

Conveners of Fire Authorities and Joint Fire Boards

24 November 2010

SPENDING REVIEW AND SCOTLAND'S FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES

DELIVERING THE RIGHT OUTCOMES

I wrote to you on 17 November and set out the wider spending challenges facing Scotland's public services. I now want to focus on the specific implications for the fire and rescue service; and propose interim arrangements that will align individual Fire and Rescue Authority spend or operational changes with the wider options appraisal process that we are collectively delivering under the auspices of the Ministerial Advisory Group.

While details of the Fire Capital Grant (FCG) are still being finalised, it has been agreed with COSLA that it should remain ring-fenced within the Local Government Settlement, though reduced in line with the wider reductions in overall capital spend. I hope that at the next MAG meeting on 6 December, I will be able to provide you with the detailed figures and discuss a proposal for the allocation of available capital funds in 2011/12.

Turning back to the wider funding picture, we must remember that the challenge we face is not simply one of finding one or two year savings; it is about developing new ways to improve outcomes and deliver best value with around 12% less money over at least the next four years, without impacting on the frontline unless, and until, every other option has been exhausted.

As you know, at the MAG on 29 September it was agreed by all stakeholders that, given the ongoing commitment to further improving outcomes, the scale of the required efficiencies meant the status quo in terms of the structure of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is not sustainable in the long term, and that consideration of alternative options should begin immediately. That is why we are now collectively analysing the detailed information about the operations of the eight services and Scottish Resilience, and appraising various options for the future. The MAG sub-group report will be considered at MAG on 6 December but the discussion will continue until final decisions about the way ahead are made. If and when decisions are made to change the structure, the process could take a further 1-2 years.

While future options are being discussed, I believe it is right and responsible that before FRAs proceed with any: large-scale capital projects, including those currently in the development phase; principal officer appointments and promotions; changes to frontline and control room provision and personnel conditions that they should first discuss their proposals, and possible alternative approaches, with SFRAU.

I appreciate that this is a significant departure from our normal Governance arrangements, but these are not normal times. While the legal responsibility for any such decisions remains wholly with the individual Authorities, I believe this proposed approach is not only prudent in these financially challenging times, but is a natural extension of the collective decision-making we have advocated over the past four years.

I want us all to work together to assure ourselves that any changes or financial undertakings within individual Authorities align with our collective ambition to deliver the best long term outcomes for the fire and rescue service in Scotland. I will set out the details and criteria of our proposed approach for discussion at MAG on 6 December, with a view to all stakeholders agreeing to adopt the process immediately afterwards.

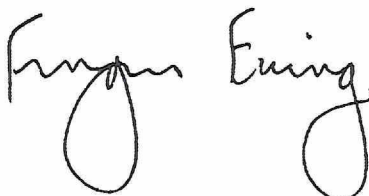
The marked reductions in the Scottish Government Budget clearly demonstrate the scale of the challenges that face all of Scotland's public services. The First Minister recently reiterated that the Government will continue to develop proposals on public service reform, including structural reform of the police and fire and rescue. While the work on fire and rescue would help inform the new Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services, it will ultimately form its own views on the steps required to deliver the ambitions set out in its remit.

The choices ahead will not be easy, but we all agree that they have to be made. Delaying the difficult decisions would only mean having to make even harder ones in the future. Now, more than ever, is a time for unity. I look to you to work with Government to shape the services of the future, to ensure they meet the needs of your local communities and to deliver the outcomes that we all want to see within the new financial settlement.

I know that you are all up for the challenge and are committed to delivering the best possible service to the people of Scotland. I look forward to continued partnership working with you and your colleagues.

I am again copying this letter to all Chief Fire Officers and Clerks to the Authorities, as well as members of the Ministerial Advisory Group and Audit Scotland.

Yours sincerely



FERGUS EWING