire and Rescue Services, one was not a formal complaint and was dealt with informally without full investigation, and one was a claim from a member of the public that was dealt with via insurance.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 TWFRS welcome all opportunities to receive feedback on the experiences of service users and members of the public, and this is used to promote continuous improvement across the Service. Feedback is an essential element of engagement with the communities served, and allows the Service to identify areas for improvement, and praise staff that have performed above and beyond their roles.
- 1.2 Investigation of instances whereby our service has fallen below standard is a crucial process for the Service, and can inform changes to internal processes to improve efficiencies.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Staff regularly interact with the public and during 2022/2023, 77,925 'official' interactions were recorded. Official interactions consist of; 33,165¹ calls to the Control room (an increase of 355), 18,725² incidents attended (an increase of 831), 22,569³ Safe and Well visits, and 3,466³ fire safety activities. The number of Safe and Well visits has increased significantly from 2021/2023 as a result of face to face visits returning following the Covid-19 pandemic. The numbers are now reflective of the figures pre-pandemic, a
- 2.2 The Service welcomes feedback in a variety of methods including face to face, postal, email and the Service's website. In 2022/2023 contacts to the compliments and complaints mailbox comprised of 158 service compliments, 18 service complaints, 2 non service complaints and 26 other contacts totaling 204 contacts. This is a 38% increase on the previous year (78).

¹ Source: Mobilising system for calls, 1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022.

² Source: IRS incident data, 1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022.

³ Source: CFRMIS for Safe and Well data and Fire Safety Audits, 1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022.

Figure 1: Contacts received 2022/23

Contact	Count
Compliments	158
Complaints	20
TWFRS	18
External – Other FRS	2
Other contacts	25
General enquiry	15
Smoke Alarm	2
Fire Safety	3
Personal Comment	4
Civil Matter	1
Overall Total	207

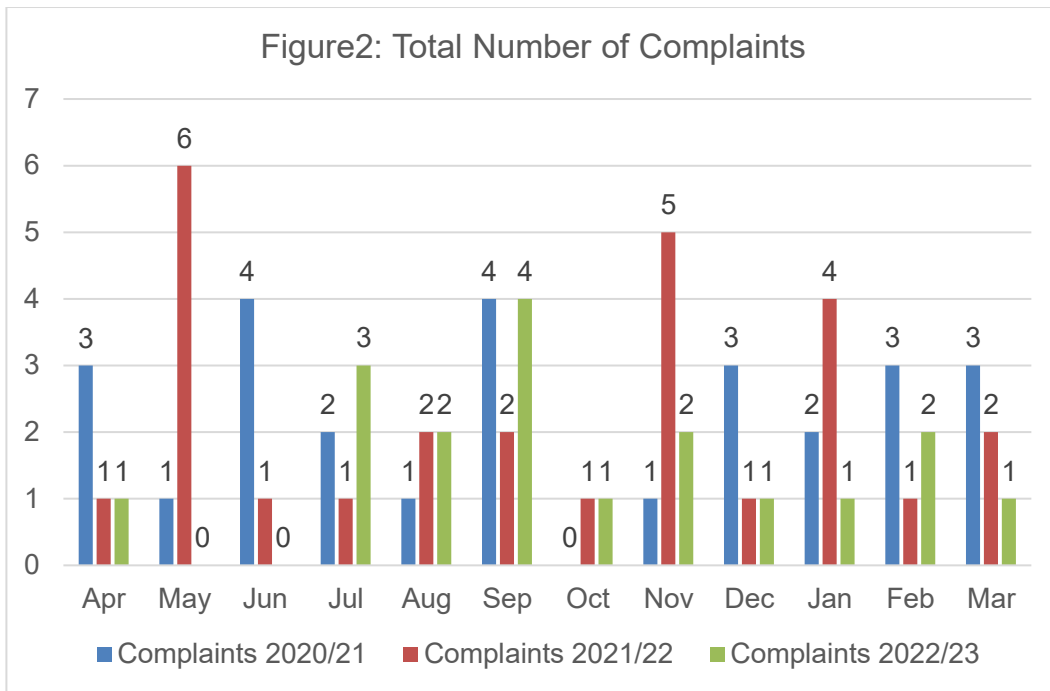
- 2.3 20 complaints were received however only 18 were investigated; two complaints received were not relating to TWFRS and were in relation to other FRS. Initial inquiries highlighted this and the complainant was referred to the correct service.
- 2.4 26 ‘other contacts’ were received via the compliments and complaints mailbox, which did not meet the criteria for a compliment or a complaint. Following a review of the contacts, the correspondence was directed to the correct department for suitable action to be taken to rectify where applicable. Examples of ‘other contacts’ received were in relation to requesting smoke alarms to be fitted in properties, which was referred to our Prevention and Education department, and person opinions expressed regarding potential industrial action.

3. 2022/23 Overview

- 3.1 The Service defines compliments as ‘*praise given by a service user or partner for a service provided, or to thank an individual, team or department for their actions*’. Compliments received from members of staff are not included within this report, however positive feedback has been received internally during 2022/23 and fed back directly where appropriate.
- 3.2 An increase has been noted in compliments during 2022/23, with a 183% increase recorded from the previous year. In relation to ‘official’ interactions, the percentage is still relatively low, however the year on year increase over the previous three financial years is indicative of a positive change and awareness of Compliment policy and procedure. The Service continue to promote the policy and procedure to staff to encourage the registration of compliments where received, as it is likely that there is still contacts that are not recorded.
- 3.3 Appendix A provides a comprehensive list of all compliments received within 2022/23; all staff referenced within compliments are notified of the contact along with their line manager, and the document is displayed on the intranet for staff to review. An overview of compliment figures continues to be reported to the Corporate Governance Board on a quarterly basis. The main topics of compliments received are around on duty conduct, emergency response, partner agency feedback and prevention activities.

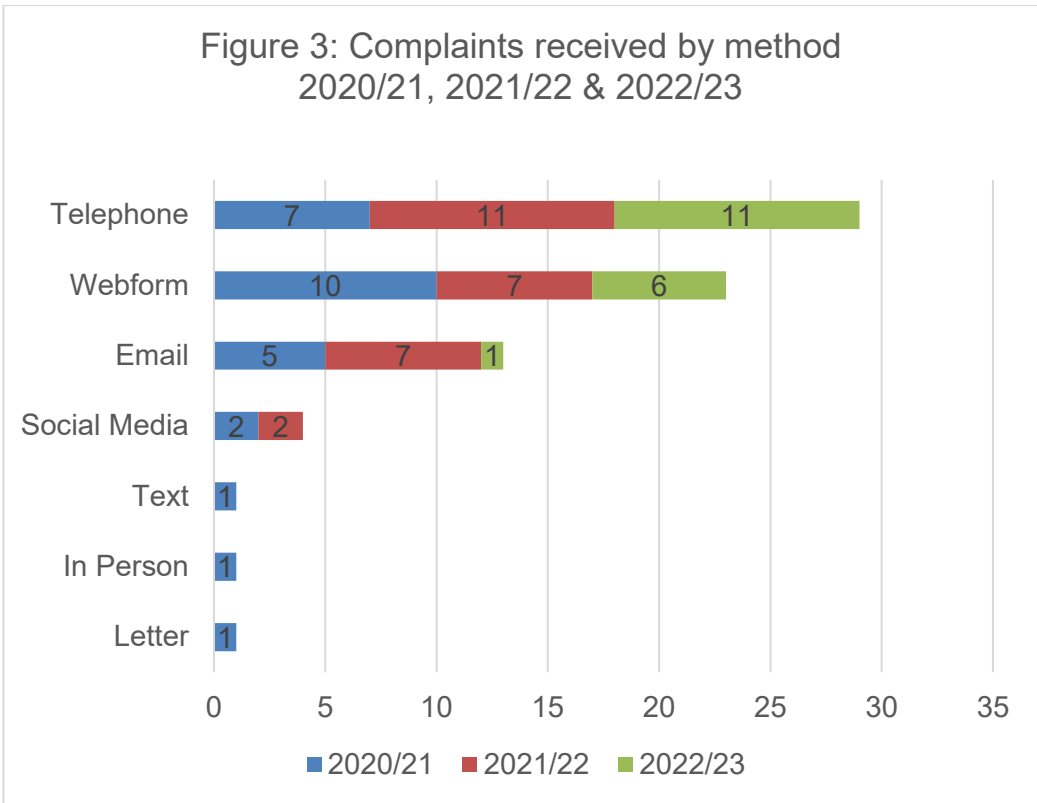
- 3.4 The Service categorises complaints as *'an expression of dissatisfaction about our action or lack of action by one or more members of the public. This may be about the standard of our service provided by us or on our behalf, or the manner in which it was provided'*.
- 3.5 There are four stages at which a complaint may be resolved:
- 3.5.1 Internally a complaint can be resolved by:
- Frontline resolution
 - Formal investigation
 - Appeal to the Chief Fire Officer
- 3.5.2 Complaints can be resolved externally by contacting the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)
- 3.6 20 complaints were received throughout 2022/23; two complaints were received which were later identified to be members of staff from other Fire and Rescue Services. Initial inquiries by the investigating officer confirmed the complaints in relation to off duty conduct and discourteous driving were in relation to other services, and therefore did not follow our complaints procedure and were not investigated.
- 3.7 An informal complaint was received regarding a social media post, which has been excluded from this report as it was resolved outside of the complaints procedure. Remedial action was taken however an investigation was not required.
- 3.8 Of the 18 complaints that were investigated by TWFRS, 13 were not upheld, 2 were upheld and 3 were partly upheld. The two complaints that were upheld were in relation to discourteous driving and smoke alarms; as a result of both complaints action was taken using internal processes to ensure this matter does not occur again. Of the 13 complaints that were not upheld, six were in relation to on duty conduct. All complaints were subject to a thorough investigation carried out by an impartial member of staff who reviews the details of the complaint, conducts interviews where required, and collates all available information to come to a decision.
- 3.8 Following the release of an ITN news article relating to culture in TWFRS on 23 March 2023, the Service received contacts from members of the public using our email systems and the complaints webform. Although the contacts were not specifically contacts that required investigation, the Service felt it appropriate to record and respond in line with our policy. Some of the contacts were vexatious in nature, and offensive and threatening to staff. This is not tolerated by TWFRS, and a response was provided to outline the position around this type of contact.

4. Volume of Complaints received



- 4.1 Figure 2 illustrates the number of complaints received by month for the last three financial years. A decrease in complaints has been noted in 2022/23 with 18 reported and investigated, which is decrease on the previous three reporting years (2020/21 27) (2021/22 27).
- 4.2 From October 2022 to March 2023 there were a consistent number of complaints received on a monthly basis, with one received per month. In September 2022 the Service received its highest number of complaints for the year, with four received in a single month; the category of the complaints provide no possible trend, with two in relation to on duty conduct of different nature, personal social media post, and discourteous driving.
- 4.3 The final stage of the Service’s Complaints process, the appeal stage, was invoked once during 2022/2023. The complaint was thoroughly investigated following our process, however it remains under review.

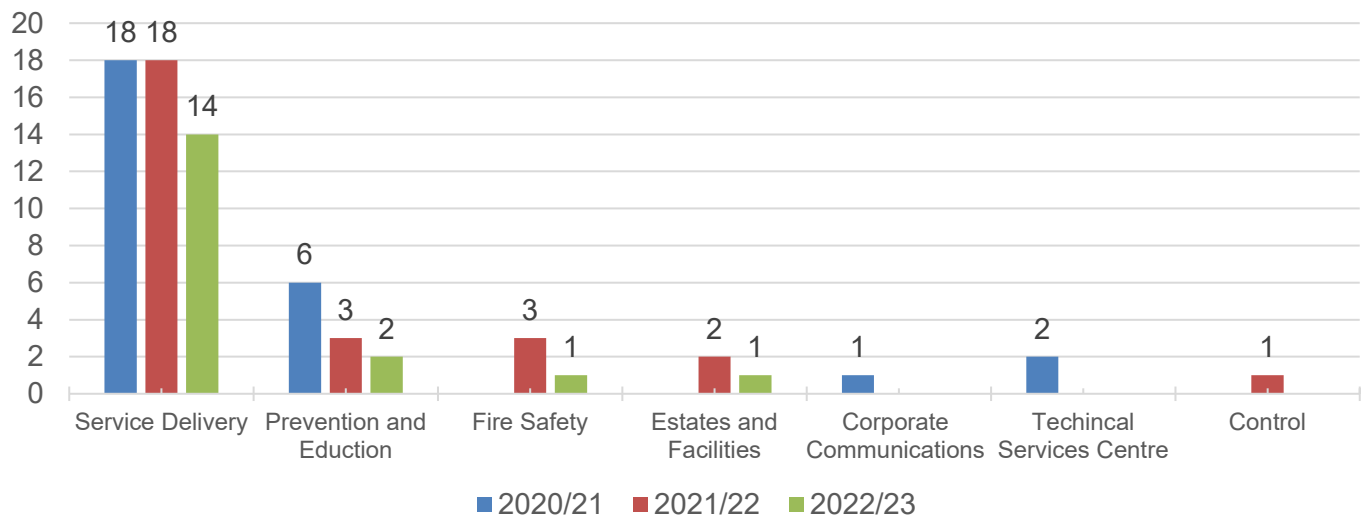
5. Complaints by method of contact



5.1 Figure 3 illustrates that during 2022/23 the preferred method of contact for reporting a complaint was the telephone (11), followed by the webform (6), and email (1). Although the introduction of the webform has provided an alternative method for contact, telephone complaints remain the preferred method of contact; complaints reported using this method have been received from a range of recipients including Control, Business Services and Station Managers. All those that may receive a complaint using any of the above methods are aware of the process for reporting it appropriately to the Compliments and Complaints mailbox.

6. Complaints received by department

Figure 4: Complaints received by department
2020/21, 2021/22 & 2022/23



6.1 Figure 5 shows complaints by department, with the highest number of complaints received relating to Service Delivery. As Service Delivery departments have the most face to face contact with members of the public, it is reasonable to expect that there would be the highest proportion of complaints for this department. Service Delivery staff attended 18,725 incidents during 2022/23, this equates to a percentage of 0.007% complaints received in line with interactions with the public.

6.2 The second highest number of departmental complaints received were in relation to the Prevention and Education team, specifically relating to delays within the team and a Safe and Well visit. Similarly to Service Delivery, Prevention and Education are primarily public facing department, who conducted 22,569 Safe and Well visits in 2022/23, therefore it is reasonable to expect a higher proportion of complaints.

7. Complaints causes and outcomes

7.1 During 2022/23, 10 complaint categories were identified and are listed below. Eight of the complaints received in the 'On Duty Conduct' category were regarding Service Delivery staff, which formed 44% of complaints. Six of these complaints were not upheld, and two were partly upheld.

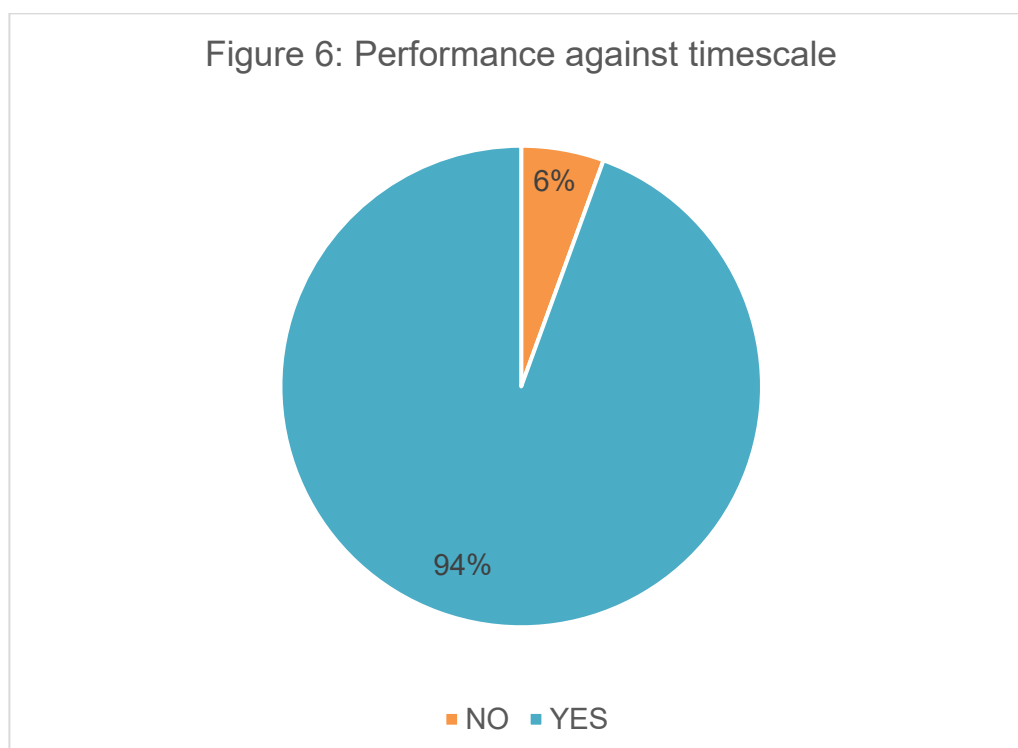
7.2 Four driving related complaints were received in relation to 'Discourteous driving' and 'Inconsiderate parking'. All those that were the subject of a driving complaint have undergone the suitable level of driver training; one complaint was upheld in relation to discourteous driving, and was dealt with using our internal processes.

Complaint Category	Total
Total	18
On duty conduct	8
Discourteous driving	3
Communication / fire report request	1
Inconsiderate parking / neighbour dispute	1
Off duty conduct	1
Off duty conduct / neighbour dispute	1
Operational Decision	1
Smoke Alarms	1
Social media personal	1

7.3 Trend analysis is difficult due to the low volume of complaints received, and varying nature of the complaints, however any remedial action required has been overseen at department level.

7.4 A complaint attributed to our Prevention and Education department has resulted in recommendations implemented in relation to our systems of recording referrals to district teams. This was identified as a result of a complaint recorded by a service user, and during the investigation it became apparent improved guidance and recording could improve this service and avoid future errors.

8. Complaints performance against timescales



8.1 The Service aims to acknowledge all complaints within seven days of receipt, providing details of an investigating officer and confirming the next steps in the process with the complainant. The Service met this target on all complaints received within 2022/2023.

- 8.2 The procedure provides a 28 day timescale to fully investigate a complaint and provide a full written response with an outcome. During 2022/23 there was one instance whereby the investigation period was extended past the 28 day timescale; the extension was required as the intervention of the Occupational Health department was required, which was not possible in the timescales initially set. The complainant received a full justification of the extension in writing.
- 8.3 A complaint regarding a broken door was fully investigated and responded to within the 28 day deadline, however following an appeal remains under investigation and has now progressed to a claim. As the original investigation timescale was met this data has not been included within this analysis.

9. Developments in 2022/23

- 9.1 TWFRS is committed to providing the highest standard of service and utilising feedback from compliments and complaints to share best practice, learn lessons and continually improve. Reviewing trends and issues highlighted via our compliments and complaints data and processes is a key tool to support this.
- 9.2 The updated Compliments and Complaints policy and procedure was launched and implemented in March 2022, and has now been embedded across the Service. The Compliments and Complaints intranet page has been developed to provide transparency to staff around the number of complaints and compliments received, with the detail of compliments made readily available for review. The policies and procedures are available on the intranet for staff to access should they require guidance.
- 9.3 The external website now has a function on the homepage for members of the public to register a complaint or compliment; of the 18 complaints logged in 2022/23 six were registered using the method on the external webpage (33%), indicating this method of contact is relatively easy to locate and user friendly for external customers.
- 9.4 Effective Complaint Handling training sessions continued throughout 2022/23, with 20 members of staff undertaking the training in 2022/23

72 members of staff have completed the training in total since May 2021, including the Executive Leadership Team.

The training covers:

- Defining and analysing complaints
- Planning investigations
- Evaluating information and making sound decisions
- Communicating decisions effectively
- Resolving and learning from complaints

This training continues to be provided by the LGO, and the Service will continue to offer this course to all middle managers and above

- 9.5 Assurance that recommendations are communicated to the appropriate responsible leader(s) following complaint investigations and that improvements or remedial action is fully implemented is a key focus of the ongoing development of our complaints process.

Ensuring this communication process is robust will support the provision of transparency and clarity to staff and the public.



TWFRS Compliments 2022/2023

Below are compliments and messages of thanks TWFRS have received to date during 2022/2023.

March 2023

30 March 2023 – Correspondence received from Mr & Mrs [X] following a safe and well visit

“Thank you for fitting smoke alarms to our property and thank you for your brave work.”

17 March 2023 – Telephone call received regarding a safe and well visit carried out by Rachel Morris, P&E

Gentleman called praising the lady who fitted his smoke alarms. He said “I normally like to complain about everything, but was so impressed with the fantastic service received, I wanted to ring up and let you know that I am really, really happy, it was fantastic.”

17 March 2023 – Telephone call received regarding a safe and well visit carried out by Josh Pitchford, P&E

“Josh had been today and he was amazing a most professional and pleasant young man he has made my day and would just like to pass on how happy I am with the service he provided”

13 March 2023 – Email thank you to the Service from Cllr Daniel Weatherley

“I know all the Service’s staff work extremely hard, especially in terms of prevention, with schools and community groups and they have been very proactive since the incident at the bowling pavilion.

I attended the fire at the bowling pavilion and can safely say all crew members were dedicated, courageous and professional at all times, I hope you could once again pass on my thanks.”

10 March 2023 – Email thank you from LGA to DCFO Heath as a speaker at the March LGA Fire Conference

“A big thank you for your input into the Fire Conference earlier this week. It was a really interesting session highlighting important issues and it was great to see people engaging and asking questions too.”

10 March 2023 – Email thank you from LGA to AM Clark as Workshops host at the March LGA Fire Conference

“A huge thank you for your input into the Fire Conference earlier this week. It was excellent to see how many people went along to and engaged in your workshop and I know it gave people lots of ideas and questions to take back to their home authorities.”

10 March 2023 – Email thank you for support, level of care and dedication displayed by Station Mike W/W Crew

“On behalf of my father and myself, I would like to say a huge thank you to all your crew members, who were on shift yesterday evening.

I had to ask for advice from your crew, on possible ways of getting my father out of his mobility vehicle, as his rear door was securely locked/jammed. My father is wheelchair bound (electric wheel chair), after a severe stroke last year leaving him paralysed down one side. He is on the large side and unable to weight bare. All the crew members went above and beyond as assistant getting my father out of his car. It was amazing to watch the team work, effort and skill involved. Last night, we had already spent 3 hours in A&E. As I drove him back to his

care home on Old Mill Lane, I was unable to unlock the rear door of his mobility car. Panicking, as it was around 9.30sh, my only thoughts was the fire station.

On arrival I explained to one of your members of staff what had happened. I was then told to bring my car into the station to keep my dad warm, as it was a freezing evening. The crew would have a look to see what they could do. Every member of this watch was fantastic looking after the welfare of my dad and myself. Their effort to try and release the door was amazing, but it was all in vain as it wouldn't open. The crews thoughts then went to getting my dad out of the car other ways. What I witnessed next, was amazing, it blew us both away. The crew somehow managed to get my dad out though the side door on a board, then also managed to get his heavy electric wheel chair out.

The level of care, support and dedication to solve this issue was incredible. As I've mentioned we both would like to thank all the crew members for helping us last night."

03 March 2023 – Well done email regarding GM Paul Thompson

"I would like to pass on how well Paul Thompson chaired recent Anti-Social Behaviour panel meetings. He has taken the training on board and shows clear empathy for the victims involved, he balances this well with his expectations on services and their increasing workloads and recognises the need to assess risk and implement actions to reflect the risk in the case."

02 March 2023 – Call received to Business Services to thank Philippa Whitworth, P&E

"Thank you to Philippa Whitworth who carried out a Safe and Well visit to my property. Philippa explained everything to me and I am going to pass on her leaflet to my neighbours."

February 2023

27 February 2023 – Email thank you for Station Juliet W/W attendance at the funeral of retired Leading FF John Knighton.

"I would like to pass on a huge thank you to the four fire fighters who were present at my Grandads funeral on 27/02/2023. Although a very emotional tribute, it was respectful and touching. I can't thank you enough for turning up. My grandad loved his time in the fire service and I know he wouldn't have changed it for the world and if he could have gone back I'm sure he would have. Thank you for taking the time out of your shift to help us say our goodbyes. It's very much appreciated. Thank you for all the work and service you do day to day for our community and stay safe. Thank you again."

14 February 2023 – Email thank you for the provision of Safe & Well Checks

"Thank you for providing such an important service in the community through the safe and well checks."

13 February 2023 – Email thank you to TWFRS Crews

"I would just like to say a huge thank you to the crew who not just 1 of them but all of them waved back to my 6 year old daughter. She loves all emergency response vehicles and being autistic such a small thing like waving back made her day and means so much to us. Thank you for making a little girl very happy today, keep up the good work and stay safe."

10 February 2023 – Email thank you to Crews, GM Thompson and GM Anderson for assistance re Crowhall Towers

"Thank all of your crews who were involved in assisting with the clean-up of Crowhall Towers. We have managed to maintain and fortify, the working relationship, that the Council and the Community Hub trustees share. Additional thanks given to Paul Thompson and John

Anderson, who stayed on Friday evening, until the building was made safe, and a safeguarding solution for the sole resident was agreed.”

8 February 2023 – Email thank you to Occupational Health Nurses and Crews involved in the health monitoring facilitation

“Professor Anna A Stec expressed her gratitude to all the Occupational Health Nurses and those crew members who assisted in the TWFRS Health Monitoring Facilitation event.”

4 February 2023 – Email thank you to the crew from Swalwell Community Fire Station

“Thank you to the crew from Swalwell Community Fire Station who attend a commemorative coffee morning and unveiling of a community defibrillator at Clara Vale village hall in Gateshead held to honour the life of firefighter Edward 'Ted' Aisbitt.”

3 February 2023 – Email thank you to Control colleague Cheryl Richardson

“Thank you to the call handler who dealt with the incident I was in for their calm, friendly and professional conduct.”

2 February 2023 – Email thank you to the Crews attending a refit of smoke alarms for an elderly couple recovering from surgery.

“My brother is 85 and his wife is 84 and are both recovering from a nasty fall in which his wife sustained a broken shoulder. Both were unable to reach the highly placed alarm due to their physical conditions. They were also very confused about what to do, so in desperation rang the fire service for advice.

They were informed that a response would be initiated, and within a very short time, firefighters arrived to help. It was established that the alarm was malfunctioning due to its age, your officers very kindly offered to replace it with a new one which they did whilst at the house.

Please would you be able to convey their gratitude to those extremely helpful officers, they were so friendly, courteous and helpful, and words are just not enough to say how grateful we all are regarding this matter.”

January 2023

24 January 2023 – Thank you card from Westerhope Methodist Church sending good wishes to Stn A firefighters following the recent attacks.

“Following the appalling attack on fire fighters in West Denton on Saturday evening when they were attempting to do their job, the community at Westerhope Methodist Church would like to pass on their kind thought and prayers to those involved and to express their appreciation to all fire fighters based at West Denton who in their role support, care and protect everyone, at times endangering their own lives.”

23 January 2023 – Twitter thank you received from a member of the public.

“Was standing next to a man with his little boy waiting at traffic lights. The boy saw a fire engine and pointed excitedly, they saw and puts lights and sirens on briefly and gave him a wave. The boy was so happy. How lush @Tyne_Wear_FRS 😊❤️ #MondayMotivation”

23 January 2023 – Verbal thank you received from a service user for CM Thompson and G/W Stn Q.

I've [P Coles, Station Administrator] taken a call today from a lady regarding a garden fire yesterday lunch time at [address]. She may have been out at the time and a note was left, but she would like to speak with the Crew who attended to give her thanks.

20 January 2023 – Email thank you from the Lifestyle Coordinator at The Manor House Gosforth Care Home about Rosemary Tarbit, Community Engagement Team Member.

“We had a colleague of yours visit us this week to do a fire and safety talk! The residents wanted me to email on their behalf and let you know that Rosey is a credit to your organisation. Believe me it sometimes takes a lot for the residents to be so impressed. She answered every question and gave her time to everyone that attended. I know this may be Rosies job, I feel like she goes over any expectations. Thank you so much for and we are grateful and look forward to the next visit. Thankyou.”

19 January 2023 – Email to the CFO from the Security Manager at Industrials REIT Limited about WM Currie, G/W Stn A.

“I am sure you will agree we are all too soon to complain but not to praise. I recently met with your colleague Matt Currie at an estate we own in Newcastle (The Waterfront). Matt is an excellent ambassador for the Brigade and an absolute credit to you. I have welcomed his support and assistance in dealing with a difficult situation. Could I please ask that my email is recorded.”

18 January 2023 – Verbal thank you from a service user for W/W Stn A.

Mr X of [address] called and asked me [J Coulson, Station Administrator] to pass on his thanks for such a prompt service. He has been most impressed!

Narrative from J Coulson

Mr X was recently visited by Stn. Alpha White Watch who carried out a Safe and Well visit at the request of Mr Harvey (who had a chirping smoke detector). The crews responded to his request the same day.

6 January 2023 – Email thank you from South Tyneside Women’s Aid to Kerry Douglass, Station Administrator and G/W Stn K.

“Just wanted to send a great big thank you to yourself and the team who came out yesterday and visited us at South Tyneside Women’s Aid. They were all fab and the children who took part thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to see the fire engine up close. We were wondering if there is any chance you could forward some details about any open days you have where we may be able to organise a visit and also if you have info regards cadets sessions as some of the children on the scheme are interested in attending.”

4 January 2023 – Email thank you to the Principal Officers from a National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) colleague.

I just wanted to touch base with you about you so generously allowing me to stay at the flat in Central Fire Station these last few weeks while my brother was under-going treatment for cancer. The flat has been an absolute godsend; following surgery, my brother experienced a number of complications which meant he had to go back down to theatre four times within a 10-day period. What should have been a 2-3 week stay in hospital ended up as just over 5 weeks. It was a very dark time for us as a family which was made so much easier by being close at hand. My brother was discharged just before Christmas and is doing well at home; however, he is due to go back into hospital in the coming week for more surgery and this will be followed by a six-week course of radiotherapy in Newcastle, due to start in January. All of your staff, from the colleagues I met at HQ just before Christmas, to everyone on station, has been absolutely fantastic – so welcoming and offering support and practical help where they can. No one has questioned my being there at the station and they have been genuine and discreet in their questioning and well-wishing. They are a credit to the service and to you as the senior leadership team.

I would hate to think I was overstaying my welcome and taking advantage of your good nature by staying in the flat, so I just wanted to check that it’s ok to stay there for the next few weeks while my brother undergoes the next phase of his treatment? I am also mindful that there is a

new Station Manager at Central Fire Station - I will contact him tomorrow to introduce myself and check he is happy with the arrangements. Should circumstances have changed, and you require me to vacate the flat then please let me know. I am at home in Nottingham at the moment but planning to return to Sunderland in the next few days for my brother's next appointment. I will also arrange to come up to HQ at some point in the coming weeks to put more faces to names. Many thanks again for your kindness and understanding and I hope to meet up with some of you very soon.

4 January 2023 – Email thank you on behalf of two charities following Stn M attendance at the Boxing Day dip.

“Thank you on behalf of Sunderland Lions and Red Sky Foundation for your attendance and support at the Boxing day dip it was greatly appreciated by all in attendance we had 329 Dippers and thousands of spectators. Please let us know how we may make a donation to the service?”

December 2022

22 December 2022 – Email thank you from a service user following

“Thank you for your letter offering us a post fire visit. We have been so impressed by the service on the night (When they fitted new smoke alarms and gave us the same fire guidance leaflet that you have also sent us.) I don't think we need a follow up visit because their care on the night was so next but if you need to do one we could fix a date, otherwise please rest assured that we are very impressed by this service and send our thanks to the fire team that came out to us so quickly (and didn't make me feel bad for calling them out!) Best wishes for a peaceful and safe Christmas to all the team. And many thanks.”

19 December 2022 – Verbal thank you on behalf of a service user following a Safe and Well visit carried out by Steven Grainger.

She mentioned how Steven had gone “*above and beyond*” as there was also a family situation regarding her brother and TWFRS provided the help and re-assurance needed.

18 December 2022 – Thank you email from a service user for W/W Stn J.

“On Friday 16th December I contacted Tynemouth Fire Station in relation to a faulty smoke alarm, the officer I spoke to said that someone would come to my house that morning and rectify the problem. About 12 noon two officers arrived and immediately replaced the faulty alarm. They were extremely pleasant and very professional. My wife and I would like to say thank you for responding so quickly to what was a minor matter, we really appreciate your response (no more chirping alarm keeping us awake)!! Thank you very much wishing all your staff a Happy and safe Christmas and New Year”.

15 December 2022 – Thank you email from a service user.

“Not only is the fire prevention/home safety/health & safety service you provide to us in our homes prompt and absolutely first-class, the person who attended to me earlier this week (Gwen) was a most friendly, helpful and amenable employee who is a credit to Tyne and Wear as well as the national service, and who helped and advised with seeming patronising. Thank you! I feel safer and happier in my home now, especially with 2 new smoke alarms!”

12 December 2022 – A thank you poster received for SM Nelson and Stn Q. from Thornhill Park School.

On 28/11/22, SM Nelson facilitated a station visit with visitors from Thornhill Park School. Following the visit a ‘thank you’ poster with photos from the day was dropped off at the station.

12 December 2022 – Thank you email from an Inspector in Neighbourhood Policing, Southern Command at Northumbria Police to R/W Stn Q, SM Andrew Nelson and the Princes Trust team.

“I want to officially thank you for the assistance you gave me on Monday the 5th of December. As you know, the day was a challenging one for all involved and the risk of further disorder was high. Thanks to you and the staff in the station, we were able to hold briefings, allow the officers working to change into appropriate PPE, have comfort breaks and still be close to where they were required to deploy. It was an excellent example of how we, as partners, work collaboratively, and puts us in good stead when we work under JESIP principles. Thank you again for being so accommodating, I’m aware that it was a much busier day in the station than usual, but it was gratefully appreciated. Please also pass on my thanks and gratitude to your senior management.”

Narrative from SM Nelson

This was crews at station Q, red watch and Princes Trust accommodating the police for a large scale operation at short notice. On site training venues and times changed, meal and break times changed and mess facilities provided. This enabled police briefings and a staging area to be set up.

12 December 2022 – Thank you email from the wife of the High Sherriff Tyne and Wear.

“Just a short note to say a huge thanks for the beautiful flowers which were a very pleasant surprise and look great in the lounge. I was sorry that I could not attend the service but David has said that like everything you do it was an excellent event well managed and a real celebration of what fire fighters have achieved for community good. As you know David has many events to attend as High Sheriff but he always looks forward to your events with real pleasure. Please have a great Christmas break and hopefully catch up in the New Year”.

11 December 2022 – Thank you email from a retired member of staff about Harry Hubber, Pensions Technical Advisor.

“I have just completed my last shift before my retirement and I want to express how grateful I am to Harry Hubber. I am in the pension 'abatement' process, which at times has been confusing and stressful. However, Harry has been constantly available to help guide myself, and others, through the process. He has been honest, professional and supportive at all times and myself and my family cannot thank him enough. He has done everything he can to inform me of my options and to ensure I am fully informed and prepared for what is a very important stage in my life. As his line manager I am certain you are well aware of his excellent work and the Service is very fortunate to be able to rely on people like Harry and yourself. Best wishes for the future.”

8 December 2022 – Verbal thank you from a service user following a Safe and Well visit carried out by the P&E Teams in the West.

I have just taken a call from Mrs X of [address] who would like you to pass on her thanks for the gentleman (Graeme) who attended her property yesterday and put up with her rabbiting on and who was also very polite and helpful.

Narrative from Nicole Mordecai, P&E District Team Leader

Prevention Teams in the West carried out an initiative at Regent Court due to the number of false alarms over the last 12 months. Great feedback from an occupier.

1 December 2022 – Thank you letter from the Chair of the Newcastle Safeguarding Adults Board Improving Practice Committee to Shaun Kelly, Policy and Strategy Manager and Alan D’Arcy, Safeguarding Manager, P&E.

“On behalf of the Newcastle Safeguarding Adults Board Improving Practice Committee, I wanted to write to thank you for hosting one of the webinars during Safeguarding Adults

Week 2022. We really appreciate you taking the time out of your busy day-to-day role to share your knowledge, experience and best practice with a wider audience in Newcastle and beyond. Over a 1,000 people participated in our events across the week which is fantastic, and their feedback has been very positive. Below is just a snapshot of the many thank-yous that we received.

- *“Amazing project! I wish other cities would understand the value of such preventative work”*
- *“Thank you so much for a great session... great to have the overlap with Newcastle Carers, Safe Newcastle and Adult Safeguarding”*
- *“Really useful and thought-provoking”*
- *“Thank you so much. Really interesting and informative”*

November 2022

30 November 2022 – Thank you email from the Care Team Lead and Careers Coordinator at Talbot House School to the Service’s Education & Engagement Manager about Philippa Whitworth, P&E District Team Member and Tommy Richardson, Education and Engagement, P&E.

“Just a message to say a big thank you for providing staff to come down today. Tommy and Phillipa were amazing from start to finish, especially with the pupils. The pupils really enjoyed the session, I will send a selection of photos over once they have been processed. Can you pass this email onto to Andy Robinson too please as he helped with organising this also”.

29 November 2022 – Verbal thank you from a patisserie shop for Stn H.

“We have received a gift from a local patisserie. They dropped off a box of cakes and pastries to Rainton Bridge fire station as a thankyou for what they said was "an excellent job we do".

29 November 2022 – Thank you email from the Early Years Leader at Grindon Infant School for R/W Stn Q.

“We really enjoyed Fridays visit the children have not stopped talking about it. Thank you again for organizing”.

25 November 2022 – Thank you email from a service user to WM McSherry W/W Stn F.

“I'm writing about last night's call-out to [address]. Thank you so much to the team for sorting out the problem, switching off the stove before anything started to actually burn. I'm commuting from the south every week because my wife got a job down here, I'll know forever now not to prepare any food an hour before leaving. But the whole experience dealing with the fire service was really great, thanks again.”

17 November 2022 – Thank you email to WM Kirby, Stn E from the 2nd Wideopen Cub Scout Group.

“Thank you so much for a fantastic visit to Gosforth fire station today. My daughter said it only felt like 20 minutes and could have stayed longer. Can't wait to arrange a visit in the summer maybe I don't know if it's allowed but thought kids could help wash a fire engine as part of it?”

Narrative from WM Kirby

The cub scouts were given advice to ensure they got their Fire safety badge and were shown around the station, the appliances, and Control sent down a test fire call to show how the crews respond to emergency fire calls.

10 November 2022 – Twitter thank you from a service user.

“Just want to say another huge thank you to the amazing teams of our local firefighters that came to help us this morning in Gosforth, you were all amazing.”

8 November 2022 – Thank you letter to SM Griffin from the Chief Constable of Hertfordshire Constabulary, JESIP Interoperability Board Chair and JESIP Senior Responsible Officer and National Police Strategic Lead.

“I write this letter on the day that the Manchester Arena Inquiry, Volume 2 has reported the failings found in the emergency service response to the terrorist attack. The report provides a powerful and salutary reminder of the importance of JESIP and ensuring that all our responders and commanders are appropriately trained and can operate effectively to these multi-agency procedures when required. In support of this throughout the year, you and your colleagues have delivered the Train the Trainer (TtT) workshops, critically upskilling trainers in responder organisations across the country in the updated JESIP Multi-Agency Interoperability Training Course content to enable local and regional delivery.

The final centrally coordinated workshop was delivered in October, with responsibility to upskill new trainers now passing to the services who will achieve this through identification of appropriate trainers using JESIP Training and Trainer specification and TtT material provided. Between you and your colleagues, you delivered 13 workshops, resulting in over 230 trainers being trained to deliver the essential JESIP training course. This is an outstanding achievement and I would like to formally say ‘Thank You’ to you all for this incredible effort. A further reflection of your dedication and professionalism was highlighted through the candidate feedback. It would have been so easy to lose the quality in delivery when trying to rollout the training to such a large number of people, however the feedback showed most attendees were either satisfied or very satisfied with the course and its delivery. This again is truly exceptional. You should be incredibly proud of yourselves and the positive impact your efforts will have on the public we serve.”

8 November 2022 – Thank you email to the CFO and DCFO from the ACFO South Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service.

“Good afternoon, hope you’re both well. As you’re probably aware we’ve held a really informative meeting with both Louise and Laura today. I just wanted to express my sincere thanks on behalf of our service. They were both absolutely fantastic and a real credit to Tyne and Wear FRS.” We’ve taken a huge amount of learning away from your HMI experience.”

7 November 2022 – Thank you email from a service user OIC WM Crutwell, and crew from Stn. N, M and Q.

“I would like to thank you for how quick you attended tonight when the fire alarm went off. This is the central alarm system for the block, not individual flats, so residents couldn’t resolve it. My first response was to call the property management company, who advised me to contact 999. I was not sure about calling 999 for a fire alarm, but I did. I was so impressed with how the local fire station responded, arriving here almost instantly. They were here almost as soon as I ended the call. The crew that attended were very professional and efficient, quickly checking out the scene and turning off the alarm. On behalf of all residents here, thank you.”

7 November 2022 – Thank you letter from the High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear.

“Thought that I would drop you a brief note of thanks for the invitation to Central Control a visit which I found to be informative, reassuring, interesting and enjoyable. It was so good to meet so many officers and to hear of the extensive work they do to help to keep our community safe.

What struck me most when I left was the extensive evidence of teamwork and how all the various parts of Tyne and Wear Fire Service work together for community good supported by extensive training, procedures, and processes. Well done to all and I hope that you were not too busy with all of the fireworks at the weekend.

Please keep up the excellent work and do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything I can do to help during my year in office.”

5 November 2022 – Thank you email from the NFCC Chair to L. Clarkson, S. Allison, L. Brookes and V. Vickerson following the work conducted in support of the Manchester Arena Inquiry Response Cell.

“In my discussions with Chris over the last few days he mentioned all four of you and your support in setting up and running the MAI cell as the latest report was released this week. Now that the dust of the last few days has settled a bit I wanted to take the opportunity to say thank you for everything you did. The arrangements and support was superb and enabled us to just get on with the job in hand. As with all things – it is the work of colleagues behind the scenes that determines the success of anything we do. I’m delighted with how it went and hope this short email conveys my thanks and appreciation, and that of my colleagues inside T&WFRS and across NFCC and many other FRS.”

1 November 2022 – Text message thank you from Councillor Fletcher, Washington North Ward following crew attendance at a fire at a petrol station in Washington.

“Could you please pass on my thanks for the fantastic response to the petrol station fire yesterday as it could have been catastrophic.”

October 2022

30 October 2022 – Email thank you from a service user.

“My attention has been drawn to a piece of GOOD WORK by your Crews from WASHINGTON and BIRTLEY when they put in an excellent STOP at a FIRE on a Filling Station Forecourt on 25/10/2022. It always pleases me to receive such reports from local residents, in this case my Son [name]. Please ensure a copy of our thanks is passed to the Crews attending and the Control Room Staff on watch at the time of the incident. Well done to all.”

30 October 2022 – Email thank you from a service user for WM Batey and B/W Stn Y.

“I just wanted to say thank you so much to the team who came out to get my daughter who was "stuck in her chair" I was so relieved and so apologetic that I had to call them out. But I really am so grateful. You really are angels thank you so so much.”

29 October 2022 – Email thank you from a service user about WM Montgomery, FF Parker and G/W Stn E.

“Hi there, just wanted to thank Kev Montgomery and Green Watch at Gosforth Fire Station for their kindness and professionalism earlier this week. Due to a swollen finger, I needed to have a ring removed. Young Jake (Trainee Firefighter) carried this out with great care and consideration, under the supervision of Kev.”

27 October 2022 – Email thank you on behalf of a service user for crews from Stn S & W and Control Staff following attendance at a fire at a petrol station in Washington.

“My attention has been drawn to a piece of GOOD WORK by your Crews from WASHINGTON and BIRTLEY when they put in an excellent STOP at a FIRE on a Filling Station Forecourt on 25/10/2022. It always pleases me to receive such reports from local residents, in this case my Son [name]. Please ensure a copy of our thanks is passed to the Crews attending and the Control Room Staff on watch at the time of the incident. Well done to all.”

24 October 2022 – Email thank you from a member of the public.

“I just want to say a huge thank you to the lovely fire fighters that called to a near by property in kenton my little boy age 4 was so amazed and is over the moon they all said hello and spent time to show how important they are they all made my little man's day which is fireman Sam mad and all for the emergency services. I am so grateful and my son is more than grateful he burst into tears when your lovely firefighters drove off. Also its amazing to see fire

lady's at 31 years of age its the first time I have seen a women taking on this roll and I have to admit It is so empowering to see what a lovely bunch. Thank you so much."

18 October 2022 – Email from a USAR Capability Officer at the NFCC National Resilience Assurance Team following an assessment of WM Carr and Merlin.

"The time and hard work they have both put in have definitely paid off and their performance was a credit to themselves and Tyne & Wear FRS."

15 October 2022 – Email thank you from a member of the public.

"I visited Newcastle City Centre today parked my car in the Grampian Multi Storey Car Park, when returning I could not find the entrance, so I asked one of your crew members who kindly showed myself and my friend where to go, it was so lovely of him and very much appreciated."

12 October 2022 – Email thank you from a service user about FF McKane following a safe and well check.

"We completed your online fire safety assessment a few days ago and someone called this morning to offer us a home visit. We accepted the offer and someone came round at 10.30am today. We didn't catch the gentleman's name but he was incredibly helpful. He installed three smoke alarms and a heat alarm in our kitchen. He also gave us some really good advice. We hadn't thought about a safe escape route in our home and it was useful to learn why this is so important. We realised that we don't have keys for some of our windows upstairs so will be ensuring that gets sorted. Just wanted to say thank you for making our home safer and for such a prompt and efficient service."

10 October 2022 – Thank you letter from the High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear following his involvement in the long service award ceremony.

"What a very special night on Saturday at the Tyne & wear Fire long service awards which I was honoured and pleased to attend. It was so good to see so many officers and their families attending with the awards service a tremendous success which helped to reinforce the significant role which the fire service play in our community for community good.

I know that these events are not possible without demanding work, determination, and imagination from a lot of people, and I would be grateful if you would pass on these thanks where you think it appropriate. Well done to all.

Please keep up the excellent work and do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything I can do to help during my year in office."

7 October 2022 – Email thank you from the Assistant Headteacher at Southmoor Academy, Sunderland

"Please can we just pass on our thank you to the team that attended this morning to talk to our students. Can you pass on a thank you to those who were involved? It was an extremely important message to pass to our students which was done in a great way to really make them think carefully. So thank you for organising and we would welcome the Fire crew in again to talk to our students."

3 October 2022 – Email thank you from the Vice-Chair at Northumbria Blood Bike to the PO Suite, reception and security staff in support of their AGM.

"Just wanted to say thanks for your help in organising everything for our AGM last night. Everything went really smoothly and we are very grateful for the use of the facilities. If you could pass my thanks up the line please."

3 October 2022 – Thank you card from a service user about Stn Q W/W.

"To the fire crew who saved my house. Thank you."

September 2022

29 September 2022 – Email thank you from a Fire Authority Member about Stn J.

"I just wanted to say that I had a bit of an accident today at Shields Town Hall. I had a nasty fall and as it was on the marble floor I couldn't get up. Officers from Tynemouth Station came and they were absolutely fantastic. I was still quite shook up with a nasty bump on the head but they took control as only your officers can. It was a very embarrassing situation but they were extremely professional, reassuring and basically just brilliant! I only know that the lead officer was called Steven, I didn't get the names of the other two I'm afraid. They were there at about 3.00pm and I know it's a long shot but could you please try and pass my sincerest thanks onto them. I can't praise them enough. Just so pleased that TWFRS can always be relied on as they have always been. Hope everything is ok with you. Take care and very best wishes."

28 September 2022 – Verbal thank you from a service user following a P&E Safe and Well visit by Steven Grainger and Colin Soulsby.

I've just taken a call from Mr X who wished to praise the efforts of "Colin and Steve" who visited his property on 22/09 to carry out a S&W. Comments from Mr X included:

- an asset to the company
- very efficient
- very polite
- very friendly

Mr X wished for me to pass this feedback on to their manager. He mentioned health issues his wife was having and how he was not going through a good time at the moment, so our staff help was ideal during the difficult time he is going through.

27 September 2022 – Verbal thank you email on behalf of a service user about Stn Q G/W.

Could you please pass on the thanks of Mrs X's Daughter, Jill to the watch from Stn Q who visited to S&W on 10th? Jill was super impressed with their courteousness and their flexibility when discussing attendance times. I gave her our website details so hopefully she will fill in the comments slip on there too!

Email thank you from Mrs X's daughter

"I would like to take this opportunity to say a huge Thankyou to Tyne and Wear fire service. I called them on a weekend as my elderly Mothers smoke detectors had started bleeping intermittently. They had just been fitted in May so I was unsure if they were faulty. 3 of the most friendly, helpful fire fighters arrived on a Saturday evening to replace the detectors. They took time to do a fire safety check and brief talk about slips and falls. Talk about service with a smile!! Thankyou so much for a fantastic service."

26 September 2022 – Thank you letter from the High Sheriff of Tyne and Wear following his involvement in the long service award ceremony.

"Thought that I would drop you a brief note of thanks for the invitation to present the long service awards for the Tyne & Wear Fire Service which I was honoured and pleased to complete. It was so good to see so many officers and their families attending with the awards service a tremendous success which helped to reinforce the significant role which the fire service play in our community for community good.

I know that these events are not possible without demanding work, determination, and imagination from a lot of people, and I would be grateful if you would pass on these thanks where you think it appropriate. Well done to all.

Please keep up the excellent work and do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything I can do to help during my year in office."

25 September 2022 – Thank you email from a recipient / attendee at the long service award ceremony.

"Just a note of appreciation for last night. It was great to meet up with everyone and also see the pride in the families watching their nearest and dearest being recognised for their service. Thanks for giving us the opportunity to share this with our families. The highlight of the night was most definitely the response to Dave Metcalf, it really demonstrates that everyone in the Service has great respect for him. Please pass on my appreciation to your team that clearly put in a lot of work to make the evening happen and giving up their own family time to ensure things run smoothly."

24 September 2022 – Social media thank you from a service user Stn K.

"Today I had to go to South Shields Fire Station for help and they were brilliant. I lost my hubby 15 years ago and my three children brought me a gold ring with his ashes in obviously it means the world to me as I felt he was always beside me. Tomorrow I am having a operation on my hand and I could not get my ring off. I was absolutely gutted. I've cried buckets lol. I went down and they managed to get my ring off without cutting it off. I so grateful as it was inscribed inside cutting it might of caused damage. I can't thank them enough. Brilliant service and companion they all showed was amazing."

21 September 2022 – Thank you letter on behalf of a service user about the crew of Y01 who assisted with a road traffic incident at Fellside Road, Whickham.

"May I take this opportunity to pass on my thanks and gratitude to the crew of Y01 who attended the above incident involving my daughter [name]. Their professionalism and expertise were excellent and their care and consideration for my daughter was greatly appreciated. I would be grateful if you would pass on my appreciation to the crew and personnel involved."

21 September 2022 – Email thank you from a service user about Stn G and F. G/W. WM Connelly and CM Gaukroger.

"I would just like to say a massive thank you to everyone who attended the arson attack in the early hours of Sunday morning, which unfortunately spread to our car. They were extremely quick to attend and did the most amazing job! I'd hate to think what the outcome would have been if it weren't for yourselves. You are all amazing and do an absolutely outstanding job! Thank you so much :)"

21 September 2022 – Verbal thank you from a service user following a Safe and Well visit Stn T. W/W.

I spoke to Mrs X this morning; she would like to extend her thanks to the crew who visited her for a S&W visit on 7th September (W/W Stn T). She said they were all polite and the 'boy' who did most of the talking had a lovely manner, very knowledgeable and fortunately didn't find too much wrong in the house!

16 September 2022 – Email thank you from a member of the public following a visit to Hebburn Community Fire station.

"Hi, I just wanted to say a huge THANK YOU to Matty and Nathan, your firefighters at Hebburn fire station. My 3 year old boy Isaac absolutely loves fire engines, loves watching them on tv and gets so excited when they pass our car on the road. I went to the fire station, hoping on the off chance he may get to see a fire engine up close. The welcome we received was amazing. Isaac was given a tour of the fire engine and even had a go of the hose and press the siren. His face is beaming when he is telling family and friends about it. He was very shy during the visit but Matty and Nathan were brilliant with him. They are a credit to the

service. They also give us a childrens book to read and an activity book. Thank you again so much for this experience and for being so kind and thank you for keeping us safe.”

15 September 2022 – Verbal thank you from a service user following a P&E Safe and Well visit by Scott Curtis.

A lady has rang to say she had a visit from us regarding her smoke alarms and would like to say a huge thank you she mentioned Scott that he was amazing so informative, caring and thorough and would like me to pass her sincere thanks for an amazing service to all.

14 September 2022 – Letter received to the LRF Chairs from the Director, Resilience and Recovery Directorate, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

“I wanted to thank you all for your superb efforts and hard work in preparing for and leading local plans to ensure the smooth running of Operation London Bridge. Whilst the last five days have been unlike any others during my time in the Civil Service, I’ve also received numerous offers of support and thanks for the work that we’re carrying out in the resilience community. I wanted to share the deep-felt thanks with you all ahead of us coming together again tomorrow at the ResCG. Equally, I wanted to thank you for your ongoing support in providing data, and treating information shared with you with sensitivity. As we move to the latter half of the response, appropriate information security and handling protocols will remain essential to smooth delivery. We truly appreciate all the work being undertaken and thank you again for your continued support.”

13 September 2022 – Thank you letter to TCG members on behalf of the High Sherriff.

“On behalf of the Lord Lieutenant and other honoured guests thought that I would drop you a brief note of thanks for the help of Northumbria Police for the Accession Proclamation at Newcastle Law Courts yesterday.

As usual Northumbria Police came up with a solution arranging for all guests to meet at Middle Engine Lane and to be transported to the court with a police escort and I must confess that this in its own way was special as many of us had never had a police escort before and had the major benefit of us all arriving on time, it also must be noted that due to the Great North Run Northumbria Police already had major resource commitments at this time, I know that these events are not possible without hard work, determination, and imagination from a lot of people, and I would be grateful if you would pass on these thanks where you think it appropriate, and we again witnessed the professionalism, respect, and friendship of all the officers involved. Well done to all.

Please keep up the excellent work and do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything I can do to help during my year in office.”

12 September 2022 – Email thank you from a service user about crew from Stn J.

“We had an event on Sunday 11.09.2022 at 06.20 when the Fire Alarms went off at our Home and rang 999 for the Fire Service. The Tender attended very quickly to our premises and the crew carried out a full inspection and found no evidence of Fire or Excessive Heat. I would firstly like to thank the service for their quick response and diligence of the Officer and Crew that attended. We, following a safety inspection by the Fire Service of our property upgraded the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms in the property as we were advised by the Officer that they should be changed. We chose FireAngel Smoke Alarms to replace the BRK Mains Powered units as they were recommended by BRK who no longer supply to the UK / EU and appeared to be the Manufacture of preference to many UK Fire Services the Carbon Monoxide Alarm was Kidde. It appears that one of the FireAngel Smoke Alarms is faulty and I am communicating with the supplier on this matter. I have read in Forums on the Web on 'Which Alarms' that I should inform the Fire Service? However, my communication is a 'Thank You' from my Wife and Myself who are both pensioners for the prompt response to our call on Sunday Morning from I assume the Tynemouth Station.”

12 September 2022 – Verbal thank you from a service user following a P&E Safe and Well visit by Steven Grainger and Colin Soulsby.

A gentleman rang to say we carried out a S&W visit and would like to say thank you so much the service was exemplary our colleagues were amazing so informative and knowledgeable we gave him so much advice. He wanted me to pass on his sincere thanks for a great service.

11 September 2022 – Email thank you from a service user about crew from Stn S.

"I work in the control center for Ambulnz Community Partners and yesterday evening one of our Ambulance's based in your area was about to be stranded for the night, it had a flat battery and was parked in a car park near to Washington Primary care center. we had called AA and they were coming as a matter of urgency. However the car park closed at 6pm and it was already 5:10 with two lady drivers and two speed humps pushing vehicle out of car park was proving difficult. I rang Washington Community Fire Station and requested help. the crew were brilliant didn't hesitate to help. I would like to express our gratitude, the crew are an absolute credit to the fire service Once again Thank you."

7 September 2022 – Email thank you from a member of the public about FF Jones, Stn J. B/W.

"On the 6th September 2022, myself and my friend Joshua paid a trip to Tynemouth Community Fire Station, and yes that was in the pouring rain. We went to get photos of the trucks in the bays, and when we rang the bell were greeted by Fire Fighter Brandon Jones of Blue Watch, who showed us around all of the bays, and gave us amazing insight in to the trucks, the kit onboard, and let us get as many photos of the vehicles as we wanted. Brandon went above and beyond what we had hoped for, and I want to thank him for the time he spent showing us around, and for making my trip up from Teesside worthwhile, he is a credit to the service, and fielded every question with a smile and made our trip extremely memorable. I would love to see him receive high praise for taking the time from his day to show us around, and give us greater knowledge and insight."

5 September 2022 – Thank you card from a service user following TWFRS support to Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service.

"Hello again, Today I received the wonderful picture of the team that came to help us here in Ashill. I'm please to say it arrived unscathed, even though the postman was shoving it through the post box. Luckily I was there to pull it through. Thank you so much, I will be taking it to the archivist soon and I know they will be over the moon. Can't say thank you enough. Things are going slowly with the properties that were totally damaged, insurance companies, what can I say. I think dragging their heels is an understatement, but people here are resilient and are dealing with it as best they can. Hope you are all doing well. We'll never forget you. Thank you."

5 September 2022 – Verbal thank you from a service user. Stn K.

Mrs [X] had fallen over and got herself wedged between the cupboard and fridge and couldn't get up. She had a pan on and could smell it starting to burn so she pressed her pendant and 'suddenly everyone was in my house!' She was so grateful for their help and can't thank them enough.

4 September 2022 – Email thank you from a resident in Australia.

"Amazing, with the badger rescue. Thank you for your goodwill and kindness."

2 September 2022 – Twitter thank you from a member of the public.

"Thank you to Ben for showing my little boy Archie around his fire engine today whilst doing safety checks in my area. You've made his day!"

August 2022

31 August 2022 – Thank you letter for the West Denton Fire Cadets from the High Sherriff of Tyne and Wear.

“Thanks for the invitation to your meeting on the 30th of August a visit I found to be enjoyable, informative, and uplifting. It was good to have the opportunity to discuss with you the benefits of being a Fire Cadet and volunteering and to see first-hand the demonstration of your firefighting skills which was faultless. As cadets you learn new skills, including working as a team, self-confidence, how to communicate, resilience and self-presentation all of which will help you in your future life and careers and I would like to thank Karen Soady 1691, Tamsin Carmichael 4355, and all the volunteers for all their support for Fire Cadets. Please keep up the excellent work and do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything I can do to help during my year in office.”

23 August 2022 – Social media thank you from a member of the public.

“Last night I thought I smelled plastic smoke for a couple of hours but couldn’t see anything outside. I checked all my plugs in fear but they were all safe. I saw the fire engine a bit later and I saw today that the bins outside the flat have melted. Thank you for putting the fire out.”

23 August 2022 – Thank you card received from a member of the public.

“To Area Manager Richie Rickaby, With my heartfelt affection to you and your crew in the rapid response to the fire on Percy Way Walbottle Village NG15 8JA. As an ex villager ‘I know the area very well as having had a clipping sent to me of the Evening Chronicle write up. Brought tears to my eyes. ‘Thank You’, for your chosen careers in the fire service.”

19 August 2022 – Email thank you from a service user. Stn H. R/W. CM Jon McNestry and FFs Rukin, Cook and Hogg.

“On 12/08/2022 my family and I unfortunately experienced a flood at home whilst abroad on holiday. As I was driving back from Spain at the time, it fell to my Dad to deal with which, given his current health issues was not ideal. Due to the sheer volume of water playing on to the electrics he called 999 and the incident was dealt with by the crew of Station Hotel Red Watch with CM Jon McNestry in charge. After speaking to my Dad both during the response itself and on my return to the UK the next day, the one thing that stood out for him was the exceptional professionalism of the crew from start to finish. He was absolutely blown away by their approach, attitude and commitment to resolving the problem. He couldn’t have asked for more and as a former serving Firefighter himself it gave him great comfort to know that (in his words!) standards hadn’t slipped. On behalf of my Dad, can I take this opportunity to pass on my sincere thanks to the crew for their work and their compassion and can I also personally thank them for the help and support they provided to my Dad when he needed it the most. Cracking work CM Jon McNestry and FFs Rukin, Cook and Hogg.”

15 August 2022 – Verbal thank you from a service user. Stn C, F and J W/W.

“I’ve just taken a telephone call from [name] who has praised White Watch for their quick response to the open land fire at Walbottle on Thursday. [Name] had been evacuated from their home due to the fire spread and told me that by the time they were able to return to their home the crews had stopped the fire from spreading to their property as they are the first house at the end of the field where the fire was spreading. [Name] said the crews did a remarkable job as it was a horrendous fire. Had crews not controlled it when they did, they would’ve lost their property. She spoke to relief crews in the evening who told her that White Watch had responded and got the fire under control. [Name] are so very grateful to the hard work and perseverance demonstrated in keeping the fire away from the houses.”

15 August 2022 – Email thank you from a service user.

“A cat, not ours, was up a very high tree in our garden. As RSPCA couldn’t be bother to answer their phone we rang you. Top marks to all on the crew, professional, engaging and humorous. They attended [address] They are excellent ambassadors for the service.”

14 August 2022 – Email thank you from a member of the public.

“First of all just want to say that you all do a fantastic job and especially with the hot weather and the chaos that it brings.”

13 August 2022 – Social media thank you from a service user.

“Would just like to leave a quick thank you and well done for everything you all do, 999 was phoned this morning after a small grass fire had started across the roas from the nursery on our nearby housing estate in Jarrow, the children were fascinated watching you put the fire our and none stop talked about that you do all day, the fire we saw was nothing compared to what some of you are tackling at the minute but it goes to show your work doesn’t go unnoticed. From all the children and staff at Jarrow Day Nursery thank you for all your hard work xxx.”

13 August 2022 – Social media thank you from a member of the public.

“Tyne and Wear FRS, I want to pass on my praise to the crews who dealt with the walbottle fire today, I’m a royal navy fire fighter and helped very slightly supporting the initial crew spotting the fire and relocating hose runs, however I was impressed by the level of commitment and dedication by the initial crews, I believe they were from fossway station, at one point it was a very close situation to people losing houses and a particular firefighter from the fossway who I believe was called Mark or “marky” was instrumental in stopping the fire spreading further, at one point it was 5 meters from the hedge line we were in, if you could pass on my thanks from ‘tommy’, it was a pleasure even when I’m “off duty” to help the guys and girls out, many many thanks.”

12 August 2022 – Social media thank you from a service user.

“Thank you for your service and keeping Tyne and Wear a safe place to live in. Please stay safe yourselves your lives matter to.”

11 August 2022 – Email thank you from a service user.

“Dear TW Fire Service, on behalf of the people of Walbottle and specifically Percy Way and Queen Road I just wanted many thanks for your hard work today which saved our homes, and my tortoises. I cannot thank you enough for your care, due diligence, dedication and continuous feedback which helped us to understand what was happening and then allowed us to assess the damage. So many thanks to West Denton, Newcastle Central and Tynemouth (sorry if I missed anyone). Without your help I, and many others would be having very different and traumatic evening.”

11 August 2022 – Email thank you from a service user. A02 and E01 attended with Ian Crookes and Lee Greener in charge of both respectively.

“Wednesday 10th august I was on the metro system that broke down, 2 fire service teams attended to help get everyone of the metros. I was feeling unwell and both teams helped to make sure I was okay and looked after me really well. I just want to say thank you to both teams I didn’t manage to catch any names but they were all amazing! Thank you for all that you do and the continuous support you give!”

10 August 2022 – Email feedback and a thank you from the Salvation Army.

“It was good to read/hear your message on twitter reminding folks of the dangers of BBQ’s etc during the current hot spell. I was on a day trip with a group of families from Southwick to Morpeth, and came across of a group of youngsters jumping off a bridge into the boating lake,

the further worrying thing was a parent was filming them doing it – crazy when there were families on the boating lake, in row boats. Some folks still find it difficult to take onboard messages to prevent injury – than can be both life changing/threatening. I know we were placed on standby last Thursday for the barn fire in Houghton, we are always available during this hot spell and beyond if required – I am aware large fires don't occur often within TW, I we are not always required, we are here if required. Thank you for everything TWFRS do not only within the Community, for the support shown towards ourselves, it is appreciated."

8 August 2022 – Social media thank you from a service user. Stn S and M G/W.

"Hello Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue wanting to recognise your amazing crews who put there life at risk every day so we cab stay safe tonight. I have witnessed this I rang for help when I come across a serious house fire in follingsby near wardley. I pulled up on a house fire that was significantly developed fire. Your crew arrived and got straight to work I want to recognise there dedication and determination to fight this fire." [sic]

4 August 2022 – Verbal thank you from Councillor Bell and Councillor Woodwark.

"Councillor Ged Bell at Governance Committee held on 29th July 2022 complimented myself and the Finance Team for completing all of the work to get the statement of accounts for 2021/22 drafted by within the statutory timescale of 31st July 2022 and which were noted by the Committee. This was also mentioned by Cllr Woodwark too. Cllr Bell specifically asked me to pass this compliment on to your team so that it would be logged properly, which was nice of him and unexpected."

1 August 2022 – Email thank you from a service user.

"My dog could not get up a steep bank from the water in Ponteland Park and firefighters were dousing down a small blaze in the park next to where I was standing (Monday 1 August 1.30pm). One of your fireman called across that he would send someone over which he did and hauled the dog up the bank and also asked if he could help me up as well. My regards to your team and thank you for your help."

July 2022

29 July 2022 – Email feedback / thank you from a service user.

"This is certainly not a complaint, last night while i was out walking my dog in the fields near Dunbmire Industrial Estate backing onto the Burnside estate. While there i heard a really loud bang and a few minutes later saw smoke rising from the very dry grass. Two youths had set fire to an aerosol in the grass, when i got to the area fire had taken hold and another lady was on the phone to the fire brigade, i could see it spreading as the grass was so dry and thought i have to do something as i know you guys are very busy and could have been sometime arriving. I asked the lady to look after my dog, took my sweat top off and beat the flames as hard as i could, it took a little while but i did manage to put out all of the fire although there was still smoldering in the center of the area. After a while i started to head home. I noticed the fire engine arrive and thought i would let the crew know what had happened, what i had done and that the fire probably still needed to be dampened. As i got closer to the engine it pulled away, i waved to try and catch their attention but i guess the person who waved back at me in the back of the engine thought i was just waving at them, even though i looked a bit like Worzel Gummidge with bits of dried grass in my hair and soot on my face carrying what was left of my burned sweat top and ...not forgetting a bit smelly. I want to thank you guys for all you do, what happened last night made me realise how quickly fire can spread, so many little scroats thinking setting fires is fun but not having the common sense to know how dangerous it is. I thank you all for all you do."

27 July 2022 – Social media feedback from a member of the public about FF recruitment.

“A fantastic service! Got to say the last few years I’ve been applying for firefighter roles in various brigades / services but mainly local including Tyne & Wear the most, I have always been contacted back from recruitment letting me know about upcoming recruitment, applications and dates etc. and every time I have applied to Tyne & Wear FRS they have been immensely helpful along the whole way. I’m talking about regular emails and communication asking how I’m getting on with my applications, if I need any help, right up to getting invited to firefighter taster sessions at a local station! No disrespect to any other services but T&WFRS have been absolutely fantastic every step of the way when I keep trying again. I could go on all day but just to once again say a huge Thank You and Well Done to everyone at T&WFRS for the fantastic communication & effort in assistance as well as the service you provide.”

26 July 2022 – Feedback from NHS England Improvement regarding Fire Safety good practice.

“Neil has taken this Protocol to NHSEI and they have confirmed that they will add it into HTM as an exemplar protocol.”

22 July 2022 – Thank you voicemail from a service user about Stn T G/W.

“Hi this is [name] from [address] in Jarrow, thanks very much to your crew – very helpful and very informative and the smoke alarms were faulty anyway. I can’t praise you enough for that, I reported it lunchtime and it was done this afternoon. You can’t complain at that – can you? Thank you very much indeed.”

22 July 2022 – Card from a member of the public following TWFRS support to Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service.

“This is to all you, our village in Norfolk is a lovely place to be and it’s thanks to you most of it will stay that way. We live with ort house backing onto the village green and in the scary time of the wildfire it made me almost burst with pride to see crews from your area. It’s a long way to come from there and I can say from everyone here THANK YOU. My husband and I came from Sunderland and my dad was in the Fire Service there a long time ago. It’s hard to put into words what you did for us. We were so lucky, as the fire spread over the fields towards the farm (and one house width from that bit [of] our house) the wind changed and sent the fire towards the Old Post Office and other properties. We count ourselves lucky but sadly others were not that lucky. Just wanted you to know how much we appreciate your hard work. Thank you doesn’t seem enough. I know this might be a strange request but can we have a picture of the crews who came. It’s for our village archives. They record all important events and have done for years. I do believe that they deserve recognition here. Again BIG Thank you.”

21 July 2022 – Email thank you from a service user for Stn C R/W.

“The firefighters who helped me out of a locked car park were great and were reassuring even though I felt like my issue wasn’t worth their time. They were quick and friendly”.

20 July 2022 – Social media thank you from a service user Stn E W/W.

Dear Firefighters, Thank you for attending my fault after some came out of my oven. Your response was quick, efficient and caring on the hottest day ever! I have ordered a new oven so I hope I won’t be troubling you again soon. Many thanks again and kindest regards.”

20 July 2022 – Social media thank you from a member of the public.

“Thank you for your service.”

20 July 2022 – Social media thank you from a member of the public.

“Hi there I am contacting you to thank you for the amazing gesture you’ve done to support

Norfolk Fire and Rescue and the major incident in Ashill last night and this morning, my father and I went to ashill to go see if anyone needed helping out and was not expecting to see a Tyne and Wear Fire appliance on scene, thank you for your help for the county.”

18 July 2022 – Thank you letter to the CFO from the Firefighters Charity.

“As Chief Executive of The Fire Fighters Charity I am delighted to be able to send you a thoroughly deserved Certificate of Appreciation on behalf of everyone at the Charity and our thousands of beneficiaries. This certificate recognises the incredible support and contribution your staff and volunteers have made in fundraising for us during the challenging financial year of 2021/22. The year presented us with a whole set of new challenges as we looked to climb our way out of the fundraising shortfall that resulted from the Covid-19 pandemic. Just as you and your colleagues worked with your local communities to help them return to normality, you also supported us to help begin the return of our fundraising activities and income to pre-pandemic levels. This involved a process of transition for us all, exploring ways in which we could safely reintroduce car washes, take on fundraising activities and events involving the public, re-launch mass participation events and welcome local communities back to stations and premises across the UK.

Of course, 2021/22 also continued to challenge us in regard to our service provision in the wake of Covid, but as your Charity I am proud of the work we have done to ensure that you now have the proactive advice, information and practical help you need to live healthier and happier with the issues that affect you. Our Covid Recovery Programme is just one example of the innovative new programmes and resources we have put in place over the past year. My Fire Fighters Charity, meanwhile, now offers you a means to interact with us, access our support and connect with friends and peers across the fire services community.

With your incredible support and hard work, we are now beginning to see an upturn in our income, which will allow us to invest in new services and opportunities for you and your colleagues in the years ahead. Indeed, we are changing as an organisation and over the coming months and years you will see us doing more, for more members of the UK’s fire family. We will be delivering more proactive health and wellbeing content, launching new programmes for families and young people, delivering more online and virtual support and working closer with all our fire and rescue services.

Of course, to do any of this, we continue to rely on your support. And I recognise how hard the cost of living crisis is making it for us all at the moment, forcing us to make some hard decisions with our personal finances. However, I would urge you to remind your teams that The Fire Fighters Charity has been here for the past 79 years, supporting our fire communities through good times and bad, thanks solely to the continued support of the community, regardless of what is happening across society.

So, I thank you all for continuing to regularly donate, for volunteering with such enthusiasm, for organising all the events and activities that you do on our behalf. Every penny you raise makes a huge difference and I would like to remind you all that we continue to be here for you, offering far more than you might expect in terms of support.

Our Support Line is available to you on 0800 369 8820, while a wealth of health and wellbeing information and online courses can be found on My Fire Fighters Charity (www.firefighterscharity.org.uk/myffc), with further information available on our website.

Thank you once again for everything you and your service have done for us, I hope we can continue to rely on your support over the year ahead as we strive to do more for more members of our incredible fire and rescue services community.”

18 July 2022 – Email thank you from the Cayman Islands Fire Service CFO.

“It was nice to meet you all, I had a great visit. Thank you again, for your wonderful hospitality.”

18 July 2022 – Social media thank you from a member of the public about Stn M G/W.

“Fireman stopped outside our house the other night [9 July] they let the kids have a look around, there [sic] from Marley Potts park, just would like to say thank you very much, my children have autism and my son is obsessed, every time they drive by our house he’s straight out and they always wave!! Thank you.”

18 July 2022 – Social media thank you from a member of the public about Stn F.

“Thankyou Byker Station for attending to the 30 foot refuse fire the idiot in [address] had...in tinder dry conditions...and he lost control of it...job well done lads...But what a waste of vital services for a bonfire.”

15 July 2022 – Email thank you from a service user for Stn F B/W.

“I just wanted to thank the team who responded to a call about a cat trapped in a van engine at Williams Park this morning (15th Jul). They turned up very fast and were incredibly professional and friendly. They released the cats leg without causing any damage to the van (and more importantly the cat) within a few minutes. A few of us had been trying for a while prior to their arrival. We really appreciate you offer this kind of service. Thanks again.”

15 July 2022 – Social media thank you from a member of the public.

“Thank you for attending the fire at [address] yesterday and today, 4 x pumps in attendance. Excellent response from your amazing firefighters, great respect for what you do at TWFRS.”

15 July 2022 – Social media thank you from a member of the public. Stn A.

“Just want to say a big thank you to your crew from West Denton who got into the car to get my little niece out were on screen [sic] within minutes.”

13 July 2022 – Social media thank you from a member of the public. Stn M.

“Just like to thank one of your fireman who was in Fulwell yesterday, he was in the appliance waiting for his mates putting smoke detectors in. My 2 nosey grand bairns aged 3 and 4 asked why the engine was there, and he came out and explained everything so they could understand, my 3 year old granddaughter is now convinced she’s wants to be a fire fighter now, I sadly didn’t get his name, but I’m sure he said he was based on Martley Potts, please pass on our thanks” [sic]

11 July 2022 – Email thank you from a teacher at Mill Hill Primary School. Stn Q B/W & W/W.

“Hi, Thank you so much for coming to visit our school a couple of weeks ago - the children absolutely loved it. Your crew were all fantastic!”

11 July 2022 – Email thank you from the Deputy Director Protect and Prepare of Homeland Security about GM Robinson.

“I wanted to write and express my thanks to your contribution in the two recent workshops in Athens. As you know, the JOPP team have been working alongside [name] and [name] to engage with operational colleagues in the Hellenic emergency services for a couple of years now to build better understanding around interoperability and share UK knowledge and expertise. Your contribution and perspective really helped to cement this relationship and land some key messages. In particular, thank you for agreeing to contribute at the COBR event and share your personal experiences. This was above and beyond what was asked of you but was really well received and added huge value to the day. I think you’ll agree that the Greeks demonstrated a desire to learn and we hope this relationship continues to grow.”

7 July 2022 – Email thank you from a service user.

“Hi, Just to say thank you for the lads and lasses who dealt with a bedroom fire next door to me last night and they fitted 2 free smoke alarms as mine were broken. Many thanks again.”

6 July 2022 – Email thank you from the Youth Almighty Project following Service participation at the West Area Event 2022.

“Hi Everyone, What an amazing time we all had in Barnes Park! We just want to say a massive Thank you for your contribution to this years event!! The feedback has been brilliant from all 3 days. Over the three days you:

- *Delivered free activities to West Communities*
- *Worked with 15 schools and 694 school children over the Thursday and Friday*
- *On Saturday we estimate we had 10,000 people through the park gates*

We will be presenting feedback from the event to the West Committee Councillors soon, hoping for a potential event next year – subject to funding being secured. Thank you again for your support!!”

4 July 2022 – Verbal thank you from the family of a deceased person following the conduct of a Fire Investigation by GM Robinson.

The individual’s family asked for their appreciation to be passed on to the fire investigation officer for their *“professional and sensitive manner”* in which the investigation was handled.

3 July 2022 – Email thank you from the Headteacher at Lambton Primary School. Stn S. R/W.

“I would like to say thankyou to the fire fighters who came to the summer fayre at Lambton Primary School on Friday 17th June 2022. The team was Sierra Red Watch from Washington fire station. The officer in charge; Michael Taylor was friendly and helpful. I am the Headteacher at the school and had requested that a team attend with the appliance to be part of the school fayre. I thought it would be an ideal opportunity for the fire fighters to meet the community. It gave the children a chance to talk to them and see the fire engine up close. I have to say it was a huge success. They stayed for quite a while, as they weren't called away. I spoke to them all and they were all friendly and approachable. They took the time to speak to all who approached the appliance. It really did make a huge difference. Thank you so much to the team - they really did an amazing job - the whole school community enjoyed meeting them. THANKYOU!”

2 July 2022 – Thank you email on behalf of a service user. Stn G B/W.

“To the Watch on duty Friday 1st July, after 6pm. A huge THANK YOU for going to my Mam’s house to sort out her smoke detectors, and fitting an extra one too! That’s fantastic community service. Thank you.”

June 2022

30 June 2022 – Thank you card for Andrew Baylis and others involved in delivering sessions to the community.

“Ever since attending the first fit & well session I have been so impressed by the warm welcome offered to everyone & the happy, encouraging atmosphere created by you & every staff member. Each person has been treated with respect, patience & friendliness & activities have been chosen so that each individual can enjoy & experience some success. The physical & mental benefits of attending these sessions cannot be over-emphasised. Many thanks for your enthusiasm & all your efforts to help every person. You are all inspirational - patient & great motivators. Long may these sessions continue.”

30 June 2022 – Social media thank you from a member of the public.

"Hi, just wanted to say well done to all the fire brigade who attended a big fire in our street in Annitsford today. The guys had to work so hard to pull down a high fence to get to the fire, they really put their lives at risk to try to contain and then successfully put it out. Well done guys."

30 June 2022 – Social media thank you from a member of the public.

"Shout out to the guys who just pulled over on A19 northbound to help move a crashed car from the middle of the road to the shoulder. Great job".

30 June 2022 – Social media thank you from a member of the public.

"Thanks for all of you attending the fire in the Spinney!"

28 June 2022 – Email from a member of the public thanking crew at Stn K.

"I would just like to say a big well done and thank you for the fantastic response from our South Shields station crew during the early hours of the morning who responded to a kitchen fire in my street. From calling 999 to having the emergency services arrive at the scene in 3 minutes is a fantastic response time, and yet again shows the professionalism and dedication of the crew. Thankfully nobody was seriously injured and the fire was extinguished preventing major damage to the property. Please pass these compliments onto the crew members for providing such a great service at a time of need. Well done".

24 June 2022 – Email from a member of the public thanking crew.

"To thank you for making my son smile, we were out and about and spotted a firetruck parked up, so I asked if he wanted to see it, he got excited, next thing I know he's inside the truck, putting on helmets and trying gloves and he had the biggest smile on his face, even letting him use the hose he was truly a happy little boy. I cannot thank you enough because just 10 minutes before that he fell over and scraped his knee. On top of that my best friend also got to be a kid again for 10 minutes as he always wanted to go in a firetruck but never did. You guys are truly amazing. Thank you and thank you for protecting us all from the dangers of fire".

23 June 2022 – Email to HR from a FF recruitment applicant about the recruitment process.

"Thank you for letting me know so promptly. I certainly will consider applying in your next recruitment campaign. I would be very grateful for any feedback you can provide me. I would also like to add that I have been thoroughly impressed with the whole recruitment process and the efficiency of everyone within the team."

23 June 2022 – Email from a service user about WM Kevin Williams and G/W, Stn H.

"A huge thank you to the crew who made entry into my mam's house after she'd fallen down the stairs late evening of 22 June [address], assisted the ambulance crew in getting her safely moved to the ambulance, replaced the door lock and made secure the back door where they had to gain entry. Not only that, they looked after my niece before I arrived and continued to take care of me until I left in the ambulance. The crew - especially Kevin who showed such kindness - are a total credit to the Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Services. Please pass on my sincere thanks to them all."

21 June 2022 – Email from a FF recruitment applicant about Janet Coulson, CM Graeme Younger and Stn A. R/W.

"I just wanted to pass on a quick thank you to the West Denton fire station and in particular to Janet in admin, Graham Younger and the red watch crew for helping me during the recent recruitment process for Tyne and Wear fire rescue. I was unfortunately unsuccessful in my interview stage but I am still grateful for everyone at West Denton for their help through it all. If you could pass on my thanks to those who helped me then that would be great."

21 June 2022 – Email from a member of the public about the TWFRS Facebook page.
“Whoever is running the Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service Facebook, well done. Posts are always informative, heartfelt and relevant. I no longer live in the North-East but have so much respect for the men and women putting their lives on the line. Appreciate you keeping us up to date. On another note, great initiative here.”

16 June 2022 – Email from the Shared Lives Manager thanking Rosemary Tarbit, P&E for the fire awareness sessions.

“I just wanted to drop you an email to say how very much I appreciate the support your service has provide to the Shared Lives scheme in South Tyneside (I’ve attached an information leaflet as this will highlight what we are about) I particularly wanted to provide feedback on Rosemary. Rosemary has been extremely helpful and supportive, initially by affording time to discuss the required needs regarding Shared Lives carer training, then by arranging dates, times and a venue to facilitate the awareness session. We have 3 separate sessions arranged, the first took place yesterday at South Shields Fire station. I have received some very positive comments from my staff member and from individual carers present stating that Rosemary made the session very interesting, very informative and was encouraging of participation (I don’t often get positive responses regarding people attending training 😊). I have copied Rosemary into this email however I would appreciate if you could record my comments. Rosemary has also recently provided awareness sessions at 2 of my Extra Care facilities, 1 unit supports older people and the other supports individuals with learning disabilities / mental health issues – again very good comments received regarding Rosemary’s approach and delivery.”

15 June 2022 – Email from a member of the public following Stn K Station Open Day.

“I just wanted to say thank you to the service and for the fabulous open day provided at South Shields Fire Station. It was very interesting and the children seemed to have loved it. However, I did come with a baby and found out the station did not have any baby changing facilities. This is a bit disappointing considering the station is suppose to be a community fire station. I was advised by a member of staff to change the baby in a bush when asking where she could be changed. However, overall thank you I just hope in the future baby changing facilities can be made available for these events. Once again thank you for the service you provide to keep us safe and keep up the great work. P.s. I am behind you all the way for a pay rise.”

13 June 2022 – Email from a member of the public thanking crew from Stn M.

“I just wanted to say a huge thank you to the fire fighters that were up in the air on the crane & the fire fighters on the ground tonight. My 6 year old little boy who has autism is obsessed with Marley Potts [sic] fire station we pass it everyday for Jack to count how many fire engines are there and luckily for us tonight we caught all the fire fighters up in the air. Jack waved at them and every single one of them waved back, it has made jacks day since his been having such a tough time at school. You’s are all absolutely amazing I can’t thank you’s enough! It’s been such a long time since I’ve seen jack with a big smile on his face and it’s all thanks to you’s. Keep up with the good work!”

8 June 2022 – Social media from a member of the public thanking Stn T. W/W.

“Really impressed with how efficient you guys were tonight. Could have been nothing but can’t be too careful where fire is concerned. Thanks for keeping everyone safe”.

Additional information provided

“It would have been the Hebburn crews. Responding to a garden fire that was a little unprofessionally set up. There in less than 10 minutes, fire out and away they went. Fab service.”

8 June 2022 – Social media message from a member of the public thanking Stn S. B/W.

"I would just like to say thank you to the firefighters who stopped and talked to our children who were extremely fascinated to see the fire engine in [address], Washington tonight. They really went above and beyond and our 2 boys are absolutely thrilled to have seen the engine up close and to be shown some of the equipment. It was such a kind thing to do to take a few minutes of their time, they really made their day. Both have come home really excited and my youngest said 'this is the best day ever'. He can't wait to tell his Dad all about it tonight!!! Thank you so much to the kind and caring firefighter for not only their time, but their patience and knowledge. You all went above and beyond and really did make their day."

3 June 2022 – Email from DCFO, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service following Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service attendance at a cross-border incident.

"Having spoken with the OIC...he has subsequently sent me the email below. This was a complex set of circumstances, which as you'll read below brought out the best of our respective crews. We were concurrently dealing with another complex situation in the Blyth area, so all in all quite a challenging evening. I just wanted to record my sincere appreciation and ask that you pass this on to your crews, who clearly did your service proud."

OIC email

"Following my attendance at a persons reported dwelling fire at [address] 01/06/22 at 23:26, I would like to highlight the excellent work that was demonstrated by a Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service crew supported by TWFRS colleagues. N04P1 (name) were assisted by E01 and F02 in attending a rapidly escalating dwelling fire with a resident still present within the property. As well as the fire, crews were faced with limited access, complex construction and highly volatile residents. The crews partner working, dynamic decision making and team work, resulted in the occupier being rescued from the property and the fire being restricted to the floor of origin. Without doubt, the skill and diligence of the crews attending, lead to a safe conclusion to the incident. Their attention to detail during the incident, their casualty care and the occupier safeguarding is excellent testimony to the professionalism demonstrated by the crews of both Services."

May 2022

31 May 2022 – Thank you card from a member of the public about volunteer John Pate.

"Dear Sir, I am 86 years old and partly sighted so please excuse the writing. I want to tell you about volunteer firefighter John Pate. John does a lot for us. On days off he takes me for a run out. I had just lost my son and John took me to Seaton Carew. I have been to lots of other places. Hospital appointment. John offers to take us to the community and is a good member of the community. Before joining the fire service John ran a group for us at school, taken out and learned about the NE. John can't do enough for us. An officer and a gentleman. Thanks John and thank you for what you do."

30 May 2022 – Email from a member of the public following a visit to Stn G.

"Just want to say thank you to you & the team for helping me set up the day with my son, He had a blast and hes done nothing but talk about it since. I really appreciate yous being able to give him that experience. Only downfall is all ive watched since then is fireman sam. Thank you!"

25 May 2022 – Verbal thank you from service user following S&W visit.

I've been conducting some S&W questionnaires over the phone and Mr [X] of [address] wanted me to pass on his thanks to the crew that carried out his S&W visit.

"Mr [X] is extremely impressed with the service as crews had carried out a comprehensive S&W (slips, trips and falls) assessment and arranged a slip mat and grab sticks (pickers) to

be dropped off at his home the next day. He is very grateful for these and can't thank crews enough!"

25 May 2022 – Email from the Environmental Enforcement Team at Sunderland City Council to WM Cuggy, Fire Safety Inspector following collaborative working.

"Great result. Many thanks again for the assistance."

24 May 2022 – Email to P&E from The Essence Service following staff participation at their open day.

"Sincere thanks from myself and my colleagues at Essence for making our Open Day on Wednesday such a huge success. We hope you enjoyed it too and welcome any feedback you may have about the event so we can make any necessary changes when planning future events. Visitors to the Open Day really appreciated the information and advice from your individual services including the 'freebies' (and 'goody bags' from services who were unable to attend on the day). We look forward to seeing you all in the future and I will be in touch to arrange more promotional events in the coming months. (PS. If it was your colleagues who attended the session - but are not included in the mailing list – I would be obliged if you can please pass on our thanks to them)."

20 May 2022 – Email from a service user following a P&E Safe and Well visit by Philip Sanson and Mehrban Sadiq.

"Just wanted to say what a great service you provided. We now have smoke alarms fitted and very clear guidance about risks in home."

20 May 2022 – Email from a member of the public following her son's interaction with firefighters.

"I just wanted to say thank you. On Wednesday there had been an incident in [address]. We don't know what had happened but my little boy (just turned 3) had noticed the fire engine on the way home (we are in the next street). Upon spotting the fire engine he wanted to say hello (at this point the incident seemed to be resolved) so my husband let him go over to say hello. The response he had from the firemen on duty was amazing. They let him try their hat on, get in the fire engine, they spoke to him about the lights and all the buttons, and generally totally inspired him!!! He was a bit awe struck by all accounts but hasn't stopped talking about it since. Yesterday we got a notification from nursery to say that he had been telling everyone about his experience and been playing fireman role play all day!! Thank you so much for taking the time to inspire our little boy and give him a memory he will treasure forever! Thank you so much, you made his week!!!"

19 May 2022 – Email from a Firefighter recruitment applicant.

"I recently applied for this years Wholetime FireFighter Recruitment, however unfortunately I was unsuccessful from the Online Tests. I'm just writing to pass on my appreciation and to say a big Thank You to everyone in the recruitment team & HR for all the support, the best advice and the fantastic communication. When I had any questions they were answered with positive & great feedback along with the best advice and help. From the start with the Teams Meeting to even successfully managing to get booked onto a taster session at Sunderland Central, (who I would also like to thank for the greatest hospitality) the whole experience has been fantastic, even in the very early stages and I will be trying once again in the next recruitment in the near future. I'd just like to quickly add as well from other Fire & Rescue Services I've applied to in the past, Tyne & Wear have always been the best for communication, professionalism & the most warmest welcome into what could be a fantastic place to work!"

18 May 2022 – Email on behalf of a Firefighter recruitment applicant.

“Just wanted to pass on my thanks for the support my friend has received from TWFRS following her application to become a FF. So far she has gone through majority of the stages and is heading for her RR Test this week. Having spoken to her, she is so grateful for the way in which she has been supported through this process via TWFRS, including the support of a FF Mentor which she has greatly appreciated too. Once again thank you from myself, but I already know that the TWFRS Family are amazing.”

16 May 2022 – Email from a service user following a Service Delivery Home Safety Check. Stn S R/W.

“A big thank you to the Firemen who knocked on our door with advice on smoke alarms. I am ashamed to say only 1 of the 2 were working and we knew 1 may not be working. Your colleagues checked them and fitted a new one. I am so grateful as I was unaware that this was a free service. We have read the leaflet they left and will make sure we test these regularly. We have also moved a spare key for our front door into the passage next to the door so we know where the key is if we need to exit at the front. Thank you once again.”

14 May 2022 – Email from a service user following a lift rescue.

“I would like to say a huge thank you to the Sunderland firemen who came to my rescue today when I was trapped in lift at Wilcos what great guys.”

11 May 2022 – Letter from Group Captain, Royal Air Force Boulmer following a RAFA Charity Dinner.

“I would like to personally thank you for attending and supporting our RAFA Charity Dinner on 6 May 2022. As alluded to, the purpose of the RAFA Charity Dinner was to raise awareness of (and funding for) Rothbury House Building Futures Appeal, which seeks to reduce loneliness among elderly veterans by creating community housing facilities. I am proud to announce that through your generosity and contribution, we raised a grand total of £16566.50 on the night, far exceeding our hopes of £10000. Following the first phase of work to convert Rothbury House into such a facility, the funding raised shall support the later phases of the project of completion. This important project will eventually provide 26 permanent flats and communal amenities for RAF veterans or their spouses, such as [name] whom we had the pleasure to host on the evening. Most importantly, it will provide a place where friendship and camaraderie can endure amongst those who have faithfully served their country. Due to your generosity, this project is on track to complete as scheduled. The RAF Association have asked that I pass on their gratitude for your amazing support to the RAF Boulmer charity dinner. [Name] Head of Partnerships and Events comments: ‘The monies raised will help to make Rothbury House into a wonderful place to live for members of our community. The funds raised far surpassed our expectation and this was down to the dedication of the Boulmer team and you, thank you. Once again, thank for your support in surpassing our goal!’.”

10 May 2022 – Email from Ryhope St Paul's Rainbow Unit following a visit to Stn Q.

“Can I just add how fantastic last night's visit with our rainbows was, Troy was absolutely fantastic with the girls and I've never seen them so engaged. He is an absolute asset to your Station.”

8 May 2022 – Email from a member of the public following a visit to Stn A.

“On Thursday (05/05/2022) myself and a friend visited West Denton Fire Station, and made an enquiry as to whether we'd be able to enter the station and bays to take photos of the appliances that were based on site. As we rang the bell, we were approached by a member of the team Janet Coulson, who is an absolute credit to the service, and someone who's charisma, and spirit lit up both of our experiences, as she went above and beyond what we had originally hoped for, and offered us not only the tours of the vehicles, but a tour around

the station, and gave us an in depth insight in to how the station operated, and how everything ran behind the scenes. I also wish to thank both the day and night watch staff for coming over to myself and my friend, and fielding any questions we had and for being so welcoming to us. We thoroughly enjoyed our visit, and left feeling extremely happy, and we cannot thank Janet and the staff enough.”

3 May 2022 – Email from a service user following a Service Delivery Safe and Well visit.

“Thank you to the lady and gentleman who kindly fitted smoke alarms today so friendly. The safety information expertly explained and helpful once again thank you for the sterling service you all provide stay safe.”

2 May 2022 – Social media message from a member of the public following a station visit.

“I emailed last week explaining my son is absolutely obsessed with everything fire! Fire engines, fire poles, fireman Sam just everything. We asked very nicely if we could visit our nearest fire station and we were allowed! We went to marley park today and the 2 firemen on shift were so lovely to Vinnie and showed him everything. Thanks so so much for making a little boys dreams come true. He’s never stopped talking about it.” [TWFRS news story](#)

April 2022

26 April 2022 – Email from a service user following attendance at an incident

“The fire brigade attended our property on Saturday 23/04/2022 early hours to assist the paramedics as my partner had fallen down the stairs and was in a very bad way. These guys were absolutely fantastic and went above and beyond to help and comfort me during this very stressful experience. Please pass on my gratitude and thanks to the fireman that attended.”

22 April 2022 – Twitter post from a member of the public

“My little boy spotted a fire engine in a car park. He’s really obsessed with fireman Sam. He went over for a look. The guys were absolutely lovely. Can’t thank them enough for being so nice to him. Really made a little boys day.”

15 April 2022 – Email on behalf of a service user following our attendance at an incident.

Mrs X made contact with the Service after seeing a TWFRS Facebook post about her friends car accident. She wanted to thank the crew that helped.

8 April 2022 – Letter to the CFO from the CFO at Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service regarding NFRS Service Funeral.

“On behalf of Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service and Cllr Colin Horncastle, NCC Fire Authority Chair, I wanted to extend our sincere thanks to you and the T&WFRS Executive Team for the support provided to ensure we were able to give Nigel the send-off he so richly deserved. As well as serving NFRS and his local communities with distinction for 42 years as a dedicated and hugely respected on-call firefighter, Nigel was also the heart and soul of so much of what makes the community of Allendale and the Allen Valley such a special place. To hear first-hand the deep affection, warmth, and sincerity of the tributes paid to him by his on-call colleagues and his friends from Allendale village was truly humbling. To be able to properly recognise his NFRS service and his personal impact within his community which such a significant NFRS attendance was only possible because of your gracious support. The attendance of so many NFRS colleagues who were able to contribute to the fulsome and fitting celebration of Nigel’s life was clearly cherished and appreciated by his family and Allendale on-call colleagues. At times of real sorrow, we always see the very best of the fire family. I’m incredibly proud that the relationship between our services is rooted in that fire family ethos and is as vibrant and strong as ever. Thanks once again.”

5 April 2022 – Email from a service user following a Service Delivery Safe and Well visit.

“I would like to thank Fire Fighters Luke Gallagher and Chris McCabe of Rainton Bridge Community Fire Station. They attended my house same day, in fact within the hour to fit two smoke alarms following my telephone enquiry. They we’re both friendly, polite and professional and fitted alarms following a risk assessment of my property, I was also provided supplementary advice around fire safety which was very useful and has prompted me to buy a carbon monoxide alarm. Thank you for such a quick response- much appreciated.”

