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Dear Mr Aldridge,

CHANGES TO FIRE POLICY LEAD AT DH

Your letter dated 7 January 2010, was received in the Department on the 22 February 2010, copied via correspondence to the Minister of State for Public Health. I must apologise for the delay in responding to your concerns.

As you will be aware, the Department of Health is a Department of State, whose primary remit is to support the ministerial team and develop policy. The Gateway Reviews, Estates & Facilities Division within the Department has recently undertaken a review of its current work areas to ensure they meet the objectives of those of a Department of State. This review identified areas of work that need to be retained; those that would be better placed within another organisation (or other area of the Department); and, those areas of work that are no longer necessary (e.g. completed work programmes). It also identified areas of an operational nature in which it is no longer appropriate for the Department to be directly involved.

Whilst fire safety in healthcare premises is a very important area, the focus of the Division should be supporting ministers and developing policy. The NHS, in following the Department of Health guidance on fire safety 'Firecode', has a duty to ensure they employ competent personnel in key roles such as those of a Fire Safety Adviser. The initial point of contact for an NHS trust on fire safety related matters should be their Strategic Health Authority. The Division continues to provide support to Strategic Health Authorities in addition to supporting cross-government initiatives on fire safety that affect the provision of healthcare.

As you know, the Department of Health, along with other government departments, has to make effective use of its resources. The Department retained the expertise of the fire policy lead, but considers it more efficient to focus their skills on supporting the Ministerial team, delivering policy, and supporting cross-government initiatives on fire safety that affect healthcare. This has released a considerable amount of time previously spent on operational issues, which can now be utilised to deliver other key policy initiatives such as the Premises Assurance Model (PAM).

The Department, working closely with the NHS, is currently developing the PAM to enable healthcare providers to demonstrate assurance that premises from which healthcare is delivered, meet acceptable standards of safety and quality in addition to complying with statutory duties. This will include, for example, the Regulatory Reform

(Fire Safety) Order 2005, in which NAHFO will have a direct interest. The PAM includes self-assessment questions relating to fire safety.

On the more specific issues you raise:

- Continuing to support NAHFO – This element is likely to have limited support. NAHFO is an operationally based and focussed organisation. As the Department directs limited resources to supporting Ministers and cross Government issues, providing support to NAHFO members directly is not practical. There may be some scope to provide limited support at national level through your National Executive Committee but only on policy development issues.
- SHA Advisors knowledge and national picture – SHA advisers have a wide knowledge across a range of estates related topics. Where they have difficulty in responding to a particular issue, including fire safety, they have recourse back to the Department for support and assistance.
- Review of HTM 05-03: Part K – Responsibility for publications and guidance, including Firecode, currently rests with our head of Knowledge and Research. He will continue to utilise the Fire Policy Lead as an ‘informed client’ when considering any revisions to future guidance.
- NAHFO representation on Firecode development – The policy of the Department is that any guidance must be co-produced with the NHS. NAHFO, as a key stakeholder and expert body, would continue to be an essential part of any working group involved in the production of NHS fire safety guidance.
- Loughborough University Course – Whilst recognising that the course, which I believe runs twice a year, is currently the only one of its kind in the UK, unfortunately, it will not be possible to provide continued support in the future.

I accept that these views may not be openly welcomed. I hope you can see, by responding to specific queries you have raised, the Department does value NAHFO as a credible and valuable organisation involved in the promotion and delivery healthcare fire safety.

Yours sincerely



Rob Smith
Director of Gateway Reviews and Estates & Facilities