



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority

SECTOR REFORM UPDATE

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 23 February 2024

Purpose of Report:

To update Members on the Government consultation response to the 'Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service'

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Members:

- Note the contents of the report.
- Agree to receive further updates on sector reform at future meetings.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In response to findings from His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and learning from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, in May 2022, the Government launched a White Paper consulting on reform to fire and rescue services (FRSs). The consultation ran from 18 May to 26 July 2022 and outlined three areas of people, professionalism and governance. The consultation received 290 responses in total.
- 1.2 The Government's response has also been influenced by more recent investigations into culture and leadership in FRSs, including the London Fire Brigade Independent Culture Review, the Spotlight review and subsequent inspections by HMICFRS.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 The Government's response begins by highlighting the crucial work that FRSs undertake, both on the incident ground and in support roles, and when engaging with the public in local communities. The response also recognises the importance of the role played by both National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the Fire Standards Board.
- 2.2 The response then focuses on the three consulted areas of people, professionalism and governance in turn.

PEOPLE

- 2.3 Several pieces of work have been ongoing in the area of 'people' prior to the publication of Government's response. New legislation was introduced to enable FRSs to undertake enhanced disclosure and barring checks, new leadership programmes have been launched, and April 2023 saw the launch of the Direct Entry Scheme pilot for Station Managers. The Government's response provides little additional information beyond monitoring these pieces of work and ensuring they are embedded consistently across FRSs.
- 2.4 The response confirms the Government's position that they believe the role of FRSs is clear in relation to firefighting, community safety, and national resilience / civil contingencies. It also restates the Government's commitment to FRSs collaborating with other partner agencies, particularly in health and policing.
- 2.5 The Government states they will support employers to work with representative bodies to review the National Joint Council and pay negotiation mechanisms through an '*inclusive process*' which Home Office aim to be completed by early 2024.
- 2.6 The Government response also states that, if the review does not result in '*meaningful change*', the Home Office will '*explore other routes to ensure a modern, fair pay system that constructively enables role reform in England.*'

In particular, the Government would like to see consideration of '*scope for variation and self-determination including by types of services and by location*'.

- 2.7 There are brief mentions of issues in relation to improving workforce diversity and addressing the recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters, with the Government committing to continuing to work with partners on these issues.

PROFESSIONALISM

- 2.8 The White Paper proposed establishing a separate, independent, professional body which would build on the existing work of both the NFCC and the Fire Standards Board in setting and maintaining professional standards for FRSs. This proposal took the form of a College of Fire and Rescue (CoFR) and suggested that this new body could mirror the existing College of Policing.
- 2.9 The NFCC has been working with the Home Office to develop these proposals since the consultation was launched. The White Paper response confirms Government's commitment to establish a CoFR it states that they will work with partners to develop the most appropriate delivery model. The Government also states that data and research are also expected to be key pillars of the CoFR.
- 2.10 Following establishment of a CoFR, the Government states that they will legislate to create powers which will allow certain aspects of professional standards, including the Fire Service Core Code of Ethics, to be placed on a statutory footing and applied by Chief Fire Officers in their FRSs.

GOVERNANCE

- 2.11 In this area, the White Paper focused on the perceived benefits of single point accountability and agreed with HMICFRS's recommendation that Chief Fire Officers should be afforded operational independence similar to Police Chief Constables, however details on the specifics of this are still to be established.
- 2.12 The Government states they will not, at this stage, be mandating transfers of Fire and Rescue Authority functions to Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners where they are not already in place, the Home Office will make changes to streamline the process of voluntary transfers.
- 2.13 The Government will also support elected Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners to take on fire governance functions where they cover the same area as the FRS. This could include the Combined County Mayors being established in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act.
- 2.14 The response also states that steps will be taken to improve the transparency of how FRS budgets are allocated where they are governed by county councils and unitary authorities, through changes to the National Framework

Document which is highlighted as being reviewed to implement many of the changes from this consultation.

- 2.15 In summary, many of the consultation responses require further detail for the implications to be clearly understood and, whilst the Government highlights that they aim to implement changes at the '*earliest opportunity*', it is considered unlikely that any of the required legislative change, or changes to the National Framework Document, will take place prior the next General Election due to the timescales and existing Parliamentary commitments.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no human resources or learning and development implications arising from this report.

5. EQUALITIES AND ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An equality impact assessment has not been undertaken because of the nature of this report.
- 5.2 The Service has undertaken a comprehensive approach to embedding the Fire Service Core Code of Ethics, complementing the Service's values. This approach has meant that the Service is in a strong position in relation to the proposed legislating of this area as an area for Chief Fire Officers to embed within their Services.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no environmental or sustainability implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

The Chief Fire Officer continues to make representation through the NFCC in relation to the proposed changes and ensuring that the implications of the proposed areas of change is fully understood, in relation to Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 10.1 Note the contents of the report.
- 10.2 Agree to receive further updates on sector reform at future meetings.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None.

Craig Parkin
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER