

Lancashire Combined Fire Authority

Meeting to be held on 26 June 2023

Reports from Members on Outside Bodies

Contact for further information – (Mark Nolan, Clerk and Monitoring Officer)

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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 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 (FSMC) (Virtual)

- Friday 9th December 2022

Finance update – Chief Finance Officer Ben Ansell, National Fire Chief Council (NFCC) Finance Lead, updated members on the latest financial situation for Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs). He thanked all the members who had engaged in the recent lobbying for greater funding and financial flexibilities for FRAs. The letters had been well coordinated and well received. The continued focus was on an inflationary Consumer Price Index (CPI) uplift in the Business Rates Multiplier and Revenue Support Grant and £5 precept flexibility for Band D properties.

Accountability and Transparency - Lucy Ellender, Senior Adviser, and Jonny Bugg, Head of Fire Strategy and Reform Unit - Home Office. Ms Ellender reported that the Home Office had originally agreed to hold a discussion on governance at the current meeting but, given that the response to the Fire Reform White Paper consultation had not yet been released, they had asked, (after the agenda had been circulated), for it to be postponed to the following meeting. Mr Bugg said that the new Minister, Chris Philp, had already shown some positive engagement on the fire agenda and remained committed to reform through the White Paper response. The London Fire Brigade's Culture Review had ignited significant interest in Parliament and the Minister was keen to address the problems it had highlighted. The Minister was also focused on the finance and productivity agenda and Mr Bugg considered that this was key to future funding Wildfires.

Paul Hedley, NFCC Wildfires Lead, delivered a presentation. He ran through the unprecedented extent and impact of the wildfires during the 2022 season and the

measures being taken by NFCC to try to mitigate risk. He reported that he had just launched a survey of FRSs on the impact of the 2022 wildfires, and on resilience in the sector more broadly.

Members discussed the pros and cons of increased regulation to restrict the sale of high-risk items such as disposable barbecues, Chinese lanterns, and fireworks. It was agreed that it would be useful to develop a wider evidence-based national strategy to look at the issues involved, and the possibility of holding a summit with all interested stakeholders (e.g., local authorities, supermarkets, FRAs) was suggested as a means of taking this forward in the first instance.

Stronger public education/information campaigns were considered vital in highlighting the risks. Additional resources would need to be found for local authorities to support effective enforcement if regulation was to be increased. It was agreed that: FSMC work with the NFCC to push for more national capacity to support Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) in fighting wildfires and support and promote NFCC's work around wildfires including an updated and enhanced Wildfire Prevention Toolkit and National Training Packages. FSMC amplifies national messages around wildfire awareness and safety and encourages government to launch a national awareness campaign around the risks of wildfires. Officers to carry out further research to enable FSMC to develop a position on the sale of disposable barbecues and other high-risk items such as lanterns and fireworks.

Emergency Services Mobile Communications Programme (ESMCP) - Ian Taylor, Senior User and Business Change Lead, NFCC, and Simon Parr, Senior Responsible Owner, Home Office, introduced the update. Mr Parr updated members on developments with ESMCP since the previous report on the Business Case in March 2021. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) had carried out an investigation into Motorola, the suppliers of the current Airwave system, in relation to excess profits and possible deliberate delays to the introduction of the less profitable Emergency Services Network (ESN). The CMA published provisional findings in October 2022 and concluded that Motorola were making supernormal profits – at current prices, the opportunity to earn just under £1bn of excess profits between now and 2029. The CMA announced their intention to impose a price control to restrict excess profit, to require Motorola to facilitate a workable transition between Airwave and ESN and to instruct the Home Office to fully introduce ESN by 2029 at the latest. Motorola had decided to step away from delivering ESN at the end of their current contract in 2024 and were currently negotiating early release (Dec 2022). Market engagement had begun on reprocurring the ESN contract with a view to formally launching the process in early 2023 and starting a new contract in early 2024. The network contract with EE was also due to expire in 2024 and conversations were taking place about how to proceed on this front. Mr Parr concluded that, despite all the problems, the strategic case for an Emergency Services Network (ESN) remained very strong as the Airwave technology gets closer to becoming obsolete.

Mr Taylor added that in the light of the Motorola contract termination, those FRSs that had been early adopters of ESN would unfortunately have to be transitioned back off early in 2023. The report advised FRAs not to anticipate any Airwave related savings in their budget setting due to the possibility of legal challenge by Motorola.

The logic behind taking early adopter services off ESN was queried. Mr Taylor confirmed that once the Motorola contract ended, the data centres that enabled the

system to function would no longer be accessible and so continuing would not be possible. This was very disappointing for those FRS's as ESN had proved extremely effective. It was suggested that the developments with Motorola might provide an opportune moment to review the whole project and the rationale behind it. Mr Parr ran through the benefits of ESN and explained that it would combine the benefits of standard mobile phones with new robust devices with access to reliable high bandwidth broadband. The FSMC representative on the ESMCP Fire Customer Group, reiterated the huge potential of ESN and reassured members that, despite the setback with Motorola, everything was being done by officers to bring the system to fruition.

Manchester Arena Inquiry - Emergency Response. Mark Norris, Principal Policy Adviser, introduced the report. Mr Norris reported that one of the key findings from the second report of the Inquiry was that interoperability between the emergency services, in particular the Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP), broke down on the night of the attack. The report recommendations were largely designed to ensure that this process worked better in practice in future. The NFCC had set up a working group to take forward the Inquiry's recommendations. The report set out how the FSMC could work to support FRAs to assure themselves their service was responding to the Inquiry's recommendations and successfully embedding the JESIP principles. This would include developing a guidance document for FRA members and working with the NFCC, Home Office and HMICFRS to implement the Inquiry's recommendations.

- Monday, 6 March 2023 Hybrid Meeting - Crowne Plaza Hotel, Nottingham

Cllr. Jane Hugo and CFO Justin Johnson attended in person.
CC Nikki Hennessy (virtual).

The chair introduced the new FSMC Equalities Advocate – Cllr Jane Hugo.

Fire Service Culture. Mark Norris, Principal Policy Adviser, introduced the report. Mr Norris set out some of the recent issues and incidents which had shone a light on culture within several Fire & Rescue Services in England and Wales. The importance of the LGA continuing to work jointly with the National Fire Chiefs Council on addressing the challenges was stressed.

Cllr Jane Hugo, FSMC Equalities Advocate, stated that there was plenty of best practice and skills/expertise both within and outside the sector that could be shared, and stressed the importance of all partners working together to address the worrying situation. Mark Hardingham, NFCC Chair, stated that FRSs were not yet as diverse as they should be and, although there had been progress in recent years, e.g., through establishing a Core Code of Ethics and the Fire Standards Board, there was much work still to be done. The current situation represented a failure of leadership within the sector and the challenge of addressing it ranked alongside the responses to Grenfell and Manchester Arena. Mr Hardingham outlined some of the measures being taken by the NFCC, including internal restructuring, and establishing an external advisory group.

It was important to link this into the wider fire reform agenda currently being taken forward by the Home Office. Alex Hill, HMICFRS, reiterated that their inspection process had highlighted the fact that the people pillar was the one area that FRSs struggled with more than any other. HMICFRS was currently producing a 'spotlight' report on this issue which could feed into the wider work to address the problems.

HMICFRS was also learning and adapting its inspection process in the light of emerging incidents and using learning from recent experiences in police services. Jonny Bugg, Head of Fire Strategy and Reform Unit, Home Office, stated that this was a key issue of concern for the Minister, and the Home Office response to the Fire Reform White Paper would likely contain more about improving values and ethics. A 4th session Bill in Parliament was still on course. He reported that later in the Spring, the vetting system for FRS employees would be upgraded to move it in line with other public facing professions.

The vital importance of maintaining the trust and confidence of the public was emphasized. 24 were performing well and there was plenty of good practice that could be used to support the 20. The Local Government Agency's sector-led support offer was highlighted as a means of helping FRAs and it was suggested that there would be benefits of jointly delivering this with the NFCC.

Support and training for EDI champions and other FRA members was requested to enable proper scrutiny of senior officers.

It was stated that proposed Home Office reforms around governance and operational independence of CFOs were a distraction and would not address the underlying cultural issues in the sector. By contrast, it was stated that two thirds of the White Paper was about people and professionalism, and the FSMC should therefore get behind and embrace these proposed reforms which were essential to drive longer-term cultural change in the sector.

Fire Service Management Commission

Friday, 14 October 2022

CC David O'Toole and CC John Shedwick attended.

CC Nikki Hennessy sent her apologies

LGA Fire EDI Champions Network meeting (virtual)

28th April 2023

Cllr. Jane Hugo (Chair), CC Nikki Hennessy, CC John Shedwick and Liz Sandiford attended.

The meeting was very well attended and included presentations from HMICFRS, Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service, and Liz Sandiford from LFRS gave an excellent presentation about "getting the culture right for diversity".

Cllr. Jane Hugo will be chairing an in-person conference on Tuesday 27th June at the LGA HQ focussing on Culture in the Fire and Rescue Service. The conference aims to support members in their leadership role and reinforce the role of governance, supporting members with effective and appropriate scrutiny in driving improvement in culture and equality, diversity, and inclusion.

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