

**Item 7**

## **Work Programme for 2010 - 11**

### **Purpose and Summary**

This paper sets out a programme of work for the Fire Services Management Committee for 2010-11. In doing so, it

- attaches a broad priority to each topic;
- proposes LGA objectives and activity for each issue.

### **Recommendation**

Members to decide whether the work programme set out below reflects their view of the issues on which the LGA should focus in 2009-10.

### **Action**

If agreed, this programme will form the basis of action for members, officers and advisers over the coming months

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## Work Programme for 2010 - 11

### Background

1. The Local Government Group business plan for 2010/11 sets out the LG Group's focus for the year ahead. It builds on last year's plan, which was the first time we had a plan for the whole LG Group. We have listened to councils and councillors and this year our plan has a greater focus, with five key priorities - all aimed at supporting local councils.
2. These are:
  - **Reputation** – building and maintaining the national and local reputation of councils. To be able to play its full part in the transformation of public services, local government must be strong and confident and seen by local people, the public as a whole and Government, as credible, effective local leaders, service providers and employers.
  - **Innovation and value for money** – supporting councils to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness. There are major pressures on local government funding as the Government seeks to balance its books. Tough decisions are needed, but there are opportunities to lobby for greater freedom and flexibility and freedom to reform local government funding. Efficiency gains will need to be driven by greater joined-up working at local level and innovation must be released by putting users at the heart of service design and delivery.
  - **Local democracy** – ensuring councils are at the forefront of greater local decision making on spending priorities and service delivery and leading improvement work across the sector. There is an emerging political consensus that the current highly centralised model of the state is not meeting 21<sup>st</sup> century needs. Local public services need to be liberated from unnecessary central controls so they can develop tailored responses to the challenges of their communities in a co-ordinated and efficient way. We need a new framework of accountability that liberates public sector partners to work together more effectively, and ensures they are driven by and responsive to the needs of their communities.
  - **Economy** – supporting councils to lead their communities to prosperity in the economic recovery. Leading the local economy is key to leading the local community. In the face of the economic downturn, tighter public spending and the UK's commitment to carbon reduction, more will be expected of local government in providing leadership and generating capital for regeneration.
  - **Customer service** – ensuring the LGA Group enhances the reputation of local government and delivers value for money. With councils facing increasing challenges arising from the economic situation, it is more important than ever that as a national organisation we add value. Through our major change programme *Getting Closer* we will:

- i. Ensure that the LGA Group is more focussed on councils and councillors.
  - ii. Further integrate the work of the LGA and the central bodies.
  - iii. Reduce our costs and maximise efficiencies.
3. The 2010/11 business planning process has been driven by the collaboration of the six organisations of the LG Group. We work together to support, promote and improve local government. The coming year could be one of potentially significant change - by identifying and focusing on joint shared priorities we will ensure that LG Group will be more efficient and effective in the way we serve local government.

### **FSMC Work Programme**

4. The FSMC work programme falls under the LGA business plan broad priorities, while being flexible enough to recognise that events will inevitably introduce new issues and raise others up the agenda. The priority work areas are:
  - Comprehensive Spending Review (Economy)
  - Improvement and Development (Reputation)
  - National Functions (Local democracy)
  - Fire Futures (Local democracy)
  - FiReControl (Efficiency and value for money)
5. There are a number of second order topics that the FSMC will also support and the full work plan for 2010-11 can be found at **Annex A**.

### **Performance and development**

6. Many Boards already regard sector performance and improvement as an important part of the work they have been doing. The remit of the new Programme Boards reinforces this responsibility and serves as an invitation to Boards to review their approach and consider the extent to which they should seek to maintain an ongoing understanding of council priorities and performance in their areas of responsibility and how best to do so.
7. Two issues arise:
  - a. **First:** the Group will need to be in a position to respond quickly to councils that may require support on a range of issues. We will need to be confident that as a sector and as a Group we have the capacity to deal with these issues. This issue is probably most acute in high profile areas such as children's services and adult social care where to date the government has provided significant resources and support to councils that have been identified with challenges in these areas through their use of field forces and service advisors.

- b. If they have not already done so Boards will want to consider the extent to which they maintain an ongoing understanding of council priorities and performance in their areas of responsibility and how best to achieve this. The Improvement Board is charged with oversight of the performance of the sector as a whole but is keen to work with all the respective boards to ensure that they are fully engaged in the service areas that come under their remit.
  - c. **Second:** the CAA data will have a relatively short shelf life and the future of the NIS is unclear. A new approach to performance data is needed that makes more use of the data that councils and partners already use to manage their own performance. In due course this should provide an easily accessible resource enabling the sector to monitor its performance across a range of locally important and selected indicators.
  - d. In the meantime members are invited to offer views and suggestions about the type of performance information they would find helpful in monitoring performance of the sector within their remit.
8. In addition, on 13 August, the Secretary of State announced plans to disband the Audit Commission and refocus audit on helping local people hold councils and local public bodies to account for local spending decisions. In summary:
  - The Commission's responsibilities for overseeing and delivering local audit and inspections will stop
  - The Commission's research activities will end
  - Audit functions will be removed to the private sector
  - Councils will be free to appoint their own independent external auditors from a more open and competitive market, regulated within a statutory framework and overseen by the National Audit Office
  - The powers of the Local Government Ombudsman will be strengthened, making findings legally enforceable
  - There will be a new audit framework for local health bodies.
9. The new system will be in place from 2012/13 financial year with the necessary legislation being sought in this Parliamentary session.

## **Comprehensive Spending Review**

10. The LG Group has reached agreement with CLG for topslice to be paid to a single specified body for a set of agreed high level outcomes, allowing us to allocate funding and decide on the best means of delivery to achieve those outcomes. In return we are bidding for RSG topslice of £31.5m - a 30% reduction. CLG is currently consulting councils on these proposals.
11. Over the summer, work has been underway across the LG Group on the RSG top slice bid, building on a consultation exercise with councils carried out in the Spring by Rob Whiteman, Managing Director of Local Government Improvement and Development, and further discussions with councils at the LG Group conference.

12. Members are invited to review the priorities in the draft submission prior to this being signed off by the LG Group Executive on 16 September - where Board Chairs will have the opportunity to feed back - and Resources Panel the following week. As well as forming the basis of the submission to CLG, these priorities will be central to the LG Group's strategy and business plan for 2011/12, which will be discussed further with members over the autumn.

### **Conclusions and next steps**

13. Subject to member agreement this programme will form the basis of action for members, officers and advisers over the coming months

### **Financial Implications**

14. Delivery of the work programme will be achieved through existing LG Group resources.

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