

25 September 2015

Priorities for 2015/16

Purpose

For discussion and direction.

Summary

This report provides a draft set of priorities for the work of the FSMC and the Fire Commission in the year to July 2016. The draft priorities reflect the Chairman's priorities which are based on ongoing work and amongst other things reflect the new government's intention to continue the austerity agenda; to enable fire and police services to work more closely together and develop the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner; and to tackle 'the disproportionate impact of strikes on essential public services'.

Recommendation/s

Members are invited to consider and comment on the draft priorities.

Action/s

Officers will develop a forward work programme to deliver the agreed priorities.

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Priorities for 2015/16

Background

1. The LGA's Business Plan sets out the following as the top priorities for local government in 2015/16:
 - 1.1. Reform of funding for local government so councils have confidence their financing is sustainable and fair, opportunities to raise more funds locally, and greater ability to promote collective working across local public services.
 - 1.2. A radical re-think of governance and accountability to achieve a real shift in power to local people.
 - 1.3. Economic growth, jobs and housing with councils recognised as being central to revitalising local economies.

2. As part of the recent member-led review of governance the LGA Executive and Leadership Board have been asked to commission work from our policy boards where there is a clear corporate priority or an important issue straddles more than one board. The Leadership Board met in July and agreed the following cross-cutting areas of work which are being commissioned from relevant boards:
 - 2.1. **Devolution and the future shape of local government.** This will be led jointly by the City Regions and People and Places Boards, with any supporting evidence submitted to these Boards from other relevant Boards. At their last meetings in the 2014-15 cycle, the City Regions and People and Places Boards considered future work where the LGA can add value. They suggested that more work needs to be undertaken on the models and mechanisms of future governance (including work on policing and fire). The Leadership Board has requested that this work should be new, commissioned externally and have a practical application in "devo deals".

 - 2.2. **Promoting health and wellbeing.** This work should be commissioned from the Community Wellbeing Board, with input from other relevant boards and potential wider contributions from think-tanks and other parts of the public sector including the NHS and Public Health England. It can draw on ongoing projects such as tackling child sexual exploitation, ageing and skills which already operate across Boards. Continued moves towards an integrated health and care system remains at the top of councils and the Government's agenda, and getting these new arrangements right for councils and citizens remains a significant opportunity for the LGA. This work should: draw on the wider role of other local services such as schools, children's services, the fire service, public health, housing, transport and leisure; and play in promoting wellbeing across the life course and keeping people physically and mentally healthy, in work, and in their own homes. It should also consider the role of citizens and communities in supporting themselves and each other and promoting resilience and independence.

 - 2.3. **Housing.** This work is to be led by the Economy, Environment, Housing and Transport Board, with any supporting evidence submitted to EEHT from other relevant Boards. There should also be support from an independent advisory board of experts (to be developed by the Board). Addressing housing need was a clear

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priority at LGA conference from all political groups. Later this year, we will have a new Housing Bill (including the extension of the right-to-buy and the sale of high-value properties) where new local solutions are required, especially on finance. Through leadership of this debate, we have the opportunity to ensure that a much bigger agenda about place shaping is developed, focusing on issues such as skills, welfare reform, community safety and an ageing population that are vital parts of delivering our housing ambition. A clear steer from the Leadership Board was that the focus on housing needed to be clear, rather than a wider debate on infrastructure in general.

- 2.4. **Finance.** This work should be commissioned from the Resources Board, with support from all relevant Boards. Work will need to continue on the future funding outlook through the spending review and into even more difficult financial era. This work is well-established in the organisation and it should be an important continuing priority.
3. All lead boards have been asked to detail the scope of the Leadership Board's request at their first meeting and report back to the LGA Executive. This Committee is well placed to contribute to a number of these cross-cutting commissions, for example in promoting health and wellbeing. As the lead boards develop the cross cutting commissions we will seek contributions from this Committee to the work.
4. Following the general election, the subsequent Queen's speech and the summer budget, it is clear that the government intends to continue with its austerity agenda. In preparation for the Spending Review, the outcome of which will be reported on 25 November, the Treasury has invited government departments to set out plans for reductions to their resource budgets. They are being asked to model two scenarios of 25 per cent and 40 per cent savings in real terms by 2019/20.
5. Just before the parliamentary recess the government presented a Bill to Parliament, the Trade Union Bill 2015-16, which aims to give effect to the commitments in the Conservative Party's manifesto to reform trade unions and protect essential public services against strikes. Fire and Rescue Services are seen as essential public services in the context of the Bill. We also expect that the Government might publish the findings of the Adrian Thomas review of firefighter conditions in the autumn.
6. The Government is preparing a Policing and Criminal Justice Bill, which, amongst other things, we understand will formally address the manifesto commitment to enable police and fire services to work more closely together and develop the role of elected and accountable Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs). In preparation for this the Government issued a consultation, [Enabling closer working between Emergency Services](#), on 11 September 2015, which amongst other things seeks views on enabling PCCs to take on the duties and responsibilities of Fire and Rescue Authorities while proposing three governance models for closer working between the police and fire. This will be covered in more detail in a separate item on the agenda.
7. Finally the devolution agenda continues apace. This will inevitably have a bearing on Fire and Rescue Authorities and the governance of FRSs; we have already seen the plan (subject to legislation) for the Greater Manchester directly elected mayor not only to take on the functions of the PCC from 2017, but also oversee the work of the Greater Manchester FRS.

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8. In parallel with this Government activity, Fire and Rescue Services continue to establish themselves at the heart of the prevention agenda working alongside colleagues in public health and cooperating closely with other blue light services. They are also taking advantage of government transformation funding to deliver a more cost effective and efficient service across the country.
9. As last year the Chairman of the FSMC and the Fire Commission, Cllr Jeremy Hilton, has indicated that he would like the work programme to concentrate on a small number of strategic priorities for members to focus on with the aim of:
 - 9.1. Ensuring the FRS emerges from an intense period of change in a stronger and more secure position; and
 - 9.2. Ensuring that the LGA is well positioned to respond to ongoing government initiatives.

Members are therefore invited to contribute to these overarching headings.

Proposed priorities

10. Funding

- 10.1. Along with the rest of local government, fire and rescue services can expect to face further funding cuts over the period of the current spending review. But unlike other providers of public services fire and rescue services cannot meet their remit if funded solely on the basis of activity. The message in the joint LGA/CFOA submission to the spending review that services should be funded based on risk bears regular reiteration. Notwithstanding the reduction in fires over recent years, a certain latent level of recognised risk remains and the service must retain the capacity to respond to it. In addition, recognising that the reduction in fire related and other incidents is due in large part to the prevention work undertaken by the FRS, unless the service retains the capacity to continue this work there will be an inevitable rise in incidents and fire related deaths. In lobbying for fair, risk based funding, the significant and valued contribution of the FRS to the wider public health agenda while working to protect communities against the risk of fire should be emphasised.
- 10.2. Over the period of the last spending review, the FRS received £75 million of transformation funding topsliced from the RSG. As outlined below, ongoing work on transformation will be required. There is therefore a need to work with the Government to seek further funding, while resisting any attempt to provide this through a further topslice.
- 10.3. As the year progresses we can expect to see the Emergency Services Communications Programme move closer towards implementation. There may well be an as yet unquantified cost to the FRS for the procurement and installation of the associated hardware and provision of services. Lobbying maybe required to ensure that any additional burden is acknowledged and properly funded.

11. Fire and Rescue Service Transformation

- 11.1. The FRS has made good progress in transforming the way it delivers services to the community and operates with its partners, but to mitigate the impact of the funding challenge, fire service transformation needs to continue apace. Within this context, it is recommended that in addition to pressing for further transformation funding the Committee should focus on:
 - 11.1.1. Further blue light collaboration, including co-responding and the manpower implications of this.
 - 11.1.2. The terms and conditions for the fire service and responding to the findings of the Thomas report.
- 11.2. Later in the year the Committee might want to review progress on the delivery of the transformation agenda and also consider how better value can be gleaned from procurement.
- 11.3. In 2014 DCLG and CFOA jointly commissioned PA Consulting to look at current FRS spend data, price benchmarking and strategic future plans. The findings of the study, published in March 2014, suggested possible savings of £18 million on a total FRS procurement spend of £127 million. In response to the report CFOA has been working to rationalise procurement within the FRS and has published a high level procurement strategy. The Committee might like to review work completed so far and put its weight behind efforts to get full FRA buy in to a more collaborative approach to procurement.

12. Governance

- 12.1. Members are aware of the Government's manifesto commitment to examine a greater role for PCCs in the governance of the FRS. As mentioned above, a consultation on this has been issued in advance of launching a Policing and Criminal Justice Bill at the end of the year; the response deadline is 23 October 2015. It would be helpful for the Committee to agree the LGA response to the consultation and the line to take for future lobbying around the Bill in light of discussions between FSMC Lead Members and the Leadership Board.
- 12.2. One plank in the argument for retaining the independence of the FRS from the police is the trust in which the FRS is said to be held by the public and how this might be tarnished if the FRS was seen to be too closely integrated with/absorbed by the police. While it is assumed that this is the case and there is some evidence of the trust in which the FRS is held from post incident and visit reports and social media, there is no specific evidence available to support the argument as a whole, which we could quote in evidence. There would therefore be merit in the Committee commissioning a survey to support future submissions/discussions.

13. Prevention

- 13.1. The growing role of the FRS in community health and wellbeing is becoming increasingly well recognised. In addition to promoting, supporting and monitoring this development the Committee is recommended to consider how individual

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FRSs can ensure their work better meets local priorities identified in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments through FRSs having greater involvement in the work of local health and wellbeing boards.

- 13.2. Associated with this are issues around the future role of firefighters in the 21st century and the evolution of more flexible terms and conditions to match changes both in the modus operandi of the FRS and legislation now beginning its passage through parliament. All of this is likely to raise issues on which officers will need to guidance in order to provide an appropriate response.

14. Communications and events

- 14.1. There are a number of internal and external communications channels available to help the FSMC promote the work it is doing and to seek the views of member authorities. Throughout the year we plan to continue to issue a quarterly e-bulletin (though the LGA's e-bulletins are due to be reviewed), maintain the dedicated fire and rescue section of the LGA web site and place the agenda and papers of both the FSMC and the Fire Commission on the site. In addition we will support outside speaking events and interviews, and ensure that FRS features and news items take their place in First magazine. We will also make use of twitter to keep in touch with our members.
- 14.2. Additionally we will arrange and support the annual fire conference, scheduled for 8-9 March 2016 in Bristol and deliver a dedicated Fire Leadership Essentials course, 13-14 October, with the possibility of a second course in the New Year if there is the demand.

Next steps

15. Members are asked to:

- 15.1. Consider and comment on the draft proposals above and
- 15.2. Agree the priorities for the Fire Commission and the FSMC to enable:
- 15.2.1. Officers to prepare a detailed work programme to manage the day to day work and
 - 15.2.2. The Chairman to communicate the agreed priorities to all members of fire authorities

Financial Implications

16. None.