

REPORT REFERENCE NO.	DSFRA/22/14
MEETING	DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY (Ordinary Meeting)
DATE OF MEETING	10 JUNE 2022
SUBJECT OF REPORT	GOVERNMENT WHITE PAPER “REFORMING OUR FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE”
LEAD OFFICER	Chief Fire Officer
RECOMMENDATIONS	<i>That the Audit & Government Committee be delegated authority to approve a final response from this Authority to the White Paper at its meeting scheduled for 22 July 2022.</i>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	This report advises of publication of the White Paper, responses to which are invited by 26 July 2022.
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	Nil.
EQUALITY RISKS AND BENEFITS ANALYSIS	N/A
APPENDICES	Nil.
BACKGROUND PAPERS	Home Office White Paper “Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service” published May 2022

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Following the initial announcement in the House of Commons in March 2021, the Home Office published the White Paper “Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service” on 18 May 2022.
- 1.2. Responses are invited to some 48 questions posed in the White Paper by the closing date of 11.59hours on 26 July 2022.
- 1.3. The White Paper proposes reforms to drive change and improvement in three areas:
 1. People;
 2. Professionalism; and
 3. Governance.
- 1.4. The main themes of these are set out in the following sections.
- 1.5. Building on previous fire and rescue reform, experiences during the pandemic, and the outcomes of inspections by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), the stated ambition of the government is, through the White Paper, consultation and future legislation, to:

“...strengthen fire and rescue services across England...to develop services with communities at their heart that provide excellent support and development for their teams. This will be underpinned by clear decision-making processes and operational leaders who are empowered to plan and respond quickly to new challenges held to account by a single executive leader, ideally a directly elected politician. We want to ensure that services play to their strengths in responding to emergencies, as well as sharpen their focus on their prevention and protection functions. This will allow service leaders and their professional teams to face the future with confidence, reduce the risk of harm, and help keep people safe”.

2. PEOPLE

- 2.1. In the introduction to the White Paper, the Fire Minister, Lord Greenhalgh comments that the reform proposals in this area:

“...seek to introduce changes that will allow fire professionals to further develop their skills and thrive in their work. We want to clarify the role of fire and rescue services and of the firefighter, unlock talent and improve diversity within services, take action to ensure that we are supporting the creation of a positive culture, and further develop schemes to consistently identify and nurture talent. Finally, we will commission an independent review into the current pay negotiation process and consider if it is fit for a modern emergency service”.

3. PROFESSIONALISM

- 3.1. In the introduction to the White Paper, the Fire Minister, Lord Greenhalgh comments that the reform proposals in this area:

...seek to modernise the fire and rescue service, to enable greater professionalism and to ensure that we are recruiting and training our fire and rescue services to be the best that they can be. We want to increase professionalism by moving from a Fire Standards Board (which sets clear expectations for the sector) to the creation of a College of Fire and Rescue. We want to develop a mandatory 21st century leadership programme for progression to senior roles, set clearer entry requirements for recruitment, and put in place a statutory code of ethics and a fire and rescue service oath”.

4. GOVERNANCE

- 4.1. In the introduction to the White Paper, the Fire Minister, Lord Greenhalgh comments that the reform proposals in this area:

“...seek to strengthen governance arrangements across the sector. Out of 44 fire and rescue authorities, 38 operate a committee structure. We want to transfer fire functions to a single, elected – ideally directly elected – individual who would hold their operationally independent Chief Fire Officer to account. This person could be: a mayor who could delegate day-to-day oversight to a deputy mayor; or a council leader who could delegate to a cabinet member or a police, fire and crime commissioner. This effective political oversight would maintain and enhance public accountability”.

5. NEXT STEPS

- 5.1. By the time of this meeting, the Authority will already have had initial opportunity to discuss the White Paper at the Members’ Forum meeting held on 30 May 2022.
- 5.2. It is also intended that the White Paper be discussed further at the Members’ Forum meeting scheduled for 19 July 2022.
- 5.3. These discussions will be used to inform a proposed response from the Authority. Given the closing date for submission of response, it is recommended that the Audit & Governance Committee be delegated authority to approve a final response at its meeting scheduled for 22 July 2022.

LEE HOWELL
Chief Fire Officer