

Reforming our fire and rescue service consultation

**TUC response to government
consultation
July 2022**

Introduction

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) is the voice of Britain at work. We represent more than 5.5 million working people in 48 unions across the economy. We campaign for more and better jobs and a better working life for everyone, and we support trade unions to grow and thrive.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the white paper on reforming fire and rescue service.

Since 2010, central funding from Westminster to fire and rescue services across the UK has been cut by more than 40% in real terms. Since 2010, more than one in five firefighter jobs (almost 12,000 jobs) have been cut across the UK, the worst period of cuts in the entire history of the service.

Firefighters have gone above and beyond to keep fire and rescue services going during the pandemic. Following a decade of cuts and pay restraint, fire and rescue services desperately need investment and professional standards of service to improve the service firefighters provide to our communities. The TUC believes the white paper does not address these issues.

Firstly, the TUC is concerned that the review on pay would undermine existing national collective bargaining structures. It would threaten the legal rights of firefighters to collectively bargain with their employers over pay, conditions, safety and other vital contractual matters.

Secondly, The TUC is concerned that the white paper threatens the right of firefighters to democratically organise and to take lawful industrial action when those terms and conditions are challenged by employers.

Thirdly, The TUC believes that giving chief fire officers operational independence would undermine accountability to local taxpayers and significantly reduce local democracy. The TUC echoes the FBU in that every form of governance should involve a committee of elected politicians for scrutiny and accountability. We see no evidence to change this model of accountability.

And finally, the TUC support all the points made within the FBU's submission to the consultation on reforming fire and rescue service and supports the FBU as they defend firefighters' right to organise and bargain collectively for pay and conditions.

Pay and collective bargaining

Collective bargaining is a public good that promotes higher pay, better training, safer and more flexible workplaces and greater equality.

The National Joint Council (NJC) is supported by both the FBU and the fire employers. It is the UK-wide collective bargaining body where fire employers across the UK and the FBU negotiate on the terms of firefighters' pay and conditions.

In recent years the NJC has:

- Formed the Inclusive Fire Service Group, a stakeholder body tackling developing policy and guidance to address inequalities across the fire and rescue service
- Managed the first nine months of the Covid-19 response
- Ensured retained, part-time firefighters receive equal treatment in compliance with the law
- Raised concerns about the impact of vehicle taxation changes on fire officers
- Developed a procedure for fitness management, to ensure the health of firefighters on duty
- Assisted with implementing apprenticeship schemes across the fire and rescue service.

The White Paper states that the ministers will commission an independent review into the current pay negotiation process and consider if it is fit for a modern emergency service. This is an attack on the collective bargaining arrangements for firefighters that could cut firefighters' pay, worsen working hours and damage industrial relations for years to come.

Governance

The white paper threatens to introduce a more hierarchical and less democratic system of accountability for the fire and rescue service governance.

It proposes to transfer fire functions to a single, elected individual who would hold their chief fire officer to account.

This proposal implies that chief fire officers would no longer have their work supervised by committees of elected councillors. We believe this would undermine the rights of local people and their elected representatives.

The white paper also proposes to grant chief fire officers operational independence.

Operational independence would aim to give chief fire officers a free hand to dictate to firefighters on role maps, shift systems, and any other changes they see fit, without due process, appropriate consultation and agreement. It would also allow chief officers to cut firefighter jobs, reduce attendance times, close fire stations, reduce night cover and make other arbitrary changes to worsen the service to the public.

Proposals

The TUC echoes the FBU proposals for the transformation of the fire and rescue service across the UK, including:

- Westminster-funded investment in the fire and rescue service across the UK
- Immediate recruitment of 5,000 new firefighters as a prelude to a wider review to increase establishments
- UK-wide service delivery standards developed in collaboration with fire and rescue services and governments in the devolved parts of the UK
- A statutory advisory body for the UK, including the FBU in its composition
- A publicly owned Fire Service College with a governance body, reflecting workforce representatives elected by the workforce and the four UK administrations that will utilise the College
- A publicly owned and funded fire research body
- Returning the Building Research Establishment to public ownership
- Restoration of all building control functions to local authority building control
- An adequately resourced and high-quality fire safety inspection regime conducted by trained fire and rescue service specialist fire safety inspectors during all stages of building construction, occupancy and use of all buildings and premises other than individual dwellings.

TUC responses to the reforming our fire and rescue service consultation

People

Q1: To what extent do you agree/disagree that fire and rescue services should have the flexibility to deploy resources to help address current and future threats faced by the public beyond core fire and rescue duties?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
		✓		

Q2: To what extent do you agree/disagree that fire and rescue services should play an active role in supporting the wider health and public safety agenda?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
		✓		

Q3: To what extent do you agree/disagree that the business continuity requirements set out in the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 provide sufficient oversight to keep the public safe in the event of strike action?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
✓				

Q4: To what extent do you agree/disagree that the current pay negotiation arrangements are appropriate?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
✓				

Q5: Please provide the reasons for your response.

Q6: To what extent do you agree/disagree that consistent entry requirements should be explored for fire and rescue service roles?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
✓				

Q7: Please provide the reasons for your response.

Q8: To what extent do you agree/disagree that other roles, in addition to station and area managers, would benefit from a direct entry and talent management scheme?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Professionalism

Q9: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the proposed introduction of a 21st century leadership programme?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
✓				

Q10: Please provide reasons for your response.

Q11: To what extent do you agree/disagree that completion of the proposed 21st century leadership programme should be mandatory before becoming an assistant chief fire officer or above?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
✓				

Q12: To what extent do you agree/disagree that each of the activities outlined above are high priorities for helping improve the use and quality of fire and rescue service data?

- A national data analytics capability.
- Data-focused training.
- Consistent approaches to structuring data
- Clear expectations for data governance
- Securing data-sharing agreements.

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
✓				

Q13: What other activities, beyond those listed above, would help improve the use and quality of fire and rescue service data? Please give the reasons for your response.

Q14: To what extent do you agree/disagree that each of the activities outlined above are high priorities for improving the use and quality of fire evidence and research?

- Collaborating
- Commissioning
- Conducting
- Collating

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
✓				

Q15: What other activities, beyond those listed above, would help improve the use and quality of evidence and research on fire and other hazards? Please provide the reasons for your responses.

Q16: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the creation of a statutory code of ethics for services in England?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q17: To what extent do you agree/disagree that placing a code of ethics on a statutory basis would better embed ethical principles in services than the present core code of ethics?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q18: To what extent do you agree/disagree that the duty to ensure services act in accordance with the proposed statutory code should be placed on operationally independent chief fire officers?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q19: To what extent do you agree/disagree with making enforcement of the proposed statutory code an employment matter for chief fire officers to determine within their services?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q20: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the creation of a fire and rescue service oath for services in England?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q21: Please give the reasons for your response.

Q22: To what extent do you agree/disagree that an Oath would embed the principles of the Code of Ethics amongst fire and rescue authority employees?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q23: To what extent do you agree/disagree with an Oath being mandatory for all employees?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q24: To what extent do you agree/disagree that breach of the fire and rescue service oath should be dealt with as an employment matter?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q25: To what extent do you agree/disagree that the five areas listed above [leadership, data, research, ethics and clear expectations] are priorities for professionalising fire and rescue services?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q26: What other activities, beyond the five listed above, could help to professionalise fire and rescue services?

Q27: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the creation of an independent College of Fire and Rescue to lead the professionalisation of fire and rescue services?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
		✓		

Q28: Please provide your reasons for your response

Governance

Q29: To what extent do you agree/disagree that Government should transfer responsibility for fire and rescue services in England to a single elected individual?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q30: What factors should be considered when transferring fire governance to a directly elected individual? Please provide the reasons for your response.

Q31: Where Mayoral Combined Authorities already exist, to what extent do you agree/disagree that fire and rescue functions should be transferred directly to these MCAs for exercise by the Mayor?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q32: To what extent do you agree/disagree that Government should transfer responsibility for fire and rescue services in England to police and crime commissioners?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q33: Apart from combined authority mayors and police and crime commissioners, is there anyone else who we could transfer fire governance that aligns with the principles set out above?

No

Q34: If yes, please explain other options and your reasons for proposing them.

Q35: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the legal basis for fire and rescue authorities could be strengthened and clarified?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
		✓		

Q36: Please provide the reasons for your response.

Q37: To what extent do you agree/disagree that boundary changes should be made so that fire and rescue service areas and police force/combined authorities (where present) areas are coterminous?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q38: To what extent do you agree/disagree with ring-fencing the operational fire budget within fire and rescue services run by county councils and unitary authorities?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
✓				

Q39: Please provide the reasons for your response.

Q40: To what extent do you agree with this proposed approach (as outlined in the table above)?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q41: Do you have any other comments to further support your answer?

Q42: Are there any factors we should consider when implementing these proposals?

Q43: What factors should we consider when giving chief fire officers operational independence? Please provide the reasons for your opinions.

Q44: What factors should we consider should we make chief fire officers corporations sole?

Q45: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the responsibility for strategic and operational planning should be better distinguished?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q46: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the strategic plan should be the responsibility of the fire and rescue authority?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
✓				

Q47: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the operational plan should be the responsibility of the chief fire officer?

Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
				✓

Q48: Please provide the reasons for your response.