

Note of last Fire Services Management Committee meeting

Title: Fire Services Management Committee

Date: Monday 9 March 2020

Venue: The Grand Hotel, Blackpool

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
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1 Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Fiona Twycross AM, Cllr Karen Kilgour, Cllr Carolyn Lambert, Cllr Greg Brackenridge and Cllr Frank Biederman. Cllr John Robinson JP was substituting for Fiona Twycross AM and Cllr Roger Price was substituting for Cllr Carolyn Lambert.

The Chair stated that Cllr Carole Burdis had stood down from the Committee for health reasons and that he had written to her thanking her for her work and wishing her well.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Emergency Services Mobile Communications Project

The Chair welcomed Ian Taylor, Senior User and Business Change Lead for the National Fire Chiefs Council, to the meeting and asked him to introduce his report.

Ian explained that the Emergency Services Network (ESN), the product of ESMCP, would replace the existing Airwave service as the next generation of communications for the emergency services in Great Britain, providing secure and resilient mobile broadband capability with near universal coverage across the country. He said that ESMCP was a cross-Government Programme led by the Home Office. He added that governance arrangements were in place locally and were predominantly officer-led but there was a vacancy on the Fire Customer Group for two LGA members.

Ian said that two years ago, the programme was in a state of flux but, after a reset, it was now back on track with a revised Full Business Case due out for consultation in Spring 2020. It was hoped that the full roll out of ESN would take place by 2024.

In the meantime, Ian said that County Durham and Darlington FRS

became the first users of an ESN service in July 2019 and other FRS's were keen to take early capability.

Ian reported that £21.6 million of Local Transition Resource Funding had recently been agreed with the Home Office for implementation of ESN contingent upon greater levels of assurance on spend.

Ian went on to say that since 2015, ESCMP had appeared before the Public Accounts Committee on 8 occasions and been the subject of 2 National Audit Office reports, the last of which made 6 recommendations which were laid out in paragraph 18.

Ian said that work was still being done on the Airwave system to ensure that it remained working up until the time of switch over.

Finally, Ian acknowledged that FRAs had concerns about potential additional costs of introducing ESN due to the loss of the 60 per cent Government grant funding they currently received for Airwave. He assured members that the NFCC was working on quantifying these costs and potential business benefits.

Following Ian's presentation, members raised the following comments and questions:

- Concerns about potentially higher costs for FRAs were echoed by members.
- Was there confidence about good countrywide coverage with ESN? Ian agreed that coverage was key and this was one of the key issues they were working on. He added that ESN was on a different frequency to Airwave which gave better coverage.
- It was suggested that emergency services staff regularly used personal mobile phones for communication as the current system was not fit for purpose. Ian accepted this was the case and argued that ESN should address this.
- It was stated that S.151 officers did not have the authority to sign off expenditure on Local Transition Resource Funding. Ian said that the Home Office wanted a greater level of assurance over spend and this was designed to achieve that.
- Were the experiences of the trial authorities being documented? Ian said that they were and had been very positive. He added that County Durham and Darlington FRS were delivering a workshop on this at the conference.
- Was the ESN system being future-proofed? Ian reassured members that future-proofing was a key part of the system development and he added that lots were retendered on a regular basis to ensure that ESN kept pace with advances in technology such as 5G.
- Where could members look at for examples of best practice in this field? Ian said that the US system was very enterprise focussed but that there were lots of schemes with little interoperability. He added that the UK was considered to be at the forefront of this technology.
- Was Artificial Intelligence being looked at as a means of making

systems more efficient? Ian said that new technologies were taken forward as part of the NFCC Digital Strategy.

- Was the NFCC collaborating with universities and tech hubs on this project? Ian confirmed that there was considerable interest being shown by various academic institutions.

Decisions

Members noted the ESMCP update.

Actions

Conservative and Labour Group Lead Members to appoint LGA representatives to the Fire Customer Group.

3 Inclusion and Diversity

The Chair invited Jess Norman to introduce the report.

Jess explained that at the FSMC meeting in October 2019, members agreed to make Inclusion one of the three main priorities for the year and that this report outlined some of the work being done to reflect this increasing emphasis.

Jess said that the HMICFRS had identified a range of problems around diversity and inclusion in their first tranche of inspections and highlighted the fact 25 services received Require Improvement judgements and two were graded Inadequate in the 'People' pillar.

Jess said that the LGA had set targets for diversity in recruitment and retention 2 years ago in its Fire Vision but latest Home Office workforce statistics showed that much work still remained to be done if the targets were to be met.

Jess explained that a key piece of work being done by the LGA was the establishment of a Diversity and Inclusion Champions' Network which met for the first time in January. The aim of the network was to disseminate good practice and to drive change in FRS's locally and the LGA was encouraging all FRA's to appoint a Champion.

Jess said that the LGA was continuing to work with its key partners on improving inclusion and diversity, in particular the NFCC through their People Programme and via the NJC-led Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG).

Finally, Jess explained that the LGA was proposing to stop providing bespoke, standalone events on culture, diversity and inclusion as these were not considered to be the best way to engage members from a wide range of authorities on this agenda. The Leadership Essentials programmes however, would continue and the Champions' Network would discuss possible future training resources for members.

Following Jess's introduction, members raised the following comments

and questions:

- Were the NFCC workstreams outlined in paragraph 9 still on track to be delivered and what was the Future Working Patterns project? Jess said that she believed that they were all still being worked on but were on target. She said that the Future Working Patterns was a new programme to replace the on-call project and included looking at how more flexible approaches could help support a more diverse range of new recruits. Mark Norris said that if members were interested, more information could be brought back on this to a future FSMC meeting.
- Was the effectiveness of the IFSG work being assessed? Gill Gittins said that an in-depth piece of work to review the implementation and impact of its work was now underway and a full report would be produced.
- It was considered that the FSMC should be leading by example when it came to promoting diversity.
- It was suggested that inclusion and diversity should be embedded in all LGA training, not just as one-off standalone items.
- The Leadership Essentials course was praised. Jess said that it continued to be very popular and the 'conversations on culture' element was very important in raising awareness of diversity and inclusion issues with leaders.
- There was considered to be an issue with retention of BAME fire service staff, possibly in relation to pay gaps. Were figures on BAME pay gap collected as they were with gender?
- The accuracy of the HMICFRS conclusions on cultural problems in FRS's was queried, in particular, whether a few isolated examples of bad practice were being used to draw conclusions across the board. The Chair confirmed that these were genuine and widespread issues that needed to be addressed. Mark Norris said that one of the State of Fire report's recommendations was to establish a model code of conduct for the fire service which could help to address some of the poor performance.
- Was there enough awareness of the NFCC's Inclusivity Strategy and had the LGA been part of drawing it up?

The Chair thanked Jess and other officers for their work in this important area.

Decision

Subject to the comments made during the debate, members endorsed the proposed approach and next steps outlined in paragraphs 17-23 of the report.

Actions

Officers and NFCC to bring a report back to a future FSMC meeting on the Future Working Patterns project.

The Chair welcomed to the meeting John Buckley, NFCC Finance Lead, and Amy Webb the newly appointed Team Leader for the CSR resource.

John explained that the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) would be a 3 or 4 year financial settlement and so it was vital that the Fire & Rescue Service sector was able to put up a good case to the Treasury to increase funding. He thanked all the FRA's that had agreed to contribute financially to set up a small team whose job would be to identify all the pressures facing the sector to inform that case. He said that Amy Webb had been appointed to lead this team.

Amy thanked members for inviting her to the meeting. She said that although the project was funded until September, the Government had shortened the timescales for the CSR and it was now expected to happen in July with submissions to the Treasury by the end of April. She said that she would be trying to assemble a team of data analysts, and the London Fire Brigade had offered to help with this as they held a wide range of information. She said that she would be engaging with a range of stakeholders over the coming weeks and would welcome the opportunity to report back to FSMC at its next meeting.

Following John and Amy's introduction, members raised the following comments and questions:

- Members agreed that the sector was in a much better position this time around than at the last CSR and were confident that a good case could be put, built around the new responsibilities being asked of the sector in the light of Grenfell, Hackitt and HMICFRS.
- It was stated that funding for the sector would be tied into the Government's wider Fair Funding Review and fundamental review of Business Rates. Other members cautioned about getting into a debate about the fire funding formula and how resources were distributed between FRAs at this stage. John said that whilst the Home Office recognised that there were issues with the formula, it was unlikely that the Government would look at it for this CSR. He said that it was more important to concentrate on increasing the overall size of the pot for fire and rescue services at this stage. Members agreed with this assessment.

Decision

Members noted the update.

5 LGA Business Plan 2019-22

The Chair asked Mark Norris to introduce the report.

Mark explained that the Business Plan was agreed by the LGA Board and contained elements of the ongoing work plans of each of the organisation's Boards and Committees. He said that for the FSMC, the key workstreams were outlined on pages 36-37 of the Plan and were the ones identified by members at the first meeting of the 2019-20 year in October – namely, funding, diversity and inclusion and responding to the recommendation of the Grenfell Inquiry Phase 1 and the HMICFRS State

of Fire report.

Decision

Members noted the LGA Business Plan for 2019-22.

6 Workforce update

The Chair invited Clair Alcock and Gill Gittins to introduce their update.

Clair explained that the Treasury had now issued their informal early stage proposals to remedy age discrimination in public sector pension schemes arising out of the McCloud/Sargeant claims. She said that they were proposing to return members to their former final salary scheme for the 'remedy period', but to offer a choice to the member to receive benefits based on the current Career Average Revalued Earnings scheme if it was better to do so.

Clair said that it was not clear at this stage when the end of the 'remedy period' would be, however it was not expected to be before 2022. She said that the proposals consulted on two options - for benefits to be received either at the end of the remedy period or at the member's retirement age.

Clair said that it was very challenging to work through the implications of the two options at this stage and further information was required. However, she said that the Scheme Advisory Board had been working on a response to the Treasury's formal consultation and that this would be agreed at their meeting later in the month. She added that FSMC might want to submit their own response.

Gill highlighted paragraph 24 of the report indicating that work was continuing with legal representatives on appropriate approaches to government to reinforce the position that any costs arising from the pension legal cases should not fall on FRAs.

She added that FRAs had been approached to seek their views on whether they would like the LGA to coordinate the defence of a new set of claims by the FBU on a cost-sharing basis. She said that the overwhelming majority of respondents had indicated support for this and so it would be taken forward.

Gill also reported to members that FBU members in Scotland had rejected a 17 per cent pay offer from their employers which had been linked to revised job roles. The FBU had recommended rejection.

Members made the following comments:

- The choice between the Treasury's two options was very complex and the pros and cons needed to be weighed up very carefully. It was not a simple binary choice.
- Had any assessment been carried out of how many members of staff would be likely to take early retirement as a result of both of

the Treasury's options? Clair said that the workforce implications of both options were being looked at.

Decision

Members noted the update.

7 Building safety update

The Chair asked Mark Norris and Charles Loft to introduce the update.

Mark said that steady progress was being made on the ACM cladding remediation programme although this was slower on private sector blocks. He added that owners who the Government considered weren't acting fast enough, were being named and shamed.

Mark said that on the reform side, the MHCLG Secretary of State had made a detailed statement in January and he highlighted three points from this as being of particular significance to FRAs:

1. The intention to lower the height threshold for sprinkler requirements in new buildings from 30 meters to 11 metres, a measure that FSMC has long campaigned for.
2. A new building safety regulator would be set up, initially in shadow form, within the Health & Safety Executive. This would happen within weeks.
3. A new Fire Safety Bill would be published shortly that delivered on the recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 1 report.

Mark then asked Charles Loft to speak about the recent work of the Fire Protection Board (FPB).

Charles reminded members that the FPB wrote to both Chief Fire Officers and FRA chairs in November asking whether they were satisfied with the measures duty holders were taking to mitigate risks from ACM cladding in buildings over 18 metres that had yet to be remediated. The letters also asked whether FRS's had plans in place to deal with a fire in these buildings. All but two authorities had responded to this letter and the two that hadn't – Greater Manchester and London – had been given an extended deadline due to the number of properties involved. Charles said that this exercise had been very helpful in moving forward fire safety work in these buildings.

Charles reported that the FPB was working with the Home Office to prepare a business case in relation to £10 million of funding that had been made available by the Government to support inspection and assurance work on all 11,000 residential properties over 18 metres by the end of 2021.

Following this introduction, members raised the following comments and questions:

- Did the naming and shaming just apply to private sector owners? Mark said that it applied to all landlords but that individuals/companies that only owned one or two buildings were not being named as it would readily identify tenants and leaseholders.
- Steven Adams flagged up the Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee Inquiry into progress on remediation of dangerous cladding and said that Lord Porter had been called to give evidence on 23 March.
- Concern was expressed about leaseholders and owners whose properties had become blighted due to being covered in dangerous cladding. Many were unable to either sell or get insurance for their properties and leaseholders were being asked to pay huge amounts by the freeholder to cover the cost of works. It was considered that the naming and shaming process was contributing to this. Charles said that in his view, the only way out of this situation was for Government to intervene and pay for the work.
- Concern was expressed about the number of buildings with High Pressure Laminate cladding which, like ACM, was also flammable. Mark said that the LGA had been raising this with Government for 2 years and councils were currently assessing how many affected properties there were in their areas. He added that it was likely to be more than those with ACM cladding.
- Concerns were raised about the number of skilled professionals that would be required to carry out all the inspection and remediation work. Members considered that there simply weren't enough qualified people to meet the Government's deadlines. Mark said that the £10 million for the FPB was going to be in part used as 'seed funding' to upskill the workforce. Members then queried whether any of this would go into local authority building control. Mark said that this was yet to be determined. Charles added that the FPB had already achieved a lot in a short space of time and the NFCC was working hard on a plan of action for inspections.
- The Chair said that he thought it was crucial that the Government was made aware of FSMC's concerns around these issues and that people were held to account. Mark said that Lord Porter had sent a letter to the Chancellor asking him to allocate more money to remediation of unsafe buildings and he would circulate this to members. It was then suggested that FSMC send a separate letter seeking an urgent meeting with the Minister to discuss their concerns. This was agreed by members. Mark added that a roundtable meeting with the Minister was being set up by Luke Hall to discuss the implementation of the Grenfell Inquiry Phase 1 recommendations.

Decision

Members noted the update.

Actions

- Officers to circulate Lord Porter's letter to Members.

- Officers to draft a letter to the Minister from FSMC seeking an urgent meeting to discuss building safety.

8 **FSMC update**

The Chair asked Jess Norman to introduce the update.

Jess reported the following last-minute alterations to the Fire Conference agenda:

- The new Fire Minister, James Brokenshire, was unable to attend and so Luke Edwards was stepping in to deliver the keynote speech.
- Fiona Twycross was now unable to attend conference due to her commitments around emergency planning in London and so Rebecca Knox had kindly volunteered to step in for her for the diversity and inclusion session. Ian Stephens would now be chairing the building safety session.
- Alison Sansome was stepping in for Suzanne McCarthy on the Fire Standards Board session.
- Unfortunately, Hertfordshire were now no longer able to deliver their StayWise workshop.

The Chair thanked Jess on behalf of the Committee for all her hard work in putting together an excellent conference programme, including handling the last-minute changes.

Mark Norris then gave a short update on the Coronavirus situation.

Mark made the following points:

- The Government had published its 3 phase action plan the previous week.
- The LGA had been working closely with Government and Public Health England over coordinating a response to the crisis and had been having regular dialogue with Local Resilience Forums.
- Current planning assumptions were for an infection rate of 80% in the population with around 4% of these requiring hospital treatment. Depending on remediation measures, 50% of the population may get infected for a three week period with a fifth of the workforce potentially being off at any one time. This would clearly have serious implications for FRS's and they might need to consider asking recently retired staff to come back temporarily.

Mark asked members to feed back any concerns or questions about the impacts on fire and rescue services to him.

Decision

Members noted the update.

9 **NFCC update**

Decision

Members noted the update.

10 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 January were agreed.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Ian Stephens	Isle of Wight Council
Vice-Chairman		
Deputy-chairman	Cllr Nick Chard Cllr Keith Aspden	Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service
Members	Cllr Eric Carter Cllr Mark Healey Mr Roger Hirst Cllr Rebecca Knox Cllr Nikki Hennessy Cllr Les Byrom CBE Cllr Cleo Lake Cllr John Robinson JP	Shropshire and Telford Fire & Rescue Authority Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority Essex Police, Fire & Crime Commissioner Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service Lancashire Fire & Rescue Authority Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority Avon Fire & Rescue Authority County Durham and Darlington Fire & Rescue Authority
Substitutes	Cllr Roger Price	Hampshire Fire & Rescue Authority
Apologies	Dr Fiona Twycross AM Cllr Karen Kilgour Cllr Carolyn Lambert	Greater London Authority Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Authority East Sussex Fire Authority
In Attendance	Ian Taylor John Buckley Amy Cross Steven Adams	NFCC NFCC NFCC/London Fire Brigade