

Priorities for 2016/17

Purpose

For information and discussion.

Summary

This paper sets out the priorities for the work of Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) over the year to July 2017. The priorities, which have been discussed and agreed in FSMC, are based on a combination of areas of interest previously indicated by FSMC members, on-going work, and recent policy announcements by government.

Recommendation

The Commission is asked to note the priorities for 2016/17 agreed by FSMC.

Action

Officers are developing a forward work programme to deliver the agreed priorities.

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Priorities for 2016/17

Background

1. At its meeting in September FSMC was asked to consider the policy priorities for its work programme for the coming year. In making these decisions members were asked to consider two issues:
 - 1.1. The work that the LGA Leadership Board has asked Boards to undertake based on the overall policy priorities of the LGA; and
 - 1.2. Specific policy priorities based on the remit of FSMC.

Work commissioned from the LGA Policy Boards by the LGA Leadership Board

2. As in 2015/16, LGA Policy Boards, including FSMC, have been asked to incorporate cross-cutting LGA priorities within their work programmes. The key request from the LGA's Leadership Board for the 2016/17 board cycle is for individual boards and committees to:
 - 2.1. Consider the impact of the vote to leave the European Union on their policy areas and make appropriate provision in their work programme.
 - 2.2. Contribute to the development of the LGA's Autumn Statement submission and pitch to the new Government.
3. Alongside this the LGA Business Plan is being refreshed. The key themes in the plan, in common with previous years are expected to be devolution, housing, finance, adult social care and health, as well as Brexit. FSMC's work programme will reflect the new business plan, with the following areas likely to have particular resonance: adult social care and health and increased collaboration between the fire and rescue service and health; and devolution in terms of governance changes in fire and rescue services.

Impact of the vote to leave the EU on FSMC policy areas and work planning

4. At its meetings in July and September, the LGA's Leadership Board identified five priority areas for the LGA to influence following the vote to leave the EU:
 - 4.1. Securing investment which is currently sourced from the EU
 - 4.2. Developing a new legal base for local government
 - 4.3. Initiating a constitutional debate
 - 4.4. Community Cohesion
 - 4.5. Place-based impact
5. The work on developing a new legal base for local government is of relevance to FSMC's work programme as EU legislation has operational and workforce implications for the fire and rescue service.

Developing a new legal base for local government – impact of Brexit on Fire and Rescue Authorities

6. Local government services are influenced to a significant degree by European legislation. With the UK having voted to leave the EU, there is a need therefore to develop a new legal base for local government.
7. The working and operational environment for the fire and rescue services is shaped by Europe, with a range of standards driven by European legislation having direct relevance for Fire and Rescue Authorities, including the following areas:
 - 7.1. Procurement
 - 7.2. Groundwater pollution
 - 7.3. Environmental damage
 - 7.4. Product safety
 - 7.5. Health and safety
 - 7.6. The working time directive
 - 7.7. Transport of dangerous goods
 - 7.8. Packaging and labelling requirements in particular for chemicals and hazardous materials
8. Some of these areas also fall within the remit of other LGA boards for example environmental damage and the working time directive.
9. In common with other services, the fire and rescue service is subject to a mix of EU directives that have been transposed into UK law (which will still apply when the UK actually leaves the EU) as well as EU regulations and decisions that apply directly. These would not apply once the UK leaves the EU, meaning that in those areas there will be no legal framework following exit.
10. In relation to both, Brexit provides an opportunity for political choices to be made to change laws previously based on EU regulatory frameworks, for example if they have been 'gold-plated', are simply outdated or are no longer desired.
11. All Boards with policy areas whose legal basis will be affected by withdrawal from the EU are being asked to identify priority areas to flag with government as part of our ongoing discussions on Brexit.
12. Given the range and technical nature of much of the EU-led regulation in this area, FSMC will give a general steer on the priority areas for the fire and rescue service affected by the UK leaving the EU. This will help to shape the LGA-wide approach to renegotiating the legal base for local government.

Agreed Priorities

13. Following discussion FSMC agreed the seven key overarching themes for 2016/17, which incorporate amendments suggested by members, along with a series of activities underpinning them:

13.1. Governance

Improving the accountability of the fire and rescue service is fundamental to the Home Office's fire reform agenda. FSMC and Fire Commission have previously highlighted the importance of this area to FRAs, so FSMC members agreed:

- 13.1.1. That during the remainder of the Policing and Crime Bill's passage through parliament the LGA should continue to press the case for amendments to the provisions so that a transfer of governance to a police and crime commissioner (PCC) can only take place where there is local agreement.
- 13.1.2. To continue to discuss with the Home Office the basis on which any independent assessment of a PPC's business is made and make the case for it to be conducted by a panel.
- 13.1.3. To continue to engage with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioner Chief Executives' work to develop a template business case.
- 13.1.4. That once the Bill has received Royal Assent the LGA should support Fire and Rescue Authorities around the implementation of the legislation.

13.2. Transparency

- 13.2.1. The Home Office's fire reform agenda also looks to increase the transparency of the fire and rescue service. At the heart of these proposals is a plan to reintroduce a fire inspection regime to help Fire and Rescue Authorities and PCCs hold the service to account. At its meeting in July FSMC agreed to engage with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's work on what the inspection regime should look like going forward. FSMC also agreed to work with the Home Office to ensure that any inspection regime is proportionate, that it does not place a financial and administrative burden on the fire and rescue service, and that it allows the LGA's and the Chief Fire Officers Association's (CFOA) Fire Peer Challenge to coexist alongside the inspection regime.
- 13.2.2. A fundamental component of a successful inspection regime will be performance data allowing the inspectorate to compare performances across different fire and rescue services. The Home Office is committed to publishing performance data and as the LGA already published performance data on the fire service and is advising regional benchmarking activities, the Committee agreed that the LGA will engage with this work to ensure that Fire and Rescue Authorities' (FRAs) views are taken into consideration.

13.3. 21st Century Firefighter

With the workforce representing such a significant proportion of FRAs' expenditure, it is unsurprising that increasing flexibility so resources can be deployed in different

ways, as demands and risks change in the future, is seen as a vital part of the fire reform agenda. This agenda will be given further impetus by the recommendations of the Thomas review, which the Home Office have indicated they will publish soon. FSMC therefore agreed:

- 13.3.1. After considering the issue of workforce reform and greater flexibility in the use of resources at its July meeting that the LGA will publish a paper examining the extent for large scale recruitment in the future in light of further funding reductions and how this could be used to increase the diversity of the workforce. This will bring together case studies and good practice to help the sector prepare for when further recruitment is necessary.
- 13.3.2. The LGA will share best practice from across the fire and rescue service on diverse recruitment, as well as work with organisations with expertise in increasing the diversity of workforce such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission, and learn from other public services which have been successful in increasing the diversity of their workforce.
- 13.3.3. To work with the LGA's improvement function to provide resources to aid this work for example the Equalities Workbook for councillors. This was originally published in 2008 and provides a series of practical exercises around equality and diversity for councillors to complete.
- 13.3.4. To continue to support the work of the NJC Inclusive Fire Service Group.
- 13.3.5. To work with the LGA's improvement function and CFOA to ensure that the peer challenge process considers equality and diversity issues in general and specifically in relation to recruitment.
- 13.3.6. To consider and then respond to the recommendations of the Thomas review when it is published.

13.4. Retained/On-call Firefighters

- 13.4.1. The Knight Review identified that an increased reliance on on-call firefighters could create efficiency savings, and in her speech in May on fire reform, the then Home Secretary highlighted the increased flexibility that use of on-call firefighters offered. FSMC was therefore keen to examine how the use of on-call firefighters and apprenticeships could provide greater flexibility so firefighters are available at the time of greatest risk or demand and what contribution they can make to increasing the diversity of the workforce.

13.5. Collaboration

- 13.5.1. The LGA will continue to engage with NHS England, Public Health England, CFOA and Age UK to promote further joint working between the fire and rescue service and health, including contributing to the development of robust measures to assess the value provided by the fire and rescue service in engaging with this work.
- 13.5.2. We will continue to support and engage in this work, and will consider the scope in the near future for the LGA to support thinking on governance designed to further encourage and support collaboration.

13.6. Procurement

13.6.1. A series of reports have identified ways in which procurement in the fire sector can be improved. As is detailed in a separate report on the agenda the potential to save £18 million through improved procurement practices across a total spend of £127 million by FRAs on a specific group of products was identified in 2014. CFOA have established a Commercial Transformation Programme to develop a strategy to support national, regional and cross-sector collaboration on procurement. FSMC has agreed to support CFOA and the initiatives it is pursuing to improve procurement.

13.7. Funding

13.7.1. FSMC agreed to continue to make the case for fair, risk based funding for the fire and rescue service and encourage the Home Office to recognise that the reduction in fire related and other incidents is due in large part to the prevention work undertaken by the fire and rescue service, and unless the service retains the capacity to continue this work there will be an inevitable rise in incidents and fire related deaths.

Communications and events

14. There are a number of internal and external communications channels available to help FSMC promote the work it is doing and to seek the views of member authorities.

Throughout the year we plan to continue to issue a quarterly e-bulletin, maintain the dedicated fire and rescue section of the LGA website and place the agenda and papers of both FSMC and Fire Commission on the site. In addition FSMC members will be supported in outside speaking events and interviews, and ensure that fire and rescue service features and news items take their place in First magazine. We will also make use of twitter to keep in touch with our members.

15. Additionally the LGA will arrange and support the annual fire conference, scheduled for 7-8 March 2017 in Gateshead, and deliver a dedicated Fire Leadership Essentials course, 25-26 October, with the possibility of a second course in 2017 if there is demand and funding is available.

Next steps

16. The Commission is asked to note the priorities for 2016/17 agreed by FSMC.

Financial Implications

17. The proposals set out in this paper can be delivered through existing resources.