

Governance

Governance Structures

There are 44 FRAs across England operating under a range of different governance models. We believe this variation in the operation of models is unhelpful and leads to problems in relation to accountability and transparency.

Unlike FRAs overseen by PFCCs or combined authority mayors, the majority of authorities still operate a committee structure comprising many members (in the case of one authority, nearly 90). This can slow decision making and impair accountability. And across most of England, the public do not have a direct say in who is responsible for their fire service. In most areas, while members are elected (for example, as a councillor), they are not directly elected with a clear mandate in relation to fire.

Public awareness of FRAs and their members is not high. Our public polling as part of the review of PCCs found that the majority (89%) could not name a member of their FRA. In contrast, the awareness of PCCs (including police, fire and crime commissioners) is growing since the first candidates were elected in 2012. In the same polling, nearly two thirds (65%) of the public in these areas said they were either aware of their commissioner, or aware that they were responsible for policing (this figure is in line with other recent estimates from the Crime Survey for England and Wales). The 2021 PCC elections saw a significantly increased turnout – provisionally up 6.5 percent more than in 2016 - and more than double that of the 2012 elections. This shows the model is maturing and public awareness is growing.

After considering the conclusions of the PCC review, and reviewing inspection and other reports, the government view is that oversight of fire services needs to change. Our preferred governance model is one that meets the following criteria:

- there has a single, elected – ideally directly elected – individual who is accountable for the service rather than governance by committee
- there is clear demarcation between the political and strategic oversight by this individual, and the operationally independent running of the service by the chief fire officer
- that the person with oversight has control of necessary funding and estates
- decision-making, including budgets and spending, is transparent and linked to local public priorities

Therefore, to strengthen governance across the sector, we believe there is a strong case to consider options to transfer governance to an elected individual.

We seek views on this approach and who the most appropriate person may be. Options will need to be discussed options with each local area. There are a number of options for who this person could be. These include a directly elected combined authority mayor or a PCC. Each is a single directly elected individual who can provide the accountable leadership that we envisage, enabling the public to have a say in who oversees their local service. But there may be other options, including retaining fire in county council's under a designated leader. We seek views on who else could provide this executive leadership.

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.

The Mayoral Model

An option to achieve directly elected oversight of fire could be through the combined authority mayoral model. The government would like to see more combined authority mayors exercising public safety functions.

As set out in the Home Secretary’s response to the PCC review (2021) and the Levelling Up white paper, combined authority mayors could also take on public safety functions where boundaries allow.

Of the eight existing MCAs without fire and rescue functions currently, four (Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, Sheffield City Region, West Midlands and West Yorkshire) are already coterminous with fire and rescue boundaries. Subject to this consultation, we will explore options for transferring the fire functions directly to the MCAs for exercise by the mayors in these areas at the earliest opportunity. The four remaining existing MCAs (Liverpool City Region, North of Tyne, Tees Valley and West of England) are not currently coterminous with fire and rescue boundaries and so, subject to this consultation, we will need to consult with those in the local areas to establish the way forward.

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

Police and Crime Commissioners

Another option could be to transfer responsibility to a police, fire and crime commissioner. In 2017, measures were introduced through the Policing and Crime Act 2017 to enable PCCs to take on oversight of their local fire services.

It is for each commissioner to determine whether they want responsibility for fire. If so, they need to produce a proposal for the Home Secretary that demonstrates how a governance transfer meets the statutory tests of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and that it does not have a detrimental impact on public safety. To date, four areas have made the transition to a police, fire and crime commissioner.

The PCC review considered how PCCs' accountability could be strengthened, and their role expanded in line with the government's manifesto commitment, and considered the benefits of directly elected oversight of fire services. Those interviewed from both policing and fire in the review were broadly supportive of the benefits of bringing policing and fire governance together under a directly elected individual, particularly to maximise the benefits of emergency services collaboration and strengthen accountability and transparency to the public. To achieve a more consistent approach to fire governance, many were strongly in favour of mandating governance change across England, rather than the current bottom-up piecemeal approach.

We have seen the immense value in what PFCCs in the four areas who have responsibility for fire have provided, including strengthened local accountability, enhanced collaboration and improvements in what their fire services provide the public. The business cases for the first four PFCCs estimated savings of between £6.6 million to £30 million over the first ten years. In Northamptonshire, the financial autonomy provided by the commissioner enabled the service to recruit new firefighters and replace equipment and facilities, thereby improving the support it provides to people and businesses. In North Yorkshire, the 'Enable' service brings together police and fire back-office staff to work as one team, under one roof, improving efficiency and affordability for all. The enhanced collaboration driven by commissioners is not only improving organisational efficiency but is saving lives. In Staffordshire, the commissioner agreed a missing persons support protocol between Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, Staffordshire Police and West Midlands Ambulance Service in which 90% of relevant incidents attended by fire and rescue crews were lifesaving or injury preventing.

The PCC review crystalised our proposals on fire service governance which the Home Secretary set out in her Written Ministerial Statement of March 2021. We therefore seek views on whether this is another acceptable option.

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

Other Options, such as an executive councillor

We recognise, reflecting the circumstances of each local area, that it may be preferable for somebody a different option other than a PCC or mayor to be given responsibility. This may be where a fire service is currently part of a county council or local boundaries aren't aligned. We are therefore filling to consider other options, although any option will need to meet our

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criteria for good governance as listed above, in particular the need for clear executive – rather than committee – leadership.

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?

Yes	No

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

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