

## **FRS Training and Development: Skills for Justice future funding**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion and direction. To highlight to Members the end of DCLG funding for the FRS Sector Skills Council, Skills for Justice in March 2012 and to seek support from Members for continued funding from Fire and Rescue Services in England.

### **Summary**

This paper sets out the background to fire and rescue involvement with Skills for Justice (SfJ), highlights the work done by SfJ and the difficulties the withdrawal of funding brings. The paper seeks support for continued funding from Fire and Rescue Authorities and proposes a lead authority model in order to maintain the focus at national level, ahead of this being incorporated into the work of the Fire Service College.

### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

1. Encourage English Fire and Rescue Authority Chairs/Cabinet Members and Chief Fire Officers to continue subscriptions to Skills for Justice for a one year period, 2012/13;  
and
2. Accept the proposal that London Fire Brigade should make a sector-wide collective payment, with reimbursement from individual FRSs.

### **Action**

Officers to take forward any actions agreed by the Committee.

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### **Background**

- 1 As a result of firefighter fatalities in the early 1990's and subsequent Improvement Notices from the HSE, work was undertaken by FRAs and Government to develop a suite of National Occupational Standards (NOS) for fire and rescue services. Over the years this work evolved into the Integrated Professional Development Scheme. Following the industrial action in 2003 the NOS formed part of the national pay agreement in the form of rolemaps. Nationally, vocational standards and qualifications are now developed and made available to different sectors through Sector Skills Councils. The fire and rescue sector skills council is Skills for Justice.
- 2 For the last three years DCLG has paid for English fire and rescue personnel membership subscriptions for Skills for Justice (SfJ). Other members include Scottish, Northern Ireland and Welsh services, funded by their respective devolved administrations and private sector fire service organisations from areas within the sector such as firefighting in the oil industry. The fee is currently £3.50 per employee (all employees). Since this relationship has been established SfJ have carried out a number of functions on behalf of the sector. These include:
  - 2.1 Developing a risk based qualifications framework
  - 2.2 Maintaining and refreshing National Occupational Standards (NOS)
  - 2.3 Securing additional training resources/funding for services
  - 2.4 Hosting all of the IPDS materials and products previously hosted by DCLG
  - 2.5 Linking the sector into broader national Further Education and skills arrangements including apprenticeships
  - 2.6 Carrying out sector research with employers and developing a replacement for the English Learning & Development strategy
  - 2.7 Refreshing and rebranding IPDS leading to the current development with CFOA of a "lighter touch" competence framework focusing on firefighter safety
- 3 Local authority fire and rescue services are by far the biggest beneficiary of SfJ work, and the work it carries out on behalf of the sector is directed by the National Occupational Committee, which is chaired by CFOA.
- 4 The latest SfJ work includes supporting work to review guidance on risk critical training and assessment frequency, ensuring risk critical activities

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have relevant qualifications and work to promote interoperability and national resilience. What the funding buys is dedicated capacity within SfJ to carry out work on behalf of the FRS to develop and maintain the competence based approach and also the expertise to link into broader learning and development work nationally. Some of these functions carried out by SfJ could potentially be carried out by the Fire Service College in the future. However, in order not to lose this resource for the FRS, a collective payment for SfJ for 2012/13 is proposed as an interim measure.

**Skills for Justice Funding**

- 5 DCLG have indicated that there will be no further central funding available for Skills for Justice, though the devolved administrations and other members have indicated they will be in a position to continue funding. The total amount Skills for Justice received from DCLG for England this year was £188,921. To put this in some context, for a service like West Sussex FRS the bill going forward would be  $£3.50 \times 911 = £3,188$ . For a larger service like West Midlands FRS the total would be closer to £8,750. Leaving 46 separate authorities to pay is likely to lead to fragmentation and therefore a collective payment may be the best way forward. London Fire Brigade has indicated a willingness to act as Lead Authority in this matter and then seek remuneration from all other authorities. This would give the added advantage that a discount could be negotiated with SfJ (as was done by DCLG in 2010) so that the agreement would deliver the best possible value for all fire and rescue authorities.

**Issues associated with ending our relationship**

- 6 There are a number of issues associated with non payment of SfJ subscriptions. The key issue is that the NOS were developed originally in response to HSE Improvement Notices and currently form part of the rolemaps which in turn are part of the national pay agreement. In addition the qualifications framework covers areas such as incident command, BA and other risk critical areas and should be seen as vital in securing and assuring firefighter safety. More recently, SfJ have led on the review of the national Learning and Development Strategy issued by DCLG in 2005. This work is gathering pace and will lead to a replacement of IPDS which gives much greater flexibility locally but also focuses on risk critical operational training, interoperability and also supports national resilience.