

Notes of Decisions Taken and Action

FIRE SERVICES FORUM

19 October 2007

Room 8.1 Local Government House at 11.00a.m.

Cllr Les Byrom noted that this would be the last meeting attended by Cllr Audrey Jones. Members thanked Cllr Jones for her work on the Fire Services Forum.

1. Membership of the Fire Services Forum and Office Holders 2007/08

The membership of the forum and its office holders were noted.

2. Update from the Fire Services Management Committee

Cllr Les Byrom told the forum that the following issues were discussed at the FSMC meeting held on September 10th at Local Government House:

- The membership of outside bodies is being finalised. There is a need to co-ordinate the work of groups on resilience.
- The imminent publication of consultations on the Centre of Excellence, the National Framework and the Equality and Diversity Strategy has raised concerns about the capacity of FRAs and FRSs to respond to these in an appropriate and timely manner. These consultations will be the subject of further discussion at the November meeting of the Fire Services Management Committee and Fire Forum.
- Barry Dixon (CFOA) updated the FSMC on business continuity planning and will be providing a further report on this in due course.
- Co-responding – this will be discussed at the Central-Local Partnership meeting on the 8th November. It will be necessary to engage with the ambulance and health service to provide a joined-up response to this.
- Discussions are on-going with regards to New Dimension ownership and funding
- Work is continuing on the Route Map through the Ten Year Vision task group.
- Parmjit Dhanda MP is the new minister with responsibility for fire issues at the Department for Communities and Local Government and he has been invited to address a future meeting of the Fire Services Forum. The date of this meeting is still to be confirmed.
- Since the FSMC meeting, CSR07 has been announced. The implications for FRAs will not be known until the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement in early December. However it is known that the FRS has been set an efficiency target of £110m of savings over the three year period. This equates to approximately 1.6% per FRA.
- The LGA will continue to lobby central government to get the best possible financial settlement for FRAs and the issues will be discussed at the November CLP meeting.
- In discussion members expressed some concerns about Firebuy.

Cllr Fred Walker told the forum that Greater Manchester FRS had undertaken some work on carbon footprinting within the fire and rescue service. This and other environmental issues affecting the service would be discussed in greater detail at the fire conference in March 2008. Cllr Walker stressed that this was a high profile issue and could be an opportunity to secure additional funding for FRSs.

3. Sprinklers and fire suppression systems

Cllr Michael Murphy, chair of the Fire Suppression and Sustainable Buildings task group addressed the forum. He explained that the task group was established to progress work in three stages:

1. *Fire suppression in schools* – to seize the opportunity offered by the capital investment in new and refurbished schools through the Building Schools for the Future programme to address the current serious situation where the direct cost of school fires is almost £100million a year;
2. *Fire suppression in other buildings where vulnerable people are likely to be accommodated.* Houses in Multiple Occupation, social housing in deprived areas, and sheltered housing/residential care homes are likely candidates for this work;
3. *Fire safety and sustainable buildings more broadly* – considering, for example, any trade-off between the use of environmentally sustainable building materials and the risk and impact of fire.

The group has already been successful in lobbying the government on sprinklers in schools and is now in a position to add significant value to the campaign for the wider application of fire suppression systems. This work could be based on the development and application of a robust risk assessment tool similar to that developed for sprinklers in schools.

Cllr Les Byrom welcomed the cross-cutting work of the task group which linked strategic local planning, sustainability and environmental protection, and local Fire and Rescue Service's Integrated Risk Management plans.

Alan Brinson (British and European Fire Sprinkler Network) addressed the Forum. He told members that sprinklers and fire suppression systems were being seen increasingly as a form of fire prevention rather than a means of extinguishing a fire.

The LGA was praised for the work it has carried out in promoting the use of sprinklers, but it was noted that England and Wales still lagged behind other European countries where sprinklers were used in a greater number of buildings.

The debate needs to be refocused on sprinklers protecting property as well as people's lives and highlighting the economic impact of fires would help to reinforce this point. The importance of sustainable buildings for sustainable communities also needs to be highlighted.

Members asked whether the industry standard for domestic sprinkler systems was too high to allow for more general use and whether there were any plans for this to be moderated.

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It was also asked whether major infrastructure such as road tunnels would be sprinklered in the future.

Alan Brinson responded by saying that the standard for domestic sprinkler systems was due to be reviewed. New technologies have made these systems cheaper to install and the building industry needs to adjust to these new technologies. There is a great deal of interest across Europe with regards to sprinklering road tunnels. In England and Wales fire safety in tunnels has in the past been determined by civil engineers, but now fire safety officers are also becoming involved in the planning process.

Cllr Michael Cartwright told the forum that Hampshire County Council had introduced a policy which saw a fire safety officer involved in the planning of all new and significantly refurbished council buildings. It was hoped that this good practice could be taken up by other local authorities.

4. Pensions

Cllr Fred Walker told the forum that there were two issues of interest:

- The change in pension rules has resulted in chief and other senior officers considering taking the lump sum payment after thirty years service and then remaining in post. FRAs were encouraged to share their experiences on this subject.
- The situation regarding ill-health retirement and redeployment is also causing concern. There are an increasing number of firefighters on 'light' duties but there may be a finite number of jobs they can undertake. There is recognition that this is a problem for all FRAs and will require further discussion.

5. Centre of Excellence update

Cllr Les Byrom reported that CLG was continuing to work on proposals for a Centre of Excellence in conjunction with the LGA and CFOA and that the consultation paper will be launched on 26 October.

The consultation paper will offer a range of options for the role, functions, status and governance of the Centre of Excellence.

Members noted that all FRAs are faced with a challenging financial situation and that there are concerns that need addressing. Detailed discussion on the consultation will take place at the next Forum meeting on 30 November.

6. FiReControl update

Madeleine Rudd (CLG) provided an update on the FiReControl project, which covered a number of key issues, particularly:

Finance

CLG was aware that questions had been raised regarding the business case. As part of the engagement strategy a number of events had been held across the country – jointly

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with the FRAs and/or RMBs – and a number had covered the business case. Madeleine Rudd emphasised that the project team was keen to keep up the positive engagement, and made the offer that CLG would welcome any discussions/event requests to discuss the business case (or, indeed, any other FiReControl matters).

CLG reiterated its position that it would meet the net cost of the FiReControl project through New Burdens funding. There would also be greater funding stability through the three year settlement process, and the funding system would need to retain some flexibility to be able to meet the actual costs of the FRAs particularly in the initial tranche, although no final decisions have yet been made on how this mechanism would work.

A consultation on regional cost apportionment is due to be undertaken by CLG before the end of 2007.

Infrastructure Services

EADS have reported some slippage of dates, but were working with CLG to produce a clear plan for the initial requirements by the end of October – this was to enable the FRAs to plan for implementation.

Buildings

Three RCCs have been completed so far and five more will be built by the end of 2008. It has been announced that the London RCC will be situated in the London Borough of Merton.

Engagement

CLG were keen to meet directly with FRAs and RMBs to continue discussions on emerging issues if that would be helpful. CLG was keen to maintain, and build on, good communications – it was recognised that these will be crucial to the successful implementation of the FiReControl project.

LGA Involvement

During the Q&A session Cllr Jerry Willmott explained that he was the LGA representative on the FiReControl project board, sounding board and HR working group and he encouraged members to contact him directly or through Emma Varley (Senior Policy Consultant) if they had any concerns regarding the project or issues they would like raised at any of these meetings.

7. Feedback from the NJC

Cllr Les Byrom reported that the revised joint constitution had been agreed and all parties were content. The mechanism for minority trade union recognition is now in place. FOA currently has one member of the Employees' Side. It was noted that the Joint Working Party on Pay 2008 will commence discussions shortly.

8. Future meeting dates

Member noted the meeting dates for the remainder of the 2007/08 meeting cycle.

9. Note of the previous meeting

The note of the previous meeting was agreed.

10. AOB

It was asked whether any consideration had been given to the role of FRAs with regards to security and safety arrangements being made in advance of the 2012 Olympics. Cllr Les Byrom suggested that interested FRAs should meet under the auspices of the LGA to discuss these.

Next Meeting

The next meeting would be held on **Friday 30 November 2007** at Local Government House.