

Minutes of last Fire Services Management Committee meeting

Fire Services Management Committee

Friday, 19 May 2023

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 Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

He thanked former councillors Keith Aspden, Eric Carter and Luke Frost for their contributions to FSMC and wished them well for the future.

Apologies were received from Fiona Twycross (substitute Cllr Les Byrom)

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting - 6 March 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2023 were agreed as an accurate record. There were no matters arising.

3 On call firefighters

The Chair invited Steve Healey (SH), Deputy CFO of Lancashire FRS, to address the Committee.

SH gave a presentation on the work of the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) in respect of on call firefighters. He emphasised the vital importance of on-call staff to English FRSs and highlighted the problems of recruitment and retention that the NFCC's project was looking to address. A project business case was being developed including a data-driven analysis to demonstrate the value of on-call firefighters. SH called for the support of FRA members in addressing the challenges and highlighted some of the variations in on-call contracts that had already been developed locally to try and tackle problems with recruitment and retention. However, he stressed that the problems went deeper than just pay and conditions, and the NFCC, with partners, hoped to address this as part of the project.

Members' comments and questions:

- The work of the former on-call group that the LGA took part in with the NFCC was referenced. Cllr Mark Healey, who was a member of this group, called for LGA involvement in any new joint working arrangements. SH confirmed that the work of the previous on-call group would not be lost moving forward. A new strategic board would be set up which would involve key partners. SH invited Cllr Healey to attend the strategic/practitioner forum that would be taking place on 6 June. Gill Gittins (Senior Adviser, Workforce and Negotiations) added that the NJC for LAFRS had just commenced a joint working group on the retained duty system which would also be looking at the issue more widely than pay and conditions. SH agreed that data from the NFCC project would be shared with the NJC joint working group to facilitate its work.
- It was suggested that there was an opportunity to recruit more on-call firefighters from the growing pool of people working from home. SH agreed and added that fire stations could also be opened up as alternative workplaces.
- Many FRSs had good local recruitment campaigns but a national effort to raise the profile of on-call opportunities was also needed.
- The importance of regular training for on-call staff was emphasised, not least in respect of EDI. SH agreed that this was vital and suggested that the narrative around firefighting needed to change. Regular training was considered vital for on-call staff and this should be tailored to individual needs.
- Were tax incentives to encourage on-call recruitment and retention being explored? SH said that previous proposals had been vetoed by the Treasury but a new business case needed to be put forward, particularly around incentivising employers to release staff. An 'on call covenant', similar to the 'armed forces covenant' could also be looked at for recognising employers.
- It was suggested that the contractual system for on-call staff needed to have more flexibility in order to help retain staff. For example, minimum hours stipulations were not helpful. SH said that there was currently significant local flexibility in terms of grey book contracts and local arrangements but this issue would be looked at more closely by the NJC working group.

Decision:

FSMC **noted** the presentation

Action:

Further update to be scheduled for Fire Commission on 9 June or FSMC on 7 July.

4 Wildfires and Climate Change update

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

RJ updated members on the work undertaken since the presentation

given by CFO Paul Hedley, NFCC wildfires lead, at the FSMC meeting in December 2022. This included recent trends in wildfires and problems with data collection. Current options open to local authorities in addressing the causes of wildfires were discussed, including the possibilities for restricting the use of disposable barbeques and associated problems with enforcement. The Government position was that there currently wasn't enough evidence to support a ban on the sale of barbeques, sky lanterns and helium balloons but they were open to discussions with local authorities on additional measures to mitigate risks. RJ ran through current awareness raising campaigns and the opportunities for the LGA to influence these. Adaptation and mitigation measures were highlighted, including tensions between current land management trends and fire risk. Finally, RJ asked for members' views on the proposed one-day evidence gathering session and highlighted that the Climate Emergency Handbook for FRA members was currently being updated.

Members' comments and questions:

- Members agreed that the tension between nature conservation and fire risk needed to be explored in more detail.
- It was suggested that the UK100 group of councils should be involved in the evidence gathering session.
- The difficulty in pinning down specific causes of wildfires was discussed. It was suggested that a principle of general community responsibility should be promoted, possibly as part of the forthcoming White Paper, with FRAs playing a key role in their localities.
- In relation to paragraph 14, a member queried whether it was the intention to recruit suitably qualified fire investigators? RJ agreed to look into this with the NFCC and report back. The importance of having a specific category of wildfire for recording purposes, rather than just 'secondary fire', was also raised
- With the start of the wildfire season imminent, the timing of the release of the revised handbook was queried. RJ replied that this would be issued before the July/August hot weather season.
- It was suggested that the evidence gathering session look at how national messaging could be more effective – e.g. through alerts on news/weather bulletins, or through mobile phone messaging. RJ said that alerts did appear on the Met Office website but these did not currently have a wide audience.
- The cost to FRAs of specialist equipment, training etc. to deal with wildfires and flooding was raised as a significant issue not currently recognised in funding settlements.

Decisions:

FSMC **agreed** the next steps outlined in paragraph 56 of the report.

Actions:

- RJ to investigate issue of qualified fire investigators and report back to Committee
- Officers to recruit a suitable range (political and geographical) of members to take part in the evidence gathering session (Cllrs Hugo, Price and Brackenridge offered their services at the

meeting).

5 Emergency Service Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) update

The Chair invited Ian Taylor (IT), Senior User and Business Change Lead, NFCC, and Simon Parr (SP), Senior Responsible Owner, Home Office, to introduce the update.

SP updated members on developments with ESMCP since the previous report to FSMC in December 2022. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) had published its final report into the Airwave Motorola contract on 13 April and the conclusions and recommendations were not materially different to those reported to FSMC in December 2022 (see minutes of 9 December FSMC for further detail). In particular, the CMA will impose a cost cap to limit the price that Motorola can charge to a level that would apply in a well-functioning, competitive market. The implications of this for FRAs are not yet fully understood and so, as previously advised, FRAs may be best placed not to anticipate any Airwave savings within the current financial year. Re-procurement of lot 2, to replace the Motorola ESN contract, should formally commence in the next few weeks with 4 suppliers showing early interest. Negotiations were progressing well with EE over an extension of their contract for lot 3, which expires at the end of 2024. Given the historic and ongoing problems experienced with the project, full switchover from Airwave to ESN was not now expected for some time, and much later than originally anticipated.

Members' comments and questions:

- Given the critical importance of this issue for FRAs, both operationally and financially, it was suggested that a regular update be brought to every FSMC meeting.
- It was suggested that the data part of the project, which currently worked well, be rolled out straight away, and that the push to voice part, which the fire service is not dependent on, be taken forward as a separate project, perhaps with a lower and less costly specification. SP stated that he hoped to be able to roll out the data part to FRSs by 2025.

Decisions:

FSMC **noted** the content of the report and agreed to wait until the new FSMC membership was determined in July/August to consider the appointment of 2 members to the ESMCP Fire Customer Group.

6 Culture in the Fire & Rescue Service

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

LE highlighted the HMICFRS spotlight report on culture and values in the fire and rescue service and, in particular, the recommendations from this that impacted directly on the LGA. The LGA's next steps actions list had

been updated to reflect the comments of members at the FSMC meeting on 6 March. LE then invited Mark Hardingham (MH) and Rob MacDougall (RM) to introduce the NFCC's draft Culture action plan.

MH stressed the importance of adopting a multi-stakeholder approach to addressing the challenges facing the sector. The NFCC recognised that lots of good work had already taken place around diversity and inclusion and, in particular, they were keen to build on the previous work of the Inclusive Fire Service Group. Recent events had demonstrated that much more work needed to be undertaken to transform the working culture in FRSs, and the draft Action Plan was the start of that process.

RM explained the process behind the drafting of the Action Plan and highlighted 2 key workstreams that emerge from it: (i) the creation of a Culture Dashboard Performance Methodology to provide services with a cultural performance benchmarking and monitoring tool; and (ii) the creation of a Challenging Behaviour Toolkit containing information, guidance and best practice. RM then ran through the timeline for the development of, and consultation on, the Action Plan, culminating in its expected publication in July 2023. A governance structure is being put in place to ensure that the Action Plan is delivered and that progress is communicated effectively.

Members' comments and questions:

- Clarity was sought from members on how the Action Plan, and response to the HMICFRS recommendation 13, addressed issues of employment law when employers wanted to take disciplinary action against unacceptable behaviour (and what the role of the FBU should be in this process). RM said that there was a medium-term action in the Plan around exploring options for investigations and hearings. The NFCC were keen for all the representative bodies to be involved in this process and the Inclusive Fire Service Group was a good forum to facilitate it. MH added that the Fire Standards Board would be looking at whether another fire standard would be required in order to achieve some consistency in dealing with disciplinary matters. Existing tools such as the Core Code of Ethics could be used to benchmark behaviour and to recalibrate the level of tolerance of various behaviours.
- The diversity of the group that drew up the Action Plan was queried. RM said that the NFCC were aware that this was an issue for them as an organisation, but conscious efforts had been made to ensure that as diverse a range of delegates as possible took part in the NFCC's Culture Conference, out of which much of the Plan emerged. In addition, an external advisory board had been established by the NFCC to provide robust challenge where needed.
- More information was requested on the Direct Entry programme and how this could improve diversity in the workforce. MH said that 7 FRSs had joined the scheme as early adopters and the level of interest had so far been good, with a diverse range of candidates coming forward. MH offered to bring a further update on the scheme to a future FSMC meeting.
- Members asked whether the NFCC had had sight of the

disciplinary case examples that FRSs had been asked to provide to HMICFRS to inform their work. MH said that he would pick up the findings of the exercise from HMICFRS when they had processed the information as it was not appropriate for confidential personal information to be passed to him directly.

The Chair concluded by encouraging members to sign up to attend the LGA's one-day culture conference on 27 June.

Decision:

FSMC welcomed the NFCC's draft Action Plan and agreed the revised next steps set out in paragraph 37 of the report.

Action:

Schedule an update on the Direct Entry programme for a future FSMC

7 Building Safety update

The Chair invited Mark Norris (MN), Principal Policy Adviser, to introduce the update.

MN indicated that he was happy for the update to be taken as read but added that there were likely to be some further developments with regard to the Building Safety Regulator which he would update members on at either the Fire Commission in June or FSMC in July.

Decision:

FSMC **noted** the update.

8 Workforce and Pensions update

The Chair invited Gill Gittins (GG) (Senior Adviser, Workforce and Negotiations) and Elena Johnson (EJ) (Acting Senior Adviser, Pensions) to introduce the update.

GG indicated that she was happy for the report to be taken as read and to take any questions as required.

Members' comments and questions:

- An update was requested on the 'new role' work as part of the recent pay settlement. GG said that as indicated in the National Employers offer letter which had resolved the pay dispute, an initial update would be brought to the employer' and joint meetings of the NJC on 6 June. Members would recall that work on broadening the role has been suspended following funding issues. Discussions were taking place about how to take this potentially similar work forward now. The Retained Duty System and Pay Progression joint working groups had held initial meetings and considered approaches to their work going forward, which would be taken to the NJC meeting on 6 June for agreement. Background work was already underway to gather evidence to support the groups.

Discussions were in hand at joint secretariat level on the best approach to take to the Control Staff pay differential issue.

- Further information was requested on progress with the gold book negotiations. GG said that a response was still awaited from the Fire Leaders Association (FLA) to the last employers' offer. Cllr Nick Chard, Chair of the Employer's Side, NJC for Brigade Managers, added that the employers had been proactively trying to resolve the issue and had recently held a joint lead members meeting with the FLA to that end.

Decision:

FSMC **noted** the update.

9 National Fire Chiefs Council update

The Chair invited MH to introduce the update.

MH indicated that he was happy for the update to be taken as read and to answer any questions as required.

Decision

FSMC **noted** the update.

10 Fire Standards Board update

The Chair invited Cllr Nick Chard, the LGA's representative on the Fire Standards Board, to introduce the update.

Cllr Chard indicated that he was happy for the update to be taken as read and was happy to take any questions as required.

Decision:

FSMC agreed to:

- 1) note the contents of the report for information;
- 2) provide ongoing support to officers in enabling and empowering them to engage in the development and implementation of the Fire Standards both in production and when published; and
- 3) encourage the monitoring of the benefits of the Fire Standards in their services.

11 FSMC update

The Chair invited RJ to introduce the update.

RJ indicated that she was happy for the update to be taken as read and to answer any questions as required.

Members' comments and questions:

- Cllr Byrom reported that it had been agreed in Parliament with cross-party support that the fire service would be added to the

regulations requiring enhanced DBS checks to be undertaken on staff.

Decision

FSMC **noted** the update.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chair	Cllr Frank Biederman	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority
Vice-Chair	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Gloucestershire County Council
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Greg Brackenridge	City of Wolverhampton Council
Deputy-Chair	Cllr Rebecca Knox	Dorset & Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Authority
Members	Cllr Dave Norman	Gloucestershire County Council
	Cllr Mark Healey MBE	Somerset County Council
	Mr Roger Hirst	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex
	Cllr Nick Chard	Kent & Medway Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr Nikki Hennessy	Lancashire Combined Fire Authority
	Cllr Jane Hugo	Blackpool Council
	Cllr Roger Price	Hampshire & Isle of Wight Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr John Shuttleworth	Co. Durham and Darlington Fire Authority
	Cllr Les Byrom (sub)	Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority
Apologies	Dr Fiona Twycross	Greater London Authority
In Attendance	Cllr Matt Dormer	Hereford & Worcester Fire & Rescue Authority
	Mark Hardingham	NFCC
	Rob MacDougall	NFCC
	Steve Healey	NFCC
	Ian Taylor	NFCC/Home Office
	Simon Parr	Home Office
	Jonny Bugg	Home Office
	Susannah Hancock	NFCC
	Steven Adams	NFCC
LGA Officers	Mark Norris	Principal Policy Adviser
	Lucy Ellender	Senior Adviser
	Rebecca Johnson	Adviser
	Naomi Cooke	Head of Workforce
	Sarah Ward	Principal Adviser, Workforce
	Gill Gittins	Senior Adviser (Workforce and Negotiations)
	Elena Johnson	Acting Senior Adviser (Pensions)
	Jonathan Bryant	Member Services Officer
Joseph Sloyan	Graduate Trainee – Building Safety	