

The Fire and Rescue Service: Making our Nation Safer and More Prosperous

Foreword

Investing in our nation's future: The first 100 days of the next government was launched last year by the Local Government Association (LGA). It set out the challenges any new government will face in May 2015 and provided a local government offer on how to help them deal with the most pressing issues.

Through their work to build safe and resilient communities, Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) make a major contribution to the country's shared prosperity, protecting people and places from harm and creating the conditions for economic prosperity. Although many of the proposals in the 100 days publication would be beneficial to Fire and Rescue Authorities as part of the wider local government family, this document presents specific asks and offers directly relevant to the fire and rescue sector.

This document sets out from an LGA and Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) perspective what the service offers to a new government. The main focus of the new policy ideas is to broaden and deepen prevention work – from reducing road traffic collisions, to legislation for the installation of sprinklers, to preventing unnecessary deaths and injuries, which in turn mean less demand and reduced costs for public services. But there are also proposals to cement the Fire Service as a key partner within other blue light services and to ensure it receives the recognition it deserves, whether it be from ensuring the service has the legislation it needs, to a share in the proceeds of crime, to helping to look after our ageing population.

The LGA and CFOA have worked together to develop this set of costed proposals which will make a real impact on the ability of fire and rescue services to prevent, protect and respond more effectively and play an important part in delivering public service efficiency and improvement. This set of proposals will enable the fire and rescue service to continue their good work, take fire prevention to the next level, and provide additional tools in our armoury to keep communities safe, while also saving over £500 million.

Signed:

Cllr Jeremy Hilton, Chairman LGA Fire Services Management Committee
Peter Dartford, President, Chief Fire Officers Association

Introduction

Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) play a key role in building safe and resilient communities, protecting people and places from harm and creating the conditions for economic prosperity. Fire deaths are at an all-time low and the number of fires continues to fall, thanks to prevention and safety work by services across the country and regulation from central Government where it is needed. Other public services see the value of prevention in order to reduce demand on services, but rarely do we see a service which can demonstrate the benefits of prevention in such a visible and cost effective way. But there is more that can be done.

As part of the wider local government family, many of the considerations and issues for debate about wider local government are relevant to the fire and rescue service. Fire and Rescue Authorities are grappling with a number of issues – from funding cuts, to industrial action, to ageing vehicles. Yet there are important differences too, most notably their resilience responsibilities as defined in the National Framework¹ and the legal context which means they have to provide minimum levels of community resilience and safety. This means that alongside delivering a first class local response, FRAs need to be prepared to respond to wider incidents which demand a multi-service response, across geographical boundaries. A wider debate is needed to avoid further cuts compromising the service's capacity and capability.

The 46 Fire and Rescue Authorities in England and Wales spend approximately £2.1 billion² protecting the communities that they serve, with more than 80 per cent of staffing costs being spent on frontline operational firefighters. In his review, Sir Ken Knight³ concluded that the service 'spends to budget'. The LGA has demonstrated⁴ that there is a clear link between numbers of incidents and costs which means that if incidents continue to reduce, and demands on emergency response reduce, there will be some scope for savings.

However, the service is uniquely placed to actively contribute to some of society's most difficult issues, particularly around health and wellbeing. The workforce is now multi-disciplinary with a wide range of skills and expertise which communities can rely on. The service now provides education work with young people; works with older people in their homes to keep them safe; acts as a role model for young people on the edge of crime; delivers first aid support; works with community safety partners to prevent and tackle crime; and helps to build business and community resilience. As it transforms itself, there is no doubt that the fire and rescue service has a central role in public services.

As local government funding declines further, the service has stepped up to the challenge of working across the blue light services, through sharing buildings and control facilities, co-responding with police and ambulance services and procurement arrangements. There is still more to do and the Transformation Fund projects will accelerate this work. However, central Government is lagging behind – Whitehall needs to catch up and break down their silos to better reflect local activity, join-up policy nationally and ensure we can involve all partners in this work.

Fire and rescue services are democratically accountable and a vital part of local government. This is a service anchored in local communities, with services and

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5904/nationalframework.pdf

² £2.123 billion budgeted 2014/15 spend on fire and rescue services in England

³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/365581/RA_Budget_2014-15_Statistical_Release.pdf

⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/200092/FINAL_Facing_the_Future__3_.md.pdf

⁴ tbc

resources designed around local risks and responses, directly engaging with residents when difficult decisions have to be taken. Some areas are now developing different structural and governance arrangements and we support this incremental, locally-led approach.

The recommendations from the Thomas Review of terms of conditions⁵ of firefighters, although resource neutral, will provide further analysis and ideas for reform of the workforce. The professional and political leaders of the service, those represented by the LGA and CFA, will have a responsibility to take these recommendations forward. We are committed to providing the best possible service to our communities and we want to ensure that the terms and conditions enable and positively support new ways of working.

Our Mission: Prevent, Protect and Respond

Fire and Rescue Authorities continue to work hard to reduce the number of fires and road traffic collisions. There has been a 17 per cent reduction in fires or false alarms in Britain since 2011-12 and FRAs attended a total of 192,600 fires in 2012-13, 29 per cent fewer than in the previous year. Importantly, fire-related deaths in Britain are also reducing; in 2012-13 there were 47 fewer deaths than in the previous year and lower than in any year in the last fifty years⁶.

Beyond the devastating effect fire deaths can have to families and communities, fire deaths are estimated to cost £1.65 million each⁷. In 2004, the total economic cost of fire in the UK was estimated at £7.03 billion, equivalent to almost one per cent of the gross value added of the economy⁸. Of that cost, £2.5 billion can be attributed to the consequential costs of fire such as property damage, lost business and the loss to the economy from injuries and deaths. By 2008, this estimated cost had increased to £8.3 billion⁹.

The service needs to continue to focus on prevention. There is a moral and economic case for doing so. Through a wide range of fire safety activity, Fire and Rescue Authorities are determined to hold on to and increase these gains.

Prevention work is not just related to fire safety. Because of a trusted reputation officers provide bespoke fire advice and support through home safety fire checks in over 700,000 homes, and the service already uses visits to deliver other public safety messages and provide help or support, particularly to the elderly population. The service has a unique brand, with high levels of public satisfaction¹⁰, and confidence and this allows the service to target activity on vulnerable people, providing advice and support across the breadth of public services to help keep them safe.

What does this mean for the fire and rescue service?

Successive governments have been keen to recognise and value the work of the fire and rescue service. But the role of a firefighter has changed considerably over the years and we need clarity and understanding about a broader social mission for the fire and rescue service.

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-opens-independent-review-of-firefighter-conditions>

⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/313590/Fire_statistics_Great_Britain_2012-13_final_version.pdf

⁷ tbc

⁸ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/fireandresiliencestatisticsandre/firestatistics/economiccost/>

⁹ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919132719/http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/1838338.pdf>

¹⁰ tbc

The new Secretary of State for Local Government's public statement, May 2015

This statement would provide the government with an immediate opportunity to outline expectations of the fire and rescue service and what the government will do to ensure that these expectations are met.

The statement will also provide an opportunity for the Secretary of State to pay tribute to the professionalism and commitment of firefighters in providing a first class service for our communities; and to highlight the high esteem in which the profession is held by the public. The Secretary of State would also recognise that the re-design and delivery of public services in a context of reduced resources, changing customer demands and expectations, and evolving technology must continue apace in all public sector organisations, including smaller ones like the fire and rescue service. The statement would include an acknowledgement that the world of firefighting has changed significantly over the past 30 years and will continue to do so; fire prevention is vital for the safety of our communities, rescues from floods and road traffic accidents are more prevalent than from fires and firefighters are engaged in collaborative working with other public service colleagues in activities that stretch well beyond firefighting. We would expect the Secretary of State to recognise this as all positive but challenge the service to go even further.

In making a comment about the workforce, a broad statement about fire and rescue services needing a diverse workforce with the skills and ambition to work flexibly, efficiently and creatively to keep local communities safe might be expected; as well as clarification about recruiting as widely as possible to reflect local communities, providing rewarding careers and ensuring a positive environment for industrial relations.

Finally, a Ministerial statement could finish with a call to action from all partners as a shared responsibility between fire and rescue authorities, the workforce, the trade unions and local communities. The statement would therefore commit the government to supporting effective and productive relationships between all these partners.

The first Queen's speech

To ensure that Fire and Rescue Authorities can continue to meet their responsibilities and the expectations of the communities that they serve, the new government must announce a new **Public Service Bill** that will:

- Make four million households in private rented properties safer by making it mandatory to install and maintain smoke alarms; and to ensure that electrical systems in these properties are maintained annually in line with gas certification requirements.
- Introduce a new Data Sharing Bill (rather than data protection) to streamline existing rules and require all public bodies, such as the NHS, to share data in order to protect vulnerable people.
- Lowering the drink-drive limit to bring it into line with those in Northern Ireland and Scotland, reducing fatalities and providing savings of as much as £285 million a year; and introducing a graduated licensing scheme for young drivers up to 19 years old. These combined measures would lead to a reduction of up to 9,434 casualties, with associated savings of £509 million.

- Make 500,000 sheltered housing properties safer by extending the Regulatory Reform Order to ensure there are regular audits and inspections of the entire premises, preventing hundreds of fires a year, and ensuring that these vulnerable residents have the same protection as care homes.

A new **Fiscal Devolution Bill** will:

- Ensure that future local tax regimes give more flexibility (including the removal of de facto capping of council tax) for FRAs to determine with their communities the balance between service levels and local taxation.
- Allow Fire and Rescue Authorities to set locally appropriate fees, charges and subsidies, enabling them to support those who need it most and driving down the number of false call outs.
- Introduce new flexibilities around capital receipts so that Fire and Rescue Authorities can recycle this into prevention work.
- Establish an independent body for the distribution of funding to Fire and Rescue Authorities, acknowledging the commitment in the Autumn Statement to introduce indicative multi-year budgets to provide stability.

The new government's **first Budget** should:

- Recognise that further cuts to Fire and Rescue Authorities' resourcing needs to be based upon a clearly understood risk assessment.
- Make a commitment to provide £200 million to fund all national resilience assets (such as high volume pumps) when they come to end of their life in 2016/17.
- Inject £114 million a year into a much needed programme of capital investment to ensure equipment and appliances remain fit for purpose.
- Provide an incentive for businesses to install sprinklers by implementing a reduction in stamp duty in new or renovated properties that are fitted with sprinklers, reducing the £1.29 billion a year cost of these fires. Returning just 1.5 per cent of the £2.9 billion in stamp duty collected on commercial properties annually would meet the cost of installing sprinklers in the 8,000 commercial premises that caught fire in 2012-13¹¹.
- Give Fire and Rescue Authorities access to a share of the assets recovered from criminals who have been prosecuted for cannabis farms offences (as well as a range of other crimes including arson) under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.
- Extend the £1 million Fire Kills campaign around smoke alarms to include core messages around the three most frequent causes of fires: cooking, cigarettes and alcohol, to prevent fires happening in the first place.

Introducing these measures will ensure that English Fire and Rescue Authorities, working alongside other public sector organisations, could ensure their communities are safe and save over £500 million to the public purse.

¹¹https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/313590/Fire_statistics_Great_Britain_2012-13_final_version_.pdf