

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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Securing the future of the Fire Service College

1. Background

On 5 September 2011, the Fire Minister announced the Government's intention to explore options for a new ownership, operational and governance model for the Fire Service College by undertaking a short phase of pre-market engagement. Having reviewed the responses to the pre-market engagement and having considered a number of possible options, the Government has decided to sell the College as a going concern to a private sector company who would continue to operate the College as a training centre.

2. Decision on the future of the Fire Service College

The Government is committed to supporting the delivery of resilient fire and rescue services that protect the public by preventing and responding to emergencies.

The Government sees strong value in a national college for the delivery of common, consistent standards of safety critical training and improved inter-operability across fire and rescue authorities in support of resilience and to enable them to meet public expectations. However, the current Fire Service College ownership and business arrangements do not provide the flexibility necessary for the College to operate with sufficient commercial success.

The Government has conducted a pre-market engagement exercise to inform its view of market appetite and viable options for a new ownership, operational and governance model for the Fire Service College which secures its future, supports national resilience and provides best value for the public purse.

Having reviewed the responses to the pre-market engagement and having considered a number of possible options, the Government has decided to sell the College as a going concern to a private sector company who would continue to operate the College as a training centre. By freeing the College from the constraints of Government ownership, a private sector owner can generate new business and provide the capital investment which the College needs to secure its long term future.

The Government will be insisting on a number of conditions on the proposed sale, including commitments not only that the College will be preserved as a national training college for fire and rescue, but also that it will continue to offer wider national resilience and emergency services training and exercises, that the wider emergency services will be involved in the overall setting of training governance and that Government permission will be required to sell the site on for other uses.

3. Next Steps

The formal sale process is expected to commence next month with the issuing of an Information Memorandum to the market. This is a key document in the sale process providing a detailed overview of the College's business and buyers will use it to assess their interest in the College. We are looking to complete the sale of the College by the Autumn of 2012.

For further information please contact:

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Fire Service College Future Options project	Email	harriet.hepburn@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Bidding round for Fire Capital Funding 2013-15

1. Background

The Fire and Rescue Minister Bob Neill MP announced at the Local Government Association Fire conference on 21 March 2012 a bidding round for fire capital funding for 2013-15.

2. Guidance

Following on from last year's consultation the Fire and Rescue Minister Bob Neill agreed that for the years 2013-15 fire capital grant would be allocated based on a combination of:

- an efficiency fund administered as a capital grant via a bidding process, and
- a pro-rata distribution using current distribution method.

This enables fire and rescue authorities to make efficiency changes and demonstrate value for money. The Department has issued guidance on bidding which can be found at the Department for Communities and Local Government website at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/capitalfunding201315>

The bidding round will close on the 2 July 2012. Once the bids are received they will be assessed by a departmental panel. The panel will make recommendations to the Minister with the intention of announcing the outcome in the autumn.

3. Arrangements for Capital Grant payments for 2012-13

For the year 2012-13 the Department will retain the current pro rata distribution method (that is with £500,000 base plus the percentage of population, excluding the Isles of Scilly). Payment of grant for 2012-13 will be made in early May 2012.

For further information please contact:

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Fire Kills Campaign

1. Background

Fire Minister Bob Neill announced at the LGA Fire Conference on 21 March that the Fire Kills campaign has been given approval to continue in 2012-13.

2. Fire Kills Campaign

As with the previous two years, the focus of the 2012-13 campaign will be to support and empower local fire and rescue authorities to deliver the campaign and its messages locally. Therefore, the Department for Communities and Local Government will shortly be discussing detailed plans for the 2012-13 campaign with the Fire Kills Practitioners' Group.

For further information please contact:

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Council Tax Referendums

1. Background

The Localism Act 2011 abolished Whitehall capping in England and instead provides local residents with a power to approve or veto excessive council tax rises. The new provisions require the House of Commons to approve principles by the Secretary of State defining an excessive increase in council tax for any financial year.

Each local authority must determine whether its council tax increase is excessive by reference to the principles and, if so, arrange for a referendum to be held. It must also make substitute calculations which would result in a non-excessive increase in council tax, and which would apply if the authority's council tax increase is rejected in a referendum. The result of the referendum will be binding.

2. Excessiveness principles for 2012-2013 and 2013-14

No authority has reported that it has exceeded the council tax excessiveness principles which apply in 2012-13, in which case there will be no council tax referendums this year.

The principles were that authorities must seek the approval of their electorate in a referendum if they set council tax increases in 2012-13 that exceed:

- 4% for police authorities, and single purpose fire & rescue authorities;
- for the Greater London Authority, either or both of:
 - 4% for its adjusted relevant basic amount
 - 3.75% for its unadjusted relevant basic amount;^{1[1]}
- 3.5% for all other local authorities.

It is intended that excessiveness principles for 2013-14 will be proposed by the Secretary of State around November/December 2012, in parallel with the annual announcement of the provisional local government finance settlement. It cannot be assumed that the same principles will apply as in 2012-13.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/counciltax201213>

3. Referendum Procedure

On 20th January 2012 the Department circulated Information on referendum procedures. It is intended to provide a summary of the key provisions for council tax referendums and authorities' responsibilities in the event that they are required to arrange for a referendum to be held in 2012-13. It is not a definitive interpretation of the regulations or the primary legislation (see paragraph 3 of the Note).

The Note provides contact details within the Department for individual authorities and electoral administrators who may require further advice on council tax referendums.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/localgovernmentfinance/counciltax/counciltaxreferendums/>

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- ^{1[1]} The unadjusted amount applies to the City of London and does not include any amount in respect of the metropolitan police.
 - The adjusted amount applies to all parts of Greater London other than the City of London and includes an amount in respect of the metropolitan police"

The Council Tax (Administration and Enforcement) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2012 come into force on 1 April 2012 and specify the actions that an authority must then take in respect of individual bill payers if its excessive increase is not approved in a referendum, and it has to adopt its substitute calculations (which mean a lower bill for council tax payers).

Billing authorities will be able to issue new bills, offer refunds at the end of the year or credits against liability. Individuals requesting a refund must be provided with one.

The regulations prohibit enforcement action in pursuit of the difference between the amount set out in the original bill and the amount that would be charged under the substitute calculations when an authority loses the referendum.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2012/672/made/data.pdf>

For further information please contact:

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Transfer of the Fire and Rescue Service National Co-ordination Centre

1. Background

The Fire and Rescue Service National Co-ordination Centre was established to co-ordinate the national mobilisation and deployment of New Dimension resources and is an integral function within the National Co-ordination and Advisory Framework. Since its inception, the Fire and Rescue Service National Co-ordination Centre has been located within West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service. As from Monday 1st April 2012 the Fire and Rescue Service National Co-ordination Centre will be relocated within the London Fire Brigade.

2. Current Status

The Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, Sir Ken Knight wrote to all Chief Fire Officers on Friday 30th March to inform them of the new arrangements.

The Fire and Rescue Service National Co-ordination Centre became operational on 1st April 2012. The Fire and Rescue Service National Co-ordination Centre can be contacted as follows:

Primary contact number: 020 8536 5900

Secondary contact number: 020 8542 9254

Email: frsncc@london-fire.gov.uk

Information relating to national resilience resources and requests for national resilience resources should be made to these contacts from now on.

The Fire and Rescue Circular 30-2006 Fire and Rescue Service National Co-ordination Centre Guidance Document will be revised to reflect these new arrangements and will be published shortly.

For further information please contact:

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Incident Recording System new release 23/4 April 2012

1. Background

This item highlights the release of version 2.2.0 of the Incident Recording System, which will be implemented on 23 April 2012. The release is the largest since the Incident Recording System was launched in 2008 and comprises numerous changes and refinements. The new version will be available for Fire and Rescue Services to use on Tuesday 24 April 2012.

2. Detail

This is a major piece of work which will see the introduction of over 100 changes to the system. Some are fixes to current bugs but most are improvements in response to requests from fire and rescue authorities. Views from fire and rescue authorities were sought on the desirability and practicalities in the review of the Incident Recording System carried out in 2009/10. As a result of this work, data quality and user accounts and log-in security should be improved and usability will be enhanced.

Key areas of change are as follows:

- There will be a new version of the Incident Recording System Guidance which explains the changes. In addition, contextual help in the taxonomy lists will now be in the form of floating guidance bubbles.
- Additional downloadable incident report formats have been introduced. There are now eight reports each of which can be customised further. This is to allow Fire and Rescue Services to define more easily which information they should pass on in response to any given request for incident information, having considered the sensitivity of the information, for example with respect to the Data Protection Act.
- The search facility has been enhanced, improving Over the Border searches in particular.
- Validation mechanisms have been reviewed and changes have been made. This should make it easier to answer questions and improve quality assurance processes.
- In response to requests from 13 fire and rescue authorities, updates of each one's station identifiers have been implemented
- A new read-only user type has been introduced. This will allow managers and administrators who do not need to change information to view incident records as required.
- The way that users log in to the Incident Recording System has also been changed. This will ensure that user credentials are not automatically saved in some browsers improving security.
- Clarifications to question titles have been made where the meaning was judged to be ambiguous.
- Taxonomy lists have also been changed for types of property, false alarm and special service, so that these are more relevant and user friendly.
- The Incident Recording System homepage has been redesigned to improve usability.

Fire and rescue authorities will be able to access the Incident Recording System Training environment between 2 and 16 April to test their systems.

Technical guidance in the form of the Incident Recording System Schema pack was released on 7 March 2012. Details of the changes can be obtained from the Incident Recording System Helpdesk

(irshelp@communities.gsi.gov.uk, 0845 3777 888). The helpdesk continues to provide support and advice on all aspects of using the system.

For further information please contact:

Technical information and guidance:

Samantha Wright	Telephone	0303 444 3936
Incident Recording System	Email	samantha.wright@communities.gsi.gov.uk

New downloadable incident reports:

Gavin Sayer	Telephone	0303 444 2818
Incident Recording System	Email	gavin.sayer@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Accountability System Statements

1. Background

Accounting officers in government departments are accountable to Parliament for the proper stewardship of the resources allocated to them. Departments will publish statements regarding the resources they distribute to local bodies.

The accountability system statement for the Department for Communities and Local Government was published on 22 March 2012 and can be found at:

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

2. Accountability System Statements

This sets out the accountability system for local authorities and fire and rescue authorities for the financial year 2012-13. It has been signed off by Sir Bob Kerslake as accounting officer for the Department. It sets out current funding systems, legislation and guidance which forms the system at present, and it signposts changes which are expected to be made during the year.

It covers the core accountability system for local authorities, which is concerned with issues such as their financial management and democratic accountability. Annex B sets out the arrangements in place for fire and rescue authorities.

Departments which oversee other services run by local government will publish statements in relation to these services and will be published on the relevant department's website.

For further information please contact:

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National Operational Guidance

1. Background

The Department for Communities and Local Government has recently published operational guidance for fire and rescue authorities in relation to Railways, Tunnels and Underground Structures.

2. Recently Published National Operational Guidance

The Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser wrote to all Chief Fire Officers on the 26th March 2012 to inform them of two publications by the Department for Communities and Local Government of the Fire and Rescue Service Operational Guidance.

The Operational Guidance is available to be viewed and downloaded in electronic format.

- Fire and Rescue Service Operational Guidance – Railway Incidents
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/railwayincidents>
- Fire and Rescue Service Operational Guidance – Incidents in Tunnels and Underground structures
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/tunnelincidents>

Hard copies of the published document will be sent to fire and rescue authorities from The Stationary Office during May 2012.

The Operational Guidance Programme identified that much of the guidance on these subject areas was over 10 years old and in need of review and revision. Guidance relating to these areas previously issued by Her Majesty's Government that is now deemed to be obsolete or superseded are set out in Section 13 in each of the new Operational Guidance documents. Electronic versions of these documents are retained within the National Archive.

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