

## **LGA Member Arrangements for Fire and Rescue Services**

### **Decisions**

1. Review member arrangements for issues relating to the fire and rescue service
2. Respond to a request from Combined Fire Authorities to establish a special interest group.
3. To determine when new arrangements should be introduced.

### **Actions Required**

4. All fire and rescue authorities in LGA membership to be informed of decisions.
5. Officers to put new arrangements in place.

Action by:

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## **LGA Member Arrangements for Fire and Rescue Services**

### **Summary**

1. This report poses a set of revised arrangements following a consultation process with local authorities and fire authorities towards the end of 2004.
2. It also proposes a response to a request from Combined Fire Authorities to establish a special interest group within the LGA.

### **Background**

3. The fire dispute from 2002-2004 created a range of concerns and difficulties about the handling of fire matters both inside and outside the LGA. Perhaps inevitably emotions were heightened and the complexity of the dispute combined with the glare of national publicity strained both relationships and structures to their limits. This culminated in major difficulties during the summer of 2004 and caused considerable strain within the Association.
4. Lessons to be learned from the dispute itself have been the subject of an internal scrutiny report which appears elsewhere on this agenda. Therefore the time is appropriate to review member arrangements within the Association and ensure that lessons learned are applied in a robust and integrated set of political arrangements.
5. Towards the end of 2004 consultation took place with fire authorities and local authorities on the effectiveness of current arrangements and options for the future. It was evident that there is considerable confusion about current arrangements, which is understandable given the complexities stated by different constitutional arrangements for fire authorities throughout the country and the pressures of the recent dispute.
6. However the main current objective of the LGA, its partner organisations in the UK and the Employers Organisation is the rigorous implementation of the change agenda which arises out of the agreement with the Fire Brigade Union in August 2004. Therefore the Association's arrangements must be designed to ensure that objectives are pursued effectively.
7. At a conference in December 2004 Combined Fire Authorities passed a resolution at their conference to be considered as a special interest group of the Association. All Combined Fire Authorities are associate members of the LGA except Derbyshire which ceased membership some years ago. A previous request for SIG three years ago was declined on the basis that CFAs did not have sufficiently distinct interests from other fire authorities to justify a SIG.

### **Proposals**

**8. Following extensive consultation and specific discussions with group leaders and the Fire Forum the following structure of bodies is proposed:**

**a) The Safer Communities Board has strategic responsibility for fire and other community safety and public protection issues. Whilst fire policy issues are integral to its work its overall objectives are too wide ranging and cross-cutting to deal with specific fire service issues;**

**b) The current Fire Modernisation Task Group is replaced and re-titled. It should be constituted from representatives of all types of fire authorities – counties, Combined Fire Authorities, Fire and Civil Defence Authorities and LFEPA together with representatives of Regional Management Boards. It would have a clear work programme established at the beginning of each year by the Safer Communities Board and deal with day-to-day matters affecting the fire and rescue service and steer implementation arrangements.**

**c) Specific recommendations would be made to the Safer Communities Board.**

**d) The Fire Forum remains open to members of all fire authorities with representation determined in proportion to size. It is a forum for debate and development of national policy options, scrutinising progress, raising and responding to fire and rescue service issues and consulting with the Fire Directorate of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The Forum would meet at least quarterly and the scope and style of meetings would be determined by it. It would have the ability to create sub-groups to look at specific issues or reflect different types of authority.**

**e) negotiations on pay and conditions continue to be managed on the United Kingdom basis by the National Organisation of Employers of Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services. The constitution of that body has recently been reformed to include 14 members 9 of which are appointed by the LGA. The secretariat is provided by the Employers Organisation.**

**f) High level policy and service condition matters are discussed directly with government in the CLP sub-group on fire which meets at least twice a year. It is co-chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and the chairman of the LGA and is currently attended by group leaders and principal group spokespeople on fire.**

**9. Clear terms of reference and an organisational chart should be developed for each of these groups, demonstrating their responsibilities and how they relate to each other as soon as new arrangements are approved.**

## **Appointments**

**10. Appointments to all these bodies should be made by the political groups recognising the political proportions of the LGA. The Fire Forum must represent all fire authorities in proportion to their size.**

**11. The chair of the new fire body should have a place on the Safer Communities Board. The LGA should appoint 4 Fire and Rescue Group spokespeople who would be**

core members of the Fire Forum Implementation Group and the National Organisation of Employers.

12. In order to ensure consistency across these bodies the chair of the National Employers (appointed by the LGA as the majority group) should always have a place on the Implementation Group and the CLP sub-group.

### **Proposal for a Special Interest Group**

13. All members of Combined Fire Authorities are appointed by principal local authorities. The CFAs now have separate status, setting their own precept, which creates particular challenges. This is also true of LFEPA which is a regional body as are fire and civil defence authorities in the former metropolitan counties. A call for a special interest group from CFAs has been persistent in recent years and they have nominated a lead authority. In December 2004 this passed from East Sussex to Hampshire.

14. The LGA group leaders have been consulted on this proposal. Because they are sympathetic to this idea they recommend to the Executive that any decision should be deferred until these new arrangements are in place with a commitment to review that decision within the next 12 months. At a meeting of the Fire Forum on 18 February most representatives considered that these requirements could be met within the Fire Forum arrangements for the time being.

15. If the LGA Executive changes these political arrangements they would usually come into force after the General Assembly in July 2005. However leading members are seeking more rapid implementation of any decisions taken by this Executive.

### **Implications for Wales**

16. Since the Fire Service Act 2004, service policy has devolved to the Welsh Assembly. LGA officers have consulted WLGA officers on aligning policy advice and member arrangements.

### **Financial/Resource Implications**

17. Officer support arrangements must be reviewed in the light of decisions made on any new member arrangements.

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