



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Fire and Rescue Monthly Bulletin

Bulletin number: 24

06 August 2012

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 London Commissioner
The Chief Fire Officer

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This item highlights the Business Rates Retention Technical Consultation.

Department for Business Innovation and Skills led “Focus on Enforcement” review of the Fire Safety Order

1. Background

The Government is keen to understand business perceptions of local regulators and enforcement bodies to ensure that businesses - particularly small - medium enterprises - are able to get the advice and support they need to comply with regulations in a helpful and proportionate way.

2. Information

The Department for Business Innovation and Skills has therefore worked with DCLG and the Chief Fire Officers Association to develop a short review of business experiences of fire safety enforcement under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 under its Focus on Enforcement programme. The scope of the review can be found at <http://discuss.bis.gov.uk/focusonenforcement>

The review aims to complete in the Autumn and is intended to provide an evidence base to inform fire and rescue authorities longer term strategies to support compliance and deliver their enforcement duties in accordance with business aspirations.

For further information please contact:

Louise Upton	Telephone	0303 444 2934
Fire Safety Team	Email	Louise.upton@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill

1. Background

The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament on 16 January 2012. It has now completed its passage in the Scottish Parliament on 27 June 2012.

The purpose of the Bill is to make provision to create a single police service and a single fire and rescue service in place of the current eight of each.

2. Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill

The Bill sets out the governance arrangements and framework for the new single services. In addition, it provides:

- a modern purpose for the police service and updated oath for constables. For fire, the Scottish Government intends that a new purpose will be included in a new fire and rescue framework;
- a statutory framework for the delivery of police and fire and rescue services and appropriate scrutiny and oversight arrangements; and
- arrangements for the transfer of existing officers and staff to both services.

The Bill is in 3 parts. Part 1 deals with police, Part 2 deals with fire and rescue and Part 3 deals with general provisions.

A copy of the Bill as passed is now available on the Scottish Parliament's Website at:

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/bills/billsInProgress/index.htm>

For further information please contact:

Harinder Sahota	Telephone	0303 444 1312
National Fire Policy and Analysis Division	Email	Harinder.sahota@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Community Right to Challenge – Statutory Guidance

1. Background

Fire and Rescue Monthly Bulletin Number 22 issued on the 11 June 2012 set out the publication of draft Statutory Guidance on Community Right to Challenge:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/fsb222012>

2. Publication of draft Local Audit Bill

The final Community Right to Challenge guidance was published on 27 June:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/righttochallenge/guide>.

A Community Rights website has been launched to give people more information about the new powers and opportunities available to them. The website can be viewed at:

www.communityrights.communities.gov.uk

For further information please contact:

Matthew West	Telephone	0303 444 2069
Community Right to Challenge	Email	matthew.west@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Anna Wadsworth	Telephone	0303 444 2954
National Fire Policy and Analysis Division	Email	anna.wadsworth@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Publication of the Draft Local Audit Bill

1. Background

Fire and Rescue Monthly Bulletin Number 18 issued 6 February 2012 highlighted information about the Future of Local Audit: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/fsb182012>

2. Publication of Draft Local Audit Bill

The draft Local Audit Bill was published on 6 July 2012 for consultation and pre-legislative scrutiny alongside our proposals for the audit of smaller local public bodies (those with a turnover of less than £6.5 million). The draft Bill confirms our plans to abolish the Audit Commission in 2015 (subject to Parliamentary approval), moving to full local appointment of auditors once the current centrally administered contracts for audit services run their course. The abolition of the Audit Commission will save £650 million over the next five years.

A copy of the draft Bill and how to respond to the consultation (which **closes on the 31 August 2012**) can be found on the Department's website at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/draftlocalauditbill>

The main provisions in the draft Local Audit Bill are:

- Closure of the Audit Commission and making arrangements to transfer its assets, liabilities and continuing functions to other bodies
- A requirement on local public bodies, such as councils, to appoint an external and independent auditor on the advice of an independent auditor panel
- Transferring responsibility to the Financial Reporting Council and professional accountancy bodies for regulating the provision of local public audit services, mirroring the arrangements for private sector audit
- Giving responsibility to the National Audit Office for setting the high level code of audit practice, which auditors of local public bodies must follow, and for undertaking a small number of value for money studies relating to local government
- The continuation of the National Fraud Initiative to prevent and detect fraud, which will be transferred to another body.

The key elements of the proposals for smaller local public bodies are:

- A proportionate regulatory regime, and retention of the current light touch system of audit (limited assurance), which the National Audit Office will set out in a schedule to the code of audit practice.
- Giving smaller bodies the option of having the procurement and appointment of their audit services carried out by a sector-led body.
- Those bodies with an annual turnover below £25,000 will no longer be subject to external audit. This will be counterbalanced by new transparency requirements for all smaller bodies with turnover below £200,000, and local people will still be able to raise objections and have complaints investigated by an auditor if deemed appropriate.

We would welcome responses from interested parties to the consultation. Please use the response form on the Department's website and email responses to: fola@communities.gsi.gov.uk. Your responses will help us to refine the draft Bill and our proposals for smaller bodies before legislation is formally introduced to Parliament.

For further information please contact:



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Future of Local Audit Team	Email	fola@communities.gsi.gov.uk
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Anna Wadsworth	Telephone	0303 444 2954
National Fire Policy and Analysis Division	Email	anna.wadsworth@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Business Rates Retention: Technical Consultation

1. Background

The consultation seeks views on detailed issues of implementation and operation of the Government's business rates retention proposals.

The scheme will operate to create a direct financial incentive for local authorities, including both single purpose fire and rescue authorities and fire and rescue authorities within county councils, to grow their economies, while ensuring sufficient resources for local services

The consultation builds on the Government response to the Resource Review consultation published in December: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/resourceviewgovtresponse> ; and on the statements of intent published on 17 May 2012:

- 1.1 Business rates retention scheme: The central and local shares of business rates
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/businessratescentral>
- 1.1 Business rates retention scheme: The Safety Net and Levy
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/businessratessafety>

2. Overview and Fire Funding

Views are particularly sought on how the Government proposes to calculate local authority start-up funding allocations, baseline funding levels and set-up and operational parameters.

Section 2 focuses on establishing local authority baseline funding levels and revenue support grant methodology. **Section 3** outlines other parameters, particularly those defining individual authority business rate baselines. **Section 4** details proposed operation post set up. **Section 5** covers the proposals for closing the 2012-13 national non-domestic rating account.

Reductions are proposed to fire spending control totals as set out in the Autumn Statement of 2011.

It is proposed to hold back up to £7m from the Revenue Support Grant for fire and rescue authorities, to provide capitalisation support for authorities and to ensure that there is some additional support for the safety net in the early years of the business rates retention scheme.

The consultation confirms that fire revenue grants paid to authorities to enable them to maintain equipment that is used for national resilience will remain as a specific grant.

It is proposed to calculate baseline funding levels for each authority on the basis of the 2012-13 formula grant process with updated data sets and limited technical updates.

Safety net proposals are outlined, as well as a 1 % fire and rescue rural sparsity adjustment.

The proposed scheme design will ensure fire and rescue authorities are top-up authorities, to provide a degree of funding protection. Proposals are for annual uprating by Retail Price Index.

The consultation closes on 24 September 2012 and can be found at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/businessratestechnical>

For enquiries and to respond to this consultation:

please e-mail: brtechnicalconsultation@communities.gsi.gov.uk

or write Andrew Lock Department for Communities and Local Government Zone 5/J1, Eland House, Bressenden Place London SW1E 5DU Telephone: 0303 444 2137

For further information please contact:

Chris Sewell	Telephone	0303 444 3807
National Fire Policy and Analysis	Email	chris.sewell@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 0303 444 0000
Website: www.communities.gov.uk

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