

Note of last Fire Commission meeting

Title:	Fire Commission
Date:	Friday 13 October 2017
Venue:	5th Floor Conference Suite (South Side), Layden House, Turnmill Street, London, EC1M 5LG

Item Decisions and actions

1 Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

The Chair, Cllr Ian Stephens, opened the meeting, giving thanks to officers, lead members and previous members of the Fire Commission, as well as welcoming new members. Several apologies were given (see [Appendix A](#)) and there were no declarations of interest.

2 Professional Standards Body

Dan Tasker, Area Manager at Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority, attended the meeting to give members an update on the work he is doing on the Professional Standards Body Project.

Dan explained that part of the fire reform agenda was the need to create a suite of standards for the fire and rescue service. The Professional Standards Body (PSB) Project team has been commissioned to create a consistent, accountable and transparent set of standards which the service can strive to achieve and also be measure against. This is an ongoing process and the project team are working closely with HMICFRS, as well as looking at how existing standards bodies work for other public services. Research undertaken as part of the project had been narrowed down to two primary means of delivering standards – physical standard setting and a standardised approach to delivery. The PSB would provide a clear, standardised approach on how to achieve a benchmark level of standards but the model by which this is delivered was still up for discussion. Dan outlined four possible delivery models – the fully absorbed model, the mirror model, an affiliated or collaborative model, and a FRS-led model. It was suggested that the second and third options look most useful and that the affiliated model seemed to be a popular choice with stakeholders.

The affiliation model of delivering standards would allow for two separate colleges – one for fire and one for policing – with collaboration at its heart. This would involve joint standards, codes of ethics and scene investigation, with the fire and rescue service already works with the police on. The PSB was looking at how best to bring joint strategic leadership programmes, as well as joint research and development hubs together to benefit both services.

In terms of funding, members were told that there had to be an idea of the scope and nature of the standards agreed, as well as the size of the organisation needed to deliver such standards before an accurate suggestion of costs could be made. The project team had started to look at where potential funding could come from and it was noted that a lot of what is needed already exists so it could be a matter of utilising

existing capacity to deliver a standards body. Consideration was also being given to a transition grant fund and whether fire authorities would need funding support to achieve new standards.

Dan concluded by saying that developing standards involves a six-stage process which can take up to 18 months but as a number of standards already exist, it may not take this long.

This comment was made following the presentation:

- Research and development activities are already taking place across the sector – MoU signed by NFCC, the Fire Service College, the Fire Industry Association (FIA) – why is this work being duplicated? Dave Curry noted that the NFCC team looking at this had already had detailed discussions with the Professional Standards Body project team about combining this work. Dan Tasker suggested that efforts were being made to collate the findings from all of these activities to find common ground so that standards are led by accountability, consistency and transparency.

Decision:

Members **noted** the update.

3 Retained Firefighters Union

The Chair introduced Tristan Ashby, Chief Executive of the Retained Firefighters Union (RFU), who gave members an overview of the RFU and their position of various topics relevant to the fire service. Tristan explained that the RFU was founded in the run up to the first national fire strike and that it has a 'no strike' constitution. The union has no political affiliations, relies on subscriptions and is member-led. Members dictate the strategy and policies of the union, and it is represented on all working groups. In 2005, the RFU was recognised by the National Employers for consultation purposes and they welcome NJC reform as an organisation.

Tristan noted that the RFU was trying to move away from the terminology of 'retained' firefighters and was keen to encourage use of the term 'on-call' instead.

Approximately 12,500 on-call firefighters in England equate to around 10,000 full time equivalent roles and some of these firefighters are available 120 hours per week. The average earnings of an on-call firefighter is £5-8,000 per year, which is fully taxable. On-call firefighters are trained, equipped and resourced exactly the same as full time colleague, with the only difference being the length of time it takes to respond to the station when there is a need for them.

Members were told that there were always a number of vacancies for on-call firefighters and that there was a natural turnover of around 10 per cent a year, which allows members to tackle the diversity agenda where possible. In terms of wider reform, the RFU welcomed Sir Ken Knight's support in 2013 when he called for the expansion of on-call firefighters, as well as the Adrian Thomas report. On inspections, the RFU had lobbied for an Ofsted-style inspection regime for a number of years as it felt there was a clear need to provide accountability and scrutiny within the sector. The RFU also welcomed talks around broadening the role of on-call firefighters and Tristan noted that a number of operators had been working in co-response schemes for over 20 years.

Tristan noted that there were challenges faced by the union, including the view that their members often felt unrepresented at a national level in regards to collective bargaining. The RFU was clear that all voices should be heard at a national level and while some progress had been made, a number of on-call firefighters felt that they were treated as inferior when compared to full time colleagues. It was also noted that there had been a lot of talk about mental health recently, and that the services needed to consider what it does on a daily basis and how people were treated.

The following comment was made after this presentation:

- The voice of the RFU on behalf of on-call firefighters was welcomed as areas exist where there is no difference between on-call and whole time firefighters. The RFU's efforts in the South West in particular were praised and members were keen to share best practice. It was noted, however, that this would require additional resources and the RFU agreed that any assistance from the Home Office on this would be useful.

Decision:

Members **noted** the presentation from the RFU.

4 Pensions Scheme Board Chair

The Chair of the Pensions Scheme Advisory Board, Malcolm Eastwood, gave members an update on the work of the Board, and confirmed that Cllr Roger Philips and Fiona Twycross had been appointed to sit on the Board, alongside Cllrs Roger Price, John Bell, Thomas Wright, and Tristan Ashby from the Retained Firefighters Union, who sits on the Board as an employee representative.

Malcolm advised members that they could delegate the role of scheme manager but that they needed to ensure that effective management was in place. He said that there was an indication from the Pensions Regulator that they were looking at this extremely closely and were issuing fines where contraventions were found. Malcolm drew members' attention to the free training offered by the LGA, suggesting that they contacted Clair Alcock if there was any interest in free annual training offered to FRAs. Members were also told about free tax seminars which were being held across the country, some of which were being run in tandem with those designed for the police service. Members were encouraged to champion fire pensions to scheme members, and ensure that they were managing their delegation of scheme managers where appropriate. Members should be aware of the risks involved but should also proactively support their local pensions boards.

Decision:

Members **noted** the update.

5 Fire Service College

The Chair introduced Tim Jackson, Business Development Director of The Fire Service College who gave an overview of how the College was benefitting from investment and the various improvements made to the College over the past few years.

Tim explained that there had been an agreement made between the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and Capita on the change of ownership of the College and that there had been a considerable amount invested into the College since Capita had purchased it. The investment was primarily put towards the upkeep of the College, which costs £11 billion each year to keep open, as well as a refurbishment project and the maintenance of existing infrastructure and facilities. Tim said that £35 million had been invested since the purchase and while the improvements were being done incrementally, a number of works had already been completed including a new accommodation block, new breathing apparatus facility and refurbishments to the restaurants, bars, reception and toilets, some of which were ongoing. The result of this investment meant that the College was the second largest training site in the world, the only site in the UK with full accommodation, and the largest conference venue in the south west. Tim said that the College had had over 400,000 delegates through its doors over the past 40 years and that the College tried hard to maintain good standards.

In order to maintain these investments, Tim noted that the College had to diversify with new markets but that the international market was growing. He said that the UK Fire and Rescue Service generated 50 per cent of the College's revenue, with other government agencies and the private sector generating a further 25 per cent each. The College was making a profit for the first time this year, which would allow further investment back into the college and the services it provided, including additional foundation training programmes for new recruits, a new eLearning platform, a new scheduling/booking system and the renovation of blocks which had not been used for some time.

In terms of the leadership and direction of the College, members were told that the fire and rescue service was still the primary customer of the College but that its strategy had to be adapted to remain open by sourcing other clients. The leadership team was taking a more proactive approach in its communication with clients and a new senior advisory team would be put in place. The College was looking for members' support to develop a relationship with the UK fire and rescue service and was clear that they wanted the service to be a strategic partner. Tim invited members to visit the College and said there was an open invite for anyone who wanted to see the facilities it offered.

Members made the following comments:

- Having visited the College, members voiced their endorsement of it and encouraged other members to visit. Members said that it was exciting to see the range of activity taking place at the College and that the facilities were an impressive asset.

Decision:

Members **noted** the presentation.

6 Grenfell Tower and fire safety in high rise buildings

London Fire Brigade (LFB) Commissioner, Dany Cotton, attended the Fire Commission meeting and gave members an update on the work which had been ongoing since she gave a detailed update at the Fire Commission meeting in July 2017. Dany said that the public inquiry was underway and that the LFB had core participant status so was being asked to supply a considerable amount of information

to the inquiry, which was proving challenging in the timescales given. There had been a request to interview between 300 – 600 members of LFB staff in addition to the request for documentation, which was difficult to facilitate and was stretching staff capacity. The LFB was also performing risk assessments of those being asked to be interviewed as a number of staff were not considered to be in a fit state to be interviewed. The LFB's priority was to protect staff wherever possible and ensure that their mental health was not compromised. In addition to the public inquiry, the LFB was also contributing towards the police investigation and fire safety teams were working hard to facilitate the requirements of high rise building safety, carrying out the second tranche of visits to high rises and working closely with local authorities. There were a number of challenges associated with this, including the large number of buildings impacted, a shortage in the supply chain of physical goods (fire doors, lighting strips, etc.), and staff who were competent and able to do these assessments. The main priority in all of this was to ensure the safety of residents in buildings, but a further ongoing piece of work would look at privately owned buildings, as well as hospitals and schools.

Steven Adams spoke on behalf of the NFCC, noting that they were collating evidence from all fire and rescue services and looking at the differing views and challenges faced by areas across the country. The inquiries were generating a considerable amount of work for the NFCC, who had been provided some support by the Home Office. As well as details about their position statement, Steven told members that the NFCC was providing the next stage of support which included technical and professional advice where there were some buildings local officers were not clear how best to make safe in the interim period before new fire safety or suppression measures could be installed. The NFCC and LGA were in the process of putting together some guidance on how to increase residents' safety but it was noted that work on this would be ongoing for some time.

Principal Policy Adviser for the LGA, Mark Norris updated members on the work being done to assess private sector buildings and he encouraged members to provide information about the costs their areas were likely to incur when replacing unsafe cladding.

The following comment was made:

- There was a feeling that the LGA was not consulting as much with the Fire Services Management Committee or Fire Commission as it should be as none of the lead members had been appointed to the Grenfell Tower Task and Finish Group. It was felt that the structures could be brought into this and be consulted more regularly.

Decision:

Members **noted** the update.

Action:

Officers to continue collating survey responses from local authorities about the costs they will incur.

7 FSMC and Fire Commission Policy Priorities for 2017-18

The Chair asked members to note the policy priorities for 2017/18 and asked if

members had any comments:

- A suggestion was made the a sprinkler working group was put back on the agenda as a priority and that the LGA took a firmer approach to calls for sprinklers. There were a number of volunteers who were willing to take part in this group and other members welcomed the suggestion. The Chair asked for a show of hands in support of this and it was clear that the Fire Commission backed the idea.

Decisions:

- 1) Members **noted** the policy priorities.
- 2) Lead members would discuss the suggestion of a sprinkler working group.

Action:

Officers to liaise with lead members to discuss how to re-establish the working group.

8 Workforce paper

Cllr Nick Chard gave members an update on the pay negotiations and explained that the 2 per cent offer had been rejected by the Fire Brigade Union (FBU) membership, despite approval having been recommended by the executive council. The NJC was waiting for the FBU to come back to them on this and Gill Gittins, Principal Negotiating Officer, noted that despite the rejection of the offer, the union's leadership were committed to engaging in positive communications around the issue. Members were told that progress was being made in terms of identifying what broadening the role of firefighters would look like and that the NJC would continue to press the Government on the view that more money should be made available to fire services across the UK, not just in England.

The following points was made:

- A concern was raised about a possible typing error in paragraph 16 of the report where it said that an agreement was reached 'now to uplift pay across the board by 1.0 per cent'. Clarification was sought from the workforce team on this point.

Decision:

Members **noted** the workforce paper.

Action:

Workforce officers to continue negotiations.

9 Update paper

Cllr Chard gave members a summary of the meeting he and the Fire Services Management Committee lead members had with the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service on 10 October 2017. He told members that they discussed the independent assessment of Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) business case submissions,

the pay negotiations, the NJC and the implications of Grenfell Tower. The lead members and Cllr Chard told the Minister that if the fire and rescue service will be allocated a greater role in terms of inspections, it should come with additional resources and statutory duty. The Minister said he would welcome evidence from authorities detailing how much they had already spent, and predicted future costs.

In response to the update paper, the statistics in paragraph 14 were queried. It stated that 31 per cent of all incidents were non-fire related and that 29 per cent were fire related. It was not clear what sorts of the calls the remaining 40 per cent were made of. Officers said that they would look at the statistics and update members via email.

Decision:

Members **noted** the update paper.

Action:

Officers to review statistics featured in the paper and update members.

10 Notes from the previous meeting

Members **agreed** the minutes from the previous meeting as an accurate record of the discussion.