

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.

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HMICFRS COVID-19 Inspection National Report

1. In August 2020, HMICFRS were commissioned to inspect how fire and rescue authorities in England responded to the COVID-19 outbreak and the various challenges it presents. Virtual inspections of England's 45 fire and rescue services were conducted during September to November 2020, with inspection activity focussed on their response during the initial phase of the pandemic. On 15 January 2021, HMICFRS published its national inspection report, [Responding to the pandemic: The fire and rescue service's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020](#) (the Report).
2. Overall, HMICFRS found that fire and rescue services responded very well to the outbreak. This included maintaining their ability to respond to fires and other emergencies in these extraordinary times, whilst also supporting communities in ways that extended far beyond their statutory duties.
3. In the Report, HMICFRS did take issue with the tripartite agreements, taking the position that they were too prescriptive and, in some cases, a hindrance. They did outline, however, that emergency responses were not compromised by the pandemic. HMICFRS has also again called for legislative updates to give Chief Fire Officers operational independence.
4. The 14 headline findings outlined in the Report include:
 - i. There was strong multi-agency working in every area, supported and facilitated by LRFs
 - ii. All services maintained their ability to respond to fires and other emergencies
 - iii. The prioritisation of response was, in some cases, to the detriment of protection and prevention activity
 - iv. Access to data on vulnerable individuals from partners varied
 - v. The oversight and scrutiny of fire and rescue authorities varied
 - vi. Some services were more prepared for the pandemic than others
 - vii. The fire and rescue sector were able to come together effectively during the pandemic
 - viii. The intent behind the tripartite agreement was pragmatic, but it was too prescriptive in practice
 - ix. On-call firefighters further demonstrated their enormous value to fire and rescue services
 - x. Services could have done more to ensure the efficient and productive use of their staff

- xi. Most services put effective measures in place to protect control room functions
- xii. More could have been done by services to consider if their risk profile changed as a result of the pandemic
- xiii. The additional costs services incurred when responding to the pandemic were mainly covered by government grants
- xiv. Wellbeing provision offered to staff during COVID-19 was good but varied.

Fire Diversity and Inclusion Champions Network

- 5. In December 2020, the FSMC was updated on the current work of the Network, brings together elected representatives who are responsible for diversity and inclusion issues in their fire and rescue authorities. This included the Network's upcoming focus on the topic of 'racial equality', and engagement of a specialist facilitator to deliver these sessions. In January 2021, the LGA commissioned Kemi Labinjo, Barrister and Director, Amber and Greene, to deliver a two-part meeting series on 'Racial Equality in the Fire and Rescue Sector'.
- 6. The first meeting was held on 22 January 2021, during which the fundamental concepts related to racial equality and anti-racism were explored. The Network also heard a presentation from Wayne Brown, Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Phil Loach, Chief Fire Officer, West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service, regarding the work they have been doing with their workforce and in their local area more generally, in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. The next meeting is scheduled for 23 March 2021, during which Kemi Labinjo will deliver a two-hour session on 'anti-racism in practice'.
- 7. Officers are currently exploring options to expand this critical work beyond the Network, with Members more broadly in 2021, and will report back to the FSMC in June.
- 8. The [video recordings and transcripts](#) for previous sessions held in 2020 are available on the Champions Network webpage.

Fire Member Development Offer

- 9. In 2020, 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 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.
- 10. The first two webinars, ['The Role of Fire and Rescue Authority Members'](#) and ['Political Oversight of Fire and Rescue Service Performance'](#) are available on the LGA website. The third webinar, 'Effective Fire and Rescue Authority governance for times of crisis' will be made available in March 2021.

Fit for the Future

11. Throughout January and February, the LGA has continued to work in partnership with the NFCC and the National Employers to review feedback from the initial engagement exercise on the proposed Fit for the Future improvement objectives. We received a range of feedback from stakeholders across the Fire and Rescue sector during this initial engagement exercise. We are working with the NFCC and National Employers to determine next steps and Officers will continue to engage with the sector as we further develop the document.

Outside bodies update

12. Strategic Resilience Board (SRB): On 25 January, Cllr Les Byrom attended the SRB, during which the fire and rescue sector's response to COVID-19, and industrial action and business continuity were discussed. The next meeting is yet to be scheduled.
13. Fire Standard Board (FSB): The FSB convened on 16 February 2021 and was attended by Cllr Nick Chard. A range of topics were discussed, including: the [publication of the first four Fire Standards for England](#) on 16 February; and progress updates on the development of remaining Fire Standards for this tranche, including the Fire Protection Standard and Fire Prevention Standard. The next FSB meeting has not yet been scheduled.
14. HMICFRS External Reference Group (ERG): The ERG last met on 16 December 2020, where a summary of initial findings from the HMICFRS COVID-19 inspections was provided. The next meeting is scheduled for 15 March 2020.
15. HMICFRS Chiefs and Chairs Event: On 25 January, HMICFRS convened this event to discuss a range of topics including the key priorities of the Government's fire reform programme and the HMICFRS COVID-19 Inspection National Report.