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Status	Consultation exercise on proposed changes to inform the 2008/11 Fire and Rescue National Framework		

Consultation on 2008/11 Fire & Rescue National Framework and the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy

Issued by:

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Addressed to:

**The Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Chief Executive of the County Council
The Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Clerk to the Combined Fire and Rescue Authority
The Commissioner of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
The Chief Fire Officer**

Please forward to:

Heads of Human Resources

Summary

This consultation document includes questions relating to proposed changes to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for 2008/11 and on the Equality and Diversity Strategy for the Fire and Rescue Service

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Government is responsible for setting clear priorities and objectives for the Fire and Rescue Service. The National Framework sets out:

- The Government's expectations for the Fire and Rescue Service;
- What Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to do; and
- What support Government will provide.

1.2 One of the key priorities for the Government is to work with the Fire and rescue service to ensure it is able to engage fully with the community it serves. To do this, it must become more representative of that community. The government has produced a strategy setting out how equality and diversity of the Fire and Rescue Service will be informed.

1.3 This circular seeks your views on both the National Framework and the Equality and Diversity Strategy.

2.0 The FRS National Framework 2008-11

2.1 The National Framework underlines the Government's long-term commitment to improving fire and rescue services in England. The Government is now seeking the views of stakeholders on the revised National Framework document which is attached to this circular. The main proposed changes since the last National Framework document include:

- Scaling down the narrative to key 'must/should' messages so that our priorities are more transparent.

- Lifespan – moving to a three-year document so expectations highlighted in the National Framework run alongside the Fire and Rescue Service's financial commitments.

- Structure – moving away from the nine original chapter headings and creating 4 new chapters focussed on key strategic priorities:

- **Chapter 1 - Prevention, Protection and Response** - covers the core business of Fire and Rescue Authorities in analysing risks and taking action to meet and mitigate the effect of those risks.
- **Chapter 2 - Resilience** - covers the delivery of key resilience programmes and the actions authorities need to take to ensure they are fully equipped to meet the demands of the resilience agenda.
- **Chapter 3 - Diversity and Workforce** - covers the importance of mainstreaming diversity in all levels of the Fire and Rescue Service and workforce development, training and pay and conditions.
- **Chapter 4 - Governance and Improvement** - covers institutions in place to support the delivery of Fire and Rescue Authority business, the new Local Government White Paper framework including Local Area Agreements, Performance Assessment and Finance.

3.0 FRS National Framework Consultation Questions

3.1 For each chapter consultees are specifically invited to respond to the following questions in respect of the National Framework document. Where necessary, please indicate which chapter(s) your comments refer to for each of the questions below. We are also seeking views on the proposed Departmental Strategic Objective which can be found in the introduction to the draft National Framework document:

1. What are your views on the new structure of the National Framework?

2. Is the National Framework clear about the Government's objectives and priorities, what Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to deliver, and the support the Government will provide? If not, how could it be improved?

3. Do you agree with the policies set out in each chapter? If not why not, and what alternative policy would you wish to see instead?

4. Do you have any comments on the implementation of the policies set out that are of relevance to the National Framework?

4.0 Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy

4.1 The Fire and Rescue Service must engage with and understand the needs of the diverse communities it serves and plan and deliver its services to take account of those needs. Equality and diversity are therefore central to the effective protection of the public through fire prevention and emergency response. Progress has been made in recent years, particularly on community engagement, but the workforce remains overwhelmingly white and male and equality and diversity have yet to be embedded in all areas of the work of the Service.

4.2 The draft Equality and Diversity Strategy aims to deliver a step change, building on the Equality Standard for Local Government, and the Core Values for the Fire and Rescue Service. Its vision is to create by 2018 a Service which can demonstrate that it serves all communities equally to the highest standards, building on a closer and more effective relationship with the public and creating a more diverse workforce which better reflects the local working population in each area. The Strategy requires action by Fire and Rescue Authorities, supported by Communities and the Local Government, the Local Government Association and other partners in five priority areas: leadership, workforce diversity, service delivery, evaluation and dissemination of good practice and accountability.

- 4.3** As part of the development of the draft Strategy we have also considered with the Local Government Association, representative bodies and other stakeholders the existing workforce composition targets for women in operational roles (15% by 2009) and ethnic minority staff (7% by 2009, with local targets in line with local working population). The aim of these targets was to motivate and measure change in the overall composition of the workforce. This remains the goal to which we are absolutely committed. But at 31 March 2006 (the most recent published statistics) 2.8% of staff in operational roles were women and 3% of all staff were of minority ethnic background. The existing targets are plainly not achievable.
- 4.4** We concluded that there is an urgent need to change our approach while maintaining a very high level of ambition and challenge.
- 4.5** Progress towards the existing targets depended on a very wide range of factors, including leadership and culture as well as employment practices and public awareness, over a ten year period. In addition recruitment has been low over the last few years, making it more difficult to alter workforce composition. As a result the targets failed to unite the whole Service in the urgent change required. We have therefore considered what targets would focus effort across the whole Service on a small range of factors, which require immediate action, can be significantly changed in the short term and will make a real difference to workforce composition.
- 4.6** Positive action in recruitment including awareness campaigns, taster days, mentoring and other support has been shown to make a difference to the success of applicants from traditionally under represented groups, and to public perceptions. We are therefore proposing targets for recruitment, retention and progression by 2013. Our intention is to make a visible change to the style of recruitment and to the people joining the Service which will build momentum and support change under the wider Strategy, especially on leadership and culture.
- 4.7** Your views are requested in particular on:
- the level at which recruitment targets for women in operational roles should be set for all FRAs, within the range from 12% up to 18% (by 2013); and
 - the level at which recruitment targets for minority ethnic staff should be set, either (option 1) at the same percentage as the minority ethnic representation within the local working population;
 - or (option 2) within the range from the same percentage as the minority ethnic representation within the local working population up to 5% above that level (e.g. for an FRA where the minority ethnic percentage of the local working population is 10% the possible range would be 10% to 15%) (by 2013),
 - and if option 2 is preferred, the level at which the target should be set
 - whether, in order to ensure targets are meaningful, FRAs with very low minority ethnic working age populations (e.g. below 2%) and low recruitment requirements (e.g. less than 20 people a year)
 - should set a minority ethnic recruitment target in terms of individuals recruited over the five year period rather than a percentage of total recruitment.

- 4.8 It also proposes that a third target, to reach parity in rates of retention and progression between minority ethnic and white employees, and between men and women, by 2013. Performance on recruitment, retention and progression in relation to the other equality strands (disability, faith and belief, sexual orientation, gender identity and age) and to women in non-operational roles would be monitored.
- 4.9 The aim in the long term would be to change the composition of the Fire and Rescue Service workforce in England so that it includes the same percentage of minority ethnic staff as in the working age population (currently 12%) and 12% women in operational roles (as an achievable basis for further action). Targets above the bottom of the ranges proposed would enable this aim to be achieved more quickly. New targets for the second half of the Strategy's life would need to be set depending on progress.
- 4.10 The draft National Framework requires Fire and Rescue Authorities to implement the Strategy, to report progress to elected members and to Communities and Local Government at least annually and to review all areas of their work over the lifetime of the Framework to ensure that they promote equality and diversity in the workplace and in service delivery. Your views are also invited on what guidance is needed to support implementation in addition to guidance already available for the Service or for the public sector generally.
- 4.11 You are invited to comment on the draft Equality and Diversity Strategy and in particular to respond to the following questions:

Strategy

- **Do you consider that the Strategy sets out the actions which will together drive change? If not, why not? And what would you wish to change?**

Targets and monitoring

- **Do you support the principle of recruitment, retention and progression targets and consider that they will drive improvement on workforce diversity? If not why not? And what would you propose should be put in place?**
- **What are your views on the level at which recruitment targets for women in operational roles and ethnic minority staff should be set (within the ranges proposed), in order to be challenging but achievable, and likely to motivate action?**
- **Do you consider robust monitoring of all seven strands of diversity achievable, and likely to motivate action?**

Guidance

- **Are there areas covered by the strategy for which you consider specific guidance for the Fire and Rescue Service is required, (in addition to existing guidance developed for the Service or for the public sector in general)?**
- **We would also welcome any comments that you may have on the accompanying Impact Assessment (i.e. is there anything specifically you want Communities and Local Government to collect additional information on i.e. costs / benefits?)**

- 4.12 We have published the draft National Framework and Equality and Diversity Strategy with this Circular which is available at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/publications/consultations/>
- 4.13 The consultation will run for a full twelve weeks. All comments should be sent to the National Framework Team by email to national.framework@odpm.gsi.gov.uk, fax number 0207 944 8319 or by post to Talia Watson at the above address by **6 February 2008**. Could you please clearly identify your comments pertaining to the National Framework and/or the Equality and Diversity Strategy. We will consider all comments received by this date.
- 4.14 We will consult different groups during the consultation process. Fire and Rescue Services are requested to forward the website link <http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/publications/consultations/> to any local groups they believe would benefit from having the opportunity to comment on the Strategy.
- 4.15 CLG will publish a summary of responses to this consultation. A circular will be issued to notify FRAs after the consultation has closed.

5.0 Consultation Information and contact details

- 5.1 If you have any further questions about the consultation, please contact the National Framework Team at: national.framework@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

Code of Practice - Consultation Criteria

- 5.2 The Government has adopted a code of practice for consultations. The criteria below apply to all UK public consultations by government departments and agencies. Though the code does not have legal force, and cannot prevail over statutory or mandatory external requirements (e.g. under European Community law), it should otherwise generally be regarded as binding on UK departments and their agencies, unless Ministers conclude that exceptional circumstances require a departure from it.
1. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
 2. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
 3. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
 4. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
 5. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.
 6. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.
- 5.3 The full consultation code may be viewed at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/Consultation/Introduction.htm
- 5.4 Are you satisfied that this consultation has followed these criteria? If not, or you have any other observations about ways of improving the consultation process please contact:

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6.0 Freedom of information

- 6.1 Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004).
- 6.2 If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on Communities and Local Government.
- 6.3 Communities and Local Government will process your personal data in accordance with the DPA and in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

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