

Note of decisions taken and actions required

Title: Fire Services Management Committee
Date and time: Friday 15 November 2013, 11.00am
Venue: Westminster Suite, Local Government House, London.

Attendance

Position	Councillor	Council
Chairman	Cllr Kay Hammond	Surrey CC
Vice chair	Cllr John Joyce	Cheshire FA
Deputy chair	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Gloucestershire FRS
	Cllr Phil Howson	East Sussex FA
Members	Cllr Mark Healey	Devon & Somerset FRS
	Cllr Maurice Heaster OBE	London FEPA
	Cllr David Topping	Cheshire FA
	Cllr John Bell	Greater Manchester FRA
	Cllr Simon Spencer	Derbyshire FA
	Cllr Julie Young	Essex FA
	Cllr John Edwards	West Midlands FRA
	Cllr Darrell Pulk	Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham FA
	Cllr Roger Price	Hampshire FA
Substitutes	Cllr Les Byrom CBE	Merseyside FRA
	Cllr Tom Wright	Tyne and Wear FA
Apologies	Cllr Navin Shah	London FEPA
Officers:	Helen Murray, Eamon Lally, Gill Gittins, Lucy Ellender, Steve Service (all LGA)	

Item	Decisions and actions	Action by
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The Chairman welcomed members and officers to the meeting.

1. Chairman's report

Cllr Hammond summarised her activities as Chairman since the last FSMC meeting.

Members asked about the reason for meeting with South East fire authorities, with some questioning the cost effectiveness of dinner.

Cllr Hammond responded that the meeting was part of an ongoing series of meetings with Fire Authorities in different parts of the country which she had initiated since the previous year. The LGA-funded dinners provided an opportunity to hear about authorities' needs in more detail in a setting which was convenient for them to get to.

Several members voiced support for this approach, with some saying that their work during the day meant evening meetings were the only feasible time when they could attend.

Decision

Members **noted** the report.

2. Chief Fire Officers' Association

Cllr Hammond introduced Paul Fuller, President of CFOA to talk about the links between the two organisations and CFOA's trading arms.

In his presentation, Paul outlined several areas where he felt CFOA and the LGA's priorities were in alignment, including policies on sprinklers, retained firefighters' pensions and the sector response to Coroners' recommendations arising from incidents in high rise flats.

In response to a question on **how CFOA influences the rest of the sector** and its communication channels, Paul said that all of the minutes from its meetings are on its online community pages which all CFOA members and some associate organisations have access to.

Paul cited the Fire Futures Forum as an example of ongoing dialogue with external stakeholders, adding that Fire and Rescue Service councils take place 3 times each year as well as a series of seminars on sector-specific topics which are open to those with a special interest. He argued that because the views of CFOA do not always agree with everyone in the fire sector, this can sometimes lead to the perception that it does not communicate well.

Members commented that 6 months on from the Ken Knight review, the sector were still no clearer on what the government thought. They argued that the fire funding issue was too serious to be solved by **blue light collaboration** alone.

Paul said that the Government is getting mixed messages on interoperability, with the ambulance service less enthusiastic than police and fire. He agreed that new ways of working such as sharing premises would not resolve the financial deficit in isolation and emphasised that the service needs to seek a stronger steer from stakeholders in terms of what activities were adding social value and what should be stopped. He criticised the Government's pillaring of FAs for making a decision from the limited range of financial choices currently offered to them.

Members noted that recent Government statements in the press had claimed that Fire is expensive and underused in comparison to the ambulance service, despite the ambulance service declaring itself to be in crisis. They asked if this represented a race to the bottom for emergency services.

Paul said that if the ambulance service were failing on call out response there were potential questions to be asked about how calls were managed. He emphasised the need to reconsider how services were focussed in the needs of the citizen, arguing that when someone had a heart attack they did not care whose defibrillator saved their life.

In light of current finances, members asked when CFOA had last undertaken an **audit** and whether there was scope for its costs to FAs to be reduced further.

Paul said that CFOA's longer term ambition was to become self-financing enough that FRSs do not have to contribute. He said he would be happy to consider a review of its activities and what it costs to its subscribers.

Members asked what CFO's position was on the potential for **PCCs** overseeing Fire Authorities. Paul said that CFOA's view was based on the functionality of the role. As elected representatives, PCCs would want to fulfil their manifesto on public issues which might come at the expense of issues which had a less visible public status but were nonetheless a high priority. He argued that having a distinct deputy for fire would potentially be a more workable arrangement.

Paul cautioned those who opposed elected PCCs outright that if they were to do so, they would need to be able to rationalise to Government why so many elected members currently sit on FAs.

Cllr Hammond thanked Paul for attending and said that the LGA looked forward to working with CFOA further on how to better engage with communities. She emphasised that the Fire Service needed to be seen to be proactive on working together and should not wait for the Government's response to Sir Ken's review to initiate change.

3. Industrial relations

Cllr Heaster as Chair of the National Employers and Gill Gittins, LGA Principal Negotiating Officer summarised the latest developments in the dispute between the FBU and Government Ministers in England, Wales and Scotland. Whilst recognising that the dispute is between these parties, the LGA is nonetheless concerned at the effect on fire authorities.

Members discussed a range of potential scenarios which could evolve in the coming months and the likely impact on the service.

Decision

Members **noted** the update and the issues set out in the paper.

4. LGA Autumn Statement submission

Eamon Lally, LGA Senior Adviser introduced this paper. He said that the proposed LGA submission restates the position already agreed by FSMC regarding fire funding and asked if members would like the LGA to write to the Fire Minister in advance of the Autumn Statement to reinforce this position.

Members agreed that a letter be sent as suggested and made the following comments regarding the LGA's submission:

The key recommendations outlined on page 4 of the submission should also include the need to allow greater scope for FRSs on council tax decisions, expanding the flexibilities afforded to the 8 FRSs in the last year.

The submission should highlight the diversity of services that the Service offers beyond simply fighting fires, including its public engagement role on cross cutting issues across the public sector.

Mention of the "Fire Service" should be amended to "Fire and Rescue Service", to underline its multifaceted role.

Some members felt that fire was cited as a secondary consideration to wider Safer Communities concerns and that the case for fire needed to be put more strongly.

Action

Officers to write to Brandon Lewis MP to reinforce the view expressed in the LGA's submission and incorporating the above comments from members (see letter at **Appendix A**).

Eamon Lally

Officers to take forward the LGA's Autumn statement submission as directed.

Eamon Lally

5. FSMC update paper

Cllr Healey gave an update as an FSMC representative on the CFOA Retained Duty System Board. At the last meeting, Cllr Healey said that the group looked at the implications of using more retained staff. It was noted that the biggest issue was recruiting staff who could be available during the working day.

Members asked about national operational guidance and what contingency was in place as LFEPA's initial contribution to its ongoing development was now running out. Helen Murray reported that a bid to CLG was currently being finalised by the National Operational Guidance group which would be match-funded by FAs. This bid was set to be submitted early in the following week.

Members commented that the Fire Service College's development of regional delivery capability alongside FRSs was a positive step forward.

On the Sprinklers Campaign Working Group, members felt that more could be done to engage with the private sector. Cllr Edwards said that the group would look to revive conversations with the Association of British Insurers. Officers reported that representatives from insurance companies had been invited to attend the forthcoming Fire Conference in March 2014.

Cllr Edwards reminded the Committee that 3 February was National Sprinklers Week and asked members to look at running awareness raising events during that period.

Cllr Hammond gave a summary of discussions by the Fire Conference

Working Group in September and said that PCCs from across the country had been invited to attend. She said that as conference delegates left the conference early on the second day before its afternoon finish in previous years, she had made the decision for it to conclude at lunchtime.

Cllr Hilton reported that at the last Strategic Resilience Board meeting he had asked the Board to look at the Government's response to Sir Ken Knight's review and its potential impact on national resilience.

Members asked about the forthcoming reorganisation of the LGA's Governance structures. They highlighted the substantial financial contribution that Fire Authorities make to the LGA's membership and the importance of Fire Authorities maintaining a policy-making role on fire issues going forward. Cllr Hammond said that the Political Group leaders would ultimately make the final decision on this issue and members should direct their comments to them accordingly.

Members noted the issues set out in the paper.

6. Note of the last meeting - 19 September 2013

Members approved the minutes of the previous meeting.

Date of Next Meeting:

Friday, 24 January 2014 at 11.00am in the Westminster Suite (Room 8.1), Local Government House, Westminster

Appendix A

Brandon Lewis MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department of Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

22 November 2013

Dear Brandon

I am writing on behalf of the Fire Service Management Committee to reiterate the messages set out in the LGA's Autumn Statement submission.

As with the rest of local government, fire and rescue authorities and county run fire and rescue services are under intense financial pressure as funding reductions continue to 2015/16 and potentially beyond.

Fire and Rescue Authorities are doing all they can to adjust to the changing financial position while maintaining a level of service, determined by the local risk profile, that keeps their communities safe.

Fire and Rescue Authorities have evolved over the last 10 years and have developed a significantly wider role in public safety and prevention and they contribute substantially to the achievement of a range of societal goals, including:

- Support to our economy through direct work with business and by helping to create the environment in which business can thrive.
- Support to young people who have become marginalised and at risk of entering the criminal justice system
- Support to the elderly which extends the time that people can remain in their own home and contributes both to the wellbeing of individuals and reduces pressures on the public purse
- Activity to improve public safety and public health.

It is important that the added value represented in these activities is factored in when considering the future, and future funding, of the fire and rescue service.

There is an untested assumption in government that further funding reductions can be absorbed without changing the risk factors that underpin communities' high regard of and trust in fire and rescue services. Incidents are declining, but communities have an expectation about the quality and universality of fire and rescue service response. The government should consider the impact of further reductions in funding on risk levels and stand ready to have an open discussion with communities about the level of risk mitigation it is prepared to pay for.

Like the rest of local government, the capacity to increase council tax has been constrained by the government's requirement for fire and rescue authorities to hold referendums on increases it considers excessive; currently the limit is 2 per cent. Fire and rescue authorities have argued that in many cases the cost of holding referendums is greater than the additional income it would generate. The Chief Fire officers Association has estimated that "to increase council tax amongst all precepting [fire] authorities by just 5% would cost an estimated £41 million in referenda costs and yet would raise just £38 million in extra income". In the 2012 settlement, eight Fire and Rescue Authorities were exempted from the referendum requirements. FSMC would like to see all Fire and Rescue Authorities exempted from the council tax referendum requirements.

Closer working across the emergency services will raise the quality of the service to communities and potentially realise efficiencies. Fire and Rescue Services have already begun this process. Examples include the Future Control programmes and the Joint Emergency Service Interoperability Programme (JESIP). These Initiatives provide the catalyst for further collaboration. Merger might be the solution for some, and the Government should consider removing all barriers to merger, including the current requirement for the equalisation of council tax across merging authorities, are removed.

Further shared services, co-location with other blue light services and other public sector organisations, and asset rationalisation are beginning to happen now and will all be necessary in the future. There is an important role for the Department of Communities and Local Government in breaking down the barriers in Whitehall which have the potential to stall further and sustained collaboration at the local level.

The underlying rationale for pension reform has been to ensure that public sector pensions are affordable in the long-term. The changes which are proposed for the firefighters' pension scheme have this purpose. We would welcome early confirmation of the scale and timing of savings to be expected as a result of the pension reforms so that it can assist in the fire and rescue services medium term planning.

Yours sincerely



Cllr Kay Hammond
Chairman, LGA Fire Services Management Committee