



8 September 2017

Dear FRA Chair

As you know, the Policing and Crime Act makes provision for Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to take on the functions of a Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA). It also provides that where one or more of the relevant councils object to the proposal the business case produced by a PCC who wishes to take on the functions of an FRA has to be submitted for independent assessment.

The Home Office issued a note to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) on 18 August setting out how the independent assessment process for PCC proposals will operate.

We are writing to inform you that the process outlined in the note is not supported by the Local Government Association (LGA).

The LGA has consistently argued that PCCs should only take on FRA functions where there is a robust business case setting out the advantages of doing so, which is supported by all sides, including local communities and businesses. The assessment process must therefore be seen to be credible and independent, in order to ensure that any governance changes command the widest possible support and to avoid further dispute or the challenging of decisions in the courts.

Throughout our discussions with Home Office officials over the development of the assessment process we have argued that each independent assessment commissioned should, at a minimum, seek a view from those with fire, police, local government and financial expertise. We have also argued that a view from only one of these areas of expertise would not provide a sufficiently broad view on the entirety of a local case.

Even where the emphasis of an objection appears to relate to one or two of the above areas of expertise, it is our belief that a balanced view of the proposal requires contributions from all four of these fields of expertise.

While the appointment of a single assessor may appear to provide a cheaper option, we consider it essential for the effective operation of the fire service that business case assessments are thorough and indisputable.

This remains the LGA's view and has done been our view throughout our discussions with Home Office officials. We made it clear to civil servants that we did not support the proposals set out in the note circulated on 18 August when we were consulted on it. It is

disappointing therefore that the Home Office note fails to make reference to our strong objections to their preferred process for conducting the independent assessment. We continue to hope that the Minister's comments to the Fire Commission in July, that it was for local areas to determine the best governance for them, were an accurate reflection of his intentions, and we are seeking a meeting with him at the earliest opportunity to see how best to move forward constructively.

Kind regards

The image shows four handwritten signatures in black ink. From left to right: 'I. Stephens', 'Fiona Twycross', 'Rebecca Knox', and 'Keith'. The signatures are written in a cursive, personal style.

Cllr Ian Stephens (FSMC)    Fiona Twycross Vice Chair (FSMC)    Cllr Rebecca Knox Deputy Chair    Cllr Keith Aspden Chair Deputy Chair