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Update on current issues for Fire and Rescue Authorities

Purpose of report

For information / noting.

Summary

This paper gives an update on recent developments in priority areas of the Fire Management Services Committee's work.

Recommendation

Commission Members are asked to note the report.

Action

LG Group officers to progress actions as appropriate.

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Update on current issues for Fire and Rescue Authorities

LG Group Annual Fire Conference

1. The LG Group's two-day annual Fire Conference is taking place in Gateshead on 7 - 8 March. A full copy of the programme is attached at **Appendix A**. As agreed at the last meeting of the Commission, the programme will include sessions on the implications of the spending cuts on Fire and Rescue Authorities. It will also focus on radical approaches to delivery that could help reduce spending; a localist approach to delivering national functions; working with the voluntary sector and looking at how technology can assist in managing the risk of fire. The conference will hear from a range of UK and international speakers, including the Fire Minister, Bob Neill MP; CFO Peter Holland, President, Chief Fire Officer's Association; and Matt Wrack, General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union. We hope to ensure full representation at the conference and Members are requested to encourage their authority to ensure they are registered to attend.

Capitalisation flexibility

2. As part of our response to the Local Government Finance Settlement, the LG Group has made representations to CLG and the Treasury to argue that local authorities and fire authorities should be able to capitalise redundancy costs fully. The £200m allocation is less than 0.1% of the local authority asset base. Greater flexibility on capitalisation would allow councils to maximise their spending on frontline services and plan efficiency savings, rather than emergency cuts. Guidance on application for capitalisation is expected by the end of February. We would welcome evidence from Fire and Rescue Authorities on the need for capitalisation to support our lobbying on this issue.

National Functions

3. The LGA and CFOA met with the Fire Minister, Bob Neill MP, on 18 January to present the sector's proposals for how key activities, currently undertaken by central government, can be better delivered collectively by the sector. The proposals were well received by the Minister who has asked his officials to work with us to develop them in more detail. The extent to which some of them can be taken forward are subject to negotiations with CLG on funding and liabilities.
4. In summary, the proposals are:
 - 4.1 National Procurement – In light of the abolition of Firebuy and the Minister's request for expressions of interest to assume some of its functions, the LG Group and CFOA propose to take on a central role,

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potentially working collaboratively with a lead authority or authorities, in coordinating procurement and liaising between FRSs and in dissemination of good practice and innovation to ensure the fire service can benefit from large scale contracts.

- 4.2 Tackling underperformance – The CFOA and the LG Group’s offer is to develop a sector-led framework for self- assessment as a more effective means of tackling underperformance than that provided by the Audit Commission and CAA. This will involve tools for self assessment and bench-marking, dissemination of good practice, and brokering support where it is required.
- 4.3 National Resilience Assurance – CFOA and the LG Group will provide the governance arrangements to support assurance of the delivery of capabilities under New Dimensions.
- 4.4 Operational Guidance – Operational guidance should be based on identified operational risks. It should also be proportionate and responsive to local needs whilst continuing to support national interoperability. It is therefore right that the sector plays a central role in producing the guidance. However, there are a number of issues around risk, liability and accountability as well as resources that need to be addressed prior to the sector receiving the transfer of this function.
- 4.5 IRMP Guidance – CFOA will continue to lead and coordinate work on good practice and driving innovation on integrated risk management planning.
- 4.6 Workforce development – The CFOA and LG Group proposal is for an overarching workforce development framework that is sector led and balances a consistent approach to workforce development with the need for local flexibility. This will involve reviewing existing programmes and initiatives to remove prescription and duplication whilst maintaining support for leadership and development of staff and credible and recognisable standards in the sector.
- 4.7 National Campaigns – CFOA and the LG Group would provide advice to Government to ensure national safety campaigns are effective and encourage individual FRAs to support such activities locally. This will avoid duplication of effort and maximum impact in communicating key safety messages.
- 4.8 Research and statistics – CFOA and the LG Group propose that responsibility and funding for national research should be transferred from CLG to the sector to ensure more effective and coherent coordination of research. CFOA and the LGA Group would provide governance and

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management arrangements to facilitate input from the sector to ensure research is closely tailored to the sectors' needs.

- 4.9 European Union – CFOA and the LG Group will work together to influence EU legislation, provide information on EU funding to ensure FRAs can identify potential funding opportunities and share intelligence on other EU issues affecting FRAs.
- 4.10 Equality & Diversity – Ultimately, CFOA and the LG Group believe that equality and diversity work should be mainstreamed and part of the way we do every day business. However, to ensure that progress recently achieved is not lost, the sector supports the dissemination of best practice and improvement using existing tools and networks.

Self regulation and improvement for Fire and Rescue Services

5. Officers from LGA, Local Government Improvement and Development and LG Research have been working with CFOA to develop the LG Group self regulation and improvement offer in relation to Fire Authorities and to build on this core offer to ensure that the model exploits the improvement expertise and innovation adopted by individual FRs for the benefit of all.

General Power of Competence

6. Following the publication of the Localism Bill, LGA officers have been engaging with FRAs on the Bill's proposals to grant general powers to Fire and Rescue Authorities to ensure that the powers will enable the sector to develop innovative approaches to service delivery and generate new income streams. The sector is broadly happy with the Bill's proposals, however we have raised a number of detailed concerns on the flexibilities afforded to FRAs which are being considered by CLG officials.

Future of Control Services

7. Members of the Fire Services Management Committee met with Chairs and Chief Fire Officers from a wide range of Fire and Rescue Services on 24 January to discuss the Government's recent decision to cancel FiReControl. The seminar focussed on what Fire and Rescue Services were doing in the short-term to ensure that resilience capacity is in place, and on the role that the LG Group can play in sharing best practice at the local level in designing cost-effective and comprehensive resilience solutions for the first term. A further meeting to discuss progress will take place at the LG Group's Annual Fire Conference.

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Flexibility to apply enhanced redundancy terms to NJC for LAFRS employees

8. Members will be aware of the survey conducted by the National Employers to ascertain whether or not authorities would like us to explore the possibility of putting in place an express statutory right, which would allow fire authorities the flexibility to apply enhanced redundancy terms (over and above the statutory requirements) should an authority wish to do so as is the case with local authority staff and fire control staff (who are eligible to join the Local Government Pension Scheme). At present, authorities do not have this flexibility for e.g. firefighters. Further detail on the background was contained in the survey. The overwhelming majority of authorities who responded within the indicated timescale have indicated that this is something they would be interested in and the National Employers will therefore explore this further as part of its short term priorities. Late responses will still be accepted.

Future priorities

9. The National Employers constantly review priorities in the context of what meets the needs of fire authorities and the best strategy for achievement of those priorities. Across the public sector, employers are looking at the whole employment package and the fire service is no exception. The exceptionally difficult current circumstances for authorities will be of paramount importance in those considerations and how to take matters forward.

LG Group annual fire conference and exhibition: the future of fire

Tuesday 8 – Wednesday 9 March 2011, Hilton Newcastle Gateshead Hotel

Appendix A

Conference Programme

Day One – Tuesday 8 March

09.30–10.30	Registration, refreshments and exhibition viewing
10.30–10.45	Conference opening Cllr Brian Coleman AM , Chairman, LG Group Fire Services Management Committee His Worshipful the Mayor of Gateshead Cllr Michael Hood
10.45–11.45	Session 1: Localism and spending cuts Chair: John Ransford , Chief Executive, LG Group CFO Peter Holland , President, Chief Fire Officers' Association Neil O'Connor , Director, Fire and Resilience, Communities and Local Government Matt Wrack , General Secretary, Fire Brigades Union There will be a question and answer session after each speaker.
11.45–12.10	Refreshments and exhibition viewing
12.10–13.00	Plenary 1: Radical approaches to delivery Chair: Cllr Paul Shannon , Deputy Chair, LG Group Fire Services Management Committee, Greater Manchester FRA and Association of Metropolitan FRAs Henrik B. Hansen , Fire Chief, Falck Cllr Mark Healey , Chairman, Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service
13.00–13.15	Questions and discussion
13.15–14.15	Lunch and exhibition viewing
13.45–14.10	Fringe session: Optimising fire service delivery for the future Mike Vicary , Managing Director, ORH Ltd Paul Murray , Consultant, ORH Ltd
14.15–15.15	Workshop sessions These workshops will be repeated on day two. Places are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis according to room capacity. W1. Flexible staffing arrangements Chair: Cllr Kay Hammond , LG Group Fire Services Management Committee and Surrey Fire and Rescue Authority Ann Millington , Chief Executive, Kent Fire and Rescue Service W2. Improved sickness management CFO Iain Cox , Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service W3. Pay restraint and recruitment freezes James Dalgleish , London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority W4. Shared services/back office functions Marcus Coulson , Improvement Manager, Local Government Improvement and

Development
Caroline Bosdet, Senior Improvement Manager, Local Government
Improvement and Development

W5. Improved procurement
Sharon Matthews, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service

W6. Sharing Chief Officers and other senior staff
Speakers to be confirmed

W7. London's preparation for 2012
Ron Dobson, Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority

15.15–15.45 Refreshments and exhibition viewing

15.45–16.05 **Plenary 2: National functions**
Chair: **Cllr Fred Walker**, LG Group Fire Services Management Committee and
Greater Manchester FRA
CFO Lee Howell, Vice President, CFOA and Devon and Somerset Fire and
Rescue Service

16.05–16.15 Questions and discussion

16.15–16.45 **Plenary 3: Has health and safety legislation gone too far in the fire service?**
Chair: **Cllr Brian Coleman AM**, Chairman, LG Group Fire Services Management
Committee

16.45 Close of Day One by Conference Chair

17.00–17.45 **Political group meetings**
Conservative Group
Labour Group
Liberal Democrats
Independent Group

18.00–19.00 **Fire Authorities meetings**
Metropolitan Fire Authorities
Combined Fire and Rescue Authorities
County Fire Authorities

19.30 **Drinks reception**

20.00 **Conference dinner**
Opening speech: **Cllr Thomas Wright**, Chairman, Tyne and Wear Fire and
Rescue Authority
Response: **Cllr Brian Coleman AM**, Chairman, LG Group Fire Services
Management Committee

Day Two – Wednesday 9 March

08.30–09.30 Chairs and Chiefs morning meeting on FiReControl

09.00–09.40 Registration, refreshments and exhibition viewing

09.40–09.45 Welcome back from conference chair
Cllr Brian Coleman AM, Chairman, LG Group Fire Services Management
Committee

09.45–10.15 **Plenary 4**
Chair: **Cllr Brian Coleman AM**, Chairman, LG Group Fire Services Management
Committee
Bob Neill MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Communities and Local
Government

10.15–10.25	Questions and discussion
10.30–11.30	<p>Workshop sessions</p> <p>A repeat of Day One. Places are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis according to room capacity.</p> <p>W1. Flexible staffing arrangements W2. Improved sickness management W3. Pay restraint and recruitment freezes W4. Shared services/back office functions W5. Improved procurement W6. Sharing Chief Officers and other senior staff W7. London's preparation for 2012</p>
11.30–12.00	Refreshments and exhibition viewing
12.00–12.30	<p>Panel discussion: Fire and rescue and the voluntary sector</p> <p>Chair: Cllr Fred Walker, Vice Chair, LG Group Fire Services Management Committee and Greater Manchester FRA CFO Vij Randeniya, West Midlands Fire Service Jean Templeton, Chief Executive, St Basils</p>
12.30–12.50	<p>Plenary 5: Understanding people profiles: managing risks to reduce fire deaths</p> <p>Chair: Cllr Christopher Newbury, LG Group Fire Services Management Committee and Wiltshire FRA Andy Ward, Community Safety and Law Enforcement Lead, Experian Public Sector Jo Munton, Central Account Manager, Law Enforcement and Community Safety, Experian Public Sector</p>
12.50–13.00	Questions and discussion
13.00	Close of conference by Cllr Brian Coleman AM , lunch and exhibition viewing