

19 July 2010

Notes of Decisions Taken and Actions Required

Fire Services Management Committee

11.00am, 24 May 2010 in 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 Paul Bryant (Royal Berkshire CFA); Cllr Kay Hammond (Surrey CC); Cllr Tony Arbour (London FEPA / Richmond LB); Cllr Maurice Heaster (London FEPA / Wandsworth LB); Cllr Ann Holland (Essex FRS)
- Labour:** Cllr Navin Shah (London FEPA / Harrow LB); Cllr John Joyce (Cheshire FRA); Cllr Brenda Forster (Cleveland FRA)
- Liberal Democrat:** Cllr Roger Price (Hampshire FRA)
- In attendance:** Cllr Mehboob Khan (West Yorkshire FCDA); Cllr Peter Robinson (Lincolnshire CC); Cllr Bernard Hughes (Devon CC); Mr David Cartwright (LFEPA); Commissioner Ron Dobson (LFEPA); Susan Johnson (Durham and Darlington FRS); Helen Murray, Trish O'Flynn, Caroline Bosdet, Sarah Messenger, Clive Harris and Paul Johnston (LGA Group)
- Apologies:** Cllr Tony Ward (West Midlands FRA); Cllr David Kirk (Hampshire CFA); Cllr Jeremy Hilton (Gloucestershire FRS)

The Chairman noted that James Pearson and Bertha Joseph had not been re-elected at the recent local government elections, and would accordingly no longer be sitting on the Committee.

The Chairman congratulated Bob Neill MP on being appointed as the new Fire Minister.

The Vice-Chair congratulated Cllr Joyce on being chosen as the new Mayor for Warrington Council.

1. FiReControl

The Committee welcomed Roger Hargreaves, CLG, and Robin Southwell OBE, EADS UK, to the meeting.

The Chairman noted that he had received hospitality from EADS UK, which had been registered appropriately on public record.

Roger Hargreaves said that CLG officials had begun to brief the new Minister on the FireControl project, and that there was no move in the timetable since last announced. Roger added that CLG were keen to circulate a set of key milestones for the project in moving forward to stakeholders once it had been agreed by Ministers.

Robin Southwell said that the recent CLG Select Committee report had identified a number of problems with the project to date, and that CLG and EADS UK had made a number of changes accordingly. Robin said that the previous sub-contractor had not delivered to the expected standard, and that the newly appointed sub-contractor had already produced improved results. Robin added that both CLG and EADS UK had allocated improved resources and staffing to the project, and that both parties had improved their engagement with the fire and rescue service.

Robin said that he was confident that the end product would work well for fire services, but that work still needed to be done on embracing the end user community to ensure that the requirements of each Fire and Rescue Service were being met.

Robin said that he was committed to EADS delivering to the agreed standard, and hoped to see equipment delivered to four regional control centres (East Midlands, West Midlands, North East and the South West) with one Fire and Rescue Service in each region going live by mid-2011.

Cllr Walker stated that in his view much progress had been made and that FRAs were feeling more positive about the project. Roger updated Members on progress made since the last Committee meeting in March. Roger noted that CLG had recently finished the process of elaborating requirements from the fire and rescue service, and that individual requirements had been taken into account. The testing process for the whole system was to shortly commence, and an Assurance Board had recently been set up to discuss technical details of the project. Progress had also been made in further rolling out of station end equipment and mobile data terminals, and Fire and Rescue Services had responded positively to the equipment that they had received. The legal contracts between CLG, LACCs and FRAs were at final draft stage. CLG were also to shortly issue payments to help regional teams with their work on delivering the project.

Members suggested that the new Government may still cancel the project. Robin responded that EADS needed to undertake further work to convince the Government and the Fire and Rescue service of the worth and credibility of the project, and needed to further improve relations with the fire and rescue community. He extended an invitation to the Committee to visit the EADS

plant at Newport.

Members asked whether Fire and Rescue Services were compelled to accept the project once completed. Roger responded that powers of direction did exist, but that FRSs would not accept and want to use the project if it was not proven to work, and added that those responsible for FiReControl would have to ensure that the project was fully functional.

Commissioner Dobson said the view amongst Chief Fire Officers was that fire and rescue services had been better engaged over the last 12 to 18 months, but that further engagement was necessary, along with improved visibility of the project's progress. Commissioner Dobson added that a number of fire and rescue services would need investment in their current control systems in the short-term and asked whether it would be possible to install a non networked version of the system in those authorities which needed to replace legacy systems.

The Chairman tabled the following motion:

“This committee reiterates the LGA’s position on FiReControl and urges the new Minister to bear in mind the views of the LGA and the Communities and Local Government Select Committee.

We further urge the Minister to listen to fire authorities and Members’ calls for freedom and flexibility when deciding future Government policy in this regard.”

The motion, being seconded, was put to a vote and carried by a majority.

Decision

- The Committee agreed the following:

“This committee reiterates the LGA’s position on FiReControl and urges the new Minister to bear in mind the views of the LGA and the Communities and Local Government Select Committee.

We further urge the Minister to listen to fire authorities and Members’ calls for freedom and flexibility when deciding future Government policy in this regard.”

- The Committee agreed that Cllr Hobbs represent the FSMC at the various CLG FiReControl bodies, with Cllr Holland as substitute Member for Cllr Hobbs and Cllr Walker to feed in to this work.

2. Future of National Functions

The Committee received a short presentation from John Tizard, Director of the Centre for Public Service Partnerships (CPSP), in which John noted that CPSP

had been commissioned by Communities and Local Government and the Chief Fire Officers Association, to look at the possible transfer of a range of national functions currently undertaken by the Department. John said that work on this was moving forward and a number of options, including the LGA Group taking on some of the functions, were being considered, but that it was clear that the long-term arrangements should be owned by the fire and rescue sector. A further workshop was to be held on 10 June.

Members expressed concern over the ability of the LGA Group to take on the range of national functions cited in the report, and said that the Government needed to examine whether all the current functions were necessary and that any transfer must be accompanied by appropriate levels of funding.

Decision

Members agreed that national functions be reconsidered at the next Committee meeting in July, and that Lead Members be consulted prior to the meeting.

Members agreed that the Fire Services Forum be allowed proper consideration of this item.

Members agreed that the Committee should be represented at the workshop on 10 June.

Action

Officers to submit a report to the Fire Services Management Committee and Fire Services Forum in due course. **Trish O'Flynn**

Officers to invite FSMC Members to the next national functions workshop on 10 June.

3. Sector Led Improvement

The Committee heard updates on the Operational Assessment (OpA) peer review programme from Caroline Bosdet (IDeA) and Susan Johnson (Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service), who noted that the programme had proven to be successful in its first year, with feedback proving to be largely very positive. Members who had been involved in the programme also noted that had found the programme to be very worthwhile.

Members asked about the involvement of Chief Fire Officers within the programme. Officers responded that the programme intended to give enough notice to senior officers and Members to ensure their participation. Officers added that there remained capacity in the sector to run these programmes through the partnership working with CFOA.

Members argued that there was a strong role for the LGA Group Improvement Board to play in examining this work and ensuring that the importance of the Committee in fire and rescue service improvement was properly acknowledged.

Members suggested that the IDeA needed to continue to ensure that this work was widely publicised, and said that the best practice workshop sessions needed to have stronger Member involvement.

Decision

Members agreed the report and that a further report be brought to the Committee in six months' time.

4. LGA Annual Fire Conference 2010: fire service – the next five years

Members noted the report.

5. Industrial relations update

Members received a brief update on industrial relations from Sarah Messenger, who noted that Local Government Employers were assisting a small number of authorities with industrial relations issues and that a good response had been received to the survey on use of the good industrial relations protocol.

Cllr Arbour tabled a motion that the Committee recommend to the LGA members on the NJC a zero per cent increase in pay for all fire service staff for 2010 / 11.

The motion, being seconded, was put to a vote and carried by a majority.

Decision

Members agreed that the Committee formally recommend to the LGA members on the NJC a zero per cent increase in pay for all fire service staff for 2010 / 11.

6. Notes and decisions from the previous meeting

The note of the last meeting was agreed as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of apologies from Cllr Navin Shah.

7. Any other business

Retained Duty system

Cllr Hammond said that the Committee should undertake a formal piece of

work on the challenges facing the retained duty system.

Decision

Members agreed that a proposal for a formal piece of work on RDS be brought to the next meeting, and that Cllr Hammond liaise on this further with officers.

Pensions update

Cllr Walker updated the Committee on the firefighters' pension scheme, noting that the Firefighters Pensions Committee had recently met to discuss the viability of the scheme in the long term.

Cllr Walker also noted that the scheme's current rules meant that some Chief Fire Officers were not able to retire before the age of 55 years. The Committee supported Cllr Walker's position that Chief Fire Officers should be required to work the full term of their role as it was part of the contractual agreement with the Fire Authority when they took on the job.

Date of next meeting: 19 July 2010, Local Government House, London