

POLICE AND FIRE REFORMS 2016: MERGER IS NOT INEVITABLE

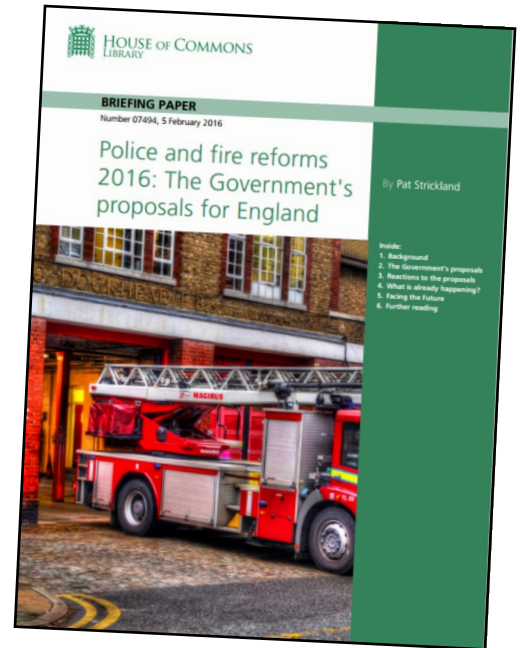
“...this is not a police takeover and the important distinction between operational policing and firefighting will be maintained. We will preserve the distinct identity of the fire and rescue service and the police force...”

Over the last three years, the boundaries of collaborative working between police and fire have blurred, especially on the front line.

We have reported many times in this magazine on voluntary, blue-light shared buildings, shared response centres and in some cases shared back office services.

However, the voluntary nature is being replaced with the Policing and Crime Bill which was introduced to the House of Commons on 10 February 2016. The main proposals are:

- A new statutory duty on police, fire and ambulance services to collaborate to improve efficiency and effectiveness (with local discretion over how this is done)
- Police and Crime Commissioners would take over responsibility for fire and rescue services “where a local case is made”
- The transfer to those PCCs would be done through secondary legislation following local consultation and the case being made to the Secretary of State
- Where the parties were not in agreement about the transfer, the PCC would still be able to put the case to the Secretary of State, who would decide, taking into account the local consultation and an independent assessment of the business case
- In areas where the PCC takes over fire services, there would be a “single employer” for fire and policing rather than a separate Chief Constable and Chief Fire Officer
- Where the PCC had not taken over responsibility for fire services, legislation would enable them to have voting rights on their local Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) or its committees if they make the case and the FRA agree



- The Government will legislate to abolish the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, and create a “London Fire Commissioner” to run the London Fire Brigade with the Mayor being responsible for setting budgets and strategic direction.

The new collaboration duty has been broadly welcomed, although some have questioned whether it is necessary.

The central proposal of allowing responsibility to transfer to PCCs where there is local demand, has received a more mixed reception.

But not a merger of Police and Fire

At the September 2016 Chief Fire Officers AGM, the new Policing and Fire Minister Brandon Lewis stated that *“...this is not a police takeover and the important distinction between operational policing and firefighting will be maintained. We will preserve the distinct identity of the fire and rescue service and the police force...”*

So you may want to put your “First Responder” hi-viz jacket, back in the wardrobe for now.