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HUMBERSIDE
Fire & Rescue Service

Lord Greenhalgh
Minister of State for Building Safety,
Fire and Communities at
Ministry of Housing, Communities &
Local Government and Home Office

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Dear Lord Greenhalgh

HM CHIEF INSPECTOR OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES' STATE OF FIRE AND RESCUE REPORT 2019

Further to your letter dated 14th May 2020, please find below the response from Humberside Fire Authority and Humberside Fire and Rescue Service regarding the recommendations made in the State of Fire and Rescue report 2019:-

(1) Setting expectations to create modern fire and rescue services fit for the future

By June 2020, the Home Office, in consultation with the fire and rescue sector, should review and with precision determine the roles of: (a) fire and rescue services; and (b) those who work in them.

Notwithstanding the very ambitious timescale which has been further impacted by the pandemic response (applicable to all 4 recommendations), we are broadly supportive of this recommendation and feel that the FRS's and those that work within them would benefit from improved clarity from Government in these areas. The recent and current FRS response to the pandemic in several diverse areas has demonstrated the capability and flexibility of the FRS beyond our traditional role. It is now time to look in some detail at expanding the traditional role of the FRS into areas where we can provide the greatest benefit to our communities. These should be areas where there is an identified need and there is an evidence base that suggests that the FRS can achieve tangible outcomes. The review process should also clearly determine what is not the role of the FRS and as such improve the consistency of approach nationally. Clearly any such review has implications for the roles of those that work within the FRS and for practical implementation purposes the two areas are inextricably linked.



(2) **Potential reform of employment arrangements**

By June 2020, the Home Office, the Local Government Association, the National Fire Chiefs Council and trade unions should consider whether the current pay negotiation machinery requires fundamental reform. If so, this should include the need for an independent pay review body and the future of the 'grey book'.

The current uncertainty surrounding Firefighter pay presents potential financial and resilience challenges. Firefighters and other public sector workers pay has not kept pace with inflation due to pay restrictions as a result of austerity. The current arrangements for negotiating Firefighter pay appear cumbersome and unpredictable, are not achieving the remuneration that we feel our Firefighters are worth and are not well suited to effective financial planning due to the uncertain nature of any outcomes. We have very little influence over national pay negotiations, but carry significant risk in this area. It is also important to note that those who can directly influence pay negotiations are not able to influence the funding that may be needed to meet any negotiated settlement. This is creating a position whereby the only way to meet pay increases at a level higher than our funding increases is by reducing the number of staff, and that will undoubtedly increase risk to our communities. We agree that reforms are required in this area and as such we are supportive of this recommendation. Whilst in Humberside we do not experience difficulties in managing with the flexibilities that the grey book allows we do feel that an independent pay review body might provide a better solution to national pay, as long as the individual, or group, that the pay review body reports to is able to directly impact upon the funding that Fire Authorities are able to access to pay for any increases.

(3) **Operational independence for chief fire officers**

By September 2020, the Home Office should consider the case for legislating to give chief fire officers operational independence. In the meantime, it should issue clear guidance, possibly through an amendment to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, on the demarcation between those responsible for governance and operational decision making by the chief fire officer.

Humberside Fire Authority (HFA) has in place a [Constitution](#) which sets out how decisions are made and areas of responsibility and operational independence. That Constitution brings clarity to role of the HFA, and the scheme of delegated authority within it provides clarity regarding the decision making autonomy of the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive.

There is no formal obligation upon a Combined Fire Authority to adopt a Constitution. However, the HFA considers that a Constitution provides the most effective means to set out its governance arrangements and a framework for greater openness and engagement with our communities.

Whilst we would welcome any additional clarity that the Government may wish to provide through legislation or the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework on the role of chief officer's operational independence, we do not feel that is currently a significant issue within HFRS, and feel that any issues of concern could be easily resolved by robust constitutions being in place for Fire Authorities.

(4) **A code of ethics for fire and rescue services**

By December 2020, the National Fire Chiefs Council, with the Local Government Association, should produce a code of ethics for fire and rescue services. The code should be adopted by every service in England and considered as part of each employee's progression and annual performance appraisal.

HFRS has in place a clearly defined set of Principles and Behaviors that are well understood and embedded throughout the organisation, as acknowledged in our recent HMICFRS inspection report. These are also considered as part of each employee's recruitment, progression and annual performance appraisal. Within the Humberside Fire Authority Constitution there is a detailed code of conduct for both Members and Officers. These are based on the seven principles of public life (Nolan Principles) which all Members and Officers are expected to observe.

However, a nationally agreed code of ethics would compliment the approach outlined above and provide a degree of standardisation within this area to the FRS in England, we would therefore welcome the suggested approach.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact either of us.

Yours sincerely

John Briggs
Chair, Humberside Fire Authority

Chris Blacksell
Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive