



Communities Select Committee
21 November 2012

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE ADVISORY GROUP (FRAG)

Summary / issues addressed in the Report	The report suggests an approach to clarifying arrangements between FRAG and the Select Committee.
Type of Report	This Report is for the Select Committee to decide on the proposed changes to arrangements
Additional Documents	None
The Select Committee is asked to consider the recommendation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. That the Cabinet Member for Community Safety is requested to share the following information regarding FRAG on a regular basis: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Any changes of membership b. All report papers for meetings c. Any significant changes such as changes of terms of reference ii That due to the elements of duplication between the Members' Reference Group and FRAG in terms of both focusing on the Public Safety Plan and surrounding issues of this Plan, it is recommended that the Members' Reference Group ceases and issues on progress and implementation of the Public Safety Plan are directed to the Select Committee on a periodic basis for scrutiny. iii. That this report be presented to the Select Committee Chairman's Group for information and any comments.

Introduction:

1. The issue of the Fire and Rescue Advisory Group was first brought to the attention of the Select Committee on 22 May 2012, in the context of the Surrey Fire and Rescue Service Fire Peer Challenge. This Peer Challenge (that took place in January 2012) was an opportunity for a Local Government Association led team to develop sector led improvement.

The outcome of the review was a set of emerging challenges, and one of these challenges related to the Fire and Rescue Advisory Group (FRAG). This challenge stated:

“Clearly define the role of FRAG and improve engagement with the Select Committee”

2. The Peer Challenge added that, “more work is required to fully develop this capacity and to clearly articulate the role of FRAG. During the peer challenge it was clear that there is an appetite from the Select Committee to provide more robust scrutiny and support to both the Service and the Portfolio Holder. Further discussion is required in this area to maximise the opportunities available to develop a more robust and rigorous scrutiny process.”
3. The result of the Select Committee’s meeting on 22 May was an agreement by the Select Committee to further scrutinise the role of FRAG.
4. This further scrutiny of FRAG took place at the meeting of the Select Committee on 12 July 2012. At this meeting, the Select Committee took evidence from Kay Hammond, Cabinet Member for Community Safety. During this session, the Cabinet Member explained that FRAG helped her to explore a variety of issues and as such acted as a sounding board. Thus, the Cabinet Member confirmed that the Group will remain.
5. As a result of this opportunity to scrutinise FRAG arrangements, the Select Committee raised a number of issues and the Chairman was requested to consider these issues and provide a set of recommendations, which are now set out in this report.

Key Issues considered by the Select Committee on 12 July 2012

6. **The establishment of Advisory Groups**
The Select Committee wanted to know more about the setting-up and the constitutional basis for advisory groups. A request was made to Democratic Services to provide clarification and the following statement was provided:
7. “An advisory group has no powers or functions but is viewed in terms of a ‘sounding board’ for the Cabinet

Member to use prior to making a decision. In some instances an advisory group can provide a group of Members with the expertise to be able to represent the Council at related events when the Cabinet Member is unable to attend (but not substitute in a decision-making capacity). This is due to the advisory group not being a formal committee.”

8. Therefore, it is clear that the Cabinet Member is within her rights to set-up such a group as FRAG and to use it within this context.
9. FRAG was set-up via a Cabinet Member decision in April 2010 and as an advisory group does not have a specific constitutional position as it has no powers or functions it can operate more informally.
10. **Membership and appointment of FRAG**

The Select Committee was also interested in the membership of FRAG. It was noted that membership had recently changed within FRAG, due to two members having been replaced. The Select Committee was keen that any changes of membership of FRAG should be shared with the Select Committee in a timely manner, as this change was only noted during the Select Committee’s evidence taking on 12 July.
11. **Duplication and the sharing of information**

The Select Committee was keen that information from FRAG was shared with Committee members. Similarly, the Committee also asked that any changes to FRAG’s terms of reference would be shared. The aim of sharing this information would be the outcome that members will have a more rounded understanding of the working of FRAG. The Select Committee therefore asked that there was a stronger link between FRAG and the Select Committee and agendas and report papers were requested to be shared.
12. The Select Committee was particularly concerned that the work of its Member Reference Group appeared to duplicate the work of FRAG because both bodies were focusing on the Public Safety Plan. Therefore that the Member Reference Group ceases and that the Select Committee undertakes future scrutiny on the implementation of the plan on a direct basis.

Conclusion and Recommendations

13. **Conclusion**

The Select Committee recognises the value that advisory groups can have for aiding Cabinet Members; however, due to its concerns over duplication with FRAG, the following recommendations are presented to the Select Committee:

14. Recommendations for the Select Committee

The Select Committee is asked to consider the following recommendations:

- i. That the Cabinet Member for Community Safety is requested to share the following information regarding FRAG on a regular basis:
 - a. Any changes of membership
 - b. All report papers for meetings
 - c. Any significant changes such as changes of terms of reference
- ii. That due to the elements of duplication between the Members' Reference Group and FRAG in terms of both focusing on the Public Safety Plan and surrounding issues of this Plan, it is recommended that the Members' Reference Group ceases and issues on progress and implementation of the Public Safety Plan are directed to the Select Committee on a periodic basis for scrutiny.
- iii. That this report be presented to the Select Committee Chairman's Group for information and any comments.

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