

Note of decisions taken and actions required

Title:	Fire Commission
Date and time:	Friday 11 February 2011, 11.00
Venue:	Westminster Suite, Local Government House

Item	Decisions and actions	Action by
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1	Localisation of Business Rates – implications for Fire Authorities	
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The Commission received a presentation from Stephen Jones, LG Group Finance Director on issues arising from the forthcoming Local Government Resources Review and the potential for local authorities to retain business rates. Stephen invited Members' views on the possible implications of the localisation of business rates for Fire Authorities, which would be used to inform the wider LGA position.

Members stressed the importance of ensuring that the sector's views were fed into the Government's review of local government finance, and made the following comments:

Local authority boundaries were often arbitrary, and businesses tended to be concentrated within certain areas within those boundaries, which led to differing takes within regions in business rates. Members expressed concern that certain areas did not enjoy the local economic conditions conducive to using business rates based incentives to support local economic growth.

Members expressed concern that, in those areas that did not enjoy high economic growth, falling local revenues would pull a locality into a downward spiral of decline. Officers said that there were stabilising mechanisms within the current model, and that these mechanisms would need, at least in part, to be built into any future model.

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Members said that the principle of greater localisation of business rates accorded with the Association's principle of greater localism and local autonomy. Some Members were however keen that that any new local government finance model should contain safeguards to ensure a degree of equalisation.

Members asked whether Government was seeking to incorporate a growth incentive within business rates. Officers said that Government had discussed the idea of a "business bonus incentive" but that further discussions were needed on how this incentive could be modelled.

Members thanked Stephen for his presentation.

Action

Officers to reflect Members' comments in discussions with Government on localisation of business rates.

Stephen Jones

2 The future of the Fire Service College

Members recognised the crucial work that the Fire Service College had played in supporting the fire and rescue sector. Members said that there were a number of issues to consider to inform the LGA's proposals.

Members said that the current debt held by the College was concerning, and that the College's current financial footing needed to be examined;

Members said that options for partnership working in going forward should be examined, potentially with the private sector.

Decision

Members agreed to the formation of a cross-party working group to examine issues around the Fire Service College and to formulate LGA proposals for the future of the College.

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Action

Officers to discuss with political groups proportionality and representation on the working group, and to formulate draft terms of reference.

Helen Murray

3 Update on current issues for Fire and Rescue Authorities

The Chairman informed Members that he had recently met with Bob Neill MP, the Fire Minister, regarding the future of national functions. Officers said that LG Group proposals were 'light-touch', and that it was for the sector to agree priorities in going forward.

Members raised proposals within the Localism Bill providing Fire and Rescue Authorities with a General Power of Competence. Officers said that current proposals allowed FRAs a general power in any activity relating to fire and rescue, and said that CFOA and the LG Group were lobbying for FRAs to have a wider power of competence.

Members discussed the Government's decision to not continue with the FiReControl project, and said that Fire and Rescue Authorities needed to be able to liaise with Government over issues such as future funding. Members expressed concern over poor communication from CLG, and said that the LG Group should lobby for LACC funding to be available in future for Fire and Rescue Services.

Cllr Maurice Heaster, Chairman of the NJC Employers' side, encouraged FRAs who had not yet responded to the National Employers' survey on enhanced redundancy terms to do so.

Members discussed the implications of the Getting Closer LG Group programme of work. Officers said the Programme would ensure that the Group focussed more tightly on priorities for the fire and rescue sector and that the Group would continue to provide the best possible value for its members.

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Decision

Members agreed that the Chairman write to the Fire Minister to express the abovementioned concerns on future resilience systems following the discontinuation of FiReControl.

Members agreed that officers clarify progress on the Pensions Amendment Order.

Action

Officers to draft correspondence on behalf of the Chairman to the Fire Minister on future resilience options.

**Helen Murray
(Correspondence
attached as
appendix 1 & 2)**

Officers to clarify progress on the Pensions Amendment Order.

Gill Gittins

4 Note of the last meeting

The note of the last meeting was agreed as a correct record.

Date of next meeting: 11.00, Friday 17 June 2011