

# Lancashire Combined Fire Authority

Meeting to be held on 24 April 2023

## Reports from Members on Outside Bodies

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### Executive Summary

The full Authority receive appropriate reports from Members who sit on outside bodies to provide feedback on key topics discussed in other forums such as Local Government Association meetings.

### Recommendation

The Authority is asked to note the report for information.

## Information

County Councillor Nikki Hennessy has attended the following Local Government Association (LGA) meetings and is privy to confidential conversations. She would like to draw Members' attention to the following key discussions and decisions:

### Fire Services Management Committee (Virtual)

- Friday 8 July 2022 (Cllr. Jane Hugo also in attendance)

Rod Hammerton, Chief Fire Officer and Project Executive for the National Fire Chief's Council (NFCC) Direct Entry Project gave an overview of the project including the issues it was seeking to address, how it fitted in with existing leadership development initiatives and the allocation of costs between the Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) and NFCC. He stressed that the Government was supportive of the project (although not financially) and this was highlighted in their Fire Reform White Paper as best practice.

It was agreed that Direct Entry could be a useful tool for expanding diversity and expertise in fire service management but that it was also important to focus on development opportunities for existing firefighters. Political awareness was seen to be a key skill for senior management in FRSs.

- 22 July 2022

Mark Hardingham, NFCC chair updated members on the latest situation with wildfires across the country. There had been more than 460 wildfires across the country in the calendar year to date (247 at this stage in 2021) with a much longer season.

Unfortunately, 60 properties had been destroyed in the recent spate of wildfires. 19,000 emergency 999 calls had been received on 19 July (daily average of 2,500) and as a result, Operation Willowbeck had been activated for the first time. This had worked well in spreading the load of calls across the country. Mutual aid arrangements had been put under considerable strain due to the number of different FRS's experiencing fires. The London Fire Brigade reported its busiest day since World War 2 and Mr Hardingham

expanded upon some of the implications of this for the service. Conversations were taking place with the Home Office to try and capture learning from the events. The science was clear that such occurrences would become much more common over the coming years and FRSs needed to be adequately resourced to deal with the increased risk.

It was suggested that the discussion needed to include looking at resilience in the broader built environment in addition to the more immediate issues of FRS response.

Mr Hardingham said that the NFCC would be holding an extreme weather conference in the near future, and they would welcome conversations with the LGA about what resources might be needed moving forward. More detail was sought on how fire crews were looked after during challenging incidents such as wildfires. With the recent wildfires, 7 or 8 services had reported heat stress injuries in their firefighters affecting between 30-40 crew members.

- 23 September 2022 (Cllr. Jane Hugo was also in attendance)

Fire Finance was discussion in relation to Fire Fighters pay award. Fire Service Management Commission to add 'sector-led improvement' and 'climate change' to 'people, professionalism and governance' as priorities for the year ahead.

### **Fire Service Management Commission**

- 10 June 2022 (CC David O'Toole, CC John Shedwick and Cllr. Jane Hugo were in attendance)

Anjli Mapara, Deputy Head of Fire Strategy and Reform Unit and Stuart Harwood, Head of Governance from the Home Office gave a presentation on the Fire Reform White Paper.

It was noted that the Government's case for the reforms proposed in the White Paper, included Covid 19, HMICFRS inspection reports and the Grenfell Tower and Manchester Arena disasters. It was stressed that the Home Office was keen to have conversations with local areas, particularly around governance reform, to try and come up with solutions that were acceptable to all parties. Lucy Ellender, LGA Senior Adviser, expanded upon the proposed governance changes and their implications for FRAs highlighting the table in the White Paper on potential demarcation of responsibilities between the political (executive) leader and the Chief Fire Officer (CFO).

Members welcomed the Government's commitment to improving fire and rescue services through the White Paper although it was suggested that they needed to be clearer about exactly what outcomes they wanted from the process. Members felt very strongly that it should be up to local areas to determine the governance arrangements that best suited their individual circumstances, not for central Government to dictate.

Comments included that putting power in the hands of one individual would reduce accountability and scrutiny, and valuable local expertise in Fire and Rescue Authorities would be lost. It was considered that there were several other more pressing issues, such as pensions, recruitment/retention of senior officers and diversity and inclusion that needed to be resolved and would have a much greater impact on improving services. It was noted that none of these issues were addressed in the White Paper. Anjli Mapara confirmed that this process had not yet been determined but reiterated that the Minister's preference remained for a single directly elected individual to take on governance.

Members agreed that the two alternative options put forward by the LGA in the report should be worked up and put forward in the consultation response.

Comments on the task to try to abolish the current NJC structure and collective bargaining included that it would create more problems than it would solve, and the Government should work with the stakeholders to address any perceived issues. A plea was made for regional variations in cost of living and other issues to be considered in any reform of the NJC structure and for local flexibility on possible entry requirements.

Fire Commission agreed the proposed direction of response to the Fire Reform White Paper, encapsulating comments made during the debate.

### **NJC for LAFRS Employers side meeting (substitute)**

- 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2022
- 7<sup>th</sup> October 2022
- 13<sup>th</sup> February 2023
- 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2023
- 17<sup>th</sup> March 2023

### **Business risk**

None

### **Sustainability or Environmental Impact**

None

### **Equality and Diversity Implications**

None

### **Data Protection (GDPR)**

N/A

### **HR implications**

None

### **Financial implications**

None

### **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985**

#### **List of background papers**

Paper:

Date:

Contact:

Reason for inclusion in Part 2 if appropriate: N/A