

Fire Services Management Committee Update

Purpose

For information and discussion.

Summary

The Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) reports to the Safer and Stronger Communities Board. The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Jeremy Hilton, is taking this opportunity to update the Board on the principal issues concerning the FSMC and the fire community at large.

Recommendation

The Board is recommended to note the update.

Action

Officers to note members comments and take action where required.

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Background

1. The role of the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) is to represent, as an LGA body, the views and concerns of the fire community, ensuring that local circumstances have a voice in the national context. It takes the lead on behalf of the LGA on:
 - 1.1. The future direction of the fire and rescue service.
 - 1.2. Improvement within the sector.
 - 1.3. All other day-to-day issues (e.g. technical or operational matters) affecting fire authorities.

FSMC work programme

2. At its 25 September meeting the FSMC agreed the following priorities for work over the next year:
 - 2.1. **Funding.** It was agreed to promote two key messages with government. First the need for the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) to be funded on the basis of risk rather than activity in order to maintain the required resilience to meet the latent risk, both national and local. Second the need for further transformation funding, but without this being funded through a topslice of the government grant to Fire and Rescue Authorities. These messages were at the heart of the joint LGA/Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) spending review submission to the Treasury.
 - 2.2. **Fire and Rescue Service Transformation.** The FRS has made good progress in transforming the way it delivers services to the community, but to mitigate the impact of the funding challenge, fire service transformation needs to continue apace. Within this context the FSMC agreed to focus on:
 - 2.2.1. Further and wider blue light collaboration;
 - 2.2.2. Continued promotion of collaboration with health partners;
 - 2.2.3. Working with the Community Wellbeing Portfolio to explore areas where the FRS can contribute to the LGA's health and wellbeing priorities;
 - 2.2.4. Emphasising the contribution the FRS makes to the wider community safety agenda;
 - 2.2.5. Reviewing progress on the delivery of transformation.
 - 2.2.6. Reviewing work to rationalise procurement across the FRS and put its weight behind efforts to get full Fire and Rescue Authority buy in to a more collaborative approach to procurement.

- 2.3. **Governance.** Following the Conservative manifesto commitment to examine a greater role for PCCs in the governance of the FRS and the launch of a consultation on Enabling Closer Working between the Emergency Services, the FSMC were unanimous in agreeing that there was no need for a new duty to foster collaboration between the emergency services and that governance should only change where there was across the board local support, including from the general public. This widely held view was reflected in the LGA response to the consultation and will if necessary be used in lobbying when legislation to implement the government's proposals are brought before Parliament.
- 2.4. **Prevention.** In addition to promoting, supporting and monitoring the growing role of the FRS in community health and wellbeing, the Committee has agreed to consider how individual FRSs can ensure their work better meets local priorities identified in Joint Strategic Needs Assessments through Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) having greater involvement in the work of local health and wellbeing boards. Associated with this are issues around the future role of fire fighters and the evolution of more flexible terms and conditions.
- 2.5. **Events.** The FSMC will continue to support the annual Fire Conference (8 & 9 March 2016 in Bristol) and two Fire Leadership Essentials programmes the first of which took place in October.

National Audit Office Reports

3. At the beginning of November the NAO published two reports; [Financial sustainability of fire and rescue services](#) and [Impact of funding reductions on fire and rescue services](#). The first report examines whether DCLG understands the impact of funding reductions on the financial sustainability of FRSs. The second provides detailed comparative analysis of changes in income, spending and financial and service sustainability across the sector.
4. The financial sustainability report concludes that FRSs have managed funding reductions since 2010 well, with fire incidents continuing to fall and with no financial failures. It expresses an expectation that DCLG would have a fuller understanding both of the continued financial and service sustainability and of the appropriate funding level to sustain this. It is also critical of the assurance systems in place to ensure the FRS delivers value for money and remains effective. Notably from an LGA perspective, it questions the robustness of the peer challenge process, which, despite intervention from the LGA at the drafting stage to correct this view, it sees as an assurance tool rather than what it is - a tool for sector-led self-improvement.
5. The impact of funding reductions on the fire and rescue services report advises that having coped well with funding cuts and absorbed significant drops in funding since 2010, there are now indications that some FRAs are beginning to experience greater challenges in continuing to manage cuts. It warns that were funding reductions to continue, the sector would be faced with twin challenges: to implement new cost-reduction measures, and to manage increased risks, for example to fire fighter safety.
6. The two reports were considered by the Public Accounts Select Committee on 26 November. In his session before the Committee Cllr Hilton gave an initial view of what the funding reductions in the Spending Review might mean for FRAs, set out the LGA's

views on the government's proposals for changes in fire governance and explained the purpose of the LGA and CFOA's fire peer challenges.

Next steps

7. Members are asked to:
 - 7.1. Note the update.

Financial Implications

8. None.