

# EMERGENCY SERVICES COLLABORATION

THE DUTY TO COLLABORATE – AN INFORMATION AND SUPPORT DOCUMENT



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# FOREWORD



As Chair of the Emergency Services Collaboration Working Group (ESCWG) and as the Police and Crime Commissioner for a highly collaborative police force, I firmly believe that greater collaboration between emergency services will enable us to deliver the highest quality service to the public we serve. Demand on our services is changing and collaboration provides us with a real opportunity to create innovative responses to these challenges whilst strengthening future resilience, effectiveness and efficiency.

The police, fire and rescue and emergency ambulance services now have a duty to collaborate as a result of the Policing and Crime Act 2017. This provides us with a tangible legal framework to increase the scope of collaborative work and keep our communities safer. This information and support document is intended to assist and support the emergency services sector to better understand the benefits of collaboration and the legislative framework that now exists to support it.

Many excellent examples of collaboration between the police,

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ambulance and fire and rescue service already exist, and it is the aim of the ESCWG to help improve and accelerate the pace of this work to create a more cohesive national picture. The ESCWG, a cross-emergency service representative body, will work with the emergency services (including those not covered in the Duty) and the government to highlight best practice remove barriers to greater partnership and work to embed collaboration as the norm, for a brighter future.

**Philip Seccombe TD**  
Police and Crime Commissioner for Warwickshire  
Chair of the Emergency Services Collaboration Working Group







## THE EMERGENCY SERVICES COLLABORATION WORKING GROUP

The Emergency Services Collaboration Working Group is a sector-led and government-backed group that was formed in September 2014 with support from the Home Office, Department of Health and Department for Communities and Local Government. Ministers have been clear that they want to see collaboration between the emergency services go further and faster; central to this vision is that local services are best placed to determine how to collaborate for the benefit of their communities. The ESCWG continues to receive the support of government and reports to the Emergency Services Collaboration and Interoperability Ministerial Board.

Underpinned by the principle that change should be centrally supported but locally driven, the ESCWG provides strategic leadership, coordination and an overview across England and Wales to improve emergency services collaboration. The aim of the ESCWG is to facilitate and encourage greater collaboration between the emergency

services in England and Wales where it will enhance efficiency, effectiveness, or public safety, with a goal to embed the principles and practices of collaboration within the sector.

The ESCWG consists of key representatives from the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, National Police Chiefs Council, National Fire Chiefs Council, Association of Ambulance Chief Executives, the Local Government Association, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, and the College of Policing, as well as the relevant government departments.

Much of the work to deliver emergency services collaboration will be delivered locally. However there is a need to ensure coordination, consistency and shared learning across the emergency services landscape.



# A BACKGROUND TO THE DUTY TO COLLABORATE

Within individual emergency services, collaboration has had a long history in England with benefits on the ground evident across the country. Innovative partnership initiatives have saved services money, reduced local response times, created value for money and have better protected the public. However, the push for deeper and stronger collaboration, particularly between emergency services has also been recognised as an important next step. For example, Sir Ken Knight's 2013 report into the efficiencies and operations of the fire and rescue service found that improvements in service efficiency, quality and cohesion could be driven through stronger collaboration such as co-responding and co-location amongst blue-light services.

Following a 2015 manifesto commitment to 'enable fire and police service to work more closely together,' the government consulted on the introduction of a duty to collaborate. This received overwhelming positive support from the sector for its aim to transform the way emergency services work with each other to drive efficiencies, reduce duplications and remove local barriers to providing a strengthened service. The Policing and Crime Act 2017 introduced a new duty on the police, fire and rescue and ambulance services to keep collaboration opportunities under review and, where it is in the interests of their efficiency or effectiveness, to put those collaboration opportunities into practice. The

duty is deliberately broad to allow for local discretion so that the emergency services themselves can decide how best to collaborate for the benefit of their own communities.

Emergency services' collaboration can take many forms, from operational matters such as co-responding to incidents to more behind the scenes work such as sharing premises or integrating control rooms. Initiatives like these may help reinvest resources into the frontline and deliver an improved service to the public with shorter response times.

Whilst good partnership work already exists in many areas, more can be done to encourage wider and deeper collaboration. It was this desire to broaden and deepen collaboration across the country that the new statutory duty arose, giving a clear signal that a step change is required to fully realise the benefits that cross-service collaboration can provide.

This document has been written by the Emergency Services Collaboration Working Group (ESCWG) and aims to provide detail about the duty, how it can be used and what a good collaborative agreement looks like. This document will focus on the Duty to Collaborate rather than other aspects of the Police and Crime Act that may impact on cross-service collaborative arrangements, such as PCC governance.





# A GUIDE TO THE DUTY TO COLLABORATE

The duty for emergency services to collaborate is found within Chapter 1 of the Police and Crime Act 2017. The legislation states that a collaboration agreement can be made between:

- A fire and rescue body
- An ambulance trust
- A police body.

The Act only covers these services in England. A collaboration agreement should exist between at least two emergency services; however, it could include more than one service from the same limb (e.g. two police forces and one fire service).

Whilst the Duty does not cover other emergency services such as the Coastguard or other non-emergency bodies, this should not prevent other organisations from participating in collaboration agreements. On the contrary, participation from bodies such as local government, health providers and the voluntary sector should be encouraged where appropriate.

It is important to note that the Act is deliberately broad to allow for maximum local innovation and implementation. It does not specify

how services should collaborate except for a few high level provisions and restrictions.

A 'collaboration agreement' is an agreement in writing that sets out how the parties that sign up to it will work together in discharging their functions. As such it could set out the governance structures of the collaborative agreement or the detail of how the parties will work together as well as the anticipated benefits.

The Act states that the three emergency services should consider opportunities to collaborate with other services. If it is in the interests of the efficiency or effectiveness of at least one of the parties to collaborate, then the relevant service (i.e. the service that originally considers the opportunity) must notify the other services of the proposed collaboration.

Should it be agreed by the parties involved that the proposed collaboration would be in the interests of their effectiveness and efficiency, then they should enter into a collaboration agreement.

Clearly if an emergency service has reviewed a collaboration opportunity and comes to the view that it would have an adverse effect of

public safety or their own efficiency and effectiveness, then the legislation does not require them to enter into a collaboration agreement.

The Act also contains a number of other specific restrictions in Chapter 1, Clause 3 of the Act. Interested parties should have reference to this before entering into collaboration agreements. Such restrictions include (but are not limited to) limiting the Duty to the emergency functions of ambulance services, and ensuring that local police consult their chief constable prior to entering an agreement.

The Act sets out in broad terms what a collaboration agreement might include. However, it is important that this is not seen as a checklist; individual agreements will vary considerably based on things like the scale of the collaboration, the number of parties involved and financial considerations.

Collaboration agreements may, for example, make arrangements for the joint exercise of functions or for one party to exercise another party's functions. The Act also states that each of the services involved in collaboration will be able to make payments for the purposes of the agreement. Both of these functions would, however, be achieved through existing legislation.







# WHAT WILL THE DUTY TO COLLABORATE ACHIEVE?

The Duty to Collaborate aims to strengthen and deepen cross-emergency service collaboration opportunities. It will have a wide range of benefits, both for the services themselves and for the public.

Benefit	How will this be achieved?
Keeping communities safer	The Duty will encourage services to work together to improve the effectiveness of our emergency services, enabling the delivery of a better outcome for the public.
Increasing collaborative momentum	The Duty enables a quicker and more structured process for understanding collaboration opportunities and how they can be taken forward at the local level.
Developing a wider understanding of good collaboration across the country	The Duty will help to 'normalise' collaboration, providing the legal backing required for those areas starting out on their collaboration journey.
Value for money	The Duty will help facilitate additional efficiencies for emergency services through increased collaboration, which can be reinvested into front line provision.



# WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DO NOT COLLABORATE?

As stated above, emergency services should not enter into collaborative agreements that are not in the interests of the effectiveness or efficiency of at least one of the parties. Equally, emergency services should not take forward collaborative opportunities that contravene the specific restrictions set out in the Act. In addition, where parties enter into a collaboration agreement and the interests of efficiency, effectiveness and public safety become adversely affected, parties can agree minor changes, replace the agreement, or terminate it.

The Act does not provide for formal sanction should collaborative agreements that are in the interests of emergency services not take place. However, by providing a legislative framework for collaboration agreements and via the creation of the sector-led Emergency Services Collaboration Working Group, it is envisaged that keeping collaboration opportunities under review and enacting them where appropriate will become the norm across the sector.

Where blockages between parties do exist, the ESCWG is able to help with advice and support. Equally we envisage that collaborative activity will become an increasingly important part of inspection regimes going forward.



A guidance document by the Emergency Services Collaboration Working Group



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National Fire  
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