Fire and rescue collaboration

Helping the fire and rescue sector improve value for money through effective collaboration
Spring 2014
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The case for structural change

Fire and rescue services are under intense financial pressure. They are considering merger as one way of making the necessary savings and efficiencies, while still delivering the services that citizens require. Merger, however, is one solution along a continuum of forms of joint working.

The 2013 ‘Facing the future’ report by Sir Ken Knight highlighted changes in the demand for fire and rescue services and the need to modernise the service and make efficiency savings.

The report acknowledged that achieving efficiency in the fire and rescue service involves doing things differently – such as looking at crewing levels – and considering “wider structural and collaborative approaches”.

One of the main conclusions from the report is that the current 46 local fire authorities in England “does not make for a sensible delivery model”. The report has sparked a lively debate about the scope for fire service mergers.

Drawing upon our discussions with clients, the treasurers in the sector and a recent Grant Thornton Fire Summit, on the case for structural change in the fire and rescue sector, this paper highlights the learning points from previous successful and abandoned mergers, other potential ways of joint working and how to manage a merger or collaboration project successfully.

The case for merger and collaborative working includes:

- the potential to drive efficiencies by removing “duplication of effort in the design, commissioning and evaluation of fire-specific products” (Sir Ken Knight)
- increasing efficiency in working times and scheduling of personnel
- finding opportunities to make savings through the merger planning itself
- the opportunity to modernise systems
- facilitating the specialisation of skills and services
- increasing spending power
- assisting with master planning for a wider geographical region and the effective placing of new facilities
- improving communications and emergency response times across current authority and county boundaries
- reducing the impact of historical funding streams, that were not necessarily based on the needs of the local population.
Learning points from previous mergers

While there may be a case for structural change, there have only been two fire authority mergers in the past seven years. These resulted in the creation of the Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service in April 2007 and the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in April 2013.

Both mergers were ambitious and complex, but successful. They each demanded significant management and non-executive time and were driven by clear focus, from the outset, on delivering significant efficiencies through rationalisation. These mergers also demonstrate that clear political support and leadership is vital.

Case study

Scottish Fire Service

The most significant and recent merger was the creation of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in April 2013. The new national service for Scotland involved the merger of the eight former local fire authorities.

A board, appointed by the Scottish ministers, has replaced the local councillors who previously had governance responsibilities for the Scottish fire and rescue services. The service is accountable to Scottish ministers and local scrutiny arrangements have been established.

The service is now funded by the Scottish Government, rather than being part of the local government settlement. There was substantial cross-party political support for the merger, with only one of the main parties dissenting, and support from the major trade unions.

So far the merger has enabled the service to reduce its budgeted expenditure from £290 million in 2012/13 to £277 million in 2013/14. The Scottish Government has set demanding targets for further efficiencies and these are reflected in forward financial plans.

A new combined financial system has been introduced and work is underway to rationalise the 19 payroll systems that are currently in place.

A significant amount of rationalisation is required in all areas of operation.

The service has adopted a new partnership model of employee relations, reflected in its Working Together Framework, to which the board and all recognised trade unions have formally committed.

Achieving such a significant fire service merger has been a complex task and has placed significant demands on management and the board. The focus in the initial phase has been on establishing the new service and protecting front line outcomes.

Outcome

While it is too early to fully assess the benefits arising from the merger, the evidence indicates the national service has responded effectively to a number of significant operational challenges during its first year – including major wildfires in the Highlands in April 2013 – and is well placed to realise further benefits.
Devon and Somerset merger

The Somerset County Council Fire and Rescue Service and the Devon Fire Authority merged in April 2007.

The merger plans evolved from concerns from both authorities that their relatively small sizes created financial and operational risks. Both authorities believed they were suffering from capacity constraints which were restricting their ability to deliver further improvements to services and value for money for their communities.

The merger plans were supported by a business case that showed savings of over £3 million in the first five years. (In the event, savings in the first five years exceeded the business case by £0.7 million, with recurring savings of £2.2 million per annum thereafter.) The impact on council tax was estimated as a Band D increase in Somerset of between 0.01% and 0.22%, and a fall in Devon of up to 0.1%.

Both services had a strong history of joint working in areas such as:
- training support
- engineering and stores facilities
- tactical planning
- identification of operational risk
- incident command systems
- cross-border use of specialist appliances.

The options appraisals that were carried out by both authorities considered: maintaining the status quo; increasing collaboration and fully combining the services.

Each option was assessed for strategic, operational and financial impact. The conclusion of the options appraisal and the business case was that the full combination of the two authorities provided the best long-term option to increase capacity while reducing costs. The merger plans received extensive cross-party political support from Somerset County Council and Devon Fire and Rescue Authority, as well as the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The key factors that enabled this merger to be a success were:
- the ability to address concerns over existing financial and operational capacity
- a robust business plan that showed how financial and operational benefits would be delivered
- a limited impact on council tax levels
- strong support from both national and local government
- a strong history of close working between the two fire services.
Barriers to potential mergers

While merger discussions appear a logical response to the current challenges faced by the fire and rescue sector, there are considerable barriers. This is evidenced by the fact that only two mergers have occurred in the past seven years. Other proposals have either been put on hold (such as Cambridgeshire and Suffolk) or abandoned (such as East and West Sussex).

The many barriers to mergers are set out below. Our round table discussion highlighted the first two as the biggest issues that can halt the process.

- **Impact on council tax levels** – particularly where the merger would result in a significant increase in council tax in one of the areas involved
- **Lack of political agreement** – the absence of political agreement on the need for merger, particularly where neighbouring authorities are controlled by different political parties, can mean that formal merger discussions are virtually a non-starter
- **Fears of a loss of quality service delivery and impact on response times** – particularly where there are fears that the merger might mean a rationalisation of fire stations and appliances near county boundaries

- **Number of stakeholders involved in the process** – including local electors, fire fighters, local media and trade unions, who need to be on-side
- **Additional costs** – incurred through upheaval and disruption to existing services and staff
- **Lack of confidence in ongoing viability** – concern that, post-merger, the combined authority will be stretched too thinly
- **Cultural, operational and training differences** – between fire authorities. At our national fire summit, senior fire service managers provided a number of examples where incidents near county boundaries were attended by fire appliances from neighbouring authorities, and different operational practices relating to building entry and working at heights had been a problem. A fire merger might harmonise some of those working practices, but the barrier becomes a major obstacle where one authority has predominately retained crews and the other permanent fire fighters and the differences in experience and expertise are likely to be most acute
Case study

Council tax issue halts merger plans for East and West Sussex

In December 2010, West Sussex County Council and East Sussex Fire Authority started to examine options for closer collaboration, up to and including a full merger of the two fire and rescue services.

The initial business case concluded that a full merger was the best option to secure financial and operational resilience. A 12 week public consultation exercise was held with a view to the merger taking effect from April 2013.

While the consultation exercise showed broad support for the proposed merger, the proposals had to be abandoned because of the uncertainties about the future funding for the newly merged fire authority for Sussex. A particular problem was whether and how council tax for the merged service could be equalised across the whole of the area.

Source: www.esfrs.org

Lessons from aborted mergers

The relevant bodies must recognise the barriers to mergers occurring, and the resources required to overcome them, at the outset. This will ensure that not only the resulting service is a long-term, viable solution to protect front-line services, but that the process itself is worth embarking on.

They will need to revisit some of these questions regularly as the merger project develops. Other issues are so fundamental that they will need to resolve them before significant financial resources are devoted to developing the proposals further.

With these barriers to merger, the question is whether there are sufficient levers in place for mergers to occur, or whether better collaborative working can bring about the benefits while decreasing the challenges.

Is a merger the best option? Key questions:

What are the operational and financial benefits that the merger will achieve?

Does the business plan stack up?

Is the merger with the right party, in terms of maximising value for money for the taxpayer?

Are local politicians supportive?

Is there a politically acceptable plan to equalise the levels of council tax across the merging authorities?

Have all alternatives been fully explored?

Are there any contingency plans in case of a last minute change of heart?

Are there clear project plans in place to ensure the savings are delivered?

Have the knock-on effects on other local authorities been fully evaluated?

How will operational differences across the merging areas be reconciled?
Other forms of collaboration

Mergers that result in the creation of new legal entities represent one end of a continuum of joint working. Other forms of joint working seen across the sector include:

- joint procurement
- informal sharing of specialised services or equipment such as high volume pumps, or boats for flooding incidents
- reciprocal arrangements for operational support, covering training, emergency cover, control rooms and procurement
- combined back office functions or shared senior management
- different types of consolidation – combining services, but not the entity, for example, joint control rooms and joint training facilities
- consolidation across police and fire services.

While all these forms of collaboration offer the opportunity to find efficiencies, their impact and effectiveness vary.

**Joint procurement**

Fire service finance managers have reported mixed results for achieving value for money from joint procurement. This has been successful for standard items, such as uniforms and equipment, but less so for the procurement of non-standard, highly-specialised products, such as fire engines and ladders.

**Shared back office functions**

Many fire and rescue services already obtain their back office services from larger county councils and metropolitan borough councils. These typically cover functions such as asset management, accountancy, payroll, internal audit and human resources and allow fire authorities to focus on front line delivery.

Fire service finance managers have a range of views about the equity of the charges for these services. One county council fire accountant had successfully challenged the county treasurer to ensure that the level of charges reflected the activity that was carried out. Stand-alone fire and rescue authorities have much more scope to shop around to ensure they get the value for money from support services.

Three fire and rescue authorities currently have plans to merge their back office functions to form a joint secretariat to deliver finance, estates management, IT and other functions. This aims to provide, in addition to saving money, greater resilience in the event of staff changes.

In South Yorkshire, there is already a joint secretariat providing back office services to the fire, police, pension fund and passenger transport authorities.

**Joint working with the police**

A variety of views have been expressed about closer working with the police and crime commissioner. This has the potential to work particularly well where fire and police services have similar geographical boundaries, so down-time associated with staff and vehicles travelling across a wide geographical area can be minimised.

The benefits of joint working across these sectors can include:

- sharing central overheads across a wider operational base
- economies of scale in combining similar operations, such as vehicle fleet maintenance
- better use of assets such as buildings by co-locating emergency staff and vehicles in the same building. Redundant buildings can then be sold to generate capital receipts
- improved response times through increased co-responding
- more co-ordinated responses to major incidents, as the police and fire staff are used to working together.

There are a number of positive examples of joint working. These range from front line service delivery such as combined safety visits to vulnerable older people to co-locating police and fire staff in existing property to procurement and build of joint headquarters and command and control centres. A key feature of these positive examples is a strong political and operational enthusiasm for closer working and a relentless focus on achieving the desired outcomes.

However, attempts at joint working can lead to tensions between the services. One police and crime commissioner has been particularly vocal in his disappointment about...
the decision of the fire and rescue authority to share a joint control room with a neighbouring brigade rather than use a joint control room with the police.

One initiative for a police base in a local fire station was aborted when it was established that the police service car parking requirements would not leave any space for retained fire fighters to park when they were mobilised in the middle of the day.

Case study

Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Service and Kent police

In December 2010, the government cancelled the national FiReControl Project which would have introduced regional control centres. Under this plan, Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Service (KMFRS) emergency calls would have been handled by a centre in Hampshire. KMFRS analysed the options available which would ensure that performance, efficiency and resilience of call-handling and mobilisation were maintained in the future. The research indicated that closer collaboration with the other emergency services would improve the overall response to major incidents and bring efficiencies, while improving interoperability.

KMFRS already had an existing relationship with Kent police, who hosted the disaster recovery function. Further investigation showed that moving the control centre permanently to the same site as the Kent police under a collaborative agreement was likely to be more cost-effective than a stand-alone option. It also provided KMFRS the opportunity to benefit from the joint working initiatives outlined in recent reviews and supported the roll-out of the Joint Emergency Services Integration Project (JESIP) within the county. This move was completed in April 2012 and has already delivered operational advantages.

The next stage of the project is to replace the existing mobilisation software. The plan is to utilise the fire module of the mobilising system which is currently used by the police. KMFRS aim to complete this element of the project by the end of 2014, after which mobile data and station-end mobilising equipment will be refreshed.

Case study

Northamptonshire police and fire services collaborate successfully

The fire and rescue service in Northamptonshire is beginning to work more closely with the police and crime commissioner. This work includes looking at the scope for sharing premises, vehicle maintenance, training and supporting office services; and a more collaborative emphasis on community safety and prevention.

The collaboration has led to the refurbishment of Thrapston Fire Station, which allowed the creation of a dedicated police facility within the station. This has enabled the police to relocate from their existing station.

This work has included the allocation of dedicated communications room and access controls, which enhance resilience.

The fire and rescue service is considering this type of development in several other locations.

It is also collaborating with Northamptonshire police to service and maintain the vehicles operated by both services. This approach means that they can make more effective use of the workshop and maintenance facilities at the fire service’s Moulton Logistics Centre and the police headquarters at Wootton Hall.

Senior managers from both emergency services are now co-located at the police headquarters.
Dublin fire fighters trained as paramedics

Dublin Fire Brigade operates 12 emergency ambulances in Dublin with all operational fire fighters rotating from fire to ambulance duties. Over 140 of Dublin’s fire fighters are registered paramedics and this provides a flexible and highly skilled workforce to be deployed across the city as the need arises. This is very obvious when responding to a cardiac arrest or a serious road traffic incident as all personnel can operate closely together under a single command structure.

Dublin Fire Brigade has achieved accreditation under the International Standards Organisation ISO 9001/2000 Quality Management System for its ambulance service.

The Emergency Control Room will despatch an ambulance as well as a fire engine at the same time if the situation requires both.

For example, for any cardiac arrest, non-minor road traffic accident, possible spinal injury etc a fire appliance with up to five paramedics on board is dispatched automatically along with the ambulance.

These extra paramedics means that a much greater level of patient care can be given during procedures such as resuscitation or spinal log rolls which require extra trained practitioners. The extra personnel also can also assist with lifting heavier patients especially from upstairs or more inaccessible locations.

With all fire engines in Dublin carrying experienced paramedics and medical equipment such as defibrillators and oxygen therapy, patient treatment can begin immediately at paramedic level by a fire appliance crew, if they are the first on the scene.

Joint working with ambulance services

Fire authorities reported a range of examples of good practice in operational joint working with the ambulance service. These include ambulance staff based in fire stations and joint working or co-responding. Clinical evidence proves that patients in a life-threatening situation who receive rapid medical intervention have better chances of survival and co-responding has the potential to improve medical response times in some areas. Although a significant number of fire and rescue authorities have agreements with the local ambulance service for joint working or co-responding, there is a view from some in the fire service that the very different command and control structures between the fire and ambulance sectors might limit the joint working opportunities available.

A number of senior fire officers, including a former president of the Chief Fire Officers Association, have suggested that ambulance response times and greater monetary efficiencies could be improved if fire services also operated ambulances. There are examples of fire services delivering more integrated ambulance services overseas. In countries such as the United States, Japan, Hong Kong and Ireland, ambulances can be operated by the local fire service. This is not just in rural areas, where maintaining a separate service is not necessarily cost effective, but also in major cities such as Tokyo and Dublin. However, ambulance chiefs argue that the public is better served by the ambulance service remaining part of the NHS.
Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service delivers co-responder scheme

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and South Central Ambulance Service are working in partnership to deliver a co-responder scheme across the county. Co-responders now operate from 18 fire stations.

Co-responders are fire fighters trained in basic life support who may respond to medical incidents alongside or supporting an ambulance crew.

The first priority of fire and rescue service employees is to ensure that fire stations maintain adequate operational cover. If sufficient fire fighters are available to offer fire cover, then a fire fighter may crew the Co-responder Unit (CRU) for calls to a range of medical emergencies including:

- cardiac arrests
- serious/uncontrollable bleeding
- breathing difficulties
- unconscious patient
- choking
- signs of shock
- diabetic/epileptic emergency
- suspected stroke
- traumatic injuries.

The aim of co-responding is to have a suitably trained person at the scene of a potentially life-threatening incident within eight minutes. Co-responders are mostly located in areas where their presence will have maximum benefit.

Training is provided by the ambulance service and comprises two days of intensive first aid training. The bulk of this is based around resuscitation and defibrillation. Re-certification, with refresher training, is given every six months.

The co-responder is mobilised by the Ambulance Control Centre. They receive the 999 call and, once the call type has been identified, they decide whether a co-responder will be mobilised.

Source: www.hantsfire.gov.uk
Regardless of the degree of collaboration a fire and rescue authority opts for, good management disciplines should be applied to ensure the planned benefits are achieved. Some ingredients for successful collaboration include the following.

- **A compelling strategic rationale**
  Often the rationale behind a transaction is driven by a financial objective, most commonly achieving cost efficiencies or increasing income. These are important considerations, but, for a fire authority transaction to realise long-term benefits, there also needs to be a compelling case behind it, and the transaction should genuinely improve the way things are done. The focus must also remain on the citizen and this will be a key way to justify and drive the organisational upheaval and to satisfy public concern.

- **Effective pre- and post-merger planning**
  Transactions soak up management time and capacity, and are set within a complex and changing environment. Too often, the focus of an integration is the transaction itself and not the benefits it needs to deliver. The early development of robust governance arrangements, an effective implementation plan with clear responsibilities and an operational blueprint are essential. These should help decide what will be done internally and whether external support is required.

- **Stakeholder support**
  As a transaction develops and evolves, politics can dominate and the final stated aim of a transaction may not be consistent with the original strategic rationale. To minimise this risk, the strategic rationale behind a transaction should be clearly understood and supported by key stakeholders. Considerable effort should be focused on gaining staff buy-in to ensure that the transformational benefits of a transaction are realised.

- **Risk management**
  The benefits from a transaction are often over-estimated or not well planned and executed. Effective governance, project management and due diligence – by each partner and by the enlarged organisation – will identify issues at an early stage and allow risk to be managed effectively throughout the planning, contracting and delivery process.

**Defining the vision**
A key task for delivering a successful scheme is to develop a clear, shared vision of the operational, cost and quality improvements that the project will deliver. This vision needs to be captured in quantitative targets.

Various approaches have been adopted to develop a common shared vision, but the most usual is a workshop with project leads from each sponsor organisation, to brainstorm what each wants from the project and the broad scope for improvement.
Developing an implementation plan

Having defined the project’s vision and secured stakeholder buy-in, it is essential to translate this into an operational implementation plan. All the successful joint working schemes we have reviewed feature good project management with clear timelines, deliverables and accountability.

Investment-led projects will have a longer lead time, particularly if they involve the implementation of new IT, buildings or equipment. For very large projects, many public sector organisations use a formal project manager or project management office. This injects the extra formal discipline that the project needs to help orchestrate many complex strands.

Crucial factors for sustaining project progress

- Developing processes to deal with teething problems in the early days
- Regular team meetings to reinforce the new processes and systems
- Sharing progress and success
- Monitoring progress
- Visible leadership

Key elements of an implementation plan

- An identified owner
- Clear milestones and accountabilities
- A detailed sub-plan for each party or sponsor
- A steering group to oversee change
- Adequate resourcing, with each participant’s day-to-day responsibilities back-filled where required
- Clear articulation about the resources needed from each partner
- A communication plan with an agreed distribution list and frequency of reporting
- A contingency plan and risk management strategy
- Reporting and monitoring arrangements to track progress in relation to project delivery

Other sources of guidance on mergers and alternative delivery models

- Responding to the challenge: alternative delivery models in local government
  Grant Thornton UK LLP
- Learning the lessons of public body mergers
  Audit Scotland
Monitoring progress
To ensure long-term and sustainable change, the partner organisations need to maintain momentum by ensuring that change is embedded. Through its monitoring of activity and review of deliverables, the project board plays a crucial role in ensuring that the financial and operational objectives of merger or collaboration initiatives are met.

Structured collaboration
BS11000 is the British national standard on structured collaboration. Collaboration, as codified in BS11000, represents an evolution in how partnering can be managed. The standard advocates sharing visions and resources and has a particular focus on approaches and mechanisms that can create efficiency and effective delivery.

Structured collaboration is relatively new to the UK and early adopters include the defence, aerospace and rail industries. There could be considerable benefits in learning how the fire and rescue sector could apply the concepts and tools set out in the standard, to improve the effectiveness of collaboration. These concepts include:
- changing behaviours and improving trust, to make collaboration more efficient within and between organisations
- introducing a common language to improve communication between organisations
- aligning aspirations and capabilities between partners and playing to organisations’ strengths to improve productivity
- providing greater continuity and flexibility of resource across organisations
- enhancing governance across organisations, such as by the use of shared approaches to risk management
- promoting innovation and continuous improvement.

Questions to help ensure success
- What is the compelling need for change?
- Have similar transformational projects worked elsewhere?
- How will partners measure the success of outcomes?
- Is there a clear vision of how the project will produce cost and quality improvements?
- How are services currently organised and what service configuration are we looking to achieve in future?
- Which organisations will deliver services and in what setting?
- What is the baseline position and what improvement is required, in numbers?
- What services, people and functions will be included in the project?
- Are there any project parameters or constraints, eg statutory targets, patient safety?
- What are the risks?
- What are the likely timelines for the project and which financial years will improvements be delivered in?
- Who will lead the project?
While merger and consolidation may seem a logical option, only two mergers of fire and rescue services have taken place in the last seven years. All other merger proposals have been abandoned or put on hold. Fire authorities, like other areas of the public sector, face many challenges in merging, particularly as the underlying driver is ostensibly to drive efficiencies rather than to ‘grow’. Strong political support and changes to the funding regime are essential if mergers are to happen.

The largest barrier is that of equalising council tax levels between fire and rescue services. To avoid abortive expenditure on merger and business planning, there needs to be clear agreement between the interested parties on council tax and other funding up front. If there is no agreement, then no expenditure or management attention on the merger should occur.

There are, however, a variety of alternative solutions for future structures and collaboration between fire and rescue services. Collaboration short of a merger and collaboration with other blue-light services have been tried and tested. These may represent more viable alternatives to a merger for many fire and rescue services. Many examples of merged control rooms and achievement of savings through close collaboration exist, and have been much easier to achieve than a full merger.

Doing nothing is not an option. Fire authorities need to fully evaluate the alternative options available to them, and ensure that robust financial appraisal and project planning disciplines are followed to deliver the efficiencies required. Mergers and closer joint working are part of the solution to driving efficiency, but are not the whole story.
Supporting fire and rescue services to respond to the challenge

These are challenging times. But there are many opportunities for fire and rescue services to take the initiative and identify creative solutions that protect and improve front-line services. To succeed, they need to look at many different things simultaneously: financial measures; operational efficiency; new ways of financing; and partnership working. These must all be work together so fire and rescue authorities can respond to new financial and operational challenges.

Grant Thornton has significant experience of working with fire authorities and the wider public sector. We have the expertise and commitment to deliver tangible results for fire and rescue authorities as they look to:

- **realise strategic ambitions** by assessing and structuring service delivery models, including outsourcing and partnership arrangements
- **finance growth and investment** in new equipment and facilities whilst ensuring long term financial resilience
- **optimise operations** as they tackle efficiency and develop new response models and collaboration with other public services
- **win the talent battle** by retaining and rewarding those with the right skills for the future
- **master risk** by developing strong governance processes and targeting resources in areas of greatest need.

Assisting fire and rescue joint working

At Grant Thornton we have a wealth of experience and expertise in local government, financial management, and governance as well as in the commercial sector. We are also a leading firm in the domain of transactions advice. Examples of the support that we can provide include:

- delivering cost and quality improvement schemes
- strategic options appraisal
- identification of merger partners
- bid support, eg advising on negotiation strategies
- developing business cases and financial models
- due diligence
- negotiation of heads of terms and business transfer agreement
- reviews of partnering organisations and proposed contracts
- developing and assessing cost improvement plans
- post-merger planning and integration support
- structured collaboration health check
- advising on successful governance arrangements to deliver new initiatives, such as setting up fire safety companies.
Our wider service offering

- Realise strategic ambition
  - Winning the great battle
  - Finance, growth and investment
  - Optimise operations

- Matter and risk
  - Mitigating the risk of fraud
  - Ensuring financial and VAT compliance
  - Effective corporate governance
  - Reassuring stakeholders
  - Third party suppliers and senior hires
  - Protection from cyber threats and data theft
  - Efficient tax compliance

- Win the great battle
  - Staff appointment and retention through reward
  - Delivering an effective workforce
  - Organisational development
  - Senior leadership effectiveness

- Optimise operations
  - Energy efficiency
  - Tax and VAT efficiencies
  - Cost effective outsourcing
  - Supplier and contract optimisation

- Finance, growth and investment
  - Growth funding strategies
  - Regeneration and economic development
  - Accessing finance
  - Capital strategic partnering
  - Establishing joint ventures
  - Strategic options appraisal
  - Income optimisation
  - Asset recovery
  - Major project delivery and procurement
  - Sustainability support
  - Efficiency and savings in front line and back office services

- Matter and risk
  - Mitigating the risk of fraud
  - Ensuring financial and VAT compliance
  - Effective corporate governance
  - Reassuring stakeholders
  - Third party suppliers and senior hires
  - Protection from cyber threats and data theft
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  - Strategic options appraisal
  - Income optimisation
  - Asset recovery
  - Major project delivery and procurement
  - Sustainability support
  - Efficiency and savings in front line and back office services
About us

Dynamic organisations know they need to apply both reason and instinct to decision making. At Grant Thornton, this is how we advise our clients every day. We combine award-winning technical expertise with the intuition, insight and confidence gained from our extensive sector experience and a deep understanding of our clients.

Grant Thornton UK LLP is a leading business and financial adviser with client-facing offices in 25 locations nationwide. While we understand regional differences and can respond to needs of local authorities, our clients can also have confidence that our team of local government specialists is part of a firm led by more than 185 partners and employing more than 4,200 professionals, providing personalised audit, tax and specialist advisory services to over 40,000 clients.

Grant Thornton has a well established market in the public sector. We are the largest employer of CIPFA members and students and our national team of experienced public sector specialists, provide the growing range of assurance, tax and advisory services that our clients require.

We are the leading firm in the public sector audit market. This includes working with 20 fire and rescue services across the UK and auditing over 40% of the specialist sector. This depth of experience ensures that our solutions are grounded in reality and draw on best practice. Through proactive, client-focused relationships, our teams deliver solutions in a distinctive and personal way, not pre-packaged products and services. Our approach combines a deep knowledge of local government, supported by an understanding of wider public sector issues, drawn from working with associated delivery bodies, relevant central government departments and with private-sector organisations working in the sector.

Alongside our work in the fire sector, we are the largest supplier of audit and related services to the Audit Commission, and count 40% of local authorities in England as external audit clients. We also audit local authorities in Wales and Scotland via framework contracts with Audit Scotland and the Wales Audit Office. We have over 180 local government and related body audit clients in the UK and over 75 local authority advisory clients. This includes London boroughs, county councils, district councils, city councils, unitary councils and metropolitan authorities, as well as police authorities. Across the NHS, our national practice clients comprise 18 foundation trusts, 49 trusts and 79 clinical commissioning groups.

We take an active role in influencing and interpreting policy developments affecting local government and responding to government consultation documents and their agencies. We regularly produce sector-related thought leadership reports, typically based on national studies, and client briefings on key issues. We also run seminars and events to share our thinking on local government and, more importantly, understand the challenges and issues facing our clients.
Contact us

If you would like to find out more about how we can support fire and rescue services, please contact one of our regional leads:

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