



Safest People, Safest Places

Combined Fire Authority

20 January 2025

English Devolution White Paper

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide members with an overview of the elements of the English Devolution White Paper relevant to Fire and Rescue Authorities.

Background

2. On 16 December 2024, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution Jim McMahon set out details of the government's plan for devolution in a Written Ministerial Statement. Alongside the Statement, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published its Devolution White Paper.
3. In his Statement, the Minister states that "at its core, the White Paper sets out how the government will strengthen and widen the mayoral model of devolution across England.
4. The Government's number one mission stated in the paper "is to relight the fire of our economy and ignite growth in every region."

Potential Implications for Fire and Rescue Authorities

5. The White Paper outlines several key intentions related to fire and rescue authorities in section 3.9 on Public Safety. A summary of these are set out below.

6. Where geographies align with Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authorities, Mayors will, by default, be responsible for those services.
7. The government state they are committed to increasing the number of Mayors who take on Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authority responsibilities. Alignment with police and fire services boundaries will therefore be a key consideration in the negotiation of new Strategic Authorities.
8. The possibility of a single Mayor taking on Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authority responsibilities across two or more Police Force and Fire and Rescue Authorities, where boundaries align, will be explored in time through the English Devolution Bill.
9. The paper highlights that the government will enable police and fire boundaries to be altered incidentally upon the transfer of Police and Crime Commissioner and Fire and Rescue Authority functions to Strategic Authority Mayors, to ensure the continued efficiency and effectiveness of policing and fire functions.
10. The government aims to align public service boundaries over the long term, including job centres, police, probation, fire, health services, Strategic Authorities and Local Authorities.
11. Any changes to public service boundaries will be made in consultation with stakeholders and considering the impact on service delivery. In the meantime, the government will look for practical solutions to allow Mayors to deliver where service boundaries are non-coterminous, considering the benefits on a case-by-case basis.

Recommendation

12. Members are recommended to:
 - a. **Note** the contents of this report.