

11 July 2018

Informal notes of from the Home Office Roundtable with Fire Service Management Committee

Title:	Home Office Roundtable
Date:	Wednesday 11 July 2018
Venue:	Victoria Room, 8th Floor, 18 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3HZ

1 Welcome

CLlr Nick Chard thanked members for staying after the Fire Service Management Committee Hackitt Review meeting and welcomed Anna Richardson and Emma Lawrence from the Home Office.

Emma and Anna spoke of how demand and risk for Fire Service Authorities (FRA) has changed, where they will go in the future and the current financial resilience. The Minister has contacted a number of FRAs by phone and post to consult with them. A number of stakeholders like National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) have been contacted too. This is the start of the conversation with FRAs not the end

Home Office officials were planning to put information to the Fire Minister before Summer recess for further consideration.

2 Demand and risks

During the discussion on risk and demand members made a number of comments:

- There was no uniformity among FRAs. Conditions and circumstances of FRAs are very varied across the country – for instance whether they are rural, or urban, the type of establishment and shift systems they use as well as the demographics of their communities will all make a difference to the risks and demands on the FRA.
- The on-call duty system was identified as one of the biggest areas of pressure for many FRAs. Recruitment and retention was a huge issue for the sector. The effectiveness of the system, which had a high turnover, was discussed.
- Emergency Medical Response is seen as a way of keeping staff engaged in the on-call system, however, they warned that if the on-call work took up too much time, this would mean that the primary employer would be more reluctant to release staff.
- The availability of on-call staff in coastal areas during the summer season

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- could be problematic as the demands in their primary employment increased.
- Changing demographics i.e. an ageing population will increase demand on FRAs. There was some discussion on what the projected need would look like in the future, with the potential for a rise in incidents after a long decline.
 - The need for a minimum establishment number to provide resilience for when large scale fires and incidents occur. Ensuring that any discretionary capacity that may exist is used for a wider range of activities to ensure that resilience is not compromised.
 - An FRAs establishment number will be affected by a number of issues including locally set response times, shift patterns, rural or urban areas etc. There was no set national standard on response times, these are instead a matter for local decision.
 - Risk and demand are not mutually exclusive, both will help to inform an FRAs risk assessment. However, it was noted that there was no single assessment of risk across FRAs. The NFCC were currently working on producing this through their community risk work.
 - There was some discussion on output versus outcome measures when looking at the response to fires and other incidents.

Reserves

The Home Office also discussed the role of reserves in providing FRAs with future resilience. In particular the Home Office were interested in the use of reserves to secure pay increases for firefighters, in light of the broadening of the role discussions. They outlined that whilst FRAs are putting money into reserves, this money could instead be used to fund a pay increase rather than increase reserves.

Members have had these comments to make:

- Members were concerned that the use of reserves to fund an ongoing pay increase would not be effective.
- Many FRAs have earmarked their reserves for further transformation rather than allocating them to increasing the paybill.
- This was due to a lack of capital funding available for transformation projects. Reserves were therefore critical to further transformation.

Any other comments

There were some discussions around the role of the FBU in transformation and change. Members outlined that the unionised workforce means that it can take time to implement change, including the broadening of the role discussions.

Grenfell was noted as the big unknown, in terms of the role of the fire service going forwards and how that would impact on demand.