



Cheshire
Fire Authority

Community Risk Management Plan

2024-2028

Draft for consultation
Autumn 2023

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“

...we are pleased to be able to present a package of proposals which address our challenges and deliver more risk-reducing prevention and protection activity, and better response, for no additional cost.

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If you require this or any other document in a different format, please contact us by emailing consultation@cheshirefire.gov.uk, calling **01606 868700** or contacting us via our social media channels.

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Foreword



Councillor Stef Nelson
Chair, Cheshire Fire Authority

Fire and rescue authorities, the democratically accountable bodies that provide local fire and rescue services, must produce a Community Risk Management Plan, or CRMP.

In Cheshire we face a variety of different risks, from an ageing population to our extensive transport networks and industrial sites, to name but a few. We are also confronted with new risks, such as the growth of electric vehicles and battery technologies and impacts of climate change. Throughout this draft CRMP, we will explain our proposals to continue addressing existing risks and deal with new ones, so we can move towards our vision of “a Cheshire where there are no deaths, injuries or damage from fires and other emergencies.”



Alex Waller
Chief Fire Officer
and Chief Executive,
Cheshire Fire and
Rescue Service

To mitigate risks and prevent fires and other emergencies, we carry out a range of fire prevention and protection activity, focusing on the people in local communities who are most at risk.

Of course, through our fire stations, fire engines and dedicated firefighters we also respond to emergencies, providing a high quality, timely, safe and effective response. Maintaining this response, or ‘fire cover’, requires a range of different staffing models or ‘duty systems’. These are explained in more detail on page 10. The changing nature of society means it is becoming more difficult for us to operate particular duty systems effectively at certain times of the day. Therefore, we have carefully reviewed the way we provide fire cover, to improve our response capacity and capability during our busiest periods. These proposals are outlined in detail on pages 28 to 43.

We know that many people are facing significant financial pressures and the country is facing considerable financial uncertainty. So, we are pleased to be able to present a package of proposals which address our challenges and delivers more risk-reducing prevention and protection activity, and better response, for no additional cost.

Our future success depends primarily on our people and we will continue to support them to thrive and work hard to create a diverse and inclusive workplace, founded on our values and principles of dignity, respect and fairness.

Our proposals very much reflect the future direction of the fire and rescue service nationally. The Home Office, His Majesty’s Inspectorate for Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Local Government Association all expect us to deliver a modern, effective, efficient and inclusive service to the public. These expectations are set out in numerous inspection reports, Fit for the Future and in the white paper on reforming the fire and rescue sector.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service is YOUR fire and rescue service. Therefore, between now and the end of the year we want to hear your views on our proposals. Further details on our public, staff and stakeholder consultation programme and the ways in which you can take part, are detailed at the end of this draft CRMP.

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What is a CRMP?



Under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, a CRMP should identify risks facing the community and describe how a fire and rescue authority will address those risks, and prevent and respond to fires and other emergencies. In short, it serves as our organisational plan for the future. A CRMP should have a lifespan of at least three years and be produced in consultation with the public, fire and rescue staff, local partners and representative bodies.



Details of our consultation are set out the end of this document, which once approved will cover the four years between 2024 and 2028. We will produce annual action plans during this period to show the progress we are making.



The first sections of this draft CRMP provide an overview of Cheshire and explain the way our fire and rescue service is organised to deliver prevention, protection and response activities.

Between pages 12 and 27 we describe the demands on our Service, and outline the key fire and rescue risks facing Cheshire and how we propose to address them over the next four years.



Between pages 28 and 43 we explain in more detail the proposals to change and improve the way we respond to emergencies, following a comprehensive review of our fire cover. Further information is available on our website.



The final sections outline further plans to improve other important aspects of our organisation and provide an overview of our funding arrangements. A summary of our proposals and the way in which you can get involved in the consultation is then provided from page 51.

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The county of Cheshire

Cheshire covers some 905 square miles and has a population of almost 1.1 million people. The county is largely rural, with urban populations and major industry concentrated mostly in its north west. Major conurbations include the city of Chester and the towns of Warrington, Crewe, Macclesfield, Ellesmere Port, Runcorn and Widnes.

- [Cheshire West and Chester](#) as a unitary authority includes the historic city of Chester, the industrial towns of Ellesmere Port and Winsford, and market towns and villages. It is largely rural, with the main centres of population in the north and west of the borough. The area benefits from strong tourism and retail sectors, alongside established agricultural, automotive and manufacturing industries. There are nationally important petrochemical and nuclear fuel industries in the north of the authority area and a historic link to salt mining. Cheshire West and Cheshire has pockets of affluence alongside communities that are relatively disadvantaged.



- [Cheshire East](#) is a large unitary authority containing the principal towns of Crewe and Macclesfield, as well as market towns and the commuter belt south of Manchester. It is home to internationally renowned vehicle manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies, while rail, agriculture and financial services are also key industries. It is an area of contrasting features, combining urban centres with rural villages and containing areas of significant affluence but also pockets of social deprivation. The borough is served by the M6 motorway, a network of urban and rural 'A' roads and the west coast rail line, while Manchester Airport lies on its northern border. It is home to several heritage buildings and the north east of the authority area sits at the gateway to the Peak District National Park.





- [Halton](#) incorporates the industrial towns of Runcorn and Widnes, connected by two major bridges across the River Mersey. The area is home to various chemical and science industries, as well as distribution and logistics companies. Aside from the Mersey crossings, key infrastructure includes docks and ports and a gas-fired power station at Rocksavage, south of Runcorn. The Manchester Ship Canal also runs across the borough, while Liverpool John Lennon International Airport lies just over the border in Merseyside. Some of Halton's communities are among the most disadvantaged in the country.



Photo courtesy of Merseylink

- [Warrington](#) is located in between Liverpool and Manchester and is the largest conurbation in Cheshire. Warrington is traversed by the River Mersey, Manchester Ship Canal, three motorways and the west coast rail line. Due to its location it has developed into an important transport and logistics hub. It also maintains strong retail, energy and night-time economies. There are several minority ethnic communities that call the borough home, making it one of the most diverse areas of Cheshire. Some areas, mostly in the centre of the town, fall within the 20% most deprived in the country, while other areas on the edge of the borough are within the 30% most affluent.



Cheshire is bordered by the Liverpool City Region and Greater Manchester in the north, Derbyshire and Staffordshire to the east, Shropshire to the south and North Wales lies to the west of the county.



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Your Fire and Rescue Service

Overview

Cheshire Fire Authority comprises 23 elected councillors or 'members' appointed by Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council, Halton Borough Council and Warrington Borough Council. The Authority oversees the fire and rescue service on behalf of the communities of Cheshire. You can find more information about the Authority and its members on our [website](#).

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service is led by a Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive and a Service Leadership Team. This comprises senior officers who are responsible for departments looking after our Service's key operational and corporate functions.

Service Delivery

This looks after our firefighters, fire engines and 28 fire stations, ensuring they respond 24/7 to emergencies. Details of how we provide this cover is set out on pages 10 to 11.

Operational Policy and Assurance

The department provides operational and incident command training to our firefighters from our state of the art training centre at Sadler Road, Winsford. It also develops operational policies, plans and procedures, manages and maintains our vehicles, tests and develops new equipment, and oversees health, safety and wellbeing. The department also works closely with North West Fire Control in Warrington, our 999 control room shared with Cumbria, Greater Manchester and Lancashire fire and rescue services.

Prevention

The department oversees much of our community work. This includes delivering fire safety and health and wellbeing advice to households, road and water safety education, reducing deliberate fires, engaging with schools and young people and managing our volunteers. The department also runs Safety Central, our interactive life skills education centre at Lymm.



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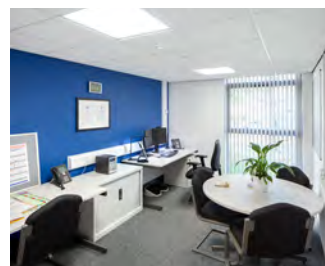
Protection

This department ensures non-residential premises meet their obligations around fire safety. It engages with businesses and where necessary enforces compliance with legislation. Protection officers also work with local authorities and others regarding building regulations and the highest risk premises including industrial facilities, heritage sites and care settings.



Service Improvement

The department monitors our performance, and leads our corporate planning and our work with HMICFRS. The team also co-ordinates our work to modernise our facilities and manages our relationship with the joint corporate services we share with Cheshire Constabulary (see below).



Communications and Engagement

The department leads all aspects of internal and external communications including media relations, our website and social media and our graphic design function. The team also coordinates consultation and engagement with staff and the community, our programme of events and our work to promote equality, diversity and inclusion.



Finance

Our finance team ensures we operate under sound financial principles, within legislation, and achieves a balanced budget each year by supporting departments with their financial management and planning.



Governance

This small team looks after our corporate planning, the Fire Authority, executive support and information management.



People and Organisational Development

The department provides human resources services including payroll and pensions, recruitment, HR business partnership and the provision of leadership and development training.

Joint Corporate Services

Information Technology (IT), Facilities and Estates, Procurement and Contracts, Legal Services and Stores functions are shared with Cheshire Constabulary through an arrangement called Blue Light Collaboration.



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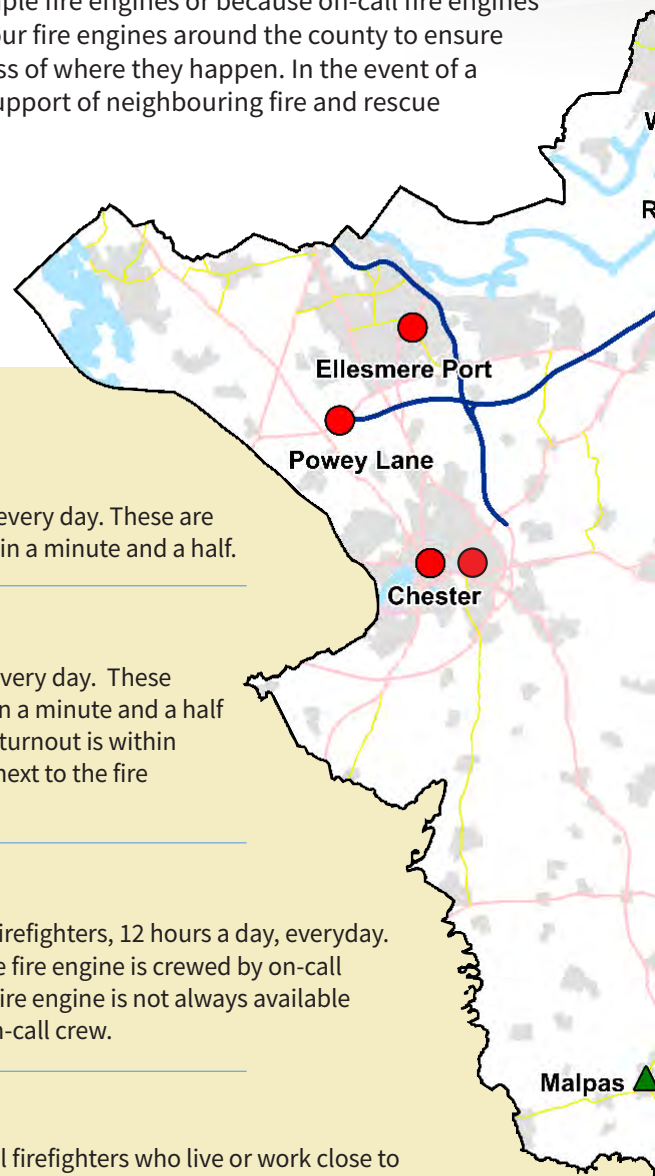
Your Fire and Rescue Service

Our firefighters respond to fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies from 28 fire stations across Cheshire. These are shown on this map.

Some fire stations have one fire engine and some have two. Other stations have specialist vehicles like aerial ladder platforms, rapid response rescue units (RRRUs) or boats, depending on the risks in their areas.

In total we have 35 fire engines, but not all of these are available at the same time. This can be because of crews undertaking training, large incidents that require multiple fire engines or because on-call fire engines have insufficient crew. For that reason, we constantly move our fire engines around the county to ensure that we can get to most incidents within 10 minutes regardless of where they happen. In the event of a significant or long-running incident we can also call on the support of neighbouring fire and rescue services if we need to.

We have four duty systems so we can crew our fire engines based on local risks and needs. We tend to use full-time firefighters when it is busy and part-time firefighters when it is quieter with fewer incidents.



● **Wholetime fire engine**

Eleven wholetime fire engines, available 24 hours a day, every day. These are crewed by full-time firefighters and crew turnout* is within a minute and a half.

■ **Day crewing fire engine**

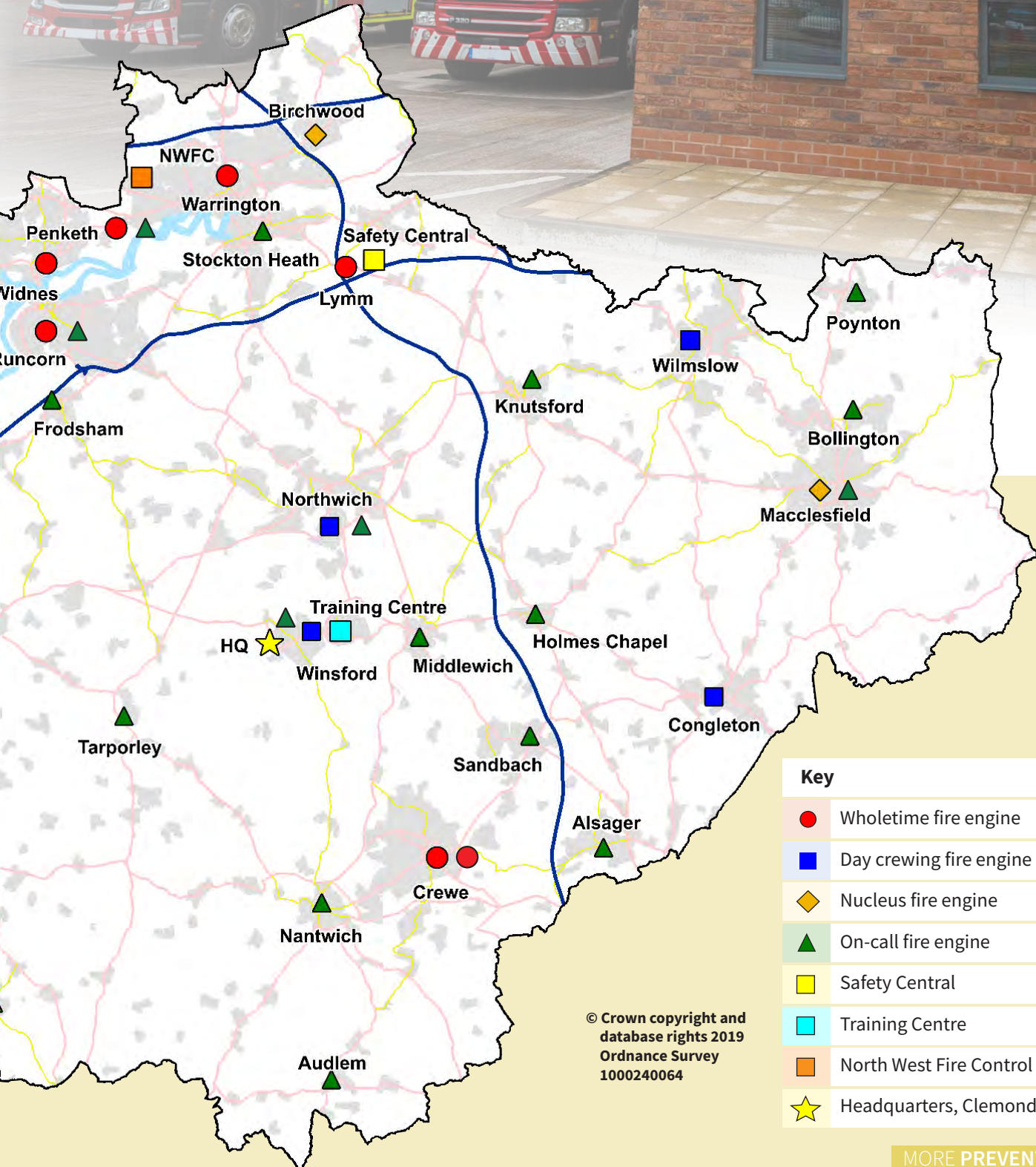
Four day crewing fire engines, available 24 hours a day, every day. These are crewed by full-time firefighters. Crew turnout is within a minute and a half during weekday daytimes. At nights and weekends crew turnout is within five minutes. The full-time firefighters live in our houses next to the fire station so they can turnout within five minutes.

◆ **Nucleus fire engine**

Two nucleus fire engines. These are crewed by full-time firefighters, 12 hours a day, everyday. Crew turnout is within a minute and a half. Overnight the fire engine is crewed by on-call firefighters and crew turnout is within five minutes. The fire engine is not always available overnight and depends on the availability of sufficient on-call crew.

▲ **On-call fire engine**

Eighteen on-call fire engines. These are crewed by on-call firefighters who live or work close to the fire station. Crew turnout is within five minutes. The fire engine is not always available and depends on the availability of sufficient on-call crew.



Key	
●	Wholetime fire engine
■	Day crewing fire engine
◆	Nucleus fire engine
▲	On-call fire engine
■	Safety Central
■	Training Centre
■	North West Fire Control
★	Headquarters, Clemonds Hey

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Our operational demands


Current Operational Demand

*based on average yearly demand between 2020/21 and 2023/24

	8,274	Incidents attended
	2,432	Fires
	3,198	False alarms
	2,031	Other special service incidents
	372	Road traffic collisions
	318	Accidental dwelling fires
	917	Deliberate fires
	139	Fires in non domestic premises
	65	Injuries in accidental dwelling fires
	19	of these attended hospital

Predicted Annual Future Operational Demand

*based on average demand between 2024/25 and 2027/28

	8,289	Incidents likely to be attended
	2,126	Fires
	2,989	False alarms
	2,273	Other special service incidents
	353	Road traffic collisions
	296	Accidental dwelling fires
	809	Deliberate fires
	124	Fires in non domestic premises
	50	Injuries in accidental dwelling fires
	13	of these who may attend hospital

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How we assess and mitigate risk and demand

We use our Community Risk Management (CRM) model to assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect our communities. We then put in place arrangements to mitigate these risks, by refining or changing the way we do things, investing in equipment or facilities, or developing our partnerships.

The first step in the CRM process is to look at information from a wide range of sources. This includes data about incidents, including who they affect, when and where they happen and how long it takes us to reach them. Risks in specific buildings or locations are considered, as well as the wider social needs of our local areas. We also consult with staff, partners and our communities.

After this information has been collated and analysed using sophisticated computer software, officers carefully examine the evidence and consider risks to people, places and firefighters before deciding on what activities need to be done to reduce or mitigate risks.

These activities are delivered through our prevention, protection and response teams against targets and standards agreed with members. Performance is regularly monitored and published.

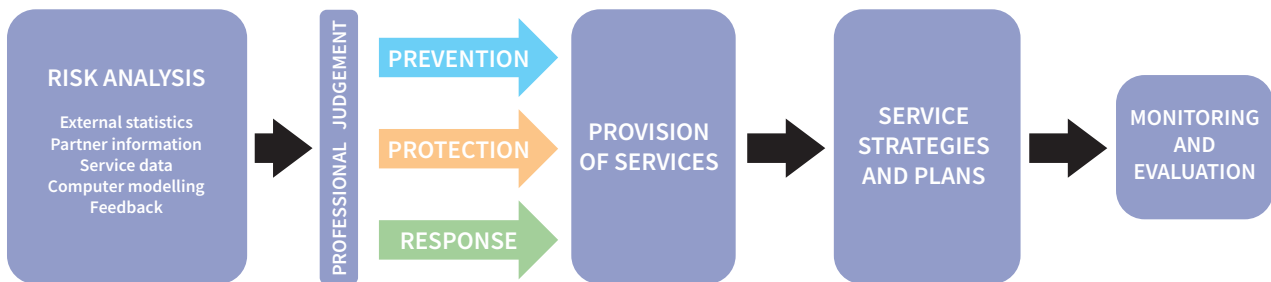
Effective response to some of the risks means working in partnership with other emergency services, local authorities, health providers and partner agencies. These partners are brought together through the [Cheshire Resilience Forum](#) (CRF) to prepare and plan for a range of emergencies. We regularly test these plans in joint training exercises.

Local resilience forums such as the CRF have to produce a Community Risk Register (CRR), which highlights potential risks facing the area. The risks outlined in this draft CRMP include some of those identified in the CRR and the government’s updated National Risk Register, as well as some more specific fire and rescue risks.

We undertake to analyse risks in Cheshire using many data sources and use our professional judgement

To determine the optimum provision of services to address risk across Cheshire, according to our resources available

This provision is outlined in the Service’s plans, such as the CRMP. Changes to our service provision will also be informed by feedback from public consultation



We monitor and evaluate our performance to inform any changes we may need to make to address and mitigate risks in the community

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Developing our **draft CRMP**

To help shape this draft CRMP, we have undertaken a comprehensive review of fire cover across Cheshire. We do this every few years to ensure the Authority continues to provide its emergency response in the most effective and efficient way. The review of fire cover is part of our CRM process, explained on the previous page.

In early summer 2023, members agreed some guiding principles for the way we should review fire cover and develop proposals for the future. These are set out below.

- Giving our colleagues and communities a genuine say in the development of our Service.
- Continuing to respond to incidents as quickly as we do now and where possible, even quicker in the future.
- Increasing the availability of fire engines, especially during daytime hours.
- Enabling our staff to be more productive and effective, keeping our communities safe.
- Strengthening our prevention and protection programmes to meet the needs of those most at risk.
- Providing high quality, sustainable workplaces for our colleagues by continuing to modernise our buildings and facilities.
- Continuing to promote our Service's safe, supportive and inclusive workplace culture.

This draft CRMP has also been shaped by the views of the public, staff and partners. We have already undertaken pre-consultation to seek feedback on our guiding principles, explore options for the future in more detail, understand impacts on minority groups and ask for views on new and emerging risks. A summary of feedback from the pre-consultation can be found on our website.

Throughout the pre-consultation, and to inform our formal consultation, we have sought guidance from the Consultation Institute. They are independent experts in consultation and engagement, who are helping us talk and listen to our communities in line with best practice.



The
Consultation
Institute

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Risks Prevention

Changing population



Fire and other accidents are more likely to affect the oldest and youngest people in our communities. Cheshire's population is getting older, meaning we could see more incidents unless we invest in our prevention work. At the same time, younger people continue to need our support to stay safe.

What are the risks?

National and local data consistently shows that the older you get, the more likely you are to suffer a serious injury or die if you have a fire in your home. This risk increases even more if you live alone or are over 65.

Older people are also more likely to live with conditions like dementia, have poor mobility or experience health problems which put them at risk of having a fire or accident.

We are becoming an older county, with our average age increasing faster than the national average. This increase is more pronounced in Cheshire East, and Cheshire West and Chester.

There are other risk factors that impact people under the age of 65 that put them at higher risk of injury or death, such as lifestyle and living conditions.

At the other end of the age spectrum, we are seeing an increase in the number of young people living with mental health issues. Young people are often responsible for deliberately setting fires, wasting firefighters' time and putting property and lives at risk. We are called to almost 1,000 incidents like this every year.

What do we currently do?

- Our prevention team and firefighters visit more than 20,000 households at most risk of fire each year to fit smoke alarms, offer safety advice and provide health information. These are known as 'Safe and Well' visits.
- Where we find people who are most at risk of fire and other harm, we work closely with our partners in health and social care to keep them safe.



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Risks Prevention



- Our Fire Cadet scheme, run at many of our fire stations, gives young people aged 12-17 a worthwhile pastime outside school and builds their confidence and skills.
- We engage children and young people at risk of being excluded from school through our RESPECT programme, which aims to instil positive behaviours and good citizenship.
- We deliver the Prince's Trust Team Programme on behalf of local colleges to help 16-25 year olds into education, training or employment.
- Our firefighters and prevention teams visit every primary school in Cheshire to deliver fire safety education, and thousands of children visit Safety Central each year to learn how to avoid a wide range of accidents.
- We deliver targeted advice and support on key safety themes throughout the year in collaboration with the NFCC.

What do we plan to do?

- Implement the recommendations from a review of our Prevention Department in 2023, ensuring all our community safety programmes continue to have the greatest possible impact in reducing harm, injuries and deaths.
- Continue to improve the way we target our Safe and Well visits, ensuring we see the people who are most at risk of fire.
- Gradually increase the number of Safe and Visits we carry out year on year during the lifespan of this CRMP, so that as many people as possible benefit from this life-saving scheme.
- Improve the way we work with our partners in health, social care, housing and the police so that people are safeguarded and get the support they need.
- Train our prevention teams and firefighters in motivational interviewing techniques, which should help to increase the number of homes we get into and deliver safety messages effectively.
- Include safety information about new and emerging technologies, such as lithium-ion batteries and battery energy storage systems (BESS), in our Safe and Well visits.



Road and water safety



We attend more road traffic collisions than fires in the home and more people are killed or seriously injured each year on the roads than in fires. In 2022, almost twice as many people drowned in the UK than died in fires.

What are the risks?

Cheshire is served by an extensive network of roads and waterways. Alongside four busy motorways (M6, M62, M53 and M56), there are a series of trunk 'A' roads and smaller roads in urban and rural areas.

The rivers Mersey, Dee, Weaver and Bollin, a canal network and the Manchester Ship Canal run through areas of population. There are also many lakes and meres in more rural areas. These attract swimmers and bathers, particularly in warmer weather.

What are we currently doing?

- We have a dedicated Road Safety Team that runs a range of education programmes aimed at young people, drivers, cyclists and motorcyclists, and supports fire crews to engage with their communities on all aspects of road safety.
- We are one of the only fire and rescue services in the country to be commissioned by a local authority to deliver road safety education. This sees us deliver sessions to thousands of children and young people in Cheshire East each year.
- We are an active partner in the Cheshire Road Safety Group, alongside Cheshire Constabulary and the four local authorities, which is currently developing a strategic plan to direct the work of all partners.
- We support campaigns led by the NFCC to promote staying safe in and around water and established the North West Water Safety Group.
- We are supporting fire stations to deliver proactive water safety activities in their areas.

What do we plan to do?

- Implement the new Road Safety Strategic Plan with our partners and increase the number of road safety events we deliver.
- Expand our water safety programme to reduce the occurrence of accidental drowning.



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Risks Protection

Non-domestic premises



A fire in any type of business premises can have a devastating impact on lives and livelihoods. We have a duty to help those responsible for these premises to understand and comply with fire safety laws or potentially face criminal action.



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What are the risks?

Cheshire's rich industrial and social heritage, and its unique geographical position, means it has vibrant and diverse economy. Across our county there are small, medium and large commercial premises used for retail, hospitality, healthcare, financial services, petrochemicals and nuclear processing, manufacturing, life science, agriculture and logistics.

Fire safety laws also apply to shared spaces, such as hallways and stairwells, in blocks of flats or housing complexes. The Grenfell Tower tragedy of 2017 and, more locally, the fire at the Beechmere retirement complex in Crewe in 2019, underline the importance of having strong relationships with housing providers.

What are we currently doing?

- When inspecting non-domestic premises, we prioritise those where a fire is more likely or would pose the greatest danger to life. This is called our Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) and it is carried out by highly-qualified staff, trained to enforce the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (2005).
- Firefighters are trained to carry out inspections in lower-risk premises, providing advice and identifying any areas of concern.
- We have a Business Safety Team that engages people responsible for premises, to provide advice, guidance and support around fire protection.
- We have campaigned tirelessly for sprinkler systems to be designed into new buildings or fitted in existing ones. This includes part-funding sprinklers in most of Cheshire's high rise blocks of flats.

What do we plan to do?

- Review our Protection Department to ensure it remains efficient and effective.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of our RBIP to ensure we target inspection activity at the right premises.
- Provide accredited training for operational managers, to improve their knowledge and understanding when inspecting premises.
- Continue to campaign for the installation of sprinklers in new and existing commercial premises.
- Work in collaboration with the NFCC to become a statutory consultee where BESS facilities are to be developed. This will include the appointment of a specialist officer in Protection.



Heritage



A fire in a heritage building not only poses a risk to occupiers, staff and visitors, but also threatens irreplaceable and priceless architecture and artifacts.

What are the risks?

The history of Britain is reflected in the wide range of historic buildings and sites across Cheshire. From the remains of a Roman fortress, medieval cathedral and the unique Victorian Rows in Chester, to Tudor, Jacobean and Edwardian country houses elsewhere, the county's heritage is a significant part of the local economy.

These sites were not built to modern standards, so fire safety legislation must be applied carefully and sensitively. Consideration must also be given to how a fire might be tackled safely in buildings where it might spread differently.

What are we currently doing?

- We employ a dedicated heritage officer to work with those responsible for heritage sites to promote and improve fire safety.
- We undertake fire safety audits at heritage sites and work with owners and occupiers to ensure they comply with fire safety regulations.
- We hold heritage impact days in areas with significant numbers of historic buildings.
- We develop operational plans and conduct operational training exercises specific to heritage sites, which include the salvage and recovery of historic items such as artwork.

What do we plan to do?

- Continue to develop our work with local partners and those responsible for heritage buildings to keep these premises safe from fire.



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Risks Protection

Modern methods of construction



If built outside recognised standards, or subsequently modified after construction, timber framed buildings can suffer rapid and major failings of their protection measures in the event of a fire. This can present significant risk to occupants of the building as well as to firefighters.

What is the risk?

The construction of properties using timber frames rather than brick, block and steel is increasingly being seen as a preferred method by developers due to the potential savings in time, materials and labour. It is also regarded as a more sustainable method of construction.

What are we currently doing?

- Our inspection programme is focused on buildings where a fire would pose greatest risk to life. We pay particular attention to care homes, sheltered accommodation and extra care villages with timber framed construction.
- We advise all timber framed property owners to review their fire safety policies and procedures regularly.
- We advise residents to raise concerns about fire safety procedures with property owners.
- We recommend the fitting of sprinklers in domestic and commercial buildings.
- We are reviewing and learning from the outcomes of the Hackitt Review and Grenfell Tower Inquiry.

What do we plan to do?

- Ensure our protection activities align with the outcomes of the Building Safety Review and recent changes to the Building Safety Act 2022.
- Continue to campaign for the installation of sprinklers, especially in timber framed buildings.

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Risks Response

Climate change



Climate change is already causing severe weather events that require a fire and rescue response. Several services reported their busiest day since World War II during the record-breaking heatwave of 2022. The number of people living in areas at significant risk of flooding in the UK could double by the 2050s.

What are the risks?

Cheshire's blend of rural landscape and urban conurbation means that the principal risks to life and property in Cheshire relate to flooding and wildfires.

Parts of the county around the River Mersey in Warrington, River Dee in Chester and River Weaver in Northwich are at a higher risk of flooding. However, any built-up area may be at risk of surface flooding in the event of heavy rainfall.

Wildfires can happen in any open space, but firefighting in the forests of Delamere and Macclesfield, on the high ridges of the sandstone trail or the hills of Cheshire East would be particularly challenging.

What did our pre-consultation tell us?

Feedback received from our pre-consultation highlighted climate change as a key concern, particularly the impact of prolonged or extreme weather events.

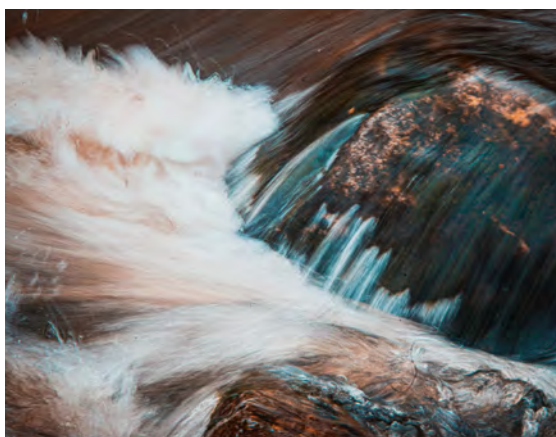
What are we currently doing?

- All fire engines carry pumps of differing sizes which enables us to respond effectively to life-risk flooding events. Our high volume water pump provides firefighters with the capability to pump large amounts of flood water during these climate related emergencies.
- All our firefighters are trained to rescue people from flood water with support provided by our two rescue boats. We have reviewed our water capability and invested in additional training and kit to enable us to respond more effectively when rescuing people from water.



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Risks **Response**



- We are a member of the Fire Operations Group, which brings together six fire and rescue services, the Peak District National Park, National Trust, water companies, landowners and gamekeepers to draw up fire plans, train and raise awareness of ways to prevent moorland fires.
- We have invested in an off-road all-terrain vehicle, specialist equipment and protective kit to enable firefighters to respond to wildfires more effectively. This project was led by firefighters themselves.

What do we plan to do?

- Our emergency response proposals are outlined later in this draft CRMP. If implemented, these would help us provide a more resilient response in times of high demand, such as extreme weather events. We will continue to explore other options to scale up resources during peak demands
- We will continue to review our flood and water response provision across Cheshire to ensure that it meets emerging needs.
- We will support national and local campaigns to raise awareness of staying safe outdoors and during periods of extreme weather.



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Emerging technologies



The number of fires in the caused by exploding lithium-ion batteries in e-scooters and e-bikes rose by 150% in 2021. As of 2022, there are more than a million solar panel installations in the UK.



What are the risks?

To date we have seen only a very small number of fires caused by lithium-ion batteries in Cheshire. However, when they do occur we have seen how they develop very rapidly and are challenging to extinguish. They also produce particularly harmful smoke.

As well as powering electric cars, bikes and scooters, smaller batteries are now used in an array of products like laptop computers, mobile phones and disposable vaping products. There is a particular risk of fire when these are charging or if they are disposed of incorrectly with normal household waste.

In addition to small scale batteries, grid scale battery energy storage systems (BESS) are being installed at an exponential rate across the UK. Fires at BESS sites can be extremely hazardous and could impact on the safety of the public and responders.

Fires involving solar panels need to be tackled carefully owing to the risk to firefighters from the electricity they generate.

What did our pre-consultation tell us?

Many people who responded to our pre-consultation said that our CRMP should take into account increasing levels of electric car ownership and the risk of fires caused by their batteries.

What are we currently doing?

- We have adapted our operational policies and procedures to include fighting fires involving solar panels, including the investment of specialist equipment to render them electrically inactive when fighting a fire, reducing the risk to firefighters.
- Along with other fire and rescue services, we are conducting research into how we can most effectively fight fires in electric vehicles. This includes examining new equipment, policies and procedures to deal with these fires and keep our firefighters safe.

What do we plan to do?

- Continue to develop our understanding of the fire risks presented by lithium-ion batteries and working with others to research ways to effectively deal with such fires.
- We will build links with partners and work closely with them to identify BESS sites, so we can reduce risks and prepare our site-specific emergency response plans.

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Risks Response

Firefighter safety



The nature of firefighting means there are risks and hazards that need to be carefully managed to avoid the risk of death, serious injury or illness in the longer-term.



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What are the risks?

Firefighting is dangerous work and our firefighters face risks every day. For that reason, firefighter safety will always be a major priority within our CRMP.

What are we currently doing?

- We have invested almost £12m in an operational training centre, to enable personnel to practise the skills of safe and effective firefighting and rescue in the safest and most realistic environment possible.
- Learning from incidents is a key part of how we develop our procedures and keep our firefighters safe. We regularly hold structured debriefs and collate information from crews and share best practice both locally and nationally.
- Officers, members and representative bodies work together closely to monitor and review matters relating to the physical and mental health, safety and wellbeing of our staff.
- We constantly invest in new kit and technology to improve our operational effectiveness and to keep our firefighters safe. Over recent years this has seen the introduction of new road traffic collision cutting gear, wildfire equipment, new aerial appliances, a 'Scorpion' high reach extendable turret and new personal protective equipment.
- We are reviewing fireground welfare facilities for our firefighters, to improve privacy and provide a place to rest and remove contaminants.

What do we plan to do?

- We will undertake a major programme to replace and upgrade breathing apparatus.
- We will continue to review our operational kit and equipment to ensure our staff have the appropriate resources to carry out their roles safely and effectively.
- We will review our procedures for learning from operational incidents and ensure that it maximises the safety of our firefighters.
- We will continue to work with representative bodies, partners such as the NFCC and others on any developments affecting the health, safety and wellbeing of our workforce.



Maintaining sufficient fire cover



In spite of significant investment in the on-call duty system, we have not been able to improve the availability of on-call fire engines.

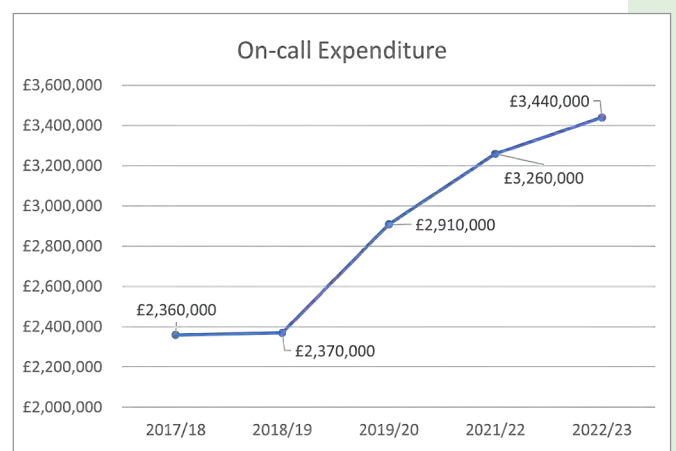
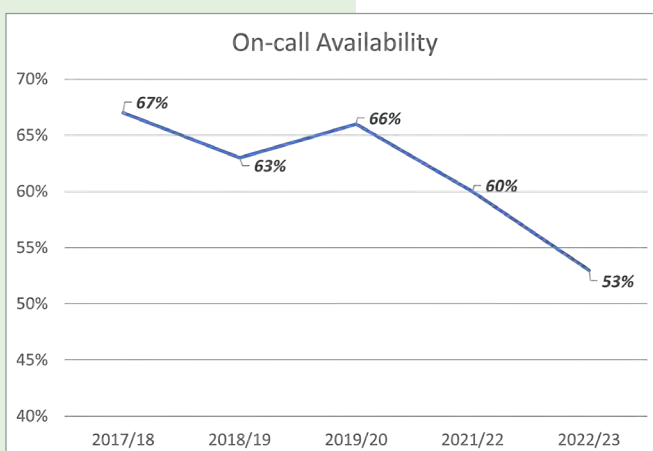
What is the risk?

Most incidents we attend (95%) require only one or two fire engines. However, larger incidents may require many more resources. Recent examples include the fire at Roberts Bakery in Northwich in June 2023 and at BIP Organics in Middlewich in July 2022. Some of our largest incidents, such as the fires at the Beechmere assisted living complex in Crewe in 2019 and Chester Zoo in 2018, needed more than 20 fire engines and specialist resources, which requires us to call on support from neighbouring fire and rescue services.

We have 35 fire engines and we constantly move these around to maintain the optimum response, aligned to risk and demand. Eighteen of the fire engines are on-call and they are crewed by part-time firefighters. On-call fire engines are not always available and mainly operate in the more rural and less populated areas of Cheshire, with fewer incidents.

The charts below show that on-call fire engines were available for 53% of the time on average and availability is on a downward trajectory despite increased financial investment.

If an incident occurs when the local on-call fire engine is not available, we send the nearest available fire engine. This works satisfactorily most of the time but during larger incidents or busy periods it can be a challenge. The lack of on-call fire engine availability also means we have fewer fire engines to move around to maintain response provision across Cheshire.



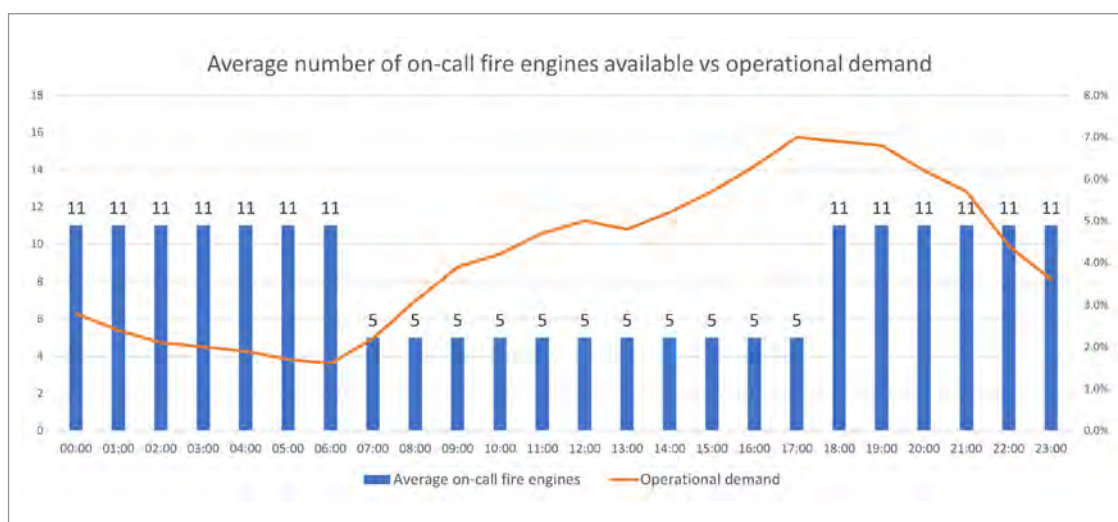
* Data from 2020/21 has been excluded owing to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on on-call availability and expenditure.

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Risks Response

On-call availability is lowest during the daytime when we are usually busiest. The blue bars on the chart below show how many on-call fire engines are typically available during each hour of the day, while the red line shows the level of demand (i.e. the number of calls we receive). This shows that we frequently have fewer on-call fire engines available during our busiest daytime hours.



What have we already done?

- We have introduced bold changes to improve the spread of fire cover across Cheshire. This included increasing the number of fire stations from 24 to 28 by building new fire stations at Alsager, Lymm, Penketh and Powey Lane.
- We introduced a fleet of 13 rapid response rescue units (RRRUs), mainly in rural parts of Cheshire where response times tend to be slower. An RRRU can be crewed by two firefighters who will respond to road traffic collisions to provide lifesaving trauma care. The RRRU can also be used to transport more firefighters to incidents.
- We reviewed the on-call system and implemented an extensive programme focusing on issues such as improving recruitment, retention and rewards and increasing managerial support and capacity.



Malpas Fire Station

What do we plan to do?

- Proposals 2, 3 and 4 (pages 34 to 41) set out what we intend to do. If all the proposals are implemented, we will increase the number of fire engines guaranteed to be available during the weekday daytime by five, from 17 to 22. Like all our fire engines, these will move around to benefit the whole of Cheshire and will help improve response times.
- Proposal 1 changes the way we measure our performance so we can monitor the effectiveness of these proposals and our overall response model consistently.
- Proposal 5 aims to strengthen the on-call duty system to make it more effective, more rewarding for staff and more sustainable.



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Response proposals 2024-2028

Reviewing our fire cover arrangements

Fire cover review process

The following pages outline our proposed changes to the way we provide fire cover in Cheshire. We have developed these proposals following a detailed review of whether our firefighters, fire engines and fire stations operate in the right way, at the right time, in the right place. This process is called a fire cover review, which we carry out every time we produce a strategy like a CRMP.

To undertake a fire cover review, we carry out a range of activities including:

- analysing our historic incident data and performance against our targets
- carrying out a horizon scanning analysis to look for future risks and developments affecting fire and rescue service
- reviewing national reports and findings relating to the fire and rescue sector
- considering the response plans of our neighbouring fire and rescue services, and the plans of other agencies where appropriate
- using modelling software to predict the impact of any potential changes to the location or staffing of our resources on response times.

The fire cover review has considered things such as:

1. **Our emergency response standard.** Determining whether our target for the time it takes to get to incidents remains fit for purpose.
2. **Fire engine requirement and crewing models.** Determining the location and number of fire engines we need across Cheshire and the best way to crew these to meet risk, demand and targets.
3. **Special appliances.** Determining the type and capability requirements for specialist vehicles and resources, and the best location and crewing model for these.

Some of the outcomes from the fire cover review are included in this draft CRMP as proposals for consultation. If these proposals are taken forward, they may have implications for special appliances which might require further internal and/or external consultation.



Fire cover review guiding principles

In addition to a well-established process for reviewing our fire cover arrangements, we also adopted six guiding principles. These reflect our ambition to use the review as an opportunity to improve our service to the community and a clear view, expressed during pre-consultation, that there should be no reduction in the number of fire engines or fire stations.

- **Improving emergency response times by preventing any further increases and where possible making improvements.** This is because average fire and rescue response times have increased gradually over the last decade, nationally and locally.
- **Less reliance on the availability of on-call fire engines, particularly during the day, and;**
- **Increasing the number of wholetime fire engines in on-call station areas, resulting in increased capacity to deliver prevention and protection activity.** This is because we have challenges in maintaining the availability of many of our on-call fire engines during daytime hours.
- **Looking after our people and aiming to avoid compulsory redundancies.** This is because the changes will impact on part-time firefighters, those who have to relocate and those that rent houses from the Authority. We will offer other suitable employment including full-time firefighter jobs.
- **No closures of fire stations or construction of additional fire stations.** This is because we believe Cheshire has the right number of fire stations.
- **Maintaining the same cost base, with better outputs and value for money.** This is because we wish to be clear our review is about improving our efficiency and effectiveness, not about cutting our service.



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Response proposals 2024-2028

Options development

A suite of options was developed as part of the review, which involved a range of different crewing configurations and fire cover arrangements.

Both Authority members and officers were clear that any proposals which were to be put forward to full consultation must be in line with each of the guiding principles and other requirements outlined on the previous pages.

In addition, officers used their professional judgement to determine whether a particular package of options was operationally viable by being efficient, effective and sustainable to operate. They also considered whether an option provided appropriate levels of fire cover to meet the risks and demands of the specific locations concerned and ensured a balance of resources across the whole county of Cheshire.

The final package of proposals we are consulting on meets our guiding principles, is considered to be operationally viable and we believe is appropriate for the levels of risk and demand we face.

To help understand our response proposals, we have produced short animated videos, which can be viewed on our website.



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Our five proposals in detail

PROPOSAL 1: change the way we measure response times

We want to improve the way we measure and report the time it takes our firefighters to get to incidents. This involves making some small but important changes that would enable us to better monitor the impact of the proposals set out on the following pages, all of which aim to improve our response times.

There is no national target for the time it should take a fire engine to get to an incident. Different fire and rescue services measure and report these times in different ways. In Cheshire, we currently meet our current 'response standard', agreed through previous risk management plans, which is to:

**Respond to life-risk incidents
within 10 minutes on 80% of occasions.**

We are proposing to change this to a commitment that:

**The average response time to primary fires in
Cheshire will not exceed 10 minutes.**

We would still aim to get the nearest fire engine to an incident within 10 minutes. However, behind the scenes there would be three changes to the way we measure and report our performance:

1. We want to start measuring our response time from the moment a 999 call is answered in our control room, not from the time the control operator alerts the fire station.
2. Instead of measuring the response times to life-risk incidents, we would measure the response times to fires involving homes, businesses and vehicles (known as 'primary fires').
3. We would report our average response time rather than the percentage of incidents we respond to in 10 minutes.

Rationale

The time it takes the fire and rescue service to get to incidents has gradually increased over the past 10 years in England. The reasons are varied and include things like increased traffic on the roads and the fact that staff who answer emergency calls ask more questions of the caller to understand the risk. Compared with the 16 other English fire and rescue services categorised as 'significantly rural', like Cheshire, we have limited the increase in our response times. We have achieved this by spreading the cover of our fire engines around the county.



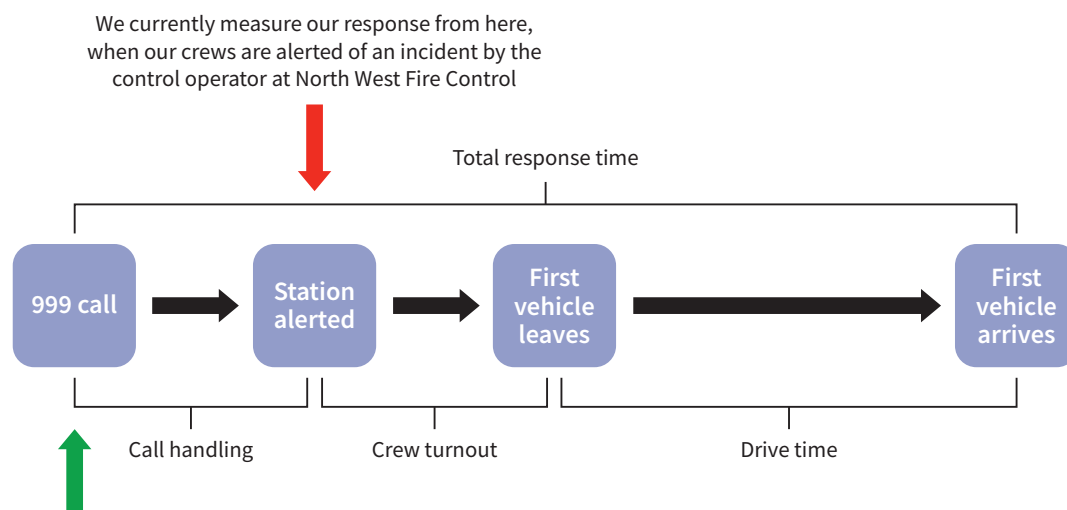
Response proposals 2024-2028

Average response times to primary fires only

	2012/13	2022/23	Increase over decade
Significantly rural areas	8min 45sec	10min 29sec	1min 44sec
Cheshire (also significantly rural)	9min 12sec	10min 02sec	0min 50sec

At the moment, we measure and report our response times differently to the way the Home Office collects and reports the performance of fire and rescue services. This actually masks the fact that our response times have increased. Our proposed changes would bring us in line with the Home Office's very reliable approach, enabling us to benchmark our actual performance with similar-sized services, with similar risks. National performance data on response times is publicly available.

Starting the clock from the moment a 999 call is answered in our control room gives a truer picture of the caller's experience than measuring it from the time the fire station is alerted. This was confirmed in feedback to our pre-consultation. It would also enable us to look at ways of speeding up call handling if necessary and the other steps in the process of deploying a fire engine including crew turnout and drive time.



We propose to start measuring our response time from here, as soon as the 999 call is answered

- **Call handling** time is the duration between the time of call and the point at which the station is alerted.
- **Crew turnout** time is the duration between the time at which the station is alerted and the time the first vehicle departs, meaning the time it takes for the firefighters to prepare to leave.
- **Drive time** is the duration between the time the first vehicle leaves to the time at which the first vehicle arrives at the scene of the incident (not necessarily the same vehicle).



Measuring response times to primary fires instead of life-risk incidents would not change the way we respond to incidents. However, by measuring response times to primary fires – those involving homes, businesses and vehicles – rather than just life-risk incidents, we will get a broader picture of the speed of our response, which we can benchmark against other fire and rescue services.

Finally, during our pre-consultation, the public and our staff told us that they would prefer us to report our response performance as an average time rather than percentage.

Impact

The changes to the way we measure and report response times could be easily introduced by our Service Improvement Team. Members would receive the new-look performance information from April 2024 onwards.

We acknowledge that our crews have no control over the call handling phase of deploying a fire engine, which is managed by North West Fire Control. We will continue to work closely with our colleagues there to ensure that they contribute to the overall achievement of the 10 minute standard.



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Response proposals 2024-2028

PROPOSAL 2: convert four on-call fire engines to full-time crewing during weekdays

Runcorn, Winsford, Northwich and Macclesfield currently have two fire engines each. One is crewed by full-time firefighters and the other is crewed by on-call firefighters. We want to convert these on-call fire engines, so they are crewed by full-time firefighters during the day, Monday to Friday. The full-time fire engines at these stations would continue to operate as they do now, 24/7.

Because these fire engines would be crewed full-time, they would be guaranteed to be available on weekday daytimes. The on-call fire engines at these four fire stations have, on average, only been available for 18% of the time during the day.

The daytime weekday fire engines would be able to mobilise to incidents three and a half minutes faster than an on-call fire engine and help improve response times during our busiest periods. Importantly, the full-time crews would also deliver additional community work and prevention and protection activities, focusing on the people who are most at risk.

The four full-time weekday daytime fire engines would operate in defined areas, set out on the following pages, but also move around, as needed, to benefit the whole of Cheshire. They would not replace the on-call fire engines at other fire stations across Cheshire; they would be in addition to them, therefore adding greater resilience and capacity.

Rationale

On average the on-call fire engines at Runcorn, Winsford, Northwich and Macclesfield were available for less than 18% of the time during weekdays and 33% overall during 2022/23.

By converting these on-call fire engines to full-time crewing, they will be guaranteed to be available on all weekday daytimes and would be used in areas where they are needed most, helping improve resilience, response times and delivery of community work and prevention and protection activities.

Impact

- a) Increase of 20 full-time firefighter posts.
- b) Reduction of 55 on-call (part-time) firefighter posts at these four fire stations. Of these, 17 posts are vacant, 17 people are already full-time firefighters, which leaves 14 people remaining. They would be supported and offered suitable employment with us. We will also work closely with our trade unions to minimise the impact of the changes on all staff affected.



- c) No change to the number of fire engines across Cheshire, which would remain at 35.
- d) More fire engines guaranteed to be available during the daytime on weekdays, increasing from 17 to 21, resulting in improved resilience and faster response.
- e) Runcorn, Winsford, Northwich and Macclesfield would no longer have an on-call fire engine, but there would be no change to the number of fire engines guaranteed to be available.
- f) Possible reduction in callouts for on-call crews available in areas where the weekday daytime fire engines operate. If the on-call fire engines are available, we will aim to use the weekday daytime fire engines elsewhere to improve resilience and response. We will also invest in the on-call duty system to improve rewards, increase on-call availability and utilisation of all on-call fire engines – see Proposal 5.
- g) Faster response times and increase in community work and risk-reducing prevention and protection activities, focused on the people most at risk.

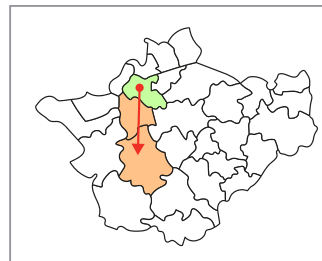


Northwich Fire Station

Response proposals 2024-2028

Weekday daytime fire engine 1

We are proposing to convert Runcorn's on-call fire engine to a weekday daytime fire engine, which would primarily provide flexible cover across the Frodsham and Tarporley areas.



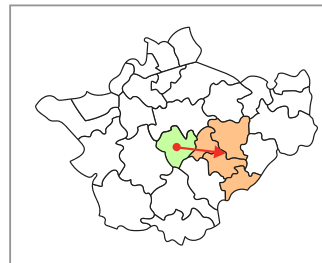
Rationale

We are proposing this change because the availability of the on-call fire engine at Runcorn in the day was on average 23% in 2022/23. In the first five months of 2023/24, it has averaged just 18%. At Frodsham, daytime availability averaged 13% and at Tarporley the on-call fire engine was available 27% of the time during the day.

Because there is already a full-time fire engine at Runcorn, there would be no change to the level of guaranteed fire cover in Runcorn and introducing the proposal would provide guaranteed cover available across Frodsham and Tarporley during weekday daytimes. If both fire engines at Frodsham and Tarporley were available to respond then we would use the weekday daytime fire engine in Runcorn or elsewhere in Cheshire.

Weekday daytime fire engine 2

We are proposing to convert Winsford's on-call fire engine to a weekday daytime fire engine, which would primarily provide flexible cover across Middlewich, Sandbach, Holmes Chapel and Alsager.



Rationale

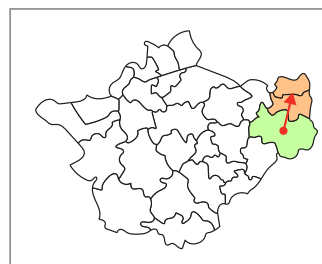
We are proposing this change because the availability of the on-call fire engine at Winsford in the day was on average 14% in 2022/23. In the first five months of this year, it has averaged 9%. At Middlewich, daytime availability averaged 64%, at Sandbach 44% and at Alsager it averaged 57%. At Holmes Chapel the on-call fire engine was available during the daytime only 16% of the time.

Because there is already a wholetime fire engine at Winsford, there would be no change to the level of guaranteed fire cover in Winsford. The proposal would provide guaranteed cover across the Middlewich, Sandbach, Holmes Chapel or Alsager areas during weekday daytimes. If one or more of these stations were available to respond then the resource would operate in one of the other areas in order to best maintain fire cover. As with the previous proposal, if fire engines at all four stations were available to respond then we would use the weekday daytime fire engine flexibly in Winsford or elsewhere in Cheshire to improve capacity.



Weekday daytime fire engine 3

We are proposing to convert Macclesfield's on-call fire engine to a weekday daytime fire engine, which would primarily provide flexible cover across Poynton and Bollington.



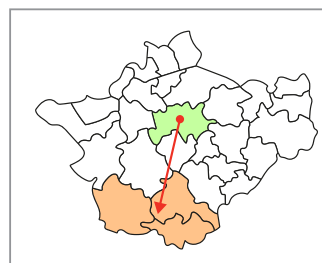
Rationale

We are proposing this change because the availability of the on-call fire engine at Macclesfield in the day was on average 24% in 2022/23. In the first five months of 2023/24, it has averaged just 6%. This does not include the on-call cover provided by crews at night. At Bollington, daytime availability averaged 76% and at Poynton this figure was 32%.

Because there is already a full-time fire engine at Macclesfield during the day, there would be no change to the level of guaranteed fire cover in Macclesfield. The proposal would provide guaranteed cover in Poynton and Bollington during weekday daytimes. If one of these stations were available to respond then the weekday daytime fire engine would operate in the other areas in order to best maintain fire cover. If fire engines at both stations were available to respond then we would use the weekday daytime fire engine flexibly elsewhere in Cheshire – in Macclesfield if required.

Weekday daytime fire engine 4

We are proposing to convert Northwich's on-call fire engine to a weekday daytime fire engine, which would primarily provide flexible cover across Nantwich, Audlem and Malpas.



Rationale

We are proposing this change because the availability of the on-call fire engine at Northwich in the day was on average 10% in 2022/23. In the first five months of 2023/24, it has averaged just 1%. At Nantwich, daytime availability averaged 64%, at Audlem it averaged 47% and at Malpas it was 13%.

Because there is already a full-time fire engine at Northwich, there would be no change to the level of guaranteed fire cover in the town. The proposal would provide a guaranteed fire engine available across Nantwich, Audlem or Malpas during weekday daytimes. If one of these stations is available to respond then it would operate across the other areas in order to best maintain fire cover. If fire engines at all three stations are available to respond then we would use the weekday daytime fire engine elsewhere in Cheshire as needed.

Note: we use all fire engines across all areas of Cheshire as required to meet risks and demands

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Response proposals 2024-2028

PROPOSAL 3: convert Knutsford's fire engine from on-call to day crewing

We want to improve response times and carry out more community work in and around Knutsford by reintroducing the day crewing duty system at the town's fire station. This would provide guaranteed availability of the fire engine 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Full-time firefighters would crew the fire engine from 9am to 7pm on weekdays. At all other times the fire engine would be crewed as if it were still on-call. However, this on-call cover would be guaranteed because it would be provided by the full-time firefighters who do so as part of their contract. The full-time firefighters would live in the houses we own next to the fire station and would receive an additional allowance for providing the guaranteed on-call cover.

Rationale

Currently the fire engine at Knutsford is crewed on-call and is therefore crewed by part-time firefighters who live or work within five minutes of the fire station and respond by pager when on call. The fire engine's availability varies throughout the week and in 2022/23 it was available during the daytime for 38% of the time and 49% overall.

Day crewing already operates successfully at four fire stations across Cheshire and operated at Knutsford until 2017. Until then the fire station was also the base for our technical rescue unit, specialising in rescues from height and confined space. We propose to return that capability to Knutsford through this change.

When the fire engine is crewed full-time it would be on average three and a half minutes faster than an on-call fire engine, helping to improve response times during daytimes, Monday to Friday. Importantly, the full-time crew would also deliver additional prevention and protection activities focusing on the people in local communities who are most at risk.

Impact

- a) No change to the number of fire engines across Cheshire, which would remain at 35.
- b) More fire engines guaranteed to be available during weekday daytimes, from 17 to 22 resulting in improved resilience, when combined with Proposal 2.
- c) Faster response times.
- d) More community work and prevention and protection activities in Knutsford.
- e) The technical rescue unit would move from Lymm to Knutsford.
- f) Increase of nine full-time firefighter posts at Knutsford.

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BETTER RESPONSE

- g) Reduction of eight full-time firefighter posts elsewhere in Cheshire.
- h) Fifteen on-call (part-time) firefighter posts would be removed from Knutsford. Only 12 of these posts are filled currently. Of these, nine are filled by people who are full-time firefighters. The remaining three on-call firefighters would be supported and offered suitable alternative employment with us. Firefighters currently renting the houses we own next to the station would move out if they were not appointed into the new roles. We will work closely with our trade unions to minimise the impact of the changes on all staff affected by this change.



Knutsford Fire Station



Response proposals 2024-2028

PROPOSAL 4: reorganise daytime fire cover in Warrington

We want to improve the spread of daytime fire cover and prevention and protection activity across Birchwood and Stockton Heath, two of our five fire stations in the borough of Warrington. This would mean changes to the way we operate both these fire stations.

Birchwood

This is currently a nucleus fire station, which means it is crewed by full-time firefighters between 7am and 7pm every day and at night by on-call firefighters who live or work within five minutes of the fire station and respond by pager when on-call.

We propose to crew the Birchwood fire engine with full-time firefighters between 7am and 7pm on 50% of days (four days in eight), then by on-call firefighters on the other 50% of days. There would be no change to the on-call cover overnight between 7pm and 7am.

Stockton Heath

This is currently an on-call fire station, which means the fire engine is crewed solely by on-call firefighters who live or work within five minutes of the fire station and respond by pager when on-call.

We propose to crew the Stockton Heath fire engine with full-time firefighters between 7am and 7pm on 50% of days (four days in eight). Outside of these times there would be no on-call cover in Stockton Heath. Instead, neighbouring fire stations such as Warrington and Lymm would respond to incidents within 10 minutes. This happens now when Stockton Heath's on-call fire engine is not available.

Rationale

This proposal would balance fire cover and ensure that response times in Stockton Heath and Birchwood would still be within 10 minutes on average.

The outputs of community work and risk-reducing prevention and protection activities would remain the same in Warrington borough but would be shared more evenly across Stockton Heath and Birchwood.

During 2022/23, Stockton Heath's on-call fire engine was available only 10% in the day and 67% at night. This has worsened to 4% in the day and 62% at night in the first five months of 2023/24. Replacing this on-call cover with full-time cover on 50% of days will be, on balance, more effective.

Ending the on-call cover at Stockton Heath means that we can sell the nine houses we own near to the fire station and use the proceeds to fund our capital programme including replacing the fire station in Warrington town centre.



Impact

- a) No change to the number of full-time fire engines during the day in Warrington borough, which would remain at four.
- b) Average response times in Stockton Heath may be up to one minute faster. Average response times in Birchwood may be up to one minute slower. Average response times in both areas would still be within 10 minutes.
- c) No change to community work and prevention and protection activities in Warrington borough, but activity would be spread more evenly across Birchwood and Stockton Heath.
- d) Six of the 12 full-time firefighter posts at Birchwood would move to Stockton Heath.
- e) No change to the number of on-call firefighter posts at Birchwood and the on-call crew would be able to cover on 50% of days instead of nights only.
- f) Fifteen on-call firefighter posts would be removed from Stockton Heath. Only 10 of these posts are filled currently. Of these, five are filled by people who are full-time firefighters. The remaining five on-call firefighters would be offered suitable alternative employment with us. In addition, those on-call firefighters currently renting the houses we own near to the fire station would move out. We would work closely with our trade unions to support staff and minimise the impact of the changes.
- g) When the full-time fire engine is not available at Stockton Heath there would be no on-call cover. Cover will be provided by Warrington and Lymm within 10 minutes.
- h) We would sell Authority houses at Stockton Heath to help fund our capital programme.



Birchwood Fire Station

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Response proposals 2024-2028

PROPOSAL 5: strengthen the on-call system

Fire engines that operate in the more rural and less populated areas of Cheshire are usually crewed by on-call firefighters. On-call firefighters live or work within five minutes of the fire station and are alerted by pager to respond to incidents. They have fewer incidents to deal with compared with full-time firefighters; fire engines operated by full-time firefighters are available 24/7.

Our on-call firefighters undertake their role as a part-time job, often in addition to demanding full-time employment and busy lives outside work. They are highly committed and work extremely hard to maintain the availability of the fire engine so they can respond to emergency incidents and support their communities.

Unfortunately, in recent years, the overall availability of on-call fire engines has declined; in some areas, quite significantly, especially during the day when we tend to be busiest. Despite the best efforts of our on-call firefighters and some initiatives that have been trialled, it has not been possible to reverse this decline.

If the on-call fire engine is not available, we send the nearest available fire engine to the incident. However, this may take longer to arrive than the on-call fire engine would have done. Proposal 2 would increase the number of fire engines guaranteed to be available on a weekday across Cheshire, but it would not provide additional fire engines overnight or at the weekend.

The decline in on-call availability is a major challenge across the country, not just in Cheshire. Some of the issues are explained on page 25.

Proposals within this CRMP would reduce the number of fire engines crewed by on-call firefighters by converting them to full-time crewing. Full-time crewing is expensive and cannot be justified for fire engines that respond to low numbers of incidents, so we need to get the balance right. Going forward we would still depend heavily on on-call firefighters. If the proposals are taken forward, they would continue to crew 13 of our 35 fire engines.

Therefore, through this CRMP, we reaffirm our commitment to the on-call duty system and our on-call firefighters. As a priority, in the first year of the CRMP, we would undertake a review with the intention of taking forward some of the learning from previous initiatives. Our aim would be to improve the pay and reward for on-call firefighters. We would also seek to strengthen the on-call duty system to make it more effective, more rewarding for staff and more sustainable. On-call staff and the trade unions that represent them would help to shape our efforts and be involved at every stage.

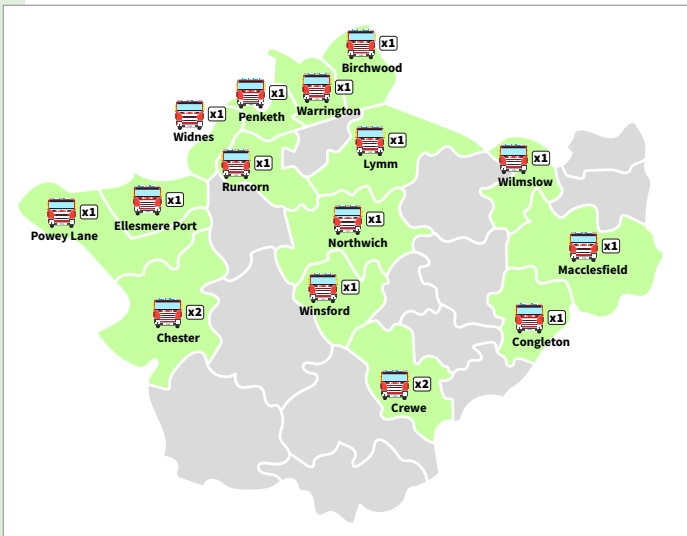


Tarporley Fire Station

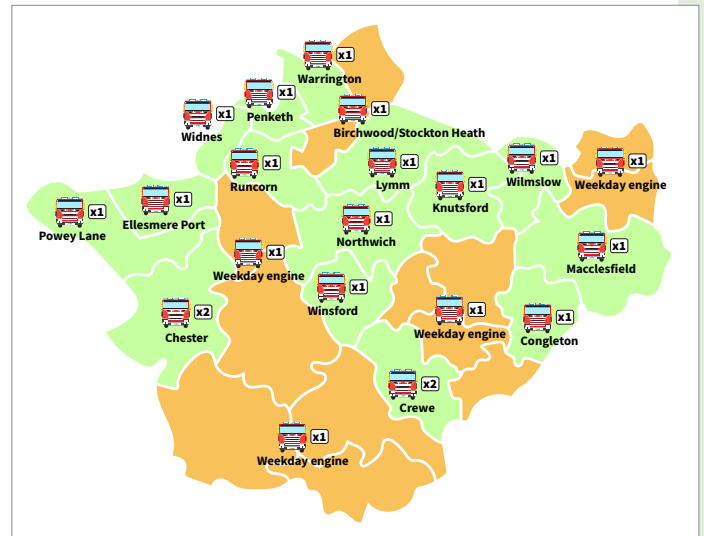


Impact of proposals at a glance

The two maps below show the impact on guaranteed cover on weekday daytimes if the proposals were implemented. The first map shows the current guaranteed weekday daytime provision, while the second shows the provision after the implementation of the proposals. The areas in green indicate guaranteed weekday daytime provision, while those in amber show the areas to be covered flexibly by the new daytime fire engines and the fire engines at Birchwood and Stockton Heath.



Current guaranteed weekday daytime provision



Proposed guaranteed weekday daytime provision
(this will also include guaranteed overnight cover in Knutsford)

The table below shows how the proposals would guarantee additional fire cover and enable us to carry out more prevention and protection work, while retaining exactly the same number of fire engines and fire stations.

	Current arrangements	Proposed arrangements	Change
Fire stations	28	28	No change
Fire engines	35	35	No change
Guaranteed weekday daytime fire engines	17	22	+5
Guaranteed weekend daytime fire engines	17	18	+1
Guaranteed overnight fire engines	15	16	+1
Safe and Well visits to homes *	21,580	24,310	+2,730
Business safety inspections by firefighters *	6,896	7,156	+260
Assessment of premises presenting highest operational risks *	1,193	1,676	+483

* Minimum number of visits, inspections and assessments

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Developing our organisation

Promoting a positive and inclusive culture

The fire and rescue service nationally has been under scrutiny following the publication of an independent report into the culture of London Fire Brigade (LFB) and allegations of inappropriate conduct at several other services. This led to HMICFRS publishing in March 2023 a spotlight report on values and culture in the sector, and a series of far-reaching recommendations.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has been working hard for many years to create a workplace founded on the principles of dignity, respect and fairness. This is reflected in the results of our biannual staff surveys and the latest HMICFRS inspection, which concluded we are “good at ensuring fairness and promoting diversity”, have “well-defined values, which staff understand” and “a positive working culture” with “staff feeling empowered and willing to challenge poor behaviours”.

However, we are not complacent and recognise there are lessons to be learned from LFB, and that the HMICFRS’s important spotlight report recommendations will take some time to implement. During the lifespan of this CRMP, these culture-related actions will serve to strengthen our People Strategy, which is due to be refreshed in 2025.

In addition, we will:

- continue to emphasise the importance of our Core Values and the national Core Code of Ethics for the Fire and Rescue Service
- establish our new People Board as a strategic focal point for co-ordinating and monitoring our efforts to remain a safe and positive place to work, and an employer of choice
- develop and publish an updated Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy, when the existing three-year strategy ends in March 2024. Its implementation will be overseen by our well-established EDI Steering Group
- produce a new Communications and Engagement Strategy, setting out a clear framework for the way in which we talk and listen to colleagues across the Service
- continue to work hard to attract, recruit and retain a diverse and empowered workforce that at all levels truly represents the communities we serve
- continue to play a role in regional and national networks for sharing and learning from good practice when it comes to workplace culture.



Meeting the challenges of the future

Our firefighters, fire officers and fire staff are our greatest asset and we will continue to invest in their development so that they can reach their full potential and keep providing a first-class service to the community.

Our priorities for the next four years include:

- aligning our learning and development activities to the NFCC Leadership Framework, enabling individuals to effectively lead the Service, their function, their team or themselves depending on their role
- being innovative in the way we develop staff by offering accelerated progression, access to apprenticeships and degree programmes
- carefully forecasting our workforce needs into the medium term, so that attraction, recruitment and training activity can be planned accordingly
- strengthening the way we support the health and wellbeing of our staff through occupational health, our mental health and fitness advisors, sports and social groups, and staff inclusion networks
- helping colleagues plan for full or flexible retirement and supporting them through this transition in their lives.



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Developing our **organisation**

HMICFRS

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) is the independent inspectorate of fire and rescue services within England.

HMICFRS uses a similar grading model to that which is used by OFSTED for school inspections with the following gradings: Outstanding, Good, Adequate, Requires Improvement or Inadequate.

The outcome of the most recent inspection of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, which took place in February 2023, was published in August 2023 and can be found [here](#).

Against 11 key metrics which assess our efficiency, effectiveness and how we look after our people; we were graded as "good" across six thematic areas and "adequate" across the remaining five. Encouragingly, we were rated "good" across all areas relating to our workplace culture and looking after our people; and we were highlighted for our innovative practice in relation to our leadership development – an area which required improvement in our previous inspection in 2021.

We will engage with staff to develop an action plan to address the findings of our latest inspection and continue to drive improvements across the organisation.





Continuous improvement

Over the next four years we will continue to develop the organisation so that it is able to deliver frontline services to the community as efficiently and effectively as possible.

This means refining our corporate structure to ensure it meets our business needs, keeping our collaborations under review, having in place robust systems for managing performance and moving towards digital solutions wherever possible.

We will also continue to strive to be sustainable, ensuring our buildings and our fleet have minimal adverse impact on the environment.

Our plans include:

- re-establishing our own dedicated headquarters at Sadler Road in Winsford, bringing together most departments and the leadership team under one roof
- continuing to review the efficiency and effectiveness of our remaining shared corporate services at Cheshire Police and to develop our resilience and community safety partnerships
- completing the modernisation of smaller fire stations and setting out proposals to replace Ellesmere Port and Warrington fire stations, both of which are no longer fit for purpose
- investing in a state-of-the-art system at North West Fire Control for mobilising fire engines to incidents
- getting the most out of our investment in Microsoft 365 by using it to drive the way we store and review management information and bring teams together to collaborate
- continuing our investment in electric vehicles and charging infrastructure.



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Our finances

How we are funded

Cheshire Fire Authority receives funding from two main sources: from central government and from its share of council tax, called its precept. Council tax makes up around 68% of the Authority's funding with government grants and its share of business rates comprising the other 32%.

For the last full financial year, 2022/23, the Authority had a revenue budget of £46.9m and a capital budget of £7.8m. The graphic to the right outlines what it actually spent in the year. Further details can be found in the Authority's Statement of Accounts at www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

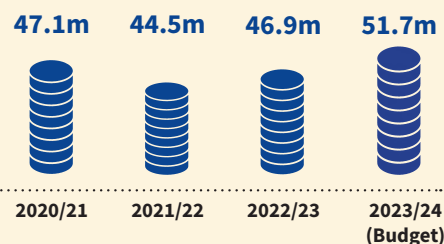
As part of its budget management process, the Authority produces a Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP), covering a five year period. The MTFP is updated regularly to reflect emerging local, regional and national issues and makes informed assumptions about issues such as future pay, inflation, government funding and council tax levels. The latest MTFP can be viewed on www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

As with other public sector organisations, the Authority is impacted by spending decisions taken by government. The government outlines its key spending priorities through its annual budget announcement and, longer-term, through Comprehensive Spending Reviews.

The Authority is legally required to set a balanced budget, against a backdrop of considerable uncertainty with regards to public spending decisions. The Authority is mindful of the need to ensure efficient use of public funds and has an annually updated efficiency plan to help it achieve this.

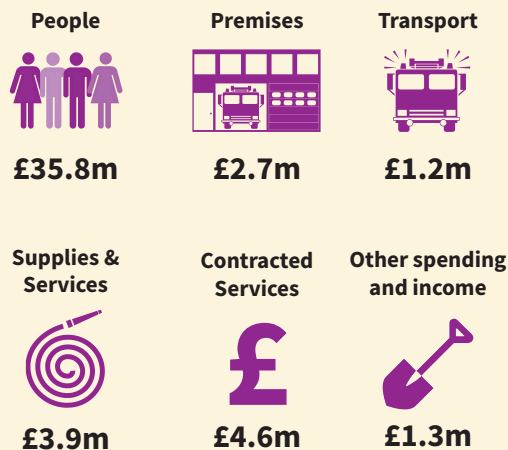
The Authority undertakes an annual priority based budgeting exercise to ensure that it effectively aligns resources to deliver its key aims and objectives. This ensures that its funding is allocated towards priority areas aimed at making the community safer.

Our funding



What we spend it on

2022/23 actual spend:





The Authority's biggest outlay is on its staff, which accounts for about 76% of its revenue spending. Other significant costs include supplies and services such as utilities and equipment.

Since 2014 the Authority has received no capital funding. This has meant that capital spending, such as replacement fire engines, new fire kit and equipment and building refurbishment and replacement, has been completely funded by the Authority either through reserves or by setting aside money from its revenue budget (which is the amount of money the Authority requires to provide its services during the year).

In addition to regular capital spending on items such as those described above, the Authority has a significant capital programme of building replacement and modernisation underway. The programme, which is anticipated to cost in excess of £15m over the four years of the CRMP, will use up a significant proportion of the Authority's reserves and includes building a new fire station at Crewe and completing the modernisation of smaller stations and Authority housing. The Authority also plans to replace dated stations at Warrington and Ellesmere Port but has not identified sufficient funding at present.

Affordability of our proposals

We believe the proposals we have set out in this draft CRMP are affordable within our existing MTFP, as it stands in autumn 2023. If all of the proposals are taken forward the package will have a near-neutral impact on the annual budget (around £55,000 increase). This must be seen in the context of an anticipated budget of around £53.6m in 2024/25. We believe that it will be possible to find efficiency savings elsewhere in the organisation to offset this small additional cost. If the full package of proposals is not taken forward we would have to carry out a further assessment of the financial impact and create a revised MTFP.

The impact of inflationary pressures in the economy and the fact that our final funding settlement for 2024/25 will not be announced by government until December 2023 means there is a significant degree of uncertainty in our funding position. We will need to review the affordability of this CRMP in early 2024 at the same time as we consider the feedback from the consultation.

Prevention, Protection and other organisational projects described earlier in this document will be funded through existing departmental budgets, refined on an ongoing basis through the priority-based budgeting process.

The Authority continues to face a significant challenge to fund capital expenditure, which not only affects the replacement of vehicles and equipment, but also the updating and maintenance of its existing buildings and, in particular, as mentioned above, replacing its fire stations at Warrington and Ellesmere Port. One of the proposals is intended to provide a significant capital receipt that can be used to part-fund works to existing fire stations and the building of a new fire station.

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Summary of our plans

Prevention

- Implement the outcomes of a review into our Prevention Department.
- Continue to refine our targeting methodology to ensure our Safe and Well visits target those most at risk; and work with partners to improve the referral process for vulnerable people.
- Reduce the occurrence of deliberate fires in partnership with Cheshire Police.
- Implement a new Road Safety Strategic Plan with our partners, increasing road safety activity.
- Increase the number of Safe and Well visits by the end of this CRMP, from the current 20,000.
- Increase our water safety education activity.
- Improve the way we work with partners to safeguard and support people.
- Provide training to our Prevention team and firefighters to increase our effectiveness in delivering safety messages.
- Incorporate information relating to lithium-ion batteries into our fire safety advice delivered to homes and communities.

Protection

- Review our Protection Department to ensure it remains efficient and effective.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of our risk based inspection programme to ensure we are targeting inspection activity at the right premises.
- Review how we undertake our primary authority responsibilities to ensure they are effective and self-funding.
- Ensure our Protection activities align to the outcomes of the Building Safety Review.
- Upskill our operational managers with Protection qualifications to enhance firefighter safety and allow for more effective inspection of non-domestic premises.
- Continue to lobby and campaign for the installation of sprinklers in the built environment.
- Work with the NFCC to become a statutory consultee for planning on BESS facilities.
- Appoint a specialist BESS officer role in the Protection team.

Response

- Review how we respond to flood and water related incidents.
- Research and develop operational procedures to deal with BESSs.
- Change the way we measure response times.
- Convert four on-call fire engines to daytime weekday fire engines.
- Convert Knutsford's on-call fire engine to day crewing.
- Reorganise daytime fire cover in Warrington.
- Strengthen the on-call system.

Objectives carried forward from the 2023/24 risk management plan include: implementing the outcomes from our review of specialist vehicles and resources; implementing an emergency cardiac response capability; and implementing outcomes from our review of the wholetime duty system at fire stations that operate 24/7.

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Have **your** say

We are undertaking a comprehensive consultation to seek views on the proposals set out in this draft CRMP before we make any final decisions. We would like you to get involved and have your say.

There are a number of ways in which you can do this. The main way is through an online survey, which you can access via this link (to be inserted).

Alternatively, you can see us in person at one of our roadshows in the community. To find out more about when and where these will take place, call us on 01606 868700, email consultation@cheshirefire.gov.uk or visit our website www.cheshirefire.gov.uk

If you would prefer to get in touch in a different way, you can by the following methods:

- Email: consultation@cheshirefire.gov.uk
- Facebook: @CheshireFRS
- X (Formerly known as Twitter): @CheshireFire
- Writing: FREEPOST CHESHIRE FIRE CONSULTATION (no stamp required)

Our consultation runs from **Monday 2 October 2023** to **Tuesday 2 January 2024**, so please let us have your comments before then.

If you require this or any other of our consultation documents in a different format, then please call 01606 868700 or email consultation@cheshirefire.gov.uk

Following the consultation, a report containing all feedback received will be presented to members of Cheshire Fire Authority for their consideration at their meeting on 14 February 2024.

Here, they will take the feedback into account as they consider and decide on the Authority's 2024-2028 CRMP. Subject to approval of the Fire Authority, the CRMP will then take effect from 1 April 2024.



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