

Notes of Decisions Taken and Actions Required

Fire Services Management Committee

9 March 2009

at Bristol City Council

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); Cllr Watts Stelling (Durham CC) (Independent).
Conservative: Cllr Richard Hobbs (Warwickshire CC); Cllr Joanna Spicer (Suffolk CC) and Cllr Jerry Willmott (Wiltshire & Swindon CFA)
Labour: Cllr Mehboob Khan (West Yorkshire FCDA) and Cllr Tony Hooton (Cheshire)
Liberal Democrat: Cllr David Goddard (Stockport)
Substitute: Cllr Phil Box (Shropshire) (Labour)
Cllr Paul Shannon (Greater Manchester) (Liberal Democrat)
Apologies: Cllr Michael Cartwright (Hampshire CFA); Cllr Eddie Clein (Liverpool); Cllr Mac McGuire (Cambridgeshire CC); Cllr Peter Roffey (Leicestershire CC); Cllr Navin Shah AM (LFEPa) and Cllr Sharon Sullivan (Merseyside FCDA)
In attendance: Steve McGuirk (CFO Cheshire); Dave Webb (CFO Leicestershire) (only for Item 2 onwards); Helen Murray, Emma Varley and Clive Harris (LGA)

The Chair informed members that this would be Emma Varley's last meeting of the Committee before leaving to work for DWP. The Committee thanked Emma for her work and wished her luck for her new job.

1. Role of the Lead Advisor to the Fire Services Management Committee

Helen Murray introduced the item, explaining that Steve McGuirk (CFO Cheshire) had been appointed to the role of Principal Fire Advisor until 31st December 2009, after which the Committee will have the opportunity to review the appointment. Members were asked for their views as to the specific purpose of this role and for comments on the proposed work programme.

Members welcomed the appointment and noted the importance of this role in

providing advice to the committee on operational issues. However they emphasised the importance of ensuring that this advice is fully independent of CFOA and other interests. They also confirmed that LGA officers would continue to take the lead in supporting and advising the Committee and developing policy, with the Principal Advisor assisting as required.

Members asked that the Principal Advisor provide regular reports back to the Committee and update the lead members between meetings if necessary. To reflect this, paragraph 7 of the report should be amended to read, "...should not speak on behalf of the LGA without consulting officers **and lead members.**"

The Committee welcomed the fact that the Principal Advisor would be expected to attend every meeting of the FSMC and asked for him to also play a more visible role at Fire Forum meetings so that the wider membership are aware of the role.

Decisions

- The Committee noted the appointment and role of the Principal Fire Advisor.
- The Committee agreed the proposed work programme.

Action

- The Principal Fire Advisor to provide regular reports on his work to the FSMC when requested and to update the lead members between meetings as necessary.

2. Update on current issues

Cllr Anthony Duggan updated members on the following issues:

FRA's will have received a letter from CLG regarding the **Fire Gateway** which asks for a contribution of £6,000 per FRA for the 2009/10 financial year to ensure the portal remains in operation. A survey of FRA's is being conducted to establish the ongoing value of Fire Gateway to the sector before developing future plans.

The **Audit Commission's latest performance assessment** results for FRA's were published on 12th February. The report finds that fire services in England continue to improve, but the gap between the best and worst services is widening. It also concludes that all fire services have the potential to improve further.

The Audit Commission and partner inspectorates have published the **final framework for CAA** which will come into effect from 1 April 2009, taking over from the system of Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). Several members welcomed the opportunities that CAA will provide for FRA's to achieve greater recognition for their work within local partnerships. However, there were some concerns about the implication that poor performance of other partners could have, particularly in those areas where an FRA covered several districts.

Cllr Jeremy Hilton updated members on the **New Dimension Programme**. Members noted that, depending on the final details of the transfer, this could be rejected by certain authorities. There has been some delay in this process, but a circular setting out revised terms is due to be published by CLG shortly.

Cllr Fred Walker gave an update on **pensions**, explaining that a circular on 19th February notified CFOs that a 5% increase had been agreed. He added that work is currently underway to consolidate several aspects of the pension scheme.

In response to a question from Cllr Joanna Spicer, Clive Harris informed members that a meeting had taken place between CLG, CFOA, LGE and the LGA to discuss the implications of the loss of the opt-out of the **working time directive**. It was reported that a briefing had been sent to FRA Chairs on 6th March to inform them of the lobbying activity that the LGA was carrying out on these issues on their behalf. The LGA will request that this is discussed at the Central-Local Partnership meeting with the Fire Minister on 1st April.

The Chair reminded members that the Minister would also be addressing an additional meeting of the **Fire Services Forum** on the afternoon of Thursday 2 April at 2.00pm at Local Government House.

Actions

- CLG Officials to provide an update on the New Dimension Programme to the next meeting. **Clive Harris**
- An item on the actuarial review of the pension scheme will be on the agenda at the next FSMC meeting. **Clive Harris**

3. Equality and Diversity in the fire and rescue service

Emma Varley introduced the item, highlighting progress with sign-up to the charter and with developing a member champions network. Cllr Duggan represents the LGA on the National Equality and Diversity Partnership and will bring an update on the partnership to a future meeting of the committee.

Actions:

- Sign-up to the charter to be extended to all members of the cabinet of country fire authorities. **Clive Harris**
- FSMC members agreed to encourage sign-up both within their own authorities and during the Fire Conference. **Members**

4. FiReControl – LGA position

Dave Webb updated the committee on the FiReControl project. He informed members that work on performance standards is ongoing but, once finalised, will be sent out for formal consultation to all stakeholders.

There are some concerns that funding for the continuity of existing systems will not be included in 'new burdens' payments, but the details are not yet clear.

LGA has been asked to nominate representatives to two boards that have been created following a restructure of the project governance arrangements.

Cllr Jerry Willmott informed members that the Business Assumptions Review Group is expected to meet again before the final business case is published on 30th April. As a result of his work on the project board to increase understanding of the nature and risks of the democratic process, CLG has now added this to the risk register.

In response to questions from several members, Dave Webb explained that despite considerable confusion, it is possible for FRAs to sub-let the RCC buildings, but they may wish to take their own legal advice first.

5. NJC update (oral report)

The Chair updated members on the following:

- Pay 2009 – Meetings of the Joint Working Party continue as does additional discussion at Joint Secretary level. The balance between affordability and securing further change to terms and conditions is a key issue for Employers' Side members. Progress will be reported back to members of the NJC in March.
- Annual Survey - The NJC's Annual Survey which will provide vital information in order to inform future negotiations is currently underway. All authorities are encouraged to ensure the survey is completed and returned.
- Advisory Forum - the LGA's most recent nomination to the Advisory Forum, Steve McGuirk (CFO Cheshire), has been accepted by members of the Employers' Side of the NJC.
- At the request of the Employers' Side, the Employers' Secretariat (LGE) has issued a survey to all UK fire authorities seeking the views of Chairs on a number of issues. The response rate has been exceptionally low (25%) despite a reminder and officers will liaise with the Employers' Side to identify what further action can be taken to increase the level of response.
- Pay 2009 - A formal claim, dated 19 January, for an increase of 2.6% has now been received and a response is currently being considered by members of the Employers' Side.

6. Note of previous meeting

The note of the previous agreement was agreed.

7. Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Fire Services Management Committee will take place on **Monday 11 May 2009 at 11am at Local Government House.**