

Item 3

The future of national functions

Summary

This report updates Members on developments since their last meeting and provides a summary of the next steps.

Recommendations

Members are asked to

1. Receive an update;
2. Agree the LG Group and CFOA continue to work together to discuss individual functions at paragraph 6.

Action

As determined by Members.

Contact Officer: Helen Murray
Phone No: 020 7664 3266
Email: Helen.Murray@local.gov.uk

Item 3

The future of national functions

Background

1. In September, Members agreed that the LG Group and CFOA should work together to make a joint offer to the Department for Communities and Local Government to take over the following specific group of national functions:
 - 1.1 National procurement
 - 1.2 Tackling underperformance
 - 1.3 Operational guidance
 - 1.4 National resilience assurance
 - 1.5 IRMP guidance
 - 1.6 Workforce development
 - 1.7 National fire safety campaign
 - 1.8 Fire research
 - 1.9 Equality and Diversity
 - 1.10 European Union and standards

- 2.. Following the Chairman's positive meeting with the Minister where he signalled his agreement to this approach, officers have been pursuing the detail of these arrangements, and seeking to understand more clearly the role of CLG in these policy areas. A further update was provided at the Fire Commission meeting in February. CLG have already scaled back activity in many of these areas and propose no further activity or funding for most of these, and therefore there is no difficulty in formalising these. In matters of national resilience and interoperability, as well as assurance to the Minister on significant operational events, CLG do see a continuing involvement for themselves and are keen to discuss a commissioning relationship with the LG Group/CFOA.

Current context

3. For the two areas of Operational Guidance and Workforce Development, greater clarity around the Department's expectations and requirements is still required. The conclusions of the LG Group project group commissioned by the Fire Commission to look at the Fire Service College will feed in to this.

4. Although we have not yet received confirmation, we believe we have reached agreement with the Department in the following areas:
 - 4.1 National Procurement – beyond the transition of the ongoing framework contracts, central government will not seek to sponsor or fund any sector-led activity;

Item 3

- 4.2 Tackling underperformance (and improvement support) – no Whitehall funding or resources for specific FRS assessment or support activity. FRAs will have access to the LG Group’s framework for self regulation and improvement involving peer reviews, tools for self assessment and benchmarking, dissemination of good practice, and brokering support where it is required. We do need to develop an early warning system and understand when and how Ministerial intervention might be deployed as a last resort;
- 4.3 National Resilience Assurance – CLG will continue to fund the current arrangements to support assurance of the delivery of capabilities under New Dimensions for the time being. In time, it will want to consider longer term funding models, but agree that current arrangements are a good model of a sector led approach;
- 4.4 IRMP Guidance – This is a matter for FRAs both individually and collectively and there is no role for CLG. In light of this, we need clarification that the annual IRMP returns will now cease;
- 4.5 National Fire Safety campaign – CLG intends to continue running these campaigns until the end of the existing contract, after which they will cease for the foreseeable future. The sector will be unable to run national campaigns, but we anticipate that the “fire kills” brand and material will be made available to FRAs for locally co-ordinated campaigns;
- 4.6 Fire research – CLG activity in this area is significantly reduced but closer sector involvement in the framing of this research will be vital;
- 4.7 Equality and Diversity – CLG will no longer undertake practical activity or provide funding in this area. Ownership should remain with individual FRAs and the sector as a whole and the LG Group/CFOA's work in this area is already well established;
- 4.8 European Union and Standards – Government will continue to represent the Country’s best interests at the European level. The LG Group / CFOA intend to have a role in monitoring and advocating on behalf of the sector in Europe, so there will be an ongoing need for discussion. Work on the implications of the Working Time Directive is already well advanced.

Conclusions and next steps

5. Discussions so far between the LG Group, CFOA and CLG have focused on the need for a clearer, more open and equitable relationship between the sector and the government. Although this principle is well accepted, translating this to practical action is proving more challenging. We believe the best way to demonstrate our commitment and ability to lead this work is to swiftly develop an impressive programme of work which will bring about changes the sector wants to see.

Financial Implications

6. Most of these activities are currently unfunded by Government so activity within the LG Group/CFOA will depend entirely on LG Group/CFOA resources.

Item 3

Within the LG Group, proposed Programme Board budgets are to be discussed at the LG Group Executive in March. Members have expressed concern over the scale of these activities given the current organisational changes within the LG Group. However, managerially, officers judge that much of this is 'light touch' activity and can therefore be accommodated within our existing work programme.

Contact Officer: Helen Murray
Phone No: 020 7664 3266
Email: Helen.Murray@local.gov.uk