

## 0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Preface

- 0.1** The purpose of this Executive Summary is to set out briefly the main findings, conclusions and recommendations in our report on the Strategic Review of Fire Safety and Fire Services in Ireland. It follows the sequence of the Sections in the report itself. This Review was an extremely thorough and detailed review, over a 6 month period, of all aspects of the Fire Safety and Fire Services regime in Ireland. It involved an extensive process of consultation with all stakeholders, including members of the public, as well as benefiting from inputs from international experts and from global best practice benchmarking.
- 0.2** Given the lengthy and very detailed work programme involved, including a number of overseas visits, the extensive research undertaken, the large number of submissions received and the sheer volume of information and data collected, the report itself is, in fact, only a summary of the total process which underpinned the Review. This brief Executive Summary should, therefore, ideally not be read as, nor regarded as, a substitute for the analysis and argumentation in the report itself. It seeks merely to highlight a small range of the issues addressed in the Review for purposes of convenience.
- 0.3** As pointed out, the Review process benefited from extensive consultation with, and inputs from, a wide spectrum of interests. These included:
- Members of the public who made submissions to us or who attended seven regional public consultation fora.
  - A large array of interest groups who made submissions to us and/or who were interviewed by us.
  - Fire Service personnel at all levels in a large number of Local Authorities.
  - The Review Advisory Group which oversaw the Review process and which comprised officials of the Department of the Environment and Local Government, representatives of Local Authority management, Ministerial nominees, representatives of Fire Services management, Fire Service staff at all levels and two eminent international experts (one from the UK and one from Holland).
  - Chief Fire Officers and representatives of other management grades in the Fire Service.
  - The various statutory bodies involved in the delivery of the Fire Safety and Fire Services regime.
  - Union officials and representatives of fire-fighting staff in the full-time and retained brigades.
  - Officials of the DoELG and Local Authorities involved in the planning, development, management and oversight of the Fire Safety and Fire Services regime.
  - In addition to our own core management consultancy team, two specialist international consultancy firms, one specialising in standards of fire cover and one specialising in major emergency planning and management were engaged in developing the findings, conclusions and recommendations contained in our report.

**0.4** With such widespread inputs and consultation there was, as might be expected, a wide variety and spectrum of views and opinions on the issues to be addressed and on the options for dealing with them. However, we encountered a high degree of consensus across the board on a number of key points as follows:

- ❑ There are many positive features of the current Fire Safety and Fire Services regime in Ireland and much improvement has been brought about since the last major review in 1975 and the Stardust Tribunal report in 1982.
- ❑ However, international best practice has moved on in the intervening period and there are, notwithstanding the foregoing point, a wide range of areas where further improvement is now necessary in order to update and modernise the regime.
- ❑ In a number of key areas, particularly in relation to the number of fire deaths in domestic dwellings and the per capita spend on Fire Safety and Fire Services, Ireland lags behind in terms of international trends and comparisons.
- ❑ With the passage of time since the last review, and having regard to vastly changed circumstances since the core features of the current regime were put in place, fundamental structural, organisational, funding, operational and process change is now needed in order to position the Fire Safety and Fire Services regime to bring about reductions in fire deaths, loss and damage from fire as well as in improving the capacity to respond to a wide variety of non-fire emergency situations.
- ❑ Government had already identified the need for action through increased capital spending over the last few years. The commissioning of this Review is further evidence of its commitment to developing and modernising the Fire Safety and Fire Services regime in Ireland in other areas as well.

### Section 1 - Introduction

**0.5** Section 1 of the report sets out the background to the Review, the Terms of Reference for its conduct and describes the process by which the Review was conducted. It identifies, in detail, the inputs and consultation processes involved which have been briefly referred to above.

### Section 2 – The Current Regime

**0.6** Section 2 describes the current regime in Ireland for Fire Safety and Fire Services. It identifies how the regime has evolved over time. It describes the role and functions of all the key parties. In particular, it draws attention to the wide range of functions involved, with a particular emphasis on new functions which have accrued over time, and which now heavily outweigh responding to fire calls as the main activities and taskings of the Fire Service.

### Section 3 – International Comparisons

- 0.7 Section 3 sets out the results of our research into international comparators. It highlights the difficulties involved in making such comparisons because of the lack of reliable statistical data and the absence of any systematic research and development function in the Irish regime. However, it points out that in relation to a number of key trends *e.g.* fire deaths and per capita spend on Fire Safety and Fire Services, Ireland is somewhat lagging behind.

### Section 4 – Analysis of the Current Arrangements

- 0.8 Section 4 sets out our detailed findings and conclusions in relation to the current arrangements. It does so under three broad headings as follows:

- Firstly, it acknowledges the many positive features of the current regime.
- Secondly, it draws attention to a number of overarching strategic problems which remain to be addressed.
- Thirdly, in accordance with our Terms of Reference, it sets out our findings and conclusions under a relatively large number of headings covering all those aspects of the current regime which we were specifically directed to review and report upon.

- 0.9 In acknowledging the many positive features of the current regime, particular attention is drawn to the following key points:

- Increased capital spending by Government is tackling the infrastructure problems in relation to fire stations, the appliance fleet and other equipment.
- Ireland has a relatively good record in relation to major fire incidents in multiple occupancy buildings leading to multiple fire deaths/casualties.
- The Fire Service has a large number of professional and committed personnel at all levels.
- There is no ostensible reason why unnecessary public alarm or concern should be raised in relation to fire cover and emergency fire response capability.
- A massive increase in fire and non-fire emergency calls is, by and large, being responded to and as far as we can ascertain, being handled in a satisfactory manner.
- The building control system (for fire safety purposes) has been in place since 1992 and the licensing enforcement regime is being improved, *albeit* at the expense of other forms of fire prevention activity.

- 0.10 The main overarching strategic problems which require to be addressed are identified as including:

- The extent to which the diffusion of authority, responsibility and accountability across a wide number of statutory agencies and within DoELG and Local Authorities does not provide the integrated structures and strong national leadership which the regime now requires.

- ❑ The fact that our approach to the determination of fire cover standards has been overtaken by best practice models which now follow a risk-based approach.
- ❑ The need for further development of the Major Emergency Management regime particularly in relation to scenario planning, in improving mitigation as well as response capacity, in the structures and the processes for dealing with major incidents, which by definition will overwhelm local capacity and will, in our view, require a regional or national scale response and in developing expert competencies and specialist coordination arrangements at national level.
- ❑ The low morale within the Service which points to the need to advance the developmental HR agenda and to overcome restrictive practices and the other negative impacts of an historically fraught and adversarial industrial relations regime.
- ❑ The need to change, strengthen and improve structures at all levels and to overcome barriers to promotion and career advancement inherent in the current two-tier entry system. There is also a need for greater emphasis on health and safety for Fire-fighters, and on competencies, training and equality issues.
- ❑ The variability of service provision from one Local Authority to another, from emergency response to the different level of involvement and practices adopted in relation to fire prevention, building control and licensing enforcement. The variability of standards involved, which is compounded by the absence of performance management or quality auditing, is not appropriate in the field of public safety.

**0.11** The findings and conclusions arising from the specific aspects which we were directed to review and report upon under our Terms of Reference are too numerous to outline in this Executive Summary. In many respects the issues which arise are, in any event, mainly symptomatic of the more fundamental causal factors set out above. However, the following points are indicative of the issues identified:

- ❑ Gaps and weaknesses in the legislative frameworks.
- ❑ Difficulties in maintaining the retained service unless more flexible arrangements are put in place.
- ❑ Gaps in training provision.
- ❑ The need for further improvements in infrastructure (stations, appliance fleet, equipment).
- ❑ The degree to which the voluntary sector is not sufficiently integrated within the statutory regime and is not, therefore, sufficiently leveraged.
- ❑ The extent to which potential for increasing effectiveness and/or realising savings are not being fully exploited *e.g.* in relation to Section 59 agreements, in providing more services on a regional basis and in greater utilisation of information technology.

## Section 5 – Recommendations

**0.12** Section 5 sets out our recommendations for further enhancing the Fire Safety and Fire Services regime to deal with the areas where improvement is necessary as set out in Section 4. We take the view in Section 5 of the report that the primary focus needs to be on putting in place a robust framework which will enable the major change agenda now required to be definitively tackled.

- 0.13** We also point out in Section 5 that the fact that a fundamental overhaul of the regime is now necessary is perhaps understandable given the length of time since it was last reviewed. The nature and extent of the change programme now needed should not, in our view, be used to level unfair and unjust criticism nor should it be exploited to raise unnecessary public alarm or concern.
- 0.14** Our primary recommendation is that a new National Authority for Fire and Civil Protection/Emergency Services be established. We believe that the new Authority should be brought into being through integrating and amalgamating into a single structure the functions currently discharged by:
- The Fire and Emergency Planning Section of DoELG.
  - The Fire Advisory Service of DoELG.
  - The Fire Services Council.
  - The National Safety Council (fire safety promotion and awareness).
  - The Construction Section of the DoELG in relation to building control (the Construction Section of the DoELG will remain responsible for the ongoing development and upgrading of Building Regulations / Standards and related Technical Guidance Documents in consultation with the Building Regulations Advisory Body (BRAB)).
- 0.15** We believe strongly that a single unified structure under the new Authority is the optimum means of achieving coherent national leadership and development for the Fire Safety and Fire Services regime.
- 0.16** We also recommend that it would be more rational for Government to transfer to the new Authority certain functions which currently reside elsewhere in the administrative structures of the State. These include:
- Civil Defence.
  - Inland Waterways Search and Rescue.
  - Mountain and Cave Search and Rescue.
  - The Local Authority Lifeguard Service.

It seems to us that these functions have more affinity with the core functions proposed for the new Authority. In addition, if our recommendations in this regard are accepted, we believe that they will provide for better integration and leverage of the voluntary sector, which we believe can make a significant and valuable contribution in terms of community self protection.

- 0.17** We recommend new structures for the Authority based on a Board and an Advisory Council and a staffing structure consisting of four directorates (Operations, Safety Programmes, Major Emergency Management and Corporate Services) headed by a Chief Executive and with a total of 45 staff.

- 0.18** We recommend new structures at Local Authority level also which mirror the arrangements now proposed at national level. This will involve bringing existing Local Authority Fire Services and Building Control functions together, with those referred to at 0.16 above, into a single structure at local level.
- 0.19** We make a large number of other more detailed recommendations, the key features of which include:
- The adoption of a new risk-based approach to the determination of fire cover standards.
  - New approaches, processes and structures for Major Emergency Management.
  - More concentration and investment in prevention/mitigation including the implementation of Community Fire Safety programmes and the harnessing of Fire-fighters as front line ambassadors of the safety message.
  - Better enforcement of building control regulations and of licensing (including During Performance Inspections).
  - The introduction of a competency-based approach to recruitment, retention and career progression including the removal of barriers to promotion inherent in the current two-tier entry system.
  - Greater flexibility in the deployment and tasking of staff at all levels.
  - An enhanced training regime.
  - Continued capital investment to improve infrastructure.
  - More use of Section 59 agreements and more rationalisation and better coordination at regional level.
  - A range of measures to enhance the retained Fire Service.
  - More emphasis on implementation of health, safety and welfare at work initiatives and equality.
- 0.20** Despite the extent of our recommendations and the fundamental change programme involved, we believe that the outcome of the Review can be implemented within an affordable cost envelope. Our key recommendations on funding are that:
- The increased capital investment programme be maintained at current levels and be reviewed on a three-year cyclical basis as infrastructure and equipment are brought up to standard.
  - The increased focus on prevention, mitigation and enforcement be achieved on a self-financing basis based on revenues from sectors which benefit.
  - The significant immediate additional cost which will arise will be in relation to the staffing costs of establishing the new National Authority which we estimate at about IR£2m/≈2.54m to IR£3m/≈3.81m per annum.
  - The insurance industry be required to make a greater contribution to costs.
  - The abolition of incident-related charges (other than nuisance deterrent charges) which contribute relatively little to overall costs and which are difficult to levy and difficult to collect.

## Section 6 – Implementation

- 0.21 Section 6 sets out our views on implementation. In essence, we recommend that the Minister, following consideration of our report, and if he is in agreement, announce his acceptance of the main thrust of the findings, conclusions and recommendations and his intention to establish the new Authority as a first step towards change. We then recommend the implementation structure which should be put in place and the process needed for developing a detailed, phased implementation plan.

### Some Key Facts about the Irish Fire Service

- Each Local Authority is charged with the duty of providing a Fire Service in their functional area, under the Fire Services Act, 1981.
- The Fire Service is part of the Local Authority system and is delivered as part of Programme Group 5 - Environmental Protection and absorbs 50 *per cent* of the cost of the Environmental Protection Budget on average in Local Authorities.
- While the day to day operations of the Fire Service is under the direction of the Chief Fire Officer in a Local Authority, ultimately the County Manager or his/her delegate is by definition responsible for the provision of Fire Protection Services in the Authority's functional area.
- Most of the functions in relation to the Fire Service in the Local Authority are executive functions and are the responsibility of the Manager of the Authority with the exception of Preparation of Fire and Operations Plan, known as the Section 26 Plan, which is a reserved function and is a matter for the Council as a whole *i.e.* locally elected politicians.
- The Department of Environment and Local Government has an 'advisory' role and as such does not have the authority to inspect Local Authority Fire Services or impose Performance Standards for the Fire Service on the Local Authorities.
- Fire services in Ireland are delivered by full-time brigades in the large urban areas and retained (or part-time brigade) in the rest of the country.
- Recruitment to the Fire Service is at two levels *i.e.* as a recruit Fire-fighter or to the lower levels of Senior Officer grades. Under current arrangements, only graduates in engineering (or architecture) can progress to the level of Chief Fire Officer.
- Training of Fire Service personnel is the responsibility of the individual Fire Authorities. They are assisted in this by the FSC, which organises training for Officers.
- The DoELG provides capital funding for fire stations, appliance fleet and equipment as well as mobilisation / communication equipment.
- The NSC is the statutory body responsible for the promotion of fire safety awareness. Individual Fire Authorities are empowered to give advice on public safety under the Fire Services Act, 1981.