

## **FSMC update paper**

### **Purpose of report**

For information.

### **Summary**

The report outlines issues of interest to the Committee not covered under the other items on the agenda.

### **Recommendation**

Members to note the update.

### **Action**

Officers to progress as appropriate.

**Contact officer:** Helen Murray  
**Position:** Head of Programmes, LG Group  
**Phone no:** 020 7664 3266  
**E-mail:** [helen.murray@local.gov.uk](mailto:helen.murray@local.gov.uk)

## **FSMC update paper**

### **Localism Bill: charging for False Alarms callout**

1. The LG Group, CFOA and London Fire Brigade have been lobbying for an amendment to the Localism Bill concerning the ability of FRS to charge for false alarms. There is a concern that the current drafting of Clause 10, which deals with the power of Fire and Rescue Authorities to charge for responding to fire signals from AFA where mechanical error was the cause, is unnecessarily restrictive and in fact does not address the policy intention of reducing the number of false AFA callouts, which is a huge drain on resources across the fire service nationally.
2. Following positive discussions with CFOA, industry and DCLG in August, we had hoped the proposal to have the word “mismanaged” (alongside “misinstalled” and “malfunctioned”) would be inserted into the Bill. However, DCLG have now confirmed that no change will be made. We will continue to lobby on this point, and the President of CFOA has written to the Fire Minister supporting our case.

### **Progress on capital funding allocation – consultation launched**

3. LG Group and CFOA met with DCLG at the beginning of August to discuss the methodology for distributing capital funding for the next three years (a total of £210m, £70m per year). The LG Group and CFOA have registered the difficulties about a burdensome bidding process on already stretched FRAs. For speed and clarity, the advice of finance directors has been that the current distribution formula, although not perfect, would be preferable.
4. DCLG are now launching a formal consultation seeking views on the distribution and have partially accepted our case. The suggestion, subject to views, is that the fund will be split into two parts: allocations based on an efficiency fund, administered via a bidding process, and a pro-rata distribution using the current method.
5. The consultation will be seeking views on bid criteria, the proportion of funding available for distribution versus the proportion of funding available to be bid against, the number of bidding rounds and sharing best practice.

### **Fire Service College**

6. On 5 September, the Fire Minister launched the Government's pre-market engagement exercise on the future of the Fire Service College. It is encouraging that the Minister favours a public/private partnership to jointly run the college with the fire sector having an integral role in the governance structure. This is in line with the recommendations from the Fire Commission's Working Group. However, this exercise will seek views on this and other options. We are now pressing for a meeting with the Minister to present our recommendations in full and to urge more momentum in moving forward with arrangements.
7. The FSMC's comments have been picked up by the trade press, namely in articles in Public Finance, Fire Magazine and by the Fire Industry Association:
  - <http://www.publicfinance.co.uk/news/2011/09/ministers-seek-private-partners-for-fire-service-college/>
  - <http://www.fire-magazine.com/Content/Doc.aspx?id=1946>
  - <http://www.fia.uk.com/en/Information/Details/index.cfm/Govt-seeking-partners-to-run-Fire-Service-College>

### **Business continuity**

8. Following the discussion at the June Fire Commission meeting, Cllr Brian Coleman wrote to all Chairs of FRAs reinforcing the need to review business continuity arrangements. A copy of this letter is attached at appendix A.

### **National Framework**

9. DCLG has established a National Framework officer working group to consider a new National Framework for introduction in Spring 2012. The working group has met twice and in addition a National Resilience sub group has met to consider this element of the Framework. The new framework is being developed in the context of the localism agenda, and it is expected that it will reflect a shift in roles and responsibility to Fire Authorities and their Fire and Rescue Services. In the spirit of localism it is expected that the new National Framework will concentrate on less detailed issues. A report will be brought to FSMC in November to consider key issues.

### **Fire Conference – March 2012**

10. Planning for the annual Fire conference is now underway. The central theme of the event will be resilience and there will be a host of workshops tackling key related issues including the National

Framework, civil disturbances and preparedness for the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Further details on the organisation of the conference will be regularly provided. If any members have any suggestions for workshop or plenary themes please contact Meenara Islam ([Meenara.islam@local.gov.uk](mailto:Meenara.islam@local.gov.uk)).

### **Fires and incidents at sea – Maritime Incident Response Group**

11. The Maritime Incident Response Group (MIRG) is a collective of 13 UK FRAs set up in 2006 to ensure that professional firefighters could be deployed to tackle fires and incidents at sea. In 2010/11 the cost of running the MIRG to the MCA was approximately £600,000 (match-funded by the 13 MIRG FRS).
12. The MCA are recommending to the Department of Transport that the arrangement is ended. It proposes a replacement capability comprising of two commercial salvors and an MCA Marine Casualty Officer specifically to assist with the transition of a vessel from at sea to alongside (i.e. no specialised fire containment, other than the limited provision provided by ship's crew, will be in place whilst the vessel is at sea).
13. CFOA have serious concerns about this proposal not only due to its potential impact on public safety but also on all coastal fire and rescue services.
14. If any FSMC members have any issues or concerns they would like to have raised about this issue please contact [eamon.lally@local.gov.uk](mailto:eamon.lally@local.gov.uk).

### **Forward schedule of meetings**

15. Please note the following are dates for the FSMC over the next 12 months:
  - 16 September 2011
  - 17 November 2011 (replaces the meeting originally scheduled for 11 November)
  - 23 January 2012
  - 14 May 2012
  - 16 July 2012

### **Work plan**

16. Officers have compiled a work plan based on the strategic priorities for the sector. This includes work on:
  - 16.1 Lobbying and influencing government departments on legislative and policy changes;

- 16.2 Local Government Resource Review:
- 16.3 The future of the Fire Service College;
- 16.4 National resilience;
- 16.5 National framework;
- 16.6 Sector-led national functions;
- 16.7 Industrial relations and other workforce issues;
- 16.8 Business continuity;
- 16.9 Pensions; and
- 16.10 Improvement support.

**Appendix A**

Dear Colleague

**BUSINESS CONTINUITY**

You may recall that at the 17<sup>th</sup> June Fire Commission meeting, we discussed business continuity arrangements of Fire and Rescue Authorities. The amended recommendation recorded in the minutes asked Members to report on what action they have taken, or are intending to take, to test and review business continuity plans and to ensure that their own Authorities have made necessary arrangements to fulfil their statutory duties in relation to business continuity.

No doubt, you will all have seen the press release and circular issued by the Fire Brigades Union on 28<sup>th</sup> July about industrial action over pensions and suggesting support for industrial action in the autumn.

Informal soundings suggest that there is still a significant proportion of Authorities which have not examined business continuity plans in detail. There may be a number of reasons for this: some Chiefs believe that any industrial action will not affect their area; or that the impact on different unions will be phased; or indeed that these are target duties rather than absolute duties. However, Lead Member colleagues on the Fire Services Management Committee and I do not share that view and I am therefore urging you to urgently review and test your business continuity plans to satisfy yourself that these are plans are in place. In the event of widespread industrial action, it is unlikely that the Government, or the media, would regard it as acceptable for politicians of any FRA not to have recently tested processes and procedures.

We have a number of business continuity technical experts in our sector who can provide first class support and guidance so please do not hesitate to ask if you would like to take advantage of this.

**Councillor Brian Coleman AM FRSA**

Chairman, Local Government Group Fire Services Management Committee