

17 July 2006

## **Note of Decisions Taken and Action**

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### **Fire Services Management Committee**

15 May 2006

Local Government House, Smith Square, London

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#### **Present**

<b>Chair:</b>	Cllr Les Byrom (Merseyside F&RA) (Conservative)
<b>Vice Chair:</b>	Cllr Peter Young (Tyne & Wear F&RA) (Labour)
<b>Deputy Chairs:</b>	Cllr Christina Jebb (Staffordshire CC) (Liberal Democrat) and Cllr Watts Stelling (Durham CC) (Independent).
<b>Conservative:</b>	Cllr Jerry Willmott (Wiltshire & Swindon F&RA), Cllr Anthony Duggan (Bedfordshire & Luton F&RA) and Cllr Richard Hobbs (Warwickshire CC) (RMB Member); Cllr Mac McGuire (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough F&RA)
<b>Labour:</b>	Cllr James Ashton (Northamptonshire CC), Cllr Fred Walker (Greater Manchester F&RA).
<b>Liberal Democrat:</b>	Cllr Gordon Beever (West Yorkshire F&RA) and Cllr Jeremy Hilton (Gloucestershire CC).

#### **Action by**

#### **1. DCLG (formerly ODPM) update**

The Chair gave the following update on OPDM following the Cabinet re-shuffle.

A new **Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)** had replaced ODPM which no longer existed. **DCLG** had an expanded remit under **Ruth Kelly** as Secretary of State. Jim Fitzpatrick had moved to DTI with **Angela Smith** (ex NI Office) assuming responsibility for **fire** matters.

David Harper (DCLG) confirmed the new Ministerial team's commitment to the fire modernisation programme. He had perceived no indication of change in priorities, and anticipated the same pace of change in fire matters within the new DCLG.

Subsequent discussion focussed on the industrial dispute within Hertfordshire FRA the continued threat of strike action, and the need to accelerate the process of **Contingency Planning**.

John Ransford advised that the Minister had met the parties to the Herts dispute the previous Friday, 12 May. A compromise solution was possible, whereby two stations would be closed in Herts, but without any job losses, including amongst retained staff. However, the FBU had been unable to recommend the proposal to its members, adopting a (deliberately) neutral stance. Strike action had been averted on 15 May, but remained a possibility on 20 May.

Cllr Byrom (Chair) said the DCLG's stance that military intervention was not an option in the Herts dispute underlined the need for all FRAs to accelerate their efforts to draw up comprehensive Contingency Plans excluding the military option.

Further discussion focussed on the following issues:

- There was a need to improve cross-border co-operation in the event of industrial action. Issues around indemnity, pensions, and insurance would need to be resolved to achieve this;;
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- Other areas were facing the risk of industrial action. A dispute had been registered in South Yorkshire, and North Yorkshire, Humberside, Staffordshire and Surrey were also facing issues;
- Requests for cross-border assistance should take into account the urgency and severity of incidents;
- It would be important to build on what had been proposed at the contingency planning conference in Bolton.

#### Decisions

- A letter of welcome should be sent to Angela Smith, inviting her to attend a future meeting of the Fire Forum, and expressing the expectation that meetings of the CLP sub-group on fire would continue;
- A further letter should be sent to Jim Fitzpatrick, thanking him for his contribution as Fire Minister;
- Cllr Fred Walker should bring proposals to the meeting of the Fire Forum in September, and these should be followed up by broader discussions.

#### Actions

- Secretariat to prepare letters to Angela Smith and Jim

Fitzpatrick, for agreement by lead members;

- Cllr Walker to continue to take forward work with CFOA and DCLG, with the aim of bringing a paper to the July meeting of the Fire Services Management Committee;
- Following discussion at the FSMC, Cllr Walker to refine proposals for discussion at the September meeting of the Fire Forum.

Secretariat

Cllr Fred Walker

Cllr Fred Walker

## **2. Comprehensive Spending Review 2007: Resourcing the Fire and Rescue Service**

Members were updated by Bill Wilkinson, LGA fire finance advisor, who went over the key points in his paper and the latest position following the meeting of the Fire Expenditure Group on 4 May. It was clear that the Treasury was strongly influencing Government thinking in the CSR07 process. Key messages from the Chancellor's recent budget statement were:

- Funding was tight, with little if any new money and scant room for manoeuvre. The best any service was likely to get was a standstill in real terms – 2.5% to 3% in cash terms;
- Further efficiency savings were likely to be sought, with a possible target of 4–5%;
- Treasury were seeking to dispose of 10% of capital assets currently held by the public sector, though there did not appear to be a timescale for achieving this;
- A small percentage movement of funding towards the fire service could have a big cash impact;
- The Government required comprehensive case studies to support the case for new resources. These should highlight how FRAs interact with communities and the national economy;
- The submission should draw on the work to develop the LGA's 10 Year Vision for Fire. This would cover a period of successive Spending Reviews and should help make the case for long-term investment;
- Case studies should draw on the impact of national projects such as FiReControl, FiReBuy and the Centre of Excellence;
- Co-ordinated approaches by FRAs, CFOA and the LGA Task Group on the ten-year vision, expressing a common view would be essential;

- It was intended that information to support the submission would be assembled by the end of July, with a draft submission produced by September.

Members expressed the following views in subsequent discussion:

- Caution was expressed over the establishment of the Centre of Excellence. It would be important to ensure that it added value for fire authorities;
- Property losses from fire were rising. It might be possible to come to some arrangement with the insurance industry to lever additional resources into the fire service;
- The role of Local Area Agreements should be considered;
- Case studies would provide evidence of the impact of resources so far, and should be used to highlight the effectiveness of the fire service in delivering real outcomes;
- The submission should include evidence of the cost to the national economy of fire deaths and injuries, and commercial losses through fire;
- It would be important to engage more closely with health and social services in future.

Bill Wilkinson said that evidence of how well FRAs were using current funding should form part of the case for additional funding for the future, showing the need for investment and expansion over the 10 year Vision period. Linking the CSR07 and 10 Year Vision processes was essential.

#### Decisions

- It would be important that members were kept in touch with the progress of work. Bill Wilkinson would attend a future meeting of the Committee and Fire Forum to provide an update.

### **3. NJC Reform**

Members noted the conclusions of the last Fire Services Forum on NJC reform. It was noted that:

- A joint standing sub-committee had been requested on 19 May, to look at co-responding, Continuous Professional Development, NJC reform and other issues;
- The FBU had requested an Annual General Meeting of the NJC on 12 June. This appeared to support the view that the national negotiating machinery remained important to the

FBU.

- The LGA representatives at the NJC would take the agreed points from the Fire Services Forum to other members of the Employer's side of the NJC to gain an agreed position. The best possible deal would be negotiated on that basis.

#### **4. LGA annual fire conference**

Members noted that the 2006 annual conference held in Runcorn in March, was both positively received by members, and a commercial success, generating a 10–15% increase in profits over 2005.

##### Decisions

- That the 2007 conference be held in East Anglia, with Cambridge or Peterborough as the preferred venue;
- That the chosen venue should be close to a town centre or general amenities;
- That the theme for conference 2007 be the LGA's "Ten Year Vision";
- That the 2008 conference be held in the West Midlands, perhaps Birmingham. Early planning should begin for this to find a suitable venue.

##### Actions

##### **Secretariat**

- Secretariat to pursue Conference 2007 venue arrangements with LGA Conferences and Events team;
- Secretariat to liaise with Conferences and Events on a possible 2008 venue in the West Midlands.

#### **5. Performance assessment framework**

##### Decisions

Members agreed the LGA's response to the Audit Commission on the performance assessment framework for 2006, outlined in the paper before them with the following comments:

- Some differences of view existed over whether FRAs had a role in preventing non-fire related incidents such as road traffic collisions. This would impact on the indicator around attendance at such incidents. This indicator also appeared to dis-incentivise co-responding;
- The request to reconsider the more stringent tests around

use of resources should not have the effect of discriminating against county councils with county fire authorities. Further advice should be sought on this point;

- Deprivation had an impact on indicators other than those it was currently being proposed should be adjusted for deprivation;
- The Performance Indicators should be weighted most heavily towards performance in more recent years, to reflect improvement;
- There were difficulties around using the indicator on fires confined to the room of origin as a measure of fire service performance; and
- The proposal that the service assessment be weighted in favour of the toolkit should be strengthened.

#### Actions

#### **Secretariat**

That the Secretariat reflect the Committee's views in the draft response; circulate the revised draft to members of the Fire Forum and RMB Chairs, copied to Committee members for further comment; and clear the final paper with lead members prior to final submission to the Audit Commission on 30 May.

#### **6. FiReControl governance**

Claire Cooper (Fire Programme Manager, LGA) introduced the paper on the LGA's proposed response to DCLG's consultation on governance arrangements for FiReControl.

Cllr Jerry Willmott updated members on the first FiReControl regional seminar, held at Reigate and jointly sponsored by DCLG, CFOA and LGA. This had gone well. There were challenges to be met to ensure that DCLG were fully aware of local concerns. LGA had a lead role to play in the process, and were the primary conduit to DCLG. But Members should also attend their regional seminar and provide input.

#### Decisions

That the LGA paper be agreed, subject to the following comments:

- The Standards Board of England should be asked to advise on issues of conflict of interest for members acting as directors of the company and members of fire authorities and Regional Management Boards;
- No diversification of activity by the companies should ever

jeopardise their core resilience functions. The decision to diversify must be the responsibility of the company's board;

- It was difficult to take an informed view on the proposed Articles and Memorandum of Association. It was hoped that the regional seminars would provide more information;
- Members of companies should be appointed by fire authorities, and the boards should be comprised solely of elected members;
- The response should reflect RMB's functions as set out in the National Framework. These would need to be carried out in conjunction with fire authorities;
- Further guidance on the company memorandum and articles of governance.

In conclusion, Members noted that the experience of the first round of FiReControl companies would inform those that followed.

#### Actions

#### **Secretariat**

- Revised draft paper addressing Members concerns to be circulated to RMBs Chairs and Vice Chairs, members of the Fire Forum and LGA advisers for further comment. The final response should be agreed by lead members before final submission to DCLG by 14 June.

#### **7. Notes of the Previous Meeting**

It was confirmed to Members that the Notes were a summary rather than a verbatim record.

The Notes of the meeting on 13 March 2006 were accepted.

