

Briefing for Police and Crime Commissioner

Topic: Fire Governance

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Purpose of briefing

To appraise the new Commissioner of the existing and future ability of PCCs to take on governance of local Fire & Rescue Services.

Background

The Police & Crime Act 2017 introduced a specific duty to collaborate though it should be noted that some collaborations existed prior to this Act. The primary aim of the duty and the supporting legal framework is to strengthen and deepen the joint working between emergency services in order to be able to deliver high quality services to the public and to keep them safe. Demand on blue light services continues to evolve and become more complex, and collaboration offers an opportunity to meet new demand, deliver prevention and early intervention initiatives, enhance the knowledge, skills and practice of the workforce, ensure resilience and enable efficiency, effectiveness and value for money benefits to be realised.

The outcome of Phase 1 of the PCC Review indicates the government's desire to effect fire and rescue service reform, including consultation on the governance model, wherein it is proposed that PCCs would take on fire governance and replace Fire & Rescue Authorities. This is seen to enable greater accountability. To date, four PCCs engaged in local consultation and submitted a business case to the Home Secretary, thus becoming PFCCs. They are responsible for setting the fire budget and precept, setting fire and rescue service strategic objectives in a Fire Plan, and appointing or dismissing the Chief Fire Officer.

Importantly, this process is not a police fire merger and both force and service maintain their distinct identities.

Current Issues

On 16th March 2021, the government announced its intentions to consult on whether to mandate the transfer of fire and rescue functions to the PFCC model across England where boundaries are coterminous. If successful, this would replace the 2017 legislation and business case process, meaning PCCs would be mandated to take on fire governance.

Decisions Needed

A White Paper and public consultation are expected to be published in May/June. This will provide further details of the government's proposals and opportunity for PCCs to respond. The Association of Police & Crime Commissioners is working with the Home Office on this and wider reform to the fire sector and will provide advice and support to PCCs as this progresses.

Partnership Involvement

Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Service's Chief Fire Officer is Stuart Errington, and his Deputy is Steve Helps. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Fire Authority are Cllrs John Robinson and Audrey Laing.

Police Involvement

As the White Paper progresses, emergency services (ambulance, fire and police) are still able to come together as part of official and more casual collaborations to respond to a range of issues, be it planning for civil emergencies or responding to road traffic accidents. As directed by the 2017 Act, PCCs and forces should keep collaboration opportunities under review.

People to Meet

Cllr John Robinson

Cllr Audrey Laing

CFO Stuart Errington

DCFO Steve Helps

ACFO Sarah Nattrass

Deputy Chief Executive Tony Hope

Area Manager Keith Wanley

Area Manager Keith Carruthers

Area Manager Steve Wharton

Head of People Katherine Metcalfe

Head of Corporate Resources Keith Lazzari