

Minutes of last Fire Services Management Committee meeting

Fire Services Management Committee

Friday, 23 September 2022

Hybrid Meeting - 18 Smith Square and Online

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A**

Item	Decisions and actions
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1 Welcome, apologies and declarations of interest

The new Chair introduced himself and welcomed members to the first meeting of the new LGA year and, in particular, the new members and substitutes on the Committee.

Apologies were received from Roger Hirst (substitute Cllr Dave Norman) and NFCC Chair, Mark Hardingham (Susannah Hancock substituting).

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

3 FSMC 2022-23 - Membership, Terms of Reference and Outside Bodies

The Chair introduced the item and highlighted one change to the outside bodies Appendix D - Cllr Luke Frost would now be the Independent Group nomination for the Strategic Resilience Board.

Members' comments and questions:

- The issue of FRAs not paying travel expenses for members to attend FSMC and Fire Commission meetings in person was raised. Members considered that it was important for all members, regardless of political allegiance, to be able to get involved in networking and lobbying activity. The Chair said that he would raise the issue in a letter that he would shortly be sending out to FRA Chairs. Mark Norris (MN), Principal Policy Adviser, added that this issue was being discussed by the LGA political group offices and hopefully a resolution would be found.
- Members considered that was important to have a vehicle for discussing issues around on-call firefighters.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee:

- **agreed** its Terms of Reference;
- formally **noted** the membership for 2022/23;
- **noted** the future meeting dates for 2022/23;
- **agreed** the Board's nominations to outside bodies;
- **agreed** the re-appointment of Fiona Twycross as FSMC Equalities Advocate.

Action:

Chair to raise payment of travel expenses in letter to FRA Chairs.

4 FSMC priorities for 2022-23

The Chair invited Lucy Ellender (LE), Senior Adviser, to introduce the report.

LE explained that following feedback at the July FSMC meeting, it was proposed to add 'sector-led improvement' and 'climate change' to 'people, professionalism and governance' as priorities for the year ahead. LE invited further comment and feedback from members on the proposed priorities.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members were generally happy with the priorities as presented but felt it was important not to overload the work programme. It was suggested that the priorities themselves could be prioritised, with for example, finance being the most urgent requirement.
- It was suggested that FSMC needed to be on the front foot with the fire reform white paper proposals as there was a potential vacuum whilst the new minister got to grips with the issues. MN advised that Home Office civil servants were working on introducing aspects of the white paper proposals into possible legislation for a King's Speech in Spring 2023 but it was still not clear whether the new Minister had actively engaged with this process at a political level.
- Issues around climate change, such as increased flooding risk, were considered to be fundamental to FRAs over the coming years.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **agreed** the priorities for the forthcoming year as set out in the report but that a flexible approach should be taken, dependent on circumstances.

5 Fire finance

The Chair invited CFO Ben Ansell (BA) and Mark Hemming (MH) from the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), to update the Committee on current finance issues affecting the sector.

BA explained that pay was going to be a key issue moving forward, with

every 1% increase for staff costing English Fire & Rescue Authorities (FRA) around £14m. The challenge for FRAs would be to build any increase into their base budgets. BA said it was vital that 4 key figures in the new Government – Home Secretary, Fire Minister, Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Local Government Minister – were aware of the financial issues facing FRAs and efforts were ongoing to engage them. The importance of putting across a consistent message in lobbying was emphasised.

MH reported on the provisional results of two surveys recently carried out by the NFCC on reserves and non-pay inflation. Between March 2021 and 2022, reserves across English FRAs increased by around 5 per cent but there was a great deal of variation between services. Non-pay inflation has been estimated to be around £41m for English FRAs but this was prior to the recent Government announcement of an energy cap for non-domestic customers. Work was currently taking place to estimate the impact of this cap, and the NFCC was having conversations with the Home Office on the potential impacts on staffing. 79 per cent of services had rated both pay and non-pay inflation as a serious risk in their budget setting moving forward.

Members' comments and questions:

- It was considered important to keep up lobbying pressure on Government over inflationary costs, particularly as the energy price cap was for just 6 months.
- Members agreed that a unified lobbying message was important albeit that county council services may have different requirements from precepting FRAs. It was suggested that individual CFOs pair up with their Chairs, or worked with near neighbours on specific local lobbying. BA agreed that this would be helpful but there needed to be clarity around exactly what was being asked for, especially on precept flexibility. It was agreed that LGA officers should work with the NFCC on a joint briefing for members to be able to use when lobbying.
- Spending one-off reserves to support services or pay awards was not considered to be a viable and sustainable approach to budgeting for FRAs. Were there any 'outlier' FRAs who were accumulating unnecessary amounts of reserves which the Government was latching onto to draw wider conclusions? BA said that it was authorities who had high amounts of non-earmarked reserves that the Government was focussing on. MH confirmed that around 40 per cent of reserves nationally were earmarked for capital projects, however, mainly due to a reduction in activity around Covid, reserves were increasing. It was expected that levels would start to decrease in the coming years.
- It was stressed that any unfunded pay agreements would have to be paid for by cuts to staff and services and it was important for this point to continue to be made to Government.
- The point was made that many local residents were struggling to pay bills at the current time and so lobbying for powers to raise council tax further may not go down well with them. BA said that they were very aware of this and were trying to tread the fine line between having an adequately funded fire service which was

affordable for local people. If services weren't properly funded then residents would also suffer through reduced services or capacity to respond to emergencies.

- Members requested sight of the final survey results in report format once available. MH agreed to provide these to LGA officers for circulation to the Committee once they were finalised.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update.

Action:

LGA officers to produce finance lobbying briefing for members.

6 Economic and Social Value of UK Fire and Rescue Service

The Chair invited Assistant CFO of Shropshire FRS, Dan Quinn (DQ), to give his presentation.

DQ gave members a brief overview of the NFCC's Economic and Social Value of the UK FRS project, which aims, for the first time, to put a monetary value to the services provided by fire and rescue services in the UK. This will help negotiations around funding nationally, and also at a local level to allow FRS's to direct resources to the most beneficial activities. The final report was due to be officially launched at the NFCC Autumn Conference the following week. The initial report covered English FRS's with a further phase 2 report covering the whole of the UK. The digital tool for individual FRSs would be launched towards the end of 2022.

DQ reported that over the period 2016/17 – 2018/19 the model estimated that the value of saved property due to FRS intervention was £4.45bn per annum and the value of saved lives was £5.35bn per annum. There were also significant savings from water rescue, making environments safe, clearing spills and leaks, medical assistance and extrications. For every £1 spent on the Fire and Rescue Service there was £6.17 saved. DQ finished by saying that this was an ongoing project and he looked forward to further data and improvements from services to fine tune the model.

Members' comments and questions:

- Had similar exercises been carried out with other public sector organisations such as the Police, and could comparisons with these reflect badly on the FRS? DQ said that although research had been done on individual parts of local government, the police and ambulance services for example, this approach across the whole fire and rescue sector was unique. He expected that other sectors would follow suit in the near future.
- The Chair invited DQ to hold a workshop on the project at the LGA Fire Conference in March 2023. The invitation was accepted.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the presentation.

7 Sector-Led Improvement

The Chair invited Emily McGuinness (EM), Senior Regional Adviser, to introduce the update.

EM reported that officers were continuing to develop an SLI offer in line with members' priorities but that they had yet to secure funding to deliver a programme of work. Discussions had been taking place with the Home Office and further meetings were planned, with a focus on showcasing the LGA's improvement expertise. Officers had also developed good working relationships with NFCC colleagues.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update.

8 Workforce update

The Chair invited Gill Gittins (GG) and Claire Hey (CH), Senior Advisers, to introduce the update. CH indicated that she was happy to take questions on the pensions element of the report.

GG reported that since the update report had been written, two further pay consultation meetings had taken place with Chairs, PFCCs and CFOs, the outcomes from which were currently being analysed to be fed into the National Employers' considerations.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the issues set out in the paper.

9 Building Safety update

The Chair invited Charles Loft (CL), Senior Adviser, to introduce the update. CL indicated that he was happy to take questions on the report.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update without discussion.

10 National Fire Chiefs Council update

The Chair invited Susannah Hancock (SH), NFCC Chief Operating Officer, to introduce the update. SH indicated that she was happy to accept any questions from members on the report.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members welcomed the update and the breadth of topics covered but suggested that the key issue for the sector moving forward was finance. SH reassured members that finance was a major focus for the NFCC at present but that they also wanted to showcase the range of other work that the NFCC was currently engaged in.
- Members asked whether contact details of lead officers could be provided in the report so that members who were interested in

finding out more information could do so, for example around the on-call project mentioned in paragraph 2.35. SH agreed to look into this for future reports and said that in respect of on-call, the NFCC's lead officer had made contact with Cllr Healey to discuss LGA involvement in the project. This could then be reported to a future FSMC meeting. DQ added that Shropshire FRS had recently held a conference to launch a research document on 'on-call' called 'Sustaining Success' which he hoped would be able to add value to the on-call community across the UK.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update.

Action:

NFCC to provide further details of on-call project at next FSMC meeting.

11 Fire Standards Board update

The Chair invited Cllr Nick Chard to introduce the update. Cllr Chard indicated that he was happy to take questions on the report.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update without discussion.

12 FSMC update

The Chair invited Rebecca Johnson (RJ), Adviser, to introduce the update.

RJ indicated that she was happy to take questions on the report.

Members' comments and questions:

- Progress on, and the future of, the ESMCP project was queried in the light of the recent news that Metropolitan Police Officers were to be issued with mobile phones. Cllr Carter, FSMC's representative on the ESMCP Fire Customer Group, expressed his frustration at the limited amount of information that could be shared with colleagues due to the commercial sensitivity of much of the project detail. LE added that the whole point of the ESMCP project was to move away from the expensive Airwave infrastructure and make use of existing mobile communications facilities. It was hoped that more information could be shared at the Fire Commission meeting on 14 October when the Competition & Markets Authority had reported.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **noted** the update.

13 LGA Annual Fire Conference 2023

The Chair invited Catriona Coyle (CC), Events Manager, to introduce the report.

CC advised members that both the Nottingham Crowne Plaza and the Bristol Marriott City Centre hotels met the criteria for holding the conference and were similar prices. She, therefore, asked members for their views on a preferred location.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members considered that it was very important for the financial viability of the conference that exhibitors had the best space possible. The feedback from Bristol in 2016 was that they weren't entirely happy with the Marriott in this respect. It was therefore suggested that Nottingham be used for 2023 and then Bristol in 2024. In the meantime, to see whether Bristol could offer any improvement on their previous facilities for exhibitors.
- Nottingham was considered to be a more central location and therefore accessible for more people.
- The suggestion was made to ask Nottingham whether any discount would be available were the hotel to be booked two years in a row. However, there was concern about committing to two years when the hotel had not been used before for the conference. CC said she could ask them about a discount for the subsequent year on the proviso that delegates were happy with the first year. This was agreed.
- LE asked members to send through any suggestions for possible sessions at the conference to her and RJ over the next few weeks so a draft agenda could be put together for Lead Members to discuss.

Decision:

Fire Services Management Committee **agreed** that the LGA Fire Conference and Exhibition should be held at the Nottingham Crowne Plaza hotel on 7-8 March 2023.

Action:

- CC to investigate options for discounted rate for two year booking at Nottingham.
- Members to provide suggestions for conference content to LE and RJ by mid-October.

14 Confidential minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2022

Decision:

The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chair	Cllr Frank Biederman	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority
Vice-Chair	Cllr Keith Aspden	City of York Council
Deputy-Chair	Dr Fiona Twycross	Greater London Authority
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Rebecca Knox	Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Authority

Members	Cllr Eric Carter	Shropshire and Wrekin Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr Mark Healey MBE	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr Nick Chard	Kent & Medway Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr Nikki Hennessy	Lancashire Combined Fire Authority
	Cllr Carl Johnson	Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr Jane Hugo	Lancashire Combined Fire Authority
	Cllr Greg Brackenridge	West Midlands Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Gloucestershire County Council
	Cllr Luke Frost	Cleveland Fire & Rescue Authority
Cllr Dave Norman (Sub)	Gloucestershire County Council	
Apologies	Mr Roger Hirst	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex
	Cllr Darren O'Donovan	West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Authority
In Attendance	Cllr Matt Dormer	Worcestershire County Council
	Cllr Les Byrom	Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr John Shuttleworth	County Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr Nigel Smith	North Wales Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr Roger Price	Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Authority
	Susannah Hancock	NFCC
	CFO Ben Ansell	NFCC
	Mark Hemming	NFCC
	Assistant CFO Dan Quinn	NFCC
	Steven Adams	NFCC
LGA Officers	Mark Norris	Principal Policy Adviser
	Lucy Ellender	Senior Adviser
	Charles Loft	Senior Adviser
	Naomi Cooke	Head of Workforce
	Gill Gittins	Senior Adviser (Workforce & Negotiations)
	Claire Hey	Senior Pensions Adviser
	Emily McGuinness	Senior Regional Adviser
	Catriona Coyle	Events Manager
	Rebecca Johnson	Adviser
Jonathan Bryant	Member Services Officer	