

The Fire and Rescue Service: First 100 Days

Purpose of report

For discussion and agreement.

Summary

The attached LGA/CFOA document briefly sets out the sector's asks and offers to the next Government. It contains a number of proposals which are important to the fire and rescue service, which if adopted would make a difference to public safety and also save the public purse over £500m over the lifetime of the next Parliament.

Recommendation

Members are invited to review the draft document and endorse/amend the proposals.

Action

Officers to take forward as directed.

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The Fire and Rescue Service

Background

1. The Fire Commission on 17 October agreed the development of a LGA/CFOA fire and rescue-specific publication which would set out proposals in terms of an offer to the next Government, in line with the wider LGA publication *Investing in our Nation's Future; the first 100 days of the next Government* which we launched at this year's Annual Conference. The draft document is attached at **Annex 1**.

Development of key proposals

2. LGA officers drew up a long list of ideas with input from CFOA. These proposals then evolved through further discussion with Chiefs, Chairs/Portfolio Holders and officers in services across the country and through various online forums and networks. With additional support from colleagues across the LGA, an evidence base has been developed to support each proposal to assess our rationale and to ensure the costings stand up to scrutiny. Most of this evidence is robust and referenced with statistics, and others adopt a common sense approach. From a long list of proposals, and with advice from the FSMC's Strategic Adviser, Ron Dobson, we have sifted out the minor/less relevant ones and propose inclusion of the best proposals which have some public resonance, and will therefore be of interest to future national politicians.
3. During this process there have also been a number of areas which we originally developed where continued lobbying has started to pay off. For example the consultation on the Bellwin scheme proposes reducing the access threshold and paying 100% of costs which will be favourable to FRAs. Similarly, we have been successful in securing £1m for the National Operational Guidance programme and therefore do not need to include these.

Structure of the document

4. The draft document is deliberately short to ensure that it holds attention of the readers. After a foreword by both the Chair of FSMC and the President of CFOA, we have included a short introductory section in order to provide some context for the proposals. In terms of new content, the document starts by proposing a Secretary of State statement in order to make a positive statement about the value and changing nature of the service and to cement the fire and rescue service's place as part of wider public services.
5. In the first Public Services Bill we propose 4 new measures, all aimed at keeping key sections of the population safer. By focusing on people in rented accommodation; young drivers; and people in sheltered housing, all of whom have increased risk of

fire/accident, we register the importance of the legislative framework needing to support prevention measures.

6. In the first Fiscal Devolution Bill, we propose 4 measures focusing on flexibility around council and other tax flexibilities at the local level. We also include the same proposal as in the original document about local government taking responsibility for allocating funding. This does not detract from our wider messaging around finances which will continue into the next Comprehensive Spending Review.
7. In the first Budget, we propose a range of issues: from incentivising business to install sprinklers, to a securing a share of the Proceeds of Crime money to extending the Fire Kills campaign.

Headline messages

8. Overall, the document has a strong prevention theme which we believe will be both attractive politically and this also make strong financial sense. Providing additional incentives and protections to both vulnerable and young people will be uncontroversial, and chime with the general direction of travel about keeping people safely in their own homes for as long as possible so we would hope to get some traction on these ideas. We feel that this positions the service as being central to the big debates in our society.
9. The headline financial saving to the public purse is £500m over the life of the next Parliament. This equates to around 25% of the annual fire and rescue national budget. However, it is important to note that not all costs and benefits are directly attributed to the fire and rescue service and the key savings identified in the document come from the proposals around driving (lowering the drink-drive limit and introduction of a graduated licensing scheme) with the other impacts being negligible.
10. We are not advocating these new measures in return for a larger than anticipated cut of 8.5% to Fire and Rescue funding in the next Parliament. Rather, our argument is that we can reduce demand on a range of public services and these measures can form part of the answer to help fire and rescue balance budgets.

Wider issues

Equality and Diversity

11. Given the fact that 80% of costs are workforce costs, we were keen to include a workforce dimension. Although there are no specific asks in this context, partly because the Adrian Thomas review is examining a number of these issues, our research revealed that equality and diversity issues now need to come to the fore. Members will be aware of efforts to increase the numbers of women/BME staff and under the last Government with a specific target of 15% for all female operational staff and 7% for BME by 2009. Unfortunately, the figures currently stand at 4.5% (women)

and 3.9% (BME) and is clearly not reflective of the general population. Separately Members will be aware that the Minister has written to Chief Fire Officers about the culture and values in the service. Although individual services have their own policies on equality and diversity, there is a gap in terms of strategic workforce issues at the national level and we therefore propose to host a roundtable with key CFOs and Directors of HR to explore these issues, and what can be done to address these, in early February. We will bring the conclusions to the FSMC in March.

Whitehall Departments

12. We also did some preliminary exploration of the costs and benefits of bringing the emergency services civil service teams together in Whitehall. The location of emergency services across three Government Departments (Department for Communities and Local Government, Home Office and Department for Health) can create barriers and tensions in terms of interoperability on the ground as each central Department has different political imperatives. There are clearly some advantages in bringing this together centrally as the blue light services are similar in some ways. But they are also different in many ways - whether it be the inspection regimes, governance, funding or pay arrangements. On balance, we concluded that the risks, particularly around the fire service being subsumed by the much larger police service, outweigh the benefits in the shorter term. However, we know that Government is being asked to develop a range of models for different Whitehall arrangements and as this moves forward we will want to keep Members informed so that we can influence discussions.

Conclusion and next steps

13. Once agreed and published, we will be promoting several of these proposals through the national and trade press and online features, our regular bulletin, blogs and comment pieces. Our communications team are drawing up a strategy to ensure there is wide visibility of this piece, and we will be writing letters to key politicians and parliamentarians from all parties and those with an interest in the fire and rescue service. These opportunities will raise the profile of the fire and rescue service. This will also provide Members with a quarry of information and ideas when positioning the fire and rescue service with politicians locally.

Financial Implications

14. All publication costs will be met from existing LGA budgets.