

A Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service

1. *The consultation **A Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service** was published on 26 October 2007, with a closing date for responses of 31 January 2008. This consultation seeks views on whether FRAs and other stakeholders want a Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service in England. It sets out options for the role, functions, status and governance of a Centre of Excellence and associated costs and possible funding arrangements.*

2. *A Centre of Excellence would be a new national delivery body filling an intermediate role between the Fire and Rescue Service and Communities and Local Government. It will be for FRAs to decide those functions which they wish to fund a Centre of Excellence to undertake on their behalf and the consultation provides an indication of possible costs. If FRAs wish the full range of functions to be carried out, as set out in the consultation document, a financial contribution of some £50,000 per annum would be required from each FRA if costs are shared equally across all 46 FRAs. There are alternative funding options.*

3. *The consultation makes the case for a Centre of Excellence on the basis that the demands now being made of the Service, alongside the continuing competition for resources and the challenges which the Service faces in the future (demographic and socio-economic change, the political landscape, technology, energy, transport, environmental and ecological changes and security threats), mean that some functions would be more effectively delivered nationally. This may help facilitate greater consistency across the FRS and help drive up standards through the sharing of best practice, deliver economies of scale and reduce duplication of effort and expenditure.*

4. *The key benefits are stated as:*

- *allowing the FRS to take much greater responsibility and ownership for managing the present and to take a central role in influencing the future direction of the service as a whole;*
- *enabling the FRS to respond to new challenges quickly and to the highest standards;*
- *facilitating collaborative working, dissemination of good practices and interoperability across the FRS;*
- *helping streamline multiple impacts of the modernisation programme on FRAs;*
- *helping build capacity and strengthen leadership at all levels; and*
- *promoting cost effectiveness and efficiency in delivery, and achieving economies of scale, by bringing together some activities currently undertaken in individual FRAs.*

5. *A Centre of Excellence has the potential to support a wide range of functions focused around the following drivers of FRS improvement:*

- **Operational and corporate development**, including organisational development, operational doctrine, equality and diversity, health and safety, fire prevention co-ordination, and technology and research
- **Training delivery**
- **Procurement**
- **Resilience** including operational assurance, national procurement and contract management

6. *The consultation offers a number of options ranging from a joint management committee to a Non-Departmental Government Body.*

7. *The earliest date on which it would be practicable to establish a Centre of Excellence is April 2009.*

8. *The LGA has been involved throughout the development of the proposals. We and CFOA have sat on the Project Steering Group and the Project Board.*

The LGA has publicly said that a Centre of Excellence or national service agency, has the potential to help the Fire and Rescue Service deliver further coordinated improvements and to continue to drive up standards. It could do this by securing economies of scale and removing duplication. We continue to state the case that in order to be successful, a Centre of Excellence will have to deliver real benefits to FRAs and provide value for money.

9. *The consultation document can be viewed at:*

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/centreexcellencefire>