

POWERS OF THE MINISTER

20. Under the draft Bill the administration of the Act and the efficiency of the Service is the responsibility of the Council. Government is mainly concerned to see that an emergency organization is established on a national basis. The draft Bill therefore provides that the Minister may attend any meeting of the Council, ask for any reports and papers considered necessary, and communicate to the Council the policy of Government in any matter affecting the national organization of the Service or its co-operation with other national or local services. The transition from Ministerial to Council control and the initial setting-up of the emergency organization will involve close liaison with Treasury and other Government Departments. For this reason the Minister is empowered to appoint the Chairman of the Council for the first term. In the same way, for similar reasons, and to avoid the setting-up of an unnecessarily costly central organization to which Government is required to contribute half the cost, he is empowered to direct that the clerical work of the Council be carried out by the Department of Internal Affairs as at present.

COUNCIL AND BRIGADE-CONTROLLING AUTHORITIES

21. The powers of the Council with respect to Fire Boards and other local authorities are strictly limited. The draft Bill requires every brigade-controlling authority firstly to maintain an efficient service as provided in section 43 of the Fire Brigades Act, and secondly to conform with the emergency organization requirements of the new legislation. The latter provision is qualified so as not to require the services outside the district of more than one-fourth of the brigade members or of plant and equipment essential for the fire protection of the town. The Council, for its part, if it considers that any brigade-controlling authority is not carrying out its duties, may require the authority to take such action as it deems necessary. The Fire Board or local authority may in turn appeal to a Magistrate against any such requisition on the grounds that such compliance is not in fact necessary for the efficiency of the Service or that the cost of compliance would be unreasonable having regard to any special conditions existing, the rateable capacity of the town, or the comparative expenditure on fire protection in other towns of comparable size and population.

EXISTING FIRE BOARDS

22. Existing Fire Boards and fire districts are not affected by the draft Bill, except that their estimates are approved by the Council instead of the Minister, their insurance contributions will be collected for them by the Council, and the existing Government member is replaced by a member nominated by the Brigade or, where more than three permanent men are employed, by the Union Federation on behalf of the brigade. The provisions of the Fire Brigades Act as to formation of united fire districts are retained.

NEW FIRE DISTRICTS

23. The recommendation of the parliamentary Committee is adopted and all towns classified by the underwriters are constituted fire districts. The towns affected are set out in the First Schedule to this report. A statutory committee of the local authority with the same membership as a Fire Board is constituted to control the local fire service. All other towns which have an effective service of a lower standard are declared secondary fire districts. The local authority is in this case required to set up a committee, including a representative of the brigade, to control the local service. The Second Schedule to this report sets out the towns so constituted. Provision is made for the Council to make grants not exceeding £25 to the local authority controlling a brigade below the standard required for a secondary fire district. Provision is also made for the Council to be a classifying authority and for the local authority of any secondary fire districts to apply for reclassification as a fire district or for the local authority of a town not in either Schedule to apply for classification as a secondary fire district or, should conditions