

The Future Working of the Fire Commission

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to support a discussion at the Fire Commission on how members can get the most out of the Fire Commission and in doing so ensure that the Fire Commission remains influential in shaping and influencing policy decisions that relate to fire.

Recommendation

Members are asked to consider and contribute to the discussion of the questions set out in paragraph 5.1 to 5.5 on the future working of the Fire Commission.

Action

Officers will take action as directed.

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Item 2

The Future Working of the Fire Commission

Background

1. The Fire Commission provides a focus for the needs and concerns of fire authorities. All fire authorities in full or corporate membership of the Local Government Association (LGA) have the right to representation and voting on the Fire Commission. Although it is not a decision making body, it provides a sounding board to take views and test proposals for input to the Fire Services Management Committee. It also provides an opportunity to highlight emerging themes and hear from external speakers to provide a wider perspective on issues. The Commission meets four times a year at Local Government House and around 60 of the possible 80 Members regularly attend. Political Group meetings are held an hour before the Commission. The Fire Minister usually attends one Commission meeting a year.
2. The Fire Commission operates in concert with the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) and acts as a broader based forum that feeds into the work and the decisions of the FSMC. These links have been strengthened over the past year.
3. The Fire Commission also operates through task and finish groups which undertake discrete pieces of time-bound work on particular policy issues. These have been very influential. Recent examples include the working groups on the Future of the Fire College, the Fire Peer Challenge and the campaign approach for advancing the use of sprinklers.

Future working of the Fire Commission

4. There are a number of reasons why now is a good time to review the working of the Fire Commission to ensure that it is effective as it can be:
 - 4.1 Fire authorities are operating under every more stringent financial conditions and it is important that members continue to get value for money from their investment in the Fire Commission.
 - 4.2 The changed relationship between central government and fire authorities, as set out in the new national framework, places an increased emphasis on the fire sector taking greater ownership for addressing issues and generating innovation in how fire services operate. It is important to ensure that this greater responsibility is reflected in how the sector comes together to address the significant issues it faces.
 - 4.3 The Fire Commission provides a valuable opportunity for Chairs and Portfolio Holders to come together at a national level to discuss common issues and to ensure that the LGA's lobbying and improvement work is grounded in the everyday work of FRAs. However, this is an important part of our membership offer to FRAs and so there is value in exploring how this might be further build upon for the benefit of the sector. We might for example, consider sharing learning from peer reviews; showcasing good practice; or a series of presentations from invited speakers.

Item 2

Your views

5. It would be helpful if you could let us have views on the following questions, either at the meeting or via officer networks.

5.1 What do you value in the current format of the Fire Commission meetings?

5.2 Is the balance right between information giving and discussion?

5.3 Would you like to see more time in Fire Commission meetings given to tackling specific issues in depth and if so how would you like to see this operate?

5.4 Would you like to see the Fire Commission meetings themed so that future meetings address a single issue in depth such as funding or recruitment and retention of retained firefighters?

5.5 Would you like to hear about case studies showcasing good practice across FRAs?

Next steps

6. The outcomes of the discussion will inform the future working of the Fire Commission throughout this cycle and beyond.