

Notes of Decisions Taken and Actions Required

Fire Services Management Committee

20 July 2009

at Local Government House, London

Present

Vice Chair (in the chair):	Cllr Fred Walker (Greater Manchester FCDA)
Deputy Chair:	Cllr Jeremy Hilton (Gloucestershire CC) (Liberal Democrat)
Conservative:	Cllr Richard Hobbs (Warwickshire CC); Cllr Peter Roffey (Leicestershire CC); Cllr Mac McGuire (Cambridgeshire CC); Cllr Joanna Spicer (Suffolk CC)
Labour:	Cllr Navin Shah (London FEPA); Cllr Sharon Sullivan (Merseyside FCDA), Cllr Mehboob Khan (West Yorkshire FCDA)
Liberal Democrat:	Cllr David Goddard (Stockport); Cllr Eddie Clein (Liverpool)

In attendance: Steve McGuirk (CFO Cheshire); Dave Webb (CFO Leicestershire); Roger Hargreaves - for item 2 (CLG), Gerard Murphy for item 3 (Greater Manchester FRS), Helen Murray, Trish O'Flynn, Clive Harris and Jo Simon (LGA)

The Chair started the meeting with a minute's silence to commemorate the Scottish Fire Fighter who died on duty.

1. Update on current issues

The Chair updated Members on the Equality and Diversity Charter, stating that currently 65% of Authorities had signed up, which was still short of the target, and added that new members of Fire Authorities would need to be advised urgently.

Cllr Spicer commented that two actions were needed in order to get to the required numbers. She suggested launching an active campaign in September and that the approach to county authorities required clarification in order to get maximum sign-up. The Chair suggested the portfolio holder to sign up.

The Chair confirmed the next Member Equality Champions' Network meeting for 3 September and that invitations to every FRA had gone out.

The Chair updated Members on the Camberwell fire. He reported that John Denham MP had asked for a report on findings from police, fire and other investigations.

Cllr Shah reported that local MPs and Councillors would be asking for an enquiry and that the site itself had been designated as part of a criminal investigation. Key issues regarding refurbishment, maintenance, management and design of the building would need to be addressed.

The Chair notified members of the CLG's consultation on Fire and Resilience functions of FireLink and asked the members to respond to officers prior to the closing date of 5 October.

Action

The draft LGA response to the CLG consultation to be discussed at the meeting in September.

2. FiReControl update

The Committee welcomed Roger Hargreaves, Project Manager at CLG, to the meeting.

Roger Hargreaves informed the members that, while a 10 month delay to the project had been announced, Ministers were committed to its completion. Contract terms had been reviewed and a deal on royalties had been struck, enabling the Government to recoup some of the costs, possibly via a reduced service charge. CLG had looked at various contingency options, including shutting the project down or changing suppliers but came to the conclusion that continuing the current path was not only the best but also the best value for money option. This played a major part in the Minister's consideration.

Following Roger's presentation, discussions were held on the following points:

- Concern was raised by Members that Fire and Rescue Authorities would have to pay toward the FiReControl scheme, by, for example, covering the cost of staff migration. Roger responded that individual FRA requirements would be examined on a case by case basis.
- A query was raised over whether FiReControl would be in place in sufficient time to enable rigorous testing ahead of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Roger responded that the timetable for London had been considered very carefully. Since London wasn't in the first wave of FRAs to cut over, slippages and problems would be ironed out prior to the launch in London.
- Discussions were held over contingency plans in place. It was noted that CLG were currently working on this, and that separate discussions were taking place as part of the Contingency Plan.
- Concern was also raised by Members over the workability of the project, and over the delays that had been experienced thus far. The Chair responded that there was a danger that Members were seeking to re-open

the broader debate on FiReControl, and that this should be avoided.

3. Climate Change – implications for the FRS

The Chair welcomed Gerard Murphy (Greater Manchester FRS) to the meeting. Gerard Murphy outlined that reducing CO2 carbon emissions, carbon impact projections over the next 50 years and effects on the environment were big issues for the fire services. The services required would change over the years due to the nature of future incidents, such as concentration on floods, extreme storms and high temperatures.

Members expressed concern that fire service issues might not be addressed in wider LGA climate change work, as well as local and regional groupings. There was a danger that councils and fire authorities might not coordinate future activity, particularly in county services.

Members added that there were further issues that would need significant consideration. Eco-towns would be using more timber in buildings, and other features may create potential fire hazards. Sprinklers were seen as an important long term tool in managing risk and reducing fire losses. Consideration should be given to how to incentivise developers and use Building Regulations and Local Development Frameworks to increase the use of sprinklers.

It was noted that not all FRAs had signed the Nottingham declaration.

The Chair suggested adding this item to the Fire Forum for further discussion. He also suggested extending membership to Sustainability Champions to add to the discussions.

Action

Officers to provide a paper to the Fire Forum on climate change implications for FRAs and invite sustainability champions to attend on that occasion.

4. Fire Gateway – future arrangements

Clive Harris (Policy Directorate) outlined the recommendations regarding the future of Fire Gateway. Given the results of the survey, which showed poor take up, it was concluded that the service wasn't well used and should be halted. All members agreed.

Action

Members regrettably agreed to the orderly closure of the Fire Gateway by the end of the 2009/10 financial year.

5. LGA Account Management

Clive Harris (Policy Directorate) informed the Board about LGA's commitment to strengthening its relationship with member councils and Fire and Rescue Authorities and has introduced a named Account Manager to act as a first

point of contact for every local authority and English FRA. Members welcomed this move and asked that a letter be sent to FRA Chairs and portfolio holders highlighting the service.

Action

Officers to extend Account Manager information to Chairs of FRAs as well as Chief Executives/CFOs

6. NJC Update

Pay Deal: The Chair reported an offer of 1.25% pay deal made, that was currently awaiting final feedback from trade unions.

Pensions: The Chair reported that due to a recent London judgement, there would be new guidance on ill-health retirement.

Action

An update on ill-health retirement to follow at the next meeting in September.

7. Note of the last meeting

The note of the last meeting was agreed.

Cllr Walker reminded Committee Members of the LGA Annual Fire Conference 2010 to be held on 9/10 March in Manchester.

Cllr Walker thanked Members for their hard work during the last year and stated that he was looking forward to the challenges ahead in the new year.