



A Centre of Excellence for the
Fire and Rescue Service – Consultation
Summary of Responses



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The findings in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Department for Communities and Local Government

Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 4400
Website: www.communities.gov.uk

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PO Box 236
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Tel: 08701 226 236
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Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	5
2. Respondents	6
3. Summary of Responses	7
Question 1 – Do you agree that a Centre of Excellence should be established for the Fire and Rescue Service in England?	7
Question 2 – What evidence can you provide which would support the case for the establishment of a Centre of Excellence?	9
Question 3 – What is your preferred name for the new body?	10
Question 4 – Which of these functions would you like for a Centre of Excellence to deliver and are there any others which should be included?	10
Question 5 – What do you think will be the impact on equality, highlighting any risks and opportunities?	12
Question 6 – Which model for training delivery do you prefer?	12
Question 7 – Which service delivery model do you prefer?	14
Question 8 – Which governance option do you support?	16
Question 9 – Are there any other options which you wish to propose?	17
Question 10 – Do you agree that the existing forums need to be reviewed? If so, how should they be restructured and interact with a Centre of Excellence?	18
Question 11 – Would your authority be willing to contribute to funding a CoE?	19
Question 12 – Which of the options for allocating costs do you prefer? Is there another means of allocation which would be preferable?	21
4. Conclusion and way forward	22
Appendices – list of respondents	24

Chapter 1

Introduction

On 26 October 2007, the Government issued a consultation on proposals for establishing a Centre of Excellence for the Fire and Rescue Service in England (CoE).

The consultation set out options for the role, functions, status and governance of a CoE and associated costs and possible funding arrangements.

The consultation made clear that a CoE would only be established if it had the support, including financial support, of Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and other key stakeholders.

This paper contains a breakdown of the numbers of responses received and provides a summary of the comments made. It does not attempt to give a full account of all of the suggestions or comments made. In addition, it should be noted that not all of the respondents commented on or responded to every question raised as part of the consultation exercise.

Chapter 2

Respondents

A total of 76 responses were received from a range of public and private sector bodies and organisations (detailed at Annex A):

Fire and Rescue Authorities	39*
Fire Industry	9
Other Representative Organisations	8
Other Government Departments/Devolved Administrations/Public Sector bodies	12
Others	8

*out of a total of 46 Fire and Rescue Authorities in England

Chapter 3

Summary of responses

Question 1

Do you agree that a Centre of Excellence should be established for the Fire and Rescue Service in England?

There was considerable support, in principle, for the establishment of a Centre of Excellence (CoE) but this support was, in many cases, qualified by underlying concerns. Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) in particular were unwilling to commit themselves to any formal establishment of a CoE until they were satisfied that their concerns, including funding arrangements and the CoE's remit, were resolved (these concerns are described below and in the answers to other questions).

Only one FRA categorically did not support the establishment of a CoE in any form although significantly the largest FRA, the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, whilst agreeing that a central body with a strategic co-ordinating role might benefit the FRS, did not feel able to support the proposals as it considered that it would not offer any benefits to itself.

Respondents from the fire industry, whilst being very much in favour of the Centre of Excellence concept, considered the proposals too narrow and should instead embrace all those who contribute to the wider fire community.

The Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), who were a key stakeholder in developing the consultation proposals, supported the need for a national CoE but considered that it should take the form of a reformed Fire Service College.

The Local Government Association (LGA) supported the principles underpinning the establishment of a CoE and believed that the consultation document represented a significant opportunity for FRAs in England to take greater control over their future direction.

Examples of comments made by respondents

"...support is conditional and the Authority wish to reserve judgement pending the development of more detailed proposals and a review of measurable progress made during 2008-09 by the interim functions"

"...one of cautious welcome, conditional upon satisfactory arrangements being determined relating to costs, performance and governance of the Centre."

"...more detailed information should be provided as to reasons why this function could not be carried out by existing Communities and Local Government structures....."

"...the movement of these central government responsibilities to a centre of excellence should have a greater impact on the funding apportionment model..."

"...does not consider that a centralised Centre of Excellence would provide any benefit to this Service in respect of governance, management and timely delivery..."

"...the Centre of Excellence as described goes into territory that would not offer benefits to the [name of FRA]..."

"...suggest that the CoE idea is reviewed and alternative options looked at..."

"...any Centre of Excellence related to Fire and Rescue Service in the UK has broad appeal provided that embraces not just Fire and Rescue Services but the wider UK Fire Sector."

"We agree that there is merit.....provided that the UK fire industry is seen as an integral part of such a function."

"There are also opportunities for the wider fire and safety community that have not been explored in the consultation document."

Question 2

What evidence can you provide which would support the case for the establishment of a Centre of Excellence?

Those who responded to this question in the main highlighted the benefits that a national body could bring in terms of facilitating greater consistency, driving up standards, avoidance of duplication and securing economies of scale. Many also drew attention to the need to have a national body to develop and maintain technical advice and operational doctrine which in their view had stagnated since the demise of HM Fire Service Inspectorate.

One FRA, however, considered the benefits being generated from their participation in the work of their Regional Management Board and of their own officers work with CFOA, would appear to outweigh any inferred savings or benefits from a Centre of Excellence.

Examples of comments made by respondents

"...the Service nationally has suffered from something of a stalling in Operational doctrine...."

".....common national arrangements for the development and publication of fire and rescue service policy and technical matters has real potential to add value."

"...the overall infrastructure is best led and co-ordinated and quality assured on a national basis..."

"It will give a national focal point for the identification of the issues brought about by external considerations such as demographic and socio economic change..."

Question 3

What is your preferred name for the new body?

This was not a major concern for respondents but of the variety of names suggested other than Centre of Excellence the most preferred was The National Fire and Rescue Service Improvement Agency (or slight variations of that theme).

Question 4

Which of these functions would you like for a Centre of Excellence to deliver and are there any others which should be included?

The majority of respondents were content with the broad functions listed in the consultation document and with the proposal that resilience and procurement functions would not be part of a CoE at the outset but could be included in a later phase. However, a number of respondents were also of the view that Firebuy should not be included at any stage.

The operational doctrine function was seen as the priority issue for many respondents.

A number of FRAs queried the inclusion of the Health & Safety and Equality & Diversity functions and the benefits which would accrue from these functions.

More strategic functions were suggested by several FRAs for inclusion – performance management and the link to Audit Commission processes, capacity building, peer review and the co-ordination of service assessments.

A more general concern amongst many FRAs regarding functions was not to make the CoE's remit too wide at the outset. In their view, limiting the scope of the body to key functions, such as operational doctrine, and allowing it to evolve over time would give it a better chance to establish itself, perform well and add value.

Examples of comments made by respondents

"The functions suggested seem an excellent foundation upon which to build the concept....."

"The six key functions.....are all ones which require to be developed on an ongoing basis. It would make sense.....if these form the business core....."

"...does not support the inclusion of Firebuy...at this or any other time."

"...express serious concerns over Firebuy.....not wish to see it subsumed within the CoE.."

"Procurement should not fall within the remit of the CoE"

"...we have serious concerns regarding the inclusion of training delivery and subsequently Firebuy....."

"...do have concerns about the inclusion of Equality & Diversity and Health and Safety. We feel that there is insufficient detail ...to identify how these functions can impact..."

"...it is not clear what benefits would accrue from the Equality & Diversity or Health and Safety workstreams. It is our view that both of these can only be driven against the background of local demography and local IRMPs..."

"...the proposed range of functions is, at this stage, too broad. This Authority believes that the development of the CoE should be an evolution over time....."

"....such a body should not be stretched over such a wide remit as identified....."

"...we maintain that a focus on operational doctrine, procedures and innovation, as well as health and safety, should be the principal functions"

".....there is a need to start off on a small scale, focusing on key issues and keep things simple before considering other functions in the longer term"

Question 5

What do you think will be the impact on equality, highlighting any risks and opportunities?

In general terms respondents considered that a CoE would have a positive impact although a number pointed out that they would need more detail regarding the functions, governance and funding to form a mature view.

Several respondents made clear that they would have expected a full equality impact assessment to have been undertaken.

Question 6

Which model for training delivery do you prefer?

The consultation paper offered three different options for training delivery:

Option A – keep training delivery in an Agency separate from a CoE

Option B – a partnership arrangement between an Agency and a CoE

Option C – integrating training delivery fully into a CoE.

Forty-four per cent of those FRAs expressing a view considered full integration of training into a CoE as offering the best way forward (14 out of 32). A further five FRAs were minded to support this line but only when a sustainable financial model had been established for the Fire Service College (FSC). In the interim they would support a partnership arrangement between the FSC and a CoE. On the basis that full integration is their preferred longer term choice this would increase the support for option C to 60 per cent (19 out of 32).

However, it is significant that well over a third of those FRAs who responded to this issue were very clear that training delivery should remain in an agency separate to, or working in partnership with, a CoE in the longer term.

Examples of comments made by respondents

"We are not supportive of the inclusion of training delivery in the functions of the new body"

"It is essential that training delivery remains an agency separate from CoE"

"...it would be inappropriate to place the Fire Service College at risk should a centre of excellence fail to deliver"

"...in the short to medium term Option B provides the most sound business case..."

"Option B.....seems the most appropriate way forward at this time. We would not want to see a situation where FRAs were in any way obliged to source training only from a Centre of Excellence"

"...a partnership arrangement....appears to present specific economies of scale whilst keeping training delivery separate from the work of the CoE."

[Option C] ...would enable the CoE to make use of the unique fireground and infrastructure already in place...

"...Option C model is better suited to meeting customer requirements owing to its customer service rather than business dominated focus."

Question 7

Which service delivery model do you prefer?

The consultation paper offered three different options for service delivery:

Option 1 – Direct

Option 2 – Brokered

Option 3 – Hybrid

Of those FRAs who expressed a view, 68 per cent supported the hybrid option (21 out of 31) followed by Direct (seven in favour – 23 per cent) and Brokered (three in favour – 9 per cent). A similar pattern emerged amongst other respondents with 72 per cent of those expressing a view indicating support for the hybrid approach.

The preferred option, therefore, was clearly the hybrid approach which would see a CoE having a core of staff made up of experts from the FRS and from Communities and Local Government. Some work would be directly delivered by a CoE through in-house experts and some would be commissioned from FRAs or other sources.

The Fire Industry were keen to see the core of staff expanded beyond the FRS and Communities and Local Government.

Examples of comments made by respondents

"...the hybrid option. This will allow delivery of cost effective solutions for the FRS through a responsive control mechanism"

"Hybrid Delivery....ensures access to service expertise whilst providing flexibility and competition"

"...a hybrid delivery model may provide the most flexible and effective option..."

"...hybrid delivery approach would produce the greatest benefits as it would be created using experts from fire and rescue services as well as individuals from central government"

"Direct Delivery.....FRS would be clear about what is available and deliverable, and from what source"

"...Direct Delivery....[the FRA] would then have control of the resources to deliver the necessary outcomes"

"...could make the CoE too inward looking, thus it is suggested that some staff are recruited or seconded in from industry...."

"...the core of staff would need to be of a wider discipline to ensure that the body reflects and understands the requirements of a wider mandate..."

Question 8

Which governance option do you support?

The consultation paper offered a number of different governance options:

Option 1 – The establishment of a new Executive Agency

Option 2 – The establishment of a new executive Non-Departmental Public Body

Option 3 – Enhancing an existing executive Agency – the Fire Service College

Option 4 – Enhancing the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA)

Option 5 – Establishing a joint committee of stakeholders.

A Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) was clearly the preferred governance arrangement, supported by the majority of FRAs – around 80 per cent of those FRAs expressing a preference (22 out of 28) indicated their support for an NDPB either at the outset or in the future once a CoE was more mature. With regards to the latter, most respondents expressing this view considered a joint committee or stakeholder committee might be the most appropriate stepping stone to an NDPB.

Support for the other options was minimal. Those expressing no preference did, however, make clear that whatever arrangements were chosen should ensure legitimacy, authority and accountability.

A similar pattern emerged amongst the other respondents to the consultation with an NDPB being the preferred option.

Examples of comments made by respondents

"...most appropriate would be the establishment of a new executive Non-Departmental Public Body. This will establish robust, professional arrangements including FRS and CLG representation at Board level."

[NDPB] "We feel that this would offer the greatest degree of flexibility for the CoE and enable it to operate to meet its customers' needs."

"....a non-departmental public body as its reporting lines and board members would best complement the needs of a modern day fire and rescue service."

"We are not convinced that the NDPB is the right option at this time, but we would not discount this as an option for the future...."

"...governance needs to ensure legitimacy, accountability and authority...."

"....any governance model has sufficient transparency and involvement for those who will ultimately pay for it"

Question 9

Are there any other options which you wish to propose?

This question generated few comments and those that did respond generally highlighted one of the original options mentioned in Question 8. However, one FRA did suggest the possibility of a Local Government Act 1972 committee or a company limited by guarantee with shared underwriting of liabilities, and one of the Fire Industry organisations proposed establishing the Centre as a "Not for Profit Organisation" with partners drawn from the public, private and not for profit sectors.

Question 10

Do you agree that the existing forums need to be reviewed? If so, how should they be restructured and interact with a Centre of Excellence?

There was clear agreement that the existing forums need to be reviewed but it was also evident that any review should not be taken in haste. For example, a number of respondents were of the view that the extent of the review would need to be determined only once the governance of a CoE had been established.

Examples of comments made by respondents

"...an in depth review should take place to ensure no duplication of remit."

"...will need to be determined once the governance of the Centre of Excellence is established and confirmed."

"The existing forums will need to be restructured and reviewed as they may have conflicting terms of reference with the CoE."

"...imperative that existing forums are reviewed and where appropriate restructured."

Question 11**Would your authority be willing to contribute to funding a CoE?**

This question generated a very mixed response but it is clear that there is no firm commitment amongst FRAs to contribute to funding a CoE:

- only three gave a clear, unambiguous “yes” answer
- twenty-three indicated that they may be willing to contribute to funding a CoE but only on the basis of more detailed information such as what they will be getting for their money and the added value it would bring to their organisation
- five FRAs were unwilling to even give a “yes, in principle” response without more information such as a detailed analysis of projected workloads and resource options
- eight FRAs had serious concerns with the funding proposals and indicated that they are either unwilling or unable to contribute to funding a CoE.

One of the key issues for many of the FRAs was the apparent shift of responsibility for national matters from Communities and Local Government to the local level. There is a view that many of the proposed functions have in the past been funded centrally and should continue to be funded in this way – if not then new burdens payments should apply. In their view the proposed balance of funding between FRAs and Communities and Local Government was wrong. Many FRAs considered that Communities and Local Government should be contributing substantially more, if not all the cost, along the lines of the National Police Improvement Agency.

Examples of comments made by respondents

“...like to see a full detailed analysis of projected workloads and resource options before committing to the funding.”

“...prepared to contribute...provided that the division between central responsibilities and local FRAs are clearly defined at the onset of establishment i.e. what specifically would FRAs get for their money.”

“...in principle the answer is yes. However, we would need some more detail before committing ourselves further.”

“Yes in principle but costs will need to be carefully controlled and a proper and realistic split between what is funded by CLG and what is funded by the FRAs will need to be determined and be transparent.”

“The CoE should be established in a similar manner [to the NPIA] with robust ongoing financial support from CLG.”

“The Government must be responsible for the majority of funding for the Centre of Excellence”

“...not in a position where it is able to provide any contribution...”

“...we would wish to see the CoE established along similar lines as the National Police Improvement Agency which benefits heavily from central funding.”

“We remain fundamentally opposed to Fire and Rescue Services having to fund a Centre of Excellence, which we believe should be provided by central government.”

Question 12

Which of the options for allocating costs do you prefer? Is there another means of allocation which would be preferable?

The consultation paper offered two means to allocate costs – population based or equal shares for all FRAs.

Twenty-three of the 36 FRAs (64%) who responded to this question favoured a population based approach. Three of the remaining 13 FRAs opted for an equal share model, the remainder expressing concern with both suggestions and offering alternatives.

As with Question 11, a number of FRAs expressed the view that more financial support from Government is needed particularly in light of the recent revenue support grant settlement.

Examples of comments made by respondents

"The population based approach towards funding would appear to be the fairest"

"...funding should be based on population. Taking this approach should not squeeze out smaller FRS from being active members through the CoE Board"

"Neither option is satisfactory. The burden on FRAs is disproportionate and a greater proportion should be met by CLG"

"...seems logical that if Government has been prepared to financially support similar institutions like the National Police Improvement Agency then why not Fire and Rescue?"

"...individual FRS contributions should be proportionate and balanced against the level of individual FRS budgets"

Chapter 4

Conclusion and way forward

The consultation paper made clear that a CoE would only be established if it had the support, including financial support, of FRAs and other key stakeholders.

Whilst there is considerable support, in principle, for the establishment of a CoE that support, in many cases, is qualified by underlying concerns. It is clear that FRAs in particular are unwilling to commit themselves to the formal establishment of a CoE until they are satisfied that their concerns, including funding arrangements and the CoE's remit, are resolved.

Therefore, as the consultation outcome is not conclusive with regards to FRA commitment, Communities and Local Government will not be taking action to establish a CoE at this time. But we do not rule out the possibility in the future. How functions delivered nationally to support FRA's operational role are delivered in the longer term will depend on how circumstances evolve.

The functions identified for early inclusion in a CoE in the consultation document will, for the time being, remain being delivered by their current delivery bodies i.e. Communities and Local Government or the Fire Service College (FSC). However, we will continue to build on the work undertaken on developing proposals for a CoE and explore how best to take forward issues identified in the consultation responses. In particular, we will be looking at how we can improve our arrangements for securing the engagement and influence of stakeholders in the services Communities and Local Government, the FSC and Firebuy deliver to support FRA operations.

We recognise the concerns, expressed by respondents to the consultation, that a key priority is operational doctrine for the FRS given that work on developing and reviewing operational guidance has been limited in recent years. Responsibility for this function has been inherited by the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser's Unit (CFRAU) from HM Fire Services Inspectorate. CFRAU are urgently developing procedures, in liaison with CFOA and other stakeholders, for the production of guidance and research is already underway to prioritise work.

Training will continue to be delivered by the FSC and the FSC will also continue to deliver Organisational Development work, the Managed Learning System and Fire Gateway. But whilst for 2008/9 a Pathway Group was set up to agree a level of funding to be provided by subscription, for 2009/10 we will be looking to the FSC to provide these functions on the basis that they are providing a service to FRAs to be funded on a fee basis. As the

consultation document mentioned we are continuing with the work to develop a more sustainable financing model for the FSC.

Work on Equality and Diversity, Health and Safety, Fire Prevention and Research will continue to be delivered by Communities and Local Government on the current basis.

Functions identified for possible later inclusion in a CoE – resilience and procurement – will also remain being delivered as at present. But we are looking at the issue of future ownership of resilience assets and working to identify how operational support functions should be delivered once FireControl and Firelink reach steady state. Proposals for New Dimension are already well developed.

Central to the successful delivery of all the functions identified above will be the relationship between Communities and Local Government, FRAs and other stakeholders. Alternative options for improving stakeholder engagement and streamlining the current ad hoc project board and steering group arrangements are now being urgently considered. This could possibly involve establishing an overarching strategic committee, based on the successful Pathway group model, which could provide scrutiny, co-ordination and give strategic focus to the functional workstreams. The Pathway model was used to assess proposals for Organisational Development, the Managed Learning System and Fire Gateway services to be provided by the FSC in 2008-09. These options will be progressed in discussion with the Local Government Association and the Chief Fire Officers' Association.

We also look forward to continuing to work with industry which has an important role to play in fire matters in taking forward our joint interests. In particular we wish to explore the commercial opportunities there might be for further utilising the FSC site at Moreton in Marsh.

Functions identified for a CoE included those to improve efficiency where functions are currently duplicated across FRAs. Without a CoE to deliver such functions, FRAs will need to review the opportunities to deliver greater efficiencies through closer joint working or sharing of functions at regional or sub-regional level.

List of respondents

Fire and Rescue Authorities

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough
Cheshire
Cleveland
Cumbria
Derbyshire
Devon and Somerset
Dorset
Durham and Darlington
East Sussex
Essex
Gloucestershire
Greater Manchester
Hampshire
Hertfordshire
Humberside
Isle of Wight
Kent and Medway
Lancashire
Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland
Lincolnshire
London
Merseyside
Norfolk
Northumberland
North Yorkshire
Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Oxfordshire
Royal Berkshire
Shropshire
South Yorkshire
Staffordshire
Suffolk
Tyne and Wear
Warwickshire
West Midlands
West Sussex
West Yorkshire
Wiltshire

Fire Industry

Association of British Insurers
Association for Specialist Fire Protection
European Fire Sprinkler Network
Federation of British Fire Organisations
Fire Industry Association Limited
Fire Information Group
Fire Protection Association
Fire & Rescue Suppliers Association (FIRESA)
Institution of Fire Engineers

Other Representative Organisations

Asian Fire Service Association
Child Accident Prevention Trust
Chief Fire Officers' Association
Fire Brigades Union
Fire Officers' Association
Institution of Occupational Safety and Health
Local Government Association
South West Chief Fire Officers Association Human Resources and
Development Committee

Other Government Departments/Devolved Administrations/ Public Sector Bodies

Building Research Establishment
Cabinet Office – Civil Contingencies Secretariat
Cabinet Office – Emergency Planning College
East Midlands Regional Management Board
Environment Agency
Firebuy
Health & Safety Executive
Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service
South East Regional Management Board
The Scottish Government
Welsh Assembly Government

Others

Marion Barnes

David Brown

Elaine Debenham

Grant Thornton Limited

Jamie Hockley

Julia Mason

Bridget Schneider Browne

Darren Walter

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