

## **Fire Services Management Committee work programme progress report**

### **Purpose**

For noting and discussion.

### **Summary**

This report offers an overview of the context and main issues affecting the Board in the 2010-11 Board. It also provides Members with a summary of the Committee's achievements over the last year. Priorities for 2011-12 will be discussed by the Committee in September.

Feedback at and outside the meeting would be welcomed.

### **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the contents of the paper.

### **Action**

Members and officers to feedback. Actions as directed by Members.

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### **Background**

1. The dominant aspect of the political environment after the General Election was the need to recover the public finances and the implications for the public sector which was set out in the Comprehensive Spending Review. Within FRAs, concerns about the funding settlement and what this would mean for frontline services, the future of FiReControl, sector-led improvement post-Audit Commission inspections, National Functions and the Fire Futures exercise all provided early priorities for the Committee.
2. The Committee subsequently decided to undertake a piece of work on the future of the Fire Service College; and a working group was set up with CFOA to examine and improve fire peer support challenge.
3. The FSMC met 6 times throughout the year with an additional FiReControl meeting in January 2011 at London Fire Brigade HQ. The Fire Commission met 4 times.

### **Strategic issues**

4. Overall our assessment is that we delivered important shifts in Government policy, for example FiReControl, and good progress has been made in other priority areas. However in addition to this, the breadth and reach of the work of the Committee has expanded over the past year as Members have embraced the opportunities the localism agenda brings to the fire sector.
5. The overarching thrust of the Government's decentralisation agenda and a recalibrating of the central/local relationship is welcome and Members have been keen to demonstrate the maturity of the sector, with a clear emphasis on the sector determining its own future. With the Fire Minister reviewing a range of policies, close political engagement in influencing and delivering a good outcome for FRAs has been an important activity for Members.
6. In addition to the work priority areas, the FSMC/Fire Commission has examined a range of issues of interest to the sector as a whole, including emerging threats, health and safety, sprinklers legislation, business continuity, 7/7, relocalisation of business rates, fire safety in rented accommodation, pensions, the problem of false alarms, and Firebuy.
7. The LG Group appoints Members of the FSMC to a range of national bodies. Over the past year these have included the Pensions Committee, the National

Resilience board, the Fire Service College Working Group and others and Members have reported back to the Committee on developments, seeking a steer, where necessary.

8. Members drawn from the LG Group hold 9 of the 14 seats on the Employers' Sides of both the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services and the National Joint Council for Brigade Managers of Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services.

### **Achievements**

9. The Committee has achieved some significant successes throughout the year. The headline successes are:
  - Successfully lobbying for a general power in the Localism Bill, so that this is available to all FRAs;
  - Establishing a strategic partnership with CFOA in order to deliver a range of national functions;
  - Lobbying on the Spending Review, making the case that councils, including FRAs, are the most efficient part of the public sector and have achieved savings targets set;
  - Delivering a range of opportunities through the Committee and Fire Commission for Members to lobby and speak with the Fire Minister, and following up specific points in correspondence;
  - Leading the debate on FiReControl, with an understanding of the national picture and residual funding of £1.8m available to all FRAs and the LG Group/CFOA;
  - Sharing good practice on the Retained Duty System through a seminar and publishing case studies for creating an effective on-call system;
  - Delivered 10 peer reviews/challenges;
  - Delivery of a targeted Fire and Rescue leadership academy led by a Member Peer;
  - Developing and promoting a sector-wide position on the future of the Fire Service College;
  - A prestigious Fire Conference in March in Gateshead with 240 delegates and positive feedback about the plenaries and workshops, themed around 7 issues to support FRAs in making efficiencies and publication of *Fire and Rescue Services: Going the extra mile*. 92% of those who responded to our evaluation survey were very or fairly satisfied with the event overall;
  - Substantially influencing the *Fire Futures* project thus ensuring that recommendations were in line with the views of Members;
  - The provision of induction packs to all FRA Members, including policy positions, events information and improvement offers and new Employers' Side members;

- Press releases on the Fire Service College, calls for action and answers on FiReControl, new fire regulations to protect people in flats, and warnings about wildfires.

### **Wider Group activity**

10. Our work within the National Joint Council included:

- Delivery of a zero national pay increase position in the NJC for LAFRS without industrial unrest for the second successive year;
- A negotiated compensation settlement to the approximately 15,000 Employment Tribunal cases lodged against FRAs across the UK by both the Fire Brigades Union and Retained Firefighters Union at a level members, legal representatives, and advisers believe to be a very good deal for FRAs;
- Agreement on a raft of changes to the terms and conditions in the Scheme of Conditions of Service (Grey Book) to ensure compliance with the Regulations from the end of the compensation period;
- Joint delivery of Industrial Relations training within a number of FRSs, building upon the Joint National Protocol;
- Joint delivery of conciliation, assisting local parties to identify a mutually acceptable resolution to local issues. This included resolution of an issue which had resulted in strike action;
- The introduction of industrial relations training for senior management teams at local level;
- Preparation work with the Advisory Forum and a wider group of HR advisers to consider potential future negotiating priorities.

### **Other issues**

11. Links have been strengthened between the FSMC and the Fire Commission with a number of important strategic issues being discussed at the Commission and thereby shaped and informed the FSMC view.
12. In the LG Group FRAs benefit from a single point of contact at senior management level for all FRAs and this has proved useful in ensuring officers and Members can provide support on individual issues, raise issues at the FSMC and signpost to experts. FRAs are able to benefit from the reductions in subscriptions afforded to councils and all FRAs remain in full membership of the Group. Alongside councils, all FRAs will now be offered a free peer challenge every three years.

### **Knowledge, networks and communication**

13. Across all issues, we have strengthened the flow of information and communication between the Group and the sector. Specific actions we have taken include:

- Refreshing the LG Group's Fire bulletin;
- Providing a comprehensive update paper for both the Committee and the Commission;
- Making good use of our professional advisers, on issues such as operational assurance, and finance;
- Raised the profile of the fire sector within local government by hosting a workshop at the LG Group's Annual Conference;
- Regular features and news in brief in First magazine which goes out to 20,000 councillors.

### **Looking forward**

14. We will be discussing a new workplan with the FSMC in September and it would be good to have Members' views of priorities in advance, so that these can be fully taken into account. It is clear though that continuing to support FRAs to make reductions in spending through efficiencies and improving productivity will remain an important priority. The final two years of this Spending Review will present even more challenges – particularly for the Metropolitan FRAs - since the reductions are backloaded.
15. The relationship between national, regional, local and community is a constant strand in all our discussions with Government and ensuring that FRAs can take the maximum benefit from this new approach is important. Meanwhile we will need to win important discussions with Government about what a new National Framework contains, and the main mechanisms for lifting performance to ensure that all FRAs can operate at the level of the best.
16. Wider reforms to the pension system could also have an impact on industrial relations, both locally and nationally. Discussions between all public sector unions and the Government are on-going. Whilst a number of public sector unions took strike action in June, fire service unions were not involved. It is anticipated that should talks not result in a mutually satisfactory outcome, fire service industrial action in whatever form is likely to take place in the Autumn.

### **Resource implications**

17. The importance of the Board's business for Fire Authorities is well understood within the LG Group. Nevertheless, pressures on the Group's finances has meant a significant restructure and mean we will need to look even more vigorously at focusing on the most important issues, making better use of the resources we have.

### **Implications for Wales**

18 July 2011

**Item 4**

18. We have recently spoken to colleagues in the Welsh LGA about the fire agenda and new links with the WLGA's Fire Panel will be established next year.