

Item 6

Fire Services Management Committee update paper

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

The report outlines issues of interest to the Fire Services Management 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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Pensions update

1. On 9 February 2012 the Government published the Heads of Agreement for the Firefighters' Pensions Scheme that will be introduced from April 2015. The Heads of Agreement contains a commitment to review the Normal Pension Age (NPA). It also states that the review will be informed by research carried out by the Firefighters' Pension Committee (FPC).
2. The FPC has decided to undertake a review of the Normal Pension Age at an early stage and Dr Tony Williams, a consultant occupational physician has been appointed by the Minister to chair the review.
3. The NPA was raised from 55 to 60 in the 2006 scheme and 60 is proposed for the pension scheme that will be introduced from 2015. A key question for the review is whether firefighters can be expected to cope physically and medically with serving an additional five years.
4. The terms of reference for the review are to:
 - 4.1 consider the evidence to support the appropriate NPA for firefighters;
 - 4.2 consider structural implications for proposed scheme;
 - 4.3 be mindful of reasonable expectations; and
 - 4.4 take account of economical, efficient and effective management of the fire and rescue service.
5. An employer representative is required to participate as part of the review team. It is proposed that James Dalglish, Head of Human Resources & Development, London Fire Brigade and an adviser to FSMC on pensions, will undertake this role.

LGA Annual Conference

6. We held a session on the **future funding of fire and rescue services** at the LGA Annual Conference on 28 June 2012. The session, which was well attended, was Chaired by Brian Coleman, Chairman of FSMC. Kieran Timmins, Director of Finance, Merseyside Fire and Rescue, gave a presentation on future funding for the fire sector. Chief Fire Officer Simon Pilling of West Yorkshire talked about fire station closures and relocations of fire stations in his area. Experience from Cllr John Livings, Chairman of East Sussex fire authority, spoke about its recent exploration of merger with its neighbouring authority West Sussex.

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7. At the end of the meeting a representative of the Japan Local Government Centre (HANYU Yuichiro) expressed his thanks to the panel members for the support given to his country by UK Fire and Rescue Services.

Community right to challenge

8. The Community Right to Challenge in the Localism Act gives community and voluntary bodies, existing employees and parish councils the right to challenge to provide any local authority or fire and rescue service. Services excluded by the Secretary of State in regulations are exempt.
9. For FRAs core activities to put out fires, undertake rescues from fires and respond to road accidents should be excluded from the Community Right to Challenge in forthcoming regulations. The Community Right to Challenge also cannot be used to take over any 'functions' of a FRA, i.e. decision-making powers or duties. Prevention Services carried out by FRAs, however, are likely to be within the scope of the Community Right to Challenge provisions. Authorities will have the opportunity to manage the flow of challenges to run these services by specifying periods when 'Expressions of Interest' will be accepted.
10. On 27 June, Government published statutory guidance providing more detail of the legislative context to coincide the enactment of the Community Right to Challenge:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/righttochallengestatguide>

Consultation on localising support for council tax

11. Towards the end of last year, the DCLG consulted on their proposals for localising council tax. It was part of the Local Government Resources Review and concerned FRAs as precepting authorities. The response to the consultation was published in December 2011 which can be found here:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localisingtaxresponse>
12. DCLG consulted with billing and precepting authorities including FRAs on the Government's plans to distribute funding, options on possible allocation adjustments to prevent potential budgetary pressures in some authorities. The consultation closed on 12 July but the proposals can still be accessed here:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/2146644>
13. The Government response will be reported back to FSMC and Fire Commission when it is released.

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FRA use of electromagnetic spectrum

14. Fire and Rescue Services no longer use the majority of their current spectrum holdings in VHF Low and Medium Band as they have now migrated over to the Airwave network. It has been agreed that the disused Low Band 68-87MHz and Medium Band 138-165MHz will be released for civilian use which will have a direct cost saving benefit to individual services.
15. A further two bands have been selected for release which are currently used by both space services and emergency services. Fee liability will now be taken over solely by space services.
16. Previously, the police and fire rescue authority shared costs of the emergency service spectrums with the police paying for 80 per cent and the latter 20 per cent. It has been agreed in discussions, including ACPO and CFOA, that police and fire and rescue authorities will only pay for the spectrum that each directly use. This could mean an annual fee reduction for fire and rescue authorities from £722k to £219k.
17. The Office of Communications will soon be writing to Chief Fire Officers and Chairmen of Fire and Rescue Authorities detailing the new charging arrangements.

Breathing Apparatus Telemetry: Potential interference from the Introduction of Long Term evolution 4G Technology

18. The Breathing Apparatus Telemetry Working Group's recommendations have been accepted by government and the Department for Culture Media and Sport is committed to funding the reasonable costs associated with the implementation of solutions put forward by the working group. DCLG wrote to all Chief Fire Officers on 2 July inviting them to alert CFOA and DCLG if their authority should be included in the list of affected fire authorities. DCLG is looking for a response by 16 July.
19. The current list of those affected is Avon, County Durham and Darlington, Dorset, Greater Manchester, Hereford and Worcester, Isle of Wight, Kent, Lancashire, Leicestershire, London, Merseyside, Northumberland, South Yorkshire, Staffordshire, Tyne and Wear, Warwickshire, West Midlands, Wiltshire, and Devon and Somerset (Somerset only).

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National Co-ordination and Advisory arrangements of London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics

20. The fire and rescue service is integrated into the governance arrangements for Olympics and Paralympics Command through the National Olympic Co-ordination Centre. This Centre provides a direct channel of communication between FRAs and central Government. A fire and rescue desk will be responsible for providing information and contributing to the safety and security of the Games. It will work closely with DCLG, which will gather and disseminate intelligence and information from fire and rescue authorities and other partners.