

Draft Fire and Rescue Plan 2021 – 2024

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent



STAFFORDSHIRE COMMISSIONER

Police | Fire and Rescue | Crime

Introduction

“Even though the risk of fire and other incidents remains low, the prevention work that Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service does is absolutely vital”

Ben Adams

The work that fire and rescue services do has changed significantly in recent decades. Staffordshire* Fire & Rescue Service provide a broad range of services to keep people safe at home, at work and at in public places. The number and types of incidents attended has also changed and whilst there had been a downward trend for many years, the service has seen an increase in blue-light response over the last three years. Some of that demand is more complex than before; climate change has led to more extreme weather events leading to flooding and large-scale fires in open areas that have required protracted, resource intensive responses.

Even though the risk of fire and other incidents remains low, the prevention work that Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service does is absolutely vital to make sure this remains the case. The prevention effort is becoming more targeted towards those who are most at risk, whether due to their age, infirmity, physical disability, mental health or drug and alcohol abuse. The problems people face can be complex and multi-faceted, so it is important for the service to work in close partnership with other agencies including the NHS and local councils to make sure people get the support they need to keep them safe.

As well as vulnerable people, the service also increasingly needs to focus its efforts on vulnerable locations. The tragic events at Grenfell Tower have increased the emphasis on technical fire safety audits, inspections of premises and the use of enforcement powers. Legislation is expected imminently which will formalise these. Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service is already responding positively to this challenge with the recruitment of more specialist staff. It is already clear that protection work will be an increasing priority for future investment and resource allocation.

The service has also had to evolve and prepare thoroughly to be able to deal with complex and challenging potential threats such as terrorist incidents or severe weather events. It stepped up as part of the collective effort during the COVID-19 pandemic, distributing food packages and helping vulnerable people, delivering PPE, and helping with testing and vaccination sites.

A lot of this work is built on the professionalism and enthusiasm of fire and rescue staff. However, in terms of formal roles, terms and conditions, the fire and rescue sector has remained largely unchanged for decades and reforming it to be able to meet new challenges is in the public interest.

It is a Government priority, legislation is expected imminently that will kick-start the process. Here in Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent we can demonstrate the huge potential of a modern fire and rescue service. Given more flexibility to address local need, there is a real opportunity for more imaginative and radical options for protecting people and places. I believe preparing the service for the future is essential and have already triggered work to consider options. This may involve deploying staff and using assets differently and applying greater discretion to how low-risk incidents and non-essential activities are dealt with. I will have open and honest conversations with employee representatives and the communities of Staffordshire and all other stakeholders to take this forward.

Together we can keep Staffordshire safe.

Ben Adams
Staffordshire Commissioner

*Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent will hereinafter be referred to as Staffordshire for simplicity.



Keep Staffordshire safe

Our priorities

A flexible and responsive service

Ensure your local fire and rescue service continues to be accessible and responsive so that risk is appropriately and proportionally managed, community and firefighter safety remains paramount and high levels of public confidence and trust in the service are maintained.

Protect people and places

Protect people, premises and the environment through the right balance of education, advice and support and the use of regulatory and enforcement powers to keep people safe.

Help people most at risk stay safe

Deliver effective and targeted prevention work that provides early help to individuals, families and communities so that we keep people safe from fires and other incidents, they feel safer and there is less pressure on fire response services.

A Fire and Rescue service for tomorrow

Ensure that Staffordshire Fire & Rescue is fit for a changing future and is a leading example for other services to follow so that the people of Staffordshire can be reassured that their money is being used efficiently and effectively and the workforce better reflects the communities it serves.

Our approach

Community focused

Understanding communities and recognising their different needs is essential to delivering services in their local area that builds relationships, tackles the right problems and increases public confidence. It's therefore important to give people a voice so that they feel they are being heard and are confident to engage with their fire & rescue service. I will also encourage people to get more involved through shaping priorities and services, volunteering, scrutinising the service and helping to solve problems in their community.

Prevention and early intervention

Preventing fires, road traffic collisions and other incidents from happening in the first place reduces demand on our fire and rescue and other services, and reduces harm. By intelligently targeting interventions at the most vulnerable people and locations and intervening as early as possible we can prevent issues from happening in the first place or escalating so that they become even more damaging, complex and costly. So, prevention and early intervention will be central to delivering all aspects of this plan.

Solving problems together

The issues affecting individuals, families and communities are often complex and rarely solved by one organisation alone so we need to bring organisations together to prevent problems from escalating and protect people from harm. This means sharing resources and knowledge and aligning services to deliver more efficient and comprehensive solutions. Even better collaboration between partners including neighbouring fire and rescue services, other blue light services, councils, health authorities, business and the voluntary and community sector is essential.

Properly equipped

Our fire and rescue service must have the equipment, vehicles, facilities, technology, training and wellbeing support it needs to be able to perform at their best. It is particularly important to ensure the service makes the best use of technology to save money, create capacity, improve services and help protect the public. Recognising the Government's climate change commitment, I will also work with the service to do everything we can to reduce our impact on the environment without compromising operational effectiveness. I will also help communities to address their local safety concerns and ensure that partners have the skills to intervene early, recognise and address vulnerability.

Value for money

I will always consult residents before reaching a decision on council tax increases. Wherever possible, every penny in fire & rescue should be directed towards their core purpose of keeping people safe. This is not about cost cutting but changing the way the service works by listening to the people doing the job and learning from other organisations.

Open and transparent

I will listen, act on public concerns, explain what we are doing to address them and treat people fairly and I expect Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service to do the same. I will challenge, scrutinise and share performance data publicly to demonstrate my expectation of the highest standards of public service and to maintain trust and confidence.

About Staffordshire

[Infographic on Staffordshire statistics to be inserted in final plan]

Shaping the Plan

To help inform and develop this plan, a number of considerations have been made. This includes reviewing national guidance, understanding and assessing local fire safety and broader community safety needs and importantly seeking and listening to professional and community opinion.

The following section outlines the main findings.

National Fire and Rescue Priorities

The Government has set out its ambition *“to make fire and rescue more accountable, more effective and more professional than ever before...building on the great strides in prevention and collaboration that fire and rescue services have already made”*.

This programme of reform formed the basis of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, and included:

- transforming the local governance of fire and rescue by enabling mayors and police and crime commissioners to take on responsibility for their fire and rescue service where a local case is made;
- establishing Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) as an independent inspection regime for fire and rescue services;
- developing a comprehensive set of professional standards to drive sector improvement;

- supporting services to transform commercially with more efficient procurement and collaboration;
- increasing the transparency of services with the publication of greater performance data and the creation of a new national fire website;
- driving forward an ambitious programme for workforce reform including through enhancing: professionalism; management and leadership; training and development; equality and diversity; culture; and options for flexible working.

The framework itself sets out five priorities for Fire and Rescue Authorities:

- make appropriate provision for fire prevention and protection activities and response to fire and rescue related incidents;
- identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks their areas face;

- collaborate with emergency services and other local and national partners to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the service they provide;
- be accountable to communities for the service they provide; and
- develop and maintain a workforce that is professional, resilient, skilled, flexible and diverse.

The Government has announced that a White Paper on Fire Reform will be published in 2021 that will set the direction for English Fire and Rescue Services in three areas: professionalism, people and governance. This is in response to the recommendations from Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and the findings of Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Service, Tom Winsor's State of Fire report.

It is likely to build on the existing framework and will seek to deliver a set of reforms to ensure Fire and Rescue Services operate effectively and efficiently, put the public first and meet the needs of the communities they serve, whilst adapting to societal changes. It will focus on new governance arrangements, drawing on lessons learned from the first cycle of governance transfers to PCCs, which included Staffordshire. Importantly, it will consider legislating to create operational independence for Chief Fire Officers. This is in line with arrangements currently in place for policing and I very much support this proposal.

Local Needs

Staffordshire is a relatively safe place to live, visit and work and the risk of fire and other incidents that require a response remain very low. This is due to years of prevention work, changes in behaviour and improvements to the design of buildings, vehicles and appliances to minimise risk.

In addition to the national priorities set out above, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service conduct detailed assessments of demand, threat and risk to provide a sound evidence base to inform decisions on how resources are allocated. This process has informed the priorities set out in this plan.

Fire and Building Safety

Changes in legislation over the past 30 years have led to a gradual reduction in the fire safety work that fire and rescue services are required to carry out to help ensure that buildings are safely designed, constructed, maintained and operated. However, following the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in 2017, inquiries into building regulations and fire safety have identified the need to tighten these arrangements to keep people safe in their homes. This will certainly place greater responsibilities on all fire & rescue services to ensure the right numbers of skilled, specialist staff are available for audit and inspection work. Staffordshire Fire & Rescue service are already responding to this and it will continue to be an investment priority.

Climate Change

The service is increasingly being required to deal with large scale fires in open areas during hot, dry periods and incidents arising from storms and other severe weather events. The service is currently not statutorily required to respond to floods but does so willingly to protect and rescue people and minimise the damage caused to properties and public spaces. This is a critical issue for the service and the right equipment, training and other resources need to be provided so that the service can continue to deal with these events.

People most at risk

The leading causes of accidental fires in the home are cooking, heating appliances, electrical fires, smoking and candles. The primary human factors that contribute to injuries and deaths from these incidents in Staffordshire have been identified by the service as smoking, alcohol and drug use, mobility and the elderly. The population is increasing and is ageing. More houses are being built and more people are being supported to live at home independently for longer. We also know that motorcyclists, pedal cyclists, pedestrians and young drivers are at most risk of becoming a casualty on our roads. It's important to identify those that are at most risk, engage with them and provide practical help and advice to prevent fires, road traffic collisions and other incidents from happening.

Public Concerns



Home Office

In my conversations with communities it is clear that their primary concern is to have a rapid response when faced with an emergency, so our priority will always be to maintain high standards of service.

It is also clear to me, however, that people expect the service to evolve to meet current and emerging risks.

My challenge, and the challenge for Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service, is to get the balance right in meeting the traditional expectations of communities whilst also making the reforms that are desperately needed to ensure the service is prepared for future challenges.

I will continue to listen to and consult with people across Staffordshire as your concerns will always be foremost in my local Fire and Rescue Plans.

Priority 1

A flexible and responsive service

Ensure your local fire and rescue service continues to be accessible and responsive so that risk is appropriately and proportionally managed, community and firefighter safety remains paramount and high levels of public confidence and trust in the service are maintained.

I will:

- Ensure a rapid response to fires, road traffic collisions and other emergencies wherever needed in our area and to assist other areas in line with our mutual aid commitments, regionally and nationally.
- As part of the Staffordshire Local Resilience Forum, continue to take an active role in planning and preparing responses to disruptive events including those arising from adverse weather conditions, public health crises, industrial incidents, transport incidents and terrorist attacks.
- Ensure an effective response to risks associated with rural communities and open spaces such as grassland fires and open water incidents so that people, livestock, wildlife and the environment can be rescued and protected.
- Develop plans and capabilities to be able to respond to fire risks associated with rapidly growing new technologies including electric vehicles and home battery power storage systems.
- Further develop work between Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service, Staffordshire Police and other emergency services in examining their approach to managing incidents where multiple services attend. This local initiative is additional to established national principles for managing major incidents.
- Explore opportunities for fire and rescue teams to respond to incidents which might be initially reported to other agencies. Examples are gaining access for paramedics at 'concern for welfare' incidents or carrying out emergency treatment at cardiac arrest incidents.
- Continue to work to reduce repeated demand from the same locations and from false alarms.

Priority 2

Protect people and places

Protect people, premises and the environment through the right balance of education, advice and support and the use of regulatory and enforcement powers to keep people safe.

I will:

- Maintain the pace of the Community Sprinkler Programme to reduce the risk to occupants of multi-occupancy buildings within the scope of the programme and lobby for the installation of sprinkler systems to new multi-occupancy residential premises to become a regulatory requirement.
- Continue to work with the Environment Agency, Staffordshire Police, Local Authorities and other partners to ensure co-operation in investigation and enforcement activity related to fly-tipping, waste and environmental crime, often linked to organised crime.
- Continue to develop the audit process by which the service identifies high-risk premises to ensure inspection activity is properly targeted. This will be enhanced by better information sharing and joint analysis with partners.
- Ensure that the service has the required specialist staff, training and other resources to undertake an expanded role in the risk-based audit and inspection of premises and the application of regulatory powers.
- Strike the right balance between advising and supporting co-operative businesses to achieve compliance and robust enforcement where it's needed.
- Consolidate the existing range of services provided to support businesses that are affected by fire or fall victim to crime into a more joined-up service 'offer'.
- Establish an overarching community safety forum to enhance joint planning and service delivery; collaborating with partners to ensure prompt, shared action and shared responsibility to prevent harm and protect individuals and families.
- Intensify the activity of our Safer Roads Partnership so that police, fire & rescue, local authorities and National Highways work jointly towards safe roads, safe vehicles, safe road use, safe speeds and post-crash care to reduce road casualties that have devastating consequences for families.
- Engage communities more in understanding the work of the service and volunteering to support prevention work in activities such as Community Speed Watch.

Priority 3

Helping people stay safe

Deliver effective and targeted prevention work that provides early help to individuals, families and communities so that we keep people safe from fires, road traffic collisions and other incidents, they feel safer and there is less pressure on fire response services.

I will:

- Ensure that safe and well checks are targeted at those at most risk of fire in the home and enable prompt intervention to provide the support people need to prevent fires and identify underlying issues which contribute to fire risks.
- Follow up safe and well interventions to ensure improvements are sustained, the impact is evaluated and any learning is applied to other cases.
- Ensure referral pathways are in place between fire & rescue and health services so that people get the help they need to reduce the risk of fire and other incidents in the home such as mental and physical health, and drug and alcohol support.
- Share data appropriately to ensure services are targeted towards people and places most at risk.
- Work with schools and alternative education providers to develop and deliver consistent, good quality education about fire safety and road safety, so children are able to make informed, positive and safe choices.
- Divert children away from harm through a range of personal development programmes and positive diversionary activities and ensure that they are brought together with similar activities in policing in a cohesive and coordinated way.
- Support the delivery of education initiatives targeted towards groups most at risk of road traffic collisions.

Priority 4

A fire and rescue service for tomorrow

Ensure that Staffordshire Fire & Rescue is fit for a changing future and is a leading example for other services to follow so that the people of Staffordshire can be reassured that their money is being used efficiently and effectively and the workforce better reflects the communities it serves.

We will:

- Apply robust processes to understand present and future service demand and risk to provide a sound and transparent evidence base for resource allocation and funding decisions.
- Use this evidence base to develop an operating model that puts the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time to respond to fires and other incidents and deliver the services which will prevent incidents and reduce risk even further.
- Ensure the right resources are available to respond to fires and other incidents, considering the balance between wholetime and on-call firefighters, generalist and specialist roles, shift patterns and working locations. Reviewing the vehicle fleet mix and associated crewing arrangements should reform part of this process.
- Increase the diversity of the workforce to better reflect the community we serve, promoting inclusion and addressing any organisational or cultural barriers to achieving this.
- Build on our police/fire collaboration programme to deliver effective and efficient support services and bring together the best in new ways of working and the technology that supports it from both organisations.
- Make better use of our best buildings by enabling fire and rescue and police staff to share accommodation.
- Implement strong evaluation processes to provide a better understanding of productivity and impact the service is having against the outcomes it is working towards.

Delivering the Plan

Finance and Resources

The total revenue budget for 2021/22 was set at £42m. The funding for the Fire & Rescue Authority comes from two main sources; firstly, from Council Tax which amounts to around 65% of the total budget with the remaining 35% coming from Settlement Funding, which is a combination of local business rates and Revenue Support Grant provided directly by the Government.

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets out the basis of our current assumptions for the future and looks ahead in order to predict the overall funding position for Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service for the next few years. The future is always difficult to predict but there is likely to be a significant impact of the pandemic on public finances both locally and centrally. As at 2022/23, the current MTFS is predicated on identifying savings of £2.9m.

The Service continues to develop its transformation plan to meet new financial and operational challenges with value for money being a key priority. The plan will need to be flexible to allow for changes in assumptions and the overall funding position.

A key factor in this is pay settlements which have been previously negotiated without the involvement of the four police, fire & crime commissioners who have taken on governance of local fire services. I will ensure that we are not excluded from future national conversations on pay and conditions as they impact significantly on our financial plans.

Future funding considerations will of course influence any proposals that I put forward regarding the level of council tax increases required for 2022/23 and beyond. Increases in Council Tax for the Fire & Rescue Authority have been kept very low during the last 10 years and, as with policing, I will only ask for funding above the level of inflation where I consider the increase necessary to protect services and keep our communities safe.

Budget allocation schematic to be inserted

Fire/Police Collaboration

Staffordshire was only the second area in England where governance of fire and rescue was transferred to an elected Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. Collaborative work has brought real benefits to how fire and police work together to keep communities safe, and delivered significant financial benefits.

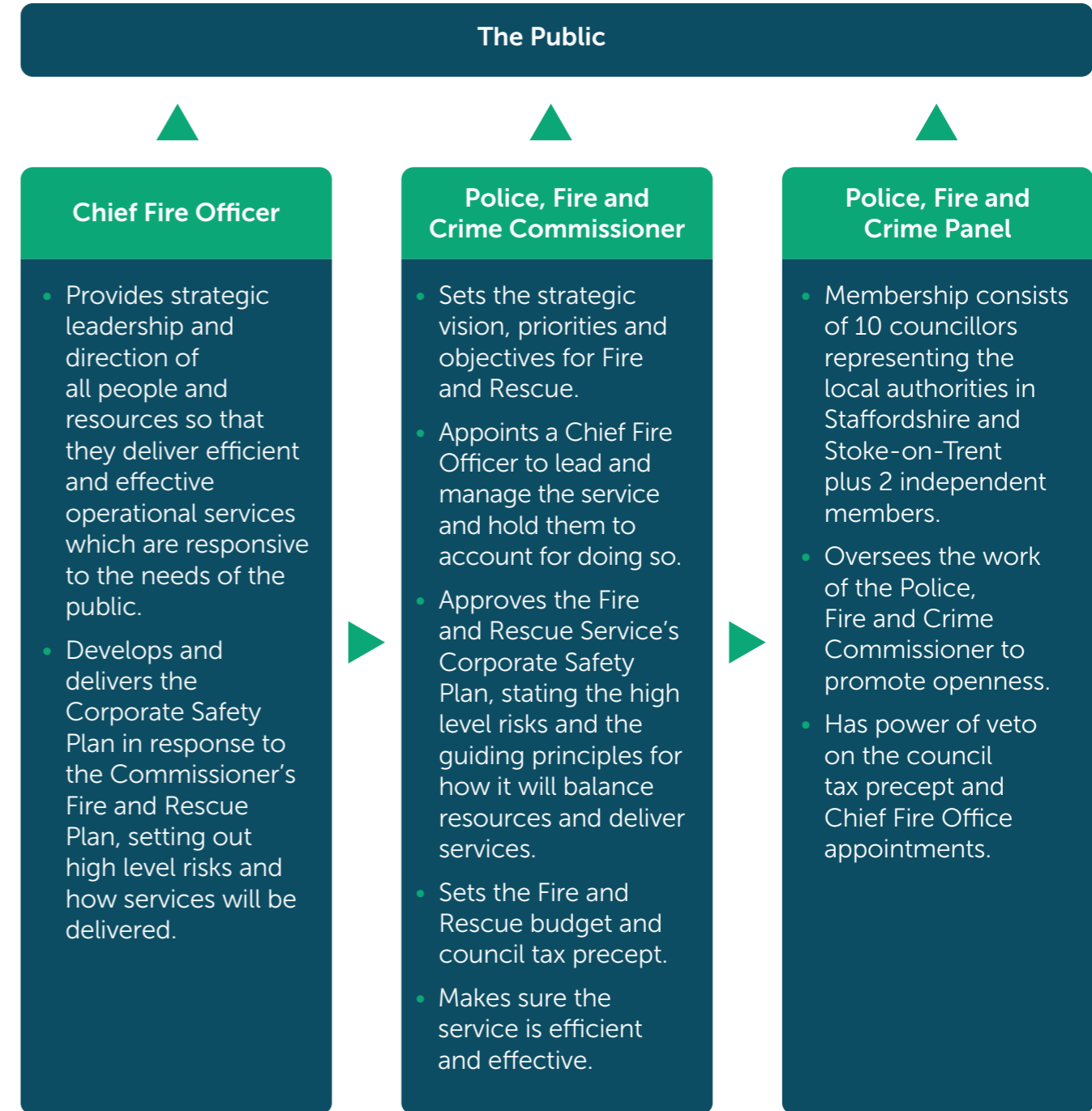
A bold joint estates plan has seen fire and police teams brought together in modern facilities in Hanley and Tamworth, with public money no longer spent on separate buildings for each team. There are plans for similar arrangements in other locations across Staffordshire.

Staffordshire Police and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service now share a number of vital support services including vehicle fleet management, estates management, corporate communications, financial services, supplies and logistics, HR and occupational health. This saves money that is redirected to front line services.

In addition to financial savings, closer working between fire and police is bringing benefits such as joined-up approaches to protecting vulnerable people, and missing persons searches that take advantage of both services' resources and skills.



Performance and Accountability



I expect the Chief Fire Officer to develop a Corporate Safety Plan (which fulfils the legal requirements of an Integrated Risk Management Plan) in response to each of the public priorities set out in this plan. Evidence on progress will be gathered from a number of sources including the service's own performance data, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) reports, government reports and datasets, audit findings, data from partners and public surveys.

I will be completely open about performance against the measures I will monitor locally to ensure our priorities are being delivered. I will publish performance data and hold Public Performance Meetings where I will hold the Chief Fire Officer to account for delivery and which will be available online.

Governance statements, policies and procedures, decision records and details of expenditure and contracts are all accessible at <https://staffordshire-pfcc.gov.uk/transparency/>.

Progress against this plan will be regularly reported to the Police, Fire & Crime Panel and an annual report will be published. This plan will be kept under review and refreshed to take account of finances, changes in national policy or major events.

My office is separate to the fire & rescue service and the police service and works closely with partners, businesses and communities to support me in implementing this plan. It also undertakes public engagement, the scrutiny of the fire & rescue service and the police, and commissions services to support community safety.

My office is specifically responsible for:

- Monitoring and scrutinising the performance of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Staffordshire Police.
- Seeking public views on fire safety, road safety and broader community safety decisions that affect them directly.
- Keeping the public up-to-date and informed about fire and rescue service performance, my work and that of my office.
- Publishing easy-to-access and transparent information about decisions, budgets, performance and governance.
- Working with partners to co-ordinate community safety and prevention activities across Staffordshire.

Get Involved

As your Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Staffordshire, I welcome your feedback. By letting me know the issues that matter to you most, you will be directly shaping Fire and Rescue and broader community safety decisions both now and in the future.

You can contact my office to give feedback or ask questions about your Fire and Rescue service.

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