

Note of last Fire Commission meeting

Title:	Fire Commission
Date:	Wednesday 25 May 2016
Venue:	Westminster Suite, 8th Floor, Local Government House, Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as [Appendix A](#) to this note

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	Policing and Crime Bill and Fire Reform	
	<p>The Chair introduced Dan Greaves, Fire & Resilience Director at the Home Office, who spoke to the Fire Commission about the Home Secretary's speech on fire reform.</p> <p>The Home Secretary has great respect for the fire service's strengths and achievements in securing the continued downward trend in deaths, false alarms, and its work on prevention and with partners. There were three key areas covered in the Home Secretary's speech: efficiency and collaboration, workforce reform, and governance and transparency.</p> <p>There is already lots going on across the fire service to reduce expenditure, but the government wants to see all up to the standard of the best. The collaborative duty contained in the Police & Crime Bill is to support this work. Research and development is another key area where Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) can work with CFOA and partners to deliver efficiency.</p> <p>The Government believes better procurement can result in savings and is an area where efficiencies can be made. The Fire Minister will write to all FRAs and will publish a table showing how much each authority has paid for 25 standard items of equipment.</p> <p>The government will offer a four year funding settlement in exchange for robust financial plans from authorities.</p> <p>The Home Secretary set up the College of Policing to set standards and expectations within the police. The intention is to establish something similar for the fire service to drive up standards and professionalism. This provides an opportunity for the sector to set this framework for the service.</p> <p>The high spend on workforce means it needs to be flexible and diverse. Flexible deployment means an increase in on call firefighters and there shouldn't be a distinction between on-call and whole-time firefighters. Traditional models should not be barriers to change.</p>	

The Home Secretary and the Director have heard from some that the National Joint Council (NJC) is a barrier to change. If so, the challenge to the sector on the NJC is to reform it or withdraw from it.

The natural churn within the FRS gives it an opportunity to change the demographic of the service so that it is more representative. The Home Secretary does not want to set targets for this but she will provide challenge where necessary. There is nothing in the Thomas review that FRAs need to see before they take action on this

On governance the Home Secretary's view is that a single individual elected with a mandate for change is able to provide strong leadership and accountability at the ballot box. Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) are expected to work with local representatives. These plans are not mandatory but are to be locally led. Police will not be taking over the FRS, there will be clear distinctions in finances. The government is not going to change its view on this however, it is willing to have a conversation on who conducts the independent review. Where FRAs do not agree PCC proposals, the Home Secretary will submit the business case for independent review with counter-representations. There is no guarantee that PCCs will be able to take over FRAs without their consent.

The Home Secretary wants to see robust independent assessments which are comparable. She will lay amendments to the Police & Crime Bill to establish an independent inspection regime. Inspection and peer review are about assurance and improvement and serve two different purposes, and again the Home Office wants to hear FRA views and have their input to its development.

The government has a programme for fire reform which is radical, ambitious and sector driven. The reforms aim for a more accountable, effective, professional than ever before.

In the discussion which followed the Director's talk a number of points were raised:

- The Director would like to meet a group of elected members to discuss what the independent inspection regime will look like and how the independent review of a PCC business case will work in practice. He also indicated that he was willing to discuss the points made in the on-call report produced by Kent.
- The Director recognised that some county fire authorities have good links with other public services, which is why when looking at governance it is important to look at the process and balance of benefits.
- The Home Office does not have a position currently on sprinklers or carbon monoxide alarms. However, they are looking again at a 'fire kills' campaign and fire prevention.
- The Home Office is aware of the long-term downward trend in demand and the reductions in staffing within the FRS. There will continue to be reductions and FRAs should look at efficiency and collaboration to reinvest in the frontline.
- The Home Office does not want to penalise those FRAs that have already made savings through efficiency and collaboration and will take this into account when looking at efficiency plans.

- The Home Secretary is not in favour of five year plans and national targets around diversity and representation. There is churn in on-call firefighters and it is up to the sector to make drive change, and the Home Office will work with them to achieve this.
- The relationship with the FRS and the Home Office is a positive one accepting of change and able to offer lots to the police and public sector.
- On governance leadership is critical to maximise efficiency. There are a range of views in relation to the success of PCCs but the Home Affairs Select Committee recently said they were more effective than police authorities. Members are embedded in their communities and elected by the people.
- The duty to collaborate with the ambulance service is part of the Police & Crime Bill.
- The Home Secretary is not in favour of top down reorganising the service. If a PCC does not want to assume responsibility for the FRS then the Home Secretary is happy to leave the arrangements as they stand.

The Chair thanked the Director for attending the meeting and looked forward to working together in the future.

Decision

The Fire Commission noted the paper and the comments of the Fire & Resilience Director.

2 Chief Fire Officers Association update from Paul Hancock, CFOA President

The Chair introduced Paul Hancock, President of the Chief Fire Officer Association, who updated the Fire Commission on the structural changes being proposed for CFOA.

The key changes being made include:

- Reposition the FRS Council to increase influence and contribution to Fire Strategy and Reform.
- Establish a permanent and longer term position or post for leading the National Fire Chiefs Council to build and capitalise on relationships with stakeholders.
- Improve decision making and coordination of key national and local issues.
- Restructure association to build capacity and maximise contributions and expertise from across the sector (including political input).

Following the presentation several members commented that it is elected members who determine policy and officers who are responsible for operational matters. Members were concerned at the implication CFOA would start to have a policy role and wanted to see the LGA more involved in influencing policy. Members also asked if the research by Kent on the value for money of on-call firefighters would be published. The CFOA President said the report would be circulated to FRAs.

Decision

The Fire Commission noted the update from CFOA.

3 Workforce report & verbal update from Malcolm Eastwood, Chair of the Pension Scheme Advisory Board

The Chair introduced Malcolm Eastwood, Chair of the Pension Scheme Advisory Board, who updated the Fire Commission on the Board's work to date.

The Board is behind on its programme of work but making good progress. The Chair has been travelling the country to meet groups and is keen to avoid duplicating work where possible. The Board has submitted its budget to the Secretary of State for approval and is trying to improve the schemes administration.

Clair Alcock, Fire Pensions Advisor, updated the Commission on the Home Office consultation on proposed amendments to survivor benefits in the 1992 scheme and minor amendments to the 2014 scheme. She also updated the Commission on draft regulations expected in the summer on providing a contributions holiday to members of the 1992 scheme under 50 with 30 years' service.

Gill Gittins, Principal Negotiating Officer, refreshed the Commission on the economies of scale the National Employers and the National Joint Council have delivered across a range of issues including collective bargaining, one example of which was negotiating flexibility so that local FRSs can match resources and shift patterns to risk. She informed the Commission that the NJC-led Inclusive Fire Service Group, which included involvement from CFOA, RFU and FOA, was working well. It had undertaken a detailed piece of research to inform its development of improvement strategies for use at local level on matters such as under-represented groups (recruitment, retention, promotion), bullying and cultural issues. An interim report should be released shortly. The Fitness Best Practice guide which had its roots in assisting the parties to the pensions dispute was completed and issued in March this year and is available to members. The NJC is also working with the FBU and LGA on apprenticeship matters in light of the apprenticeship levy. In addition, through the auspices of the NJC, work has taken place which has resulted in an excellent take up rate within FRSs of an apprenticeship in Fitness and Exercise.

Decision

The Fire Commission noted the Workforce report.

4 Emergency Services Collaboration Working Group

Jonathan Smith, Lead Officer for the Emergency Services Collaboration Working Group (ESCWG), discussed the background of the Group and outlined its future work programme.

The ESCWG was set up in 2014 and since then has undertaken a programme of work looking at collaboration across the emergency services. The Group published an overview of the collaboration underway in blue light services across England in November 2014 and is due to publish an updated version shortly.

Mr Smith stressed that strategic buy in was key to successful collaboration and also discussed the efficiency savings provided by the Multi Agency Information Transfer (MAIT) system. Blue light collaboration is important but fire service collaboration is wider including, health, charities and other public services.

Members commented that Fire and Rescue Authorities should be represented on the roundtable discussions about collaboration.

Decision

The Fire Commission noted the update.

Action

Officers to progress as necessary.

5 Apprenticeships

Nigel Carruthers, Senior Advisor Workforce Strategy & Consultancy, introduced the paper and updated the Fire Commission on in relation to the government's apprenticeship policy and how it will impact on fire services.

The aim behind the policy is to provide young people with an alternative to higher education by creating long-term investment to support the development of apprenticeships. The levy will apply to employers with a bay bill in excess of £3million, it is assumed this will cover all Fire and Rescue Services. The levy can only be used to pay for apprenticeship training from government approved training providers.

The Enterprise Bill will give Ministers the power to set public sector organisations with 250 staff or more an apprenticeship recruitment target of 2.3% of the workforce headcount per year. There are no sanctions for failing to comply.

The LGA has opposed the apprenticeship levy because it creates a significant financial and reporting burden on the Fire and Rescue Service. There are opportunities to see how the FRS can maximise the invested levy funds.

One member stressed that their authority was in favour of the scheme and felt it was good for improving diversity within the service.

Decision

Members noted the update and agreed to feed in their views by email.

Action

Officers to progress in line with members feedback.

6 Fire Commission update report

Decision

The Fire Commission noted the report.

Action

Officers to progress as appropriate.

7 Notes from the previous meeting

The Fire Commission agreed the minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 October 2015.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Gloucestershire County Council
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Philip Howson	East Sussex Fire Authority
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Kay Hammond	Surrey County Council
	Cllr David Acton	Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority
Members	Cllr Gordon Wheeler	Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Andrew Dransfield	Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority
	Cllr David McVicar	Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service
	Cllr John Horner	Warwickshire County Council
	Cllr David Cartwright	London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)
	Cllr Christopher Carter	Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Maurice Heaster OBE	London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)
	Cllr Mark Healey MBE	Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Kay Hammond	Surrey County Council
	Cllr Richard Thake	Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Stuart Davis	West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr John Fort BEM	North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr Anthony Hedley	Essex Fire Authority
	Sir Peter Brown	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority
	Cllr John Briggs	Humberside Fire Authority
	Cllr Simon Spencer	Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Peter Abraham	Avon Fire Authority
	Cllr Rodney Rose	Oxfordshire County Council

	Cllr Andre Gonzalez de Savage	Northamptonshire Fire Authority
	Cllr Nick Chard	Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Stuart West	Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
	Cllr Darrell Pulk	Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Thomas Wright	Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr David Acton	Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Barry Doughty	Cumbria County Council
	Cllr Mohammed Idrees	West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Thomas Judge	Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Linda Maloney	Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Stef Nelson	Cheshire Fire Authority
	Cllr John Edwards	West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Philip Howson	East Sussex Fire Authority
	Cllr Geoff Brown	Cornwall Council
	Cllr Brian Greenslade	Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Roger Price	Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Zoe Patrick	Oxfordshire County Council
Apologies	Cllr Alan Bayley	Essex County Council
	Cllr Lizzie Deane	East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service
	Cllr Matthew Hicks	Suffolk County Council
	Cllr Susan Hall	London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)
	Cllr Adrian Gulvin	Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Ann Holland	Essex Fire Authority
	Cllr Rebecca Knox	Dorset Fire Authority
	Cllr Peter Robinson	Lincolnshire Fire Authority
	Mr Gareth Bacon	Greater London Authority
	Cllr Derek Prodger MBE	Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Marian Stockdale	Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Janice Brunton	Cleveland Fire Authority
	Ms Fiona Twycross	London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)
	Cllr Michele Hodgson	County Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr Jack Hopkins	London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)
	Cllr Jim Andrews BEM	South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Gary Haley	Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service
	Mr Tom Copley	London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)
	Cllr Val Smith	South Wales Fire Authority
	Cllr Meirick Davies	North Wales Fire Authority
	Cllr Mike Biggin	Cheshire Fire Authority
	Cllr Lucy Nethsingha	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority
	Mr Stephen Knight	Greater London Authority
	Cllr Nigel Moor	
In Attendance	Cllr Les Byrom CBE	Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority

