



Safest People, Safest Places

Combined Fire Authority

10 June 2021

Outcome of the Review of the Role of Police and Crime Commissioners

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

1. This paper outlines the outcome of the review into the role of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), the forthcoming White Paper on Fire Reform and the potential implications for the Authority.

Background

2. On 22 July 2020, the then Minister for Crime and Policing, Kit Malthouse MP, laid a Written Ministerial Statement in Parliament launching a review of the Police and Crime Commissioner model. The statement announced that the review would be undertaken in two parts.
3. On 16 March 2021, a further Written Ministerial Statement was laid in Parliament, setting out the findings from part one of the Review. The statement is available at:

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-03-16/hcws849>
4. The same day Lord Greenhalgh, Minister of State for Building Safety, Fire and Communities, wrote to Chief Fire Officers and Fire Authority Chairs, outlining the recommendations of the review and next steps. A copy of this letter is attached as Appendix A.
5. The second part of the Review is due to commence imminently.

Findings of the Review

6. Part one made recommendations to the Home Secretary on how to improve the accountability, scrutiny and transparency of the current PCC model. It also considered the long-term ambitions on fire governance reform, and the links between the PCC model and mayoral devolution.
7. The Government have also used the Review to map out their longer-term reform ambitions for fire, in order to respond to the significant recommendations arising from Phase 1 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry, the Manchester Arena attack and to build on the findings from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspections and Sir Thomas Winsor's State of Fire and Rescue Report 2019.
8. The letter from Lord Greenhalgh also outlined that the Government believed that the response to the Covid-19 pandemic has also demonstrated the wider support and skill that fire and rescue services can provide for their emergency service partners and in keeping the public safe. They are keen to build on this learning to create and embed services which are fit for the challenges of the 21st century.

White Paper on Fire Reform

9. The Government also announced that further consultation will take place with key stakeholders when they publish a White Paper on Fire Reform later in the year. The White Paper is expected to focus on three key areas: people; professionalism and governance.
10. From a people perspective they stated that it is vital that services get the best out of their people and ensure the fire and rescue service is fit for the future. They intend to unlock talent and diversity within services and develop clear skills pathways with clear competency frameworks. They will also take action to ensure they are supporting the creation of a positive culture in services. The Government has also indicated that they will respond to the HMICFRS recommendation to urgently clarify the role of the fire and rescue service and firefighters. They state that they wish to see local flexibility to determine roles, which would enable firefighters to do more to support their communities, other emergency services (including providing significant support to ambulance services) and other local partners, as was demonstrated in the response to Covid-19.
11. On professionalism the Government want to see professional, well led services with credible operational standards at their heart. This will include a strengthened model of sector leadership and greater assurance through inspection. They are intending to consult on the development of a mandatory 21st century command course for progression to senior roles, minimum entry requirements for anyone joining services and they are looking to develop schemes to consistently identify and nurture talent.

12. From a governance perspective they have stated that the majority of their focus will be on implementing the recommendations arising from the PCC Review. Government believes that the variation of forty-five fire and rescue authorities across England, operating under a range of different governance models, has led to a lack of consistency and challenges of accountability and transparency.
13. They go on to say that the White Paper will consider the following recommendations:
- Consulting on whether to mandate the transfer of fire and rescue functions to the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) model across England where boundaries are coterminous, unless there is an option to transfer fire governance directly to an elected Mayor.
 - Consulting on how to address coterminosity challenges, including in the South West.
 - Legislating to create operational independence for Chief Fire Officers and to clearly separate and delineate strategic and operational planning for fire and rescue.
 - Considering options to clarify the legal entities within the PFCC model.
14. The review also outlined the view that in terms of mayoral devolution, there are advantages in joining up public safety functions under a combined authority mayor and that this has the potential to offer wider levers to prevent crime. The Home Office will take steps to remove barriers to more mayors taking on these functions and will work with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to develop the forthcoming Devolution and Local Recovery White Paper with that longer-term trajectory in mind.

Implications for the Authority

15. The White Paper will arguably outline the most significant changes to the fire and rescue service for decades. Some of the changes will require completely new ways of working and could alter the core roles and responsibilities of the organisation.
16. The review has the potential to radically impact on fire and rescue authorities and could move governance either under the PCC or elected mayors if wider devolution deals were announced in the North East. Given County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service is coterminous with Durham Constabulary there is the possibility the service could be mandated under the PCC.
17. It is believed that the White Paper could be published at the end of June or the beginning of July 2021, although it is difficult to predict parliamentary timelines at the moment. The Home Office have committed to a full twelve-week consultation on the White Paper, and it would be prudent for the Authority to make a formal written response under this consultation process.

Recommendations

18. Members are requested to:

- Note the report and the outcome of part one of the PCC review into the role of PCCs and the potential implications on the Service and the Authority.
- Receive further reports once the White Paper on Fire Reform is produced later in the year.