

## **Fire Services Management Committee Update paper**

### **Purpose of report**

For information.

### **Summary**

The report outlines issues of interest to the Fire Services Management Committee not covered under other items on the agenda.

### **Recommendation**

That members of the Committee note the report.

### **Actions**

Officers to continue to provide updates to members.

**Contact officer:** Rachael Aldridge  
**Position:** Policy Adviser  
**Phone no:** 020 7664 3370  
**Email:** Rachael.Aldridge@local.gov.uk

## **Fire Services Management Committee Update paper**

### **Spending Review 2020**

1. On 25 November 2020, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak MP announced the outcome of the [Spending Review 2020](#) (SR). As outlined in the LGA's [On-the-Day Briefing](#), the SR provides some certainty for councils next year, but the long-term outlook remains unclear. The potential increase of 4.5 per cent in council core spending power will support vital local services; though this assumes that council tax bills will rise by 5 per cent next year, placing a significant burden on households at a time of economic uncertainty.
2. FSMC Lead Members were briefed by Home Office officials on 3 December on what the settlement will mean for fire and rescue services. This follows on from the joint work the LGA (completed by Amy Webb earlier in the year) has been doing with the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and Home Office, to make the case for further funding to answer the cost pressures felt by the sector due to risk and demand. The briefing confirmed that Fire and Rescue Authorities will receive a flat real grant settlement, alongside the flexibility to increase the precept by 2 per cent. Like councils, Fire and Rescue Authorities will also be compensated for 75 per cent of irrecoverable losses from council tax and business rate income. Home Office officials were also able to confirm Authorities will receive the funding they have previously been given to cover the pensions costs arising from remedying court judgments, such as age discrimination.
3. Alongside the SR, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) released its [Economic and Fiscal Outlook \(EFO\)](#) in November 2020, which highlighted the significant effects that COVID-19 has had on the UK economy. The OBR's analysis suggests that spending on unprotected public services such as police, fire and local government is likely to be broadly flat in real per capita terms in 2022-23.

### **Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP)**

4. The ESMCP (the Programme) will deliver the next generation of mission critical communications for emergency services and the Programme is run by the Home Office on behalf of the emergency services, Scotland and Wales. In October 2020, there was a change in governance and leadership of the Programme; the Senior Responsible Owner, Stephen Webb, stepped down after nearly 10 years in the role and the Programme now comes within the purview of the Crime Police and Fire Group within the Home Office. This change in reporting is aimed at better aligning stakeholders and Government in preparation for transition phase.
5. On behalf of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), CFO Darryl Keen from Hertfordshire FRS, as the NFCC's Operational Communications lead, wrote to the Home Office in October, outlining the sector's concerns with the latest draft iteration of the ESMCP full business case (FBC) (see **Appendix A**). Following further assessment and scrutiny of this latest draft of the FBC, it has been decided that further, more detailed

revisions are required ahead of an anticipated sign off in late Spring 2021. Key areas for further work and refinement in the FBC include:

- 5.1. better assessment and incorporation of costs for users;
  - 5.2. further planning, reflecting a revised technical delivery plan and anticipated deployment timescales for the emergency services;
  - 5.3. a better alignment of where finance, risk and benefit sit between users and Government.
6. The present, and interim, FBC indicates that transition onto the new Emergency Services Network (ESN) should be complete by mid-2025, with contingency a little way beyond that. Following discussion with LGA officers, it is intended that a more detailed paper and update on ESMCP and the FBC, will be brought to the FSMC meeting in March 2021.
  7. Following concerns being raised about the cost and affordability of ESN at local level, a tool is being prepared with which Fire and Rescue Authorities and Fire and Rescue Services can estimate ESN costs over the 15-year life of ESMCP. It is envisaged that this tool will be available in the new year.
  8. Progress in implementing aspects of the ESN continues, with three Fire and Rescue Services currently using early ESN products in limited and low risk scenarios; County Durham and Darlington FRS, Dorset and Wiltshire FRS and Merseyside FRS. Feedback has been positive, and a good number of other Services are working through the implementation of early ESN, mostly data, products.

### **Fire Member Development Offer**

9. Earlier this year, the LGA commissioned Andy Fry, ex-Chief Fire Officer and former HM Inspector of Fire Services in Wales, to deliver a series of instructive videos covering various topics associated with the governance role of Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) members. The first video, [‘The Role of Fire and Rescue Authority Members’](#), is now available on the LGA website.
10. The webinar series aims to provide an introduction to governance issues for those who are new to FRAs, as well as the support the development of existing members. This work will also cover wider governance issues including governance during times of crisis, which is informed by recent experiences of FRAs responding to COVID-19, as well as scrutiny and the relationship between the political and professional leadership of the sector.

### **Fit for the Future**

11. Throughout October and November 2020, the LGA has worked in partnership with the NFCC and the National Employers to review feedback on the proposed Fit for the Future improvement objectives, received from stakeholders across the Fire and Rescue sector. We received a wide range of feedback and the participation in this initial engagement

exercise will help to shape our next steps. Officers will continue to engage with the sector as we further develop the document.

### **Consultation – Domestic Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms**

12. On 17 November 2020, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government published its [consultation on proposals to extend the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm \(England\) Regulations 2015](#) (the Regulations). Closing on 11 January 2021, the consultation seeks views on:
- 12.1. Amending the Regulations to require social landlords to ensure at least one smoke alarm is installed on each storey of the premises on which there is a room used wholly or partly as living accommodation.
  - 12.2. Amending the statutory guidance (Approved Document J) supporting Part J of the Building Regulations to require that carbon monoxide alarms are fitted alongside the installation of fixed combustion appliances of any fuel type (excluding gas cookers).
  - 12.3. Amending the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 to require private and social landlords to install a carbon monoxide alarm in any room used as living accommodation where a fixed combustion appliance is used (excluding gas cookers).
13. These proposals relate to England only. This consultation follows on from the government's [social housing green paper](#) (published August 2018), the [social housing white paper](#) (published November 2020) and the [review of carbon monoxide alarm requirements](#) that concluded in January 2019.

### **Outside bodies update**

14. Fire Standard Board (FSB): The FSB last convened on 12 October and was attended by Cllr Nick Chard. A range of topics were discussed, including: the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between FSB and HMICFRS; and progress updates on the development of new Fire Standards, including the Leadership Fire Standard. The FSB will next meet on 9 December 2020.
15. Strategic Resilience Board (SRB): Cllr Cleo Lake and Cllr Les Byrom attended the SRB on 13 October 2020. A range of topics were discussed, including local responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and preparing for the UK to leave the EU on 1 January 2021.
16. HM Inspectorate for Constabulary and Fire *and Rescue Service (HMICFRS)*:
  - HMICFRS External Reference Group (ERG): The ERG last met on 19 October 2020, where a summary of early findings from the HMICFRS COVID-19 inspections was provided. The next meeting is scheduled for 16 December 2020.
  - HMICFRS COVID-19 Inspection meeting: Cllr Ian Stephens and LGA officers, Mark Norris and Charles Loft, met with Zoe Billingham on 9 November and 20 November, to

provide feedback on behalf of the LGA on HMICFRS COVID-19 inspections. A range of topics were discussed including the tripartite agreements, the role of the LGA and National Employers and the support the LGA gave to local government during the pandemic.