

## Note of last Fire Commission meeting

---

<b>Title:</b>	Fire Commission
<b>Date:</b>	Friday 10 June 2022
<b>Venue:</b>	Bevin Hall, 18 Smith Square and online via Zoom

---

### Attendance

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

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome, Apologies and Declarations of interest</b>  The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.  Apologies were received from: Cllrs John Briggs, Linda Taylor, Steven Lambert, Amanda Peers, Carolyn Lambert, Lesley Rennie, Janet Willis, James Doyle, Frank Biederman, Trevor Ainsworth, Tudor Davies, Morris Bright and Simon Coles.  There were no declarations of interest.	
<b>2</b>	<b>Minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 September 2021</b>  The minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2021 were agreed as an accurate record.	
<b>3</b>	<b>Fire Reform White Paper</b>  The Chair invited Anjli Mapara (AM) - Deputy Head of Fire Strategy & Reform Unit and Stuart Harwood (SH) – Head of Governance, from the Home Office to give a presentation on the White Paper.  AM set out the Government’s case for the reforms proposed in the White Paper, with Covid 19, HMICFRS inspection reports and the Grenfell Tower and Manchester Arena disasters all highlighting the need for change in how FRSs are run. The proposals in the White Paper were under 3 headings:  1) Professionalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establishing an independent College of Fire &amp; Rescue</li><li>• Introducing minimum entry requirements and development schemes</li><li>• A mandatory 21<sup>st</sup> Century leadership programme</li></ul>	

2) People

- Carrying out a review of the pay structure
- Defining the role of a firefighter
- Unlocking talent and diversity
- Developing a firefighter's oath

3) Governance

- Transferring FRA functions to a single elected (ideally directly-elected) individual
- Introducing operational independence for CFOs
- Separating strategic Fire and Rescue Plans from operational Independent Risk Management Plans.

AM stressed that the Home Office was keen to have conversations with local areas, particularly around governance reform, to try and come up with solutions that were acceptable to all parties. She encouraged members to respond to the consultation which would be running until 26 July.

Lucy Ellender (LE), LGA Senior Adviser, expanded upon the proposed governance changes and their implications for FRAs and highlighted the table in the White Paper on potential demarcation of responsibilities between the political (executive) leader and the Chief Fire Officer (CFO). Feedback was requested from members on the two possible alternative governance arrangements proposed in the covering report.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members welcomed the Government's commitment to improving fire and rescue services through the White Paper although it was suggested that they needed to be clearer about exactly what outcomes they wanted from the process.
- Members felt very strongly that it should be up to local areas to determine the governance arrangements that best suited their individual circumstances, not for central Government to dictate. The rationale for changing governance of FRAs was queried and whether enforced changes would actually improve service delivery. Putting power in the hands of one individual would reduce accountability and scrutiny, and valuable local expertise in FRAs would be lost. It was considered that there were a number of other more pressing issues, such as pensions, recruitment/retention of senior officers and diversity and inclusion that needed to be resolved and would have a much greater impact on improving services. None of this was addressed in the White Paper. Members queried what the process would be, should there be disagreement between central and local government in a particular area. AM confirmed that this process had not yet been determined but reiterated that the Minister's preference remained for a single directly-elected individual to take on governance. Members agreed that the two alternative options put forward by the LGA in the report should be worked up and put forward in the consultation response.

- A Mayoral governance model could be made to work with the establishment of an effective Police, Fire & Crime Panel – the example of Greater Manchester was cited. SH said that the Government would seek to replicate the Manchester model in future Mayoral arrangements.
- The costs of changing governance arrangements and wider reforms had not been factored in by Government and needed to be balanced against the perceived benefits. AM referred members to the Impact Assessment published alongside the White Paper which contained cost estimates of the proposals. A further, more detailed impact assessment would be published when the Government response to the consultation was published.
- It was suggested that much of what was in the White Paper could be achieved without new legislation, through sharing best practice.
- The White Paper proposals on governance had not been joined up with the proposals in the Levelling Up White Paper on changes to local authority governance.
- The corporation sole model would not work in county council fire services.
- Trying to abolish the current NJC structure and collective bargaining would create more problems that it would solve – the Government should work with the stakeholders to address any perceived issues.
- The benefits of introducing a firefighters' oath were queried.
- Some of the proposals under professionalism were welcomed, in particular, the establishment of a properly resourced Fire College.
- If closer integration and greater accountability of blue light services was the Government's objective, then lack of accountability in the ambulance service should also be looked at.
- Ring-fencing of funding was not considered a good idea from an accounting point of view as it reduced services' flexibility to be responsive to situations.
- With PCCs not being restricted in how much they could increase their share of council tax, there was a danger that the value for money residents received could actually reduce with the proposed governance changes.
- A plea was made for regional variations in cost of living and other issues to be taken into account in any reform of the NJC structure and for local flexibility on possible entry requirements.
- Introducing stricter entry requirements for firefighters could be counter-productive in terms of recruitment of a more diverse and inclusive workforce. AM stressed that the White Paper was not specifying academic entry requirements.
- It was suggested that the White Paper proposals could help in facilitating a broadening of the role of firefighters.

The Chair thanked Anjli and Stuart for attending the Fire Commission and said that a draft response to the White Paper would be brought to the Fire Services Management Committee on 8 July for agreement.

**Decision:**

Fire Commission **agreed** the proposed direction of response to the Fire Reform White Paper, encapsulating comments made during the debate – draft response to be agreed by Fire Services Management Committee on 8 July 2022.

#### **4 Fire Finance**

The Chair invited Mark Hemming (MH), Buckinghamshire FRS and CFO Ben Ansell (BA), Dorset & Wiltshire FRS to introduce the report.

BA reminded members that it was currently year 1 of a 3-year Spending Review settlement from Government although services had only been provided with year 1 figures. The local government finance settlement for 2022-23 contained mixed news. Whilst giving the lowest 8 council tax FRAs the ability to raise their council tax precept by £5 was welcome, it was disappointing that this, or increased flexibility, was not extended to other FRAs. Whilst discussions with the Home Office were ongoing, it was unlikely that there would be any changes to the fire funding formula before 2025 at the earliest. It was therefore important for both the NFCC and the LGA to continue to lobby both DLUHC and the Treasury for greater flexibility around the council tax precept.

MH reminded members of the commitments made around efficiency and productivity (and the Forum established to help deliver these) as part of the Spending Review submission. The biggest challenge was around data collection and a standardised efficiency plan template was therefore being worked up through the Fire Finance Network. This would enable services to demonstrate efficiency gains and to aggregate these up nationally. MH explained that a full-blown submission to Home Office would not be required this year but several key issues such as pay awards, pensions and inflation would be highlighted to Government in terms of their impact on FRA finances. In particular, research was being carried out into the impacts of the rapidly increasing energy costs for FRAs.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members agreed that the current joint working arrangements with the NFCC on finance had been very helpful and should continue.
- Members felt it would be helpful if a projection of the various expected cost increases could be made for individual FRAs in order to help with budgeting, as well as lobbying. BA said that additional in-year funding was not expected and so FRAs would have to continue to plan within their current budgets. MH added that individual FRAs were being surveyed around increased costs and this would be aggregated nationally to try and produce a range of inflation scenarios to help FRAs plan ahead.
- It was considered important to distinguish between genuine efficiencies and cuts to services that would damage outcomes for residents.

**Decision:**

Fire Commission **noted** the previous work of the NFCC and LGA and

**endorsed** continued joint working on lobbying for sustainable funding for the sector.

## 5 Building Safety Update

The Chair invited Georgia Goddard (GG) – NGDP Graduate, to introduce the update.

GG took members through some of the key points from the update paper:

- Discussions taking place with DLUHC and NFCC to support a coordinated risk audit within medium-rise residential buildings
- The Joint Inspection Team has secured funding for the next two years which will see it triple in capacity by the end of this financial year
- The Building Safety Act has now received Royal Assent but there will be a significant number of pieces of secondary legislation needed in order to set up the new Building Safety Regime. The LGA's outstanding concerns were set out, in particular, a lack of Government funding to achieve desired outcomes.
- Fire Safety Act and a number of Grenfell Tower Inquiry phase 1 recommendations had now commenced.
- The Government had just published the consultation outcome on the review of the ban on the use of combustible materials in and on the external walls of buildings alongside updated guidance to fire safety and building regulations.
- The Government had also published a third consultation on PEEPs, containing new proposals, including a proposal called Emergency Evacuation Information Sharing. Fire Services Management Committee had agreed that the LGA should not support the proposals in the consultation as they don't require the responsible person in a building with simultaneous evacuation to have a plan on how a resident with a disability would evacuate in the event of a fire. The LGA's view was that such a policy would be unlawful under the Equalities Act if adopted by local authorities.

Members' comments and questions:

- Concerns were raised over the Government's latest proposals on disabled residents in high rise blocks. Charles Loft, Senior Adviser, welcomed the establishment of a working group with residents and landlords to look in more detail at the issues but warned that it was not sustainable for the Government to effectively transfer responsibility from the duty-holder to the fire service for ensuring the safety of disabled residents in blocks with Simultaneous Evacuation.

### **Decision:**

Fire Commission **noted** and **endorsed** the LGA's building safety related work.

## 6 National Fire Chiefs Council update

The Chair invited Mark Hardingham, NFCC Chair, to introduce the update.

MH passed on his thanks to colleagues who had facilitated the deployment of three convoys of UK fire service kit and equipment to Ukraine over the last two months, providing vital life-saving equipment to firefighters there. The Fire Commission Chair also recorded his appreciation for those firefighters.

**Decision:**

Fire Commission **noted** the update.

**7 Fire Standards Board update**

The Chair invited Cllr Nick Chard to introduce the update.

Cllr Chard highlighted and welcomed the new Leadership Standard which was going out to consultation.

**Decision:**

Fire Commission **noted** the update.

**8 Fire Commission update**

The Chair invited Lucy Ellender (LE), Senior Adviser, to introduce the update. LE indicated that she was happy to take questions on the report.

**Decision:**

Fire Commission **noted** the update without discussion.

**9 Workforce update**

The Chair invited Gill Gittins (GG), Senior Adviser (workforce and negotiations), to introduce the update. GG indicated that she was happy to take questions on the report.

**Decision:**

Fire Commission **noted** the update without discussion.

**Appendix A -Attendance**

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Ian Stephens	Isle of Wight Council
Members	Cllr Brenda Massey	Avon Fire Authority
	Cllr John Chatterley	Bedfordshire Combined Fire Authority
	Cllr Pauline Helliars-Symons	Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
	Cllr Edna Murphy	Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority

Cllr Bob Rudd  
Cllr Martyn Alvey  
Cllr Rebecca Knox

Cllr John Shuttleworth  
Cllr Carol Theobald  
Cllr David Norman MBE  
Dr Fiona Twycross  
Cllr Steve Williams  
Cllr David Lancaster  
Cllr Rhydian Vaughan  
MBE  
Cllr Kit Taylor  
Cllr Nick Chard  
Cllr David O'Toole  
Cllr John Shedwick  
Cllr Lindsey Cawrey  
Cllr Les Byrom CBE  
Cllr Elwyn Williams  
Cllr Margaret Dewsbury  
Paul Fell  
Cllr Neil Fawcett  
Cllr Eric Carter  
Cllr Charlie Hogarth  
Cllr Tony Damms  
Cllr Andy Crump  
Cllr Peter Hogarth MBE  
Cllr Duncan Crow  
Cllr Darren O'Donovan  
Cllr Peter Harrand  
Cllr Mark Healey MBE

Cllr Lesley Rennie  
Cllr Richard Bell

Cllr Greg Brackenridge  
Cllr Nikki Hennessy  
Cllr Jane Hugo  
Cllr Carl Johnson  
Cllr Leigh Redman  
Cllr Colleen Atkins MBE  
Cllr Keith Aspden  
Cllr Ruth Skelton  
Cllr Roger Price  
Cllr Jeremy Hilton  
Cllr Tom Woodwark  
Cllr Paul Kirton  
Cllr Nigel Smith

Apologies

Cllr Janet Willis  
Cllr Trevor Ainsworth  
Cllr Simon Coles  
Mr Roger Hirst

Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service  
Cornwall Council  
Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue  
Service  
Co. Durham and Darlington Fire Authority  
East Sussex Fire Authority  
Gloucestershire County Council  
Greater London Authority  
Greater Manchester Combined Authority  
Greater Manchester Combined Authority  
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Combined Fire  
Authority  
Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority  
Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority  
Lancashire Combined Fire Authority  
Lancashire Combined Fire Authority  
Lincolnshire County Council  
Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority  
Mid and West Wales Fire Authority  
Norfolk County Council  
Northants Police Fire & Crime Commissioner  
Oxfordshire County Council  
Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority  
South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority  
South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority  
Warwickshire County Council  
West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority  
West Sussex County Council  
West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority  
West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority  
Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue  
Authority  
Merseyside FRA  
County Durham and Darlington Fire &  
Rescue Authority  
West Midlands FRA  
Lancashire County Council  
Blackpool Council  
Tyne & Wear FRA  
Somerset County Council  
Bedfordshire FRA  
North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service  
Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Authority  
Hampshire and Isle of Wight FRA  
Gloucestershire County Council  
Tyne and Wear FRA  
Cleveland FRA  
Conwy County Borough Council

Cumbria County Council  
Derbyshire County Council  
Somerset County Council  
Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for  
Essex

Cllr Amanda Peers	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
Cllr Morris Bright MBE	Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr John Briggs	Humberside Fire Authority
Cllr Tudor Davies	South Wales Fire Authority
Cllr Linda Taylor	Cornwall Council
Cllr James Doyle	Tyne and Wear Fire Authority
Cllr Carolyn Lambert	East Sussex Fire Authority
Cllr Steven Lambert	Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority
Cllr Frank Biederman	Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority

In Attendance

Janet Perry (for Roger Hirst)	Essex PFCC
Cllr Reena Ranger (for Cllr Morris Bright)	Hertfordshire County Council
Cllr Gohar Almass	West Yorkshire FRA
DCFO Steve Helps	Darlington FRS
Cllr Stef Nelson	Cheshire FRA
CFO Mark Preece	Gloucestershire FRS
Richard Stanton	West Midlands FRS
Cllr Paul Duckett	Bedfordshire FRA
Cllr Kamran Ali	
Cllr Don Davies	Avon FRA
Cllr Kevin Deanus	Surrey County Council
Steven Adams	NFCC
CFO Justin Johnson	Lancashire FRS + NFCC
Cllr Kevin Pardy	Shropshire & Wrekin FRA
Ben Wilkinson	
CFO Neil Odin	Hampshire & Isle of Wight FRS
Cllr Hetty Wood	Merseyside FRA
Mark Hardingham	NFCC
Anjli Mapara (for item 3)	Home Office
Stuart Harwood (for item 3)	Home Office