

23 June 2017

Annual Report for 2016/17 and priorities for 2017/18

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report provides an overview of the issues and work the Committee has overseen during last year. It sets out key achievements in relation to the priorities for the Fire Services Management Committee in 2016/2017, and seeks the Committee's views on the priorities for 2017/18.

Recommendations

That the Fire Services Management Committee is invited to:

- 1) Note the achievements against the Committee's priorities in 2016/2017; and
- 2) Comment on the Committee's priority areas for 2017/18.

Actions

Officers to action as appropriate.

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Background

1. The LGA's Business Plan for 2016/17 set out clear priorities for Fire Services Management Committee, which were in line with the priorities agreed by the Committee at its meeting in September 2016. These included: supporting a positive debate about the future of blue light collaboration; influencing the proposed inspection regime for the fire and rescue service; support fire and rescue services to be more representative of the communities they serve; support greater collaboration between fire and rescue services and health; and work with fire and rescue authorities to ensure that any new governance arrangements for fire and rescue services are agreed locally and backed by a robust business case.

Achievements

2. The Committee sought to engage with member fire and rescue authorities over the last year in a number of ways. Most prominent was the LGA's annual Fire Conference in March. The conference was attended by over 260 delegates and speakers. Delegates heard from the Policing and Fire Minister by pre-recorded video message, and there were sessions and workshops on workforce and National Joint Council reform, equality and diversity in the service, governance, the retained duty system, working in partnership with health, the future of Fire Peer Challenge and procurement.
3. In addition the LGA ran a Fire Leadership Essentials course for fire and rescue authority members, was quoted in the national media on diversity in the fire service and the fire risk associated with faulty tumble dryers, while the number of followers of the Committee's twitter account @LGAfirerescue has reached 973.

Fire governance

4. A central focus of the Committee's activity over the last year was associated with the passage of the Policing and Crime Bill through Parliament. The LGA lobbied for a set of amendments to the Bill that sought to strengthen the consultation arrangements associated with any proposed transfer of governance to police and crime commissioners (PCCs), that would strengthen the independent assessment process of a PCC's business case for taking on governance of the fire and rescue service, and would mean the cost of preparing any business case would fall on the PCC and not the fire and rescue authority. The LGA also made the point that changes of governance should only take place where there was local agreement – a point raised by Lead Members in meetings with the new Home Secretary and Policing and Crime Minister appointed after the Rt. Hon. Theresa May MP became Prime Minister last summer.
5. Although the government rejected the LGA's amendments, they brought forward amendments in the House of Lords which require PCCs to consult local residents (a Committee objective) as well as affected employees. The government's amendments also increased the transparency around the business case by requiring the Secretary of the State to publish the independent assessment as soon as reasonably practicable after making a decision about the business case. Lobbying for a robust assessment of the business case has meant the LGA has been engaged by the Home Office in discussions

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on what the assessment process should involve before proposals are put to ministers. Committee members have also commented on and influenced the guidance on producing a business case developed by the Association of Police and Crime Commissioner Chief Executives.

Transparency

6. As well as introducing the possibility of changes in fire and rescue governance the Policing and Crime Act also makes provision for the creation of a new fire inspectorate. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) were asked by the Home Office to draw up proposals for the creation of the new inspectorate and Lead Members were part of the external reference group HMIC established to advise them in developing their proposals. The lead inspector for HMIC on this programme attended the Committee meeting in November to outline the proposals that had been submitted to the Home Office. A decision on which body would provide the new inspectorate was expected before the general election was called, but this will be a decision for the new Policing and Crime Minister, though the delay in making the announcement will mean it is more likely that piloting of the new regime does not get fully underway until 2018.
7. Development of the inspection proposals have of course had an impact on the Fire Peer Challenge and Operational Assessment developed by the LGA and what was the Chief Fire Officers Association. From a position where the Home Office have been critical of the Fire Peer Challenge process discussions with Ministers and officials at the Home Office have persuaded the government of the continuing value that sector-led improvement offers to the fire and rescue sector, with the then Policing and Fire Minister saying in his speech to the think tank Reform in February that he was looking forward to hearing proposals on how the LGA would update the Fire Peer Challenge offer. A member working group chaired by Cllr Kay Hammond has been leading this work, but finalising it has been dependent on the final shape of the inspection regime the Home Office creates.

21st Century Firefighter

8. Workforce reform has been an integral part of the government's agenda and the work of the Committee over the last year. This has included the Committee's contribution to the sector's work around improvements to the retained duty system and making it easier for fire and rescue services to recruit and keep retained firefighters, as well as expanding the on-call concept to other roles.
9. Alongside this work the Committee has looked at what can be done to increase the diversity of the workforce. This has included surveying chief fire officers to assess when and whether the need to recruit more firefighters could be used to increase the diversity of that part of the workforce. The results of that survey were included in the conference publication on an inclusive fire service, which included contributions from a range of organisations setting out what the fire service could do to attract a more diverse workforce.
10. The need to make progress in this area was one of the focuses of the long awaited Thomas Review of terms and conditions in the fire and rescue service. Mr Thomas attended the Committee's meeting in November, and talked about his recommendations

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which included a recommendation that the LGA and the National Fire Chiefs Council agree a memorandum of understanding (MoU) covering how people in the fire service should be treated. An MoU was signed by the LGA and the National Fire Chiefs Council alongside a range of organisations representing women, black and minority ethnic and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer firefighters. The Committee Lead Members wrote out to fire and rescue authority chairs to promote the MoU and the conference publication.

Collaboration

11. While the Policing and Crime Act places a statutory duty on the fire and rescue service, police and ambulance services to collaborate, the Committee has been keen to emphasise that the fire and rescue service is playing an increasing role in supporting wider health objectives, in particular through safe and well visits. Committee members have continued to attend the fire/health summits alongside NHS England, Public Health England, Age UK and the National Fire Chiefs Council, as well as members from the LGA's Community Wellbeing Board. The consensus statement agreed by the LGA with the other partners last year has been seen as a model for other consensus statements, such as one with the police.

Programme of work and priorities for 2017/18

12. The fire and rescue service did not feature heavily in the general election campaign as compared with the police. The Conservative Party manifesto, 'Forward, Together: Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future' did not make a direct reference to the fire and rescue service, only noting that it intended to build on the Policing and Crime Act by giving PCCs greater responsibility for criminal justice. It is likely therefore that the government will wish to press ahead with the fire reform agenda that the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Theresa May MP, outlined in May 2016 when she was Home Secretary and which the then Policing and Fire Minister, the Rt. Hon. Brandon Lewis MP, expanded on in his speech at the think tank Reform in February.
13. The broad areas of work for the Committee over the last year are therefore likely to continue into the next. The general election has delayed implementation of some of the fire related provisions in the Policing and Crime Act 2017, and the Home Office is likely to want to progress this work including amending the regulations for combined Fire and Rescue Authorities so they can invite PCCs to sit on the authority, as well as finalising the process for the independent assessment of a PCC's business case for taking on responsibility for the fire and rescue service. Further clarity about the new government's priorities for the fire service may be forthcoming at the meeting Lead Members are due to have with the Policing and Fire Minister on 20 June 2017.
14. A possible work programme for the Committee over 2017/18 could therefore include:
 - 14.1. Governance – continuing work associated with the greater involvement of PCCs in fire and rescue service governance structures, and to provide advice and assistance to fire and rescue authorities around this agenda.
 - 14.2. Transparency and standards – with the general election and the delays in announcing who will provide the new fire inspectorate much of 2017/18 is likely to

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be taken up with preparations for, and the commencement of, the first inspections. Alongside this the LGA and the National Fire Chiefs Council will be refreshing and updating the Fire Peer Challenge and Operational Assessment in light of the new inspection regime. The creation of a new standards body for the fire and rescue service will also have implications for the work of the Committee.

- 14.3. Workforce – the government has said it wants to see a more flexible, innovative and diverse workforce, and it expects the sector to take the lead on delivering the relevant recommendations in the Thomas Review, including those directed at the LGA on increasing diversity. The sector has also been looking at how more use could be made of on-call roles within the service, and this will continue to be an important strand of work for the Committee.
 - 14.4. Collaboration – the Committee has consistently supported increased collaboration between the fire service and the other emergency services. It has also highlighted to government the increasing role taken by the service in supporting broader health objectives, and the value of this role has been increasingly recognised.
 - 14.5. Procurement and value for money – the National Fire Chiefs Council will be pressing ahead with improving procurement practices and obtaining better value for money from its purchases. So far the Committee's role in progressing this agenda has been purely supportive, but it may be that a more active role is needed to help make progress in this area in the year ahead.
 - 14.6. Funding – having the capability to respond to unexpected events will remain important if the service is to meet its national resilience obligations and deal with local risks. Ensuring the service continues to be funded on the basis of risk will remain vital.
15. Members are asked to comment on whether these are the right priorities for the Committee over the next year and if any further priorities need to be considered. Members' views will be used to inform the priorities paper brought to the Committee in September.

Implications for Wales

16. Fire and rescue related policy is a devolved matter and much of the Committee's work has focused on changes for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England, with the Welsh Local Government Association leading on lobbying for Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities in Cardiff.

Financial Implications

17. All work programmes were met from existing budgets and resources.

Next steps

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18. Members are asked to:

- 18.1. Note the achievements against the Committee's priorities in 2016/2017; and
- 18.2. Comment on the Committee's priority areas for 2017/18