



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Fire and Rescue Monthly Bulletin

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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 London Commissioner
The Chief Fire Officer

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This item provides information on the publication of the Government response to the Exercise Watermark report.

Consultation on changing the name of Bedfordshire and Luton combined fire authority

1. Background

The Bedfordshire and Luton combined fire authority, a combined fire authority covering Bedfordshire County Council and Luton Borough Council, was formed by means of the *Bedfordshire Fire Service (Combination Scheme) Order 1996*, with members from both Bedfordshire County Council and Luton Borough Council.

Since then, two unitary councils (Central Bedfordshire Council and Bedford Borough Council) have replaced Bedfordshire County Council, which has been abolished. This means that the fire authority's name is no longer wholly representative of its constituent bodies.

2. Consultation

On Tuesday 28 August 2012, Minister for Fire and Rescue Bob Neill MP published a consultation on changing the name of Bedfordshire and Luton combined fire authority. Neil O'Connor, Director of fire, resilience and emergencies directorate also wrote to all fire and rescues authorities, borough and county councils that were directly affected by the name change request.

The change of name requires an amendment to the *Bedfordshire Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1996*. The procedure for such an amendment is set out within section 4 of the *Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004*.

This consultation seeks views from selected bodies on the proposal of Bedfordshire and Luton combined fire authority to change its name to Bedfordshire fire and rescue authority.

The consultation document can be found at the Department for Communities and Local Government website at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/bedsfraconsult> and will run for four weeks from 28 August 2012 to 25 September 2012, which is in accordance with Cabinet Office guidance. Please send any responses to: fsed6@communities.gsi.gov.uk.

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Access to fire and rescue incident records in England

1. Headline

Fire and rescue authorities in England are now able to download Incident Recording System records upon signing up to a set of access conditions.

This enables fire and rescue authorities to derive wide-ranging information at local and national level, for example for deriving statistics for benchmarking and to support fire safety and prevention.

2. Accessing the data set

Fire and rescue authority access to the data sets will be via a secure file transfer download facility.

The data access conditions are available by emailing Gavin.Sayer@communities.gsi.gov.uk or Ian.Rowe@communities.gsi.gov.uk. These require authorisation by a senior member of staff, along with an undertaking from a manager with day-to-day responsibility for ensuring supervision of adherence to the data access conditions. This includes up-to-date training to those staff who need to have access, e.g. in data protection.

3. Content of the data set

The specification of the data set was developed in consultation with fire and rescue authorities, with sixteen authorities providing comments in response to draft specifications.

The data set contains a majority of details of incidents collected under the Incident Recording System. Some data are excluded; this is either because they have been deemed potentially particularly sensitive, or because there was potential sensitivity meanwhile the benefits of inclusion in the data set were not compelling.

4. Access to fire and rescue incident data for those other than fire and rescue authorities

This has also been under development. A specification was tested over winter 2011-12 for risks of the disclosure of personal information. These tests were carried out by a leading academic appointed by the Administrative Data Liaison Service, an organisation funded by the Economic and Social Research Council to encourage the development of access to data sets. The results of these tests indicated that the fire and rescue incident record-level data base is not suited for unrestricted public access, and that instead access for others should be via a secure data lab. The Department is therefore also pursuing this option as part of its delivery to the Government's Transparency Agenda. Meanwhile a wide range of statistics at national and fire authority levels continue to be available on the Department's website at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/researchandstatistics/firestatistics/>.

For further information please contact:

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Publication of the Government response to the Exercise Watermark Report

1. Background

Exercise Watermark took place in March 2011 and examined national and local responses to different types of major flood incidents. The team that reviewed the lessons learnt and feedback issued the Exercise Watermark Final Report in September 2011 making a number of recommendations.

The report can be found at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13673-exercise-watermark-finalreport.pdf>

2. Government response

The Government's Response to the Exercise Watermark Final Report was published on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs website on 31st July 2012. It largely welcomes the recommendations from the Report and lays out Government actions to address the issues raised, much of which has already been completed.

The Government response can be found at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13810-exercise-watermark-gov-resp.pdf>

There are a number of responses of interest to fire and rescue authorities that include:

- Confirmation that Government and most partners' view is that improved guidance on coordination of flood rescue assets would give the greatest flexibility at the local level: existing guidance will now be amended accordingly;
- Information is provided on the on-going work on co-ordination of the response to an east coast inundation, through the East Coast Flood Group, where fire and rescue authorities are playing a key role;
- Advising that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Lead Government Department Plan for Flooding and the National Flood Emergency Framework for England will be revised in autumn 2012.

We will be writing to fire and rescue authorities and other key partners in the near future to outline any actions and support needed to deliver the recommendations of the Report.

For further information please contact:

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