

## **CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED CREATION OF A NEW COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY FOR HAMPSHIRE, ISLE OF WIGHT, PORTSMOUTH AND SOUTHAMPTON – DRAFT RESPONSE**

1. The County Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the proposal to create a new Combined Fire Authority for Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton. Hampshire County Council's response represents the views of the County Council as whole; the proposal was discussed at a meeting of the Full Council on 20 September 2018.
2. The County Council has carefully considered the evidence provided by the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority and the Isle of Wight Council and believes that the proposal to create a new Combined Fire Authority for Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton should be submitted to Government.
3. In reaching its conclusion, the County Council is mindful of and fully respects the perspective of the Isle of Wight Council and that local authority's duty to reach its own conclusion based upon its own analysis of the pros and cons of the proposal for the Island and its residents.
4. The County Council understands that there is increasing pressure on Fire and Rescue Authorities to ensure that Fire and Rescue Services are efficient, effective and maintain high standards to keep our communities safe. The County Council is of the view that a new Combined Fire Authority is the next logical step to relieve some of the pressure on the Fire and Rescue Authorities, while maintaining and improving services. This is, in part, due to the success over the past three years of the strategic partnership between Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority and the Isle of Wight Council which has delivered significant financial and operational benefits. The County Council is also of the view that the proposal would help reinforce the functional area of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and could encourage further harmonisation across the same geography.
5. One of the County Council's four strategic aims is that People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives; the impact on the safety, health and wellbeing of residents has therefore been a key consideration. The County Council believes that the creation of a new Combined Fire Authority would not have any negative effects on the safety of Hampshire residents and is more likely to increase their safety due to greater operational efficiency. The creation of a single Combined Fire Authority for the four local authority areas would also allow for the alignment of safety campaigns and greater consistency of safety messages to the public and could allow for enhanced cutting-edge delivery of services. It is also unlikely that Hampshire residents would experience any financial impacts such as changes to the level of council tax currently paid across the county. However, the County Council recognises that Government would ultimately determine the Council Tax harmonisation.
6. The County Council understands that the Isle of Wight Council, similarly to most councils across the country, is facing financial challenges. Moving to a single fire authority would ease financial pressure on the Isle of Wight Council and establishing a new Combined Fire Authority should secure a budget

capable of providing the resilience and capacity required across the area. However, the County Council is concerned that the cost of implementing a new Combined Fire Authority is not yet fully known and account would need to be taken of the Isle of Wight Council's property maintenance liability which would be transferred to a new Combined Fire Authority. The County Council will therefore seek to gain assurance from Government that the property maintenance liability would not disadvantage Hampshire and that the transition arrangements are fair.

7. The County Council favours the proposal over other considerations, such as the Police and Crime Commissioner taking on responsibility for the Fire Service. While the emergency services work together effectively at incidents, the County Council is not of the view that there is an operational reason for the Police and Fire services to merge. The roles and powers of the Police and the Fire services are distinct and the County Council believes it is vital to maintain the public's trust in the impartiality of the Fire Service. Therefore, the County Council welcomes the Police and Crime Commissioner's current participation in Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority meetings as an invited guest and believes that this invitation should continue under a new Combined Fire Authority.
8. A new Combined Fire Authority would provide simpler governance arrangements which the County Council believes could lead to clearer accountability. The County Council is resolute that that the reduction to a single point of governance should not dilute the representation or accountability that meets the needs of local communities. It is clear that creating a new Combined Fire Authority would build capacity, increase resilience and deliver further economies of scale. This could allow for enhanced cutting-edge delivery of services which would benefit residents and businesses across the whole of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.