

## **Future priorities**

### **Purpose of report**

For discussion and direction.

### **Summary**

This paper sets out draft priorities for the work of FSMC in the coming year. It draws on the responses by fire authorities to the letter sent by Cllr Kay Hammond, Chairman of FSMC on 9 August 2012.

### **Recommendation**

Members are invited to consider and comment on the draft priorities and to agree a final version.

### **Action**

Officers to draw up detailed workstreams in the light of this discussion.

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## **Future Priorities**

### **Background**

1. The annual business plan for 2012/13 for the LGA was agreed by the Executive in March 2012. Six priorities were identified as the focus for the LGA's work in 2012/13:
  - 1.1. Public Service Reform
  - 1.2. Growth and Prosperity
  - 1.3. Funding for local government
  - 1.4. Efficiency and Productivity
  - 1.5. Sector-led Improvement
  - 1.6. The LGA's own effectiveness and efficiency.
2. All of the LGA's Boards work within the broad framework set by these priorities. The performance report presented to the Leadership Board after the first quarter showed that broadly the LGA is on track to deliver.
3. Although mid-way through this year's business plan period, the advent of the new membership of the FSMC is an opportunity to consider the ongoing and future work programme.
4. On becoming Chairman of FSMC, Cllr Kay Hammond wrote to the Chairmen of all fire authorities inviting them to propose priorities for the work of FSMC in the coming year. The letter is attached as Appendix 1.
5. The opportunity to feed into the work programme and to ensure we genuinely represent our member authorities was warmly welcomed. To date we have received responses from:

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority  
Cornwall Fire Authority  
Dorset Fire Authority  
Essex Fire Authority  
Greater Manchester Fire Authority  
Hampshire Fire Authority  
Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority  
Leicestershire Fire Authority  
North Lincolnshire Fire Authority  
Oxfordshire Fire Authority  
Shropshire Fire Authority  
Suffolk Fire Authority  
West Yorkshire Fire Authority

6. These responses are reflected in the proposed priorities set out below.

**Proposed priorities**

7. The future programme for FSMC is being developed at a time of continuing and substantial change in the level and method of funding. The shift in the relationship between the fire and rescue service and government also continues to change with the LGA and CFOA increasingly providing the national cement that hitherto would have come from government. Fire authorities are taking tough decisions on front line services and will be looking to substantial reform ahead of the next spending review period in 2015. The issues that have been raised by fire authorities reflect this challenging context in which the service is operating.
8. There will remain an oversight role for some significant pieces of work currently in train such as ensuring the sale of the Fire Service College proceeds satisfactorily and rolling out the new Fire Peer Challenge programme, and ensuring we support FRAs to deliver Firecontrol projects. But going forward FRAs are proposing that these are combined with new strategic and targeted additions. The proposed priorities are summarised below.

**(a) Future Funding**

9. As anticipated, future funding was the overwhelming priority for fire authorities. This has several aspects to it including:
  - 9.1. Setting out the case for the fire and rescue service in the preparation of a fire sector CSR submission
  - 9.2. Lobbying for a fair and equitable settlement in the remainder of this spending period and into the next.
  - 9.3. Lobbying for an early announcement of the 2013/14 and 2014/15 settlement for fire authorities
  - 9.4. Supporting fire authorities to understand and respond to the shift to a retained business rate system and the localisation of council tax benefit

**(b) Responding to the new context for the fire sector**

10. FSMC will have a continuing role in supporting fire authorities in the implementation of the new national framework. Through its membership of the Strategic Resilience Board, FSMC will have an important role in supporting fire authorities to shape and deliver national resilience.

**(c) Retained Firefighters**

11. Retained firefighters are an important feature of most fire services and in recent years the ratio of retained firefighters to wholetime firefighters has been increasing. Fire authorities want the conditions for the recruitment and retention of retained firefighters to remain favourable. They are keen that FSMC lobbies in Europe and in the UK to protect and enhance the opportunities for retained firefighters.

**(d) Sprinklers**

12. Sprinklers has been a high priority for fire authorities and this is reflected in the work that the FSMC Working Group, led by Councillor John Edwards, did last year to raise the profile of this issue. This remains a priority and FSMC has already committed to supporting fire authorities in their use of the toolkit that has developed.

**(e) Retained firefighter pensions**

13. This is an issue which could have a large financial impact on fire authorities. FSMC has been lobbying government on the issue of the allocation of the non-employee costs associated with providing retrospective access to the pension scheme to retained firefighters. We have recently written to the fire minister setting out the concerns of the sector and it is likely that this will remain an issue in the coming year. It will be important to raise this issue early on with the new Fire Minister.

**(f) Health and Safety**

14. The role of the Health and Safety Executive, in respect of fire and rescue services and how that role is interpreted and carried out has been raised as an issue of concern to FRAs, particularly in the context of the Atherstone on Stour fire.

**(g) National negotiations**

15. Some Fire Authorities have raised pay, industrial relations and the national negotiations around these areas as significant issues in the coming year. These areas are the responsibility of the National Joint Committee (NJC) for Fire and Rescue Services, which includes members nominated by the LGA. The Employers' Side of the NJC, including LGA members, will be mindful of the views of the LGA membership more widely in addressing these complex and important issues.

**(h) Responding to changing local governance arrangements**

16. Fire authorities are keen that there is support in defining the new relationship with Police and Crime Commissioners and continuing influence of fire authorities in the broader community safety agenda.

**(i) Road safety**

17. Attendance at road traffic accidents is an increasing feature of the work of the fire and rescue service, and was highlighted at last year's Fire Conference. Members may wish to consider exploring the role of firefighters in local multi-organisation road safety partnerships.

### **Communications**

18. There are a number of internal and external communications channels available to help the Fire Services Management Committee promote the work it is doing and ensure key messages are received in a professional manner by as many stakeholders as possible. Members will be aware that we use the full suite of these tools and techniques to ensure that the safer communities and policing contacts are aware of, and support, our work.
19. We have a programme which centres on the annual fire conference which has grown and is now a flagship event. We also have a dedicated section on the LGA website, bulletins, outside speaking events and interviews, Knowledge Hub, blogs, features and news items in First magazine, and twitter accounts which are used to keep in close touch with our members to hear their concerns, but also to ensure they are aware of the work of the LGA. We also work with some of our key partners such as the Chief Fire Officers Association to give added strength to our messages.

### **Conclusion and next steps**

20. Following a decision by FSMC on its priorities, officers will prepare a detailed work programme to manage the day to day work and the Chairman will also communicate the agreed priorities to all members of fire authorities. These will feed into the wider LGA business planning exercise which begins in earnest early in 2013.

### **Financial Implications**

21. All work can be met from existing resources.