

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	RC/15/5
MEETING	RESOURCES COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING	10 FEBRUARY 2015
SUBJECT OF REPORT	URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE (USAR) GRANT REDUCTION
LEAD OFFICER	Director of Operations
RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>To note the reduction in Section 31 Grant from DCLG for the period 2015/16 onwards.</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>The Cabinet Office has changed the planning assumptions for simultaneous terrorist events occurring within England. As a consequence, the grant is being reduced by 11.2% which for DSFRS represents a reduction of £103,000.</p> <p>The Chief Fire Officers' Association National Resilience Group has been considering the impact of this decision together with options for all USAR capabilities across the country. In recognising the change in funding the Service is confident we can absorb the change and will be considering alternative crewing options whilst continuing to maintain the capability on the same level of readiness as is the case today.</p>
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	The grant reduction impacts on Wholetime establishment attached to Station 60 (USAR).
EQUALITY RISKS AND BENEFITS ANALYSIS (ERBA)	There are no Equality Impact Assessment issues associated with this report
APPENDICES	A. Letter from Neil O Connor dated 24 November 2014
LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS	Report DSFRA/10/8 "Transfer of New Dimensions Assets" to Fire Authority meeting held on 25 March 2010.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service (DSFRS) has the largest compliment of National Resilience assets outside of London, designed to respond to mass decontamination (IRU), major flooding (HVP) and Urban Search & Rescue (USAR) and Enhanced Logistical Support (ELS). The decision to be part of the Country's National Resilience was taken some years ago and as a consequence, the Service has developed in-house capabilities that support this. The Service now benefits from an extremely robust assurance process, cost free central training, and cost free maintenance of all vehicles along with asset refresh.
- 1.2 DSFRS National Resilience (NR) is funded entirely from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) revenue grant. This grant is received monthly and is apportioned across the 4 NR capabilities, USAR, IRU, ELS and HVP. DCLG has an expectation that all capabilities serviced by the grant are fit for purpose and can be mobilised anywhere in England 24 hrs a day with competent staff.
- 1.3 The Authority first considered a report of the Director of Service Support at its meeting on the 25 March 2010 (DSFRA/10/8) on the proposed transfer of New Dimensions assets from the DCLG to this Authority with effect from 1 April 2010. Whilst it was agreed that the Authority accept the transfer of these assets, it was only on the proviso that the Authority reserve the right to review its ongoing ownership of such assets in the event that the CLG cease or reduce the associated central government funding.
- 1.4 The Cabinet Office has undertaken a review of its planning assumptions, and the letter attached as Appendix A to this report sets out the decision made to instigate a reduction in the USAR grant funding based on the assumption of a reduction in the level of national risk by one-third.
- 1.5 The Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) and DCLG looked at options to change current arrangements and finalised discussions around 2 preferred options:
- Option 1: reduce the capability by reducing team numbers across the country.
 - Option 2: top slice each USAR team Grant by £102.5K (11.2% Financial reduction) to £815,630, this being the agreed option.
- 1.6 As a consequence Option 2 was agreed - top slicing fire and rescue service USAR budgets. For DSFRS, this will require a change to the National Crewing Model using our assets more effectively.
- 1.7 At present, DSFRS NR receives an annual revenue grant from DCLG for £1.1m this budget is separated as below:
- USAR £918,190 (includes consumable etc. reducing to £815,630 in 2015-16);
 - IRU £120,000
 - ELS £73,000
 - HVP £20,000
- 1.8 The grant reduction will commence from April 2015. DSFRS will not be required to underwrite any National Resilience grant reductions.

- 1.9 The Service may need to consider alternative options for crewing in the future in the light of the grant reduction but it is felt that the current staffing levels can be maintained within existing budgetary provision.

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Efficiencies in Section 31 grant payments for all USAR-hosting fire and rescue authorities in England

I am writing to you and all other Chief Fire Officers of USAR (Urban Search and Rescue) hosting fire and rescue authorities in England to inform you of the outcome of a joint Government/Chief Fire Officers' Association review of Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) capabilities in England and the impact this will have on grant funding for these capabilities from 2015-16 onwards.

The aim of the USAR review was to examine current operational procedures to determine where there was the potential for efficiencies; and to take account of a one-third reduction in the level of risks to be planned for, as set out in the revised Cabinet Office Planning Assumptions. We have worked closely with the Chief Fire Officers' Association, and National Resilience fire service leads to consider options, including removing a number of USAR teams, or securing savings in other ways. Having consulted each of you, the Chief Fire Officers' Association have recommended keeping all teams in place to leave each hosting authority with flexibility over the capability, given its usefulness for and integration in local response, and delivering savings via a proportionate reduction in the section 31 grant payment made to all USAR authorities. We propose therefore to reduce the annual USAR grant to each of the 19 USAR teams in England by £102.56k to £815.63k. You will note that this represents only a 11.2% financial reduction against a 33.3% risk level reduction. The annual grant for the West Sussex Strategic Reserve would reduce by £51.28k to £411.15k.¹ This approach was discussed at the last meeting of the Fire and Rescue Strategic Resilience Board and the Fire Minister, Penny Mordaunt MP, has since endorsed it.

¹ The precise figure £102.564k relates to the grant for a fully staffed USAR team; the figure for the Strategic Reserve is £51.282k.

This will deliver an annual saving of approximately £2 million across the capability and will apply from 2015-16 onwards. I am very grateful for your and CFOA's collaboration on this and hope you will be satisfied with the outcome.

Yours sincerely,

NEIL O'CONNOR

**Director
Fire, Resilience & Emergencies**