

Note of last Fire Services Management Committee meeting

Title: Fire Services Management Committee
Date: Monday 6 March 2017
Venue: The Hilton Gateshead, Newcastle

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions
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1 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme**

The Chair introduced Ian Taylor, CFOA's Business Change Lead on the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP), who had been invited to update the Committee on the scope and progress of the ESMCP. This report outlined the need to deliver a replacement communications system for the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) which was more in line with technological advances than the existing systems, FiRelink and Airwave. It was acknowledged that the system had worked well but that its equipment would be obsolete within a few years. It was noted that the new system, the Emergency Services Network (ESN), would be more cost effective than the current provision.

The report provided an update on the tendering process and confirmed that the users services contract had been awarded to Motorola and the network provider would be EE. The full business case was approved in autumn 2015 and the Committee were advised that the new system was likely to make financial savings just short of £3 billion over a 15-year period, and would be half the price of Airwave. Members were told that all Chief Fire Officers had agreed to sign up to ESN and that this was mirrored across all emergency services.

On funding, Ian Taylor explained that funding principles for the programme had not changed following a move from the Department for Communities and Local Government to the Home Office and that approximately £74 million would be provided by the Government to fund ESMCP. In terms of transition costs, £2 million of Section 31 grant money had already been assigned and a further £20 million was earmarked for FRSs to pay for transition costs over the next year. One of the key areas for transition lies within the extended area services (EAS) project. The Committee were told that the project would need to install 230 additional masts in remote locations not already covered by EE. It was acknowledged that there would likely be concerns from local residents about masts and that the

ESMCP needs to be clear about the benefits the masts would bring in terms of extending access to 4G.

The report also offered members an update on governance and the review undertaken by the National Audit Office (NAO) last year. The NAO report identified concerns from staff about timelines, user engagement and the delivery of new technology, each of which the ESMCP are working to address. One of the concerns recently raised by the Public Accounts Committees about timescales was about contingency plans should the programme be delayed. ESMCP offered assurance that the emergency services would not lose access to Airwave and would not transition onto new system until it is ready. The Public Accounts Committee were satisfied with this response.

In terms of next steps, Ian Taylor offered to provide updates on the ESMCP going forward,

A discussion followed, in which Members raised the following points:

- Questions were raised about Section 31 grants and what the additional money would cover. Ian Taylor explained that an additional £10 million would go towards improving ICT security measures for a number of authorities which were not originally considered in the full business case.
- A Member noted that largescale public procurement projects were often fraught with unexpected problems. It was asked whether there were likely to be any extra unexpected costs. The Committee was advised that the ESMCP had negotiated a fixed price for development aspects of the project but that the EE network may have variable prices for usage.
- The issue of coverage in rural areas was discussed at length, with several members noting that current coverage provisions are very poor in large swathes of the country. Ian Taylor responded by explaining that EE would have 97.5% coverage on all major roads in the UK under the new system but he acknowledged that more needed to be done to increase coverage in more isolated areas. He suggested that the ESMCP was working on stakeholder engagement to ensure that proposed masts were not blocked and that discussions were being had with councils' and national parks' planning teams to ensure that applications were approved as far as possible.
- Members asked whether the ESMCP was in discussion with BT about coverage, given that they have spent £100 million on updating broadband in rural areas. It was explained that the programme had contracted with different suppliers on some lots and they expected BT to appear as a contractor or subcontractor somewhere along the line. The ESMCP is also looking at the possible use of satellites to enhance coverage in rural areas. The point about BT specifically was noted.
- Members sought assurance that each individual FRA's costs for the new system would be lower than they are under the existing

FiRelink/Airwave system. Ian Taylor explained that tailored costs had been provided to each FRA, based on their current use of Airwave against the unit cost of the new system. All bar two services would be better off in terms of costs but other cost pressures may creep in. The Fire Finance Network was working with the ESMCP to ensure that the new programme would be cheaper than current provision.

- Concerns were raised about whether the new digitalised system could be a risk of cyber-attack and how resilient the system would be from outside interference. It was noted that the old system was not subject to a cyber-attack but that the new one could be. Ian Taylor agreed that this was something to keep in mind but he offered assurance that security measures to prevent hacking had been applied. Though the next system would operate on 4G, it would operate at a layer above to prevent easy access by hackers. The Committee were told that these security measures would be tested robustly before the transition process begun.

Decision

The Fire Services Management Committee added to the recommendations that they were particularly concerned about the issue of rural coverage and then **noted** the ESMCP report and agreed to help the programme engage on planning issues related to rural coverage.

Action

Officers to monitor progress of the programme, informing members as and when updates from the ESMCP are available.

3 Fire Conference and Exhibition 2017

Catriona Coyle, LGA Events Manager, gave an overview of the Fire Conference, the number of delegates attending and the sponsorship and exhibition agreements secured. There were approximately 280 delegates and 20 exhibitors attending, including some who had not previously exhibited at the conference. The exhibition space was sold out and it was expected that a profit would be made.

Policy Adviser, Lucy Ellender, highlighted some changes to the conference programme, namely that the Fire Minister, Brandon Lewis MP, was no longer able to attend due to parliamentary business. A pre-recorded message would be played and questions would be answered by Home Office staff.

Future plans for the conference were discussed and members were asked to approve plans to open out conference sessions for bidding alongside existing set plenary sessions. It was suggested that the LGA could approach a number of different organisations and that members could have the opportunity to discuss best practice. This process was already being used for a number of other LGA-led conferences and members had given positive feedback on having this opportunity. The suggestion was that lead members would have a key role in deciding which bids were

approved and that this new approach would allow members greater input on the organisation of the conference.

Members made the following comments:

- The suggestion was welcomed by members, particularly the point about sharing best practice, though it was agreed that some benchmarking on what best practice is would be required first. It was suggested that the LGA could work with the Home Office to measure or keep records of examples of best practice. Roy Wilsher, NFCC, offered assistance with this and agreed that what is meant by the term needed to be solidified.
- Members suggested that the bidding process would work best if a theme was established so that the approved sessions created a cohesive conference programme. It was agreed that it was important to have a well-structured programme and that in order to ensure this, ideas would need to be received and decided upon early in the year.
- The proposal to have lead members decide on which bids were successful was agreed as the most practical solution but it was also suggested that the proposed programme could be discussed at a future FSMC meeting so that other members could give their views.
- Members were keen to ensure that Fire Conference maintains its ability to highlight the good work that both FSMC and FRSs more widely do and that this does not get lost in the process of opening sessions out for bidding.

Decision

The Fire Services Management Committee members:

- 1) **noted** the conference programme and the publication of 'An Inclusive Service: The 21st Century Fire and Rescue Service'; and
- 2) **approved** the idea of establishing a bidding process for future conferences, providing a theme is decided beforehand to ensure that the programme remains well-structured.

Action

FSMC lead members and LGA officers to establish a possible theme for Fire Conference 2018.

- a) Appendix A - Fire Conference and Exhibition Programme

4 Workforce report

LGA Fire Pensions Adviser, Clair Alcock, provided an update on the Scheme Advisory Board's decision to establish sub-committees to enable the board to support its work plan. There were two working groups established: one to look at Local Pensions Boards and the requirements

needed to ensure that they comply with the pensions regulator; and one to assess the cost-effectiveness and administration of pension schemes. Across all FRAs, there are 30 different administrators which could lead to inconsistency and replicated costs. This sub-committee would evaluate the cost of paying pensions and how administration can be more streamlined.

Membership of the Scheme Advisory Board was discussed and it was confirmed that the Board is waiting for the Secretary of State to confirm Councillor Jason Zadronzy's appointment. An update was also provided on the levy for 2016/17 and 2017/18 and it was confirmed that the increase would help fund a new post at the LGA. The dates for forthcoming Scheme Advisory Board meetings were outlined and it was made clear that the Board would welcome FRA chairs attending the meetings.

Gill Gittins, LGA Principal Negotiating Officer, then provided an update on a number of current general workforce issues including the University of Hertfordshire report, which was distributed to members prior to Fire Conference. The independent evaluation examined the impact of fire fighters undertaking work through the auspices of the NJC's emergency medical response workstream trials relating to medical emergencies and wider safe and well visit issues. It concluded that appropriately trained and equipped fire fighters co-responding to targeted, specific time-critical medical events, such as cardiac arrest, can improve patient survival rates. However, some concerns were drawn out in the report for example employee mental well-being, training, inoculations and potential gaming (where the fire service had already responded, the incident may slip down the ambulance service's priority list). The data also indicated that there is a potential need from members of the public, particularly the elderly, isolated or vulnerable in the context of the wider work. However, there is currently insufficient data to be able to estimate the net benefit of the work. Members of the NJC would consider the outcomes of the report on 9 March 2017. The Fire Brigades Union would be considering whether or not to continue to support such trials at its recall conference later that month.

Members raised the following points in the discussion which followed:

- Members noted the increased levy to the Scheme Advisory Board and asked what the additional funds would be used for. Clair Alcock explained that the levy will pay for a new post at the LGA which will provide actuarial assistance and advice to look at how to respond to requests from the Government's Actuary Department. It was suggested that money should already be being spent by FRAs but that it would be spent more wisely from one centralised pot.
- A point was raised about contracting out reconciliation and the potential financial implications for FRAs. A suggestion was put forward that a short item on this was included in the agenda for the next Fire Commission meeting on 24 May. The need to look at how local pensions boards work was suggested so that continuity across the whole service could be established. Members felt it was important for members of FRAs not involved in pensions to have an understanding of the implications if the cost cap was breached,

including increased pension contributions or a reduced pension.

- Concerns were raised about how tax liabilities would affect people and how this could be a barrier to people taking opportunities if not handled in the right way. FRAs need to be aware of their tax liabilities and deferment of pension costs.

Decision

The Fire Services Management Committee members **noted** the workforce update.

Action

Officers to include short item on high level pension issues for FRAs to be made aware of at the forthcoming Fire Commission meeting.

5 Update report

The Chair introduced the report, which provided updates on issues of interest which were not included elsewhere on the agenda.

The following points were raised as part of the discussion:

- The Chair noted that the Fire Peer Challenge Working Group is making progress but is waiting for an announcement from the Home Office about who would do the inspection and what the inspection template would look like.
- Gary Hughes, LGA Principal Adviser, noted that the response from the sector had been excellent so far, despite not knowing clearly what the inspection regime would look like. A consultation would be launched at a workshop at Fire Conference and the key message was that there needed to be a strong commitment to sector-led improvement. The peer review team had asked for a specialist in on-call fire fighters to attend a sounding board meeting. The Retained Duty System (RDS) group will make suggestions.
- On the Home Office consultation on re-employment of senior officers after retirement, members acknowledged that there had been some instances where this was poorly managed but it was hoped that the Government would not take an overbearing or draconian position on this, and it should remain a matter of local determination. Chloe Dunnett, Head of Fire Strategy and Reform at the Home Office, said she would welcome views on what would be classed as draconian and noted that the consultation on this closed in early April.
- Members gave thanks to Dan Greaves, who has moved onto a different role within the Home Office. Members noted that he carried out his role diligently and they were impressed with the willingness of civil servants in the Home Office to establish a good working relationship with the Committee. Chloe Dunnett said she

was keen to maintain this positive working relationship.

- On the Fire Service College, a point was made that the college needs to be safeguarded and should be the subject of scrutiny by the Fire Commission. It was suggested that a representative of the Fire Service College updates members on proposed changes to staffing arrangements and land-sales at the next Fire Commission meeting in May.

Decision

The Fire Services Management Committee members **noted** the updates provided in the report.

Action

Officers to draft a letter of thanks to Dan Greaves for his work with the Committee.

6 Members' update

7 Notes of the previous meeting

The Fire Services Management Committee **agreed** the minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 January 2017 as an accurate summary of the meeting.

8 NJC Reform - potential approaches to reform of terms and conditions

This was a confidential item, the paper for which was noted by the board.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Gloucestershire County Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Philip Howson	East Sussex Fire Authority
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Rebecca Knox	Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service
	Cllr David Acton	Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority
Members	Cllr John Bell	Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Nick Chard	Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Mark Healey	Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Peter Jackson	Northumberland Council
	Cllr Simon Spencer	Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Darrell Pulk	Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Michele Hodgson	County Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Authority
Apologies	Cllr Thomas Wright	Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr John Edwards	West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
Apologies	Ms Fiona Twycross	London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)
In Attendance	Cllr Roger Price	Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority