

## A Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service in England – Consultation Responses

### 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 the outcomes of a consultation exercise undertaken by Government concerning the development of a Centre of Excellence (CoE) for the Fire and Rescue Service in England.

### 2 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

1. Note the outcome of the Communities and Local Government (CLG) consultation proposals for the development of a CoE; and
2. Agree to transfer the £6,879 previously budgeted for funding the development of a CoE to Contingencies, pending further deliberations by CLG and their partners.

### 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 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. 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 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. A copy of the letter subsequently forwarded to the Director of Fire and Resilience at CLG regarding funding is attached as Appendix A to this report.

#### **4 Consultation – Summary of Responses**

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 Response' a copy of which is attached at Appendix B. Members will note 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 have determined that they will not be taking action to establish a CoE at the current time but they do not rule out the possibility of establishing a new body for the fire and rescue service at some time in the future.

#### **5 Financial Implications**

Having agreed to provide funding in support of the development of a CoE, Members have allocated funding of £6,879 in their budgets for the next three years for that purpose. In view of the possibility that a new body may still be established and thus require funding, it is recommended that funding allocated for the current year is transferred to Contingencies. Funding for future years can then be addressed through normal budget setting arrangements.

#### **6 Legal Comment**

There no direct legal implications 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 to Director of Fire and Resilience dated 29 January 2008

**Appendix B** Fire and Rescue Service Circular 21/2008

## 9 Background Papers

### Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority

13 February 2008, Agenda 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

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	*

**Appendix A** to report on  
A Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service  
in England – Consultation Responses  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority  
Strategy and Resources Committee  
22 May 2008

Mr P Betts  
Director of Fire and Resilience  
Department for Communities and Local  
Government  
Zone 9/G9  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London  
SW1E 5DU

29 January 2008

Alan Taylor

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01743 260225

GAT/LI            let42li

Dear Peter

On 8 November 2007 I wrote to you confirming that Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority (SWFA) were prepared to contribute financially in 2008/09 towards the joint support for certain key projects underpinning the modernisation of the FRS. At that time you estimated that the costs were likely to average £25,000 per FRA, and SWFA therefore confirmed that they were prepared to contribute £10,221 based upon population and calculated in accordance with Table 2 of Annex F of the Centre of Excellence consultation document.

In your letter dated 21 December 2007 you confirmed that the Pathway Group had reduced the estimated costs and had concluded that the average costs for FRAs in 2008/09 would be £17,200. You also pointed out that although there had been some correspondence regarding a single level of payment being inappropriate, the Pathway Group did not feel able to make recommendations about different levels of payment.

At a meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee of SWFA held on Thursday 24 January 2008, Members of the Committee agreed that SWFA remained committed to supporting the proposals of the Pathway Group and therefore (once again on a population based approach) were prepared to contribute a sum of £6,879. As detailed in your letter, we look forward to receiving an invoice for this amount from the Fire Service College in April this year.

If you require any further information or advice please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

G A Taylor  
Chief Fire Officer

CC Stuart West, Chair of Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority  
Andrew Eade, Chair of Strategy and Resources Committee, Shropshire and  
Wrekin Fire Authority  
Keith Dixon, Treasurer, Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority  
Joanne Coadey, Principal Accountant, Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority

Circular number	<b>21/2008</b>	Date issued	<b>6 May 2008</b>
This circular is	<b>For information</b>	No response required	
This circular is	<b>Relevant to the National Framework</b>		
Status	<b>This Circular informs you of the publication of the summary of responses to the consultation paper 'A Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service'.</b>		

# A Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service – Summary of Responses

**Issued by:**  
**Brian Nash**  
 Fire and Rescue Service Development Division

<b>Addressed to:</b>	<b>Please forward to:</b>
<b>The Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority</b> <b>The Chief Executive of the County Council</b> <b>The Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority</b> <b>The Clerk to the Combined Fire and Rescue Authority</b> <b>The Commissioner of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority</b> <b>The Chief Fire Officer</b>	

**Summary**

This Circular informs recipients of the publication on 6 May 2008 of the summary of responses to the consultation document 'A Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service'. The summary of responses document can be accessed from the Communities and Local Government website.

<b>For further information, contact:</b>	
<b>Richard Davis or Brian Nash</b> <b>1/B3 Ashdown House</b> <b>123 Victoria Street</b> <b>London SW1E 6DE</b>	Direct line <b>020 7944 5307 or 5620</b> Fax <b>020 7944 5599</b> E-mail <a href="mailto:richard.davis@communities.gsi.gov.uk">richard.davis@communities.gsi.gov.uk</a> <a href="mailto:brian.nash@communities.gsi.gov.uk">brian.nash@communities.gsi.gov.uk</a>
<b>Website</b> <a href="http://www.communities.gov.uk">www.communities.gov.uk</a>	

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 On 26 October 2007, the Government issued a consultation paper on proposals for establishing a Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service (CoE). The consultation ended on 31 January 2008. This Circular informs you that the Summary of Responses to the consultation document is published today (6 May 2008).
- 1.2 The consultation paper set out options for the role, functions, status and governance of a CoE and associated costs and possible funding arrangements. The consultation paper made clear that a CoE would only be established if it had the support, including financial support, of Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and other key stakeholders.
- 1.3 A total of 76 responses were received from a range of public and private sector bodies and organisations. 39 FRAs in England responded to the consultation.
- 1.4 The majority of respondents supported, in principle, the establishment of a CoE but this support was, in most cases, qualified by underlying concerns. FRAs in particular were unwilling to commit themselves to the formal establishment of a CoE until they were satisfied that their concerns, including funding arrangements and the CoE's remit, were resolved.
- 1.5 As the consultation outcome is not conclusive with regards to FRA commitment and support, Communities and Local Government will not be taking action to establish a CoE at the current time. But we do not rule out the possibility of establishing a new body for the FRS in the future. How functions are delivered in the longer term will depend on how circumstances evolve.
- 1.6 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). However, we will continue to build on the work undertaken on developing proposals for a CoE and explore how best to take forward issues identified in the consultation responses. In particular, we will be looking at how we can improve our arrangements for securing the engagement and influence of stakeholders in the services Communities and Local Government, the FSC and Firebuy deliver to support FRA operations.
- 1.7 Functions identified for possible later inclusion in a CoE – resilience and procurement - will also remain being delivered as at present. But we are looking at the issue of future ownership of resilience assets and working to identify how operational support functions should be delivered once FireControl and Firelink reach steady state. Proposals for New Dimension are already well developed.

- 1.8 Central to the successful delivery of all the functions identified above will be the relationship between Communities and Local Government, FRAs and other stakeholders. Alternative options for improving stakeholder engagement and streamlining the current ad hoc project board and steering group arrangements are now being urgently considered. These options will be progressed in discussion with the Local Government Association and the Chief Fire Officers' Association.
- 1.9 A copy of the Summary of Responses document can be downloaded free of charge from <http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/publications/consultations>.

**Brian Nash**

**Fire and Rescue Service Development Division**