

Horizon Scanning: Mergers / Amalgamation of Emergency Services

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Paul Raymond, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Steve Worrall, Assistant Chief Fire Officer on 01743 260204.

1 Purpose of Report

This report acts as an 'horizon scanning' document to raise awareness of the current debate concerning mergers/amalgamation of the nation's emergency services.

2 Recommendation

The Fire Authority is asked to note the contents of this report.

3 Background

In a recent edition of the Sunday Times (16 June 2013) it was reported that the Home Secretary is pursuing the idea of merging fire, police and ambulance services under Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs).

The Times' article has stimulated increasing debate concerning this idea, not only within the press and media but also within the emergency services sector itself. Many PCCs have also been quick to voice their opinions, some of which openly support the proposed mergers and abolition of fire authorities.

Whilst the notion of either 'fire-fire-fire' or 'police-fire-ambulance' mergers has been topical for many years, there appears to be a growing interest in combining the emergency services under PCCs. The report - ***Doing it justice: Integrating criminal justice and emergency services through Police and Crime Commissioners***¹, published in October 2012 by Reform (a non-party think tank), argues the case strongly for increasing the powers and remit of PCCs.

¹ <http://www.reform.co.uk/resources/0000/0498/DoingItJustice.pdf>

The potential to merge services and for PCCs to replace fire authorities is also advocated within Sir Ken Knight's recent review: ***Facing the Future: Findings from the review of efficiencies and operations in fire and rescue authorities in England.***²

Timed to coincide with this, and also cited by the Chancellor during his recent spending review (26 June 2013), as the All-Party Parliamentary Group report: ***Improving Efficiency, Interoperability and Resilience of our Blue Light Services***³. The report sets out seven comprehensive recommendations as to how efficiency and interoperability might be improved in the emergency services. In summary they are:

1. Ministerial responsibility for the Blue Light Services brought into one single government department, preferably a new department of Homeland Security
2. Creation of a single Fire and single Ambulance Authority for England and Wales, with hubs of responsibility, based on regional boundaries
3. Establishment of a Chief of the Emergency Services, who sits above the Police, Fire and Ambulance authorities
4. Establishment of a joint National Operations and Coordination Centre, which has the ability to monitor locations, move blue light assets around the country and tie into Local Resilience Forums
5. Merger of training for the blue light services through the creation of a National College of Emergency Service Excellence
6. A single Parliamentary Select Committee to scrutinise the work of the Blue Light Services
7. Local Resilience Forums, given a legal status, with the power to direct members and funding taken from savings made through the merger of Fire and Ambulance Services

Francis Maude MP (the incumbent Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General) provides the foreword to the report, stating:

'In Britain we need to examine constantly how we can do things better. Money is very tight, and technology is opening doors that have long been closed. So it makes sense for us to be open-minded to change. This paper is a thorough and imaginative study, exploring some ways to innovate and develop. I commend the authors for breaking ground that can no longer be treated as untouchable.'

2

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/200092/FINAL_Facing_the_Future_3_md.pdf

3

http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Blue-light-Report_LR.pdf

This debate will be monitored by officers on behalf of the Fire Authority, with further reports prepared, setting out the potential strategic implications for the Authority, Service but, more importantly, the community, should these proposals gain further momentum.

4 Financial Implications

There are no direct and / or immediate financial implications arising from this report. It should be noted, however, that the Chancellor announced within his most recent spending review a £30m fund to encourage fire and other emergency services to merge.

5 Legal Comment

Responsibility for the provision of fire and rescue services currently rests with fire and rescue authorities and is enacted through the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. Any proposals to merge / amalgamate emergency services under the leadership and direction of PCCs would require legislative change.

6 Initial Impact Assessment

An Initial Impact Assessment has been completed.

7 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

8 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.