

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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Fire Services Management Committee Update paper

PCC Review and the Fire Reform White Paper

1. In July 2020, the Home Office commenced an internal review on the role of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). The review was in response to the Government's manifesto commitment to strengthen the accountability of PCCs and expand their role.
2. The Home Office used part one of the two-part review to examine their long-term ambitions on fire governance. In September 2020, the LGA submitted a [response to the consultation on part one of the review](#), on behalf of the Fire Services Management Committee and the Safer and Stronger Communities Board. The submission focussed on both Police and Crime Panel issues as well as fire governance. The LGA represents Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs), PFCCs and Police and Crime Panels (PCPs).
3. On 16 March 2021, the Home Secretary laid a [Written Ministerial Statement in Parliament setting out the findings from part one of the PCC Review](#). This included a series of recommendations to reform the police service and fire and rescue sector. The LGA provided an [on-the-day response to the Parliamentary Statement](#).
4. In a letter to Chief Fire Officers, Fire Authority Chairs and Fire Partners, the Minister of State for Building Safety, Fire and Communities, Lord Greenhalgh, also outlined that the findings from this part of the review would inform options for the upcoming White Paper on fire reform. Centred on three pillars of improvement – Professionalism, People, and Governance - the White Paper will outline the roadmap for reform, alongside the comprehensive legislative programme on fire and building safety.
5. On 26 March 2021, an additional meeting of the Fire Commission was convened to discuss the findings from part one of the PCC Review and next steps for the White Paper. The meeting was attended by Minister of State for Building Safety, Fire and Communities, who delivered a presentation on the Government's proposals for fire reform, as outlined by the Home Secretary in the Parliamentary Statement on 16 March.
6. On 1 April 2021, the LGA wrote to the Minister to re-emphasise the importance of locally determined governance and that the LGA does not support mandatory changes in governance.
7. The White Paper is scheduled to be published in Summer 2021, for consultation throughout the Autumn. To inform the LGA's response to the White Paper consultation, we will be looking further at the question of governance and alternative models. As part of this process, FSMC Lead Members agreed to establish a Governance Task and Finish Group to discuss options for creating stronger executive and scrutiny functions within fire and rescue authorities. Once convened, the Group will bring proposals to FSMC for consideration.

HMICFRS State of Fire 2020 Report

8. In accordance with section 28B of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services' delivered the annual report on the [State of Fire and Rescue -- The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2020](#). The report draws on findings from inspections in the 45 fire and rescue services in England, to provide an overall view of the state of the fire and rescue sector. It also includes: an assessment of how the London Fire Brigade is responding to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 1 recommendations; and considers how services are responding to the issues the Inspectorate raised during Round One of inspections.
9. During a year in which the response to the COVID-19 pandemic was the sector's priority, the Inspectorate's findings focused on making the case for local and national reform, including more timely delivery of the six national recommendations made in [State of Fire 2019](#).
10. This report also considered findings from the Inspectorate's national COVID-19 inspection report, [Responding to the pandemic: The fire and rescue service's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020](#) (published January 2021). 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.

Spending Review

11. 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 provided some certainty for councils in 2021, but the long-term outlook remains unclear. On 3 December 2020, FSMC Lead Members were briefed by Home Office officials, where it was confirmed that Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) would receive a flat real grant settlement, alongside the flexibility to increase the precept by two per cent. Like councils, FRAs will also be compensated for 75 per cent of irrecoverable losses from council tax and business rate income. It was also confirmed that FRAs would receive the same level of funding previously allocated to cover the pensions costs arising from remedying court judgments, such as age discrimination.
12. The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and the LGA continue to work together to input into the next Spending Review process. HM Treasury is expected to make an announcement this summer about the timing of the next Spending Review, with submissions then probably due in the autumn. LGA Officers have met with the Home Office and NFCC to discuss the next steps to progress this work. It has been recommended that the Senior Sector Group (SSG) is re-convened, following the positive engagement we had with the Home Office through the SSG throughout 2020.

13. The recruitment process for the role of strategic support to draft the business case remains ongoing, as an appointment has not yet been made. We are therefore considering options for how this role might be fulfilled, including options to commission or completing another round of recruitment.

LGA Fire Conference 2021

14. On 1-4 March, the annual LGA Fire Conference was held virtually for the first time. All of the four plenary sessions and two interactive meetings were well attended, and positive feedback received.
15. In Autumn 2021, Officers will commence planning for next year's Fire Conference, proposed for early March 2022. The LGA is currently reviewing the key considerations regarding options to return to in-person conference activity, subject to government guidance later in the year.

Outside bodies update

16. Strategic Resilience Board (SRB): On 28 April 2021, Cllr Les Byrom attended the SRB, during which topics such as industrial relations and national resilience issues were discussed. The next meeting is yet to be scheduled.
17. Fire Standards Board (FSB): On 19 April 2021, Cllr Nick Chard attended the FSB. Members were provided with progress updates on the development of the remaining Fire Standards for this tranche, including the upcoming launch of the Code of Ethics Fire Standard on 18 May 2021. The next FSB meeting is scheduled for 14 July 2021.
18. HMICFRS External Reference Group (ERG): The ERG last met on 6 May 2021, where the early findings from the Round Two inspections were discussed, in addition to updates on the Inspectorate's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work. The next meeting is yet to be scheduled.