

**Report of the Lancashire Combined Fire Authority (CFA)
8 September 2014**

1. Chairman's Acknowledgement

The Chairman recognised the work of Area Manager Chris Waters and Area Manager Keith Marsh who were both retiring at the end of September and the Authority wished them well for the future.

2. Ministerial Statement on Fire and Rescue Services

In June 2013 the Authority had considered a paper which outlined the main findings from Sir Ken Knight's Review of efficiencies and operations in fire and rescue authorities in England alongside the progress that Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service (LFRS) had made against the key areas identified in the Review. At that time it was anticipated the government would give its views on the Review in the autumn.

A written Ministerial Statement had been issued on 15 July 2014 which was considered by Members. The Statement did little to change the direction of travel for LFRS which remained around increasing efficiency and working collaboratively where appropriate. One new piece of information was that the government was to commission an independent review of the conditions of service for all fire and rescue staff and the way in which they were negotiated and decided.

3. Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014

The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 came into force on 6 August 2014. These Regulations applied to the Authority. They made provision for any person attending one of the Authority's meetings (while that meeting is open to the public) to be permitted to report on the meeting. The Regulations define the term 'reporting' as:

- (a) filming, photographing or making an audio recording of proceedings at a meeting;
- (b) using any other means for enabling persons not present to see or hear proceedings at a meeting as it took place or later; or
- (c) reporting or providing commentary on the proceedings at such a meeting, orally or in writing, so that the report or commentary was available as the meeting took place or later, to persons not present.

The Regulations do not require the Authority to permit oral reporting or oral commentary on a meeting as it takes place, if the person reporting or providing the commentary is present at the meeting. They allow any person who attends a public meeting for the purpose of reporting on it to use any communication method, including the internet, to publish, post or otherwise share the results of their reporting activities and the Authority must provide, so far as practicable, reasonable facilities. Members considered the government's plain English guide which provides practical information to help the public and practitioners exercise the new rights to film, blog, tweet and use other social media to report meetings and access information about decisions taken by officers. Members considered and approved a draft 'Guidance for Reporting at Meetings' which set out some of the practical considerations and clarified the role of the meeting Chairman in order to support any person who wished to attend an Authority meeting.

Subject to the rules concerning the disclosure of confidential exempt information, the Regulations also required the Authority to make publicly available, as soon as reasonably practicable a 'written record' to be produced in a specified format of a decision delegated to an officer either:-

- (a) under a specific express authorisation; or
- (b) under a general authorisation to officers to take such decisions and, the effect of the decision is to:
 - (i) grant a permission or licence;
 - (ii) affect the rights of an individual; or
 - (iii) award a contract or incur expenditure which, in either case, materially affects that relevant local government body's financial position

The written record must be retained for a period of 6 years with any background papers for a period of 4 years. The Regulations also make it an offence for a person to intentionally obstruct, or refuse to make available for inspection by members of the public, documents relating to these decisions.

The Authority considered that it already complied with the principles of this. For example, in terms of delegated authority decisions these were reported back through the urgent business process or through other reports to other Committees. Members considered and agreed that a full report be presented to the Authority meeting in December 2014 on the practical effects of the implementation of the Regulations.

FRANK DE MOLFETTA
Chairman

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