

Item 5

Fire Futures

Summary

This report provides members an update on the Fire Futures project, sets out proposed handling arrangements for inputting into the project and suggests key messages to be incorporated.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the contents of the paper
- Confirm handling arrangements for development of the LGA submission
- Agree preliminary points to make for the 4 workstreams

Action

As determined by Members.

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Fire Futures

Background

1. The Fire Minister, Bob Neill MP, has initiated a review called Fire Futures to consider a number of aspects of how the Fire and Rescue Service may need to evolve over the coming years. A Ministerial workshop on 28 July was attended by 88 people from across the English FRS, including members of the FSMC, along with other stakeholders.
2. The scope and terms of reference for the review agreed by Ministers are at **Annex A**. The current timetable is for a report setting out policy options to be submitted to Ministers by late autumn. The review will explore how the fire sector can face the challenge of maintaining effectiveness and achieving value for money, alongside the expectation from government that the service reflect localism, decentralisation, transparency, accountability and the Big Society.

The review going forward

3. Fire Futures has been structured into four workstreams, chaired and supported by volunteers from across the sector. The four workstreams are:

Workstream 1 - the role of the fire and rescue service and how it might be better delivered, chaired by Cllr Paul Shannon – Greater Manchester FRS, Deputy Chairman FSMC. Key questions:

- Are the current set of roles and functions the right ones going forward?
- Should the FRS take on additional roles?
- Could delivery of current functions by others better meet these objectives now or in the future and, if so, what would the delivery model look like?

Workstream 2 - efficiency, effectiveness and productivity, chaired by Max Hood, County Fire Officer, West Sussex Council. Key questions:

- Are there changes in how fire and rescue services are provided which would enable improvements in cost effectiveness in the provision of Fire and Rescue Services in England while improving or at worst having a neutral impact on effectiveness?
- Are there opportunities to improve productivity?

Workstream 3 - localism and accountability, chaired by Cllr Andre Gonzalez De Savage, Customers and Communities portfolio holder, Northamptonshire County Council. Key question:

- Would alternative community engagement and governance structures improve localism and performance in the delivery of Fire and Rescue Services now and in the medium/long term?

Workstream 4 - national interest, chaired by Brian Robinson, London Fire Commissioner 1991-2003 and president of the Association for Specialist Fire Protection. Key question:

- Where does the national and government interest lie?
4. The process and governance around this exercise has been highly unsatisfactory and it remains unclear as to the mechanism for feeding in views and submissions from representative bodies. That said, we see no reason not to proceed with an LGA submission and understand that CFOA are taking a similar position. The timescales remain challenging, with workstream leads being tasked to complete their research and produce a first report by the week beginning 18 October.
 5. Following our representations, the Chairman of the FSMC sits on the Fire Futures Steering Group, and workstream leads also have a Sounding Board to test out their ideas. Workstream leads report that although they are being supported by CLG officials to finalise their work areas and crystallise thoughts around what each will include, the timelines and expectations are over-optimistic. It is clear that workstream 4 remains ill-defined and there is more work to be done to ensure that whatever emerges from this does not destabilise the overall recommendations.
 6. Two elected Members are leading key workstreams, Cllr Shannon and Cllr Andre Gonzalez De Savage. They are keen to engage with as many FRAs as possible and in order to accurately reflect the thinking in the sector, we have asked all FRA Chairs for views to inform an LG Group response. Despite the challenging timescales, it is vitally important that the sector is given an opportunity to feed in to the individual workstreams. Although we have sought views by email we propose that each workstream lead comes to the special Fire Commission meeting on 24 September to ensure full exploration and discussion of issues which will ensure key messages are registered.
 7. Preliminary thoughts about issues the LGA would want to input on each of the workstreams are as follows:

The role of the fire and rescue service and how it might be better delivered

8. The LG Group does not believe that most of the areas suggested by the review are sufficiently ground breaking, expressing as they do existing issues that ultimately will be resolved by local adoption and the sharing of experience and good practice. The Group instead calls for a radical reshaping of the state through devolved place-based budgets and this should form the basis of our submission.
9. There are some strategic areas identified that would benefit from a thorough examination. These are:
 - a single service provider for some or all emergency services;
 - a levy on insurance premiums for building and vehicle insurance to reflect the economic cost of fire;
 - greater opportunities for charging for discretionary services.

Efficiency, effectiveness and productivity

10. The CLG/LG Group's Productivity Programme involves working with over 60 councils who are exploring/implementing alternative service delivery models for areas such as shared services, procurement, capital and shared assets. Early indications of gains are expected by the end of September and we will want to explore the linkages and shared learning as it applies to the FRS in our response.
11. The LG Group is developing a new approach to driving up performance and providing an appropriate level of assurance using a more rigorous peer review process. This provides the basis to argue for further reductions in inspection, assessment and data returns to Government.
12. We will want to include a section on performance data to signal that a new approach is needed that makes more use of the data that councils, FRAs and partners already use to manage their own performance.

Localism and accountability

13. The FRS is already a localised service that meets the needs of the communities that it serves. There may, however, be room for FRSs to engage more with their communities through:
 - better consultation with the public on changes to IRMPs;
 - greater use of modern marketing techniques;
 - more effective use of stations as hubs of the community; and
 - FRA members and Chief Officers developing their profile and accessibility to the communities that they serve
 - Taking a role in participatory budgets schemes.
14. The Retained Duty System is a good example of how the FRS is already well integrated with communities, using volunteers to delivery key services, and puts the FRS in a strong position to meet the national challenge of the Big Society. There is much good practice we can cite here eg partnerships with Age Concern etc.
15. Highlighting the valuable and effective democratic oversight role of councillors on FRAs will be central to our submission. As the only democratically representatives of communities at a local level, who live, work and understand the issues facing their communities, they are already accountable to local communities. This has been confirmed by high public satisfaction levels with the level of service provided by the FRS.
16. Broadening and deepening partnership working at the local level, and resisting a silo mentality, will continue to be a challenge for the FRS in the current financial climate will also need to be explored.

The national interest

17. There is agreement that some functions have to be undertaken at the national level: terrorism and resilience, flooding, New Dimensions and legislative/regulatory issues and central funding, for example. However the place where the remaining functions sit should be decided through sector-led discussion, with the FSMC putting forward the views of the 46 FRAs. The question of a National Framework with localism can work but with the need to have a will to share best practice amongst and between elected members and between senior officers.

Conclusions and next steps

18. Following the Fire Commission meeting on 24 September, and subject to the views of the Committee, officers will draft the Fire Services Management Committee's submission for clearance by Lead Members.

Financial Implications

19. Detailed financial implications will need to be determined once recommendations are framed. Reports will be advanced in their development ahead of the Spending Review on 20 October but will need re-working once the settlement is known.

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Annex A – CLG Fire Futures scope and terms of reference

Working together with the sector, develop a joint view on the future shape and direction of the FRS and the respective roles of local and central Government in that.

This should involve consideration of the range of new and evolving challenges facing the Service and how these will impact particularly in relation to role, structure, governance and efficiency.

The Strategic Review will develop a range of robust future strategy options for the Fire and Rescue Service and make recommendations to Ministers for how these should be taken forward.

Key issues are likely to include the following, although we will take our lead from the Sector itself in terms of the current and future remit and strategic priorities for the FRS over the short, medium and longer term.

- The current and future delivery model for the Service, taking account of the work that the sector is already leading on decentralisation, and considering how this can be taken further to drive increased localism.
- The efficiency of the Service and how this can be further improved to enhance value for money.
- The respective roles and responsibilities of central Government and local partners including consideration of the future role of a national framework.
- Implication of all of the above for the FRS workforce and for the future structure and governance of the Service.

The review will be within the context of our clear commitment to achieving value for money whilst prioritising the front line, improving resilience and ending forced regionalisation of the service.