

For Publication

Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority  
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**REPORT AUTHOR:** CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

**SUBJECT:** MEMBER BRIEFING ON THE CONTENTS OF THE HOME OFFICE WHITE PAPER ON REFORMING OUR FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

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Background Papers: Home Office, *Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service: Building professionalism, boosting performance and strengthening governance, May 2022*. See [HERE](#)

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**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this report is to present members of the Fire & Rescue Authority (FRA) an overview of the key proposals made by the Home Office in its White Paper consultation 'Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service.'

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) Members:

1. Discuss the issues presented by the White Paper and note the opportunities to discuss and inform the Authority's formal response to the consultation in advance of the deadline of 26<sup>th</sup> July, and;
  2. Consider delegating responsibility for signing off the final version of the Authority and Service responses to the consultation to the Chair and Chief Fire Officer respectively.
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## 1. Background

- 1.1 The UK government is taking major steps towards reforming the Fire and Rescue Service and has published a Fire Reform White Paper and consultation, which sets out the government's proposals for reform. They are welcoming views from all stakeholders and members of the public on these proposals.
- 1.2 The motivation for this White Paper is the public interest surrounding the Grenfell Tower and Manchester Arena Inquiries which make the case for fundamental reform. In addition, the sector wide reforms identified by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) in Sir Thomas Winsor's State of Fire Reports find a perception of a lack of transformative change in the sector.
- 1.3 The White Paper makes recommendations in 3 clear areas, People, Professionalism and Governance.
- 1.4 It asks a total of 48 questions.
- 1.5 The Chief Fire Officer and Fire and Rescue Authority Chair are proposing two collective responses are submitted. One representing the views of the FRA and another representing the collective views of the Principal Officer Team. It is recommended that FRA to delegate responsibility for signing off the FRA and FRS response to the Chair and CFO respectively.
- 1.6 In the paper the Home Office sets out a Vision for Fire and Rescue Services. Which is as follows:

*We want to see 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.*

## 2 People

- 2.1 The proposals seek to introduce changes that will allow fire professionals to further develop their skills and thrive in their work.
- 2.2 The Home Office want to clarify the role of fire and rescue services and of the firefighter, unlock talent and improve diversity within services, take action to ensure that they are supporting the creation of a positive culture, and further develop schemes to consistently identify and nurture talent.
- 2.3 The Home Office will commission an independent review into the current pay negotiation process and consider if it is fit for a modern emergency service.
- 2.4 The government is clear that under current arrangements there is a role for service and their employees to respond to terrorism in all its forms.
- 2.5 The Paper states that 'Chief fire officers should be empowered to safely make decisions on the basis of risk and resources. While it is right that all relevant trade unions have a role to play in discussions on terms and conditions and the health and safety of their members, this must not come at the expense of safe and sensible progress and efficiency when communities need action.'
- 2.6 Whilst the Home Office wishes to limit the power of the Unions to restrict a Chief Fire Officer's ability to deploy resources to meet local needs the White Paper is explicit that the government is not proposing to remove the freedom for staff to choose to participate in industrial action. However, the Home Office is seeking assurance that public safety will be ensured in the event of industrial action.

## 3 Professionalism

- 3.1 Home Office proposals seek to modernise the fire and rescue service, to enable greater professionalism and to ensure that we are recruiting and training our fire and rescue services to be the best that they can be.

- 3.2 The Home Office want to increase professionalism by moving from a Fire Standards Board to the creation of a College of Fire and Rescue.
- 3.3 The Home Office want to develop a mandatory 21st century leadership program for progression to senior roles, set clearer entry requirements for recruitment.
- 3.4 The paper proposes a statutory code of ethics and a fire and rescue service oath. This could involve the creation of powers in legislation, when parliamentary time allows, to create and maintain a statutory code. These powers could enable a statutory code to be created or amended via secondary legislation.
- 3.5 The Home Office wish to explore whether central fire and rescue research personnel, working closely with services, could help to ensure that research carried out within the physical and social sciences is effectively prioritised, coordinated, quality assured, and disseminated.

#### 4 Governance

- 4.1 With reference to the White Paper terminology, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority is referred to as a Standalone authority and reforms would apply.
- 4.2 The Government's view is that oversight of fire services needs to change. Their preferred governance model is one that meets the following criteria:
  - There is a single, elected – ideally directly elected – individual who is accountable for the service rather than governance by committee;
  - There is clear demarcation between the political and strategic oversight by this individual, and the operationally independent running of the service by the chief fire officer;
  - That the person with oversight has control of necessary funding and estates; and,
  - decision-making, including budgets and spending, is transparent and linked to local public priorities.

4.3 Under the options outlined above the White Paper proposes that there would be some form of body formed to scrutinise the decision making of the executive leader/commissioner. This is likely to be a scrutiny panel of local authority members similar to the current Police and Crime Panel arrangements.

## 5 Next Steps

5.1 Members will have the opportunity to discuss the White Paper response at the following meetings:

- 22<sup>nd</sup> June - FRA Executive;
- 7<sup>th</sup> July - Members Development Workshop (1-hour slot on the agenda);
- 20<sup>th</sup> July - FRA Meeting (the final draft FRA response will be presented to this meeting before the submission deadline of 26<sup>th</sup> July).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

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2. Consider delegating responsibility for signing off the final version of the Authority and Service responses to the consultation to the Chair and Chief Fire Officer respectively.

**ANDREW HOPKINSON**  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**