

DRAFT RESPONSE SERVICE

As part of the Rural Opportunities Bulletin, RSN will regularly provide concise potential responses to key current consultations. These are not intended to be definitive or to reflect the views of RSN and may include potentially opposing responses to reflect different views designed to assist individual organisations in compiling their own response. We do however recognise the pressure members are under and we hope this service will assist.

Enabling closer working between the emergency services – Home Office and Departments for Communities & Local Government and Health consultation

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/enabling-closer-working-between-the-emergency-services>

The Government is consulting on a series of measures “to transform the delivery of local fire and police services, and drive greater collaboration between the police, fire and rescue and NHS ambulance services.” The measures being consulted upon are:

- introducing a new duty on all three emergency services to actively consider collaboration opportunities with one another to improve efficiency and effectiveness;
- enabling Police and Crime Commissioners to take on the duties and responsibilities of fire and rescue authorities, where a local case is made;
- where a Police and Crime Commissioner takes on the responsibilities of a fire and rescue authority, enabling him or her to create a single employer for police and fire staff, facilitating the sharing of back office functions and streamlining management;
- in areas where a Police and Crime Commissioner has not become responsible for fire and rescue services, enabling them to have representation on their local fire and rescue authority;
- abolishing the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority and giving the Mayor of London direct responsibility for the fire and rescue service in London, as will be the case in Greater Manchester.

This consultation is open until 23rd October 2015.

The consultation sets out a series of questions. Possible responses to the first 10 questions are set out below.

Question 1 – *How do you think this new duty would help drive collaboration between the emergency services?*

Draft Response: As the paper notes, there are many examples of effective collaboration between emergency services across the country. Rather than establishing a duty, the alternative of additional encouragement to collaborate through promotion of best practice and other means could also be considered. Establishing a duty to collaborate would, clearly, provide added impetus to ensure that collaboration opportunities are pursued. However, if such a duty is put in place it will be essential that the improvement of services is clearly identified as the main driver for collaboration.

Question 2 – *Do you agree that the process set out above would provide an appropriate basis to determine whether a Police and Crime Commissioner should take on responsibility for fire and rescue services?*

Draft Response: No. Collaboration is the focus for this consultation and, therefore, only collaborative proposals should be pursued. It is critical that Police and Crime Commissioners should only be considered to take on these additional roles where the Fire and Rescue Authority agrees and where

a strong local case is jointly submitted by both parties. Police and Crime Commissioners were appointed for a specific purpose and may not be appropriate in every case to take on the proposed new roles.

The consultation document correctly refers to the need for public consultation on any proposed mergers. This will be a critical measure in determining whether proposals should go forward. For clarity, it would be helpful if the document set out the detailed requirements as to how public consultation should take place and the parameters for considering the results of consultation.

Question 3 – *Do you agree that the case for putting in place a single employer should be assessed using the same process as for a transfer of governance?*

Draft Response: The same comments apply as under question 2 above. A single employer should only be considered where both parties agree and where a strong local case is made. The opportunities for back office collaboration, which form a core element of the consultation, should not depend on the existence of a single employer.

Question 4 – *What benefits do you think could be achieved from empowering Police and Crime Commissioners to create a single employer for police and fire and rescue personnel, whilst retaining separate frontline services, where a local case has been made to do so?*

Draft Response: The retention of separate frontline services is rightly recognised as important within this consultation. This must remain as a fundamental requirement, recognising the clear differences between these two professions and the value placed on both services by the public. The benefits of creating a single employer are not clear. Sharing back office functions could be achieved without such a change and the proposed duty to collaborate would ensure that sharing back offices would be fully considered in any event.

Question 5 – *Do you agree that the requirement for a chief officer to have previously held the office of constable should be removed for senior fire officers?*

Draft Response: The establishment of a new post of chief officer to oversee both services appears to be an unnecessary expense. There is no reason why existing senior officers from both services should not work collaboratively or in close partnership without the need to pay for an additional senior role sitting above both.

Question 6 – *How do you think the requirement for a Police and Crime Commissioner to have access to an informed, independent assessment of the operational performance of the fire service should best be met?*

Draft Response: Lessons from the existing peer review process should be examined in order to determine how best to make improvements. Peer reviews across local government have been carried out for many years and a great deal of learning in their effective operation is available.

Question 7 – *Do you agree that where a Police and Crime Commissioner takes responsibility for a fire and rescue service, the Police and Crime Panel should have its remit extended to scrutinise decision making in relation to fire services?*

Draft Response: The two services are very different and, therefore, require different scrutiny processes and panels. More focussed scrutiny will be accommodated by retaining separate scrutiny processes.

Question 8 – *Do you think that where a Police and Crime Commissioner takes responsibility for a fire and rescue service, the Police and Crime Panel should have its membership refreshed to include experts in fire and rescue matters?*

Draft Response: If the Police and Crime Panel is to have its role expanded then, as the consultation document states, there will be a clear need to expand the membership of the panel to enable it to carry out this task effectively and knowledgeably.

Question 9 – *Do you think that where a Police and Crime Commissioner puts in place a single employer for fire and rescue and police services personnel, complaints and conduct matters concerning fire should be treated in the same way as complaints and conduct matters concerning the police?*

Draft Response: There is no reference in the consultation document to any problems or issues arising from the current process for complaints and conduct matters. In such circumstances, therefore, there seems no reason or justification to consider changes to the process, regardless of the existence of a single employer.

Question 10 – *Do you agree that Police and Crime Commissioners should be represented on fire and rescue authorities in areas where wider governance changes do not take place?*

Draft Response: Yes. This would seem a sensible step, aiding improved collaboration between the two services.