



FIRE INDUSTRY CONFEDERATION

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REVIEW OF THE SALIENT POINTS OF THE WHITE PAPER: OUR FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE (Published 30 June 2003)

National Perspective

The Government will provide a new national framework for the Service to bring together all the expectations and requirements which Central Government has on behalf of the nation generally but will not dictate matters which are best decided at local or regional level.

Since April 1997, Government and Local Authority spending on the Fire Services has increased by more than a quarter. Such resources, however, are not always allocated on the basis of need. At present, many more resources are devoted to protecting buildings in city centres where deaths are low compared to residential areas where deaths are much higher.

Response standards and the way in which resources are organised should vary in accordance with those different levels of risk.

Regional Perspective

The ODPM intends to establish, as soon as is practicable, Regional Fire and Rescue Authorities in those Regions that choose to have elected Regional Assemblies.

In those areas where elected Regional Assemblies are set up, the Government will establish new larger Fire and Rescue Authorities on a Regional basis. In the meantime, Fire Authorities will remain within Local Government and will be accountable for the Service to local elected authorities.

The ODPM will strengthen its powers to combine Fire Authorities on a compulsory basis if the voluntary regional management solution does not deliver.

The Government envisages that, eventually, where there are elected Regional Assemblies, Fire and Rescue Authorities will be Regional bodies constituted along similar lines to the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) which has a majority of members from the Greater London Assembly.

The middle of 2006 is the earliest date for such elected Assemblies to be established even in those areas such as the North East which could be holding a referendum in the Autumn of 2004.

Local Fire Authorities will be required to establish, before 1 April 2004, robust regional management arrangements with Members from existing Fire Authorities.

The ODPM will discuss with existing Local Authorities, the LGA and other stakeholders the system of regional management to ensure that it meets national objectives.

Subject to future decisions by Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on the organisation of their Services and, following completion of Regionalisation in England, the structure of Regional Authorities in the UK:

- ❑ 9 Regional Fire Authorities or Regional Management Boards in England
- ❑ 8 Fire Authorities in Scotland
- ❑ 3 Fire Authorities in Wales
- ❑ 1 Fire Authority in Northern Ireland
- ❑ 21 in total (of which twelve will be in England and Wales) compared to 59 in the UK as a whole at present.

In some of the larger Regions e.g. South East, it may be appropriate to introduce 2/3 Sub-Regional combinations of Fire Authorities.

Devolution to Wales

The responsibility for fire services has already been devolved to Scotland and Northern Ireland. Wales will now follow.

Institutional Reform

A radical overhaul of current institutions is now well overdue. The emphasis will be on developing a new simpler institutional framework to ensure strategic direction from Ministers on the basis of independent expert advice.

The Central Fire Brigade Advisory Council set up under the Fire Services Act, 1947 to provide advice to the Secretary of State, which has had no representation from the Fire Protection Industry, is to be scrapped.

The Government will be inviting a smaller number of people with fire and rescue experience, as well as outsiders with relevant expertise, to meet them occasionally in order to bring a wider perspective to modernising the Service.

In addition, a Practitioner's Forum, to provide input into policy development is to be established.

The Forum will assist in co-ordinating Fire and Rescue Authorities implementation of the national framework and it will provide a Forum for discussion on best practice. The lead will be taken by the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association who will provide

both the Chairman and Secretary. The Fire Service College and the Fire Services Inspectorate will provide professional and technical input.

Whilst the CFBAC has been scrapped, the White Paper highlights that the work of the Fire Safety Advisory Board which, hitherto, had reported to the CFBAC has proceeded well and that building on this success a new Stakeholder Advisory Group “The Business and Community Safety Forum” is to be established. Specifically, the White Paper states that the ODPM will be discussing with the independent Chairman of the FSAB, namely, Pamela Castle on how to develop its role and responsibilities so as to enable stakeholders to engage in and contribute fully to the modernisation of the Fire and Rescue Service.

The FSAB Chairman intends to consult with key stakeholders including FIC on this matter.

The ODPM is to establish a Service Improvement Team to principally act as a catalyst to change and promoting reform.

The Audit Commission will take over the role of quality assurance and inspection at regional and local levels.

The Fire Service College is to be reformed so as to be in the forefront to introducing new management and personnel systems and in the promotion of the delivery of services. It will focus on raising professional standards by developing the future leaders of the Fire and Rescue Service and will work with partners to develop itself as a centre of expertise on civil contingency planning.

The work of the Fire Service Inspectorate is to be reformed and redirected so that it is a smaller and more efficient body.

Charging for False Alarms

There is no mention of brigades being given the power to charge for false alarms emanating from AFD systems.

Brendan Gately
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