

Steve Howley
Brigade Secretary
North Yorkshire Fire Brigades Union
By email: Steve.Howley@fbu.org.uk

17 November 2025

Dear Steve,

Thank you for your letter dated 14 September 2025, outlining North Yorkshire Fire Brigades Union's formal response to the public consultation on the new Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2025–2029 and the Fire and Rescue Plan 2025–2029.

The response to the CRMP consultation was submitted after the formal eight-week consultation window had closed. Nonetheless, thank you for taking the time to share the FBU's professional insights. This letter responds to the points you have raised.

Developing the new CRMP 2025-2029: assurance

Following the public consultation in September 2025, I was concerned about the responses to two of the proposed service changes. I raised these directly with the North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service's Strategic Leadership Team (SLT). I reviewed public responses thoroughly and asked for additional assurances, including the supporting data and evidence for each proposal.

Emergency response times and staffing

An essentially rural fire service area such as ours depends disproportionately on on-call firefighters who do an absolutely outstanding job across our region. National concerns regarding response times and the sustainability of the on-call duty system are well understood. The CRMP recognises the challenges of the on-call model and includes commitments to improve on-call firefighter recruitment and retention, working with partners across the Combined Authority, as well as to explore alternative crewing arrangements in areas such as Craven.

The CRMP also proposes reviewing the operational staffing reserve and exploring Incident Support Teams to enhance resilience at under-resourced on-call stations. I know the SLT would welcome further dialogue with the FBU on how best to strengthen the resilience of the current staffing model. I would also welcome discussions about how the Mayor and I can support this through the wider work of the Combined Authority.

Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) attendance policy

I am assured the proposal to extend the policy of not attending AFAs at commercial premises where no one sleeps is based on national best practice and supported by consistent local data showing a very high proportion of false alarms.

The policy extension is expected to deliver several benefits, including fewer interruptions to prevention and protection work, increased crew availability for genuine emergencies, and a reduction in road risk for both firefighters and the public due to less emergency response driving.

The consultation document confirmed that the Service will continue to attend all AFAs at high-risk premises, all commercial premises where people sleep, and domestic properties. An effective call-challenging process will remain in place to ensure AFAs are appropriately assessed, and an emergency response will always be provided if a fire is confirmed.

I am also informed that the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO) places a duty for Automatic Fire Alarm Systems on responsible persons to manage them appropriately and to ensure they have adequate management systems in place. Fire alarms which actuate when there is no fire can be an indication of poor fire safety management on the premises. The Service will continue to work with responsible persons to reinforce their legal responsibilities and improve understanding in this area.

North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service will continue its core regulatory responsibilities, with specialist fire safety staff auditing all high-risk premises every three years in line with the Risk-Based Inspection Programme.

I sought additional assurances around the potential delays in the rare event that an AFA signals a genuine fire, particularly at commercial premises in remote rural areas. To address this, the Service will implement a focused programme of enhanced business engagement, including targeted outreach to commercial premises in rural and remote areas where response times are unavoidably longer.

In addition I'm assured that a comprehensive communication plan will precede implementation of this change to ensure responsible persons and Alarm Receiving Centres are clearly informed of the change in approach in advance.

Water bowser provision

Water provision across the region is clearly a vital resource for our largely rural service where mains water connection is not always available or straightforward. I have sought significant assurances in this area of the CRMP, not least given the public response and the Fylingdale fire which straddled the consultation period. I understand that the decision to replace only one of the Service's two water bowzers is part of a broader strategy to ensure the service modernises its wildfire response capabilities. Both existing water bowzers have limitations: once emptied, they can take a considerable time to refill before they can return to the incident, and their size and design make access to remote terrain difficult.

At the height of the Fylingdale incident, 15 water bowzers were deployed - a combination of the Service's two vehicles and externally provided larger capacity water bowzers and bowzers transported via tractors, which offered far better off-road capability.

Following the consultation, the Service has introduced a new Area of Focus in the CRMP to strengthen resilience to major incidents, "Developing a Community Asset Register and formalising contracts with third-party providers to support wildfire and major incident

response.” In addition, the Service will seek to purchase the most appropriate vehicles to meet the risks within our service area.

The original CRMP proposal focused on exploring new technologies and partnerships to enhance wildfire resilience. This has been broadened to: “Replacing one of our two water bowsters and redirecting funds towards wildfire training, alternative vehicles, equipment, and PPE to improve rural response in line with the community risk profile.”

The recent Fylingdale incident highlighted the critical importance of water logistics in tackling large-scale rural fires. In response, we have asked for an additional Area of Focus: “Working closely work with our partners to ensure we maintain suitable water provision across the service area.”

As a result of this thorough process, the Mayor has approved the Community Risk Management Plan 2025–2029 with a clear understanding of its implications and the assurances the Service has committed to. The Plan will now proceed as adopted.

The Mayor and I remain firmly committed to ensuring that its implementation is responsive to operational realities and shaped by ongoing engagement with frontline professionals, including the FBU.

Fire and Rescue Plan

The Fire and Rescue Plan was subject to a comprehensive public consultation during the autumn of 2024, which included opportunities for engagement with all key stakeholders, including the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). While informal engagement did take place, no formal response was received from the FBU during the consultation period. The Plan was subsequently adopted and published in March 2025, following careful consideration of all feedback received. I trust you are familiar with the priorities set out in the Fire and Rescue Plan, which place the safety of both the public and firefighters at its core.

Funding and financial strategy

You have expressed concern that last year’s £24 Band D increase in the fire precept represents a regressive measure used to offset reductions in central government funding. While there were challenges posed by the withdrawal of central grants such as the Rural Services Delivery Grant, the precept increase has enabled us to maintain core service delivery and to deliver essential investment following a prolonged period of underfunding and underinvestment.

The Fire and Rescue Plan seeks to financially stabilise the Service while continuing to advocate for fairer central funding. The Mayor and I remain committed to lobbying for a revised funding formula that reflects the unique demands of delivering fire and rescue services across a large, rural county like North Yorkshire.

Thank you and FBU members for sharing your views on the new CRMP. Following our meeting last month we will continue to discuss these matters going forwards. I hope you agree that our continued collaboration is vital to delivering a fire and rescue service that meets the needs of our communities and prioritises the safety and wellbeing of our firefighters.

Thank you again for your detailed response and for your continued dedication to public service.

Best wishes



Jo Coles, Deputy Mayor for Policing Fire and Crime

Copy to:

David Skaith, Mayor of York and North Yorkshire

Jonathan Dyson, Chief Fire Officer, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service