



# Cheshire Police and Crime Panel

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**Date of meeting:** 21<sup>st</sup> July 2022

**Report of:** Brian Reed, Head of Governance and Democratic Services

**Subject:** Home Office Initiatives / Consultation

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## 1. Report Summary

- 1.1 There are a number of current Home Office initiatives which could have an impact on the way in which Police and Crime Panels operate. At the meeting on 24 June the Panel received brief updates on the Home Secretary's two stage review of Police and Crime Commissioners and the publication of a White Paper "Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service – Building professionalism, boosting performance and strengthening governance". The White paper includes a consultation exercise which closes on 26 July 2022.
- 1.2 This report briefly summarises the potential changes that the Home Secretary wishes to introduce in relation to the powers and duties of Police and Crime Commissioners, including possible changes to the way in which Police and Crime Panels are supported, and the way in which independent members are recruited. The report also outlines the key issues contained in the White Paper on the Fire and Rescue Service and how the Panel could respond to the consultation exercise.

## 2. Recommendations

### 2.1 Recommendation

- (i) That the outcome of the Home Secretary's review into Police and Crime Commissioners be noted.
- (ii) That the Panel agree a submission to the Home Office consultation on the future of the Fire and Rescue Service, authorising the Secretariat to

compile the detail of the submission, finalise the response, and submit this, as appropriate.

### **3. Background information**

#### Review of Police and Crime Commissioners

- 3.1 At the Panel's meeting on 24 June the Chair, Mr Evan Morris, had intended to briefly update Panel members on progress with the Home Secretary's ongoing review of Police and Crime Commissioners. Unfortunately, a recent medical procedure had prevented his attendance. An extract from Hansard which was included in the papers of that meeting is attached as Appendix I; in addition, a further document is attached (Appendix II) which contains the Government's recommendations. Please note that this is a Government document and is reproduced from the Home Office website.
- 3.2 The Panel's attention is drawn to the comments on the appointment of independent members and the possible introduction of regional support for Panels. Other than indicated in Appendix II, there is no indication of timescales. At the time of writing there was no information available from the Local Government Association on the detail of the recommendations relating to Police and Crime Panels.

#### Reforming Our Fire and Rescue Service – White Paper, published May 2022

- 3.3 This White Paper and consultation cover a package of proposals for the reform of Fire and Rescue Services in England. The proposals cover three principal areas: people, professionalism, and governance. The consultation runs to 26 July 2022. Respondents can answer as many or as few questions as they wish.
- 3.4 It is recommended that the Panel only comment on questions relating to Governance where a change could have an impact on the way in which the Panel operates. Panel members may have views on other issues and there is nothing to stop personal submissions being made. The White Paper is attached as Appendix III.
- 3.5 There are 44 Fire and Rescue Services across England, operating under a range of different governance models. In Cheshire there is a Combined Fire Authority with members from the four Cheshire local authorities. The Government are of the view that the variation in operating models is unhelpful and leads to problems in relation to accountability and transparency.
- 3.6 The White Paper concludes that to strengthen governance there is a strong case to consider options to transfer governance to an elected individual. The White Paper outlines a range of possible models:
- An elected Mayor;
  - Police and Crime Commissioners; and
  - An Executive Councillor.

Under each model, current Fire and Rescue Authorities would be abolished.

- 3.7 Given the context of Cheshire, the only realistic option would be the transfer of responsibility to the Police and Crime Commissioner. The Panel are asked to note that the current Police and Crime Commissioner, Mr John Dwyer, has made it clear on several occasions that he has no appetite to submit a proposal to the Home Secretary in relation to the transfer of governance of the Fire and Rescue Service in Cheshire.
- 3.8 Under the current legislative arrangements, Commissioners can in certain circumstances, assume responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service in their area, but this has only occurred in four areas of England. In those areas, the Panels have become Police, Fire and Crime Panels. Informal feedback received from members of those Panels and the Officers that support them, is that the workload of the Panel changed significantly when responsibility for Fire was taken on.
- 3.9 Appendix IV outlines those questions which the Panel may wish to consider responding to.
- 3.10 There is no indication within the White Paper of any timetable for change to be introduced.

#### **4 Financial implications**

- 4.1 There are no financial implications associated with responding to the consultation, but any change to the responsibilities of the Panel could have significant resource implications for the host authority.

#### **5 Equality implications**

- 5.1 There are no specific equality implications.

#### **6 Contact information**

Contact details for this report are as follows:

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