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**Fire and Rescue Authorities within the LGA**

**Purpose of report**

To inform members of the background and current issues relating to the role and place of Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) in the Association, to inform a forthcoming meeting between their lead members and the Chairman and Group Leaders.

**Summary**

This report sets out the governance and subscription arrangements for FRAs, a proposal from Combined Fire Authorities for a change in the way that the lead fire member is appointed and other options for a review of current arrangements.

**Recommendation**

A report will be prepared for the LGA Executive following the joint meeting on 17 November.

**Action**

Officers to action as appropriate.

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## **Fire and Rescue Authorities within the LGA**

### **Background**

1. Since the LGA was established, Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) have been in associate membership of the Association. Although they have restricted voting rights at the General Assembly, in practice they receive access to the full range of benefits across the Association including access to the political groups, lobbying, policy, workforce and improvement support in the same way as councils do.
2. All 46 FRAs through individual or corporate arrangements are currently in membership, bringing revenue of approximately £0.5m into the Association. Basically there are four types of FRA in England.
  - 2.1 London has a regional body, the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) appointed by the Mayor of London.
  - 2.2 In metropolitan conurbations there are Fire and Civil Defence Authorities appointed by the metropolitan districts (West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Tyne and Wear).
  - 2.3 In reorganised counties there are Combined Fire Authorities appointed by counties and unitaries in the former county areas.
  - 2.4 In unreorganised shires, Fire and Rescue is a function of the County Council.
  - 2.5 Fire and Rescue is a devolved service in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, although the LGA supports NJC negotiations on a United Kingdom basis.
3. Despite different governance structures at the local level, the functions of all Fire & Rescue Authorities are the same and therefore our overarching message to Government is one for FRAs as a whole and our work reflects that context. A National Framework was introduced by the government when the LGA defeated John Prescott's proposal for regional Fire Authorities in 2004. The LGA influences that Framework. That said, fire and rescue is still a locally led service when there are particular issues which affect particular FRAs, or a cluster of FRAs, we have made appropriate representations. The LGA recognises the different types of authority. Combined Fire Authorities meet at the annual LGA Fire Conference and have an annual gathering in addition.

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**Governance structures**

4. The Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) is linked to the Safer and Stronger Communities Programme Board. The FSMC is made up of 15 members, which must represent all types of FRA and with country-wide geographical coverage, with the number of representatives for each political group determined by political balance. It meets 6 times a year and the meeting is extended to all Chairs when the Fire Minister attends. It makes appointments to a range of national bodies, including the Pensions Committee and the National Resilience Board and commissions task and finish groups on specific issues.
5. Membership of the Fire Commission is open to all Fire Authorities. It is an excellent opportunity for all Chairs and other leading members to discuss matters of common concern, share ideas and exchange good practice. Representatives of government often attend. This is also an opportunity to shape policy development and to influence the work of the FSMC. It also meets 6 times a year.
6. There has been active engagement with all Fire Authorities on a wide range of issues, most of which result in clear and measurable benefits for them. However, from time to time we receive queries about the levels and value of subscription. The current LGA policy of not commenting on grant distribution led to the establishment of a separate organisation the Association of Metropolitan Fire Authorities (AMFRA) although all have remained as associate members of the LGA.

**Subscriptions**

7. FRAs pay subscriptions that are related to their populations: for Metropolitan Fire Authorities the subscription is a basic £29,950 with a supplement of £0.40 per thousand population above 1 million. Other Fire Authorities pay a basic £10,750 with a supplement of £2.00 per thousand population above 1 million and a discount of £7.25 per thousand population below 1 million. The range of subscriptions is therefore from £6,622.42 to £31,835.00.
8. In line with wider issues relating to subscriptions for all authorities, we have committed to make further reductions to subscription levels. Subscriptions for fire authorities have, overall, been reduced by more than 21% since 2009-10. This is about the same as the level of reduction in subscriptions for most other types of authority. The prompt payment discount introduced this year was taken up by all 46 fire authorities. The Resources Panel is also examining what more might be done to assist Metropolitan Fire Authorities.

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**The existing LGA offer**

9. The breadth and depth of LGA work on fire is significant. Over the last year there were significant lobbying wins which will benefit all FRAs. These include:
  - 9.1 Successfully lobbying for a General Power in the Localism Bill;
  - 9.2 Sustained lobbying for a broadening of proposed legislation around charging for Automatic Fire Alarm callouts;
  - 9.3 Leading the debate on an alternative to the failed government regional Fire Control project which led to residual funding of £1.8m being available to all FRAs;
  - 9.4 Sharing good practice on the Retained Duty System;
  - 9.5 Working through the implications of the Local Government Resource Review for Fire & Rescue Authorities, and developing a submission;
  - 9.6 Raising the profile of business continuity arrangements, in the light of possible industrial action;
  - 9.7 An annual conference, and additional workshops, roundtables, and other events throughout the year.
10. With the new Board cycle currently underway, the FSMC is now focusing on some important strategic issues such as firefighter pensions and the risk of industrial action, a new National Framework, national resilience, and a strengthened peer review process.
11. FRAs also benefit from the Chair of the FSMC sitting on the Safer and Stronger Communities Programme Board as of right and influencing a wide range of LGA policies and initiatives eg. response to civil disorder, total place initiatives and planning of the Olympics.

**Future arrangements**

12. There is a strong case for redefining the LGA's offer to associate members. The LGA Executive has already considered the position of Police and Crime Commissioners from 2012 and exploratory discussions are taking place about new arrangements. Something similar may be considered for National Park Authorities linked to the DeFRA proposal for direct elections to replace Secretary of State nominations. Integrated Transport Authorities (ITAs) already

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have specific arrangements. FRAs already have specific and effective arrangements within the LGA, but can also influence wider policy and development issues. For instance, intensive work has recently been targeted on developing a bespoke peer challenge programme at no additional cost to FRAs.

13. More specifically, combined fire authorities have lobbied for greater direct democracy in the appointments process for the Chairman of the FSMC and Fire Commission. At present the Chair is appointed through the LGA political template and in recent years the nomination has been made by the Conservative group. The Combined FRA's view is that direct election from all fire authorities would provide greater transparency and accountability. Lead members must balance whether this should be treated as a specific case or whether it would set a wider precedent within the Association. The current review of the LGA governance arrangements provide an appropriate context for this discussion. At its last meeting the Leadership Board decided to meet representatives of FRAs to discuss this. The meeting will take place on 17 November. Any change would take effect after the General Assembly in June 2012

**Financial Implications**

14. None, other than addressed in this report

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