

FAQs

How much does Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service have to save?

Northumberland Fire & Rescue Service has to save £500,000 in 2016/17 on top of the £1.5 million already cut over the last two years as a result of reductions in the Council's budget by Central Government. We have sought to make the required savings in a way that has the least impact on our communities.

How much does a fire appliance cost?

A fire appliance costs £360,000 over a 15 year life span.

How much will the new smaller fire engines cost?

A smaller fire appliance will cost 15 - 20 % less than a full size fire appliance, based on feedback from other UK fire and rescue services.

Will you be able to staff the new smaller fire appliances?

The introduction of smaller fire appliances and flexible staffing through phased response are two separate issues. Phased response can be introduced on current fire appliances, providing flexibility in how we respond to incidents. When retained (part time) firefighter availability is low, the smaller fire appliance may still be able to respond to low risk incidents such as small grass or rubbish fires and automatic false alarms. When four or more retained firefighters are available, they would be able to respond the full range of incidents just as they do now.

What incidents will the new smaller fire appliances go to?

The smaller fire appliances would be able to attend all incidents that they currently respond to if there were four or more suitably qualified personnel available. Where there are fewer firefighters available, the smaller fire appliance would be able to attend incidents such as small grass or rubbish fires. If staffed below four retained firefighters then they would also be able to attend life risk incidents as the second or third fire appliance.

Will this affect the safety of firefighters?

The safety of our firefighters and the public is our number one priority. Flexibility and mobilisation of response will be fully risk assessed, with firefighter and community safety at the heart of the assessment.

Why are you suggesting these specific proposals?

Proposals have been based on an external, objective review of our service combined with the professional judgement of experienced fire and rescue personnel. Firefighter availability, incident demand, risk profile and the ability to provide county-wide resilience have all been considered when developing the change proposals. We have to look at the overall resilience of the county, in particular taking into account the size of the county and the location of available resources.

Smaller fire engines have been proposed for Ponteland, Seahouses, Wooler and Alnwick second appliance to enhance our community response. Currently our fire engines can only respond to an incident when there are a minimum of four firefighters available. With around 60 percent of fires in Northumberland being small outdoor fires, fewer firefighters would be able to respond using the new smaller fire

appliances. They would also be able to respond to false alarm incidents, which account for 40 percent of all incidents. This provides a much more flexible fire and rescue capability.

Could you do more to recruit retained (part time) firefighters?

Whenever, due to retirement or resignation, staffing levels fall below that required to ensure effective fire cover can be maintained at any wholetime, day staffed or retained duty system stations, Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) will continue to recruit. NFRS will recruit pro-actively, taking into account retirement profiles, and reactively when retained firefighters leave to take up employment opportunities which fall outside the five minute response time. As part of this consultation, we are asking if you have any suggestions on how we can further improve our recruitment of retained firefighters.

NFRS continues to recruit for retained firefighters and holds training courses every year. However, we recognise that retained firefighter recruitment continues to be a challenge, which reflects the national picture. Both the significant number of residents commuting out of the county for employment, and the ageing population, contribute to the challenges we face. If phased response is introduced, NFRS will be able to continue to attend appropriately risk assessed incidents when less firefighters are available.

Will retained firefighters be made redundant?

Should these proposals be approved, there may be firefighter redundancies; however we will do our best to support those affected through our retained to wholetime recruitment process and Northumberland County Council re-deployment opportunities.

How many retained firefighters firefighters may go?

Should these proposals be approved, there is the potential for around 30 retained firefighter posts to go.

How much will it cost to make the retained firefighters redundant?

Should these proposals be approved, we will look at a number of ways to support our retained firefighters at risk of redundancy. These *include*:

- Retained to wholetime recruitment process where vacancies exist: providing those retained firefighters at risk with the opportunity to be selected for a wholetime position via a selection process and where vacancies allow;
- The option for retained firefighters to transfer to another retained community fire station where vacancies exist; and
- Northumberland County Council re-deployment opportunities

The cost of redundancy will vary between individuals, taking into account issues such as length of service.

Are you looking at merging with another fire and rescue service?

We have a responsibility to consider all options. However, the £500,000 cuts are required from April 2016/17 and the proposed changes will allow us to meet our responsibilities to deliver a balanced budget.

Could you do more to reduce management and back office staff?

Management posts have been cut at every level, including middle and senior management, with cuts ranging from 20 to 75 percent of department teams. Changes proposed as part of this consultation process include a further consideration of management structures.

Will lives be put at risk?

We can never fully eradicate risk, however we will continue to use prevention, protection and response activities to minimise risk in our communities, just as we do now.

How will you cope with a major incident?

In carrying out the review which has led to these proposals, we have considered the following areas;

- Assessment of incident risk across the county and in local station areas,
- Assessment of the proposals against our service response standards.
- Strategic location of our resources and stations.
- Incidents most likely to result in injury or loss of life.
- Assessment of lifestyle data from the index of multiple deprivation.
- Use of national risk profiling (Fire Service Emergency Cover) to assess proposed changes
- Two sampling periods were used for the purpose of analysis: a five year sample was utilised to establish trends and a two year sample was applied for performance analysis and demand profile.

The assessment of risk has taken into consideration resilience at times when major incidents occur. Resources will continue to be used flexibly to support spate conditions (where several incidents are happening at the same time).

How would you cope with a major flood?

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- Assessment of the proposals against our Service Response Standards.
- Strategic location of our resources and stations.
- Incidents most likely to result in injury or loss of life.
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- Use of national risk modelling (Fire Service Emergency Cover) to assess risk
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Could you have more whole-time firefighters instead?

Retained firefighters provide cover to over 90 percent of the UK. Here in Northumberland they make up over 62 percent of our operational workforce (excluding officers) and operate almost three quarters of our fire appliances. They provide a very cost effective service. In comparison, wholetime firefighters are expensive, and are therefore utilised in Northumberland in areas experiencing the highest number of incidents.

What are you going to do with the 4 by 4 vehicles?

There will be no change to these vehicles.

How will these proposals impact on the special appliances?

There will be no impact on special appliances.

Will you be moving to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC)/Mayor if devolution goes ahead?

Northumberland Fire Authority is closely monitoring developments regarding PCCs and devolution.

Northumberland is a very large county; will the fire service be stretched too thinly with these proposals?

The proposals have been based on an external, objective review of our service combined with the professional judgement of experienced fire and rescue personnel. Firefighter availability, incident demand, risk profile and the ability to provide county-wide resilience have all been considered when developing the change proposals. We will continue to dynamically mobilise resources to incidents, and to ensure county-wide resilience. In some areas, the introduction of phased response would actually allow our firefighters to respond to a greater number of incidents locally.

What if Hexham and Haltwhistle firefighters are busy with flooding?

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service has developed a multi-layered approach to responding to flooding and providing swift water rescue. Personnel are water rescue trained to a variety of levels.

Level 1 All fire and rescue responders are trained in water awareness

Level 2 52 firefighters at Pegswood Community Fire Station and ten firefighters at Rothbury Community Fire Station are fully trained and equipped as Water Rescue First Responders. They are able to carry out wading rescues in still and flowing water.

Level 3 Three specialist Swift Water Rescue Teams have been created and strategically placed throughout the county - one in the north (Berwick), one in the west (Hexham) and one in the south (Pegswood). These teams have specialist training and equipment to enable them to respond to emergencies within swift water, mud and ice. Each team has a Mercedes Sprinter van which is equipped with inflatable rescue boats with outboard motors, rescue lines and rescue sleds.

All our resources are dynamically mobilised to incidents, and to provide county-wide resilience. This includes moving resources to strategic locations in order to provide emergency response to flooding incidents. We can also call on our neighbouring fire and rescue services and others across the country.

Will you listen to people's views?

We are committed to listen to the views of our communities and would encourage you to respond to our consultation.

The press release said there were 96 incidents in Haydon Bridge over the last five years. The retained fire appliance at Haydon Bridge attended 65 of these incidents, the others dealt with by crews from the surrounding stations. However, it has been claimed that over that period, Haydon Bridge assisted Haltwhistle 189 times, and Allendale 47 times, for chimney fires, road traffic collisions, house fires, and alarm calls at residential homes. Is this correct?

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service statistics show that the retained crew at Haydon Bridge were called out to surrounding station areas a total of 189 times over the last five years, this included the 4 x 4 vehicle.

Is it the case that Haydon Bridge is the second pump into Haltwhistle, Allendale (at night), and the third pump into Hexham (including Egger), behind Hexham's two pumps.

The crew at Haydon Bridge are used as global cover (i.e. county-wide) as all the fire stations and resources within Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service are. The Service continues to dynamically mobilise and move appliances strategically throughout peak incident times to ensure county-wide cover.

It has been said that Haydon Bridge is a key strategic location for the wider district, providing cover the whole of West Tynedale, if crews elsewhere are immobilised.

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It has been suggested that savings could be made in other ways, such as removing the smaller 'pick up' type vehicles which are based at stations, alongside fire engines.

The proposals have been put forward for consultation based on detailed analysis of incidents and risk by senior firefighters. As part of the consultation process we would welcome other suggestions on how we can make the necessary savings. Although it is important to note that 4 x 4 vehicles are financed through capital budgets (i.e. one-off spend e.g. for buildings and equipment). The £500,000 savings needed for 2016/17 has to come from revenue budgets (i.e. year on year spending such as for repairs, maintenance and staffing).

Locally, Haydon Bridge has the A69 trunk road, a railway line, a river which is prone to flooding, the busy B6318 Military Road, and two schools.

Duty managers look at global resources to move fire appliances and firefighters as appropriate. This may be to support large scale incidents such as flooding, or to

ensure fire cover at strategic locations. We also have robust mutual arrangements with neighbouring fire and rescue services and can call on national resources where necessary.

It has been suggested that it would be better to close either Allendale or Haltwhistle stations, with Haydon Bridge located in an accessible location to both.

The proposals have been put forward for consultation based on detailed analysis of incidents and risk by senior fire officers. However, as part of the consultation process, we would welcome other suggestions on how we can make the necessary savings.

Would Sure Start at Haydon Bridge Community Fire Station be relocated in the area? Would help be provided for the other groups to find a new home?

We continue to work with our partner, Sure Start, to find a suitable way forward.

Who owns the site on which Haydon Bridge Community Fire Station is situated?

Haydon Bridge Community Fire Station site is freehold and owned by Northumberland County Council.

Will additional home fire safety checks be provided should the proposals go ahead?

32.6 percent of homes in Haydon Bridge area have received a home fire safety check from Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service since 2007. We will further analyse the risk profile for Haydon Bridge area to prioritise Home Fire Safety Checks should the proposed closure of Haydon Bridge Community Fire Station be approved.

How do you know it is a false alarm or small fire until you get there?

Calls received by Fire Control are categorised according to strict criteria, and therefore the Service will have an understanding of the type of incident being reported before they deploy resources.

When firefighters respond to an incident in a smaller fire appliance, will they feel a moral compulsion to do more than they should?

The safety of our firefighters and public are our number one priority. Smaller fire engines will only be deployed to smaller incidents such as grass or rubbish fires when there is less than a crew of four, or to support another fully crewed fire appliance already in at an incident.

Do the smaller fire appliances only go to small fires?

No, where there is a minimum of four firefighters, the smaller fire appliance will attend everything that the bigger fire appliance attends. It is only when the number of firefighters available is less than four that the smaller fire appliance will attend lower risk incidents such as small grass or rubbish fires.

Are there more cuts to come?

There are further cuts expected of Local Government. We don't yet know how this will impact on Northumberland Fire & Rescue Service.

Will the fire service stop cutting people out of cars?

No, the fire and rescue service will continue to attend road traffic collisions, and where necessary will cut people out of their car.

Could you sell vacant fire stations to off-set the requirement for £500,000 of cuts?

Selling vacant fire stations would raise a one-off capital sum. The £500,000 savings requirement is year on year revenue reduction. Capital monies cannot be used to off-set revenue saving requirements.

Cramlington is a growing town, should we be growing our fire service to match?

We know that despite the cuts Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service has already made, the county continues to see a reduction in incidents. In the last 10 years, the total number of incidents has reduced by 42 percent, accidental house fires by 33 percent, and injuries from accidental house fires by 52 percent. In addition, fires in non-domestic properties have been reduced by 67 percent. Our review also gives us confidence that incidents happen in more-or-less the same geographical area year on year.

Is there a legal responsibility to have a fire service that reflects the size of the population?

No, this requirement is no longer in place. Fire authorities have a responsibility to assess risk, and to provide prevention, protection and emergency response activity to mitigate that risk.

What is more important; saving lives or spending money on a new building?

Money for new buildings comes from a capital budget (one off purchases for things like buildings or equipment), whereas the cuts Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service are expected to make are to the revenue budget.

Can you guarantee two full time fire appliances will remain at West Hartford Community Fire Station at all times?

The two full time fire appliances form part of a whole county resource. Each day duty managers will assess resource and some fire appliances may be moved to ensure the county has resources at strategic locations. This will not change should the proposed changes be implemented.

If you used seven fire appliances at a medium size fire, what would happen at a large incident?

Resources would be moved around the county to ensure sufficient fire appliances were attending the incident, and we could provide fire cover at strategic locations. We also have mutual arrangements in place with our neighbouring fire and rescue services, and nationally, to ensure we receive the relevant support when we require it.

Could you reduce one wholetime (full time) fire appliance at either Pegswood or West Hartford Community Fire Station to day staffing to save money?

Wholetime fire appliances provide resilience across Northumberland. Reducing a wholetime fire appliance at this time would significantly impact on global resilience.