

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

Appointment of Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser - CLG

1. The Department for Communities and Local Government is seeking to recruit Sir Ken Knight's successor as Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser. The appointment will be made on a fixed-term two year contract, further details can be found here:
<https://jobsstatic.civilservice.gov.uk/csjobs.html> or by contacting CLG via recruitment@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Fire and Rescue Services Protective Security Strategy

2. CFOA/CFRA published the Fire and Rescue Services Protective Security Strategy on the 30th October. The Strategy is made up of a framework and toolkit that is designed to assist FRSs with the introduction of requirements contained in HMG Security Policy Framework (<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/security-policy-framework>). Further details on the strategy can be found here:
<http://www.cfoa.org.uk/12729>

DCLG secondees

3. The Department for Communities and Local Government is currently looking for two secondees, each for a minimum of one year, one to provide technical advice, and one to work with the Department and to support the Chief Fire Officers Association in the Department for Business Innovation and Skill's piloting of a Primary Authority Scheme for fire. Further details can be obtained via FireSecondees@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency

4. CLG's Fire and Rescue Monthly Bulletin Number 15 issued on 15 October 2011 highlighted the publication of the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/fsb152011>.
5. The Code asks all local authorities, including Fire and Rescue Authorities, to follow three principles of transparency when publishing data they hold; responding to public demand; releasing data in open formats available for re-use; and, releasing data in a timely way. This includes data on senior pay, the structure of their workforce, tenders, contracts, councillor expenses, voluntary sector funding, meetings, and frontline service data so that 'armchair auditors' can clearly see the decisions being made on their behalf. The code can be found at:
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/transparencycode

CLG Consultation on "Improving Local Government Transparency"

6. The Government is now consulting on making regulations to require local authorities, including fire and rescue authorities, to publish data falling within certain descriptions of information specified in the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency.

7. The consultation proposes amendments and additions to the code to facilitate greater clarity as to what data must be published, when and in what format. It also adds clarity to what the requirements will be under the proposed regulations. To take account of experience and improved best practice, the Code will be revised and updated as and when needed.

Council Tax freeze and referendum threshold 2013-14

8. The Government has announced that it will set aside an extra £450 million to help freeze council tax bills in England in 2013-14.
9. The funding will be made available, through an unringfenced grant, to councils, police and fire authorities who decide to freeze or reduce their council tax next year. Those which do so will receive £225million of funding in both financial years 2013-14 and 2014-15, equivalent to raising their council tax by one per cent. The council tax freeze offer will therefore apply separately to each billing and major precepting authority in England, rather than to each council tax bill issued.
10. In addition, in 2013-14 the Government will propose to lower the council tax referendum threshold to two per cent. This would mean if an authority seeks to raise its relevant basic amount of council tax by more than two per cent, local people would have the right to approve or veto the increase in a binding referendum. The Secretary of State will set out the detail on this in December 2012.

Transitional Grant for Localising Support for Council Tax

11. The Department for Communities and Local Government has announced £100 million will be made available to assist with the localising of council tax support. The grant will be payable in March 2013 to those authorities who adopt schemes that comply with criteria set by Government to ensure that low income households do not face an extensive increase in their council tax liability in 2013-14. This funding will enable councils to explore more sustainable approaches to managing the funding reduction which minimise the impact on vulnerable taxpayers.
12. Details on the transitional grant scheme including a Frequently Asked Questions guide can be found at:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localtransitionalgrant>

Fire conference – 12-13 March 2012

13. Planning continues for the LGA's Annual Fire Conference which is taking place in Brighton on the 12 and 13 March 2012. There are already 72 delegates confirmed to attend, which is extremely positive at this stage of the conference planning. The current programme and booking instructions can be found on the LGA website, whilst the current flyer can be found at **Annex A**.
http://www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/events/-/journal_content/56/10171/3700831/EVENT-TEMPLATE

Fire Services College

14. Work continues to finalise the sale of the Fire Services College. The process so far has been more complex than had been envisaged and this has resulted in some delays. It is hoped that the extra work that has been undertaken will in fact expedite the sale and result in fewer delays in the longer term. In the meantime bids should be evaluated by the middle of December.