

## **Home Office's Fire Reform Agenda**

### **Purpose**

For information and discussion.

### **Summary**

The former Home Secretary set out the government's fire reform programme in a speech she gave on 24 May. Since then a new ministerial team has been appointed at the Home Office. Dan Greaves, the Director of Fire and Resilience at the Home Office, will be attending Fire Commission to outline the new Fire Minister's priorities and how the Home Office expects to work with the sector to take forward the fire reform agenda.

### **Recommendation**

The Commission are asked to share and discuss issues relevant to the government's fire reform agenda with the Home Office's Director of Fire and Resilience.

### **Action**

Officers to progress as appropriate.

**Contact officer:** Mark Norris

**Position:** Principal Policy Adviser

**Phone no:** 020 7664 3241

**Email:** [mark.norris@local.gov.uk](mailto:mark.norris@local.gov.uk)

## **Home Office's Fire Reform Agenda**

### **Background**

1. The former Home Secretary made a speech entitled *Where next for fire reform?* on 24 May. She praised the achievements of the fire service in recent years but argued that further reform was necessary in order to promote efficiency and effectiveness.
2. The speech highlighted the three areas the reform agenda would concentrate on: transparency and accountability; workforce; and efficiency and collaboration. Further detail was provided by the Home Office's Director of Fire and Resilience at the Fire Commission meeting the following day. The full text of the speech is available here: <http://www.reform.uk/publication/what-next-for-fire-reform/>.

### **Accountability and transparency**

3. At the heart of the Home Office's proposals around accountability are giving Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) a greater role in fire governance. The Home Secretary's speech confirmed that the Government will proceed as anticipated with the proposals in the Policing and Crime Bill to allow Police and Crime Commissioners to take responsibility on responsibility from Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) for governance of the fire and rescue service.
4. As part of the package of reforms the Home Secretary also went on to set out how the transparency of the fire and rescue service would be strengthened. At the heart of the proposals is a plan to reintroduce an inspection regime to help FRAs and PCCs hold the service to account. Amendments were tabled by Ministers at the Report Stage of the Policing and Crime Bill to expand on the inspection provisions in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. These amendments allow for the appointment of a chief inspector of the fire and rescue service, the appointment of inspectors and assistant inspectors, and give these inspectors powers to enter premises and access information in carrying out their role.
5. To support greater transparency the Home Secretary announced the Home Office will also be publishing performance information on the fire and rescue service, which will then be made available for the public so they can compare individual services. The information to be published will cover for example information on value for money and diversity. The Home Office is currently developing proposals on how to achieve this and conducted a survey over the summer to seek views.

### **Workforce**

6. With around 80 per cent of fire service budgets spent on personnel, but the risks and demands on the service changing considerably over the last decade, the Home Secretary identified reforms to the workforce as a key area of work for the future.
7. Although the government is not yet ready to publish the Thomas review, it intends to do so as soon as possible. The Home Secretary said that FRAs should not wait for publication to reform the workforce. She wants to see:

- 7.1. greater flexibility in the deployment and use of resources with the new shift patterns some FRAs have already introduced being more widely adopted, and with increased use of on-call firefighters in urban as well as rural areas;
  - 7.2. the recruitment of dedicated fire prevention staff to conduct prevention work in communities and businesses and free up firefighters for specialist tasks;
  - 7.3. an end to the rehiring of Chief Fire Officers immediately upon their retirement;
  - 7.4. an end to ‘the culture of bullying and harassment we have seen in some fire and rescue authorities’;
  - 7.5. a change to the overwhelmingly white male demographic of the front-line service ('96% white and 95% male'). The Home Office believes that the age profile of the service means there will be an opportunity to recruit a more representative workforce in the next few years, and although it does not intend to set targets it will be challenging the sector’s performance in this area.
8. The Home Secretary suggested that some might regard the National Joint Council (NJC) as a block to carrying out these reforms. She pointed out that the NJC is a local government body, not a government one, and challenged FRAs to deliver the reforms through it or withdraw from it.

### **Efficiency and collaboration**

9. After significant reductions in funding, and a 1.6 per cent reduction in spending power over the current Spending Review period, the Home Secretary argued that further savings could be made, principally through collaboration schemes with the other emergency services, and she highlighted a number of projects that had already transformed service delivery.
10. The Home Office also wants Fire and Rescue Services to work together better, for example on research and development and procurement and to end small differences between services.

### **New Home Office ministerial team**

11. The appointment of a new ministerial team at the Home Office after the vote to leave the European Union has not led to any change in the substance of the fire reform agenda. Ministers have continued to progress the main elements set out in the former Home Secretary’s speech on 24 May. However with a new ministerial team there may be a different emphasis on how the Home Office seeks to deliver this agenda so Dan Greaves, the Director of Fire and Resilience has been invited to attend Fire Commission to set out the new Minister’s priorities and how he envisages working with the sector on the fire reform agenda.

### **LGA work around the fire reform agenda**

12. At its meeting in July Fire Services Management Committee considered the fire reform agenda. It agreed a number of strands of work around the fire reform agenda including continuing work on changes to fire governance, engaging with and influencing the

development of the fire inspection regime, and making the fire service more reflective of the communities it serves.

13. FSMC also agreed to meet with the Director of Fire and Resilience following an invitation to discuss in more detail a number of areas of the fire reform agenda. Cllrs Acton, Chard, Edwards, Hilton, Howson, and Knox, met with the Director and Peter Holland, the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, on 31 August. The agenda was focussed on:
  - 13.1. Diversity;
  - 13.2. Inspection and peer review;
  - 13.3. The independent assessment of a Police and Crime Commissioner's (PCC's) business case for taking over the running of the fire and rescue service; and
  - 13.4. On-call firefighters.
14. The Director of Fire and Resilience started the meeting with an overview of progress on the fire reform agenda since the Home Secretary's fire reform speech. This included publication of the different prices paid to buy standard items of equipment by different Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs), and the survey asking the public what information they would like to be made available on the performance of fire services. Members then outlined the work the LGA has in train around improving the diversity of the workforce, and there was a discussion of the work FRAs had already taken and how the Home Office could assist with this agenda going forward.
15. The meeting then discussed the Home Office's plans for inspection of the fire service. Members explained the capacity issues within the fire service to support inspection and it was agreed that the inspection process needed to be proportionate and risk based, and that the LGA's Peer Challenge process could co-exist alongside inspection.
16. There was then a discussion of how the requirement in the Policing and Crime Bill for a PCC's proposal to take on fire governance to be independently assessed where it was not supported locally would work. Members suggested that the process would be genuinely independent if the assessment was carried out by a panel. It was agreed a letter would be submitted to the Fire Minister setting out LGA views on how the process could be made robust and fair, which has now been done. The meeting then concluded by discussing work on on-call firefighters and agreed there would be benefit in the LGA and Home Office working more closely together on this in the future.
17. The priorities FSCM discussed last month, which are set out in more detail elsewhere on the agenda, take into account the discussions at this meeting and other elements of the fire reform agenda.

### **Next steps**

18. Fire Commission members are asked to share and discuss issues relevant to the government's fire reform agenda with the Home Office's Director of Fire and Resilience.

### **Financial Implications**

19. There are no financial implications arising from this report.