

‘Facing the Future’ Report by Sir Ken Knight: response to Government

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report contains the Committee’s FSMC submission to the Communities and Local Government Select Committee. Sir Ken Knight is giving oral evidence to the Select Committee on Monday 15 July and an oral update will be provided to the Committee on key lines of inquiry and issues raised. This paper proposes that the positions set out in the Submission should form the basis of our response to Government.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note FSMC’s submission to the DCLG Select Committee and to consider any further refinements, additions to include in a formal response to Government.

Action

Following the discussion at FSMC, officers will draft a final response to Government.

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‘Facing the Future’ Report by Sir Ken Knight

Background

1. The Facing the Future report – review of efficiencies and operations in FRAs in England by Sir Ken Knight was published in May 2013. FSMC and the Fire Commission have both debated the contents of the review findings. Further deliberation took place at the LGA conference fringe session on the Knight review on 4 July. The discussion heard perspectives from Members from a combined fire authority, a metropolitan authority and a county council with much discussion about the challenges of continuing to deliver the current level of service with reducing resources; concerns about changing the existing governance structures; and the importance of working with other parts of the public and private sector.
2. The Communities and Local Government Select Committee has established an inquiry into the review. FSMC has provided a submission to this inquiry. The LGA’s submission, along with all responses received by the committee to date can be found at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmcomloc/writev/knight/contents.htm>. We understand that Sir Ken will be giving oral evidence to the Committee on Monday 15 July at 4.10pm. At present he is the only witness scheduled as this will be a one day hearing for the Committee to use the various written submissions to test and explore some of his findings.

A Select Committee Submission

3. FSMC’s Select Committee submission sets out FSMC’s cross-party position on the Knight review.
4. It argues that:
 - 4.1 Fire and rescue authorities must use the findings of the review to challenge their own efficiency in the context of the variations in spend outlined in the review
 - 4.2 Fire and Rescue Authorities must collectively lead any future reform of the fire sector.
 - 4.3 Wholesale top-down governance reform would be a distraction at this time and consume scarce resources.
 - 4.4 Sector led improvement is a success and negates the need for the reintroduction of an inspectorate.

Item 3

- 4.5 Competitive elements of government funding are unhelpful and bidding against defined criteria does not often reflect the best outcome for authorities.
- 4.6 An efficiency review is required for national resilience, on which the Knight review was silent.

Response to Government

- 5. It is proposed that the response to government should contain the points set out in the Select Committee submission. However, the response to government provides Members with a further opportunity to refine and add to the current position statement if that is considered necessary.

Next steps

- 6. Following the discussion at FSMC, officers will draft a final response to government which will follow the Committee's direction.