

## Funding for the Organisational Development Centre and Fire Gateway Services 2008/09

### Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Alan Taylor, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201.

### 1 Purpose of Report

This report informs Members of a letter received from the Interim Director of the Fire and Resilience Directorate of Communities and Local Government (CLG) regarding funding for the Organisational Development Centre (ODC) and Fire Gateway in 2008/09. The report also advises Members of a response made by the Chief Fire Officer to the Interim Director requesting further details.

### 2 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- a) Note the contents of the report and the appended letters; and
- b) Note that the further information requested from CLG has not yet been received.

### 3 Background

Across the fire and rescue service (FRS) the pace and scope of change brought about by the modernisation agenda has been considerable and the demands now being made of the Service mean that some functions would benefit from being delivered nationally to facilitate greater consistency, help drive up standards by sharing best practice, deliver economies of scale and reduce duplication of effort and expenditure. In response to this need the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) worked with CLG to examine whether the FRS would benefit from having a central resource which could support the work of the FRS in driving forward the agendas for improvement, innovation and service delivery.

As a result of this work, in October 2007, CLG issued a consultation document seeking views on whether Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and other stakeholders wanted such a central resource, to be known as a Centre of Excellence (CoE). The consultation document set out options for the role, function, status and governance of a CoE and associated costs and possible funding arrangements. The document also pointed out the importance of consensus across FRAs and stressed that a CoE would only be established if it had the support, including financial support, of the FRS and other key stakeholders.

At a meeting on 24 January 2008, Members of this Committee agreed in principle to support the development of a CoE and to fund this development, but only if the cost apportionment was based upon population. As such, the Committee also tasked the Chief Fire Officer with responding to the consultation with an agreement to make a contribution towards the CoE interim arrangements for 2008/09 of £6,879.

On 6 May 2008, CLG issued Fire and Rescue Circular 21/2008 entitled 'A Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service – Summary of Responses'. Members may recall that although the majority of respondents supported, in principle, the establishment of a CoE, the support was, in most cases, qualified by underlying concerns including concerns about funding. As such, CLG determined that they would not be taking action to establish a CoE at that time but they did not rule out the possibility of establishing a new body for the fire and rescue service at some time in the future.

In view of the above, at a meeting on 22 May 2008, Members of this Committee agreed that the funding of £6,879 built into the Fire Authority's budgets for the next three years for the purpose of funding the proposed CoE should be transferred to Contingencies.

#### **4 Further Requests for Funding**

On 5 August 2008 a letter was received from the Interim Director of the Fire and Resilience Director of CLG seeking clarification as to whether the Fire Authority were intending to contribute to the funding of the central services currently being provided by the Organisational Development Centre and Fire Gateway. The letter (a copy of which is attached at Appendix A) appears to be requesting full payment of £17,200 (i.e. ignoring the Fire Authority's previous agreement to pay a proportional amount of £6,879) and implies that if full payment is not made, then the services which we receive from ODC will be cut.

The letter also required a response by 31 August 2008 and the Chief Fire Officer has responded on your behalf requesting further information. A copy of the letter is attached at Appendix B and Members are asked to note that, as yet, no response has been received.

## **5 Financial Implications**

The financial implications are as outlined in the main body of the report.

## **6 Legal Comment**

Legal advice will be provided as required to ensure that no financial commitments are made beyond those intended. Otherwise, there are no legal comments arising from this report.

## **7 Equality Impact Assessment**

Officers have considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have decided that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising from this report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

## **8 Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

Letter from Interim Director of Fire and Resilience dated 1 August 2008

### **Appendix B**

Letter to Interim Director of Fire and Resilience dated 12 August 2008

## **9 Background Papers**

### **Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority**

13 February 2008, Item 5 – Minutes of Strategy and Resources Committee held on 24 January 2008.

### **Strategy and Resources Committee**

24 January 2008, Report 9c – A Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service in England – Consultation

22 May 2008, Report 7 – A Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service in England – Consultation Responses

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity	*	Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	*
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	*
Efficiency Savings	*	Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial	*	Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*

1<sup>st</sup> August 2008

Chief Fire Officer  
Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service  
St Michael's Street  
Shrewsbury  
Shropshire  
SY1 2HJ

- 5 AUG 2008

*Dear Chief Fire Officer*

**Funding Organisational Development Centre and Fire Gateway Services for  
2008/9**

I understand that Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is yet to make the £17,200 contribution recommended by the Pathway Group to fund the provision of central services by the Organisational Development Centre (ODC) and Fire Gateway in 2008/09. I am writing to advise you that as from 3 September the ODC will only be in a position to provide a reduced service to those not making the requested contribution. We understand that you undertook to pay £6,879 as a proportion although this has not yet been received. However, Please confirm if you will be settling the invoice in full. Therefore I would be grateful if you could let me know by 31 August whether your Authority is intending to make the requested contribution.

You may recall that Pete Betts wrote to Chief Fire Officers on 24 October explaining that a Pathway Group had been set up. The four members of the Group represented LGA, CFOA, CFRA and CLG. Its prime purpose was to examine and scrutinise the proposed costs of providing the central functions supplied by the ODC and Fire Gateway and determine the FRS's priorities for funding in 2008/09. The Pathway process was seen as a one year only mechanism. The Pathway Scrutiny Group, representing the same organisations, has the remit of monitoring the income from the Pathway process and scrutinising its expenditure in 2008/09.

This Group has met to consider the performance of the ODC and Fire Gateway against planned activity and budget. Part of this review included an analysis of funding receipts from the Service to date. As the majority of FRAs have paid the contribution, the Group has asked me to write to you, as a current non-subscriber, to bring you up to date with progress and to invite your contribution to the provision of these joint services.

Department for Communities and Local Government  
Fire and Resilience Directorate  
Zone 1/D1 Ashdown House  
123 Victoria Street  
London SW1E 6DE

Sandy Bishop  
Acting Director  
Tel: 020 7944 5530  
Email: sandy.bishop@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Pete Betts' letter of 21 December 2007 set out the Pathway Group's recommendation that each FRA be asked to make a voluntary contribution of £17,200 in 2008/09. This provides £11,040 for the products and services of the ODC and £6,160 for the maintenance of the Fire Gateway. If there is a shortfall in contributions, the ODC will need to cut back on the services it provides in order to stay in budget and provide the full list of services to those FRAs that have contributed.

At Appendix 1 we list those services available from the ODC exclusively for the benefit of subscribers. In respect of Fire Gateway, you will appreciate that the main beneficiaries in terms of volume of users and impact on safety are the public. Further details of the achievements to date and the benefits of Fire Gateway are included at Appendix 2.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandy Bishop".

**Sandy Bishop**  
**Interim Director**  
**Fire and Resilience Directorate**

**ODC Services Available Through Subscription**

- Subsidised Executive Leadership Programme fees
- Free places on the Coaching Skills Programme
- Access to the Online/Interactive version of the Supervisory workbooks.
- Subsidised places at Leadership Champions Network events, ADC and NFS forums.
- Subsidised places for the Learning and Development Managers forum.
- Consultancy visits from ODC staff to keep you up to date with development of leadership products and provide OD support.
- Tailored advice and support for ADCs and NFS processes
- Free feedback sessions for the FRS Aspire 360° diagnostic.
- Access to the Ashridge Virtual Learning Centre - this service alone would cost an individual FRS a minimum of £19,500 per year for 999 users.



### Fire Gateway – Achievements and Benefits

In total, over 10,000 online requests for services have now been submitted to Fire and Rescue Services, via Fire Gateway, comprising:

- 7,180 requests for home safety visits (now averaging over 700 per month across the country)
- 3,057 workplace fire safety (RRO) self-assessments submitted
- 500 other requests (*Community Visits; Explosive Licences; Petroleum licences; Fire-setter visits and school visits*)

In addition, over 25,000 forms have been printed by users who have completed online questionnaires on the Fire Gateway, comprising:

- firefighter self-selection questionnaire reports
- workplace fire safety (RRO) self-assessments
- Home Risk Assessment and Escape Plans

The overall use of the transactional functions on the Fire Gateway has doubled since the end of 2007, and over the same time period, the number of requests for home safety visits has actually tripled.

All Fire and Rescue Services are receiving online referrals via the Fire Gateway. This is despite the fact that some FRS websites do not contain clear links to these areas of functionality on the Fire Gateway.

However, national government sites (such as DirectGov, FireKills, Business Link) do provide links to the Fire Gateway functions, as the site is regarded as the best single direct online route for the public to contact their local FRS.

In addition to the benefits for public safety, there are also significant benefits that can increasingly be achieved for Fire and Rescue Services themselves.

The secure connection of all English fire services to the Fire Gateway means that the intranet capability of the site, to which the public do not have access, is being developed to introduce online communities of practice, for Fire and Rescue Service practitioners across a number of disciplines.

It also provides the only secure means for disseminating confidential materials to the Fire and Rescue Services and key partners, such as New Dimension doctrine etc.

This ability to securely exchange data was a significant feature praised by the judges when the Fire Gateway won the national e-government award earlier this year.

As Fire and Rescue Services develop their partnerships with other local service providers such as social services, health care services, social housing agencies, the Fire Gateway offers a no-cost secure and reliable means of enabling referrals (e.g. home fire safety assessment, fire setters advice requests, free home fire safety checks) from those services where they encounter people living in vulnerable circumstances who are at greater risk of the effects of fire.



Sandy Bishop  
Acting Director  
Fire and Resilience Directorate  
Communities and Local Government  
Zone 1/D1 Ashdown House  
123 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1E 6DE

12 August 2008

Alan Taylor

alan.taylor@shropshirefire.gov.uk

01743 260225

GAT/LI

CFO/let67li

Dear Sandy

### **Funding Organisational Development Centre and Fire Gateway Services for 2008/09**

Thank you for your letter dated 1 August 2008 concerning the above. Perhaps I can firstly describe the current position from the viewpoint of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority (SWFA) which is as follows:

- In responding to consultation concerning the development of a Centre of Excellence (CoE) for England, SWFA supported the development in principle but only if funding of the CoE was to be based upon the option of cost apportionment by population as described within the consultation document;
- In a letter to Peter Betts dated 29 January 2008, SWFA also confirmed that they remained committed to supporting the proposals of the so called 'Pathway Group' albeit once again providing that funding was on a population based approach. On such a basis the Fire Authority agreed to contribute £6,879 (as opposed to the £17,200 requested) for 2008/09;
- During May 2008, SWFA took account of Fire and Rescue Service Circular 21/2008 which provided feedback on the outcomes of the CoE consultation. The feedback made clear that CLG would not be taking any action to establish a CoE at that time and that "the functions identified for early inclusion in a CoE in the consultation document will, for the time being, remain being delivered by their current delivery bodies i.e. Communities and Local Government or the Fire Service College (FSC)";
- This position appears to have been confirmed within the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11 (paragraph 4.34) published in May 2008; and

- On the basis that these services were being provided as described in both the Circular and the National Framework, and that no further information appeared to have been forthcoming regarding the offer made by SWFA to the Pathway Group, the Fire Authority made a decision that the funding made available through its budget setting process should be returned to its own contingencies budget.

In view of the above, I trust that you will forgive me for being a little confused by the content of your letter. I sincerely hope that I have not overlooked some important correspondence on this subject but the only contact I appear to have received is an invoice sent direct to my Training and Development Department by the FSC some months ago. As it was my belief that the work of the 'Pathway Group' was no longer progressing I assumed that the invoice had been raised in error and spoke to staff at the FSC personally to clarify that it would not be paid.

It is now my intention to place your letter before Members of the Fire Authority as soon as possible. It is my belief that their position is unlikely to have changed, and that they will continue to recognise the benefits of a CoE in facilitating greater consistency, driving up standards, delivering economies of scale and reducing duplication of effort and expenditure. It is likely, however, that they will also continue to hold the view that the expectation of an equal funding contribution from all FRAs is clearly unfair upon smaller authorities such as our own. This view is indeed likely to have been strengthened by the fact that CLG appear to have adopted the same rationale that 'ability to pay' is an important factor when recently making proposals concerning the shared costs of the FiReControl project.

To facilitate my discussions with Members of SWFA I would be very grateful if you could provide me with further details of the contributions made to date by other FRAs and, if possible, of the services likely to be 'cut back' by the Organisational Development Centre should there continue to be a shortfall in contributions.

I look forward to hearing from you shortly but if in the meantime I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

G A Taylor  
Chief Fire Officer