



**Agenda
for the Meeting
of the
Management Committee**

Tuesday, 6th February, 2024

At

6.30 pm

RBFRS Headquarters
Lynda Kenyon Suite
Newsham Court
Pincents Kiln
Calcot
Reading
Berkshire
RG31 7SD

For further information regarding this meeting, please contact:

Committee Team

0118 938 4611

E-Mail at committeeteam@rbfrs.co.uk

Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD



MEETING: Management Committee Meeting

DATE AND TIME: Tuesday, 6th February, 2024 at 6.30 pm

VENUE: Lynda Kenyon Suite
RBFRS Headquarters
Newsham Court
Pincents Kiln
Calcot
Reading, Berkshire RG31 7SD

S U M M O N S

You are hereby summoned to attend the meeting of the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority at the time, date and venue indicated above, when it is proposed to deal with the business set out in the enclosed Agenda.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Graham Britten'.

GRAHAM BRITTEN
Monitoring Officer

To: Members of the Management Committee:

Councillor Jeff Brooks	Councillor Ishrat Shah
Councillor Paul Gittings	Councillor Rachelle Shepherd- DuBey
Councillor Pauline Helliard-Symons	Councillor Mike Smith
Councillor Peter Frewer	Councillor Helen Taylor
Councillor Wendy Griffith	Councillor Simon Werner
Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle	

Copy to: Senior Leadership Team (SLT), Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service

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AGENDA

1. Representative Bodies

Purpose:

The Chair may, at his discretion, invite the Representative Bodies present to address the Management Committee once on any Part I item, on the prerequisite that the Representative Bodies advise the Chair at the commencement of the meeting of those Agenda items they wish to speak to.

2. Apologies for Absence

3. Declarations of Interest

Purpose:

To receive Declarations of Interest from Members relating to items to be considered at the meeting, in accordance with the provisions of the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct, and any from Officers.

4. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2023 (Pages 7 - 14)

Purpose:

That the Minutes of the meeting and any recorded actions held on 4 December 2023, be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. Receipt of Announcements

Recommendation:

To receive announcements from the Chair and / or Chief Fire Officer.

6. Issues arising from the Audit and Governance Committee

Recommendation:

That it be noted that no reports have been referred by the Audit and Governance Committee.

7. Draft Annual Budget (To Follow)

To note and recommend the 2024/25 Draft Annual Budget to the Fire Authority for approval.

8. Automatic Fire Alarm Consultation (Pages 15 - 36)

Purpose:

To recommend to the Fire Authority that they agree a 10-week public consultation in March 2024, and they agree the draft consultation document.

9. Home Office Response to Fire Reform White Paper (Pages 37 - 130)

Purpose:

To agree no further action until further detail and information is forthcoming from government.

10. 2023/24 Budget Monitoring - Quarter Three (Pages 131 - 144)

Purpose:

To note the estimated revenue outturn and to receive an update on capital projects at the end of quarter three 2023/24 (October - December 2023).

11. Quarter Three Appliance Availability and Response Standard Performance (Pages 145 - 152)

Purpose:

To note Appliance Availability by Crewing to Meet Corporate Measures 16 and 17.

12. Forward Plan (Pages 153 - 154)

Recommendation:

To note the Forward Plan.

13. Date of next meeting

Tuesday 9 April 2024, 6.30pm at RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

14. Exclusion of the Public (*Pages 155 - 156*)

Recommendation:

To Resolve that under Section 100 (A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the public be excluded from the meeting for the following Agenda Items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in the Paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the said Act indicated and is exempt information if, and so long as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Categories of 'Exempt Information' under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

15. Training Centre Redevelopment (*Pages 157 - 166*)

Purpose:

To agree the recommendation outlined in the report for the redevelopment of the Training Centre.

16. Cleaning Contract Award (*Pages 167 - 170*)

Purpose:

To agree the award of Cleaning Contract.

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Held on Monday, 4th December, 2023 at 6.30 pm

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) Headquarters,
Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

Members:
(*present)

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| * Councillor Jeff Brooks | * Councillor Ishrat Shah |
| * Councillor Peter Frewer | * Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey |
| * Councillor Paul Gittings | * Councillor Mike Smith |
| * Councillor Wendy Griffith | * Councillor Helen Taylor |
| Councillor Pauline Helliar-Symons | * Councillor Simon Werner |
| Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle | |

In Attendance: Mark Arkwell (Deputy Chief Fire Officer, DCFO)
Wayne Bowcock (Chief Fire Officer, CFO) - *Virtual*
Paul Bremble (Head of Corporate Services, HCS)
Graham Britten (Monitoring Officer, MO)
Paul Brooks (Head of Assets, HoA)
Councillor Tricia Brown (Audit and Governance Committee, Chair)
Conor Byrne (Head of Finance and Procurement, HF&P)
Ben Cairns (Area manager Response and Resilience, AM R&R)
Katie Mills (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, ACFO)
Fayth Rowe (Democratic Support Lead, DSL)

Observers: James Aldridge, Reading Chronicle

35. REPRESENTATIVE BODIES

There were no questions received from Representative Bodies on any of the agenda items.

36. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Pauline Helliar-Symons and Tina McKenzie-Boyle.

Action

Apologies for lateness was received from Councillor Ishrat Shah.

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest from Members in accordance with the Fire Authority's Local Code of Conduct.

There were no Declarations of Interest made from Officers.

38. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2023

There was one recorded action in the Minutes. *Post meeting note – An email had been circulated to all Management Committee Members to update on an action from Jim Powell, Area Manager Collaboration and Policy from the meeting on 16 October 2023.*

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2023, be approved as a true record to be signed by the Chair.

39. RECEIPT OF ANNOUNCEMENTS

Incident in Reading

The Chair offered his thanks to all crews who responded to the incident in Reading late last month. Three fire engines arrived at the scene in under eight minutes. Crews worked quickly and efficiently to get the fire under control. He stated it was another great example of the professionalism and dedication of RBFRS staff.

He commended the crane operator for an incredibly skilful rescue under extremely difficult circumstances, aided by two team members who guided him during the rescue. He stated, without their actions, we may be looking at an entirely different outcome. The Authority will be looking for ways to recognise their outstanding actions at the Annual Awards Ceremony in 2024.

The Chair praised the actions of Thames Valley Police, South Central Ambulance Service and Reading Borough Council who supported firefighters in their swift response to this incident.

Firefighter Career Sessions

Ahead of our next round of firefighter recruitment, the Service was running a programme of events to help potential candidates learn more about becoming a firefighter. The programme includes online introductory sessions, station tours, demonstrations by crews, and 'Have a Go' days aimed at appealing to the next generation of firefighters. To date, over 100 individuals have signed up to the

programme. To support the Service's positive action work to attract candidates from underrepresented groups, the Service has reached out to over 60 community groups, including faith groups and female specific groups.

The next recruitment window is due to be opened shortly and will be announced on RBFRS website and social media channels.

Sale of Dee Road Update

The demolition of Dee Road Fire Station took place late last month. Following this development, the Chair announced the Service will receive an extra 95 thousand pounds from the sale.

The extra income from the sale is a direct result of the overage clause that Members wisely supported 24 months ago. The developers, Bellway Homes, were recently granted approval for more homes to be built on the Dee Road Site. The overage clause ensures that the Service will be one of the beneficiaries of this most recent development.

Submission of Planning Permission for Whitley Wood Fire Station

Plans for a new Training Centre at Whitley Wood Fire Station have now been submitted to Reading Borough Council. The Training Centre has been partially out of action since summer 2022 following a flood that rendered some of the site unusable.

In line with the Fire Authority's commitments in the Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF), it was determined that it would be more cost-effective to build a new, modern facility instead of renovating the damaged building. Following a thorough procurement process, Premier Modular Limited has been selected to design, manufacture and install a new two-storey building.

The programme of works will include the demolition of the current building and the green cabin at the site, both of which will be replaced by the single, prefabricated building next to the Firehouse.

The Chair thanked the project team for their efforts thus far. The Authority will be updated on the outcome of its submission in approximately 13 weeks.

New On-Call Firefighter initial training completion

Three new on-call firefighters have recently completed their initial training courses and will join firefighters at Crowthorne Fire Station.

New recruits Charlie Down, James Griffin and Lee Richards were presented with a certificate and welcomed into the service by Area Manager Ben Cairns on 1 December 2023. They undertook a rigorous two-week training course where they learnt to operate safely on incident ground and operate as part of a crew

under supervision whilst they continue to undergo their ongoing developmental training.

The Chair congratulated them for completing their initial training and welcomed them to the Service.

Asian Fire Service Association

Fayth Rowe, Democratic Support Lead was an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champion nominee at the recent Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) Conference in Leeds on 22/23 November 2023.

She was one of three nominees in that category for her work on the Summer Internship and Leonard Cheshire (Change 100) programmes held earlier in the year.

On behalf of the Fire Authority, the Chair thanked her for her hard work and well-deserved nomination.

Tea and Coffee Morning at Wokingham Fire Station

Throughout the festive season, firefighters at Wokingham Fire Station will be holding several tea and coffee mornings to help combat loneliness.

All are welcome to come along for a hot drink and a chat with crews about the work they do.

The events take place between the third and twenty-third of December and there is no need to register in advance or confirm attendance. The timings are available on RBFRS events calendar via its website.

In referring to the incident in Reading, the Vice-Chair, Councillor Paul Gittings congratulated crews on their magnificent response, however he stated it was the second incident of this type in Station Hill, in the last six months. It was also the third working at height incident in Reading. He asked whether there had been any lessons learnt for the Service in the most recent working at height fires, and whether there was a health and safety inspection after the first incident. He also asked how long will a tier 2 inspection take.

Councillor Simon Werner stated he too, was concerned about the recent incident in Reading, as the previous Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead administration agreed to build an 18 story tower block. He stated, he was keen to understand lessons learnt from the Reading incident and how these incidences could be prevented.

In referring to the first incident in Station Hill in July, Mark Arkwell, Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) stated he was proud of the response provided. The crew arrived in under 8 minutes and also credited the Built Environment programme which assisted in the preparedness of operational colleagues. In relation to

lessons learnt, debriefs on all types of incidents were held and learning identified. The incident in Station Hill sits under the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and they were carrying out their investigations.

The Service will carry out its own fire investigation via West Midland Fire and Rescue Service partners.

The Built Environment programme identified 180 high rise buildings in Berkshire and stated operational staff were equipped to deal with high rise incidents. The Service's Protection Teams will be working with relevant partners to prevent such incidents.

40. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Councillor Tricia Brown, Chair of Audit and Governance Committee was in attendance. Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement (HF&P) provided a verbal update on the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts. He reported external auditors EY, recently signed off 2020/21 Statement of Accounts at the Audit and Governance Committee on 30 October 2023. The delay was partly related to Deloitte signing off Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Pension Fund. He added 2021/22 and 2022/23 Statement of Accounts remained outstanding.

In response to Councillor Paul Gittings, Conor Byrne explained external audit baseline fees were negotiated by Public Sector Audit Appointments (PSAA), which was currently £26,000 per year. He stated, EY (external auditors) felt the current fee was too low. For comparison, he stated, prior to the abolition of the Audit Commission, the Authority paid £81,000 for external auditors of which EY was transferred under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE) across. Procurement exercises have been held since the abolition of the Audit Commission.

Conor Byrne stated there were 980 audits outstanding. Councillor Tricia Brown queried the effects the delay in signing off Statement of Accounts had on staff. Conor Byrne reported of the challenges it had on staff.

41. ICT HARDWARE REPLACEMENT

Conor Byrne, HF&P, advised the report was seeking Member approval for the expenditure of £107,000 on end-user equipment. He advised the capital expenditure would be funded from the Strategic Asset Investment Framework (SAIF), previously approved by the Fire Authority on 15 February 2023.

Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey endorsed the recommendation. The Chair moved the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey. On being put to the vote, it was unanimously,

RESOLVED that the expenditure of £107,000 on end-user equipment be approved.

42. 2023/24 BUDGET MONITORING - QUARTER TWO

Councillor Mike Smith, Budget and Income Generation Lead summarised the report. He stated the forecast revenue outturn for 2023/24 (Appendix A) showed an anticipated surplus of £26,000 compared to the original budget. The increase in interest rates will result in additional investment income. In referring to *Employee costs*, he stated the overtime forecast was £207,000 over budget, as well as the *Contribution to TVFCS & Collaboration* line was £11,000 over budget. There were several large projects at the end of the financial year in relation to Capital Monitoring programme.

Conor Byrne, HF&P reported the budget included the replenishment of the Budget Contingency Reserve. Within Grey Book *Employee Costs*, there was an underspend on base salary and overspend on overtime due to Water Rescue training. The cost of training new Wholetime Firefighter apprentices had been built into the budget forecast with an additional 18 forecast to be taken by the end of the financial year.

The Green Book Pay award will be built into quarter three budget monitoring forecast. There was an overspend of £112,000 in the *Repairs & Maintenance* line, which include £92,000 estimated total cost of completing works to the Firehouse at Whitley Wood Fire Station.

The Authority continue to work with a third party to challenge business rate charges for Fire Stations and Management Committee recently approved a six-month extension to the Cleaning Contract to enable the Authority to go through a tender process.

The cost of the fleet maintenance contract with Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service forecast was £42,000 over budget due to the increase charge rate for vehicle technicians and vehicle parts.

In referring to Appendix D (Treasury Management), Conor Byrne confirmed that the Authority's treasury management operations were fully compliant.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

43. QUARTER TWO APPLIANCE AVAILABILITY BY CREWING TO MEET CORPORATE MEASURES 16 AND 17

Ben Cairns, Area Manager Response and Resilience (AM R&R) reported the Wholetime availability for quarter two was slightly below target of 97.2% against a target of 99%. He explained there were a significant number of operational staff that were in development, as well as the introduction of Water Rescue

training made an additional impact. On-call was utilised to support and enable 14 pump appliance availability.

In discussing ongoing pressures, Ben Cairns reported wholetime sickness rate was 4.55% and 12 staff were on light duties. Service delivery teams and HR colleagues work closely to manage absence management.

On-call availability for the quarter was 38.4% against a target of 50%. He stated quarter two covered the summer months where on-call colleagues took their annual leave. He was pleased to announce five new on-call colleagues had been recruited.

In discussing the Response Standard, the Service achieved 72.9% against a corporate measure target of 75% of emergency incidents attended in 10 minutes.

In referring to Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) priority 5, Councillor Paul Gittings stated he was pleased on-call were being used to ensure there were 14 appliances available across the county. He also stated there were few occasions where 14 appliances were not available and highlighted a number of other Fire and Rescue Services (FRS') did not have the same Response Standards.

In response to a question from Councillor Paul Gittings, Ben Cairns reported the Service looked at other FRS Response Standard and appliance availability as a comparison. Katie Mills, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) reported Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) backed national trends and in referring to Home Office data, she stated the Service's attendance times were positive.

The Chair stated the Authority wished to see the Service achieve its Response Standard of 75% of emergency incidents attended in 10 minutes, and acknowledge on-call availability remained a challenge.

RESOLVED that:

- 1) The 2023/24 quarter two performance of 97.2% appliance availability of the Service's 14 wholetime appliances in line with Corporate Measure 16 be noted.
- 2) The 2023/24 quarter two overall on-call appliance availability performance of 38.4%, in line with Corporate Measure 17 be noted.

44. FORWARD PLAN

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted.

45. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 6 February 2024, 6.30pm at RBFRS Headquarters, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

46. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), the public be excluded from the meeting for the following Agenda Items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the said Act indicated and is exempt information if, and so long as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

47. PART II MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 OCTOBER 2023

There were no recorded actions.

RESOLVED that the Part II Minutes of the meeting on 16 October 2023 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

(The meeting concluded at 7.29pm)

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	6 FEBRUARY 2024
SUBJECT	AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARM CONSULTATION
LEAD OFFICER	PAUL BREMBLE HEAD CORPORATE SERVICES AND JIM POWELL; AREA MANAGER COLLABORATION AND POLICY
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR PAUL GITTINGS
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	FOR DECISION

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Through the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP), Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) sets out how it proposes to deliver services, meet the Strategic Objectives contained in the Corporate Plan and seeks to drive continuous improvement. This journey of improvement has been supported by the inspection programme of His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS).
- 1.2 False Alarms make up a significant proportion of the incidents RBFRS attend, and this was noted by HMICFRS who concluded that *“the service should ensure it addresses effectively the burden of false alarms (termed ‘unwanted fire signals’).”*
- 1.3 The Fire Authority CRMP set out a priority to address the burden of Automatic Fire Alarms on the service and the public *“We will work with businesses to educate them on their responsibility under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to reduce the impact of unwanted fire signals (automatic fire alarms) on our operational crews”.*
- 1.4 False Alarms account for 48% of all incidents and 99.3% of Automatic Fire Alarm notifications require no action by the service. Of those that were actual incidents, particularly in the premises subject to the

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consultation, the impact was minor.

- 1.5 The service currently successfully challenges around a quarter of the calls we receive to Automatic Fire Alarms. However, following a consultation in 2022, the subsequent changes that were made had a minimal impact on improving this position.
- 1.6 Attending false alarm calls creates significant disruption to other more risk critical activities and research has shown that by changing the way the service responds to these types of incidents could provide significant benefits to communities and Firefighters.
- 1.7 As these changes represent a variation to the way we deliver our response, the service should consult publicly on any proposals. This paper sets out that proposal, presenting a draft consultation paper (Appendix A) and seeking agreement to take the proposal forward to public consultation.
- 1.8 For the avoidance of doubt, this consultation proposal covers only our response to the Automatic Fire Alarms specified within the consultation document. We will still always maintain our emergency response to 999 calls.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Management Committee:

- 2.1 **AGREE** to recommend to the Fire Authority to commence a 10-week public consultation in March 2024, at a specified date to be confirmed at the Chief Fire Officers discretion, to inform a future decision on how it responds to Automatic Fire Alarms;
- 2.2 **AGREE** to recommend to the Fire Authority the draft consultation document, subject to delegating responsibility for any minor amendments to the consultation document to the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Fire Authority and CRMP Lead Member.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 Royal Berkshire Fire Authority recognised the outcomes of the 2022/23 HMICFRS report and the burden that false alarms place on the service by setting out a priority in the Authorities CRMP to 'review our operational response to unwanted fire signals (Automatic Fire Alarms) to reduce the impact on the service and public.'
- 3.2 The service attends around 2,300 alarm related incidents each year with over 99% being false alarms. Attending these types of incidents disrupts essential activities which are undertaken daily by our Firefighters.

- 3.3 These activities enable the service to ensure it manages community risk, through delivering Safe and Well visits to vulnerable people, enabling Firefighters to do more training and to ensure they have the knowledge and understanding of their local risks so that they can respond effectively when there is a real incident.
- 3.4 These activities are carefully planned throughout the year and the disruption caused by false alarms has a compounding effect that can have a significant impact on ensuring both our communities and our Firefighters are safe.
- 3.5 The evidence suggests that by changing the way we respond to some of these incidents, as set out in the consultation document, the service could reduce this disruption and provide more time for those key activities which would have greater benefits for our communities and across the service.
- 3.6 The proposed changes do not offer monetary savings and this has not been a driving factor in developing the proposals. The focus is solely on reducing risk by minimising disruption to those key activities we know will provide the most benefit in keeping people safe.
- 3.7 It is important to note that in recent years many Fire and Rescue services have reviewed the way they respond to AFAs. This has been for similar reasons as those that RBFRS is now considering, essentially ensuring their resources are aligned to risk and are utilised in the most effective way possible.
- 3.8 Officers conducted an analysis of 20 Fire and Rescue Services from across England, looking at how they have changed the way they respond to AFAs. Whilst there are subtle variations around the time of day or risk categorisation of property types, all these services have chosen not to attend AFA calls in one form or another.
- 3.9 For example, North Yorkshire and Humberside FRS will not attend 'non-sleeping premises, for North Yorkshire this is only between 07.00-19.00 whilst for Humberside this is 24hrs, 7 days a week. At the opposite end of the spectrum Surrey and Gloucestershire FRS will not attend any AFA calls at any time with some specific exceptions for certain premises such as domestic properties, hotels and hospitals.
- 3.10 This range can be broadly seen in figure 1 below, which shows the majority of services will not attend retail, commercial and industrial premises with the minority also choosing not attend healthcare settings. The options contained within the RBFA consultation document have been plotted to provide an indication of where RBFRS would sit within this sample:

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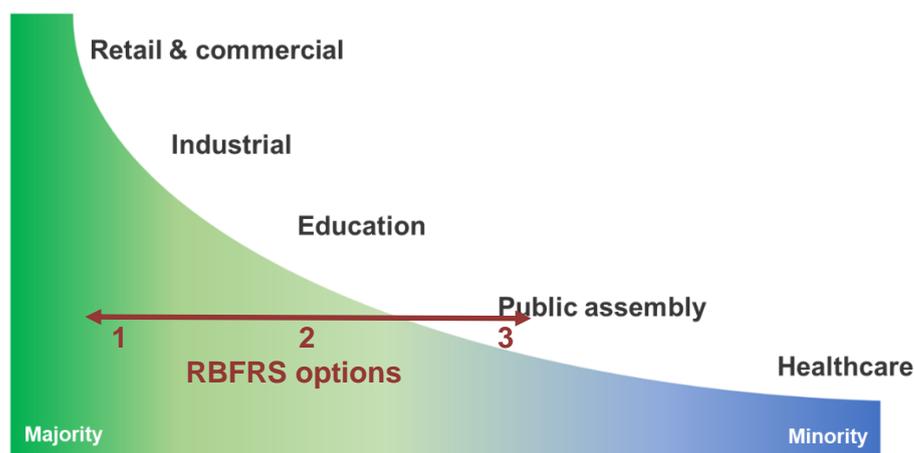


Figure 1

- 3.11 The proposal and associated information are captured in the draft consultation document at Appendix A.
- 3.12 The proposals were considered by members in a task and finish group that met several times during December 2023 and January 2024. This was attended by Cllr Mike Smith, Cllr Billy Drummond, Cllr Haqeeq Dar, Cllr Robert Steadman and Cllr Dennis Benneyworth. The group supported the consultation proposals in principle and recommended it go forward to Management Committee.
- 3.13 Following feedback from members, officers will continue to refine the document ahead of starting the consultation and the recommendation at 2.2 will enable good governance and sign off whilst supporting ambitious delivery timelines.
- 3.14 To ensure RBFA (Royal Berkshire Fire Authority) can make the best possible decisions, it is necessary to consult publicly on any changes it makes to its Service Delivery arrangements.
- 3.15 RBFRS is able to build on the positive consultation experiences of recent years and ensure we can reach 'seldom heard' groups within our communities as well as focusing on key stakeholders by conducting a thorough equality assessment and stakeholder analysis.
- 3.16 The service will utilise all its existing and embedded communication channels and provide focused community engagement through the Service Delivery Hubs to ensure we maximise involvement across Royal Berkshire.
- 3.17 The consultation document provides the main focus of the consultation and is supported by a range of underpinning information. This will ensure communities and stakeholders have access to all the relevant information, enabling them to fully consider the proposals and the reasons for them.

- 3.18 In order to reach a decision, and implement any subsequent change, officers recommend commencing the consultation in March 2024. The recommendation at 2.1 provides some flexibility on this date should it be required, however, it is expected that any change in the start date would be minimal.
- 3.19 A full report would be presented to Fire Authority in June 2024, to enable members to conscientiously consider the views of residents when making a decision.
- 3.20 Following the consultation, should members take a decision in June 2024 to change the way we respond to AFAs (Automatic Fire Alarm), the service will conduct a thorough review to evaluate the intended benefits, seeking to capture any findings that would support future action or improvements, reporting back to Fire Authority as appropriate.
- 3.21 It is important to reiterate that this consultation proposal covers only our response to the Automatic Fire Alarms specified within the consultation document. We will still always maintain our emergency response to 999 calls.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 Prevention - We will reduce the risk to our communities through our partnership duties and prevention activities, ensuring that our services are accessible to all.
- 4.2 Protection - We will support those with responsibility for premises to understand their duties in ensuring the safety of all people using buildings covered by the Building Safety Act 2022 and Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, whilst ensuring that our services are accessible to all.
- 4.3 Response- We will ensure that our people are trained and resources are located to provide the most effective response and to have a positive impact on incidents in our communities.
- 4.4 Resilience - We will ensure our resilience and work with our partners to promote and build resilience in the communities we serve.
- 4.5 Sustainability- We will ensure that we provide a financially sustainable and environmentally friendly service to our communities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no additional financial burdens in delivering the consultation identified at this time. There are likely to be some incidental expenditure, such as printing costs, however this can be made available from existing budgets.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There is a legal requirement under Section 7(2)(c) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to “make arrangements for dealing with calls for help and for summoning personnel”, in order to discharge its obligations under section 7(1) to extinguish fires in its area and protecting life and property in the event of fires in its area.
- 6.2 The obligations under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 are ‘target duties’ and not actionable, by someone suffering loss, for breach of duty; and the English courts have consistently ruled along the lines that no duty of care arises (save in circumstances where personnel attend and make matters worse).
- 6.3 The principles established are that a fire and rescue authority may be liable where its negligent acts cause physical harm, but owes no positive duties to act to protect others from harm in the absence of a specific voluntary assumption of responsibility *Capital and Counties Plc v Hampshire CC* [1997] EWCA CIV 3091 ‘In our judgment the fire brigade are not under a common law duty to answer the call for help and are not under a duty to take care to do so. If therefore they fail to turn up or fail to turn up in time because they have carelessly misunderstood the message, got lost on the way or run into a tree, they are not liable.’
- 6.4 In responding to calls English courts have distinguished the fire and rescue duties from ambulance service obligations as the ambulance service is an arm of the health service which might owe a duty of care in similar circumstances. In *Kent v Griffiths & Ors* [2000] EWCA Civ 3017 (3 February 2000) it was held that it was arguable that, once a 999 call was accepted, a relationship of sufficient proximity was established between the caller and the ambulance service and, whilst the ambulance service operated in difficult circumstances, it was possible that a court would find that it was fair, just and reasonable to impose a duty of care on it.
- 6.5 The legal obligations concerning the requirement to consult and how consultation should be conducted are set out in the ‘Legal obligations’ section of the consultation document. It defines the requirement to consult on CRMP matters as set out in the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England and describes the common law framework set out in the four Gunning Principles (*R v London Borough of Brent* [1985] 84 LGR 168).
- 6.6 Undertaking a public consultation will support the Fire Authority in determining that any future decision is proportionate, appropriate and reasonable.

7. EQUALITY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 An initial impact assessment and stakeholder analysis has commenced, building on the consultation in 2022, and this will be

developed into a full stakeholder analysis and equality impact assessment prior to the launch of the consultation and any resultant actions will inform the consultation plan.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The analysis of any implications are outlined in the consultation document at Appendix A. Essentially this change represents a low risk to the public and as stated at 3.6 will enable more time for other risk mitigation activity to occur, such as Safe and Well visits.
- 8.2 This proposal will not change the fundamental position that RBFRS will always mobilise resources where there is a confirmed fire.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 9.1 AFA (Automatic Fire Alarm) mobilisations are managed and delivered on behalf of RBFRS by Thames Valley Fire Control Service.
- 9.2 Officers are working with partners in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service to work towards an aligned policy for mobilising to AFAs.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 10.1 Chief Fire Officer
- 10.2 Head of Finance and Procurement
- 10.3 Monitoring Officer

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Automatic Fire Alarm call filtering evaluation - [Minutes of the meeting of Royal Berkshire Management Committee 16 October 2023 \[Minute 25\]](#)
- 11.2 Automatic Fire Alarm Consultation Results – [Minutes of the meeting of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority 28 April, 2022 \[Minute 69\]](#)

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Appendix A – AFA consultation document.

13. CONTACT DETAILS

- 13.1 Paul Bremble bremblep@rbfrs.co.uk 07786145153
- 13.2 Jim Powell powellj@rbfrs.co.uk 077742156644

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Automatic Fire Alarms - 2024

A consultation on proposed changes to the way we respond to false alarms



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Foreword

We are committed to ensuring we provide excellent services to the people of Royal Berkshire.

Our [Community Risk Management Plan](#) (CRMP) sets out key areas of work to reduce risk to people, places the environment and the economy in Berkshire. To do this, we need to prioritise the delivery of our essential services.

False alarms account for 45% of all the incidents we attend and the majority of these are the result of Automatic Fire Alarm systems (AFAs). 99% of these AFA incidents require no action by the Service. False alarms can be caused by several issues, for example, aerosol sprays, cooking fumes or a fire alarm system that hasn't been serviced properly.

Attending false alarm calls creates significant disruption to other more risk critical activities. Changing the way, the Service responds to these types of incidents could provide significant benefits to communities and Firefighters. The proposed changes do not offer monetary savings. Our focus is solely on reducing risk by minimising disruption to key activities.

Therefore, we are asking you to consider three options. For all the options we are consulting you on, we are proposing the same change to how we respond to category A buildings. For category B buildings, we propose a number of options for your consideration.

We will continue to send fire engines to automatic fire alarm notifications at higher risk buildings, where anyone sleeps, such as hotels and care homes, houses, and flats.

Most importantly, we will continue to maintain our emergency response to 999 calls, confirmed fires and to automatic fire alarm notifications from private dwellings.

No decisions have been made and your feedback will be vital to the decision-making process. Please take the time to consider the proposed options. Your comments will help inform the decision which will be made by Royal Berkshire Fire Authority on which proposal to adopt.

The consultation will run for 10 weeks from 4 March 2024 until 13 May 2024.



Chair of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
Councillor Jeff Brooks



Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive
Wayne Bowcock



Why Are We Consulting?

Our CRMP sets out key areas of work to reduce risk to people, places, the environment, and the economy in Berkshire.

Attending alarm calls creates significant disruption to other more risk critical activities. Changing the way, the Service responds to these types of incidents could provide significant benefits to communities and Firefighters, further improving the service provided to the people of Berkshire.

The proposed changes do not offer monetary savings. The focus is solely on reducing risk by minimising disruption to key activities.

The impact that automatic fire alarm calls have on fire and rescue services has been recognised. It remains clear that there is still the need for significant improved action associated with the management of false alarms.

Nationally (2022-23), 39% of 999 calls to fire and rescue services were false alarms. We want to bring our service in line with, or below, this percentage.

Automatic Fire Alarm Notifications

In Berkshire, false alarms make up 45% of the incidents we attend. Most of these calls come from commercial automatic fire detection systems. We refer to these as automatic fire alarms (AFAs).

In 2022-23 alone, we attended 2,294 AFAs. On 99% of these calls (in the buildings we are consulting on), no action was required by the Service as there was no fire.

The 1% of automatic fire alarm notifications that were confirmed as fires resulted in no injuries or deaths. No significant property damage was caused by these incidents. Attending these types of incidents disrupts the essential daily activities of our Firefighters.

According to the law, Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA) must make provision for extinguishing fires and for protecting life and property in the event of fires. They must also make arrangements for dealing with calls for help when there is a fire. **There is no legal duty on a FRA to respond to notifications from AFA systems for the purpose of establishing whether there is a fire.**

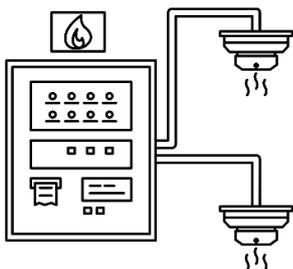
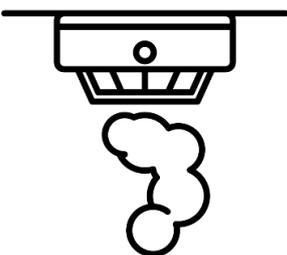
In non-domestic premises covered by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, the employer, the owner, or someone else who has control of the premises (the 'responsible person') must ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that the premises are safe for its occupants in the event of a fire. When an alarm system is fitted these arrangements include maintenance of the system and providing the actions to be taken if the AFA system was activated.



This consultation reflects a change to how we respond to Automatic Fire Alarm calls in the premises categorised below, where the Responsible Person cannot confirm there is a fire.

We will continue to send fire engines to automatic fire alarm calls at buildings where anyone sleeps, such as hotels and care homes, houses, and flats. We will also **continue to attend fire alarm notifications at** a range of existing known **higher risk sites**. Such as regulated sites (COMAH, REPPiR) and heritage properties.

We will continue to maintain our emergency response to 999 calls, confirmed fires and to automatic fire alarm notifications from private dwellings.

 <p>45% of all our calls received were false alarms</p>	 <p>99% of the automatic fire alarm notifications received are false alarms</p>	 <p>1% of automatic fire alarm notifications were confirmed as fires. There were no injuries, deaths, or significant property damage</p>
---	---	--



We will continue to send fire engines to 999 calls and confirmed fires.

We will continue to send fire engines to automatic fire alarm notifications from private dwellings.

Why Do We Want to Reduce Attendance at False Alarms?

Every year, we attend around 2300 false alarms generated by Automatic Fire Alarms. Attending these types of incidents disrupts essential daily activities undertaken by our Firefighters.



Risks

We know that 99% of automatic fire alarm notifications (in the buildings we are consulting on) are false alarms. We need to change the way we respond to automatic fire alarm notifications. If we do not, we are unable to address the following risks:

- We want to carry out more in person fire safety visits to our most vulnerable residents and businesses to help them live and work safely. Every time a fire engine is sent to an automatic fire alarm notification during a visit it disrupts the business, delays us giving vital advice to residents, and increases risk to the public.
- Being called to automatic fire alarm notifications can divert firefighters from real emergencies, potentially putting life and property at risk. Additionally, driving to false alarms under emergency conditions puts our residents at unnecessary risk as well as having an environmental impact.
- If we do not change the way we respond to these false alarms, it will have a longer-term impact on the delivery of critical training. It is essential that our teams can train, exercise, and develop their skills and knowledge to deal with known and emerging risks in our communities. It is vital that we can respond effectively when there is a real incident. Dealing with false alarms regularly disrupts training and exercises.
- Firefighters carry out familiarisation visits at high-risk buildings so that we are well prepared to respond to real incidents. It is a legal duty for firefighters to gather this information. Maintaining up to date risk information helps us minimise the risk to our staff and the public. Attending false alarms disrupts us gathering the information we need and creates unnecessary risk.

Last year, we spent around 2,900 hours responding to false alarms. While this is an indicative figure, we know that attending these types of incidents causes significant disruption to the delivery of our essential services and training.

These activities are carefully planned throughout the year and the disruption caused by false alarms has a compounding effect. We need to change the way we respond to automatic fire alarm notifications to ensure our communities and our Firefighters are kept safe.



How we Currently Respond to Automatic Fire Alarms

Our current policy is that we will send a fire engine to all automatic fire alarm notifications in buildings that are high-risk, occupied buildings. For example, buildings such as care homes, hotels, houses, and flats (where anyone sleeps).

We call-challenge all reports of automatic fire alarm notifications in lower risk buildings that are reasonably assumed to be occupied. Currently, the Service successfully challenges around a quarter of these calls. We will send a fire engine if we cannot contact a person, or if the cause of the alarm is not confirmed by the building occupier. For all automatic fire alarm notification calls, we will always use our discretion. If Fire Control have reasonable doubt about the call, or a cause for concern, they will send a fire engine. We will always send a fire engine to 999 calls and confirmed fires.

We carried out [consultation in 2022](#), about how we challenge calls to Automatic Fire Alarm notifications. The subsequent changes that we made had a minimal impact on the disruption caused by responding to false alarms.

Consultation Categories

We have three proposed options to consult on. These options explain how we plan to reduce our response to automatic fire alarms in the buildings categorised below, addressing the risks identified in this document.

The proposed changes do not offer monetary savings. The focus is solely on reducing risk by minimising disruption to key activities.

We will continue to send fire engines to alarms at higher risk buildings, where anyone sleeps, such as hotels and care homes, houses, and flats, at any time.

We will always send a fire engine to 999 calls, confirmed fires and to automatic fire alarm notifications from private dwellings.

We have separated all buildings into categories. This helps us explain how we want to change our response to automatic fire alarm notifications. Detail of the building types in each category are [available on our website](#).



Buildings in category A

	Examples
Commercial non-residential ¹	Shop, office, warehouse
Entertainment	Leisure centre, cinema, theatre
Education non-residential ¹	College, university
Stadium	Sports ground, pavilion, stadium

Buildings in category B

	Examples
Community properties	Library, town hall, museum
Education non-residential ¹	Primary and secondary school
Medical	Doctors' surgery, health centre

Options for Consultation

For all the options we are consulting you on, we are proposing the same change to how we respond to category A buildings. For buildings in category B, we propose 3 different options for your consideration. This is to enable us to reduce the number of unnecessary false alarms attended and disruption caused by these, further improving the service we provide to our residents.

The number of automatic fire alarm notifications in the options below are taken from 2022-2023 data for Berkshire. The hours saved are indicative but do demonstrate the significant disruption caused by false alarms to the delivery of our essential services and training. The estimated number of productive hours gained are a conservative estimate and do not account for the disruption to our service caused by AFAs. We expect a higher return of productive working hours.

Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service believe that option 3 provides the most benefits to communities and the service itself. This is because it offers the greatest reduction in unnecessary time spent responding to false alarms. It will enable more time to be spent on the critical activities described in the 'Risk' section of this document. This option also presents Fire Control Operators with a streamlined approach with the potential to improve call handling times in Fire Control. We also believe that this will help to futureproof the way the Service responds to these types of alarms. It is for all these reasons that option 3 is the preferred option of the service.

While this is the preferred option, it is important to note that no decisions have been made yet. We want to hear what you think of our proposals.

¹ Non-residential means no-one sleeps in the building.



Option 1

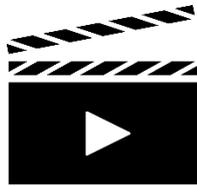
We will **stop automatically sending a fire engine to an automatic fire alarm notification** at buildings in **Category A** when there is no confirmed fire, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

If a fire is confirmed or we receive a 999 call, we will immediately send a fire engine. We will continue to send fire engines to automatic fire alarm notifications from private dwellings.

Types of buildings affected



Shops



Cinemas



Universities



Sports stadiums

Change Proposed

	<p>Category A buildings We will stop automatically sending a fire engine to an automatic fire alarm notification when there is no confirmed fire</p>	 24 hours a day  365 days
	<p>We will continue to send fire engines to 999 calls and confirmed fires. We will continue to send fire engines to automatic fire alarm notifications from private dwellings.</p>	
<p>Estimated number of automatic fire alarm notifications affected by Option 1</p>		<p>725</p>
<p>Estimated productive hours gained for critical activities</p>		<p>986 hours</p>



Option 2

We will stop automatically sending a fire engine to an automatic fire alarm notification at buildings in **Category A** when there is no confirmed fire, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

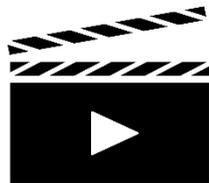
We will stop automatically sending a fire engine to an automatic fire alarm notification at buildings in **Category B** between 9am and 6pm, 365 days of the year, when the buildings are likely to be occupied and therefore the Responsible Person can confirm if there is an emergency response needed.

If a fire is confirmed or we receive a 999 call, we will immediately send a fire engine. We will continue to send fire engines to automatic fire alarm notifications from private dwellings.

Types of buildings affected



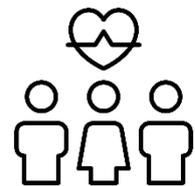
Shops



Cinemas



Schools



Doctors Surgeries

Change Proposed

	<p>Category A buildings</p> <p>We will stop automatically sending a fire engine to an automatic fire alarm notification when there is no confirmed fire</p>	 24 hours a day 365 days
	<p>Category B buildings</p> <p>We will stop automatically sending a fire engine to an automatic fire alarm notification when there is no confirmed fire</p>	 between 9am and 6pm
	<p>We will continue to send fire engines to 999 calls and confirmed fires.</p> <p>We will continue to send fire engines to automatic fire alarm notifications from private dwellings.</p>	
Estimated number of automatic fire alarm notifications affected by Option 2		810
Estimated productive hours gained for critical activities		1,074 hours



Option 3

We will stop automatically sending a fire engine to an automatic fire alarm notification at buildings in **Category A** when there is no confirmed fire, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

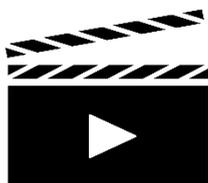
We will stop automatically sending a fire engine to an automatic fire alarm notification at buildings in **Category B** when there is no confirmed fire, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

If a fire is confirmed or we receive a 999 call, we will immediately send a fire engine. We will continue to send fire engines to automatic fire alarm notifications from private dwellings.

Types of buildings affected



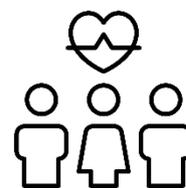
Shops



Cinemas



Schools



Doctors Surgeries

Change Proposed

	Category A buildings We will stop automatically sending a fire engine to an automatic fire alarm notification when there is no confirmed fire	 24 hours a day
	Category B buildings We will stop automatically sending a fire engine to an automatic fire alarm notification when there is no confirmed fire	 365 days
	We will continue to send fire engines to 999 calls and confirmed fires. We will continue to send fire engines to automatic fire alarm notifications from private dwellings.	
Estimated number of automatic fire alarm notifications affected by Option 3		894
Estimated productive hours gained for critical activities		1,228 hours



How to Have Your Say

The Automatic Fire Alarm consultation will run from 4 March 2024 until 13 May 2024.

No decisions have been made yet. We want to hear what you think of our proposals.

Following the consultation, we will offer a mechanism for all Responsible Persons and Building Owners whose premises falls under the consulted categories the opportunity to request a review by the fire and rescue service.

We are committed to providing all members of our communities with the opportunity to give feedback.

This document is also available in Easy Read, large text, plain text form and a web version.

The web version has been created to be more accessible, easier to search, and can be translated into different languages using the Google Translate tool on RBFRS' website. If anyone would like a hard copy or require assistance with accessing the information in an alternative format, please contact us using any of the methods below.



Responding to the consultation on our website: www.rbfrs.co.uk/consultations



Writing to us at: Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Consultation, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading, Berkshire, RG31 7SD



Emailing us at: consultations@rbfrs.co.uk



Phoning: 0118 938 4331



Following us on social media on X, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and LinkedIn



Find out more about us and how we consult

- Visit our website to find out more about [our Service](#).
- Visit our website to find out more about Automatic Fire Alarms and False Alarms
- Visit our website to learn more about [our CRMP and our priorities for the next four years](#).
- To find out more about how we carry out consultations you can read our [Consultation Strategy](#). This helps us to ensure we meet our [legal obligations](#).
- To find out more about how we analysed the data for this consultation, please visit our Methodology document.

Next Steps

Consultation period – The 10-week consultation and engagement with residents, staff and key stakeholders will run from 4 March 2024 until 13 May 2024.

Consultation closure – Consultation closes, and work begins on analysing and compiling the responses into a summary report for decision makers.

Conscientiously consider the results – Royal Berkshire Fire Authority will meet in June 2024 to conscientiously consider the results of consultation and make decisions on the options.

Implement decision – Once the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority has made its decision it will be implemented.

Evaluation – The impact of the decision will be evaluated after a year of implementation and reported back to the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.

ROYAL BERKSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

-  RoyalBerksFRS
-  @RBFRSOfficial
-  RoyalBerkshireFire
-  Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service
-  rbfrs.co.uk

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	6 FEBRUARY 2024
SUBJECT	HOME OFFICE RESPONSE TO FIRE REFORM WHITE PAPER
LEAD OFFICER	WAYNE BOWCOCK, CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR BROOKS
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	DECISION

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The UK Government published a Fire Reform White Paper consultation which closed in July 2022. The White Paper laid out a range of proposals with the aim of reforming fire and rescue services in England and improving public safety.
- 1.2 Updates regarding the White Paper have been provided at Authority meetings:
- 1.2.1 19 April 2021 - Management Committee report 'Fire Reform White Paper'.
- 1.2.2 05 April 2022 - Management Committee presentation 'Fire Reform White Paper update'.
- 1.2.3 04 October 2022 - Extraordinary Fire Authority report 'RBFA Response to White Paper Fire Reform Consultation'.
- 1.3 On the 12 December 2023, the Government's response to the Fire Reform White Paper consultation was published (previously circulated and attached).
- 1.4 The response remains focussed on the three areas of People, Professionalism and Governance and highlights the proposals the Government intends to take forward.
- 1.5 The Home Office has launched a review of the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England and has already started to engage with stakeholders regarding its contents as part of the suite of key strategies for the fire and rescue sector.

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- 1.6 The proposals intended to be taken forward include reference to the establishment of a college of fire, developing operational independence for Chief Fire Officers, tasking the National Joint Council to review the pay negotiation mechanism, and improving integrity and culture in fire and rescue services. Considering the potential for local impacts on Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) e.g. to training and professional standards through the introduction of a college of fire and to the scheme of delegation through the introduction of operational independence, this report will be accompanied by a presentation of the intentions as currently understood.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

That Management Committee:

- 2.1 **AGREE** to take no action until further detail and information is forthcoming from Government.

3. **REPORT**

- 3.1 Members have received numerous briefings regarding the proposals in the Fire Reform White Paper consultation, particularly relating to governance and operational independence.
- 3.2 This report and presentation is intended to update members on the response to the consultation, which is a scaled down set of proposals but contain clear intent from Government to be progressed.
- 3.3 As there are proposals which would impact the delivery of statutory duties and functions e.g. a college of fire and operational independence for Chief Fire Officers, the Chief Fire Officer has engaged with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and considered the current policy and governance framework implications which should be put before the RBFA for decision.
- 3.4 Although it is unusual to suggest members take 'no action at this time', the matters under consideration are reserved for RBFA.
- 3.5 In making this recommendation, the Chief Fire Officer has considered the short- and medium-term impact of the proposals and ways in which RBFA might wish to react e.g. reviewing the scheme of delegations relating to operational independence. There is an ongoing developmental nature of the Reform White Paper, the review of the Fire and Rescue National Framework and consideration of other key stakeholder positions (LGA and NFCC).
- 3.6 RBFA current governance arrangements are regularly reviewed and are adequate to meet its statutory obligations. Therefore, Members will be kept informed and recommendations for change brought forward when required.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 Prevention: We will reduce the risk to our communities through our partnership duties and prevention education activities, ensuring that our services are accessible to all.
- 4.2 Protection: We will support those with responsibility for premises to understand their duties in ensuring the safety of all people using buildings covered by the Building Safety Act 2022 and Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, whilst ensuring that our services are accessible to all.
- 4.3 Response: We will ensure that our people are trained, and resources are located to provide the most effective response and to have a positive impact on incidents in our communities.
- 4.4 Resilience: We will ensure we are resilient and work with our partners to promote and build resilience in the communities we serve.
- 4.5 Sustainability: We will ensure that we provide a financially sustainable and environmentally friendly service to our communities.
- 4.6 People: We will support our staff by providing a safe and inclusive environment for them to thrive in, building a diverse organisation that is engaged with, and accessible to, our communities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 At this stage there are no known financial implications.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 may be amended as part of the proposals within the Fire Reform White Paper consultation response.
- 6.2 RBFA must have regard to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England in the discharge of its duties which is currently under review.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 When reforms are implemented, the local response will consider the equality and diversity implications. [OBJ]
- 7.2 Taking no action does not adversely affect equality and diversity.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct risks from taking no action.
- 8.2 Future reports will consider the risk implications against detailed proposals.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 9.1 The implications of the Fire Reform agenda will be Fire Sector wide so collaboration will include receiving and sharing good practice as well as stakeholder engagement.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 10.1 The Chief Fire Officer is the report author.
10.2 The Monitoring Officer was consulted in preparation of this report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 Management Committee report 'Fire Reform White Paper' on 19 April 2021.
11.2 Management Committee presentation 'Fire Reform White Paper update' on 05 April 2022.
11.3 Extraordinary Fire Authority report 'RBFA Response to White Paper Fire Reform Consultation' on 04 October 2022.

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Appendix A - Fire Reform White Paper consultation
12.2 Appendix B - Fire Reform White Paper consultation response

13. CONTACT DETAILS

- 13.1 Wayne Bowcock, Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive
bowcockw@rbfrs.co.uk



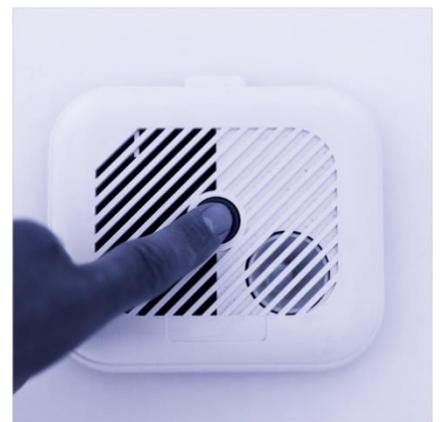
Home Office

Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service

Building professionalism, boosting performance and strengthening governance

May 2022

CP 670



Agenda Item 9

Appendix A



Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service

**Building professionalism, boosting performance
and strengthening governance**

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for the Home Department
by Command of Her Majesty

May 2022



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This publication is available at www.gov.uk/official-documents.

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at firereformconsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk

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About this consultation

- To:** This white paper and consultation covers a package of proposals for the reform of fire and rescue services in England. The proposals cover three principal areas of the reform vision: People, Professionalism and Governance. Views are sought on the specific proposals and the wider package of reforms presented.
- Duration:** From 18/05/22 to 26/07/22
- Enquiries (including requests for the paper in an alternative format) to:** **Email:** firereformconsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk
Or
Fire Reform Consultation
Fire Strategy & Reform Unit
4th Floor, Peel Building
2 Marsham Street,
London
SW1P 4DF
- How to respond:** There are three thematic sections in this consultation. Each section is divided into topical chapters which provide background information to the lead question(s).
- Respondents can answer as many or as few questions as they wish. You do not have to comment on every section or respond to every question in each section but can focus on where you have relevant views and evidence to share. If you wish to respond to all questions, you do not have to complete the whole form at once.
- Please send your response by 11:59pm on 26 July 2022
- Please respond to the questions in this consultation online at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-our-fire-and-rescue-service>
- Alternatively, you can send in electronic copies to:
firereformconsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk; or,

Agenda Item 9

Appendix A

Alternatively, you may send paper copies to:

Fire Reform Consultation
Fire Strategy & Reform Unit
4th Floor, Peel Building
2 Marsham Street,
London
SW1P 4DF

Additional ways to respond: If you wish to submit other evidence, or a long-form response, please do so by sending it to the email address or postal address above.

Response paper: A response to this consultation exercise is due to be published at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-our-fire-and-rescue-service>

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Ministerial Foreword

Home Secretary



I never cease to be impressed by the dedication of our fire and rescue professionals. As Home Secretary, I have always regarded the police as the first public service but I have come to realise that the fire and rescue service plays an equal part. Together they provide vital pillars of support in the mission to keep the public safe which is the first duty of any government.

It has been a challenging period for us all. Despite the difficulties that we have faced, I have been immeasurably proud to witness the efforts of fire and rescue services in responding to the needs of our communities throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Fire and rescue professionals have taken on a number of the responsibilities that the emergency demanded. From driving ambulances, supporting the vulnerable, to managing food and distribution hubs and administering vaccinations, fire and rescue services have been ready, willing and able to play a critical role in protecting communities. I would also like to acknowledge the important role on call firefighters provide in keeping their communities safe. Looking beyond our borders, I was proud to be able to offer the expertise of our fire and rescue services to help their Greek colleagues in the fight against horrific wildfires in the summer of 2021.

We are immensely grateful for their efforts. We should strip away any barriers that hold our fire professionals back and provide them with the support they deserve.

Our fire and rescue services protect communities and save lives. It is imperative that they are fully supported to respond to the changing risks they face. This means building on the response to the pandemic, learning from major public inquiries, and responding to the challenges identified by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in relation to leadership, culture and collaboration.

Nonetheless, there is a compelling case for reform of our fire and rescue services. Both of Sir Thomas Winsor's HMICFRS State of Fire reports have concluded that significant reform is needed. The need to improve the emergency response of fire and rescue services to a major incident is compelling. The fire at Grenfell Tower was a national tragedy resulting in the greatest loss of life in a residential fire since World War 2. The Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report made 46 recommendations for the London Fire Brigade (LFB), all fire and rescue services, other emergency services, building owners and the government. The government has committed to implementing all 46 recommendations in the most practical and proportionate way possible. An independent report (known as the Kerslake report) into the Manchester Arena bombing found that the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service was "bought to a point of paralysis" as their response was delayed for two hours. The need to improve fire protection is also clear. Dame Judith Hackitt's review into building safety, alongside the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, has highlighted its importance.

Now the government must take action to enable fire and rescue services to perform and fulfil their core functions of prevention, protection, response and resilience effectively in a way that responds to the local needs, the changing risks and challenges faced, and that enables collaboration with other emergency services on a range of public safety challenges. This white paper sets out this government's vision for fire reform.

Fire Minister



The white paper concerns the reform and strengthening of fire and rescue services in England. This builds on fire and building safety system reform in recent years and the government response to the fire at Grenfell Tower. Our vision for the reform seeks to drive change and improvement in three key areas: People, Professionalism and Governance.

People

Our reform proposals seek to introduce changes that will allow fire professionals to further develop their skills and thrive in their work. We want to clarify the role of fire and rescue services and of the firefighter, unlock talent and improve diversity within services, take action to ensure that we are supporting the creation of a positive culture, and further develop schemes to consistently identify and nurture talent. Finally, we will commission an independent review into the current pay negotiation process and consider if it is fit for a modern emergency service.

Professionalism

Our reform proposals seek to modernise the fire and rescue service, to enable greater professionalism and to ensure that we are recruiting and training our fire and rescue services to be the best that they can be. We want to increase professionalism by moving from a Fire Standards Board (which sets clear expectations for the sector) to the creation of a College of Fire and Rescue. We want to develop a mandatory 21st century leadership programme for progression to senior roles, set clearer entry requirements for recruitment, and put in place a statutory code of ethics and a fire and rescue service oath.

Governance

Our reform proposals seek to strengthen governance arrangements across the sector. Out of 44 fire and rescue authorities, 38 operate a committee structure. We want to transfer fire functions to a single, elected – ideally directly elected – individual who would hold their operationally independent Chief Fire Officer to account. This person could be: a mayor who could delegate day-to-day oversight to a deputy mayor; or a council leader who could delegate to a cabinet member or a police, fire and crime commissioner. This effective political oversight would maintain and enhance public accountability.

Fire professionals put their lives on the line to protect and serve their communities. It is only right that they have our full support. This Fire Reform white paper is the first step towards reforms that will achieve this profoundly essential public interest objective.

Building on Success

The Case for Change

The government intends, through this White paper, consultation and future legislation to strengthen fire and rescue services across England.

Our ambition is to develop services with communities at their heart that provide excellent support and development for their teams. This will be underpinned by clear decision-making processes and operational leaders who are empowered to plan and respond quickly to new challenges held to account by a single executive leader, ideally a directly elected politician. We want to ensure that services play to their strengths in responding to emergencies, as well as sharpen their focus on their prevention and protection functions. This will allow service leaders and their professional teams to face the future with confidence, reduce the risk of harm, and help keep people safe.

Fire and rescue is already a highly skilled profession. We want to support staff further, ensuring that they are given the opportunities, development, and oversight to match their status. Our fire and rescue professionals and our communities deserve nothing less.

Fire and Rescue Reform to Date

The proposals in this white paper build on a legacy of reform of fire and rescue services introduced by the Home Office over recent years. Changes have been designed to make services and those working within them more able to work efficiently and effectively, and to adapt to the public safety challenges and emergencies we face, both now and in the future.

The reforms of the past five to ten years have seen the establishment of an independent inspection regime to report to the public on the efficiency and effectiveness of fire and rescue services, stronger national coordination amongst operational leaders, increased government funding for service improvement, and the development of clear and consistent expectations of fire and rescue services. We have supported fire and rescue services as they serve the most vulnerable in communities. We have done this by increasing both the focus and funding for fire protection, nationally and locally, by helping services across England to respond to the lessons highlighted by the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and by continuing to promote fire prevention, including through the national Fire Kills campaign.

We have also strengthened the governance of fire and rescue services by legislating to enable police and crime commissioners (PCCs) to take on responsibility for services, with the intention of improving their transparency, collaboration and accountability.

While meaningful national and local reform has taken place, recent inspections and inquiries have established that there is further to go to ensure both employees and the public are getting the support and service they should expect. That is why the government proposes to introduce a comprehensive reform programme, as set out in this white paper.

Stepping Up During the Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a huge challenge for all emergency services, and we are proud of how fire and rescue employees across the country stepped up to support their communities.

Last January, HMICFRS highlighted how services continued to respond to fires and other emergencies, while also supporting communities through one of the most difficult periods in our country's history. Most services were involved in proactive work through their local resilience forums (LRFs) – from supporting strategic coordination of the multi-agency response, driving ambulances and joining multi-agency teams responding to deaths in the community, to delivering food and medicines to the vulnerable and using their skills to help others to work safely.

However, the report also highlighted the barriers services face to becoming more effective and efficient, including the challenges posed by a sluggish national negotiation system for pay and conditions, between unions and employers. For example, during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, service leaders were not able to deploy their staff to support communities in a timely manner. Instead, a series of national agreements (the 'tripartite agreement') had to be painstakingly negotiated before fire and rescue professionals could act. In the pandemic this process slowed down – and in some places, stopped – services fully supporting their communities.

Following the end of the restrictive national agreements, services were freed up to safely provide an even greater range of support to their communities. Chief fire officers were able to work with local partners to take a leading role in testing and vaccine logistics, and in administering vaccinations in many areas. This work is rightly a source of pride for service leaders and fire and rescue professionals who, empowered to make operational decisions and risk assessments at a local level, were able to step up to serve their communities.

Shining a Light Through Independent Inspection

Independent, expert, objective and fearless inspection is essential to the promotion of improvement. On the basis of rigorous analysis of evidence and professional judgment, it establishes where policies and practices are working well, so they can be adopted everywhere, and it explains to services, elected representatives and the public where things are not as they should be. Its analysis and the reasons for its conclusions and recommendations for improvement are fully explained, so that services, the public and others can see and easily understand them.

Since 2018, every service in England has been inspected at least twice. Her Majesty's Chief Fire and Rescue Inspector, Sir Thomas Winsor, has produced three annual State of Fire and Rescue reports that have provided clear assessments of the state of the sector and highlighted where reform is needed. They have been significant catalysts for our proposals to further strengthen services.

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The inspectorate found that while the fire and rescue services have many commendable strengths, the system needs national and local reform. Based on the inspectorate's reports, it is clear that the strength of fire and rescue services is rooted in their operational response. When the public dial 999, services will respond with highly skilled and committed crews. While response is the most urgent function of a fire and rescue service, some services have unduly neglected vital protection and prevention work. And while some services have taken steps to improve productivity, more could and should be done to ensure that they are making the best use of public resources in ways that always put communities first.

Sir Thomas recognised that in recent years some reform and innovation has been implemented, but improvements have been sporadic. To date, the inspectorate has made six national recommendations. These include: improving the governance of services by granting chief fire officers operational independence to enable flexibility; providing greater clarity on the precise scope of the role of the fire and rescue service, improving the transparency and effectiveness of the negotiation mechanism for pay and conditions; and putting in place measures to improve the culture in fire and rescue services.

Lessons from Grenfell

The fire at Grenfell Tower, on 14 June 2017, is an indelible tragedy in the history of our country. The Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report (GTI phase 1) made 46 recommendations for the London Fire Brigade, all fire and rescue services, other emergency services, building owners and the government. The government has worked alongside service leaders to ensure that action is being taken across the country, supported by legislative change and significant additional funding to drive improvement. The reforms set out in this white paper will complement the work already underway to strengthen fire safety and protection - building the capacity and capability within services that our communities deserve.

Last April, the government secured the passage of the Fire Safety Act 2021. The Act establishes that the scope of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO) applies to the structure, external walls and flat entrance doors. On 17 March 2021, the government published its response to the fire safety consultation which set out proposals to strengthen fire safety in all regulated buildings in England. Further changes will be introduced through the government's Building Safety Bill, which will enable the establishment of a Building Safety Regulator, as part of the overhaul of building and fire safety regimes for higher-risk buildings. Furthermore, the government held a consultation from 8 June to 19 July 2021 to seek people's views on proposals relating to the complex issue of Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs). While there was considerable support for the idea of PEEPs, the consultation also raised operational challenges to implementing PEEPs in high rise residential buildings which typically would have no staffing or very limited staffing. Concerns include the practical challenges of ensuring safety when evacuating using the stairs, both for the vulnerable persons with the PEEPs and for other residents using the same stairwell; and the operational impact on firefighters using the same space. Further, there are concerns that, if extra staff are needed to make PEEPs work, it would result in disproportionately increased costs for residents. We intend to shortly propose a collection of initiatives that

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together seek to achieve our policy aim of enhancing the safety of residents in high rise residential buildings whose ability to self-evacuate may be compromised in a way that is proportional and implementable. While this package would not directly implement the PEEPs-related recommendations in the GTI Phase 1 report, we are confident that it will satisfy the principles of improved fire safety of vulnerable persons behind the recommendations. The government intends shortly to lay regulations that implement the majority of the recommendations made by the Inquiry's Phase 1 report which require a change in the law.

The need to strengthen fire protection is clear. Dame Judith Hackitt's review into building regulations and fire safety, the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, other fires and HMICFRS inspection findings have highlighted its importance. That is why we provided £30 million in additional funding during 2020/21 and have continued to provide further funding this financial year. This funding supports services to review or inspect every high-rise residential building in England by the end of 2021 and strengthen the response to risks in other buildings, including residential buildings under 18 metres, care homes and hospitals. £7 million of this funding helped services to implement Grenfell recommendations through new training, equipment (such as smoke hoods) and technology to support communications and control room systems. In addition, we have commissioned research to support the development of national guidelines on evacuations from high-rise buildings.

A Clear Role for Fire and Rescue Services

The role of the fire and rescue authority (FRA) is set out in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. However, the work of fire and rescue services has evolved over the years. The built environment has become more complex and the nature of the risk facing communities has changed. The vulnerability of occupants is having a tangible impact on how services manage and respond to risk. Prevention, legislation, regulation, innovation and better building and product design have mitigated some longstanding public safety risks, and communities are safer as a result. This major public service success story does not get the recognition it deserves.

Historically, services have managed their resources to meet foreseeable risks to the public. But cumbersome industrial relationships have limited chief fire officers' ability to flexibly use their resources to truly meet changing risk, for example, by changing working patterns to respond to changing demand. Services need to plan for instances where they may need to simultaneously respond to large scale emergencies and a range of smaller incidents. Furthermore, staff need to be trained to respond to incidents safely, adapting to the ever-changing nature of malicious risks, such as terrorist incidents. The challenge, then, is to ensure flexibility so that fire and rescue professionals can fully serve their communities in partnership with other services. Crucially, local flexibility must be available to operationally independent service leaders to make the best use of their people and assets, balancing innovation with the core functions established in statute.

The Way Forward - Strengthening our Fire and Rescue Service

The case for strengthening fire and rescue services is clear. We want to improve the offer to professionals and the public, ensuring that services can adapt and change.

Our Vision

We want to see services providing excellence in their core prevention, protection, response, and resilience functions, responding to local needs in line with national expectations and guidance. Services will be helped to make the best use of the resources available to them, with the ability to come together quickly and respond safely to local and national emergencies, based on good data and evidence. Services need to be more able to adapt to changing threats and risks, working flexibly with other local partners.

Chief fire officers will be skilled leaders and managers, with clear responsibility to run and manage their services effectively and efficiently, in order to meet their local risk. Strong political, executive oversight will ensure services are properly accountable to the communities they serve and run in the public interest.

Twenty-first century fire and rescue services will embrace an ethical culture that attracts and retains talented people, values diversity and reflects the communities they serve. Their employees will be well supported and trained to do their jobs. At the same time, services will embrace learning, use data and evidence to inform their decision-making, and share best practice and innovation.

Employment arrangements across the sector need to be modernised. They need to be more transparent and should recognise staff for their skills and competence and not just for time served. The interests of all parties will be fairly represented during discussions on pay, terms and conditions and other workplace matters.

People, Professionalism and Governance

Our reform agenda seeks to drive improvement in three essential areas: well-trained and supported **people**; high levels of **professionalism**; and strong and effective **governance**.

On **People**, it is vital that fire and rescue services create an environment where they get the best out of their people. Staff should feel confident that they will be supported to reach their full potential, with accessible development opportunities and structured learning available. As recommended by HMICFRS, the role of fire and rescue services needs clarification with greater local flexibility for firefighters and staff to add value; the proposals in this white paper seek to address this recommendation, amongst others. Furthermore, fire and rescue professionals should be supported by a professional pay negotiation process. The current National Joint Council has strayed beyond its original scope and into negotiation of operational response, which should be a matter for operational leaders.

On **Professionalism**, this white paper examines how we can continue to support fire and rescue professionals to help them better protect their communities. Our reform plans set out

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our ambition for an independent College of Fire and Rescue focussed on the following five areas:

- Research
- Data
- Leadership,
- Ethics
- Clear expectations for fire and rescue services

Subject to the response to the consultation, this College of Fire and Rescue could be located at an existing body such as a training provider, fire and rescue service or other professional body. This could include the Fire Service College (FSC) at potentially no cost, for example, given its historic links to government. The FSC is one of a number of training providers, all with a similar market share, available to fire and rescue services. We would like to hear from potential hosts to understand where the proposed college could be located given the potential benefit to both the host and the college of co-location. The proposed college should take on the functions carried out currently by the Fire Standards Board, which sets out clear expectations for the sector. Development opportunities for staff should include support for progression to leadership roles and development schemes to identify and nurture talent. Further, we want to examine the opportunity to support a consistently positive culture within services through the creation of a statutory code of ethics and a fire and rescue service oath.

On **Governance**, the lack of executive oversight in most FRAs and the variation and inconsistency between governance models have hampered accountability and transparency for the public. A review of the role of PCCs found that simplifying and strengthening the governance regime for fire services across England is critical to unlocking the wider reforms that are needed. We are setting out criteria for good governance and our ambition is to move governance to an executive leader, such as a combined authority mayor, a police, fire and crime commissioner (PFCC), or a county council leader. These options are illustrated in Figure 1. They, as ‘the Occupant’, would be able to delegate some or all of their day-to-day responsibilities to a deputy mayor, deputy PFCC or council cabinet member respectively. We also intend to implement HMICFRS’s recommendation to confer operational independence on chief fire officers. This will enable the chief fire officer to have direction and control over their resources to meet the executive leader’s priorities. We propose – whether in primary legislation or statutory guidance – to clearly define the role and responsibilities of both the executive leader and chief fire officer with clear demarcation between the two. Effective governance will ensure a publicly accountable figure can set clear priorities and hold the chief fire officer firmly to account for their performance in order to best deliver for the public.

This could be alongside making chief fire officers corporations sole, thereby making them the employers of fire professionals.

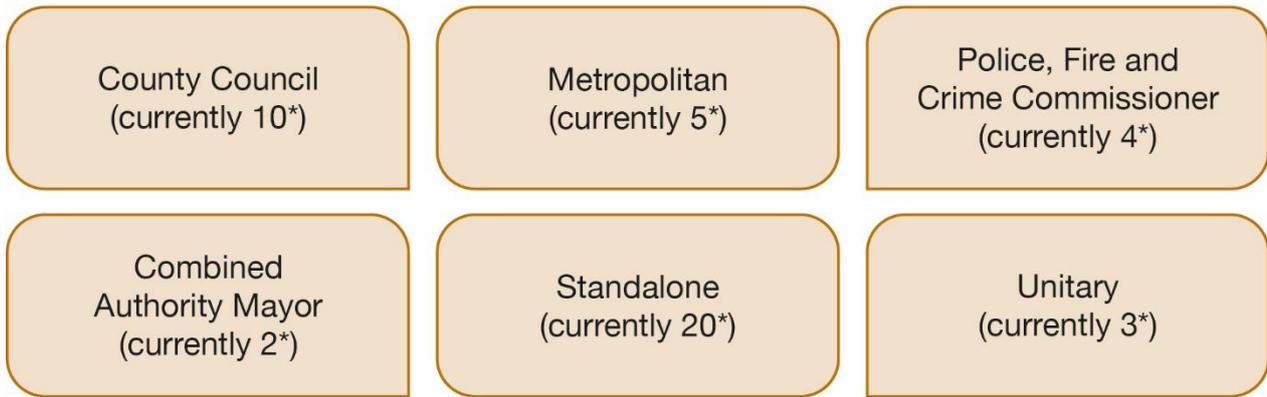
We believe that these governance changes will enable effective executive oversight to hold an operationally independent chief fire officer to account with appropriate support and challenge. The executive would be required to produce a strategic fire and rescue plan listing their priorities while the chief fire officer would focus on their operational requirements to meet those priorities. Finally, we do not wish to lose the skills and experiences of existing councillors on the fire and rescue authority who could be used to scrutinise the decisions of this individual.

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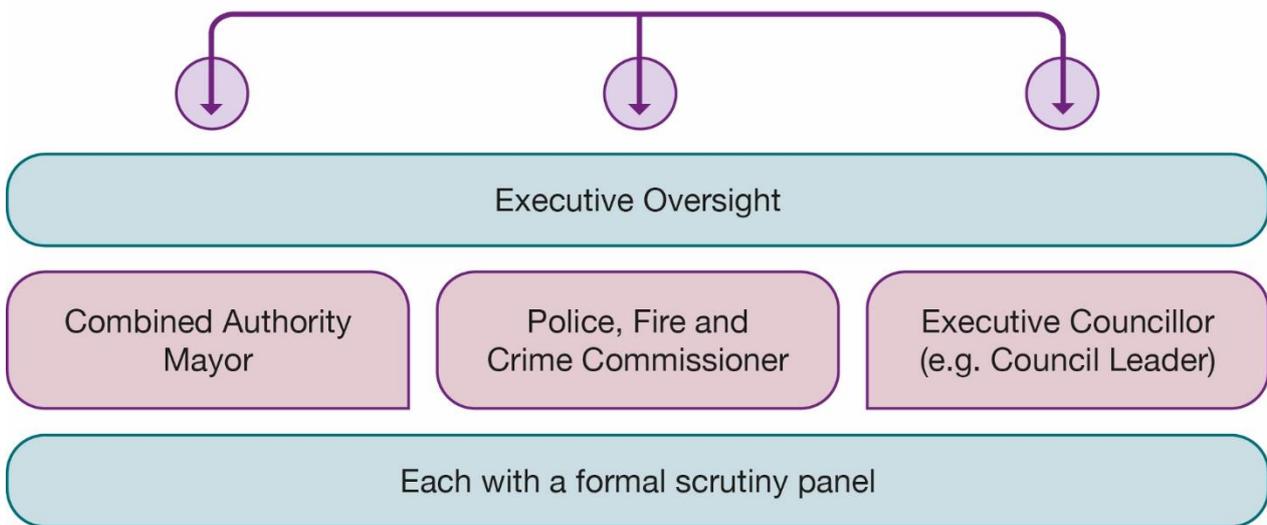
Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service: Government Consultation

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Current Types of Fire and Rescue Authority



Proposed reform



*fire and rescue authorities as at 1 January 2022

People

The biggest asset available to fire and rescue services is the people who work for them. Their dedication and skill, and the respect they command from their communities, make them a crucial part of the public safety system. We are committed to ensuring that fire and rescue employees are representative of the communities they serve and are equipped with the skills they need to reduce risk, save lives, and meet the challenges of the future.

However, current working practices are highly inflexible and, in some services, no longer reflect the range of incidents faced. In his 2020 State of Fire and Rescue report, Sir Thomas Winsor recognised that for services to better serve the public, they need to be able to adapt and do things differently. He noted substantial barriers to change and efficiency and recommended that the government takes an active role in clarifying fire fighters' true responsibilities and improves the mechanism for establishing pay and conditions.

The Role of Fire and Rescue Services

The principal role of fire and rescue services is to keep the public safe through prevention, protection and response work. The statutory functions of fire and rescue authorities are set out in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. Furthermore, the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 sets out their role as Category 1 responders in response to civil emergencies. This includes their increasingly significant role in local resilience forums, civil protection and in incidents where there is the threat of serious damage to human welfare or the environment.

The Cabinet Office's Integrated Review 2021 put an increasing focus on building national resilience and commits the government to consider strengthening the roles and responsibilities of Local Resilience Forums in England alongside a wider National Resilience Strategy. Fire and rescue services and senior fire officers play key roles in the operation and leadership of LRFs in preparing for emergencies and in responding to emergencies in multi-agency Strategic Coordination Groups.

The Cabinet Office's National Resilience Strategy Call for Evidence closed in September 2021. The Home Office has consulted with the National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC), to ensure the fire sector continues to play a strong role in both national and local community resilience, across the resilience cycle.

In carrying out their functions, services must work with the public and businesses to reduce incidents of fire and ensure that appropriate measures are in place to mitigate their impact. Firefighters need to be prepared, equipped with the right skills and expertise to attend, assess the risk and respond to a range of incidents, across the complex, built environment and national infrastructure. They are supported, where necessary, by expert fire safety inspectors and engineers.

HMICFRS inspections have highlighted that operational response is a key strength of services but reported that there is considerable variation in how prevention and protection work is carried out, understood and prioritised. The most effective services have protected and extended their reach in this area, and we will continue to work with the NFCC on the development and implementation of prevention and protection programmes.

Modern Working Practices

Just as society continues to change, so have public safety challenges to which services must respond: from the increased risk from terrorism and environmental challenges, to pandemics and the increasing demands on local authorities, given that people are living longer and vulnerability is better understood. The role of services, and of those who work for them, needs to continuously evolve. Fire and rescue services provide a skilled, capable and engaged workforce that is ready, willing and able to step into these challenges in the Community Risk Programme. It is right that the public can expect them to be deployed to assist their communities as the need arises.

However, the barriers to doing so were seen during the sector’s ongoing response to Covid-19, where the determination of fire and rescue staff to assist their communities was not always matched by flexible and modern employment practices. The national negotiation mechanism established by the National Joint Council has been recognised by inspectors and others as a barrier to a rapid and flexible response. These barriers have meant services have struggled to adapt and communities have not always been well served in the process. For example, previous collaborations with health partners have floundered in some places and in Greater Manchester, a team formed to respond to marauding terrorist attacks in the city withdrew their labour because of a dispute, leaving the community unacceptably vulnerable. While this capability has been restored through a local agreement that costs more taxpayer money, the government is clear that under current arrangements there is a role for services and their employees to respond to terrorism in all its forms.

Chief fire officers should be empowered to safely make decisions on the basis of risk and resources. While it is right that all relevant trade unions have a role to play in discussions on terms and conditions and the health and safety of their members, this must not come at the expense of safe and sensible progress and efficiency when communities need action.

We will work with fire and rescue leaders to ensure that services can fully support their communities. The need to identify emerging issues and continually assess risk extends to prevention and protection functions where services should ensure that they adapt to meet emerging issues and levels of risk, with their activity tailored to those they target.

Q1: To what extent do you agree/disagree that fire and rescue services should have the flexibility to deploy resources to help address current and future threats faced by the public beyond core fire and rescue duties?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Public Safety

Fire and rescue services play an important role in assisting communities with health and crime prevention and reduction. Services have already demonstrated their ability to support wider public safety. For example, StayWise is an NFCC-led partnership initiative that supports blue light and educational professionals in the provision of safety messaging to children. Some services have collaborated with local partners to help prevent crime and support their communities. For instance, a multi-agency partnership involving Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service, local councillors, Northumbria Police, a local housing company and Sunderland City Council led to the formation of SARA (Southwick Altogether

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Raising Aspirations). SARA brings together partners to help the most vulnerable members of the community – from supporting those with mental health problems, helping victims of crime and working in schools to divert and dissuade vulnerable teenagers from a life of crime.

Other activity ranges from identifying and referring those at risk of domestic abuse, modern slavery and hate crime, to diverting young people away from trouble through fire cadets and other schemes. The new Serious Violence Duty in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which proposes to bring together local agencies to prevent and reduce serious violence, will also apply to fire and rescue authorities.

As discussed later, as well as considering the merging of fire and policing governance under democratically elected combined authority mayors or police, fire and crime commissioners, we would also seek to strengthen the emergency service response to local issues and promote greater collaboration between agencies to support public safety needs.

Q2: To what extent do you agree/disagree that fire and rescue services should play an active role in supporting the wider health and public safety agenda?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Business Continuity

The first duty of any government is to keep the public safe. Unlike the police, firefighters and control staff can strike, which inevitably puts the public and non-striking fire professionals at risk. While we do not propose removing the freedom for staff to choose to participate in industrial action, we believe that public safety needs to be ensured.

Fire and rescue services are ‘Category 1 responders’ under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. This requires them to carry out specific civil protection duties, which chief fire officers must bear in mind when considering their business continuity plans. Requirements for business continuity are also set out in the fire and rescue service National Framework for England. The Home Office will work closely with the NFCC to ensure that each service has a robust business continuity plan that considers a range of challenges, including the impact of industrial action. Working with the NFCC, the National Resilience Assurance Team and HMICFRS, we will commission that the plans are independently assured. As outlined later in this white paper, the operational independence of chief fire officers plays a crucial role in allowing them to manage risk within their service.

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 is also under review, alongside the wider National Resilience Strategy and includes the duties on fire and rescue services in relation to civil emergencies and in collaboration with key local partners. As part this review, we will consider strengthening the basis on which all Category 1 and 2 responders cooperate and support local resilience structures, with FRS services being central to this.

Q3: To what extent do you agree/disagree that the business continuity requirements set out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 provide sufficient oversight to keep the public safe in the event of strike action?

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Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Pay Negotiation

Everyone is entitled to be treated fairly. When it comes to public sector pay, those who provide public services, and those who pay for them, deserve no less. The process for determining pay should be open to scrutiny, so that all concerned can understand the decisions that are made.

The effectiveness of the National Joint Council (NJC) – the body that oversees decisions on firefighter pay and terms and conditions – has long been questioned. Adrian Thomas, in his review of conditions of service in 2015, concluded that it needs to be modernised and in the State of Fire and Rescue 2020 report, Sir Thomas Winsor called for fundamental reform. The negotiation of annual firefighter pay awards is a closed process until after any decisions is effectively made, with the views and agreement of only one union being sought and considered. HMICFRS have made recommendations on the current pay negotiation structure, including a suggestion to review its current operation and effectiveness. We welcome this recommendation and will consider how best to take it forward as part of our package for reform. The independent review would consider whether the current pay negotiation process is dynamic enough to respond to changing priorities. It could consider evidence from other employment models and sectors.

Q4: To what extent do you agree/disagree that the current pay negotiation arrangements are appropriate?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q5: Please provide the reasons for your response.

Nurturing New and Existing Talent

There is more to do nationally to stimulate the debate about talent and to ensure that services open and modern employers who value diversity and nurture talent. Fire and Rescue professionals deserve development and support to achieve their full potential. Inconsistent identification and management of talent limits the scope to specialise and professionalise, and means that high-potential individuals may be overlooked.

HMICFRS found that services need to do more to support future leaders, and that diversity in senior leadership positions is even more limited than in the wider workforce. They also found that services often do not actively manage talent, relying on traditional models of development and progression, often linked to time served.

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Some services have talent and development schemes, but there are no standardised national progression routes or consistent levels of education or experience required for entry into roles, in contrast to comparable public services including health and policing. We seek views on whether we should explore clearer, consistent entry requirements for fire service roles, so that a consistent approach is applied across the country. In doing this, we need to consider the impacts not only on professionalising services, but also any unintended consequences on the recruitment and retention of people from the widest possible talent pool. Consistent entry requirements, along with consistently applied personal development and progression, could be key to developing the management and leadership cadre of the future.

We want to ensure that fire and rescue is open to the best and brightest. As well as a focus on developing the talent already working in the fire services, there have been positive recent steps to bring in people with experience from other sectors at a range of levels. The NFCC leadership hub is leading a project on direct entry schemes at station and area manager level, as well as developing a coaching and talent-focused culture. This is a welcome development and should be supported by all services. We will also explore the potential to learn from national talent and recruitment schemes such as Teach First, Police Now, Unlocked and the civil service’s Fast Stream scheme model to establish high-potential development programmes. Such schemes could be open to both new entrants and existing staff and would offer a structured development programme. Skills could be tested and extended through placements in a range of roles and projects.

Q6: To what extent do you agree/disagree that consistent entry requirements should be explored for fire and rescue service roles?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q7: Please provide the reasons for your response.

Q8: To what extent do you agree/disagree that other roles, in addition to station and area managers, would benefit from a direct entry and talent management scheme?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Professionalism

The vision in this white paper is for fire and rescue services to continue to be a vital asset to our communities, and a great public sector profession with a focus on continuous improvement and professional development. Services will continue to attract talented people who understand the communities they are serving. This will be supported with clear and consistent expectations and training opportunities that build on the effective use of data and evidence. To realise this vision, we need to have the right support structures at the head of the profession to ensure that the improvement cycle functions well, with clear expectations, strong implementation, and a robust inspection regime.

Leadership of the Profession to Date

The National Fire Chiefs' Council (NFCC) was established in 2017 with the goal of supporting operational leaders to transform services, thereby maximising effectiveness and partnership working. The independently chaired Fire Standards Board (FSB) was created in 2019 to produce and maintain a suite of national professional standards for fire and rescue services. Eight fire standards have now been published, ranging from operational matters such as community risk management planning to issues related to culture and ethics. Fire standards are intended to drive consistency and have a positive impact on the performance and professionalism of services, supporting continuous improvement and setting clear expectations for the service the public should receive. HMICFRS have regard to these expectations in their inspections.

This first wave of reform has clearly moved the fire and rescue profession forwards and government has provided significant financial support, totalling over £15 million over the last four years. The NFCC has provided leadership that the sector was lacking and is in the process of carrying out a significant programme of work. We want to explore how we can build on this success to further support professionals and strengthen fire and rescue services across five key areas of leadership, data, research, ethics and clear expectations.

Leadership

In several reports and inspections, leadership has been found to be problematical. Twenty years ago, an independent review (the Bain Report, 2002) reported “a lack of leadership throughout the service at the political, institutional and operational levels”. The report also detailed the need for senior staff to receive “more training in general and personnel management,” that “a proportion of officers should come from outside the Service” and the importance of sector organisations to provide “a body of expertise on technical matters and business processes.” By 2019, inspections identified that only 12 out of 45 services were ‘good’ at developing leadership and capability.

Effective leadership is not only about strengthening the role of the chief fire officer, but about building capability, embedding values and nurturing talent within services. Indeed, there are many accomplished individuals in the current leadership cadre, but there is no current structure or assessment that ensures that this is consistent. The work of chief fire officers is vital and could become even more complex and challenging if they are provided with operational independence, as recommended by HMICFRS.

Senior operational leaders require a range of skills. They must take on-the-spot decisions in highly pressurised circumstances, which can be matters of life or death. The aftermath of

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such decisions can also present leadership challenges both in terms of public confidence and achieving organisational learning. Fire and Rescue leaders are also required to manage complex organisations through change, building positive and inclusive teams as well as taking account of contextual issues such as industrial relations.

A 21st Century Leadership Offer

In December 2020, the Home Office surveyed chief, deputy and assistant fire officers' views on leadership in three domains of command, leadership and organisational management. Around four in ten (42%) thought that services were 'not very' or 'not at all' effective at both identifying and developing high potential or talent and while most were at least 'fairly satisfied' nearly 70% said they would value a mandatory and standardised training programme for senior leaders.

In some sectors, a standardised assessment to reach levels equivalent to assistant chief officer and above provides greater national consistency, transparency and clarity. A new, statutory leadership programme designed for the challenges of the 21st century could allow for a standardised approach in how services identify and prepare the leaders of tomorrow. Officers completing the course should also find it easier to move between leadership roles in fire and rescue services. The police Strategic Command Course provides a model we wish to explore. As with policing, we will need to consider how direct entrants would be able to demonstrate comparable experience and competence gained outside fire services, particularly in relation to command, and how the skills and competence required could be developed in a fair and consistent way.

Q9: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the proposed introduction of a 21st century leadership programme?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q10: Please provide reasons for your response.

Q11: To what extent do you agree/disagree that completion of the proposed 21st century leadership programme should be mandatory before becoming an assistant chief fire officer or above?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Smarter Use of Data

Data is a vital asset in helping services to deploy resources and manage services more effectively and professionally. While there are undoubtedly services where data is being used well, in his State of Fire and Rescue report in 2019, Sir Thomas Winsor identified that

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“the sector is missing opportunities to use data and technology effectively” and lacks an overall national strategy to bring consistency and promote innovation.

We have provided funding to the NFCC for them to help set a common direction for services and to consider how best to provide central digital and data support. We want to explore how best to offer further data support to fire and rescue services. This could include improving national data analytics capability and developing data-focused training for those working with data in services and a consistent approach to structuring data. In addition, this could include setting expectations for data governance and for securing data-sharing agreements.

Central to this should be the capacity and capability of fire and rescue services to cooperate with other responding organisations under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and share data, when appropriate with local and national partners, including LRFs. This will support activity across the resilience cycle including preparation, response and recovery to ensure we make the best use of the data we have.

Q12: To what extent do you agree/disagree that each of the activities outlined above are high priorities for helping improve the use and quality of fire and rescue service data?

- A national data analytics capability.**
- Data-focused training.**
- Consistent approaches to structuring data**
- Clear expectations for data governance**
- Securing data-sharing agreements.**

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q13: What other activities, beyond those listed above, would help improve the use and quality of fire and rescue service data? Please give the reasons for your response.

Research

It is vital that the work of services is supported by the best available evidence and research to ensure that services can effectively serve their communities. The current landscape, with a variety of organisations pursuing research activities, presents the risk that research is not co-ordinated to an optimal degree. Further, many individuals in services who conduct research work are doing so alongside other pressing roles.

We want to explore whether central fire and rescue research personnel, working closely with services, could help to ensure that research carried out within the physical and social sciences is effectively prioritised, co-ordinated, quality assured, and disseminated.

A central fire and rescue research capability could undertake the following activities:

- **collaborating** – providing a permanent set of skilled analysts to collaborate with others, including services, to promote good quality research that will provide benefits to services
- **commissioning** – commissioning other organisations to conduct research on behalf of the central fire and rescue research function when national-level research is appropriate
- **conducting** – directly undertaking research, including reviews of existing evidence, using staff permanently housed within the central fire and rescue research function
- **collating** – identifying emergent issues, opportunities, and ongoing fire-related research undertaken across services, academia, industry and other organisations, ensuring that priorities are being addressed and learning is being shared to avoid duplication of effort

Q14: To what extent do you agree/disagree that each of the activities outlined above are high priorities for improving the use and quality of fire evidence and research?

- Collaborating
- Commissioning
- Conducting
- Collating

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q15: What other activities, beyond those listed above, would help improve the use and quality of evidence and research on fire and other hazards? Please provide the reasons for your responses.

Clear Expectations

A hallmark of professionalism is the creation and implementation of clear expectations. While local flexibility is important, robust and consistent national standards help improve the quality of service provided to the public.

Currently, the independently chaired FSB is tasked with creating and maintaining fire standards (the documents through which the FSB sets clear expectations for services) for fire and rescue services. Eight fire standards have now been published, ranging from operational matters such as community risk management planning to issues related to culture and ethics. A 9th fire standard on safeguarding is due to be published imminently. The FSB is supported in this work by the NFCC’s Central Programme Office. The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England requires services to implement these standards. HMICFRS will have regard to them in their inspections.

We want to build on the successes of the FSB and ensure we continue to set clear expectations. We want to ensure effective implementation in support of the fire and rescue

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profession. We also want to consider how best to ensure that there is a continued close link between these common expectations and the guidance that supports their implementation, including National Operational Guidance.

Ethics and Culture

We want to see fire and rescue services where everyone is welcome, treated with respect and able to thrive. The need for more consistent application of a robust ethical framework is clear. HMICFRS found in their 2019 State of Fire report that “the culture in some services is toxic”, that 20 out of 45 services required improvement and that a further three were inadequate.

Code of Ethics

In response to the HMICFRS recommendation, the Local Government Association, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, and the NFCC developed a core code of ethics that all services should embed in their work. This is a positive first step, but we want to consider whether more is needed to ensure we have a consistently positive culture in all fire and rescue services.

The current code has no legal status but is supported by a fire standard (the documents through which the Fire Standards Board sets clear expectations for services) which requires services ‘adopt and embed’ the code. The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, to which fire and rescue authorities must have regard, provides that all authorities must adhere to these clear expectations. The duty on fire and rescue services to adhere to the core code is therefore indirect and we are seeking views on whether to place a code on a statutory footing (a ‘statutory code’) to ensure its application in every service. This could involve the creation of powers in legislation, when parliamentary time allows, to create and maintain a statutory code. These powers could enable a statutory code to be created or amended via secondary legislation. If follow the outcome of this consultation the government proceeds with this proposal, the core code could be subject to review before being placed on a statutory basis.

Q16: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the creation of a statutory code of ethics for services in England?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q17: To what extent do you agree/disagree that placing a code of ethics on a statutory basis would better embed ethical principles in services than the present core code of ethics?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

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If a statutory code were to be created, a duty would need to be placed on services to follow it. We are consulting on this duty being placed on chief fire officers who, under proposals outlined in the governance section of this document, could be operationally independent and therefore best placed to ensure their services act in accordance with the statutory code. We believe fire and rescue authorities would retain an important role in holding chiefs accountable for the discharge of their duties to ensure they and their services adhere to the code. However, we do not propose that the statutory code would apply to elected representatives in fire and rescue authorities.

We do not believe that the duty to adhere to the statutory code should be placed on individual employees of authorities as this would not address the need for a service’s policies, as well as its people, to adhere to the statutory code. The need for individuals to adhere to ethical values is considered below in relation to the fire and rescue service oath.

We are consulting on the enforcement of the statutory code – and the related oath – being an employment matter for chiefs to determine within their services, in accordance with the proposal for operational independence contained elsewhere in this document.

Q18: To what extent do you agree/disagree that the duty to ensure services act in accordance with the proposed statutory code should be placed on operationally independent chief fire officers?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q19: To what extent do you agree/disagree with making enforcement of the proposed statutory code an employment matter for chief fire officers to determine within their services?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Fire and Rescue Service Oath

We are also consulting on introducing a fire and rescue service oath (‘the Oath’) in England. The Oath would be a promise to uphold the principles in the statutory code while undertaking tasks on behalf of fire and rescue authorities, to help address the cultural challenges identified above and provide a positive expression of the role services can play in their communities. A mandatory duty to take the Oath would need to be placed on all FRA employees although it would not apply to the elected representatives in the authority as separate ethical standards arrangements are already in place. As is the case with police officers and PCCs, the Oath would be specified and provided for in legislation. We consider that a requirement for all FRA employees to consciously affirm ethical principles through an Oath would make it more likely that the principles would be adhered to. We think this would be preferable to a voluntary option because it would provide a more consistent approach across all services.

As noted above, the core code may be subject to review before being placed on a statutory basis, if that option is pursued. However, by way of example, an Oath based on the core

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code may include affirming such principles as acting with integrity, and supporting equality, diversity and inclusion. As we anticipate the Oath and the statutory code to be intrinsically linked, subject to the outcome of this consultation, we will continue to work closely with interested parties on the content and process associated with the statutory code and Oath.

If a breach of the Oath occurred, we believe it would be most appropriate for it to be dealt with by each service as an employment matter. Managers should exercise their professional judgment, reflecting service disciplinary procedures and the circumstances of the individual case. We consider that, in the absence of congruent criminal offence, it would be disproportionate for breach of the Oath alone to be a criminal offence.

Q20: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the creation of a fire and rescue service oath for services in England?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q21: Please give the reasons for your response.

Q22: To what extent do you agree/disagree that an Oath would embed the principles of the Code of Ethics amongst fire and rescue authority employees?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q23: To what extent do you agree/disagree with an Oath being mandatory for all employees?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q24: To what extent do you agree/disagree that breach of the fire and rescue service oath should be dealt with as an employment matter?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Professionalism Summary

We consider that action in these five key areas of improvement could help facilitate further professionalisation of fire and rescue services. Drawing on responses to this consultation, we intend to continue building capacity and capability across these five areas of leadership, data, research, ethics and clear expectations. It will be vital to make efficient use of resources in supporting services. We will therefore seek to prioritise those areas of delivery that are most beneficial in strengthening services and protecting the public.

Q25: To what extent do you agree/disagree that the five areas listed above are priorities for professionalising fire and rescue services?

- Leadership
- Data
- Research
- Ethics
- Clear Expectations

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q26: What other activities, beyond the five listed above, could help to professionalise fire and rescue services?

Independent Strategic Oversight

We believe there could be an opportunity for an independent body to build on the foundations laid and continue to drive forward the further professionalisation of services.

A key benefit of creating an independent professional body could be to provide an organisation independent of fire and rescue services and at arm’s length from government to lead the continuing development of the fire and rescue profession. It could comprise and be led by staff working in the organisation as their primary role and providing a dedicated resource to support services rather than by those who also must undertake pressing operational roles. This would help it carry out important activities not currently conducted on a sustainable basis. While we see benefits to independence, it would be vital for any new organisation to work with services, employers, the NFCC, the unions, HMICFRS and others, to ensure that work is fully informed by the views of the sector.

A College of Fire and Rescue

We therefore want to explore our ambition for the creation of a College of Fire and Rescue (CoFR) to be the independent body to support our fire and rescue professionals to best protect their communities. Through providing a permanent body of independent expertise and sharing the outputs of its various proposed strands of work, the independent CoFR could provide a vital aid to services in implementing the reforms outlined in this white paper.

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We will carefully consider the creation and appropriate remit of a CoFR using the views gathered through this consultation. We would want to ensure we prioritise areas of work that add greatest value to services, making best use of available resources. We are therefore seeking views on which of the five opportunities for further professionalisation should be priorities for the proposed independent CoFR.

By way of example, the proposed independent CoFR could have the following remit:

- on **Leadership**, developing and maintaining courses such as Leadership Programmes and direct entry schemes
- on **Data**, providing a home for a strategic centre of data excellence
- on **Research**, housing a central research function to ensure that research is prioritised, conducted effectively, and shared
- on **Clear Expectations**, taking on responsibility for the creation of fire standards, building on the work of the Fire Standards Board
- on **Ethics**, the proposed independent body could be provided with powers to create and maintain the proposed statutory code of ethics and fire and rescue service oath, and also keep practical implementation of the code and Oath under review

The remit outlined above could help ensure that these vital activities are conducted in a sustainable and independent manner by an organisation dedicated to undertaking this work. Placing multiple strands of work in the same organisation focused solely on their delivery would allow each strand to be supported by the others. Taking the examples above, a CoFR could allow expectations of services to be informed by the latest research and help leadership programmes to be imbued with strong ethical principles.

We also want to make sure that the proposed independent CoFR has the power to effect further improvement in fire and rescue services. We therefore wish to consider whether it should be given legislative powers to support its work. These could mirror the powers held by the College of Policing under the Police Act 1996, as amended by the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime & Policing Act 2014, or could involve the extension to the College of Fire of the powers held by the Secretary of State under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. For example, legislative powers provided to the CoFR could include the power to issue statutory codes of practice with the approval of the Secretary of State.

It should be noted that the remit of the NFCC extends significantly beyond the functions outlined above. Therefore, if the independent College of Fire were to be created, a strong co-operative working relationship with the NFCC would be vital in achieving the aims of both organisations.

Q27: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the creation of an independent College of Fire and Rescue to lead the professionalisation of fire and rescue services?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q28: Please provide your reasons for your response

Governance

Governance Structures

There are 44 FRAs across England operating under a range of different governance models. We believe this variation in the operation of models is unhelpful and leads to problems in relation to accountability and transparency.

Unlike FRAs overseen by PFCCs or combined authority mayors, the majority of authorities still operate a committee structure comprising many members (in the case of one authority, nearly 90). This can slow decision making and impair accountability. And across most of England, the public do not have a direct say in who is responsible for their fire service. In most areas, while members are elected (for example, as a councillor), they are not directly elected with a clear mandate in relation to fire.

Public awareness of FRAs and their members is not high. Our public polling as part of the review of PCCs found that the majority (89%) could not name a member of their FRA. In contrast, the awareness of PCCs (including police, fire and crime commissioners) is growing since the first candidates were elected in 2012. In the same polling, nearly two thirds (65%) of the public in these areas said they were either aware of their commissioner, or aware that they were responsible for policing (this figure is in line with other recent estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales). The 2021 PCC elections saw a significantly increased turnout – provisionally up 6.5 percent more than in 2016 - and more than double that of the 2012 elections. This shows the model is maturing and public awareness is growing.

After considering the conclusions of the PCC review, and reviewing inspection and other reports, the government view is that oversight of fire services needs to change. Our preferred governance model is one that meets the following criteria:

- there has a single, elected – ideally directly elected – individual who is accountable for the service rather than governance by committee
- there is clear demarcation between the political and strategic oversight by this individual, and the operationally independent running of the service by the chief fire officer
- that the person with oversight has control of necessary funding and estates
- decision-making, including budgets and spending, is transparent and linked to local public priorities

Therefore, to strengthen governance across the sector, we believe there is a strong case to consider options to transfer governance to an elected individual.

We seek views on this approach and who the most appropriate person may be. Options will need to be discussed options with each local area. There are a number of options for who this person could be. These include a directly elected combined authority mayor or a PCC. Each is a single directly elected individual who can provide the accountable leadership that we envisage, enabling the public to have a say in who oversees their local service. But there may be other options, including retaining fire in county council's under a designated leader. We seek views on who else could provide this executive leadership.

Q29: To what extent do you agree/disagree that Government should transfer responsibility for fire and rescue services in England to a single elected individual?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q30: What factors should be considered when transferring fire governance to a directly elected individual?

Please provide the reasons for your response.

The Mayoral Model

An option to achieve directly elected oversight of fire could be through the combined authority mayoral model. The government would like to see more combined authority mayors exercising public safety functions.

As set out in the Home Secretary’s response to the PCC review (2021) and the Levelling Up white paper, combined authority mayors could also take on public safety functions where boundaries allow.

Of the eight existing MCAs without fire and rescue functions currently, four (Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, Sheffield City Region, West Midlands and West Yorkshire) are already coterminous with fire and rescue boundaries. Subject to this consultation, we will explore options for transferring the fire functions directly to the MCAs for exercise by the mayors in these areas at the earliest opportunity. The four remaining existing MCAs (Liverpool City Region, North of Tyne, Tees Valley and West of England) are not currently coterminous with fire and rescue boundaries and so, subject to this consultation, we will need to consult with those in the local areas to establish the way forward.

Q31: Where Mayoral Combined Authorities already exist, to what extent do you agree/disagree that fire and rescue functions should be transferred directly to these MCAs for exercise by the Mayor?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Police and Crime Commissioners

Another option could be to transfer responsibility to a police, fire and crime commissioner. In 2017, measures were introduced through the Policing and Crime Act 2017 to enable PCCs to take on oversight of their local fire services.

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It is for each commissioner to determine whether they want responsibility for fire. If so, they need to produce a proposal for the Home Secretary that demonstrates how a governance transfer meets the statutory tests of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and that it does not have a detrimental impact on public safety. To date, four areas have made the transition to a police, fire and crime commissioner.

The PCC review considered how PCCs’ accountability could be strengthened, and their role expanded in line with the government’s manifesto commitment, and considered the benefits of directly elected oversight of fire services. Those interviewed from both policing and fire in the review were broadly supportive of the benefits of bringing policing and fire governance together under a directly elected individual, particularly to maximise the benefits of emergency services collaboration and strengthen accountability and transparency to the public. To achieve a more consistent approach to fire governance, many were strongly in favour of mandating governance change across England, rather than the current bottom-up piecemeal approach.

We have seen the immense value in what PFCCs in the four areas who have responsibility for fire have provided, including strengthened local accountability, enhanced collaboration and improvements in what their fire services provide the public. The business cases for the first four PFCCs estimated savings of between £6.6 million to £30 million over the first ten years. In Northamptonshire, the financial autonomy provided by the commissioner enabled the service to recruit new firefighters and replace equipment and facilities, thereby improving the support it provides to people and businesses. In North Yorkshire, the ‘Enable’ service brings together police and fire back-office staff to work as one team, under one roof, improving efficiency and affordability for all. The enhanced collaboration driven by commissioners is not only improving organisational efficiency but is saving lives. In Staffordshire, the commissioner agreed a missing persons support protocol between Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, Staffordshire Police and West Midlands Ambulance Service in which 90% of relevant incidents attended by fire and rescue crews were lifesaving or injury preventing.

The PCC review crystalised our proposals on fire service governance which the Home Secretary set out in her Written Ministerial Statement of March 2021. We therefore seek views on whether this is another acceptable option.

Q32: To what extent do you agree/disagree that Government should transfer responsibility for fire and rescue services in England to police and crime commissioners?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Other Options, such as an executive councillor

We recognise, reflecting the circumstances of each local area, that it may be preferable for somebody a different option other than a PCC or mayor to be given responsibility. This may be where a fire service is currently part of a county council or local boundaries aren’t aligned. We are therefore filling to consider other options, although any option will need to meet our

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criteria for good governance as listed above, in particular the need for clear executive – rather than committee – leadership.

Q33: Apart from combined authority mayors and police and crime commissioners, is there anyone else who we could transfer fire governance that aligns with the principles set out above?

Yes	No

Q34: If yes, please explain other options and your reasons for proposing them.

As part of any governance change, we could take the opportunity to strengthen and clarify the legal basis against which fire and rescue authorities operate. The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires fire authorities to make provision to provide ‘core functions’ (for example, fire safety, firefighting, rescuing people from road traffic accidents, functions in emergencies). While the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England provides a little more in terms of defining the role of authorities, further work could be done to define their scrutiny and oversight function.

In transferring responsibility to a single individual, we could also put good governance principles in statute. For example, legislation could expressly set out the role and function of the FRAs including its oversight and scrutiny functions, specifying how transparency objectives should be met, and clarifying the relationship between political oversight and operational decision making. If not in statute, this could also be included in the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

Q35: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the legal basis for fire and rescue authorities could be strengthened and clarified?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q36: Please provide the reasons for your response.

Should we decide to bring forward governance change and transfer governance from existing fire and rescue authorities, we do not want to lose the skills and expertise built up by FRAs. And regardless of who the executive leader is, each would need a body to scrutinise their decision making. Part 2 of our PCC review is assessing the current scrutiny arrangements for PCCs in more detail and how they could be improved. In the light of this, we will consider carefully what may be the appropriate arrangements for fire, including the findings from Part 2 of our PCC review which considered how the current scrutiny arrangements for PCCs could be improved.

Boundaries

In order to transfer fire governance to an elected official, the boundaries of the fire and rescue service and the police force/combined authority/county council must align. This is to ensure that there is a consistent electoral mandate across the whole of the area concerned. Across most of England, the boundaries for fire and rescue services and police forces/combined authorities (where present) are coterminous, making the transfer of governance to combined authority mayors and PCCs practicable. In areas where there is more than one fire and rescue service within a police force area (for example, Sussex Police covers the area of both East Sussex and West Sussex fire and rescue services) a transfer of functions is still possible as the PCC can take responsibility for each fire and rescue service that falls within their area. We would not seek to combine services unless there was local appetite to do so.

However, in other parts of the country such as the south-west of England, fire and police boundaries do not align. This means the transfer of fire governance to someone like a PCC would not be practicable unless steps were taken to bring about coterminous boundaries. We will discuss options for these areas with interested parties to determine how to achieve the necessary change.

Q37: To what extent do you agree/disagree that boundary changes should be made so that fire and rescue service areas and police force/combined authorities (where present) areas are coterminous?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Fire Funding

We are aware that any governance change will have funding implications. This will be particularly acute in services that are part of a county council or unitary authority. Should any governance transfer be made, we will need to assess that impact, for example on staff, assets and revenue transferred, and council tax precept. We are keen to ensure that both the financial sustainability for all local authorities and the operational capabilities of fire services are maintained throughout, including during any transition period. The government’s aim is that we will keep council tax bills low and this will not be adversely affected by our governance proposals.

Where fire is part of a county or unitary authority, we have seen that fire and rescue does not always receive the resources it might otherwise be allocated due to competing priorities within the parent authority. As a result, fire and rescue can see its budget reduced mid-year to meet pressures elsewhere in its parent authority. The fire and rescue service also must compete with other parts of the local authority for capital funding to replace essential equipment. Subject to the results of this consultation, should fire stay within a county council or unitary authority rather than be transferred to a PCC or mayor, we propose taking steps to ring-fence the operational fire budgets within all county councils and unitary authorities who run fire services. This will enable the executive leader and chief fire officer to have certainty at the start – and throughout – the financial year over what resources they have available to them in order to meet the requirements of their local plan.

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On conclusion of this consultation, we will work with national and local government representatives to consider these issues further. Should any changes to governance be given effect, we will consider options to ensure that authorities in all their forms continue to take effective decisions on their service provision ahead of any governance change.

Q38: To what extent do you agree/disagree with ring-fencing the operational fire budget within fire and rescue services run by county councils and unitary authorities?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q39: Please provide the reasons for your response.

A Balanced Leadership Model

Chief fire officers, properly held to account for performance by stronger governance, must also be able to make operational deployments and use their resources in the most efficient and effective ways to meet known and foreseeable risks. Yet in many cases, they are required to engage in prolonged negotiation at both the national and local levels on matters that should be within their operational responsibility.

In their first inspections, HMICFRS found that the lack of clear operational independence of chief fire officers created a barrier to services becoming more effective and efficient, and they found examples where chiefs were prevented by their authorities from implementing operational changes. HMICFRS recommended that the Home Office should take steps to give chiefs operational independence, including issuing clear guidance on the demarcation between governance and operational decision making. We agree with this recommendation and will legislate to do so when parliamentary time allows. While good governance, accountability and robust political decision-making is critical, it should be for the chief fire officer to determine the operational deployment of their staff.

We want to move to a consistent position where the political, executive leader of the fire and rescue authority will be responsible for their fire service and will be accountable – ultimately at the ballot box – for the service’s performance. This will be alongside the chief fire officer being accountable for operational decisions, with the two working effectively together to ensure the best service to the public.

The table below illustrates the possible demarcation of responsibility between the political (executive) leader and the chief fire officer. For example, the chief fire officer would make decisions in relation to the appointment and dismissal of staff, and the configuration, deployment and organisation of fire service resources. They would also make decisions to balance competing operational needs aligned to the strategic priorities set by the executive leader, to which they must have regard; including operational decisions to reallocate resources to meet immediate and ongoing demand and allocate staff to specific duties to reduce risk and save lives. We will work with those in the fire sector and local government to define this further ahead of making the required legislative changes.

Task	Responsible
<u>Setting priorities</u>	<u>Executive leader</u>
<u>Budget setting</u>	<u>Executive leader</u>
<u>Setting precept</u>	<u>Executive leader</u>
<u>Setting response standards</u>	<u>Executive leader</u>
Opening and closing fire stations	Executive leader*
<u>Appointment and dismissal of chief fire officer</u>	<u>Executive leader</u>
<u>Appointment and dismissal of other fire service staff</u>	<u>Chief fire officer</u>
<u>Allocation of staff to meet strategic priorities</u>	<u>Chief fire officer</u>
<u>Configuration and organisation of resources</u>	<u>Chief fire officer</u>
<u>Deployment of resources to meet operational requirements</u>	<u>Chief fire officer</u>
<u>Balancing of competing operational needs</u>	<u>Chief fire officer</u>
<u>Expenditure up to certain (delegated) levels</u>	<u>Chief fire officer</u>

*Opening and closing of fire stations could be a joint decision; operationally fire chiefs could be responsible for decisions on moving teams, whilst ultimate political and executive responsibility lies with the executive leader.

There will be a bright, clear line demarcating the nature and extent of the chief fire officer's operational independence against the role of the executive leader. We will consider best practice in local government to develop this, as well as learning from the relationships between PCCs and their chief constables. We could consider producing something akin to the Policing Protocol to clarify roles and responsibilities and provide safeguards.

To support that, the declaration of the acceptance of office of PCCs and mayors could be extended to respect the operational independence of chief fire officers in the same way it presently applies to the independence of police officers.

At all times, the strengthened governance model of an executive leader will hold the chief to account for their decisions and performance.

Q40. To what extent do you agree with this proposed approach (as outlined in the table above)?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q41. Do you have any other comments to further support your answer?

Q42. Are there any factors we should consider when implementing these proposals?

Q43: What factors should we consider when giving chief fire officers operational independence?

Please provide the reasons for your opinions.

Legal Entity of Chief Fire Officers

When considering the role of chief fire officers in the context of transferring governance to a PCC, the extent of operational independence granted to them becomes even more relevant.

In the PCC model for policing governance, chief constables have operational independence from their commissioner in relation to the running of their police forces. The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 provides that a police force and its civilian staff are under the direction and control of the chief constable. The 2011 Act also makes each chief constable a corporation sole. That means that the chief constable is a legal entity in their own right, occupying a single incorporated office. It makes the chief constable the employer of all those who work for the police force, and gives them legal authority over certain decisions and functions.

We therefore will consider whether to legislate to make chief fire officers corporations sole. This could clarify their role and responsibilities, and make them the employers of all fire personnel. This would mirror the arrangement in policing, although we will ensure these new arrangements are appropriate for fire. Subject to the views of the consultation, should we decide to proceed, we recognise specific arrangements may need to be put in place for chief fire officers employed by fire and rescue services run by county-councils and unitary authorities due to how closely fire professionals and assets are embedded in those organisations. We will work with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and others in local government to consider this further.

Q44: What factors should we consider should we make chief fire officers corporations sole?

Clear Distinction Between Strategic and Operational Planning

Fire and rescue authorities are required by the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England to publish an Integrated Risk Management Plan (or similar for mayors and PFCCs). Put simply, the plan should assess all foreseeable fire-and-rescue related risks the service may face, and list how they will be met or responded to.

We are seeking views on how best to clarify the distinction between strategic and operational planning. We believe there should be a clear distinction between a strategic fire and rescue plan established by the fire authority and for which it is responsible, that sets priorities for the service on behalf of the public, and an operational plan which would become the responsibility of the chief fire officer and would deal with how strategic priorities will be met and risks mitigated.

Appendix A

Regardless of whether we require a new strategic plan, we propose to change the title of the operational plan to ‘the Community Risk Management Plan’. This better reflects the focus that these plans should have on risks to communities and more closely aligns to the newly established Community Risk Fire Standard introduced by the Fire Standards Board.

Q45: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the responsibility for strategic and operational planning should be better distinguished?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q46: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the strategic plan should be the responsibility of the fire and rescue authority?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q47: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the operational plan should be the responsibility of the chief fire officer?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Q48: Please provide the reasons for your response.

--

About you

Please use this section to tell us about yourself

Full name	
Job title or capacity in which you are responding to this consultation exercise (for example, member of the public)	
Date	
Company name/organisation (if applicable)	
Address	
Postcode	
If you would like us to acknowledge receipt of your response, please tick this box	<input type="checkbox"/> (please tick box)
Address to which the acknowledgement should be sent, if different from above	

If you are a representative of a group, please tell us the name of the group and give a summary of the people or organisations that you represent.

Contact details and how to respond

Please respond to this consultation online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-our-fire-and-rescue-service>

Alternatively, you can send in electronic copies to:

firereformconsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk

Alternatively, you may send paper copies to:

Fire Reform Consultation
Fire Strategy & Reform Unit
4th Floor, Peel Building
2 Marsham Street,
London
SW1P 4DF

Complaints or comments

If you have any complaints or comments about the consultation process you should contact the Home Office at the above address.

Extra copies

Further paper copies of this consultation can be obtained from this address and it is also available online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-our-fire-and-rescue-service>

Alternative format versions of this publication can be requested from:
firereformconsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk

Publication of response

A paper summarising the responses to this consultation will be published online at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-our-fire-and-rescue-service>

Representative groups

Representative groups are asked to give a summary of the people and organisations they represent when they respond.

Confidentiality

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA), the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004).

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Home Office.

The Home Office will process your personal data in accordance with the DPA and in the majority of circumstances, this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Impact Assessment

The Government is mindful of its duty to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 and the need to assess the potential impact of any proposal on those with protected characteristics. In each part of the consultation, we invite views and evidence on the potential impact of the proposals and the package of proposals as a whole on such persons.

The impact assessment for this consultation can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-our-fire-and-rescue-service>

Consultation principles

The principles that government departments and other public bodies should adopt for engaging stakeholders when developing policy and legislation are set out in the consultation principles.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance>

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Appendix A



Home Office

A profession we can all be proud of - Reforming our Fire & Rescue Service

Government consultation response to the Fire Reform White Paper

December 2023

CP 993

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Appendix B



A profession we can all be proud of - Reforming our Fire & Rescue Service

Government consultation response to the Fire Reform White Paper

Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for the Home Department
by Command of His Majesty

December 2023



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Introduction and contact details

This document is the post-consultation report for the consultation paper, Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service.

It will cover:

- Introduction
- The background to the consultation
- A summary of the consultation responses
- A detailed response to the specific questions raised in the report
- The next steps following this consultation.

Further copies of this report and the consultation paper can be obtained by contacting the Fire Strategy & Reform Unit at the address below:

Fire Strategy & Reform Unit

Home Office

2 Marsham Street

London SW1P 4DF

Email: firereformconsultation@homeoffice.gov.uk

This report is also available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-our-fire-and-rescue-service>

Complaints or comments

If you have any complaints or comments about the consultation process, you should contact the Home Office at the above address.

Ministerial Foreword



As the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire, I have the privilege of overseeing one of the most important duties of government – keeping people safe. I have witnessed first-hand the hard work and dedication of our emergency services as they protect their communities. Fire and rescue professionals play a crucial role in keeping the public safe - whether they are firefighters or fire staff and whether working as first responders, in corporate functions or in vital prevention and protection

roles - and they deserve to be supported to be their best.

There is no doubt that our fire and rescue services are made up of brave, dedicated people. However, there is more to be done to ensure everyone is supported, respected and valued in the workplace. We need look no further than London's Independent Culture Review, shocking media reporting and the independent fire inspectorate's findings on culture and values to see the scale of the challenge. And whilst Government investment following the Grenfell Tower Tragedy has allowed us to invest in improving vital protection services and has driven real change through the Fire Standards Board and the National Fire Chiefs Council, there is more to do to ensure fire professionals have the training and support they need to respond to the evolving challenges we face. Reform is necessary to ensure that this becomes reality.

The Fire Reform White Paper set out the government's vision for fire and rescue service reform. Launched last summer, the White Paper asked for views on a range of proposals. I would like to thank everyone who took the time to respond to the consultation – your input has helped shape the next steps on reforming a vital public service.

Although our plan was already strongly focussed on making sure that fire and rescue is a great profession which values its people, we have refined our approach to take recent changes and reports into account. We have focussed our efforts on the reform steps that will have the most impact for the public and for fire professionals: supporting dedicated fire staff to develop a profession to be proud of and ensuring that fire services do more to put the public first.

This means setting up a professional body to continue to raise standards. It means putting integrity and leadership front and centre with great training, consistent and more open recruitment practices and a statutory code of ethics. It means helping fire professionals to keep their community safe by giving chiefs operational control of their service. It means helping sector leaders to manage pay fairly without getting caught up in bureaucracy. It means playing a full role in protecting the community, working with health, police, and other partners. It means enabling more directly elected leaders to bring public focus and economic rigour to fire and rescue services.

But publishing this reform strategy is just the start. To deliver this ambitious plan we will need joint effort between operational and political leaders and a commitment to change at the front line. The Home Office worked closely with stakeholders from fire and rescue

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services during the development of the White Paper, and we will continue to do so as we move forward to develop policy detail and deliver solutions.

Our fire and rescue service professionals put themselves on the line for their communities. We need to ensure that they are supported as professionals in a changing world - it is the least they deserve. The strategy set out in this consultation response is a major step in delivering reform, and I look forward to working together to make it happen.

Background

The case for reform

The consultation paper “Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service” was published on 18 May 2022 to seek views on Government’s ideas for reform, building on lessons from independent inspection, concerning national reports and the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. It laid out a vision for fire reform and was built on our ambition to strengthen fire and rescue services. However, the fire reform challenge has become clearer since the launch of the White Paper. Evidence gathered during the consultation stage and a number of key reports and events have provided further insight into the issues set out in the White Paper which have informed our strategy for reform.

In addition to the consultation itself, the Home Office has conducted a significant programme of engagement with fire professionals across the country, at all levels and ranks. Our discussions on the future of fire professionalism involved interviews, service visits and online workshops with over 220 people from 32 fire and rescue services in England and other linked organisations.

As a result, we have focussed our efforts and our thinking on the reform steps that will have the biggest impact for the public and for fire professionals: supporting employers and employees to develop a profession to be proud of and ensuring that fire services do more to put the public first. We will continue to use all tools available to us to drive improvements, including legislation where appropriate, through revisions to the National Framework and building on wider sector plans, such as Fit for the Future. This report summarises the consultation responses and sets out the Government’s strategy for reform. It is right that we address the integrity and industrial action issues that have since been brought to attention.

Integrity Matters

Autumn 2022 saw the publication of the Independent Culture Review of London Fire Brigade, finding widespread and disturbing bullying, harassment and discrimination. Whilst the findings were troubling, it is right that senior leaders gripped the issue at hand. It quickly became apparent that these issues were not confined to London, far from it.

In response to this review, and other allegations in multiple services, the Minister for Crime, Policing and Fire commissioned His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) to produce a “Spotlight” report on values and culture. The Report was published in March 2023 and highlighted widespread unacceptable behaviour. HMICFRS also raised serious concerns around the misconduct process, background checks, and leadership across services.

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The Home Secretary therefore commissioned HMICFRS to conduct a thematic inspection of the handling of misconduct in fire and rescue services. This will examine the effectiveness and consistency of the misconduct processes.

The Home Office will prioritise the actions needed to ensure fire and rescue services are welcoming, respectful workplaces that enable all individuals who work in them to thrive and will expect all partners and sector leaders to play their part.

Keeping communities safe during strikes

This year has also seen services in a period of uncertainty and the public potentially placed at undue risk due to strike threats. Although a high pay offer from fire employers ended the current pay dispute without industrial action, this has highlighted the need for more robust business continuity planning and a more modern, transparent pay mechanism. Employees should have the right to strike, but it is essential that the public remain protected, and business critical services can continue to be delivered.

With fire and other public services in mind, this Government took steps to protect the public with the introduction of minimum service levels legislation into Parliament. In the event of industrial action, these measures would ensure a sufficient level of staffing to keep the public safe.

A public consultation concluded on 11 May 2023 and on 20 July 2023 the Strikes (Minimum Service Level) Act 2023 received Royal Assent in Parliament, ensuring workers maintain the ability to strike whilst giving the public access to the essential services they need. We are continuing to work through what the policy design for fire and rescue minimum service levels could look like.

A profession we can all be proud of – our strategy for reform

Setting the course for reform

The Fire Reform White Paper consulted on the government's vision for fire reform, centred around three main themes:

People – improving systems, flexibility and culture.

Professionalism – helping fire professionals to best serve their communities.

Governance – strengthening oversight and leadership.

Although our proposals focussed strongly on making sure that fire and rescue is a great modern profession, recent reports have illustrated how central these issues should be in our strategy for reform. The changes we outline here will support both the public and fire and rescue professionals: building a profession we can all be proud of.

People

The White Paper outlined plans to help fire professionals to further develop their skills and ensure that everyone could thrive in their work. This included clarifying the role of fire and rescue services, unlocking talent and improving representation within services.

The Home Office is already taking significant steps: with grant funding to support new standards, leadership programmes at all levels and embedding the Code of Ethics. The Home Office has also worked with the Ministry of Justice, National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Disclosure and Barring Service to introduce legislation, supported by new guidance, expanding eligibility for background checks on Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) employees in the interests of both staff and public safety.

Talent and inclusion

The White Paper set out our intention to build on existing progress to provide effective leadership of the sector and building capability, embedding values and nurturing talent within services.

There are a great many skilled and talented people working in fire and rescue services, but it cannot be that all talent can only come from within services. The White Paper sought to support the development of established staff and to widen the talent pool from which services hire, ensuring that our workplaces are open and inclusive.

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Direct entry was a divisive issue for some consultation respondents; however, fire already has a strong track record in this area with several fire and rescue services being successfully run by non-operational leaders. The Home Office is funding the development and piloting of wider direct entry schemes through the NFCC, bringing new perspectives into services alongside the many talented professionals already serving. The Home Office will continue to work with the NFCC and others to develop talent management schemes for both new recruits and those already working in fire and rescue.

The Home Office will also work with service leaders to consider consistent entry requirements, including barriers in current entry requirements.

Pay and role

The consultation laid out the Government's fundamental position that the role of the fire and rescue service in England is clear – laid out comprehensively in legislation across three key acts of Parliament that address fire, community safety and civil contingencies. While the law may be clear, its implementation is hampered by cumbersome pay and conditions machinery and a lack of clear accountability for fire operations and resources. The system needs to be flexible to enable chiefs to make local level decisions about staffing, whilst working productively with unions. We need fire and rescue services to be able to play a full role in protecting the community, working with health, police and other partners without getting tied up in red tape. We saw how this could work during the later stages of the pandemic, when chiefs could protect their staff and support the community without getting caught up in bureaucracy.

We want to work with the full range of both fire employers and unions to address the call for change that has come through in the consultation responses in relation to the operation of the National Joint Council (NJC). In the first instance, we will support the fire and rescue authorities and unions to critically review the NJC's own mechanisms, operations and transparency. This should be an inclusive process and should be completed by early 2024. It is clear from this consultation that the right answer cannot simply be a defence of the status quo. We will want the review to actively consider the changes that it is clear consultation respondents want to see and to explore whether there needs to be more scope for variation and self-determination including by types of services and by location. If this does not result in meaningful change, we will need to explore other routes to ensure a modern, fair pay system that constructively enables role reform in England.

Professionalism

Proposals in the Professionalism section of the White Paper centred around the creation of an independent body for fire professionals. These proposals will build on the important and ongoing work of both the Fire Standards Board (FSB) which has developed a strong suite of Fire Standards ranging from operational matters to culture and ethics, and the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), who will have an enduring and important role in future.

Creating a College of Fire and Rescue

A College of Fire and Rescue was proposed to strengthen the development of individuals and the overall professionalism of fire and rescue services, setting the direction on data, research, leadership, ethics and professional standards. It was also proposed that a College could be given powers mirroring those of the College of Policing, to help it drive change. The consultation showed an overwhelmingly positive response to the creation of a College, which could develop practice across the prevention, protection and response functions that fire professionals undertake.

The Home Office will continue to work openly with sector leaders, the frontline and existing comparable organisations such as the College of Policing, as we develop the most appropriate delivery model.

Raising standards

The White Paper proposed creation of a statutory code of ethics, the case for which is bolstered by inspection findings of HMICFRS and serious lapses of integrity in parts of our fire and rescue services. The majority of respondents were supportive of this course of action. In matters of integrity and elsewhere, the Home Office wants to see professional standards which drive consistency and drive-up performance and professionalism.

The Home Office will place future responsibility for professional standards with the College of Fire and Rescue and will create powers to place elements of professional standards such as a code of ethics on a statutory basis when parliamentary time allows.

Governance

The White Paper opened debate on strengthening or simplifying fire governance. It indicated that single point accountability allows for better link up between services, more efficient use of resources and clearer accountability to the public. The current process of submitting business cases for governance transfers can be complex, costly and time-consuming. The White Paper also confirmed our intention to deliver on the independent inspectorate's recommendation that chief officers should be afforded operational independence, similar to their policing counterparts.

Governance change

The White Paper outlined the value of single point accountability in fire and the Home Office is committed to supporting moves towards this. We will not, however, take forward the mandatory transfer of FRA functions to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), Mayors or single elected individuals at this stage.

The Home Office will encourage PCCs and Mayors who want to take on fire governance functions, where the areas are co-terminous, to step forward, in order to enable the Home

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Office to assess readiness and support change. The Home Office will also work proactively with PCCs and the Association of Police & Crime Commissioners to explore ways to simplify processes and incentivise voluntary transfers. This could be done by radically streamlining the business case process or exploring legislative means to remove them altogether. The Home Office will also, as part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda, continue to support locally led devolution deals and any fire governance transfers that result from these deals.

Operational Independence

The proposals in the White Paper set out plans to clarify the responsibilities of fire authorities and chief officers. The aim is to create a framework that complements existing structures while providing greater clarity and transparency in the division of responsibilities. At all times, the fire and rescue authority will be responsible for their fire service. The chief officer is effectively responsible for operationalising the authority's strategic directions. Operational independence would provide chief officers with the ability to make decisions on practical and management issues.

The Government will seek to legislate, at the earliest opportunity, to give chief officers operational independence. The Home Office will also take action to make the responsibilities of the fire and rescue authority and the chief officer clearer, with regard to a clearer separation of strategic and operational planning requirements and the governance of services.

Detailed Question Analysis

A total of 290 responses to the consultation paper were received. The online survey did not collect any personal data. 77% (86 out of 111) of survey responses sent by letter or email were provided by the fire and rescue service or their governing authority.

The Impact Assessment accompanying the fire reform consultation has been updated to take account of evidence provided by stakeholders during the consultation period and individual impact assessments will be completed for each proposal.

This section provides a statistical breakdown of the responses received and outlines our proposed next steps for each consultation question. As these figures are rounded to the nearest whole number, the rounding may result in a 1% disparity between the individual percentages shown in the tables and where responses are aggregated.

People

Q1: To what extent do you agree/disagree that fire and rescue services should have the flexibility to deploy resources to help address current and future threats faced by the public beyond core fire and rescue duties?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
133	53	76	30	15	6	11	4	18	7

1. This question sought views on our proposal to expand the role of fire and rescue services in relation to the range of incidents faced by the public. The current role of fire and rescue services is to keep the public safe through prevention, protection and response work with a duty to collaborate with other Blue Light services where this will improve public safety outcomes, and the legislative framework is clear and coherent. However, some working practices have been found to be highly inflexible when faced with emerging threats or new opportunities. HMICFRS have also highlighted the need for clarity and flexibility.
2. With 83% of respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing with the proposal, and 11% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, it is evident that the sector is in favour of clarifying the extent of the role of the fire and rescue services.
3. The most recurring themes from the qualitative responses were that the sector needs to be more flexible to protect the public more efficiently. Some respondents mentioned that bureaucracy often gets in the way of change and is holding the sector back. The conflation of issues of role and pay through the NJC was felt to add to bureaucratic hurdles.

Next Steps:

4. The Government believes the law is clear – but its implementation is hampered by cumbersome pay and conditions machinery and a lack of clear accountability for fire operations and the tasking of fire professionals. We will continue to work with the sector to address this as well as to identify and explore opportunities and action which will benefit public safety.

Q2: To what extent do you agree/disagree that fire and rescue services should play an active role in supporting the wider health and public safety agenda?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
110	43	77	30	19	8	22	9	25	10

5. This question was aiming to establish whether our proposal of expanding the role of fire and rescue services should involve having a more active role in the wider health and public safety agenda.

6. Again, a large proportion of respondents (74%) either strongly agreed or agreed with this proposal and 19% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

7. It is clear that the sector acknowledges that greater interactions with other emergency services facilitates an even more valuable and efficient fire and rescue service.

Next Steps:

8. We will work together with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and other partners to explore options further. We will also work alongside fire and rescue services across the UK, DHSC, NHS England, NHS Wales and regional Ambulance trusts to support the work of the ambulance services in a way that increases public safety. Operational independence for CFOs will also help facilitate fire and rescue services playing a wider role in the health and public safety agenda, as they will have the powers to deploy resources in their local areas.

Q3: To what extent do you agree/disagree that the business continuity requirements set out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 provide sufficient oversight to keep the public safe in the event of strike action?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
30	12	52	22	64	27	74	31	21	9

9. This question sought to understand whether the sector felt that it was well prepared to keep the public safe in the event of industrial action. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places a duty on Fire and Rescue Authorities, as Category 1 responders, to assess the risk of and respond to emergencies. They have a duty to maintain business continuity plans and emergency plans to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that if an emergency occurs, they are able to continue to perform its functions. The freedom to take part in industrial action is important but we believe that public safety needs to be ensured regardless. Assessing the robustness of Business Continuity

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Plans – owned by fire and rescue services and authorities, is currently undertaken by the National Resilience Assurance Team (NRAT), a team of seconded fire professionals led by Merseyside FRS, with support from the NFCC and Home Office.

10. For this proposal, 34% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that the sector's plans were robust enough, while 39% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The stark divide in responses indicate a need for each service's business continuity plans to be reviewed to ensure that they are comprehensive and instil confidence in both the public and fire and rescue professionals.

Next Steps:

11. The government is taking action to introduce minimum service levels for fire and rescue services which are intended to provide a specified level of cover on strike days. In the meantime, the Home Office will continue to work closely with key partners to ensure business continuity plans enable services to keep the public safe in the event of industrial action.

Q4&5: To what extent do you agree/disagree that the current pay negotiation arrangements are appropriate?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
32	13	32	13	49	20	59	24	74	30

12. This question sought to establish the extent to which the sector considered the current pay negotiation arrangements appropriate.

13. The breakdown of the quantitative responses shows that 26% either strongly agreed or agreed and 54% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The responses clearly show an appetite for a reform of current pay negotiation arrangements.

14. Qualitative responses provided context with some respondents saying that the current process is outdated, slow and opaque. Other responses suggested that pay should be negotiated nationally and that negotiations for uniformed and non-uniformed fire and rescue employees should be carried out in tandem in the interest of fairness. The introduction of pay scales and of an annual review of the negotiation process are other recurring suggestions.

15. Those that supported the current pay negotiation arrangements were keen to underline their belief that any changes to the current set-up could negatively impact on national collective bargaining and questioned the effectiveness of other forms of pay negotiation bodies such as the existing Pay Review Bodies in certain public sectors are for their respective workforces.

Next Steps:

16. We want to work with fire employers and unions to address the call for change that has come through in the consultation responses in relation to the operation of the National Joint Council. In the first instance, we will support the National Joint Council secretariat to rapidly review its mechanisms, operations and transparency whilst considering the changes that it is clear consultation respondents want to see. This includes but is not limited to how to better reflect the specific needs of England in pay negotiations and decisions and to account for different FRA circumstances.

Q6&7: To what extent do you agree/disagree that minimum entry requirements should be set for fire and rescue service roles?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
77	30	112	44	31	12	25	10	12	5

17. This question sought to understand whether respondents agreed with the proposal that minimum entry requirements should be set for fire and rescue service roles.

18. Quantitative responses showed that 74% either strongly agreed or agreed with the proposal, while 14% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The apparent lack of consistency, the importance of striking the right balance between operational and academic experience and the need for more inclusive standards were recurring themes in the qualitative responses. Respondents who were against the proposal were primarily concerned that minimum entry requirements could have an adverse impact on recruiting from diverse backgrounds or those without academia.

Next Steps:

19. The sector would benefit greatly from having consistent and flexible standards to attract and promote talent from a more diverse pool. The Home Office will continue to explore options and engage with key stakeholders to determine how best to implement this proposal with a focus on consistency.

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Q8: To what extent do you agree/disagree that other roles, in addition to station and area managers, would benefit from a direct entry and talent management scheme?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
32	13	70	28	38	15	49	20	57	23

20. This question sought to establish the extent at which respondents agreed or disagreed with the notion that other roles, in addition to station and area managers would benefit from a direct entry and talent management.

21. Quantitative responses showed that 41% either strongly agreed or agreed, while 43% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. With responses almost evenly split, it was important to understand the rationale behind them.

22. Respondents were mostly supportive of direct entry and talent management schemes, but some were also uncomfortable about the scheme being introduced at a senior level.

Next Steps:

23. Direct entry and talent management schemes would achieve a more diverse workforce to the sector at all levels, if carefully developed and implemented. The Home Office will explore options and engage with key stakeholders to determine how best to implement this proposal, taking into account lessons and experiences from the pilot that is being run by NFCC.

Other themes arising from the consultation

24. In addition to the questions posed in the White Paper, many respondents commented on other issues affecting how they could improve or enhance their services and public safety. We will continue to work with the sector to explore these issues further and identify any additional action necessary.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

25. Inclusion is essential within a modern fire and rescue service. The sector would benefit from better representation across the workforce; there is much work to be done to have a fire service that reflects the community it serves and that everyone is treated with fairness and respect, in an environment where they can thrive. We will continue to work with key partners in the sector to ensure this remains at the forefront of any recruitment and development schemes.

On-Call

26. Respondents highlighted concerns regarding on-call firefighter recruitment and retention as a major issue affecting the sector. We will work with key partners, including the NFCC which is considering this issue through its People programme to explore potential solutions.

Professionalism

In addition to the consultation responses captured on these questions, we have continued engagement with frontline partners over the last six months through our work to strengthen professionalism in the fire and rescue sector.

Our debate on the future of fire professionalism has involved interviews, service visits and online workshops with over 220 people in a range of roles from 32 fire and rescue services and other linked organisations. Where appropriate and linked to the questions, we have highlighted these insights as additional reflections from the sector.

Q9&10: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the proposed introduction of a 21st century leadership programme?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
74	30	110	44	31	12	16	6	18	7

27. This question sought views on our proposal to introduce a standardised leadership programme for assistant chief fire officers and chief fire officers. A leadership programme aims to provide a standardised approach to how services identify and prepare the next generation of leaders. Completion of a course could make it easier to move between leadership roles in fire and rescue services

28. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal, with a combined total of 74% in support. 12% neither agreed nor disagreed, while a combined total of 14% were unsupportive of this proposal.

29. Some of the prominent themes that emerged included the need for talent spotting and progression and the benefits of standardised leadership training. Some respondents highlighted that this could boost consistency. A response from one FRS suggested that standardised leadership training could make it easier to transfer between services and would offer a structured route for high potential employees to progress. However, some respondents felt that leadership training should be open to a wider range of staff.

Next Steps:

30. It is clear that there is support for a refreshed leadership programme. The qualitative responses have provided us with a range of suggestions which we will take into consideration as we develop this proposal further with the NFCC, which has already commenced work to enhance the leadership learning offer.

Q11: To what extent do you agree/disagree that completion of the proposed 21st century leadership programme should be mandatory before becoming an assistant chief fire officer or above?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
69	28	61	25	49	20	39	16	29	12

31. This question sought to build on the previous question and asked respondents whether completion of a leadership programme should be mandatory before becoming an assistant chief fire officer or above.

32. 53% of respondents agreed that a leadership programme should be mandatory. 20% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 28% did not support the proposal.

Next Steps:

33. The Government will work with partners to ensure chief officers are equipped with the necessary skills to lead their Service effectively and protect the public.

Q12: To what extent do you agree/disagree that each of the activities outlined above are high priorities for helping improve the use and quality of fire and rescue service data?¹

Pre-Fix (18 – 27 May)²

Answer Choice	A national data analytics capability	Data-focused training	Consistent approaches to structuring data	Clear expectations for data governance	Securing data-sharing agreements	Response Total
Strongly agree	20	3	6	2	10	41
Agree	10	6	6	9	4	35
Neither agree nor disagree	5	7	9	8	5	34
Disagree	3	7	1	6	7	24
Strongly disagree	5	2	4	4	7	22

¹ This question is as written in the consultation; each of the activities mentioned are outlined in the tables

² When the online survey first launched it only allowed respondents to allocate one unique response for each activity (i.e., if “A National Data Analytics Capability” was given a Strongly Agree, the highest response “Data-Focused Training” could receive would be Agree). As a substantial number of Qualitative responses (Q15) was dedicated to allowing users to submit Strongly Agree for all areas, we decided it would be best to allow users to respond as freely as they liked and therefore provide more relevant answers to the qualitative question. This issue and change also affected Questions 14 and 25.

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Post Fix (28 May – 26 July)

Answer Choice	A national data analytics capability	Data-focused training	Consistent approaches to structuring data	Clear expectations for data governance	Securing data-sharing agreements	Response Total	Pre & Post fix combined
Strongly agree	100	98	112	99	103	512	553
Agree	60	63	60	69	58	310	345
Neither agree nor disagree	23	19	20	16	19	97	131
Disagree	6	7	2	4	6	25	49
Strongly disagree	5	5	7	7	5	29	51

Q13: What other activities, beyond those listed above, would help improve the use and quality of fire and rescue service data? Please give the reasons for your response.

34. Sir Thomas Winsor's 2019 *State of Fire* Report highlighted how the fire sector was lacking an effective national strategy for utilising data, which was therefore proving to be a missed opportunity. The quantitative responses to both data tables show that there is significant support for all five proposed activities with very little to separate them.

Next Steps:

35. It is evident that there is a significant appetite and need to modernise and offer national support for gathering and sharing data to ensure it can be consistent across the country and accessible to not only fire and rescue services but potentially to other blue light services as well. For this reason, the Home Office has already begun work with the NFCC and is developing plans for data to become a key pillar of a College of Fire and Rescue.

FRONTLINE INSIGHTS

In our interviews we heard that people wanted to understand how to use data to make better decisions, to have faith in the quality of shared data, and to have an agreed way of measuring data. Further, people also wanted help identifying national trends and accessing useful datasets to help inform their work.

The workshops conducted in services identified data training and common data sharing agreements as the most valuable solutions. People hoped they could work to common standards, share data more easily and help everyone understand the value of data.

Q14: To what extent do you agree/disagree that each of the activities outlined above are high priorities for improving the use and quality of fire evidence and research?

Pre-Fix (18 – 27 May)

Answer Choice	Collaborating	Commissioning	Conducting	Collating	Response Total
Strongly agree	30	3	4	3	40
Agree	6	11	10	5	32
Neither agree nor disagree	0	6	9	6	21
Disagree	2	2	6	8	18
Strongly disagree	4	1	1	1	7

Post Fix (28 May – 26 July)

Answer Choice	Collaborating	Commissioning	Conducting	Collating	Response Total	Pre & Post Fix Combined
Strongly agree	95	87	92	91	365	405
Agree	63	65	61	64	253	285
Neither agree nor disagree	23	27	26	24	100	121
Disagree	4	7	6	5	22	40
Strongly disagree	6	6	5	5	22	29

Q15: What other activities, beyond those listed above, would help improve the use and quality of evidence and research on fire and other hazards?

36. Responses highlighted there are several organisations who aim to provide up to date research and relevant evidence to fire services. However, there is the concern that we are lacking a suitable method to collate all of this information and ensure that the work being undertaken is suitably joined up.

37. Similar to the quantitative tables seen with our *Data* questions, the public’s response suggests that all four activities proposed to improve the quality of evidence and research of fire and other hazards are high priority.

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38. The two most prevalent themes emerging from the qualitative responses were also fairly well aligned. The most popular theme (32) outlined several ways in which both data and research could be taken forward in a consistent way. The second most popular theme (31 total responses) called for links with other research groups, both domestically (particularly the NFCC's Academic Collaboration, Evaluation and Research Group) and internationally.

FRONTLINE INSIGHTS

Based on the research interviews conducted by the Home Office, it is clear there is a strong case to form an entity that can conduct and commission research, gather data and build an evidence base that will be helpful for the sector to forward plan. There is a desire to have research areas prioritised for the sector, providing access to high quality and reliable data that can be shared across the sector to support research.

Next Steps:

39. It is little surprise that Research has proven to be a topic with high public investment, and it will therefore be a key pillar of our work within the College of Fire and Rescue and building on the recent establishment of the Academic Collaboration Evaluation and Research Group.

Q16: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the creation of a statutory code of ethics for services in England?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
76	32	67	28	46	19	25	10	25	10

40. This question sought views on the creation of a statutory code of ethics that all fire and rescue services should embed in their work. The current code, created in response to an inspectorate recommendation, is non statutory.

41. 60% of respondents agreed with the creation of placing the code on a statutory basis. 19% neither agreed nor disagreed, while 21% disagreed.

FRONTLINE INSIGHTS:

Introducing a statutory code of ethics was a popular idea in our workshops with services. In interviews and workshops, people said that they hoped they could change the culture of the fire and rescue service to create a more open and supportive environment. Participants also wanted to ensure their services had the capacity and training in place to meet expectations and told us they also needed to trust the development process and that it needs to be easy to understand whether you are meeting the Code.

42. Respondents identified the importance of any intervention leading to meaningful change and of engaging with the sector in the creation of a Statutory Code of Ethics.

Next Steps:

43. As a result of this feedback, the Home Office will make the delivery of a statutory code of ethics a key early priority for the College of Fire and Rescue. This will be pursued in close collaboration with partners in the fire and rescue sector. We will seek to establish the appropriate powers and to place a code on a statutory basis when parliamentary time allows.

Q17: To what extent do you agree/disagree that placing a code of ethics on a statutory basis would better embed ethical principles in services than the present core code of ethics?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
58	24	57	24	47	20	46	19	32	13

44. This question builds on the previous proposal. 48% of respondents were in agreement that a statutory code of ethics would ensure ethical principles were better embedded in fire and rescue services, while 20% neither agreed nor disagreed and 33% did not agree. The data suggests that although a substantial majority of respondents agreed the code of ethics should be placed on a statutory footing, some were unsure that it would help embed the principles of the code within services.

Q18: To what extent do you agree/disagree that the duty to ensure services act in accordance with the proposed statutory code should be placed on operationally independent chief fire officers?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
52	22	87	36	49	20	19	8	33	14

Q19: To what extent do you agree/disagree with making enforcement of the proposed statutory code an employment matter for chief fire officers to determine within their services?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
43	18	97	41	39	16	24	10	35	15

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45. If the code was placed on a statutory basis, the duty to have regard to it would be most effectively placed on identified individuals. The two questions above sought views on whether that duty should be placed on operationally independent chief fire officers who it was proposed could also be responsible for the enforcement of the code.

46. There was support for placing the duty to have regard to the code and responsibility for enforcement of the code with the chief fire officer; 58% and 59% of respondents were supportive of these questions respectively. Only 22% were unsupportive of giving CFOs the duty to ensure their services follow the code and 25% were against giving CFOs responsibility to determine enforcement.

Next Steps:

47. As indicated in the Governance chapter of this response, we are committing to providing chief fire officers with the operational independence they need to lead their services. For this reason, it would seem appropriate that the duty to have regard to a statutory code of ethics is placed on operationally independent chief fire officers who would also take on responsibility for applying it in their services.

Q20&21: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the creation of a fire and rescue service oath for services in England?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
40	17	38	16	55	23	49	20	58	24

Q22: To what extent do you agree/disagree that an Oath would embed the principles of the Code of Ethics amongst fire and rescue authority employees?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
31	13	53	22	45	19	50	21	59	25

Q23: To what extent do you agree/disagree with an Oath being mandatory for all employees?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
33	14	45	19	38	16	51	21	71	30

Q24: To what extent do you agree/disagree that breach of the fire and rescue service oath should be dealt with as an employment matter?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
30	13	88	37	42	18	30	13	48	20

48. This proposal sought views on introducing a fire and rescue service oath in England. The oath would be a promise undertaken by fire and rescue authority employees to uphold the principles in the statutory code while undertaking tasks on behalf of fire and rescue authorities, to help address the cultural challenges identified above and provide a positive commitment to the role services can play in their communities.

49. This proposal was not supported by respondents, with only 33% of respondents in agreement that this would help. Similarly, during our frontline engagement sessions, a common comment was that people could take the oath, but it was not clear what it would achieve. A larger proportion of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the creation of the oath with a combined total of 45%. This trend continues with the following two quantitative questions; 46% believed that the oath would not embed the principles of the Code of Ethics and 51% did not think the oath, if introduced, should be mandatory.

50. On the qualitative responses, respondents felt that whilst the intended outcome of improved integrity in services is right, the delivery mechanism of the oath was not. The second complements this by suggesting that wider cultural change within fire and rescue services would be needed alongside introducing the oath to ensure consistently high levels of integrity.

Next Steps:

51. After considering the findings of the consultation, it is clear that respondents have concerns regarding the oath and that it may not address the challenges within the sector as desired. The Home Office will therefore not be taking this proposal forward at this time.

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Q25: To what extent do you agree/disagree that the five areas listed above are priorities for professionalising fire and rescue services?

Pre-Fix (18 – 27 May)

Answer Choice	Leadership	Data	Research	Ethics	Clear Expectations	Response Total
Strongly agree	25	3	1	3	6	38
Agree	6	2	3	7	9	27
Neither agree nor disagree	3	4	5	7	6	25
Disagree	0	9	6	3	3	21
Strongly disagree	0	5	9	4	1	19

Post-Fix (28 May – 26 July)

Answer Choice	Leadership	Data	Research	Ethics	Clear Expectations	Response Total	Pre & Post Fix Combined
Strongly agree	89	59	58	63	77	346	384
Agree	76	90	97	83	83	429	456
Neither agree nor disagree	10	22	19	22	18	91	116
Disagree	7	9	6	11	6	39	60
Strongly disagree	12	14	13	17	13	69	88

Q26: What other activities, beyond the five listed above, could help to professionalise fire and rescue services?

52. Throughout this chapter we explored a series of proposals dedicated to facilitating the further professionalisation of fire and rescue services. These proposals can ultimately be captured under the five distinct themes of: Leadership, Data, Research, Ethics and Clear Expectations. While the Home Office considers all these areas important, we wanted to know whether one should take precedence, and if another vital area of work had been overlooked.

53. When the Pre-Fix data is incorporated, we can further see the importance placed on Leadership; the Strongly Agree responses hugely outnumber the combined total for the other four activities. Whilst the qualitative responses did not reinforce these

statistics further, they raised a number of equally popular themes. The need for better training facilities and learning opportunities was raised as frequently as the need for better pay (17).

FRONTLINE INSIGHTS

People working in services told us that they want:

1. Support for services to meet national standards
2. Focussed efforts on services struggling to meet the standards
3. To seek ways to enforce standards, for example, legislation
4. Engagement with the sector on what the priorities are for reviewing and developing standards
5. To ensure standards are developed using robust research data and evidence
6. Measures to evaluate the impact of new standards

Next Steps:

54. The qualitative findings clearly demonstrate that the proposed five strands of work are widely considered to be valuable to fire and rescue services. The Home Office will therefore continue to progress these areas of work with our partner organisations, including the NFCC, and within our development of a College of Fire and Rescue. Consideration will also be given to how the proposed work could link more effectively to learning and training approaches for professionals.

Q27&28: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the creation of an independent College of Fire and Rescue to lead the professionalisation of fire and rescue services?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
73	31	105	44	30	13	9	4	20	8

51. The qualitative responses to these questions demonstrated high levels of support for the proposal to create a College of Fire and Rescue to be the independent, dedicated body to lead the fire and rescue profession, with 75% of respondents in favour or strongly in favour.

52. In the qualitative responses, key themes included: the importance of clear lines of accountability, learning from other public services who have their own professional bodies, and retaining a public service ethos.

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Next Steps:

53. The Home Office will be proceeding with the creation of a College of Fire and Rescue to provide fire services and professionals with the support they need. We are working closely with our partner organisations and comparator bodies, such as the College of Policing, to consider the most appropriate delivery option for a College.
54. Government will explore legislation, when parliamentary time allows, to provide the College of Fire and Rescue with the statutory powers to enable it to lead the profession, including to create a statutory code of ethics and to set standards on leadership. We also consider these powers could be valuable to set professional standards.
55. As part of the ongoing work on the future of fire professionalism, the Home Office has been working with hundreds of people across the fire and rescue sector to consider what a College of Fire and Rescue could do to best support fire and rescue services and professionals. This has ensured our proposals are well founded on both consultation responses from organisations and lived experiences from the frontline. The Home Office will continue to take an open approach to developing policy and keep engaging the sector on these important issues, including the matters raised in qualitative responses.
56. We also recognise there will be an enduring and important role for the NFCC within the sector and will ensure that a future College builds on important work of both the NFCC and the FSB.

Governance

Q29: To what extent do you agree/disagree that Government should transfer responsibility for fire and rescue services in England to a single elected individual?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
48	19	29	11	53	20	34	13	95	37

Q30: What factors should be considered when transferring fire governance to a directly elected individual? Please provide the reasons for your response.

57. The White Paper proposed to transfer responsibility of fire and rescue services from committee style governance seen in many fire and rescue authorities (FRAs), including in county council, combined and unitary FRAs, to a single, (directly) elected, individual. The rationale for this proposal was to improve accountability and transparency in the governance arrangements of fire and rescue services and to simplify the governance landscape by reducing the number of models in operation.
58. The White Paper outlined three potential governance models: Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), Mayoral Combined Authorities (MCAs) or an Executive Councillor model. The last model allowed for county council and unitary FRAs to retain responsibility for fire within their council structures but these FRAs would be required to nominate a single councillor who would hold responsibility for fire. We also asked respondents to provide suggestions on alternative models of governance which are not outlined in the White Paper.
59. Half of respondents, a total of 50% of all responses, either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal to transfer responsibility of fire to a single, (directly) elected, individual with respondents' views on factors we should consider when pursuing this proposal highlighted a number of concerns.
60. When compared against the existing committee style governance model, many respondents felt that there were problems inherent in the single, (directly) elected, model. Respondents raised concerns around competence in fire matters, relative priorities, political interference and the potential for local relationships to be disrupted. Respondents also challenged the evidence base and costs.
61. For the minority of respondents agreed with this proposal, a total of 30% of responses, noted a number of factors to consider to ensure successful delivery. This included ensuring a clear division between political oversight and operational decision making, ensuring sector competence and effective scrutiny.

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Next steps:

62. After considering the findings from the consultation, the Home Office does not intend to mandate governance transfer to a single, (directly) elected, individual at this time.
63. However, the Home Office will proactively support any PCC or Mayor who is interested in effecting a voluntary transfer and where the areas are co-terminous and will explore options to simplify the process and incentivise transfers. Further, as part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda, we will continue to support locally led Mayoral devolution deals and any fire governance transfer that result from these deals, or from other Local Government reform.

Q31: Where Mayoral Combined Authorities already exist, to what extent do you agree/disagree that fire and rescue functions should be transferred directly to these MCAs for exercise by the Mayor?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
14	6	40	16	80	33	35	14	75	31

64. As outlined previously, we consulted on the potential to transfer responsibility of fire to one of the three potential governance models that fitted our criteria of a single, (directly) elected individual. This was the Combined Authority Mayor (MCAs) model for those areas where MCAs already exist.
65. The majority of respondents, a total of 45% of all responses, either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposal as opposed to 22% of all respondents who agreed or strongly agreed.
66. For those respondents who opposed this proposal, the previous qualitative question (Q.30) highlighted several concerns respondents had with the MCA model, namely concern of political interference and lower priority for the service, given the breadth of a Mayor's mandate over local issues.

Next steps:

67. As previously stated, the Home Office will not be mandating governance transfer to a single, (directly) elected, individual but will proactively support locally led Mayoral devolution deals as part of the Government's Levelling Up agenda.
68. Furthermore, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, currently going through Parliament will introduce a new category of Mayor, combined county Mayors, who

will also have the ability to assume FRA functions for their area with Home Office support where appropriate.

Q32: To what extent do you agree/disagree that Government should transfer responsibility for fire and rescue services in England to police and crime commissioners?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
49	19	18	7	41	16	30	12	119	46

69. The majority of respondents, a total of 58% of all responses, either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this proposal, compared to 26% of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed. Concerns were similar to those expressed above.

70. Supportive respondents felt that if fire transferred under a PCC model it would increase accountability and transparency, lead to clearer strategic direction for the service and increase focus on delivering for the public.

Next steps:

71. As well as supporting locally led Mayoral devolution deals and PCC transfers the Home Office will explore ways to simplify the current business case process for PCCs to take on local oversight of their fire and rescue service.

Q33: Apart from combined authority mayors and police and crime commissioners, is there anyone else who we could transfer fire governance that aligns with the principles set out above?

Yes		No	
#	%	#	%
80	35	150	65

Q34: If yes, please explain other options and your reasons for proposing them.

72. The consultation invited respondents to provide suggestions on alternative models of governance which met our need for a clear executive – rather than committee – leadership.

73. The majority of respondents, a total of 65% of responses, provided no alternative options as opposed to 35% of respondents who did. These ranged from creating

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broad regional fire services with an elected regional lead or a regional board to creating directly elected Fire Commissioners.

74. It should be noted that in the same qualitative question, a number of respondents highlighted strong support to retain the existing mix of governance structures.

Next steps:

75. Whilst it is illuminating to consider the alternative governance models proposed by respondents, particularly independent Fire Commissioners, we will not be mandating governance transfers to models aligning to our criteria of a single, (directly) elected individual at this stage.

Q35&36: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the legal basis for fire and rescue authorities could be strengthened and clarified?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
51	21	110	45	54	22	13	5	17	7

76. The White Paper outlined the opportunity to better clarify the legal basis against which fire and rescue authorities operate. We proposed to clarify in statute the role of the authority, the service and the chief fire officer, and to clarify the relationship between political oversight and operational decision making.

77. The majority of respondents, a total of 66% of all responses, either agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal, as opposed to 12% of respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

78. For those respondents who supported this proposal, it was outlined it would remove ambiguity, clarify understanding on legal responsibilities and improve accountability and transparency.

79. For the minority of respondents who disagreed with this proposal, the primary view was that for some county council FRs, the Fire and Rescue Services Act (FRSA) 2004 laid down the basic duties and functions of FRAs and through local county council constitutions, they have already laid out the role and responsibilities between the FRA and CFO.

Next steps:

80. The Home Office will seek to better clarify the legal role of fire and rescue authorities in the oversight of their local service. This will be achieved through a proposed demarcation of responsibility when seeking to grant operational independence to chief fire officers.

Q37: To what extent do you agree/disagree that boundary changes should be made so that fire and rescue service areas and police force/combined authorities (where present) areas are coterminous?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
50	20	64	25	72	29	17	7	48	19

81. The White Paper considered the boundary implications of mandating governance change which would require boundaries to be coterminous. The majority of respondents, a total of 45% of all responses, either agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal, as opposed to 26% of respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Next steps:

82. Although the proposal is supported by 45% of respondents, the government position not to pursue mandatory governance transfers limits the value of this proposal. As we will not be mandating changes to governance models there will be no need to enforce boundary changes which would prove disruptive and controversial. Whilst we will be proactively supporting voluntary transfers of FRA functions to PCCs or Mayors in those areas which are co-terminous with FRAs, those areas which are not co-terminous will remain under their current governance arrangements and we will work with them to explore options to improve transparency and accountability within current structures.

Q38&39: To what extent do you agree/disagree with ring-fencing the operational fire budget within fire and rescue services run by county councils and unitary authorities?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
114	46	64	26	40	16	23	9	8	3

83. The majority of respondents (71%) either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the idea of ring-fencing operational fire budgets in county councils and unitary authorities. However, responses from fire & rescue services and councils directly impacted by the proposal were not supportive of the change as it was seen to reduce budget flexibility.

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84. In preference to budget ring-fencing, some of those directly impacted by the proposal said that they would welcome greater transparency around the reporting of fire budgets in county councils and unitary authorities.

Next Steps:

85. The Government will not pursue ring-fencing of operational budgets within fire and rescue services run by county councils and unitary councils. Instead, taking into account what those directly impacted by this proposal have said, we will focus on improving transparency of reporting around how fire and rescue services are funded at local level. We will do this by amending the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England to the effect that FRAs with 'parent authorities' are asked to publish their allocated budgets on their website prior to the start of each financial year, and then again if the budget is changed mid-year.

86. The Government will review the effectiveness of this new practice in due course and may consider the introduction of further measures to increase the transparency of funding arrangements, if necessary.

Q40: To what extent do you agree with this proposed approach (as outlined in the table)?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
41	17	100	41	45	18	20	8	40	16

<u>Task</u>	<u>Responsible</u>
<u>Setting priorities</u>	<u>Executive leader</u>
<u>Budget setting</u>	<u>Executive leader</u>
<u>Setting precept</u>	<u>Executive leader</u>
<u>Setting response standards</u>	<u>Executive leader</u>
<u>Opening and closing fire stations</u>	<u>Executive leader*</u>
<u>Appointment and dismissal of chief fire officer</u>	<u>Executive leader</u>
<u>Appointment and dismissal of other fire service staff</u>	<u>Chief fire officer</u>
<u>Allocation of staff to meet strategic priorities</u>	<u>Chief fire officer</u>
<u>Configuration and organisation of resources</u>	<u>Chief fire officer</u>
<u>Deployment of resources to meet operational requirements</u>	<u>Chief fire officer</u>
<u>Balancing of competing operational needs</u>	<u>Chief fire officer</u>
<u>Expenditure up to certain (delegated) levels</u>	<u>Chief fire officer</u>

*Opening and closing of fire stations could be a joint decision; operationally fire chiefs could be responsible for decisions on moving teams, whilst ultimate political and executive responsibility lies with the executive leader.

Q41: Do you have any other comments to further support your answer?

Q42: Are there any factors we should consider when implementing these proposals?

Q43: What factors should we consider when giving chief fire officers (CFOs) operational independence? Please provide the reasons for your opinions.

87. The White Paper proposed a leadership model which balanced political and operational accountability. It was proposed this demarcation of responsibility would be outlined in statute.
88. The majority of respondents, a total of 57% of responses, either agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal as opposed to 24% of respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed.
89. For those respondents who agreed it was felt that demarcation in statute would provide clarity on roles and responsibilities. However, in the view of some respondents, certain responsibilities need further clarification and should either be reallocated or jointly held between the FRA or CFO.
90. The minority of respondents who disagreed with the proposal noted that for some county council led services, a demarcation of responsibility already exist in their local constitutions in the form of 'schemes of delegation'.
91. A summary question invited respondents to provide any additional views on the proposals outlined so far in the Governance chapter of the White Paper. To improve accountability and transparency, some respondents suggested that a monitoring mechanism should be in place, potentially overseen by HMICFRS, to assess the working relationship between the fire authority and operationally independent chief fire officer in order to determine whether it is providing the intended benefits.
92. A sizeable number of respondents emphasised the need to ensure clarity, by way of providing guidance, on roles and responsibilities. It was highlighted that appropriate checks and balances need to be in place to ensure an operationally independent chief officer is held to and that effective scrutiny arrangements are needed. Equally, respondents felt that chief officers would need training and support.

Next steps:

93. The Government will legislate at the earliest opportunity to give CFOs operational independence. This will include a new statutory definition of a Chief Fire Officer and a Fire and Rescue Service. Currently, the requirement for the provision of all fire and rescue functions is attributed to FRA in the FRSA 2004.
94. Through our provisions on Operational Independence, we will outline clear demarcations of responsibility. We will facilitate the introduction of a standardised

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scheme of delegation, supported by regulations and guidance setting out the detail of this demarcation. The intention for this is to create clear lines of responsibility where they do not already exist and to strengthen existing schemes of delegation already in place.

Q44: What factors should we consider should we make chief fire officers corporations sole?

95. In delivering operational independence for CFOs, the White Paper outlined an additional proposal to complement this, that is to make the role of CFO a corporation sole.
96. The intention behind this proposal was to create a model of operational independence, which mirrored the existing structure in policing, that is that the chief constable of a police force is operationally independent from their PCC and has corporation sole status, making them the employer of their police force with staff under their direct control. A significant portion of respondents noted the complications this would add to existing governance arrangements for fire services. In addition, a number of respondents stated there was no evidence to suggest the policing model would be effective for fire governance arrangements. For those respondents who were either supportive or had a more nuanced approach to this proposal, it was highlighted that the legal duties needed clarity and that training would be needed.

Next steps:

97. Whilst the Home Office will pursue operational independence and a clear demarcation of in legislation, it would not be possible to uniformly apply corporation sole status in all governance models and as such we will not pursue this proposal.

Q45: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the responsibility for strategic and operational planning should be better distinguished?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
64	26	93	38	40	16	26	11	21	9

Q46: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the strategic plan should be the responsibility of the fire and rescue authority?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
83	34	84	34	44	18	18	7	15	6

Q47&48: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the operational plan should be the responsibility of the chief fire officer?

Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
107	44	87	36	24	10	9	4	16	7

98. The White Paper proposed a clearer separation of strategic and operational planning responsibilities. It was proposed that all authorities be required to produce a strategic plan outlining the priorities for the service and that the chief fire officer would be responsible for the operational plan, to deliver those strategic priorities. It was also proposed that the operational plan, currently called an 'Integrated Risk Management Plan' would be changed by legislation to a 'Community Risk Management Plan'.

99. On better distinguishing the responsibility for strategic and operational planning (Q45), a majority of respondents, a total of 64% of responses, either agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal, as opposed to 19% of respondents who either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The trend of support for this proposal continues into the following questions, especially on the need for clear operational planning accountability.

100. However, whilst there was strong amount of support, a concern raised by respondents was that chief officers should be held accountable for how they are operationalising the strategic plan.

Next steps:

101. The Government will explore legislation, when parliamentary times allows, to amend and clarify responsibilities with regards to the production of strategic and operational plans. The current legal requirement for a separate strategic plan is already set out in statute for Combined Authority Mayors (MCAs) and Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners (PFCCs). The Home Office wish to legislate so that

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this requirement applies to all categories of FRA listed in the FRSA 2004 and to clarify the name and responsibility for the operational plan, whereby the 'Integrated Risk Management Plan' (IRMP) will become the 'Community Risk Management Plan' (CRMP). The change in will be reflected in legislation at the earliest opportunity and updated in the National Framework. These next steps will only apply to England, as fire and rescue is a devolved issue in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

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ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	6 FEBRUARY 2024
SUBJECT	2023/24 BUDGET MONITORING – QUARTER 3
LEAD OFFICER	CONOR BYRNE, HEAD OF FINANCE AND PROCUREMENT
LEAD MEMBER	COUNCILLOR MIKE SMITH
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	FOR NOTE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To inform members of the estimated revenue outturn and provide an update on capital projects at the end of quarter 3 2023/24.
- 1.2 The report also contains a quarterly update on treasury activity.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That the Management Committee **NOTE** the report.

3. REPORT

Commentary on Revenue Outturn

- 3.1 The detailed revenue outturn for quarter 3, 2023/24 is shown in **Appendix A**. Net costs of Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) for quarter 3 are shown in **Appendix B**.
- 3.2 The 2023/24 Revenue Budget agreed by Members in February 2023 was set at £41.975m. Income was set to exceed expenditure by £573,000 allowing the Fire Authority to replenish its reserves – specifically the Budget Contingency Reserve.
- 3.3 The forecast revenue outturn for 2023/24 is shown in Appendix A and shows an anticipated surplus of £110,000 compared to the original budget. Variances against individual revenue lines are explained below.

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- 3.4 *Employee costs.* A settlement was reached in 2022/23 for the rates of pay for Grey book staff that also covered the current year. The Service was under establishment for April and May. The 23 new recruits that joined in February 2023 are now all on station. A further eight new recruits have been taken on and after training joined stations in late November 2023. Taking into account known leavers, the outturn on wholetime salary costs is anticipated to be a saving of around £278,000. The overtime forecast is showing at £271,000 over budget for the year. This has been affected both by covering for the under establishment and additional training needs of water rescue MOD 2 and 3 and other increased training. These figures do not take into account any further leavers beyond those that are currently known.
- 3.5 On-call stations are currently showing a net saving of £138,000 against budget.
- 3.6 The Green book pay award was finalised and paid (including back pay from 1 April 2023) and came out as an average of 5.4%, against the original budget of 4% resulting in an additional £77,000 of costs, although this has been offset by vacancies.
- 3.7 The cost of new trainee firefighters has been built into the forecast with an additional 18 forecast to be taken by the end of the financial year, at an additional budgetary pressure of £108,000. This is shown on the *non-stations* line, which is where new recruit costs are posted while in training and before they go onto stations. The training costs of the additional apprentices are reflected in the higher costs in the training line.
- 3.8 *Repairs and Maintenance.* Repairs to the Firehouse at Whitley Wood are ongoing. The total cost of completing works is estimated to be around £121,000, including corrective repair works on the roof and floor.
- 3.9 *Rates.* The Authority continues to work with a third party to challenge business rate charges for stations. Since budget setting, an appeal for Newbury Fire Station was successful resulting in an £11,000 refund and a 6.5% decrease in future bills. The final historical refunds in respect of Dee Road were received in Q1 2023/24.
- 3.10 *Cleaning.* From April 2023 an additional, above inflation, price increase of 8.2% has been applied, due to the living wage increase. In addition, Management Committee agreed a six-month extension to the current contract that expires in September to allow a re-tendering exercise to be undertaken. Cleaning costs are about £22,500 per month, giving a total yearly cost of £270,000, an increase of £21,000 over the budgeted amount.
- 3.11 *Utilities* – the price of gas has come down and this is reflected in a reduction in the forecast spend.

- 3.12 *Equipment* – spend is forecast to be £44,000 higher than budget due to price rises above inflation, additional water rescue equipment (over and above the project to bring water rescue to the East of the County) and additional scrap cars needed for increased training.
- 3.13 *Communication* – the Wide Area Network (WAN) project has been delayed leading to reduced revenue costs of £62,000, as the new WAN costs have not yet been realised. The delay impacts the performance and efficiency of the MS 365 environment.
- 3.14 *Contribution to TVFCS* – the original budgets for TVFCS were set before the pay rises were finalised resulting in higher employment costs.
- 3.15 *Transport* – The cost of the fleet maintenance contract with Hampshire FRS is forecast to be £49,000 over budget. The increase is due to the increased charge rate for vehicle technicians as well as parts.
- 3.15 *Cross border charges* - these have been agreed with Thames Valley partners for the quarter and, based on this, it is estimated that charges will be £52,000 lower (under *Contracts Other*) and income £54,000 lower (under *Income Other*) than the budgeted targets.
- 3.15 *Interest receivable* – increases in interest rates should result in increased investment income of £248,000 more than originally budgeted.

Capital

- 3.17 Capital expenditure for quarter 3, 2023/24 and supporting commentary for each respective scheme is shown in **Appendix C**.

Treasury

- 3.18 Treasury management activity for quarter 3 is shown in **Appendix D**. All treasury management operations have been conducted in full compliance with the Authority's Treasury Management Practices.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 Commitment 5 – Sustainability. We will ensure that we provide a financially sustainable and environmentally friendly service to our communities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The 2023/24 Budget includes an appropriation of £573,000 to replenish the Budget Contingency Reserve.
- 5.2 The forecast outturn position on the Revenue Account is a surplus of £110,000.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Expenditure complies with the Authority's Financial Regulations.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no equality and diversity implications arising from this report.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The revenue and capital outturns together with the reserves position are consistent with the assumptions within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

8.2 Regular monitoring of expenditure against budgets helps ensure that resources are matched to need.

8.3 Treasury activity complies with the Authority's Treasury Management Policy.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

9.1 The duty to collaborate is considered as part of the procurement process for both revenue and capital expenditure.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

10.1 The Chief Fire Officer has noted the contents of the report.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Agenda and Minutes, Royal Berkshire Authority: 15 February 2023.

12. APPENDICES

12.1 Appendix A – Revenue position at quarter 3, 2023/24

12.2 Appendix B – Net costs of TVFCS at quarter 3, 2023/24

12.3 Appendix C – Capital position at quarter 3, 2023/24

12.4 Appendix D – Treasury activity at quarter 3, 2023/24

13. CONTACT DETAILS

13.1 Mark Hawkins, Finance Manager
07785 573434

13.2 Conor Byrne, Head of Finance and Procurement
07585 991602

	Annual Budget £'000	Q3 Outturn £'000	Forecast to YE £'000	Fcast - Budget Variance £'000
EMPLOYEES				
STATIONS	18,846	14,047	18,700	(146)
NON-STATIONS	12,619	9,353	12,694	75
TRAINING	537	308	581	44
OTHER	299	202	307	8
	32,301	23,910	32,282	(19)
PREMISES				
REPAIRS & MAINTENANCE	865	793	1,014	149
RATES	888	729	857	(31)
CLEANING	276	198	297	21
UTILITIES	880	447	856	(24)
	2,909	2,167	3,024	115
SUPPLIES				
INSURANCE	418	414	418	0
EQUIPMENT	563	467	607	44
IS EQUIPMENT & LICENCES	1,002	866	1,005	3
CLOTHING/PPE	361	337	363	2
COMMUNICATIONS	786	465	725	(61)
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH	267	160	268	1
PRINT/STATIONERY/PUBLICATIONS/SUBSCRIPTIONS	144	105	152	8
COMMUNITY FIRE SAFETY SUPPLIES	160	66	111	(49)
SUPPLIES OTHER	213	167	229	16
	3,914	3,047	3,878	(36)
CONTRACTS				
CONTRIBUTION TO TVFCS & COLLABORATION	977	719	997	20
LEGAL	50	32	51	1
CONTRACTS OTHER (incl Professional Services)	937	503	902	(35)
	1,964	1,254	1,950	(14)
TRANSPORT				
VEHICLE RUNNING COSTS	829	337	878	49
TRAVEL	233	155	232	(1)
	1,062	492	1,110	48
PENSIONS				
PENSIONS	455	351	456	1
	455	351	456	1
INCOME				
GRANTS	(2,079)	(1,924)	(2,080)	(1)
RENTAL INCOME	(216)	(145)	(216)	0
TVFCS RECHARGE INCOME	(394)	(295)	(394)	0
INCOME OTHER	(566)	(169)	(522)	44
	(3,255)	(2,533)	(3,212)	43
NET COST OF SERVICES	39,350	28,688	39,488	138
DEBT CHARGES INTEREST	333	167	333	0
INVESTMENT INTEREST	(474)	(375)	(722)	(248)
REVENUE FUNDING OF CAPITAL	1,515	0	1,515	0
APPROPRIATION TO/(FROM) RESERVES	567	0	567	0
FINANCING COSTS	684	0	684	0
NET EXPENDITURE	41,975	28,480	41,865	(110)
GOV GRANTS/PRECEPTS	(41,975)	(36,937)	(41,975)	0
(SURPLUS)/DEFICIT BEFORE USE OF RESERVES	0	(8,457)	(110)	(110)

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Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
Quarter 3 Budget Monitoring Report 2023/24

Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS)

	Annual Budget £'000	Outturn to Dec 23 £'000	Forecast to Y/E £'000	Forecast Variance £'000
EMPLOYEES	1,923	1,482	1,983	60
CORPORATE RECHARGES TO TVFCS FROM RBFRS	394	295	394	0
SUPPLIES/ OTHER	47	(6)	47	0
TECHNOLOGY	275	173	270	(5)
NET COST OF TVFCS	2,639	1,944	2,694	55
RBFRS Share of Costs (37%)	977	719	997	20

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Project Owner	Active Capital Projects	Total Project Budget £000's A	Spend in Prior Years £000's B	Spend YTD 2023/24 £000's C	Estimated Project Spend to Completion £000's D	Anticipated spend in 2023/24 £000's E	Total Estimated Project Spend £000's B+C+D	Overall variance on Project	Estimated Project Completion Date	Q3 Commentary
Estates Development Programme	Training Centre - pre-construction	352	0	110	242	352	352	0	Q4 24/25	No change to spend forecast in 2023/24. Design at an advanced stage in Stage 1 of the two-stage process with Premier Modular Ltd (PML).
	Slough refurbishment	780	0	88	692	702	780	0	Q1 24/25	No change to forecast. Work progressing to schedule using Logic Contracting Services.
	SUB-TOTAL	1,132	0	198	934	1,054	1,132	0		
Fleet & equipment	White Fleet (including EV vehicle)	711	280	184	247	209	711	0	Q2 24/25	Vehicles on order via RBFRS / Hants & IOW FRS agreement. No change to forecast.
	Appliances	2,664	0	0	2,664	0	2,664	0	Q1 26/27	Vehicles on order via RBFRS / Hants & IOW FRS agreement. The first 3 appliances are anticipated to be delivered in Q2 2024/25
	SUB-TOTAL	3,375	280	184	2,911	209	3,375	0		
ICT	Network Refresh (WAN)	394	0	0	404	0	404	10	Q2 24/25	Contract discussions with BT regarding project implementation are ongoing.
	DCS Implementation (SanH)	47	0	0	66	66	66	19	Q4 23/24	Work in progress, will be completed by March 2024
	Software - Firewatch Development	50	0	0	20	20	20	-30	Q4 23/24	Work in progress, will be completed by March 2024
	MDT Refresh	141	0	174	0	174	174	33	Q3 23/24	Completed
	Fireground Radio Replacement	136	0	0	136	0	136	0	Q1 24/25	Timetable and testing procedure progressing for delivery in quarter 1 24/25
	Station End Refresh	67	0	0	68	68	68	1	Q4 23/24	The order has been placed and completion is expected within Year-end and on Budget
	Hardware - Laptops	107	0	0	107	107	107	0	Q4 23/24	Completion is expected within year-end
	SUB-TOTAL	942	0	174	801	435	975	33		
TVFCS	Vision system Hardware and UPS replacement	183	88	95	0	95	183	0	Q3 23/24	This project is now complete
	Video monitoring	24	0	24	0	24	24	0	Q3 23/24	This project is now complete
	SUB-TOTAL	207	88	119	0	119	207	0		
TOTAL		5,656	368	675	4,646	1,817	5,689	33		

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Treasury Management Update – Q3 2023/24

Background

The Local Government Act 2003 requires the Authority to have regard to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (the Prudential Code) when determining how much money it can afford to borrow. The objectives of the Prudential Code are to ensure, within a clear framework, that the capital investment plans of local authorities are affordable, prudent and sustainable, and that treasury management decisions are taken in accordance with good professional practice. To demonstrate that the Authority has fulfilled these objectives, the Prudential Code sets out several indicators.

It is now a requirement of the CIPFA Prudential Code that these indicators are reported quarterly.

Borrowing

The Authority's debt position was unchanged in Q3 2023/24, total debt remaining at £8,922k. No additional borrowing is planned during 2023/24 and none of the existing debt is due to mature during the current financial year.

	2023/24 Original Estimate (£000's)	Position as at 31 December 2023 (£000's)	2023/24 Outturn Estimate (£000's)
Debt	8,922	8,922	8,922

Investment Portfolio

The Authority held investments totalling £17.14m as at 31 December 2023.

During the quarter, the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) voted to maintain Bank Rate at 5.25% in December 2023.

A sum of £10m was invested spread across four counterparties in line with our investment strategy, with different durations based on cash flow needs and the anticipated additional Bank Rate increases throughout the remainder of the financial year. Two fixed term deposits of £2m each will mature on the 5th January 2024 and another two fixed term deposits of £3m each will mature on 18th January 2024 and

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will be re-invested to maximise returns. A sum of £7.14m is held in a call Account with a UK bank.

The Authority continues to closely monitor liquidity needs and all of these fixed-term deposits mature in the current financial year to provide flexibility where needed. The added advantage of this approach is that if bank rate increases in the future, the Authority will be able to benefit from this when placing further investments.

The budgeted investment return for 2023/24 is £474,000. With the investments placed, as outlined above, the Authority estimates that the total return in 2023/24 will be £722,000.

Compliance with Treasury and Prudential Limits

It is a statutory duty for the Authority to determine and keep under review its affordable borrowing limits. During the quarter ended 31 December 2023, the Authority has complied with the treasury and prudential indicators set out in the Authority's Treasury Management Strategy Statement for 2023/24. The Head of Finance and Procurement reports that no difficulties are envisaged for the current or future years in complying with these indicators. All treasury management operations have also been conducted in full compliance with the Authority's Treasury Management Practices.

Treasury Indicators	2023/24 Budget (£000's)	31st December 2023 Actual (£000's)	Estimated Outturn 2023/24 (£000's)
Authorised Limit for external debt	14,422	14,422	14,422
Operational boundary for external debt	9,022	9,022	9,022
Gross external debt	8,922	8,922	8,922
Investments – 31 December 2023		17,138	
Net borrowing – 31 December 2023		(8,216)	

Maturity structure of fixed rate borrowing	31 Dec 2023 Actual (£000's)
Under 12 months	0
12 months to 24 months	394
24 Months to 5 Years	597
5 Years to 10 years	3,581
10 Years to 20 Years	1,350
20 Years to 30 Years	3,000
Total	8,922

Prudential Indicators	2023/24 Projection (£000's)	31st Dec 2023 Actual (£000's)	Estimated Outturn 2023/24 (£000's)
Capital expenditure	4,672	675	1,817
Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)	10,085	10,085	10,085
Annual change in CFR	(684)	(684)	(684)
In-year borrowing requirement	0	0	0
Ratio of financing costs to net revenue stream	1.95%	1.95%	1.95%

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ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT

COMMITTEE	MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	6 FEBRUARY 2024
SUBJECT	QUARTER THREE APPLIANCE AVAILABILITY AND RESPONSE STANDARD PERFORMANCE
LEAD OFFICER	AREA MANAGER/HEAD OF RESPONSE AND RESILIENCE - BEN CAIRNS
LEAD MEMBER	N/A
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	TO NOTE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides information on Quarter Three performance with a supporting narrative on the whole-time duty system and the on-call duty system appliance availability.
- 1.2 Whole-time availability across the quarter was **97.6%** against a target of **99%**. This is an increase of 1 percentage point in comparison to Q3 2022.
- 1.3 On-call appliance availability through the quarter was 33.5% against a target of 50%. This represents a 2.4 percentage point decrease in comparison to Q3 last year.
- 1.4 Crewing and availability across both duty systems remain challenging. The Operational Support Team are working closely with Response and Assurance Managers to mitigate the challenge of low staff numbers and high sickness levels combined with high levels of training.
- 1.5 Against a corporate measure target of **75%** of emergency incidents attended in 10 minutes, the Service achieved **71.5%**. See supporting narrative.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Management Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTE** the 2023-24 quarter three performance of **97.6%** appliance availability of the Service's 14 whole-time appliances in line with Corporate Measure 14¹

¹ Corporate Measure 14: Percentage of wholetime frontline pumping appliance availability (fire engines).

² Corporate Measure 15: Percentage of hours where there is adequate crewing on On-Call frontline pumping appliances (fire engines).

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- 2.2 **NOTE** the 2023-24 quarter three overall on-call appliance availability performance of 33.5%, in line with Corporate Measure 15².

3. **REPORT**

Whole-time Duty System Appliance Availability

- 3.1 This section of the report provides the 2023-24 Quarter Three performance update against Corporate Measure 14, which is the *percentage of whole-time frontline pumping appliance availability*. Overall availability for the Quarter was **97.6%**, which was an improvement on Quarter Two.
- 3.2 RBFRS employ a lean operating model, including the Wholetime Duty System (WDS) provision. With an establishment of 324 staff (81 per duty line), maintaining sufficient minimum numbers of qualified firefighters requires effective management combined with flexibility and commitment to provide additional hours from staff on a pre-arranged overtime (PAOT) basis. Whole-time duty system appliance unavailability can be attributed to several factors, including appliance defects, post-incident activity, training and exercising and primary crewing of specialist appliances. This Quarter, appliance unavailability occurred on 33 occasions. However, for 23 of the 33 shifts we maintained 14 appliances utilising On-Call appliances and Wholetime detachments.
- 3.3 Whole-time staff sickness levels continue to add pressure to the Service's ability to meet its target for corporate measure 14 in relation to crewing. Q3 WDS station-based sickness rate was 7.9% which is a significant increase from Q2 figure of 4.6%. While a significant amount of work is in place to manage sickness across teams in HR and Service Delivery (monitored through the Strategic Performance Board), we are over the Service's 4% target. Additionally, at the end of Q3 the number of WDS staff on operationally restricted duties is 19, which impacts a lean establishment. Service Delivery teams and HR colleagues work closely to manage and support staff concerning sickness and restricted duties. We plan to roll out a series of engagement sessions in February and March 2024 to support managers in fulfilling their responsibilities relating to absence management.
- 3.4 The leaver profile has continued to present challenges in maintaining consistent establishment levels across our whole-time duty system. Workforce planning and Service Delivery focus on predicting and monitoring leavers, but this has been more volatile over the past two years, particularly concerning the high number of transfer processes to London Fire Brigade. We are expecting up to 10 personnel to leave for London Fire Brigade during Q4 2023, this is monitored through the Workforce Planning Board. The Operational Support Team is working closely with the Response Assurance Managers to manage this impact on stations. Seven more Apprentice Firefighters have now been posted to station after completing their initial course.
- 3.5 By virtue of staff turnover during the past two years, the Service now has a high number of operational staff in development roles. The training and

assessment requirements add further pressure to the management of appliance availability. Service Delivery management continues to work closely with colleagues in learning and development to minimise the impacts of training and development on availability by planning and scheduling courses around other demands.

- 3.6 Service Delivery managers forecast resourcing gaps in advance and fill these by utilising pre-arranged overtime when appropriate. Mindful that this financially impacts the Service, Service Delivery managers have reviewed several policy positions that should support the better management of overtime spending. The Operational Support Team monitor overtime spend to provide further oversight and to ensure Overtime is being utilised correctly. This has resulted in a decrease in expenditure for crewing compared to Q3 2022, whilst improving appliance availability by 1 percentage point.
- 3.7 On those occasions where sufficient crewing cannot be achieved through the various interventions, the Service's Degradation Policy is consistently applied to reduce the impact on Response Standard and manage any other associated risks.

On-Call Duty System Appliance Availability

- 3.8 The report also details performance against Corporate Measure 15, which sets a target of *50% of hours where there is adequate crewing on on-call frontline pumping appliances (based on 24/7 crewing)*. This measure is being applied across the individual and overall availability of the Service's five on-call appliances. The overall availability for on-call appliances in Q3 was 33.5%
- 3.9 The Q3 performance reflects some of the fragility of the on-call system. The table below provides year-on-year availability since 2017. Notably, there was a period during Covid when performance was significantly higher than before or after. This is attributed mainly to on-call staff working remotely (or not working) for primary employers.

Year	Q1.	Q2.	Q3.	Q4.
2023	46.5%	38.4%	33.5%	
2022	44.4%	40.3%	35.9%	41.7%
2021	59.8%	34.7%	36.5%	43.8%
2020 (Covid)	72.4%	60.9%	61.1%	68.2%
2019	45.0%	36.2%	42.5%	45.4%

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2018	37.1%	33.0%	38.3%	47.6%
2017	36.3%	33.7%	31.6%	35.8%

Year on year comparison Identifying Covid restrictions in 2020.

- 3.10 A target of 50% will always be challenging for our on-call model. Many factors have contributed to overall on-call appliance availability falling short of the 50% target during Q3. However, it is predominantly related to the challenge of attracting and retaining individuals who can offer daytime appliance availability and losing individuals with critical qualifications such as incident command and emergency response driving. For context, typically, it takes about 18 months to qualify as an operational crew member, three years as a driver and four years as an incident commander. The on-call is often seen as route to becoming a wholetime firefighter whilst this may be an attraction it can also have a negative effect on retention. On-call recruitment remains a challenge as the sphere of eligibility is geographically restrictive to a small distance from the fire station. This also has an impact on the diversity of applicants as again it is geographically restrictive to meet operational requirements.
- 3.11 On-call availability in Q3 was impacted similarly to wholetime availability, with many staff taking leave during this period. Unfortunately, availability continues to be impacted due to staff in development and key personnel leaving the Service. This accounts for the low availability at Lambourn, specifically where a Junior Officer and Firefighter have left the Service due to no longer living in the cover area.
- 3.12 AM R&R has initiated a group to develop several areas of focus linked to increasing on-call availability and an on-call action plan is being developed.

Response Standard

- 3.13 The Response Standard during this period was below the target of 75% at 71.5%. It represents a decrease on Q3 last year, which was 74.2%.
- 3.14 The Response Standard is made up of 3 constituent parts, the **call handling time**, the **turnout time**, and the **travel time**. A wide range of data has been analysed to understand why performance against the measure has decreased and it is several compounding factors that have attributed to the change.
- For context, 2019 was the only non-Covid year in which we met the Response Standard. To better understand performance in this 2023, we have undertaken a detailed analysis against 2019 to better understand the variable impacting on Response Standard performance. Comparisons are drawn specifically between the first 3 Quarters of 2019 and 2023.

Incident Profile

- 3.15 Incident numbers have returned to pre-pandemic levels and in fact have increased by 6.3% from 2019. The incident profile has changed, false alarms and special service calls now make up a larger proportion of the incidents we attend. These changes in incident numbers and profile have an impact on both call handling and travel times, and overall Response Standard performance. When setting the Response Standard, it was a stretching and ambitious target for the Service and performance against it is sensitive to the incident profile and numbers.

Call handling

- 3.16 There has been a decline in call handling performance across all incident types which can be attributed to several factors.
- 3.17 In November, Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) began to migrate from its legacy Airwave SAN H connection to a Home Office mandated replacement solution 'Dispatch Communications Server' (DCS). This has involved significant service works, which have impacted on call handling times.
- 3.18 Technical works to fully replace command and control system hardware was undertaken in September, there has been a period where anticipated issues have arisen which have required navigation to get to a fully stable position.
- 3.19 The changes in call profile have seen an increase in calls that require a greater degree of call challenge. The aim of call challenge is to prevent unnecessary mobilisation of FRS assets and to therefore preserve their availability for genuine emergency. This process applies predominantly to automatic fire alarm activations, which make up a significant proportion of both incoming calls to TVFCS and of 'incidents' attended by crews, but also increasingly to calls from other blue light services requesting assistance with other matters (for example, affecting entry to premises and handling bariatric casualties).
- 3.20 Within TVFCS there has been a high turnover of staff which is replicated within the national fire control sector. New control room staff receive comprehensive training in their role, but still take time to develop confidence in 999 call handling and the most efficient ways of utilising equipment. For this reason, we expect to see a deterioration in call handling performance when we have a large numbers of new starters in a relatively short time period.
- 3.21 During 2023, the TVFCS Joint Coordinating Group has been developing a new suite of performance measures for TVFCS, which includes a more detailed breakdown of call handling performance. Now that these measures have been finalised, the performance data has been reviewed and work is taking place to identify the most significant causal factors relating to call handling times, and then develop a strategy for improvement. The technical works required during 2023 have taken up a very large proportion of management

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capacity, but now that these works have completed, TVFCS should be able to devote more time to improving call handling performance.

Turnout time

- 3.22 Positively, there has been continued and overall improved turnout performance since 2019 which is pleasing to see.

Travel Time

- 3.23 Travel time overall performance has got a little worse, this varies by incident type with false alarms and primary fires seeing the greatest change. Incident volume has a significant correlation with travel time performance, the higher the call volume, the greater the number of incidents where travel time exceeded our target. This can be attributed in part to simultaneous incident activity, where a station is committed to an incident and another incident occurs in the same area then a neighbouring appliance is sent which has an impact on travel time. Reading has seen the greatest increase in false alarms which are predominantly resulting from automatic fire alarms. This change in incident profile and incident volume can also mean that incidents within Berkshire are being responded to by neighbouring fire appliances which can also have a negative impact on travel time.

Ongoing Trend Analysis

- 3.24 Moving forward, we will continue to closely monitor and manage our performance, together with longer-term trends in our incident profile and demand. In addition to the detailed work on call handling, we will continuously review the management of our resources via the Operational Support Team to ensure we are optimising all ability to respond as quickly as possible and explore opportunities in the longer-term that would support this objective.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

4.1 Commitment 3 – Response

We will ensure that our people are trained and resources are located to provide the most effective response and to have a positive impact on incidents in our communities. We will provide advice, consultation and enforcement in relation to fire safety standards in buildings.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The use of pre-arranged overtime (PAOT) continues to be utilised to support a lean crewing model and to mitigate other extractions. Despite the pressures through the quarter with regards an increase in sickness and light duties, Overtime expenditure is continuing to drop in comparison with 2022/23.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None Identified.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None identified.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The provision of sufficient minimum qualified firefighters and appliance availability is listed as a corporate risk under risk 681. It is monitored by the Director of Service Delivery, and, as necessary, treatments are reported to the Senior Leadership Team and the Audit and Governance Committee.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

9.1 None identified.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None.

11. APPENDICES

11.1 None

12. CONTACT DETAILS

12.1 Ben Cairns – Area Manager/Head of Response and Resilience, Service Delivery cairnsb@rbfrs.co.uk

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ITEM	DECISION BODY	NEXT REPORTING DATE	REPORTING FREQUENCY	RECOMMENDED ACTION	LEAD OFFICER	LEAD MEMBER	PART I / II
Annual Budget 24/25, Medium Term Financial Plan & Strategic Asset Investment Framework and TVFCS Budget	Fire Authority	15.02.24	Annual	Agree	HF&P	Budget and Income Generation/ Collaboration and Strategic Assets Lead	Part I
Code of Conduct Consultation	Fire Authority	15.02.24	Annual	Note	MO	N/A	Part I
AFA consultation proposal	Fire Authority	15.02.24	Ad-hoc	Agree	AM C&P	N/A	Part I
Pay Policy Statement	Fire Authority	15.02.24	Annual	Agree	HHR&L&D	N/A	Part I
Internal Audit Report	A&GC	28.3.24	Quarterly	Note	HF&P	N/A	Part I
External Audit Report	A&GC	28.3.24	Quarterly	Note	HF&P	N/A	Part I
Annual Report on Members Development	A&GC	28.3.24	Annual	Note and Recommend	HCS	Member Development Champion	Part I
Annual report on Governance / Members attendance and allowances / Code of Conduct annual consultation results	A&GC	28.3.24	Annual	Note and Recommend	HCS	A&GC Chairman	Part I
Quarter 3 Performance Report	A&GC	28.3.24	Quarterly	Note	Data, Performance and Risk Manager	N/A	Part I
CRMP P4 Statutory Duties report	Management Committee	9.04.24	Ad-hoc	Agree	HCS	N/A	Part I
CRMP P6 Statutory Duties report	Management Committee	9.04.24	Ad-hoc	Agree	HCS	N/A	Part I
Disciplinary Effectiveness	Management Committee	9.04.24	Ad-hoc	Note	HHR&L&D	N/A	Part I
Corporate Calendar 2024/25	Fire Authority	22.04.24	Annual	Agree	HCS	N/A	Part I
Lead Member and Champion Annual Reports	Fire Authority	22.04.24	Annual	Note	Lead Officers	Lead Members	Part I
Annual Plan	Fire Authority	22.04.24	Annual	Agree	HCS	N/A	Part I
Integrated Service Delivery Strategy	Fire Authority	22.04.24	Ad-hoc	Agree	ACFO	N/A	Part I

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**Categories of “Exempt Information”
under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972**

	Category
	[For each of nos 1 - 7, see <u>Qualification 1</u> below]
1	Information relating to any individual
2	Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual.
3	Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information). [see <u>Qualification 2</u> below]
4	Information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.
5	Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.
6	Information which reveals that the authority purposes: (a) to give under any enactment a notice under or by virtue of which requirements are imposed on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction under any enactment.
7	Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime.

Qualifications:

- (1) Information falling within paragraph 3 is not exempt information by virtue of that paragraph if it is required to be registered under -
 - (a) the Companies Act 1985;
 - (b) the Friendly Societies Act 1974;
 - (c) the Friendly Societies Act 1992;
 - (d) the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts 1965 to 1978;
 - (e) the Building Societies Act 1986; or
 - (f) the Charities Act 1993.
- (2) Information is not exempt information if it relates to proposed development for which the local planning authority may grant itself planning permission pursuant to regulation 3 of the Town and Country Planning General Regulations 1992.
- (3) Information which -
 - (a) falls within any of paragraphs 1 to 7 above; and
 - (b) is not prevented from being exempt by virtue of the two preceding paragraphs
 is exempt information if and so long, as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest

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in disclosing the information.

Interpretation:

- (4) "*Employee*" means a person employed under a contract of service;
- (5) "*Financial or business affairs*" includes contemplated, as well as past or current, activities;
- (6) "*Labour relations matter*" means -
 - (a) any of the matters specified in paragraphs (a) to (g) of section 218(1) of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992[10] (matters which may be the subject of a trade dispute, within the meaning of that Act);
or
 - (b) any dispute about a matter falling within paragraph (a) above;and for the purposes of this definition the enactments mentioned in paragraph (a) above, with the necessary modifications, shall apply in relation to office-holders under the authority as they apply in relation to employees of the authority;
- (7) "*Office-holder*", in relation to the authority, means the holder of any paid office appointments to which are or may be made or confirmed by the authority or by any joint board on which the authority is represented or by any person who holds any such office or is an employee of the authority;
- (8) "*Registered*" in relation to information required to be registered under the Building Societies Act 1986, means recorded in the public file of any building society (within the meaning of that Act).

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