

## Note of last Fire Commission meeting

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**Title:** Fire Commission  
**Date:** Friday 14 October 2016  
**Venue:** Westminster Suite, 8th Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

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### 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 Home Office's Fire Reform Agenda

Dan Greaves, Director of Fire and Resilience at the Home Office, addressed the Fire Commission on the Government's fire reform programme, the new Fire Minister's priorities, and how the Home Office expected to work with the sector to take forward the reform agenda.

The following points were raised as part of the Director's presentation:

- In May 2016 the previous Home Secretary had set out a commitment to work with FRAs to reform the service in as radical and ambitious a way as had previously been developed with the police. This would be accomplished through strengthening of collaboration and accountability, alongside workforce reform. The new Home Secretary and Fire Minister were committed to delivering this reform agenda.
- The new Fire Minister, Brandon Lewis, had prioritised efficiency and collaboration. Details had been published in the summer of what FRA's spent on a basket of common goods. This exercise would be repeated in 2017. The Home Office wanted to work with FRAs to transform procurement and this would be an early test of the sector's ability to deliver change at pace.
- There were some good examples of collaboration to build on, and the Police and Crime Bill, which was soon due to receive Royal Assent, included a high-level duty to collaborate. Collaboration with health services was important, and prevention pilots would form a useful evidence base to deliver better outcomes for communities.
- The Government had offered four-year funding settlements in return for robust plans which set out ambitions for increased efficiencies. FRAS should receive greater planning certainty, with funding targeted on the basis of need and

transformation. There had also been the consultation on removing fire funding from business rates, with responses being broadly supportive.

- Under the transparency and accountability strand of the reform agenda work was ongoing with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners Chief Executives around developing business cases. The Fire Commission had previously expressed concern over Ministerial approval of business cases, and the Government had emphasised the importance of independent assessment where there was disagreement. The Fire Minister had invited the LGA to be represented on a working group on independent assessment.
- An independent inspection regime for FRAs was a key pillar of the fire reform agenda and the support from FRAs was welcome. This would be designed to enhance security and transparency and improve performance and outcomes. The Government had commissioned Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary to consider proposals, how quickly a service could be introduced and what it would cost. It was anticipated that the new inspection regime would be introduced in April 2017 to undertake piloting, scoping and benchmarking exercises, and would be fully operational in April 2018. A risk based and proportionate response would be taken, and inspection and the LGA/CFOA Peer Challenge could be complimentary.
- Transparency would also be improved through increased public availability of information and data. Operational statistical data would be expanded, and more information on diversity and incident level data would be made publically available.
- Workforce reforms included an ambition for the service to be more professional and diverse, and to review any national frameworks which were not fit for purpose. Details of reforms workforce reforms were included in the Thomas report, which was due to be published in the coming weeks.
- CFOA had been asked to work on a professional framework for the fire service, including more work on professional development and an independent body to drive this, in a similar way to the College of Policing. The Home Office wanted to work with members on this area.
- The Director explained that the Government was keen for the reform agenda to be undertaken in partnership with the sector, in consultation with Members as the political leadership of FRAs. FRAs were the employers, set the strategy and developed plans to drive transformation. FRAs had a responsibility to ensure that the service was as diverse and flexible as possible through institutional reform, and had to provide the leadership to drive the transformation of the service. The police sector had created a transformation board and the idea of bringing together the political and operational leadership in a fire context should be pursued.

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

- FRAs were committed to working with the Government on workforce reform, and welcomed the Minister's desire to work with the sector.
- In response to a question on legislation in the Police and Crime Bill for FRAs to collaborate with the other emergency services and the wider joint work with the health service, the Director said he had seen at first-hand the benefits of co-responding explained that the Government was currently gathering evidence about the value to the work.
- Members highlighted that the Fire service was very professional and other services could learn from what it had achieved in planning and prevention, and how it operated in respect of knowledge, learning development, best practice and ethics. The sector should continue to look for savings through joint procurement, and would welcome the creation of an independent inspection regime.

- It was acknowledged that the role of the 21<sup>st</sup> century firefighter had changed, with the role including a greater amount of public safety and prevention work. It was suggested that recruitment processes should reflect this, possibly through greater recruitment of university graduates, which could also help to address concerns around diversity of the service.
- In the South-West there were no co-terminous fire and police boundaries so they had established an emergency services forum to promote greater collaboration. The Director welcomed the initiative and added that the Home Office wanted to hear propositions including those for greater fire/fire collaboration.
- Members noted the different needs of different FRAs such as those in rural areas and that this might impact on some elements of procurement.
- In response to a question on joint working with ambulance trusts, the Director explained that it was for individual trusts to decide how they wanted to jointly work with their local FRA. Evidence from national pilots suggested that co-response was an important catalyst for change and how better outcomes could be delivered at a lower cost.
- It was suggested that a national campaign about retained firefighters would assist the service, including in terms of diversity. The Director said there was a role for communications in all this and different areas had different needs, and there was already work on what could be done to encourage people from different backgrounds to become firefighters.

#### **Decision**

The Fire Commission **noted** the issues related to the Government's fire reform agenda and thanked the Director of Fire and Resilience for his presentation.

### **3 Chief Fire Officers Association Reform Programme**

Andy Fry, CFOA Vice-President, addressed the Fire Commission on CFOA's plans to revise their governance and operating procedures which had been agreed by the CFOA Annual General Meeting on 14 September 2016.

The following points were raised as part of the presentation:

- CFOA were proposing to become the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC). The Council would be the main decision making body with a number of coordinating committees underneath. A full-time Chair of the NFCC would be elected on a two or three year basis, which was a change from the current arrangements where the President of CFOA was a part-time position lasting a year.
- CFOA were looking to improve capacity, continuity and impartiality as part of the reforms. There were currently challenges around inclusivity and consensus, and it was important that FRAs saw a return on their investment into the organisation. Members noted that the emerging Home Office fire reform programme, which focussed on efficiency and collaboration, transparency and accountability, and workforce reform, had also been a key driver to change in the organisation.
- Part of the proposed reforms involved closer working with the National Police Chiefs Council (NPCC). Although it was not a statutory requirement, it was important for the NFCC and the NPCC to work together, particularly around national management of large scale emergencies, procurement, and headquarters support.
- Regarding transparency and accountability, it was highlighted that there would be

joint development of an inspection regime, independent standards, and performance measures, and a single web portal for development would be introduced.

- Priorities around workforce reform would include reforms of the retained duty system to get as much value as possible, and improvements to equality and diversity of the service.
- Consideration was being given to whether a representative of the LGA's Fire Commission would be invited to join the NFCC as a trustee. The election of the NFCC Chair was in progress, with the result expected in November 2016. The shadow NFCC would be in place early in 2017, with the new model fully implemented in April 2017.

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

- In a response to a question on funding models for the reformed organisation, the Vice-President explained that there were two options. FRAs could initially see a small increase to annual subscriptions, though over time planned savings in the way NFCC operated compared with current arrangements could mean a small decrease because of savings which were made. However if there was a consensus that FRAs did not wish to pay a greater contribution, the service would be funded through CFOA reserves. The formal approach to FRAs regarding increased subscriptions would be made the following week.
- It was explained that should the Police and Crime Bill become law then Police and Crime Commissioners would be included in the governance structure of the reformed organisation, alongside FRAs and devolved administrations.
- Members raised concern that they had been consulted quite late in the process, but were keen to jointly move forward with the reforms.. In response the importance of FRA members and Fire Commission was noted, as was the fact that FSMC Lead Members would continue to meet regularly with the CFOA Presidential team on the fire reform agenda.

### **Decision**

The Fire Commission:

1. **Noted** the changes to CFOA's governance and operating procedures; and
2. **Noted** the decision by FSMC Lead Members and the CFOA Presidential team to meet regularly to discuss the fire reform agenda.

## **4 Commercial transformation, procurement and R&D**

Ian Curry, Home Office adviser to CFOA on delivering greater efficiencies through improved collaboration around procurement, research and development, addressed the Fire Commission on reforms and commercial transformation work which was ongoing.

The following points were raised as part of the presentation:

- Factors which prompted the reform programme included the previous Home Secretary's reform speech, lessons which had been learnt from successful police commercial reform, and a greater need for sector ownership and leadership.
- The reform programme sought to reduce procurement costs in order to reinvest in the fire service and protect the front line.

- Officers had looked at the costs of a variety of items used by FRAs across the country to include in a 'basket of goods' of 25 goods. It had been identified that the costs of products greatly varied across the country with no valid reason, but where items were bought in bulk the unit price reduced. A similar exercise with a different basket of goods would be undertaken in the coming months, which would include building costs and the cost of facilities management.
- CFOA were forming a commercial strategic approach of standardisation, aggregation and strategic supplier management. A Chief Fire Officer would lead a team to look at opportunities to standardise goods and to join up buying power where there was a common need.
- The reforms would be sector-owned and led, with support from the Home Office. Work with FRAs had already begun to review core data to see spending patterns.
- The programme would be split into categories and would look for quick wins, but also to implement strategic supplier management across the service. Regular communications to the sector would be essential.
- A Research and Development Hub would be created to undertake research, development and evaluation once, remove duplication and share results to the sector.
- Members were encouraged to ask their Chief Fire Officers how they intended to support the programme and what resources they were using.

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

- Some equipment used by particular FRAs was specialist depending on the areas they covered, and therefore there should still be flexibility to accommodate those needs. It was highlighted that each category would have conditions and look at the competitiveness of the market to get the best price.
- Members raised caution that it was difficult to get an average cost of building a fire station as there were great regional differences in the costs of labour and land, as well as differences in the particular sizes and uses of the station.
- It was highlighted that quality of equipment and clothing was vitally important, and quality should not be compromised for price or quantity. Each category group would look at what was fit for purpose and quality would be an integral part of this assessment.

### **Decision**

The Fire Commission:

1. **Noted** the work being undertaken by CFOA to improve procurement and research and development practice across the sector and the creation of a commercial transformation programme; and
2. **Agreed** that the Fire Commission should support CFOA and promote the initiatives outlined in the report.

## **5 FSMC Priorities**

Mark Norris, Principle Policy Adviser, introduced the report which set out the agreed priorities of the Fire Services Management Committee for 2016/17.

In the discussion which followed the following points were raised:

- The FSMC priorities reflected the priorities of the Home Office and CFOA.

- Individual FRAs had different opinions on Retained Duty Service (RDS) firefighters, and it was important that each FRA had its own working arrangements. Cllr Simon Spencer, the FSMC representative on the CFOA RDS Working Group, encouraged all FRAs to have representation on the Working Group in order to share best practice and concerns from authorities across the country.
- Discussions were ongoing with the armed services on shared learning on recruitment, retention, payments, shift patterns, and how primary employees could be incentivised.
- Communications on the Leadership Essentials programme should be improved, and information on the programme should be recirculated and promoted to a wider audience.
- Sprinklers remained on the agenda, and the Fire Commission agreed to write to the Department for Education regarding the mandatory installation of sprinklers in new schools.

### **Decisions**

The Fire Commission:

1. **Noted** the priorities for 2016/17 as agreed by FSMC; and
2. **Agreed** that a letter from the Fire Commission should be written to the Department for Education calling for mandatory installation of sprinklers in new schools.

### **Action**

Letter to be sent to DfE as agreed by Members.

## **6 Workforce Report**

Clair Alcock, Fire Pensions Adviser, introduced the report and highlighted that the Minister had approved the Pensions Scheme Advisory Board budget at a total cost of £136,062.50, which would be levied out to Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) in due course. The LGA would write to FRAs in the next month to advise on the process for distributing the budget.

The Fire Commission also noted that the Government would provide the necessary funds to FRAs to enable the refund payments as a result of regulations to introduce a pension contributions holiday which had come into force. Payments to firefighters were expected to be made by the end of the financial year.

### **Decision**

The Fire Commission **noted** the issues set out in the report.

## **7 Fire Commission update report**

Members noted the various updates provided in the Fire Commission Update Report.

The view was reasserted that the government should do more to prevent the selling of dangerous and flammable Halloween costumes to children. The Government was working with retailers and trading standards on the issue, and the LGA would continue to lobby on the matter. There would be another media campaign in advance of Halloween this year.

**Decision**

The Fire Commission **noted** the report.

**Action**

Officers to progress as appropriate.

**8 Notes from the previous meeting**

**Decision**

The Fire Commission **agreed** the notes of the previous meeting held on 25 May 2016.