

Notes of Decisions Taken and Actions Required

Fire Services Management Committee

19 January 2009

at Local Government House, Smith Square, London

Present

- Chair:** Cllr Anthony Duggan (Bedfordshire & Luton CFA)
Vice Chair: Cllr Fred Walker (Greater Manchester FCDA)
Deputy Chair: Cllr Jeremy Hilton (Gloucestershire CC) (Liberal Democrat);
Conservative: Cllr Peter Roffey (Leicestershire CC); Cllr Jerry Willmott (Wiltshire & Swindon CFA); Cllr Richard Hobbs (Warwickshire CC); Cllr Mac Maguire (Cambridgeshire CC)
Labour: Cllr Mehboob Khan (West Yorkshire FCDA); Cllr Sharon Sullivan (Merseyside FCDA); Cllr Tony Hooton (Cheshire); (sub)Cllr Phil Box (Shropshire)
Liberal Democrat: Cllr Dave Goddard (Stockport MBC); Cllr Jeremy Hilton (Gloucestershire CC); Cllr Paul Shannon (GMFRA);
Apologies: Joanna Spicer (Suffolk CC) (Conservative)

1. Update on current issues

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting and congratulated Clive Harris on his permanent appointment as Business Manager for Fire. 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 wished thanked Emma for her worked and wished her well for the future.

The Chair reported that he had spoken at an LGA/CFOA **Equality and Diversity** Conference on 25 November, where he launched the LGA' s Equality and Diversity Charter for FRA Members. Over 200 members have signed up to the charter to date.

CLG has agreed to underwrite the risk for the Fire Services College to host the **Fire Gateway** for the 2009/10 financial year and contracts would be extended accordingly. All FRAs will be asked to pay a subscription of c. £6000 to the running of the Gateway for 2009/10 and CLG will make a financial contribution to reflect their use of the facility. A survey of FRAs will be conducted to establish the ongoing value of Fire Gateway to the sector and subject to the results of this, the LGA, CFOA and CLG will be working towards the development of a sustainable funding model and governance arrangements for 2010/11 onwards.

Cllr Jeremy Hilton updated members on the **New Dimension programme**. CLG will be undertaking a second consultation with FRAs at the end of January which will include a revised version of the Transfer of Ownership Agreement and their response to the comments received as part of the first consultation. These documents have been issued to the LGA in advance for comment by 26 January.

Cllr Fred Walker then provided an update on **pensions**. Retained firefighters are now entitled to a salary-based pension, although there are still issues around loss of earnings through injury that need clarification.

Commutation of pensions and related costs is an issue of increasing importance. This is a complex issue and will require a great deal of discussion over the next few months. Members agreed that the issue of retained pensions should be raised at the next Fire Forum and that wider pensions issues should be discussed in full at a future meeting of the Fire Services Management Committee.

Cllr Peter Roffey provided an update on the work of the Arson Control Forum. He asked members to investigate whether their authorities had an Arson Prevention Strategy and noted that Leicestershire FRS had benefited from the assistance of a seconded police officer to assist on arson-related issues.

Actions

- Retained pensions to be raised at Fire Forum under update on current issues
- At an appropriate time, a future FSMC agenda to include a substantive item on pensions

2. Audit Commission national study report on the Fire and Rescue Service 'Rising to the Challenge – improving fire service efficiency'

Emma Varley introduced the item and outlined the key points contained in the paper on the Audit Commission's national study report. Members noted the key findings of the report and discussed how the LGA could support FRAs to improve efficiency and performance in line with the recommendations in the Audit Commission report.

Members agreed that the report should be discussed at the Fire Services Forum both in terms of raising awareness and identifying good practice that could be disseminated across FRAs. There is a financial imperative to ensure efficiencies are made during a testing economic situation. Members agreed that more needed to be done to ensure that FRA members have a stronger understanding of strategic issues.

Members observed that the data tool published by the Audit Commission alongside the report is useful as it helps FRAs to identify where they are placed in the comparative charts. However, it is complicated to use so there is a role for the LGA to develop a simplified version for members. It was noted that Greater Manchester FRA has carried out an initial analysis of where it is placed in the comparative charts. Members agreed that the data tool should be publicised to FRAs,

3. Sector-led improvement for Fire and Rescue

Emma Varley introduced the paper on sector led improvement support for fire and rescue and highlighted the key points, noting that extensive work has taken place since the previous discussion at the September meeting of the FSMC.

Cllr Mehboob Khan noted that a key factor in the development of the proposals was the need to encourage CLG to have confidence that in specific cases of under performance the sector is capable of providing the appropriate support. It was noted that previous Audit Commission reports have highlighted the growing gap between the strongest and weakest performers. All evidence suggests that improvement works best when it is led by the sector itself and the proposals in the report complement the broader approach to local government improvement.,

Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) are member-led partnerships that act as a regional 'hub' providing a central point of contact to enable authorities to access the right support at the right time.

Sara Williams (IDeA) told members that the IDeA has a good track record of helping FRAs improve performance. This included member training, web tools, case studies and peer review. These services will be enhanced through a partnership with CFOA.

Nick Collins (CFOA) told members that CFOA will be creating a specific directorate to coordinate its operations in assisting FRAs that will complement the work of the IDeA. There will be a much more structured approach to sharing good practice within the sector by making available the skills of the best performers to drive overall improvement.

It was noted that it is not widely known amongst FRA members that RIEPs are the first point of contact for improvement support and members felt that the LGA should continue to raise awareness amongst FRA members.

The proposed pilot scheme for the approach outlined in the paper should include both strong and weaker authorities to ensure a balanced approach. It was observed that with strong member leadership, the approach outlined in the paper should drive improvement across the sector

4. The role of Local Government Employers

Due to unforeseen circumstances this item would be deferred until the May FSMC meeting.

The Chairman reported that Local Government Employers (LGE) had received a letter from ACAS offering to facilitate discussions between FRAs and trade unions concerning employment issues associated with the creation of Local Authority Controlled Companies. The FSMC was asked to consider whether to take up the offer of joint sessions between FRAs and trade unions.

Following discussion, members decided not to take up the offer at the current time because of the stage of development of LACCs.

5. NJC update

Cllr Anthony Duggan reported that pay negotiations for the main NJC are continuing through the Joint Secretaries and the Joint Working Party. Pay negotiations for the NJC for Brigade Managers have begun.

6. Note of previous meeting

Additional comments were made in regard to the Graduate/High Potential Development Scheme to be discussed at the Fire Services College on 20 January. Cllr Richard Hobbs and Clive Harris would both be attending on behalf of the FSMC.

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

7. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Fire Services Management Committee will take place on **Monday 9th March 2009 at 2pm at the offices of Bristol City Council.**