

STATEMENT MY MR EVAN MORRIS MBE

I welcome the fact that the Cheshire Police and Crime Panel called for a full and formal meeting to discuss the Government White Paper, "Reforming our Fire and Rescue Service".

Some members of the Panel are aware of my career in Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service and my proud association and experience with the Cheshire Fire Authority. Indeed, it was only with the support of members of the Authority that the Service's efforts in Community Safety and prevention, saw Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service being awarded many national awards for innovation and collaboration and subsequently receiving the award for Fire and Rescue Service of the Year. Such was the impact and support of the Cheshire Fire Authority on the operational effectiveness and the service delivery of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.

I outline this to set the scene for this meeting. The Cheshire Police and Crime Panel has responded in the past to two consultations where we have highlighted the collaboration between Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service and Cheshire Police and the potential for the future. These were the Police Foundation Strategic Review of Policing and the Home Secretary's review of the role of Police and Crime Commissioners. Both have sought to extract opinion on future governance models of Fire and Rescue Services.

What I want us to consider are the implications in this White Paper for Police and Crime Panels. The three governance options put forward effectively do not include Fire Authorities. This being the case it would be irresponsible for us not to scope the potential impact on our Panel, when and if the White Paper is translated into legislation. One of the issues I would suggest the Cheshire Panel needs to reflect in our submission to the White Paper, is our severe concern that where the four existing Police Fire and Crime Commissioner governance models exist, there have been no additional resources from the Home Office to either the Police and Crime Panel or the local authority that supports them.

For us as a Police and Crime Panel this has serious consequences. If the governance models outlined in the White Paper become law, a single elected official will become responsible for the governance of both the Fire and Rescue Service and the Police. In these circumstances he or she would then replace Fire Authorities, and Police and Crime Panels would become Police Fire and Crime Panels.

Finally, and in testament to the Cheshire Fire Authority and the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, I would highlight that the White Paper is critical nationally of the overall Fire and Rescue Services response to the Pandemic, sighting a report by Sir Tom Winsor the Chief Inspector of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services. I would ask the Cheshire Police and Crime Panel to consider and acknowledge in responding to this consultation that during the Pandemic, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service went way beyond its statutory duty in service delivery in responding to the crisis. This was acknowledged in a very detailed and complimentary letter dated 22 January 2021, from Zoe Billingham, Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Service

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Vice Chair, National Association of Police Fire and Crime Panels