

13 October 2017

FSMC and Fire Commission Policy Priorities for 2017-18

Purpose of report

For information.

Summary

This paper sets out the priorities for 2017-18 which were discussed at the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) in September. The proposals are based on both corporate LGA priorities and options for broader work based on a combination of areas of interest previously indicated by Board members, ongoing work and recent policy announcements by Government.

Recommendation

The Commission is asked to note the priorities for 2017/18 agreed by FSMC.

Action

Officers will undertake the projects set out in the report.

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FSMC and Fire Commission Policy Priorities for 2017-18

Background

1. At the first meeting of the political cycle members of the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC), were asked to consider the policy priorities for the 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.
 - 1.2. Specific policy priorities based on the remit of FSMC.
2. This paper builds on the draft priorities outlined in the end of year report considered by the FSMC in June and takes account of the Committee's comments then.

Work commissioned from LGA policy Boards by the LGA Leadership Board

3. As in previous years, LGA policy Boards are being asked to incorporate cross-cutting LGA priorities within their work programmes. The LGA's business plan, refreshed last Autumn, sets out the organisation's existing corporate priorities:
 - 3.1. Britain's exit from the EU
 - 3.2. Funding for local government
 - 3.3. Inclusive growth, jobs and housing
 - 3.4. Children, education and schools
 - 3.5. Promoting health and wellbeing
 - 3.6. Devolution
 - 3.7. Sector led improvement
4. The work of the FSMC makes a contribution to a number of these overarching themes. Of particular relevance are the importance of and the link between fire safety and the LGA's work around housing, funding issues around new burdens that may arise for the fire safety aspects of the building safety review, collaboration around health and changes to fire peer challenge alongside the development of the new fire inspectorate.

Supporting councils to respond to the Grenfell tragedy

5. Alongside the corporate priorities set out in the business plan, supporting the sector to manage the aftermath and implications of the Grenfell fire tragedy is also a critical organisational priority.
6. This has already had a major impact on the work of the team, with both the Principal Policy Adviser and Senior Policy Adviser heavily involved in the LGA's response over the last four months and the team's Adviser taking on an increased workload as a result. This seems likely to continue for at least the first half of the new FSMC cycle, with possible implications for the team's capacity to deliver other priorities during this period.

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Specific work of relevance to this Committee's remit

7. Alongside Brexit and other corporate work, LGA Boards will continue to develop specific work within their policy areas. These priorities will be reported back to the LGA Executive.
8. Members agreed that the broad areas of work for the FSMC over the last year are likely to continue into 2017/18. The proposed work programme FSMC discussed in June for 2017/18 drew on the overarching key themes from 2016/17, with the addition of work around the Grenfell Tower and fire safety. The proposed priorities set out in this paper also reflect the need to respond to the Government's policy agenda, particularly around the fire reform programme and the inquiries associated with Grenfell Tower.
9. The draft priorities outlined below suggest a series of activities underpinning each of the seven themes:

9.1. Governance

- 9.1.1. We will continue to work with the Home Office on the Fire Reform Programme, including on the changes to governance to ensure that the concerns of our members are understood within this process.
- 9.1.2. We will provide advice and assistance to our members around this agenda, including on the role of Police and Crime panels in scrutinising Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner-style Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs).

9.2. Transparency and standards

- 9.2.1. We will work with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services on the introduction of the new inspection regime.
- 9.2.2. We will refresh and update the Fire Peer Challenge and Operational Assessment in light of the new inspection regime alongside the National Fire Chiefs Council.
- 9.2.3. The creation of a new standards body for the fire and rescue service will also have implications for the work of the Committee. We will continue to engage and influence the creation of the standards body.

9.3. Workforce

- 9.3.1. The LGA has already produced the Memorandum of Understanding on equality and diversity in the fire and rescue service following the publication of the Thomas Review. We will be monitoring the outcomes of that work and continuing to work with FRAs, with the representative groups the government and with FRAs to improve the diversity of the firefighter.
- 9.3.2. The sector has also been looking at how more use could be made of on-call roles within the service, and this will continue to be an important strand of work for the Committee.

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9.4. Collaboration –

- 9.4.1. The LGA will continue to support increased collaboration between the fire service and the other emergency services. We have opened up sessions for bidding at the Annual Fire Conference to showcase some of this work and will continue to call for case studies via the Fire Bulletin.
- 9.4.2. We will continue to highlight the important contribution that FRAs can make to health and wellbeing in their local areas.

9.5. Procurement and value for money

- 9.5.1. The National Fire Chiefs Council will be pressing ahead with improving procurement practices and obtaining better value for money from its purchases. The LGA has been supportive of this work so far, and it may be that a more active role is needed to help make progress in this area in the year ahead.

9.6. Funding

- 9.6.1. Having the capability to respond to unexpected events will remain important if the service is to meet its national resilience obligations and deal with local risks. Ensuring the service continues to be funded on the basis of risk will remain vital.
- 9.6.2. Members also discussed council tax precepts, capital programmes and transformation funding as being an important part of the wider discussions on funding. It was noted that there needed to be an understanding of the impact on county authorities in any discussion on council tax precepts.

9.7. Grenfell tower

- 9.7.1. We will contribute to the LGA's response to the review of building regulations and fire safety announced by the Government in July and continue to contribute to the wider LGA work in response to the fire at Grenfell Tower.
- 9.7.2. We will engage with the Cabinet Office review of civil resilience to shape its recommendations, issue good practice guidance drawing on the experience of chief executives in recent civil emergencies, and work with the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives to improve civil resilience in the sector.

Communications and Events

- 10. There are a number of internal and external communications channels available to help the FSMC promote the work it is doing and to seek views from our member authorities.
- 11. We have a full programme of conferences and events which support these draft priorities and are designed to support members and officers with new issues and improving their ability to protect the public and communities they serve. Conferences already being planned include:

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11.1. **18-19 October 2017**: Leadership Essentials Fire and rescue

11.2. **20 February –21 February 2018**: Leadership Essentials Fire and rescue

11.3. **13-14 March 2018**: Annual Fire Conference

12. We also have a dedicated section on the LGA website, regular e-bulletins with a personal introduction from the FSMC Chair (though the LGA's e-bulletins are due to be reviewed), outside speaking engagements and interviews, features and news items in First magazine as well as twitter accounts which are used to keep in touch with our members.

Next steps

13. Following the FSMC meeting, officers are preparing a detailed work programme to manage the day to day work. The priorities agreed by the Committee will also be reported back to the LGA Executive.

Implications for Wales

14. Fire and rescue related policy is a devolved matter and much of the Committee's work has focused on changes for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England, with the Welsh Local Government Association leading on lobbying for Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities in Cardiff.

Financial implications

15. This programme of work will be delivered with existing resources. Additional supporting projects may be commissioned subject to funds being available from a small directorate / team budget.