

Item 3

The future of national functions

Summary

This report updates members on developments since their last meeting, sets out national functions that could be included in a bid to CLG and proposes how the LG Group and CFOA might handle those functions.

Recommendations

Members are asked to

- Receive an update;
- Agree the LG Group and CFOA make a joint offer to CLG to take over a specific group of national functions as set out in paragraph 6.

Action

As determined by members

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The future of national functions

Background

1. In July Members agreed in principle that there is a role for the Local Government (LG) Group in coordinating and commissioning the limited number of functions that need a national perspective, and noted that the proposals in the paper represented a significant opportunity for the Committee to take a greater policy role within the fire sector. That said, the Committee was clear that only those functions which could be reasonably accommodated and with minimum bureaucracy should be considered and on a case by case basis.
2. Subsequently, the Committee's Lead Members met with the CFOA Presidential team on 4 August and agreed that a partnership between the LG Group and CFOA would be the best way to take forward, on behalf of the sector, those functions which have a political or professional interest. (see paragraph 6 below.)

Current context

3. The Fire Futures project aims to set the future shape and direction of the English Fire and Rescue Service and the respective roles of local and central Government within that. The outcomes of that project, due in late autumn, will give an indication of how that relationship might develop. A potential CFOA/LG Group joint offer about the transfer of functions from CLG to the sector can be seen to give a strong decentralist message and be in tune with the government's thinking.
4. The Minister continues to streamline activities carried out by CLG, stepping back from some fire workstreams including: leadership of equality and diversity; requirements around Regional Management Boards; disbanding the Business and Community Safety Forum; and ending intervention in Cornwall in FRS – all in keeping with the principles of localism and decentralisation. The Minister has concluded that it is a matter for fire and rescue services and the wider fire sector to determine, in going forward, what structures should be in place to offer advice on fire related matters.
5. In July the National Audit Office published a critical report of Firebuy, the national procurement agency for the fire service. The future of the organisation is under review as part of the Government's review of all Arms Length Bodies. A proposed joint LG Group/CFOA position for consideration by Members is a separate item on the agenda.

What is the LG Group and CFOA offer?

6. The following individual functions were considered as being suitable for delivery by the LG Group/CFOA partnership.

(a) Procurement/Firebuy

The LG Group/CFOA proposition is that fire and rescue services should either singularly or collectively or with other partners, establish their contractual obligations directly with suppliers. This will allow greater local determination over local requirements and procurement routes. If the Government decides to discontinue Firebuy, the LG Group/CFOA consider that there would be merit in a lead authority or local authority company providing the management and governance through an enhanced CFOA National Procurement Board. As well as assisting with co-ordination this Board could take on responsibility for good practice, strategic development and innovation.

(b) Fire safety national marketing campaigns

Although neither the LG Group nor CFOA have resources to run full scale marketing campaigns in place of CLG, there is value in continuing some of this work to ensure that key messages about prevention continue to have an impact in communities. Co-ordination of campaigns between different services, the sharing of notable practice and core messages could form the basis of the partnership programme of work.

(c) Equality and diversity

As agreed at the FSMC, the LG Group would continue to lead this work, adopting a light touch approach, where it genuinely adds value to the sector. Leadership on the FRS Equality Framework, enhancing the LG Group network, peer reviews and the sharing of good practice and Member materials could form key parts of a joint workplan.

(d) EU standards

The responsibility for EU standards and identifying their impact on FRAs currently lies with the CFRA. The LG Group European and International Unit and CFOA could take a monitoring role so that officers and Members were alerted when an issue requiring lobbying arose.

(e) IRMP guidance

IRMP is a key plank in the shaping of fire and rescue provision to local communities. As such the LG Group and CFOA believe that the principle of local determination of risk and corresponding allocation of resources should remain a matter for individual FRAs. CFOA will continue to lead this work with the LG Group contributing to various elements such as the innovation conferences which are a useful platform to share good practice and learning.

(f) Long term capability management and New Dimensions

The LG Group and CFOA already have developed governance arrangements to assure Government of the delivery of the capabilities provided under New Dimensions. This should continue.

(g) Research and statistics

Fire research is vitally important in both analysing existing, and informing future policy. However, there is currently an uncoordinated and fragmented approach to the commissioning and dissemination of data and analysis. The LG Group/CFOA partnership believes that a more coherent and effective approach can be developed through a standing group to develop a shared national fire research and statistics strategy with clear outcomes and links to sector-led priorities.

(h) Improvement and support

The LG Group and CFOA are committed to sustaining the pace of continuous improvement across the sector. We propose to build on the existing arrangements to champion the sector led approach that exploits the improvement expertise and innovation adopted by individual FRSs for the benefit of all.

There are two more areas – **Operational Guidance and Workforce Development** – where we are keen to signal our willingness to take on activity from CLG. However, these require further work on a planned transition to ensure clarity around liabilities and funding before finalising our offer.

Conclusions and next steps

7. If Members are content with the CFOA/LG Group partnership approach, and the handling of the workstreams set out in paragraph 6, we will:
 - Provide Lead Members with a draft LG Group/CFOA letter setting out our offer as an opening to negotiations;
 - bring a paper to the next Fire Commission meeting reporting on developments.

Financial Implications

8. Notwithstanding the pressures on central government to make cuts, some of the current national functions do have funding attached, some of which could be transferred to the LG Group/CFOA as the partnership takes on these responsibilities. While most discussions will be predicated on doing business differently, discussions about funding will still need to take place with government to ensure that any available resource is secured.

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