

## Climate Change

### Purpose of Report

For direction.

### Is this report confidential?

No

### Summary

The report details the content and outcomes of the LGA's Climate Change Evidence Session, held on Wednesday 6 September 2023.

**LGA Plan Theme:** Championing climate change and local environments

### Recommendation

**That the Board notes the report and considers next steps set out in paragraph 16.**

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# Climate Change

## Introduction

1. On 6 September 2023, the LGA hosted a climate change evidence session for a small group of FSMC members from each political group.
2. The objective of the session was to provide members and officers with an opportunity to hear directly from external specialists with varying roles and views on how Fire and Rescue Services can address the challenges that climate change poses.
3. In attendance from the Committee was Cllr Frank Biederman, Cllr Greg Brackenridge, Cllr Rebecca Knox and Cllr Roger Price. Speakers were:
  - 3.1. Professor Rowena Hill (Professor of Resilience, Emergencies and Disaster Science, ESRC Policy Fellow on Climate Change to DLUHC)
  - 3.2. Jack Walter (Senior Advisor for Incident Planning Partnerships at the Environment Agency)
  - 3.3. Jim McNeil (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Northumberland, NFCC Wildfire Lead).
  - 3.4. Bridget Betts (Environment, Policy and Partnerships Team Manager in Dorset County Council)
  - 3.5. Matt Oakley (Watch Commander and National Wildfire Tactical Advisor in Surrey County Council)
4. The evidence sessions looked particularly at the risks we are currently facing as a sector, the potential impact of a changing climate and some suggestions of where there might be particular issues going forwards.

## Presentations

5. Professor Rowena Hill
  - 5.1. Professor Hill's presentation gave an overview of the challenges facing the sector including modelling of potential climate change impacts based on different scenarios. She outlined the common expected impacts as higher temperatures, longer warmer spells (drought), milder winter temperatures (increasing the potential for disease harbouring), more rainfall on wettest days, more complex wind events and sea levels rising.
  - 5.2. Professor Hill outlined the importance of the sector having long term plans for reducing the effects of climate change on communities through both adaptation and mitigation activities. Climate adaptation actions were those that reduced the effects of climate change by reducing the vulnerability of communities to their impact and mitigation activities were those linked to achieving net zero and reducing emissions etc.
  - 5.3. She used a tool developed by the Met Office to demonstrate vulnerabilities of critical infrastructure in certain areas of England, showing that this data can be used to think ahead about future issues, and where the service might see the most impact

on issues such as rainfall, wildfires, drought, infrastructure (such as buckling train tracks under heat) and health which can then feed into the community risk planning process through CRMPs.

- 5.4. Professor Hill outlined the importance of having an interdisciplinary approach towards climate change and working across both borders and across other local structures, particularly Local Resilience Forums (LRF) to coordinate activities.

## 6. Jim McNeil, NFCC

- 6.1. Jim outlined the learning that the NFCC had gathered from the last year's wildfires. There had been a significant increase on wildfires in 2022, and whilst the numbers had been lower in 2023 so far they were still an increase on 2021 figures. There had been significant numbers of wildfires crossing from rural areas into the urban (the rural/urban interface or RUI), highlighting a significant issue for consideration in the future. Whilst rewilding was acknowledged as positive for the environment, there was also a risk posed to fire and rescue services due to the increased amounts of fuel rewilding can mean for wildfires.
- 6.2. Jim outlined that further work was necessary around the exposure of firefighters to harmful contaminants as a result of these fires.
- 6.3. The major themes of the learning were around the importance of consistent national policies and strategy, supported by effective communications, ensuring that firefighters have the correct PPE and support as well as how staffing and resources could be used to work on prevention, mitigation and education. Working in partnership on risk was highlighted, particularly issues around rewilding where other agencies are responsible but the risks around fire are maybe not understood.
- 6.4. The role of communities in contributing towards prevention through their own activities was highlighted as well as working effectively through the LRF.

## 7. Jack Walter

- 7.1. Jack attended the session and, reflecting on his work with partnerships, he stated the Environment Agency's (EA's) keenness to work with the LGA. He went on to explain the extent of the risk of flooding in England, and that whilst flooding had always existed risks were also changing. Jack emphasised the importance of a risk strategy when preparing for the effects of climate change. The National Flood Risk Assessment is due an update in 2024, with version two being more detailed and comprehensive. He noted the requirement for investment in flood prevention as well as the nature-based solutions which could make communities more resilient. He spoke about the interconnectedness of different climate risks – e.g. a drought means that the water cannot sufficiently seep into the ground, leaving an area more prone to flooding.
- 7.2. Jack spoke about the importance of understanding across areas where the mutual risks were for fire services, councils and the EA and understanding how we can work together and learn from others in order to make communities more resilient.

## 8. Matt Oakley

8.1. Matt outlined his experiences in Surrey with wildfires and the work that they had been engaged with. The importance of a joined-up approach to wildfires was highlighted, especially given the risks that wildfires posed to communities more generally, as well as the need to engage with landowners.

## 9. Bridget Betts

9.1. Bridget spoke about what Dorset County Council had been doing to tackle the threat of wildfires. Firstly, she outlined the context in which she was facing this issue – a very rural area of the country with lots of heathland and grassland. Bridget has been asked to put together a paper with a range of options on what could be done about the threat of wildfires and, after consideration, Dorset created a multi-agency campaign with councils, businesses, landowners, emergency services and NGOs. Dorset implemented Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) in several places and banned disposable barbecues in high risk areas. She noted that most visitors thought it was banned entirely and that local supermarkets removed them from the shelves.

9.2. Bridget also spoke about work that the council had recently done around flooding with a number of residents. They had created a targeted campaign for residents, using tailored messages and 11 community flood wardens had been created as a result.

## Further discussion

10. In discussion following the presentation members made a number of points:

10.1. Members wished to ensure that best practice was being captured and shared by the LGA. It was important that work on fire and by fire and rescue services was shared across the wider local government sector.

10.2. It was clear that there were opportunities to learn from other countries experiences, particularly around their experiences of wildfires.

10.3. Communities play a vital role in prevention and engaging with them on the issues facing the sector as a result of climate change, such as wildfires prevention, flooding issues etc would be key to the response. Putting in place an effective community engagement process was vital.

10.4. LRFs play an important role in preparing for the impact of climate change working across the local area. All fire and rescue services are heavily involved in the running of their LRFs and it provides another avenue for discussion around the impact of climate change.

10.5. There were particular concerns that other Boards within the LGA needed to be engaged and aware of the impact of climate change on fire and rescue services, and the particular impacts that environmental policies such as rewilding could have. Issues around planning and the role of fire and rescue services in planning were also discussed. Members were keen to ensure that the voice of services were being listened to within the planning process and wanted to explore this

further. Linked to this, members discussed new methods of construction and their potential impact.

- 10.6. As a part of our work on the next Comprehensive Spending Review, we should consider collecting evidence on the impact of climate change through investment in new PPE, vehicles, equipment etc.
- 10.7. The exposure of firefighters to contaminants through wildfires was of particular concern.

## NFCC

11. The NFCC have undertaken a range of work in this area, and have recently published a new [Environment, Sustainability and Climate Change toolkit](#). The toolkit aims to provide context around the UK's commitments in this area, the role of National Operational Guidance, evaluation methods for environmental and sustainability performance including emissions from fires, environmental audits and impact assessments, available grants, and other useful information including the Emergency Services Environment and Sustainability Group Charter and Charter Tool. The toolkit is a living document and will be updated and amended as new information emerges.
12. The NFCC have outlined three particular themes within their work:
  - 12.1. Climate resilience: how do we become more resilient into the future by anticipating, preparing for and responding to incidents related to climate change? This would include work through local resilience forums in the local areas and through CRMPs to identify local risks and put plans in place for responding to them.
  - 12.2. Climate security: what impact will climate change have on the security of the fire and rescue service's access to the resources it needs? For instance the potential impact of drought and lack of water on the fire and rescue service.
  - 12.3. Climate adaptation: how do we adapt to the climate change impacts that we already have? This includes the weather impacts that we see, as well as issues around changing technology. The issues outlined by Phil Clark at the Fire Commission in September 2023 on the threats posed by emerging technology, such as lithium-ion batteries and changes to infrastructure can be understood in this context.

## Implications for Wales

13. There are no specific implications for Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities.

## Financial Implications

14. There will be financial implications for Fire and Rescue Authorities in implementing mitigation measures that reduce the climate change impact of fire and rescue service activities, as well as adapting training and equipment to ensure it remains suitable in a changed climate.

## Equalities implications

15. The impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events are felt unequally and can exacerbate inequalities that already exist. The LGA has pulled together resources on [Climate Action: climate justice, health and social care](#) to support councils to identify those who are most at risk from the impacts of climate change and look at what is being done to assist the most vulnerable.

## Next steps

16. The Committee are asked to note the discussion and consider next steps. It is proposed the Committee:
  - 16.1. Continue engaging with the NFCC regarding climate change, environment, sustainability and emerging technologies.
  - 16.2. Engage with the other boards within the LGA, particularly the Local Infrastructure and Net Zero Board on issues affecting the fire service, including the fire service's role within planning and the potential fire risk impact from environment policies.
  - 16.3. Continue to share case studies and good practice, including working with communities, through the LGA's website and as a part of the updated climate handbook which is expected to be published soon.
  - 16.4. Input climate change impacts into the Comprehensive Spending Review.
  - 16.5. Issues around toxicity in wildfires etc should be explored further.