

LANCASHIRE COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY
Meeting to be held on Monday 20 February 2017

**NEXT STEPS FOR FIRE REFORM –
MINISTERIAL SPEECH – 7 FEBRUARY 2017**
(Appendix 1 refers)

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Executive Summary

On 7 February 2017 the Rt Hon Brandon Lewis, Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service, gave a speech on the “Next Steps for Fire Reform”. In this he gave his views on the direction of travel for the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) and critical factors that Fire Authorities should be aware of and preparing for. A full transcript of the speech can be found as appendix 1 and a link to the video of the speech is also provided. <https://youtu.be/N7F0dInwOYM>

This paper summarises some of the key issues so Members can consider these in their planning process for next year. There are definite synergies between this speech and the Adrian Thomas Review which is the following Authority paper.

Recommendation

That Members note the contents of the report and are aware of the Government’s intended direction of travel for the coming year.

Information

On 7 February 2017 ACO Russel attended a speech organised by a government think tank, Reform in London. Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service (LFRS) were one of 35 Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) represented. The Rt Hon Brandon Lewis, Minister for Policing and the Fire Service, gave a 30 minute speech on the “Next Steps for Fire Reform”. The tone of the speech recognised some progress had been made in improving the FRS but it had to go “further and faster”. He linked this speech to those from previous years to emphasise reoccurring themes that had still to be addressed. These were:

- Outdated Working Policies;
- Lack of Diversity;
- No Independent Scrutiny;
- Improving Procurement Procedure (mentioned later).

Scrutiny

The lack of independent scrutiny would be remedied by the introduction of a new Inspectorate for the Fire Service looking at efficiency and effectiveness, with particular reference to response and prevention, Value for Money (VFM), understanding demand and future risks, together with its leadership, training,

diversity, values and culture. These areas would be complemented by thematic inspection, the first area being diversity, flexible employment and collaboration. Inspections will commence this year and be complemented by a transformed peer review process.

Greater transparency and accountability would also be facilitated by the introduction of a new website providing incident and performance data. It would mirror the police approach including information of Chief Fire Officers' pay, expenditure, accounts, efficiency plans and workforce composition.

Governance

Regarding the Police and Crime Act he confirmed the new term of Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners. He did not propose a blanket takeover of FRS by these commissioners but did emphasise that a local business case could be made and that FRA were obliged to co-operate in preparing this. The objection of a FRA to any proposed change would not be enough on its own to prevent a change occurring. He emphasised the opportunity to make closer and stronger links between fire and police, and for FRA to work closer with Police and Crime Commissioners to get the best outcome for their Communities.

The Minister indicated his intention to work productively with the newly constituted National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC), which he viewed as the operational voice of the FRS. Also mentioned was the Chief Fire Officers Association's (CFOA) work on peer review, procurement and standards. There was also an increased emphasis on collaboration and he highlighted best practice with some examples provided.

Professional Standards body

To provide a consistent standard to test against, the Minister announced his intention to set up an Independent Standards Body. This would provide guidance and standards on leadership, workforce development, equality and diversity and codify effective practice. This could be integrated within or affiliated to the College of Policing.

Culture

Reference was made to culture and the Adrian Thomas Review. To avoid duplication, these matters are reserved to the following CFA paper. Suffice to say, great emphasis was made on diversity and the workforce composition reflecting the communities they serve.

Procurement

The speech reminded the audience of the disparity in the cost of some goods procured by FRS exposed in a recent Home Office Survey. He intended to extend the 'basket of goods' exercise in the Spring to include training procurement and facilities management and then to repeat the whole exercise again in the Autumn.

The experience in Lancashire has been that we pay below average on 18 of the 24 items.

For 7 items, we were 25% cheaper than national average.

Of the 6 areas where we are deemed above average, only 3 of these exceeded the average by more than 10%. These can be explained by the increased complexity or high quality of goods we are procuring.

For example, we buy wicking T-shirts which are £2.00 more expensive than cotton to increase comfort and reduce the risk of flash burns.

Desktop PCs are relatively few in number and predominantly reserved for high end CAD and GIS applications, hence they are more expensive. Our general use of thin client servers is far cheaper than laptops.

Our BA sets cost £1,100 compared to an average of £795 for a basic set. However, our high tech approach includes telemetry that automatically updates information held outside the working area and provides a communications link in emergencies.

Business Risk

The next expected steps for the government are to enshrine its stated direction of travel with a refreshed National Framework, to be published later this year. This will clarify national expectations and responsibilities. Under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, FRA “must have regard to the Framework in carrying out their functions”. If an Authority fails to act in accordance with the Framework, the Secretary then has powers of intervention.

It is worth noting that the Home Office has just instigated a 3 month investigation in Avon Fire & Rescue Authority, so this could be an indication of government adopting a more proactive approach in the future.

Environmental Impact

None arising from this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

Increasing diversity is a clear mandate from government. LFRS currently reflects the national picture of being 96% white and 95% male. The Minister was clear that lack of recruitment does not constitute an excuse in this area. Any actions that do not align to this agenda will be scrutinised and expose the FRA to potential criticism.

HR Implications

Covered in the section of Equality and Diversity.

Financial Implications

VFM is a criteria that will be looked at by any inspection regime and there will be increased scrutiny of Procurement processors going forward.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985
List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact
Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate:		