

End of Year report

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report provides an overview of the issues and work that FSMC has delivered during the last year. It sets out key achievements in relation to the priorities set out at the beginning of the year and proposes communicating this information to our member authorities, along with a request for priorities for 2014/15. Priorities for next year will be discussed by the Committee at its September meeting.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

1. note the contents of the paper; and
2. agree this information is communicated more widely to Fire and Rescue Authorities along with inviting priorities for the 14/15 Committee cycle.

Action

Officers to take action as appropriate.

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End of Year Report

Background

1. The political and financial environment has shaped the interests and work of the Fire Services Management Committee over the last year. The spending round announcement in June 2013 confirmed the financial position out to 2015/16 as one in which central government funding for fire and rescue continues to decline.
2. The fire sector continues to demonstrate its enormous value to national and local resilience demonstrated through the flooding crisis in early 2014. Over 1,000 firefighters were out in force across the country during the flooding and crews were drafted in from a number of services to support the flood response in Devon and Somerset, the Thames Valley and elsewhere.
3. FSMC met 6 times throughout the year. The Fire Commission met 4 times. There have also been a number of task and finish groups involving the wider membership; the Chairman's dinners around the country to meet FRA Chairs and portfolio holders; and an increasing engagement with outside bodies.

Strategic issues

4. The financial pressures on fire and rescue authorities are ever present, but this year has been characterised less by naming the problem, than by action. This year's fire conference exemplified this change in emphasis, with a focus on a range of innovative practice and different models of integration and commercialisation.
5. However, we have not lost sight of the challenge and have made sure that Government is keenly aware of the significant impact that the funding reductions have had. FSMC's *Any Fire* document, which was published at the Fire Conference, is an example of how this has been articulated.
6. Resilience in the sector has also been tested in the last year. The East Coast surge in December 2013 and the extreme flooding in the South East and South West in January was met with customary expertise and professionalism by firefighters from across the country. The reviews into the system's effectiveness will be numerous and it will be important to understand how effective the National Resilience Assets were in the response and what lessons can feed into a review of national resilience. CFOA have already conducted their review and this and other conclusions will be discussed at the Fire Strategic Resilience Board.
7. The ongoing industrial dispute between the Fire Brigades Union and the Government over pension reforms has also had its impact over the year. To date the business continuity arrangements have stood up to the test. The Employers Side have played an important role in determining principles for moving forward during negotiations.

8. This year has also seen the sector make continued and considerable progress on the Future Control Services Scheme. Partnerships have been effective in developing and implementing improvements on time and within budget and savings will be in the order of £129 million by 2024.
9. The LGA appoints Members of the FSMC to a range of national bodies. Over the past year these have included the Pensions Committee, the Fire Strategic Resilience Board the National Resilience board, the Fire College Management Board, the Arson Prevention Forum and others and Members have reported back to the Committee on developments, seeking a steer, where necessary.
10. Members drawn from the LGA hold seats on the Employers' Sides of both the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services and the National Joint Council for Brigade Managers of Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services.

2013/14 activity

11. In the last year FSMC and the Fire Commission have considered a wide range of issues including: the extreme weather crisis; the introduction of the Primary Authority scheme to FRAs; the changes to the retained firefighters pensions' scheme; the new pensions governance reform; national resilience; industrial relations; the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme; the peer challenge programme; fire and rescue service procurement and the JESIP programme. There has also been a series of meetings with the Fire Minister over the course of the year.

Achievements

12. The Committee has made some significant gains throughout the year. It has:
 - 12.1. Submitted evidence to DCLG Select Committee on Knight Review and the Chairman of FSMC Kay Hammond gave oral evidence to the Committee, along with a number of Chief Fire Officers.
 - 12.2. Championed the importance of a bottom up approach to reform and have successfully galvanised support for this approach from Ministers.
 - 12.3. Been successful in achieving a manageable timetable for the implementation of the Primary Authority Scheme to fire safety and have worked closely with the sector to ensure the success of the scheme.
 - 12.4. Held the Fire Conference in Cardiff and attracted over 300 delegates. Highlights included a debate on blue light integration, commercialisation of the sector and national resilience, particularly relating to flooding, over the two day event. The LGA published at the Fire Conference, *Any Fire*, a report in the re-wiring local government suite that set out the case for reform to the financing of the fire sector.

- 12.5. Lobbied successfully for a lower reduction in funding in 2015/16 for fire. We have helped government recognise the value of the service not just in terms of fighting fires and reducing fire deaths, but also in terms of the broader preventative and community safety work it does to contribute to economic and social outcomes.
- 12.6. Invested in actuarial and legal advice in respect of fire pension reforms following the Government's consultation on the retained firefighters' pensions' scheme. A fire pensions working group has been established with the aim to negotiate the best possible outcome for the fire sector.
- 12.7. Maintained and enhanced our links with the Civil Contingencies Secretariat in light of the flooding crisis.
- 12.8. Held a dedicated Fire and Rescue Service Breakfast Session at the LGA Annual Conference.
- 12.9. Continued to see positive engagement in the OpA and Fire Peer Challenge from all FRAs, plus the Firefighters Charity, Defence Fire Risk Management Organisation and Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. A total of 37 peer challenges have been delivered to date and Cardiff University has conducted an evaluation of the programme which has highlighted its effectiveness as well as areas where it could be made even stronger.
- 12.10. Successfully ran Fire Leadership Essential programmes across the country, involving Chairs and senior members of local fire and rescue authorities.
- 12.11. Within the wider LGA work, established an online resource for councils and fire authorities to use to keep up to date with the latest developments on flooding. Supported and kept in contact with local authorities affected by the flooding crisis and participated in the national recovery groups convened by the government.
- 12.12. Supported the first ever Fire Sprinkler Week from 3 to 9 February 2014. This is part of a three-year campaign to spread more widely an awareness of sprinkler facts and promote greater understanding and acceptance of the benefits of sprinklers by businesses, the property and construction industry and politicians.

Knowledge, networks and communication

13. We have continued to develop communication between the LGA and the sector to increase the reputation of the Fire Service as part of the local government family. Specific actions we have taken include:
 - 13.1. A Fire Bulletin which is a regular quarterly publication from Cllr Kay Hammond, as Chairman of FSMC, which goes some way to addressing the issue of learning across the sector, rather than just sharing good practice.

- 13.2. A comprehensive Chairman's update paper for both the Committee and the Commission.
- 13.3. Making good use of our professional advisers, on issues such as finance and pensions.
- 13.4. Raising the profile of the fire sector within local government by hosting a breakfast workshop at the LGA's Annual Conference.
- 13.5. Regular features and news in brief in First magazine which goes out to 20,000 councillors.
- 13.6. Undertaken a number of visits to fire and rescue services across England.

Looking forward

14. We will be discussing a new workplan with the FSMC in September. Members' views of priorities are welcomed in advance, so that these can be fully taken into account. At the same time, it is clear that several issues are on-going which will require attention from the Committee next year.
15. Continuing to support FRAs to adjust to budget constraints through efficiencies and improving productivity remains an important priority between now and 2015/16. FSMC will want to continue to influence all national parties in the run up to the 2015 election.
16. The CIPFA/LGA independent commission on local government finance will also be an opportunity for the sector to raise its concerns and propose solutions to the future funding of the fire and rescue service.
17. Preparing for the next Comprehensive Spending Review (which is expected in 2015 after the next general election) will remain a significant area of work for FSMC.
18. National resilience will remain an important issue into the coming years. FSMC's presence on the Fire Strategic Resilience Board and the National Resilience Board ensure that it will retain influence over the agenda. The Strategic Resilience Board will continue to review priorities and asset renewal over the coming year.

Board Cycle

19. As part of the revised governance arrangements the FSMC will meet 4 times a year and the Fire Commission will meet twice a year. The Committee cycle for 2014/15 is as follows:

Fire Services Management Committee

19.1 5 September 2014

19.2 12 December 2014

19.3 9 March 2015 at the Fire Conference in Gateshead

19.4 26 June 2015

Fire Commission

19.5 17 October 2014

19.6 22 May 2015