

**TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**Item No 9**

**MEETING: 20 SEPTEMBER 2010**

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**SUBJECT: LOCAL TRANSPARENCY AND PUBLICATION OF FINANCIAL SPEND**

**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY, THE FINANCE OFFICER AND PERSONNEL ADVISOR**

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**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report informs members of the proposal from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Bob Neill MP, that Fire and Rescue Authorities commence publishing all items of spend over £500.00 in value.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The new coalition government has stated that it is committed to increasing transparency within government and across the public sector in general, and as part of this commitment, it has requested that all authorities, including Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority, should provide more information to the public with regard to the spend profile of the service.
- 2.2 One way in which it is proposed that this should be facilitated is by authorities publishing all items of spend over £500.00, whilst being sensitive to the need to ensure that data protection requirements are not breached. The Fire Minister has indicated, in Fire and Rescue Bulletin 01/10 (FRSB), that he wants fire and rescue authorities to take this action, although, at this moment, there is no legal requirement to do so. However, it is expected that authorities will comply by January 2011.

**3 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AUTHORITY**

- 3.1 From a practical standpoint, undertaking this work and publishing the results, should not be unduly onerous and it is anticipated that publishing all spend over £500.00 on the internet could be achieved by December 2010. Data protection issues may complicate the process to some extent but provided the Authority takes a cautious approach to the release of information other than the spending figures, this should not be too great an obstacle.
- 3.2 The key issue with regard to implementing this proposal is that it has the potential to generate a large number of Freedom of Information requests from individuals or groups who wish to explore further the rationale underpinning the various items of spend, and this could become a significant burden.
- 3.3 However, until such times as such requests do materialise it is not possible to accurately predict the impact of this, therefore it does not provide a reason for

not complying with the proposal.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

4.1 Taking the Minister's comments into account, it is apparent that the proposal to voluntarily publish items of spend over £500.00 is liable to become mandatory in the near future.

4.2 Accordingly it would be appropriate to commence work on itemising and, where appropriate, anonymising spend over £500.00, ready to commence publication of the data on the Authority's website by the end of December 2010.

#### **5 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no equality and fairness implications in respect of this report.

#### **6 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

#### **7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Note the above report;
- b) Approve commencement of work to publish all items of spend over £500.00.
- c) Receive further reports as appropriate.

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#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of the above report:

- Fire and Rescue Service Bulletin 01/10