

11 March 2013

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Sir Ken Knight's Efficiencies Review

Purpose of report

For discussion and action.

Summary

Sir Ken Knight will attend this meeting of the Fire Services Management Committee to discuss the emerging findings from his efficiencies review. This paper seeks to summarise some of the key issues that have been raised by Fire and Rescue Authorities with Sir Ken and also communicated to the LGA.

Recommendation

Members to discuss the emerging issues that Fire and Rescue Authorities have raised with Sir Ken Knight as part of his review of FRA efficiency.

Action

Officers to progress as appropriate.

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Sir Ken Knight's Efficiencies Review

Background

1. The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Brandon Lewis MP, announced on 14 December that he was commissioning Sir Ken Knight to lead a short review into the operational efficiency of the services delivered by fire and rescue authorities in England. He is due to report after the local government elections in May.
2. The review set out to examine options for savings both within and beyond the current Spending Review period including through:
 - 2.1 Firefighter training
 - 2.2 Flexible staffing and crewing arrangements
 - 2.3 The use of retained firefighters
 - 2.4 Procurement
 - 2.5 Shared services
 - 2.6 Collaboration with emergency services and other organisations on service delivery and estates
 - 2.7 Sickness management
 - 2.8 Sharing of senior staff
 - 2.9 Locally led mergers and operational collaborations
 - 2.10 New fire-fighting technology
 - 2.11 Preventative approaches
 - 2.12 Working with local businesses.
3. As part of this review Sir Ken has invited written submissions from all FRAs and visited: Cleveland, Cornwall, Cumbria, Devon and Somerset, Essex, Manchester, Hampshire, Humberside, London, Merseyside, Oxfordshire, Shropshire, Bedfordshire, Suffolk and West Yorkshire.

Written submissions

4. Councillor Kay Hammond and officers at the LGA have met Sir Ken and his team three times throughout the review period. Although it has been premature to discuss emerging findings throughout the fieldwork stage, we have looked at most of the written submissions and would group the comments into five main themes:

The role of elected members

5. Fire and Rescue Authorities have noted that in order to create the right environment for effective decision making, the governance and supporting arrangements of the Fire and Rescue Authorities themselves may need to be reviewed. One FRA, for example, has created a bespoke board-type structure, coupled with robust scrutiny arrangements and these arrangements have put the FRA in a much stronger position to take decisions.

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Workforce

6. There are a number of examples of Chief Fire Officers and other senior staff having a broader remit than just fire (trading standards and emergency planning, for example), but this is limited to county FRAs. Whilst some FRAs have held discussions on shared chief officers between fire and rescue authorities, these have not progressed to implementation. Members may wish to consider how the barriers to shared senior management teams can be identified and overcome.
7. Other examples of increasing the flexibility of the workforce highlighted by FRAs include: moving to a largely on-call service (particularly in rural areas) and changes to crewing and shift patterns.

Shared services

8. FRAs have been working closely with council and police colleagues to identify a range of opportunities that have the potential to deliver cost savings, greater resilience and improved service across the relevant organisations. This work has identified areas such as asset management and back office services as the main areas for savings. Pursuing this approach allows FRAs to prioritise spending on frontline services, as well as providing better career opportunities for staff.
9. In the written submissions, there are good examples of collaborative working between FRAs; such as multi-authority fire controls, whilst other partnership approaches have looked to create efficiencies in areas such as
 - 9.1 Regional/joint procurement initiatives
 - 9.2 Common Standard Operating Procedures
 - 9.3 Standard specifications
 - 9.4 Community safety messages
 - 9.5 Training provision.

Income generation

10. To offset the impact of on-going grant reductions on service provision, some FRAs are looking at setting up various types of business arrangement to generate income through selling services to other organisations for the benefit of the FRA and taxpayers in general.

Communication of best practice

11. We understand that Sir Ken has been impressed with the range of exciting and innovative projects across the sector. However, it is unclear whether there is an effective mechanism for communicating this work across the sector and as a result there is some duplication across Authorities. Although CFOA have a database of

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notable practice, and there is some cross-fertilisation of ideas through the peer review programme, Councillor Hammond is keen for the LGA to play a role here, perhaps through a new bulletin which will signpost members to new and innovative examples across the sector.

Conclusions and next steps

12. Although this is a DCLG-owned report, Members may wish to press for full publication of the report. We would expect some recommendations to be for Government, and some for the sector and the FSMC will want to play a full role in assisting the sector to implement these to deliver further efficiencies.