

## Note of last Fire Commission meeting

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| <b>Title:</b> | Fire Commission                                 |
| <b>Date:</b>  | Friday 10 June 2022                             |
| <b>Venue:</b> | Bevin Hall, 18 Smith Square and online via Zoom |

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### Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

| Item     | Decisions and actions   | Action |
|----------|---|--------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of interest</b><br><br>The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.<br><br>Apologies were received from: Cllrs John Briggs, Linda Taylor, Steven Lambert, Amanda Peers, Carolyn Lambert, Lesley Rennie, Janet Willis, James Doyle, Frank Biederman, Trevor Ainsworth, Tudor Davies, Morris Bright and Simon Coles.<br><br>There were no declarations of interest.  |        |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 September 2021</b><br><br>The minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.   |        |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Fire Reform White Paper</b><br><br>The Chair invited Anjli Mapara (AM) - Deputy Head of Fire Strategy & Reform Unit and Stuart Harwood (SH) – Head of Governance, from the Home Office to give a presentation on the White Paper.<br><br>AM set out the Government’s case for the reforms proposed in the White Paper, with Covid 19, HMICFRS inspection reports and the Grenfell Tower and Manchester Arena disasters all highlighting the need for change in how FRSs are run. The proposals in the White Paper were under 3 headings:<br>1) Professionalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishing an independent College of Fire &amp; Rescue</li><li>• Introducing minimum entry requirements and development schemes</li><li>• A mandatory 21<sup>st</sup> Century leadership programme</li></ul> 2) People <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Carrying out a review of the pay structure</li></ul> |        |

- Defining the role of a firefighter
- Unlocking talent and diversity
- Developing a firefighter's oath

### 3) Governance

- Transferring FRA functions to a single elected (ideally directly-elected) individual
- Introducing operational independence for CFOs
- Separating strategic Fire and Rescue Plans from operational Independent Risk Management Plans.

AM stressed that the Home Office was keen to have conversations with local areas, particularly around governance reform, to try and come up with solutions that were acceptable to all parties. She encouraged members to respond to the consultation which would be running until 26 July.

Lucy Ellender (LE), LGA Senior Adviser, expanded upon the proposed governance changes and their implications for FRAs and highlighted the table in the White Paper on potential demarcation of responsibilities between the political (executive) leader and the Chief Fire Officer (CFO). Feedback was requested from members on the two possible alternative governance arrangements proposed in the covering report.

#### Members' comments and questions:

- Members welcomed the Government's commitment to improving fire and rescue services through the White Paper although it was suggested that they needed to be clearer about exactly what outcomes they wanted from the process.
- Members felt very strongly that it should be up to local areas to determine the governance arrangements that best suited their individual circumstances, not for central Government to dictate. The rationale for changing governance of FRAs was queried and whether enforced changes would actually improve service delivery. Putting power in the hands of one individual would reduce accountability and scrutiny, and valuable local expertise in FRAs would be lost. It was considered that there were a number of other more pressing issues, such as pensions, recruitment/retention of senior officers and diversity and inclusion that needed to be resolved and would have a much greater impact on improving services. None of this was addressed in the White Paper. Members queried what the process would be, should there be disagreement between central and local government in a particular area. AM confirmed that this process had not yet been determined but reiterated that the Minister's preference remained for a single directly-elected individual to take on governance. Members agreed that the two alternative options put forward by the LGA in the report should be worked up and put forward in the consultation response.
- A Mayoral governance model could be made to work with the establishment of an effective Police, Fire & Crime Panel – the example of Greater Manchester was cited. SH said that the Government would seek to replicate the Manchester model in

future Mayoral arrangements.

- The costs of changing governance arrangements and wider reforms had not been factored in by Government and needed to be balanced against the perceived benefits. AM referred members to the Impact Assessment published alongside the White Paper which contained cost estimates of the proposals. A further, more detailed impact assessment would be published when the Government response to the consultation was published.
- It was suggested that much of what was in the White Paper could be achieved without new legislation, through sharing best practice.
- The White Paper proposals on governance had not been joined up with the proposals in the Levelling Up White Paper on changes to local authority governance.
- The corporation sole model would not work in county council fire services.
- Trying to abolish the current NJC structure and collective bargaining would create more problems that it would solve – the Government should work with the stakeholders to address any perceived issues.
- The benefits of introducing a firefighters' oath were queried.
- Some of the proposals under professionalism were welcomed, in particular, the establishment of a properly resourced Fire College.
- If closer integration and greater accountability of blue light services was the Government's objective, then lack of accountability in the ambulance service should also be looked at.
- Ring-fencing of funding was not considered a good idea from an accounting point of view as it reduced services' flexibility to be responsive to situations.
- With PCCs not being restricted in how much they could increase their share of council tax, there was a danger that the value for money residents received could actually reduce with the proposed governance changes.
- A plea was made for regional variations in cost of living and other issues to be taken into account in any reform of the NJC structure and for local flexibility on possible entry requirements.
- Introducing stricter entry requirements for firefighters could be counter-productive in terms of recruitment of a more diverse and inclusive workforce. AM stressed that the White Paper was not specifying academic entry requirements.
- It was suggested that the White Paper proposals could help in facilitating a broadening of the role of firefighters.

The Chair thanked Anjli and Stuart for attending the Fire Commission and said that a draft response to the White Paper would be brought to the Fire Services Management Committee on 8 July for agreement.

**Decision:**

Fire Commission **agreed** the proposed direction of response to the Fire Reform White Paper, encapsulating comments made during the debate – draft response to be agreed by Fire Services Management Committee on 8 July 2022.

## 4 Fire Finance

The Chair invited Mark Hemming (MH), Buckinghamshire FRS and CFO Ben Ansell (BA), Dorset & Wiltshire FRS to introduce the report.

BA reminded members that it was currently year 1 of a 3-year Spending Review settlement from Government although services had only been provided with year 1 figures. The local government finance settlement for 2022-23 contained mixed news. Whilst giving the lowest 8 council tax FRAs the ability to raise their council tax precept by £5 was welcome, it was disappointing that this, or increased flexibility, was not extended to other FRAs. Whilst discussions with the Home Office were ongoing, it was unlikely that there would be any changes to the fire funding formula before 2025 at the earliest. It was therefore important for both the NFCC and the LGA to continue to lobby both DLUHC and the Treasury for greater flexibility around the council tax precept.

MH reminded members of the commitments made around efficiency and productivity (and the Forum established to help deliver these) as part of the Spending Review submission. The biggest challenge was around data collection and a standardised efficiency plan template was therefore being worked up through the Fire Finance Network. This would enable services to demonstrate efficiency gains and to aggregate these up nationally. MH explained that a full-blown submission to Home Office would not be required this year but several key issues such as pay awards, pensions and inflation would be highlighted to Government in terms of their impact on FRA finances. In particular, research was being carried out into the impacts of the rapidly increasing energy costs for FRAs.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members agreed that the current joint working arrangements with the NFCC on finance had been very helpful and should continue.
- Members felt it would be helpful if a projection of the various expected cost increases could be made for individual FRAs in order to help with budgeting, as well as lobbying. BA said that additional in-year funding was not expected and so FRAs would have to continue to plan within their current budgets. MH added that individual FRAs were being surveyed around increased costs and this would be aggregated nationally to try and produce a range of inflation scenarios to help FRAs plan ahead.
- It was considered important to distinguish between genuine efficiencies and cuts to services that would damage outcomes for residents.

**Decision:**

Fire Commission **noted** the previous work of the NFCC and LGA and **endorsed** continued joint working on lobbying for sustainable funding for the sector.

## 5 Building Safety Update

The Chair invited Georgia Goddard (GG) – NGDP Graduate, to introduce the update.

GG took members through some of the key points from the update paper:

- Discussions taking place with DLUHC and NFCC to support a coordinated risk audit within medium-rise residential buildings
- The Joint Inspection Team has secured funding for the next two years which will see it triple in capacity by the end of this financial year
- The Building Safety Act has now received Royal Assent but there will be a significant number of pieces of secondary legislation needed in order to set up the new Building Safety Regime. The LGA's outstanding concerns were set out, in particular, a lack of Government funding to achieve desired outcomes.
- Fire Safety Act and a number of Grenfell Tower Inquiry phase 1 recommendations had now commenced.
- The Government had just published the consultation outcome on the review of the ban on the use of combustible materials in and on the external walls of buildings alongside updated guidance to fire safety and building regulations.
- The Government had also published a third consultation on PEEPs, containing new proposals, including a proposal called Emergency Evacuation Information Sharing. Fire Services Management Committee had agreed that the LGA should not support the proposals in the consultation as they don't require the responsible person in a building with simultaneous evacuation to have a plan on how a resident with a disability would evacuate in the event of a fire. The LGA's view was that such a policy would be unlawful under the Equalities Act if adopted by local authorities.

Members' comments and questions:

- Concerns were raised over the Government's latest proposals on disabled residents in high rise blocks. Charles Loft, Senior Adviser, welcomed the establishment of a working group with residents and landlords to look in more detail at the issues but warned that it was not sustainable for the Government to effectively transfer responsibility from the duty-holder to the fire service for ensuring the safety of disabled residents in blocks with Simultaneous Evacuation.

**Decision:**

Fire Commission **noted** and **endorsed** the LGA's building safety related work.

## **6 National Fire Chiefs Council update**

The Chair invited Mark Hardingham, NFCC Chair, to introduce the update.

MH passed on his thanks to colleagues who had facilitated the deployment of three convoys of UK fire service kit and equipment to Ukraine over the last two months, providing vital life-saving equipment to firefighters there. The Fire Commission Chair also recorded his appreciation for those firefighters.

**Decision:**

Fire Commission **noted** the update.

## 7 Fire Standards Board update

The Chair invited Cllr Nick Chard to introduce the update.

Cllr Chard highlighted and welcomed the new Leadership Standard which was going out to consultation.

**Decision:**

Fire Commission **noted** the update.

## 8 Fire Commission update

The Chair invited Lucy Ellender (LE), Senior Adviser, to introduce the update. LE indicated that she was happy to take questions on the report.

**Decision:**

Fire Commission **noted** the update without discussion.

## 9 Workforce update

The Chair invited Gill Gittins (GG), Senior Adviser (workforce and negotiations), to introduce the update. GG indicated that she was happy to take questions on the report.

**Decision:**

Fire Commission **noted** the update without discussion.

## Appendix A -Attendance

| Position/Role        | Councillor                                | Authority                                      |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Chairman             | Cllr Ian Stephens                         | Isle of Wight Council                          |
| Members              | Cllr Brenda Massey                        | Avon Fire Authority                            |
|                      | Cllr John Chatterley                      | Bedfordshire Combined Fire Authority           |
|                      | Cllr Pauline Helliar-Symons               | Royal Berkshire Fire Authority                 |
|                      | Cllr Edna Murphy                          | Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority |
|                      | Cllr Bob Rudd                             | Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service                 |
|                      | Cllr Martyn Alvey                         | Cornwall Council                               |
|                      | Cllr Rebecca Knox                         | Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service   |
|                      | Cllr John Shuttleworth                    | Co. Durham and Darlington Fire Authority       |
|                      | Cllr Carol Theobald                       | East Sussex Fire Authority                     |
|                      | Cllr David Norman MBE                     | Gloucestershire County Council                 |
|                      | Dr Fiona Twycross                         | Greater London Authority                       |
|                      | Cllr Steve Williams                       | Greater Manchester Combined Authority          |
|                      | Cllr David Lancaster                      | Greater Manchester Combined Authority          |
| Cllr Rhydian Vaughan | Hampshire and Isle of Wight Combined Fire |  |

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|-------------------------|--|
| MBE                     | Authority  |
| Cllr Kit Taylor         | Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority                |
| Cllr Nick Chard         | Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority            |
| Cllr David O'Toole      | Lancashire Combined Fire Authority                   |
| Cllr John Shedwick      | Lancashire Combined Fire Authority                   |
| Cllr Lindsey Cawrey     | Lincolnshire County Council                          |
| Cllr Les Byrom CBE      | Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority                 |
| Cllr Elwyn Williams     | Mid and West Wales Fire Authority                    |
| Cllr Margaret Dewsbury  | Norfolk County Council                               |
| Paul Fell               | Northants Police Fire & Crime Commissioner           |
| Cllr Neil Fawcett       | Oxfordshire County Council                           |
| Cllr Eric Carter        | Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority                 |
| Cllr Charlie Hogarth    | South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority            |
| Cllr Tony Damms         | South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority            |
| Cllr Andy Crump         | Warwickshire County Council                          |
| Cllr Peter Hogarth MBE  | West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority              |
| Cllr Duncan Crow        | West Sussex County Council                           |
| Cllr Darren O'Donovan   | West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority             |
| Cllr Peter Harrand      | West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority             |
| Cllr Mark Healey MBE    | Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority         |
| Cllr Lesley Rennie      | Merseyside FRA                                       |
| Cllr Richard Bell       | County Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Authority |
| Cllr Greg Brackenridge  | West Midlands FRA                                    |
| Cllr Nikki Hennessy     | Lancashire County Council                            |
| Cllr Jane Hugo          | Blackpool Council                                    |
| Cllr Carl Johnson       | Tyne & Wear FRA                                      |
| Cllr Leigh Redman       | Somerset County Council                              |
| Cllr Colleen Atkins MBE | Bedfordshire FRA                                     |
| Cllr Keith Aspden       | North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service                |
| Cllr Ruth Skelton       | Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Authority                 |
| Cllr Roger Price        | Hampshire and Isle of Wight FRA                      |
| Cllr Jeremy Hilton      | Gloucestershire County Council                       |
| Cllr Tom Woodwark       | Tyne and Wear FRA                                    |
| Cllr Paul Kirton        | Cleveland FRA  |
| Cllr Nigel Smith        | Conwy County Borough Council                         |
| Apologies               | Cumbria County Council                               |
| Cllr Janet Willis       | Derbyshire County Council                            |
| Cllr Trevor Ainsworth   | Somerset County Council                              |
| Cllr Simon Coles        | Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex        |
| Mr Roger Hirst          | Greater Manchester Combined Authority                |
| Cllr Amanda Peers       | Hertfordshire County Council                         |
| Cllr Morris Bright MBE  | Humberside Fire Authority                            |
| Cllr John Briggs        | South Wales Fire Authority                           |
| Cllr Tudor Davies       | Cornwall Council                                     |
| Cllr Linda Taylor       | Tyne and Wear Fire Authority                         |
| Cllr James Doyle        | East Sussex Fire Authority                           |
| Cllr Carolyn Lambert    | Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority     |
| Cllr Steven Lambert     | Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority         |
| Cllr Frank Biederman    | Authority  |
| In Attendance           | Janet Perry (for PFCC Essex PFCC                     |

Roger Hirst)

|                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Cllr Reena Ranger (for    | Hertfordshire County Council  |
| Cllr Morris Bright)       |                               |
| Cllr Gohar Almass         | West Yorkshire FRA            |
| DCFO Steve Helps          | Darlington FRS                |
| Cllr Stef Nelson          | Cheshire FRA                  |
| CFO Mark Preece           | Gloucestershire FRS           |
| Richard Stanton           | West Midlands FRS             |
| Cllr Paul Duckett         | Bedfordshire FRA              |
| Cllr Kamran Ali           |                               |
| Cllr Don Davies           | Avon FRA                      |
| Cllr Kevin Deanus         | Surrey County Council         |
| Steven Adams              | NFCC                          |
| CFO Justin Johnson        | Lancashire FRS + NFCC         |
| Cllr Kevin Pardy          | Shropshire & Wrekin FRA       |
| Ben Wilkinson             |                               |
| CFO Neil Odin             | Hampshire & Isle of Wight FRS |
| Cllr Hetty Wood           | Merseyside FRA                |
| Mark Hardingham           | NFCC                          |
| Anjli Mapara (for item 3) | Home Office                   |
| Stuart Harwood (for item  | Home Office                   |
| 3)                        |                               |