

Minutes of last Fire Services Management Committee meeting

Fire Services Management Committee

Friday, 7 July 2023

Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions
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1 Welcome, apologies and declarations of interest

The Chair welcomed members to the final meeting of the LGA calendar year and paid tribute to those who were standing down, in particular former Lead Member - Fiona Twycross - and former Chair - Cllr Jeremy Hilton.

There were no apologies.

Cllr Brackenridge declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 8 – Pensions Update – as a member of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 May 2023

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 May 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

3 Culture in the Fire & Rescue Service - next steps

The Chair invited Lucy Ellender (LE), Senior Adviser, to introduce the update.

LE provided members with an update on progress against agreed actions and gave feedback on the recent Culture in the Fire & Rescue Service conference held at 18 Smith Square on 27 June. Feedback from the conference had been positive with a range of suggestions for future events and training. Materials from the conference would be made available on the LGA website in due course. A further update on progress against actions would be brought to the FSMC meeting in October.

Members' comments and questions:

- Whilst members welcomed the conference and thanked all the excellent contributors, it was noted with regret that only approximately one third of FRAs were represented. Potential ways of reaching out to those FRAs that were less willing to engage

were discussed, including greater use of online interaction, peer challenge and taking LGA support directly to FRAs. The FSMC Equalities Advocate, Cllr Hugo, proposed meeting with LGA officers to agree a way forward on further engagement and LE emphasised that the conference was envisaged as being the first in a series of events and training sessions that the LGA would be putting on for FRAs. The Chair added that the LGA's EDI Champions' Network met throughout the year and had been doing so for several years – this would continue.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** progress on agreed actions.

4 Spending Review and finance update

The Chair invited CFO Ben Ansell (BA) and Mark Hemming (MH) – NFCC; and Emma Lawrence (EL) - Home Office to introduce the update.

Following the success of the previous year's consistent and evidence-based process for input into the local government finance settlement, BA asked members if they were happy to endorse a similar approach for the upcoming 2024/25 settlement. The proposed ask was for government grant increases in line with CPI inflation (as at September 2023) and band D precept flexibility of £5 or 3%. The evidence base was currently being strengthened by a survey of CFOs on non-pay inflationary pressures. A consistent position across all authority types would be sought and FSMC members would be asked to write to key ministers and other MPs in due course.

EL emphasised the importance of (i) the evidence from the inflation survey, particularly non-pay inflation over which FRAs have no control; and (ii) the consistency of the ask across authorities, in influencing HM Treasury.

MH provided more detail on the progress of the inflation survey. Once analysis of the results was complete, it would be shared with FSMC.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members strongly supported the proposed approach and offered their assistance in seeking a 100% response rate to the inflation survey.
- Members asked whether there was any prospect of the Government introducing a 2 or 3 year settlement in order to provide FRAs with more certainty. EL said that the expectation within the Home Office was that there would be a multi-year settlement following the next Spending Review.
- Concerns were expressed about future capital and non-consolidated grants and whether these would be continuing. EL said that negotiations were currently taking place with DLUHC about the pensions and protection grants in terms of potentially rolling them into the main grant. There was unlikely to be a separate capital grant moving forward but it was important for FRAs to quantify their capital requirements to feed into the submission to HM Treasury.

In conclusion, BA thanked members for their support and offered to provide a further update at the FSMC meeting on 6 October.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update and **endorsed** the proposed approach to the upcoming local government finance settlement.

5 Efficiency and Productivity

The Chair invited CFO Phil Shillito (PS) – NFCC - and Emma Lawrence (EL) and Jack Pickering (JP) - Home Office - to introduce the report.

PS provided members with some background to the Fire Productivity and Efficiency Forum, which was formed in January 2022 in response to commitments by the NFCC and Home Office to increase both productivity and efficiency in the fire and rescue service over the course of the current Spending Review period (2022/23-2024/25).

To address gaps in the evidence base around productivity, academics at Cambridge Econometrics had been commissioned to devise a fire productivity metric. This was presented to the Forum in 2022 and was now being further refined and developed.

EL updated members on the results of the Fire Productivity and Efficiency Plans. Headline findings showed that between 2022/23-2024/25, at national level, FRAs are forecast to make average savings of 5.6 per cent per annum (£97m) against non-payroll budgets of £1.7bn, against a target of 6%. Outliers from the survey were currently being engaged with to get further detail, and examples of good practice were being collated.

JP informed members about the Firefighter Utilisation Survey which would be running through 2023/24, with quarterly snapshots planned for its duration. The survey would help to provide a baseline level of data which could then feed into the productivity metric and would be used by HMICFRS to inform inspections. Further work on measuring the quality of outcomes would be undertaken.

Members' comments and questions:

- It was suggested that the productivity and efficiency agenda had largely been overtaken by the pressing need to address problems with culture and inclusion in fire services. PS said that both agendas were very important and were strongly linked, particularly in terms of public trust in the service. The Chair endorsed this view and stated that culture remained a key priority for all services.
- Reassurance was sought over the consistency of measurement of activity between services. JP said that data consistency was still being worked on but it was moving in the right direction.
- Roger Hirst asked if it would be possible to have access to the model behind the productivity metric. JP agreed to contact Roger directly.
- Cllr Brackenridge, Chair West Midlands FRA, asked how his service's West Midlands 'risk-based crewing' model would be

reflected in the productivity metric. PS confirmed that this would be recorded as an efficiency for that service but emphasised that decisions of this sort were operational ones for services to make. Use of technology also needed to be carefully considered in relation to efficiency and productivity.

- It was considered important to be able to demonstrate the benefits that firefighters bring to their communities during the 90+% of their working time when they are not attending an operational incident. PS agreed but added that this figure was a lot lower for services who operated predominantly on-call duty systems. Policy decisions such as not attending 'unwanted' fire signals also had implications for efficiency and productivity and this needed to be accounted for. Activities other than operational incidents were being recorded as part of the Firefighter Utilisation Survey.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee:

- 1) **Noted** the ongoing work on improving productivity and efficiency of fire and rescue services in England; and
- 2) **Agreed** to actively promote and discuss the importance of the fire productivity and efficiency agenda with their local Fire and Rescue Authority.

6 End of Year Review and priorities for 2023/24

The Chair invited Lucy Ellender, Senior Adviser, to introduce the report.

LE briefly outlined progress against the current year's priorities and noted that the flexibility built into the work programme which members had asked for, had enabled a strong focus on culture to be implemented in early 2023 in response to events in the sector. Feedback was invited from members on possible priority areas of work for 2023/24.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members supported continuation of the current priorities with the proviso that the focus on culture within the people priority, and the need to increase productivity within the Sector Led Improvement priority, be made more explicit to reflect ongoing developments in this area.
- The success of the NJC in securing a pay settlement, when compared to other sectors, was noted.
- The potential impact on FSMC priorities of the upcoming general election and the need for the LGA to influence party manifestos was raised.

LE thanked members for their input and said that the priorities would be amended in the light of the comments made, and presented to the Fire Commission on 22 September and FSMC on 6 October for final agreement.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the work of the FSMC over the last year and **agreed** initial proposals for 2023/24 priorities, subject to final agreement at the FSMC meeting on 6 October.

7 Workforce update

The Chair invited Gill Gittins (GG), Senior Adviser (Workforce & Negotiations) to introduce the update.

GG indicated that she was happy for the report to be taken as read and to answer any questions as required.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update.

8 Pensions update

The Chair invited Elena Johnson (EJ), Acting Senior Pensions Adviser, to introduce the update.

EJ indicated that she was happy for the report to be taken as read and to answer any questions as required.

Members' comments and questions:

- Cllr Byrom said that he had recently joined the Scheme Advisory Board and found the level of detail and complexity in the reports too great for what should be a broad member oversight role. EJ thanked Cllr Byrom for the feedback and agreed to look into the report structure and content.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update.

9 Building Safety update

The Chair invited Mark Norris (MN), Principal Policy Adviser, to introduce the update.

MN indicated that he was happy for the report to be taken as read and to answer any questions as required.

Members' comments and questions:

- The issue of recruiting and retaining building safety inspectors to support the new building safety regime was raised. MN reassured members that this was very much on the LGA's and NFCC's radar, particularly around the sustainability of funding for the work once initial Government seedcorn funding expired. Mark Hardingham, NFCC, endorsed these comments and said that retention of highly qualified staff, in particular, was becoming a really significant issue, especially in London. Engagement with universities over provision of fire engineering degrees was also being discussed to try and increase the number of newly qualified recruits to the profession.
- An update on Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans was requested. MN said that Home Office proposals around this were expected before the summer Parliamentary recess. Jonny Bugg,

Home Office, confirmed that the PEEPs proposals, and the Fire Reform White Paper response, were both currently in the advanced stages of cross-Government clearance with a view to release either before, or shortly after recess.

- The information on Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete was welcomed but members asked if there were any other similar building safety issues that the LGA was currently concerned about. MN urged FRAs, not only to be aware of any schools in their area that contained RAAC, but also to look at their own estates, as this material was used quite widely in the 1950s, 60s and 70s in municipal buildings. In terms of further building safety and construction issues, MN said that Large Panel System buildings remained a cause for concern and more work needed to be done to both identify and remediate them.
- The Chair highlighted the work of the LGA's Joint Inspection Team and encouraged members to consider whether any buildings in their areas would benefit from a JIT inspection, and to contact brian.castle@local.gov.uk in the first instance.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update.

10 National Fire Chiefs Council update

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

MH indicated that he was happy for the report to be taken as read and to answer any questions as required.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members requested an opportunity to scrutinise the review of the recent 999 outage. MH said that he would be happy to bring an update to the FSMC meeting following the completion of the review and suggested that a BT representative might also be happy to join that call.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update.

Action:

Schedule 999 outage item for future FSMC meeting

11 Fire Standards Board update

The Chair invited Cllr Nick Chard, LGA rep on the FSB, to introduce the update.

Cllr Chard indicated that he was happy for the report to be taken as read and to answer any questions as required. He added that he very much hoped that in the Government's forthcoming White Paper consultation response, the FSB would not be subsumed into a police college or similar, as it had been doing excellent work. The Chair endorsed this view.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee:

- **noted** the contents of this report for information;
- **agreed** to provide ongoing support to officers in enabling and empowering them to engage in the development and implementation of the Fire Standards both in production and when published; and
- **agreed** to encourage the monitoring of the benefits of the Fire Standards in their services.

12 **FSMC update**

The Chair invited Mark Norris (MN), Principal Policy Adviser, to introduce the update.

MN reported that a letter from the Minister on the changes to the DBS regulations had been received on 6 July and were therefore now in force.

Members' comments and questions:

- Cllr Healey reported that he had attended the recent NFCC conference on on-call duty systems and felt that it was important for the LGA to be represented on the NFCC's Committee on this moving forward. MH agreed that it was important for FRAs to be represented as this was a strategic as well as operational issue for services.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update.

Action:

Officers to add NFCC on-call Committee to list of outside body appointments.

13 **Fire Reform White Paper response**

The Chair invited Mark Norris (MN), Principal Policy Adviser, to introduce the item.

MN reported that the Government response to the White Paper consultation was likely to be published before the summer Parliamentary recess (20 July). As FSMC was not due to meet again until 6 October, members views were sought on some proposed broad principles (set out in paragraph 18 of the report) to enable the LGA to respond, in consultation with the Lead Members, once the Government document is published. MN said that the Home Office were keen to talk to FSMC about possible ways of improving accountability and transparency in FRAs without mandatory governance changes, but wanted to wait until the Government White Paper response had been signed off by ministers. It was hoped that either the Minister, and/or officials, would be able to attend the Fire Commission meeting on 22 September to discuss the way forward.

Members' comments and questions:

- In response to a query from the Chair, MN clarified that the LGA would be looking to put out a press release, straight after publication of the Government response. For speed and expediency, this would need to be signed off by Lead Members. A more detailed response to the proposals could then be drawn up through consultation with members at both the scheduled Fire Commission and FSMC meetings.
- Some members considered that the three principles outlined in paragraph 18 needed to be more positive, recognising the need for, and welcoming some reform in the sector. For example, it was stated that both operational independence and qualifications for CFOs would be positive and welcome reforms to the sector.
- Members agreed that changes to governance could be beneficial but needed to be evidence-based and supported locally, not imposed on FRAs by Government. This had always been the LGA position and should remain so.
- It was suggested that the LGAs response and discussions with the Home Office should include the need for legislative changes that would enable FRAs to address issues with culture in services, particularly on employment law and disciplinary procedures. The current situation was hampering greater transparency in services.
- It was considered important that the fire service retained its own identity and did not get subsumed within a Police College.
- It was suggested that the LGA response should include recognition of the efficiency and effectiveness of the NJC in industrial relations matters, but recognising that it could be improved, by the partners themselves and not top-down imposition.
- It was considered that operational independence was not an issue for county brigades as councils already had clear demarcation between strategic and operational matters through clear schemes of delegation.
- In relation to the West Midlands Combined Mayoral Authority, Cllr Brackenridge stated that transfer of governance from the existing FRA to a Mayor would not be supported by the constituent authorities, nor would any proposed executive arrangements reporting in to the Mayor. He added that the proposal for a Mayoral arrangement was rejected unanimously by the West Mids metropolitan leaders, PCC and West Mids fire authority members previously and in the recent White Paper response.

MN thanked members for their input and said that officers would start work on redrafting the principles based on this feedback. This would go to Lead Members in the first instance, with a more detailed proposal being taken to the wider Fire Commission and FSMC at their next meetings.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **agreed** that officers should redraft the principles set out in paragraph 18 based on members' feedback and seek agreement from the Lead Members in the first instance to inform an initial response to the Government's Fire Reform White Paper response, and then draw up a more detailed response in consultation with Fire Commission and FSMC.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chair	Cllr Frank Biederman	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority
Vice-Chair	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Gloucestershire County Council
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Greg Brackenridge	West Midlands Fire & Rescue Authority
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Rebecca Knox	Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Authority
Members	Cllr Mark Healey MBE	Somerset County Council
	Mr Roger Hirst	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex
	Cllr Nick Chard	Kent & Medway Fire & Rescue Authority
	Dr Fiona Twycross	Greater London Authority
	Cllr Nikki Hennessy	Lancashire Combined Fire Authority
	Cllr Carl Johnson	Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr Jane Hugo	Lancashire Combined Fire Authority
	Cllr Roger Price	Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr John Shuttleworth	Co. Durham and Darlington Fire Authority
	Cllr Les Byrom	Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr Dave Norman MBE	Gloucestershire County Council
In Attendance	Mark Hardingham	NFCC
	Susannah Hancock	NFCC
	CFO Phil Shillito (for items 4&5)	NFCC
	CFO Ben Ansell (for items 4&5)	NFCC
	Mark Hemming (for items 4&5)	NFCC
	Emma Lawrence (for items 4&5)	Home Office
	Jack Pickering (for item 5)	Home Office
	Jonny Bugg	Home Office
	Steven Adams	NFCC
LGA Officers	Mark Norris	Principal Policy Adviser
	Lucy Ellender	Senior Adviser
	Sarah Ward	Principal Adviser, Workforce
	Naomi Cooke	Head of Workforce
	Gill Gittins	Senior Adviser, Workforce & Negotiations
	Elena Johnson	Acting Senior Pensions Adviser
	Joseph Sloyan	Graduate Trainee – Building Safety
	Jonathan Bryant	Member Services Officer