

Notes of Decisions Taken and Action

FIRE SERVICES FORUM

27 June 2008

Conference Rooms 3 & 4 Local Government House at 11.00a.m.

Cllr Fred Walker welcomed members and officers to the meeting. He explained that he was no longer the Chair of Greater Manchester FCDA but that he was still Chair of the North-West LACC and would continue on the Fire Services Forum has one of the Labour group's 'top-up' members.

It was noted that Shona Dunn had been appointed as Pete Betts' successor at Director of Fire and Resilience at CLG, but that she was yet to commence employment in this post.

The Chair reminded members that the LGA Annual Fire Conference would be taking place on the 10th and 11th March 2009 in Bristol.

Members congratulated Cllr Anthony Duggan on receiving an OBE in the Queen's birthday honours list.

Cllr Duggan noted that a firefighter from Bedfordshire and Luton FRS had been nominated in the Council Worker of the Year awards.

1. Update of current issues including FSMC

Cllr Fred Walker noted that discussion had taken place at the FSMC on:

- National Functions – As the Centre of Excellence is not going ahead, there was agreement that some services should be provided nationally but discussions were on-going as to the shape of the delivery body. Collaborative arrangements would be needed until a decision could be reached.
- The approach to transition from CPA to CAA – this would be on the agenda of a future fire forum meeting.

Cllr Walker reported that:

- Co-responding had been discussed at the Central-Local Partnership meeting that took place with the fire minister, Parmjit Dhanda, on the 18th June. It was hoped that a meeting would be held to progress the issues with CLG, the DoH and the LGA before September.
- The LGA raised two issues with the minister at the CLP meeting on behalf of Combined Fire Authorities. On the power of well-being, CLG requested specific examples from CFAs of issues that needed addressing and where the power would be necessary. CFAs are requested to pass examples on to the LGA so that they could be used in discussions with CLG. CLG agreed to look into the issues of lack of funding for CFAs in relation to the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

- There remained a need for all FRAs to be vigilant in their use of ill-health retirements. The LGA is developing guidance on this for FRAs and this will be published shortly.

2. Flooding

Sir Ken Knight gave a presentation to members on the recommendations made following his and Sir Michael Pitt's review of the floods of summer 2007. Sir Ken noted that he had completed his own review into the FRSs response to the flooding in March 2008 and that his findings had been submitted to the Pitt Review team. Sir Ken's recommendations focused on five issues:

- Control and communications
- Capability and statutory duty
- Equipment, health, safety and training
- Flood risk information
- National co-ordination and clarity of roles

It was noted that the need for a statutory duty on FRSs was supported by both CFOA and the FBU, but Sir Ken questioned whether this was necessary; a 'power not a duty' would provide a more flexible approach for FRAs to act locally as appropriate. This would be complimented by a national inter-operable response capacity that would allow resources to be directed as necessary. It was suggested that this capability and availability of resources was of greater importance than a statutory duty.

Members agreed that it was necessary for the LGA to further develop its position on a statutory duty. There were a number of issues that need addressing but any decision must be supported by a strong legal case.

The Chair noted that the LGA has not been in favour of statutory duties being imposed on local government in the past because they are inflexible and do not guarantee accompanying resources.

3. FiReControl Business Case

Richard How (CLG) explained to members that there had been a slight delay in the publication of the business case, but it was hoped that publication would take place in early July. The final business case would continue to be a fluid document which would allow for the refinement of assumptions as appropriate.

FRAs will have until the end of September 2008 to provide CLG with feedback on the business case and regional annexes. The business case will provide aggregate numbers but more detailed figures could be produced by CLG if required.

Cllr Jerry Willmott expressed his disappointment at the delay in publication of the business case. It was noted that the work of the assumptions review group had been a learning process for CLG and that it would be necessary to highlight the value for money aspects of RCCs as well as increased resilience.

CFO Dave Webb (LGA adviser on FiReControl) explained that from an operational perspective resilience was the main driver for the project. There was also a need to ensure that there was no loss of function during the cut over to the new RCCs. The mechanism for the apportionment of cost per FRA needed further work, but it was stated that financial pressures could not hamper resilience.

4. III-Health Pensions

The Chair noted that this had been covered under Item 1 – Update of current Issues including FSMC.

5. NJC Update

The Chair noted that the pay settlement for 2008 had been agreed at an increase of 2.45% on all pay points and an increase of 2.45% on continual professional development payments. It is hoped that a two year pay settlement for 2009 and 2010 would be negotiated that would assist with FRA's long-term planning.

It was noted that the NJC does not represent LACCs with regards to RCC staff and the LACCs meeting taking place following the Fire Services Forum would discuss related issues.

6. Note of the previous meeting

The note of the last meeting was agreed.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on **Friday 10 October 2008** at Local Government House.

This would be followed by a LACCs meeting.