

MEETING: 21st JULY 2008

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE FIRE AND RESCUE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT 2008/2011

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report updates Members on the current status of the Fire and Rescue Framework 2008/2011, which was issued for consultation by the department of Communities and local Government (CLG) in late November 2007. (A copy of the Framework can be found at www.twfire.gov.uk).

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 As Members will be aware the Fire and Rescue National Framework document, originally conceived in 2004, is aimed at setting out the government's priorities and objectives in respect of the Fire and Rescue Services.

2.2 Since its inception the document has been subject to revision on a regular basis and in November 2007 a further revision was published as a draft for consultation.

2.3 One key aim of the draft document was to acknowledge the high workloads being dealt with by Fire and Rescue Services by proposing a move to a three year revision cycle and a reduction in the range of government requirements by distilling the original nine main areas of activity into four key areas of work, namely:

- Prevention, Protection and Response
- Resilience
- Diversity and Workforce
- Governance and Improvement

2.4 This Authority duly responded to the consultation paper, approving a set of responses to the issues raised in the draft document at the meeting held on 21 January 2008 (Minute no.101/2008 refers). The response was forwarded to the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) following the meeting.

2.5 At the close of the consultation period the CLG had received a total of 47 responses and, following an assessment of these responses, they published a final Fire and Rescue Framework 2008/2011 at the end of May 2008. The key issues that arose from the consultation process and the CLG's response to them are set out below for the consideration of Members.

3 OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION

- 3.1 There was widespread support with regard to the proposed change to a three year review timescale and the reduction in the number of requirements imposed upon Fire and Rescue Services, therefore CLG has determined to adopt this new format.
- 3.4 With regard to Section One of the document 'Prevention, Protection and Response', two key areas that were highlighted during the consultation process were that of the perceived need for a statutory duty for Fire and Rescue Authorities to prepare for flood rescues and the need for ongoing central funding to supplement the £25m CLG community safety grant provided to Fire and Rescue Services for the four years 2004/2005 to 2007/2008.
- 3.5 The CLG has rejected both of these responses. The first on the grounds that Sir Ken Knight's report into the flooding concluded that there was no such requirement for a new statutory duty. The second on the basis that the grant was only intended to act as pump priming in the first instance and that most Authorities were now able to fund the supply of detectors through local efficiency savings.
- 3.6 It is interesting to note that Sir Michael Pitt's report into the widespread flooding in 2007, and which is the subject of a separate report on today's agenda, has arrived at a somewhat different conclusion to that of Sir Ken Knight.
- 3.7 A key response to Section Two of the Framework Document, 'Resilience', concerned the role of Regional Management Boards (RMB) with regard to their relationship with the Regional Control Project. In particular, there was a concern that the role of the RMB's was being downgraded in respect their responsibility for delivering the RCC project. The response of CLG was to stress that RMB's do have an active and important role to play in establishing the RCC's. However, the nature of the relationship between the Local Fire Authorities, the RMB, the LACC and the Regional Project Board is one that falls to the local level to determine and this position is reflected in the final Framework Document.
- 3.8 Consequently, it will be for this Authority, in conjunction with the three other North East Fire and Rescue Authorities to determine the role of the RMB in respect of the RCC Project and, in particular, the relationship with the Local Authority Controlled Company. It is envisaged that this role will essentially be a residual client role on behalf of the four North East Fire and Rescue Authorities as the direct contractual relationship will be between the Company and each individual Fire and Rescue Authority in the North East.
- 3.9 Section three of the Document, 'Diversity and Workplace', remains largely unchanged from the original draft. The main area of concern that was highlighted through the consultation process centred upon the requirements to implement the National Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS), the Firefighter Selection Tests and Assessment and Development Centres.
- 3.10 Many FRS's registered their concerns over the impact of the full implementation of one or more of these systems, primarily on the grounds that they were

resource intensive, particularly when considered in relation to retained duty staff.

- 3.11 However, it should be noted that this Authority has implemented the above systems in full. Therefore, whilst it is acknowledged that they are resource intensive, the systems are already in place in Tyne and Wear and it is accepted that they do provide a robust means of selecting and developing personnel within an equality framework.
- 3.12 The final section of the report concerns 'Governance and Improvement'. The government has rejected the proposal from this Authority that it should not be necessary to submit a business case to CLG should we wish to extend the duration of an existing contract. CLG claim that their position is in line with Central Government expectations as set out by HM Treasury and the Office of Government Commerce in the report 'Transforming Government Procurement'.
- 3.13 This position appears to be one that has been adopted to in order to persuade Fire and Rescue Services to procure goods and services through FiReBuy, where this is appropriate.

4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The move to a three year revision cycle and the reduction in the number of requirements with the Framework Document is to be welcomed. Furthermore, with regard to the actual requirements set out in the document this service is already undertaking work to ensure that they are met.
- 4.3 However, the Chief Fire Officer intends to undertake a review of the requirements in order to ensure that the current action plan is up to date and adequately prioritised.

5 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no Equality and Diversity implications associated with the specific content of this report. However, the Framework Document does set out Equality and Diversity requirements that Fire and Rescue Services will need to respond to. This service has already done so but will keep this under review.

6 HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 6.1 There are no Health and Safety implications in respect of this report.

7 RISK MANGEMENT

- 7.1 The Authority is subject to compliance.

8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no additional financial implications in respect of specific content of this report.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 The Authority is requested to:

- a) Acknowledge the publication of the Fire and Rescue National Framework 2008/2011
- b) Receive further reports as appropriate

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of this report;

- FSC 22/08 Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008/2011