



*Local Government Association*

# fire and rescue in 2017: rising to the challenge

a consultation document from the LGA



## shaping our future

Across the fire and rescue service, the pace and scope of change brought about by the modernisation agenda is striking, and brings with it both great challenges and opportunities. A quick look at some of the developments that have taken place since Sir George Bain's review of the service in 2002 is a reminder, if any were needed, of the scale of the changes that the service has undergone. To name but a few:

- the new emphasis on prevention, which has played a major role in driving down fire deaths to their lowest level for 50 years;
- the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, which set out a broader role for the service than ever before;
- the introduction of Integrated Risk Management Plans, which have been a major step forward for fire authorities in identifying and planning for the specific needs of their area;
- Regional Management Boards have been established, providing a formal mechanism for collaborative working between fire authorities at the regional level;
- the Integrated Personal Development System has established a competence based approach for fire and rescue service staff, targeting individual development needs; and
- a range of measures have been undertaken to improve resilience, from the Civil Contingencies Act to the New Dimension programme and the ongoing project to establish regional control centres.

The world we are working in is changing too, particularly in terms of the threats and risks faced by the people we serve, and the technology available to help us respond. It can be difficult to avoid being swept up in the pace of change – and it is important that we look to the future, and consider the challenges that lie ahead. If this horizon scanning is done effectively, we can ensure that fire and rescue authorities and other key players are prepared to take advantage of the opportunities presented and to meet the

challenges ahead. By agreeing where we want to see fire and rescue in 2017, this vision is our starting point to achieve that.

## leadership towards a shared vision

As those responsible for the delivery of fire and rescue services, it is fire and rescue authorities who will take the lead to ensure that those services meet the needs of our communities into the future. The Local Government Association (LGA) has therefore developed this draft vision statement for consultation as the first step in articulating the kind of service we want to see develop before 2017.

A vision statement can only help to drive change if it has the agreement of all the key partners in delivery. We want to set out a vision that fire and rescue authorities through the LGA, together with the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), will be able to agree represents our shared ambitions for the future and, as such, can form the basis for a co-ordinated approach to our work over the coming years. The LGA will continue to work with DCLG and CFOA through the consultation period with the aim of issuing a joint vision statement at the LGA's fire conference in March.

All three partners recognise the importance of working together to ensure that the vision is delivered, both in their own work and in supporting other stakeholders. For the LGA, the agreed vision will inform the work plan of the Fire Services' Management Committee - our decision making body on fire and rescue issues - ensuring that we focus on the key issues that will help us achieve our goals. At a local level too, we hope that the vision will support decision-making by fire and rescue authorities.

The LGA will be leading partners in working to ensure that we make the most of our resources to deliver the best possible fire and rescue service for the public. We are keen to hear views from

stakeholders across local and national government, local communities, business, the community and voluntary sectors, as well as from within the fire community itself, on what needs to happen over the next ten years to achieve this.

## the story so far

The draft vision statement has been developed over a number of months, with the benefit of input from a range of groups who have considered early drafts. These groups have included representatives of a wide range of stakeholders, including central and local government, principal officers and other fire and rescue service staff, community groups, staff representative bodies and business representatives. We would like to thank the following bodies for their advice and support:

- Fire Forum
- Practitioners' Forum
- Business and Community Safety Forum
- IRMP Steering Group
- Diversity Happens Programme Board
- e-Transformation Coordination Group
- the Fire Service College's Learning and Development Programme Board
- the Emergency Planning College
- Performance Assessment Steering Group

In consultation with these bodies and reference groups, we have now developed a series of short statements setting out what the LGA believes the fire and rescue service should look like before 2017. In each section there is an explanation of the thinking behind each statement.

## responding to the consultation

If you have any comments on the vision statement, please contact Caroline Tolan (020 7664 3261 or [caroline.tolan@lga.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.tolan@lga.gov.uk)) before 4 January. A number of questions are posed at the end of this document to which we are particularly interested in receiving feedback.

We are also consulting separately on a number of questions that will inform the development of a draft route map for the LGA. This route map will set out the role that both the LGA and fire and rescue authorities will play in achieving the vision. Respondents are welcome to submit comments on the vision statement and the questions for the draft route map either separately or together. For further details on the route map, please contact Caroline Tolan (details above).

All comments may be made publicly available unless you specifically request that they be treated in confidence.

## next steps

The LGA will be managing the consultation process, reflecting the leadership role of fire and rescue authorities in this work. The final vision statement, which we hope will be shared with DCLG and CFOA, will be launched at the LGA Fire Conference in March 2007.

The vision itself is a vital first step – but it is only a first step. It will lay the foundation for more detailed consideration of the challenges and opportunities facing the service up to 2017, and the role that the LGA, fire and rescue authorities, and other key partners will need to play if the vision is to be achieved.

As set out above, the LGA will be taking forward further work to develop a route map that will set out the role that it and fire and rescue authorities will play in delivering the vision. We are currently seeking views on a range of questions, the answers to which will inform the development of the draft route map. We expect to issue this for consultation next year.

# draft vision statement

## towards 2017

- Fire and rescue services are **building safer communities**, working with partners and the community to reduce risk and drive down death and injury, damage to property and harm to the environment caused by fire and other emergencies.
- The fire and rescue service is **locally owned and delivered**, responsive to the needs of local people, and with policy decided by elected councillors who are held to account by their communities for its delivery.
- Any **regional or national activities are owned by fire and rescue authorities**, as they are democratically accountable for their services.
- Fire and rescue authorities **work in partnership** with each other and other agencies to achieve greater effectiveness, efficiency and value for money for the public.
- All fire and rescue authorities are **fully engaged with their local communities**.
- The membership of all fire and rescue authorities and services **reflects, values and responds to the diversity** of the communities they serve.
- Fire and rescue services **make the best use of technology** to deliver effectively and efficiently.
- Fire and rescue authorities will be recognised as civic bodies in which their members, staff and community **take pride**.
- **Everyone working in the fire and rescue service understands their role in delivering this vision and is committed to working together to achieve it.**

The statement focuses on the outcomes we want to see by 2017. The LGA's route map and partner organisations' plans will set out how we will work to achieve this vision. An explanation of the thinking behind each part of the vision statement is set out below.

### **primary role**

- **Fire and rescue services are building safer communities, working with partners and the community to reduce risk and drive down death and injury, damage to property and harm to the environment caused by fire and other emergencies.**

This bullet point sets out the key outcomes the service will be working towards in 2017. It reflects fire and rescue services' role in the three strands of prevention, protection and response, and the key part they play in the strategic aim of building safer communities.

The broader role for the fire and rescue service set out by the Fire Services Act 2004 will have developed still further by 2017. The need to manage resources efficiently while delivering the best possible service to the public will demand effective partnership working with a range of bodies from local authorities to private, voluntary and community sector partners, to the police and other statutory bodies (a theme which is also explored in the section on partnership working on page 6). Fire and rescue services will face a challenge in maintaining a clear focus on their statutory responsibilities, whilst also recognising and utilising their role in community engagement for the benefit of broader community safety objectives.

The fire and rescue service has already seen significant success in driving down deaths and injuries from fire. That success will need to be sustained, while the service both looks critically at the scope for further reducing damage from fire to property and the environment, and takes an increasing role in partnership work to prevent death and injury in other arenas, such as road traffic collisions, where its resources are already directed in responding to incidents.

While the increasing focus on prevention has already saved lives and can be developed still further, we will never be in a position where fire and other emergencies can be completely eliminated. Firefighting and incident response more broadly will continue to be a vital part of the role of the fire and rescue service over the next ten years. It will be as important as ever to ensure that we are equipped to perform this function to our existing high standards.

In achieving this aim, we will need to look carefully at the changes to the risks facing our communities. To take just one example: current government policy supports an increase in the number of nuclear power stations and even the widespread use of commercial magma power stations. It is clear that such developments which will bring significant changes to the environment in which the service is operating and for which we will need to be prepared.

### **accountability**

- **The fire and rescue service is locally owned and delivered, responsive to the needs of local people, and with policy decided by elected councillors who are held to account by their communities for its delivery.**
- **Any regional or national activities are owned by fire and rescue authorities, as they are democratically accountable for their services.**

Responsibility for fire and rescue services will remain with the elected members of fire and rescue authorities, ensuring that services are connected with their communities and accountable to them for delivery. Ever stronger community engagement will be supported by locally owned and accountable fire and rescue services. Local flexibility is essential and locally elected members are best placed to provide it to the communities they serve.

Elected members will lead the agenda, working within a framework for national priorities agreed by Ministers, advised by the LGA and CFOA, and supported by the advice of their chief fire officers and effective performance information. Every authority

will be supported in developing the capacity to deliver an excellent standard of service to local people.

Regional Management Boards will enable authorities to reap the benefits of collaborative working, while maintaining the democratic accountability of local fire and rescue authorities. Where activities are directly funded by central government, it is understood that DCLG will play a leading role. In all cases, however, fire and rescue authorities must be satisfied that they will continue to be able to fulfil effectively their statutory responsibility to provide a fire and rescue service to their local communities.

### **partnership working**

- **Fire and rescue authorities work with each other and other agencies to achieve greater effectiveness, efficiency and value for money for the public.**
- **Fire and rescue authorities work with local authorities, the police and other public, voluntary and community bodies to build safer communities.**

Safer communities can only be achieved if all of the statutory agencies and voluntary groups operating in a locality work together with the local community. Fire and rescue authorities and partners will work together to achieve the best deal for their communities. On a practical level, that might mean anything from sharing purchasing power to setting up co-responding schemes.

Effective collaboration is already taking place on a number of issues, and increasing expectations coupled with likely pressures on resources will ensure that this continues to be critical to delivery. Partnerships might be between fire and rescue authorities, or with other agencies. The guiding principle must be to work in partnership where this can deliver a better service to the public than could otherwise be achieved.

### **engaging local communities**

- **All fire and rescue authorities are fully engaged with their local communities.**
- **The membership of all fire and rescue authorities and services reflects, values and responds to the diversity of the communities they serve.**

Understanding the risks and issues faced by local people will remain as important as ever to ensuring that fire and rescue services meet their needs. Safer communities can only be achieved by working with people in their local communities.

At present, the service is held in extremely high regard by the public, with an excellent record on working with young people in particular. In 2017, demographic change will have brought new challenges both to communicating messages on community safety and, more broadly, to maintaining community cohesion.

Valuing diversity will be even more important, both in creating a workforce that reflects the local communities it serves, and in providing services that are able to meet the needs of an ethnically and culturally diverse population. Fire and rescue services will see their traditional recruitment pool of young, white males shrinking significantly, adding the basic need to maintain operational capacity to the drivers for improving performance in recruiting from other parts of the community.

At the same time, more diverse local populations will increase the need to utilise a range of approaches to communication and engagement on fire safety and the other aspects of the widening preventative agenda.

Fire and rescue authorities will be amongst the leaders in addressing these challenges, ensuring that recruitment and Human Resources policies more widely support diversity, and that every opportunity is taken to support effective engagement with local people.

## using technology

- **Fire and rescue services make the best use of technology to deliver effectively and efficiently.**

The fire and rescue service will be in a position to take advantage of new developments in technology, using it effectively whether in prevention, protection or response. Developments in technology will also bring major changes to the wider world, presenting new opportunities for improving community safety as well as challenges for risk management.

With technology continuously developing, other stakeholders from both within and outside the fire community will need to play their part in using the best available technology to minimise the risk of fire.

The pace of change in this arena is forecast to be dramatic, with a broad range of pertinent technological advances predicted by 2017. To take just a couple of examples: British Telecom predict that fully auto-piloted cars will be in development by 2017, with the potential to have a major impact on the incidence of road traffic incidents; while the prospect of a 'chemical lab on a chip', expected within the next five years, could bring huge improvements in detection, identification and monitoring equipment.

## authorities to take pride in

- **Fire and rescue authorities will be recognised as civic bodies in which their members, staff and community take pride.**
- **Everyone working in the fire and rescue service understands their role in delivering this vision and is committed to working together to achieve it.**

Fire and rescue services will be held in high esteem by all stakeholders. The general public will understand the broad role played by firefighters in 2017, seeing them as a valued part of the local community and recognising the importance of their role in preventing incidents and – if all else fails – responding to them.

Local people will understand that those services are accountable to them through fire and rescue authorities, recognising their stake in a vibrant local democratic process. For elected members, appointment to a fire and rescue authority will be a badge of status.

Fire and rescue authorities value their staff as their greatest assets. All their employees will know that they are valued. There will be a constructive dialogue about the delivery of this vision between the authorities and the bodies who effectively and equitably represent their employees.

## consultation questions

1. Do you agree that a vision statement will be useful in setting the strategic direction for fire and rescue service in England? Please comment on any impact you feel an agreed LGA-DCLG-CFOA vision statement would have on the work of your organisation.
2. Do you agree with the main points of the draft vision statement?
3. Are there any key outcomes that the fire and rescue service should be seeking to achieve in 2017 that have been omitted from the list of statements?
4. What are the main challenges that will need to be addressed if the vision is to be achieved? Please comment freely on challenges for the LGA and fire authorities, DCLG, CFOA or other delivery partners.

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Picture supplied by Chris Phillips, Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service

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November 2006  
LGA code F/EP053  
ISBN 1 84049 539 1

Published by the LGA