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MEMBERS' CIRCULAR 24/07

29th August 2007

To: Regional Representatives, Branch Secretaries and FRS Contacts

FOR THE ATTENTION OF ALL UNIFORMED MEMBERS

CPD / LSI Payments – Pension Benefits

The CLG has issued a consultative Circular outlining proposals for the accrual of pension benefits for payments received under the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) scheme agreed by the NJC earlier this year. The Circular also contains proposals that recognise pension contributions paid on the Long Service Increment (LSI) prior to its removal from October 2006.

A copy of the Circular can be obtained from http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/foalibrary/downloads/foa_circslinks/FPSC0707.pdf and its appendices are available from the following links: -

The Circular also introduces a proposal to introduce 'split pension' provisions as a means to protect the pension benefits of firefighters whose income (for whatever reason) reduces before entering their last three years of service.

1992 Scheme Amendment Order: http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/foalibrary/downloads/foa_circslinks/1992_Amendment_Order.pdf

2006 Scheme Amendment Order: http://myweb.tiscali.co.uk/foalibrary/downloads/foa_circslinks/2006_Amendment_Order.pdf

Please send your views on these papers to Head Office (foa@fireofficers.org.uk) by 13th September 2007 so that they can be taken account of in the Association's reply.

Draft National Framework 2008-09

Summary of the first National Framework Stakeholders' Meeting, 31st July 2007

Attendees: CLG, CFOA, Unison, FBU, HSE, CBI, FPA, ABI, IFE, FIC, RFU, FOA

Context for the National Framework

CLG explained that the discussions at stakeholders' meetings were not part of the formal consultation on the Framework which will take place sometime in the autumn.

The consensus view was that increasing the lifespan of the Framework to 3 years made sense, as it should mean that expectations highlighted in the NF would run alongside financial commitments.

Comments on the draft Framework

The balance between strategic and tactical roles of the document needs to be right and consistent and it must contain details on how an FRS should strategies into practice.

The document contains many recommendations which do not translate into musts/shoulds.

Stakeholders' opinions on individual chapters

Introduction

- Needs to be more ambitious and aspirational – should set out a clear direction of travel for the FRS and a steer on how the govt sees the FRS getting there.
- Should be more bottom-up and emphasise the FRS' role as a public service provider there to serve the community.
- Should briefly explain what is covered in each chapter and how they fit together including the key themes/messages that run throughout the document.
- Equality and Diversity section – doesn't sit well here and should be moved to chapter 3 on Equality and Diversity. This bit also needs cross-referencing to underpinning documents such as the Equality and Diversity Strategy.
- It may be appropriate to include the role of the new Chief Fire & Rescue Adviser's Unit (CFRAU) in the introduction.

Chapter 1

Stakeholders thought that the chapter needs to be clear on how the government sees prevention, protection and response working together to provide a risk-based approach through IRMP. However, it should not focus solely on the impact of fire and the Government's expectations about other risks, such as RTCs should be included.

The chapter should consider carefully how expectations for Regional Management Boards reviewing IRMPs and efficiency at a regional level will impact in terms of the shift in balance between national, regional and local responsibilities.

Cross border planning should be a "must" - integration with Scotland, Wales & NI needs to be addressed in the document. Other key players who support the FRS, e.g. businesses, need to be identified,

FRS should be able to defend buildings critical to the community and the Regulatory Reform Order section needs strengthening and it needs to be clear that it is not the Building Regulations but Approved document B that has been revised.

On sprinklers, the text implies that they are used to prevent fires. It should be stressed that they should be only one consideration in a holistic approach.

It was suggested that a statement on environmental protection issues should be included in this Chapter.

Regarding effective response it would be better to replace "musts" and "shoulds" with a requirement to implement individual services; improvement actions as not all authorities have the same problems.

Reference should be made to other departments and organisations who have responsibilities for operational matters.

With regard to requirements for research, some guidance some explanation of how these might be achieved is required.

Chapter 2: Resilience

From the outset, the chapter needs to say that the FRS is a category 1 responder.

Transparent arrangements are referred to but this might be difficult to achieve given the sensitive nature of the work.

It was suggested that reference to flooding should be omitted until there is clarity about the FRS's role in flooding and other water-incidents.

The Framework needs to be clear about the overall management and accountability mechanisms for mutual aid resources. In particular this relates to the balance between local, regional and national accountability for resilience issues.

Clarity is also needed with regard to the resources that will be available to FRAs for the long term maintenance of the New Dimensions equipment.

Musts/shoulds are inconsistent in their level of detail within the chapter and have been included for some areas of delivery on FireControl but not for others.

With regard to FireControl, a positive statement about the benefits and improvements will be delivered through time.

Reference to integration across Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is needed..

Chapter 3: (Not yet titled)

The chapter's language needs refining, for example, references to "staff on all duty systems" is too general and it was recommended that a suitable term for non-uniformed staff be agreed and used consistently throughout the document.

It was suggested that the Equality and Diversity section should appear in this chapter.

It was recommended that "musts" and "shoulds" ought to remain strategic rather than detailed and that those which are statutory requirements should be removed.

Stakeholders thought there to be unequal treatment of uniformed and non-uniformed staff as there are many "musts" for uniformed staff but only "shoulds" for non-uniformed staff. This could make the latter seem less important as a resource.

It was suggested that the Retained Duty System section needs to be strengthened to ensure that FRAs really deliver the changes required. This needs to be supported by a business case and the linkage to equality and diversity delivery needs to be stressed.

For workforce planning, it was suggested that the last requirement on maintaining or improving existing level of ill-health retirements should be expanded to include accidents.

There is no mention of the role of representative bodies in this chapter and it was suggested that they be included.

In the area of workforce development, it was suggested that "FRAs should apply IPDS principles to the recruitment, development and progression of all staff" be changed to a must and that it should be emphasised that this will help staff be able to transfer between services.

It was also suggested that a sentence be added to emphasise the importance of staff well-being and safety and that health and safety needs to be emphasised more throughout the chapter.

References to staff retention had been diluted since the document's last iteration and stakeholders called for the inclusion of comment on how FRS culture affects retention.

The need for and purpose of Criminal Records Bureau checks should be clarified

Chapter 4: Governance and improvement

Overall CLG's role in promoting the contribution that the FRS can make needs to be strengthened in this chapter.

In the area of Community engagement and involvement FRAs should be accountable to the public and explain why if they reject views from their communities when consulting on their IRMPs.

On performance assessment and improvement, the Framework needs to say whether FRAs should publish the data they collect, not just that they should continue to collect it.

It was felt that there should not be any reference to pensions as this area is covered by statute.

Stakeholders questioned whether references to asset management planning are necessary.

It was asked whether recommendations relating to the National Procurement Strategy will become requirements in the future. If so, it will be necessary to consider their status in 2 - 3 years time.

In the area of 'Charging and trading', there is a need to say what CLG feels would be the role of charging as part of a risk-based approach to prevention, i.e. how does this fit with IRMP.

5. Next Steps:

The National Framework team will consider the points raised at the meeting and the group will meet again on 4th October 2007.