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Fire Services Management Committee **Item 4**

19 July 2010

Progress against the Fire Services Management Committee work-plan and LGA Group Business Plan

Summary

This paper sets out the progress made on objectives that were agreed as part of the FSMC work programme in September 2009.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note progress made against the Fire Services Management Committee work-plan as agreed at the September 2009 meeting of the FSMC.

Action

As requested by Members.

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Progress against the Fire Services Management Committee work-plan and LGA Group Business Plan

Background

1. At the Fire Services Management Committee meeting that took place in September 2009 members received a report that proposed a series of objectives that the Committee should pursue over the 2009-10 meeting cycle. It was explained that the work of the Committee would be governed by the overarching priorities that had been included in the LGA Group Business Plan which had been agreed as follows:

   - **Recession**
   - **Improvement and the reputation of local government**
   - **Efficiency and value for money**

Progress on the FSMC work-plan

2. FSMC members agreed the following priority work areas, with progress detailed below:

   Recession
   Gathering evidence for the next spending review

   - Although the Spending Review was deferred officers have been working closely with the Fire Finance Network to ensure a robust evidence base is submitted as part of the LGA's response on behalf of Fire and Rescue Authorities in September 2010.

   Supporting FRAs in facing the recession

   - At the LGA fire conference we launched our publication "Building the Top Team: a discussion document for Fire and Rescue Authority members". The document asks how the service can take full advantage of the area based approach to funding and assessment, looks at the management skills needed in senior officers and how fire authority members might approach their own development. A further piece of work is currently being commissioned.

   Improvement and the reputation of local government
   Lead on the development of a sector-led improvement programme for FRAs, including the first set of Comprehensive Area Assessment results (with IDeA)

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- The Committee agreed a partnership between IDeA and the Chief Fire Officers Association to deliver the Operational Assessment (OpA) peer review programme, utilising IDeA's experience in local government peer review and drawing on CFOA's professional experience. This marked an important shift from an inspection focus to sector led improvement as part of the new performance arrangements from April 2009.
- The Committee agreed a partnership between IDeA and the Chief Fire Officers Association to deliver the Operational Assessment (OpA) peer review programme, utilising IDeA's experience in local government peer review and drawing on CFOA's professional experience. In 2009-10, the first year of OpA, twenty one peer reviews were completed. Feedback from members and chief officers on their experience of the review has been very positive.

Support FRAs in the implementation of the national Equality and Diversity strategy

- The IDeA, in conjunction with CFOA, has produced the new Fire and Rescue Services Equality Framework (FRS EF). The FRS EF recognises and addresses equality and diversity objectives that are a priority for the fire and rescue service. The IDeA will continue to work with FRAs to ensure that all 46 become *Excellent Fire and Rescue Authorities* as set out in the *Journey to Excellence* publication that links the FRS EF to the wider Equality Framework for Local Government
- We have run three Fire Authority Members' Equality and Diversity Network meetings, with diverse speakers including Fire and rescue service officers, a police authority speaker and IDeA advisers.
- We published "*People like me - advancing opportunity and fairness in the fire and rescue service*" at the beginning of 2010. This document looks at the LGA's progress since the government launched its Equality and Diversity Strategy for the Fire and Rescue Service in 2008. The majority of FRAs have achieved level 3 or above in the Equality Standard for Local Government, 72% of FRAs have joined Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme to promote lesbian, gay and bisexual equality in the workplace and the LGA has a 72% sign up rate to our equality and diversity charter.

3. Elsewhere we have raised the profile of work being undertaken by Fire and Rescue Authorities through a series of articles in *Local Government First* magazine and we also provided an induction pack detailing the work of the LGA's fire policy team to all Fire and Rescue Authority members.

Efficiency and value for money
Pensions

- The LGA has argued that the employers can not sustain a higher level of contribution and that any gap will need to be funded either by higher employee contributions or by reductions in benefits.

- A big issue for the Committee this year has been the definition of pensionable pay and the LGA has commented on a consultative paper produced by CLG.
- The LGA has been encouraging CLG to amend the scheme rules with regards to pension abatement.
- The LGA also produced its best practice guide on ill health retirement. This guidance is designed to assist Fire and Rescue Services in England to manage those medical incapacity and long term sickness cases which may result in an ill health retirement and in particular, to enable them to avoid reaching that outcome as far as is practicable.

FiReControl project

- The FSMC has consistently made 4 key points: that FiReControl is at serious risk of becoming a failed IT project; that confidence is at rock bottom with FRAs considering alternatives; any new burdens incurred by FRAs as the project proceeds/fails should be met by government and that a realistic operational and financial assessment needs to be made of alternatives to the project.
- Made submission and gave evidence to CLG Select Committee. This proved influential as our points were recognised by the CLG Select Committee which noted that the project was "*Inadequately planned, poorly executed, and badly managed*".

Long term funding and governance for national functions, including Firebuy

- The Group has been involved in detailed discussions with CLG, CFOA and other groups on the future of National Functions. There is agreement on all sides that a number of functions that are currently undertaken by Communities and Local Government could be taken on by the sector or discarded. This piece of work will continue until a final decision on which functions should continue and where they should sit is reached.

Fire Conference 2010

- The LGA Fire Conference 2010 was considered a great success which built on the 2009 event. The Fire Conference bucked the trend of a reduction in numbers attending other conferences and delegate feedback was positive, not withstanding the previous Fire Minister pulling out at very short notice.
- A fringe event was held at the LGA's annual conference entitled *the case for mergers* that was chaired by the FSMC Chairman and featured contributions from the Chair and Chief Officer from Devon and Somerset FRA as well as the leader of the new Durham council.

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Account management arrangements

- The LGA Group has successfully implemented a system of named Account Managers for every local authority in membership. LGA officers have visited FRAs including Cheshire, Tyne and Wear, London, West Yorkshire, Northumberland, the West Midlands and Durham and Darlington and are available for further visits as required.

4. There were also other areas of work of lower priority that required some input from the LGA in the coming period:

Close down of Fire Gateway

- The closure of the Fire Gateway was completed at the end of March 2010, with the majority of the content that was held there being moved to the Directgov and Businesslink websites.

Co-responding

- The Committee agreed that this was a local issue for individual FRAs, but there could be further discussions as budget cuts and efficiencies are discussed across the public sector.

Contingency planning

- Officers from LGA and LGE worked to improve the Audit Commission's survey of FRAs about contingency plans

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