

Independent Review of Conditions of Service for Operational Staff in the Fire and Rescue Service

Purpose of the Report

To update the Fire Commission on the review commissioned by DCLG.

Summary

This paper is to update Members on the Review and the LGA's response. Sarah Messenger (Head of Workforce) will be making a presentation at the meeting.

Recommendation

For discussion.

Members are asked to:

Consider the issues set out in the paper.

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Background

1. Sir Ken Knight's Review, published in May 2013 highlighted a number of areas in the fire service which could be reformed. He found that the conditions of service of firefighters could be an actual or perceived barrier to changes that could otherwise provide a more efficient service to the public although he also recognised that there could be self-limitation at local level.
2. DCLG responded to Ken Knight's Review in July and announced that it was setting up an independent review into conditions of service in the fire service. This review is being undertaken by Adrian Thomas (a HR professional). In summary its objective is to look at the conditions of service of chief fire officers and firefighters and the processes by which they are determined to consider whether they present barriers to reform, improvement and efficiency. The review covers England only, while national bargaining machinery for Fire is UK-wide.

Consultation with the fire and rescue service

3. Mr Thomas has committed to consult widely during the review and, as a first step, sent out questionnaires to both FRAs and firefighters. He asked fire authorities for two returns: (i) statistical information about determining pay, recruitment and training of firefighters, general employment practice and industrial relations; and (ii) more detail on recruitment, promotion, crewing policy, use of on-call firefighters, views on the flexibility of the Grey and Gold Books, and collaboration with other services, including what the barriers may be to dissuade collaboration. After an approach from the LGA the original deadline for submitting responses was extended to 17 October to give FRAs more time to ensure political sign-off for their responses.

The LGA response

4. There was initial discussion on the review at the FSMC's meeting in July, at a time when little detail was known about it. There was a more detailed discussion at FSMC's meeting in September.
5. There was a shared view at FSMC that the national employers should have been engaged directly at the earliest possible stage and that the questionnaire sent to FRAs was simplistic. It was recognised that FRAs should choose the nature of their own response and not be tied to the questionnaire structure.
6. It was agreed that a single response should go from the LGA. Taking account of comments made by the FSMC and further input from LGA lead members on the Employers' Side of the National Joint Councils, the attached response was submitted on 29 September.

17 October 2014

7. The Chair of the Employers' Side (Councillor Maurice Heaster) and the Employers' Secretariat had an initial meeting with Mr Thomas prior to the submission of the LGA's response. Mr Thomas has already agreed to further discussions with the Secretariat.
8. The review is expected to report to the Secretary of State at DCLG by February 2015.
9. The LGA's Head of Workforce (Sarah Messenger) will make a presentation on the review and the LGA's response at the meeting.