

23 January 2012

Item 5

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.

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FSMC update paper

Operational Assessment & Fire Peer Challenge Programme

1. In November 2011, FSMC members approved the piloting of the new Operational Assessment (OpA) and Fire Peer Challenge offer. In January and February 2012, three Fire & Rescue Authorities piloted the new OpA and Fire Peer Challenge. They were:
 - 1.1 Surrey – County FRA
 - 1.2 Leicestershire – Combined FRA
 - 1.3 West Yorkshire – Metropolitan FRA
2. Officers from the LGA and CFOA are currently undertaking an evaluation of the pilots. Overall initial feedback from the pilot peer challenges was very positive with each pilot particularly valuing the tailored approach to the peer challenge that identified the specific needs of each FRA. There was positive feedback on the quality and expertise of the peer team and the contributions of both officers and Members were welcomed by recipients.
3. The peers themselves valued the new approach and commented that it was much improved from the previous model, providing them with opportunities for learning and development that they could take back to their own FRAs. A full evaluation will be completed by mid March 2012 and will be fed back to FSMC in due course.

Fire and rescue control rooms

4. The Minister for Fire and Rescue Bob Neill MP announced the release of £74 million in response to 23 bids from 44 FRAs. 20 of the bids were successful. The funding will go towards supporting projects to improve resilience in control services. A 'national picture' document summarising the proposed plans submitted by FRAs are set in context in this document:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/futurecontrolnationalpicture>
Individual bids can be viewed here:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/futurecontrolsummaries>
5. The LGA released a press release welcoming the announcement:
<http://www.publicfinance.co.uk/news/2012/03/ministers-approve-20-bids-for-fire-and-rescue-cash/>

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Localism Act 2011 – commencement of general power

6. The commencement of the general power of competence for councils – including county councils that provide for Fire and Rescue Services - was recently fast tracked as a result of the High Court ruling banning prayers in council meetings. Alongside this, the general power for standalone Fire and Rescue Authorities has now also been brought into force.
7. The general power of competence gives councils the power to legally do anything an individual can do unless specifically forbidden by law. The general power, similar to the general power of competence, now granted to standalone Fire and Rescue Authorities which enables them to do anything they consider appropriate in relation to their statutory responsibilities. The announcement of the launching of these powers is contained in the following press release:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/newsroom/2091532>

Sprinklers' campaign working group

8. The working group has now met twice and will be meeting next on 21 March, following the close of the Fire Conference. The working group is pulling together a toolkit to enable FRAs to work with communities to raise the profile of the benefits of installing sprinkler systems in premises where vulnerable groups either reside in or use regularly. This includes schools, hospitals, care homes and homes of multiple occupation (including social housing).
9. The working group is examining all potential campaign activities to include in the toolkit to enable communities and local groups to use in their own lobbying efforts. These including mobilising the press, lobbying parliamentarians and using social media to raise the profile of the benefits of sprinklers.
10. Key messages include:
 - 10.1 Sprinkler systems save lives and protect the vulnerable;
 - 10.2 They are an investment in the short term for long term gain, yielding benefits such as the potential reduction of insurance premiums, prevention of property damage (hence saving costs of fire damage) and minimising the costs to society (if a school was to suffer a fire and has to be closed, young people would suffer the most);
 - 10.3 Localism is key to change – change in behaviours and legislation start at the grassroots. The working group supports this notion and is working to

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enable FRAs locally to work with communities through the proposed online toolkit.

11. Other activities that are being considered by the working group include a 'top line briefing', which forms the basis of the myth-busting element of the proposed local campaigning toolkit. A 'national' pledge on sprinklers is also being developed to become a universal document for all FRAs to sign up to and adopt. Whilst there is wide agreement in both the fire and insurance sector, the case for the installation of sprinklers is still to be made to convince the public and homebuilders.
12. Members of the working group are currently mobilising support from other elected members and colleagues across the LGA to garner their support and gain their endorsement. Cllr Richard Hobbs, on behalf of the Chairman of the working group Cllr John Edwards, will be meeting with the portfolio lead on the LGA Housing Board in mid-March.

Fire Kills Campaign

13. This national advertising campaign for 2011-12 aims to link the biannual clock change with smoke alarm testing. People are being encouraged to do both at the same time. A first bout of advertising took place in October and will be followed by a second round this month ahead of moving to BST. DCLG are keen to hear examples of FRS undertaking local activities to complement the campaign. Stories can be sent to James Webb (james.webb@communities.gsi.gov.uk or 0303 444 2932).

Pensions

Firefighter Pensions Reform

14. DCLG published the Firefighters Pension Heads of Agreement on 9 February. Although there has not yet been agreement with the fire unions negotiations are ongoing. Paragraphs 3 h and I of the Heads of Agreement refer to regular reviews of the normal Pension Age (NPA) and the role of the FPC undertaking research to inform the reviews. The LGA will be working with DCLG and the Fire Unions under the auspices of the Fire Pensions Committee on the approach to undertaking this research.

Retained Firefighters' Pensions

15. The Fire Minister, Bob Neill MP, has now replied to the Chairman's letter outlining our concerns about the potential scheme liability arising from the Employment

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Tribunal judgment (both letters are attached below as Appendices A and B). The response refers to the negotiations underway between DCLG and the Fire Brigades Union of the terms of the settlement. We have asked for an updated estimate from DCLG on the potential scheme liability and have provided data on the retained workforce to support the analysis. We have also raised the issue with all fire authorities through the Fire Commission. Once we have a better understanding of the potential scheme liability we will need to work with DCLG on options for how this can be addressed.