



6 August 2025

Chief Fire Officer
Peter Rickard

When telephoning ask for
Peter Rickard

Alex Norris MP
Under-Secretary of State (Building Safety, Fire and Local
Growth)
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

(01429) 872311 Ext. 4000
Email:
prickard@clevelandfire.gov.uk

Sent via email – alex.norris.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Mr Norris MP

Fair Funding Review 2.0 Consultation

I am writing as the Chief Fire Officer of Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFB) regarding the current Fair Funding Review. I am supported by the Cleveland Fire Authority. The Authority welcomes the opportunity to comment on this consultation and hopes the Government will address the concerns set out in the following paragraphs. The Authority greatly appreciates the actions the Government is taking to reform the funding system and return to multi-year settlements - which are essential for long term planning of local Fire and Rescue Services.

The Authority welcomes the statement in the Ministerial Foreword that “too many areas have felt the combined impact of reducing government support and low historical tax bases to raise income from.” This is exactly the position faced by Cleveland Fire Authority as a result of the previous government’s austerity programme and is a concern we have raised for many, many years.

The assumptions set out within the consultation, and consequential modelling by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), would worryingly see a continuance of the North East and Cleveland Fire Authority, specifically, suffering even greater financial challenges in what are some of the most deprived areas of the country, with one of the highest concentration of COMAH sites in England. If applied as is proposed, this will lead to cuts in front line (Firefighters) service provision. Cleveland Fire Authority provides fire and rescue services to around 570,000 residents, living in 267,000 properties across Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton. Since 2014, CFB has lost 34% of its wholetime firefighters which is above the national average.

Cleveland Fire Brigade

Training & Administration Hub, Endeavour House, Queens Meadow Business Park, Hartlepool TS25 5TH

☎ 01429 872311

✉ info@clevelandfire.gov.uk

🌐 www.clevelandfire.gov.uk



The Authority supports many of the comments made by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) in its response to the consultation. However, as the consultation proposal has different impacts on individual Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs), this letter outlines those areas most relevant to Cleveland Fire Authority and the wider North East.

1. Legacy of Austerity funding cuts

In responses to previous years' annual Local Government Finance Settlements, we highlighted the disproportionate impact of the previous government's funding cuts on the Authority. This situation was compounded by our low tax base, which means we only fund **43%** of Core Spending Power from Council Tax, compared to an FRS average of **60%** and **73%** for the FRSs least reliant on Government grant funding.

Consequently, Cleveland Fire Authority had to reduce the number of wholetime firefighters by 34%, which is a third greater than the total reduction for all FRSs of 25%.

We appreciate the funding challenges facing the Government and are not arguing for restoration of previous funding levels, or a levelling up of the previous reduction in the number of whole-time firefighters.

However, this position needs to be recognised in the funding arrangements for 2026/27 and future years, as individual FRSs are starting from different places. Therefore, we believe all FRSs should have the same percentage increase in Core Spending Power for 2026/27 and future years. The following points explain why this is important and how it can be achieved.

2. Future Spending Pressures 2026/27 onwards

The Fire and Rescue Service is a people-focused service, and the majority of all FRSs annual budgets are spent on pay budgets – typically 80%. All FRS therefore face the same financial pressures in relation to national pay awards for both Green and Grey book staff.

Similarly, non-pay budgets are spent on the same broad categories (including derv for fire appliance, energy costs/business rates for operational fire stations, insurances and uniform costs). Therefore, all FRSs face the same annual percentage inflation increases.

In view of the broadly similar percentage increase in costs facing all FRSs the future funding system needs to provide all FRSs with the same basic increase in Core Spending Power. If this is not the case this Authority will continue to face the combined impact of reducing government support and a low council tax base to raise income from. This will result in the stark reality that many FRSs, including this Authority, will again be cutting services (including cuts in the number of fire fighters), whilst other FRSs will have resources to increase services, or avoid having to increase Council Tax by £5.

3. NFCC proposal for a dedicated funding system

We support the NFCC view that there is a strong rationale for the Fire and Rescue Service to be considered in a comparable manner to policing, with its own dedicated funding system.

4. Cleveland Fire Authority further proposal for dedicated funding system

A dedicated funding system would recognise that individual FRSs do not act alone and support a system of national resilience. We believe that a dedicated funding system could address the issues detailed in point 2 above.

We agreed with the view expressed in the NFCC that the Government should not assume full utilisation of referendum principles as a justification for a reduction in Government grants.

We would be content if use of the referendum principle assumption was built into a dedicated funding system and sat alongside an increase in Government funding. This would then create a known national funding “resource” and enable the Government to allocate more Government funding to areas with a low Council Tax base.

The objective of the system would be to ensure all FRSs receive the same annual increase in total funding, accepting the principle that some individual FRSs would achieve less of this increase from the £5 referendum increase and more from an increase in Government funding. With other FRSs achieving more of the increase from the £5 referendum increase and less from an increase in Government funding.

To make such a system work, a national percentage increase in total FRS “resources” (i.e. Council Tax income plus Government support) would need to be set. It will be a decision for Government to set this total, although it needs to recognise unavoidable inflation pressures.

5. Specific Grants

We understand the rationale for the government’s plan to simplify the grant landscape. It is our understanding that for council grant regimes there is significant duplication and overlap and better service outcomes can be achieved from the Government proposals.

However, for grants paid to FRSs we have very significant concerns these proposals may produce unintended outcomes and compound the impact of potential core grant cuts.

We believe that grants provided for specific cost pressures (i.e. to cover increases in the Employers’ Pension contribution for fire fighters arising from national actuarial revaluation and increases in Employer’s National Insurance contributions for Green and Grey book employees) should continue. This will ensure transparency for the impact of national policy decisions on costs and the funding provided.

In summary, Cleveland Fire Authority had to manage some of the largest reductions in Core Spending Power as a result of the previous Government's austerity regime. We addressed these issues successfully and believe the Authority is efficient and effective.

However, this means we will be starting 2026/27 in a more challenging position than most other FRSs – as evidenced by the 34% reduction in whole-time firefighters compared to an FRS average reduction of 25%. Therefore, it is essential that the significant concerns we have raised and our proposal to address these issues are addressed before the funding reforms for 2026/27 and future years are determined.

This is a similar position faced by my colleagues in the fire and rescues services across the country, noting the North East is disproportionately impacted.

My hope would be in welcoming you to the North East, and Cleveland Fire Brigade. This is an offer I am sure you have received from the other Chiefs in the region. We are a proud, passionate and dedicated group serving our communities, who are concerned about the risks we face with the reduction in funding.

We look forward to welcoming you to the North East when your diary permits.

Yours sincerely,



PETER RICKARD
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Copy to:

Andy McDonald MP - andy.mcdonald.2nd.mp@parliament.uk

Anna Turley MP - anna.turley.mp@parliament.uk

Chris McDonald MP - chris.mcdonald.mp@parliament.uk

Jonathan Brash MP - jonathan.brash.mp@parliament.uk

Luke Meyer MP - luke.myer.mp@parliament.uk

Matt Vickers MP - matt.vickers.mp@parliament.uk