

Notes of Decisions Taken and Actions Required

Fire Services Management Committee

18 January 2010

at Local Government House, London

Present

Chairman:	Cllr Brian Coleman (LFEPA/LB Barnet) (Conservative)
Vice Chair:	Cllr Fred Walker (Greater Manchester FRA) (Labour)
Deputy Chair:	Cllr Paul Shannon (Greater Manchester FRA) (Liberal Democrat); Cllr Christopher Newbury (Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority) (Independent Group)
Conservative:	Cllr Richard Hobbs (Warwickshire CC); Cllr Bertha Joseph (LFEPA/LB Brent); Cllr James Pearson (Greater Manchester FRA); Cllr Paul Bryant (Royal Berkshire CFA); Cllr Kay Hammond (Surrey CC); Cllr Tony Ward (West Midlands FRA)
Labour:	Cllr Mehboob Khan (West Yorkshire FCDA); Cllr John Joyce (Cheshire FRA); Cllr Brenda Forster (Cleveland FRA)
Liberal Democrat:	Cllr Jeremy Hilton (Gloucestershire FRS); Cllr Roger Price (Hampshire FRA)
In attendance:	Commissioner Ron Dobson (LFEPA); Dave Webb (CFO Leicestershire); Roger Hargreaves (CLG) (item 1 only); Trish O'Flynn, Clive Harris and Paul Johnston (LGA)

1. FiReControl

The Committee received an update on FiReControl from Roger Hargreaves, Department for Communities and Local Government, which focussed on Intergraph being chosen as project subcontractor following the decision to terminate the contract with Ericsson.

In response to concerns set out by Cllr James Pearson, the Committee's lead Member on FiReControl, Roger stated that CLG had fully assessed Intergraph's ability to deliver on the project, and confirmed that the previous subcontractor was no longer involved with the project. EADS had given top level assurances on its ability to deliver the project to agreed milestones, and, having acknowledged previous limitations in its delivery of the project, had committed more resources to FiReControl. To restore confidence in the project, EADS would nonetheless have to demonstrate its ability to deliver high quality product to agreed timetables. Roger stated that Fire and Rescue Authorities would not be expected to cover any of the project costs.

Members raised broad concerns over the viability of the project, and the ability of the contractors and subcontractors to deliver the project on time, and reiterated the low confidence of Authorities in FiReControl.

The lack of an up-to-date, visible work plan for the project was concerning to officers and Members, who queried how EADS and Intergraph could be expected to deliver to milestones that were not embedded in a current work plan. Roger responded that the key elements and interdependencies of the plan remained unchanged, but that aspects of the plan which EADS were to deliver on had changed. The latest iteration of the plan would be available in February.

Responding to concerns over project costs, Roger stated that the cost to CLG remained the same, and reiterated that FRAs would not bear any of the cost.

The Committee thanked Roger for attending the meeting.

Members discussed the upcoming Select Committee inquiry into FiReControl, noting that the National Audit Office would undertake work as part of this inquiry and that the LGA had fed in its submission to the Committee.

Decision

The Committee noted Roger's update on FiReControl and noted the LGA submission put forward to the Communities and Local Government Committee.

Action

Officers to circulate up-to-date version of the CLG FireControl project plan to Members. **Paul Johnston**

Officers to provide a very high level plan to enable Members to monitor key deliverables by EADs. **CFO Dave Webb**

Officers to inform Members over decisions coming out of the Select Committee Inquiry. **Trish O'Flynn**

Officers to examine work in Scotland and Wales in their work on resilience to compare best practice. **Trish O'Flynn**

2. LGA Membership

Clive Harris introduced the report, stating that it highlighted the benefits to Fire and Rescue Authorities of LGA membership.

The following points were raised:

- Members acknowledged the reduction in subscriptions for 2010-2011
- Members suggested that LGA Fire Forum papers be more comprehensive and that Forum agenda be circulated to Members further in advance of the meeting. Members noted that the Forum was a focal point for Fire and

Rescue Authorities, and meetings needed to provide the opportunity for all Members to have a reasonable debate.

- Members suggested greater joint working between LGA Member structures on topics of joint interest, and this should extend to planning of conferences and events.
- Members praised the quality of agenda papers and the notes of meetings, and suggested that these be circulated more widely to all FRAs within LGA membership.

Action

Officers to establish the number of FRAs represented at the LGA Fire Conference. **Clive Harris**

Officers to examine means of sharing information on FSMC and Fire Forum meetings with member Authorities. **Paul Johnston**

3. The Future of National Functions

Trish O'Flynn introduced the report, stating that it considered the future ownership of key national functions that were currently carried out by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Members were concerned over proposals that advocated the creation of a further quango or quango-type body, and held similar concern over the number of bodies currently involved in national decision making on fire services issues. However, any initiative that belonged to the sector and afforded Fire and Rescue Authorities, more responsibility over local issues was to be welcomed, with lead authorities commissioned to carry out work on behalf of the sector.

Members also noted that there was a strong role for the Local Government Association, as the voice of English Fire and Rescue Authorities, to play in these discussions. Members were disappointed that the group of stakeholders set out within the Fire Protection Association's proposals did not include mention of the LGA.

Decision

Members noted the report, and suggested exploring further the scope for Fire and Rescue Authorities to take on additional responsibility.

Action

Officers to continue to develop work on possible alternative options for Fire and Rescue Authorities to be more widely involved in the delivery of national functions, including commissioning based options. **Trish O'Flynn**

4. Equality and Diversity progress report

Cllr Brenda Forster, as the Committee's Equality and Diversity Champion, introduced the report.

Members agreed the need for Fire and Rescue services to be exemplar employees in this area, and the need to ensure that services were both reflective of the communities they served and able to meet the diverse range of needs that those communities might hold.

The following further points were raised:

- Bullying and harassment were best addressed as management issues, and Authorities should have policies and processes in place to address this.
- Members recognised that the Fire and Rescue Service had already progressed hugely in this area, but some Members felt there was a large amount of work still to do and that it was appropriate for the LGA to take an active lead on this issue to encourage further culture change and share good practice. Other Members stated that much of what was prescribed within the report was “business as usual” for Authorities, and that Fire and Rescue services performed well in this area compared with other services.
- Some Members felt the imposition of equality and diversity targets to be harmful, and that signing Charters did not necessarily demonstrate a full and active commitment toward ensuring equality and diversity within the fire service.
- Concerns were raised over the implications, particularly on rural authorities, of the Equalities Bill.

Decision

The Committee noted LGA activity on equality and diversity, and agreed future Group activity.

5. Transfer of New Dimensions assets contracts

Cllr Jeremy Hilton and Jon Hall, Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service, introduced the report.

Members noted CLG’s request in a recent circular for Fire and Rescue Authorities to accept a transfer of function, which would see ownership of all vehicles and equipment transferring to those authorities hosting them. Several Members stated that their Authority had not yet agreed this transfer as there were contracting issues, or more information was being sought. Members also raised concern over the increasing duties imposed on FRAs that were not in statute.

Decision

The Committee supported the work undertaken in developing the National Resilience Board, and noted the contents of the report.

6. Treatment of supplements for Pension purposes

Cllr Fred Walker introduced the report and circulated a briefing paper on the recent actuarial assessment of the pension schemes. Cllr Walker stated that

there were concerns over increasing demands on the Firefighters' pension schemes and that funding mechanisms needed to be reviewed. The paper had been brought to the Committee seeking Members' views to inform negotiations on the Firefighters' Pension Committee.

Members agreed that the scheme must be affordable for FRAs, and that FRAs should be encouraged to make sure that any enhancements to pay be non-pensionable.

Decision

The Committee noted the report, agreed the current position on treatment of supplements for Pension purposes and asked Cllr Walker to keep them informed of developments.

7. Other business update

No other business was discussed.

8. Note of the last meeting

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

Date of next meeting: 8 March 2010, Manchester Town Hall