



**THE CHIEF
FIRE OFFICERS
ASSOCIATION**

The professional voice of the
UK fire and rescue service



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24th September 2010

Bob Neill MP
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Both the LGA and CFOA are keen to respond to your call that those who deliver the service are best placed to shape its future. You will already be aware through correspondence and conversations that CFOA and the LGA have been in detailed discussion with your officials about how certain key activities, currently undertaken by central government, can be better delivered collectively by the sector.

We strongly support the government's commitment to less state control and bureaucracy and believe that as more power and responsibility is devolved to the local level, services will improve, deliver better value for money and be more responsive to the needs of local people. However, the fire and rescue service does form part of the critical national infrastructure and without the strength of national vision, and the sensible provision of appropriate national level activities to support it, there are downside risks of fragmentation, duplication, waste and possibly a deterioration in service in many areas. The service is built on the ability to respond and operate seamlessly and there is therefore a strong argument to deliver national functions.

The maturing of the Integrated Risk Management Process has led to sensible and innovative variations on the central theme of risk reduction. Nevertheless, progress and performance has been uneven. The best have tended to get even better and at a faster rate than their less well-performing counterparts. What is needed is to harness the collective capacity of

the whole sector to support improvement and development. It is the shape and nature of this collective effort that is the heart of the current debate.

However, the issue goes well beyond improvement. The following issues can be said to constitute the benefits to the UK national fire and rescue interest;

- Operational safety in a hazardous occupation and the promotion of better interoperability across borders;
- Sensible economies of scale and the avoidance of wasteful duplication;
- Intellectual and professional coherence with which external suppliers can engage to support economic and business development in the wider economy;
- Technological innovation and investment;
- International relationships and the development of market opportunities, placing the UK as a worldwide market leader in fire issues.

The two bodies with representative responsibility across the sector, and hence authority to act, are the Local Government Group, the employers, and CFOA, the professional managers.

A number of national functions could lie with this political/professional axis. Broadly speaking, these fall largely into the category of supporting and promoting industry-wide standards and good practice (including national resilience), providing capacity to support the weaker services, clarity on future technological requirements and investment, and services which make local people safer. We consider the principal areas to be:

- National safety campaigns – well-placed and thought out marketing campaigns can change risky personal behaviours which tend drive the demand for fire and rescue services; co-ordination of these can amplify their effect nationally;
- IRMP Guidance – the ability to learn from, and disseminate proven good practice in reducing local risk;
- Research and statistics – both CFOA and the LGA can corral the increasingly sophisticated capacity that exists within individual FRSs to produce meaningful and helpful data for comparison and measurement purposes as well as to inform future research into risk issues;
- Workforce development – whilst the general principles of IPDS have merit the various tools and prescription surrounding them have attracted considerable criticism. We consider that some sensible national approaches can be maintained while still allowing local employers the make the choices most appropriate to local needs.
- In terms of Operational guidance/doctrine, the production of risk critical operational guidance at an appropriately generic level is vital for safe and effective operations and public safety. And it's our belief that the sector has the expertise to produce such

guidance. There would, however, need to be a properly managed transition from the current arrangements to clarify issues of liability and funding;

- National procurement – FireBuy has had a problematic few years and we believe that much of the same functions could be performed by a joint alliance between the two bodies at considerably less cost;
- Equality & Diversity – the intention is to look at where opportunities exist to add genuine value to the way services are delivered to people with a variety of needs;
- Long-Term Capability Management for National Resilience arrangements – we consider that the existing model which places the LGA and CFOA at the heart of the governance arrangements of both the assurance and contractual activities is both robust and innovative.

The Fire Service College, we consider, fulfils an important national function and is a vital component in many of the key areas above. We would welcome a discussion about the government's intentions for future governance and funding.

Similarly, in relation to UK representation in Europe on fire matters, and particularly standard setting, the sector needs to understand what role government wishes to play in the future.

Clearly we appreciate that the Fire Futures programme includes a workstream focusing on 'national interests'. However, you will be aware that CFOA, the LGA and the LG group have already invested considerable effort and resource in progressing this matter and now feel we are in a position to discuss with you in greater detail our jointly agreed approach. As such, we believe that this sector led approach to national functions could form the cornerstone of the 'Fire Futures' work.

Both CFOA and the LG Group now feel it would be of mutual benefit to discuss this with you.

Yours sincerely



Cllr. Brian Coleman
Chair – Fire Services Management Committee



John Bonney, QFSM
CFOA President

