

### The revised Framework - Summary

1. In his introduction to the revised National Framework, the Minister for the Fire and Rescue Service set out his appreciation of the proficiency and experience of Fire and Rescue Authorities, and his aim to allow them the freedom and flexibility to deliver their services *'without being hampered by Whitehall bureaucracy and red tape.'* While the Framework is designed to provide an overall strategic direction to Fire and Rescue Authorities, it *'will not seek to tell them how they should serve their communities.'*
2. The introduction also makes the purpose clear: the Framework *"sets out the Government's priorities and objectives for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England. The Framework sets out high level expectations. It does not prescribe operational matters"* which are best determined locally.
3. Having said that, the document still contains no less than eighteen 'musts' among their expectations. In the accompanying 'Summary of responses' the Government explains that it *"has used 'musts' rather than 'shoulds' in the Framework to be clear about the Government's key priorities and objectives for Fire and Rescue Authorities."* To reinforce this point, it also notes the potential implications should a Fire and Rescue Authority not wish to follow their expectations: *"Unlike most guidance issued by Government, the requirements of the Framework can be enforced through section 22 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (although the Government does not intend to use this power except as a last resort). The Government considers that in this context it is appropriate to use 'musts' to highlight those key aspects of the Framework."*
4. The Government was also keen to stress that the revised Framework does not set out any new roles or requirements that are not already stated in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, the Emergencies Order 2007 and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. In its response to comments on the difficulties of the current funding environment, the Government added that *"Where new burdens arise, for example as part of building new national resilience capabilities, the Framework is clear that Government will pay if Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to meet these – in line with the new burdens doctrine."*
5. In line with the Government's approach to localism, the Framework makes it clear that *"Fire and Rescue Authorities are accountable to their communities for their actions and decision making."* The 'Summary of Responses' notes that *"The Framework reinforces the Government's vision for resetting the relationship to put power back to communities and the locally elected councillors who represent them. Ultimately it is local communities, not Government, that Fire and Rescue Authorities are accountable for the service they provide to keep communities safe."*

6. Some parts of the Framework have been updated to provide more detail. For instance, the recent establishment of the Fire and Rescue Strategic Resilience Board has helped to clarify the strategic governance arrangements for national resilience. The Framework still requires all Fire and Rescue Authorities to prepare an annual statement of assurance on financial, governance and operational matters, and explains that the Government will be providing further *“light touch guidance”* on what this should look like.
7. In response to a general concern that Fire and Rescue Authorities could not possibly identify *all* risks in preparing their Integrated Risk Management Plans, the revised Framework text has been amended to make it clear that Fire and Rescue Authorities need to identify and assess the full range of *foreseeable* fire and rescue related risks in their areas. It also adds that authorities should deliver *effective and proportionate* prevention and protection activities.
8. The Framework is considerably shorter than the 2008-11 Framework, which is to be welcomed. The Chair of the Local Government Association’s Fire Services Management Committee has commented that *“this will allow Fire Chiefs and local politicians more freedom to concentrate their efforts on protecting communities and responding to incidents.”*