

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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Community Right to Challenge – Statutory Guidance (Draft)

1. Background

Fire and Rescue Monthly Bulletin Number 16 issued November 2011 set out some information on the Localism Act including provisions for Community Right to Challenge

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/fsb162011>

2. Guidance

The [guidance](#) was published on 21 May 2011 and provides further explanation of the legislative framework for the Community Right to Challenge. This is contained in Part 5, Chapter 2 of the Localism Act 2011, The Community Right to Challenge (Expressions of Interest and Excluded Services) (England) Regulations 2012, and The Community Right to Challenge (Fire and Rescue Authorities and Rejection of Expressions of Interest) (England) Regulations 2012.

The Localism Act was enacted on 15 November 2011. However, Community Right to Challenge provisions will be commenced at the same time as the regulations made under those provisions come into force. Regulations have been laid in Parliament and are subject to parliamentary approval. As such, this guidance remains draft and subject to any changes as a consequence of changes to secondary legislation following its passage through Parliament.

A final version of this guidance will be published when the Community Right to Challenge provisions come into force. This is expected to be on 27 June 2012.

For further information please contact:

Angela Harrowing	Telephone	0303 444 1349
Community Right to Challenge	Email	angela.harrowing@communities.gsi.gov.uk

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

Consultation on Localising Support for Council Tax: Funding arrangements consultation

1. Background

The Local Government Finance Bill supports the Government's commitment to delivering economic growth, decentralising control over finance, and reducing the deficit. It includes provisions for local council tax support schemes in England, delivering the Spending Review 2010 commitment that support for council tax would be localised from 2013-14 and expenditure reduced by 10% from the same date.

To implement local council tax support schemes in April 2013, local authorities will need to be preparing their proposed schemes and embarking on consultation with major precepting authorities and their taxpayers.

The Department consulted last year on proposals for localising council tax support, including running a series of engagement events. The response to the outcome of consultation was published in December 2012: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localisingtaxresponse>. This set out how the Department intends to implement the Spending Review commitment in England.

2. Public Consultation

The consultation is aimed at billing and precepting authorities: local government, fire and rescue authorities, police authorities and parish councils.

This document sets out how the Government intends to distribute funding to support local schemes and seeks views on possible adjustments to allocations to avoid potential budgetary pressures in a few authorities. It is published alongside statements of intent for the key sets of regulations which will provide the legal framework for local schemes.

The consultation closes on 12 July 2011 and can be found at:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/2146644>

For enquiries and to respond to this consultation.

Please e-mail:

CTB-REFORM@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Or write to:

Localising Council Tax Benefit Team, Department of Communities and Local Government, 5/J3 Eland House, Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5DU

For further information please contact:

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

Fire and Rescue Authority use of electromagnetic spectrum - Spectrum Release and Licence Fee Reduction for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England and Wales

1. Background

Fire and rescue authorities no longer use the majority of their current spectrum holdings in VHF Low band (68 – 87MHz) and VHF Mid band (138-165MHz). This is because they have now migrated onto the Airwave network for the majority of voice and data communications. The Public Safety Spectrum Policy Group have therefore determined that for the emergency services sector, in the context of the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme and any future communications considerations, these bands are not required. As such, the Group has agreed to the release of this spectrum to civil use. This in turn has a direct cost saving benefit to individual fire and rescue authorities.

2. Details

A further two bands have also been identified for release. These are the bands 1668 – 1670MHz paired with 1698 – 1700MHz (2x2MHz) which are co-primary to both space services and the emergency services. Responsibility and fee liability for the band will now be solely to the space services (radio astronomy and metrological satellite services) where they have an ongoing interest.

Equally, the Public Safety Spectrum Policy Group have decided that spectrum shall be held by the emergency services in the UHF bands (450 – 470MHz) as well as 2x 8MHz above 1 GHz (at 1790 – 1798MHz paired with 2302 – 2310MHz). These will be retained as necessary to facilitate Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme initiatives. In England and Wales, these bands are thus to be held jointly for future purposes by fire and rescue authorities and the police based on the existing spectrum reservation arrangements.

Historically, in England and Wales, the policing sector paid for 79.6% of the total emergency services spectrum whilst fire and rescue authorities took on the remaining 20.4% (referred to as the “80:20” arrangement). The 20.4% was then further subdivided based on 999 call outs amongst fire and rescue authorities in England and Wales (as established in December 1999).

Following discussions with the Chief Fire Officers Association and the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Office of Communications have agreed that fire and rescue authorities and the police should now be paying for spectrum that they directly use. The Office of Communications informed them that changes applied from 1st April 2012 with a saving in annual fees to fire and rescue authorities of 70% (£219k/pa, down from £722k/pa). It is only where there is a continuing joint spectrum interest that the two will continue to pay on the existing ‘80:20’ arrangements.

Fire and rescue authorities and the police will still retain the use of a limited number of VHF channels for ongoing use. In addition, if individual fire and rescue or police end users wished, in future, to access some of the released VHF spectrum they would still have the option to do so by taking out a Wireless Telegraphy Act licence, where the relevant channels are available, in exactly the same way that civil users would (and where channels were not still available, then access to other similar channels will be made available).

A letter summarising the Office of Communications revised charging will be sent to Chief Fire Officers and copied to Chairs of Fire Authorities shortly.

For further information please contact:

Les Griffiths	Telephone	0303 444 2840
Office of the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser	Email	Les.griffiths@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Review of content of the publication *Fire Statistics Great Britain*

1. Background

*Fire Statistics Great Britain*¹ contains statistical outputs derived from records of incidents attended by fire and rescue authorities, for example on causes of fire and the effectiveness of smoke alarms.

The implementation of the new Incident Recording System included various changes to the details and scope of information recorded by fire and rescue authorities about fire and rescue incidents. The content of the latest edition of the publication *Fire Statistics Great Britain* included some new analysis, but there is scope for a range of further insights on fire safety to be drawn out. It is therefore appropriate that the content of *Fire Statistics Great Britain* is reviewed and re-prioritised.

1. www.communities.gov.uk/fire/researchandstatistics/firestatistics/firestatisticsuk/ (*Fire Statistics Great Britain*, was formerly *Fire Statistics United Kingdom*, as explained in the introduction of the latest publication)
2. www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/firestatsgb201011

2. Key Points

A questionnaire has been sent to those who responded to our invitation to register their interest³ as a user of Fire Statistics which was promoted last summer, and to a list of data analysts across fire and rescue authorities.

The questionnaire suggests some possible new content, for example, numbers of people rescued at incidents, and analysis of dwelling fires where alcohol or drugs were involved. It also highlights some outputs that may no longer be high priority, for example: some data tables that are similar to those in the Fire Statistics Monitor (tables 22-24) and regional aggregations of basic counts of incidents and casualties (table 29-31).

If you would like to tell us what you use from within the publication, and more generally provide views on how our statistics outputs could be improved, a copy of the questionnaire can be obtained by emailing IRSHelp@communities.gsi.gov.uk.

Responses should be received by Monday 30 July 2012 in order to enable views to be considered before work begins on the Fire Statistics Great Britain 2011-12 publication.

3. www.communities.gov.uk/fire/researchandstatistics/firestatistics/firestatfeedback/

For further information please contact:

Gavin Sayer	Telephone	0303 444 2818
Head of Fire Statistics Team	Email	Gavin.sayer@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Emergency Services Interoperability at Incidents – Awareness Training package

1. Introduction

As part of the ongoing cross government programme of work on blue light interoperability the Chief Fire Officers Association, Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Ambulance Chief Executives have produced a joint training package. The package entitled *Emergency Services Interoperability at Incidents* has been developed to raise the awareness for Commanders of emergency responders of the roles and responsibilities of each of the other emergency services.

2. Details

The package has been circulated by the Chief Fire Officers Association to all Chief Fire Officers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and it is the expectation that the training is delivered to all fire Incident Commanders and those with potential to be in command of incidents prior to the start of the Olympic games in July 2012. The training pack may also be used to raise wider awareness for all operational staff including control room operators.

For further information please contact:

Steve Beckley		
West Yorkshire FRS	Email	steve.beckley@westyorksfire.gov.uk

Martin Blunden		
Hertfordshire FRS	Email	martin.blunden@hertscc.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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