

# Portfolio Holder (Community Safety) Proposed Decision to be taken on or after 9 March 2012

## Response to Department for Communities and Local Government consultation on 'Fire and Rescue Service National Framework for England'

### Recommendation

That the response be approved

## 1.0 Background

1.1 The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 requires a Fire and Rescue National Framework to be in place that sets out the priorities and objectives for fire and rescue authorities in connection with the discharge of their functions.

1.2 The Fire Minister Bob Neill MP wrote to partners across the fire sector on Monday 13 June 2011 to announce that officials in the Fire, Resilience and Emergencies Directorate were due to begin work on the next Fire and Rescue National Framework.

1.3 The Department for Communities and Local Government announced the publication of the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework for England consultation on 7 December 2011.

## 2.0 Introduction

2.1 The draft Framework marks a key milestone in resetting the relationship between fire and rescue authorities and Government. It proposes moving away from prescription, enabling fire and rescue authorities to deliver their services locally, whilst continuing to meet the wider needs of national resilience. The Government will retain an overarching responsibility for national resilience at a strategic level.

2.2 The priorities proposed in the draft Framework are for fire and rescue services to:

2.2.1 Identify and assess the full range of fire and rescue related risks their area faces, make provision for prevention and protection activities and to respond to incidents appropriately;

2.2.2 Work in partnership with their communities and a wide range of partners locally and nationally to deliver their service; and

2.2.3 Be accountable to communities for the service they provide.

2.3 The public consultation gives fire and rescue authorities, members of the fire and rescue services, professional and representative bodies, local authorities and other local bodies, industry, charities and the general public an opportunity to shape the revised Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

### 3.0 Response to the Consultation Paper

In terms of the Department for Communities and Local Government's proposals, Warwickshire County Council's response is set out below:

#### **Question 1 Is the content of each chapter clear, specific and proportionate?**

Within some of the text there is the potential for duplication and confusion. In particular, sections 1.12 to 1.15 would benefit from another attempt to set out the expected collaborative arrangements for interoperability. In a similar vein, section 1.24 to 1.28 could be merged and made to be more easily understood to deal with potential resilience gaps and the capability to deal with them.

Sections 1.32 and 1.33, referring to partnership working, are insignificant and largely irrelevant as it is dealt with within many other areas of the Framework.

#### **Question 2 Does the draft National Framework set clear and appropriate expectations of fire and rescue authorities? If not, how could it be improved?**

Within the Ministerial foreword, and quite rightly, government recognises that it is not the intention to "*micro manage from the centre*". With this in mind, it is puzzling to find within the 11 pages of main text, that there are 16 occasions, usually written in bold, where fire authorities are told that they must carry out a certain activity. This is unlike, for example, the new National Crime Agency Plans or National Policy Plan.

We are pleased, however, that government recognises its role within the wider national resilience frameworks.

**Question 3 Are the respective roles of fire and rescue authorities and the Government set out clearly? If not, how could they be improved or made clearer?**

Whilst the local authority requirements are clear within the existing or new legislative frameworks, the repeated use of the term “*agreed strategic governance arrangements*” does not offer clarity in the relationship with central government. Recognising that since this consultation began, another document has been produced that relates to the ‘strategic governance arrangements, there is an assumption that all government agencies are clear on their relationship with the Fire and Rescue Service. It is important that this is, in fact, the case with inter departmental arrangements in place.

**Question 4 Do the requirements for fire and rescue authorities on scrutiny, access to comparable performance data and assurance go too far or not far enough?**

Whilst it is right and proper for local communities and the public to have access to comparable data, it is vital that there is confidence in the accuracy and validity of such information. It is unclear what arrangements would be in place to ensure consistency across all fire and rescue authorities.

In relation to peer reviews and self assessments, once again a consistent approach would be of value. Anything less would be insufficient to give operational or financial assurance.

Some clarity about scrutiny gaps and the statement of assurance would be helpful.

## **4.0 Background Papers**

Communities and Local Government Fire and Rescue National Framework for England Consultation document dated December 2011.

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