

Minutes of last Fire Services Management Committee meeting

Fire Services Management Committee

Friday, 6 October 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
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The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the new LGA year and introduced new members of the Committee.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Rebecca Knox (sub - Cllr Roger Phillips), Cllr Jane Hugo (sub - Cllr Lud Ramsey) and Cllr Nikki Hennessey.

There were no declarations of interest.

2	Minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 July 2023
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The minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

3	Fire finance update
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The Chair invited Ben Ansell (BA), Mark Hemming (MH) – NFCC finance leads, and Emma Lawrence (EL) – Home Office, to introduce the update.

BA updated members on the joint work between the NFCC, LGA and Home Office on developing a case to input into the forthcoming local government finance settlement. The inflationary pressures survey had achieved a 100% return rate which was hugely important in building a strong evidence base. BA proposed that the ask across the sector should be (a) increase in government grant in line with September 2023's CPI inflation; (b) council tax precept flexibility of 3% or £5, whichever is the higher. This ask had been agreed by the Fire Commission and the NFCC Full Council. BA asked for coordinated letters from Chairs and CFOs to be sent to relevant government ministers, arguing the case and thanked those that had already completed this. MH expanded upon the results of the inflationary pressures survey, the headline figure being £139m (cf

£145m last year), and said that the evidence base was strong, consistent and independently verified. He clarified that the base was 3%, not 2%. EL stressed that the decision was likely to be made within the next couple of weeks so urged members to get their letters in quickly. She warned members that this year, there would be an added political dimension to the process, with a general election likely to take place in 2024 and continuing cost of living pressures on council tax payers.

Members' comments and questions:

- Concern was expressed about placing additional burdens on those residents least able to manage through increased council tax. BA acknowledged the dilemma facing FRAs but stressed that the precept increase would be optional and they were also pushing for core grant increase. Realistically it was unlikely that broader issues around fire finance would be addressed before April 2026 due to political constraints. EL confirmed that precept flexibility and inflationary grant increases were the most realistic ask of Government at the current time.
- It was suggested that writing to local MPs to lobby DLUHC, as well as ministers, would also be effective. BA agreed and urged members to do this.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update and **endorsed** the ask and strategy outlined by BA.

4 Climate change

The Chair invited Lucy Ellender (LE), Senior Adviser, Ben Brook (BB), NFCC Climate Change lead, and Phil Clark (PC), NFCC Emerging Energy Technologies lead, to introduce the update.

LE said that the report outlined the proceedings of the climate change evidence session hosted by the LGA on 6 September 2023.

BB highlighted 3 specific areas of work that the NFCC was focussed on and which FSMC may want to consider: (i) climate adaptation – dealing with the impacts of climate change now; (ii) climate security of the sector – e.g. availability of water supply; and (iii) climate resilience – preparing for future risks and vulnerabilities. The NFCC had produced a toolkit to help FRAs with their approach to environment, sustainability and climate change and how to build this into Community Risk Management Plans. The NFCC was also working with academics as part of a Foresights Group, looking at how climate change was likely to impact the sector in the longer-term future.

PC expanded upon the NFCC's climate adaptation work including – improved public awareness campaigns around the risks of new technologies; product safety and standards; improving relationships with council planning authorities; designing buildings to accommodate new technology, charging infrastructure etc.; car park safety; and working with developers on new technologies.

Members' comments and questions:

- Concern was expressed that vital safety implications would not be taken into account if fire services continued not to be statutory consultees on more significant planning applications. PC said that the main concern for the FRS was knowing where potentially hazardous facilities were located. Engagement with planners through planning practice guidance was very helpful in this regard. PC highlighted possible new environmental permitting regulations around lithium ion batteries that would introduce new standards to be complied with on an ongoing basis, not just at the initial planning applications stage. It was agreed that Lead Members should look at this issue in more detail given its broader relevance across different LGA workstreams.
- The importance of building local resilience within communities and in partnership with local FRSs was stressed, particularly in relation to, for example, flooding incidents. BB agreed and stated that Local Resilience Forums had a key role to play, ideally with an enhanced FRS input.
- Work between Hampshire & Isle of Wight FRA and international partners in the US and Australia on the causes of wildfires was highlighted. Could the NFCC look at developing specialist training in this area? BB reassured members that the NFCC had a wildfire lead and associated working groups who would be looking at international best practice. Expert advice was available for FRSs who needed support in tackling wildfires.
- The new NFCC toolkit was welcomed but this needs to be disseminated to a much wider audience including councils, local resilience fora etc. The technology is fast moving and authorities need to be on top of it. BB agreed and asked for members help in facilitating this dissemination.
- Product safety standards and their effective enforcement were considered key. It was suggested that Lead Members could take forward lobbying in this area.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update and **agreed** the next steps set out in paragraph 16 of the report.

Actions:

Lead Members to discuss role of planning process and enforcement of product safety standards.

5 Toxicity in fires

The Chair invited Professor Anna Stec, Centre for Fire and Hazards Sciences at the University of Central Lancashire, to give her presentation.

Professor Stec presented the key findings from her recent research into the exposure of firefighters to toxins and associated health impacts, including from the UK Firefighter Contamination Survey. This piece of research was commissioned by the Fire Brigades Union to provide an

evidence base for understanding the risks and common sources of contaminant exposure, informing decontamination and future research recommendations.

Members' comments and questions:

- Concern was expressed at the results coming from the Contamination Survey and it was recognised that more needed to be done in terms of everyday procedures and practices, as well as culture, to minimise firefighter exposure to toxins, albeit that this could be challenging for individual firefighters on the ground.
- The issue of prescriptive illness was raised and the role played by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council, which had concerns about some of the methodology used in the research. Professor Stec said that her team had addressed their concerns and she defended the methodology used.
- It was suggested that the LGA lobby Government to get firefighters' profession put onto GP records to help expedite diagnosis and treatment of conditions. Professor Stec said that this had happened in Scotland but it was more of a challenge in England where there was less central harmonisation of services.

MN summarised the 3 main areas where the LGA could potentially influence this work: (i) lobbying around reducing the amount of toxic compounds in building materials etc.; (ii) working with the NJC to try to influence culture and working practices that could be contributing to ill health in firefighters; and (iii) lobbying to ensure that problems are picked up earlier in the piece by the NHS, potentially through something similar to the Armed Forces Covenant.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee noted the presentation and agreed to take forward the points in (i) to (iii) above.

6 Membership, Terms of Reference and Outside Body appointments

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

MN highlighted that an additional Fire Commission meeting was being planned for when the Government response to the Fire Reform White Paper is published – most likely November 2023.

Proposed outside body nominations were presented in Appendix D.

Members' comments and questions:

- Cllr Chard proposed PFCC Roger Hirst to be the Conservative Group FSMC representative on the ESMCP Fire Customer Group.
- Cllr Roger Price confirmed that he would be the Lib Dem representative on the HMICFRS External Reference Group, not Cllr Lambert as stated in the papers.
- In relation to the additional Fire Commission meeting, members requested any further news on a proposed publication date for the

White Paper response. Jonny Bugg, Home Office, confirmed that a date had not yet been set but it was likely to be after the King's Speech.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee:

1. **agreed** its Terms of Reference (**Appendix A**);
2. formally **noted** the membership for 2023/24 (**Appendix B**);
3. **noted** the future meeting dates for 2023/24 (**Appendix C**);
4. **agreed** the Board's nominations to outside bodies, subject to the additions noted above (**Appendix D**);

7 **FSMC priorities for 2023-24**

The Chair invited Lucy Ellender to introduce the report.

LE outlined the proposed priorities for the coming LGA year which mainly followed the priorities set out in the Government's Fire Reform White Paper. There were also two additional priorities not in the White Paper – Sector Led Improvement and Climate Change (including emerging technologies). The report also looked ahead to potential new developments in the sector over the coming year. At the Fire Commission meeting on 22 September members had raised several additional items for consideration – planning issues, RAAC, fire safety at asylum centres and toxicity of building materials. LE proposed that officers devise a work plan based on the suggestions made which would be taken to the next Lead Member meeting for further prioritisation. Flexibility in the plan would also be important to take account of changing events.

Members' comments and questions:

- New and emerging technologies, such as increasing numbers of battery powered e-bikes, were considered to be a key issue for fire safety.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **agreed** the draft priorities set out in the paper and **agreed** that a work plan be drawn up to enable further prioritisation by Lead Members.

8 **RAAC update**

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

MN provided members with an update on the current state of knowledge of RAAC in UK buildings and, in particular, highlighted the specific implications for Fire & Rescue Services (FRS) and Fire & Rescue Authorities (FRA). The two main current areas of concern are: (i) identifying buildings in the FRA estate that contain RAAC; and (ii) operational implications for FRSs in relation to incidents with buildings containing RAAC. In relation to (ii), the National Fire Chiefs Council

(NFCC) was pressing the Government to produce a register of all known buildings containing RAAC to enable a more targeted approach for FRS support and interventions. Whilst progress was being made on quantifying the problem in the public estate, little was still known about private sector buildings.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members agreed that it was vitally important for firefighters to know whether buildings contained RAAC prior to entering during a fire incident.
- The importance of frequent fire drills in schools was emphasised.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** recent developments pertaining to the identification, remediation, and management of RAAC.

9 Workforce update

The Chair invited members to take the update as read.

Members' comments and questions:

- Disappointment was expressed that an agreement still hadn't been reached on a non-uniformed staff pay settlement, particularly as this affected many lower paid workers. The offer had been made on 23 February.

Decision:

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

10 Pensions update

The Chair invited members to take the update as read.

Decision:

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

11 Building safety update

The Chair invited members to take the update as read.

Members' comments and questions:

- Was the Building Safety Fund still open and being widely advertised? MN confirmed that the Fund was still open for applications and had recently been expanded to include buildings over 11m in height.

MN informed members that the deadline for registering buildings over 18m with the new Building Safety Regulator (BSR) had passed and that the number of buildings registered was significantly higher than predicted. The

funding implications for the work required were now being reviewed by the NFCC and BSR.

Decision:

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

12 National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) update

The Chair invited members to take the update as read.

Decision:

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

13 Fire Standards Board update

The Chair invited members to take the update as read. He placed on record his thanks to Cllr Chard for representing the LGA on the Board since it was set up and wished Cllr Brackenridge well as his successor.

Decision:

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

14 FSMC update

Marshall Scott (MS), Policy Adviser, highlighted the following points from the update paper to members:

- In relation to the LGA's proposed new Local Government White Paper, officers would work up some proposals around fire and bring them to the next FSMC meeting in December.
- Members' input was sought on the LGA Fire Conference 2024, in particular, ideas for any sessions, an overall theme for the Conference and whether shadow ministers should be invited to speak in addition to the current Fire Minister. The Chair asked members to feed any ideas to their Lead Member as soon as possible.

The Chair reported that he had been asked to speak at a Chairs and Chiefs event on 1 November about what members thought of the HMICFRS inspection process and whether it could be improved in any way from the perspective of FRAs. He invited members to provide him with their thoughts prior to the event.

The Chair also recommended the Leadership Essentials course taking place on 1 and 2 November in Warwick.

Decisions:

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

Actions:

- LE to e-mail FSMC members seeking feedback on HMICFRS inspection process.
- All members to feed back suggestions for Fire Conference to Lead Members.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chair	Cllr Frank Biederman	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority
Vice-Chair	Cllr Carolyn Lambert	East Sussex Fire Authority
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Greg Brackenridge	West Midlands Fire & Rescue Authority
Members	Cllr Karen Kilgour Cllr Les Byrom CBE Cllr Nick Chard Mr Roger Hirst Cllr Mark Healey MBE Cllr Carol Theobald Cllr Ben Nutland Cllr Dr Wendy Maples Cllr Ludwig Ramsey (sub) Cllr Roger Phillips (sub)	Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Authority Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority Kent & Medway Fire & Rescue Authority Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex Somerset County Council East Sussex Fire Authority Avon Fire & Rescue Authority East Sussex Fire Authority Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Authority Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Authority
Apologies	Cllr Nikki Hennessy Cllr Jane Hugo Cllr Rebecca Knox	Lancashire Combined Fire Authority Lancashire Combined Fire Authority Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Authority
In attendance	Cllr Roger Price Cllr John Shuttleworth Professor Anna Stec (for item 5) CFO Ben Ansell (for item 3) Mark Hemming (for item 3) Emma Lawrence (for item 3) CFO Ben Brook (for item 4) Phil Clark (for item 4) Jonny Bugg Steven Adams Liam Stowell Albie Collins	Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Authority Co. Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Authority University of Central Lancashire NFCC NFCC Home Office NFCC NFCC Home Office NFCC NFCC NFCC
LGA Officers	Mark Norris Lucy Ellender Naomi Cooke Sarah Ward Claire Johnson Marshall Scott Jonathan Bryant	Principal Policy Adviser Senior Adviser Head of Workforce Principal Adviser (Workforce) Senior Pensions Adviser Policy Adviser Member Services Officer

