

## Note of decisions taken and actions required

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**Title:** Fire Commission  
**Date and time:** Friday 10 December 2010, 11.00  
**Venue:** Bevin Hall, Local Government House

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Item	Decisions and actions	Action by
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**1 Address from the Fire Minister – the future for local fire services**

The Commission received a presentation from Bob Neill MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Communities and Local Government.

The Minister outlined the impact of the Comprehensive Spending Review on Fire and Rescue Authorities, noting that FRA spending cuts had been back-loaded. This was designed to give FRAs the necessary time to develop innovative and creative ways of maintaining services and the Minister said that one of the central aims of the Fire Futures project was to establish a greater range of tools for FRAs to drive service improvement.

The Minister said that the Localism Bill would be presented to Parliament shortly after the Commission meeting. The Minister said that the Bill would contain a provision for a Power of General Competence for Local Authorities, and that provisions within the Bill would grant Fire and Rescue Authorities wide ranging powers.

The Minister said that a decision would be taken shortly on the future of the FiReControl project. The Minister said that both he and his Department wanted the best outcome for Fire and Rescue Services from the project.

The following points were raised by Members:

- On FireControl, Members said that there was, in certain areas, a growing desire to explore and progress contingency options. Members said that Government would need to provide support to FRAs if FiReControl were not to

be pursued.

- On funding, Members asked why the Government was not continuing certain PFI investment, which had delivered both employment and in promoting the localism agenda. The Minister said that decisions on funding for each PFI scheme would be taken on an individual basis and invited those FRAs concerned to meet with him to make representations.
- Members expressed concern that a number of Fire Authorities had been disproportionately affected by the distribution of Formula Grant. The Minister said that it was difficult to depart too far from the current local government finance formula, but that the formula had taken account of deprivation and that it would be revisited in the forthcoming Local Government Resource Review.
- Members asked whether the Government would act on proposals for allowances for elected members on Metropolitan FRAs and CFAs to become pensionable. The Minister said that CLG officials would examine this point.

Members thanked the Minister for attending the Commission.

## **2 Meeting the spending cut challenge – delivering services, delivering savings**

Officers introduced the report and asked Commission Members for their proposals on means of reducing spending within the Fire and Rescue Service.

Members said that, despite the Minister's statement that funding cuts were back-loaded, savings would need to be identified and realised immediately in those areas facing significant cuts in the first year. Members also expressed concern that many FRAs had already begun work on delivering savings and that it would be difficult to identify further efficiencies.

In addition, as the settlement for the third and fourth years of the spending review was not known, Members said that it was impossible to plan for cuts that would need to be delivered. Officers said that CLG's reason for not announcing the settlement for the second half of the spending review was that this would be dependent on the outcomes of the Local Government Resource Review, and that the LGA had continued

to emphasise the need for clarity.

Peter Holland, CFOA President, noted that CFOA had good practice on delivering savings available for Fire and Rescue Authorities available via their website.

### ***Decision***

*Members agreed that LG Group should produce examples of how FRAs have delivered efficiencies in time for the LG Group Annual Fire Conference in March 2011.*

### **Action**

Officers to work on collating best practice amongst Fire and Rescue Authorities in realising savings.

**LG Group  
officers**

## **3 The Fire Industry Association**

The Commission received a presentation from Graham Ellicott, Chief Executive, Fire Industry Association (FIA) on the problem of false alarms from Fire Detection and Alarm Systems. The presentation also covered the Association's view on charging and trading by Fire and Rescue Services.

Copies of the presentation are available via the LGA website:  
<http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelId=15448891>

Members said that, with greater budget constraints, increased charging and trading by Fire and Rescue Services was a positive means of generating additional revenue. Graham responded that the FIA position was that Fire and Rescue Services should be able to trade provided that such trading did not unfairly distort the market. LG Group officers said that the Group had lobbied for FRAs to gain a General Power of Competence, and that such a power would enable FRAs to have greater innovation and flexibility in how to deliver on savings.

Members said that there was a need for consistency on the use and application of Automatic Fire Alarms.

Members expressed concern that, in a climate of economic austerity, the safeguards in place on fire alarms could be compromised through either poor maintenance or less stringent

inspection standards. Graham agreed that inspection was a high priority issue and that the FIA would welcome a joint approach in ensuring business owners complied with risk registers.

Members thanked Graham for his presentation and for raising a number of important issues to the sector.

**4 Report from the Fire Services Management Committee**

The report was noted.

**5 Note of the last meeting**

The note of the last meeting held on 24 September 2010 was agreed as a correct record.

**Date of next meeting: 11.00, Friday 11 February 2011**