



Northumberland County Council

Your ref:

Our ref:

Enquiries to: Nichola Turnbull

Email: nichola.turnbull@northumberland.gov.uk

Tel direct: 01670 622617

Date: Tuesday, 20 February 2024

Dear Sir or Madam,

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the **COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OSC** to be held in **CONFERENCE ROOM 2 - COUNTY HALL** on **WEDNESDAY, 28 FEBRUARY 2024** at **2.00 PM**.

Yours faithfully

Dr Helen Paterson
Chief Executive

To Communities and Place OSC members as follows:-

N Oliver (Chair), M Mather (Vice-Chair), D Carr, E Cartie, G Castle, A Dale, B Gallacher, N Morphet, J Lang and J Reid



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AGENDA

PART I

It is expected that the matters included in this part of the agenda will be dealt with in public.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Unless already entered in the Council's Register of Members' interests, members are required where a matter arises at a meeting;

- a) Which **directly relates to** Disclosable Pecuniary Interest ('DPI') as set out in Appendix B, Table 1 of the Code of Conduct, to disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote and not to remain in room. Where members have a DPI or if the matter concerns an executive function and is being considered by a Cabinet Member with a DPI they must notify the Monitoring Officer and arrange for somebody else to deal with the matter.
- b) Which **directly relates to** the financial interest or well being of a Other Registrable Interest as set out in Appendix B, Table 2 of the Code of Conduct to disclose the interest and only speak on the matter if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain the room.
- c) Which **directly relates to** their financial interest or well-being (and is not DPI) or the financial well being of a relative or close associate, to declare the interest and members may only speak on the matter if members of the public are also allowed to speak. Otherwise, the member must not take part in discussion or vote on the matter and must leave the room.
- d) Which **affects** the financial well-being of the member, a relative or close associate or a body included under the Other Registrable Interests column in Table 2, to disclose the interest and apply the test set out at paragraph 9 of Appendix B before deciding whether they may remain in the meeting.
- e) Where Members have or a Cabinet Member has an Other Registerable Interest or Non Registerable Interest in a matter being considered in exercise of their executive function, they must notify the Monitoring Officer and arrange for somebody else to deal with it.

NB Any member needing clarification must contact monitoringofficer@northumberland.gov.uk. Members are referred to the Code of Conduct which contains the matters above in full. Please refer to the guidance on disclosures at the rear of this agenda letter.

3. MINUTES (Pages 1 - 14)

Minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC held on 31 January 2024, as circulated, to be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

4. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS (Pages 15 - 26)

To note the schedule of decisions made by Cabinet since the last meeting together with latest Forward Plan of key decisions. Any further changes made to the Forward Plan will be reported to the Committee.

OVERVIEW

The Cabinet Member requested to attend for the following items is Councillor Cllr Gordon Stewart, Portfolio Holder for Looking After Our Communities.

5.1 Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service Inspection Report (Pages 27 - 80)

The report provides an update on the findings of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) following the publication of the third inspection report into Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service on 29 November 2023. The inspection report was received by Council on 17 January 2024.

5.2 Storm Response (Pages 81 - 96)

This report provides an update about Northumberland County Council's preparedness and response arrangements for storms. Included is a summary of progress against the Storm Arwen recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's task and finish group.

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY CO-ORDINATOR

6. COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME AND MONITORING REPORT 2023-24 (Pages 97 - 104)

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee operates within a work programme which is agreed at the start of the Council year. The programme is reviewed at each meeting so that it can be adjusted to reflect the wishes of the Committee and take account of any changes to the latest Forward Plan (which outlines decisions to be taken by the Cabinet). The Committee is asked to review and note its work programme for the 2023/24 council year.

7. URGENT BUSINESS

To consider such other business as, in the opinion of the Chair, should, by reason of special circumstances, be considered as a matter of urgency.

IF YOU HAVE AN INTEREST AT THIS MEETING, PLEASE:

- Declare it and give details of its nature before the matter is discussed or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.
- Complete this sheet and pass it to the Democratic Services Officer.

Name:		Date of meeting:	
Meeting:			
Item to which your interest relates:			
Nature of Interest i.e. either disclosable pecuniary interest (as defined by Table 1 of Appendix B to the Code of Conduct, Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest (as defined by Appendix B to Code of Conduct) (please give details):			
Are you intending to withdraw from the meeting?		Yes - <input type="checkbox"/>	No - <input type="checkbox"/>

Registering Interests

Within 28 days of becoming a member or your re-election or re-appointment to office you must register with the Monitoring Officer the interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 1 (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests)** which are as described in "The Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012". You should also register details of your other personal interests which fall within the categories set out in **Table 2 (Other Registerable Interests)**.

"Disclosable Pecuniary Interest" means an interest of yourself, or of your partner if you are aware of your partner's interest, within the descriptions set out in Table 1 below.

"Partner" means a spouse or civil partner, or a person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or a person with whom you are living as if you are civil partners.

1. You must ensure that your register of interests is kept up-to-date and within 28 days of becoming aware of any new interest, or of any change to a registered interest, notify the Monitoring Officer.
2. A 'sensitive interest' is as an interest which, if disclosed, could lead to the councillor, or a person connected with the councillor, being subject to violence or intimidation.
3. Where you have a 'sensitive interest' you must notify the Monitoring Officer with the reasons why you believe it is a sensitive interest. If the Monitoring Officer agrees they will withhold the interest from the public register.

Non participation in case of disclosable pecuniary interest

4. Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to one of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in **Table 1**, you must disclose the interest, not participate in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest, just that you have an interest.

Dispensation may be granted in limited circumstances, to enable you to participate and vote on a matter in which you have a disclosable pecuniary interest.

5. Where you have a disclosable pecuniary interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

Disclosure of Other Registerable Interests

6. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your Other Registerable Interests (as set out in **Table 2**), you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting but otherwise must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

Disclosure of Non-Registerable Interests

7. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **directly relates** to your financial interest or well-being (and is not a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest set out in **Table 1**) or a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate, you must disclose the interest. You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation. If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.
8. Where a matter arises at a meeting which **affects** –
- a. your own financial interest or well-being;
 - b. a financial interest or well-being of a relative or close associate; or
 - c. a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under Other Registrable Interests as set out in **Table 2** you must disclose the interest. In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied
9. Where a matter (referred to in paragraph 8 above) **affects** the financial interest or well- being:
- a. to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
 - b. a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise, you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

If it is a 'sensitive interest', you do not have to disclose the nature of the interest.

Where you have an Other Registerable Interest or Non-Registerable Interest on a matter to be considered or is being considered by you as a Cabinet member in exercise of your executive function, you must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest and must not take any steps or further steps in the matter apart from arranging for someone else to deal with it.

Table 1: Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

This table sets out the explanation of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests as set out in the [Relevant Authorities \(Disclosable Pecuniary Interests\) Regulations 2012](#).

Subject	Description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vocation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain. [Any unpaid directorship.]
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the council) made to the councillor during the previous 12-month period for expenses incurred by him/her in carrying out his/her duties as a councillor, or towards his/her election expenses. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Contracts	Any contract made between the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners (or a firm in which such person is a partner, or an incorporated body of which such person is a director* or a body that such person has a beneficial interest in the securities of*) and the council — (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land and Property	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the council. ‘Land’ excludes an easement, servitude, interest or right in or over land which does not give the councillor or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners (alone or jointly with another) a right to occupy or to receive income.
Licenses	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the council for a month or longer
Corporate tenancies	Any tenancy where (to the councillor’s knowledge)— (a) the landlord is the council; and (b) the tenant is a body that the councillor, or his/her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/ civil partners is a partner of or a director* of or has a beneficial interest in the securities* of.
Securities	Any beneficial interest in securities* of a body

	<p>where—</p> <p>(a) that body (to the councillor’s knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the council; and</p> <p>(b) either—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the total nominal value of the securities* exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or ii. if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the councillor, or his/ her spouse or civil partner or the person with whom the councillor is living as if they were spouses/civil partners has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.
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* ‘director’ includes a member of the committee of management of an industrial and provident society.

* ‘securities’ means shares, debentures, debenture stock, loan stock, bonds, units of a collective investment scheme within the meaning of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 and other securities of any description, other than money deposited with a building society.

Table 2: Other Registrable Interests

You have a personal interest in any business of your authority where it relates to or is likely to affect:

- a) any body of which you are in general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority
- b) any body
 - i. exercising functions of a public nature
 - ii. any body directed to charitable purposes or
 - iii. one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union)

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Wednesday, 31 January 2024 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor N. Oliver
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Carr, D.	Lang, J.
Cartie, E.	Mather, M.
Castle, G.	Morphet, N.
Dale, A.	Reid, J.
Gallacher, B.	

CABINET MEMBERS

J. Watson	Promoting Healthy Lives
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OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

M. Antoniou	Senior Economic Development Manager
N. Carney	Strategic Tourism Project Manager
S. Green	Head of Customer Experience
P. Metcalfe	Head of Operations and Services, Active Northumberland
S. Nicholson	Scrutiny Co-Ordinator
N. Turnbull	Democratic Services Officer
N. Walsh	Director of Stronger Communities
M. Warnes	Active Northumberland, CEO

1 member of the press.

30. MINUTES

In response to questions, it was confirmed that:

Minute No 22.1 Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2022-2026 Action Plan Progression

- Advice obtained from the Strategic Housing Manager to young homeless people was that they should ring 999 if they were the victim of domestic abuse or in an emergency. She was unsure of the source of the information obtained by Councillor Morphet.

Minute No. 28.1 Planning Service Performance Report

An update would be sought regarding reference by the Director of Planning and Housing to additional training by Highways Officers (fourth bullet point, page 6).

The Chair confirmed that an update would be given on Planning Enforcement under agenda item 4.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Communities and Place OSC, held on 29 November 2023, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

31. DISCLOSURE OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Oliver, in the interests of transparency in respect of agenda item 5.2, stated that he paid to have an Airbnb property that he owned listed on the Visit Northumberland website. This was similar to paying for a Council service such as emptying of garden waste bins, and he understood that it was not a disclosable interest.

32. FORWARD PLAN OF CABINET DECISIONS

The Committee considered the schedule of decisions made by Cabinet since the last meeting with the latest Forward Plan of key items (Schedule enclosed with the signed minutes).

The Chair was pleased to report that the recommendations of the Committee on Planning Services Performance Report had been presented to Cabinet on 16 January 2024. These had been accepted. A report with proposals for the structure of the Planning Department including Enforcement for additional resource had been prepared by the Director of Housing and Planning and was to be considered by the Senior Leadership Team.

RESOLVED that:

1. The schedule of decisions made by Cabinet and the Forward Plan of key items be noted.
2. Cabinet's response to the Planning Services Performance report be noted.

33. OVERVIEW

33.1 Active Northumberland Annual Outcome Report 2022-23 including the Service Plan Successes 2022-23

The Committee received Active Northumberland's Annual Outcome Report 2022-23 which contained a review on how the Active Northumberland Service

Plan had been delivered for the previous financial year. (A copy of the report and presentation is enclosed with the signed minutes).

The Chair noted that a new organisation had been appointed to take over management of the Council's leisure centres on 1 April 2024 and emphasised that the purpose of this report was to consider performance during 2022/23. He confirmed that the new organisation would be invited to a future meeting of the committee.

Councillor Jeff Watson, Portfolio Holder for Promoting Healthy Lives stated that he was very proud of the Council's leisure offer in Northumberland. Following significant investment over the last few years it was now regarded as one of the best leisure services in the country.

Active Northumberland had worked with NCC to create a strong partnership during the previous 9 years. Over this time the Council had invested in new and improved facilities. Active Northumberland had capitalised on this investment producing excellent results for the health and well-being of residents in Northumberland.

The Council had to look at its contracts periodically and undertake a government prescribed procurement exercise to ensure value for money as well as delivery of key objectives. As a result of the procurement exercise, a new contractor had been appointed. Active Northumberland was working with the Council to ensure a smooth transition for the business to the new contractor.

Councillor Watson commended Active Northumberland on the manner in which they were conducting themselves. No doubt they would be disappointed that the contract had not been awarded to them. Their primary concern was for the health and well-being of residents of Northumberland and they continued to work with the council to ensure this continued. The report was well written and detailed performance in the previous year.

Nigel Walsh, Director of Stronger Communities, echoed the Portfolio Holder's comments regarding his experience working with Active Northumberland after the recent contract decision. They continued to give customers the best service and a smooth as possible transition for the highly valued workforce, including management.

Mark Warnes, CEO and Paul Metcalfe, Head of Operations and Services, at Active Northumberland shared a powerpoint presentation which included details of:

- Financial performance – revenue had increased by £2.5 million despite a planned reduction in management fees.
- 61% market share in Northumberland and users as at October 2023.
- Memberships including:
 - fitness data by age and facility – likely to be around 10% increase for 2023/24.

- Cancellations and attrition.
- Swimming lessons
- Spa membership
- Fitness class attendance
- Expansion of health and well-being services
- Employee data with contracted v. casual staff and apprenticeships including Leisure Duty Manager posts.
- Capital investments in 2022/23 including refurbishment of Newbiggin Sports and Community Hub and completion of phase 3 at Berwick Sports and Leisure Centre.
- 'Very good' Quest accreditation for the 3 participating centres.
- A new environment strategy launched to reduce energy costs and carbon footprint.
- Capital investments in 2023/24 with Morpeth Sports and Leisure Centre and Ponteland Leisure Centre placed first and second in the country/ This met Active Northumberland's aim to be the best community leisure and wellness provider in the UK.

The data provided figures for 2020/21 following lockdowns as a result of the Covid pandemic, 2022/23 as well as 2023/24 up to 31 December 2023 as it was the last update to be provided by Active Northumberland. There was overall strong performance given that there 3 months of the financial year left with January to March traditionally being the highest sales periods.

They highlighted:

- Performance for the current years was ahead of target in many areas.
- Membership at Blyth in the 18-35 age group had been impacted by the opening of a new Pure Gym. It's pricing catered for a different market.
- The new facility and equipment at Morpeth were competing with other nearby centres. The centres at Ashington, Blyth and Concordia had strong outside competition.
- Introduction of Membership Experience Advisors and new Elevate fitness pathway which has reduced membership cancellations.
- A new swimming academy to train swimming instructors had given more availability. Increasing the Learn2Swim programme had impacted on the slots available for open swimming.
- Participation had increased in the older aged groups after targeted marketing campaigns and success of exercise on referral programmes which saw participants continuing to exercise.
- All staff were commended for their achievements and contribution to the success of the organisation.

Responses to questions and comments made by members included:

- The response by management and staff during the pandemic who had made the centres available as Covid testing and vaccination centres. Their participation with other services meant the organisation was well

thought of by their local communities as well as emergency response to recent storms.

- The increase in membership and usage was due to a number of factors including transformation of the business, digital offer, marketing improvements, brand recognition, new facilities, equipment and general investment in the portfolio had driven users back to the centres. The planning and process changes in the background during furlough contributed to the strong recovery following the pandemic lockdowns. Active Northumberland had recovered 80% of business within 6 months compared to the expected by 18 months anticipated by UK Active and LGA.
- Few complaints were received regarding leisure centres. Reduction in temperatures (within recommended operating parameters) had been addressed during the presentation.
- Every opportunity was taken to upgrade to the latest environmentally friendly and efficient equipment where possible during planned maintenance. Ground source heat pumps had been installed at Willowburn Sports and Leisure Centre. It was anticipated that the payback could potentially have been reduced given increasing energy costs. Details would be provided after the meeting as well as the reason why these had only been installed at one of the three new centres.
- Waterworld Prudhoe was very different to the other centres, appearing more aged and with a lower market share due to its proximity to the county's border and competition with facilities elsewhere, such as Blaydon.
- It was essential that older people kept fit and essential that participation continued to increase in this sector. This was believed due to a number of factors, including the transformation of the centres, internal and external marketing and targeting the over 65 age group, refer a friend initiative, the exercise referral schemes and the HIVE cafes which provided good quality food and welcoming environments for social meetings. Co-location of core services, such as libraries, also increased the values of sites.
- 'Grams' could participate in the Mams on the Move sessions if present with a baby.
- Active Northumberland leisure centres offered an all-inclusive product and were very different to gym only centres. They included pool use and fitness classes and it was therefore accepted that they were more expensive. They did not, therefore, attempt to compete with a gym only product. Membership across all age demographics had increased quite significantly and therefore it was felt they had adopted the correct approach.
- Satellite sessions at community centres were more cost effective for families on low incomes.
- Neighbouring authorities offered 'swim to trim' sessions for £1 at less popular times and should perhaps be considered in Northumberland.
- Given the excellent performance, some members queried why the contract had been awarded to another provider.
- Use of biomass or a hydro scheme to power the Wentworth Leisure Centre had not been progressed due to costs.

The Chair and members thanked the officers for the well written report and presentation as well as their stewardship of the council's leisure services in recent years. Officers were wished well for the future.

RESOLVED that the report and presentation be noted.

33.2 Update on delivery of Visit Northumberland and the Northumberland Destination Management Plan 2022-2032

The purpose of the report was to update the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee on delivery of Visit Northumberland and the Northumberland Destination Management Plan (DMP) 2022-2032. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes).

Councillor Jeff Watson, Portfolio Holder for Promoting Healthy Lives, was delighted with the progress that had been made with the visitor economy in a short space of time and that the Northumberland Destination Management Plan was regarded as a leading example across the country.

The tourism and service industry were probably one of the largest employers in the county. He stressed the importance of it being handled in a way that produced income and employment as well as ensuring that local residents were not disadvantaged. Reference was made to successes which included a recent Visit Northumberland tourism conference which had seen 120 participants in attendance. The figures were significant, with further progress having been made since Maria Antoniou had been employed.

Maria Antoniou, Senior Economic Development Manager, outlined the report which gave:

- An overview of the changes to national and regional Visitor Economy partnership arrangements, and the council's role. Visit Northumberland had been established as the county's Destination Management Organisation to lead the management of the Northumberland visitor economy.
- Visit Northumberland had achieved accreditation as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) in February 2023 with 14 other destinations (one of the recommendations of the De Bois review).
- The North East was selected as the first pilot for a regional Destination Development Partnership (DDP). The visitor economy was recognised in the NE Devolution deal as well as local plans and priorities to support inclusive growth.
- Headline indicators from the most recent survey data were contained in paragraph 5.12 of the report.
- An explanation of what destination management entailed and how partners worked together to improve the visitor economy and visitors experience.

- An update on the Destination Management Plan was contained within Appendix 1. It was to be refreshed to ensure actions remained valid.

Neil Carney, Strategic Tourism Project Manager, explained that Visit Northumberland were the custodian of the DMP to drive it forward for the county. The plan was owned by all stakeholders and partners.

The key priorities were:

- Data Evidence and Intelligence
- Destination Infrastructure and Connectivity
- Position and Profile
- Business, Product and People Development

There was also an overarching priority under a theme of sustainability which linked the above 4 priorities in a regenerative sense to ensure the visitor economy gave something back.

The key priorities were managed by stakeholders from the industry including representatives from tourist attractions, the county council and the national landscapes managing the 5 key priorities taking the actions identified to address opportunities within the DMP. The review in 2024 would check whether the actions were still relevant and whether it was still addressing problems, issues or opportunities identified when the plan was first written in 2022.

80 stakeholder partners which formed an Action Planning Forum were scheduled to meet on 27 February 2024. The refreshed priorities and actions would be published for implementation from 1 April 2024.

The following information was provided in response to questions from members:

- There was a lot happening in Berwick upon Tweed in respect of the broader cultural development as well as the visitor economy which would take time to come to fruition. A new place-based approach had been piloted in Alnwick and was to be rolled out elsewhere, to bring businesses together and consider how campaigns were put out for visitors. The 'Step into Alnwick' programme had seen the development of a town centre app to optimise appeal of the town during the winter months alongside a visit to the Alnwick Garden Winter Trail. They hoped that the approach would work elsewhere with place-based campaigns to focus on towns. They would look to see how they could work with businesses in Berwick, when it was appropriate with the broader activity in the town.
- Whilst Berwick benefitted from a train station in the town, Alnwick had two of the highest visited tourist attractions in the county, Alnwick Garden and Alnwick Castle and the recently opened Lilidorei. The ability to book an experience was an important part of product development with the DMP.
- Representatives of VN sat on the Board of the Destination Tweed Programme which was developing the River Tweed Trail, a walking route

from source to sea (Moffat to Berwick upon Tweed). As new products were developed, this would hopefully broaden the appeal of the historic town to visitors with different audiences using the transport hub and accommodation.

- The creation of a Northumberland Dashboard was in hand. To ensure accurate information was built into the dashboard, a region wide accommodation study had been conducted to develop an accurate picture of the numbers and types of accommodation and occupancy data around the county for all types of accommodation including hotels, self-catering cottages and Airbnb properties. Data on visitor attractions was also included. A tech partner, Squidgy, was creating the digital dashboard with the aforementioned data being fed into it.
- The Director of Environment and Transport and his team were looking to see how information could be collated as part of the Infrastructure Audit and the right method to share information which was relevant to tourism businesses.
- A Strategic Transport Working Group had not yet been established. They were looking how the plan could be embedded within existing groups, such as being more proactive within the Northumberland Cycling and Walking Board and to ensure the voice of tourism was represented within existing groups. It was anticipated that the movement of the tourism function to the Place and Regeneration Directorate alongside transport would provide opportunities as well as Transport Northeast and the North East Mayoral Combined Authority where activity or funding was required to deliver schemes.
- The Glasgow Declaration of Climate Action in Tourism came under the Sustainability Working Group led by Duncan Wise and would require discussion by multi stakeholders and had not yet been progressed. The immediate priority of the working group was to look at the Global Destination Sustainability Management Index with a rural pilot in Northumberland by GDS Movement who were leaders in setting sustainability indices for cities, and developing sustainability indices for the DDP at Durham, Newcastle and Sunderland. The Northumberland rural index would be the first rural index created with it being potentially replicated in other regions of the world.
- The Covid pandemic had a significant impact on the value of the visitor economy between 2020 and 2021 (falls of 50% of visitors and 56% of the value within Northumberland). The DMP had been borne from the crisis and had assisted in the management of returning visitors not used to exploring the countryside, parking inconsiderately and leaving gates open. The infrastructure had been unable to cope with the numbers of visitors that returned to the county.
- The provision of quality accommodation was one of the main drivers of the DMP to ensure the quality of the visitor experience and welcome received in the county was better than elsewhere. In a visitor survey conducted in 2021, 100% of the 450 visitors sampled felt welcome and enjoyed a quality experience. Businesses wanted to compete with other destinations around the country which was driving up the quality experience. They were also encouraged to enter the Northeast Tourism Awards and other national awards programmes.

- Visit Northumberland's role was to influence investment but not deliver services. If the infrastructure audit identified that there were not enough car parking spaces, public conveniences or bins were overflowing, they hoped to influence the providers of services where these were lacking and to inform the decision process to improve visitor experience in Northumberland. Businesses wanted to see improved infrastructure such as more parking and repairs to rural roads as well as along the coastal area.
- The popularity of Blyth beach and additional investment were best raised with the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration or Regeneration team through the Energising Blyth programme as well as the Director of Environment and Transport who chaired the Infrastructure Working Group for the DMP.
- The overnight motorhomes parking pilot project had been very successful, and consideration was being given to expansion at more locations, subject to planning requirements. This pilot was identified as a regional exemplar and included within the DDP as an opportunity to be replicated across the region. Other partners actively encouraged parking by motorhomes including the national parks and Kielder Forest.
- Day visitors could travel up to 3 hours. These were not broken down between residents of Northumberland and visitors from other counties. It was hoped more of these could be persuaded to stay overnight.
- Data and intelligence from the DMP would inform where there was a need. Events and festivals, food and drink and programmes at The Alnwick Playhouse, Queens Hall in Hexham and The Maltings in Berwick upon Tweed would hopefully meet the needs of visitors. The Festival of Flame at Hexham Abbey as part of their 1350th anniversary celebrations during a February weekend extended the season and likely encouraged more overnight visitors. Individual components such as the latter event, helped to build and sustain broader aspects of the visitor economy.
- Product development work funded by the North of Tyne Combined Authority meant that visitors could see what other experiences were available which encouraged them to stay longer and spend more money.
- Regional assets encouraged visitors to participate in a city experience in Newcastle and combine it with rural aspects which Northumberland offered, such as day trips to Hadrian's Wall or Alnwick. 60% of all revenue was from staying visitors and the value of this contribution within the economic impact was recognised.
- There had been 1.2 million new users to the 'visitnorthumberland.com' website in 2023 which had increased 19% on the previous year.
- Public transport was challenging with 86% of visitors to Northumberland used private transport to get to the county but only 81% used that vehicle to travel around, the rest used other means. VN did what they could to support promotion of bus routes. Some attraction operators such as National Trust and English Heritage worked with Go NE to provide funds for bus services to Belsay Hall and Wallington Hall. The County Council supported the AD122 bus to Hadrian's Wall with other local authorities along that route. There were also a number of bus services along the coastal route. Visit Northumberland was working with Newcastle

Gateshead initiative on a North of Tyne funded programme to be launched in 2024 linking the Hadrian's Wall country train route into to Newcastle connecting with the Tyne and Wear Metro, linking the new Northumberland Line and Port of Tyne to encourage more walking, cycling and use of public transport.

- Provision of capacity for bikes on public transport needed to be addressed and was identified with the DMP.
- Visit Northumberland did not have a direct link with the various Town and Parish forums. The Visit Northumberland partnership programme worked with the businesses that had signed up to work with the organisation to take forward promotion of the destination. They worked closely with the National Park Authority and also the 2 National Landscapes which represented its residents in the work that they did. Visit Northumberland did not sit on any formal town or parish council meetings; however, they made representations on matters of relevance when required.
- An ambition for the region was the reintroduction of direct services from Scandinavia to the Port of Tyne. A feasibility study was looking at ferry service every 3 days. Currently there were direct air services from Scandinavia to Newcastle International Airport by Logan Air. The County Council was a shareholder in the airport.

Issues raised by members included:

- It was important that partners worked together to create new destinations, and that this continued such as the excellent work in respect of Hadrian's wall following the Foot and Mouth outbreak. It was important that tourism development following the Covid pandemic was not started then stopped.
- Rights of ways and walking were important to rural areas such as Blanchland. It was important that the public conveniences remained open in these areas.
- Reference was made to comments by the Leader of the Council who had stated that the whole of the Northumberland area, coastal and inland, was rural.
- The overnight parking for motorhomes pilot project should be expanded to perhaps Woodhorn Museum. Such visitors were likely to use more services in the county than day trippers.
- Parking charges at some locations, such as Holy Island, were expensive and perhaps cost prohibitive for some residents of Northumberland.
- Clarification was requested on the meaning of local within the Local Visitor Economy Partnerships.
- Installation and ownership of Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCPs) by the council would maintain control over costs. Competitive charging could influence the destination of some visitors and make Northumberland more desirable than another location. Funding for EVCPs needed to be made available for fast chargers to enable turnover of visitors, rather than installation of slower chargers. This would be highlighted with transport colleagues.
- The availability of more activities in the evening would encourage visitors to stay overnight.

- The Director of Environment and Transport be invited to a future meeting of the Communities and Place OSC when the Infrastructure Audit had been completed to share information about capital investment and sources of funding.
- It was important that car parking in Blyth remained free.
- Where parking charges had been introduced in some wards, these had been implemented at the request of the local town or parish council, to help manage visitors as the volume had been too high for the number of car parking spaces available.
- Businesses such as takeaways should ensure that there was no litter waste in the immediate area.
- Lilidorei attempted to address seasonality of tourism at Alnwick Garden and Alnwick Castle. Incorporation of shows and films for children at The Alnwick Playhouse attracted participants in the winter months. A new restaurant had solid bookings shortly after its opening in January 2024.
- Tourism should not be forced on residents in a locality before it became a destination, their concerns and issues needed a voice to be addressed. Town and Parish Councils should perhaps be emailed with contact information for concerns, particularly regarding the diminishing availability of affordable rental accommodation due to second homes and development of B and Bs to ensure that residents were not impacted negatively by tourism. It was agreed community engagement process could be added to the review of the DM Plan.

Officers were thanked for the report and information.

RESOLVED that:

1. The achievements of Visit Northumberland's efforts to maximise the visitor economy's contribution to the Northumberland economy, be noted.
2. The progress made in the delivery of actions against the priorities of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan, be noted.
3. The Infrastructure Audit be added to the committee work programme, when completed.

34. SCRUTINY

34.1 Corporate Feedback Performance 2022/2023

The purpose of the report was to review the operation of the complaints process between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 and to keep Members informed about the effectiveness of current arrangements for handling customer complaints.

Sarah Green, Head of Customer Experience, provided a brief summary of the report which provided corporate feedback on complaints that had been dealt with in the previous financial year. She added that a number of improvements were being implemented including use of a new bespoke iCasework case management system which had been introduced in November 2023. This

would help manage response timescales to customers, enable data retrieval, production of reports and aid understanding to assist with service improvements.

The following information was given in response to questions from Members:

- Clarification was provided on the differences between service requests, informal resolutions and stage 1 complaints, and the numbers in 2022/23.
- It would be helpful to include the resolution for all of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). (It was omitted for the seventh case.)
- LGSCO remedy could include compensation, an apology or improvements to processes to ensure decisions were communicated efficiently and effectively.
- Feedback was obtained from a sample of customers as part of the complaints process although not all individuals wanted to engage. Those that did participate, appreciated it.
- The LGSCO Public Interest Report on a planning matter had recently been considered by the committee as part of the Local Commissioner's findings. The Scrutiny Co-ordinator agreed to check with his colleague about other Public Interest Reports and whether they had been considered by other Overview and Scrutiny Committees.
- The new case management system should enable better management of complaints with automatic prompts to the identified officer, link officer and complaints team to flag up if something was out of time and required follow up. This should ensure that complaints did not remain unresolved for unreasonable lengths of time.
- If a complainant was unhappy with a decision as stage 1, they should escalate their complaint to stage 2. This was set out within the stage 1 decision letter.
- A copy of the complaint handling process be circulated to members.
- Comments regarding lack of planning enforcement would be referred to the service. The complaints team were currently recruiting to some vacant positions and so additional resource should be added to the team in the near future.
- The process incorporated targets to ensure that complaints were responded to in a timely manner. When feedback was received it was fed into service planning to resolve an issue. Some complaints may not seem like a significant issue to the service or the Council as a whole in the context of all the services provided; however it should be recognised by staff that the matter could be of extreme importance to the individual. We are working to ensure that teams don't forget the person at the centre of the issue.
- It was accepted that there was always likely to be complaints and it could not be prejudged how many there could be. Each complaint was dealt with as separate issue and only very serious issues were taken to the LGSCO. The person should be at the heart of the issue, not a corporate target.

Councillors Castle and Cartie left the meeting at 4.09 p.m. during the discussion of this item.

Comments made by members included:

- Given the breadth of the services that the Council provided, it was remarkable that only 16 LGSCO complaints had been upheld.
- It would be helpful in the future if the report included comparative data with other local authorities in the region or with similar county councils.
- Some individuals would have spent considerable time and effort preparing a case to take it the LGSCO.
- Fix My Street only updated the original individual who reported a problem.
- Whether targets could be incorporated within future reports.
- Whilst ideally there would be no complaints; a procedure that put people first and provided them with an opportunity to state their case, be treated fairly, was a service to be proud of.

Several members thanked the officer for the report commenting that it was often a difficult area in which to work.

RESOLVED that the report be received.

35. Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the 2023/24 council year. (Report enclosed with the signed minutes).

It was reported that in Section 2:

2nd bullet point should be amended to read 'Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plans'.

7th bullet should point be amended to read 'Local Nature Recovery Strategy'.

It was noted that issues regarding potholes and a potential task and finish working group on funding be discussed at the OSC Chair's Group on 2 February when it could be discussed directly with the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration.

An update be requested from the Business Resilience and Emergency Planning Lead on the Storm Arwen recommendations including a suggestion that preferred contact details be obtained for elected members and experiences during recent storms.

RESOLVED that:

1. The work programme be noted.
2. An update from the Business Resilience and Emergency Planning Lead on the Storm Arwen recommendations be added to the work programme.

3. The DMP Infrastructure Audit be added to the committee work programme, when completed.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____

Agenda Item 4

DECISIONS TAKEN BY CABINET SINCE LAST OSC MEETING AND FORTHCOMING CABINET DECISIONS - MARCH 2024 TO APRIL 2024

DECISION	CABINET DATE/DECISION
Cabinet Papers – 13 February 2024	https://northumberland.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=140&MId=2293
Budget Engagement Report	13 February 2024
Budget 2024-25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024-2028	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that County Council be recommended to:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note that the figures contained within the Budget 2024-25 within Appendix 1 are based on the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement of 18 December 2023. 2. Approve: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) the Revenue Budget for 2024-25 including the efficiencies totalling £10.846 million for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1 (detailed in Appendix 10), subject to the deletion of the proposal in Environment and Transport to increase the charge for a pay and display and display parking permit (2024-25 £0.012m; 2025-26 ££0.011m; 2026-27 £0.015m); and, b) the Schedule of Efficiencies totalling £14.950 million for 2025-26 contained within Appendix 1 (detailed in Appendix 10) noting that the efficiencies identified may be progressed during 2024-25 in order to realise the efficiencies early. 3. Note the Revenue MTFP covering the period 2024-28 detailed within Appendix 1 and the requirement to deliver budget balancing measures of £20.248 million in 2026-27 and £14.238 million in 2027-28. 4. Note the estimated receipt of Revenue Support Grant of £14.020 million for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1. 5. Note the estimated retained Business Rates and the Top-Up Grant funding to be received by the Council for 2024-25 of £103.696 million and £324.303 million over the remaining period of the MTFP contained within Appendix 1. 6. Note the estimated surplus from prior years on Collection Fund Business Rates balance of £3.471 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.

	<p>7. Note the estimated receipt of Rural Services Delivery Grant of £2.745 million for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>8. Note the estimated receipt of the New Homes Bonus of £1.682 million (excluding service element of £0.028 million) for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>9. Note the estimated receipt of Improved Better Care Funding Grant of £12.496 million for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>10. Note the estimated receipt of Social Care Grant funding of £25.821 million for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>11. Note the estimated receipt of Adult Social Care Discharge Grant funding of £2.920 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>12. Note the estimated receipt of Adult Social Care Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund Grant of £6.656 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>13. Note the estimated receipt of the Services Grant of £0.439 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>14. Approve a 2.99% increase in Council Tax for 2024-25, noting that this is in line with the Government's assumptions regarding the Council's Core Spending Power; and, within the Government's referendum limit of 3.00%.</p> <p>15. Note that the MTFP 2024-28 includes a 2.99% annual increase in Council Tax for 2025-26 and then 1.99% thereafter for the remaining years of the MTFP and, that an estimate of annual tax base growth has been included.</p> <p>16. Note the non-collection rate for Council Tax purposes remains at 1.00% for 2024-25 (1.00% in 2023-24).</p> <p>17. Note the estimated surplus of £4.149 million from prior years on the Collection Fund Council Tax balance for 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>18. Approve the Council Tax Support Hardship Scheme 2024-25; a reduction of up to £100.00 to council tax bills for all working age Council Tax Support claimants; and those pensionable age Council Tax Support claimants that do not receive 100.00% Council Tax Support, once all other discounts have been applied.</p>
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	<p>19. Approve a 2.00% increase in Council Tax for 2024-25 for use on Adult Social Care services; raising an additional £4.993 million to support the Budget 2024- 25 and note that the assumed increase included in the MTFP is 2.00% for 2025-26 and zero thereafter.</p> <p>20. Approve the Reserves Policy 2024-25 detailed in Appendix 2.</p> <p>21. Note the Schedule of Reserves and Provisions contained within Appendix 3.</p> <p>22. Approve: The net contributions from the Strategic Management Reserve of £20.885 million in 2024-25 and note the proposed net contributions from reserves of £10.831 million in 2025-26 and £0.027 million in 2026-27, and the proposed net contribution to the reserves of £0.997 million in 2027-28, contained within Appendix 1, comprising:</p> <p>a) non-recurrent pressures of £7.147 million for 2024-25, and note the non-recurrent pressures totalling £2.084 million in 2025-26, £0.027 million in 2026-27, and £0.028 million in 2027-28, (as detailed within Appendix 9; excluding the Adult Social Care Discharge Fund, Locality Coordinators, Hirst Welfare Centre – transitional support, Council Tax Support Hardship Scheme, and BEST Initiative);</p> <p>b) delayed investment interest due from the airport as a result of Covid-19 will be repaid to the Strategic Management Reserve. It is anticipated that the airport will start to repay the delayed interest over a three-year period, commencing in April 2027 at £1.025 million per annum;</p> <p>c) revenue contribution to capital (RCCO) of £13.171 million in 2024-25; comprising of £8.171 million for investment in the Schools' Development Programme, and £5.000 million for investment in the enabling works at strategic employment sites within Northumberland; and £6.591 million in 2025-26 for investment in the Schools' Development Programme; and,</p> <p>d) contribution from the reserve of £0.567 million in 2024-25 and note the subsequent proposed use of up to £2.156 million in 2025-26 in order to balance the Budget.</p> <p>23. Approve the use of the Public Health Revenue Grant Reserve of £0.428 million in 2024-25, and note the proposed contribution from this reserve of £0.180 million in 2025-26 and £0.100 million in 2026-27 contained within Appendix 1, comprising:</p>
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	<p>a) four fixed term Locality Coordinators totalling £0.178 million in 2024-25; and,</p> <p>b) Hirst Welfare Centre – transitional support at £0.250 million in 2024-25, £0.180 million in 2025-26, and £0.100 million in 2026-27.</p> <p>24. Approve the use of the Council Transformation Fund Reserve of £3.000 million to fund BEST programme delivery costs in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1.</p> <p>25. Approve the use of the Council Tax Hardship and Discount Scheme Fund Reserve of £1.726 million in 2024-25 contained within Appendix 1 to fund the Council Tax Support Hardship Scheme for 2024-25.</p> <p>26. Note the Schedule of Service Specific Grants of £263.663 million contained within Appendix 4, and that some are still indicative pending final confirmation.</p> <p>27. Note the Schedule of Fees and Charges 2024-25 contained within Appendix 5.</p> <p>28. Approve the Inflation Schedule for 2024-25 totalling £28.559 million detailed in Appendix 6.</p> <p>29. Approve the Recurrent Growth and Pressures Schedules of £14.823 million and the additional revenue costs associated with the Capital Programme of £19.100 million for 2024-25; and note the Growth and Pressures of £2.265 million in 2025-26; £3.130 million in 2026-27; and, £0.875 million in 2027-28 and the additional revenue costs associated with the Capital Programme of £12.609 million in 2025-26; £6.000 million in 2026-27; and £6.000 million in 2027-28 included within Appendices 1, 7 and 8.</p> <p>30. Approve the Non-Recurrent Pressures of £15.221 million for 2024-25 and note the Non-Recurrent Pressures of £2.264 million for 2025-26, £0.127 million for 2026-27, and £0.028 million in 2027-28 included within Appendix 9.</p> <p>31. Approve the Non-Recurrent Income of £5.475 million for 2024-25 and note the Non-Recurrent Income of £0.314 million for 2025-26; £0.283 million for 2026-27, and £0.269 million for 2027-28 included within Appendix 9.</p> <p>32. Approve the identified budget balancing measures contained within Appendix 10 of £10.846 million for 2024-25 and £14.950 million for 2025-26; and note those budget balancing measures totalling £6.017 million already identified for 2026-27 to 2027-28.</p>
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	<p>33. Note the Corporate Equality Impact Assessment at Appendix 11.</p> <p>34. Note the Budget by Service Area 2024-25 detailed in Appendix 12.</p> <p>35. Note the receipt of Dedicated Schools Grant of £175.086 million in 2024-25; and note the revised allocation of £158.046 million for 2023-24. This is following the conversion of four schools to academy status during 2023-24.</p> <p>36. Approve the Capital Strategy 2024-25 to 2027-28 contained within Appendix 13.</p> <p>37. Approve the revised Capital Programme as detailed within Appendix 14 and note the increase in the Capital Programme 2024-28 of £277.560 million detailed in Appendix 15.</p> <p>38. Approve the delegation of the detail of the final Local Transport Programme and any subsequent in-year amendments to the Executive Director Place and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member responsible for improving our roads and highways.</p> <p>39. Approve the delegation of the detail of the capital allocation for Highways Maintenance Investment in U and C Roads and Footpaths, and the Highway Maintenance and Pothole Repair Fund to the Executive Director Place and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member responsible for improving our roads and highways.</p> <p>40. Approve the Capital Prudential Indicators 2024-25 to 2027-28 based on the proposed Capital Programme detailed within Appendix 16.</p> <p>41. Approve the Annual Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy detailed in Appendix 17.</p> <p>42. Approve the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024-25 detailed in Appendix 18.</p> <p>43. Approve a delegation to the Executive Director for Transformation and Resources (the Council's Section 151 Officer) to draw down a total of £2.000 million from the Council's Transformation Fund Reserve and £0.800 million from the Estates Rationalisation Reserve in order to expedite work required with regard to the BEST initiative. Also, to note that Cabinet will receive updates of any drawdowns in the quarterly financial monitoring reports.</p>
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	<p>44. Approve a delegation to amend the Budget 2024-25 and MTFP in light of any changes as a result of the final Local Government Finance Settlement to the Executive Director for Transformation and Resources (the Council's Section 151 Officer) in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services if the final Settlement is received after the 21 February 2024 Council meeting. If the final Local Government Settlement is received prior to the Cabinet or 21 February 2024 Council meeting, then a supplementary report will be provided to Members advising of any changes necessary.</p>
<p>Revenues and Benefits Policies</p>	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that County Council be recommended to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the Revenues and Benefits Policies attached as Appendix 1 to Appendix 6; • Approve implementing the 100% Empty Homes Premium after one year from 1 April 2024; and • Make a determination to implement a 100% premium for second homes to increase the council tax charge to 200% from 1 April 2025.
<p>Corporate Fraud Policies</p>	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that County Council be recommended to approve the updated Anti-Money Laundering Policy and Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy, attached as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to the report</p>
<p>Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group</p> <p>Energising Blyth Programme – Culture Hub and Market Place</p>	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Cabinet approve the amended budget, shown in table 6.16, for inclusion in the Capital Programme of £16.546 million including £6.135 million from the Energising Blyth Project Delivery Support budget which is included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan; b) authority be delegated to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration to enter into the main construction contract relating to the project, subject to the appropriate procurement processes being followed; c) Subject to approval by North East Mayoral Combined Authority (NEMCA) of the £2.5m Business Case, this be

<p>Gilesgate Structural Works</p> <p>Broadband Connectivity and Oracle Upgrade</p>	<p>added to the Culture Hub & Market Place budget within the Medium-Term Financial Plan, and the associated financial profiles be approved as set out in the report; and</p> <p>d) Cabinet approve the transfer of funding of £0.388 million from the 2024-25 Climate Change Fund to the Culture Hub Project.</p> <p>a) Cabinet approve the spend of £0.100 million to undertake the structural works at 2 Gilesgate, Hexham. This spend will be funded from the Property Stewardship budget within the Capital Programme, and</p> <p>b) Cabinet approve the amendment to the Capital Programme to reallocate the funding from the Property Stewardship budget to the 2 Gilesgate, Hexham project.</p> <p>a) Cabinet note the receipt of a Gainshare payment from BT of £3.707 million;</p> <p>b) Cabinet approve the payment of a portion of the Gainshare receipt of £1.723 million to BDUK as per the terms of the funding agreement. Approve the allocation of the remaining Gainshare receipt of £1.984 million to the Community Broadband project in the Capital Programme. The £1.984 million will be profiled with £0.044 million in 2023-24 and the remaining £1.940 million in 2024-25;</p> <p>c) Cabinet approve the spend of £0.088 million for the implementation of new functionality in the Oracle system. This will be funded as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reallocation of £0.044 million from the Community Broadband project in 2023- 24. • A reallocation of £0.042 million from the Microsoft 365 project in 2024-25. • A reallocation of £0.002 million from the Computer Hardware project in 2024-25; and <p>d) Cabinet approve the amendments to the capital programme as per the above</p>
<p>Adult Social Care: Extra Care and Supported Living Strategy</p>	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that</p> <p>(a) Cabinet endorse the Extra Care and Supported Living Strategy as the overarching strategy that will provide the context, vision and aspirations for delivery of projects in Northumberland;</p>

	<p>(b) Cabinet support opportunities which are consistent with the strategy including those that involve the use of Council land or buildings and planning decisions;</p> <p>(c) Cabinet note that some schemes can be developed without Council funding, whilst others may require support including capital funding and/or the use of Council land. Where Council capital funding is required for the viability of schemes, detailed business cases will be prepared; and</p> <p>(d) the Executive Director for Adults, Ageing and Wellbeing be requested to prepare a future report on the capital requirements of this programme once a number of submissions have been analysed.</p>
<p>North East Investment Zone</p>	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that:-</p> <p>(a) Cabinet note the proposals in relation to the North East Investment Zone (NEIZ), including the inclusion of the Blyth Energy Central Site as an Investment Zone (IZ) Tax Site;</p> <p>(b) Cabinet authorise inclusion of the Blyth Energy Central BRR Site in the NEIZ for 25 years, noting the NEIZ Business Rates Reinvestment Strategy (attached at Appendix 1); and</p> <p>(c) Cabinet authorise the Executive Director of Place and Regeneration, in consultation with the Director of Finance, the Director of Law and Corporate Governance, the Cabinet Member for Supporting Business and Opportunities and Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources, to finalise the elements of the NEIZ proposal specific to Northumberland County Council in conjunction with the Interim Chief Executive Officer for the North East Mayoral Combined Authority, and enter into a written agreement with the North East Mayoral Combined Authority and constituent local authorities.</p>
<p>School Admission Arrangements for Community and Voluntary Controlled Schools for the 2025/2026 Academic Year</p>	<p>13 February 2024</p> <p>RESOLVED that:-</p> <p>(a) Cabinet note the outcomes of the six week consultation undertaken in relation to the Council's proposed admission arrangements for community and voluntary controlled schools for 2025/26 that took place between 10th November 2023 and 22nd December 2023;</p>

	<p>(b) Cabinet approve the proposed co-ordinated admission scheme for all maintained schools and academies, as provided in Appendix 1 of the report;</p> <p>(c) Cabinet approve (determine) the proposed admission arrangements, including proposed oversubscription criteria and proposed admission numbers for First and Primary community and voluntary and controlled schools, as provided in Appendix 2 of the report;</p> <p>(d) Cabinet approve (determine) the proposed admission arrangements, including proposed over subscription criteria and proposed admission numbers, for Middle, High and Secondary Community and Voluntary Controlled schools, including sixth forms, as provided in Appendix 3 of the report;</p> <p>(e) Cabinet approve a reduction of the Published Admission Number at Seahouses Primary School from 21 to 15 with effect from September 2025, in view of current and future pupil numbers; and (f) Cabinet Approve a reduction of the Published Admission Number at Longhoughton Primary School from 30 to 15 with effect from September 2025, in view of current and future pupil numbers.</p>
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FORTHCOMING CABINET DECISIONS

<p>Financial Performance 2023-24 – Position at end of December 2023</p> <p>The report will provide Cabinet with the revenue and capital financial performance against budget as at 31 December 2023.</p>	12 March 2024
<p>Energy Central Campus Phase 1 – Technical Training Kit: Outline Business Case</p> <p>In accordance with the Energising Blyth Programme - Local Assurance Framework, the report seeks the approval of the Outline Business Case (OBC) for the Energy Central Campus Phase 1 – Technical Training Kit which is part of development and delivery of the £20.71m Levelling Up Deep Dive (LUDD) funding awarded to Blyth earlier this year. The OBC has been externally appraised with a recommendation to proceed to Full Business Case (FBC).</p>	12 March 2024
<p>Financial Performance 2023-24 - Position at the end of December 2023</p> <p>The report will provide Cabinet with the revenue and capital financial performance against budget as at 31 December 2023.</p>	12 March 2024
<p>Hirst Masterplan</p> <p>To introduce the Hirst Masterplan to cabinet and seek authorisation to move forward in developing its contents further.</p>	12 March 2024
<p>Housing Regeneration Report – Stock Rationalisation</p> <p>The report seeks Cabinet approval to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decommission a number of low demand homes in Blyth (See appendix 1A); • To place on hold lettings for empty homes and any homes that become empty in the addresses listed within this report; • To give priority status for re-housing to all customers who currently reside in any of the addresses detailed in this report. • To approve the award of Homeloss & Disturbance payments for any customers relocating from the properties detailed in this report 	12 March 2024
<p>Northumbria Road Safety Partnership</p> <p>To consider and determine entry into a new Northumbria Road Safety Partnership (NRSP) with the five Tyne and Wear local authorities and Northumbria Police.</p>	12 March 2024
<p>Summary of New Capital Proposals considered by Officer Capital Strategy Group</p> <p>This report summarises the capital proposals considered by the Capital Strategy Group on 30 January 2024.</p>	12 March 2024
<p>Climate Change Action Plan 2024-26</p>	9 April 2024

<p>To replace the expiring Climate Change Action Plan 2021-23 and to set out our intended strategies for reaching our climate change targets across the next three years and beyond.</p>	
<p>Housing Regeneration Report – Stock Rationalisation</p> <p>The report seeks Cabinet approval to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decommission a number of low demand homes in Blyth in low to mid rise blocks; • To place on hold lettings for empty homes and any homes that become empty in the addresses listed within this report; • To give priority status for re-housing to all customers who currently reside in any of the addresses detailed in this report. • To approve the award of Homeloss & Disturbance payments for any customers relocating from the properties detailed in this report. 	<p>9 April 2024</p>
<p>Energising Blyth: Levelling Up Deep Dive – Bowes Ct.</p> <p>This report updates Cabinet and seeks approval of the Outline Business Case and other key decisions regarding the delivery of the Bowes Court retro-fit of properties. It will recommend the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To approve the Outline Business Case to enable progression to Full Business Case.? • Delegate authority, in accordance with the Local Assurance Framework, to the Council’s Executive Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) following consideration by the Energising Blyth Programme Board to approve the Full Business Case.? • Delegate approvals to the Executive Director for Place and Regeneration to enter into any contracts relating to the project subject to confirmation of associated funding being in place and the appropriate procurement processes being followed. 	<p>9 April 2024</p>

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Northumberland County Council

County Council

Wednesday, 17 January 2024

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service Inspection Report

Report of Councillor(s) Cllr Gordon Stewart, Cabinet Member for Looking After our Communities

Responsible Officer(s): Graeme Binning, Chief Fire Officer, and Helen Paterson, Chief Executive

1. **Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

Delivery of Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service effectively and efficiently contributes to the delivery of all three corporate priorities.

2. **Purpose of report**

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) has undertaken a third full inspection of Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS). The inspection commenced on 29 May 2023, with initial feedback (hot debrief) provided on 9 August 2023. The final report was received by the Service on 27 November 2023 and published on HMICFRS website on 29 November 2023. This report provides an Executive Summary.

3. **Recommendations**

3.1 Council is recommended to note the outcome of the Inspection Report

4. **Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable**

This report does not require a key decision.

5. **Background**

5.1 At the time of publication, nine fire and rescue service reports had been published in round three so far. These include; Northumberland, Warwickshire, Cornwall, Merseyside, Cambridgeshire, Cheshire, Buckinghamshire, Surrey and Bedfordshire.

5.2 Overall, Northumberland has made significant improvements since the previous inspection. Key highlights are as follows:

- No Causes of Concern.
- No Inadequate judgement (or grades).
- No Requires Improvement.
- 7 Adequate.
- 4 Good.
- 12 Areas for Improvement (52 percent reduction since the second round of inspections).

Direction of travel ➔												
HMICFRS Round 1 Performance 2018/19				HMICFRS Round 2 Performance 2021/22				HMICFRS Round 3 Performance 2023/25				
Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Outstanding	Good	Requires Improvement	Inadequate	Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires Improvement	Inadequate
	Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	Understanding fires and other risks			Protecting the public through fire regulation	Understanding fires and other risks			Preventing fires and other risks	Understanding fires and other risks		
		Protecting the public through fire regulation		Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	Making best use of resources			Future affordability	Protecting the public through fire regulation	Responding to fires and other emergencies		
		Making best use of resources			Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity		Promoting the right values and culture	Protecting the public through fire regulation	Responding to major and multi-agency incidents		
		Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity			Managing performance and developing leaders	Managing performance and developing leaders		Getting the right people with the right skills	Responding to major and multi-agency incidents	Making best use of resources		
		Managing performance and developing leaders			Preventing fires and other risks	Preventing fires and other risks			Making best use of resources	Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity		
		Preventing fires and other risks			Responding to fires and other emergencies	Responding to fires and other emergencies			Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	Managing performance and developing leaders		
		Responding to fires and other emergencies			Future affordability	Future affordability						
		Future affordability			Promoting the right values and culture	Promoting the right values and culture						
		Promoting the right values and culture			Getting the right people with the right skills	Getting the right people with the right skills						
		Getting the right people with the right skills										

5.3 Of all nine services, Northumberland has demonstrated the most significant improvement by far, with many of the nine services seeing a deterioration in performance.

5.4 Of special note is the judgement that Northumberland is good at promoting the right values and culture. The report states:

“The service has well-defined values, which staff understood. We found staff at all levels of the service showing behaviours that reflect service values. Recent changes in both the fire and rescue leadership team and the county council leadership team, has meant a committed focus on values and culture throughout the organisation.” (page 33)

5.5 In addition, inspectors state:

“In response to our survey 94 percent of people (119 of 126) felt they are treated with respect by the people they work with.” (page 33)

5.6 HMICFRS is commissioned to undertake inspections of fire and rescue services in England across the three areas of effectiveness, efficiency and people. Supporting these three areas are 11 key questions or diagnostics, against which each service is judged. These questions have remained consistent across all three full inspections, while judgments have increased from four to five. **The inspectorate has emphasised that a reduction in grade, particularly from good to adequate**

does not necessarily mean there has been a reduction in performance, unless this is stated in the report.

5.7 During the first full inspection, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service received 10 Requires Improvement judgments and 1 Good judgement against the 11 diagnostics. The Service also received 24 Areas for Improvement.

5.8 During the second full inspection, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service received 9 Requires Improvement judgements and 2 Good judgements against the 11 diagnostics. The Service also received a Cause of Concern, and 25 Areas for Improvement.

6. Options open to the Council and reasons for the recommendations

6.1 Not applicable. The report is presented for information.

7. Implications

Policy	Areas for improvement identified in the report may require changes in policy.
Finance and value for money	There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. The Service was assessed as being Good at making the Service affordable now and in the future.
Legal	. Independent inspection of fire and rescue authorities in England is delivered by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The chief fire and rescue inspector and inspectors of fire and rescue authorities in England have powers of inspection given to them by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, as amended by the Policing and Crime Act 2017
Procurement	Not applicable.
Human resources	Not Applicable
Property	Not applicable.
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No - not required at this point No decisions are required and therefore no EIA has been produced.
Risk assessment	No risks identified.
Crime and disorder	Not applicable.

Customer considerations	HMICFRS undertakes independent inspections of Fire and Rescue Service on behalf of the public.
Carbon reduction	Not applicable.
Health and wellbeing	The Service was assessed as Good at preventing fires and risk.
Wards	(All Wards);

8. Background papers

[Fire & Rescue Service 2023-25 Effectiveness, efficiency and people \(An inspection of Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service\)](#)

9. Links to other key reports already published

Not applicable.

10. Author and Contact Details

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Fire & Rescue Service 2023–25

Effectiveness, efficiency and people

An inspection of Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service

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Changes to this round of inspection

We last inspected Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service in June 2021. And in December 2021, we published our inspection report with our findings on the service's effectiveness and efficiency and how well it looks after its people.

This inspection contains our third assessment of the service's effectiveness and efficiency, and how well it looks after its people. We have measured the service against the same 11 areas and given a grade for each.

We haven't given separate grades for effectiveness, efficiency and people as we did previously. This is to encourage the service to consider our inspection findings as a whole and not focus on just one area.

We now assess services against the characteristics of good performance, and we more clearly link our judgments to [causes of concern](#) and [areas for improvement](#). We have also expanded our previous four-tier system of graded judgments to five. As a result, we can state more precisely where we consider improvement is needed and highlight good performance more effectively. However, these changes mean it isn't possible to make direct comparisons between grades awarded in this round of fire and rescue service inspections with those from previous years.

A reduction in grade, particularly from good to adequate, doesn't necessarily mean there has been a reduction in performance, unless we say so in the report.

This report sets out our inspection findings for Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service.

More information on [how we assess fire and rescue services](#) and [our graded judgments](#) is available on our website.

Overall summary

Our judgments

Our inspection assessed how well Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service has performed in 11 areas. We have made the following graded judgments:

Outstanding	Good	Adequate	Requires improvement	Inadequate
	Preventing fire and risk	Understanding fire and risk		
	Future affordability	Public safety through fire regulation		
	Promoting values and culture	Responding to fires and emergencies		
	Right people, right skills	Responding to major incidents		
		Best use of resources		
		Promoting fairness and diversity		
		Managing performance and developing leaders		

In the rest of the report, we set out our detailed findings about the areas in which the service has performed well and where it should improve.

HMI summary

It was a pleasure to visit Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service, and I am grateful for the positive and constructive way in which the service worked with our inspection staff.

Overall, I am pleased with the performance of Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service in keeping people safe and secure from fire and other risks. But it needs to improve in some areas to provide a consistently good service. For example, the service has recently reviewed its risk information process, but it has yet to be fully implemented. Firefighters should also improve their knowledge and

understanding of local risks. A more effective risk information process and greater familiarisation with local risks should improve the safety of the public and attending firefighters.

We were pleased to see that the service has made progress since our 2021 inspection. The principal findings from our assessments of the service over the past year are as follows:

- The service has improved its approach to prevention. Operational crews continue to support the community safety department with an improved, targeted approach to [safe and well visits \(SAWVs\)](#). The service is building partnerships that help it target members of the community who are most vulnerable to fire risk.
- The service has a sound understanding of its future financial challenges and plans accordingly, using its assessment of risk in the county to guide it. The service actively seeks efficiencies and uses technology to further improve performance.
- The service has a much-improved approach to its values and culture, and this is evident at all levels of the organisation. The newly implemented people strategy bases its expectations of staff on the service's code of ethics. Staff told us that they feel empowered to challenge unacceptable behaviours and are confident they will be supported by managers when they do.
- The service has made a commitment to improve its approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This includes assigning a dedicated EDI lead. Staff awareness of EDI issues has improved and continues to do so. There is further work to be done on updating [equality impact assessments](#), and the service recognises the need for this. It would benefit the service if all staff across the organisation developed a better understanding of the need for positive action and how this could improve equality and diversity.

Overall, I am pleased with how Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service has improved since our last inspection. I encourage the service to continue to improve in the areas we have highlighted and look forward to seeing how this benefits the public and the organisation in the future.



Roy Wilsher

HM Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services

Service in numbers



Profile

	Northumberland	England
Area		
Square miles	1,943	50,370
Population (thousands)		
30 June 2021	322	56,536
Population density		
Thousands per square mile	0.2	1.1



Cost

Funding		
Year ending 31 March 2022	-	£2.5bn
Expenditure per population		
Year ending 31 March 2022	£58.24	£41.88

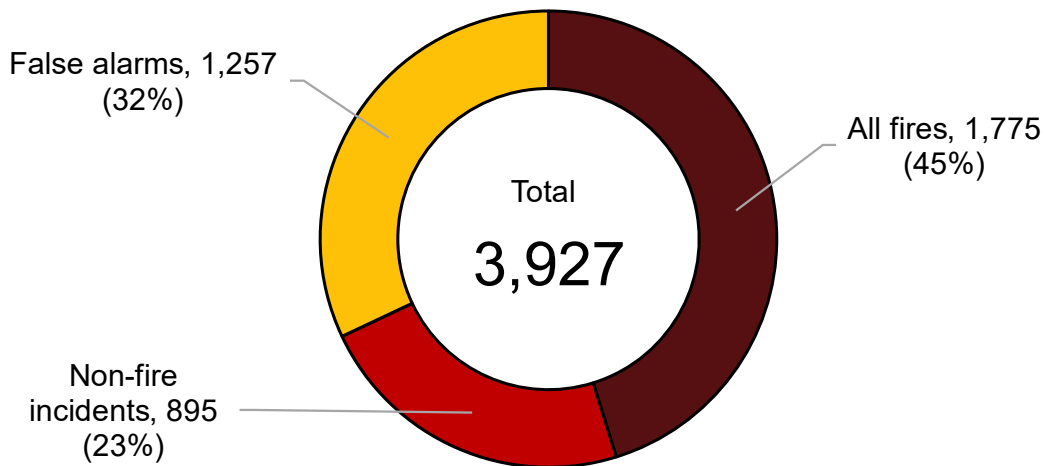


Response

Incidents attended per 1,000 population		
Year ending 31 December 2022	12.2	11.1
Home fire safety checks carried out by fire and rescue service per 1,000 population		
Year ending 31 March 2022	15.5	7.7
Fire safety audits per 100 known premises		
Year ending 31 March 2022	4.9	2.0
Availability of wholetime pumps		
Year ending 31 March 2022	90.0%	
Availability of on-call pumps		
Year ending 31 March 2022	82.1%	



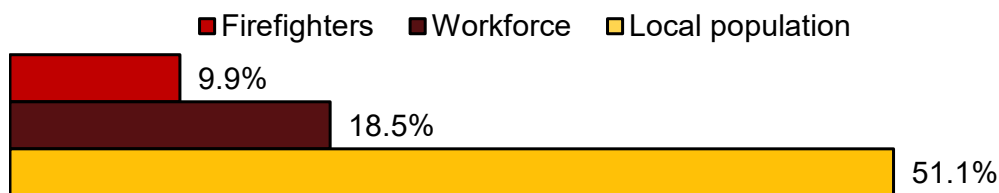
Incidents attended in the year to 31 December 2022



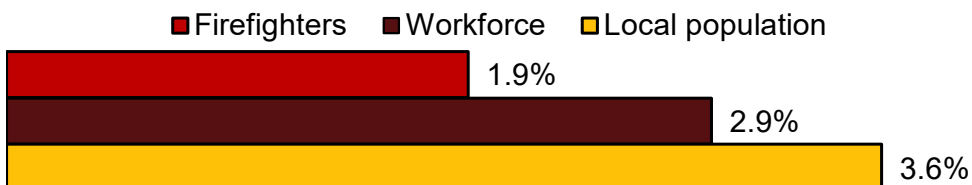
Workforce

	Northumberland	England
Five-year change in total workforce 2017 to 2022	-0.9%	0.2%
Number of firefighters per 1,000 population Year ending 31 March 2022	0.88	0.62
Percentage of firefighters who are wholetime Year ending 31 March 2022	51.1%	65.2%

Percentage of firefighters, workforce and population who are female as at 31 March 2022



Percentage of firefighters, workforce and population who are from ethnic minority backgrounds as at 31 March 2022



References to ethnic minorities in this report include people from White minority backgrounds but exclude people from Irish minority backgrounds. This is due to current data collection practices for national data. For more information on data and analysis in this report, please view the [‘About the data’ section of our website](#).

Understanding the risk of fire and other emergencies

Adequate

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at understanding risk.

Each fire and rescue service should identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks that could affect its communities. It should use its protection and response capabilities to prevent or mitigate these risks for the public.

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it gathers and records relevant and up-to-date risk information to help protect firefighters, the public and property during an emergency.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Main findings

The service is improving its understanding of risk

The service has assessed a suitable range of risks and threats using a thorough community risk management planning process. In its assessment of risk, it uses information it has collected from a broad range of internal and external sources and datasets. This includes working with [Operational Research in Health](#) to develop a risk profile of the county. The service has also considered [NHS frailty scores](#), census data, data from partners, historical incident data and environmental factors.

When appropriate, the service has consulted and held constructive dialogue with its communities and other relevant parties to understand risk and explain how it intends to mitigate it. For example, the service has developed a consultation and engagement plan in conjunction with an external consultant who was employed to facilitate effective communication.

The service used online, paper-based and face-to-face communication to make sure that as many people as possible could be involved. This included people from community groups, Age UK and Northumberland County Council staff networks. [Vulnerable people](#) and officers and councillors from county and district councils were also involved in the process.

During the consultation, the service received feedback on areas of its [community risk management plan \(CRMP\)](#) that could be more informative. It has made changes as a result.

The service has an effective CRMP

Once it has assessed risks, the service records its findings in an easily understood CRMP. The service refers to its CRMP as *Northumberland Fire and Rescue Community Risk Management Plan 2022–2026 – Making Northumberland Safer*.

The CRMP describes how the service intends to use its prevention, protection and response activities to mitigate or reduce the risks and threats the community faces both now and in the future. It provides a clear outline of the risks specific to Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service using data from 2016–2021. It identifies the most frequently attended types of incidents in order to target resources effectively. The service has improved its knowledge about risk by linking its CRMP to the community risk register and risks identified by the [local resilience forum \(LRF\)](#) – a multi-agency partnership that includes local emergency services, local authorities, health services, the [Environment Agency](#) and others.

In order to build resilience around emergency planning and public health, the service has considered future emerging risk by linking its CRMP to the findings of the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) and the challenges presented by the recent pandemic. Future community risks include:

- housing and commercial development plans;
- an ageing population and increased vulnerability;
- the possible creation of the UK's first 'gigaplant' (manufacturing electric car batteries) on the site of the former Blyth power station; and
- a planned railway project – the Northumberland Line.

The service is actively monitoring the progress of these potential new risks to make sure that it is prepared to respond.

There is more to do to improve the accuracy of the service's site-specific risk information

An area identified for improvement in our 2021 inspection was that the service should make sure its firefighters have good access to relevant and up-to-date site-specific risk information (SSRI). We were encouraged to find that the service had reviewed and improved its approach to the SSRI process. But more work is needed, and this remains an area for improvement.

During our inspection, some staff we spoke to weren't clear about what the service defines as risk or if the risk categories assigned to sites were always reasonable. Firefighters told us about instances when after gathering information from visits to sites that they felt were high risk, the risk category was then reduced by supervisory staff during the quality assurance process. The service told us that it categorises sites and buildings as lower risk when there is a high level of compliance with fire safety regulations and it considers there is a low likelihood of fire. When the service reduces the risk category of a site or building, it also reduces how often it carries out an SSRI visit.

The service needs to make sure that the risk categories it assigns to sites are appropriate. To make sure that the service gathers relevant and up-to-date risk information, SSRI visits should be frequent enough to identify and consider changes that may have been made to buildings that could increase the risk of fire.

The service collects some information about the highest-risk people, places and threats it has identified. But some of the information we reviewed was limited, inaccurate or out of date. We found that some of the firefighters we spoke to were unable to show us that they could access, use and share risk information quickly to help them resolve incidents safely.

The service is effective when sharing risk information

Where the service has recorded risk information, it communicates it effectively. It also routinely updates [risk assessments](#) and uses feedback from local and national operational activities to inform its planning assumptions. For example, the service has improved its process to routinely exchange risk information with others.

The introduction of an electronic form allows a structured approach when sharing risk information across the organisation. Other forms of communication include safety flashes, departmental manager meetings and weekly newsletters, all of which have improved organisational awareness.

The service routinely shares and reviews [joint organisation learning](#) and [national operational learning](#) to inform its planning assumptions.

It would benefit the service to have an assurance process in place to record all risk-critical information that is shared, read, understood and acknowledged by each staff member.

Preventing fires and other risks

Good

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service is good at preventing fires and other risks.

Fire and rescue services must promote fire safety, including giving fire safety advice. To identify people at greatest risk from fire, services should work closely with other organisations in the public and voluntary sectors, and with the police and ambulance services. They should share [intelligence](#) and risk information with these other organisations when they identify vulnerability or exploitation.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Main findings

The service's prevention strategy drives its activity

The service's prevention strategy is linked to the risks it has identified in its CRMP. The service has used a broad range of data to identify vulnerable people in the community. And it continues to improve the way it uses numerous datasets to highlight areas at high risk and to target those areas with activity to reduce fire risk.

The service's teams work well together and with other relevant organisations on prevention, and they share relevant information when needed. The service uses information to adjust its planning assumptions and direct activity between its prevention, protection and response functions. It is an active participant in the Northumberland County Council road safety co-ordination group and the [north-east regional road safety resource](#). Using data from the road safety groups, the service can plan and prioritise response, education, training and campaigns in its annual station plans.

Prevention and operational crews are proactive in identifying trends and collaborating with partners to inform and educate the public.

Prevention activity is targeted effectively

The service uses a risk-based approach to clearly prioritise people most at risk from fire and other emergencies by focusing prevention activity on them. For example, station plans are produced annually featuring targeted activity throughout the year. This activity is aligned with the risks identified in the CRMP, such as road and water safety. Prevention targets are set annually to accommodate periods of increased operational activity.

The service uses various datasets from internal and external sources to identify vulnerabilities and risks in the county. This enables it to better direct and target SAWVs to make sure prevention work is effective. Staff told us that they are now reaching the more vulnerable members of the community.

The service has adopted a resource-to-risk approach, which directs resources to reduce the risks it identifies. Using this approach, operational crews supported the community safety department to carry out high-risk SAWVs during a period when staff numbers were low. This allowed the service to continue to target the most vulnerable members of the community. This approach has proved to be successful. For example, in 2021/22, the number of SAWVs completed per 1,000 population was much higher than the England rate. It is essential that the service continues to target and complete outstanding SAWVs to reduce risk effectively.

We were encouraged to see the introduction of an automated system, SafeLinks, for booking SAWVs. This has led to a more efficient process for the service to receive SAWV referrals.

The service carries out a range of interventions, which it adapts to the level of risk in its communities. The service works in partnership with the youth justice team and the Northumberland Office of the [Police and Crime Commissioner](#). Together they directly refer young people to [fire cadets](#), the [Prince's Trust](#) programme and the [Extinguish](#) programme. Extinguish provides targeted education to children and young people up to the age of 18 who present a fire risk and contributes to the reduction of [antisocial behaviour](#) and deliberate fire setting.

The service should improve the training of operational staff

Staff told us they have the right skills and confidence to make SAWVs. These checks cover an appropriate range of hazards that can put vulnerable people at greater risk from fire and other emergencies. The service's aim during SAWVs is 'making every contact count'. It identifies fire risk and other risks by assessing each individual and their behaviour in the home and signposts them to specialist support when needed.

Additionally, we were pleased to see that the service has adopted safe and well champions who visit stations to give staff training and promote best practice. This should be developed further to make sure that crews are supported in this area.

However, there is still work to be done in the service's prevention department. Staff told us that training for operational crews on systems and processes for prevention needs to be improved and formalised.

The service should put processes in place to make sure that vulnerable people who might be difficult to contact are monitored and action is taken to reduce their fire or other risk. Any action should be recorded to create clear, auditable records of events for the service.

The service is responding effectively to safeguarding concerns

Staff we interviewed told us about occasions when they had identified [safeguarding](#) problems. They told us that they feel confident and trained to act appropriately and promptly. They undertake training in safeguarding, which includes how to report concerns relating to both adults and children.

At the date of our inspection, the service had successfully carried out 65 consented safeguarding interventions from a possible 67. These happen when a vulnerable person is identified by fire service staff and consent is given to receive further support from another agency.

To help identify vulnerable individuals, the service gathers information using a risk information sheet, which all staff can access. Risk forms are only processed by the control team to make sure the service uses a consistent approach. Control operators are then able to view historical calls and reasons for the previous [mobilisation](#) of crews, along with potential threats or vulnerabilities. Where needed, they pass information to responding operational crews.

The service works effectively with partners

The service works with a wide range of organisations to prevent fires and other emergencies. These include Northumberland County Council teams, such as adults' and children's social care, housing providers, emergency planning and safeguarding support. The service also has good working relationships with external partners, such as the Alzheimer's Society, National Highways, Northumbria Police, North East Ambulance Service and [family hubs](#) (formerly known as Sure Start). We found evidence that the service refers people at greatest risk to these organisations, which may better meet their needs.

The service told us that a recent partnership with Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust has provided 'hazard spotting' training for 140 of the trust's staff on behalf of the fire service. Advocates from this service proactively promote fire safety in their own day-to-day work and make referrals on behalf of vulnerable residents. The service also informed us as a result, 900 risk referrals have been made to the service's community safety department. The service prioritises the referrals and takes appropriate action to reduce risk.

The service routinely exchanges information with other public sector organisations about people and groups at greatest risk. It uses this information to challenge planning assumptions and target prevention activity. The service told us that, working with Northumberland County Council, it has identified 184 families that have been relocated to Northumberland. The service has provided these families with SAWVs to improve their fire safety and reduce any other risks identified during the visits.

The service works well with other organisations to tackle fire-setting behaviour

The service has a range of suitable and effective interventions to target and educate people who show signs of fire-setting behaviour. These include fire cadets, the Extinguish programme and the Prince's Trust programme.

When appropriate, it routinely shares information with relevant organisations to support the prosecution of arsonists. The service has established good working relationships with the safer streets team and the youth justice team's out-of-court disposal panel. Sharing information in relation to fire-setting behaviours has increased the number of referrals to the service's Extinguish programme.

The service is improving its evaluation of prevention activities

Our last inspection highlighted the need to quality assure prevention activity so that staff carry out SAWVs to an appropriate standard. Since our last visit, the service has developed and implemented a quality assurance and evaluation policy to assess the outcomes. Activity relating to assurance is highlighted as a service core measure and overseen at a senior level.

Protecting the public through fire regulation

Adequate

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at protecting the public through fire regulation.

All fire and rescue services should assess fire risks in certain buildings and, when necessary, require building owners to comply with fire safety legislation. Each service decides how many assessments it does each year. But it must have a locally determined, risk-based inspection programme for enforcing the legislation.

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure it allocates enough resources to a prioritised and risk-based inspection programme.

The service should make sure it has an effective quality assurance process so staff carry out audits to an appropriate standard.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Main findings

Protection activity is linked to the risks identified in the CRMP

The service's protection strategy is clearly linked to the risks it has identified in its CRMP.

Staff across the service are involved in this activity, effectively exchanging information as needed. For example, the introduction of Microsoft Teams, an online information-sharing platform, allows the service to share risk-critical information throughout the organisation. The service then uses the information to adjust planning assumptions and direct activity between its protection, prevention and response functions. This means resources are better aligned with risk.

The service could improve how it assesses and categorises risk in its risk-based inspection programme

The service told us that its risk-based inspection programme currently holds approximately 3,500 premises that require audits.

Using its fire safety audits, information-gathering processes and professional judgment, the service aims to produce a risk score by considering the following three principles:

1. societal life risk (when fire would have a significant effect on wider society);
2. likelihood of fire occurring; and
3. likelihood of non-compliance (the likelihood of a building not complying with fire safety regulations).

The service uses its historical data from completed fire safety audits to determine compliance levels, size of building, number of occupants and the provision of passive and active fire protection. This approach allows the service to focus its resources on premises that are less likely to be compliant with fire safety regulations.

However, we found that not all staff understood how risk categorisation was determined and, therefore, how they should prioritise their work. We found that the service wasn't consistently auditing the buildings it has targeted in the time frames it has set. When we reviewed the outstanding audits in the service's risk-based inspection programme, it was clear that the service isn't able to meet its own targets for auditing. During our inspection, we found some outstanding cases, including re-categorised medium-risk premises, that were overdue for review by three years according to the service's time frames. It is essential that the service makes sure it still monitors and meets its own risk-based inspection programme time frames.

The quality of audits is inconsistent

We reviewed a range of audits that the service had carried out at different buildings across its area. These included audits carried out:

- as part of the service's risk-based inspection programme;
- after fires at premises where fire safety legislation applies;
- after enforcement action had been taken; or
- at high-rise, high-risk buildings.

Not all the audits we reviewed were completed in a consistent, systematic way or in line with the service's policies. Of the documents we reviewed, some were out of date according to the service's own frequency time frames.

There is an effective process in place to share risk-critical information gathered from audits throughout the service.

The service is improving its use of enforcement

The service consistently uses its full range of enforcement powers, and when appropriate, it prosecutes those who don't comply with fire safety regulations.

In the year ending 31 March 2022, the service issued 2 alteration notices, 183 informal notifications, 2 enforcement notices, 8 prohibition notices and undertook no prosecutions.

However, as a result of a fire safety audit carried out in June 2021, the service has since been successful in two prosecutions in the county. One resulted in a custodial sentence.

The service should make sure it allocates enough resources to meet its protection strategy

Staff told us that they don't feel the service has enough suitably qualified protection staff who audit and enforce fire safety regulations. The service isn't currently on track to meet its risk-based inspection programme time frames. It is aware of this and plans to carry out a review of protection services that will identify exactly what is required.

The service is also aware of the appeal that the private sector has for qualified fire safety officers and as a result, has amended officer contracts to improve staff retention.

Supervisory managers have been given the appropriate training to carry out low and very low-risk audits in the county. This helps the service provide the range of audit and enforcement activity needed, both now and in the future.

Staff get the right training and work to appropriate accreditation.

The service is adapting to new legislation

Since our last inspection, the [Building Safety Act 2022](#) and the [Fire Safety Regulations 2022](#) have been introduced to bring about better regulation and management of tall buildings.

The Fire Safety Regulations 2022 introduced a range of duties for the managers of tall buildings. These include a requirement to give the fire and rescue service floor plans and inform them of any substantial faults to essential firefighting equipment, such as firefighting lifts.

Northumberland doesn't currently have any tall buildings. However, this will change with the development of the county's first high-rise building, which will affect the service and how it effectively responds to this building type.

The service is supporting the introduction of the [Building Safety Regulator](#) by actively providing some training to crews about the operational elements required to respond to tall buildings. The service should make sure that it is prepared to respond to a building of this type.

The service has good working relationships with others

The service works closely with other enforcement agencies to regulate fire safety, and it routinely exchanges risk information with them. The service has sometimes taken a joint approach with the county council's building control department to assess all elements of a premises. This joint approach is replicated with environmental health for inspections of schools and houses in multiple occupation.

Other work involves two-way communication channels between the service and the [Care Quality Commission](#), which inspects care homes. They notify each other of any suspected breaches.

The service responds effectively to business consultations

The service responds to all building consultations on time. This means it consistently meets its statutory responsibility to comment on fire safety arrangements at new and altered buildings. In 2021/22, the service responded to 99 percent of building consultations and 100 percent of licensing consultations within the required time frame.

The service could further improve its targeting of new risk using its close relationship with Northumberland County Council to access business rates data.

The service does some work with local businesses

The service does some work with local businesses and other organisations to promote compliance with fire safety legislation. For example, the service has provided business fire safety presentations to Northumberland County Council landlord forums.

Since our last inspection, the service has added a dedicated business safety page to its website with key safety messages and advice. The page also has information about how businesses can get in contact with the fire protection team if required.

The service has taken action to reduce unwanted fire signals

The service is taking some action to reduce the number of unwanted fire signals. There are processes in place to monitor unwanted fire signals through call-challenging and cost-recovery procedures. Furthermore, the service has an approach to reduce its automatic attendance to lessen the effect on attending resources. However, during 2021/22 it received 911 automated fire alarm calls and attended 717 of them. This means fire engines may not be available to respond to genuine incidents because they are attending false alarms. It also creates a risk to the public if more fire engines travel at high speed on the roads to respond to these incidents.

Responding to fires and other emergencies

Adequate

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at responding to fires and other emergencies.

Fire and rescue services must be able to respond to a range of incidents such as fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies in their areas.

Area for improvement

The service should make sure operational staff are familiar with the risk sites in their local area, so they are better prepared to fight fires and carry out rescues safely.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Main findings

The service reviews response standards and availability

The service's response strategy is linked to the risks it has identified in its CRMP. Its fire engines and response staff, as well as its working patterns, are designed and located to help the service respond flexibly to fires and other emergencies with the appropriate resources. For example, the service reviews its duty systems to make sure it is responding effectively and efficiently to risk in the county. It has undertaken a targeted risk review using Operational Research in Health data to identify risk areas and align fire engine availability accordingly.

The service has improved its response performance

There are no national response standards of performance for the public. The service has, therefore, set its own response standards in its CRMP and states that it aims to meet its own targets 80 percent of the time. Home Office data shows that in the year ending 31 March 2022, the service's average response time to [primary fires](#) was 12 minutes and 25 seconds, which is 1 minute and 40 seconds slower than the average of 10 minutes and 45 seconds for predominantly rural services.

For the year ending March 2022, the service was unable to meet its own standards, which were:

- first fire engine to property fire within 10 minutes – standard achieved 66 percent of the time;
- second fire engine to property fire within 13 minutes – standard achieved 56 percent of the time;
- first fire engine to road traffic collision within 15 minutes – standard achieved 67 percent of the time; and
- second fire engine to road traffic collision within 20 minutes – standard met 75 percent of the time.

The service plans to review its response standards in its annual response plan 2023/24.

During our inspection, the service told us that it has already carried out some work to improve its response times. The control room has introduced call performance monitoring. This allows call operators to review their own performance while mobilising fire engines to improve the efficiency of call handling. As a result, the service told us that it has significantly improved its response times. It provided us with the following data during our inspection:

- first fire engine to property fire within 10 minutes – the service told us the standard is now achieved 86 percent of the time;
- second fire engine to property fire within 13 minutes – the service told us the standard is now achieved 100 percent of the time;
- first fire engine to road traffic collision within 15 minutes – the service told us the standard is now achieved 89 percent of the time; and
- second fire engine to road traffic collision within 20 minutes – the service told us the standard is now achieved 84 percent of the time.

The service is working towards improving its availability

To support its response strategy, the service aims to have 100 percent of fire engines available 95 percent of the time. This is an ambitious target for the service and although it isn't always meeting this standard, it is still performing better for availability when compared to similar services. During 2021/22, the overall availability was 84 percent. [Wholetime](#) availability during this period was 90 percent and [on-call](#) availability was 82 percent.

The service recognises that it doesn't meet its target and has driven change to address this. The rural demographic of the county and its predominantly on-call response structure have some effect on availability. The service uses a resource-to-risk model to make sure that it responds effectively. This model means that by using data to assess risk throughout the county, it can effectively provide fire engine availability where it is most needed. To support this process, the service has introduced multi-skilled community risk and response support officers in each staffing cluster to strengthen on-call availability. This provides resilience to stations that may require support to keep a fire engine available.

The service has also increased its on-call recruitment to three times a year. Historically, recruitment to employ retained firefighters has been limited to once a year. Increasing the frequency of recruitment will maximise the availability of firefighters throughout the county.

The service's command function is effective

The service has trained incident commanders, who are assessed regularly and properly. Using an internal team of incident command instructors allows the service to make sure that revalidation takes place routinely every 24 months. The service achieves further improvements in command qualifications in line with the national standard and operational guidance via the [Fire Service College](#). This helps the service safely, assertively and effectively manage the whole range of incidents it could face, from small and routine ones to complex multi-agency incidents.

As part of our inspection, we interviewed incident commanders from across the service. They were familiar with risk assessing, decision-making and recording information at incidents in line with national best practice as well as the [Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles \(JESIP\)](#).

Improvements have been made in control

The service's control department has been integrated into the response function. We were pleased to see that as a result, the service's control staff are included in its command, training, exercise, debrief and assurance activity. It also means that training plans for control staff are aligned with training for operational crews. This will undergo further development in line with [national operational guidance](#).

We were also pleased to see the introduction of control training days and the effort dedicated to developing control staff competencies. We look forward to seeing how this progresses.

The service has improved its risk information process

We sampled a range of risk information from wholetime and on-call stations. This included the information in place for firefighters responding to incidents at high-risk commercial and residential buildings and information held by [fire control](#), including data on cross-border risk.

The service has reviewed its process to share risk information, which is robust and effective. Staff can easily access and understand it. Encouragingly, when risk information is completed, it is done with input from the service's prevention, protection and response functions when appropriate.

Firefighters should have a better understanding of risk in their areas

Since our last inspection, the service has carried out a review of how it collects SSRI and categorises risk. This change in process puts greater emphasis on the need for crews to familiarise themselves with the risks in their own station area and surrounding station areas.

Staff told us that they don't have a formal process in place that allows them to become familiar with the risks in their area. Furthermore, they haven't received any formal training in how familiarisation visits should be carried out and how any risks identified should be recorded or shared with colleagues.

It is paramount to firefighter safety that familiarisation visits to premises and the risks they may pose are regular and detailed. All information gathered from visits should be uploaded to [mobile data terminals](#) and shared with colleagues and surrounding stations.

The service aligns its performance with national operational guidance

As part of this inspection, we reviewed a range of emergency incidents and training events. This included a large-scale incident at Haltwhistle Working Men's Club.

We were pleased to see that the service routinely follows its policies to make sure that staff command incidents in line with operational guidance. It updates internal risk information with the information it receives. The service has introduced an operational feedback form to allow for effective information gathering, along with a newly established safety and assurance forum. It would be beneficial for the service to give feedback to operational crews to improve their learning. The service exchanges this information with appropriate organisations, such as the county council's emergency planning department, and is also an active partner in the LRF.

The service has responded to learning from incidents to improve its service to the public. For example, we viewed a detailed operational learning presentation that had been delivered to staff throughout the organisation. The presentation, which was developed by the training, assurance and safety team, was interactive and included live video evidence of the incident being discussed.

We were encouraged to see that the service is contributing towards and acting on learning from other fire and rescue services or operational learning gathered from emergency service partners. This includes monitoring national operational learning and joint organisation learning for updates. This is carried out by one person who oversees all national learning for the service. The service has made 2 submissions to national operational learning in the last 12 months.

The service is improving how it keeps the public informed

The service has good systems in place to inform members of the public about ongoing incidents and help keep them safe during and after incidents. This includes posts on numerous social media sites, such as Facebook and X (formerly known as Twitter). The service also has 24-hour access to the Northumberland County Council alerts system that disseminates risk-critical or community alerts to the whole county.

Responding to major and multi-agency incidents

Adequate

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at responding to major and multi-agency incidents.

All fire and rescue services must be able to respond effectively to multi-agency and cross-border incidents. This means working with other fire and rescue services (known as intraoperability) and emergency services (known as interoperability).

Area for improvement

The service should make sure it reviews its policies and procedures for mass evacuation and that staff understand them.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Main findings

The service is prepared for major and multi-agency incidents

The service has effectively anticipated and considered the reasonably foreseeable risks and threats it may face. These risks are listed in both local and national risk registers as part of its community risk management planning. For example, the Northumberland community risk register and the service's community risk management plan include:

- flooding
- wildfire
- adverse weather
- utilities failure
- pandemic.

It is also familiar with the significant risks neighbouring fire and rescue services may face and which it might reasonably be asked to respond to in an emergency.

The service should address the Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations

In our last inspection, we focused on how the service had collected risk information and responded to the Government's building risk review programme for tall buildings.

In this inspection, we have focused on how well prepared the service is to respond to a major incident at a tall building, such as the tragedy at [Grenfell Tower](#).

Since Northumberland currently has no high-rise buildings, it has developed only a limited number of policies and procedures for safely managing this type of incident. However, there are other types of buildings that may require simultaneous evacuation, such as residential homes. Furthermore, there are also developments underway for the first high-rise building in the county. We found that the service wasn't well prepared to evacuate large numbers of casualties.

During our inspection, we found that the control department was prepared to receive high volumes of calls. The service can share its mobilising system with neighbouring Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, which can provide resilience if required. The control department has knowledge of the processes to follow and has practised Operation Willowbeck, which allows a service to help another by taking a large number of 999 calls. The service's control department has also helped London Fire Brigade with a flooding incident when it dealt with high volumes of calls on its behalf. This experience has allowed the service to assure itself of its capabilities and identify future development needs. Further training exercises around its own policies and procedures for such incident types are essential to guarantee the safety of the public.

It is evident that the service relies too heavily on paper-based systems. Emergency calls are processed and logged by an operator. Risk-critical information is passed via the radio or the fire engine's mobile data terminal to staff at the incident to maximise operational awareness. During our inspection, we carried out an exercise to test this and it wasn't clear from the service's current system when action had been taken at the address in the exercise. All updates were reliant on messages from staff at the incident. These systems are too open to operator error. They also mean that staff in the emergency control room, at the incident and in assisting control rooms can't share, view and update actions in real time.

The service would benefit from reviewing national operational learning from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry in order to improve its response policies and procedures.

The service is good at working with other fire and rescue services

The service supports other fire and rescue services responding to emergency incidents. For example, the service has deployed its assets to neighbouring Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service to support it in a wildfire incident. Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service chairs the [National Fire Chiefs Council](#)'s UK wildfire group and specialises in this type of response. It is interoperable with these services and can form part of a multi-agency response.

The service should do more cross-border exercising

The service has a cross-border exercise plan with neighbouring fire and rescue services, helping them work together effectively to keep the public safe. The plan includes the risks of major events at which the service could foreseeably give support or ask for help from neighbouring services. However, we found that not all operational crews were aware of or involved in major incident or cross-border exercising. Therefore, they would benefit from further experience of this.

Incident commanders have a good understanding of JESIP

The incident commanders we interviewed had been trained in and were familiar with JESIP. The service gave us strong evidence that it consistently follows these principles. This includes the use of JESIP and [M/ETHANE](#) information to make sure multi-agency incidents are managed effectively. This is strengthened by the introduction of a dedicated [national inter-agency liaison officer](#) in the service's control department.

We sampled a range of debriefs that the service had carried out after multi-agency incidents and exercises. We were encouraged to find that the service had identified any problems it had with applying JESIP and took appropriate, prompt action with other emergency services.

The service is an active member of the LRF and has identified a county-wide need for training in marauding terrorist attacks. The LRF covers a vast area that incorporates a number of fire and police services as well as North East Ambulance Service. Training is usually held annually in an urban location outside the county. Therefore, the service has negotiated with the LRF to make sure that terrorist attack exercising is held once every other year in the county.

The service works well with other partner organisations

The service has good arrangements in place to respond to emergencies with partners that make up the Northumbria LRF. These arrangements include working with other organisations, such as local authorities, health services, the Environment Agency, HM Coastguard and utility companies to plan and prepare for emergencies to provide an effective and efficient response.

The service takes part in regular training events with other members of the LRF and uses the learning to develop planning assumptions about responding to major and multi-agency incidents. The service has a debrief process in place where learning can be recorded and fed back to staff via the training, assurance and safety group. One dedicated person creates an action plan from this learning and cross-references it with planning documents that involve other organisations (via the LRF). Improvements could be made to develop staff awareness of how to access learning.

The service monitors national learning

The service makes sure it knows about national operational updates from other fire services and joint organisation learning from other organisations, such as the police service and ambulance trusts. It uses this learning to inform planning assumptions that it makes with partner organisations.

Making best use of resources

Adequate

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at making best use of its resources.

Fire and rescue services should manage their resources properly and appropriately, aligning them with their risks and statutory responsibilities. Services should make best possible use of resources to achieve the best results for the public.

The service's revenue budget for 2023/24 is £19 million. This is a 9 percent increase from the previous financial year.

Areas for improvement

The service should make sure there is a testing programme for its business continuity arrangements, particularly in high-risk areas of service.

The service should make sure it effectively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and outcomes of any collaboration activity.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Main findings

The service effectively reviews and allocates resources to risk

The service's financial and workforce plans, including allocating resources to prevention, protection and response, are consistent with the risks and priorities it has identified in its CRMP. Operational crews support both prevention and protection departments in their service delivery, which allows specialist staff to focus on the highest risk in the county.

The service has evaluated its mix of crewing and duty systems. It has analysed its response cover and can show it deploys its fire engines and response staff to manage risk efficiently. The service has used external data research from the independent organisation Operational Research in Health to undertake a comprehensive review of its [risk modelling](#). This modelling includes prevention, protection and response. The service consistently reviews its duty systems and the location of stations to effectively direct resources to risk and demand. It is exploring whether it can tailor on-call contracts to include specific times to allow for the efficient and effective allocation of resources in relation to risk. This is coupled with the service's cluster model, which provides multi-skilled community risk and response support officers in each staffing cluster. It provides dynamic, mobile support to strengthen on-call availability at stations that need it. This approach helps keep a fire engine available at stations with low staff levels.

The service builds its plans on sound scenarios. They help make sure the service is sustainable and are underpinned by financial controls that reduce the risk of misusing public money. The service has close and effective financial arrangements with Northumberland County Council. Through a 'star chamber' meeting process, the service has to justify its proposed current and future revenue and capital spending plans to the [fire and rescue authority](#) and senior officers from the council.

The service is improving workforce productivity

We were encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since our last inspection. We were pleased to see that the service's arrangements for managing performance clearly link resource use to its CRMP and its strategic priorities. Each station has its own bespoke station plan that clearly outlines expected activity throughout the year, including prevention. Targets are set annually to allow for flexibility around increased operational activity. Where there are increased seasonal incidents such as wildfires, the annual station plan and flexible targets give autonomy to the officer in charge to direct activity.

The service understands how it uses firefighters and control staff. It collects data on how they spend their time and makes the most of its capacity. For example, the service has taken steps to understand how firefighters and fire control staff use their time over an average shift and has carried out a productivity review. It has introduced annual operating plans that are directly linked to the targeted station plans. This provides a structured approach to the work that operational staff are required to carry out to meet the priorities outlined in the CRMP.

On-call staff proactively carry out prevention activity to reduce risk. Often, they will extend their weekly allotted training time to incorporate prevention activities, such as SAWVs, to help maximise operational training time. They also attend local community events to represent the fire service and to proactively promote awareness and campaigns.

The service is taking steps to make sure the workforce's time is as productive as possible. This includes putting in place new ways of working. For example, it has relocated station managers to fire service headquarters. This allows the station-based [watch](#) commander to have more autonomy in decision-making and how firefighters spend their time to increase productivity. This in turn allows station managers to focus more on strategic planning. All firefighter activity is monitored monthly for assurance purposes.

The service should make sure that collaboration provides value for money

We were pleased to see the service meets its statutory duty to collaborate. It routinely considers opportunities to collaborate with other emergency responders.

Collaborations include:

- various contracts and service-level agreements with other fire and rescue services;
- training – at the time of our inspection, the service provided the national wildfire lead;
- co-location with Northumbria Police, family hubs and North East Ambulance Service;
- a fire control system upgrade;
- joint vehicle purchases with mountain rescue and the police; and
- the Northumberland County Council BEST programme (a programme to provide the best value for money to the public).

Collaborative work is aligned with the priorities in the service's CRMP. For example, the service shares many of its estates with other organisations that serve the community, such as the police and family hubs. This has strengthened working relationships and the way that information about prevention activity is shared. This community work has reduced the number of fires started by deliberate fire setting and therefore benefits the service.

The service has also made a joint purchase of a 6x6 vehicle with the mountain rescue team and Northumbria Police. This vehicle will be located at a fire service premise to enable its use in rural incidents, such as wildfires. The police and mountain rescue will also have access to the vehicle for their own rural activity, such as combatting antisocial behaviour.

It is encouraging to see some collaboration taking place. However, we weren't satisfied that the service comprehensively monitors, reviews and evaluates the benefits and results of its collaborations.

The service would benefit from targeting and testing business continuity

The service has gaps in its continuity arrangements for areas where it considers threats and risks to be high. This remains an area for improvement from our previous inspection. The service has since carried out a review to identify gaps in its business continuity planning and testing. However, at the time of this inspection, there had been little progress in this area.

The service doesn't regularly review and test all its plans, including those for industrial action. This means it can't be sure that plans are appropriate, and staff are unaware of the arrangements and their responsibilities.

The service has carried out an exercise to test for the loss of systems in the control room, but we found that a debrief didn't take place to share any learning outcomes or best practice with other teams.

The service would benefit from carrying out a full evacuation of its control room.

The service works effectively with Northumberland County Council to improve financial management

There are regular reviews to consider all the service's expenditure, including its non-pay costs. This scrutiny makes sure the service gets value for money. For example, the council's finance team works closely with budget holders to review and challenge expenditure through monthly meetings. At the time of our inspection, there was a projected overspend of £784,000 in 2022/23. This was partly due to the increased use of overtime during a period of higher-than-anticipated demand because of wildfires in spring and summer 2022. It was also partly due to some unforeseen inflationary pressures, which have now been included in the 2023/24 revenue budget.

Since our last inspection the service has made savings and efficiencies, which haven't affected its operational performance and the service it gives the public. Since our last inspection, the service has made efficiencies in its fleet by extending contracts for operational and support vehicles. The service told us this change has produced a saving of approximately £30,000.

The service is taking steps to make sure it achieves efficiency gains through sound financial management and best working practices. It is doing this in important areas such as estates, fleet and procurement. Where appropriate, contracts are renegotiated to reduce non-pay costs. For example, the service has told us it has saved around £100,000 by taking responsibility for the maintenance of furniture, fittings and equipment at its fire stations provided under a [private finance initiative](#) contract.

Making the fire and rescue service affordable now and in the future

Good

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service is good at making the service affordable now and in the future.

Fire and rescue services should continuously look for ways to improve their effectiveness and efficiency. This includes transforming how they work and improving their value for money. Services should have robust spending plans that reflect future financial challenges and efficiency opportunities, and they should invest in better services for the public.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Main findings

The service understands its future financial challenges

The service has a sound understanding of future financial challenges. Northumberland County Council has supported the service with funding to mitigate its main or significant financial risks and to help the service meet its priorities. For example, the revenue budget has been increased by 19 percent since 2021/22. And the 2023/24 revenue budget includes additional funding to cover inflation pressures, including the firefighter pay award agreed for 2022/23 and 2023/24.

The underpinning assumptions are relatively robust, realistic and prudent. They take account of the wider external environment and some scenario planning for future spending reductions.

The service has identified that in 2023/24, it can make £95,000 through savings and income generation opportunities. This includes savings from some contracts, the removal of some posts no longer needed and a small amount of additional rental income from its estate.

There are clear arrangements for accessing reserves

The service doesn't hold reserves that aren't earmarked as it has access to Northumberland County Council's reserves for unforeseen events. There is a robust process for the service to access reserves if they are needed. For example, it has earmarked reserves to support its improvement plans and to offset future costs related to the court ruling in the ongoing firefighters' pension dispute.

The service reviews and manages its fleet and estate provision

We were encouraged to see the improvements the service has made since our last inspection. The service's fleet and estate provision have clear links to its CRMP, which is supported by the fire support strategy. Working with Northumberland County Council and using the approach of 'invest to save', the service is using capital funding to enhance its response resources. For example, historically the service has relied on neighbouring fire and rescue services for the provision of an aerial ladder platform. This allows firefighters to work from height to assist in firefighting and perform effective rescue. Operational learning from a recent incident in the county highlighted that the service would benefit from its own aerial ladder platform to reduce reliance on other services. A refurbished aerial ladder platform has been sourced at a reduced cost to benefit the effectiveness and efficiency of the service. This has now gone through the procurement process, and a review of where it will be best located for response has taken place using historical incident and risk data.

Further work has taken place with the support of the council's BEST programme, which encourages collaboration activity. This collaboration has supported the service to buy software that allows it to monitor activity of fire engines in real time. This will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of how the service responds. At the time of our inspection, the service was negotiating a further purchase through the programme for LearnPro software, which will enable it to monitor and record staff competencies and all learning undertaken. This will further support learning and the maintenance of competencies throughout the organisation.

The service has collaborated with Northumbria Police, the mountain rescue team and members of the national partnership against rural crime to jointly purchase a 6x6 vehicle and a drone for use in response to wildfires.

Estates are managed effectively by the service's support team alongside Northumberland County Council. Together they have thought about how to improve the energy efficiency of the estate.

The service regularly reviews these strategies so that it can properly assess the effect any changes in fleet and estate provision, or future innovation, have on risk.

The service is improving its technology to support and improve efficiency

We were encouraged to see the improvements that the service has made since our last inspection. The service actively considers how changes in technology and future innovation may affect risk. Since our last inspection, the service has implemented Microsoft 365, which gives access to software such as Power BI, a data visualisation tool. This will support staff with their use of data to manage risk.

It also seeks to exploit opportunities to improve efficiency and effectiveness presented by changes in technology. The recent introduction of the SafeLinks online referral process for SAWVs reduces the administration requirements on prevention staff and allows them to be active in the community to mitigate risk. Officers have now been issued with laptops to make sure they can access the service's systems while mobile.

The service has put in place the capacity and capability it needs to achieve sustainable transformation, and it routinely seeks opportunities to work with others to improve efficiency and provide better services in the future. It is working together with the county council to implement and develop an improved IT provision to benefit all employees. It has also secured funding to appoint a data graduate via the council's BEST programme. This role will support work to improve how data is collected and used throughout the organisation and to make sure that it is aligned with fire standards. A better understanding of its data will provide a more effective and efficient service overall.

The service's income generation is limited

The service considers ways of generating extra income, but opportunities are limited. These include sharing its estates with other partner organisations and room hire at its private finance initiative buildings to generate some income. Delivery of the Prince's Trust programme and wildfire training are further sources of income for the service.

Promoting the right values and culture

Good

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service is good at promoting the right values and culture.

Fire and rescue services should have positive and inclusive cultures, modelled by the behaviours of their senior leaders. Services should promote health and safety effectively, and staff should have access to a range of well-being support that can be tailored to their individual needs.

Area for improvement

The service should assess the effectiveness of its occupational health unit to assure itself that staff benefit from a knowledgeable, supportive and accessible service.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Main findings

The service is making improvements to its values and culture

The service has well-defined values, which staff understand. We found that staff at all levels of the service showed behaviours that reflect service values. Recent changes in both the service's senior leadership team and the county council's leadership team have led to a committed focus on values and culture throughout the service. The service has implemented the [Core Code of Ethics](#) well within the newly created people strategy. Staff demonstrate this in their behaviours.

Staff told us there has been a change to the values in the service and that this has had a positive effect throughout the organisation. In our staff survey, 94 percent of respondents (119 out of 126) felt that they are treated with respect by the people they work with.

Senior leaders act as role models. For example, in our staff survey, 88 percent of respondents (106 out of 121) stated that service values are constantly modelled and maintained by service leaders.

There is a positive working culture throughout the service, with staff empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours when they come across them. Staff survey results showed that 68 percent of respondents felt safe to challenge the way things are done. The service continues to provide channels for this feedback to improve. Since our last inspection, the service has introduced an 'open door policy' to allow easy access to senior leaders, along with other feedback processes such as 'fire away' to allow staff to take part in the drive for change. Fire away is a staff forum that allows for service improvements, idea sharing, positive challenge and direct access to senior leaders to enable open discussion.

Improvements have been made to the provision of well-being services to staff

The service has well-understood and effective well-being policies in place, which are available to staff. A significant range of well-being support is available to support both physical and mental health.

There are good provisions in place to promote staff well-being. This includes a health and well-being portal that provides helpful information and signposts staff to local organisations that offer support with:

- seasonal well-being
- physical welfare
- alcohol misuse
- mindfulness
- financial well-being.

Further specialised support is also provided, such as access to psychological support from a fire service representative in Northumberland County Council, along with additional support from the [Fire Fighters Charity](#). In our staff survey, 88 percent of respondents (111 out of 126) said that they have access to services to support their mental well-being.

There are staff trained in [trauma risk management](#) available to support colleagues who have experienced a traumatic or potentially traumatic event. However, staff told us about occasions when they have asked for this support but didn't receive it.

The service should assure itself that these requests are accommodated and strengthened by further support for staff. The service is making plans to progress this. We look forward to seeing the effect of this in future inspections.

Occupational health provision needs to improve

The service has access to an occupational health department through Northumberland County Council. This facility is available for all council employees. However, some staff told us that the occupational health unit has little understanding of fire service needs.

During our inspection, fire and rescue employees told us that the provision isn't adequate for an emergency service. They described a lack of communication, long delays and limited understanding of the role of a firefighter. Several staff members feel that some decision-making processes aren't suitable in relation to their roles. For example, when a firefighter has been removed from duty, the occupational health unit fails to consider fire ground tests to prove their fitness to return. As a result, the return to duty takes longer.

It is challenging for on-call staff who often work daytime hours in their primary roles to maintain contact with the occupational health unit. Inefficient communication is often the cause of this.

It is essential that the occupational health unit understands its role in rehabilitation and the return-to-work process of all staff in the service. It would benefit employees if occupational health provided a service more tailored to the needs of the organisation and its emergency response team.

The service has an improved health and safety process

The service has effective and well-understood health and safety policies and procedures in place. Staff feel that since our last inspection, there has been a positive culture change around health and safety, including the appointment of a dedicated lead. However, better administrative support is needed for the health and safety function. The service recognises this and has taken appropriate action to provide support in this area.

The senior leadership team promote a 'no blame culture' to enhance the reporting of [near misses](#). Using safety flashes, the service communicates risk-critical information to all staff. A safety flash is a form of communication usually, via email, which informs staff of any significant change that may affect the workforce, such as faults in equipment. This process is overseen by the health and safety team and is monitored until it is resolved. To be assured of staff safety, the service still needs to do more to make sure that staff have read and understood all communications.

All policies and procedures are readily available, and the service promotes them effectively to all staff. The service prioritises the safety of its staff. The reintroduction of accredited health and safety qualifications reinforces the importance of safety throughout the organisation. The service now has 130 health-and-safety trained employees. This was evident in our staff survey results, which showed that

94 percent of staff (119 out of 126) felt they have the appropriate equipment to perform their roles safely.

The service monitors staff who have secondary employment or dual contracts to make sure they comply with the secondary employment policy and don't work excessive hours. Our 2021 inspection highlighted concerns about the management of dual contracts and staff who worked both on-call and wholetime in the service. Our inspection team returned to the service in March 2022 and was satisfied that this concern had been effectively resolved.

During this inspection, further review of secondary contracts showed that they are still effectively managed by the control department and are reviewed and assured by the senior leadership team.

Absence management is improving

We found that there were clear processes in place to manage absences for all staff. There is clear guidance for managers, who are confident in using the process. The service manages absences well and in accordance with policy. Absence management is included as a core measure for the service and is overseen by the senior leadership team to monitor and enhance welfare and drive improvement. Northumberland County Council provides support for absence management. However, some staff told us that further training in this subject would be beneficial.

In 2021/22, the average number of days not worked per firefighter due to long-term sickness increased by 7 percent compared to 2020/21. Over the same period, the average number of days not worked per firefighter due to short-term sickness increased by 69 percent. There is still work to do in this area.

Getting the right people with the right skills

Good

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service is good at getting the right people with the right skills.

Fire and rescue services should have a workforce plan in place that is linked to their [community risk management plans](#). It should set out their current and future skills requirements and address capability gaps. This should be supplemented by a culture of continuous improvement, including appropriate learning and development throughout the service.

Area for improvement

The service should assure itself that all staff receive the right training for their role.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Main findings

Workforce planning has improved in the service

The service has good workforce planning in place. This makes sure skills and capabilities align with what it needs to effectively carry out its CRMP. For example, the service has created the training, assurance and safety team, which will produce the annual workforce development plan.

Workforce and succession planning is subject to scrutiny in the form of regular meetings to discuss requirements. The workforce plan is produced annually and analyses the service's needs along with the development requirements of individuals via the appraisal process.

Further work could be done to foresee gaps in staff levels. The service should assure itself that, where possible, vacancies are filled in a timely manner. Some teams are left understaffed and awaiting recruitment, which is affecting outstanding workloads.

The service needs to improve its workforce capabilities

Some staff told us that they can access the training they need to be effective in their roles. And this isn't just focused on operational roles. The service's training plans make sure that it can maintain competence and capability effectively. The service was also able to demonstrate that staff are monitored effectively for risk-critical competencies, such as breathing apparatus use and incident command. All files reviewed throughout our inspection proved that staff are competent in these areas.

However, there are some areas of training that aren't formally carried out or recorded. During our inspection, staff told us that there are areas in which training on systems and processes could be improved. Some topics aren't routinely delivered. Examples include training in the community fire risk management information system, SSRI and HR topics, such as management skills and performance management. Additionally, the current recording method for training and feedback lacks capability across teams.

We were pleased to see that the service uses other ways to support staff. We welcome the implementation of 60 safe and well champions, video tutorials and routine notices to share information. However, for all staff to develop further, it is essential that training is provided formally and regularly on core departmental topics, systems and processes.

We understand the complexities and time constraints for on-call staff and the need for balance between operational learning and exercising. However, this shouldn't deter the service from providing consistent core training for all staff throughout the organisation.

The service is committed to improving learning

The service promotes a culture of continuous improvement throughout the organisation, and it encourages staff to learn and develop. However, this isn't supported by current systems. Senior leaders have demonstrated their commitment to staff development by proposing to buy LearnPro software. This will provide, manage and record the competency process across the organisation. We look forward to seeing how this influences learning at our next inspection.

We were pleased to see that the service has a range of training resources in place. The service has implemented an operational assurance and learning framework in addition to its operational learning page on its internal website. It has full access to courses provided by Northumberland County Council, and staff can also access courses provided by the [Fire Brigades Union](#) to enhance learning. In our staff survey, 79 percent of respondents (100 out of 126) said that they are able to access the right learning and development opportunities.

Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity

Adequate

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

Creating a more representative workforce gives fire and rescue services huge benefits. These include greater access to talent and different ways of thinking. It also helps them better understand and engage with local communities. Each service should make sure staff throughout the organisation firmly understand and show a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. This includes successfully taking steps to remove inequality and making progress to improve fairness, diversity and inclusion at all levels of the service. It should proactively seek and respond to feedback from staff and make sure any action it takes is meaningful.

Area for improvement

The service should make sure all staff understand the benefits of equality, diversity and inclusion and their role in promoting these values.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Main findings

The service actively seeks feedback and challenge

The service has developed several ways to work with staff on issues and decisions that affect them. This includes methods to build all-staff awareness of fairness and diversity as well as targeted initiatives to identify matters that affect different staff groups. The service uses several sources to interact with its employees including:

- staff surveys;
- the 'fire away' staff forum;
- community risk and response management meetings; and
- routine notices (information messages via its internal website).

The service also promotes an independent and confidential reporting line, Safecall, as an option for employees.

Of the respondents to our staff survey, 74 percent (93 out of 126) felt confident in the processes for providing feedback to all levels. However, only 67 percent (85 out of 126) felt that their suggestions would be listened to.

Our survey also showed that 86 percent (108 out of 126) of respondents felt that the service keeps them informed of changes that affect them. And staff have received these actions positively. Representative bodies and staff associations reported that the service interacts with them well. Structured meetings are in place to support communication, and the senior leadership team is developing the 'working together' document. This will build a secure framework around the relationships between the union and the senior leadership team. We look forward to seeing how future plans strengthen these professional relationships.

The service is improving its approach to bullying, harassment and discrimination

Staff have a good understanding of what bullying, [harassment](#) and discrimination are and their negative effects on colleagues and the organisation.

Our survey found that over the past 12 months, 10 percent (12 out of 126) of staff felt they had been bullied or harassed and that 11 percent (14 out of 126) felt they had been discriminated against.

Most staff are confident in the service's approach to tackling bullying, harassment and discrimination as well as grievances and disciplinary matters. Recent changes in the senior leadership team have resulted in a targeted yet proportionate approach to such concerns. Staff told us this is being felt throughout the service as a positive change in culture. The service has made sure that all staff are trained and clear about what to do if they encounter inappropriate behaviour. As a result, staff feel confident to challenge unwanted behaviours and feel supported by management in doing so.

The service is improving its approach to diverse recruitment

There is an open, fair and honest recruitment process for staff or those wishing to work for the service. The service has an effective system to understand and remove the risk of disproportionality in recruitment processes. For example, although all applications are online, accessible formats can be requested from the HR team. Each application is anonymised and coupled with an ethnic minority declaration form, which is removed from the application upon receipt. We saw an example where reasonable adjustments were made for a candidate at application stage and then throughout the process. This was received positively by the applicant.

The service has put considerable effort into developing its recruitment processes so that they are fair and potential applicants can understand them. Its recruitment policies are comprehensive and cover opportunities in all roles. The service advertises recruitment opportunities both internally and externally, using online sites, such as [Women in the Fire Service UK](#) and external recruitment specialists. The service would further benefit from using support networks such as the [Asian Fire Service Association](#) to specifically target those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Recruitment vacancies are processed via Northumberland County Council. To maximise opportunities to diversify the workforce, it would be beneficial if the EDI lead had an overview of all recruitment.

The service has made some improvements to increase staff diversity at all levels of the organisation. Since our last inspection, targeted analysis has taken place throughout the county. This analysis of diversity data is refined to each station area. Carrying out activity to this level of detail will assure the service that it is implementing positive action effectively. However, to help drive improvements, the service needs to do more to understand the diversity of its existing workforce, including those staff members with [protected characteristics](#).

The proportion of firefighters from an ethnic minority background decreased from 2.7 percent (6 people) in 2020/21 to 1.9 percent (2 people) in 2021/22. The proportion of female firefighters increased from 7.5 percent (20 people) to 9.9 percent (28 people) over the same period, which is higher than the England rate of 8.2 percent.

For the whole workforce, in 2021/22, 2.9 percent were from an ethnic minority background compared to 3.6 percent in the local population and 8 percent throughout all fire and rescue services. And 18.5 percent were women, which is similar to the England average of 18.6 percent.

The service has taken some steps to improve diversity. For example, positive action days have taken place and recruitment campaigns are aligned with national awareness days.

The service has some work to do to improve EDI

The service has improved its approach to EDI. It makes sure it can offer the right services to its communities and support staff with protected characteristics. For example, since our last inspection, the service has evidenced its commitment to EDI by seconding a dedicated strategic lead from another part of the service to provide further focus on the subject. As a result, the service has introduced a certified level 2 EDI qualification. At the time of our inspection, this was in a pilot phase and will trial three differing delivery methods. The service will evaluate the pilot to identify the most practical delivery, and this will be provided to all staff throughout the service.

Some awareness of the subject was demonstrated throughout our inspection. However, there was evidence that some staff weren't fully knowledgeable on EDI. Further understanding of aspects such as positive action and the benefits of EDI to the workplace would be beneficial.

The service is represented at network groups hosted by Northumberland County Council, which encompass:

- race equality
- mental well-being
- menopause
- LGBTQ+
- disability
- carers
- autism spectrum disorder
- armed forces
- apprentices
- female service staff.

The service should make sure it uses information gathered at the network groups to inform and drive activity.

It aims to further this work by the creation of a service neurodiversity steering group, using its own staff case studies as examples. Staff in the organisation have accessed neurodiversity education via courses provided by the Fire Brigades Union.

The service has a process in place to assess equality impact. It has introduced a new policy for equality impact assessments that is aligned with National Fire Chiefs Council standards. The policy states that an assessment will be completed for each new or reviewed policy, procedure or project. Training has been provided to managers throughout the organisation to reflect this. This is an ongoing project, and as a result, we saw some inconsistencies. For example, we found some policies that didn't have completed equality impact assessments when they should. The service should prioritise its policies and make sure that assessments are undertaken to fully understand the potential for negative effects.

Managing performance and developing leaders

Adequate

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service is adequate at managing performance and developing leaders.

Fire and rescue services should have robust and meaningful performance management arrangements in place for their staff. All staff should be supported to meet their potential and there should be a focus on developing staff and improving diversity into leadership roles.

Areas for improvement

The service should improve the way staff understand and apply the performance development review process.

The service should put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders.

We set out our detailed findings below. These are the basis for our judgment of the service's performance in this area.

Main findings

The service should do more to manage individual performance

The service has an inconsistent process in place for performance and development. Not all staff have specific and individual objectives or have had their performance assessed in the past year.

Staff don't always think the system is fair. For example, we were told that the process is inconsistent and not all staff have completed personal appraisals. Reasons given were that other work is prioritised above the appraisal process.

Staff also reported that often group appraisals are carried out for on-call staff, as opposed to individual appraisals. This doesn't allow for open or individual discussion to take place about personal development.

The service's appraisal process isn't delivered with consistency, and varying approaches to appraisals are taken. The service should aim to formalise performance monitoring and training that supports managers to carry out appraisals effectively and consistently.

The service is improving its approach to development and promotion

The service has put considerable effort into developing its promotion and progression processes so that they are fair and all staff can understand them. The service's promotion process mirrors the recruitment process to allow opportunities for all staff to progress. Since our last inspection, there has been a notable policy change to allow the transfer of on-call staff to whole-time positions. We were pleased to see that this is making significant progress. However, when these promotions are approved, it is paramount that the service supports staff in their training and exposure to commanding incidents during this progression phase.

Since our last inspection, the service has developed the 'talent management portfolio'. This 12-month plan allows successful applicants to acquire the necessary management skills for their new roles. The targeted development plan includes some certified qualifications in subjects such as:

- health and safety
- diversity and inclusion
- organisational effectiveness
- absence management
- service delivery
- personal impact
- outstanding leadership
- personal development planning.

Mentoring and coaching opportunities are also made available to enhance skills.

During our inspection, the service's first development candidates were due to complete their talent management portfolios. A full evaluation will take place to assess the effectiveness of the talent management portfolio process.

The service should do more to develop leadership and high-potential roles

The service needs to improve the way it actively manages the career pathways of staff, including those with specialist skills and those with potential for leadership roles.

The service should consider putting in place more formal arrangements to identify and support members of staff to become senior leaders. There is a gap in its succession planning.

Our last inspection highlighted a need for the service to put in place an open and fair process to identify, develop and support high-potential staff and aspiring leaders. During this inspection, we found that it needed to do more to make sure that Fire Standards Board fire standards [leading the service](#) and [leading and developing people](#) (December 2022) are effectively implemented.

The service was able to evidence a draft policy on its imminent 'talent and succession planner'. However, senior leaders feel that key management development skills are established prior to succession planning via the talent management portfolio process.

However, the service hasn't made enough progress in developing leaders and high-potential staff, so this area for improvement will remain. We look forward to seeing the progress made in the newly implemented portfolios and the effect they have on the progression and development of staff in the organisation.

The service needs to improve diversity in leadership

The service needs to encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds into middle and senior-level positions. The service advertises and fills these positions internally and externally. However, it should continue to explore opportunities to make its workforce more representative.

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Northumberland County Council

Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 28 February 2024

Storm Response

Report of Councillor(s) Gordon Stewart, Cabinet Member for Looking After our Communities

Responsible Officer(s): Graeme Binning, Chief Fire Officer

1. **Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan**

Emergency Preparedness, Response and Recovery links to all three of the Corporate Priorities:

- Putting people at the heart of our planning helps ensure they are empowered and continue to receive equitable support during an emergency.
- Having a well-prepared County, can help reduce the economic impact of shocks.
- Working with communities, helps to deliver best value and meet their expectations.

2. **Purpose of report**

This report is to provide an update about Northumberland County Council's preparedness and response arrangements for storms. Included is a summary of progress against the Storm Arwen recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's task and finish group.

3. **Recommendations**

- 3.1 That the Committee receive the report and agree the closure of 26 actions from the OSC Storm Arwen report.
- 3.2 That the Committee continue to support the concept of community resilience within Northumberland.

4. **Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable**

- 4.1 First added to the forward plan on 6 February following a request for an update at the 31 January 2024 Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

5. Background

- 5.1 After the disruption caused by Storm Arwen across the County in 2021, Northumberland County Council agreed to conduct a review of the implications of the Storm. A task and finish group of the Communities and Place OSC was convened. This group met on five occasions to hear evidence from colleagues and partners. They also received and considered 87 written submissions from residents, businesses, town and parish councils, county councillors, an MP, the military, voluntary sector, and BT Openreach.
- 5.2 At the end of the evidence gathering a report was produced with 28 recommendations. The report was presented to the Council meeting on 6 July 2022 where it was received positively and accepted unanimously. Since then, the Communities and Place OSC have received progress reports on selected recommendations. The table at Appendix A provides a summary of progress against all the recommendations.
- 5.3 26 recommendations have been closed, with several of them now being part of business-as-usual activity. The two that remain in progress are:
- a) The Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service take measures to improve the technological capability of the incident room, including the implementation of an integrated automated response and logging system.
 - b) Northumbrian Water Ltd (NWL) be requested to review its policy for the provision of emergency water supplies, recognising that in an imperfect situation and issuing the appropriate advice, communities and individuals should be able to make their own decisions on how to utilise it.
- 5.4 The technology in the incident support room has been upgraded. There is a working group looking at the use of West Hartford more widely during a response. This group is also considering feedback from a training event and the lessons identified from the response to Storm Babet. Lesson from Storm Isha will be shared with this group where relevant.
- 5.5 The Civil Contingencies Team (CCT) have been working with ICT colleagues on the development of a Northumberland specific, Incident Management System. This is coming to the end of its development phase and is almost ready to be handed over to the CCT for integration into NCC's response arrangements. At the time of writing the date for this handover had not been confirmed.
- 5.6 The issue with well-planned emergency distribution of water continues to be an area for development. It was identified again as learning from Exercise Mighty Oak in March 2023. Due to the number of partners who have an interest in this risk it has been raised with the LRF risk assessment working group via the LRF Assurance Board.
- 5.7 In previous updates to the OSC the committee have discussed communication with all councillors during an incident. There was a specific ask that Councillors be asked what the best method/telephone number to be used to contact them in an emergency. Currently this kind of bespoke communication arrangement is not in place, and it appears that it would be difficult to implement and maintain. It may be possible to put a 'push notification' process in place using the existing .gov notify service that NCC have access to. This allows for a common message to be shared via email or SMS text service. However, this would require further investigation to

determine its suitability likely followed by some frontloaded work that would have to be resourced.

- 5.8 Since the original OSC report was produced the Emergency Community Assistance Plan (ECAP) has been replaced by the Northumberland Incident Response (NIRP). This set out clear response structures and clarified the previous on call arrangements by following nationally recognised good practice. These arrangements now include on-call rotas at both the strategic (Executive Director) and tactical (Director) levels along with the Duty Civil Contingencies Officer (officers from the Civil Contingencies Team) working alongside fire service colleagues and existing operational on-call teams.
- 5.9 These new arrangements have been thoroughly tested in recent months with responses to several Storms, localised flooding, coastal pollution and, a premises fire leading to the evacuation of residents and the opening of a rest centre.
- 5.10 These activations have helped to identify further areas for improvement and development. Including:
- a) Continuous and standardised training for all strategic and tactical officers, building on the training already provided.
 - b) Meeting templates and briefing procedures to be included in the NIRP for use in response.
 - c) Review of agreed on-call expectations at all levels to ensure a resilience response is in place for local incidents.
 - d) Strengthen arrangements for other response specific roles, including loggists, communications officer and, rest centre volunteers.
- 5.11 At the time of writing debriefs for Storm Isha and the concurrent fire at Hirst Castle were being arranged. However, it is worth noting that due to the timing of these two incidents the NCC response was stretched. The individuals that needed overnight accommodation were supported and the Rest Centre plan, although in need of review, did work. However, if the second incident had been larger further support from across the organisation would have been needed. Resilient staffing for longer and/or concurrent incidents is likely to be discussed at part of the planned debriefs.
- 5.12 The response to Storm Isha also provided insight into how well Community Resilience activity has been embedded in some of our communities. It was encouraging to hear about communities that had proactively chosen to open their Community Response Hubs to support the local areas. It would also be helpful for responding agencies to know which areas have opened their Community Response Hubs so we can develop two-way communication and support them if necessary. This will also be an area for discussion in the planned debrief.

6. Options open to the Council and reasons for the recommendations

- 6.1 The report demonstrates that progress has been made against all the original 28 recommendations in the OSC Storm Arwen report. However, planning for and responding to emergencies is an iterative process that requires a learning culture. Therefore, the recommendations are:
- a) That the Incident Management System be completed and rolled out for use in response.

- b) That learning from Storm Babet be incorporated into the Northumberland Incident Response Plan and other arrangements as necessary (see also para 5.10)
- c) That debriefs be carried out for both Storm Isha and the Hirst Castle fire with the intention of applying the learning to relevant arrangements.
- d) That the community resilience work continues and ways to encourage two-way communications be considered.

6.2 In addition to the above increasing numbers of residents and communities are starting to raise concerns with NCC about the PTSN digital switchover. This was raised in submissions about Storm Arwen and continues to be a concern. While it is not directly addressed in this report several teams across the Council have come together to work jointly on the issue. This work needs to continue and can be linked to the community resilience activity mentioned above.

7. Implications

Policy	Work to develop the community response hubs overlaps with the warm spaces network.
Finance and value for money	There are no direct financial implications associated with this report. Using existing community assets when responding to emergencies provides a pragmatic and value for money operational response. Much of the upfront investment in community response hubs has been met through grant outside of the Council. Other work is being delivered via current resources.
Legal	Statutory provision via the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.
Procurement	None
Human resources	Delivered through existing resources in the Civil Contingencies Team, Northumberland Communities Together and other NCC departments.
Property	Use of existing community buildings.
The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?	No Providing a framework for community/local response improves access to support for everyone in the community in a time of crisis, including the more vulnerable, less mobile residents of Northumberland.
Risk assessment	This work supports a wider Council response and helps to develop an appropriate community response is in place if needed.

Crime and disorder	None
Customer considerations	The aim of this work is to provide a consistent framework so residents and visitors to Northumberland receive a safe and robust response to emergencies.
Carbon reduction	None
Health and wellbeing	Empowering individuals and the community to respond quickly and appropriately to incidents when needed is shown to reduce the impact on individuals' physical and mental wellbeing.
Wards	(All Wards);

8. Background papers

Not applicable

9. Links to other key reports already published

[ASC Storm Arwen Actions update.pdf \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

Storm Arwen, community resilience update [report](#) 5 Oct 2022 -

Winter emergencies communications [plan](#)

Communities and Plan OSC, report of the Storm Arwen Task and Finish Group, 6 July 2022

[06.1 Report of the Storm Arwen Task and Finish Group.pdf \(modern.gov.co.uk\)](#)

10. Author and Contact Details

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OSC Storm Arwen Recommendations - update

Title	Recommendation	Progress	Status
Incident room	The Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service take measures to improve the technological capability of the incident room, including the implementation of an integrated automated response and logging system	<p>Technology in the incident support room has been upgraded and there is an internal working group reviewing the practicalities of working in the current incident support room and across the wider West Hartford site.</p> <p>Development of Incident Management System is in progress, proof of concept has been delivered. The system has been through several iterations and will be handed over to the CCT soon (date TBC). The next steps will be training colleagues on how to use the system.</p>	In progress
Emergency Water Supplies	NWL be requested to review its policy for the provision of emergency water supplies, recognising that in an imperfect situation and issuing the appropriate advice, communities and individuals should be able to make their own decisions on how to utilise it	<p>Meeting with NWL on 2/11/22 to discuss support for households with Private Water supplies. Also discussed water distribution plan. This needs to be developed further.</p> <p>Issue with disruption to water and sanitation came out again during Exercise Mighty Oak in March 2023</p> <p>This issue has been escalated to the LRF Risk Assessment working group to request that a fuller understanding of the risk and mitigation plans be shared with partners.</p>	In progress
Road clearing equipment	NFRS officers to be trained to operate road clearing equipment and service vehicles carry such necessary equipment as is practicable	There are a number of tools that are available on all fire appliances that may offer assistance in clearing roads, including, hand tools, electric saws, tirfor (Winch), etc.	Closed

		<p>This is in addition to the equipment that exists in the Special Rescue Unit (Based at West Hartford) which includes, lifting jacks, angle grinders, cut off saw, heavy duty lifting and cutting equipment, winch, etc. However, for clarity, we do not carry chain saws and are not considering this currently, we have had this capability previously prior to removing them based on the disproportionate time, resource and cost requirements to safely maintain competence which was not balanced with the extremely infrequent requirement for this skill and competing maintenance of competence priorities. There are a number of national fire & rescue assets that may be requested in exceptional circumstances, albeit there is no guarantee of an attendance, which may assist with critical infrastructure road clearing, including the Urban Search & Rescue Unit in Tyne and Wear. The fire and rescue service will offer assistance with road clearing on a risk assessed case by case basis using manual labour in addition to the aforementioned skills and capabilities</p>	
<p>Community Resilience Project - BT</p>	<p>The Council's Community Resilience Project is shared with all relevant partners to ensure that resources are properly identified and</p>	<p>Joint community resilience work with CCT & NCT is now part of both teams' work plan. There is ongoing work also taking place at a regional level on community</p>	<p>Closed</p>

	allocated during an emergency incident.	resilience and with infrastructure providers.	
Community Resilience Project - NWL	The Council's Community Resilience Project is shared with all relevant partners to ensure that resources are properly identified and allocated during an emergency incident.	<p>NWL are part of the community resilience stakeholder group. We've continued to work with them over the summer and autumn as normal and in response to help residents who are on a private water supply and suffered water shortages.</p> <p>Joint community resilience work with CCT and NCT is now part of both teams' work plans. There is ongoing work also taking place at a regional level on community resilience and with infrastructure providers.</p>	Closed
Community Resilience Project - NPg	The Council's Community Resilience Project is shared with all relevant partners to ensure that resources are properly identified and allocated during an emergency incident.	<p>CCT has been working with NPG throughout the summer and autumn on preparations for the winter. This includes helping to roll out the soft launch of the NPg energy resilience fund attending 4 joint community meetings (2 in the West and 2 in the North of the County. Update on this work given to OSC on 5/10/22.</p> <p>Joint community resilience work with NCT is now part of both teams' work plan. There is ongoing work also taking place at a regional level on community resilience and with infrastructure providers.</p>	Closed

<p>Community Resilience Project - SPEN</p>	<p>The Council's Community Resilience Project is shared with all relevant partners to ensure that resources are properly identified and allocated during an emergency incident.</p>	<p>Improved communication links with SPEN in recent months (autumn) are helping to build closer working relationships as we move into winter. They do not have the same energy resilience fund on offer that NPg have made available.</p> <p>Joint community resilience work with NCT is now part of both teams' work plan. There is ongoing work also taking place at a regional level on community resilience and with infrastructure providers.</p>	<p>Closed</p>
<p>Liaison with colleagues - BT</p>	<p>That officers continue to liaise with colleagues at all the relevant utility companies to ensure that all partners are in a position to provide a coordinated response to future emergencies.</p>	<p>Written update from BT Openreach provided to OSC in October 2023.</p> <p>There is ongoing work taking place at a regional level with infrastructure providers.</p>	<p>Closed</p>
<p>Emergency Communications Plan - BT Openreach</p>	<p>Openreach be requested to formulate and publish an Emergency Communications Plan to be implemented in the event of future emergency incidents</p>	<p>Written response from BT Open reach shared with OSC at meeting in October. 2023</p>	<p>Closed</p>
<p>Invitation to OSC meeting - BT Openreach</p>	<p>Openreach be invited to discuss its proposals to improve connectivity across all its services in Northumberland at a meeting of the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p>	<p>Written response from BT open reach received and shared with OSC meeting October 2023</p>	<p>Closed</p>

Data sets	All the Council's personal data sets be reviewed to ensure that assistance in emergency situations can be properly targeted.	Northumbria LRF and Northumberland County Council are now partners in a data innovation project, led by Cumbria LRF called VIPER. This is developing a system that can automate the process of identifying vulnerable households in an emergency using data from several different agencies. This task will be closed as the practical work is being delivered via the CCT work plan and the internal Data Leaders group.	Closed
Sharing of personal data	Consideration also be given to how best personal data can be shared both within the Council and with partner organisations.	Northumbria LRF and Northumberland County Council are now partners in a data innovation project, led by Cumbria LRF called VIPER. This is developing a system that can automate the process of identifying vulnerable households in an emergency using data from several different agencies. This task will be closed as the practical work is being delivered via the CCT work plan and the internal Data Leaders group.	Closed
Priority customer service scheme - BT Openreach	Utility companies be encouraged to promote their priority customer schemes to ensure that as many vulnerable customers or those with "additional needs" are included on their databases	Letter from October 2022 confirms that BT Openreach relies on comms providers to identify vulnerable households.	Closed

<p>Liaison with colleagues - Northumbria Water</p>	<p>That officers continue to liaise with colleagues at all the relevant utility companies to ensure that all partners are in a position to provide a coordinated response to future emergencies.</p>	<p>Continue to work with NWL through BAU routes and in response to emergencies/incidents.</p> <p>NWL continue to attend LRF meetings and take part in exercises e.g., exercise Mighty Oak. This action can be moved to BAU activity.</p>	<p>Closed</p>
<p>Liaison with colleagues - Northern Powergrid</p>	<p>That officers continue to liaise with colleagues at all the relevant utility companies to ensure that all partners are in a position to provide a coordinated response to future emergencies.</p>	<p>Continue to work the NPg through BAU arrangements such as the LRF. Over the summer and autumn CCT have worked very closely with NPg on the soft launch of their Energy resilience fund in the West and North of the County.</p> <p>Northumberland County Council and the LRF continue to work with colleagues from NPg. NPg played a full part in the EX Might Oak, a national power outage exercise in March 2023. Therefore, this can move to BAU activity for the CCT and LRF.</p>	<p>Closed</p>
<p>Maintenance programme - Northern Powergrid</p>	<p>NPG be requested to review its maintenance programme so that corridors of powerlines are kept free of obstructions that might compromise the network during severe weather conditions.</p>	<p>This was raised at several public meetings held during the autumn of 2022. The final Ofgem report also covered the issues of maintenance and tree cutting. Following the meeting of the Emergency Committee and questions about NPg's preparedness a meeting between the Leader of the Council, NPg and the CCT manager was held on 15/12/22.</p> <p>Responsibility for this activity rests with NPg, therefore this task is now closed.</p>	<p>Closed</p>

Information in an emergency - Northern Powergrid	<p>NPG be requested to work with the Council and other partners to ensure that all relevant information in times of an emergency is accurate so that decision making can be improved, and the appropriate actions be enacted</p>	<p>Northumbria LRF is supporting the VIPER innovation project being led by Cumbria LRF. This aims to enable the identification of vulnerable households in and emergency. NPg is supporting this project. Therefore, this task will be closed as VIPER is now part of the CCT work plan, with support from public health data colleagues.</p>	<p>Closed</p>
Liaison with colleagues - Scottish Power Energy Networks	<p>That officers continue to liaise with colleagues at all the relevant utility companies to ensure that all partners are in a position to provide a coordinated response to future emergencies.</p>	<p>Improved communication links with SPEN in recent months (autumn) has led to better sharing of information. The LRF have also been reminded of the importance of including SPEN in its meetings.</p> <p>Decision to close this action following ongoing contact with SPEN. Can move the relationship management into BAU activity for the CCT and the LRF.</p>	<p>Closed</p>
Priority customer service scheme - 1. Northumbria Water 2. Scottish Power Energy Networks 3. Northern Powergrid	<p>Utility companies be encouraged to promote their priority customer schemes to ensure that as many vulnerable customers or those with “additional needs” are included on their databases</p>	<p>Information provided by NWL and shared with OSC task and finish group</p> <p>Information included preparedness in NCC's winter edition of the residents' magazine</p> <p>Included in the 30day30ways (2022) online campaign</p> <p>Ongoing campaigns by all utility companies</p>	<p>Closed</p>
Contingency plans	<p>The Council's contracts with care homes and similar providers must include a condition that an approved emergency contingency plan be in place to ensure a continuing high level of care during future emergency incidents</p>	<p>Update provided to OSC on 11 January but Adult Social Care colleague. (Recording available on YouTube)</p>	<p>Closed</p>

Emergency winter comms plan	The Council prepare an Emergency Communications Winter Plan in readiness for dealing with further emergency situations	Preparedness article to be included in Dec residents' magazine Update provided at OSC on 5 Oct 2022 Info to be included in 30days30waysUK campaign.	Closed
Contact details	The Council's Communications Team ensure that all appropriate contact details are updated and regularly reviewed and circulated to members and other key partners.	NCC's emergency confidential telephone directory reviewed, updated, and circulated on a 6-monthly cycle	Closed
Community Support Officers	The Community (COVID) Support Officers be retained and embedded into the Council's response structure	Locality coordinators have been appointed. Action card about the role of NCT is to be included in the new Northumberland Incident Response Plan. Continual joint working with NCT colleagues.	Closed
Test of community resilience	The County Emergency Committee tests and reviews the Community Resilience Project annually	Committee met on 16 November 2022 and agreed to meet annually prior to winter. Committee members also took part in FloodEx22 running the same day. County Emergency Committee have been proactively communicated with as part of the response to recent incidents.	Closed
Berwick Hospital	Berwick Hospital review its contingency plan to ensure that it has an uninterrupted water supply	Email from NHS colleague, 1/11/22 - following Storm Arwen last year we have done some re-education around business continuity to our on-call team, there was and is a current BCP for Berwick. There was an issue around water storage for this site which is being reviewed by our Estates team.	Closed

<p>Winter preparedness</p>	<p>The Council host winter preparedness sessions to be conducted annually to include contributions from town and parish councils and other partners as appropriate, which would include the promotion of personal responsibility in readiness for emergencies</p>	<p>Signed up to take part in the national 30days30ways campaign in September & October 2022.</p> <p>29 September 2022 held Community Resilience event at Newbiggin.</p> <p>Preparedness article included in the winter 2023 edition of the residents' magazine.</p> <p>Attendance at on-line events for village halls, Dec'23 & Feb '24</p>	<p>Closed</p>
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Northumberland County Council

Communities and Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Work Programme 2023-2024

1. Terms of reference:

- (1) To maintain an overview of the Management Agreements in place between the County Council and Active Northumberland, Woodhorn Museum Charitable Trust and Northumberland Tourism.
- (2) To monitor, review and make recommendations about:
 - Development Planning
 - Neighbourhood Planning
 - Conservation
 - Housing
 - Climate Change
 - Countryside, Biodiversity and Landscape Quality
 - Waste Management and Energy Use
 - Public and Community Transport Network and Travel to School
 - Highway Maintenance, Streetscape and the Local Environment
 - Local and Neighbourhood services
 - Crime, Community Safety, and Fear of Crime, including CONTEST, Prevent and Channel
 - Antisocial Behaviour and Domestic Violence
 - Fire and Rescue
 - Emergency Services and Emergency Planning
 - Customer Services
 - Provision of Cultural and Leisure Facilities
 - Improving Quality of Life through Access to Culture and Leisure;
 - Supporting Economic Growth in the Arts, Culture and Leisure Sectors

2. Issues to be Timetabled/Considered

This will include work that the OSC can be more proactive in early stage development work in formulating new policies and strategies; to investigate matters of interest and concern to the wider community, and to keep under review the performance and financial position of the Council. Issues identified by the Committee for inclusion on the work programme are:

- North East Transport Plan

- Local Cycling Walking Investment Plans – development of the programme
- Northumberland Road Safety Strategy – use of members scheme funds and costings.
- Northumberland Rights of Way Improvement Plan
- New Section 106 system
- Green / Open spaces review
- Local Nature Reserve Strategy

Northumberland County Council
Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2023-2024

27 March 2024

Northumberland Infrastructure Funding Statement

Library Service Strategy 2021-26

To consider the annual Infrastructure Funding Statement in respect of Section 106 Agreements.
To update the Committee on the implementation of the Strategy.

24 April 2024

Social Housing

To consider the implications of the new Social Housing Regulations.

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Northumberland County Council
Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee Monitoring Report 2023-2024

Ref	Date	Report	Decision	Outcome
1.	31 May 2023	Fire and Rescue – Contamination	RESOLVED that Cabinet be recommended to agree that financial support for the recommendations made by the fire and rescue service be provided to ensure that Northumberland was leading to reduce the risk of contamination and supporting fire and rescue personnel.	Recommendation was agreed by Cabinet on 11 July 2023.
2.	31 May 2023	Food Waste Recycling Pilot	RESOLVED that the presentation be received and food waste trial results to date be noted.	The OSC to receive further updates as appropriate.
Page 101	27 July 2023	Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Improving Our Roads and Highways	RESOLVED that the items listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fix My Street (with links to Network Management Plan / road hierarchy) • North East Transport Plan • Local Cycling Walking Infrastructure Plans – development of the programme • Northumberland Road Safety Strategy – use of members scheme funds and costings. • Northumberland Rights of Way Improvement Plan 	The issues identified by the Committee will be integrated into the work programme.
	4.	27 July 2023	Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Looking After Our Environment	RESOLVED that the items listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution:

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Housing Regulation Bill • New Section 106 system • Green / Open spaces review • Local Nature Recovery Strategy • A task and finish group on the environment 	
5.	27 July 2023	Update on the Development of a Tree Management Policy	<p>RESOLVED that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The progress made on developing the Tree Management Policy be noted. 2. The draft structure of the Tree Management Policy was supported with comments made as above. 	The Committee will continue to monitor this issue as appropriate.
6.	27 September 2023	Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Promoting Healthy Lives	<p>RESOLVED that the items listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Review by Active Northumberland • Presentation by future leisure services provider • DDP and DMP • Joint review with CSEG ESC on broadband. 	The issues identified by the Committee will be integrated into the work programme.
7.	27 September 2023	<p>Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Looking After Our Communities</p> <p>Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service Annual Performance Report</p>	<p>RESOLVED that</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The contents of the NFRS Annual Performance Report be noted and its review be included in the work programme on an annual basis including information on the scrutiny of core measures and the E&SV toolkit. 2. The item listed below be included within the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny work programme, following discussion between the Scrutiny Co-ordinator and officers, to determine their inclusion at the most appropriate time to enable an effective contribution: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger Local Resilience Forum pilot and COMAH exercise. 	The issues identified by the Committee will be integrated into the work programme.

8.	27 September 2023	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Public Interest Report	RESOLVED that (a) the report be agreed, and (b) a report on planning performance including numbers of applications, resourcing, enforcement including the legal process and costs of decisions against Council decisions.	A report on Planning performance be added to the OSC's work programme.
9.	25 October 2023	Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy for Northumberland 2022 – 2026 Action Plan Progression	RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted and the updates regarding actions that have been taken to meet the priorities identified to supports our residents who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	The Committee may seek further updates on the implementation of the action plan as appropriate.
10.	25 October 2023	Update on Implementation of Fix My Street	RESOLVED that the progress made on the development and implementation of the Fix My Street system be noted.	No further action required.
11.	29 November 2023	Planning Service Performance Report	RESOLVED that: 1. The contents of the report be noted. 2. Members of the committee noted the potential for increase in planning income and recommended to Cabinet to consider investment in the enforcement team and the addition of a rolling fighting fund to support this work. 3. Cabinet to also consider additional support for the Planning Department to deal with the increase in the number of planning applications and enquiries received.	Cabinet consider the OSC's recommendations on 16 January 2024 and resolved that: (a) <i>the recommendation from Scrutiny to consider investment in the enforcement team and the addition of a rolling fighting fund to support this work be accepted;</i> (b) <i>the recommendation from Scrutiny to also consider additional support for the Planning Department to deal with the increase in the number of planning applications and enquiries received be considered as part of the forthcoming budget process; and</i> (c) <i>a Policy Conference around the planning process and enforcement be set up.</i>
12.	31 January 2024	Active Northumberland Annual Outcome Report 2022-23 including the Service Plan Successes 2022-23	RESOLVED that the report and presentation be noted.	The new service provider be invited to a future meeting.
13.	31 January 2024	Update on delivery of Visit Northumberland and the Northumberland	RESOLVED that: 1. The achievements of Visit Northumberland's efforts to maximise the visitor economy's	The OSC will continue to receive annual updates. An Infrastructure Audit be presented to the OSC in due course.

		Destinations Management Plan 2022-2032	<p>contribution to the Northumberland economy, be noted.</p> <p>2. The progress made in the delivery of actions against the priorities of the Northumberland Destination Management Plan, be noted.</p> <p>3. The Infrastructure Audit be added to the committee work programme, when completed.</p>	
14.	31 January 2024	Corporate Feedback Performance 2022/2023	RESOLVED that the report be received.	The OSC will continue to receive annual updates