

Consultation: Enabling closer working between the emergency services

Warwickshire County Council Response

1. How do you think this new duty would help drive collaboration between the emergency services?

In Warwickshire, there is already an established level of collaboration between the emergency services both within the County and in respect of our neighbouring services. We have further aspirations on collaboration, either in operational areas such as co-responding with the Ambulance Service where we believe further community value can be provided, or by further extending our alliance arrangements with Hereford and Worcester FRS.

Whilst a duty to collaborate is unlikely to act as a further catalyst for new models of working locally, such a duty would most likely be beneficial overall as it would give a useful impetus for ongoing efficiency and improvement with partner agencies.

This Authority believes that a duty to collaborate should extend more widely than simply the 3 blue light services, as modern fire and rescue services now operate in a wide range of partnership arrangements either for the good of the community or for optimum organisational efficiency. Some of the most successful and recent community safety and arrangements in the UK have been in association with non-blue light services.

2. Do you agree that the process set out above would provide an appropriate basis to determine whether a Police and Crime Commissioner should take on responsibility for fire and rescue services?

No. Whilst this Authority believes that a duty to collaborate could have benefits to the community this is a separate issue to considering the most appropriate governance arrangements for the FRS as a whole.

In recent years this Authority has considered, at significant length, the viability and sustainability of its FRS and therefore its role as the FRA for the area. It recognises the benefits of collaborative working with other FRS's, has agreed a course of action in this regard and is open minded to the possibility of a new fire service model applying to Warwickshire in the future. It does not believe, however, that the FRS would automatically be best served by the PCC taking on responsibility for the FRS and believes that whilst careful consideration must be given to the optimum size of an FRS it is, and should principally remain, a local government led service.

Warwickshire Police and West Mercia Police have recently formed a Strategic Alliance which has included the merging of many back office functions and a streamlined management structure thereby achieving their own efficiencies. This work is continuing under the STRADA (Strengthening and Deepening the Alliance) programme which concludes in 2020. This Authority is familiar with, and supportive of, the Police Strategic Alliance and recognises that it is in this direction that the efforts of the PCC and Warwickshire Police should best be directed. Equally the PCC is fully sighted on the present operational collaboration with Hereford and Worcester FRS and is equally supportive that this presents the optimum future opportunities for Warwickshire FRS.

Whilst there are undoubtedly some modest organisational synergies between Police and

Fire, and several operational areas as set out in 1) above, there remain some fundamental differences between the role, public relationship, and cultures of the two organisations.

From an operational perspective, many emerging national and long standing international examples demonstrate that the largest area of opportunity for the FRS is in fact with the Ambulance Service. This consultation is entitled "Closer working between the Emergency Services" yet the community value in deepening Fire and Ambulance arrangements is omitted from the consultation narrative.

This Authority believes that Government effort and attention would best be directed at assisting in the implementation of progressive and locally led decisions on the optimum structure for the FRS in the future.

This Authority is not supportive of the proposal to allow a PCC to unilaterally make the case to take over a FRS if local authorities and the public do not show support for such a move.

3. Do you agree that the case for putting in place a single employer should be assessed using the same process as for a transfer of governance?

If a decision were to be taken to place an FRS under the responsibility of a PCC a wide range of potential options would exist which would need considering on their respective merits. Single employer status would be only one of a number of options.

4. What benefits do you think could be achieved from empowering Police and Crime Commissioners to create a single employer for police and fire and rescue personnel, whilst retaining separate frontline services, where a local case has been made to do so?

A Fire Authority has a range of options open to it now regarding securing the optimum employment arrangements, either in its present governance model or in any future one.

5. Do you agree that the requirement for a chief officer to have previously held the office of constable should be removed for senior fire officers?

The consultation stresses how both services would retain separate identities and how various current operational powers will continue in force. This Authority believes it is unlikely that effective leadership of both Police and Fire Services could be realistically achieved by any one officer regardless of their background in a way that could command sufficient public and staff confidence.

6. How do you think the requirement for a Police and Crime Commissioner to have access to an informed, independent assessment of the operational performance of the fire service should best be met?

FRS performance is currently monitored via a range of means at officer, Authority and Peer Review level, although the range of present Fire Authority governance arrangements means that these vary in practice locally.

National FRS Peer Review arrangements have value as does the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisors function, assuming that these remain suitably resourced, but the current presence of a national HMI for Policing yet not for Fire is a questionable position. Regardless of future possibilities surrounding leadership and governance, this Authority believes that serious consideration must be given to the re-introduction of a statutory national inspectorate body

for Fire.

- 7. Do you agree that where a Police and Crime Commissioner takes responsibility for a fire and rescue service, the Police and Crime Panel should have its remit extended to scrutinise decision making in relation to fire services?**

There are a variety of ways that effective scrutiny of a Fire and Rescue Service can be undertaken. In the event of a fundamental governance change the opportunity to secure the optimum arrangements could be taken and this could be a broader exercise than simply assuming that extended Police and Crime Panel arrangements were suitable.

- 8. Do you think that where a Police and Crime Commissioner takes responsibility for a fire and rescue service, the Police and Crime Panel should have its membership refreshed to include experts in fire and rescue matters?**

In any governance model - either present or future - the appropriate Authority needs to secure the most suitable provision of expert and informed opinion. A variety of options would be available to secure this, but it is believed unlikely that an "expert" level of fire and rescue representation could be realistically and consistently achieved across 43 or 46 separate service areas without national coordination via a statutory inspectorate body or similar.

- 9. Do you think that where a Police and Crime Commissioner puts in place a single employer for fire and rescue and police services personnel, complaints and conduct matters concerning fire should be treated in the same way as complaints and conduct matters concerning the police?**

No. The FRS removed its statutory discipline regulations a decade ago and adopted normal employment procedures in their place and a return to the previous arrangements would be a backward step. Similarly there is no perceived need for a national independent body such as the IPCC for Fire Service matters.

- 10. Do you agree that Police and Crime Commissioners should be represented on fire and rescue authorities in areas where wider governance changes do not take place?**

There are various presently established forums on which the Fire and Rescue Service and Police and Crime Commissioner both sit which provide opportunity for mutual scrutiny and joint working. These include local arrangements such as the Safer Warwickshire Partnership Board and local Community Safety Partnerships. In addition, the general working relationships between the Warwickshire PCC and the FRA/FRS are effective.

It is unclear what particular benefits would additionally arise if the PCC were represented on the Fire Authority. In the case of Warwickshire the elected County Council is the Fire Authority and has a direct mandate from the people of Warwickshire.

- 11. Do you agree that the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority should be abolished and direct responsibility for fire and rescue transferred to the Mayor of London?**

No comment.

12. In the event that the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority is abolished, how should responsibility for fire and rescue be incorporated into the mayoral structure?

No comment.

13. To what extent do you think there are implications for local resilience (preparedness, response and recovery) in areas where the Police and Crime Commissioner will have responsibility for police and fire?

These would be limited as the Authority is confident that officers would ensure effective planning and response arrangements continue under any governance model assuming sufficient resourcing and planning arrangements were in place that were proportionate to the appropriate risk and threat assessment. The potential single leadership model referred to in questions 4 and 5, however, does raise questions about clarity of command responsibilities and public confidence in a major multi agency emergency event.

14. To what extent do you think there are implications for resilience responsibilities in areas where an elected metro mayor is also the Police and Crime Commissioner and responsible for the fire and rescue service?

These would again be limited, assuming sufficient resourcing and planning arrangements were in place that were proportionate to the appropriate risk and threat assessment, although whether one single individual could effectively discharge such a wide range of public functions in the eyes of the public is questionable. It seems probable that deputy mayors would discharge the actual day to day responsibilities of the Mayor in practice as has been apparent in London to date.

15. Are there are any other views or comments that you would like to add in relation to emergency services collaboration that were not covered by the other questions in this consultation?

Further to the response to question 2, this Authority does not believe sufficient attention is being given to Fire/Ambulance working arrangements or to Fire/Fire collaborations and mergers. In addition, the potential for the FRS to provide significantly greater community value to a range of public sector arrangements has not been given sufficient detail.

This response is submitted by Warwickshire County Council as the Fire Authority for the area although it is aware of, and supports, the separate response submitted by the PCC for Warwickshire.

16. Do you think these proposals would have any effect on equalities issues?

In respect of internal matters this would require further attention once more detailed proposals emerged.

In external matters, the public's perception of the current neutrality of the FRS could be adversely affected. This could lead to serious and fundamental restrictions on the ability of the FRS to deliver effective community safety to some of the most diverse communities.