

**Item 1**

**The future for local fire services**

**Purpose of report**

For discussion.

**Summary**

The Commission will be addressed by Communities and Local Government Under Secretary of State, Bob Neill MP. There will then be an opportunity to put questions to the Minister on priority issues for Fire and Rescue Authorities.

**Recommendation**

Members are asked to receive the presentation from the Minister and comment upon any areas of interest.

**Action**

Officers to action as appropriate.

**Contact officer:** Caroline Green  
**Position:** Senior Policy Consultant, LGA  
**Phone no:** 020 7664 3359  
**E-mail:** [caroline.green@local.gov.uk](mailto:caroline.green@local.gov.uk)

## **The future for local fire and rescue services**

### **Background**

1. This paper gives an update on recent developments in priority areas of the Fire Services Management Committee's and Fire Commission's work to inform the discussion with the Minister.

### **Spending Review**

2. As part of the Spending Review published on 20 October, the Government announced that the formula grant to Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) will be reduced by 25% over the four year spending review period and that the cuts will be back-loaded to 2013-14 and 2014-15. At the time of writing, the Local Government Finance Settlement has not yet been published, so we do not know how these reductions will affect budgets at individual FRA level.
3. The back-loading of the reductions is something that the LGA argued for and will be important in giving FRAs time to implement the significant changes that will be required to deliver reductions. However our response to the Spending Review highlighted that the scale of the cuts mean there will inevitably be implications for delivery of frontline fire services.
4. Following the spending review the LGA has been lobbying for urgent clarity about the level of cuts to allow FRAs to begin to plan reductions and to ensure that FRAs are granted the powers they need to respond to spend cuts whilst protecting front line services. In particular, we have been lobbying to ensure that a General Power of Competence will apply to all FRAs to allow more flexibility over charging and trading.

### **Fire Futures**

5. The Fire Futures review was initiated by the Fire Minister to consider how the Fire and Rescue Service may need to evolve over the coming years. The work has been structured around 4 workstreams:
  - 5.1 *the role of the fire and rescue service and how it might be better delivered*
  - 5.2 *efficiency, effectiveness and productivity*
  - 5.3 *localism and accountability*
  - 5.4 *national interest*
6. These themes were the subject of discussion at the Commission meeting in September, following which the LGA submitted written views on the emerging

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themes, with a second iteration picking up on issues raised in a series of workshops. We have also submitted views on a large number of documents have emerged from the workstreams through participation in the review steering group. Further to discussion at the FSMC meeting in November, the Chairman wrote to the Minister to highlight the importance of ensuring that the conclusions from the Fire Futures exercise fully support FRAs ability to deliver the reductions identified in the spending review. A copy of this letter is **annexed** to this report

**FiReControl**

7. There is continuing uncertainty over the future of the FiReControl project. In November, Government informed the contractors EADS that they are in breach of their contract to deliver the project. EADS were given a short period of time to resolve outstanding issues and a decision on the future of the project is expected shortly.
8. Following the FSMC meeting in November, the FSMC Chairman wrote to the Minister to urge him to make this decision as soon as possible to allow FRAs to plan for the future. He reiterated the LGA's view that no Fire and Rescue Service should be asked to cut over to the system until it delivers full functionality. Even if revised timescales are agreed, given the project's track record, there is no confidence that new deadlines will be met or that the project will result in a satisfactory system.

**National Functions**

9. The LGA and CFOA have been developing proposals for how the sector can take responsibility for the delivery of a number national level activities, including supporting and promoting industry-wide standards and good practice, providing capacity to support weaker services, and clarifying future technological requirements and investment. We are arguing that this sector-led model should be the cornerstone of the government's approach to national functions. The LGA and CFOA will be meeting with the Minister early in the New Year to discuss the sector's proposals in further detail.