Minutes of the 27th Business and Community Safety Forum meeting on Wednesday 25th September 2008 in Rooms G/A & G/B Eland House, Bressenden Place, London

Present:

Pamela Castle (Chair); Denis O'Brien (CBI); Jonathan O'Neill (FPA); David Sibert (TUC); David Smith (ABE); Steve Frank (AC); Peter Miles (AC); Clive Harris (LGA); Ian Evans (CAPT); David Geary (FSB); Martin Harvey (FIA); Peter Holland (IFE); John Bonney (CFOA); Rhonda Bedford (Practitioners' Forum); Max Hood (Arson Control Forum);

CLG: Sir Ken Knight; Anthony Maude; Rosemary Jeboo; Anna Wadsworth; Barbara Stewart; Robert Attrill; Bess Teeger.

Apologies: Sarah Davies (CIH); Bruce McGlashan (EA); Sandy Black (IOSH); Sheila Merrill (ROSPA); Tim Humphreys (ABI); Graham Ellicott (FIC); Charlie Hendry (CFOA); Iain Cox (CFOA).

1. Introduction

1.1 Denis O'Brien noted that he would like to ask the marketing team of the Fire Kills Campaign about whether the money was justifiably spent, and what assessment is made of value for money.

2. Minutes and matters arising

Minutes of BCSF meeting of

2.1 The minutes of the BCSF meeting held on 25th September 2008 were approved.

Matters arising – Draft letter to Minister on London Olympic site

There were some concerns over the draft letter to the Minister on the London Olympic site. It was suggested that there was some confusion between the role of the Health and Safety Executive and London Fire Brigade which needed to be clarified. The Chair noted that the letter originated from the Task and Finish Group and was signed off by Graham Ellicott and Jonathan O'Neil. Max Hood noted that an LBF seconded officer is embedded into the project. The same approach was used for the Heathrow T5 project with great success and is being translated to the Olympic site with LBF liaising closely with HSE. It was decided that Max Hood will speak with Ron Dobson and clarify the position with the BCSF. It was also noted that the Forum would like to monitor this project as an ongoing issue.

Action: Max Hood to speak with Ron Dobson and report back.

3. National Procurement Strategy– Anna Wadsworth

3.1 Anna Wadsworth noted that the first National Procurement Strategy runs from 2005- 2008. The one she presented at this meeting was the consultation on NPS for the Fire and Rescue Service 2008-2011.

3.2 This current consultation seeks views on the National Procurement Strategy (NPS) for the Fire and Rescue Service in England 2008-2011, together with wider questions on the delivery of national procurement arising out of the Department's recent review of Firebuy and the existing National Procurement Strategy. The consultation is for 12 weeks and closes on 14th November 2008. It was hoped to publish final Strategy and summary of responses in early 2009.

Action: Responses are welcome from the BCSF submitted electronically to fsed6@communities.gsi.gov.uk

3.3 The Forum was keen to find out why CLG did not continue with the current strategy. Anna noted that the current document adopted a different approach since some of the criticisms of the previous version were it was:

- too prescriptive
- too Firebuy centred
- not enough stakeholder engagement
- too top down

3.4 The meeting went on to discuss Firebuy. In particular it was considered that some parts of the fire and rescue service felt that they were not fully consulted on the arrangements, but were asked to use it and pay for it. This had created antagonism.

3.5 Steve Frank from the Audit Commission noted that as independent assessors of the fire and rescue service, that as of next year, the Commission will ask specific questions on procurement. The Commission will look at procurement decisions and how Firebuy is actually used.

4. Arson Control Forum – Max Hood

4.1 Max noted that the Arson Control Forum had been in operation for a number of years and had achieved much. More recently the Forum had suffered from reduced impetus and attendance. CLG has given support to CFOA for its continuation with him as the Chair and that the next meeting is on 30th September 2008.

4.2 He said because of limited resources that his approach will be more focussed on identifying good practices and providing a communications link with the arson reduction community. This means reinvigorating links with other government departments. The intention is to utilise the move towards more partnership working as evident in Local Area Agreements and highlight good practices on deliberate fires and other initiatives with stakeholders.

Rather than reinvent the wheel i.e. not to do any more research, but rather to improve communication links with the use of newsletters and websites. In addition, the Forum would look at other related issues such as behavioural issues with children, vehicle related arson and whether changing economic circumstances all have an impact on arson. Max would like the Members of the BCSF to give him their comments regarding the direction of how they think that the Arson Control Forum should be moving.

Action: BCSF Members to give Max comments on the direction they perceive Arson Control Forum should be moving.

4.3 Pamela Castle commented that the findings of a successful seminar 'Community Engagement Seminar' held jointly by CLG and the BCSF on the 30th September 2007 found that there was a need for the sharing of good practices and cross fertilisation of data. She also noted that the BCSF Forum should work closely with the Arson Control Forum to build on what already exists. David Geary noted that the business community has a breadth of experience and should not be overlooked. Max noted that he would need to produce an annual report for the Minister and would refer to both the Members and their annual report as a point of reference.

4.4 Jonathan O'Neil said that more funding was needed and that the larger economic losses experienced were directly related to increased arson. He added that the commercial fire losses in 2008 had increased considerably and that the situation is further exacerbated by the huge variation in Fire Investigation Reports. John Bonney supported the debate that fire and rescue services will play an increasing role in economic productivity. Pamela Castle concluded that it would be beneficial if Max Hood was a regular participant at future BCSF meetings.

5. Audit Commission – Steven Frank

5.1 Steven Frank and Peter Miles gave an update on the early messages from trialling and piloting Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) including the organisational assessment in the four fire and rescue services of Manchester, Essex, Hampshire and Gloucestershire. He presented the Model of Fire Assessment and said that from the 1st April 2009, the Audit Commission is aiming to make assessment far less burdensome and add value to the Area Assessment. The organisational assessment will look at how Fire and Rescue Services manage its resources and its performance and looks at the prospects for improvement.

5.2 Peter Miles stated that the new Operational Assessment of Service Delivery (OASD) toolkit represents a clear opportunity for the fire and rescue service to prove it can regulate itself robustly and consistently. The better and more complementary the new OASD toolkit is, then the less assessment the Audit Commission will need to undertake. The Joint Assessment will involve a large number of players and improvement work will report on any improvement in areas where local strategic partners need to look at more closely. In terms of fire service outcomes, Steven said that the Audit

Commission will recognise other roles which fire and rescue services will have in the future, for example in Gloucestershire, in ensuring the area is more resilient to violent extremism. The Commission will also look at how services are managing their natural resources such as water and fuel.

5.3 In terms of Managing Performance, the Commission will be aware in their assessment that there are a lot of national indicators that fire and rescue services contribute to that LAAs may not have included. On the Delivery aspect, Steven noted that there will be samples of reports on the Audit Commission website by the end of October 2008.

6. Timber Frame Task and Finish Group – Peter Holland

6.1 Peter Holland gave an update on the significant issues from the Timber frame Task and Finish Group – the last meeting was held on 9th September 2008. He noted that fire and rescue services should be made more aware of those buildings which are timber framed and non-timber framed as the timber framed buildings could appear to be non-timber framed, as the buildings react differently in a fire.

6.2 Peter noted also that there is an issue on the partial occupation of timber framed buildings which is the dual responsibility for both Fire Safety officers and the HSE.

6.3 The worry is how widespread this problem is and to ensure that the Health and Safety Executive are aware of the risk to construction workers. A key outcome from the last meeting is his recommendations to CLG.

6.4 Peter also noted that a major problem arises when a building is under construction (such as the Colindale fire), that the distance between the buildings may be too close and that more research should be done. Sir Ken Knight agreed that the fires of special interest (FOSI) process could be used to include fires in timber framed buildings of four storeys or more.

6.5 Some key recommendations that the Timber frame Task and Finish Group made are that:

- CLG researches the suitability of building large timber framed construction in close proximity to existing buildings.
- That CLG should carry out further research into the provision of fire warning and means of escape for construction workers when involved in Timber frame building projects.
- The Group does not consider the application of a risk assessment as a suitable means of deciding whether to allow partial occupation of an incomplete building. The risk assessment is likely to be a complex assessment and very dynamic as work in progress on the incomplete parts of the structure will require constant re evaluation and update. In particular the Group considers the potential for harm to come to fire fighters and occupants as a result of incomplete active and passive fire safety measures to be unacceptable. The group recommend that it be made mandatory.

7. Update Operational Guidance – Sir Ken Knight

7.1 Sir Ken noted that until now there was no mechanism for operational guidance in place and a necessity for a robust and rigorous process is a priority. A programme board with key stakeholders will scope, risk assess and offer quality assurance. Funding will be provided by CLG. He said that a paper will go to the next Practitioners' Forum meeting, setting out the way forward.

8. Any Other Business.

8.1 There was tremendous praise for Pamela Castle for her leadership as Chairperson of the BCSF since 2003, and in her role as Chair of the Fire Safety Advisory Board. John Bonney noted that in recent years, Pamela had played a significant role in bringing the Practitioners' Forum and the BCSF closer together. Sir Ken added to this. He said that the Minister was sorry not to be at the meeting, but he had asked him to convey his thanks for all Pamela's hard work over the past years. Sir Ken himself praised Pamela for the experience and skills which she brought to the BCSF.

The meeting closed at 12:25 hours