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# **Annual Statement of Assurance 2022/23**

**November 2023**

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**Cleveland Fire Authority Endeavour House  
Training and Administration Hub  
Queens Meadow Business Park  
Hartlepool  
TS25 5TH**

**Telephone:** 01429 872311

**Email:** [communications@clevelandfire.gov.uk](mailto:communications@clevelandfire.gov.uk)

**Website:** [www.clevelandfire.gov.uk](http://www.clevelandfire.gov.uk)

## 1. Introduction

The [Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018](#) sets out the Government's priorities and objectives for all English Fire Authorities and places a requirement on them to provide assurance to their communities and Government on financial, governance and operational matters. The Framework requires all English Fire and Rescue Authorities to publish Statements of Assurance. It states:

*Each Fire and Rescue Authority is required to produce an Annual Statement of Assurance. The statement should outline the way in which the Authority and its Fire and Rescue Service has had regard to the National Framework, the Integrated Risk Management Plan and to any strategic plan prepared by the Authority. The Authority must also provide assurance to their community and to government on financial, governance and operational matters.*

In line with the National Framework 2018, this is Cleveland Fire Authority's (CFA) Statement of Assurance (ASA) for 2022/23.

The statement follows the Department of Communities and Local Government's 'Guidance on Statements of Assurance for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England'. Much of the information in the statement is already contained in other documents and where this is the case these documents are hyperlinked.

**The Authority's mission is to make Teesside Safer and Stronger and the Authority's vision is to be a leading fire and rescue service where our:**

- Communities feel safe and protected;
- People are professional, proud and passionate;
- Organisation is welcoming, trusted and respected;
- Business is built on learning, and innovative digital approaches;
- Future is 'greener' and bright.

**The Authority has published the following documents detailing its vision, strategic goals and aims and how these will be achieved, notably:**

Link to [Corporate Plan](#) which sets out the Authority's Vision for 2030 and the strategic direction for the next four years;

Link to [Community Risk Management Plan](#) which sets out how we will manage the risks to our local communities and support the U.K.'s national resilience arrangements. It is our Integrated Risk Management Plan. It is part of a suite of strategically linked documents that guide the work of Cleveland Fire Brigade to achieving the Authority's corporate objectives;

Link to [People Plan](#) which sets out how we will support, train, develop and engage our staff throughout their employment to make a difference every day;

Link to [Resource Plan](#) which sets out how we will use and manage our financial, human and technical resources to improve effectiveness, efficiency and the environment;

Link to [Service Plan 2022/23](#) which sets out the priorities to be delivered over the next year; and

Link to [Organisational Performance Report 2022/23](#) which is published and provides information on progression towards the achievement of the vision, the corporate goals, objectives and aims.

**The plans and key documents have been developed using valuable insight from:**

Link to [Community and Risk Profile](#) which details the reasonable and foreseeable community risks that the Brigade will have to deal with;

Link to [Changing Landscape](#) which details the outcomes from environmental scanning to identify new and emerging issues; and

Link to [Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/23-2025/26](#) which details our estimated financial resources available to deliver our plans.

## 2. Risk Profile

Cleveland is an area in the North-East of England and incorporates the unitary borough authorities of Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees.

CFA provides fire and rescue services to an area of approximately 597km<sup>2</sup> across four borough council areas: Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton.

The Authority's area, centered around the mouth of the River Tees, has a population of 569,390 living in 265,433 dwellings and contains 17,720 non-residential buildings.

The area has a distinctive, complex and changing demographic and risk profile which is detailed in our comprehensive [Community Risk Profile \(CRP\)](#) document.



Our mature and robust understanding of our risks helps us to proactively and reactively shape our prevention, protection, and emergency response interventions so that we keep the people of Teesside safe.

### 2.1 Managing our Risks

In managing our risk profile, we adopt a balanced approach of prevention, protection, and emergency response. The Authority's Community Risk Management Plan 2022-2026 (CRMP) informed by our Community Risk Profile identifies and assesses all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that might affect us, including those of a cross-border, multi-authority and/or national nature.

The CRMP and CRP provides the intelligence base from which we configure and deploy our resources and services in a focused and targeted manner to address the fire related risks facing our local communities.

In 2022/23 frontline services, using a balanced strategy of prevention, protection, and emergency response, were co-ordinated and delivered from Community Safety District Hubs and 14 strategically placed Community Fire Stations.

- **Prevention services** which take many forms, include Safer Homes Visits, the provision of free risk reduction equipment, information sharing and joint activities with partners, educational visits, and the provision of advice to our communities using various forms of media.

- **Protection** activities involve advising and ensuring individuals and businesses comply with Fire Safety legislation and, where necessary, undertaking enforcement action.
- Where and when emergency incidents still occur, they are responded to by professional staff using modern methods, appliances and equipment. The Brigade operates to a suite of **emergency response** standards and the [latest information](#) on how fast the Brigade attended different types of fire incidents indicates that we have some of the fastest attendance times in the country.

### 3. Operational Assurance

The National Framework (NF) outlines the requirement placed upon Fire and Rescue Authorities to provide assurance on operational matters which are determined locally by them in partnership with their local communities, citizens, businesses and others.

#### 3.1 Statutory Responsibilities

CFA has carried out its functions in accordance with the defined statutory and policy framework in which it is required to operate. The key legislative documents defining these responsibilities are:

- The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England 2018
- The Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- The Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007
- Serious Violence Duty 2023
- The Localism Act 2011
- The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- The Licencing Act 2003
- The Building Act 2004
- The Policing and Crime Act
- The Equality Act
- The Data Protection Act
- The Local Government Act
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations
- Human Rights Act

The CRMP summarises how the community risks will be addressed, and it is underpinned by a suite of procedures which acts as the foundation to the operational service delivery arrangements from which we assure and evaluate the robustness, effectiveness and efficiency of the arrangements.

The established Risk Management, Performance Management, Intelligence and Assurance Frameworks provide ongoing intelligence on the effectiveness of our operational arrangements. This is substantiated by periodic independent assessments on our operational and national resilience arrangements which provide the necessary assurance on our operational service delivery arrangements both at a national and local level.



### 3.2 His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS)

In 2017/18, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) commenced inspections of England's Fire & Rescue services that assesses each FRS in terms of their effectiveness, efficiency and how they treat their people.

Between May and July 2022, the HMICFRS conducted their second full inspection on the Brigade.

The Brigades latest inspection report was published on 20<sup>th</sup> January and saw that the Brigade was assessed as **Good** in all areas inspected as detailed in the following table:

Assessment Area	2022
<b>Effectiveness</b>	
Understanding fire and other risks	Good
Preventing fire and other risks	Good
Protecting the public through fire regulation	Good
Responding to fires and other emergencies	Good
Responding to major and multi agency incidents	Good
<b>Efficiency</b>	
Making best use of resources	Good
Future affordability	Good
<b>People</b>	
Promoting the right values and culture	Good
Getting the right people with the right skills	Good
Ensuring fairness and promoting diversity	Good
Managing performance and developing leaders	Good

*"I am pleased with the performance of Cleveland Fire Brigade in keeping people safe and secure from fires and other risks. We are pleased to see the Brigade has made progress since our 2018 inspection."*

*Overall, this is a good performance from Cleveland Fire Brigade, both for the communities it serves and for the people who work for the Brigade".*

Roy Wilshire  
His Majesty's Inspector  
of Fire and Rescue Services  
December 2022

### 3.3 National Resilience

National Resilience (NR) is defined as the capacity and capability of Fire and Rescue Authorities to work together with other Category 1 and 2 responders to deliver a sustained, effective response to major incidents, emergencies and disruptive challenges, such as (but not limited to) those identified in the National Security Risk Assessment. It refers to risks that need to be planned for on a strategic national basis because their impacts and consequences would be of such scale and/or complexity that local resources would be insufficient, even when considering mutual aid arrangements, pooling and reconfiguration of resources and collective action. Our arrangements for NR are assured through regular inspections, audits, self-assessments and training exercises.

During 2022/23 the National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT), on behalf of Home Office (HO), undertook a number of independent assurance activities on the Brigade's arrangements and capabilities to respond to National resilience issues including:

**Assurance Audit:** Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive (CBRN (e) Detection, Identification and Monitoring (DIM) capabilities February 2023 - March 2023. Of the 15 areas assessed, the following outcomes were achieved:

- 13 areas assessed as 'Good'.
- 2 areas assessed as 'Requires Improvement'.
- No areas classed as inadequate.

3 Improvement actions were identified, of which 2 of have been implemented and the final action is awaiting the publication of guidance from NRAT on the Framework for DIM support teams.

**Assurance Audit:** Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive (CBRN (e) Mass Decontamination (MD) February 2023. Of the 15 areas assessed, the following outcomes were achieved:

- 1 area was assessed as 'Outstanding'.
- 14 areas assessed as 'Good'.
- No areas assessed as 'Requires Improvement'.
- No areas classed as 'Inadequate'.
- No improvement actions were identified as being required.

**Assurance Exercise:** Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive (CBRN (e) Mass Decontamination - November 2022. Of the 7 areas assessed during the exercise, the following outcomes were achieved:

- 6 areas assessed as 'Good'.
- 1 area assessed as 'Requires Improvement'.
- No areas classed as 'Inadequate'.

- 1 Improvement action was identified, which has been resolved and approved by NRAT.

**Assurance Self-Assessment:** Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive (CBRN (e) Mass Decontamination - March 2022. Of the 20 areas assessed as part of the self-assessment, the following outcomes were achieved:

- 3 areas were assessed as being 'Outstanding'.
- 17 areas assessed as 'Good'.
- No areas assessed as 'Requires Improvement'.
- No areas classed as 'Inadequate'.
- No improvement actions were identified as being required.

**Assurance Self-Assessment:** Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and explosive (CBRN (e) Mass Decontamination April 2022 - March 2023. Of the 14 areas assessed as part of the self-assessment, the following outcomes were achieved:

- 6 areas were assessed as being 'Outstanding'.
- 8 areas assessed as 'Good'.
- No areas assessed as 'Requires Improvement'.
- No areas classed as 'Inadequate'.
- No improvement actions were identified as being required.

### 3.4 Collaborative Working and Interoperability

The Brigade works with a wide variety of local partners to deliver its balanced strategy of Prevention, Protection and Emergency Response in a joined up and co-ordinated fashion.

Collaborative working can bring significant benefits and tend to be a response to the complex and multifaceted problems that the Brigade faces and this complexity means problems cannot be tackled effectively by any individual body working alone but by organisations working effectively together to achieve common goals.

### 3.5 Local Resilience Forum

In 2022/23, we were an active member of the Cleveland Local Resilience Forum (CLRF). This is a multi-agency partnership that provides a structure to help agencies plan and prepare for major incidents and emergencies, which may have a significant impact on the community, and assists partners to meet their statutory duties under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (Contingency Planning) Regulations 2005 and accompanying statutory guidance

entitled “Preparing for Emergencies”. The CLRF is made up of Category 1, 2 and non-category responders.

As a category one responder, we are a member of the Local Resilience Forum on the CLRF Strategic Board, Tactical Business Group, Tactical Business Continuity focus group, Training and Exercise Group, Risk Assessment group, Blue Lights Group, Flood and Adverse Weather Group and the Warn and Inform Group.

Our National Resilience Manager works in the Emergency Planning Unit alongside the Police Tactical Advisor Team working jointly on Police led operations and facilitating awareness on Counter Terrorism and the Critical National Infrastructure sites located within the area.

We are member of Independent Safety Advisory Groups (ISAG), which are run through the Emergency Planning Unit to ensure that the Brigade is included in the planning for major events.

### **3.6 Strategic Operational Response and Resilience Group (SORRG)**

We are a member of the Strategic Operational Response and Resilience Group (SORRG) which forms a link into the National Operational Co-ordination Committee (OCC). This enables Strategic representatives from the four North East Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) to consider opportunities such as the regional sharing of assets and to work collaboratively on operational matters related to National Resilience (NR).

### **3.7 Emergency Response Call Handling Resilience**

The Brigade has established a collaborative tri partite partnership arrangement with Hereford and Worcester and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Services to provide resilience and ensure emergency response calls are handled using the Brigade’s mobilising system at times of high demand for emergency response call handling or when Business Continuity plans are activated. Specific exercises to test these arrangements have been undertaken during 2022/23.

### **3.8 Prevention, Protection & Response**

A framework for joint and integrated working exists in Teesside. We are members of Community Safety and other partnerships to enable organisations to address local problems collectively.

Our Prevention services are based around home safety, road safety, water safety, arson reduction and youth engagement and use a risk-based approach to target resources and provide collaborative services to those identified as being most vulnerable.

We are a member of the Tees-wide Adult and Children Safeguarding Boards (TSAB/TSCB) with regular assurance reviews on our arrangements undertaken.

Arson and deliberate fire setting continues to present a significant demand for fire and rescue services finite resources. While previous strategies have demonstrated considerable success in their reduction, deliberate fires account for around 45% of all the fires attended by fire and rescue services in England. Within Cleveland this increases to 82% of all fires that are classed as deliberate fires, the highest rate nationally. We are the national lead and work with other fire and rescue services and local partners in addressing this chronic issue.

To support our strategy to reduce levels of arson, Cleveland Police and the Brigade has jointly employed a Fire Technical Manager to work collaboratively to achieve and maintain accreditation for Fire Scene Investigation British Standards (BS EN ISO/IEC 17020), The Forensic Science Regulators Codes of Practice and Conduct and supporting relevant legislative documents as required.

Our protection services aim to educate and regulate the built environment that is governed by fire safety regulations to protect people, property, and the environment from harm. To deliver this, the Brigade has developed close working relationships with other public enforcement bodies, and we inspect, and audit buildings required to comply with fire safety legislation which have been identified through our risk-based inspection program.

We work with our local industries and participate in Site Health and Environment (SHE) Managers Meetings of the high hazard industries within our area. A Mutual Aid database of assets held at COMAH sites is maintained by the Brigade to enable an effective and coordinated response to any incidents that occur at these sites.

Our operational crews have access to Emergency Response Plans (ERP's), Site Specific Risk Information (SSRI's) and Site-Specific Pre Plans (SSPP's) at an incident ground to ensure that they have relevant risk information in an emergency. This is enhanced through a programme of information gathering and familiarisation visits by crews to key risk sites. We ensure that we share this information with other services and receive neighbouring Brigades risk information should we be required to attend incidents in their areas.

### **3.9 Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV)**

During 2022/23, the Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV) was established. CURV is the area's first dedicated partnership tasked with reducing levels of serious violence through a joined up, multi-agency approach. The Brigade is a proactive member of this group and the partnership will develop an in depth insight into the scale, trends and drivers of serious violence and produce actions to address the issues within the area.

### **3.10 Cross Border Risk Information Sharing**

We are a member of the 'Cross Border Risk Information Group' which consists of the four NE, Cumbria and North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs). Operational risk information relating to Very High and High risks is shared between organisations via a dedicated link on Resilience Direct and accessed through Mobile Data Terminals on every appliance.

### **3.11 Mutual Aid Agreements**

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 provides clear instructions and powers for FRS to make agreements (reinforcement schemes) with other Authorities to respond to incidents such as fires, road traffic collisions and emergencies within their area and in other areas. The Brigade is required to enter into such reinforcement schemes, as far as is practicable, for securing mutual assistance between authorities so statutory functions can be discharged at all times.

CFA holds and operates to formalised section 13/16 support arrangements with County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service (CDDFRS) and North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (NYFRS) to support operational activities. To support these agreements the Brigade has robust arrangements in place to ensure that critical risk information in their respective area is shared securely with neighbouring Brigades using Resilience Direct.

### **3.12 TSAB Quality Assurance Framework**

The Brigade's Safeguarding arrangements are externally assured by the Tees-wide Safeguarding Adults Board every 2 years. The TSAB Assurance process consists of the completion of a self-assessment against specific criteria and the provision of evidence to substantiate the self-assessment both of which are scrutinised, assessed and validated by an independent group consisting of TSAB board members and specialists. The last inspection of our arrangements occurred during 2021.

### **3.13 Business Continuity**

Business Continuity Management is an integral part of the Authority's corporate risk management process. Fire and Rescue Authorities have a duty to ensure plans are in place that will satisfy the requirements of both the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004.

Having robust Business Continuity Plans is essential for the Service to minimise the impact of any disruption on its ability to deliver an effective service to the community, whether the

disruptions result from staff shortage, loss of premises, technology failure, loss of information or loss of a key supplier or partner.

Operational Business Continuity Plans have been developed over a number of years in conjunction with the Local Resilience Forum. To assure their effectiveness, there is regular multi agency training and testing of the plans.

Each Department within the Brigade has its own Business Continuity Plan to ensure continuity and resilience of services.

Business Continuity Plans are being continually reviewed and tested to ensure they are fit for purpose when required to be enacted. Each Department Head reviews their BCP on an annual basis and an audit and assurance plan is in place to ensure that plans can be tested against realistic scenarios.

Through mechanisms of horizon scanning, structured meetings, generic and bespoke plans, training of staff, exercises and audit processes, the Authority strives to ensure it has appropriate arrangements in place to ensure an appropriate level of service is always available to the communities. When plans are enacted, a process of review is instigated to ensure any lessons learnt from the events are captured and included within the reviews of the business continuity arrangements.

During 2022/23, there was an increased risk of industrial action by Firefighters thus a Business Continuity Plan for such an event was developed and started to be enacted until the risk of industrial action reduced to an acceptable level.

### **3.14 Emergency Response Optimum Configuration and Appliance Availability**

Using our risk management and intelligence frameworks, we have ascertained that to achieve our emergency response standards the optimum operational configuration for the Brigade is between 14 - 18 appliances that are dynamically and strategically deployed across the Authority Area. This operational configuration also meets the operational and risk management requirements of the initial emergence response to the range of industrial worst case planning scenarios (WCPS) within the high hazard sites in the area.

During 2022/23 the Brigade operated below its optimum number of appliances of 14 appliances for 289 hours across 120 shifts, which equates to 3.36% of time during the year.

### **3.15 Emergency Response**

To meet the risk across Cleveland, the Authority's priority is to, when required, respond to and attend any incident as quickly as possible as we recognise the faster we are able to respond to an incident, the greater the chance there is of survivability.

- **Response Standards:** A suite of equitable and transparent response standards to life risk incidents have been established since 2018. Performance against these standards is monitored, reported on and analysed throughout the year.
- **Actual Attendance Times:** On an annual basis, the Home Office publishes details of actual average attendance times to Fire Incidents by individual services. The [latest information](#) published indicates that the Brigade has one of the fastest actual response times to fire incidents in the country.

### 3.16 Training

Our training and assurance frameworks are used to provide assurance of the operational readiness and competency of all our operational staff to respond to emergency response incidents. All our operational staff undertake a training programme, covering risk critical core competencies, including use of Breathing Apparatus. A programme of themed practical exercises is also conducted to further ensure the competency of Firefighters.

Our training framework includes Incident Command competency at all 4 levels, which is now assessed and validated through external bodies to provide assurance. All incident commanders undertake tri-service JESIP training.

The training framework covers the attainment, maintenance, and validation of competence, and ensures that training is recorded to enable the scrutiny and oversight of achievement from individual to Brigade level.

A suite of key training measures, covering all staff, enables the monitoring of the competency of all staff especially in risk critical skills required for a Firefighter's role.

We are an accredited training centre covering both our Learning and Development and Health and Safety functions. To retain our accredited status for training activities in these areas, validation of our arrangements is undertaken by external and independent agencies on a regular basis.

### 3.17 Operational Exercise Programme

A programme of Operational Exercises was undertaken in isolation or with other partners including neighbouring fire and rescue services and industry during 2022/23. The testing and exercise regime covers six defined levels ranging from station level exercises to National Resilience exercises.

During 2022/23, the Brigade and partners planned to conduct 104 exercises of which 103 were completed.



### **3.18 Fire Standards**

The Fire Standards identify, develop, and maintain professional standards for fire and rescue services to achieve. By 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 16 fire standards had officially been published by the Fire Standards Board.

As each standard is published a detailed gap analysis is undertaken to ascertain whether the Brigade complies with the standard. From the 16 standards published are fully compliant in 5 of the standards, 5 are assessed as partially compliant. The remaining 6 standards are in the process of having a detailed gap analysis compiled and validated by the Brigade approved procedures.

### **3.19 National Operational Guidance (NOG)**

National Operational Guidance (NOG) is the foundation for developing operational policies, procedures, good practice, and training for Firefighters to deal with incidents effectively and safely and ensure consistency of approach across the country. The Brigade is implementing the 21 NOGS in a planned and phased programme ensuring that all requirements of the NOG are fully embedded.

### **3.20 Health & Safety**

The Brigade ensures that the health and safety of the workforce is a priority and aims to conduct its activities in a safe and healthy working environment whilst promoting a positive health and safety culture.

The Brigade incurred twenty-nine accidents during 2022/23, seven of which were reportable under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrence Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR). The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have not been required to investigate any of these accidents.

Organisational Assurance audits of our Health and Safety arrangements have been undertaken for all Wholtime and On-call stations. Issues identified within these audits are being addressed on a risk prioritisation basis. There are no identified actions which have exceeded their agreed implementation dates.

## 4. Financial Assurance

Fire and Rescue Authorities are responsible for ensuring that their business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards. CFA conducts its duties under Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 in respect of ensuring that public money is properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently, and effectively.

### 4.1 2022/23 Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy

The CFA meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2022 approved the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), which included the budget and council tax for 2022/23.

CFA delivers value for money services considering the complex and high hazard environment it operates in. During 2022/23, the Council Tax for a Band D property was the equivalent of £81.86 per annum.

The equivalent comparator council tax rates of neighbouring Brigades are Tyne and Wear Fire Authority (£87.35), North Yorkshire Fire Authority (£75.61) and Durham and Darlington Fire Authority (£109.69).

### 4.2 2022/23 Financial Performance

The Authority's total net revenue budget for 2022/23 was £27.119m (which equates to £47.64 per person in the Authority's area) with a total spend of £27.049m after contributions to reserves.

### 4.3 Financial Statements

It is a statutory requirement for Authorities to publish the financial results of their activities for the year. This information is contained in the statement of accounts within 'The Financial Report' by 31st May. These regulations were temporarily relaxed to 31<sup>st</sup> July during 2021/22 with a requirement for Mazars to audit the financial statements by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

Our External Auditors, Mazars LLP, who are an independent body to the Authority, are commissioned to audit the Authority's financial statements and provide an opinion whether value for money is being achieved.

The Fire Authority's draft accounts 2021/22 were published on the Authority's website on 24th June 2022 and presented to Audit and Governance Committee on 26th August 2022.

The Authority was informed by its external auditors, Mazars that their annual report detailing their opinion on the financial statements 2021/22 would not be published by the deadline of 30th Sep 2022 due to outstanding audit work on valuation of property, plant and equipment valuation and assurance on the Net Defined Benefit Liability of the pension fund from the Pension Fund auditors.

The audit position has been explained to the public on the Brigade's website and progress reports from the External Auditor, Mazars have been provided to the Audit and Governance Committee and Fire Authority on a regular basis.

The latest audit position provided by Mazars indicates that there was only one outstanding matter which related to the annual Pension Fund assurance letter and advised that there were no material issues arising from the Pension Fund Auditor's work relating to the 2021/22 financial statements. A revised completion date for the Audit has now been provided by the Pension's Auditor of September 2023. Mazars stated that they anticipate issuing an unqualified audit opinion and reiterated that the delays are due to national issues beyond the Authority's control.

The delays relating to the completion of the Audit relating to the Statement of Accounts 2021/22 have also resulted in Mazars being unable to fully provide an opinion on value for money. The draft value for money statement was presented to the Audit and Governance Committee on 18th Nov 2022 and gave a draft value for money opinion from Mazars based on audit work to date. This stated 'we have not identified any significant weaknesses in arrangements that require us to make a recommendation however we continue to undertake work on the Authority's arrangements. As reported by Mazars on 30th June 2023, this position remains the same.

At the Audit and Governance Meeting in September 2023, Mazars advised that they aim to have completed the audit work in relation to the 2022/23 by December 2023.

### 4.4 Value for Money Assessment

The Value for Money (VFM) framework for the fire and rescue sector first emerged in 2018.

Proving Services was commissioned to adapt a VFM methodology widely used across other public sector services into a tool that was specific to the fire and rescue sector. The VFM was designed to be light touch but offer a comprehensive evaluation of both current VFM and the opportunities for improvement.

**In July 2022, the Brigade undertook a value for money self-assessment with Proving Services. The key outcome from this assessment indicates:**

- The Brigade delivers good value for money. Comparing to the eight other fire and rescue services assessed, the Brigade performs better than its peers in terms of economy and efficiency and as well as the other top performers in terms of effectiveness.
- The Brigade has developed an excellent understanding of current and projected risk and has a comprehensive strategic planning framework that is clearly aligned to budgets. It has delivered substantial efficiency savings over several years, and is self-aware of the opportunities for further improvement, with robust plans in place for delivery.

## 4.5 Financial Transparency

Link to [Pay Policy Statement](#) which brings the information on remuneration into a single document for public information and meets the obligations of the Localism Act 2011. It was approved by the Executive Committee on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2023.

Link to published [Statement of Accounts](#) which details of salaries which exceed £50,000 in accordance with the requirements of the Account and Audit Regulations 2009.

The Trade Union Facility Time Publication Requirements Regulations 2017 requires relevant public sector employers to collate and publish, on an annual basis, data on the amount and cost of facility time within their organisation. Link to Brigades [website](#) where the information for 2022/23 can be located.

Public Contracts Regulations Act 2015: Payment Performance Statistics Regulation 113 of the Public Contracts Regulations Act 2015 requires the Brigade to pay undisputed invoices within 30 days. When undisputed invoice payments are not paid within this 30-day period, interest becomes payable on the outstanding amount as set out in the late payment legislation. There is a requirement to publish performance against these requirements. Link to the latest [Organisational Performance Reports](#) where such information can be found.

In 2010, the Government placed an obligation on public bodies to publish details of all expenditure over £500. Cleveland Fire Authority publishes such information on its website on a monthly basis. Link to [What We Spend and How](#).

## 5. Corporate Governance

Cleveland Fire Authority (CFA) has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to conduct business in accordance with the law. CFA is committed to the highest standards of conduct and have robust controls over the use of resources, based on open decision making, accountability and transparency.

The Brigade takes decisions every day that impacts businesses, residents, and visitors to our area. Our Constitution details how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent, and accountable to local people.

The most significant decisions relating to our plans and strategies, such as setting and agreeing the CRMP, the budget and council tax levels are taken by CFA. Other decisions are delegated to the Executive Committee and operational management decisions, including decisions in respect of functions which require professional officer skills, are delegated to Officers in accordance with our approved Scheme of Delegation.

In 2022/23, Cleveland Fire Authority was made up of 16 Elected Members from the four councils in the Authority's area, namely Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, and Stockton. The CFA membership from each of the four Councils is based on their population size and is politically balanced to reflect the make-up of the Council.

In 2022/23, the membership of CFA was:

- |                         |           |
|-------------------------|-----------|
| ▪ Hartlepool:           | 3 Members |
| ▪ Middlesbrough:        | 4 Members |
| ▪ Redcar and Cleveland: | 4 Members |
| ▪ Stockton:             | 5 Members |

The Authority is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law, proper standards, that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively. To support this, the following committees and Forums are in place:

- Cleveland Fire Authority
- Executive Committee
- Audit and Governance Committee
- Local Pension Board
- Independent Remuneration Panel (Meetings on a As Demand Basis)

### 5.1 Governance Framework

CFA has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Our governance framework comprises systems, processes, culture, and values by which the Authority directs and controls its activities through which it is accountable for and engages with the community. The Framework enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic priorities and to consider whether those priorities have resulted in the delivery of appropriate and cost-effective services.

## **5.2 Code of Corporate Governance**

The Authority has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance which encompasses the guidance and best practice outlined in the “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework’ (2016 edition) which is published by CIPFA and SOLACE.

Corporate governance services are provided to the Fire Authority through a combination of a SLA with Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) who provide the role of Treasurer and Internal Audit function. In addition, a dedicated Legal Advisor/Monitoring Officer is employed by the Brigade.

An annual Member Development Programme is in place and Corporate and Ethical Governance development is given to officers and managers.

## **5.3 Annual Governance Statement**

The preparation of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS), to support the Financial Report, is a statutory requirement for public services. Its purpose is to demonstrate and evidence that there is a continuous review of the effectiveness of the Authority’s internal controls, performance, and risk management systems. This provides assurance on their effectiveness so users of the accounts can be satisfied that proper arrangements are in place to govern spending, safeguard assets and maximise operational effectiveness. The process enables the production of a corporate action plan to address any identified gaps or weaknesses but also enhance the current arrangements.

No issues were identified within our [Annual Governance Statement](#) by our Internal Auditors or External Auditors. The Annual Governance Statement is published as part of the Financial Report 2022/23.

## **5.4 Systems of Internal Management Control**

Cleveland Fire Authority has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness, thereby implementing the principles and responsibilities of effective corporate governance arrangements.

In discharging these responsibilities, the Authority is responsible for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control. These systems of internal control form a significant part of

the Governance Framework and are designed to manage risk to a reasonable level as they cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives. Internal Audit, commissioned from Hartlepool Council, is one methodology adopted to provide the necessary assurance on the effectiveness of the systems of management control.

The Internal Audit (IA) function provides challenge and assurance over the effectiveness of our risk management, internal control and governance arrangements and supports, provides advice, and challenges management to assist the development of robust systems of control.

A risk based internal audit plan is developed in conjunction with the Authority's Treasurer, with the purpose of providing assurance that the system of internal management controls are operating effectively within the Brigade. In February 2022, an Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23 consisting of 15 internal audits was adopted by Elected Members.

The outcome from these audits indicates all have been completed and all with a satisfactory assurance rating.

The outcome from this work enables an assessment of the effectiveness of the system of management controls to be made by the Internal Audit function. Link to the [outcome](#) of the latest review of the system of internal controls was reported to the Audit and Governance Committee and stated:

*"From the work undertaken during the year 2022/23, Internal Audit has reached the opinion that key systems are operating soundly and that there is no fundamental breakdown in controls resulting in material discrepancy. Satisfactory arrangements were implemented to ensure the effective, efficient and economic operation of Cleveland Fire Authority's financial affairs.*

*No system of control can provide absolute assurance against material misstatement or loss, nor can Internal Audit give that assurance; this statement is intended to provide reasonable assurance. These risks are reflected in the audit plan and are the subject of separate reports issued during the course of 2022/23."*

**Audit and Governance 25th August 2023 'Internal Audit Outturn Report'**

### 5.5 Local Pension Board

As prescribed in the Public Service Pensions Act 2013 and associated regulations, the Fire Authority is the 'responsible authority' for the effective and efficient management and administration of the Firefighter Pension Schemes. The Authority has delegated the management and administration of the schemes to the Chief Fire Officer as Scheme Manager.

The Local Pension Board was established in accordance with Section 5 of the Act and regulation 4 of the Firefighters Pension Scheme (England) Regulations 2014 as amended by the Firefighters Pension Scheme (Amendment) (Governance) Regulations 2015. The Board comprises of 3 Employer and 3 Employee representatives and a substitute Employer and Employee representative and meets on a quarterly basis.

To assist in the governance and assurance arrangements, a representative from XPS Pensions Ltd attends all board meetings to present their quarterly performance reports in addition to reporting on current/impending issues and any associated risks.

## 5.6 Procurement

During 2023, a Peer Review undertaken by the Chartered Institute of Procurement Supply (CIPS), the world's largest organisation dedicated to the procurement and supply profession, helping to support, improve and raise standards.

The procurement team worked with the CIPS and carried out a 'Skills Gap Analysis' which covered eleven themes of the CIPS Global Standard for Procurement and Supply. The outcome competency levels from the skills gap analysis was provided to the procurement team by CIPS with a collective group report focusing on the strengths and development needs across the team, as well as reports for each individual which will provide a firm structure for future personal development plans.

## 5.7 Data Protection / Information Security

We process information securely and follow the principles of the Data Protection Act 2018. All staff have been required and have completed an electronic training module for the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulations.

We use secure methods of transferring and storing data and apply appropriate retention periods to data. When data is no longer required, we ensure that it is disposed of securely.

During 2022/23 there have been 8 data breaches occurring, of which 2 were officially reported to the ICO (Information Commissioner's Office). In both cases, the ICO found that no further action was required.

## 5.8 Cyber Security

In recognition of the increased threat of Cyber-attacks on the Brigades ICT and communications network, in 2023 the Home Office commissioned IBM to assess Fire and Rescue Services arrangements for cyber security using the Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) that had been developed by the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC). The framework that has been used in the assessment covers:

- Governance arrangements for cyber security
- Protecting against cyber attack
- Detecting cyber attacks
- Minimising impact of attacks

The outcome of the assessment shows us that:



- **Fire Control:** Of the 39 assessment criteria there is 37 areas fully compliant and 2 areas partially compliant.
- **Corporate ICT:** Of the assessment criteria, there is 24 areas fully compliant and 15 areas partially compliant.

The Brigade has secured UK Security and Privacy Protection Insurance in 2021 which covers cyber-attack. Other organisations have had difficulty in securing this type of cover specifically due to the increased cyber activity and threats and the war in Ukraine.

## 5.9 Compliance with the National Framework Requirements

The Fire and Rescue Services Act requires the Home Secretary to report every two years on the Authority's compliance with the National Framework (NF).

In June 2023, the Home Secretary published the Fire and Rescue Authorities compliance with the national framework for England which states:

*'Having assessed this information, the Secretary of State is satisfied that every Fire and Rescue Authority in England has acted in accordance with the requirements of the National Framework, and no formal steps have been taken by the Secretary of State since the last assurance statement in 2020 to secure compliance.'*

## 5.10 Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

We are committed to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in both the service we deliver to the community and the employment of our staff.

The Public Sector Equality Duty, of the Equality Act 2010, places a legal obligation for the organisation to comply with the general equality duty. It requires public bodies to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to staff.

Cleveland Fire Authority is committed to considering equality and diversity in the way we exercise our functions, notably:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

In addition to the general duty, as a public sector body we are required to:

- Publish diversity information annually to demonstrate our compliance with the general duty; and
- Prepare and publish specific and measurable equality objectives.

On our website we have published a range of documents supporting this commitment. The documents are:

Link to [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Strategy](#).

Link to [Gender Pay Gap Report](#).

Link to [Public Sector Equality Duty Report and Disability](#).

Link to [Mental Health and Wellbeing Report](#).

Link to [Ethnicity Pay Gap Report](#).

A detailed profile of our communities and workforce in line with the EDI protected characteristics has been developed to ensure that our prevention, protection, and emergency response services can identify those hard to reach and seldom heard groups within our society.

## 5.11 External Complaints

The Brigade strives to operate to a high standard in all aspects of its work. Gathering information from customers, especially where we fall short of this aim, is a high priority. To obtain feedback from the public, the Brigade operates an External Customer Compliment and Complaints Framework. When complaints from members of the public are received, they are investigated robustly and responded to in as short a timescale as possible. A suite of internal service standards has been introduced so individuals know when they can expect a response to their complaint.

From the 26 complaints received during 2022/23, 24 (92%) received a response within the prescribed timescales. Three of the complaints were requested to be investigated at the next stage of the complaints process, all of which received a response within the required timescales.

## 5.12 Freedom of Information Requests

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act came into force in January 2005. By granting a general right of access to records held by Public Authorities it encourages an attitude of openness and will enable the public to scrutinise decisions and working practises. The Act gives anyone the right to make a written request to see information held by the Authority which should be provided within 20 working days of the request. During 2022/23, 117 FOI requests or information were received, of which 93 (80%) were responded to within the nationally prescribed timescales.

### **5.13 Subject Access Requests (SARS)**

Individuals have the right to ask the Brigade whether or not they are using or storing your personal information and request copies of their personal data, and other supplementary information held by the Service. Such requests should be complied with within 30 days of request. During 2022/23 the Brigade received 6 such requests of which 4 were complied with in the prescribed timescales.

### **5.14 Information Returns**

During 2022/23, the Brigade ensured it complied with the NFCC, Home Office and HMICFRS requirements for regular information reporting. All returns have been provided to the relevant organisation by the prescribed deadlines.

### **5.15 Compliance with Statutory & Transparency Requirements**

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) published Transparency Code, which specifies the data and information that public bodies must publish. Compliance with the Code is mandated under Section 2 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980. Our evaluation against the requirements indicates that no areas of non compliance have been identified.

### **5.16 Website Accessibility**

The Brigade assesses the accessibility of its website and associated information in line with nationally recognised accessibility standards. As at the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2023, the Brigades website was assessed as 84% (73% as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022) compliant against these standards which ranked the Brigade 15<sup>th</sup> when compared to other Fire and Rescue Services.

### **5.17 Risk Management Arrangements**

The Authority's risk management arrangements are designed to effectively support service delivery via a balanced strategy of protection, prevention, and emergency response.

Through the established Risk Management Framework, the Service annually undertakes detailed horizon scanning, risk assessments and produces a suite of intelligence and performance analysis reports to ensure that strategic, tactical, and operational decision making are risk based, intelligence-led, impact assessed and evaluated.

Employees with specialist skills work in conjunction with operational colleagues using specialist systems, research intelligence, information, and data from a multitude of sources, to ensure a comprehensive and robust profile of the risks facing the Brigade and the Community is established. Link to the [Community Risk Profile](#) where these are summarised and underpinned by a suite of detailed risk assessments so that we have an excellent

understanding of who and what is at risk, when and where they are at risk from a variety of hazardous events.

As detailed in the 2022 outcome report from the HMICFRS inspection, it assessed the Brigade 'has a good understanding of local and community risk, which it explains well to the public in its community risk management plan (CRMP)'.

Link to the [Corporate Risk Register](#) where our Corporate Risks are identified and addressed through our that that articulates and quantifies each individual risk. Risks are quantified in the context of the likelihood and impact of the risks. Control measures are identified to address the risks and the CRR is reviewed throughout the year.

## 6. Performance

Cleveland Fire Brigade has an integrated performance assessment framework which is reported to the Audit and Governance Committee on a quarterly and annual basis, for analysis and scrutiny. A suite of corporate indicators are used by the Authority and enable stakeholders to scrutinise delivery of the CRMP 2022/26.

The performance reports are made publically available and are supplemented with summary performance leaflets for the Brigade and each district. Link to the [Brigade's website](#) which has a portal to provide users with up-to-date information on performance of key indicators at a Brigade wide, District and Ward level.

An Organisational Performance Report is produced and presented to Members of the Audit and Governance Committee and the CFA. This report is publically available on the Brigade's website and shared with our key stakeholders.

Details regarding our arrangements in respect of access to data and information can be found on the Brigade's website.

The Brigade aims to make it as easy as possible for the people we serve to let us know their views. Through listening and learning we improve the quality of the services we provide and encourage and recognise good practice by staff.

The Brigade wants to hear from people if they:

- Have a suggestion on how we might improve services.
- Would like to compliment us on a job well done.
- Feel we have fallen short of their expectations.
- Feel we have fallen short of the standards we set ourselves in dealing with complaints.

Link to webpage which provides [details on how to contact Cleveland Fire Brigade](#).

## 7. Assurance Summary

As Chair of Cleveland Fire Authority and Chief Fire Officer of Cleveland Fire Brigade, we are satisfied that, during 2022/23 our business has been conducted effectively in accordance with proper standards and law and that public money was properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently, and effectively.

We are satisfied that the Authority has done everything within its power to comply with the requirements of the 2018 Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

In line with the requirements of the National Framework, we can provide assurance to the people of the Authority's area on the operational, financial and governance arrangements for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.



Ian Hayton  
Chief Fire Officer



Cllr David Coupe  
Chair of Cleveland Fire Authority

Date:.....

## Bibliography and Quick Links to Key Documents

This section provides the list of the key documents and associates links to the documents that have been used in the production of the Annual Statement of Assurance for 2022/23:

Link to [National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services for England](#)

Link to [Guidance on Annual Statement of Assurance](#)

Link to [Corporate Plan](#)

Link to [Community Risk Management Plan 2022/26](#)

Link to [People Plan](#)

Link to [Resource Plan](#)

Link to [Service Plan 2022/23](#)

Link to [Efficiency and Productivity Plan](#)

Link to [Organisational Performance Report 2022/23](#)

Link to [Community and Risk Profile](#)

Link to [Changing Landscape](#)

Link to [Medium Term Financial Strategy 2022/26](#)

## Glossary

**AGS:** Annual Governance Statement

**ASA:** Annual Statement of Assurance

**CAF:** Cyber Assessment Framework

**CBRN(e):** Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosive

**CFA:** Cleveland Fire Authority

**CIPFA:** Chartered Institute of Public Finance Accountancy

**CRMP:** Community Risk Management Plan

**CRP:** Community Risk Profile

**CLRF:** Cleveland Local Resilience Forum

**CURV:** Cleveland Unit for the Reduction of Violence

**DCLG:** Department for Communities and Local Government

**DDFRS:** Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service

**DIM:** Detection, Identification and Monitoring

**EDI:** Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

**ER:** Emergency Response

**ERP:** Emergency Response Plans

**FOI:** Freedom of Information

**FRS:** Fire and Rescue Service

**HBC:** Hartlepool Borough Council

**HMICFRS:** His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services

**HO:** Home Office

**HSE:** Health and Safety Executive

**IA:** Internal Audit

**ISAG:** Independent Safety Advisory Groups

**MD:** Mass Decontamination

**MTFS:** Medium Term Financial Strategy



**NCSC:** National Cyber Security Centre

**NF:** National Framework

**NFCC:** National Fire Chiefs Council

**NOG:** National Operational Guidance

**NR:** National Resilience

**NRAT:** National Resilience Audit Team

**NYFRS:** North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

**SARS:** Subject Access Requests

**SORRG:** Strategic Operational Response and Resilience Group

**SSPP:** Site-Specific Pre Plans

**SSRI:** Site Specific Risk Information

**TSAB:** Tees-wide Adult Safeguarding Boards

**TSCB:** Tees-wide Children Safeguarding Boards

**WCPS:** Worst Case Planning Scenarios

## Contact Us

**Address:** Cleveland Fire Brigade, Training and Administration Hub, Queens Meadow Business Park, Hartlepool, TS25 5TH

**Phone:** 01429 874311

**Website:** [www.clevelandfire.gov.uk](http://www.clevelandfire.gov.uk)

**Email:** [info@clevelandfire.gov.uk](mailto:info@clevelandfire.gov.uk)

