

Minutes of last Fire Services Management Committee meeting

Fire Services Management Committee

Monday, 6 March 2023

Hybrid Meeting - Crowne Plaza Hotel, Nottingham 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
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The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. He introduced the new FSMC Equalities Advocate – Cllr Jane Hugo - and paid tribute to Cllr Keith Aspden (who was standing down as a councillor at the May 2023 elections) for all his work on the Committee as Lead Member for the Liberal Democrat group.

Apologies were received from Fiona Twycross, Cllr Roger Price and Cllr Darren O'Donovan. Cllr Les Byrom was substituting for Fiona Twycross.

2	Minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 December 2022
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The minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

3	Fire Service Culture
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The Chair invited Mark Norris (MN), Principal Policy Adviser, to introduce the report.

MN set out some of the recent issues and incidents which had shone a light on culture within a number of Fire & Rescue Services (FRS) in England and Wales. The importance of the LGA continuing to work jointly with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) on addressing the challenges was stressed. Comments were invited from members on the proposed next steps and future actions outlined in paragraph 35.

Cllr Jane Hugo, FSMC Equalities Advocate, stated that there was plenty of best practice and skills/expertise both within and outside the sector that could be shared, and stressed the importance of all partners working together to address the worrying situation.

Mark Hardingham (MH), NFCC Chair, stated that FRSs were not yet as diverse as they should be and, although there had been progress in recent years, e.g. through establishing a Core Code of Ethics and the Fire Standards Board, there was much work still to be done. The current situation represented a failure of leadership within the sector and the challenge of addressing it ranked alongside the responses to Grenfell and Manchester Arena. MH outlined some of the measures being taken by the NFCC, including internal restructuring and establishing an external advisory group. Finally, it was important to link this into the wider fire reform agenda currently being taken forward by the Home Office.

Alex Hill, HMICFRS, reiterated that their inspection process had highlighted the fact that the people pillar was the one area that FRSs struggled with more than any other. HMICFRS was currently producing a 'spotlight' report on this issue which could feed into the wider work to address the problems. HMICFRS was also learning and adapting its inspection process in the light of emerging incidents and also using learning from recent experiences in police services.

Jonny Bugg (JB), Head of Fire Strategy and Reform Unit, Home Office, stated that this was a key issue of concern for the Minister, and the Home Office response to the Fire Reform White Paper would likely contain more about improving values and ethics. A 4th session Bill in Parliament was still on course. He reported that later in the Spring, the vetting system for FRS employees would be upgraded to move it in line with other public-facing professions. The vital importance of maintaining the trust and confidence of the public was emphasised

Members' comments and questions:

- Whilst there were 20 out of the 44 FRSs that HMICFRS had identified as requiring improvement on EDI issues, it should not be forgotten that 24 were performing well and there was plenty of good practice that could be used to support the 20. The LGA's sector-led support offer was highlighted as a means of helping FRAs and it was suggested that there would be benefits of jointly delivering this with the NFCC
- Support and training for EDI champions and other FRA members was requested to enable proper scrutiny of senior officers. The questions asked by HMICFRS of FRS's during an inspection could also be fed in
- It was stated that proposed Home Office reforms around governance and operational independence of CFOs were a distraction and would not address the underlying cultural issues in the sector. By contrast, it was stated that two thirds of the White Paper was about people and professionalism, and the FSMC should therefore get behind and embrace these proposed reforms which were essential in order to drive longer-term cultural change in the sector. The importance of strong leadership, and of embedding meaningful change within all processes in an FRS, was highlighted
- Members felt that the final bullet point in 'next steps' around engaging with the Home Office on sector-led support should be clarified and strengthened, with particular reference to seeking

funding for the LGA to provide peer support. In this regard, it was suggested that, following the publication of the HMICFRS spotlight report, a meeting be convened with the LGA, NFCC and Home Office to work out a way forward in terms of roles, responsibilities and funding. JB agreed that this would be a useful exercise in relation to directing existing funding more effectively

- It was considered vital for FRA members to appreciate the importance of communication and transparency within their service, from the bottom up, and to challenge their senior leadership team on those grounds
- The penultimate bullet point around legal frameworks was considered to be vital. Similarly, how FRSs operate, for example through the watch system, was central to the culture issue and needed to be looked at as part of a fundamental review. The Trade Unions should be a key partner in this work.
- All services could learn lessons from Dorset & Wiltshire, South Wales and London and how they considered, with hindsight, that they might have handled their interactions with the media in particular, differently.

In summarising, the Chair asked that the next steps be strengthened to include engagement, not just with NFCC, but also with the Home Office, HMICFRS and Trade Unions to consider a way forward for the sector as a whole, in order to tackle these deep-seated issues. MN added that officers would draft a revised next steps action plan, based on the comments made during the discussion, and bring it back to FSMC Lead Members for final agreement. This could then be used as a starting point for joint discussions with the NFCC, Home Office, HMICFRS and Trade Unions.

Decision:

- FSMC endorsed the next steps set out in the report, subject to the amendments agreed above

Action:

- Officers to redraft next steps in line with comments made and bring back to Lead Members for agreement

4 Building Safety Regulator update

The Chair invited Richard Fowler (RF), Head of Service Delivery and Improvement NFCC, to introduce the update.

RF reminded members of the background and context to the establishment of the new Building Safety Regulator (BSR) and how it would be operating, with 9 regional teams and MoUs with individual FRSs, with work carried out on a recharge basis.

RF then outlined current concerns with the new system – (i) recruitment and retention of sufficient FRS staff; (ii) availability of training providers; (iii) sufficiency of funding to resource the required work; (iv) HSE stating that inspection of existing buildings will be the exception, not the norm; (v)

definition of a building in multi-occupancy spaces.

Members' comments and questions:

- Allowing developers to employ their own building control officers was considered to be a mistake. Suggestion that recruiting 'clerks of works' roles could provide an additional layer of security. RF said that monitoring of building works should step up under the new system, albeit not necessarily under a clerk of works
- Could the LGA provide support to FRSs on charging for their work, utilising experience of councils in this area?
- Concern was expressed that funding from FRSs would get diverted into BSR activity and away from day-to-day fire service activities
- Further clarity was sought on the MoUs and when these would be available for FRAs to see and comment on? RF confirmed that MoUs were being prepared between the 9 regional teams and their constituent FRSs and would be available shortly
- Charles Loft, Senior Adviser, added that the LGA's Grenfell Working Group was meeting later in the week and would be discussing writing a letter to the Minister on the concerns around the definition of a building. It was agreed that the FSMC Chair should add his signature to this letter.

Decision:

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

5 State of Fire & Rescue, Spotlight Report and Round 3 Inspections

The Chair invited Alex Hill (AH), HMICFRS, to introduce the update.

AH reported on the recently published State of Fire & Rescue report (the first by new HMI, Andy Cooke), the final tranche of round 2 inspections and plans for the forthcoming round 3 inspections. The key points were as follows:

- An ongoing call for reform in the State of Fire & Rescue report – of the 6 national recommendations, only 2 had so far been implemented
- The importance of the inspection process in driving sustained improvement in services was emphasised
- For round 3, inspections would be in small batches, rather than larger tranches, to enable services to receive their reports in a more timely fashion. In addition, there would no longer be 'pillar' judgements and a 5th grade – 'adequate' – was being introduced. An innovative / promising practice section would be added to reports in order to help promote positive good practice
- Overall, the results from tranche 3 had been good although there were 4 new causes for concern
- Fire protection and risk planning had improved significantly
- Many services were still not prioritising prevention activity sufficiently and almost half of services were below 'good'

- Responses to routine and major incidents remained excellent
- Performance on efficiency varied considerably across services with appropriate allocation of resources against risk being a particular concern
- Performance across the people pillar remained worrying with 26 services requiring improvement. An Engage process had been set up with a Fire Performance Oversight Group (FPOG) established. Two services had entered this process on the back of serious concerns around culture

Decision:

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

6 LGA Fire Conference update

The Chair invited Rebecca Johnson (RJ), adviser, to introduce the update

RJ advised members that the full final conference agenda was now on the website. The Minister would now be joining the conference plenary session online rather than in person. The improvement workshop had had to be withdrawn due to speaker availability but there were still 4 other workshops to choose from. Over 180 delegates had signed up for the conference.

Decision:

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

7 Workforce update

The Chair invited Sarah Ward (SW), Principal Adviser, Workforce, and Claire Hey (CH), Senior Pensions Adviser, to introduce the update.

CH provided members with 2 updates since the report had been submitted:

- 1) The Home Office had just launched a consultation on the changes needed to the pension scheme regulations to implement the retrospective part of the age discrimination remedy. Officers were currently working through this substantial document and would report back to members. Deadline for submission – 23 May 2023
- 2) The Department for Work and Pensions had recently reset pensions dashboard activity, with a new later connection deadline to be agreed.

SW ran through the pay claims for green, grey and gold book staff as set out in paragraphs 37-48 of the report. Subsequent to the update being sent out, the FBU had just announced that their members had voted to accept the National Employers grey book offer, which had averted strike action by firefighters.

SW highlighted the workshop on the Core Code of Ethics that would be taking place the following day as part of the LGA Fire Conference. She also referred to the work of the Inclusive Fire Service Group and tie in with the Committee's previous discussion on culture in the fire and rescue service.

Finally, SW highlighted the LGA's proposed approach to responding to the Home Office's Minimum Service Levels consultation for Fire & Rescue staff, as set out in paragraph 58 of the report.

Members' comments and questions:

- Cllr Chard, as Chair of the Employer's Side, NJC for LAFRS, thanked the workforce team officers for all their hard work and support in relation to all the recent pay claims. This was echoed by the FSMC Chair.
- The Chair informed members that this was CH's final FSMC meeting before taking up a new role and put on record the Committee's gratitude for all her hard work and support over the years of her employment at the LGA.

Decision:

- Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update and **endorsed** the proposed approach to responding to the Home Office Minimum Service Levels consultation set out in paragraph 58 of the report.

8 Building Safety update

The Chair invited Marshall Scott (MS), NGDP Graduate, to introduce the update.

MS drew the following points from the report to members attention:

- Latest DLUHC figures on remediation showed a marginal improvement
- Officers continued to promote the work of the Joint Inspection Team
- Ongoing concerns over the establishment of the new BSR (as discussed in item 4)
- The HSE had just launched its 'Be Ready' campaign
- The LGA had been finalising its response to the DLUHC consultation on proposed changes to Approved Document B
- The LGA's improvement work had been progressing well

Decision:

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

9 National Fire Chiefs Council update

The Chair invited MH to introduce the update. MH indicated that he was happy for the report to be taken as read and to take questions as required.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update without discussion.

10 Fire Standards Board update

The Chair invited Cllr Nick Chard, the LGA's representative on the FSB, to introduce the update.

Cllr Chard highlighted the conference plenary session on Fire Standards and encouraged members to attend to gain a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities as FRAs in relation to the Standards. Jonny Bugg reiterated the importance of the new Leadership and People Standards in helping to address the challenges highlighted in previous conversations on culture in the fire service.

Decision:

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

11 FSMC update

The Chair invited RJ to introduce the update.

RJ highlighted the upcoming Leadership Essentials course and thanked members for publicising this through their networks. The next meeting of the LGA's EDI Network would also be taking place on 22 March.

Members' comments and questions:

- A further update on the ESMCP programme was requested for a future meeting

Decision:

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

Action:

- Officers to schedule item on ESMCP at next FSMC meeting

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chair	Cllr Frank Biederman	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority
Vice-Chair	Cllr Keith Aspden	City of York Council
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Rebecca Knox	Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Authority
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Greg Brackenridge	West Midlands Fire & Rescue Authority
Members	Cllr Eric Carter	Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
	Cllr Mark Healey MBE	Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority
	Mr Roger Hirst	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex

	<p>Cllr Nick Chard Cllr Nikki Hennessy Cllr Jane Hugo Cllr Jeremy Hilton Cllr Les Byrom (as sub) Cllr Nigel Smith (as sub)</p>	<p>Kent & Medway Fire & Rescue Authority Lancashire Combined Fire Authority Lancashire Combined Fire Authority Gloucestershire County Council Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority</p>
Apologies	<p>Dr Fiona Twycross Cllr Roger Price Cllr Darren O'Donovan</p>	<p>Greater London Authority Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Authority West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Authority</p>
In Attendance	<p>Cllr John Shuttleworth Mark Hardingham CFO Justin Johnston Richard Fowler Alex Hill Alexandra Blohm Jonny Bugg Cllr Carolyn Lambert Susannah Hancock Steven Adams Joanne Livingstone</p>	<p>Co. Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Authority NFCC NFCC NFCC HMICFRS HMICFRS Home Office East Sussex Fire Authority NFCC NFCC Chair Firefighters' Pension Scheme Advisory Board</p>
LGA Officers	<p>Mark Norris Sarah Ward Rebecca Johnson Charles Loft Claire Hey Marshall Scott Gill Gittins Jamie Osowski Elena Johnson Jonathan Bryant</p>	<p>Principal Policy Adviser Principal Adviser – Workforce Policy Adviser Senior Adviser Senior Pensions Adviser NGDP Graduate Senior Adviser (Workforce and Negotiations) Adviser - Workforce Firefighters' Pensions Adviser Member Services Officer</p>