

**SUBJECT: FIRE FUTURES: STRATEGIC REVIEW OF THE FRS**

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

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**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report informs the Committee of the national Strategic Review of the Fire Service that is currently being undertaken by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 As noted at the last Policy and Performance Committee (7/6/10 agenda item 5), the Coalition Government has begun to set out its general policy direction, with the major focus being on reducing the country's economic deficit, accompanied by (and partially achieved through) the reduction in the size of the State and Public Sector.
- 2.2 In tandem with this there is an increased emphasis on the benefits to be derived from greater individual responsibility and community self reliance with proposals for the dispersal of power from Westminster to the local area continuing to feature strongly in the Government's statements.
- 2.3 Although in year savings have been required of local authorities and police services, there is a growing focus on the outcome of the current Spending Review, which is due to be announced on 20<sup>th</sup> October 2010. Although there are no clear indications of the financial impact of the Spending Review on the Fire and Rescue Service, it has been suggested that Whitehall departments (CLG included) will be expected to reduce spending by around 25%.
- 2.4 In August 2010 the Fire Minister announced a Strategic Review of the Fire and Rescue Service ("Fire Futures") which will inform the Spending Review. It is the intention that the review will be carried out with the sector and four workstreams have been established to facilitate this.

### **3 SCOPE AND FOCUS**

- 3.1 The review is set in the context of the emerging social, economic and physical challenges facing the fire sector, and it is noted that the sector: *“must proactively change to meet these challenges to maintain its effectiveness in serving communities and to represent value for money to the public purse. Along with this is an expectation from Government that the service reflect localism, decentralisation, transparency, accountability and the big society in what they do”.*
- 3.2 The review is focusing on four key areas each with a workstream group consisting of civil servants and FRS representatives. The four themes are:

#### **ROLE AND DELIVERY MODELS**

- What should be the role and functions of the FRS in a changing environment (demographically, in terms of finance, climate etc)?
- How could FRS join with other emergency/public services to improve delivery and value for money?
- What are the implications of any proposed changes in delivery models for the skills and profile of the workforce?
- Should the FRS take a step back from direct service delivery and move to a model where FRAs commission some or all of their services rather than providing them directly?

#### **EFFICIENCY, EFFECTIVENESS AND PRODUCTIVITY**

- What alternative options for providing FRS could be considered? (eg overseas models? Optimum size and number of FRAs? Shared back office, management or political leadership?)
- Are there additional funding mechanisms that could contribute to FRS resourcing (eg insurance, charging)
- Is the balance of spending correct, eg on prevention and response
- Working in partnership adds value to the national resource- can this be quantified and should different roles of FRAs be nationally or locally determined?
- How could FRAs make better use of their physical assets (eg through collaboration on estate)

#### **LOCALISM AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

- What does localism mean for the FRS?
- Is the FRS transparent, accountable and able to offer assurance to local service users?
- How can the FRS promote the Big Society?

## **NATIONAL INTEREST**

- What should the respective roles of national and local government be on national resilience and other issues such as research and central funding?
- Is the National Framework consistent with localism and if so what form should it take?

The review is in its early stages and CLG have indicated that all comments will be welcomed.

## **4. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 4.1 A corporate risk has been identified in terms of the potential impact of reduced funding on service delivery and community risk. Community risk has been identified at the national level as a factor shaping the review outcomes.

## **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications at this moment in time although there will undoubtedly be some detrimental impact on the Authority's finances at some point in the future.

## **6 STRATEGIC PLAN LINK**

- 6.1 The review will impact on the shape of the service and therefore has the potential to fundamentally influence our own strategic planning.

## **7 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no equality and diversity implications in respect of this report.

## **8 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 8.1 The Authority is recommended to:
- a) Consider and comment upon the content of this report
  - b) Receive further reports as appropriate

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## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The following background papers refer to the subject matter of the above:

- Fire Futures Update: Letter from CLG to Chief Fire Officers 2/8/10
- Fire Futures update, CLG 11/8/10