

GM/JLA

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Draft response to Government Consultation on Distribution of Capital Grant on Behalf of the Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authorities.

Introduction

West Yorkshire Metropolitan Fire and Rescue Authority welcomes this additional capital grant for the national fire service which will help to address the shortfall in capital investment in previous years.

The timing of the grant for this Authority is particularly opportune as we have embarked upon an ambitious £38m three year capital plan driven by the Authorities IRMP and the need to maintain it's ageing building stock. I am sure you are aware that principally through IRMP this Authority has delivered almost £12m in cashable efficiency savings, however the 2006/2007 IRMP requires the Authority to invest significant amounts of capital in the area of North Wakefield to replace 4 existing station with 3 new stations at a capital cost of £12m. This of course is in addition to the normal demands on capital resources to enable the Authority to:-

- Maintaining fire stations. The Authority has 48 fire stations which based on an estimated life of 50 years means that it should replace 1 per year. In the last 20 years the Authority has been able to replace only 4 fire stations which means the rest require significant annual maintenance.
- Ensure national resilience by investing in key vehicle assets and training facilities. The Authority is in the process of constructing a USAR training facility at a cost of £2.3m
- Develop its workforce by investing in training facilities
- Improve equality by ensuring fire stations are accessible and have quality facilities to support a modern diverse workforce
- Increasing the use of technology to deliver efficiency gains

In response to Specific questions

Q1 Do you agree the criteria used for establishing an equitable distribution of the capital grant?

Q2 Which of the above options would you prefer CLG to use as the method for distributing FRS capital grant?

As you would expect this Authority would prefer Government to use option A to distribute the grant however this is not purely based on self interest but the fundamental principal that resources should be aligned with risk.

This underlying principle is critical to the national framework and the IRMP's developed by each individual authority. This principle is equally applied to the revenue support grant for fire and the concept is well accepted and supported within the UK Fire and Rescue Service.

Consequently any allocation methodology should therefore be in line with risk profiles and should be done in such a way as to maximise the return against national targets. The allocation of resources should seek to reduce fires, and accidental fire deaths and injuries and make communities safer.

The vast majority of fire deaths and injuries occur in the inner cities and this is where investment is needed most. In particular investment is required to improve community facilities to enable the Fire Service to engage with the communities that need support most. In West Yorkshire despite receiving a level 4 in operational efficiency the Authority is still struggling to reduce fire deaths to below the target of 1.25 times the national average, if this is to be achieved it requires significant additional investment.

An analysis of the latest key data for the fire service has been undertaken and shows that broadly 50% of risk lies within the Metropolitan Fire Authorities including West Yorkshire.

Key Statistic (Source Most recent Data set on CLG website)	Met Fire Services %	Other Fire Services %
All fires, including chimney fires	46	54
Primary fires	42	58
Secondary fires	50	50
False alarms	45	55
Malicious false alarms	48	52
False alarms due to apparatus,	47	53
Non-fatal casualties	50	50
Accidental dwelling⁽¹⁾ fires,	46	54
Non-fatal casualties in accidental dwelling⁽¹⁾ fires,	52	48
Deliberate primary fires in locations other than road vehicles	44	56
Deliberate primary fires	44	56
Deliberate road vehicle primary fires	44	56
Average of All Key Statistics	47	54

Broadly therefore you would expect the allocation methodology to share capital resources in line with those risks. In addition the activity levels at metropolitan fire stations is very much higher and the workload for individual fire engines more intense because of the larger populations served per station because of population density.

West Yorkshire along with London and the other Metropolitan Fire Authorities

- a) have the busiest stations which are therefore more needy of investment because of 'wear and tear'
- b) serve the most diverse communities and need investment to enable them to engage with those communities.
- c) cover the areas of greatest social deprivation which are the areas where fire deaths and injuries occur
- d) invest in fire safety programmes that exploit the fire service brand in reducing anti-social behaviour

As an example in 2007 West Yorkshire opened a new Fire Station in Bradford at significant capital cost in the heart of one of the most deprived areas of the city. The Authority is already seeing the benefit in the form of increased engagement through the use of the community room, a reduction in anti-social fires and a contribution towards a reduction in attacks on fire fighters within this area.

A further factor which should influence the method of allocation is national resilience. Fire and Rescue Authorities play a key role in the national resilience structure. And within this the Metropolitan Fire Authorities provide fire cover in the cities most at risk from terrorist incidents. In addition national resilience is predominantly provided by wholetime firefighters 50% of whom are provided by the Metropolitan Fire Authorities. The allocation method of grant should also take account of the support requirements nationally for coping with the new threats to communities, the broader role of the fire and rescue service and the national resilience that is expected.

Conclusion

Option 1 is the only option which allocates grant broadly on the basis of risk and therefore truly reflects the cost of service provision and the requirement for capital investment.

Q3 Are there other options that you would have preferred that were not included in this consultation?

Consideration might be given to a formula based upon the same sort of criteria as the revenue grant formula which whilst not ideal is broadly based upon risk.

Q4 Are there any drawbacks to the CLG preferred option (Option C)?

Under option C the Metropolitan Fire Authorities who provide cover for 50% of the risk would only receive 24% of the capital grant. This clearly does not reflect the need to invest in capital schemes.

Q5 In option C, do you consider £0.5m a suitable level for the fixed portion of the grant? If not, what level would you think appropriate?

Option C is inappropriate. The high level of fixed grant proportion means that allocation is not in line with risk

Q6 If option B were chosen, do you think fire stations would be the most appropriate building asset to use?

Whilst Fire Stations would on the face of it be the most appropriate asset to use it is not necessarily a good measure of the need to spend. What is important is the state of repair and the need to invest

maintain the building stock. Clearly the more assets are used the more often they require maintenance and replacement. In addition it does not measure the need to invest in community facilities. The Fire service is a risk based service which means that in certain areas fire stations are provided where there is very little activity and consequently little wear and tear, the inclusion of these in an allocation formula would skew the allocation. Consequently this Authority considers an allocation based on risk as a much better measure of the need to spend.

Q7 In option B, should the buildings data be updated at each settlement or would this act a perverse incentive when FRAs take decisions on their estate?

This question assumes that Authorities might adjust their expenditure pattern to maximise additional grant. There is no guarantee that Authorities will in fact use this grant to invest in property as it could be used to finance the purchase of appliances or IT equipment and therefore expenditure patterns could unintentionally skew the allocation of grant. This is a further justification for grant to be allocated on the basis of risk.

Yours faithfully

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