An Overview of the Home Office Fire Reform Programme

Police and Crime Panels fire scrutiny workshop - 12 September 2017

Nick Chard – Chairman Kent & Medway Fire and Rescue Authority
The fire and rescue service is a well respected service

- The service makes a major contribution to building safe and resilient communities as well as responding to national and international incidents
- The service provides a key humanitarian role including protecting those who are most vulnerable
- They are a well trusted brand – a recent study found fire fighters were the second most trusted profession behind doctors
- A large national employer: over 44,000 fire fighters
But it is changing with a long term downward trend in demand: number of fires, incidents and fire fatalities

- Since 05/06, number of:
  - fires: down 52% (but a 5% rise last year to 162,000)
  - incidents: down 37% (but a 7% rise last year to 528,700)
  - fire-related fatalities: down 22% (but a 15% rise last year to 303)
- non-fire incidents highest proportion they’ve ever been – this has been driven by a rise in co-responding
There are a range of hypothesis for the long-term reduction in the number of fires

Possible downward factors include:
- more targeted prevention activities
- effective building and furniture regulations
- societal change: less smoking, greater use of smoke alarms, reduction in chip pan use
- recent wet summers: the wetter the summer, the less outdoor (‘secondary’) fires seen, for example: high number (295,000) of secondary fires during the hot/dry summer of 2003 and very few (72,000) secondary fires during the very wet summer of 2012

Possible upwards factors include:
- An aging population
- More older people living alone
- Continued chaotic lifestyles within some parts of the population
- Rise in chronic ill health
Despite real achievements, Home Office believe there is real need for reform, for example: poor governance, workforce challenges, limited transparency and accountability

- Siloed and inefficient procurement
- Need for more local collaboration
- Narcissism of small differences
- Resource outstrips demand
- Workforce challenges
- Workforce lacking diversity: 96% white and 95% male
- A bullying culture within some FRAs
- Inflexible working practices adopted by many FRAs
- Lack of transparency
- An aging workforce – 1/3 will retire in 5 years
- Poor governance
- Opaque local governance mechanisms
- No independent scrutiny of services, nor chance to compare – peer view system has many flaws
- Sector leadership needs improvement
So what do Home Office intend to do about it? The previous Home Secretary outlined a ‘radical and ambitious’ package of reforms in May 2016

- Previous Home Secretary outlined her vision for fire and rescue services in May
- Approach supported by new Home Secretary and Fire Minister
- High level of ambition:
  - “Over the course of this Parliament, I intend to work with fire and rescue services to deliver a programme of reform that is as radical and ambitious as I have delivered in policing since 2010”.
The reform agenda is made up of 3 distinct pillars

• 1: efficiency & collaboration
• 2: accountability & transparency
• 3: workforce reform

• The reform agenda needs to be owned by the sector – not Whitehall
• The sector is empowered to shape and deliver reforms and become self transforming
• Ambition to help professionalise the sector
Pillar 1: seeking greater efficiency and collaboration with efficiencies possible across the sector

• Aim: to drive deeper collaboration between fire and rescue and other local services - including through the statutory duty in the Policing and Crime Act – and support CFOA/NFCC and the sector deliver commercial transformation, including procuring more collaboratively, efficiently and effectively.

• 2013 Knight Review found that:
  – i) significant scope for efficiencies - forecast savings of £196m p.a. from FRAs; and
  – ii) large variations in use of on-call fire fighters with possible annual savings of £123m by increasing proportion of retained from 30% to 40% .
Home Office seeking deeper collaboration between fire and rescue and other local services and have seen some progress

• Break down siloed working, fully utilise all local assets and latent capacity.
• Statutory duty to collaborate in the Policing and Crime Act
• Collaboration projects underway – including supported by transformation funding - and co-responding agreements now in place between fire and rescue services and health and policing
Home Office working with the sector to transform the commercial behaviours of FRAs

- Supported NFCC produce a new commercial approach
- They have commissioned (Bravo) an analysis of all FRA spend for 15/16
- Using funding as a strategic lever by offering four year funding settlement in exchange for robust efficiency plans – deadline for plans is this month
- Exploring future funding models
Fire reform pillar 2: seeking greater accountability and transparency, including enabling PCCs to take on the fire function locally

- Aim: to enable the public to fully hold their service to account by replacing opaque governance and inspection arrangements and publishing more comparable performance information.

- In the Policing and Crime Act enabling PCCs to take on responsibility for FRA functions where there is a strong local case

- This will result in a directly elected person being accountable for fire and rescue services locally, allowing the public to hold them to account
Home Office creating a new independent inspectorate for fire and rescue

• Current peer review system not an inspection. It is an inadequate driver of sector-led improvement or assurance
• Aim for the new inspectorate to be fully operational by 1 April 2018
• 2017/18 used for planning, development, testing
• Considering options for delivery: HMIC/NFCC developing proposals
• Working with LGA to develop a remodelled peer review system to complement new inspection regime
We will provide the public more information and data to be able to hold their service to account

• Builds on work of independent inspection

• Data to include:
  – enhanced workforce diversity statistics published in this month’s operational statistics
  – comparable procurement data
  – removing old GOV.UK content to make GOV.UK more accessible
Fire reform pillar 3: working with the employers to drive workforce reform

• Published independent ‘conditions of service review for fire and rescue staff in England’ by Adrian Thomas.
• Recommendations are for the sector and Government to deliver and are based around 5 broad themes:
  – the working environment including diversity of workforce
  – documented conditions of service
  – industrial relations
  – retained duty system and
  – management
Home Office working with the sector to create a coherent, comprehensive set of professional standards

• Sector driven
• Gap in the landscape in relation to building the evidence base (‘What works’), defining effective practice, and owning professional development frameworks
• Should work hand in glove with new inspectorate and be one of the key elements they inspect against
• Look to the experiences of the College of Policing
And the result?

A fire and rescue service which is more: professional, accountable, self-transforming, transparent and robustly held to account

- New delivery function: National Fire Chiefs’ Council
- New professional standards body
- New independent inspectorate
Questions?