

Notes of Decisions Taken and Action

FIRE SERVICES FORUM

6 February 2009

Room 8.1, Local Government House at 11.00am.

Cllr Fred Walker explained to members that in the absence of Cllr Anthony Duggan (who had to attend his authority's budget-setting meeting) he would be Chairing the forum.

Members were also reminded of the additional Fire Services Forum meeting that was taking place on the 2nd April that would be attended by Sadiq Khan MP, the new Minister with responsibility for fire. This meeting will take place at Local Government House, starting at 2.00pm and finishing no later than 4.00pm.

It was announced that Steve McGuirk (CFO Cheshire) had been appointed as the new Lead Fire Advisor to the Fire Services Management Committee. Steve will provide professional advice to LGA officers when appropriate.

The Chair noted that Emma Varley (Senior Policy Consultant) had been offered a new job and would be leaving the LGA at the end of March. Members thanked Emma for her worked and wished her well for the future.

1. Update from the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC)

The Chairman highlighted the key issues arising from the FSMC meeting on the 19th January and also gave an oral update on current issues:

- Over 200 members have so far signed up to the LGA's **Equality and Diversity Charter**. The Chair encouraged members to nominate an officer in their authority to ensure that all members had signed up to the Charter. Members were also told that a list of members who had yet to sign the charter would be available for individual FRAs on request.
- Cllr Tony Hooton explained that Communities and Local Government had agreed to underwrite the cost of **Fire Gateway** for the 2009/10 financial year. All FRAs would be asked to contribute approximately £6000 to finance the gateway for this period. In the longer term CLG working with the LGA and CFOA will be undertaking a survey to help inform decisions taken on the long-term future of the Gateway.
- FRAs should now have received a letter explaining that retained firefighters are entitled to contribute to the fire and rescue service **pension scheme**. The

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Chair suggested that members discuss this and the associated cost implications with their CFOs. FRAs will also need to discuss the cost of an increase in pension lump funds, including the means of financing this.

- Members asked if there had been any developments on the planned changes to the **European Working Time Directive**. Clive Harris explained that a LGA/CFOA/LGE/CLG group had been formed to quantify the implications of this for FRSs. The UK Government will be seeking to amend the legislation to ensure that FRSs and other professions are not adversely affected. It was noted that whilst any change would primarily affect the retained system it would also cause problems for wholetime shift patterns.
- The Chair reported had been received from Devon and Somerset FRA highlighting the need to keep pay increases below 2%.

2. Firebuy

Elaine Hughes (Director, Procurement and Delivery, Firebuy) took members through a presentation that provided an update on procurement delivery, vehicles and emergency response equipment and contract management. She reported that CLG has undertaken an audit of Firebuy and this process has shown that savings have been generated. There was a need to ensure these figures are robust and they would then be made available to FRAs. It was also noted that a regular briefing note that is produced by Firebuy could be distributed to members as necessary.

3. Audit Commission national study on the Fire and Rescue Service

The Chairman told members that the Audit Commission's report had been discussed in depth by the Fire Services Management Committee where it was agreed that the recommendations made in the report needed to be taken forward by all FRAs. The Committee agreed that there is a need for the LGA to provide political leadership on fire improvement.

The Chairman then explained to members the importance of the Audit Commission web-based data tool that shows FRAs where they are placed on a range of issues, and gave an overview of how it works. <http://firevfm.audit-commission.gov.uk/>

Cllr Paul Shannon pointed out that the Audit Commission report was in fact a piece of free research that could be utilised by all FRAs. He then explained that Greater Manchester had prepared a briefing document that summarised its response to the report, that gave examples of work being undertaken to improve performance and

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also provided a comparison with other FRAs in the same family group. All FRAs were encouraged to produce a similar document.

Steve McGuirk noted that data on the Audit Commission website would be updated every year which would be of value to FRAs.

The Chairman noted that FRA leadership was crucial in ensuring that FRA performance improved, noting that leadership development courses such as those organised by Cllr Anthony Duggan could play a large part in strengthening the leadership abilities of FRAs.

4. Community Risk Reduction Evaluation Tool

Lee Howell (CFO, Devon and Somerset) explained that the community risk reduction evaluation tool allows the user to determine a cost associated with achieving a set level of risk and the most cost effective way of reducing risk. It also allows the user to forecast what level of risk will be experienced with any given increase in resources. The evaluation tool was originally developed in Suffolk FRS using Green Street Berman as consultants, and data in the model includes that from FRAs in the east of England region, as well as London and Kent.

Whilst this is a technical tool that will be used by officers, it will provide evidence to allow elected members to strategically allocate resources when budgets are set.

The Chairman noted that CFOA holds a number of innovation events annually and these provide a useful insight into evolving good practice.

5. National Firefighters Memorial Trust

Lee Howell (CFO, Devon and Somerset) explained to members that the Trust was responsible for establishing the National Memorial for firefighters killed on duty and also the International Service of Remembrance held in London annually. FRAs were thanked for the support that they already provide to the Trust, but it was hoped that presentations such as this could raise awareness of its work.

Members agreed that it was important to raise the Trust's profile, especially following the local elections in June when there could be a large number of new members sitting on Fire and Rescue Authorities. Lee Howell agreed to write to all FRA chairs

post-June when appointments had been made. He reported that a representative from the LGA would be invited to attend the annual service of thanksgiving.

6. Note of the previous meeting

The notes of the Fire Services Forum meeting on the 10th October 2008 were agreed.

7. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on **Friday 3rd April 2009** at 11am at Local Government House. This will be preceded by a special Fire Services Forum meeting on the afternoon of **Thursday 2nd April** that will be addressed by Sadiq Khan MP.