



**Hampshire
& Isle of Wight**
FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

HIWFRA Full Authority

Purpose: Approval

Date: **14 JUNE 2022**

Title: **FIRE REFORM: WHITE PAPER**

Report of Chief Fire Officer

SUMMARY

1. On 18 May, the Government launched its Fire Reform White Paper: “Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service: Building Professionalism, Boosting Performance and Strengthening Governance”. The White Paper is attached at Appendix A.
2. The White Paper consults on a series of reform proposals based around three headings: People, Professionalism, and Governance. The consultation will run until 26 July.
3. The purpose of this paper is to bring the White Paper to the Fire Authority’s attention. A discussion on the White Paper to inform a response will be held at July’s Authority Policy Advisory Group (APAG) meeting. It is proposed that the Full Authority delegates to the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chairman, the ability to finalise and submit a response to the consultation on behalf of the Authority.

BACKGROUND

4. Authority Members will be aware of the Government’s longstanding intention to publish a Fire Reform White Paper. It was first publicly announced in March 2021 as part of the Government’s response to Part 1 of the Home Office’s Police and Crime Commissioner Review.

5. The White Paper consults on a series of reform proposals. These include:
 - carrying out an independent review of the National Joint Council (a UK wide body which determines firefighter pay and conditions)
 - seeking views on the changing role of a firefighter
 - asking about whether a College of Fire and Rescue could be created to improve professionalism, as well as consider things such as data, research and standards
 - creating a statutory oath

6. In relation to Governance, the Home Office is consulting on transferring responsibility from “committee structures” (which the consultation implies includes Combined Fire Authorities) to an executive leader such as a Combined Authority Mayor, a Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner or some other elected individual such as a council leader. This will be alongside providing Chief Fire Officers’ operational independence.

7. The Home Office will consider responses and respond to the consultation in the autumn, clarifying what the future of Fire Reform will be. A number of the proposals (e.g. governance reform) will require primary legislation. We haven’t been given any indication when this will be, but it won’t be before the next Parliamentary session beginning May 2023 – this is likely to be the last session before the general election expected in 2024. We can therefore reasonably expect little change in the next two years.

8. Alongside the White Paper’s launch, the Government also formally commenced the Fire Safety Act 2021 and laid corresponding regulations.

SUPPORTING OUR SAFETY PLAN AND PRIORITIES

9. The White Paper looks to build on previous Home Office fire reforms to strengthen the fire system. While it isn’t clear what proposals the Home Office will proceed with, they should improve - to varying extents - the organisations and individuals within the sector, better equipping them to support their communities. In turn, this will enable us to better meet the requirements of our Safety Plan.

10. We will need to reflect the final recommendations in our ongoing work and ensure we take account of them in our next Safety Plan.

CONSULTATION

11. The White Paper is out for general public consultation, and anyone can respond, whether in a public or private capacity. This report seeks the Authority’s agreement for the Chief Fire Officer to respond on behalf of the

Fire Authority, in consultation with the Chairman and following discussion at APAG.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

12. At this stage there are no financial/resource implications for the service. Once the Home Office has determined its future reform programme, we will then be able to consider what impact the service is likely to face.

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

13. An impact assessment has not been completed at this stage. One will be completed once the Government has determined what proposals to take forward.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

14. There are no legal implications at this stage. This will be considered further once the Government has determined what proposals to take forward.

RISK ANALYSIS

15. The Government is only consulting on a series of proposals, no decisions have yet been made. This will be considered further once the Government has determined what proposals to take forward.
16. The Fire Brigades Union has publicly opposed the White Paper. We will continue to monitor their position and the stance of their local members and engage with local officials through our formal and informal routes.

EVALUATION

17. Not applicable at this point.

CONCLUSION

18. The Fire Reform White Paper provides the Government's vision for the next stage of fire reform. It is provoking debate across the sector and is certain to generate different views. It will then be for the Government to consider these views before determining what to pursue. It's in our interests to respond to the consultation to shape the discussion.

RECOMMENDATION

19. That the White Paper is noted by the HIWFRA Full Authority and authority is delegated to the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chairman, to finalise and submit a response to the consultation on behalf of the Full Authority.

APPENDIX ATTACHED

20. Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service – Appendix A

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