

Note of last Fire Services Management Committee meeting

Title: Fire Services Management Committee
Date: Friday 12 December 2014
Venue: Twin Towers Room, Fire Service College, Moreton-in-Marsh,
Gloucestershire

Attendance

An attendance list is attached as **Appendix A** to this note

Item	Decisions and actions	Action
1	<p>Welcome</p> <p>The Chair welcomed members and introduced Jez Smith, Managing Director of the Fire Service College.</p> <p>Jez Smith welcomed the Board to the College and explained that a number of developments had been undertaken to build the College to be a centre of excellence for the fire and rescue service. He summarised the recent infrastructure improvements at the site and a number of successful programmes and opportunities available for the fire and rescue service across the country.</p>	
2	<p>Thomas Review</p> <p>The Chair welcomed Adrian Thomas, who had been appointed by the Fire Minister to undertake an independent review of terms and conditions for operational staff in the fire and rescue service. He informed members that he was an HR professional, but had no experience with the fire and rescue service prior to the commencement of his review. He explained that he had visited approximately 20 fire and rescue services out of 46, and had met with representatives of some others. He would be drawing his final report together in January 2015, and would report to the Minister in February 2015.</p> <p>Adrian Thomas stressed that his comments related to practice he had found during visits to individual Fire & Rescue Services and should not be taken as applying to all. He also pointed out that this feedback was not his words but rather what authority members or FRS staff or representatives had said to him. He commented that he had been shocked by the culture of the fire service, and the general lack of trust between operational staff and management. It was his view that the conditions of service reinforced this issue, and resulted in a combative and negative behaviours. He felt that there was a lack of clarity over who the end users or customers of the service were; the community as a whole, or individual residents who dialled 999. There was also a general aversion to service change and different ways of working.</p>	

He had noted a poor relationship between full-time and retained firefighters, and commented that there were cases where a full crew for a particular appliance could not be found as full-time staff would not mix crews with retained staff. Individual fire and rescue services adapted grey book rules to meet local needs, although some stuck firmly to the roles as set out in the grey book. Adrian noted that there was a lack of understanding of governance of the service and the role of the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services, although also concern that without it each fire and rescue service would have to negotiate individually.

Members noted Adrian Thomas' comments and observations with concern. During the discussion which followed, the following points were raised:

- The public satisfaction rate with fire and rescue services remained very high. Adrian Thomas commented that the service was performing well, but his report would focus on the areas which needed improvement to provide an aspirational vision of the current fire and rescue service. Reduction in the number of recorded fires was easy to track, but improvements and customer satisfaction levels in other areas such as community safety was less easy to quantify.
- The grey book itself was not preventing delivery of an excellent fire service, although the application of it may be. Although it was seen by many managers as a barrier to service change, many staff members saw it as a positive tool for negotiations. In other organisations similar conditions of service as the grey book had been replaced by a contract of employment and general employee handbook.
- There was great concern regarding the amount of bullying and harassment cases which had been anecdotally reported as part of the review, although the actual number of reported cases remained very low. The service also suffered from very low morale, although this was common in the public sector given the level of cuts and the ongoing pension dispute with government could contribute to the issue. However, this did not translate into people leaving the service.
Adrian Thomas commented that he hoped that the Fire Brigades Union would contribute evidence for the review on this subject before the closing date later in December 2014.
- There was an acknowledgement from front line staff that service change was inevitable including co-responding with other emergency services. Co-responding was currently being undertaken on a voluntary basis.
- There was a concern about succession planning for Chief Fire Officers and a sense of managerial and technical management rather than strong leadership. The educational standards required for entry and progression were very low in comparison to other public organisations.
- Any recommendations from the report would likely be left for the next government to implement following the General Election in May 2015. The final report was yet to be written, and it was unclear at this stage if the report would be published to a wider

audience following submission to the Fire Minister. The Board supported the view that the report be published.

- The FSMC requested that the final report presents a balanced view of the F&RS and one that was not sensationalised by some experiences.
- Members would welcome Adrian Thomas' report explaining what leadership was like in the F&RS.

The Chair thanked Adrian Thomas for the update on his review, and commented that he hoped that the report would be published before the next meeting of the Committee at the LGA's Annual Fire Conference.

Decision

The Committee noted the report.

Action

That FSMC discuss the recommendations of the Review at the March FSMC.

3 Priorities for CFOA

The Chair welcomed Peter Dartford, the Chief Fire Officer of Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service, who had taken up the role of President of the Chief Fire Officer's Association (CFOA) in September 2014.

Peter Dartford explained that the priorities for CFOA for 2015 and beyond would be similar to the priorities for the previous year. These included:

- **Building relationships:** CFOA aimed to have close and positive relationships with all partners, including the LGA, DCLG and the NHS. It was also vital for CFOA to maintain strong relationships with their members, the senior officers and the individual fire and rescue services.
- **Supporting transformational change:** CFOA would develop good practice strategies through peer review, and create a central procurement hub which would aid service transformation.
- **Promoting the wider role of the fire and rescue service:** It was important that the focus of the CFOA was not just on fighting fires, but also on community skills to make the case for the wider role of the service.
- **Industrial action:** CFOA had urged both sides in the pensions dispute to negotiate to prevent industrial action. CFOA had commissioned independent research on firefighter fitness from Bath University, which would challenge some of the

assumptions within the scheme.

- Thomas review: CFOA would engage with the Adrian Thomas review to take part in discussions regarding the way the service was structured and the need for greater flexibility.

The Chair commented that he, along with other Lead Members of the Committee, had met with Lyn Brown MP, the Shadow Fire Minister who had suggested that a future Labour government would consider implementation of a national fire service. Peter Dartford confirmed that the CFOA had no policy or position on this currently, but proposed developing a set of principles which all CFOs could sign up to regarding governance arrangements.

Decision

The Committee noted the report.

4 Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge Working Group

Chris Bowron, Programme Manager, introduced the report and explained that the Committee had agreed to re-establish a joint LGA/CFOA working group to refresh the Fire and Rescue Service Operational Assessment and peer challenge offer. The refreshed draft operational assessment and fire peer challenge toolkit had been included with the agenda for comment and endorsement by members.

Joy Brindle, CFOA, explained that the work undertaken on the toolkit was a good example of joint working between the LGA and CFOA. The refreshed toolkit would keep an operational focus, with a strategic focus on organisational change, including financial planning, leadership and capacity. Preparedness was a key issue, and there would be more emphasis on integrated control, and there would also be strengthened focus on data and intelligence as part of future reviews.

The Committee welcomed the development that a follow up visit after the initial peer review would be programmed into the timeline at an early stage. Members agreed that the new toolkit was stronger and would enable positive reviews to be conducted with constructive outcomes. It was hoped that future peer reviews would link with the outcomes of the Thomas Review.

Decision:

The Committee endorsed the draft Operational Assessment Toolkit and approved the refreshed fire peer challenge offer for piloting.

5 The Fire and Rescue Service: First 100 Days

Helen Murray, Head of Programmes, introduced the report and explained that the draft document had been produced jointly between the LGA and CFOA to set out the sector's asks and offers to the next Government

following the General Election in May 2015. The proposals included in the draft document would make a difference to public safety and save over £500m over the lifetime of the next Parliament.

The Committee were given the example that the document called for the lowering of the drink driving limit to being it in line with those in Northern Ireland and Scotland, which would reduce fatalities and provide savings of up to £285 million a year. There was also a proposal to introduce a graduated licensing scheme for young drivers up to 19 years old.

In the discussion which followed the Committee made a number of comments including:

- There should be a reference in the document that group leaders had agreed the measures proposed. There should also be an amendment to the introductory statement with reference to the Thomas Review following the earlier discussion, and more robust wording around governance arrangements.
- Some members took the view that the document contained too many proposals, and that a smaller number of asks would have a greater likelihood of being taken forward by the next Government. It was explained that the document summarised the proposals which the LGA was lobbying and was aligned with the LGA's previous 100 Days document.

Decision:

That the draft Frist 100 Days document for the Fire and Rescue Service be endorsed following suggested amendments.

Action:

Lead members to be sent the amended version of the document for endorsement prior to publication.

6 Industrial Relations Update

Simon Pannell, LGA Negotiations, summarised the report and explained that the Fire Brigades Union had lobbied to ensure support for an Early Day Motion in order to oppose the introduction of new Pension Regulations for the proposed 2015 pension scheme for England. This would take place on Monday 15 December 2014.

The Committee noted that there was a potential for strike action to be called over the Christmas period, but that negotiations with both parties were ongoing.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

7 FSMC Update Paper

This paper, which was for information, updated the Committee on activities undertaken by the Chair, Lead Members and the LGA since the last meeting.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

8 Notes of the previous meeting - Fire Commission

Decision:

Members agreed the notes of the meeting held on 17 October 2014 as correct.

9 Notes of the previous meeting - FSMC

Decision:

Members agreed the notes of the meeting held on 5 September 2014 as correct.

Appendix A -Attendance

Position/Role	Councillor	Authority
Chairman	Cllr Jeremy Hilton	
Vice-Chairman	Cllr Philip Howson	
Deputy-chairman	Cllr David Acton	
Members	Cllr John Bell Cllr John Edwards Cllr Michele Hodgson Cllr John Joyce Cllr Rebecca Knox Cllr Darrell Pulk Cllr Simon Spencer Ms Fiona Twycross Cllr Les Byrom CBE Mr James Cleverly Cllr Mark Healey Cllr Roger Price Cllr Thomas Wright	
Apologies	Cllr Kay Hammond Cllr Maurice Heaster	
LGA Officers		
Helen Murray		
Clive Harris		
Lucy Ellender		
Simon Pannell		
Paul Goodchild		