

report

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| meeting | NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY | |
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REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

FIRE 2007 CONFERENCE : OUTCOMES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform Members of the outcomes of the Fire 2007 Conference, which was held between 22 and 24 May 2007 at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, 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 Penny Griggs, Vice-Chair of the Fire & Rescue Authority and Councillor John Cottee, Spokesperson for the Conservative Group. Members were accompanied by Frank Swann, Chief Fire Officer.

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

- Security and the Terrorist Threat
- Equality and Diversity
- Climatic Change
- Co-responding

3.3 The organisers also introduced a comprehensive workshop programme covering :

- Procurement
- Fleet Management
- Major Flooding
- Centre of Excellence

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, in addition to the speech by the President of the Chief Fire Officers Association. 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

The Fire Conference is the industry's premier event and attendance ensures that Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service remains aware of key emerging national issues. Failure to attend may leave the Authority at risk of not making appropriate progress in key areas.

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.

Frank Swann
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Speech by Angela Smith MP at the Fire 2007 conference held in Birmingham on 24 May 2007.

The video is a stark reminder of why it is so important to maintain an excellent emergency response but also to work hard towards prevention and reducing the danger for people most at risk in our society.

In both, the key to success is partnership. That is the theme I want to talk about this afternoon.

Everyone in this room has something in common. Our top priority is to see safer communities, throughout the country. And we all have something to contribute in getting there - whether it is professional or political, whether better equipment or new ideas.

That is why working in partnership makes so much sense.

Time and again the FRS earns our respect and admiration - and that of countries around the world - in responding to emergencies. Not only in partnership with the other blue light services, but also in joining up across the country - as at Buncefield, and in response to 7/7 in London.

I want to look at other areas where partnership and joined-up working is important too.

Phil (Toase) mentioned the growing partnership between CFOA, the LGA and central Government. This is certainly one that I value highly and is helping us make significant progress on a number of fronts.

This will be further boosted by the appointment of the new Chief Adviser. I have a suspicion this may not come as a surprise to some of you, but I am delighted to announce that I have now appointed Ken Knight, the Commissioner for the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, to this role.

I don't need to remind you of Ken's enormous experience and the respect in which he is held across the Service. His independent professional advice will be invaluable to me, my officials and the Service alike. These links are vital.

In a few minutes, Phil, Les Byrom and myself will all be involved in presenting the first Equality and Diversity Awards. This is not a piece of stage management. It represents a shared concern and a shared determination to tackle an important issue. I'll say more about that in a minute.

Two weeks ago I spoke to the FBU Annual Conference. It was time to reforge the links.

There is no point denying that employment relations in the Fire and Rescue Service have been a bumpy path over recent years. However, the FBU is a crucial partner, as indeed are all the Fire and Rescue Service Unions. And the willingness to form a new relationship and work in partnership comes from all sides.

This is a great opportunity to look forward and not backwards. The Fire and Rescue Service has been through a period of great change and that is never comfortable. Now we need a period of constructive stability in employment relations, so those changes can bed down and translate into real improvements on the ground.

We are not going to agree on everything. A mature relationship does not demand that. But I believe we have far more in common than drives us apart. And that overriding ambition to build safer communities is certainly one thing we share.

However a new partnership with the FBU and the other unions is not just about improving the relationship at Government level and with the national leadership of key organisations. It is also about improvement at local level with local management.

That is one challenge I will leave with you. Another is related. I believe some of the problems over the last few years have been caused by poor communication. We are all guilty here. But the net result has been myths and misunderstandings getting out of hand.

Take FireControl. While we are seeing a very welcome reduction in fire deaths and injuries, we are also seeing an increasing demand for FRS services. The scale is also increasing.

Whether it is natural disasters, such as major flooding incidents - and we can expect more of these as our climate changes.

Whether it is incidents like Buncefield, when fire services from all around the country had to combine to tackle the biggest fire in peacetime Europe.

Or whether it is the threat of terrorists where we must expect the unexpected and cannot afford to limit our thinking on what that might be.

These threats and challenges to our communities mean it is sensible to join up control rooms. We have therefore taken the decision to go ahead with FireControl, and the project is moving forwards. Just this week the East Midlands RCC company agreed to sign the lease for the new regional control centre at Castle Donnington.

FiReControl will bring major benefits to the Fire and Rescue Service and to the country. Let me mention three:

First, it will build up resilience for incidents where a national response is needed.

Next, it will enable individual services to co-operate nationally, as well as act locally. And do both in a timely and effective way.

And third, it brings with it improvements to systems and equipment - such as up-to-date risk information going direct to screens in fire appliances.

The case is compelling. Now we need to work together to make sure people understand these benefits and understand what it means for them on an individual basis.

I want to see leadership on this at a local level. That is where it is now needed most. Questions must be answered and rumours put to rest.

Local leadership is also a key ingredient for the changes Phil mentioned, in how local areas will be run. At the heart of these changes is partnership. Indeed, the legislation going through Parliament at the moment will result in fire and rescue authorities being a statutory partner.

The Local Strategic Partnership, and the network of partnerships radiating from it, is a key part of the governance structure. This is an opportunity for the Fire and Rescue Service to become even more closely involved in what is happening in their local area and in working with local agencies and communities.

This is not only about sharing ambitions but also about sharing knowledge, expertise and funding streams. Local partners will have far more freedom to join up and deliver on local priorities.

Fire and Rescue Services are already involved in some highly successful partnerships all around the country.

Like the work with Youth Offending Teams giving young people from troubled backgrounds a new perspective on life.

Like the fitness programmes and joint schemes to reduce obesity. Or the work in passing on the values of the service to encourage young people to reach their potential and be better citizens for the future.

This is in addition to schemes where the link to the service is more direct and obvious. For example, the Home Fire Risk Checks and smoke alarm installations for elderly people.

And the work in schools educating children about fire safety.

Then there are the courses to encourage smarter behaviour, by all age groups, on our roads. Sadly this is the scene for many of the emergencies today's FRS attends.

Every scheme is helping to improve the quality of life in our communities. Not only are they increasing safety, but some are also helping to tackle disadvantage, to reduce health inequalities, to prevent crime and so on. There are many long-term benefits for the future of our communities, as well as short-term gains.

I have no doubt that local agencies getting together and working with local communities is an unbeatable combination for positive change. The Fire and Rescue Service has a key role here and the opportunities are increasing.

There are lots of other examples of where partnership pays. Firebuy is one where that is literally true. Savings are already being made through better deals for bulk buying and Firebuy is developing new areas with potential.

The garment trials held in Buxton for the Integrated Clothing Project were a world first and will improve the quality of kit available to our firefighters.

I am pleased to welcome Terry Brewer who was appointed as the permanent Chief Executive of Firebuy, following an open competition.

The final subject I want to discuss, where working in partnership is important, is equality and diversity. But before I turn to that, I want to sum up what I see as the key characteristics of partnership. I hope you will give them some thought.

Partnership is about plain speaking - and, equally important, plain listening. It is about building up trust so both are possible. To work well, partnerships need excellent communications so people understand what is happening, how they can be involved and where the partnership is heading. And it is about making the most of everyone's talents, knowledge and skills for the benefit of our communities.

There is no doubt that the Fire and Rescue Service has made progress in terms of recognising the needs of our diverse communities on the service delivery side. But so far it has been less successful in creating a workforce that really reflects the diversity of those communities in itself.

I cannot see how the service can continue to make good progress in reducing risks in the communities it services if it fails to attract, recruit and retain people from the widest possible pool of talent among our many communities.

I said at the November Conference that equality and diversity was one of my top priorities. And that I was looking to the newly formed Equality and Diversity Project Board to provide leadership, vision and direction in shaping a new strategy. Even though these *annual* conferences seem to come around pretty quickly, I am pleased to say they are making good progress.

The Project Board has been developing the new strategy which is a key piece of work. It will set out a 10-year programme for change and make very clear our expectations in this area. It will include:

- Leadership

- Accountability

- Recruitment, retention and progression

- Business planning and service delivery

- Sharing success and measuring progress.

We hope to be consulting on the draft strategy later this year. Let me say thank you to the Board for taking up this vital challenge. I would also like to thank the many people from across the FRS who have been involved in workshops and focus groups. This has been a true partnership effort and we have been listening very carefully to all the points of view about what the strategy should look like.

At the November Conference I also announced the Equality and Diversity Award Scheme for the FRS in England, jointly sponsored by Communities and Local Government, CFA and the LGA.

The response was good. We received 40 applications containing a wide range of initiatives and new approaches to equality and diversity.

Our distinguished panel of judges was impressed with the quality of the entries and found it difficult to reach decisions.

But they did and, very shortly, I will announce the winners.

However, before I do, I will take a few questions and then Les and Phil will join me in giving out our first Equality and Diversity Awards. Thank you.

CFOA PRESIDENT'S SPEECH AT FIRE AND RESCUE CONFERENCE 2007

Phil Toase, President of the Chief Fire Officers' Association, today addressed fire minister Angela Smith MP and over 200 delegates at the closing session of the 2007 Fire and Rescue Conference and Exhibition at the NEC in Birmingham.

In his speech Mr Toase focused on the prevention, protection and responding aspects of the day to day work carried out by fire and rescue services and the importance of maintaining the balance between operational response and other activities.

Paying tribute to the firefighters who died in the East Sussex fireworks incident and reminding delegates of the dangers faced by firefighters daily, Mr Toase said 'We must never lose sight of our responsibility in ensuring our staff are well trained, well equipped and able to deal with the risks they are presented with'.

Mr Toase highlighted the prevention work carried out by FRSs and advised that FRS workforce must reflect the social make up of communities in order to truly engage with them to reduce risk.

Community activity, including home fire safety checks and work with partners to prevent anti social behaviour, is benefiting communities, and, noting the latest fire statistics indicating the lowest number of fire deaths since 1958, Mr Toase warned against any complacency in delivering services.

Notable developments in the protection arena include the introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order in England and Wales and the Fire (Scotland) Act in Scotland. These new pieces of legislation require a 'responsible person' to undertake fire risk assessment to ensure the safety of everyone who uses or is in the vicinity of their premises. Approved Document 'B'

introduces key improvements to fire safety in buildings through greater recognition of the role of sprinklers and more help for firefighters dealing with fires in tall buildings.

In welcoming the new policy regarding school sprinklers requiring new schools and schools undergoing major refurbishment to carry out fire risk analysis Mr Toase thanked Jim Knight and Angela Smith for their support and said, ' The introduction of a risk assessment tool is a sound idea, however, I would urge that FRSs be fully engaged when the analysis of the fire risk threat to a school is being considered in their areas.'

Concluding Mr Toase said, 'Our fire and rescue service continues to be vigorous and dynamic and we should proactively pay tribute to and praise our firefighters and all our fire and rescue staff who work tirelessly to make our communities safer places to live and work.'