

25 September 2015

Developing the role of the fire and rescue service and firefighters in the future

Purpose of report

For discussion.

Summary

This discussion papers sets out the current context for fire and rescue authorities, and poses a number of questions for members to discuss on the future of the service.

Recommendation

Members are asked to discuss the questions set out in paragraphs 11 – 13 to inform the LGA's work in the future.

Action

Officers to progress as appropriate.

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Developing the role of the fire and rescue service and firefighters in the future

Introduction

1. The Government's priorities for the public sector over the next five years are clear. There will be continuing reductions in funding, further reform of public services to encourage greater efficiency, as well as greater devolution to local areas. For fire and rescue services the government has recently announced its consultation into enabling closer working between the emergency services, outlining three proposals for greater joint working with police and crime commissioners, as discussed in Item 4. There is now a need for further consideration at the local level of how the sector wishes to develop its role in the future.
2. This paper sets out the current context and then poses some questions for members to discuss about what this means for the sector in the future. The areas where we are asking for members thoughts are staffing, management and the role of the LGA within this debate.

Current context

3. The fire and rescue service of today is already very different from 10 years ago. The numbers of fire have decreased by half as the emphasis of the service has shifted from response to prevention. In fact in 2013-14 the fire and rescue service undertook more home fire safety visits than it attended fires. There has also been a focus on collaboration with both other fire and rescue services and with other blue light services. This has enabled the sector to deliver savings, and many FRAs are in the process of creating joint headquarters, joint control rooms or joint stations and also to provide a more holistic approach for their residents.
4. The LGA has been involved in discussions alongside CFOA, Public Health England, NHS England and Age UK, about how fire and rescue authorities can become more involved in improving the health and wellbeing of their communities. A consensus statement between the 5 organisations, on how we will support this work, as well as a set of model principles for conducting visits that focus on a wider range of issues during home fire safety visits have now been agreed. The fire and rescue services expertise in preventative work with vulnerable people in their communities, alongside the possibility of using any latent capacity for firefighters to contribute to this work, has led to a number of FRAs exploring this further. In addition the National Joint Council has been engaged in discussion on the potential to broaden the core role of firefighters. As part of that discussion a number of trials have been established in fire and rescue authorities relating to co-responding and broader initiatives on emergency medical response.
5. Beyond their traditional role of responding to incidents at a local level the fire and rescue service also has wider resilience duties. At both a regional and national level fire and rescue services are responding to a range of major incidents including chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive (CBRNE) threats, wide area flooding, terrorism and urban search and rescue (USAR). This work also requires

collaboration with other FRAs, but also with other Category 1 and Category 2 responders through local resilience forums, as well as working with national Government.

6. The Government's ambition on collaboration over the next five years is clear. The Government's consultation "Enabling closer working between the Emergency Services", seeks to introduce a duty to collaborate on the three emergency services. It also outlines three governance models for local areas to consider the options. The consultation states that greater collaboration will help to deliver a "more efficient and effective service for the public".
7. There have also been a number of national programmes which are changing the way in which the fire and rescue service responds to incidents, such as the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Programme, now known as the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles. JESIP seeks to improve the ways that the three emergency services work together at major incidents. The Joint Doctrine was created by JESIP to help clarify the roles and responsibilities of the emergency services in the early stages of response to a multi-agency incident. This approach is now being further embedded in all three services.
8. It is clear that the fire and rescue service is facing further change. Whilst we do not know the outcome of the spending review, unprotected Government departments were asked to model spending cuts of 25 per cent to 40 per cent. In our joint submission with CFOA to the Spending Review, we emphasised the unique position of the fire and rescue service as a service based on risk and the importance of using the service's skills, expertise and capacity to allow it to develop a further role in prevention across the wider public services. Whilst it is true that incidents have declined, FRAs still need to plan based on risk, particularly where a large-scale incident would require a large number of competent firefighters.
9. What FRAs need to be considering now is how this environment will affect their work into the future, in particular what will it mean for the staffing, the management and for collaboration with other blue light services. There are some profound changes facing the fire and rescue service as we look to the next election in 2020 and members may wish to consider what the LGA's role in this discussion should be.

Developing the fire and rescue service of the future

10. The paper poses a number of questions, broken down into three elements, for members to consider and discuss, as we look at to the future of the service.

Staffing

11. There has already been a shift to a different type of working within the service, with a focus on prevention, and it is likely that that this trend will continue, especially with the service's calls to have a wider role in prevention and community safety in a more holistic way. Members may wish to discuss the following questions:
 - 11.1. The fire and rescue service is based on risk, what are members views on the minimum acceptable level of risk that the fire and rescue service should be planning for?

- 11.2. How do members feel the role of the firefighter will transform in the future given the changes underway in the service?
- 11.3. Do members think this will/should affect the training and skills FRSs emphasise in their firefighters when recruiting?
- 11.4. As the risks that the country faces change, will this led to further diversity of roles within the fire and rescue sector, with less emphasis on the traditional “firefighter”, or, for instance, more retained co-responders, tri-service officers, differing skill levels for differing roles etc.?

Management

12. Innovative and effective management of the service is crucial to enable the sector to continue to develop and deliver both savings to the public purse and greater collaboration. Members may wish to discuss the following questions:
 - 12.1. As the firefighting and operational side of the sector becomes a part of a much wider range of responsibilities, how will this affect our management practices?
 - 12.2. Should the sector be looking to use the flexibilities it has to widen the pool of potential management candidates from outside the sector? What implications would this have?

Collaboration

13. Collaboration is a key priority for the Government, particularly between the police and fire and rescue service. Many areas are already collaborating with other blue light services and other FRAs. Members may wish to discuss the following questions:
 - 13.1. What partnerships, collaboration, and transformation would members be keen to support?
 - 13.2. Is governance a barrier or can it support further work on this area?
 - 13.3. What is the role of the FRA in pursuing new partnerships and agendas?

LGA

14. Many of the issues outlined here will have local solutions, and discussions will be taken forward at a local level to develop firefighters, management and governance structures that answer local needs with local partners. The LGA support to FRAs includes not only policy and political support but also improvement and workforce support therefore members may also wish to consider what the LGA’s role within this debate should be.

Conclusion

15. This paper poses a number of questions for members to consider on the direction of the fire and rescue service over the next five years of this Government. The Government’s ambitions for the sector are clear, however where does the sector see its own future?