

report

meeting	NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY	
date	8 December 2006	agenda item number

REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

FIRE 2006 CONFERENCE : OUTCOMES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform Members of the Fire 2006 Conference, which was held on 8 and 9 November 2006 at the International Centre in Telford, and to highlight areas of focus.

2. BACKGROUND

Members and Officers utilise this conference for national information gathering on key generic issues faced by Fire and Rescue Services. The conference addresses wide-ranging and significant issues.

3. REPORT

3.1 Attendees at this year's event were Councillor Darrell Pulk, Chair of the Fire & Rescue Authority, Councillor Brent Charlesworth, Vice-Chair of the Fire & Rescue Authority and Councillor John Cottee, Spokesperson for the Conservative Group. Due to a clash with the Deputy Chief Fire Officer appointment process, which is outlined in detail elsewhere on the agenda, Members and Officers were only present for the first day of the conference.

3.2 The two day programme covered a wide range of issues of interest to the fire community, including:

- Major Incident Management ;
- Local Authority Emergency Planning and Response ;
- Regional Resilience.

3.3 The organisers also introduced a comprehensive workshop programme covering :

- Regional Control Centre and Firelink Programmes ;
- Children and Young People ;
- Retained Review.

Speakers were drawn from a wide range of Fire and Rescue Services, local authorities, central government and other key agencies.

Attached to this report (Appendix A) is a copy of the Minister's speech for the benefit of those Members unable to attend. Other papers from the conference will be available to Members in due course via the Service's internet facility. Members attending

events such as this are encouraged to maintain a record of attendance and outcomes as part of their individual continual professional development record in keeping with the auspices of the Integrated Personal Development System and Member development.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of the conference including travel, accommodation and subsistence will be met from within the existing budget for conferences expenses.

5. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

There are no personnel implications arising from this report.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

An initial assessment has revealed there are no specific equality issues arising from this report.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no risk management implications arising from this report.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the contents of this report and continue to support attendance at this significant event.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION

None.

Paul Woods
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

FIRE 2006 CONFERENCE

*Speech by Angela Smith MP at the FIRE 2006 Conference
held in Telford on 8 November 2006*

Annual events are always a bit of a milestone - and a good opportunity to look back at progress over the year and forward to the challenges ahead.

It is something of a milestone for me too as it is almost exactly six months since I took over as Minister with responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service. During that time I have met many of you and I have seen, first hand, some of the excellent things you are doing around the country.

Like the work with young people in Northamptonshire and my own patch in Essex

Like the urban search and rescue training at the college

Like the car clear scheme, preventing arson in Avon and Somerset

Like the women firefighters who are helping us make other women think about a career in the service.

All over the country you are reaching out to communities and using your many skills, and the respect in which you are held, to make those communities safer and better places to live. You are reaching the vulnerable people in particular - the young people through schemes and courses, the older people through home safety checks and fire alarms - and improving their confidence and quality of life.

We must never lose sight of our main aim - to reduce deaths and injuries through fire. The latest figures are good news and show clearly that the focus on prevention, and on where the risk is greatest, worth doing and **is** working. The total number of fire related deaths is at its lowest in nearly fifty years.

Accidental fire deaths in the home fell by 8 per cent for the year to the end of December 2005. Injuries from fires were down by 4 per cent. And there was a fall in the number of deliberate fires, by 14 per cent over the same period which means the number of deliberate fires is now 30 per cent below the PSA target figure.

That is all a fantastic achievement and I want to congratulate and thank everyone in the Fire and Rescue Service.

But the picture is not universally of good progress - some places are doing much better than others. And there are some important aspects of the Fire and Rescue Service where the progress overall has to accelerate. The key to this will be strong and effective leadership.

FiReControl is one of these aspects. I want to make it absolutely clear that work is going ahead on FiReControl. The first regional control centre will come on stream in about two years' time. And the East Midlands are about to set up the first company, controlled by the local authorities, to run their centre. It is progress but it is only half the story.

We need to ensure staff understand why it makes so much sense to have the nine new Regional Control Centres. When I have spoken to people in control rooms their concerns are genuine but quite often based on misunderstanding or outdated knowledge - like whether people will have problems with regional accents or deal with different FRSs. We must address these concerns or people will not be able to see beyond them to the enormous benefits, and necessity, of building up our national resilience. I am relying on your co-operation and leadership for this.

The control centres, together with FireLink and the New Dimension equipment, are critical if the local FRS is to respond quickly and effectively to the many different threats we face - old and new, natural and manmade. They are equally critical if a robust response on a national scale is needed. The current system of 46 control rooms and the possibility of 46 different systems does not make sense. I know it can integrate, as Buncefield showed us, but I am not confident it will be enough in the future.

We are delivering our part. We are reaching the final stages of the rollout of the New Dimension equipment - although it is becoming a very familiar dimension for many of you. Several fire and rescue services are currently taking delivery of mass decontamination units and urban search and rescue equipment.

And it is making a difference to our fire-fighting and emergency response capability. The high volume pumps brought into use during the Buncefield disaster are a good example and I know we are going to hear much more about the response there, and lessons learnt, during the rest of the morning.

The FiReBuy project is up and running - and we expect it to result in significant savings that can be put back into frontline services.

The Integrated Clothing Project will improve the standard of personal protection for firefighters which makes it very important indeed. I visited garment trials at the Health & Safety Labs in Buxton during the summer and I was impressed by the rigorous testing - and the enthusiasm and commitment of the volunteers taking part!

The Project will also raise the profile and recognition of members of the Fire and Rescue Service through the work on a national identity. People have talked to me about this during visits so I know it is a real issue.

Last month I launched the national strategy on working with children and young people. This has so much potential for making life better in our communities - both helping young people become well-informed and responsible citizens, as well as turning round the lives of some who are already in trouble and likely to become tomorrow's young arsonists.

We are also making progress on improving performance management in the Fire and Rescue Service through work on the comprehensive performance assessment. The local government White Paper, which we published two weeks ago, set out a new performance framework which is more about auditing the place than the individual services.

Citizens will have more say, the number of indicators will be slashed and each area will have its own set of improvement targets based on the priorities for the area set out in the local area agreement.

The White Paper also proposed a much stronger framework for local partnerships so key partners, like the Fire and Rescue Service, can work very closely with other public sector bodies and organisations from the private, voluntary and community sectors.

I believe the work of the Fire and Rescue Service today fits in very well with this new vision for local areas - one of 'strong and prosperous communities'. You and your activities will be at the heart of the governance and delivery framework for the area. Again all this relies on good, strong local leadership, not only from local government but from local public service partners too. We must keep the momentum going so the trends on deaths and injuries keep going down. The new local landscape will support the Fire and Rescue Service much better in this aim.

I want to finish by saying a few words about two more areas where we must see more progress - the Retained Duty System, and equality and diversity.

I believe there is more impetus at the moment to resolve the challenge of recruiting and retaining Retained Duty System staff. Recent research has provided us with a better understanding of the other employment of staff working the retained duty system. In further research we will look at the employers too. But we have a way to go.

I hear that the recent RDS champion's conference was a success and this will be taken forward through a workshop here later today. But we really must make progress on this so I hope senior managers and elected members in particular, will come along and contribute their ideas on possible ways ahead.

Equality and diversity in the Fire and Rescue Service might be the last issue I am talking about but it is right at the top of my list of priorities. I believe it is very difficult for the Fire and Rescue Service to go on being effective in its community work, and even in emergency response work, if the make up of the workforce does not reflect the community it serves. How can you understand the community, build up the deep trust needed and reach the most vulnerable and isolated groups?

Recent research has highlighted some case studies of good practice and the new Equality and Diversity Project Board has now met - chaired by Pete Betts our Director for Fire and Resilience, with Phil Toase representing CFOA and Cllr Les Byrom the LGA. I am looking to the Board to provide leadership, vision and direction - in particular through the service-wide equality and diversity strategy they are developing. Over the next six months this will take shape with wide stakeholder involvement and we hope it will be ready to go out for consultation next June.

Recently I heard that one FRS recruited a hundred new firefighters including just one woman, and I dare not ask about ethnic backgrounds. Promoting equality and diversity calls for good leadership at every level and in every aspect of management.

Today the new Fire and Rescue Service leadership model is being launched - thanks to the work of Charlie Hendry, Kent's Chief Fire Officer, and his task and finish group. This is called *Aspire, excellence in leadership* and I hope that leaders - from crew managers to Brigade Managers,

including elected members and chairs - will take it to heart and truly 'aspire' to the behaviours it sets out.

The Centre for Leadership will produce an Aspire toolkit and that will include guides to leadership assessment. Leaders will be able to find out what it feels like to be led by them - an approach which could teach us all something about our behaviour.

I know there are already many good examples of leadership and cultural change programmes. Like the ethical leadership programme in Bedfordshire. Or the targeted development programme in London. Staffordshire has an innovative leadership and change programme, Northants a direct entry development programme. Things are happening and that is encouraging. But the best must be matched everywhere and not be the exception.

As a little further encouragement, I am pleased to announce today that we will be running an award scheme, jointly sponsored by DCLG, CFOA and the LGA. This will recognise the FRSs and individuals who have made the biggest contribution to progress on equality and diversity. The first awards will be made at the Fire Conference in May next year. I look forward to seeing some high quality entries that we can all learn from.

So I would sum up our position overall by saying there has been a great deal of progress and we are beginning to do better where progress has not been so good. But there is a great deal more to do. And it will take excellent leadership.

You can be sure of my personal and the department's continuing support.

I fully support the principle of establishing a Centre for Excellence for the fire and rescue service. Currently officials from Communities and Local Government are working with members of CFOA, the LGA and the Fire Service College on proposals. They tell me they are making good progress and will have outline proposals ready for consultation in February.

Then I hope you will all comment and make sure the Centre is designed to deliver what you need and to help you overcome any barriers to greater improvement. The new organisation must have widespread support, funding and take-up from the fire and rescue service itself, if it is to be of real benefit.

We will also continue to make sure you get the best equipment. And we will work together closely on the threats facing our nation and our changing world - through climate change, through terrorism or through something we have not yet even thought about.

Never underestimate your role, influence and the respect that you have. But the future safety and quality of life of our communities is in the hands of you and your local partners. That is the devolutionary era we set out in the White Paper. I hope you are all up for the challenge and, most particularly, I hope you are up for the leadership challenge. Thank you.

Speech by Angela Smith MP on 8 November 2006