

Mr Bob Neill MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Department for Communities and Local Government  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London  
SW1E 5DU

29th November 2010

*Dear Minister,*

### **Fire Futures**

The LGA's Fire Service Management Committee considered the draft report of the Fire Futures review at our meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> November and I am writing to share the outcomes of that discussion with you.

The Committee discussed the draft report in the context of the outcomes of the spending review and your letter to Fire and Rescue Authorities following announcement that Formula Grant to Fire Authorities would be reduced by 25%. Your letter highlighted seven areas in which savings could be achieved. I agree that we need to explore the potential for efficiencies available and recommend that the areas you identified should guide further work and provide a focus for the Fire Futures project. I am keen to work with you to develop further evidence and best practice examples of how the sector can achieve the savings required whilst limiting impact on frontline services.

The Committee recognised that a significant amount of work has taken place within a short space of time to explore the wide range of issues covered by the Fire Futures project. We are grateful to those who led the different workstrands, to all those who contributed and for the support your department has given the project. The authors of the report raise a number of interesting points which are a valuable contribution to the debate. However, given the range of issues and views expressed, the short timescales involved are not in a position to endorse the report in whole or in part.

The LGA stands by the views submitted in evidence to the review and in the meetings of the Project Board. In addition, I would like to highlight some key areas which it will be important to progress to assist FRAs in responding to the challenges we face and identifying the savings that the spending review outcome will require of us.

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Firstly, I urge you to ensure that the power of general competence is granted to all FRAs, including the combined and metropolitan authorities and London. This power is essential to empower FRAs to act in the interests of their communities, to deliver services in the most efficient way and generate new income streams from charging and trading to support excellent services.

The report discusses in some depth the potential for combining services or functions either between Fire Authorities or with other emergency services, with options ranging from co-responding to the creation of new Community Protection Authorities. Decisions about such arrangements should be entirely a matter for FRAs in consultation with their communities. FRAs are best placed to ensure that democratic accountability of services is maintained. It would be helpful however, if your department were willing to explore further the option of allowing differential precepting between authorities considering amalgamation of services, at least in a transition phase, as the need to agree a single precept is thought to be a discouraging factor in considering amalgamations. We would be happy to discuss this in further detail.

Finally, as you are aware, 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. Our jointly agreed approach offers a sector-led approach to national functions and we believe should be the cornerstone of the government's approach. We look forward to sharing our proposals with you and you officials in more detail and hope that this work will be taken into account when you consider the outcomes of the Fire Futures.

*Kind regards*



**Councillor Brian Coleman, AM FRSA**  
Chairman, LGA Fire Services Management Committee