

Cabinet

14 July 2022

Home Office White Paper - Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service

Recommendation

That Cabinet approve the White Paper “Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service” Consultation Response found in Appendix 1 of this report that is due for submission by 26 July 2022 to Home Office.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Home Office released a White Paper entitled ‘Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service – Building professionalism, boosting performance and strengthening governance in May 2022.
- 1.2 The White Paper focuses on three core elements of Fire and Rescue Service Reform – People, Professionalism and Governance.
- 1.3 This White Paper includes a set of 48 consultation questions. The majority of these questions are asking for a response indicating the level of agreement with the approach outlined in the White Paper (There are a small number of questions that ask for a fully text-based response).
- 1.4 The County Council acts as the Fire & Rescue Authority in areas where the functions of the fire and rescue service form part of a County Council, with decision making for executive matters falling to the Cabinet in line with our usual decision-making arrangements.
- 1.5 Appendix 1 of this report provides the proposed response of the Fire and Rescue Authority to this White Paper consultation.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 There are no immediate financial considerations in relation to this consultation response.
- 2.2 Following the consultation, should any of the proposals in the White Paper be adopted, a financial impact assessment should be completed. There is likely to be a cost to any proposed reform.

3. Environmental Implications

None.

4. Supporting Information

4.1 The consultation paper covers three broad themes:

(i) **People**

Questions 1 to 8 of the consultation relate to people elements of reform. These questions focus on:

- The role of the Fire and Rescue Service
- Modern working practices
- Public Safety
- Business Continuity
- Pay Negotiation
- Nurturing new and existing talent

(ii) **Professionalism**

Questions 9 to 28 of the consultation relate to professionalism. These questions focus on:

- Leadership
- Data
- Research
- Clear expectations
- Ethics and Culture
- Independent Strategic Oversight

(iii) **Governance**

Questions 29 to 48 of the consultation relate to governance. These questions focus on:

- Governance structures
- The Mayoral Model
- Police and Crime Commissioners
- Other options, such as an executive councillor
- Boundaries
- Fire Funding
- A balanced leadership model
- Legal entity of Chief Fire Officers
- Clear distinction between strategic and operational planning

- 4.2 A link to the Fire Reform White Paper and the Impact Assessment can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reforming-our-fire-and-rescue-service>
- 4.3 The proposed Fire Reform White Paper consultation response is found in Appendix 1.
- 4.4 The aims of the Fire Reform White Paper are as follows:
- Services providing excellence in their core prevention, protection, response, and resilience functions, responding to local needs in line with national expectations and guidance.
 - Services will be helped to make the best use of the resources available to them, with the ability to come together quickly and respond safely to local and national emergencies, based on good data and evidence.
 - Services need to be more able to adapt to changing threats and risks, working flexibly with other local partners.
 - Chief Fire Officers will be skilled leaders and managers, with clear responsibility to run and manage their services effectively and efficiently, in order to meet their local risk.
 - Strong political, executive oversight will ensure services are properly accountable to the communities they serve and run in the public interest.
 - Twenty-first century fire and rescue services will embrace an ethical culture that attracts and retains talented people, values diversity and reflects the communities they serve.
 - Employment arrangements across the sector need to be modernised.
- 4.5 Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Authority will not know the implications of the Fire Reform White Paper until the consultation responses have been considered and there is a Home Office response. This Home Office response will also indicate any accompanying changes to legislation and/or guidance proposed following the consultation period. Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Fire Authority will need to give further consideration to the implications at that stage. No timelines have been provided as to when Home Office will respond to the Fire Reform White Paper consultation. The Fire Reform White Paper makes it clear that the Home Office is seeking to reconsider the following, all of which have implications for the County Council:
- a. Operational Independence of Chief Fire Officer – It will be unclear until the Home Office responds to the consultation, but this could impact upon the current organisational structure, line management and delegations to the Chief Fire Officer. Warwickshire County Council is already considering proposals to strengthen delegations to the Chief Fire Officer in line with the direction set out in the Fire Reform White Paper.
 - b. Entry requirements into the service and talent management - we are supportive of this generally, but the proposals set out in the Fire Reform White Paper would result in changes to our approach and we would need to ensure that any such changes are complementary to Our People Strategy.

- c. Proposals for the CFO to become a corporation sole (and employer) as are Chief Constables. This arrangement is already implemented in London Fire Brigade. If implemented this would have significant implications from a staffing perspective. This would be challenging to achieve and would involve TUPE, pensions and employment implications. We would also need to understand the protections of the CFO in this context and what such a wholesale shift would achieve.
- d. Collation and use of data – this is likely to require the sharing of more data into national databases resulting in a greater level of national scrutiny.
- e. In relation to governance, the Fire Reform White Paper seems to favour a single, elected – ideally directly elected – individual who is accountable for the service rather than a governance model which the White Paper describes as a 'committee'. Whilst the position of a County Council model and its leadership arrangements is acknowledged in the Fire Reform White Paper, it will need further consideration once the Home Office response to the White Paper is known. The Fire Reform White Paper provides the potential for the Leader of the Council to fulfil this function and to delegate that responsibility to a Cabinet Member. Both the criteria for governance, and scrutiny arrangements will need to be considered once the Government's response to the consultation is known.
- f. In relation to budgets, the Fire Reform White Paper suggests that consideration is being given to 'ring-fencing' the operational fire budgets within all county councils and unitary authorities who govern Fire and Rescue Services. This could have significant implications for budgeting and will need to be given further consideration once the details of any such proposal are known.

4.6 When considering the Fire Reform White Paper, it is worth considering that the Home Office are also accountable for Police Forces across the Country. Much of the reform being proposed appears to be echoing Police Force governance structures and arrangements. The Home Office also has strong relationships and regular contact with London Fire Brigade. There may be value in understanding Police Force Governance and the governance and arrangements in London Fire Brigade.

5. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

5.1 Once agreed the Fire Authority's response to the Fire Reform White Paper will be submitted on or before 26 July 2022.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Fire Reform White Paper Consultation Response

Appendix 2 – Fire Reform White Paper electronic link

Background Papers

None.

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): n/a county wide

Other members: