

Note of last Fire Commission meeting

Title: Fire Commission
Date: Friday 11 June 2021
Venue: Online via Zoom

Attendance

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

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

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

The following apologies were recorded: Cllr Jayne McCoy, Cllr Janet Willis, Cllr Peter Lewis, Cllr Darren O'Donovan (sub Cllr Steve Tulley), CFO Jason Thelwell, Cllr Maggie Wright, Cllr Tina McKenzie-Boyle, Cllr Andy Crump, Cllr Morris Bright, Cllr Andrew Reid, Cllr Byron Quayle, Cllr Peter Hogarth, Cllr Tony Taylor, Cllr Sara Randall Johnson, Cllr Duncan Crow.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair then paid tribute to Chief Fire Officer for Bedfordshire, Paul Fuller, who sadly passed away on 7 June after a short illness. On behalf of the Fire Commission and FSMC, sincerest condolences were extended to Paul's friends, family and work colleagues. The Chair then ran through the highlights of Paul's long and distinguished career in the fire service and held a minute's silence in remembrance.

2 Minutes of the previous meetings held on 25 September 2020 and 26 March 2021

The minutes of the previous meetings held on 25 September 2020 and 26 March 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.

3 Update on the Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme Full Business Case

The Chair invited Ian Taylor (IT) – the lead officer from the NFCC; Simon Parr, the new Home Office Senior Responsible Owner for ESMCP; and Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ben Norman from Lancs FRS, the new Operational Communications Lead for the NFCC, to introduce the

confidential report.

IT briefly presented the Full Business Case (FBC) to members, which was now out to consultation. It was hoped that it would receive sign off from the UK governments in July 2021 with transition to the new network taking place from 2024-26. The FBC concluded that the cost of the new system (£11.8 billion) represented good value when compared to the existing Airwave. However, IT acknowledged that 2 key areas of concern remained: (i) resilience – no risks had been flagged up on the technical side but it would be stress-tested for at least 9 months before final roll out, for example, in a high-rise scenario; (ii) cost in life for FRAs could be an additional £5 million per year at a local level when compared to Airwave – the Government had been made aware of this. Consideration was also being given to how expenditure on Airwave for the last users before transition could be made more equitable

IT asked the Commission to consider whether a Members focus group for ESMCP would be beneficial in addressing concerns and providing assurance to members as the project progressed towards implementation.

Members comments and questions:

- Members accepted the offer of setting up a focus group and considered that it would be a useful opportunity for officers to provide reassurance over some of the concerns held by FRAs. Thought would need to be given to how learning from this could be rolled out nationwide through a training programme. An initial meeting of the group could also formulate an official LGA response to the consultation. On the latter point, IT advised members that the consultation closed at the end of June and so a meeting would need to be held at the earliest opportunity.
- Concerns were expressed about coverage in rural areas which currently suffered from reception black holes. Would this be addressed by ESN?
- Concern was expressed about the length of time it would take to roll out ESN and replace Airwave.
- It was stressed that FRAs needed to have realistic and viable delivery dates for ESN and a financial tool to enable them to budget for both implementation and running costs over the lifetime of the system.

Decisions:

- Fire Commission **noted** the content of the report and **agreed** that a member ESMCP focus group should be established to both draft a response to the Home Office on the Full Business Case, and to address wider concerns of FRAs moving forward.

4 New Providence Wharf Fire and Building Safety Update

The Chair invited Deputy Commissioner Richard Mills (RM) of the London

Fire Brigade (LFB) to give his presentation.

RM ran through the details of the fire which occurred on the 8th floor of the block on 7 May 2021, and in particular spoke about the improvements in the LFB's response compared to the Grenfell Tower fire. The vastly improved resident engagement during and after the incident was highlighted. An immediate review of the operation had been launched by LFB and this report was now in the public domain. The main points coming from the review were as follows:

- Wooden balconies were the main cause of the fire spreading, not ACM cladding, which covered approximately 20% of the building.
- There were a number of failures by the Responsible Person including ensuring the adequacy of interim measures, particularly the waking watch, which wasn't effective when the fire took hold.
- There was no audible alarm in the common areas of the block
- The smoke control system didn't operate as it should
- Failure of the fire lift.

The LFB investigation was ongoing and they were considering the extent of breaches of the Regulatory Reform Order by the block owners Ballymore.

RM said that the LFB were working closely with the NFCC to share learning since Grenfell, including developing fire survival guidance and a new evacuation policy which would be shared shortly.

Mark Hardingham (MH), NFCC Chair, added his thanks to the LFB for their efforts in tackling this nationally significant incident and the improvements introduced since Grenfell. MH agreed that the Responsible Person had fallen short in a number of areas and this was very concerning. This incident was yet another example of how the entire building safety system has been failing for a number of years and it was not realistic to expect the fire service to have to continue to act as a safety net for poor building standards. MH added that this was not an isolated incident and cited a recent significant balcony fire in Leeds.

Charles Loft (CL), LGA Senior Adviser, expressed serious concerns about the effectiveness of the interim measures, and that they were based upon assumptions about how the building would perform in a fire that were wrong. This was also likely to be the case in many other at-risk buildings across the country. However, he reassured members that the NFCC and the LGA were working to try and address this.

CL highlighted the Government's current consultation on Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) and stressed that their potential wider introduction in high-rise buildings needed careful thought. There were resourcing and capacity issues for landlords and this might distract from their wider building safety work which was ultimately the most effective way to ensure that vulnerable people would be safe in the event of a fire.

Jonny Bugg (JB), Deputy Director Home Office Fire Safety and Reform Unit, added his thanks to the LFB for their response to the fire and

challenged other FRA's to ask themselves whether they were confident that their services had made similar positive progress since Grenfell.

Members' comments and questions:

- The London Deputy-Mayor for Fire & Resilience, Fiona Twycross, added her thanks to the LFB for their response on the day and the huge improvements made since Grenfell. The key question for the Government and the whole sector was how to deal with the problems that continued to emerge around the built environment as a result of incidents such as this.
- Members considered that the absence of sprinklers once again made the spread of the fire worse and agreed that the LGA should continue to push for their installation in buildings housing vulnerable people to be a statutory requirement. Members agreed that it would be a good idea to resurrect the LGA's sprinklers task group to help achieve this. RM said that NPW didn't have sprinklers installed as it received planning permission prior to the recent change in requirement for buildings over 11m to have them fitted. This would be the same situation with a lot of other tall buildings in London.
- It was suggested that PEEPs should not be the sole responsibility of the Responsible Person and consideration should be given to writing them in conjunction with family members and health professionals.
- Concern was expressed about the Government extensions to Permitted Development Rights, in particular conversion of commercial buildings to residential. The Government still hadn't adequately explained how fire safety standards could be maintained in these buildings?

The Chair thanked the Deputy Commissioner for attending the Commission and sharing the LFB's learning from the fire.

Decision:

- Fire Commission **noted** the presentation and building safety update and **agreed** that the LGA's sprinkler task group should be restarted.

5 Member induction and development offer 2021

The Chair invited Rachael Aldridge (RA), Policy Adviser, to introduce the update.

RA outlined the proposed member induction and development offer for FRA members for 2021/22. In particular, she highlighted:

- Governance and leadership workshops to be held in July to support members in the context of the Government's proposed Fire Reform White Paper.
- Two further Fire Leadership Essentials programmes.

Further details would be cascaded to members in due course.

Members comments and questions:

- Members endorsed the proposed programme, in particular the governance and leadership sessions. It was requested that the County Councils' Network be represented in these sessions to put the perspective of the county brigades.

The Chair put on record his thanks to RA for all her hard work in putting together the programme which would be of great benefit to members.

Decision:

- Fire Commission **endorsed** the proposed member induction and development offer for 2021/22.

6 NFCC update and new Chair - Mark Hardingham

The Chair invited Mark Hardingham (MH), NFCC Chair, to introduce the update and to expand on his priorities for the organisation.

MH outlined 3 short-term and 3 long-term priorities for the NFCC and stressed his continued commitment to working with the LGA to achieve them.

Short-term:

1. Influencing 2 current Government consultations – (i) Proposed updating of Building Bulletin 100 on fire safety in school buildings; and (ii) New legal requirements on high rise building owners/managers to carry out PEEPs for vulnerable residents.
2. Spending Review submission to try and achieve the best possible financial settlement for the sector.
3. Addressing issues around operational guidance on fires in tall buildings.

Longer-term:

1. Responding to the Fire Reform White Paper and working with partners on its implementation.
2. Building on the excellent national resilience work that has been ongoing for a number of years as the initial investment tranche comes to an end.
3. Delivery of a significant programme of work with the LGA and the Home Office, particularly on the building safety agenda.

Decision:

- Fire Commission **noted** the update.

7 Workforce update

The Chair invited Gill Gittins (GG), Senior Adviser (Workforce & Negotiations), and Clair Alcock (CA), Senior Fire Pensions Adviser, to introduce the update.

CA highlighted the following points from the report:

- The first national Firefighter pension website www.fpsmember.org went live in May, to provide a central resource for firefighters to find out about their pension scheme and the benefits and options that are available.
- Scheme Advisory Board launched a consultation with FRAs to better understand the current arrangements for managing the pension scheme in general and, more specifically, for implementing the age discrimination remedy.
- There were still a number of gaps in the new updated Home Office guidance on immediate detriment which pose problems for FRAs with retiring firefighters who wanted to access benefits on the old system. The LGA was having urgent discussions with legal officers but the issues were complex and caveated by legal privilege.

Decision:

- Fire Commission **noted** the update.

8 Fire Standards Board update

Decision:

- Fire Commission **noted** the update.

9 Fire Commission update

The Chair invited Rachael Aldridge (RA), Policy Adviser, to introduce the update.

RA reported that FSMC Lead Members had agreed to set up a governance task and finish group to inform the LGA's response to the Fire Reform White Paper.

Members comments and questions:

- Cllr Redman (Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority) raised the issue of coterminosity in the south west of England and whether members from this region could hold discussions ahead of any decisions being made on the White Paper. Jonny Bugg agreed that it would be useful to get conversations started on this issue and said that he would be happy to talk to south west members about it. RA agreed to talk to Cllr Redman following the meeting and also to approach the LGA's Principal Adviser for the south west for advice.
- Members asked how the Fire Commission could be involved in the White Paper consultation process? The Chair advised that, depending on the timing of its publication, members could either discuss it at the scheduled meeting on 24 September, or have an additional meeting before then.

Decision:

- Fire Commission **noted** the update.

Action:

- RA to speak to Cllr Redman and south west Principal Adviser about coterminality issues.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chair	Cllr Ian Stephens	Isle of Wight Council
Members	Cllr Brenda Massey	Avon Fire Authority
	Cllr John Chatterley	Bedfordshire Combined Fire Authority
	Cllr Lesley Clarke OBE	Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority
	Cllr Paul Kirton	Cleveland Fire Authority
	Cllr Rebecca Knox	Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service
	Cllr Carol Theobald	East Sussex Fire Authority
	Mr Roger Hirst	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex
	Cllr David Norman MBE	Gloucestershire County Council
	Dr Fiona Twycross	Greater London Authority
	Cllr Roger Phillips	Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr John Briggs	Humberside Fire Authority
	Cllr Nick Chard	Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Stuart Tranter	Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Nikki Hennessy	Lancashire Combined Fire Authority
	Cllr Les Byrom CBE	Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Brian Kenny	Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Margaret Dewsbury	Norfolk County Council
	Cllr Eric Carter	Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority
	Cllr Colleen Atkins MBE	Bedfordshire Fire & Rescue Service
	Cllr Keith Aspden	North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service
	Cllr Ruth Skelton	Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Robert Taylor	South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Carolyn Lambert	East Sussex Fire Authority
	Cllr Frank Biederman	Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Luke Frost	Cleveland Fire Authority
	Cllr Barbara Jefferson JP	Humberside Fire Authority
Cllr Peter Harrand	West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority	
Cllr Rachel Bailey	Cheshire Fire Authority	
Cllr Mark Healey MBE	Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority	
Cllr Lynn Hall	Cleveland Fire Authority	
Cllr Leigh Redman	Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority	
Cllr Shaun O'Neill	Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority	
Apologies	Cllr Tina McKenzie-Boyle	Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
	Cllr Janet Willis	Cumbria County Council

	Cllr Sara Randall Johnson	Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Byron Quayle	Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service
	Cllr Maggie Wright	Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Combined Fire Authority
	Cllr Peter Lewis MBE	North Wales Fire Authority
	Cllr Jayne McCoy	Sutton London Borough Council
	Cllr Tony Taylor	Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Andy Crump	Warwickshire County Council
	Cllr Peter Hogarth MBE	West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Duncan Crow	West Sussex County Council
	Cllr Darren O'Donovan	West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr John Raine	Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Steve Tulley (sub)	West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority
In Attendance	Ian Taylor	For item 3
	Ben Norman	For item 3
	Simon Parr	For item 3
	Richard Mills	For item 4
	Mark Hardingham	NFCC
	Jonny Bugg	Home Office
	Cllr Martyn Alvey	Cornwall Council
	Cllr Lindsey Cawrey	Lincolnshire County Council
	D E Williams	
	Neil Odin	Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Service
	Kevin Wilson	Humberside Fire and Rescue Service
	Mark Preece	Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service
	Andy Hopkinson	
	Trevor Ainsworth	
	Mick Osborne	
LGA Officers	Mark Norris	
	Charles Loft	
	Naomi Cooke	
	Gill Gittins	
	Clair Alcock	
	Rachael Aldridge	
	Claire Hey	