

Notes of Decisions Taken and Action

FIRE SERVICES FORUM

22 February 2008

Room 8.1 Local Government House at 11.00a.m.

1. Update of current issues including FSMC

Cllr Les Byrom updated the forum on the main topics of discussion at the Fire Services Management Committee meeting on Monday 14 January:

CLG will continue to finance Firebuy for the year 2008/09. The Pathway Group has agreed to ask FRAs to contribute £17,200 each towards the provision of joint services to support the implementation of the Learning and Development Strategy and maintain the Fire Gateway.

Members were encouraged to attend the LGA's annual fire conference which is taking place in Coventry on the 11th and 12th March. The theme of the conference is *building resilience: responding to environmental change*.

Cllr Anthony Duggan told members that approximately 40 individuals have completed the gateway test for the leadership development programme. It was necessary to have 50 individuals registered to run the course in two groups of 25 and it was expected that this target would soon be met as there were only 7 places left to fill.

The Chair thanked Cllr Duggan for his work and noted that best practise developed by CFOA for training and development could be of value to FRAs.

The Fire Services Forum noted that Pete Betts was leaving his post at CLG. Members thanked him for all his work in the fire directorate at CLG and wished him well for the future.

The Chair introduced Helen Murray, the new LGA Programme Director for Safer Communities and Esther Thomas, the new Business Manager covering Fire.

2. Pensions update

Cllr Fred Walker told members that the Firefighters' Pension Scheme III Health Review Group would be meeting to formulate advice that would then be passed on to ministers. The last of these meetings was scheduled for the 2nd April.

The number of ill-health retirements had dropped significantly in the last decade, but numbers were still higher than in other parts of the public sector, including the other emergency services. Levels needed to drop to approximately 3.5 in every 1000 employees per authority in order for the scheme to be considered viable by the government. The current level is 3.8 in every 1000.

There was agreement that ill-health retirement was one of a number of options available to FRSs and that it should only be used as appropriate and as a last resort. Members were encouraged to look at their own authority's use of ill-health retirement.

Cllr Les Byrom explained that the Fire Services Management Committee will also be discussing ill-health retirement and the Fire Services Forum would be updated at a future meeting.

3. FiReControl

Cllr Les Byrom told members that FiReControl was a standing item on Fire Services Management Committee agendas; at the last meeting implementation and the business case were discussed. It was also agreed that the future funding options needed further discussion with CLG.

Doug Weeks (CLG) outlined progress in seven areas:

- Four RCCs have now been completed and a further four are on target to be completed on time. It has been agreed that London's RCC will be located in the borough of Merton. CLG is pursuing facilities management contracts with the expectation that these will be signed by April 2008. Six of the eight regional companies have been established and are starting to make key decisions on issues such as staffing levels and shift patterns.
- The current focus of CLG's engagement with EADS includes; mobile data terminals, early station ends and confirming New Ways of Working products. There have been challenges to the delivery schedule but EADS is committed to meeting the October 2009 cutover to the first RCCs. Both CLG and EADS are working closely with Firelink to ensure their approaches are aligned.
- Regional workshops have taken place in all nine regions to discuss testing and assurance. Testing arrangements have been explained to FRAs and other senior users. The system will be thoroughly tested by EADS with input from FRSs. It was reiterated that FiReControl would not 'go live' without the consent of Chief Fire Officers.
- Initial staff pool proposals have been agreed by two of the four first wave implementation regions. Other transitional developments include FRSs commencing Gazetteer data capture and conversion and new ways of working implementation is underway.
- Human resources guidance has been developed and distributed. This had been discussed with the HR Working Group but it was stressed that it will be the LACCs who make the final decisions. Five RCC Directors have been appointed and the appointment process for three more is ongoing (London does not require a RCC Director).
- CLG had planned to publish the business case in February but having discussed the issue with the LGA and other stakeholders it was decided that there was insufficient information available to enable members to take a final view and that publication of the business case should therefore be deferred to June 2008. A chapter on regional costs and savings will be included with the business case when published.

- It was reiterated that the cost of FiReControl would be borne by CLG until individual FRSs begin using the RCC. CLG has agreed to meet any net additional costs to local authorities arising from the project under the New Burdens principle.

Members suggested that local command and control was vital in the event of a major incident and asked how FiReControl could ensure this was retained. Richard How (CLG) explained that the Senior Operations Group, chaired by Olaf Baars, would be reviewing this and reporting back to Sir Ken Knight in April.

Members queried the cost of the London RCC and whether it would be fully operational prior to the 2012 Olympics. Richard How responded by saying that CLG was aware of the cost issues facing LFEPA and noted that cost apportionment should ensure that no FRAs lose out financially. The RCC would be completed on time.

Doug Weeks also noted that consultation on proposed staffing models was on-going and that the legal working group was working on staffing and contract issues.

Cllr Les Byrom thanked Richard How and Doug Weeks for a clear and concise presentation.

4. Firebuy update

Liz Barron (Firebuy) explained to members that CLG was undertaking a review of all aspects of procurement for FRSs and that Firebuy was only one part of this. A number of successes achieved by Firebuy were outlined to members, including respiratory protection systems, appliances, insurance mutual, telecoms provision and Fireguard.

It was important for Firebuy to engage with stakeholders and it was proposed that a conference should be arranged to take place after the elections which would allow FRAs to conduct detailed discussions with Firebuy and gain a better understanding of its role in the procurement process. Members welcomed this proposal. It was also proposed that a stakeholder group of members should meet with the Board of Firebuy.

Cllr Richard Hobbs told members that a procurement strategy is of use, especially to smaller FRAs, but that it is necessary to ensure the correct products are identified and purchased. FRAs need to set the agenda for future discussions on Firebuy, whilst the LGA must facilitate communication between FRAs and CLG.

Members agreed that Firebuy in its position as a Non-Departmental Public Body was too remote from FRAs. It was suggested that RMBs could take a greater role in procurement at the regional level; some procurement issues will be best met at the FRS level, whilst others will be addressed either regionally or nationally.

It was pointed out that there is uncertainty about what would happen to Firebuy after 2008/09. Were the funding to shift from Firebuy to a Centre of Excellence, the change would need to be managed carefully as many of the contracts negotiated by Firebuy are long-term.

5. Development of Fire Safety Guidance National Standards

Kevin Thompson told members that the current focus for LACORS' work was existing residential accommodation. This was a complex area; the *Housing Act 2004*, the *Housing Health and Safety Rating System*, the *Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005* and *Building Regulations* have produced a multi-agency enforcement approach to fire safety under different and sometimes overlapping legislation.

The situation was recognised in 2005 when the *Fire Safety Protocol* was developed by the Fire Safety Housing Working Group. This has proven to work very well in streamlining the multi-agency approach in this area. However the protocol does not set out any common standards that should be met and this has prompted LACORS' development of the *Fire Safety Guidance National Standards*.

Several regional groupings of FRSs have already developed guidance and LACORS will seek to incorporate this into the national guidance. The aim is to identify common and consistent guidance that can be used by differing regulatory bodies across England and Wales.

The consultation period will last from the 21st January to the 29th February and members were encouraged to respond to the consultation, despite the short timescale. The consultation period will be followed by an eight week period where responses will be reviewed and it is hoped to launch the document on the 1st May 2008.

Cllr Michael Murphy will contact Kevin Thompson to discuss the Fire Suppression and Sustainable Buildings Task Group's response to the consultation.

6. Feedback from the NJC

Cllr Les Byrom told members that three constructive meetings of the NJC's joint working party on pay 08 have been held and that further meetings had been scheduled for the coming months. As a result of changes to the NJC constitution the Fire Officers' Association is now represented at negotiations. The recent NJC seminar had been broadly successful. The next full meeting of the NJC will be taking place in Belfast.

7. Note of previous meeting

The note of the previous meeting was agreed

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on **Friday 11 April 2008** at Local Government House.