

Note of last Fire Services Management Committee meeting

Title: Fire Services Management Committee

Date: Friday 27 January 2017

Venue: Rooms A&B, Ground Floor, Layden House, 76-86 Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG

Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions
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1 Welcome and Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2 National FRS People Strategy

The Chair introduced Ann Millington QFSM, Chief Executive of the Kent Fire and Rescue Service, who had been invited to the Committee to update members on the National FRS People Strategy. It was explained that this draft strategy was drawn up in response to conversations about the Thomas Review, workforce reform and service delivery over the next few years. The Fire and Rescue Service had changed considerably over the past ten years and it was noted that the service in 2017 required different skills and an amended approach to workforce reform and service delivery.

There has been a lot of positive feedback on this report and a number of Fire and Rescue Authorities had confirmed that they would be pursuing some of the recommendations outlined in the strategy. In compiling the document, the team had heard from every single FRS and the next stage was to use this feedback to draw up an annual plan which outlined very clear measures of what should be done at a national level. It was also acknowledged that support would need to be provided to FRSs in implementing the recommendations so a small consulting team would be established to help services deliver their workforce strategies. The intention behind the strategy was to encourage unity. An eLearning agenda would also be properly established which it was hoped would save money and reduce the amount of time fire fighters are absent from their station for training.

Ann Millington gave thanks to the LGA's workforce team for their support on issues of equality.

In the discussion which followed, Members raised the following points:

- Members generally welcomed the strategy, noting that it covered a number of key areas and that it contained reference to good core approaches at a national level, but that it was important that it could be adapted at a local level.

- It was suggested that FRAs could almost take a pick and mix approach to the strategy, adopting different aspects depending on local needs and for example, the use of the green book. Members noted that each FRA was unique and that while a national framework was useful, it needed to be flexible. Members were advised that a new website would encourage an exchange of best practice.
- A point was raised about communicating the fire service strategy to other local organisations, including partners in the NHS and police force, and it was agreed that integration between the leadership in these areas was key.
- Members welcomed the news about an eLearning agenda and it was suggested that bringing in private investment to help develop an app could be beneficial
- Concerns were raised about the use of the word 'customer' in the executive summary of the strategy and members questioned whether there was a better word. The point was made that the core business of the Fire and Rescue Service was in the name so using the word 'customer' did not seem appropriate. Ann Millington responded by explaining that this discussion had been had but no alternative could be identified as many did not accept 'citizen' or 'victim'. One member suggested referring to communities and residents rather than customers but it was suggested that as there was no agreed term, areas ought to continue using their preferred term.
- Following on from this, a discussion was also had about the use of the term 'fire fighter', with a member suggesting that this has a masculine connotation and has the potential to put a range of people off a career in the service. It was also noted that fighting fires was just a small aspect of the role so it was perhaps not the most accurate term.
- Points were also raised about the Retained Duty System (RDS) group's preference for using the term 'on call fire fighter' rather than 'retained fire fighter' as it provided a clearer message to the public about what the role involved. Members noted that branding was an issue and while the strategy has laid the framework, more needed to be added to it for clarity. A member confirmed that the RDS group would respond directly to the strategy on this point.
- A comment was made about the possibility of Police and Crime Commissioners taking over fire services and it was noted that the strategy appeared to be acquiescing to the take overs. It was suggested that different areas had a different view on this.
- The possible impact of Brexit was discussed and members generally agreed that efforts need to be made to ensure that EU citizens working in the FRS felt included and that their jobs were protected wherever possible. Members were not clear whether HR departments had been able to systematically record how many EU citizens have worked in their areas over the years but that this information could be useful. Concerns were also raised about hate crime and FRAs doing what they could to make sure any EU nationals employed there were not subject to abuse.

Decision

The Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update on the National FRS People Strategy.

3 Workforce Update

The LGA's Fire Pensions Adviser, Clair Alcock, provided an update on a number of current issues and noted that sub-committees of the Scheme Advisory Board were being formed to look at key areas including cost effectiveness, offering advice and support on pensions, and the use of administrators.

It was noted that Councillor Howson was no longer able to commit to the Scheme Advisory Board and that the Independent Group Office had nominated Councillor Jason Zadronzy to join the board. Members agreed this nomination.

On Local Pension Boards, the Committee were advised that progress was being made and that there had been a very good response to the Governance and Administration survey. It was noted that 96 per cent of scheme managers had responded to the survey and that this showed a good level of engagement from the boards. Over 50 per cent of English Local Pension Boards have had board training from the LGA over the past year.

It was also confirmed that the Government had now provided funds to FRAs to enable contributions holiday refund payments.

Gill Gittins, LGA Principal Negotiating Officer, then provided an update on a number of current general workforce issues including on-going employment tribunal cases. Matters relating to the Part-time Workers Regulations were drawing to a close. In respect of the other ongoing Employment Tribunal cases (transitional pension arrangements), the main hearing had just finished and a judgement was due shortly.

On the Advisory Forum vacancies, members agreed that Dany Cotton and Lynne Major should be nominated to the National Employers to fill the current vacancies.

In the discussion afterwards, the following comments were made:

- It was suggested that it could be worth having a separate pensions report as a set agenda item at future meetings as some felt that the issue required greater prominence than it currently had. An alternative view was that time constraints would make this unsuitable but that if there were any major notable issues, a separate paper could be presented to the committee. The latter approach was agreed.
- In response to the information that a survey of all employees through the auspices of the NJC-led Inclusive Fire Service Group would shortly commence, members asked whether the Group would be able to use the results to develop improvement strategies. That would be the case. The Committee was advised that the IFS group would also be working with FRAs to develop guidance on a consistent approach to data collection and how that data could be used.
- Members discussed the NJC Emergency Medical Response trials and what the benefits were. It was suggested that there were figures showing how useful a collaboration with the ambulance service had been in Greater

Manchester and that the national independent evaluation of the NJC trials could play an important part in supporting FRAs in commissioning income and dealing with budget cuts between 2017 and 2020. It was not yet known what the position following the trial period would be but members suggested that there was a discussion at a future FSMC meeting about the report from the University of Hertfordshire when it was published.

- Members sought information on the Marauding Terrorist Firearms Attacks (MTFA) discussions in respect of levels of training and equipment. It was noted that safety of firefighters is paramount. Members noted the FBU position in respect of pension and compensation issues.
- A discussion was had about co-responding and the effective use of on-call fire fighters.

Decision

The Fire Services Management Committee members:

- 1) **Approved** the nomination of Councillor Jason Zadronzy to the Scheme Advisory Board.
- 2) **Approved** the nominations of Dany Cotton and Lynne Major to the National Employers to fill the Advisory Forum vacancies.

Action

Officers to notify Members when the University of Hertfordshire has published the results of their independent evaluation and include for consideration at a future FSMC meeting agenda.

4 Update paper

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 now have a template for an inspection regime and that the peer review will hopefully sit alongside it. Members felt the process needed to be kept proportionate to ensure it was not too burdensome alongside inspection.
- It was suggested that there is no current system of feeding back good work and sharing best practice with other authorities. It was felt that the group needed to be more visible.

Decision

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

5 Policing and Crime Bill update

The Chair introduced Dan Greaves, Director of Fire and Resilience at the Home

Office, who updated the Committee on changes which had been made to the Policing and Crime Bill on its passage through Parliament, and the Home Office's plans for enacting the provisions in the Bill.

The Director of Fire and Resilience highlighted that amendments had been made to provisions in the Bill around collaboration agreements with local partners, and the requirement in the original Bill for a Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) to consult on the compilation of a business case and transfers of governance. Members noted that amendments to the Bill had arisen during the Committee and Report stages of the Bill in the House of Lords following concerns raised through the LGA by Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs). Royal Assent of the Bill was expected on Tuesday 31 January, with implementation expected to follow on 1 April.

In the discussion which followed Members raised the following points:

- There were county elections in May and the Home Office needed to bear in mind the impact this would have on the ability of FRAs to implement the legislation.
- Regarding a request by FRAs for a predetermined panel to conduct independent assessments of business cases, the Director explained that the department had considered this to be too bureaucratic, and that a more flexible system whereby appointments were made as and when a business case required assessment was favoured.
- It was suggested that a fixed panel be appointed for independent assessments but with a degree of flexibility and substitution to allow for consideration of business cases in good time. The panel could be larger than 4 people and be inclusive of elected Members. It was also suggested that the panel look at non-contentious bids as well as contentious bids in order to keep a good mix of cases to reference for the future. Having members on inspection teams would also bring value to the process. The Director explained the membership and size of the panel were still open for discussion and the Committee's comments would be noted. He also added that when the Fire Inspectorate had been appointed the Home Office would set out the broader approach and pilot frameworks.
- A template for business cases was under development by the Association of Policing and Crime Chief Executives (APACE). The next draft was expected in February and the LGA would be consulted on the content.
- In response to a question it was confirmed that PCCs who took on the governance of the fire and rescue service in their areas should consult on business cases, and the views of the Committee and the LGA had been taken on board.
- It was noted that some PCCs had approached FRAs to seek a seat and voting rights. The FRA could reject the approach, but should have a reason for doing so. Some FRAs were open to this, and encouraged PCCs to attend FRA meetings, but suggested a reciprocal arrangement whereby they would also have a seat on the Police and Crime Panel.

Decision

The Fire Services Management Committee:

1. **Noted** the latest amendments to the Policing and Crime Bill; and
2. **Noted** the Home Office's plans for implementation of the legislation following Royal Assent.

6 Minutes of the previous meeting

Decision

The Fire Services Management Committee **agreed** the minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 November 2016, noting however that Councillor Byrom had been present at the meeting.

7 NJC Reform

Following discussion the Committee agreed that the report should be considered and debated in open session rather than confidential session.

Cllr Nick Chard, Chairman of the Employers' Side of the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (NJC), introduced the report which summarised a number of potential approaches which could be taken to identifying an employer position with regard to reviewing the national framework of conditions of service. There had been clear direction from the Government that the NJC required review and reform and the sector could either ignore this and have new arrangements imposed on it, or respond. It was suggested that a Task and Finish Panel be formed to look at the options from an LGA perspective for reform and that Cllrs Rebecca Knox, Nick Chard and David Acton form the membership of the Panel, alongside a number of LGA nominated advisers on the National Employers' Advisory Forum (for later consistency of approach).

It was anticipated that the Task and Finish Group would meet three times in advance of the next FSMC meeting, and that the Committee would consider a report on its work at the next meeting, prior to UK-wide employer discussions.

In the discussion which followed, Members raised the following points:

- The Committee supported reform of the NJC, and the idea of forming a Task and Finish Panel to consider approaches for reform. The membership of the Task and Finish Panel was agreed as suggested.
- It was important that the reform process did not disrupt the work of the NJC on broadening the role of the firefighter,, and it was important for reforms to be supported by all sides. Members supported the Chairman of the Employers' Side of the NJC in his continued discussions with both the Employers' and Employees' sides.
- Regional NJCs were not favoured by the Committee. Members highlighted that it was important to maintain a national negotiating body, but that it be streamlined to work more efficiently.

Decision

The Fire Services Management Committee:

1. **noted** the issues set out in the report; and
2. **agreed** to establish a Task and Finish Panel to consider high level proposals for an FSMC position on reform of the NJC, to be comprised of Cllrs Knox, Chard and Acton.

Action

Task and Finish Panel to discuss approaches for reform and report back to FSMC at the next meeting in March.

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
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
	Ms Fiona Twycross	London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)
	Cllr Darrell Pulk	Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Michele Hodgson	County Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr Thomas Wright	Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr John Edwards	West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Les Byrom CBE	Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority
Apologies	Cllr David Acton	Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority
In Attendance	Cllr Roger Price (observer)	Hampshire Fire Authority