

Minutes of last Fire Commission meeting

Fire Commission

Friday, 9 June 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 and reminded them that the 6th anniversary of the Grenfell Tower tragedy was coming up next week. Fire Commission's thoughts remained with all those affected. He noted that publication of the Inquiry report was now expected in early 2024.

Apologies were received from Cllr John Briggs, Cllr Carol Theobald, Cllr John Shuttleworth, Cllr Andrew Reid, Cllr Steven Lambert, Cllr Tina McKenzie Boyle, Cllr Byron Quayle, Cllr Andrew Reid, Cllr Jane Hugo, Cllr Ian Roome, Roger Hirst, Fiona Twycross and Mark Hardingham.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 October 2022

Cllr Chard asked if the Home Office could provide an update on when the Government response to the White Paper might be forthcoming.

Cllr Woodwark said that he was present at the previous meeting and asked that this be recorded.

With that amendment, the minutes of the previous meeting held on 14 October 2022 were agreed as an accurate record.

3 Culture in the Fire & Rescue Service

The Chair invited Mark Norris (MN), LGA Principal Policy Adviser, Alex Hill (AH), Portfolio Director HMICFRS, and Susannah Hancock (SH), COO NFCC, to introduce the item.

AH said that the HMICFRS culture spotlight report was produced on the back of 5 years of inspections where a number of problematic issues in FRSs had been reported, with a significant number of services requiring

improvement in the 'people' pillar. He ran through some of the key findings from the spotlight report and the recommendations aimed at various organisations. Since publication, strong feedback had been received about the crucial importance of middle managers in transforming the culture of FRSs. Andy Cooke, Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Services, had recently written to services and relevant organisations explaining how the spotlight report's recommendations would be monitored.

SH outlined how the NFCC was addressing the challenges around culture and inclusion in FRSs. This included a two-day culture conference out of which an action plan had been developed. Consultation with partners had taken place to get feedback on the action plan and the final version would be published in July. Some of the proposed actions were directly linked to HMICFRS recommendations in their report such as independent reporting lines, safeguarding measures and developing cultural dashboards with FRSs. An external advisory panel was being set up to provide advice and challenge on progress against the action plan. The NFCC's People, Culture and Leadership Coordinating Committee, led by Oxfordshire CFO – Rob McDougall, is driving the work on culture and inclusion. Progress against the action plan would be published for transparency and accountability. The importance of working on the issues with all relevant partners, such as the LGA, HMICFRS, the Home Office and trade unions was stressed, and the Inclusive Fire Service Group would be key to achieving this.

Members' comments and questions:

- The focus on promising and innovative practice was welcomed.
- Caution was expressed about the effectiveness of enhanced DBS checks in rooting out unacceptable behaviours. The picture was more complex than this. Jonny Bugg, Home Office, welcomed the Government's proposed strengthening of DBS and vetting requirements and said that they would be a powerful new tool for FRSs.
- It was considered important that the current focus on culture was not just a one-off effort, and positive practices needed to become embedded, which would take a lot of hard work from all partners.
- Would the Home Office be providing any additional resources to enable FRSs to employ additional staff to tackle the deep-seated cultural issue identified by HMICFRS and others? This in the light of cuts to funding for FRSs in recent years. Jonny Bugg responded that the identified cultural problems had been around for many years and FRAs had the flexibility to allocate their resources where they saw fit. The Home Office had made significant contributions to the issue by funding both HMICFRS and NFCC programmes.
- The specific challenges for on-call stations, particularly in smaller rural areas, were highlighted, and needed to be given greater prominence in the action plan given how widespread they are across the country.
- The fire service could learn lessons from the police in terms of improving diversity and the joint inspectorate was also useful in this regard.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions and said that it was

important that everyone took ownership of this issue if it were to be comprehensively addressed. Nobody should be a bystander and staff should be able to flag up unacceptable behaviour without fear of recrimination, in the knowledge that it will be acted upon.

Decision:

Fire Commission **endorsed** the revised next steps set out in paragraph 38 of the report.

4 On-Call firefighters

The Chair invited Steve Healey (SH), Deputy CFO of Lancashire FRS, and Andy Cole (AC), Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Dorset & Wiltshire Fire Service, to address the Commission.

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. A strategic/practitioner forum had taken place on 6 June which FSMC's Cllr Mark Healey had attended on behalf of the LGA. 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 touched on work around broadening the role as part of Fit for the Future. The NFCC, with partners, hoped to address these issues as part of the project.

Members' comments and questions:

- SH was asked for his view on the feasibility of mobilising pumps with 3 firefighters rather than 4 or 5 in order to make more efficient use of staff. SH responded that it was ultimately down to individual services to make those decisions in consultation with representative groups, based on resources available. However, the Manchester Arena Inquiry had shown that it was wrong to put up artificial barriers preventing crews attending incidents.
- Welsh FRA members expressed concern about some of the recommendations contained in two reports written by the Chief Fire & Rescue Adviser and Inspector for Wales around broadening the role.
- The work around 'developing the role' was very timely given the receptiveness of the current Fire and Health Ministers to the EMR agenda. The current negotiations through the NJC were proceeding, and this was considered to be the way forward for retained duty firefighters and the service as a whole.
- It was suggested that the contractual system for on-call staff needed to have greater flexibility in order to help retain staff. For example, minimum hours stipulations were not helpful. The Devon and Somerset FRS model was held up as a good example in this

regard.

- Examples were cited where the lives of young people, who hadn't engaged with formal school education, were transformed by becoming on-call firefighters. On call recruitment could help improve the diversity of the workforce.
- There were increasing challenges for on-call firefighters in getting to their stations on time to attend an incident, often due to problems with local highways. Some services were using Rapid Response Units to follow pumps in these circumstances. SH agreed that services needed to start thinking more innovatively about getting equipment and firefighters to incidents.
- As climate change related incidents started to increase, was there likely to be an issue with employers being more reluctant to release on-call employees? Andy Cole briefed members on the 'demand dashboard' being developed by Dorset & Wiltshire FRS to give potential recruits an accurate overview of the scale of operational work they would likely be facing. This was designed to try and address the problems with retention of on-call firefighters in the service and would be shared with other FRSs shortly.
- It was suggested that employers, particularly small employers, who released staff for on-call duty should be recognised in some way.

Decision:

Fire Commission **noted** the presentation.

5 Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme - 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.

IT and SP updated members on developments with ESMCP since the previous report to Fire Commission in June 2021. 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, had now commenced with a large number of suppliers showing an 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:

- Lessons needed to be learned from the project to date, particularly in terms of value for taxpayers' money. Was flexibility being built

into the new contracts to enable systems to adapt to new technology and other potential changes? SP confirmed that this was the case, for example around the ability to benefit from new 5G or 6G systems in the future.

Decision:

Fire Commission **noted** the content of the report.

6 Work of the Fire Standards Board

The Chair invited Suzanne McCarthy (SM), Independent Chair of the Fire Standards Board, to give her presentation.

SM highlighted a number of points that emerged from her presentation at the LGA Fire Conference in March. These included:

- The Fire Standards Board would be meeting on 13 June to discuss the relevant recommendations in the HMICFRS spotlight report.
- Fire standards were all about ensuring that the public was adequately protected and FRAs could use them to benchmark their service against.
- The interface between the standards and HMICFRS was discussed and the fact that if services properly implemented the standards, they would be more likely to get a good inspection outcome.
- SM said that she was more than happy to go out to services and speak to them directly about the importance of the standards. Anyone who is interested in this offer should contact her in the first instance.
- The final suite of standards was expected to be complete by April 2024 and, following that, the work of the Board would move towards communication, implementation and assessment.
- Alongside the Code of Ethics standard, the new 'leading the service' and 'leading development of people' standards were crucial in helping services achieve culture change and FRA's were key to ensuring their implementation.
- Consistency of approach across the country was considered important. Implementation of the standards would help to achieve this.
- Collaboration between agencies, and across the devolved nations, was crucial to the effective implementation of standards.
- FRAs, as the employers, effectively take on the role of 'regulator' in the system by requiring services to adhere to fire standards. National standards should be linked to, and reinforce, local visions and service values.
- Leadership at all levels has to support the professionalism that standards drive.
- In relation to the proposed College of Fire, SM made a plea that the benefits and momentum already delivered by the Fire Standards Board are not lost in any new system.

Cllr Nick Chard, LGA representative on the Fire Standards Board

endorsed SM's comments and stressed the importance of effective collaboration between the different agencies in delivering the standards. It was important that the standards were developed by the sector, for the sector, for the benefit of the communities served.

In relation to the proposed College of Fire, Jonny Bugg, Home Office, confirmed that whatever came forward would build on the success of the Fire Standards Board and partners and would not dilute their work.

Decision:

Fire Commission **noted** the presentation and **noted** the update paper at item 11.

7 Workforce update

The Chair invited Sarah Ward (SW), Principal Adviser – Workforce, to introduce the update.

SW emphasised the importance of the collaborative approach provided by the NJC working by consensus in taking forward the pieces of work agreed as part of the 2022 and 2023 pay award, for example on retained duty systems and new role development. The same was true for the work around culture in the fire and rescue service, where a range of different programmes were being pulled together to address the issues. This included the Core Code of Ethics, the Inclusive Fire Service Group and the proposals to take forward Fit for the Future outlined in the paper. Cllr Chard, Chair of the Employers' side NJC for Fire, endorsed the comments and added that having an NJC enabled much greater flexibility in reaching agreements than a national pay review body would do.

Decision:

Fire Commission **noted** the update.

8 Pensions update

The update was taken as read. There were no questions from members.

Decision:

Fire Commission **noted** the update.

9 Building Safety update

The update was taken as read. There were no questions from members.

Decision:

Fire Commission **noted** the update.

10 National Fire Chiefs Council update

The update was taken as read. There were no questions from members.

Decision:

Fire Commission **noted** the update.

11 Fire Standards Board update

Noted as part of item 6.

12 Fire Commission update

The update was taken as read. There were no questions from members.

Decision:

Fire Commission **noted** the update.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chair	Cllr Frank Biederman	Devon County Council
Vice-Chair	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Gloucestershire County Council
Members	Cllr Brenda Massey	Avon Fire Authority
	Cllr Paul Gittings	Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
	Cllr Simon Rouse	Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority
	Cllr Martyn Alvey	Cornwall Council
	Cllr Trevor Ainsworth	Derbyshire County Council
	Cllr Sara Randall Johnson	Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Simon Coles	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority
	Cllr Rebecca Knox	Dorset and Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service
	Cllr David Norman MBE	Gloucestershire County Council
	Cllr Dylan Butt	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
	Cllr Rhydian Vaughan MBE	Hampshire and Isle of Wight Combined Fire Authority
	Cllr Roger Price	Hampshire and Isle of Wight FRA
	Cllr Kit Taylor	Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority
	Cllr Morris Bright MBE	Hertfordshire County Council
	Cllr Nick Chard	Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr David O'Toole	Lancashire Combined Fire Authority
	Cllr John Shedwick	Lancashire Combined Fire Authority
	Cllr Lindsey Cawrey	Lincolnshire County Council
	Cllr Les Byrom CBE	Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Elwyn Williams	Mid and West Wales Fire Authority
Cllr Margaret Dewsbury	Norfolk County Council	
Paul Fell	Northants Police Fire & Crime Commissioner	
Cllr Jenny Hannaby	Oxfordshire County Council	

	Cllr Steve Bradwick	South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Philip Tye	Tyne and Wear Fire Service
	Cllr Andy Crump	Warwickshire County Council
	Cllr Vera Waters	West Midlands Fire Service
	Cllr Duncan Crow	West Sussex County Council
	Cllr Darren O'Donovan	West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Rachel Bailey	Cheshire Fire Authority
	Cllr Mark Healey MBE	Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Authority
	Cllr Nikki Hennessy	Lancashire County Council
	Cllr Tina Claydon	North Wales Fire Authority
	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	Gloucestershire County Council
	Cllr Tom Woodwark	Tyne and Wear FRA
	Cllr Nigel Smith	Conwy County Borough Council
	Cllr Paul Hilliard	Dorset and Wiltshire FRA
	Cllr Denise Turner-Stewart	Surrey County Council
	Cllr James Roberts	Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority
Apologies	Cllr John Shuttleworth	Co. Durham and Darlington Fire Authority
	Cllr Carol Theobald	East Sussex Fire Authority
	Mr Roger Hirst	Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner for Essex
	Dr Fiona Twycross	Greater London Authority
	Cllr David Lancaster	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
	Cllr John Briggs	Humberside Fire Authority
	Cllr Andrew Reid	Suffolk County Council
	Cllr Jane Hugo	Blackpool Council
	Cllr Steven Lambert	Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority
	Cllr Ian Roome	Devon & Somerset Fire & Rescue Authority
In Attendance	Susannah Hancock	NFCC
	Suzanne McCarthy	Fire Standards Board
	Alex Hill	HMICFRS
	Tamsin Morrall	HMICFRS
	Ian Taylor	Home Office/NFCC
	Simon Parr	Home Office
	Steve Healey	NFCC
	Andy Cole	NFCC
	Jonny Bugg	Home Office
	Jessica Hill	Schools Week
	Peter Heath	Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Service
	Justin Johnson	NFCC
	Pippa Brent-Isherwood	Essex PFCC
	Steven Adams	NFCC
	Wayne Brown	West Midlands Fire & Rescue Service