



House of Commons

ODPM: Housing, Planning,
Local Government and the
Regions Committee

The Fire and Rescue Service

Draft Volume of Written Evidence: Volume 1 (Memoranda FRS 01 to FRS 30)

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Memorandum by Helen Mason (FRS 01)

I would like to comment on Regional Fire Control Centres.

Background: I have 22 years experience of working in a large County Fire Brigade control room. I have seen many technological changes throughout my career and have worked at all levels within the Control room, and in other parts of the Fire Service. I have managed a Control room watch for over 10 years, and am currently the Officer in Charge of Essex Fire Control room on a temporary basis. I am highly qualified in Management- I have the post graduate Certificate in Management, Diploma in Management and am currently completing a Master of Arts in Management. I come from a Fire Brigade Family. My father was an Assistant Chief Fire Officer, my brother is an Assistant Divisional Officer and my husband is a Firefighter.

My fears for the public are:

1. Using a computerised system for such a large area:

I believe that, no matter how advanced the technology is, the actual call handling time for a person who is trapped in a house fire will be longer than the current 40 to 60 seconds. This is because today's systems are simple, and require only enough questions to locate on a local level. A system for 5 or more Counties will have to involve asking further questions about locations, to avoid mistaking same name villages in such a large area. Alternatively it will involve checking the location on a map in order to be able to select the appropriate fire appliances. Ultimately, someone will not get a Fire Appliance sent to them in time, using a more complex system, because the operator will have to spend more time trying to match the address. I have kept a person alive whilst trapped in a fire until fire crews arrived. I know that every second counts, as this particular person was rescued just in time.

To illustrate this point, why not investigate call handling times for Police and Ambulance services, who use these more complicated systems, and compare them to current Fire Service times.

2) Every day occurrences

The new systems are designed for coping with a terrorist attack. (How many of these have there been in the UK in the last 5 years?) This is at the expense of every day incidents.

Consider the rush hour in Britain.

9 controls with, say, 10 fire call handlers each = 90 control staff taking calls in the UK at any one time.

When a car catches fire at rush hour time, it is not unusual to receive 50 to 60 calls for this one incident. (Due to mobile telephones) This means that if there are 2 incidents on motorways, during the rush hour, somewhere in Britain, every call handler in the Country will be tied up and the callers will be stuck in a loop between the 9 fire control rooms.

(Currently there would be 3 times this amount of call takers available in the UK) What would happen to the person stuck in a burning building at this time? How will their call be answered as quickly as today?

3) Covering adjacent RCCS in spare conditions.

If I have to take a call for London, which has been diverted to East of England due to London being busy, how do I get the call back to London? I will either have to get back in the same queue and end up being diverted back to one of my own colleagues, or the mobilising system would have to cover the whole country. If this is the case, how would I keep track of my own appliances, if other RCCs start turning them out to incidents, without me knowing. I might have been planning a strategic relief of 5 appliances to a large incident at this point. I believe that this will happen every rush hour of every day, throughout the summer if it is a long hot period of weather, every time there is a thunder storm, and every bonfire night. We are being told that this would be for exceptional circumstances. I do not agree.

4) Knowledge.

Currently our staff have 2 years of study in order to learn in excess of 150 special procedures relevant to our County. These include Stansted Airport, BP refinery, Bramble Island Works, major foam attack policy, major incident policy, etc.

We have to learn about equipment, where it is held, what it is used for, how a fire ground works and command and control.

We are told that this will not be an issue in the new RCCs because the computer system will do everything for us. However, they cannot tell us which computer system this is, how it will be kept up to date, and how we provide a decent level of service if and when the computer crashes (which it will at some point) Currently, if our computer crashes, we can work with pen and paper and our comprehensive knowledge of our Country ensures that we continue to provide an excellent service to the public. What will happen in the RCC if the background knowledge of every high risk premise is not there? (It would not be as there would be far to many premises to learn about for such a large area)

(Concerning the Regional Fire Control Centres and diversity in the Fire and Rescue Service -)

As far as I am aware there are only 9 staff out of approximately 120 in the Eastern Region who are even willing to consider working in the new RCCs. This is because the Change Management team have not been able to get the "buy in" from Control staff and the majority want no part of it.

Bearing in mind that Control is by far the largest area within the Uniformed Fire Service, where women are employed, how is losing all of these people going to help improve the number of women in the Fire Service?

It's ironic that Control have been used to achieve the modernisation of the Fire Service when it is the very department which attracts women to the Uniformed Fire Service!

My biggest fear is that none of the excellent Fire Control room staff that we have in this Country, will want to have any part in these dangerous plans. If we lose these staff, (and we have already lost some in our County) their vital experience and local knowledge will be lost. This will be to the detriment to the Public, Firefighters and other

emergency services. Every Fire Service performance indicator will suffer, from the number of fire deaths, to turn out times for appliances.

I believe that the current 48 Control rooms should be interlinked and that investment should be made to make them safe from terrorism and upgrade their technology where needed. This would address the worries about our new world, whilst ensuring the local service, which is used for the vast majority of the time, is not compromised.

Finally, if I was a terrorist and wanted to paralyse the UK, how much easier would it be to take out 9 controls than 48???

Please remember that fire engines do not arrive at fires unless Fire Control get their job right (which they currently do exceptionally well)

Supplementary Memorandum by Helen Mason (FRS 01(a))

Regarding regional fire controls :

We have been told that the reason for cutting 48 fire controls down to 9 is due to the terrorist threat. We were told that the new RCCs would be secure premises , safe from terrorist attack. Why then, are they all going to be built on business parks? What controls will there be over which businesses set up adjacent to the premises? How will we stop a car bomb being parked up on a business park? How can this be resilient? The initial criteria indicated that the RCCs would be out in a place where they can be completely secure, yet every one is a glass building on a business park. This is not what we were told was going to happen.

Memorandum by David J H Smith (FRS 02)

I write to express my strong objections to the proposal to move the Gloucestershire Fire Service call centre to Somerset.

Firstly, the creation of the fire service centre at Quedgely only last year resulted directly from a Government initiative. To relocate the fire service call centre would be an inexcusable waste of public money.

Secondly, it is beyond doubt that the risk of misdirecting appliances is significantly higher the further away the call centre is located. Your Committee may already be aware (but if not please tell them) of the tragic incident in Cambridgeshire earlier this year when there was a road traffic accident at Croydon roundabout. The out-county call centre directed the fire service to the London Borough of Croydon so that 80 minutes elapsed from the call to the arrival of the emergency services at the scene by which time the victim had died. Had they not been misdirected he might have survived. Speed of response is crucial in an emergency and the proposed relocation of the Gloucestershire Fire Service call centre will jeopardise this.

Please report my objections to your committee.

Yours faithfully

David Smith

Memorandum by Mrs Jennifer Kissel (FRS 03)

New Inquiry – Fire and Rescue Service

1.a. So far as citizens in Gloucestershire are concerned I believe the introduction of a Regional Control Centre away from its present new tri-centre would be detrimental because the Fire and Rescue Service is already operating with the other emergency services from this building. To move Gloucestershire to Taunton will slow down many responses. In particular, in the countryside local knowledge can be invaluable in ascertaining and identifying the whereabouts of a caller in shock seeking assistance and this knowledge will be lost if the control centre is moved to Taunton.

1.b. I believe the contract for the FireLink radio service has already been awarded. However, if the service works from day one and links all services it will be an improvement.

2. No comment.

3. Joint working between all emergency services throughout the United Kingdom should be encouraged.

Thank you for advising me of the inquiry.

Yours faithfully

Jennifer Kissel (Mrs)

Memorandum by VectorCommand Ltd (FRS 04)

1. Introduction

VectorCommand Ltd is the single largest provider of Incident Command training technology to the UK Fire Services through its Vector Tactical Trainer product that is in use with 43 of the UK's Fire Services. Its simulation products are recognized and acknowledged for their ability to develop, mentor and provide simulated environments for assessment of individuals or groups that require validation appropriate to an incident command structure.

2. Multi-agency Training for Civil Resilience

As a result of the recent changes the new roles and responsibilities of the Fire and Rescue Services has given them a far greater involvement in the response to civil disasters. This requires a far greater degree of integrated emergency management and a clear incident command structure (ICS) for the responding agencies. This can only be achieved by a far higher standard of exercising by all the partners in Local Resilience Forums and a clearer definition of a National Incident Management Structure into which they all fit for an integrated response.

3. Local Resilience Forum Training & Exercise programmes

Some Fire Services have recognised the need for a coordinated Training and Exercise Programme for their Local Resilience Forums (LRF's) and have taken a lead in developing an exercising capability that raises the standard of such training and preparation in the UK. The agencies that make up the LRF's have statutory requirements under the Control of Major Accident Hazards Regulations (COMAH) and the Radiation Emergency Planning (and Public Information) Regulations (REPPPIR) to regularly exercise plans specific to risk sites. Additionally they now have a requirement to test their plans under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. The lead being taken by some Fire Services in creating a capability to meet these statutory requirements should be encouraged and held up as best practice to all Fire Services. This will continue to establish the Fire Service as a lead agency in the LRF's and as the UK's leading emergency service in training to established standards.

4. Incident Command System (ICS) and a National Incident Management Structure

The Fire Services development and implementation of ICS should be considered as a model for all Category 1 Responders defined within the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and should form the basis of a National Incident Management Structure for the UK. Only when this has been established can true standards for training and response be put in place by which to guide the development of integrated emergency management across all the 'responder' agencies.

Memorandum by Lancashire Combined Fire Authority (FRS 05)

1. REGIONAL CONTROLS AND FIRELINK

Lancashire Combined Fire Authority acknowledges that there is a clear requirement within the National Framework to deliver the transition to Regional Control Centres. There are genuine concerns over several aspects of the project detailed below. The Authority believe that improving clarity in these areas would improve the potential to work with Government to secure the promised improvements to service delivery. These areas are:

Costs

There is a clear need to demonstrate that this project represents value for money for the people in Lancashire. The business case has so far been based nationally, with indications that the larger existing control centres predominating in the North West will be advantaged less. Lancashire Combined Fire Authority would benefit from clarity and reassurance on when it will be provided with evidence that efficiency savings will offset the resources and time committed to the project since inception. There are indications that additional costs incurred will only be covered by 'new burdens' once they have been offset against any benefits that may be accrued. If this were to be the case, surely these benefits cannot then be used to justify the viability of the Project.

Human Resources

The Authority believes in a high level of commitment to its staff and recognises the continuing high level of service and professionalism demonstrated by them during a period of great uncertainty. The National Project has been slow to determine several key issues to allow progress with the Human Resources issues essential to support our staff through this difficult transition. The Authority would urge further progress on selection, terms and conditions, pay, relocation expenses and redundancy. It is recognised that many of these issues are linked to the new governance model for regional control centres.

Timescales/Quality Control

There have been several examples of slippage in the project so far. It is difficult to reassure the public and staff that the proposed improvements to efficiency and effectiveness will be delivered when delays have been a feature of the FiReControl Project to date. The project would benefit from being more explicit on the guaranteed improvements that will be delivered and guarantees that these will not be sacrificed if the project faces financial pressures as it approaches completion. The project would also benefit from ensuring that robust commissioning testing arrangements for the technical solutions are put in place given the crucial role of mobilising in service delivery.

Firelink

Lancashire Combined Fire Authority is one of only two Fire and Rescue Services already using the same infrastructure that is being proposed by Firelink. As our provider is now the Firelink preferred supplier, the Authority is in a unique position to continue to support the National Project. With matured voice and data capability now working effectively, the Authority's main concern is that our market leading technology may be temporarily lost due to inflexible implementation arrangements. It would be helpful if the national project would provide reassurances that this change will not provide a poorer service than that which is currently in place and that transition arrangements will be flexible enough to recognise our unique position.

2. FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE REFORM

Diversity

Lancashire Combined Fire Authority has fully embraced the Fire and Rescue Service reform agenda and has, by way of its Integrated Risk Management Planning process, placed significant additional resources into its prevention and protection services, facilitated by the release of resources from its emergency response service. To assist in the above process, whilst minimising disruption to existing staff, the Authority has had and still has in place a freeze on the recruitment of wholetime operational firefighters. The effect of this is that the Authority has been unable to make any real impact with respect to increasing diversity among its operational workforce. It is worth noting, however, that in increasing its prevention and protection capability through the employment of non-operational uniformed Community Fire Safety advocates, the Authority has successfully recruited a significant number of staff from under-represented groups, i.e. women and black & minority ethnic community members.

In light of the above, the Authority believes that the current diversity targets should not be restricted to uniformed operational staff but should be expanded to include all uniformed staff engaged in service delivery, whether those staff fulfil an operational role or not.

Institutional Reform

The Authority notes the Government's current position regarding progress in the area of institutional reform. With regard to national consultation and negotiation arrangements (as outlined in the 2003 Pay and Conditions Agreement), however, the Authority wishes to urge the Government to set a final date for new arrangements to be in place, following which it is the Authority's view that the Government should impose a solution, if no negotiated outcome is forthcoming.

3. WORKING WITH OTHER EMERGENCY SERVICES

With regard to joint working with other emergency services, the Authority prides itself on the effectiveness of those arrangements in Lancashire. Within a regional context, Lancashire Combined Fire Authority has been a proactive and committed partner in the North West Fire and Rescue Management Board which, it believes, has progressed effectively regional collaborative issues as outlined in the National Fire and Rescue Service Framework.

Whilst the Authority notes the Government's recent statement regarding Fire and Rescue Services in a regional context, the Authority is aware of on-going consultation in relation to the restructuring of other emergency services. The Authority therefore requests that the Government provides further clarity as to how those other restructures will impact on Fire and Rescue Services.

Memorandum by the North West Fire and Rescue Management Board (FRS 06)

REGIONAL CONTROLS AND FIRELINK

The North West Fire and Rescue Management Board acknowledges that there is a clear requirement within the National Framework to deliver the transition to Regional Control Centres. There are genuine concerns over several aspects of the project detailed below. The Authority believe that improving clarity in these areas would improve the potential to work with Government to secure the promised improvements to service delivery. These areas are:

Governance and Procurement

The draft national framework identifies that governance arrangements for the RCC will be in place by Spring 2006. The new entity would then enter into a contract for mobilising services with each FRS. Current guidance indicates that there is an issue as to whether European Directives will require a tendering process with a mandate to select the cheapest or the most economically advantageous option. If this is the case and Authorities proceed without a tendering exercise, the decision to contract with the RCC would be capable of being challenged with unacceptable delays being potentially introduced from even anonymous sources. Leading views would indicate that these problems may not be easily resolved. The North West is seeking to raise awareness to support the transition to RCCs by ensuring these issues receive early consideration and options for the resolution of such issues are identified..

Costs

There is a clear need to demonstrate that this project represents value for money for people in the North West. The business case has so far been based nationally, with indications that the larger existing control centres predominating in the North West will be advantaged less. The North West Fire and Rescue Management Board would benefit from having clarity and reassurance on when it will be provided with evidence that efficiency savings will offset the resources and time committed to the project since inception. There are indications that additional costs incurred will only be covered by 'new burdens' once they have been offset against any benefits that may be accrued. If this were to be the case surely these benefits cannot then be used to justify the viability of the Project.

The RCC Finance Working Group has been well supported by the North West. Recent developments would indicate that 'value engineering' is varying the original specification, reducing the cost to the central project. The North West is concerned over clarity regarding the costs and rationale for these changes. Fundamental questions on project governance are raised when the ODPM make changes to a technical specification that they have previously deemed essential without consultation with Fire and Rescue Authorities or their representatives. If an item such as compliance with the Critical National

Infrastructure is removed, then the potential exists that the remaining facility may be over specified and the leaseholder (and ultimately Fire and Rescue Authorities) left paying for functionality or resilience that is unnecessary. There is currently no independent scrutiny of the rationale and detail over how the cost savings for the ODPM are determined. These decisions ultimately affect the management of risk for the new RCC. To secure robust arrangements the North West would also urge early consideration of insurance arrangements for the new RCCs. An apparent saving on building costs may not even offset the increased potential insurance costs making it impossible to view these issues in isolation.

Human Resources

The North West Fire and Rescue Management Board has a high level of commitment to all the constituent Authorities staff. The National Project has been slow to determine several key issues to allow progress with the Human Resources issues essential to support our staff through this difficult transition. The Board urges early progress on selection, terms and conditions, pay, relocation expenses and redundancy. It is recognised that many of these issues are linked to the new governance model for regional control centres. However management and staff are becoming increasingly frustrated at the lack of progress in these areas.

Timescales/Quality

There have been several examples of slippage in the project so far. It is difficult to reassure the public and staff that the proposed improvements to efficiency and effectiveness will be delivered when delays have been a feature of the FiReControl Project to date. The project would benefit from being more explicit on the guaranteed improvements that will be delivered and guarantees that these will not be sacrificed if the project faces financial pressures as it approaches completion. The project would also benefit by ensuring that robust commissioning and testing arrangements for the technical solutions are put in place given the crucial role of mobilising in service delivery.

FIRELINK

North West Fire and Rescue Authorities are becoming increasingly concerned with the proposed interim solution regarding feasibility and possible loss of functionality during the period involved. If problems are experienced with the first tranche of RCCs there is every potential that the second tranche which includes the North West will be delayed. This could result in the interim solution with its temporary loss of functionality being extended to six months or over. We would urge early consideration of this issue to ensure that essential response standards are not compromised. As this could be mission critical particularly during a terrorist attack this requires urgent attention.

DIVERSITY

All North West Fire and Rescue Authorities have fully embraced the Fire and Rescue Service reform agenda and have through their Integrated Risk Management Planning process, placed significant additional resources into prevention and protection services, facilitated by the release of resources from emergency response service. There has been a significant reduction in the recruitment of wholetime operational firefighters as a direct result. The effect of this is that Authorities have been unable to make any real impact with respect to increasing diversity among its operational workforce. It is worth noting, however, that by increasing prevention and protection capability through the employment of non-operational uniformed Community Fire Safety staff, Authorities have successfully recruited a significant number from under-represented groups, i.e. women and black & minority ethnic community members.

In light of the above, it would make sense for the current diversity targets not to be restricted to uniformed operational staff but should be expanded to include all uniformed staff engaged in service delivery, whether those staff fulfil an operational role or not. As the goal is for the Service to reflect the communities we serve the visual perspective is a fundamentally important one. Therefore seeing more Fire and Rescue Service staff from under represented groups out and about in the community will help achieve that objective.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

The Board notes the Government's current position regarding progress in the area of institutional reform. With regard to national consultation and negotiation arrangements (as outlined in the 2003 Pay and Conditions Agreement), however, the Board wishes to urge the Government to set a final date for new arrangements to be in place, following which the Government should impose a solution, if no negotiated outcome is forthcoming.

WORKING WITH OTHER EMERGENCY SERVICES

In the North West the arrangements with the two other blue light emergency services are very effective particularly for operational responses. The NW resilience plans are robust as a result of effective Major Incident Planning Committees in all Authorities.

The Board notes the Government's recent statement regarding Fire and Rescue Services in a regional context. However the Board is aware of on-going consultation in relation to the restructuring of other emergency services. The Board therefore requests that the Government provides further clarity as to how those other restructures will impact on Fire and Rescue Services as it is necessary to have close co-operation plans in place with other emergency services and this re-organisation is a potential threat to effective joint working. There is clear evidence of the three Services working better together in such areas currently.

There is also a great deal of evidence of effective joint working on Community Safety agendas across the North West which could potentially be jeopardised especially in the area of successful youth engagement with disaffected/disadvantaged youngsters.

Memorandum by Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Authority (GFRA) (FRS 07)

GLOUCESTERSHIRE TRI SERVICE CONTROL CENTRE: THE CASE FOR RETENTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In August 2005 the Government announced that from 2009, the location for the South West Regional Control Centre would be Taunton. This decision involves the dismantling of the Gloucestershire TriService model and entails relocating the County's Fire and Rescue Control room, strategically placed in Gloucester, to an area miles away from Gloucestershire.

Gloucestershire has the UK's only fully operational TriService centre. At the heart of the centre is the joint control room, with fire, police and ambulance personnel sitting side by side, working effectively together, delivering an excellent quality of service to the people of Gloucestershire. The Fire and Rescue Service Best Value Review of Command and Control (2001) concluded that **a shared emergency control delivered the highest level of service and was the most cost effective.**

The decision to sweep away this excellent model of joined up working means that an acknowledged best practice model, which fulfils the 'ultimate solution' of the Mott Macdonald (2000 and 2003) recommendations, will be lost. It also contradicts the Government's stated assurance that regional government will only be introduced where local people want it.

It appears that in reaching the decision for basing the regional control centre at Taunton, the Government has not taken account of the above facts which, together with the following issues, the Committee is urged to consider:

SUMMARY KEY POINTS FOR RETAINING THE TRISERVICE:

1. TriService

- continues to be at the cutting edge of Fire and Rescue service modernisation since its official opening in May 2003
- clearly works well, as confirmed by the Audit Commission Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) July 2005
- has capacity to evolve and embrace technological advancement
- meets the needs of Gloucestershire - the people of Gloucestershire want to retain this local service for local people
- has all party support from the County Council for the retention of the TriService

2. TriService is widely praised as a model of best practice

- by other emergency services, government agencies and the Audit Commission. Importantly it complies with the Mott MacDonald reports 2002 & 2003 as being the 'ultimate solution.'

3. TriService can be preserved within a regional control framework

There are clear opportunities and sound evidence to retain and incorporate the TriService within a regional control structure.

The framework should recognise the importance of not losing something that provides the best services for local people

4. TriService is delivering

- a multi agency approach for safer and stronger communities
- improved resilience and ability to link up with national or regional infrastructures
- multi agency command facilities with maximum operational flexibility
- proven improvement in quality of response to emergency incidents
- rapid information sharing
- the needs of the Civil Contingencies Act

5. TriService is unique and meets the needs of a large urban and rural county

- All emergency services are combined at one location
- Gloucestershire is predominantly rural; local knowledge and local relationships are critical to successful rapid response
- Senior officers are able to reach major incidents anywhere in the county within one hour
- The Service has a high dependency on retained firefighters
- Local people want to retain this local service

6. TriService is making Gloucestershire a safer place

Excellence depends upon high quality, motivated staff, who know their patch and work as a team for the benefit of their local community; their value is immeasurable. The service:

- is staffed by local people, working effectively side by side with the other agencies
- facilitates instant communication with the crews who actually deal with the incidents, particularly retained persons
- has built solid relationships with the crews called out to deal with incidents.
- uses modern technology, so far as it has been available, to help deliver an excellent emergency response
- is locally accountable to local people and local councillors who understand the issues relevant for Gloucestershire, for example flooding

7. TriService is cost effective

- The Audit Commission confirms that this project is delivering value for money.
- All partners and the people of Gloucestershire have gained enormous benefits from this co-location and working
- Reduced 'over-mobilising' to incidents
- Greater understanding of issues has enabled the continuous pursuit of improvement through shared incident performance monitoring
- Joint procurement efficiencies achieved in areas such as facilities' management

- Has lead to a single workshop with the other emergency services and other shared initiatives (e.g. Arson analyst)
- Closing the Tri-Service Centre would mean that £6m of public money would have gone to waste.

MEMORANDUM FROM GLOUCESTERSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY (GFRA)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Authority (GFRA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the debate about the future direction of the Fire and Rescue service and in particular, wishes to make its case in the strongest terms for retention of the county's TriService control. The people of Gloucestershire are extremely disappointed that, despite the service's track record and the Government's own support for the development of TriService only a short time ago, the county is now facing the loss of this excellent facility.

1.2 We invite members to visit the centre to see the service in action and to further discuss our submission, as we feel that witnessing the service on the ground is more effective than telephone, email or letter. Despite several requests the ministers responsible for Fire and Rescue have always declined our request to visit the TriService.

In addition we would, of course, be pleased to attend a Commission meeting in support of our submission.

2. THE MOTT MACDONALD REPORT – THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION

2.1 Even before the TriService centre was built, the 2000 Mott MacDonald report into 'The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales' had concluded:

'The pilot projects in Cleveland, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire should continue to be strongly supported and encouraged. The lessons learned from these pilots have already proved useful and have informed this study. More will be learnt as these projects are implemented. They will provide an invaluable input to future control room strategy. A major finding...was that working together on control room aspects triggered greater co-operation in a range of other areas.'

2.2 The Mott MacDonald report of 2003 reflected the shift of emphasis towards the need for resilience.

The report recommended:

- a medium to long term plan that considered the integration of TriService into regional arrangements 'at a future point'.

- Mott MacDonald said this could be achieved, if considered appropriate, by using the Invest to Save pilots including Gloucestershire as the control room for the region in which it is located.

Now is the time to take forward the recommendations of this report and not lose this excellent service for the people of Gloucestershire.

- TriService is a prime example of acknowledged best practice in action.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Authority (GFRA) has embraced, and been at the forefront of, the modernisation programme for some time.

The TriService concept was borne from a corporate commitment to safety and partnership working, together with the Government's support for its development, complemented by 'Invest to Save' funding. A successful bid for funding resulted in an award of £2.6million in May 1999. The total cost of the project was £6.4million.

3.2 The TriService objectives were:

- to provide an improved emergency response
- to reduce costs and increase efficiency.
- In addition, our stated aims included 'the provision of a more secure, resilient and better-designed control centre than any one service could afford separately'.

3.3 The centre was officially opened in May 2003 on a purpose built site just off the A38 outside Gloucester, in a highly accessible location. It incorporates fire, police and ambulance joint control, ambulance patient transport, and police non-emergency 0845 response teams. Fire and ambulance headquarters are accommodated on separate floors in the same building and a new police headquarters has just been opened next door.

TriService vehicle workshops were opened on the same site in March 2004.

All emergency service partners remain committed to the TriService.

3.4 The Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), published in July this year confirmed that:

'The Authority is effectively contributing to national and regional agendas.

The County Council's three-year Public Sector Agreement (PSA) target to reduce casualties from accidental fires in homes is being met.

This target is challenging and is a reduction from 9.03 in 2002/04 to 6.88, per 100,000 population, in 2004/05.

Progress with the National Framework's six priority areas is being made

with effective engagement with the Regional Management Board (RMB).

The Authority has detailed plans for large scale emergencies, has clear regional HR policies, a regional approach to training, and effective regional procurement.

As a consequence, the Authority is in a better position to deal with emergencies and achievement is being reflected in meeting the PSA target.'

4. MAKING THE COUNTY SAFER AND STRONGER

- The value of the TriService

4.1 The Fire and Rescue Service has an integrated multi-agency approach in all aspects of its service and is closely linked to all Community Safety work across the County Council. Making Gloucestershire safer is a prime objective for the County Council and GFRA works closely with a number of agencies to help achieve it. As well as being rated a 'good' service, the linkages between the Fire and Rescue service and the County Council were highlighted as a strength in the CPA assessment earlier this year. TriService is clearly making Gloucestershire safer, so the conclusion can only be that dismantling it will have the opposite effect.

4.2 The value of the TriService can be clearly demonstrated through

- improved quality of response
- added value benefits such as closer working on road traffic accidents
- non emergency collaboration
- education and training opportunities
- overall cost and quality effectiveness and efficiency savings.

4.3 TriService partnership working has directly stimulated initiatives, such as:

- the Arson Task Force
- Crime and Disorder Partnership
- Major Incident Co-ordinating Group and
- the Multi Agency Information Database for Neighbourhoods (MAIDeN).

4.4 A process has been launched to procure a **joint service Geographical Information System (GIS)**, to further improve information sharing between the emergency services in Gloucestershire, particularly on high risk premises.

4.5 The objective of a shared service mobilising platform has had to be deferred, brought about by the uncertainty caused surrounding regional control.

5. TRISERVICE IMPACT

5.1 In January this year, the Audit Commission published a report on the TriService highlighting its many strengths, particularly 'high profile leadership, and a strong, well articulated business case'. In simple terms, **this project is viewed as national best practice.**

5.2 This Service has only been up and running for 30 months since its official opening but in this short time has

- become universally acknowledged as a model of best practice and a benchmark for excellence for emergency response
- made a real difference through innovation.

5.3 The Fire and Rescue CPA assessment for Gloucestershire noted that

'There has been notable achievement against its high-level strategic objectives including the new TriService Centre...'

The authority achieved a 'good' rating.

5.4 The Audit Commission conducted a pay verification assessment in Gloucestershire, stating that:

'the authority demonstrates good practice in partnership with others in tangible achievements such as the TriService Centre.'

5.5 Other commendations include:

The Rt. Hon Ian McCartney MP who, on a visit to TriService, said that he was

'very impressed with the facility and the attitude of staff...strong partnership ethos to deliver services through the operational advantage of working together...isn't this what we have been asking fire services to do?'

5.6 The Local Government Association:

TriService is 'a highly intelligent and cost effective approach, which the LGA Executive supports in preference to the idea of a single fire control room in each of the English regions'.

5.7 The Chief Fire Officers' Association also noted the Gloucestershire difference.

'We must work to develop an effective way of bringing Gloucestershire into the strategy,' they said, in considering regional control.

6. CONCLUSION: DON'T LOSE THIS BENCHMARK OF EXCELLENCE

6.1 We request that members of the Commission consider the known and potential benefits of retaining the TriService as contained in this report. It will be a sad day if this benchmark of excellence is allowed to die simply for the sake of uniformity, especially when there are clear opportunities to incorporate TriService within a regional control structure – the best of both worlds.

6.2 Delivering an effective emergency response is one of the key factors in the TriService' success – something that will be lost forever if current plans for regional control for the south west are affirmed.

6.3 If the driving force for change is the need for resilience, then Gloucestershire can demonstrate that TriService is the way forward. It provides an excellent platform on which to build and progress command and control to deliver the ultimate solution for national resilience, as set out in the Mott MacDonald report.

6.4 Retaining TriService as a stand alone centre will obviously generate extra links within the control room network, increasing nodes from 36 to a potential 55.

6.5 These points are made based on the experience of our dedicated team of control staff, fire-fighters, support staff, and the people of Gloucestershire – we urge you 'Please don't dismantle a winning team.'

7. TRISERVICE FACTS AND FIGURES

7.1 Staffing

Gloucestershire's fire and emergency response is provided by 285 retained firefighters, 233 whole-time firefighters, 16 fire control and 63 support staff operating out of 20 community Fire and Rescue stations, which are managed from the TriService (Police, Fire and Ambulance) headquarters situated just outside Gloucester.

7.2 Fleet assets

Four of the stations are staffed by whole-time crews.

The fleet consists of 33 frontline emergency fire appliances, a range of specialist rescue and operational support vehicles. These include 2 aerial appliances, three special rescue units, and two rescue boats together with other specialist Fire and Rescue equipment.

7.3 Response statistics

In 2003/04, the Fire Authority responded to 8,691 Fire and Rescue incidents and attended 1,873 primary fires, 1,802 secondary fires and 1,607 special service calls.

7.4 Budget

The operational revenue budget for 2003/04 was £18.6 million reducing to £18.2 million in 2004/05 (including fire service pensions).

Capital expenditure was £1.54 million in 2003/04, (including expenditure in TriService Centre) but reduced to £50,000 in 2004/05.

8. FINALLY

8.1 We welcome the opportunity to state our case and to have the merits of our argument heard and discussed fairly.

- The GFRA recognises the need for change but that **this can and should include the retention of the TriService.**
- We have in many areas been leading that change within Gloucestershire's Fire and Rescue services.
- We welcome the process of modernisation
- It would be a sad irony if the drive towards regionalisation of control centres led to the demise of an emergency control service that is leading the way.

8.2 A tremendous amount of support and concern from all parts of the community have underpinned these efforts to fight for something in which the service passionately believes. This support has come from:

- local people
- local MPs of all political parties
- County and District Councillors of all political parties
- the skilled and dedicated TriService staff who have done so much to make the concept work, and work well.
- the local media.

9. SOURCES OF REFERENCE

- a) The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales: Mott MacDonald 2000 Management Summary....p7
- b) Mott MacDonald 2000 final report ...p126
- c) Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service Best Value Review of Control and Communications, March 2001: Summary, p27
- d) Post evaluation of Joint Emergency Communication Centre Project, Audit Commission January 2005-12-07
- e) The Future of the Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales: Mott MacDonald 2003, p 53 and p55
- f) Letter from Ian McCartney MP to Nick Raynsford MP, 30 October 2003
- g) CFOA Press Statement 24 March 2004

h) Fire and Rescue Comprehensive Performance Assessment: Audit Commission
July 2005

Memorandum by McCartney Associates (FRS 08)

McCartney Associates was incorporated in 2003 and has been working within the Fire & Rescue Sector since December 2004. The Company Director, Andrew P McCartney, has over 10 years experience within the public sector the last five of which have been working at a corporate management team level involved in the modernisation agenda.

With extensive experience of strategic issues ranging from corporate governance, risk management, local strategic partnerships to working with the voluntary and business sector, McCartney Associates brings a wealth of knowledge and practical involvement to assist Fire & Rescue Service's to deliver the government's modernisation agenda.

This submission is intended to present an external perspective of how the Fire & Rescue Sector is responding to the modernisation agenda from a direct understanding of managing these changes. The comments made are not associated to any previous or existing clients of McCartney Associates and are done so in the capacity of a private individual, based upon his own experience and knowledge.

Successfully Getting from CPA to B: How Can the Government Stop the Scale and Pace of Modernisation Becoming the Reasons for its Failure?

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 If the pessimists are to be believed, the UK Fire and Rescue Service are in turmoil. For the last half century this traditional, pseudo-militaristic organisation has only been tasked with reacting to fires - dealing with whatever is thrown at it at the time (as best as it can) and, for the remainder, waiting for the next incident to happen. But as a result of the settlement that followed the national strikes in 2002-2003 and new global terrorist threats, individual Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA's) now have to ensure their services can effectively plan ahead, prevent emergencies as well as respond to them, engage in wider local and national government agendas, show robust governance frameworks and strong leadership as well as effectively managing their performance - whilst, at the same time, demonstrating value for money. In addition, all of this has to be achieved in double-quick time with a de-motivated workforce and the continuing opposition of wounded trade union. CPA and the National Framework Document are seen as tools introduced in order to keep this modernisation process on track.

1.2 From an external viewpoint, there is some truth in all of these statements, but this perspective is essentially myopic in nature. It is true that the Service is currently the subject of a fundamental change programme - not just relating to what it does, but also in respect to its culture and its core values. However, the modernisation agenda did not appear overnight and many FRA's have spent the last 20 years or more diversifying their services in order to respond more effectively to local needs, as well as establishing strong partnerships and in-house teams aimed at promoting prevention and community safety -

despite the lack of leadership, financial support and statutory provision from government. Furthermore, public satisfaction remains consistently high, even after the industrial action, which suggests the Service has successfully met the expectations of local communities over a long period – not something many other public sector organisations can boast. In fact, there are many examples of good and even best practice within the Fire and Rescue Service arena that other public sector organisations could greatly benefit from. However, a large amount of this innovative work may be sidelined or even hamstrung as individual services try to tackle the scale and pace of the modernisation agenda.

1.3 Therefore, this submission paper will focus on areas under the scrutiny of the Select Committee Inquiry that McCartney Associates believe are most likely to undermine sustainable progress in the overall modernisation agenda or even destabilise embedded practices due to a further deterioration in employee relations and a disengagement of managers with unrealistic and unachievable workloads.

1.4 Specifically, this paper will look at how the proposals to establish Regional Control Centres (RCC's) and institutional reform, including governance, may actually have a negative impact on service provision in the medium term. These issues will also be discussed in the context of the growing financial pressures on the public sector in general and whether the use of CPA is appropriate as an audit and improvement tool for a service at such a crucial stage in its transformation. It will also highlight the impact on joint working with other emergency services, which itself may have a knock-on effect in terms of local civil resilience arrangements. It will conclude by offering options to consider that may mitigate some of the potentially more destructive consequences of following such a wide-ranging and intensive change programme.

2. REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES (RCC'S)

2.1 Within the individual Fire & Rescue Services (FRS's) that McCartney Associates have been working with over the last 12 months, the issues surrounding the establishment of RCC's have proved to be some of the most contentious - both for the workforce, service management, FRA members and local communities. The apparent lack of transparency in the development of the business case by government, coupled with the anticipated additional financial burdens on the local taxpayer (needed to pay for the regional PFI contracts over the next 25-30 years) drives the opposition.

2.2 This perception is intensified by any lack of guarantees of improvements in services locally. In fact, some FRA's are now arguing that standards of service will actually get worse within a RCC set-up. This viewpoint is highlighted most prominently, for example, in organisations such as Gloucestershire Fire & Rescue Service (GFRS), where a major joint project with Gloucestershire Police and Ambulance Services has resulted in the creation of a local Tri-Service Control Centre and shared headquarters site (a venture recently assessed as a success by the Audit Commission outside of the CPA framework).

2.3 To add to the feelings of government incompetence in this matter (a view shared not only by the partner organisations but also the local communities) the county's daily newspaper is running a campaign to save the centre. For instance, it has highlighted the fact that the project was only made possible less than five years ago by a substantial 'Invest to Save' grant from the government. The conclusions drawn are that although Whitehall is demanding joined-up working from local emergency services, it is ignoring areas where good practice of inter-agency working and local resilience already exists and, in contrast, it is demonstrating its own inability to think and work in a joined-up manner.

2.4 The implications on citizens & individual FRS's are clear. Citizens feel they will receive a less effective local service when RCC's come on-line, but will end up paying more money for the privilege. They will blame the government for a dogmatic approach that lacks forward planning and apparently wastes cash – particularly where local service provision is already seen to be delivering the benefits of improved inter-agency working. As for FRS's, they are feeling pressurised to commit substantial resources to ensure the new systems work effectively, whilst at the same time, having to plan for the absorption the workloads from local control centres that lie outside of the project-scope for the RCC's - such as data collection for local and national statistical analysis and prevention-centred call handling services (e.g. abandoned car and home safety check schemes).

2.5 What is more, because the controversial issue of how much value should be attributed to maintaining a good working knowledge of local risks and local topography has never been adequately addressed by the government, the argument to maintain local control centres will continue to plague the project and put FRS's in the unenviable position of trying to reassure local communities that their everyday safety will not be compromised by the regional approach. And, all of this will have to be achieved in the face of national and local budget restrictions, brought about by the need to provide substantial "Gershon" savings.

2.6 Therefore, if the government wishes to mitigate these risks, but remain committed to RCC's, it must engage more proactively on a local level with stakeholders and communities, explaining in clear terms the benefits of the new systems and justifying any additional burdens on the local taxpayer – as this will not be done on its behalf by the FRA's.

2.7 And in order to focus this debate most effectively, the select committee has an opportunity once more to explore in detail the validity of the business case for RCC's, in the light of the additional financial burdens and local expectations now being realised by individual FRA's.

3. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

3.1 The government believe that the development of closer working relationships between FRS's on a regional level (besides RCC's) – in areas such as procurement, resilience, training, specialist services and human resource management – will improve the

effectiveness, efficiency and value for money of services in the medium term. In relation to procurement, it has also created a national procurement company (FireBuy Ltd), which it expects individual FRS's to use when procuring major service-specific items (Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006-2008, para 2.20, page 20). However, there are growing concerns within FRS's that this move towards more regional and national agendas is bringing with it additional responsibilities and financial burdens that it is expected to assimilate into its current structures and budgets.

3.2 For example, the cost of providing regional resilience hardware and its associated start-up training - such as for High Volume Pumps, Urban Search and Rescue equipment and Mass Decontamination facilities - is currently being funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). However, individual FRA's are not being guaranteed additional resources over the longer-term to maintain the competence of its workforce in these services - or to maintain and replace the equipment - despite the Emergency Order (due to come into force in Spring 2007) making such work a statutory duty of FRA's. Again, this needs to be put into the context of the financial pressures on all local authority services currently in relation to "Gershon" savings. *Will this mean FRS's having to reduce the provision of locally focused services in order to maintain its regional resilience capability?* This may be achievable in large urban and metropolitan FRS's, but in rural districts, where a considerable percentage of FRS emergency cover is already provided by firefighters working the retained duty system, the ability for FRS's to divert resources into other services is extremely limited and would also require a detailed case to be made which addresses any rural proofing issues.

3.3 On the issue of procurement in more general terms, the economies of scale brought about by regional and national working do not appear to be capable of delivering the savings first anticipated, because well-established relationships in certain areas are already achieving these cost-reductions. For example, the South West FRA's have been collaborating for some time on regional procurement issues, most recently in relation to its Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Breathing Apparatus (BA). In contrast, the national Integrated Clothing Project continues to run into legal and funding difficulties, despite its apparent endorsement by government (Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006-2008, para 2.19, page 20).

3.4 To add to these difficulties, other regional work streams (such as training, human resources and the provision of specialist services) appear to be adding layers of unnecessary bureaucracy into individual services, with only limited outcomes to date from the investment. This is compounded by the fact that the governance framework of Regional Management Boards (RMB's) does not have either the political, legal or the financial mandate to direct resources into these areas in order to drive forward implementation. Instead, this has to be achieved (with varying degrees of success) by consensus-driven politics and within the regional branches of the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA).

3.5 Therefore, if government wants regional working that delivers on its potential of improved effectiveness and efficiency, it should consider creating substantive

governance structures (as well as financial and legal mandates) that match its aspirations. The argument that this is not yet feasible for FRS's to regionalise is undermined by the enthusiasm with which government is currently looking to restructure Police and Ambulance Services onto a regional or sub-regional model. In fact, if FRS's continue to shuffle towards regionalisation it may be worse in the long-term, since the modernisation agenda will always suffer from 'moving goalpost' syndrome.

3.6 However, metropolitan and urban FRS's do not face the same pressures as rural FRS's and issues that impact on the flexibility to move local resources to match regional and national priorities, such as rural proofing, need to be appreciated by both the government and the select committee.

4. FINANCE

4.1 Significant change agendas inevitably use up resources before they start to save them, as organisations need to invest time and money in order to re-engineer their structures, services and workforce to meet the new demands and expectations being placed upon them. For example, when CPA was introduced into district councils back in March 2003, the rollout programme allowed, in some cases, over a year for individual organisations to prepare for inspection - preceded by a six-month consultation period. Moreover, CPA was introduced when district councils were seeing a growth in spending settlements, which assisted significantly in building the capacity they needed to kick-start and maintain their respective change programmes. As a result, a great deal of progress has been made in the delivery of many local authority services.

4.2 In contrast, in the run-up to Fire CPA, FRS's were given piecemeal guidance on the process and what to expect, some of which was even published after the inspection programme had already started. In other words, some FRS's did not know the rules of engagement or how to prepare for the assessment. The credibility of Fire CPA has been dented further since by the 'knee-jerk' appearance of Operational Assurance at the end of the first inspection programme.

4.3 More importantly, as a result of the first round of CPA, services are now faced with implementing significant changes and improvements to both their service provision and organisational culture against a backdrop of diminishing financial flexibility - as 'Gershon' savings totalling £105 million nationally are needed by 2007-2008 and the majority of investment following the industrial action has gone on firefighters' wages. Adding to these pressures is the possible longer-term impact of having to self-fund aspects of the national resilience programme from local budgets.

4.4 Overall, the scale of the modernisation agenda - compounded with the compressed timelines for implementation and the restrictions on finances - adds up to a cocktail of unsustainable pressures on the Service. In simple project management terms, cost,

quality and time need to be balanced if a desired and sustainable end-product is to be achieved.

4.5 McCartney Associates urges the government to reconsider its expectations of the Service over the medium and longer term – particularly in relation to its capacity to maintain and/or financially bolster national projects such as the resilience programme and FireBuy Ltd – unless it is prepared to deal with significant project failures. In fact, without the benefit of more resources to help build capacity, it could be argued that many FRS's will fail to meet the standards of the next round of CPA by default.

5. JOINT WORKING

5.1 McCartney Associates have seen strong evidence to demonstrate how effectively FRS's have engaged in joint working with other emergency services over a number of years, with numerous examples of good practice in relation to both project management, procurement and joint service delivery. For instance, the South West FRA's joint procurement initiative has rapidly extended beyond its collective purchasing power and currently takes advantage of national Police contracts, as well as offering other emergency services the option of using its contracts, where applicable.

5.2 Having said this, the concern now is that the modernisation agenda may actually subvert many of these relationships, as FRS's are forced into putting their limited managerial resources into regional projects, at the expense of local arrangements. For example, managers are being asked to commit to both local and regional projects teams – often working on the same subject matter at different speeds and with different priorities. A good illustration of this is the work of local and regional resilience forums, where issues such as business continuity management are being approached using different methods by the partner organisations at regional and local levels. This inevitably leads to a stalling of projects, as managers wait for aspects of the disparate work streams to coincide, in order to avoid duplication. And besides these elements of delay and confusion, local managers are being tasked with regional project work on an ad-hoc basis, on top of their local 'day-job', adding to the potential for project creep and even failure in relation to their own local priorities.

5.3 If this is put into the civil resilience context, together with the changes impacting on all three emergency services (Police, Fire and Ambulance), the outcome is a multi-layered, overlapping and out-of phase resilience structure between the services that makes it increasingly difficult to agree and implement workable local joint operational protocols.

5.4 In the absence of nationally agreed (and mutual supportive) governance and organisational structures for the emergency services, the government must take the lead in developing national risk assessments and operational protocols in relation to civil resilience operations – in order to override the difficulties of local variation and priorities. These must be embedded in practical experience and not the product of desktop analysis.

5.5 Furthermore, if the government wants to ensure uniformity in New Dimension service delivery, it must commit itself to funding and organising the long-term maintenance of skills and service provision across the country.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 The aim of this paper was to look at how the proposals to establish Regional Control Centres (RCC's) and institutional reform could have a negative impact on service provision. Issues relating to growing financial pressures and the appropriateness of using CPA during the early stages of a transformation process were also highlighted.

6.2 In order to mitigate the more destructive effects of these factors on established and new work streams, McCartney Associates make the following recommendation to the government and select committee:

- Regional Control Centres – the government should engage more proactively on a local level with stakeholders and communities, explaining the benefits of the new systems and justifying any additional burdens on the local taxpayer.
- Regional Control Centres - the select committee should question its support for RCC's and re-examine the government's business case, in light of the additional financial burdens and local expectations now being realised by individual FRA's.
- Regional Working - To achieve effectiveness and efficiency, the government should create governance, financial and legal structures to match its aspirations.
- Regional Working – The different pressures associated with operating in urban and rural environments, such as rural proofing, should be considered by the government and the select committee when assessing the relative flexibility of FRA's to move local resources to match regional and national priorities.
- Finances – the government should reassess the outcomes, scale and speed of its modernisation agenda, in order to confirm that the cost, quality and time factors are in balance to achieve sustainable and appropriate outcomes.
- 'Gershon' Savings – the government should tailor the next round of CPA to take into account the limited ability of FRA's to build capacity in a restricted resource environment.
- Civil Resilience – the government should develop national risk assessments and operational protocols to override the potential for local variation and priorities. These should be validated in practical terms not just theoretically.

- New Dimension Funding – the government should commit itself to funding and organising the long-term maintenance of skills and service provision across the country.

Memorandum by the Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service (FRS 09)

Introduction

In this submission, we have considered each of the aspects of the inquiry, as set out in the statement issued by your Committee requesting evidence. Some of the main issues we identified are set out below.

In Cheshire's view, the development of the FiReControl and FiReLink projects is seen as a positive development, from both a professional and public safety perspective. However, we would stress the need for better coordination of these two projects and would encourage the Government to treat these two issues as one. In addition to this, we also suggest that greater consideration be given to issue of hand-held or fireground communications, in the context of FiReLink and FiReControl.

The submission also indicates concern on the part of the Service and the Fire Authority of the narrow use of the concept of 'fire prevention' by the Committee, as well as parts of government and elsewhere at the national level. This narrow concept does not reflect the reality, potential and willingness of the Fire and Rescue Service to engage-in and tackle community needs and risks.

Finally, it is the view of both the Fire Authority and the Service in Cheshire that the positive approach to collaboration demonstrated at the regional level in the North West, and the resulting political goodwill, will be threatened by the continued reluctance of the government to clarify the role of local and regional structures, in relation to Fire and Rescue provision.

1 Cheshire Overview

1.1 Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service covers an area of over 233,401 hectares in the North West of England, incorporating the boroughs of Halton and Warrington and the County of Cheshire. The Service and its Combined Fire Authority oversee the provision of fire and rescue services to a population of 984,300, including 418,063 domestic and 30,716 non-domestic properties.

1.2 Cheshire Fire Authority forms part of the North West Regional Management Board (the Fire and Rescue Management Board) along with the Fire Authorities of Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Lancashire and Cumbria.

2 Context

2.1 Cheshire Fire Authority and Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service are widely seen as forward looking and the Authority recently achieved a 'Good' rating in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process. The Service has consistently shown that it is keen to embrace the changes and opportunities

presented through the modernisation agenda. This was demonstrated in autumn 2002, when the Service was visited by Professor Sir George Bain and his team as part of the evidence gathering phase of their inquiry into the state of the UK fire and rescue service. The team visited Cheshire because of its well developed community safety activities, and not, as was the case stated for several other authorities, the result of composition or structure. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has also previously submitted written and oral evidence to this Committee during a previous inquiry in 2003/04.

3 **Summary**

- 3.1 Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service greeted the recent announcement of the Minister, in relation to the introduction of Regional Control Centres, as a positive development both in terms of the impact on the local economy (the selected site lies within the Cheshire Fire Authority area) and from a public service perspective. It is felt that the new centre will improve resilience and service delivery within and between fire and rescue services, but also with other emergency services.
- 3.2 The Service also feels that the FireLink project presents an opportunity to develop a much more integrated means of communication that can only benefit the community and be more effective. However, we would express concern at the slow progress in assembling the FireControl project and the FireLink project into a single programme of change; given the vital requirement that both projects require a high level of interoperability and are implemented in a complementary way. We would also suggest that the Committee considers the issue of handheld or fireground communications. Previously these have not been truly considered as part of either project, being viewed as “out of scope”. We feel however, that this may cause communication problems in the future and pose a significant threat to resilience, particularly at the scene of major incidents where the need is greatest. The extent of this risk was demonstrated through the terrorist attacks on London in July 2005.
- 3.3 With regard to the second part of the Committee’s Inquiry, the Fire Service’s Act 2004 and the National Framework documents have enabled Cheshire to pursue many wider projects and work-streams than was possible under the constraints of the old 1947 Act; especially in the area of community risk reduction and partnership working. The Service has developed a number of innovative programmes designed to improve engagement with local communities and to emphasise the fire safety message. However, the Service expresses some concern at the narrow use of the concept of “fire prevention” that continues to hold sway in some areas of government and at the wider national level. This narrow concept does not reflect the reality or the true potential for the fire service nationally to develop its services to meet modern community needs and risks; for example the Service in Cheshire has recently led on an ambitious strategy to combat death and

injury on local roads, where we currently rescue three times as many people than from fires.

- 3.4 Cheshire would like to see government and national institutions adopt a more holistic concept of community safety (within the Local Area Agreement purview) in order for local fire services to have a genuine impact on reducing death and injury in their communities and also to give fire authorities the powers they require to support their partners in local government and nationally to achieve these aims.

4 Key Issues

4.1 FireControl

- 4.1.1 As outlined above, the announcement of the Minister with regard to the implementation of the FireControl project was greeted in Cheshire as a broadly positive development in two respects. Firstly, the location of the new site has been announced as Lingley Mere Business Park near Great Sankey in Warrington. This is seen as a good development for Cheshire as the site is within the Fire Authority area and there will be a positive impact on the local economy. Secondly, from a professional and public services perspective, the Service feels that the implementation of Regional Control Centres (RCC's) will provide a more resilient and responsive service to people across the North West. Additional staff and resources will ensure that calls are answered more quickly and there will be less danger of calls backing-up in the event of major or high profile incidents. The prevalence of mobile telephones means that even quite small incidents in high profile locations can result in a volume of
- 4.1.2 The Service and Authority also acknowledge public concern over the potential loss of local knowledge involved in setting up a new control centre in a new location. We believe however, that this will not be borne out in reality, as the enhanced technology supporting the centre will automatically identify the nearest available fire appliance, when a call is received. Modern GIS systems and mapping technology also means that locations are more easily and quickly determined than ever before, removing the need to rely on local knowledge. A more valid concern involves the political issues surrounding the implementation of such a high profile regional project and its implications for local accountability and for democratic control of the governing entity. A number of elected Members remain concerned at the dilution of local councillors' influence on key projects of this nature.
- 4.1.3 The Service and the Authority ask for a wider recognition of these concerns on the part of government and a more open approach with regard to their plans and ambitions for the roles of regions. It is also suggested that the role of the Regional Fire and Rescue Management Boards be further clarified, especially in the light of developments with the Police and Ambulance Services. Finally, we remain concerned with the funding arrangements and the business case for RCC's, both in

the short and long term and believe that the true cost of the resilience dimension of the project is not currently being fully recognised or acknowledged. These are real risks for the reputations of local fire authorities who retain responsibility if not control.

4.2 **FireLink**

- 4.2.1 Firstly, the Service strongly believes that this issue should not be considered in isolation from the implementation of regional control centres. Indeed, such is the level of interoperability between the two issues that the Service considers it vital that the projects be combined and their implementation be brought together in more coordinated way. The Service cites the sophistication of the technology involved in both projects and the level of integration required, as a concern in terms of ensuring effective resilience, both within the region and between the nine proposed centres. We would also suggest that particular consideration be given to the potential problems resulting from the number of contracts and sub contracts involved in delivering the project; we feel that there are too many points of failure in the system and further consideration needs to be given to simplifying the processes involved, to reduce these risks and enable better project management.
- 4.2.2 On a wider issue, we feel that consideration should also be given to the implications for the operational procedures of individual fire services, resulting from the reality of several services liaising with a single control centre. We feel that there needs to be recognition at the national level of the need to simplify and harmonise mobilising procedures in order to ensure interoperability and resilience. Additionally, we also feel it necessary to highlight the fact that fireground radios and handheld communications have not been considered as part of either of these two national projects, which means that there are important implications for the effectiveness of both. We stress the importance of the ability of all communications to be compatible and therefore, this is a vital issue with implications for resilience and future effectiveness of both FireControl and FireLink.
- 4.2.3 The final issue which we wish to raise in relation to the first part of your inquiry relates to the perceived disparity over the future direction of the national fire service. This is highlighted through the recognition of “localism” through Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMP’s) and the perceived need to develop harmonised procedures at the regional and super-regional level as a result of the development of regional control centres and the requirements of national resilience.
- 4.2.4 We feel some further clarity is required in this area from the government as this discrepancy will lead to confusion as to the type of fire service emergency response the public can expect.

4.3 Progress on wider Fire and Rescue Service Reform

Fire Prevention

- 4.3.1 The continuing use of the narrow concept of fire prevention at the national level has convinced Cheshire that there is still an inability on the part of government to appreciate the effect, or to see the future potential, of the huge amount of work undertaken in the field of community safety and risk reduction since the introduction of the Government White Paper; and especially in the last twelve months.
- 4.3.2 The narrow description of Fire Prevention used by the Committee and elsewhere at the national level, demonstrates the short distance that perceptions in the centre have travelled, when compared to the reality of the wide-ranging work undertaken by fire and rescue services nationally. The Service acknowledges the concerns over “mission creep” for fire and rescue services, but asks that the Committee considers the potential of the fire service to support wider government aims with its partners in local government and based on existing examples of good practice seen around the country. Special consideration should be given to areas such as youth engagement, where Cheshire have pioneered several successful schemes such as Fire Cadets, Kooldown, Drive-Survive, Community Safety Teams and the country’s first Fire Cadet unit inside a Young Offenders Institute. This is helping to change attitudes and improve young people’s prospects, as well as helping to preventing the occurrence of future problems such as arson.

Institutional Arrangements

- 4.3.3 After considering the institutional arrangements, which support the work of local fire and rescue services, several major issues have been highlighted as requiring further consideration to allow services to be delivered more effectively.
- 4.3.4 Firstly, following a protracted period of negotiation with our representative bodies locally, Cheshire has managed to secure the implementation of a new duty system for our whole-time personnel. However, this has not been without considerable delay and negotiation difficulties. Although we have maintained positive relationships with trade union colleagues locally throughout the process, it would be true to characterise the FBU’s organisational approach to change as one of resistance. Accordingly, it is our suggestion that the negotiation protocols be reconsidered by government as there remains the potential for stagnation and stalling tactics, but nevertheless, we welcome the freedom of local negotiation.
- 4.3.5 In addition to this issue, it is also requested that fire and rescue services receive further clarification on the future role HM Inspectorate of Fire Services and the basis on which operational assurance will be provided locally. The Service acknowledges the role of CPA in providing an assessment and a benchmark for the

effectiveness of a service's governance protocols and processes, but the exclusion of operational effectiveness from that procedure, and the corresponding changes to the name and role of the Inspectorate, leaves a gap which needs to be filled to give public confidence in an effective emergency response.

- 4.3.6 With regard to transitional funding and financial arrangements, the Service considers full investment in the fire service as vital for fulfilling the government's aim of creating a modern, reformed and public-facing service. The Service also wishes to highlight the fact that, to date, there has been no communication programme on the part of the government, setting out exactly what it has achieved through the modernisation agenda so far and what it seeks to achieve in the long-term, including the role of local, regional and national bodies. We feel that this is an important step which needs to be taken, in order to achieve public understanding and support for the changes and improvements we are striving to introduce

Diversity

- 4.3.7 As a result of the shifting emphasis and resources from emergency response to prevention and fire safety over recent years, there has been a significant reduction in the recruitment of whole-time firefighters. This situation has made it difficult for services such as Cheshire to make a real impact in increasing diversity among the operational workforce. It is important to note, however, that the growth of the prevention and protection functions through the increased employment of non-operational uniformed fire safety staff, fire and rescue services have successfully recruited a significant number of personnel from under-represented groups such as women and black & minority ethnic (BME) community members.

4.4 **Joint Working**

- 4.4.1 The Fire Authority takes a leading role in engaging with the North West Regional Management Board. The Chairman of the Regional Board is the Vice Chair of Cheshire Fire Authority and Leader of the North West Regional Assembly. It is our view that there are many benefits to working in partnership with our partner fire and rescue services in the North West. As mentioned in an earlier part of this memorandum however, openness and clarity of purpose are seen as key to enhancing regional working, and for this there needs to be movement on the part of government to set out clearly its intentions and expectations for the regions. Only a clear message on regionalism will allow Regional Boards to work together to deliver the many benefits offered by collaboration without the suspicion of the introduction of regional fire authorities by the back door.
- 4.4.2 It is an emerging theme that structural change is likely given the situation with both the police and ambulances services, therefore, there needs to be a requirement and position from government on the way forward. It is fair to say that RMB's are rapidly approaching a crossroads of achieving almost all that can be achieved

through collaboration. The next step will necessitate further structural reform and constitutional clarity. We are not necessarily advocating this step; rather we are seeking clarity in order to avoid wasting time, effort and resources in fruitless collaborative reviews as a prelude to “extinction”.

- 4.4.3 The Service also works effectively however, with a huge number of other partners to support and deliver our services and priorities across Cheshire. We are represented on a number of boards and panels with colleagues from local government, other emergency services and the private and voluntary sector, helping to deliver wider government aims such as sustainable communities. To this degree we are very successful and highly thought of, however, in the local authority pantheon we are very much the junior partner, a situation resulting from our exclusion from the list of authorities granted the use of the “wellbeing power” through Section 2 of the Local Government Act (2000). We feel quite strongly that our inability to operate under this statute renders us less effective than our partners in many situations where our experience, resources and knowledge would enable us to make a real difference. This would ensure that the fire services of the future play a full part in contributing to the life of the local community.

Memorandum by the Business and Community Safety Forum (BCSF) (FRS 10)

The Business and Community Safety Forum

1 The Government in its White Paper “Our Fire and Rescue Service” wished to see greater engagement of stakeholders in the Fire and Rescue Service, and for the Fire and Rescue Service to work much more closely alongside the wider community. Consequently, the Business and Community Safety Forum (BCSF) was set up in late 2003, with Pamela Castle as its chair, and with stakeholders drawn from a wide of areas including business, insurance, industry, the TUC and community groups:

Association of British Engineers
Association of British Insurers
Confederation of Business Industry
Chartered Institute of Housing
Child Accident Prevention Trust
Disability Rights Commission
Environment Agency
Federation of Small Businesses
Fire Industry Confederation
Fire Protection Association
Help the Aged
Institution of Occupational Health and Safety
Local Government Association
Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
Trades Union Congress

2 The main task of the BCSF is to give strategic advice to Ministers on a range of fire and rescue related issues, and in particular the reduction of fire risk, from the point of view of the communities which the Fire and Rescue Service serves. The BCSF can report directly to the Minister if it considers that it is the most effective and appropriate way of giving strategic advice.

General

3 The BCSF supports the Fire and Rescue Service Improvement Programme, including the introduction of Regional Control Centres. However, for the purposes of this inquiry, the BCSF’s evidence to the Select Committee focuses specifically on fire prevention.

4 The BCSF supports recent initiatives to prevent fires by fire suppression systems, early warnings and education.

Home Risk Fire Checks

5 The BCSF welcomes the **Home Risk Fire Check** initiative to advise householders on fire safety and to fit smoke alarms in homes of those most vulnerable to fire. The BCSF suggests that only low maintenance or sealed smoke alarms are used for this purpose. The BCSF would also encourage the fitting of mains powered sealed unit or low maintenance smoke alarms in all Houses of Multiple Occupation – not just licensed ones or those with three or more stories and five or more occupants.

Children and Young Persons Strategy

6 The BCSF supports the proposed **Children and Young Persons Strategy** – particularly the role of education in fire prevention. The BCSF trusts that this strategy will be properly funded, and that time be found for fire safety education in an already crowded curriculum as part of PSHE Education (Personal, Sexual and Health Education) to raise its profile.

Making Links with Housing Support and Social Care

7 The BCSF also supports ODPM proposals for developing links with vulnerable groups through **making links with housing support and social care**, GPs, Local Authority bodies etc, improving information, and raising awareness. The BCSF is concerned that some hard-to-reach groups, such as elderly homeowners, and others who are not in contact with housing and social services may be missed.

Lead Authority Partnership Scheme

8 The BCSF also supports the **Lead Authority Partnership Scheme** (LAPS) to raise the standard of health and safety management, including fire prevention and safety, within a partner organisation or business, and to encourage consistent enforcement across those LAs that engage with it. The BCSF notes that involvement in LAPSs may stretch the resources of many small and medium businesses, and wonders whether Lead Authority Partnership Schemes with:

- a national and regional associations/federations of allied and specialist trades;
- b local consortia of small businesses

should be considered and /or encouraged as an alternative.

Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order

9 The BCSF supports the introduction of the **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order**, (RRO) which comes into force on 1 April 2006. The BCSF also welcomes:

a the timely launch of the eFire Portal on 19 April 2006, which will give ready access to fire safety information and gateway to other links for building managers and owners of small and medium enterprises, who will have fire prevention and fire safety obligations under the new RRO;

b existing local initiatives to raise awareness of the impending RRO by visiting commercial premises. The BCSF would encourage these and other RRO related proactive initiatives.

10 The BCSF believes that extensive publicity is required for duties, impact and implication of the RRO to be understood and welcomes the work, which the ODPM plans to carry out to this end. The BCSF is also pleased that the ODPM plans to spend £2m on publicity, as it believes that the RRO will succeed only if the publicity campaign is successful.

Integrated Risk Management Plans

11 The BCSF is concerned about the lack of knowledge about the Fire and Rescue Service **Integrated Risk Management Plans** (IRMPs) across the wider community, and welcomes the reconvening of the ODPM IRMP Strategy Steering Group, where such issues can be considered and solutions proposed.

Charging

12 The BCSF is also concerned that allowing Fire and Rescue Services to **charge for non-core services** may be perceived as charging for activities relating to fire prevention. The BCSF considers that further guidance should be given to Fire and Rescue Authorities to ensure consistency between brigades, and to prevent fire prevention and fire safety from being compromised.

General

13 In addition to all the foregoing comments about the Fire and Rescue Service, the BCSF has expressed the views below about fire prevention in responses to earlier consultations.

Building Bulletin 100

14 The BCSF supports, as outlined in its response to Department for Education and Skills's proposals on fire safety in schools in its **Building Bulletin 100**, the following:

a The installation of sprinkler protection and other fire suppression systems in schools. However, the BCSF wishes to see the installation of sprinklers or equivalent fire suppression systems in all schools, as standard, not on a risk assessment basis;

b Fire prevention, as part of fire and life safety, should be considered during the school design process. Thoughtful pro-active infrastructure design could involve input from:

- i) Local Fire and Rescue Services and their Integrated Risk Management Plans;
- ii) Future occupiers and managers of schools, future insurers;
- iii) Other sources of local knowledge.

c The use of retardation materials, which are sufficiently robust to withstand considerable abuse, and which are regularly maintained and promptly repaired.

15 In line with this, BCSF would like to see ODPM further examining the fire security of school buildings.

Approved Document B

16 The BCSF generally supports the proposals in the latest draft of Approved Document B (Fire Safety) to the Building Regulations, and particularly welcomes:

- a The Inclusive Design approach in buildings;
- b Sprinkler protection in apartment buildings above 30m tall and in residential care homes.

Modern Methods of Construction

17 The BCSF welcomes the Ministerial assurances that ODPM will be undertaking a detailed assessment of any such potential fire risk associated with **Modern Methods of Construction**, including in the context of Part B of the Building Regulations.

Memorandum by the Devon Fire and Rescue Authority (FRS 11)

Introduction

The Devon Fire and Rescue Authority welcomes this opportunity to present written evidence to this Inquiry. Both the Chief Fire Officer and the Chairman of the Authority are willing to give verbal evidence to the Committee.

The Fire and Rescue Service is going through the most radical change programme since the end of the Second World War. The change agenda is significant and is placing huge demands on all Fire and Rescue Services. Smaller Services may not have sufficient capacity to cope and the Audit Commission found this to be so in many of its recent Comprehensive Performance Assessments. At the same time the government expects efficiencies to produce significant savings. An appropriate balance needs to be struck between these, sometimes, conflicting expectations.

The introduction of Regional Control Centres

The Devon Fire and Rescue Authority took the view from the very start of this project that it would provide support, albeit somewhat reluctantly. This Authority was frustrated from the start by the lack of information available in order to comment effectively or to take decisions on matters of importance. That information shortfall remains to this day with inadequate information to inform our medium term financial planning process. Consequently, we remain concerned that the Regional Control Centre may impose additional costs on this Authority.

The management of the project has been disappointing. An example is the decision of ODPM to give Chief Fire Officers and Fire and Rescue Authorities only 45 minutes advance notice of the publication of the location of the new Regional Control Centres. This left Chief Fire Officers in the unenviable position of having to advise affected staff having only discovered the location a few minutes earlier.

Technically this project is ambitious but achievable but will require great technical expertise. Experience of the move to computerised Command & Control Systems in the Fire and Rescue Service showed that there were many large, experienced IT companies that were caught out by the complexities of what at first appears to be a simple application. There is concern that this could happen again particularly as the proposed systems will be that much more complex again. Given this there is concern in relation to the timescales associated with this project, particularly as Fire and Rescue Services are yet to receive key information in relation to the data structures that will be used by the proposed system. There is likely to be considerable work for Fire and Rescue Authorities to carry out before their mobilising data is in a format that is compatible with the proposed countrywide system.

Finally, the recently announced delay in the roll out of the RCC project means that existing control rooms need to operate for longer. Here in Devon our existing equipment would have reached the end of its life at about the time of the originally planned change over date. The delay means that we cannot rely on this critical equipment for a further two years. The result is that we need to replace that equipment when we did not expect to have to do so. Unfortunately, ODPM is refusing to meet these costs and we believe that that decision should be re-considered.

The Introduction of and Implementation Process for FireLink Radio Services

Devon Fire and Rescue Service currently shares a microwave system with Devon and Cornwall Constabulary and Cornwall County Fire Service which we use to link our radio sites back to our respective control rooms. We own our part of the microwave system and currently pay maintenance for that. The majority of the cost and all site sharing costs currently fall on the police as the major user.

Devon & Cornwall Constabulary has almost completed its migration to the new O2 Airwave radio system and expects to vacate the shared microwave system by June 2006. This will result in us having to pay all of the costs of any links and sites we need to retain after that date.

This is an important matter for this authority as any slippage in the Firelink rollout would result in extra costs of £214,000 pa as well as potentially increasing disposal costs. We believe that government should meet such costs as they are entirely beyond our control and yet would impact directly upon our local council tax payers.

Progress on Fire and Rescue Service Reform

The Service welcomes the increased recognition given to the Chief Fire Officers' Association in delivering the modernisation agenda in partnership with central government, the LGA and other stakeholders. From a local perspective, however, we need to ensure there is continued meaningful consultation on all major strategic change that takes account of the different environments in which Fire and Rescue Authorities operate.

It is disappointing to note that in the draft National Framework 2006/08 no regard has been given to the inadequacies of the constitutional arrangements of Regional Management Boards in delivering improvement to the scale and timetable suggested by central government. However, from a Devon perspective it is welcoming to note that the government has not ruled out sub regional combinations of fire and rescue services as Devon is currently undertaking a strategic Review with Somerset to see if, and how the two authorities can work more closely together. See further comment on this issue below.

Transitional funding has been of assistance to Fire and Rescue Authorities in supporting the not insignificant increase in budget necessary to deliver the pay agreement 2003. This was particularly burdensome for rural authorities with more retained firefighters than

wholetime firefighters. A fact that appeared to have been overlooked at the time. Although the ethos of the pay agreement was that management and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) would work together to deliver the required changes in return for the high settlement, as can be seen from the industrial action taking place around the country this is taking longer to deliver than anticipated. We believe that it is essential, therefore, that ODPM agrees to delay the repayment of the transitional funding for a further year.

One of the other strands of the agreement was for recognition of other unions (The Retained Firefighters Union and the Fire Officers Association) on the National Joint Council, thereby, in a small way, recognising the legitimate desires of those unions to be able to represent significant parts of the Fire and Rescue Service workforce. Although work has started on this it has some way to go before reaching a conclusion. This is disappointing and means that although local recognition for negotiation purposes of these two unions has happened, we are still in a position where national procedures to resolve local issues preclude the involvement of these two unions.

Fire Service Reform continues to require “pump priming” resources if it is to be delivered at the speed required. There needs to be some recognition of this fact in Revenue Support Grant settlements for 2006/07 and 2007/08.

Fire Prevention

We welcome the long overdue change to fire legislation which will enable a risk appropriate approach to enforcement, whilst supporting the Integrated Risk Management Plan. Considerable planning, training and support is taking place to ensure that the Service is fully prepared when the Order is brought into force, on April 1st 2006, to maintain public confidence and to have appropriate, embedded, robust enforcement procedures.

Promoting Diversity

The Devon Fire and Rescue Authority has achieved a great deal in increasing the representation of women in the uniformed workforce. The table below illustrates that increase.

2000/01	26	
2001/02	27	
2002/03	35	
2003/04	47	
2004/05	57	
2005/06	58	(current figure)

The ODPM target is to ensure that 15% of the uniformed workforce is female by 2009. However, it is important to realise that we are working from a very low base. Only in recent years have we seen the repeal of the statutory controls on the minimum height of firefighters that excluded 80% of the female population. It is important, therefore, to

recognise that Fire Authorities are not to blame for the current position. Nevertheless, more needs to be done and we are working hard to improve female representation in the workforce. However, ODPM should recognise that the target of 15% by 2009 is simply unachievable.

The Devon Fire and Rescue Authority welcomes the proposal to open up the Fire and Rescue Service to enable high quality recruitment into all levels of the organisation. However, it should not be forgotten that experience is an important qualification for those Fire Officers that take command of complex operational incidents. It is important that any change to the recruitment policy does not adversely affect service delivery. This change needs to be handled with the utmost care.

Joint Working

It is very noticeable that the Home Office has a clear view of the need for change in the future structure of Policing in England. Similarly, the Department of Health appears to see a need to re-structure the Ambulance Service. The ODPM appears to have no such clarity of view on the future structure of the Fire and Rescue Service. The result could be regional or sub-regional Police and Ambulance Services with the Fire and Rescue Service remaining at a very local level. This lack of a joined up approach may leave absolutely no commonality of geographical boundaries between blue light services. Whilst we have serious reservations about the establishment of regional Fire and Rescue Services we are equally concerned about the apparent lack of joined up thinking across departmental boundaries in central government on this important issue.

The recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment conducted by the Audit Commission gave this Authority a “Good” rating. Somerset was rated “Fair”. Both Authorities agreed that the modernisation agenda and the need for greater efficiencies were placing unachievable demands on our respective organisations. As a result we have agreed to explore how we can work more effectively together. One option is the combination of our two organisations into a single Authority and Fire and Rescue Service.

This work is progressing well, however, we believe that it is important that ODPM should offer financial support, in the form of grant aid to meet transitional costs, to those Authorities proposing voluntary combinations in the interests of improved efficiency and, therefore, value for money for council tax payers.

Co-responder is a scheme where the Fire and Rescue Service responds to certain medical emergencies in support of the Ambulance Service. These responses are aimed primarily at heart attack victims and those Fire and Rescue Services that are delivering this service are already saving lives. However, whilst many Fire and Rescue Services and their local Ambulance Services are working together there is an absence of joined up thinking in central government between the ODPM and the Department of Health. That dialogue needs to take place urgently in order to establish standard protocols and financial

arrangements. It should be noted that the Fire Brigades Union is opposed to this life saving work and actively resists expansion of the scheme.

Civil Resilience

The ODPM is to be congratulated on the development of the New Dimension programme, which is considerably enhancing the capability of the Fire and Rescue Service to respond to a major terrorist attack or other disaster. Devon Fire and Rescue Service is one of twenty strategically located Fire and Rescue Services around the country with an Urban Search and Rescue Team. The vehicles, equipment, training facilities and staffing costs are all being met by ODPM and we warmly welcome that. However, the property requirements for the establishment of the team mean that we do not have existing suitable property. Unfortunately, ODPM has taken the view that it will not meet the costs of such property needs leaving individual Fire and Rescue Authorities in the impossible position of having to meet those needs from existing resources. It is essential that the ODPM reconsiders this position to ensure that Fire and Rescue Services can meet the ODPM target date of March 2007 for full operational availability of Urban Search and Rescue Teams.

Memorandum by Ken Yeo, County Councillor Perranporth Electoral Division, Executive Member – Public Protection (FRS 12)

As Portfolio Holder with responsibilities for Cornwall County Fire Brigade I would offer the following submission to the Select Committee examining the proposals for nine Regional Fire Controls. I took responsibility for this Portfolio in May of this year following the County Council Elections, I have spent some time in listening and reading a great deal of literature on the project and its objectives. I have attended a Stakeholder meeting held at Taunton when elected Members and Chief Fire Officers from the South West Region were given a presentation on the Project prior to the announcement of the location.

There are a number of issues I would request the Select Committee gives serious consideration to:

1. To what extent did the Team working on this Project understand the operations of an operational Fire Control and why, despite being invited to attend a number of Emergency Controls, did it decline to do so? Many of the smaller Fire Controls in predominantly rural authorities have operators with local knowledge and expertise, much of which will not be transferable to a Regional Control.
2. Is too much reliance being placed on untested and single system technology such that even a short interruption could have catastrophic consequences to the Region and public involved in an incident where seconds are vital? There appears to be no back up and total reliance that another Regional Control would take over and manage.
3. Why does it appear that “Big is Beautiful” is being pursued, a “One size fits all”, when there are many brigades with unique problems peculiar to their own Authority? The population spread in Cornwall is completely different to that in its only neighbouring County (Devon) and again both are different but have some similarities to other rural counties and areas.
4. Is the real priority to provide a quality service to the public in responding to life threatening and emergency incidents and to have the capability to respond to national disasters or the threat of terrorist attacks, which would have full support, or the implementation of a concept that has ignored many concerns and failed to give acceptable responses to specific brigade and elected Member issues. Detailed future budget implications for brigades have not been specified, putting Cornwall County Fire Brigade in the position of having to consider cutting initiatives that fully support the Government’s agenda on public protection issues.
5. Will the failure of the rural brigades be lost in the overall figures that will give the public a false sense of security rather than the reality that the Regional Control concept will fail to provide the high quality of service that they currently enjoy from their local Control.

6. The mobilising system proposed will have significant implications for the rural areas because of the inability to redirect a resource, because of this lives will be put at risk. This will not present such a problem in large urban areas, where fire cover is provided to a greater extent. This is just another example of the failure of the “one size fits all” approach.

Memorandum by Cornwall County Fire Brigade (FRS 13)

Cornwall County Council (CCC) is the fire and rescue authority responsible for the provision of fire and rescue services to the County of Cornwall. This responsibility is discharged through Cornwall County Fire Brigade. I am writing in my capacity as the Chief Fire Officer.

I welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to the Select Committee and would be willing to provide oral evidence if called upon to do so.

Regional Fire Control

The position of CCC regarding the establishment of a Regional Fire Control for the South West was made known to the ODPM on 24th January 2005. The concerns expressed are as follows.

CCC does not support the Outline Business Case and has specific concerns in respect of:

- (a) The dependence which the project places on untried and untested technology.
- (b) The apparent dismissal by the ODPM, of the importance of the role Fire Control staff play in assisting, managing and resolving incidents where their local knowledge is a key influence.
- (c) The unclear arrangements in respect of project initiation and on-going funding responsibilities and the absence of detail provided in the Outline Business Case.
- (d) The disregard of Cornwall's and other authorities' Best Value Review outcomes in respect of current Fire Control rooms, particularly in terms of function, value for money and operational efficiency.

CCC asked that the ODPM thoroughly review the non-core functions of existing Control Rooms and make proper arrangements for operational and financial sustainability of those functions post Regional Fire Control Rooms.

The position of my Authority has not changed.

Firelink

I support the implementation of Firelink but I am concerned about the lack of financial information. If we are to plan ahead, we need to know the cost that will fall to the Authority, both for implementation and ongoing maintenance.

Progress on Fire and Rescue Service Reform

Cornwall County Fire Brigade is a small organisation, with just 203 whole time personnel and with just 144 of these personnel attached to fire stations to provide community safety activity and front line operational response. The Brigade also has an

establishment of 425 retained personnel, an establishment which it struggles to maintain, the actual numbers being around 400. There are two whole time shift stations and five whole time day crewed stations, the whole time personnel on both the shift and day crewed stations are backed up by retained personnel. The remaining 24 stations are fully retained.

Each whole-time watch is established to turn out one fire appliance only. Remaining appliances will respond with retained crews. None of the 'special' appliances (Aerial Ladder Platforms, Rescue Tenders etc.) have dedicated crews. It is not unusual for appliances to respond with crews made up of both retained and whole-time personnel.

Community Fire Safety is well developed. Station based personnel are engaged on home fire safety checks, fitting smoke alarms where required. This activity is targeted through the use of FSEC computer profiling. The Brigade also recognises its wider community safety role and runs the 'dying to drive' programme for young drivers and an arson reduction programme known as 'prison – me? No way'

There is a project ongoing within the area of Hayle, where two firefighters are engaged full time, giving householders safety advice and fitting smoke detectors. The scheme was put in place as an alternative to the provision of a retained fire station as it was felt that this would do more to reduce the risk to residents within the area.

The Brigade is renowned for its work with young people who have offended or who are at risk of offending, running week long courses known as 'Phoenix'. The Phoenix Team also run courses for young parents and is involved in a number of other youth schemes.

I consider that Cornwall County Fire Brigade is providing a first class 'modern' service and whilst I would like to do more, I consider that there is little room for further development within existing resources. We run with a small 'back office' and are blessed with a flexible, willing workforce but there is only so much we can do.

The Brigade had capacity shortcomings identified in the recent CPA report, these capacity problems will undoubtedly be compounded as we go into the next financial year. Unlike larger brigades who are able to liberate resources from front line operations, lack of resource is the real issue for rural fire and rescue services such as ours and is an issue that must be addressed.

M. Littmoden
Chief Fire Officer

Memorandum by Paul Holmes MP (FRS 14)

The FiReControl Project proposes to close the East Midlands' five emergency fire control rooms (presently in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire) and replace them with one control room in Castle Donnington, Leicestershire that will serve the entire region.

As the Liberal Democrat Shadow Secretary of State for Local Government and Communities, Sarah Teather MP has argued, the impetus for fire service reform came from the Bain review but focussed on the need for more fire prevention rather than just fire-fighting. Effective fire prevention can be achieved only by a community-based force. Bain advised specifically against regional reorganisation and instead proposed regional co-operation, which he argued would achieve all the benefits of without major structural change. Compulsory regional fire control rules out the possibility of co-operation between emergency services. The successful tri-service control centre in Gloucestershire would have to be broken up under the current proposals for regional fire control rooms.

The Government claims that these new regional control rooms will be more 'resilient' and 'secure' than the existing network of local control rooms. Yet the East Midlands Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is gravely concerned that the location of the new East Midlands control room in a business park on a flood plain and within two miles of an airport will be neither resilient nor secure.

The cost of this restructure is escalating. As the East Midlands FBU notes, in August 2005 Jim Fitzpatrick confirmed that regional control rooms will cost as much as £2 billion – more than the £1.7 billion annual fire service budget. In just two months the projected costs had doubled, from £988 million in June. Information obtained under the Freedom of Information Act shows that consultancy fees alone are projected to be £44 million.

The East Midlands FBU has drawn to my attention the ODPM's Outline Business Case. This states that there is a 'high risk' that spiralling costs will lead to pressure to cut frontline services and could push up council tax. It also states that the risk of 'delay or even total project failure' is 'high' with a 'very high' impact if it does fail. The risk is so high because of 'the recent history of delivering IT/change projects in the public sector has demonstrated a less than 50% success rate'. There is a high risk that 'the current provisional timescales may not be achieved' which would 'increase project cost' at an estimated £11.4million per six month delay per region.

Memorandum by Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority (FRS 15)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Authority are pleased to be invited to contribute to the inquiry into the Fire and Rescue Service. Whilst it is hoped that the evidence submitted to the Select Committee, within this document will be clear and readily understood, Members of the Authority and Officers of our Fire and Rescue Service would be pleased to supplement this information should the Select Committee require additional details or clarification.
- 1.2 Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Authority is recognised as being innovative and at the leading edge of fire and rescue service reform. We have also demonstrated that through changes in our approach to protecting communities, real, tangible and measurable improvements can be made. For example, by taking responsibility for making communities safer from the perils of fire, the number of people killed or injured in accidental domestic dwelling fires fell by more than 69% in the period 2001/02 – 2004/05. That equates to around 140 people living without the effects of being harmed by fire.
- 1.3 In addition, we recognise the advantage to be gained if the issues that our Service deals with on a daily basis are progressed in partnership with the many other agencies, that face the similar issues at strategic and operational levels. Essentially, we have demonstrated that there are clear links between the specific problems a range of agencies have to deal with in certain communities and a wider ranging root cause – social exclusion.
- 1.4 Consequently, we have invested significantly in developing positive working relationships with all of those agencies operating in these areas, which has led to effective working partnerships which are delivering real improvements.
- 1.5 Arson reduction is a key challenge facing our communities. The Fire and Rescue Act 2004 assists in developing the Service role in fire investigation, but the degree to which this is occurring is variable and reflects often limited investment in this critically important area. Aligning priorities and targets across Government Departments, in particular ODPM and Home Office would enable a more integrated approach at a local level, to the development of effective arson reduction strategies
- 1.6 Our focus is not just on fire related issues. We recognise that the impact of our work is much wider than is generally appreciated and that we have a valuable contribution to make to the broader social inclusion, community cohesion and neighbourhood renewal agendas.

- 1.7 The reform of the UK Fire and Rescue Service being facilitated by the new Fire and Rescue Services Act and National Frameworks is very much welcomed. However, we believe that there remains a great deal still to be done and some significant barriers to overcome. Notwithstanding this, the Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority are confident that all of these matters can be resolved and the full potential of our Fire and Rescue Service realised.

2. Responses to Specific Areas of Inquiry

2.1 Regional Control Centres and Firelink Radio Services

- 2.1.1 The investment being made to provide a resilient network of regional fire control centres is welcomed. The provision of a national wide area radio scheme is also applauded as a positive addition to the resilience of the fire and rescue service. These two major investments also have the potential to facilitate much of the modernisation and reform needed within the fire and rescue service.

- 2.1.2 However, we believe that these two projects are, and need to be recognised as being inextricably linked. Indeed, the effective operation of regional control centres will rely on the Firelink radio and mobile data systems. Currently, the progress of each project is being made largely independently of the other. This raises concerns both about the effective integration of these systems once the RCCs become operational and the impact the requests and demands for contributions to these projects has on individual fire and rescue services and regional delivery teams. We believe that to effect the necessary integration, the management of both projects should be merged. Whilst this may cause some difficulties in the short term, it is likely to prove to be a wise investment once the RCC network begins to operate.

- 2.1.3 There are a number of specific issues that must be resolved promptly. In particular, the governance arrangements for RCCs and matters relating to the employment of staff within these new centres. The resolution of these matters will also have to deal with the difficult issues of TUPE and redundancy of existing staff working within or in support of current Control Centres.

2.2 Fire Prevention

- 2.2.1 As mentioned in the introductory paragraphs, we have demonstrated that increasing investment in proactive risk reduction and protective activities has dramatic effects. Our achievement of a 69% reduction in accidental domestic dwelling fire casualties is remarkable, particularly when considered against the national PSA target of 20% reduction by 2010.

2.2.2 In achieving this outcome, a great deal of work was carried out in partnership with other agencies. Again as previously mentioned, sustainable improvements in the 'symptoms' of social exclusion, such as high incidence of fires, can only be made by addressing the root cause rather than individual problems. The most effective way to do so is by working closely with other local agencies and the community.

2.2.3 Effective partnership working is facilitated where the boundaries each agency works within is co-terminous with others. The seemingly continual structural changes in local health services and likely changes to the governance arrangements for the Police require careful consideration to avoid impediments arising, to the clear need to work in a joined up way at operational and strategic levels. However, we do believe that the Local Area Agreement arrangements have the potential to create a fertile environment for effective collaboration between agencies, which focus on real community priorities.

2.3 Institutional Arrangements and Reform

2.3.1 It is somewhat frustrating that despite the high levels of expectation of Fire and Rescue Authorities to implement local reforms, reinforced by robust and frequent audit, reforms identified as being necessary at national level do not appear to be being rigorously pursued. For example, little meaningful progress has been made on reforming the National Joint Council.

2.3.2 This failure to institute change at the national level is having an impact locally. For example, we are still struggling to create fully inclusive arrangements within which all staff representative bodies can contribute to the development of the service. This Authority believe a fully inclusive NJC is vital and overdue. The Authority strongly advocates for an entirely separate arrangement for middle management.

2.4 Promoting Diversity

2.4.1 Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Authority are fully committed to the creation of a more diverse workforce that includes representation from all groups within the communities we serve. Although the targets set for diversity must be challenging, they are presently unrealistic and require adjustment to reflect what can be attained in a non discriminatory regulatory environment. We truly believe that there is a business need for our workforce to be fully representative and such diversity is a fundamental tenet of effective service delivery.

2.4.2 We have pursued the achievement of diversity with enthusiasm and have achieved limited success. Our workforce is increasingly diverse. However, the data used to measure this area of performance fails to recognise what has been

achieved as it is sharply focussed on only one group of employees – operational firefighters. Whilst this is an important measure, it is not the only indicator of levels of diversity within an organisation. Consequently, we believe that diversity of the whole workforce, not just one element of it, should be measured and reported.

2.5 Joint Working with other Emergency Services

- 2.5.1 Undoubtedly, there is a great deal of benefit to be realised through effective joint working with other emergency services. In Staffordshire, we have a good record of effective liaison, with all responding agencies being committed to the Staffordshire Integrated Emergency Planning (SIEP) arrangements, that have now been transformed into the Local Resilience Forum following the introduction of the Civil Contingencies Act. A revised Staffordshire Resilience Forum/Civil Contingency Unit has been established and is collaboratively resourced, demonstrating a real commitment by all Staffordshire Cat 1 Organisations to improve resilience across the County.
- 2.5.2 This joint working relationship has delivered effective operational response capabilities together with other benefits. For example, Staffordshire Fire & Rescue Service have shared wide area radio facilities with the local Police. Whilst this arrangement is soon to end with the introduction of the Firelink solution, it has provided a cost effective and reliable service for many years. Beyond the operational levels, close and effective working relationships are maintained by regular meetings of the political and professional leaders of the Emergency Services in Staffordshire.
- 2.5.3 Although co-responding schemes with ambulance services is viewed by many, as a critical element of modernisation, the Fire Services contribution is dependant on the requirements of the Ambulance Trust, which remains responsible for emergency intervention standards and protocols. In Staffordshire, the Ambulance Trust / Service strategy is well established, based on extensive development of a wide network of community first responders. The provision of one corresponding station in a rural location continues to be the Fire and Rescue Service's expected contribution. Limited as this provision is, the scheme, which has been in operation for many years and has saved the lives of a number of local people.
- 2.5.4 A key feature of our effective collaborative partnerships is co-terminosity. This relates not only to our work with other emergency services, but also with the many other agencies, in particular local authorities with whom we are working increasingly to address a wide range of social problems. As highlighted above, it is important that any reorganisation of other Services enables and facilitates close and effective local partnerships.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 There can be no doubt that the effectiveness of the fire and rescue service has improved markedly since the reform programme commenced. Indeed, many of the changes made nationally reflect the work that were already progressing in Staffordshire, albeit within the constraining environment of the previous national standards of fire cover and regulatory framework.
- 3.2 We welcome the modernisation of the Service and are energetically pursuing reform. However, there are some areas of concern, which we have highlighted above. There is nevertheless, no doubt that these issues can be overcome, allowing our fire and rescue service to realise its full potential and make an even fuller contribution to the development of well being and prosperity in all of our communities.

Memorandum by the West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority (FRS 16)

Description of Organisation

- (1) This memorandum is submitted on behalf of the West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority which is the 4th largest such Authority in England responsible for the provision of fire and rescue services to a population of over 2.1 million comprising the metropolitan districts of Leeds, Bradford, Kirklees, Wakefield and Calderdale, from whose Councils the 22 Members comprising the Authority are drawn. The Authority employs nearly 1600 full time firefighters plus 199 retained firefighters and 265 non operational support staff

Introduction

- (2) This Memorandum will address the inquiry subjects in the order raised in the committee press release and the comments and observations which follow represent the views of the Authority as determined by its members.

Implications for citizens and the Fire and Rescue Service of the introduction of Regional Control Centres:

- (3) It is reasonable to state that not all elected Members enjoy total confidence over the manner in which the FiReControl project is being managed at a national level, especially with regard to the provision of information they feel is essential for local debate and democratic accountability where decisions are sought from the national body.
- (4) It is apparent that concerns over financial clarity and the limited identification of tangible benefits to the FRA are overshadowing the purported operational FRS benefits the RCC project may deliver. An iterative process of constructing the project business case has not been received well at both local or regional political levels with elected members remaining concerned about the true costs of the project itself and the ongoing running costs that will need to be met by individual FRA's following implementation of the RCC. It is essential that the full extent of these extra costs be identified and met by central government under 'New Burdens' principles.
- (5) To enable elected members to fully engage in communicating the benefits of the project to service users and the wider populace they represent, it is imperative that the current low confidence is addressed and that the representatives of the general public feel they have been fully engaged in the planning, delivery and implementation processes.
- (6) There is little argument with the guiding principles of the project that the new national network of control centres should help deliver an even better service to

the public than at present. Indeed, there remains a compelling need to modernise the control centre function, especially in the wake of events such as 9/11 and 7/7. While existing control rooms continue to provide a good service, they are not designed to deal with major regional or national events that now require a resilient, co-ordinated and technically capable delivery infrastructure to cope with new modern-day demands.

Implications for citizens and the Fire and Rescue Service of the introduction of and implementation process for Firelink radio services:

- (7) O2 Airwave Ltd has very recently been announced as the preferred supplier against the Firelink contract. Airwave is a resilient national digital radio communications network dedicated to the emergency services and other authorised public safety users. It is constructed on technology that is proven and the network is already built and designed to meet the demands of public safety users. The addition of the FRS customer base should have minimal impact on the overall network.
- (8) Airwave is built specifically to deliver operational services. A guaranteed nationwide network that includes remote areas has been created. It is not reliant upon a relatively few number of masts, where each would be responsible for covering enormous geographical areas. Instead, Airwave has 3,300 masts around the country, most providing overlapping coverage with its adjacent mast, therefore offering unrivalled resilience in the event of mast failure.
- (9) Airwave is designed to provide a guaranteed fast response with push to talk communications between users. It also provides data and voice capability, which should allow the FRS to manage operational and command teams and resources effectively and get critical information quickly and accurately to crews.
- (10) Resilience is built into the network through route and component duplication and attack protection. Airwave is an encrypted network therefore malicious eavesdropping should not occur. Importantly, Airwave delivers interoperability between emergency services and between emergency services and other public safety agencies. Multi-agency talk groups can be pre-set like any other talk group for immediate use.
- (11) Airwave has already been chosen by the UK Police Forces. The Airwave network has over 150,000 current users, making it the largest network of its kind in the world. Airwave employs TETRA technology, which has been internationally proven. Lancashire FRS has been using Airwave for three years and apparently enjoy the additional functionality the system presents.
- (12) Regional roll-out programmes will take place over a 15-18 month period prior to FRS cut over from current control rooms to the new RCC's. The resource

requirements during the roll-out will be quite significant for each of the constituent FRS's, including the need to arrange for permanent day to day Firelink contacts, control centre management contacts, operations department management contact, transport management contact, transport personnel, vehicle drivers and communications/IT management contact. A regional Roll-Out Board will be established in each region to ensure that the necessary structures and responsibilities are in place.

- (13) Activities that have been highlighted in advance that will form part of the roll-out programme include vehicle provision for equipment fitting, provision of information to suppliers, testing arrangements, fleet mapping, training provision, technical security arrangements, matters relating to legacy equipment and also charges for additional installation requests. Such call-off contract works will pose additional implications to the overall programme of works.
- (14) As part of the overall preparations, the regional FiReControl and Firelink projects must now be pulled together to aid information sharing and improve communications. A merger of the two projects at local and regional levels has been aided by the announcement of the proposed amalgamation of the Fire and Civil Resilience directorates within the ODPM under the leadership of one Senior Responsible Officer. WYFRS continue to act as the lead authority for both projects in the Yorkshire and Humber region, however, there will be a need to bring about structural revisions to the project once the full extent of the Firelink implementation programme is known and the new burdens issues relating to the FiReControl project have been finalised.

Progress made on reform post 2003 on:

Fire Prevention

- (15) West Yorkshire's Integrated Risk Management Plan is a key building block of the Authority's modernisation programme. Priority is given to the protection of life as well as the safeguarding of property and the environment. The plan is not just about responding to fires and other emergencies, that is only one part. Of equal importance are the other two pillars to our approach, prevention and protection.
- (16) Prevention is being best achieved by ensuring that everybody understands the danger of fire and takes simple action to limit the chances on one occurring. Protection is being achieved by the use of statutory powers to ensure buildings and people in them are safe and by use of the new statutory duty to promote fire safety, such as fitting of smoke detectors in homes across the county. The impending introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 is very much welcomed by this Authority.

- (17) Improvements in service delivery are now judged by how successful the Authority is at reducing the risk of fire and other accidents within the communities it serves. Risk reduction is the theme that now dominates our strategic aims and objectives. In addition to the home fire safety check workload the Authority is committed to reduce the number of deliberate fires. Arson affects everyone. It invades communities and threatens social and economic well-being. To tackle deliberate fire-setting and create safer places to live and work we continue to invest in local arson reduction projects.
- (18) We actively seek to work jointly with local partners in health, social services, housing, education, the voluntary sector and with other emergency services to reduce risk to vulnerable groups in line with our vision. It is essential that fire related issues are absorbed into the general programme and plans of action for regeneration, neighbourhood renewal and community cohesion. It is only through such forums and strategies that the Authority has become to contribute more effectively and become committed to the broader needs of the communities it serves.
- (19) The modernisation programme, which has so far included revision of key legislation and the formulation of a guiding national framework, is allowing this Authority to drive forward its local agenda for change that relates directly to the creation of safer communities. For instance, this Authority now commits resources to undertake as many as 60,000 home fire safety checks per year, whereas previously it was achieving approximately 10,000 per year.
- (20) The Chief Fire Officer and Authority are now confident that by 2010 accidental fire deaths in the home will have been reduced in line with the Government's Public Service Agreement targets. The Authority is now determined to harness its resources to extend access to all parts of the community. By establishing dedicated teams and capitalising on our network of community fire stations we are becoming educator, mentor, role-model, and source of information. This interaction with an increasingly wide range of individuals, groups, and organisations helps us redefine the traditional function of the service and breaks down barriers to further success.

Institutional arrangements and reform

- (21) Since the 2003 White Paper and the passing of the FRS Act in 2004 the roles and responsibilities of the Service and its institutions both at national and local level have been clarified and modernised. The Service has a new strategic direction and the IRMP and CPA inspection processes have provided a new sharper focus on performance standards and efficiency improvement.

- (22) Whilst this Authority supports the overall purpose of the modernisation agenda including the creation of Regional Management Boards to share best practice and achieve benefits from greater collaboration between local fire and rescue authorities at regional level the Authority nevertheless strongly supports maximum flexibility and freedom of choice in decision making at local level and is concerned that some developments such as the proposed governance arrangements for FireBuy and for the future governance of the new regional control centres do not reflect and protect the leading role of local elected members and are likely to lead to the dilution of local accountability to the community. It is of vital importance that the democratic responsibility and accountability of local fire and rescue authorities to their local communities and the representative role of elected members are both fully recognised by central government when developing new strategies and creating new institutions pursuant to the modernisation agenda
- (23) Financial Issues
This Authority continues to deliver significant cashable efficiency savings the majority of these being redirected to fund the increasing and widening demands on the Authority.
- (24) There is concern over the funding of the fire service in particular that the Fire element of the Formula Spending Share does not truly reflect the cost of service provision. This is particularly stark in West Yorkshire where despite having the third lowest precept in the country it continues to receive the minimum revenue support grant protected only by the floor.
- (25) The Authority welcomes the revised funding mechanism for the firefighters pension scheme in principal. However exemplifications produced by the ODPM suggest that the loss of Revenue Support Grant in this Authority will exceed the reduction in pension costs by significant amounts placing a huge additional burden on the local council taxpayers. It is vital that the implication of the transfer of pension funding is monitored at authority level so that the transfer of the pension liability does not impact on the ability of Authorities to provide the core service.

Promoting diversity

- (26) There have been significant changes to many aspects of Human Resources related issues as part of the overall modernisation process. Many of these changes are welcome and have led to increased managerial freedoms and have supported our aim of managing an efficient and effective Fire and Rescue service to the benefit of all the communities of West Yorkshire. However there are some aspects of the modernisation agenda that have not brought about the benefits that were anticipated. The remainder of this section gives comments on some of the main HR areas that form part of the modernisation agenda.

(27) Equality and Diversity

The promotion of diversity within the FRS is a key objective for West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority. The Authority already has in place a well resourced Recruitment and Diversity Team and Elected members play a key role in many aspects of our initiatives, including the appointment of a diversity champion.

(28) The proposed revisions to the national point of entry selection tests which are based on job related tests will help to facilitate the recruitment of more people from the target groups and this is to be welcomed as long as there is a recognition that the role of the operational firefighter remains a physically demanding one that demands appropriate levels of physical strength and fitness.

(29) The current national targets for the recruitment, retention and progression of women and ethnic minority staff are to be revised and expanded to include the whole of our workforce and this is also welcome. This FRA remains committed to both internal cultural change initiatives and also to a comprehensive community outreach programme as the best way to achieve our goal of a more diverse work force.

(30) The Grey Book

The 6th edition of the Grey Book was meant to represent a slimming down of previous versions, when in fact it is both longer and now contains issues formerly outside of its remit, notably the inclusion of discipline and grievance procedures.

(31) The Grey Book should contain only key and core aspects of the conditions of service for fire fighters and not as at present try to encompass any and all aspects of their conditions of service. There should be a move towards local agreements within FRA's that better reflect the differing needs of local FRAS's and the communities they serve.

(32) Discipline Procedures

The removal of the Fire service Discipline regulations was long overdue. Their replacement by an ACAS based code of practice is a step forward. However the guidance for the use of the discipline and grievance procedures which is for the 1st time included in the Grey Book is unnecessarily complex and in some respects goes beyond the provisions contained in the ACAS code. It is difficult to see the need for any thing other than the ACAS guidance which is used by almost all other employers in the UK.

(33) Consultation and Negotiation Procedures

These procedure require further revision, they are too complex and there is no clear definition for the issues which fall under each procedure.

- (34) Rank to Role
The purpose of rank to role is to rationalise the hierarchical structure into 7 key roles. This will allow individuals to reach senior management positions before they are at the very end of their service.
- (35) The actual outcome of rank to role is that in fact, that many FRS have now more ranks than under the previous rank structure adopted. Essentially rank to role has created different ranks within a single role. The change has not realised any benefit, and has in fact created additional financial and procedural burdens to implement. The very fact of the necessity of the use of A and B within roles highlights the limitations of seven generic 'Roles'.
- (36) IPDS
Assessment and development centres (ADCs) do not necessarily deliver better candidates than previously, this being primarily supply and demand driven as before. As they only test an individual's managerial potential and do not test potential for command, they do not identify potential incident commanders. The ADCs have replaced the role-based exams already in place, with a more resource intensive set of selection tests. This represents a significant additional burden on FRS.
- (37) Multi Tier Entry
Within IPDS there is a requirement for existing operational staff to prove competence in their present role before progressing, yet individuals applying from outside the fire service, with no command experience whatsoever only need show generic management qualifications.
- (38) The implication that all the required command competence can be gained through a "development module" takes no account of the need for a commander at silver level, for example, to make operational judgments through the application of gained experience and proven competence, either of which cannot be easily taught to anyone entering the organisation without a grounding operationally and in the Incident Command System.
- (39) Other emergency services, such as the Police, are well aware of this fact and use a system of graduate or accelerated promotion, in which an individual must first prove competence as a uniformed operational Constable, before progressing to senior management. Such a system would be of value to the FRS and would allow the service to attract a better quality of candidate at point of entry were a graduate entry program available.

Joint working with other emergency services

- (40) Joint emergency services working in the UK has been good for many years, and progressively opportunities have been taken to improve it, eg, post Clapham Rail

Crash, Lockerbie, the widespread public disorder incidents in the early 1980's; terrorist incidents and the like. The government publication "Dealing with Disaster" was based and updated on those lessons. Following the implementation of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, that guidance has now been improved considerably and renamed "Emergency Response and Recovery".

- (41) Whereas the FRS modernisation agenda has itself not exclusively driven these changes, there is the clear area of common interest and focus of Resilience. The FRS New Dimension (ND) project, which addresses resilience from the FRS perspective, depends a lot on effective inter-agency working. This is progressing well but there are two areas that may benefit from scrutiny.
- (42) First, whereas the other emergency services and the FRS work well together, the FRS does not yet seem to have as robust a national mutual aid arrangement in place as, say, the police do with their national mobilisation plan.
- (43) FRSs are able, through the 2004 FRS Act, to make mutual aid arrangements with neighbouring, or other authorities or firefighting services providers, to ensure the provision of mutual assistance in times of need, or to discharge some or all of their statutory functions. In practice, this predominantly happens with immediate neighbours and only rarely with brigades further afield. This was understandable given the nature and extent of the expected operational challenge pre-9/11.
- (44) Now, however, there is a need for a wider sign-up to assist each other in times of crisis. Although the issue has been flagged up through ND channels, and appears as an issue in the Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006/8 (para 4.26) progress is slow and lacking in ownership between key stakeholders, ie, ODPM, LGA as employers, and CFOA as the professional advisors. Without a joined up, transparent scheme which describes, and underpins, powers of commanders, extent of duties of supporting authorities, consequent extent of liabilities, insurance issues, personnel welfare etc, then when the catastrophe occurs, valuable time will be spent in building structures and protocols which should already have been in place.
- (45) Second; although Regional Management Boards are attributed with a responsibility in the Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006/8 for "put(ting) in place effective resilience plans for large scale emergencies", this responsibility appears to be poorly underpinned by an RMB's constitution and powers. Even the Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006/8 itself, after outlining this duty on page 18, and referring for more detail to chapter 4, in fact never mentions the RMB again. This is not a case of a duty failing to be complied with, or of a gap in provision, rather of a potential for duplication and dilution of effort. In fact, all FRAs have the duty to do these things as Category One Responders under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004; thereafter to work with

partner agencies within the local resilience forums, and after that to refine and harmonise these same plans at the multi-agency regional resilience forums. This all makes good sense and works well. Given the fact that all of the resilience functions of the FRS as described in para 4.9 of the Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006/8 are discharged effectively through these statutory multi-agency forums, the role of the RMBs in FRS resilience is, therefore, unclear and possibly unnecessary.

Memorandum by West Sussex Fire and Rescue Authority (FRS 17)

West Sussex County Council strongly welcomes the opportunity to review the progress made on reform of the Fire and Rescue Service since 2003. This authority is actively promoting, implementing and delivering real changes in the Service and, working in partnership with all stakeholders, we remain committed to the process.

Progress on fire prevention has resulted in reductions in fire deaths, injuries and the incidence of fire. However, the challenge remains to deliver a more diverse workforce and to continue to drive down fire deaths and injuries, as well as reducing the incidence of other emergencies.

Modernisation and reform in the Fire and Rescue Service continues to be a complex, difficult and relatively slow process at a national, regional and local level.

One of the main barriers in the change process has been the reluctance of the Fire Brigade's Union to engage in meaningful discussions on modernisation issues, and their outward opposition to any change – whether that be in terms of constitutional arrangements, Regional Fire Controls, IRMP or working terms and conditions.

West Sussex County Council has a number of concerns about the modernisation process which are detailed in the attached memorandum.

Introduction

West Sussex County Council is the Fire Authority for West Sussex and is responsible for the implementation of the Fire Service Modernisation Agenda within the County. Whilst the authority supports the vast majority of modernisation initiatives, it has concerns with specific areas which we have identified in the attached report. For the information of the inquiry, the Chief Fire Officer of West Sussex specifically leads the Regional Control Centre project for the South-East.

Summary

Regional Controls:

We have serious concerns about the general uncertainty, lack of transparency and apparent lack of forethought given to the implications of regional control, not least the technological aspects.

The financial costs and resource implications for individual fire services in meeting the demands of regional control do not appear to be appreciated by ODPM.

There is an assumption that 'one-size fits all' which we do not believe is justified. Neither are we confident that the proposed savings of 30% are achievable.

Timescales for the project appear to have been determined based upon the financial model, rather than on a detailed assessment of what needs to be done and how thoroughly. Also, communication is poor both in terms of information and timeliness.

Modernisation:

While we believe that, overall, modernisation is progressing well, we are concerned about the lack of a national co-ordinating and advice centre.

We should welcome a middle/senior managers' representative forum, with the remit to negotiate terms and conditions of service on behalf of those staff.

We would be pleased to see government put into place the necessary arrangements to support Fire Authorities in implementing co-responder schemes where there is an identified community need.

THE INTRODUCTION OF REGIONAL FIRE CONTROLS

1. The objectives which ODPM have defined for this project are ones we would all share, in terms of improved resilience and greater interoperability. However there are a number of serious concerns about the way the project has been devised and has developed, which centre, in essence, on whether it has been an answer in search of a question. Rather than defining the objectives clearly from the outset, considering the current situation in detail and analysing the possible solutions, the project has suggested a number of regional centres and worked backwards from that position to find a rationale.
- 1.2 The practical result has been that important issues, such as legislative liability, are stumbled on late in the process. The lack of a clear project plan has resulted in ad hoc consideration of such issues and awkward attempts to fit them into a pre-determined result.
- 1.3 As with all major projects of this nature, there are issues and concerns that affect all stakeholders, and ultimately, our citizens and our communities. At this stage in the process, our concerns embody the following, which we wish to draw to the Committee's attention:
- 1.4 **General**
 - 1.4.1 There are statutory duties of fire authorities to safeguard the communities they serve, yet we are being forced to take decisions without full information being available and the responsibilities of authorities and Members remain unclear.

- 1.4.2 The lack of full acknowledgement of fire authorities' interests and concerns by ODPM. There would appear to be little feedback when authorities comment on ODPM proposals.
- 1.4.3 The lack of a full Business Case and the absence of transparency of costs. Authorities have not seen the final business case and believe that it does not include all FRA costs involved in the project.
- 1.4.4 The OBC does not reflect the 'out of scope' costs remaining with fire authorities.
- 1.4.5 National resilience is not a fire authority responsibility; therefore they should not accrue additional costs.
- 1.4.6 Additional costs of fire authorities only partly and unpredictably addressed through an unstructured 'New Burdens' process.
- 1.4.7 No realisation by the ODPM of the effect on fire authority staff of the project, in terms of retention and continuance.
- 1.4.8 Uncertainty and lack of ownership of governance arrangements.
- 1.4.9 Capacity issues for individual fire authorities. There appears to be little realisation that fire service personnel have a 'day' job outside of the project. Technical staff are required to work on the project because of imposed time constraints, without giving authorities the ability to back fill.

2. **Project Strategy**

- 2.1 Project vision is broad-brush, but complete neither in extent (logic suggests it leads to a regional / national fire service) nor in detail.
- 2.2 Concerns about whether the technological vision is achievable are as follows:
 - a) The components of the solution are mostly tried and tested technology, but have not previously been used at this scale (nine interchangeable systems serving 46 different services)
 - b) Management of this national solution to ensure all nine copies function fully and in the same way from the start, agreeing, testing and then implementing a programme of enhancements over the next 15 years will be potentially slow, expensive, and require considerable staff resource.
 - c) A linked configuration of nine identical systems introduces the possibility of total national computer failure, which in the current set-up of 46 varied and unconnected systems is small.

- d) By the time the RCCs go live, they will actually constitute a step backwards for many of the more advanced services.
- 2.3 By establishing control centres for the Government Office Regions, the assumption is that "one size fits all", regardless of geographic area, size of the requirement, or number/size of Fire and Rescue Authorities involved.
- 2.4 **Costs:** Cost and benefit analysis has not been adequate. The ODPM believes that the project will deliver nationally average savings of 30% but it is difficult to have confidence in this given the lack of definition of the project at this stage. In addition, there is little recognition of the hidden costs for fire authorities who will now need to manage 'out of scope' issues and the impacts this will have on other services within the Fire and Rescue Service or other local authority services. Current estimates for these, admittedly based upon an incomplete picture of how the RCC will operate, vary between £170,000 and £575,000 per annum per FRS (depending on size of service). For the South East as a whole, this could mean additional costs of up to £3m. Clearly these will make achievement of 30% savings an impossibility and, therefore, drastically reduce the amount of money which will be available for reinvestment in the Service.

3. **Project Implementation**

- 3.1 Assumption of a regional structure e.g. a seminar arranged by the national project for "Regional ICT Managers". In fact, no ICT Manager, or other manager, has any authority outside of their own FRS.
- 3.2 The national project team has stated that it is using an accepted project management methodology, PRINCE2, and related OGC guidelines to reduce the risks of the project, but this is not apparent to the regional teams, who therefore cannot themselves apply PRINCE2 meaningfully. Few of the national project team are PRINCE2-qualified.
- 3.3 **Timescales:** These appear to have been determined based upon the financial model for the project, rather than on a detailed assessment of what needs to be done and how thoroughly. Indeed, the national project team has not yet managed to keep to any of its own target dates.
- 3.4 Due to the lack of a detailed plan (see below) and persistent unreliability of dates given by the national project team, regional project teams are unable to plan and allocate resources to do the necessary work. This has an impact on the quality of the work and makes it difficult to provide strategic oversight due to the piecemeal approach of the national project team. It also increases the stress experienced by staff, who take the service they provide very seriously and who often have to choose at short notice whether to compromise the quality of the

returns they make to the national project on their FRA's behalf, or to compromise their day-job of keeping the existing 999 service running, knowing that either might have a most serious impact on their FRA's statutory responsibilities and public safety.

- 3.5 The uncertain timescales mean it is more difficult for regional project teams to involve locally-elected members in any discussion. This is exacerbated by the slowness (months) of response to any points the FRAs or Regional Management Board put forward.
- 3.6 **Engagement of national organisations:** The project has failed to engage the LGA/National Employers to provide timely information and leadership. This means uncertainty for affected staff, and duplication of effort for FRAs.
- 3.7 **Communication:** In spite of its expressed preference for cooperative working and open communications, the national project has persistently been unable to circulate documents for meetings in a timely manner or through the agreed co-ordinating points of contact in regional teams. It has also failed to clarify to regional teams what information can be shared with FRAs. Finally the national project has failed to set up the ODPM-standard collaborative software that would allow teams within the national project to access key documents, and would make communication with regional teams simpler and more reliable. All of this affects the ability of the FRAs and regional teams to deliver a considered response to the national project, accept the results of consultations and "work smarter" to overcome resource issues.
- 3.8 **Project Plan:** In spite of repeated urgent requests from this regional team and others, through various stakeholder fora, the national project has not been able to provide an up-to-date plan or assessment of the 'critical path' i.e. which tasks are prerequisites for other work.
- 3.9 **Funding:** Given their different sizes, regions have established teams with a different balance of work between 'regional' teams and FRA staff. Regardless of which approach has been taken, funding provided by ODPM has been too short-term and inadequate to build up the necessary underpinning capability.
- 3.10 Principles of "New Burdens" apply, but the national project's definitions of what constitutes a new burden, does not match the additional work required to deliver this project. Whilst this is not affecting council tax levels at present, it is affecting FRAs' ability to deliver this project as well as do other improvement work.
- 3.11 **FireLink:** The FiReControl and FireLink projects have been set up very differently by ODPM, which does not make it easy for the FRAs to coordinate

the demands on their staff (and both projects have a critical dependency on the same very small number of key specialists).

- 3.12 **Financial/Legal:** although numerous questions and concerns have been asked as early as December 04 on:
- the Tax and VAT implications of the proposed governing entity; and
 - effects of the RCCs on Chief Fire Officers' and FRAs' statutory responsibilities;

The ODPM has failed to address any of these issues. As a result FRA's are likely to have to commission thousands of pounds of legal advice to consider FRA interests and risks.

THE INTRODUCTION OF AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS FOR 'FIRELINK' RADIO SERVICES

4. West Sussex County Council fully supports the introduction of FireLink to replace the existing main scheme radio, and recognises the ODPM's resource and funding support in moving this project forward. At the time of specification for FireLink, the issue of hand-held communication on the incident ground fell outside the initial specification, as did the provision of alerting for retained fire stations. We believe that in light of the evolving role of Fire Authorities in supporting the civil resilience agenda as well as the increasing role the Service now plays in responding to a wider range of civil emergencies, it would be prudent to re-visit the initial specification with a view to including hand-held incident ground communication facilities (Hand-held radios) and to re-consider extending the scope of FireLink to including alerting systems for retained fire stations.

PROGRESS ON FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE REFORM

Overall we believe modernisation of the Service is proceeding well. However, there remain a number of areas of concern.

5. **Service 'Freedoms'**

We welcome the removal of some of the constraints placed on fire authorities in terms of fire/incident cover assessment and the introduction of local conditions consultation and negotiation. This is making a real difference to the way the service is delivered. However, that 'freedom' places a great emphasis and responsibility on individual fire authorities to develop local policies and procedures. The missing element is a national co-ordinating and advice centre allowing authorities to 'pick and mix' policies for local implementation without

high development costs. The embryonic system with CFOA and the ODPM, whilst helpful, does not currently meet our needs.

6. **Fire Safety**

6.1 Since the enactment of the Fire Precautions Act in 1971, we have seen a significant improvement in fire safety and fire precautions in the built environment. Fire and Rescue Services over the past 34 years have built up considerable professional expertise in fire safety and fire engineering which we believe has served the business community extremely well. We welcome the introduction of the Regulatory Reform Order, and support the drawing together of the myriad of legislation that relates to fire safety in places of work and public buildings. However, we are concerned that placing responsibility for such matters entirely on the premises occupier or owner may see a reduction in the high standards of fire safety now found in places of work and public buildings.

6.2 We believe that the professional expertise of the Fire and Rescue Service in supporting the business community should be retained, and that it would be beneficial to introduce the Regulatory Reform Order in phases.

7. **Institutional reforms**

7.1 We have considered the matter of institutional reform and have been supportive of the intention to review the National Joint Council with a view to considering the establishment of effective representative arrangements between employees and their Fire Authorities. We are not convinced that the current constitutional arrangements which have led to the vast majority of the uniformed workforce being represented by the Fire Brigades Union are the most effective way of progressing the modernisation of the Fire & Rescue Service. The current arrangements which result in many of the senior uniformed managers in the Service being represented by the FBU, is, in our view, not appropriate and does not best serve the interests of our staff.

7.2 We would support meaningful dialogue with a view to establishing a middle/senior managers' representative forum, with the remit to negotiate terms and conditions of service on behalf of those staff.

7.3 We are concerned about the way in which Regional Management Boards (RMBs) are changing from a co-ordinating entity to one which is developing wider financial responsibilities and, potentially, a further tier of Government. RMBs must complement existing fire authorities and not place a sometimes conflicting political pressure on constituent authorities.

7.4 As the Committee will be aware, there are now a number of governance structures applying to fire authorities – Combined Fire Authorities, County

Councils and the various Metropolitan options. We believe this leads to confusion and hinders 'like for like' comparisons between authorities for CPA or similar purposes. It is our belief that the 'county' model offers the most effective structure.

8. **Finance**

8.1 We would point the Select Committee to the 2003 report by Professor Sir George Bain, who considered the potential for Fire Authorities to make savings to support the modernisation agenda. He concluded that the scope for savings was likely to be different across Fire Authorities. We would argue that the scope for such savings amongst the South East Fire Authorities is minimal, and that the re-distribution of grant mentioned in the Bain Report has not materialised. All the South East Fire Authorities have a substantial mix of wholetime and retained duty system fire fighters and cover large rural areas as well as heavily populated city areas, including Brighton, Southampton and the rapidly expanding areas of Milton Keynes and Crawley.

8.2 Collectively we are responsible for providing an emergency response to the Channel tunnel, Gatwick Airport and other smaller regional airports along with providing an operational response to one of the busiest shipping highways in the world. The South East covers a large coastal area with inherent costs associated. We would argue strongly that the re-distribution of grant is a matter of considerable importance and that South East Fire Authorities should benefit from any re-distribution.

9. **Partnership Working**

We value the partnership working between the Fire & Rescue Service and other emergency services, in particular in matters related to civil resilience. We believe such partnership working must continue if we are to provide an effective response to emergency incidents and support joint exercises between the emergency services. However, we are mindful of the recent debates relating to reform of Police and Ambulance structures and would suggest that it would be prudent to await the outcome of any structural reform of those Services, before considering options for the Fire and Rescue Service. We do not believe there is any merit in regionalisation of the Fire & Rescue Service and are pleased that the Fire Minister Jim Fitzpatrick has recently stated that it is not the government's intention to regionalise Fire Authorities.

10. **Civil Emergencies**

As the work of the Fire and Rescue Service has evolved in recent years to encompass a wider civil emergency response, we have been grateful for the government's support for the New Dimension agenda. We hope the government

continues to support this additional work, which is crucial to effectiveness of the Critical National Infrastructure. In addition, we believe that the issue of co-responding is one which the Fire and Rescue Service should engage in through partnerships with the Ambulance Services. We are aware of the FBU's opposition to co-responder schemes, but cannot agree with their view that this is not the responsibility of the Fire & Rescue Services. We would be pleased to see government put into place the necessary arrangements to support Fire Authorities in implementing co-responder schemes where there is an identified community need.

11. **Introduction of the Integrated Personnel Development System**

Finally, we fully support this initiative. However, we are becoming increasingly concerned that whilst the system appears to meet the wider requirement for an integrated 'HR' system, it is becoming bureaucratic and extremely costly to the point that it has the potential of affecting the proper delivery of the Fire and Rescue Service.

Memorandum by the South West Regional Management Board (FRS 18)

The South West Regional Management Board continues to fully support the work of the Modernisation Agenda. The South West will be one of the first regions to move into a Regional Control Centre currently expected during 2008/9. This region considers that FiReControl and Firelink are the most crucial elements of this agenda, and therefore continues to prioritise as such.

The most significant area of concern to the South West Regional Management Board is that the two projects continue to be run separately at all levels. It is this area that we would wish to bring to the attention of the ODPM Select Committee inquiry into the Fire and Rescue Service. The attached report outlines the concerns of the region and the practical difficulties associated with this issue.

Whilst the governance arrangements surrounding the two projects are currently under review by the ODPM, it is the view of the South West Regional Management Board that only full integration of the two projects would produce an environment conducive to delivering the required project outcomes.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The successful implementation of the FiReControl Project is totally dependent on the success of Firelink (the National Radio Replacement Project). Currently the two projects are being run separately, which causes conflict and inefficiency due to the different management and governance structures in place. This causes operational difficulties for the staff responsible for the implementation of both projects. The South West Regional Management Board (RMB) would wish to see Firelink and FiReControl run as a single project. Seamlessly joining Firelink and FiReControl together in this way would significantly increase the likelihood of successful delivery for both projects.

BACKGROUND

The South West Region worked together to procure a regional radio solution during 2000 & 2001. This work was superseded in 2002, with a national project to procure a single national radio scheme for the fire service. "Firelink" was developed as the National Project, and has culminated in the procurement of a single radio scheme for England Scotland and Wales.

FiReControl was developed in 2004, following the settlement of the firefighters pay dispute, and a review undertaken by Mott McDonald. The FireControl programme seeks to replace the 46 individual County Control Rooms, with 9 Regional Control Centres, which will deal with all the emergency call management for each region whilst providing fallback cover for all other regions, thus providing a truly resilient infrastructure.

Firelink is an essential pre-requisite of FiReControl. The new ways of working proposed for the RCCs necessitate a single radio scheme capable of an increased use of data transfer and simultaneous reduction in voice communications.

THE ISSUE

Currently the two projects are being run separately at National level. RCC Regional Projects Directors have, in some cases, integrated the two projects at a regional level, but the lack of a co-ordinated approach at national level makes even this difficult. There are a number of key areas of concern for the South West and these are highlighted below.

1. Recent history of delivering IT change projects in the public sector has shown a less than 50% success rate. If the two projects continue to be run independently, there is a greater risk of project failure due to reduced coordination.
2. The FiReControl Outline Business Case makes reference to an inextricable link with the Firelink project. The projects' lack of full integration remains a significant barrier to efficient operation of both projects.
3. Both projects require regional level structures with Principal Officers and other technical personnel needing to attend, depending on the level. The two projects involve similar people but the misalignment of projects at a national level sometimes requires two separate meetings at regional level, particularly at project team level. This introduces inefficiencies and duplication of effort, as well as, misinformation, and lost opportunities caused by assumed knowledge that is not in fact there. If the two projects were combined this would introduce efficiencies and greater knowledge and appreciation of both projects. Closed agenda items could be used if necessary for commercial reasons.
4. Currently both projects employ significant delivery and project management resource which could be rationalised creating substantial savings if the two projects were merged.
5. The workloads that the two projects put on Fire and Rescue services often compete for the same FRS resources at the same time. This has the potential to cause conflict and is inefficient if not managed in a coordinated manner. If the two projects were combined or formally run as a programme, an integrated plan could be developed identifying 'clashes' and pinch points. An early resolution could then be sought, to prioritise the work according to the needs of the programme to support the successful delivery of both projects.
6. FiReControl are providing software to go onto Firelink hardware. An agreement to allow FiReControl contractors access to Firelink hardware will be needed. At present, because the two projects are operating separately, how this might be operated at a practical level has not been considered and this will only serve to introduce problems later. If the projects were integrated such problems could

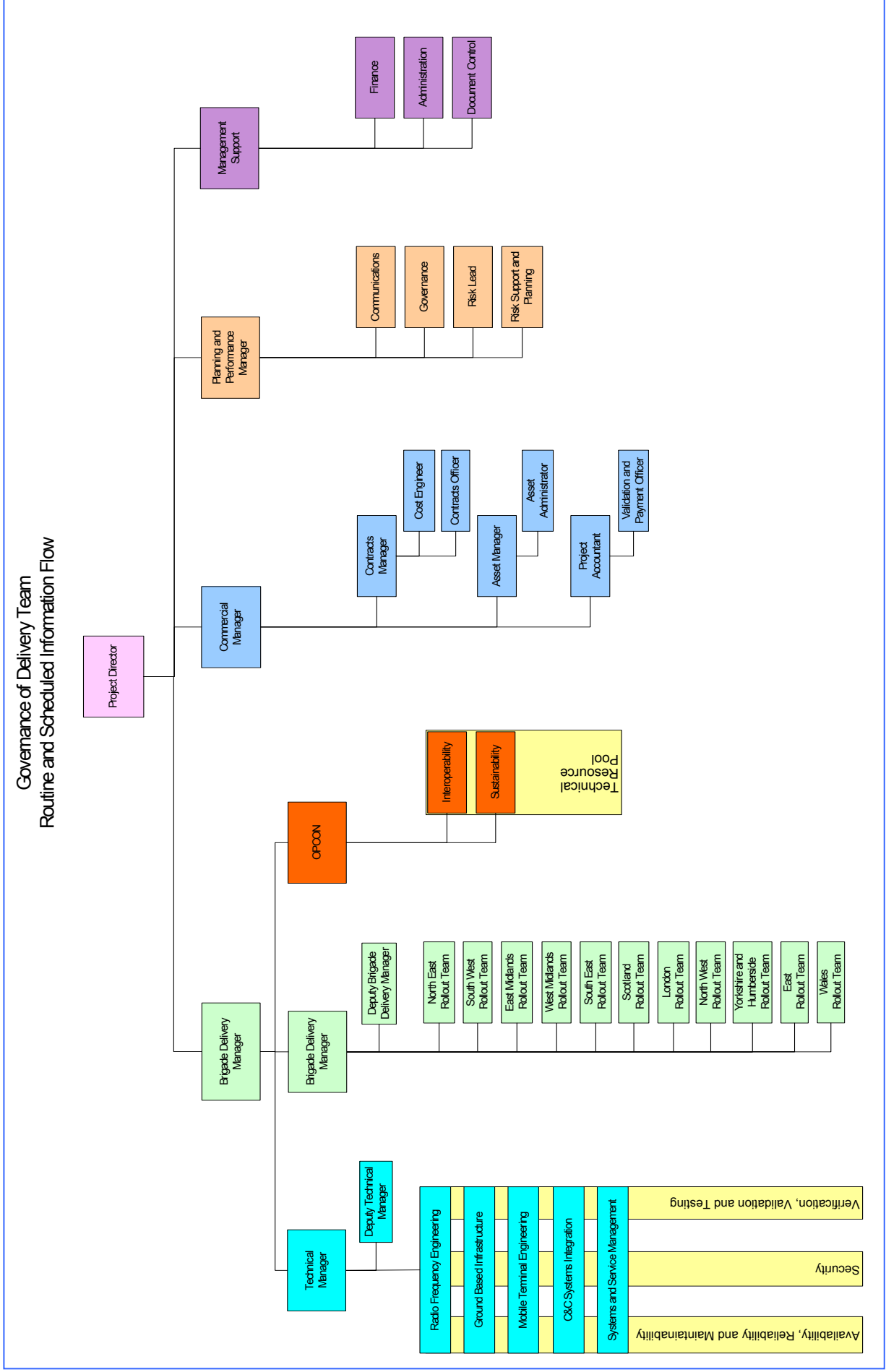
resolved before contract award therefore reducing the potential cost to both projects.

CONCLUSION

This is a risk critical project upon which, the lives of the general public and firefighters will depend. For the whole of the project to be successfully delivered there needs to be an open and transparent information exchange. This is certainly not occurring at present. The best way to achieve this is complete integration of the two current projects. Successful information exchange will reduce the chance of costly mistakes and delays which have been prevalent in other major ICT projects.

Project structure charts are attached for both Firelink and FiReControl to illustrate the lack of cohesion between the two.

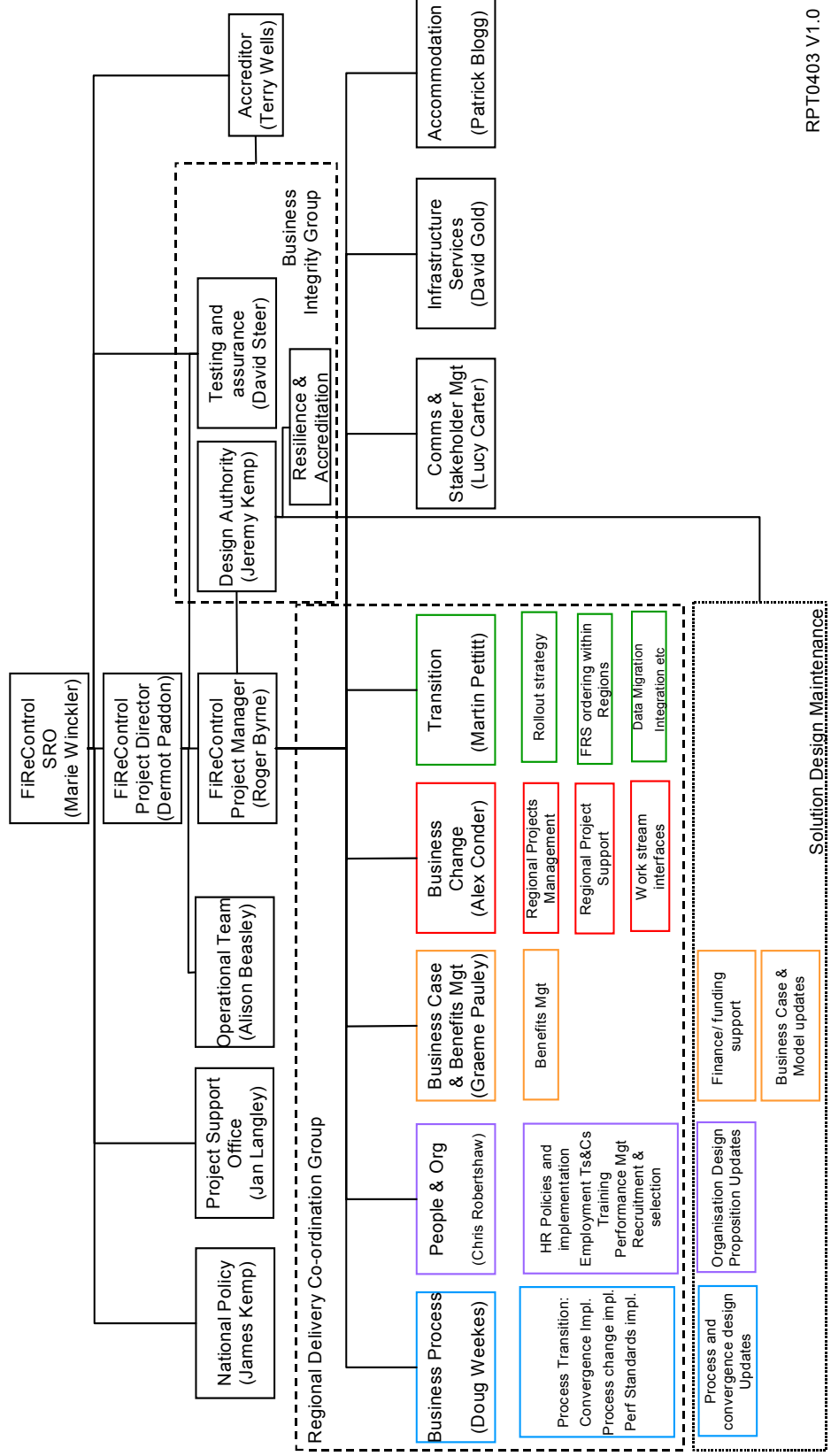
Clive Kemp
Chief Fire Officer, Somerset Fire & Rescue Service &
RCC Regional Project Director



FiReControl



FiReControl national work streams for Development Stage



Memorandum by Ordnance Survey (FRS 19)

1. Introduction

1.1 Ordnance Survey is Britain's national mapping agency. We maintain the definitive geographical framework for Great Britain, as well as capturing and marketing a wide range of geographical information. Our Director General is official advisor to the United Kingdom Government on all aspects of survey, mapping and geographic information. Ordnance Survey is a Government department and executive agency, and since 1999 has operated as a trading fund.

1.2 Ordnance Survey surveys and collects data on roads, buildings, addresses, boundaries, water courses, height and many other aspects of the natural and man-made landscape of Britain. Although traditionally supplied to the user as paper maps, this data is now more usually supplied as digital information which can be readily analysed, manipulated and linked to other information. This digital database of the surface of Britain is known as the National Geospatial Database (NGD) from which the OS MasterMap® product is produced. The NGD is kept up to date on a daily basis with up to 5,000 changes being added to the database each day. It is the most up-to-date, consistent and accurate information available and forms an essential geographic framework for Great Britain.

2. The implications for citizens and the Fire and Rescue Service of the introduction of Regional Control Centres

2.1 Establishing the precise location and nature of an incident is vital to the rapid deployment of appropriate resources. It saves lives, reduces costs and minimises risks.

2.2 Modern information systems and reliable, up-to-date information is an essential component in the efficient and effective mobilisation of Fire and Rescue Services. Geographic Information provides the underpinning framework for all information relevant to the deployment of the Fire and Rescue Services. Such information, used within a geographic information system [GIS] see Annex A, facilitates rapid and effective analysis leading to better informed decisions.

2.3 An accurate, up-to-date and consistent gazetteer of locations, including addresses, is an essential interface between control room operators, the public and service professionals. The loss of 'local knowledge' inherent in the introduction of Regional Control Centres makes this and a GIS resource essential to the process of incident identification and operational response. Current office based and 'in-cab' technology allows both controllers and responding staff to have a common view of the location, layout, known hazards and position and quality of resources on the ground, e.g fire hydrants. See Annex B.

2.4 The significant increase in the use of mobile phone technology poses increasing challenges for command and control operators because the 999 call is not always made from a known location. Accurate and up to date information maintained to a common specification is vital to establishing the location of an incident and therefore the effectiveness of Regional Control Centres.

2.5 For the emergency services particularly, the content and currency of the gazetteers and the detailed mapping in use has to be of the highest possible accuracy. Reliance on anything except the best available information increases the risk to life and property.

2.6 Command and control operators can benefit from a GIS containing a range of mapping information with functionality to allow fast zooming-in through multi-layered data, for both call takers and dispatchers. This provides a consistent base from which to determine location giving the caller and the control room team an agreed view of the world. When correctly implemented the caller has confidence that the control room staff can relate to what they are seeing.

2.7 When a coordinated response is required from a number of the emergency services a consistent map base is essential for the sharing of appropriate data to ensure all those involved respond based on a common operational picture.

2.8 The ability to reference incidents to a precise location supports emergency response in several ways. The ability to dispatch the appropriate resource from those currently available in the immediate area can only be carried out with access to location information for both incident and resources.

2.9 Where multiple calls are received from the same location, controllers can turn to their GIS to recognise any pattern in what is happening. It can help them establish if the calls are indeed related to the same incident, thus mobilising once. This can be important as multiple calls may well be routed to different operators as they come in. While verbal communication across the control room works in small centres it is more difficult in larger controls. GI-based analysis has the advantage that the correct number and type of vehicles can be mobilised to the incident, at building or road level as applicable.

2.10 Due to the nature of emergency incidents, a high percentage of calls may not originate at a clearly definable location such as a building with an identifiable street number. Such calls accounted for 54% of incidents for West Yorkshire Police between April and August 2005. Verifying the precise location using an accurate, up-to-date and consistent gazetteer and geographic information can help to cut down any delay in mobilisation.

2.11 In addition to the timely mobilisation and real time resource management a GIS can provide an understanding of the pattern of where incidents occur. This creates

opportunities to help in station planning and to identify stand-by locations resulting from 'hotspot analysis'. It can also be used to target education, for example on fire safety, and gain a better understanding of certain criminal activity. When arson crime data is combined with other police and fire data, more detailed fire patterns can be identified.. This enables educational and social services programmes to be developed to help reduce future incidents. See Annex C. Accurately locating incidents will support service improvement targets.

3. Conclusions

3.1 Establishing the precise location and nature of an incident is vital to the rapid deployment of appropriate resources. It saves lives, reduces costs and minimises risks.

3.2 Modern information systems and reliable, up-to-date information is an essential component in the efficient and effective mobilisation of Fire and Rescue Services. Geographic Information provides the underpinning framework for all information relevant to the deployment of the Fire and Rescue Services.

3.3 For the emergency services particularly, the content and currency of the gazetteers and the detailed mapping in use has to be of the highest possible accuracy. Reliance on anything except the best available information increases the risk to life and property.

3.4 Ordnance Survey, Britain's national mapping agency, provides the most accurate, up-to-date and nationally consistent geographic information available to support the introduction of Regional Control Centres for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Unprinted papers:

The following background papers are available on request from the Committee Office:

Annex A – The Modern GIS

Annex B – In-cab mapping underpins new brigade information systems

Annex C – Reducing environmental crime

Memorandum by Dorset Fire Authority (FRS 20)

Dorset Fire Authority is supportive of the direction of travel which the modernisation agenda has brought to the fire and rescue service, although it does have concerns over the pace of change, which linked to capacity and the Authority's financial ability in progressing the modernisation agenda is bringing about tensions in the Service.

During the CPA process carried out in 2005, Dorset Fire Authority received a rating of 'Good' and was placed 5th out of all fire authorities. This position shows the determination of the Authority of taking on the challenges of the modernisation agenda where its officers strive for continuous progress.

The Authority has particular concerns over the FiReControl and FireLink projects and these are described below. It feels that it has little choice other than to go along with the project due to the powers that the Secretary of State has under the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004 which can order a fire authority to participate in the project. As a consequence, officers of the Authority are actively involved in progressing towards the full implementation of the project.

As required by all fire authorities, Dorset carried out a Best Value Review of its Fire Control in 2000/01. Discussion took place with neighbouring fire authorities and other 'blue light' services in Dorset the outcome of which resulted in Fire Control remaining in Dorset but with a change of its command and control software. The new software has been operational since May 2002 and is regarded as one of the most modern and up to date systems in the country, providing call location and the ability to mobilise on vehicle location. In addition to the advantages of a modern command and control system the Authority has been able to make significant year on year savings on the software maintenance contract. The report of the Best Value Review was forwarded to the responsible Government department within the original time frame, however, the Authority has never received a formal response to its review.

Since the new software has been installed into Dorset's Fire Control it has proved its robustness and resilience on numerous occasions by dealing with both major incidents and spate conditions. The robustness of Fire Control was tested most recently by an incident in November 2005, which resulted in a nationwide interest. A major fire in a scrap yard in Poole brought down overhead high voltage power cables, causing large areas of the Bournemouth/Poole conurbation to suffer power failure. Dorset Fire Control were handling the primary incident but also taking emergency calls brought about by the sudden electrical power failure. During a period of just over three hours Dorset's Fire Control handled 130 emergency calls alone, with half of these occurring in a 30 minute period just after 9am. Whilst Fire Control was stretched, the professionalism of the staff showed they were able to maintain the resilience of the centre during these spate conditions. It also shows how a local Fire Control are able to deal with wide scale incidents and at the same time maintain control of a major primary incident.

Dorset Fire Authority first registered its strong opposition to the FiReControl project with ODPM in June 2004 for which it has received a response to its letter.

In December 2004, fire authorities were provided with a commercially censored version of the Outline Business Case (OBC) for the FiReControl project. At the time Elected Members were concerned with the lack of detail of the project and remained unconvinced at that stage that Regional Control Centres were deliverable, within the intended timescales and would provide the savings suggested in the OBC, particularly at local level.

During 2005 Members have attended several Fire Control seminars organised by ODPM but still remain very sceptical over the project for the following reasons:

Finance

- The financial effect on fire authorities of operating a Regional Control Centre is still unknown, and the Authority is still waiting to see the full business case.
- Fire Authorities medium term financial plans and in particular the 2007/08 budgets cannot be forecast without knowing the costs of the project. It is not clear whether the additional costs of maintaining existing Fire Controls with replacement staff (to cover existing staff who will take up appointments in Regional Controls) will be covered by any 'New Burdens' funding.
- It is still unclear how much data transmission will cost the Authority, and whether the costs of FireLink prior to regional controls will be borne by individual fire authorities.
- It is understood that ODPM have spent some £45m on consultant fees on this project, the Authority is concerned that these costs will be passported on to fire authorities.
- The Authority understands, that it is likely that Regional Control Centres will be built during the next twelve months and these could be left empty for up to three years. There is concern over these costs and who will pay for them.
- ODPM have introduced 'out of scope' work, this is work currently carried out by Fire Controls that will not be carried forward into Regional Controls but will be expected to be picked up by fire authorities. The Authority is concerned that these costs do not appear to have been considered in the outline business case and will fall to fire authorities.

Service Delivery

- In Dorset we carry out a regular customer satisfaction surveys that has raised concerns over a Regional Control Centre. These surveys show a high customer satisfaction rating for the effectiveness of local mobilising of fire crews to incidents. The Authority is concerned whether this level of rating will be achieved by a Regional Control Centre.

- The Authority is concerned that it will lose managerial control over its resources which could impinge on its ability to deliver an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) that is flexible and meets the needs of its area.
- Dorset Fire Control have set a high standard in mobilising, achieving 99.99% of mobilisations in less than 1 minute. The Authority would expect an equally high standard from the Regional Control Centre.
- The Authority is concerned over the IT based system. Whilst it understands that technically such a system is feasible, past experiences have shown serious problems with new and major IT programmes and therefore thorough proving trials will need to take place if the public are not to lose confidence in the system.
- The Authority is very concerned on its ability to maintain continuity of service in its existing Control, right up to handover to a Regional Control Centre. There is a need to appoint to all the positions in the new centre very early on so that authorities can plan for replacements. These costs will depend on the number of replacements required, which could be significant and there is no indication whether this will be borne by fire authorities or picked up through 'New Burdens'.

The Project

- The Authority is concerned over how ODPM will ensure that the project will eventually be delivered in line with the OBC and the original scoping documents. This concern is based on the work currently going on in deciding what is 'in scope' and what is 'out of scope' which must lead to a change in some of the original scoping concepts.
- The SW Regional Control Centre will be one of the first centres to 'go live' and originally, the Authority was advised this would happen in November 2006, it has since been delayed to Spring 2008. The Authority has learnt from those with experience of major IT projects that we could expect this to be further delayed until 2010. This does not fit well with the PRINCE 2 project management that ODPM are using and the Authority is concerned the effect these delays will have on the financial case of the project.
- The delay in timescales of the project and the prospect of further delays is having an adverse impact on our staff as it provides them with uncertainty for the future and the ability to plan their lives ahead.

At its meeting in January 2005 Dorset Fire Authority made the point that they did not consider the case for the project to be robust enough for firm decision making and were not satisfied that deliverability, affordability and value for money had been established by ODPM. They were concerned that it had not been demonstrated that the proposals would be in the best interests and safety of the people of Dorset. A year has gone by and sadly the Authority has received no further information to change its view and still remains with exactly the same concerns that it had this time last year.

Memorandum by the London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) (FRS 21)

1. The London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) welcomes this Inquiry and the opportunity to submit evidence to the Select Committee. It would be willing to attend the Committee to provide oral evidence if this would be helpful.
2. The Authority strongly supports, on a cross party basis, the modernisation of the fire & rescue service. Indeed, prior to the Government's White Paper "Our Fire & Rescue Service" and the passage of the Fire & Rescue Service Act 2004 the Authority had consistently argued for the service to be modernised. It had identified that the legislation and national framework within which the service then operated was outdated and no longer met the needs and aspirations of those it was seeking to protect. In particular it argued that individual fire & rescue authorities should be given the flexibility to plan and deliver services according to their knowledge and understanding of local risks, and that the role the public had come to expect the service to play in responding to non-fire emergencies should be recognised as part of its core functions.
3. It therefore welcomed the provisions of the Fire & Rescue Service Act 2004, in particular the extension of fire & rescue authorities' statutory powers and duties, and the introduction of integrated risk management planning into the service.

Progress with modernisation of the service in London

4. The Committee will be aware that the Audit Commission carried out two exercises in 2004 to verify the progress being made by individual fire & rescue authorities in implementing modernisation of the fire & rescue service and the national pay and conditions agreement with the Fire Brigades Union. Subsequently the Audit Commission assessed this Authority as a "good" authority under the Initial Performance Assessment. A reconciliation exercise then confirmed that "good" rating under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment for the fire & rescue service.
5. This verification work looked at progress in a number of areas of modernisation:-
 - integrated risk management planning;
 - the move from rank to role for operational staff;
 - delivery of the integrated personal development system for staff;
 - use of overtime;
 - changes in duty systems;
 - introduction of part time working;
 - delivery of the wider modernisation agenda;

- financial issues, including delivery of anticipated savings from modernisation.
6. We are proud that on both occasions the Commission found that no fire & rescue authority was making better progress than LFEPA in implementing modernisation of the service.
 7. This change has, of course, taken place at the same time as the need to enhance our resilience to respond to a terrorist attack, or other major catastrophic incidents. As the capital city, London faces a higher risk of such an event than the rest of the country, as was tragically shown by the July bombings.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

8. The pace of change has been fast, and a great deal has been achieved in a small amount of time. We would wish to highlight the following achievements in London.
9. Over the last five years, London has seen a 20 per cent reduction in deaths from accidental dwelling fires. There has also been a 23 per cent reduction in deaths from non-accidental fires in the home. Total injuries from fire have reduced by 20 per cent, and hoax calls by 30 per cent, exceeding the 20 per cent target reduction set by government.
10. These improvements picked up speed last year, when we saw a 13 per cent reduction in the more serious fires in London — for example, those in buildings — over the previous year; dramatic reductions in total fire deaths, from 86 in 2003/04 to 40 in 2004/05; and in accidental fires in dwellings from 60 to 22.
11. London now has the lowest number of fire calls per 10,000 population when compared to England's other major cities. It has the lowest number of deaths from accidental dwelling fires per 10,000 population and the lowest number of serious deliberate fires per 10,000 population. It also has the lowest number of false alarms from automatic fire detection systems per 10,000 population.
12. We are confident that it is no coincidence that these improvements have happened as we have increased our emphasis on prevention work, which has been a major priority for the Authority since it was set up in 2000.
13. We have introduced a programme of home fire safety checks, linked with a programme to install smoke alarms where they are not already fitted.
14. We have also rolled out a range of innovative schemes to work with young people to improve fire safety awareness, reduce the incidence of anti-social behaviour, such as deliberate fire setting or making false alarms, and to develop

their self confidence as part of wider efforts to tackle social exclusion. We have also continued and improved our programme of working with schools to increase fire safety awareness among children.

15. We have brought together the full range of our services (community fire safety, fire safety regulation and the emergency response) together within Borough teams, under the management of a Borough Commander. This has helped us to develop much better joint working with the London boroughs, other emergency services and other local agencies, community groups and businesses at a local level to tackle common problems and improve community safety.
16. We have made massive investment in additional vehicles, equipment and training for staff to be ready to respond in the event of a major terrorist attack or other major emergencies. The bombings on 7 July showed that this investment had proved worthwhile, when some additional vehicles, equipment and training were used to good effect.
17. At the same time, we are demonstrating innovation and creative problem solving on some of the largest construction projects in the world. Heathrow's Terminal 5, together with major transport intersections, will accommodate 30 million passengers a year and we are working closely with BAA to ensure effective fire safety measures are built into the new terminal. Thames Gateway is one of the largest development opportunities, and we are working to ensure that not only the new developments have appropriate fire detection and suppression systems fitted, but also that we are prepared to provide effective emergency cover that reflects population growth and changing risks. Major transport developments such as the Channel Tunnel link and Crossrail pose their own challenges and again we are working with the developers to make sure that effective fire safety measures are built in.
18. The government has now streamlined fire safety arrangements with the introduction of a new framework that pulls together more than 100 different pieces of earlier legislation. These changes come into effect in April 2006, and will nearly double the number of premises subject to detailed regulation. We are planning to deal with this expansion within current resources by adopting a risk-based inspection strategy, where the frequency of our visits to check premises reflects the assessed fire risk in those buildings.
19. We have prepared two Integrated Risk Management Plans, consulting widely on both of them, and are now consulting on a further Action Plan for 2006/07. These Plans took advantage of the flexibility provided by the new Fire and Rescue Services Act to provide emergency cover which better reflects the patterns of risks across the capital. We have set new attendance standards which apply across all of London, and by moving some fire engines we will be able to improve our performance. This means that for those incidents that need two or

more engines, both engines will arrive within eight minutes in over a thousand more cases a year than has been the case until now.

20. All these improvements have been achieved while we have continued to deliver efficiency savings of several million pounds a year; year after year.

REGIONAL CONTROLS AND FIRELINK

21. This Authority is of course the only regional fire & rescue authority in England, and we believe that planning and delivery of the fire & rescue service on a London-wide basis is both efficient and effective.

22. We have recently introduced our new regional control centre in Docklands. This delivers a cost effective service and, supported by modern software, is helping us deliver improved services (for example by using call challenge to reduce the number of malicious false alarms we attend).

23. The Authority has recently decided to support the FiReControl Project subject to future review which will consider issues such as:

- a) receipt of the final business case from the ODPM and confirmation of the benefits of the project to this Authority;
- b) satisfactory resolution of abortive and any other costs issues;
- c) the Authority's position in the rollout programme being appropriate and agreed with the ODPM;
- d) the Authority's current and proposed IT and information systems integration and architecture not being disadvantaged by adopting a regional mobilising system delivered by the Regional Fire Control Room Project.

Advantages and disadvantages of FiReControl

24. When reaching this decision the Authority carefully considered the potential advantages and disadvantages of its participation in this project.

25. The potential benefits for responding to emergency calls and enhancing resilience to deal with a major catastrophic incident include>

- a) immediate support from the other regional controls in spate conditions, ensuring that all calls are answered within 20 seconds;
- b) in the event of the London's control centre becoming unavailable for any reason, any one of the other regional controls would be able to immediately take

over the receipt of emergency calls and the management and mobilisation of London Fire brigade resources. Among other things, this could also remove the requirement for a dedicated London fallback control, with consequential financial savings;

c) common processes and procedures will improve interoperability between regions and Brigades which will be of particular benefit when responding to large scale, cross border emergencies.

26. However the Authority also noted the following potential risks which will need careful management and mitigation if the project is to meet its aspirations and London's requirements:

a) the long term solution developed as part of the regional control project must support the integrated risk management planning process. In London we are not currently using the FSEC tool developed by the ODPM, but have developed an alternative approach which we believe better meets our needs. We would wish to continue to have the flexibility to develop and use those tools best able to support our approach to integrated risk management planning;

b) the Authority's current and proposed IT and information systems integration and architecture are well advanced and it will be essential that any potential problems with (a) meeting critical national infrastructure requirements and (b) interoperability between these systems and the FiReControl systems are identified early and that they are capable of being resolved;

c) our current mobilising arrangements became operational in April 2004 and it is estimated a major technology refresh or replacement system would be due in 2010/11. The premises for the new control are leased until 2011 with provision for a 5 year lease extension. With London being awarded the 2012 Olympics any new system should be in operation some 18 to 24 months earlier. There has already been some slippage in the FiReControl project, and already the earliest date for implementation would be early in 2009. FiReControl is however a very complex project and is intricately linked with the complex FiRelink project. Some further slippage seems likely, if not inevitable and this could result in the Authority having to consider the accommodation options as the current lease on the control building expires in October 2011.

27. However, the potential risks identified above would apply at any time the Authority refreshes its current system. With rigorous project management arrangements, and regular and effective liaison with ODPM, these problems should be minimised and mitigated, especially as roll out of the new systems to London will be at the end of the national programme.

28. The Authority also noted a number of drawbacks to not committing, in principle, to the FiReControl Project. The major ones are:
- a) the location of London's mobilising centre (primary control) and its fallback control would not meet the requirements of critical national infrastructure~
 - b) there would be more limited scope to develop common processes and procedures with other Fire and Rescue Services and their controls, which could result in difficulties with cross border mobilisation and operations, including those to major cross border incidents;
 - c) a fallback control would have to be maintained, and service delivery and attendance times in London could be affected during the transition from the primary control to the fallback control;
 - d) London would be outside of the national procurement arrangements and, if we had a different supplier, would bear the full costs of software development and upgrades.
29. On balance therefore, the Authority decided to commit, in principle, to participate in the FiReControl project subject to the qualifications set out in paragraph 23 above. However, unlike other aspects of the modernisation programme, this decision did not command all party support.
30. The Authority decided in 2002 to support and participate in the national FiReLink project. The replacement of the current radio scheme in London is now overdue and the Authority is anxious that the new national scheme is available in London as soon as possible, particularly as it impacts directly on the Authority's planned move to a new Headquarters. We are therefore anxious that the timetable for implementation of the national scheme does not slip further and that it is rolled out in London, as planned, in 2008.
31. However, it is essential that the new control arrangements and the new radio scheme are in place well before the 2012 Olympics. The new systems need to be operating (and any initial problems with their operation resolved) before we meet the major challenge of ensuring that the Games pass off safely, given the particular profile they may present as a potential terrorist target.

PROGRESS WITH IMPLEMENTING FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE REFORM

Fire Prevention

Fire Safety Regulation

32. The main challenge facing the fire & rescue service on fire safety enforcement is the impending implementation of the Fire Safety (Regulatory Reform) Order 2005 in April 2006. This will involve a change of culture for both the service as the enforcing authority and the business community with whom we work. It will also considerably increase the number of premises that the service has detailed enforcement responsibility, which has potential resource implications.
33. The Order will replace the prescriptive regime of the Fire Precautions Act 1971 with a risk based approach where the onus rests with the person responsible for the building to comply with the legislation and secure public safety. Effectively this change will extend the approach already adopted in the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations.
34. It will mean that fire officers involved in regulation work will have to move away from reliance on codes to dealing with cases on an individual, risk assessed basis. This will have considerable training implications to equip those officers to use risk based techniques and deal at a professional level with architects, fire safety consultants etc. In effect they will have to be able to think “outside of the box”.
35. The Authority has long argued for changes along these lines, and we welcome the new Order and its introduction next April.
36. In line with the provision in the new Order, this Authority will be putting in place new inspection regimes for different categories of premises, based on the risks they present. Our approach will be to set inspection frequencies in line with assessed risks, and we expect that this will allow us to handle the much greater number of premises covered by the new Order without significant increase in our dedicated fire safety teams.
37. The change in legislation will also impact on the business community. Many small and medium sized firms rely heavily on advice and assistance from the fire & rescue service on fire safety issues in their premises. In the future they will have to become more self reliant. However, during the transitional period while the new approach is bedding down, we expect that fire & rescue authorities will need to supply a degree of support to the business community.
38. The increasing reliance on fire engineered solutions in modern buildings will also increase the need for the fire & rescue service to have professional officers, with the requisite skills and knowledge to assess such innovative solutions and to

negotiate with architects, fire safety consultants about their proposals. In London, this is a particular challenge given the increasing number of very large and complex developments such as Heathrow Terminal 5, the new Wembley stadium, White City and the Olympic sites.

39. As well as managing the changes arising from the new Fire Safety Order, other legislation such as the new Licensing Act 2003 and recent changes to housing legislation also pose challenges to the fire & rescue service. We will need to work in partnership with other enforcing agencies, and agree new working relationships with them to achieve our common goal of improving public safety and minimising risk. Again, this widening of our responsibilities could have resource implications, especially as it comes at the same time as we are coping with the increased number of premises covered by fire safety regulation.
40. There are some other issues relating to fire safety regulation which we would wish to highlight:
 - the experience of the introduction of the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations shows that the Government needs to do more to publicise changes in fire safety legislation. Their commitment to do so will be tested with the new Fire Safety Order;
 - the advent of the e-Fire portal next year will change the way in which the fire & rescue service interacts with its users. E-Fire is however only a start and we will need to develop further ways in which we can make better use of modern technology to improve our service delivery;
 - as the complexity of fire safety regulation activity grows, and we move away from a very prescriptive or “tick box” approach, we will need to keep under review how best to make sure that staff have the necessary skills and competencies for this new rule. This will involve looking at the balance between specialist fire officers and use of station based or other staff, and the appropriate mix of uniformed and non-uniformed staff within those dedicated teams;
 - it is essential that the Government continues to support our efforts to persuade, or where the risk justifies it to require, developers to include domestic sprinkler systems in new or refurbished premises. There has been a sustained campaign in which we and other informed organisations, such as the Local Government Association, have pressed for the introduction of sprinklers on a risk assessed basis as a means of tackling fires in those classes of residential and other property where the potential for fire is known to be high. Examples of premises where we believe the building regulations should include a requirement to install sprinklers would include schools, new homes in major developments such as those in Thames Gateway, and rented older houses in multioccupation or care homes. Modern sprinkler systems are reliable and rarely cause unwanted

damage through malfunction, but are very effective in limiting fire spread and fire damage and ensuring that people have the time to leave premises safely if fire does break out. Nationally, fires in schools continue to represent a huge cost counted in tens of millions of pounds, not to mention the serious educational disruption and upset that often results from them. Yet, one major insurance company has estimated that the cost of installing a sprinkler system in a school can be recouped within 7-8 years through reduced insurance premiums. Overall, we think the Government has been too slow and cautious in responding to the potential that smarter use of sprinklers offers as a means to mitigate known fire risks, and we would welcome recognition of their benefits in future changes to Building regulations;

- the service will continue to discuss with Government, the building insurance and fire protection industries how to promote the use of UKAS accredited third party certification for fire safety products to improve their competence and reliability;
- we will continue to lobby for improvements in standards and building design codes to incorporate proven fire safety technologies, particularly where this can help to ensure effective fire safety design in new and complex building projects in London;
- we believe the relationship between the fire & rescue service and local authorities on a range of enforcement work (building control, entertainments licensing, environmental health etc) should be reviewed with a view to improving joint working where this can improve community safety or reduce burdens on business.

Community Fire Safety

41. We welcome the provision in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 of a statutory duty to promote community fire safety. Unlike fire safety regulation work however, there is little in the way of detailed central guidance as to how this new duty should be discharged. The demise of the National Community Fire Safety Centre will not help to remedy this situation.
42. We would agree that to some extent community fire safety initiatives should reflect local circumstances, risks and needs. However, we also believe that there is scope for greater collaboration between individual fire & rescue authorities and for more effective involvement by the ODPM - not just in providing direction but in providing resources such as support materials etc. In addition, experience has shown that national campaigns require a greater degree of co-ordination than at present to ensure that the service is given adequate notice of these campaigns, can align them with local initiatives, and receives sufficient supplies of materials etc.

43. In harmony with our new statutory responsibilities to promote community fire safety this Authority is increasingly demonstrating its influence and potential in wider community concerns; supporting strategies which impact on neighbourhood renewal, health inequality, crime reduction and social exclusion.
44. The fire & rescue service enjoys unique public respect and support, and we have shown that we can use that trust and our record of helping people in a variety of ways to lead and inspire members of the community in projects which make a difference. This is not entirely altruistic, since there is a strong positive correlation between improving quality of life in local neighbourhoods and lower levels of nuisance and the frequency and consequences of fire.
45. Community fire safety work is resource intensive. Our approach has been to make more effective use of the time of our trained fire officers at fire stations, and increase the time they spend in their local communities spreading fire safety messages. This has enabled us to make a real impact in improving safety, without substantial additional investment.
46. However, this is not the whole story. Some of our initiatives are supported by volunteers from among staff across the whole organisation, often working in their own time because they believe in the positive outcomes that can be achieved. Some of our key youth engagement activities, e.g. our successful Local Intervention Fire Education (LIFE) scheme or our work with the Prince's Trust, are supported by external funding from agencies and are therefore at jeopardy should that funding cease or be reduced. Securing external funding is itself also resource intensive and the project based nature of such funding can cause uncertainty and, on occasions, disappointment when we are unable to meet expectations which we have helped to raise.
47. Similarly the Government's support for Operation Scrap It (the scheme to remove abandoned vehicles from the streets promptly) has helped to achieve a substantial reduction in the number of such vehicles on the streets. This has not only helped to improve the environment in the locality but, as these vehicles are a target for arson, has also helped us to achieve a dramatic reduction in the number of fires in derelict vehicles. The withdrawal of Government financial support for this scheme is a cause for concern, lest it results in a reversal of recent improvements and an increase in derelict cars on London's streets and the number of fires they attract.
48. As the number of these schemes grows, as they are rolled out more widely and as they are sustained over years, rather than months, there will be long term resource implications which will impact on fire & rescue authorities' budgets and therefore on precept demands for the council tax payer.

49. There are some other issues relating to community fire safety work which we would wish to highlight:

- we believe further consideration should be given to setting up a non-emergency contact telephone number for fire & rescue service (similar to the police);
- whilst Government funding for such initiatives as the Arson Task Force and Home Fire Safety Checks is welcome, there are difficult choices once such funding ceases between continuing them (which means an additional burden falling on council tax payers) or stopping them and reducing the impact we are having in local communities.

Institutional arrangements. including finance

50. Financial issues are a key aspect of the modernisation of the fire service. It was envisaged that a more flexible, risk based approach to protecting local people from the effects of fires and other emergencies would both help to improve services and deliver significant efficiency savings.

51. This Authority has met those twin objectives, delivering efficiency savings of some £7m in 2004/05 and over £10m in 2005/06, while also delivering the service improvements set out in our integrated risk management plans.

52. However there remain a number of significant concerns regarding the finance of the fire & rescue service, particularly as it impacts on London.

53. The provisional grant settlement for 2006/07 was announced on 5 December 2005. We welcome the postponement of the repayment of Transitional Relief into 2007/08. However, we are concerned at the impact of the adjustment in respect of the change of firefighters' pensions financing could have on precept or service levels in 2006/07.

54. The LFEPA supports the changes to pensions financing, because it should protect fire and rescue services from significant fluctuations in pension costs year-on-year. However, it is concerning that the move to what will be a less volatile system could have such a disruptive one-off impact. The Authority was aware that a change of this complexity would mean that the individual impacts on different fire and rescue authorities might not be cost neutral. But the Government's calculations suggest a much higher degree of turbulence than expected — the pensions loss of grant for LFEPA is £7.7m more than we forecast. By itself, this is adding 6% on our precept level in 2006/07.

55. Given that the actual costs of pensions will ultimately be borne by fire and rescue authorities through the employers' contribution rate, the effect of the deduction from the Fire Service Settlement for pensions if it turns out to be too high is that

council tax payers are being asked to pay 'up front' for a cost which may not actually materialise, and which, if it did, could be included in considerations influencing the next actuarially reviewed employers' contribution rate.

56. Therefore, we have asked that the Government either give further consideration to the amount which it is deducting from fire and rescue authorities' grant to pay for pensions cost in the future, or alternatively consider lowering the employers' contribution rate initially and stepping it up over a period (as, for example, local authorities often do when responding to actuarial valuations). Such a review should have regard to the risk, which central government, rather than individual fire and rescue authorities, might reasonably bear when making suitable provision for future pensions liabilities.
57. We have already referred to the changes which the Government proposes to the Firefighters' Pension scheme from next April. The Authority is generally in favour of these changes, but we have commented to Government that we have some reservations about increasing the age of retirement for some existing firefighters. We feel that such an increase - from 50 to 55 for those not eligible to retire by March 2013 - is rather arbitrary and that it is unfair for the terms of the scheme to be varied for existing staff, thereby disrupting the plans individuals may have, and appears to be out of step with the review of arrangements for other public sector bodies — such as the Civil Service, Teachers and Health Service pension regimes - where the normal retirement age is apparently to remain unchanged in so far as existing staff are concerned.
58. We welcome the significant funding we have received from Government for improving our resilience to respond to major catastrophic incidents, such as terrorist attacks. This amounted to some £2.5m in 2004/05 for example. However our costs are substantially higher than this, £11.6m in total in 2004/05 mainly in respect of equipment which was not provided by central government and which they have not, before now, seen as within the remit of their national New Dimension programme.
59. We believe that London faces particular risks, given its role as a capital city, and that this should be fully recognised by the Government by meeting the full costs of the additional investment we consider essential to improve our resilience. The need to invest in additional Fire Rescue Units (FRUs) is a prime example where we consider an unfair share of the burden would fall on Londoners under present arrangements. Experience of the attacks on 7th July has shown that at one time all the available FRUs were deployed to the 4 separate bombing incidents. The deployment to the bombings necessitated redirecting one FRU on its way to a road traffic collision. Conclusions from the review of the events surrounding the July bombings are that an additional six Fire Rescue Units would further strengthen our resilience to respond to catastrophic incidents,

while maintaining the capacity to continue to respond to other incidents (such as road traffic collisions).

60. The costs of providing this additional equipment to further improve our resilience are £3.3m in 2006/07, £8.3m in 2007/08 and £9.9m in 2008/09. We welcome the indications from the Mayor and London Assembly that they support the need for this additional investment but both the GLA and LFEPA believe strongly that these costs should be met in full by the Government, and should not fall on London's council tax payers.
61. We have repeatedly raised the matter with central government, and would hope that the Select Committee would support our case for such costs to be met by Government.

Procurement

62. This Authority has taken a very clear role in recognising the importance of procurement to the fire and rescue service. We produced the first procurement strategy for a fire and rescue service in the country four years ago and have recently approved a second three year procurement strategy. The Procurement Department has also achieved Investors in People and ISO 14001 accreditation, the first time either of these awards have been made to a procurement function in the fire & rescue service. In addition the Procurement Department has received funding from the London Centre of Excellence to undertake investigations into the state of contract management through local authorities in London and recently won an award for 'Most Innovative Organisation' for procurement recycling initiatives from the Mayor's London Remade programme.
63. LFEPA initiated the Integrated Clothing Project which has since been adopted as a national project and worked on the development of the national procurement strategy for the fire and rescue service that has recently been published. We have seconded a number of procurement staff to the interim Firebuy company to assist with the start-up arrangements for national procurement.

Industrial relations issues

64. The Authority has been progressing the modernisation agenda in line with the national agreement, including introducing new industrial relations and employee relations procedures and a revised provision for trade union facilities. We remain anxious to develop effective joint working arrangements with the FBU, as with the other trades unions. However there is little evidence locally or nationally that the FBU are prepared to engage in a constructive way with any proposals to modernise the service.

65. Our objective is to have a robust and effective working relationship with the Fire Brigades Union. However, regrettably, they are currently refusing to attend meetings set up as a result of the revised industrial relations procedures because they refuse to sit at a table with the Fire Officers' Association, who are one of the Authority's accredited trades unions. The FBU has been advised that their seats within the revised procedures are available to them and they continue to be invited to meetings. The Authority would wish a speedy resolution and the full engagement of the FBU within the Authority's procedures.
66. In October 2005 we successfully introduced one of the most far reaching changes in the fire & rescue services for many years, when we moved from the old rank structure for the Brigade to a new role based structure. However discussions with the FBU on this change (which was a key part of the agreement which settled the pay dispute) were protracted and difficult, both nationally and locally.
67. Another aspect of modernising the way that the service operates and which was included in the agreement was the removal of the FBU's objections to pre-arranged overtime and the introduction of appropriate arrangements for such overtime working in individual fire & rescue authorities. However, in the first quarter of 2005 FBU in London balloted for industrial action in an attempt to undermine the application of the Authority's pre-arranged overtime policy. Protracted discussions were required before the threat of industrial action was lifted and the Authority was able to implement its policy for pre-arranged overtime.

Promoting diversity

68. Promoting diversity remains a key priority for this Authority; in terms of both our service delivery and our role as an employer.
69. The Authority is committed to developing a workforce which reflects the diverse communities we serve. This will not only help us to provide more responsive services, but will also help to build confidence in each part of the community that we understand their particular needs and aspirations.
70. We have joined with the rest of the GLA Group in setting a target to reach Level 5 of the Local Government Equality Standard as soon as practicable. We will continue to work towards meeting this challenging target. We have also joined with the GLA and other partners to provide access for members of the public and for our staff to a community language service, which includes British Sign Language, to improve how we can communicate with those members of the community who do not speak English as their first language.
71. The Authority supports a programme of community events, designed to support achievement of our overall equalities objectives. This programme is developed in

consultation with different parts of the community, and with different groups among our own staff. We make sure that each of our Borough teams supports at least one major event in their area each year, as well as maintaining continuing links with different parts of the community.

72. Arrangements are in place to monitor the impact which this programme has in helping to meet our goals and we carry out assessments on the impact of our plans on different parts of the community. For example, some 35% of the home fire safety checks we have carried out this year have been to black and minority ethnic households. We will use these impact assessments to review and improve our programme in later years.
73. The Authority's procurement strategy makes sure that contractors are sensitive to the needs and aspirations of London's diverse communities and we promote equality of opportunity to all our contractors as well as seeking evidence of their own commitment to this goal. We continue to encourage businesses from across London's diverse communities to apply for contracts with the Authority and make sure that the way in which we structure and let these contracts places no unnecessary obstructions in the way of such applications.
74. It will be important that the new national procurement agency for the fire and rescue service (FiReBuy) continues to ensure that equalities and diversity issues are fully reflected in its structure and how it goes about its work.
75. The Authority continues to make good progress in developing a more diverse workforce, although we accept that still more needs to be done. Our non-uniformed workforce continues to be broadly representative of the communities it serves. Black and minority ethnic fire officers now represent 8.78% of our operational workforce, and 2.84% of the operational workforce are women.
76. This has been achieved by
 - changing our selection tests to ensure that these are explicitly job related, and that they have no unintended adverse impacts on any particular group, particularly those currently under-represented in our workforce;
 - continuing our programmes of outreach work to encourage people from under-represented groups (who may not traditionally have considered the fire service as a career) to apply to join the fire & rescue service;
 - continuing to run positive action programmes to support applicants from among parts of the community currently under-represented in the Brigade, recognising that they may have been disadvantaged by historical discrimination, whether overt or indirect.

77. We welcome the Government's efforts to review national entry selection criteria for the service, and hope that they will learn from the best practice developed in this Authority in recent years.
78. We would also urge the Government to review the national targets for workforce composition in the service to make sure that, while they should remain challenging, they are based on empirical evidence (particularly in relation to the number of women entrants) and are achievable.
79. The modernisation of the service has provided the opportunity to develop more flexible ways of working, and to provide opportunities for staff to work flexibly, through the introduction of prearranged overtime, part time working, different shift patterns which may be better suited to some people's working lives, multi-tier entry to the operational service, and developing more specialist roles to increase the range of job opportunities in the service. We have also modernised other aspects our human resources management, with the implementation of the Integrated Personal Development Scheme for uniformed staff (including NVQ accreditation), development of an appraisal scheme, an updated selection process to match the new role maps and programmes for mentoring and targeted development which it is hoped will particularly benefit staff from groups currently under-represented in the service.
80. The Authority is fully committed to providing a work environment which is free from harassment and bullying; one where every employee is treated with respect and dignity. We continue to challenge any example of harassment or bullying among staff, taking a victim centred approach when we come across unacceptable behaviour and seeking to take action which would help to prevent such problems happening again.
81. We provide support to groups of staff who are currently under-represented in our workforce and when they have set up networks and mutual support arrangements and support the involvement of our staff in national support networks, such as Networking Women in the Fire Service.
82. The Authority has been granted the government employment service's 2 tick symbol accreditation, and will now use the disability symbol in all relevant literature.
83. We welcome the extension of the Disability Discrimination Act to apply to all of our staff, including operational staff, although this has raised considerable challenges in ensuring that our policies and procedures are compliant.
84. The Authority continues to be part of the Stonewall Champions initiative, and has applied for the first time for a place in Stonewall's Corporate Equality Index for 2006. This index ranks the top 100 employers on lesbian and gay issues.

Competition for places in the index is high, but although the rankings will not be confirmed until January 2006, we understand that the Authority will appear in the index next year.

85. This commitment to develop a diverse workforce and a supportive working environment is underlined by programmes of work such as:-
- delivery of an innovative training programme for all our staff - Training To Succeed — which is designed to develop and support staff in their understanding of equalities and diversity issues;
 - development and delivery of measures to secure a better work life balance for our staff, through policies covering areas such as childcare, parental leave and job sharing;
 - making sure that every fire station has separate washing and changing facilities for men and women and that clothing, protective equipment and the design of operational equipment are all suitable for use by women and men, and by operational staff from different religions;
 - making sure that none of our procedures and practices discriminates unlawfully on grounds of faith. We have recently introduced a multi-faith chaplaincy that will advise the Authority on faith issues and provide support to all our staff, whatever their faith.

JOINT WORKING WITH OTHER EMERGENCY SERVICES

86. We work closely with the neighbouring fire and rescue authorities to make sure that effective arrangements for cross border working are in place and that we can support each other when this is needed at major incidents. This includes regular liaison with each of the six fire and rescue authorities with which we share a boundary and carrying out joint exercises periodically.
87. We make sure that our procedures, equipment and working arrangements are compatible so that safe systems of work are not compromised when crews from more than one brigade are working at the same incident.
88. The arrangements to improve resilience in response to the increased threat of terrorist attack or other major incident have been planned on a national basis, and we are ready to use the resources based in London anywhere in the country if needed. The Authority has therefore signed a national mutual aid agreement under which all brigades agree to do all they can to help each other in a major emergency.

89. Care is taken to make sure that effective command and control arrangements are maintained when Joint working takes place, in line with the national guidance on incident command.
90. London has developed exemplary arrangements for joint working between the emergency services, which we believe provide a model for other parts of the country in this key area. The London Emergency Services Liaison Panel (LESLP) brings together the police, ambulance and the fire and rescue services together with representatives from the London boroughs. It has agreed the respective roles and responsibilities of these agencies at any major incident, and has developed arrangements and procedures for command and control at such incidents.
91. These arrangements are tested at major exercises such as Atlantic Blue, to make sure that the arrangements work as intended and that lessons can be learnt to improve arrangements for the future.
92. These were tested for real in the response to the bombings on 7th July, and the attempted attacks on 21st July. These showed that the emergency services were well prepared to deal with such incidents, and that the arrangements for co-ordination and joint working to respond to these tragic events worked well.
93. As part of the efforts to co-ordinate responses in the event of a major catastrophic incident, the London boroughs have agreed to work together to provide effective arrangements to respond to such an event. These arrangements are known collectively as 'Local Authority Gold'. They are designed to manage the collective response of the London boroughs to a catastrophic incident, recognising that it will have an impact which cuts across borough boundaries and which requires a rapid and coordinated response from London's local authorities.
94. This co-ordination is provided by one of London's local authority chief executives attending the Gold Coordination Group. This chief executive represents the boroughs at this group, and is supported in this role by the London Local Authority Coordination Centre. Chief Executives from a number of boroughs are on call, in rotation, to attend the Coordination Centre and manage the local authority response.
95. At the request of the boroughs, this Authority has agreed to provide logistical support to LA Gold, which involves maintaining the rota and call out arrangements, provision of training to the Chief Executives involved, and establishing and maintaining a databases of relevant information such as contact details, protocols, procedures, manuals and handbooks.

96. These arrangements were also tested in earnest during the London bombings and were also found to work effectively.

RESILIENCE

97. The Authority, with support from the Mayor and London Assembly and from the Government, has made good progress to improve our resilience to respond to major catastrophic events, including terrorist attacks.
98. We will continue to make significant investment to improve our resilience, working closely with the Government to introduce new vehicles and equipment including bulk foam carriers, hose laying lorries and bulk water carriers. This equipment will also be available to enhance our day to day operational capability.
99. The Authority has doubled the number of its Fire Rescue Units (from five to ten) and expanded their role and all of these appliances are now ready to respond to emergency calls. However, we have already commented earlier in this evidence (paragraphs 55 and 56 refer) on the need for an additional six of these appliances, together with funding for the expenditure this will involve, in order to improve our resilience.
100. The first high volume pump has been received (with five more to follow shortly), ten interim Mass Decontamination Units are currently operationally available and the first of the Urban Search and Rescue units has been received.
101. The programme of familiarising, training and qualifying drivers in the extensive range of New Dimensions and London Resilience vehicles and their operating systems continues and over 430 drivers have now been trained and qualified in various aspects of London Resilience requirements. Progress is also being made in training personnel on the wide range of specialist equipment and also on safe systems of work in specific high risk environments. The programme includes a series of seminars for senior officers on incident management techniques and training in the IT equipment and software that supports many of the specialist vehicles.
102. We have worked with partner emergency services to identify the most likely areas that an attack might take place. We have put our specialist vehicles into stations that are outside of these areas, but in a position to be able to respond quickly to them. In this way we can reduce the chance of our important response vehicles and equipment being affected by any attack, thereby making them unusable.
103. In 2004/05 a multi-agency initial assessment team was set up on a trial basis to provide a rapid initial assessment at catastrophic incidents. The trial was due to

end in July 2005 but was extended until the end of November in the light of the London bombings. Assessments by these trained personnel from across the emergency services helped to minimise the risks to the public and emergency service staff from such incidents. This team brought together staff from the police, ambulance and fire and rescue services in liaison with the Health Protection Agency and was staffed 24 hours a day throughout the year and was available to attend major incidents within 15 minutes across central London. This Authority provided the accommodation from which the team operated and, with Home Office funding, made available a lorry and a personnel carrier to enable the team to operate as intended.

104. The government provided financial support for this pilot project, and provided much of the equipment used. The pilot has been independently evaluated on behalf of the Home Office, with the recommendation that the concept of the team be continued, but that three separate teams should be formed (one within each of London's main emergency services). These teams would work with agreed operational protocols and procedure and undertaking regular joint training, but each would work discretely within its parent organisation. This Authority believes that the capability provided by such a team is an important addition to our preparedness to respond to a major incident, and has accordingly approved interim arrangements pending decisions on its draft budget submission to the Mayor, which includes provision to continue to provide such a capability within the Brigade.

Memorandum by Avon Fire Authority (FRS 22)

INTRODUCTION

- 1 The Avon Fire Authority welcomes the modernisation of the Fire and Rescue Service. The process of modernisation began locally long before the recent industrial relations difficulties, and before the Fire and Rescue Service became higher on the Government's agenda.
- 2 The drive for modernisation has given impetus to the changes we have been introducing, and noticeable improvements have resulted on the ground. Our local communities now receive our preventing, protecting and responding services to a much higher standard.
- 3 Whilst we are not resistant to change, there are elements of the modernisation programme that remain of concern.
- 4 We wish to focus on the FireControl Project. We want to emphasis from the outset that this authority has never opposed government policy on this issue, and we remain committed to the principle of establishing a Regional Control Centre for the South West. However, we continue to hold serious concerns about the process that has been used to get us to the current position.

REGIONAL CONTROL ACCOMMODATION

- 5 The Avon Fire Authority has been involved in protracted and prolonged correspondence with the Minister(s) and the ODPM on this issue for 2 years. This has significantly impaired the working relationship.
- 6 Avon Fire Authority has clearly and consistently set out its position from the outset of this project. Avon has, in its ownership, an existing control centre at Lansdown, near Bath. This control centre was designed and built with a regional capability very much in mind. The concept of regional controls is not new, and was an issue under consideration when Avon acquired the site in 1994.
- 7 Whilst the control centre at Lansdown has the capacity and functional capability of operating as a Regional Centre, it has never been used for this purpose. Despite Best Value Reviews conducted in 2000 confirming that Lansdown had the capability of providing the control function for one or more other Authorities, none were minded at that time to use our existing facilities.
- 8 When the FireControl Project was announced, we naturally believed that change would result, and that the Lansdown facility could be used to full potential.

- 9 It became evident from the outset that the procurement route chosen by the ODPM Project Team was going to make that impossible. The original OJEU Notice was clearly biased towards private developer bids. From the beginning this was the only route open for establishment of Regional Controls. This excluded existing facilities from being considered which we believed was unfair.
- 10 Following representations made by Avon Fire Authority, the process was amended to allow for Authorities to submit bids, which had to be agreed by Regional Management Boards. Avon put forward Lansdown for consideration as an existing facility. The submission included proposals for minor modifications that could have been made to enable the Regional functionality. The bid was supported by the Regional Management Board, together with other green field sites identified by other Fire Authorities in the South West.
- 11 The Avon bid was rejected at the first stage of the procurement evaluation process. The reasons given were that it had failed the first 'mandatory criteria of site size. When questioned, the ODPM Project Team confirmed that the Avon bid had been ruled out because the land area was of insufficient size to accommodate the building design they had previously commissioned. Being ruled out on site size was increasingly frustrating as we would contend that the control room within the Regional Control Centre has been over specified. The number of operator positions provided bear little resemblance to the volume of work likely to be required in the south west region.
- 12 This was clearly not the intention of our submission. We did not submit Lansdown for consideration to be given to accommodating a new building. Our intention was to secure a proper evaluation of the existing building and facilities as an alternative option to a new build. We had hoped this would have then been included in the business case.
- 13 Following further representations, ODPM eventually agreed to offer an 'evaluation' of Lansdown, but subject to Avon accepting that if this was accepted, nothing would change. We saw little point in such an exercise at that time and declined the offer.
- 14 An 'evaluation' report was subsequently sent to Avon Fire Authority in August 2005. We continue to dispute that this was in any way a thorough evaluation. The report was attached to a letter which stated that the 2 main conclusions were that:
- a) the building works required would seriously impact on our ability to provide a service;
 - b) the costs involved would not represent value for money.

We find it very hard to accept these conclusions on the basis of the report. No account was taken of Avon's well established and proven resilient fall back control at a separate location, which enables the Fire Service to guarantee continuity of service even in the event of catastrophic failure at Lansdown. There would be no disruption to service if building works were needed at Lansdown. The conclusion relating to costs are hard to accept when no costings are included in the report, and no comparison is available to the new build costs.

- 15 We have argued long and hard that the process has had the unfair effect of excluding existing facilities from consideration. Our reasoned arguments have never been accepted.
- 16 We remain concerned over the additional costs that will be incurred by pursuing the new build option, when there were alternatives that were not even considered. We now accept that our position does not coincide with the Government's preferred option.
- 17 We would contend that the process used was significantly flawed from the outset. This Authority has volumes of correspondence and evidence to demonstrate what we believe is a genuine grievance. Out of sheer frustration on getting no satisfactory responses from ODPM over a 2-year period, we recently submitted a formal complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The Ombudsman has advised us that there are no powers to investigate complaints by public bodies.
- 18 We are submitting this Memorandum because we believe there must be accountability somewhere. We hope the Inquiry will look further into the issues we have identified. We believe there are pertinent questions to be asked of the ODPM FireControl Project Team, the answers to which we believe will demonstrate that our grievance is genuine. Such questions could include:
 - At the outset of the project, was any assessment made of existing control centre facilities?
 - If so, then precisely when were such assessments carried out?
 - Did anyone from the project team consider the facilities that exist at Lansdown, in Avon at that time?
 - What was the conclusion of the project team following the existing facilities assessment?
 - Precisely when was the conclusion to exclude existing facilities reached?
 - Precisely when was the OJEU Notice for Fire Control issued?

- Precisely when were Fire Authorities invited to submit bids via Regional Management Boards?
 - Why was this change to the procurement process introduced?
 - How many regions submitted bids?
 - How many Authorities put forward existing facilities in their bids?
 - What was the outcome of the evaluations of the Regional bids?
 - Avon Fire Authority claim they were advised by the ODPM Project Team that their submission was ruled out on 'site size'. Is that correct?
 - Can the Project Team specifically explain what was meant by the 'site size' criteria?
 - Precisely when was the Avon Fire Authority debriefed on its bid?
 - What was the outcome of the debriefing of Avon Fire Authority?
 - Precisely when were the Avon Fire Authority sent an evaluation of their existing facilities at Lansdown?
 - What were the main conclusions from the evaluation of Avon Fire Authority facilities?
 - Has anyone from the ODPM Project Team ever visited the Avon fall back control at Kingswood in Bristol?
 - Were any costings or financial comparisons included in the evaluation report sent to Avon?
- 19 As an Authority, we accept that we are unlikely to see any significant change as a consequence of this Memorandum. We do believe however that if the process had been managed differently, and that assumptions made at the outset tested properly, then the FireControl Project would have gained fuller support from the Elected Members and Officers of this Authority. We would be grateful if this could be acknowledged by this Inquiry.
- 20 The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive of Avon Fire and Rescue Service has all the detailed documentations and evidence if required by the Inquiry.

- 21 This Authority would wish to delegate responsibility to the Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive to speak on its behalf should oral evidence be required.

REGIONAL CONTROL GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

- 22 In response to Government Consultation earlier in the year, Avon Fire Authority, and the South West Regional Management Board, expressed their preference for the Lead Authority option for the governance of the Regional Control Centre in the South West.
- 23 In September fire and rescue authorities which had previously expressed such a preference were asked to reconsider their previous decision and to accept the government's stated preference for a Local Authority Company solution. That request was accompanied by very little financial or other information upon which to base a decision; no proper cost/benefits analysis of the options was provided.
- 24 Members of the Authority were concerned that the government's preferred approach might lead to increased costs with no perceived improvements in service expected. Moreover, Members were concerned that this approach would further distance the Control function from front-line service delivery and from the Fire and Rescue Service itself.
- 25 The problems faced by members are not limited to governance issues alone.
- 26 The Authority has certain duties under the Fire & Rescue Services Act to make arrangements to deal with emergency calls and to mobilise its resources. It also has duties in relation to Best Value. On all these matters the Authority is required to make proper and rational decisions. The Authority has very real difficulties at present in complying with those obligations, in relation to the Regional Control Centre Project.
- 27 In reality, all major decisions on the project are being made by government. We understand that the government's objectives extend beyond meeting the needs of individual Fire and rescue authorities and that the government therefore wishes to run this as a national project under its control and direction.
- 28 All we as Fire and rescue authorities are being asked to do is to endorse decisions which the government has made. There is no effective choice for Fire and Rescue Services, now, nor will there be in the future after implementation of the project. In many cases, the government's choice does not accord with the Authority's preferences and, in others, quite simply we do not have sufficient and reliable information on the government's choice and the competing options to make a valid judgement. For the Authority to adopt the decisions of the government as its own without applying its own mind to all the relevant issues would leave it

open to serious challenge both with the local Council tax payers and indeed in the Courts.

- 29 Whilst, in general, the Authority would not wish to be directed by government as to the manner in which it carries out its duties, the Authority considers that, in this case, for the reasons outlined above, this is necessary to establish a proper legal framework within which the Authority can carry out its duties. The Authority would therefore encourage the Secretary of State to use his powers under Section 29 of the Fire & Rescue Services Act or other appropriate powers) to direct the Authority (and other Fire and rescue authorities) to adopt the government's preferred solutions.

Conclusion

- 30 Avon Fire Authority welcomes this Inquiry in to the modernisation and reform programme of the Fire and Rescue Services.

Memorandum by the Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority (FRS 23)

Introduction

1. The Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority was constituted in 1998, following local government reorganisation. It is responsible for the delivery of fire and rescue services to the people of Kent and Medway, which together have 1.6 million residents and cover an area of just over 3,700km². The Authority has specific responsibilities for safety in the Channel Tunnel, and is also a member of the Marine Incident Response Group, which deals with incidents at sea at the request of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. It is one of the largest of the non-metropolitan fire and rescue services, with 66 fire stations and over 2000 staff in total. As a result of the 2005 comprehensive performance assessment of the fire and rescue service, KMFRA was one of the two authorities nationally to be rated excellent.

The implications of the introduction of Regional Control Centres and FireLink radio

2. While the Government's intention to improve national resilience in creating the regional fire control centres is clear, the Authority has some concerns about the implications of the change on sustaining the quality of service delivery locally. High performance in the control room is a key component in achieving a high standard of performance in the service, particularly in relation to local policy aims, which may require changes in working methods. For this reason we regret the loss of our control room, which has made a significant contribution to the overall rating of the service among the best nationally. Essentially this leaves the Authority in the position of having to contract out one of its core services, and the first interface with the public.
3. A key issue here is that of governance and accountability for the new arrangements. The Authority expressed a preference for a local authority company, of the limited options on offer, but we have concerns over the way in which this would operate in practice. The current consultation on the National Framework suggests that the contractor should be a partner in the proposed 'roll-out board', which we believe would muddle the client/contractor role during development. Even more critically, when the RCC is actually in place, the Authority requires robust arrangements for managing its part of the 'contract' which are hard to secure with a monopoly provider, despite the fact that the duty to secure the provision remains with the Authority. An example of the way in which these roles can be blurred is the recent proposal in the working group that the RCC should have powers to deploy resources to incidents outside an Authority's area without reference to the owning body.

4. KMFRA has also had as yet no opportunity to review the business case for the SERCC, so we have to date not been able to assess the impact on our medium-term budget position as we would have wished. One consequence of the inevitable delays in the programme has been financial, as suppliers increasingly recognise the need to sustain existing ageing systems. The Authority welcomes ODFM's assurance in the recent draft national framework that it will plug this gap with additional funding
5. The geography of the region is a significant factor in the consideration of ti-u is issue. The Government Office for the south-east region includes nine fire authorities and stretches from Margate to Banbury via Fordingbridge. The south-east region is generally recognised to be a less cohesive region than others, with no strong sense of identity. It has a much larger population than most regions with higher projected growth. In terms of emergency services, managing it as a single entity causes significant problems, not least because the road network is so dominated by London, with very high traffic volumes. In consequence, KMFRA is considering how it would deal with the 'Gold Command' element of major incidents, as it may not be practicable for senior officers to reach Fareham, the site chosen for the RCC.
6. The Authority has of course been co-operating in the development of the RCC and its supporting systems, but still believes that the option of two or three sub-regional controls, which was suggested in the White Paper on the Fire Service, would have been more appropriate for the south-east in providing real resilience.
7. There are some concerns over the impact of the RCC on service delivery and management once it is operational. Inevitably the specification for call and data handling is tending towards common denominators, but the Authority would not wish to compromise its present capacity to use performance information drawn in part from the mobilising system. It is also of the view that it will be harder to sustain the current level of public engagement with the service once calls are being remotely handled, as this is likely to affect identity.
8. The Authority also questions the assumptions being made about the resilience of the new ROC network, given that it will be a network with an integrated operating system. Although the current control rooms are individually small, their functional separation gives an additional level of resilience to the present system which will be absent in the new one. The current stand-by control for KFRS is located in the Kent Police Control Centre, a distance of only two miles, which is also the local 'Gold Command' location for major emergencies. However, in the event of a local problem affecting both these controls, there is also the option of switching calls to East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service Control in Eastbourne.

9. In relation to the proposals for the radio scheme, the Authority welcomes the decision to purchase Airwave as a clear way forward to support interoperability.

Progress on Fire and Rescue Service reform since January 2004

Community Safety and partnerships

9. The Authority has been actively engaged in a range of local partnerships over a period of some years, and has achieved demonstrable benefits through this approach. It was a party to the Kent Public Service Agreement in 2001, in the first round of national pilots, and achieved a reduction over four years of 75% in accidental fire deaths and casualties — well over the target set of 20%. This year the Authority was a signatory to the second Kent PSA, with a target of reducing loose rubbish fires, as part of a set addressing the ‘cleaner, safer, greener’ Kent objective. We will be using the reward grant of £2.1m resulting from the 100% achievement of the first target to support activity directed at achieving the second. This will also help to reduce the number of deliberate fires, as most rubbish fires are deliberately started.
10. Success as a partner in the Kent PSA has led to membership of the Kent Public Service Board, and the Local Area Agreement. The LAA includes targets on the reduction of road accidents and casualties, and we are using this route to assist us with the new statutory duty in relation to road traffic accidents. The Authority is an active player in the Medway Local Strategic Partnership and the district-based Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. It has an extensive education programme, which has been funded in part through the Arson Control Forum. While we welcome the Government’s support of such initiatives, it is to be hoped that national guidance in this area will not become too prescriptive, as much is dependent on the activity and engagement of other partners, particularly local authorities.
11. The Authority also embarked on a programme of home fire safety checks in 2001, using firefighters to install smoke alarms in high risk homes. This has now been extended, funded in part by specific grants from ODPM, to include dedicated staff for this purpose, in addition to the provision of alarms for use by local authority schemes, mainly targeting elderly people. We have also had some success in encouraging local authorities and developers to install sprinkler systems in schools and housing projects. However the Authority regrets that the Government has not made this a requirement both in schools and social housing, particularly for new developments, given that such buildings are at higher risk, and publicly funded.
12. The possibility of applying this to the major housing growth areas within Kent and Medway is currently being explored with the Government Office for the South East to see whether the new developments could incorporate higher

standards of fire suppression when built. This would help to reduce fire risk at the design stage, and also mean that standards of fire cover could be maintained without the need to build additional fire stations. This approach has been successful overseas in significantly reducing deaths and casualties.

Regional Management Board activity

13. The Authority is an active participant in the South East Regional Management Board, but the development of the Board to undertake all the functions outlined in the National Framework will present some difficulties. This is in part caused by the geography of the region described earlier: nine is the largest number of authorities in any region, and the region lacks geographic coherence and identity. It would be easier to operate in two or three sub-regions, which would still be similar in size and population to some existing regions. It is not clear to us why a single model for RMBs has to apply across the country, without regard to the locality. For the fire service, an additional level of complexity is introduced in collaboration between authorities by the mix of combined fire authorities and county-based fire services, where the support systems, such as finance, and procedures are tied to the host authority. However, the Authority believes that even in this context it is still possible to generate real efficiency savings through collaboration.

Workforce modernisation

14. Much of the modernisation agenda focused on working arrangements. While this is wholly understandable, the issues identified in relation to working arrangements by the Bain Report and consequent legislation is too dominated by metropolitan practices. For example, the impact of the 24 hour shift system is less rigid in shire areas where it forms part of a mixed economy of shift, day and retained crewing. The pressure to use overtime more also runs counter to the tenor of the Working Time Regulations, and targets being set in other public services to reduce overtime working in the interests of more family-friendly policies. Critically, however, the Authority believes that it is wrong to regard changing working arrangements as an end in itself: change should be led by service improvements, with revised working arrangements being used to deliver these improvements where appropriate.
15. The Authority recognises that equality and diversity are still clear weaknesses across the service as a whole. It is currently undertaking a Best Value review of its approach to equality and diversity, both in terms of employment and community engagement, but would welcome any national developments in support of local initiatives. One useful approach could be a further national advertising campaign to support continuous rolling recruitment in the future, to promote the fire service as an employment opportunity, particularly for women

and members of ethnic minority groups. It is difficult to have this kind of impact at a local level.

16. The Authority is committed to development for all its staff, and has for a long time had a relatively high proportion of non-uniformed staff in specialist professional roles. It has also implemented the new Integrated Personal Development System which has been introduced nationally, and has begun to appoint staff directly into the uniformed service at an officer level, now this has been made possible by the new legislation. However, there is an endemic problem with the presumption in the National Framework that staff can be moved across different employment groups and dealt with as an integrated whole. Uniformed and non-uniformed staff have fundamentally different pay structures and conditions of service, including pensions, and this severely limits the extent to which they can be regarded as interchangeable, without making authorities vulnerable to well-founded equal pay and discrimination claims.

Management issues

17. The Authority welcomes the extension of the fire service's role by the addition of new statutory duties and believes that the 2004 Act provides a much more robust framework for the service. It has ironed out many of the anomalies and obstacles which were increasingly resulting from the 1947 Act provisions remaining in force long after they had ceased to reflect the environment of the service. However some of the old centralised controls are still in place and have not been reviewed in the light of the new legislation. An example of this would be the continued requirement to submit large volumes of detailed establishment information, after the repeal of S19 of the old Act, which required establishment changes to be submitted to the Secretary of State for approval. In 2004/05 104 establishment-related forms had to be completed, one of which runs to 66 pages — one for each fire station, and the number is going up in 05/06.
18. A related point is that some of the targets for the service are not keeping pace with the modernisation agenda. For example, the Authority believes that the specialist community fire safety teams should be counted against the performance indicators for women and ethnic minority staff. They are as much in the front line as firefighters, and spend more time actually engaging with the public.

Joint working between the FRS and other emergency services

19. The Authority works closely with other emergency services especially on plans for strategic risks such as the Channel Tunnel. The requirements for joint planning and working under the Civil Contingencies Act can be met much more easily with coterminous agencies, especially the Police, with whom the fire service has the closest relationship for planning for and responding to major

disasters. Current proposals for amalgamating police forces nationally could adversely affect these arrangements, particularly as the OCA bases the response groupings, such as the local resilience groups, on force areas.

20. The Authority also has strong links with the other emergency services through other local partnerships, aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour, accident and casualty reduction. A specific protocol has been developed with Kent Police on arson reduction.

Memorandum by the Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE) (FRS 24)

1.a. Regional Control Centres

The IFE is supportive of the additional civil resilience that will arise from the substantial investments now being made by Government. There is however concern at the speed of change and the adverse impact that has arisen in terms of industrial relationships. The continued absence of the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales from full participation also raises questions around the ultimate solution. Continuing work is essential on the key issue of converging the operational practices of all 46 English fire and rescue services if the full benefit of this regionalisation is to be realised. In addition the ongoing importance of the integrated risk management programme and community anxiety relating to loss of local knowledge remain to be comprehensively addressed.

1.b. Firelink Radio

The IFE is fully supportive of the improvements that will be derived from improved technology especially as Firelink radio offers considerable enhancement in the availability of mobile data and improved telemetry that will benefit firefighter safety. The inter operability between the blue light emergency services that is derived from Airwave and Firelink is also welcomed as improving national resilience through operations. The delays occasioned in securing this new equipment have been frustrating and these have been increased by the niggling doubts about performance suggested from the existing Police user. The sooner clarity emerges as to exact performance attributes now that a contract has been awarded the better for the service.

2.a. Fire Prevention

It is the IFE opinion that the setting of floor targets to achieve reductions in fire deaths and losses has been instrumental in accelerating a fully supported policy shift that places the highest emphasis on prevention. Although the principle of fire safety and prevention was established many years ago it is especially pleasing to record that the recent surge in activities continues to show the great innovation and commitment of those in the service to promote this essential task in improving the UK situation. Linked to integrated risk management planning the opportunities presented to make the UK a safer place from fire are substantial. In addition the study conducted by the Building Research Establishment on behalf of ODPM has indicated the benefits of sprinklers for life safety in higher risk residential properties and for property protection in schools.

2.b. Institutional Arrangements

The change in the earlier established institutional arrangements remains in the IFE opinion an area that requires improvement. In particular the separation between those practising in the service and those working in the business and community are not well founded.

In addition the change of role within the ODPM Directorate responsible and task focus that has removed the quality assurance function previously provided by inspection has left no reliable independent method of public assurance regarding the effectiveness and ability of any specific fire and rescue authority or fire and rescue service.

There is also a perceived absence of measures that link the UK into the wider fire world in Europe and beyond so ensuring that the UK remains at the leading edge of practice and development in meeting new threats and challenges. Whilst the adopted strategy, of not having within government a homeland security arrangement, is understood it does suggest that further energy must be placed into ensuring the separated functions are seamless in response.

2.c. Promoting Diversity

The IFE accepts that the fire and rescue service has made considerable strides to improve diversity and this continuing trend requires encouragement not least from the community who often continue to stereotype the service as a male macho service. Significant change is unlikely without legal positive action and that requires continued investment. The Institution as a member of the UK Engineering Council and as an organisation committed to promoting diversity provides professional recognition that enhances the professional standing of members of the fire community, both helping attract a more diverse workforce and enabling it to interact effectively with other partners.

3. Joint Working Between Emergency Services

The IFE has nothing but praise for the observed inter service working that exists at all emergencies. The challenges apparent on July 7th were met in a most creditable way by all emergency services and the improvements being derived, following investments in New Dimension equipment within the fire and rescue service, are apparent at multi service exercises.

General

In making the above comments the IFE would want to acknowledge that the UK fire and rescue service is in a period of unprecedented change, referred to by the government as modernisation. This period has also involved a national strike and change in conditions of employment. The added impact of several concurrent initiatives and the restricted corporate capacity of some service organisations has it is believed been taxing even the largest authority. It is therefore unsurprising in the IFE view that morale is in some areas low with some even senior staff questioning the pace and direction of travel. Care is therefore needed if the previously good reputation of this public emergency service is not to be made vulnerable as it moves forward.

Memorandum by the East Midlands Regional Management Board (FRS 25)

Introduction

The East Midlands Regional Management Board welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and would be willing to provide oral evidence if required in support of this submission. We would also wish to recognise the opportunity that has been presented to us as Elected Members by the Government's modernisation agenda. The changes introduced by the White Paper, Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and the Integrated Risk Planning process, provide flexibility to authorities to deliver against local priorities.

In the East Midlands we have established an effective Regional Management Board, within which there is cross party support for the delivery of a first class fire and rescue service. The Board is responding well to the challenges presented to it by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Board acknowledges the resources put into the ODPM to support fire and rescue service strategy and policy development, but is concerned that if those resources are moved onto other areas of Government policy development, there will be a void that might lead to a loss of focus on the service in the future. That focus is particularly important in relation to the links to other ODPM and Government Departments with whom the service needs to work.

We would offer the following comments in response to the topics being examined by the Committee.

Regional Control Centres

The Board recognises the resilience issues associated with the mobilising and command arrangements for the fire and rescue service. It also recognises the need to ensure an appropriate infrastructure to protect national security arrangements. We welcome the Government's investment in the regional control centre, Firelink radio and other national projects. Concerns however remain.

The RCC project has already been subject to slippage and a lack of timely information from the centre. That in turn has led to the Board being less than able to provide clear direction locally to personnel serving in authorities and the public.

The governance arrangements proposed for the management of the RCCs must reflect the local authority governance and accountability arrangements. Local authorities have the legal duty to provide effective arrangements for the delivery of the service. The public draws comfort from the fact that those services are locally and democratically controlled.

There are serious concerns relating to the costs that will ultimately fall on individual authorities as a result of the introduction of the RCCs and Firelink. The running costs for all existing Control Centres are contained and managed within revenue budgets. Future costs falling on the Board and in turn the constituent authorities as result of this project are unknown. There is a real fear that the costs imposed locally by the introduction of the RCC will impact on other areas of service delivery.

There is also an issue relating to the ongoing revenue implications of other 'national' projects in due course such as Firelink and the eFire project. Firelink and the RCC project have created real additional costs locally for authorities that are being met from existing budgets and not matched by new burdens funding from Government.

There needs to be a transparency and openness during the implementation of all of the above projects with accurate projections of the financial burden that will fall on local authorities.

FiReControl and Firelink

The East Midlands Regional Management Board is very concerned that there is as yet an apparent lack of co-ordination between the FiReControl and Firelink projects which are interdependent to the successful implementation of the Regional Control Centre for the East Midlands. The knowledge, skills and level of management required to support both projects at regional level will necessitate mainly the same individuals being assigned to both. It is imperative that, even at this late stage, the management of both projects is overseen more effectively by one coordinating body within the ODPM. This will avoid duplication of effort by these individuals, give a more positive focus on the interdependency needs and enable us to contribute to the successful commissioning of a fully supported Regional Control Centre for the East Midlands.

Fire Safety Regulation

With the approach of the Regulatory Reform Order, the ODPM needs to consider its impact on both fire and rescue authorities and the business community. The continued migration from a prescriptive to a risk-based approach for fire safety will require authorities to ensure an appropriately trained workforce. There has never been recognition by any Government of the need to provide additional financial support to local authorities following the implementation of major legislative reform.

The introduction of the RRO will also require those responsible for buildings to be aware of and compliant with the expectations placed on them by the new legislation. The introduction of the Workplace Regulations showed that those who are responsible are not aware of their duties. There is a real need for the Government to promote the new Order and publicise the changes to the business community.

Governance

There are obvious constitutional differences operating across the country. The devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales add to the issue and variation in approach to strategy, and potentially service delivery. In some circumstances, constitutional differences lead to legislative differences, particularly for the Combined Fire Authorities.

The Board believes that there is no case for the further regionalisation of the fire and rescue service. East Midlands RMB's view is that the existing regional structure is the vehicle to prove effective collaboration. The co-ordination between the centre (ODPM) and the RMBs needs to be improved (see also comments on the Framework document). The RCC project is a good example of the need to manage that relationship as it has created tension between the two bodies.

National Framework Document and Integrated Risk Management Plans

The ODPM has tabled expectations for Regional Management Boards and Local Authorities within the National Framework documents. ODPM has assured stakeholders that the draft Framework Document would be published in September each year to enable Local Authorities to consider the implications in their own IRMP consultation documents. For many Authorities this year's IRMP consultation period will have now closed or will be closing shortly, with budgets being prepared in line with strategic objectives. The latest Framework document was published as a draft in November 2005, with a closing date for consultation of 18 February 2006. Authorities will be agreeing budgets in February. There must be a better way of connecting the ODPM planning process with that of local authorities.

Reform of Industrial Relations

Much of that which has been achieved since the publication of the White Paper has been driven by fire and rescue authorities in spite of the current industrial relations situation. The Fire Brigades Union, having signed up to the 2003 Pay Agreement and with it the reform agenda, are steadfastly refusing to accept the changes to the service that have resulted or are proposed.

The situation regarding the recognition of the Retained Firefighters Union and the Fire Officers Association is recognised as being an urgent issue for the National Employers and work is in progress to address it. More needs to be done to address that issue.

Given the success of the FBU when it comes to raising public alarm as a result of proposed changes locally, the ODPM should be called on to do more to promote its expectations to the public, in order to avoid the public being brought into conflict with local authorities on reform issues.

Reducing Fire and the Impact of Fire

Whilst there is some success to be applauded, there is still a lot more to be done. There is still a real need to invest in research relating to effective fire safety intervention. There is more that can and needs to be done to express the need for joint working with other agencies to further reduce the impact of fire on the community. More needs to be done to raise the spectre of fire as a crime, particularly against business, which in turn impacts on economic sustainability and employment.

The Government must seriously consider its position with regard to legislating the requirement for sprinklers to be installed in schools and other key buildings. The life safety and economic case for their introduction is overwhelming. There is also the need for the Government to consider the role of life safety sprinklers in high risk domestic occupancies.

Diversity

There is a clear need to express concern about the lack of progress on this issue. Whilst there isn't a problem with numbers applying for jobs in the service, there is a problem attracting the diverse workforce we need. The Board would ask that the Government reassess its position regarding targets for the service. Whilst the Board would not wish to see any reduction in emphasis on this important issue, there is clearly a need to ensure that the targets are achievable.

We would also ask that the Government work alongside the fire and rescue authorities in order to promote the service to women and under-represented groups, considering national campaigns as appropriate. The expectation by the ODPM is that recruitment will be dealt with at a regional level to create efficiencies, there is a danger that the process will add to the problem of under-representation. The system will potentially produce trainees cost-effectively, but it will not be able to deal with a targeted approach to recruitment, leaving that responsibility in the hands of the local fire and rescue authority. Centralising the function will not deal with geographical or ethnic diversity.

Financial Arrangements

There must be an open and transparent relationship between the process for delivering efficiencies, investment in the resilience programme (ongoing revenue implications) and grant settlements for fire and rescue authorities. That concern extends to the issue of the firefighters pension scheme. Whilst the Board welcomes the fact that the Government has decided to remove the future uncertainty relating to revenue provision from fire and rescue authorities, there is concern that future grant settlements will be reduced in order to enable Government to meet its own obligations.

There is a need for the ODPM to recognise the need for up front investment to be provided to fire and rescue authorities, ahead of delivering savings in the future. The

management of transitional funding has not been a good example of ODPM/Local Authority working. For some authorities the transitional funding has been a nuisance not a benefit.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the East Midlands Regional Management Board is of the opinion that the flexibilities provided by recent changes in legislation and strategy by the Government will ultimately provide a better service to the public we serve. We offer the comments in this report in the hope that where there is opportunity to create more effective governance and delivery arrangements, these will be noted. The Board is conscious of the economic drivers which force all Elected Members to consider strategic priorities against the potential to increase the burden on council tax payers, and is doing all it can to strike the right balance.

Memorandum by the Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority (FRS 26)

The Authority view this inquiry as entirely appropriate to examine what change has taken place since the Government's White Paper, Our Fire & Rescue Service, in 2003. It is, however, a very challenging inquiry for the Committee as it attempts to cover such a wide range of issues in a service that is at the forefront of so much public attention.

The Committee is asked to note that Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority (MFRA) is a Beacon Council for its Services to Older People in 2005 and was the highest scoring Fire & Rescue Authority in the country when declared 'Excellent' following the 2005 Comprehensive Performance Assessment carried out by the Audit Commission. This is a remarkable journey from a well documented low point of a wildcat one day strike on 10 September 2001. This 'pedigree' means that we have a great deal to offer to this inquiry. It is in the interest of conciseness, that we restrict our evidence to the progress on Fire & Rescue Service reform since June 2003 (paras 2, a,b,c, in terms of reference) and we leave others to comment on the remaining issues.

The Authority is proud of its work on fire prevention since it radically changed its focus back in 1999. The flagship of this community safety programme has been the Home Fire Risk Assessment that has seen nearly 250,000 homes visited in Merseyside and over 400,000 smoke alarms fitted, all part of a free service. Whilst, most of these visits have been carried out by operational firefighters, 5 years of experience has meant that we have had to become more sophisticated and targeted at those most at need, based on a 'victim profile' of fire. This has seen over 30 specialist advocate community safety staff recognised by the Guardian Public Service Award for 'Innovation in Diversity' and employed in the following areas:-

Bilingual Advocates:

reaching the Somali, Yemini, Chinese and Asian community

Older Persons Advocates:

Reaching this most vulnerable group

Deaf Advocates:

Reaching the 1 in 7 in the community who have hearing challenges

Drug and Alcohol Dependency:

A very high proportion of fire deaths are alcohol and drug related

Disability:

Mobility and ability to react are a factor in many fire deaths

District Community Safety Advocates:

Forging partnership with the caring agencies in local authorities

Carer Trainer:

Training thousands of carers working in the community on basic fire safety

These staff share the uniform of a firefighter and take the 'brand' into the heart of some of the most challenging communities. They also bring a greater diversity into the Service and have gained the respect and trust of their colleagues by their enthusiasm and skill. This work should be a model for all Fire Authorities and we invite the Committee to seek further evidence of the benefits of this approach. With the threats this country now faces, the ability of a public service to engage with all parts of the communities must be part of the long term solution to reduce risk.

Every study will show that fire has a social dimension and impacts on those most in need. All the local authorities in Merseyside are within the top 20% of the most income deprived in England, which makes the challenges facing this Authority perhaps greater than anywhere else. With the number of pensioners living alone rising above the national average, the number of pensioners with a long term limited illness increasing by 30% in Liverpool and Knowsley districts, an increasingly diverse population and Liverpool being the fourth highest recipient of asylum seekers in the UK, it is clear that the challenges this brings is shared across a number of agencies and a 21st century Fire & Rescue Service must work effectively in partnership with those to create a shared solution.

Below is just a few of the many partnerships the Authority has formed in recent years:-

5 District Local Authorities:	Arson reduction schemes, youth engagement, school protection, anti-social behaviour reduction, vehicle crime.
Health Services/PCTs:	Health visitor domestic fire safety training, child obesity clinics on fire stations, attendance at flu clinics, drug and alcohol dependency referrals.
Social Services:	Carer domestic fire safety training, portable one room sprinklers to vulnerable clients, juvenile fire setter referral.
Police:	Arson Task Force, Firework Incident and Research Safety Team (FIRST), Youth Engagement.
Merseyside Centre for Deaf People:	Accessing the deaf community through our deaf advocates.
Aged Carers/Help the Aged:	Accessing older people

Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation: Joint anti-smoking campaigns.

Fire Support Network: Our very strong volunteer charity providing support in the community through 300 volunteers.

Mersey Regional Ambulance Service: Co-responding

And there are many more.

After 5 years plus of experience, delivering services on a scale and breadth never before attempted in the Fire Service, the Authority believes that the model for Community Fire Safety is built around:-

- Comprehensive and ambitious local programmes of home fire safety checks delivered by operational firefighters within a strategic plan and framework;
- Supported by specialist staff who empathise with those most vulnerable in the community;
- Delivered in true partnership with the other agencies and bodies working in the same areas of the community; and
- A Service that is integral with the community, symbolised by such things as volunteer support and wide community use of fire stations.

CO-RESPONDER

Co-responding is the joint mobilisation of the ambulance and fire service to someone suffering a life-threatening event. Merseyside has carried out such a scheme from one of its fire stations involving whole-time firefighters – as far as we know, this is the only Metropolitan brigade to carry out this service. The scheme has been independently evaluated and the report by Professor John Ashton, Director of Public Health in the North West, concluded that it was a success and lives had been saved. We urge the Committee to seek evidence as to the true benefits of this approach from experts in the field of public health.

The Committee may wish to note that the Review of the Fire Service by Professor Sir George Bain saw pay rises as only justifiable if matched by improved skills and saw co-responding as an example of that improvement.

Despite our belief that the role was integral to the firefighter role map, the Fire Brigades Union, both locally and nationally are explicitly opposed to any such scheme. This is personified in their ballot for industrial action in Merseyside that insisted their Members played no part in this life-saving scheme. As a result, they have expelled 24 of their Members from the FBU for carrying out the Fire Authority policy and saving lives.

It is emphasised that co-responding is not an alternative to the ambulance/paramedic response. For instance, in Merseyside the Ambulance Service has had its biggest recruitment drive ever to raise the number of paramedics.

It should also be noted that just carrying defibrillators on fire appliances is not co-responding. It is, frankly, unacceptable in our view to spend significant sums of money on such equipment predominantly for firefighter safety and deny their use to someone having a heart attack around the corner from a fire station. We urge the Committee to endorse co-responding, to view the Fire & Rescue Service as a good samaritan and not allow this huge benefit to the safety of the most vulnerable in the community to be lost in a haze of defibrillators on fire appliances.

EMPLOYER/EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

The Service has emerged from a prolonged and damaging national dispute in 2002/03 with a promise of a bright future – more flexibility and efficiency in the way the Service is provided, a wider rescue role, the ability to respond to new challenges and new threats and greater rewards for its staff. For this to happen requires strong leadership and the co-operation of representative bodies.

One important element in securing change was to align pay increases with progress on ‘modernisation’. The reality has been different, with the FBU opposing almost all proposed changes or dragging out negotiation through an exhausting process. Meanwhile, pay rises have been awarded in good faith, more on the promise of change rather than the delivery of change.

Since the national strike in 2002/03, there have been 2 more local strikes and the threat of more, plus other industrial action. These are indications of a Union that is not modernising at the same tempo as the rest of local government.

Many examples exist in Merseyside but perhaps one symbolises this threat. In addition to its current provision, the Authority agreed to provide an additional ‘small fires unit’ for the busy period of 1600-2200 hrs to reduce the occasions front line rescue appliances were unavailable should there be a property fire. This appliance is crewed by Service staff on overtime rates of pay and deals with small fires in the open. This proposal has been opposed throughout its one year life by the FBU yet 60% of staff eligible to crew the appliance have taken advantage of the opportunity to earn extra money. To make progress in this area is notoriously difficult but some key elements need to be addressed.

If the traditional arrangements continue for providing safety cover to the community in the event of the FBU calling a strike, the very large, indeed, limitless expense falls on the Fire Authority meaning they are, effectively, held to ransom. To prevent this inequity, government should invite an open dialogue with the Service as to how the localisation of expense and disruptive industrial action could be dealt with.

FIRE AND FINANCE

The Metropolitan areas provide a fire and rescue service that:

- serves disproportionately high numbers of the national population;
- needs to invest disproportionately higher sums in community safety because of the high levels of deprivation, poverty and social need in metropolitan areas;
- needs to invest disproportionately higher sums in preparing for the emerging threats posed by new dimensions in comparison to the rest of the country, and
- are expected to find a disproportionately higher level of the national saving required following Bain and the pay agreement.

Merseyside has responded to these challenges by improving its services whilst significantly reducing its cost base. The recent grant settlement for Merseyside of just 1.57%, the failure of successive government to tackle the pension crisis means the challenge just got bigger. Merseyside will do all it can to meet that challenge.

Memorandum by the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) (FRS 27)

1. Executive Summary

1.1 Executive Summary

1.1.1 The Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) is the professional organisation for principal fire officers in the UK and this memorandum encourages a clear vision for the future of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) over the next 10 years, to meet the risk needs of tomorrow's society and its people.

1.1.2 CFOA's submission urges the availability of timely and detailed information in respect of the Outline Business Case, governance and funding arrangements of FiReControl and FireLink. Additionally the necessary guidance, structure and accountability of Regional Management Boards (RMBs) to be able to be accountable for the delivery on these national projects.

1.1.3 Our comments outline the tremendous achievements made in fire prevention but also seek to gain recognition that life-safety sprinklers will save lives and significantly reduce injuries and damage to the fabric of society. CFOA desires to see these systems being fitted into all new school buildings or in major refurbishment schemes as well as in all high-risk residential and other residential and domestic properties.

1.1.4 CFOA want to ensure that the FRS is properly recognised as an integral stakeholder in community safety and cohesion, in the Government's wider agenda of cross-departmental policies and strategies.

1.1.5 CFOA believes that a robust structure and funding mechanism must be maintained which ensures that Authorities are able to meet the business demands we face, in an economic, efficient and cost effective structure that meets the risk needs of our societies including the securing of national, regional and local resilience.

1.1.6 This paper proposes a strengthening of the governance model for Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) which will ensure not only local political representation but also representation from the business community. Similarly, we urge the institutional reform of the National Joint Councils (NJC) to achieve a separate middle-manager negotiation forum and a seat by right, for the Fire Officers Association (FOA) and Retained Firefighters Union (RFU) on the NJC.

1.1.7 Our commentary recommends the completion of the review of FSS and funding mechanisms for the FRS to ensure that we have the appropriate resources to secure the delivery of efficient and effective services to meet the risk needs of our communities.

1.1.8 The Association believes that it is important to create within the FRS, an industrial relation environment which engenders trust, respect and a proactive approach to negotiation together with consultation within national, regional and local contexts.

1.1.9 We also recommend in this submission that a clear definition and recognition in terms of operational response, assurance and competence be provided, to ensure that the Service and its people are skilled, experienced and qualified to command critical incidents. Additionally we need legislation in place which makes it a specific offence to hinder, interfere or obstruct not only firefighters but all emergency workers in the execution of their duties.

1.1.10 Diversity remains an area that merits continual attention and CFOA believes that a renewed emphasis is required to drive this agenda forwards. CFOA is keen to work with Government and other key stakeholders to ensure that Diversity issues are kept properly in focus.

1.1.11 In joint working between the Emergency Services the memorandum acknowledges that there are economies of scale to be realised. Indeed, the paper provides examples of good practice around the country but recognises that there are still more tangible benefits yet to be realised in saving lives.

1.1.12 CFOA comments in summary, that to achieve a clear agenda the Government's 10-year vision for the FRS must be set out succinctly. The memorandum agrees that the performance of the Service and its people in driving down the risks our communities face has been first class, however the pace of change in other essential areas has been limited and that there is a need to maintain the momentum of modernisation if we are to create safer communities.

1.1.13 CEGA acknowledge that this will entail some difficult issues regarding governance, structure, funding, institutional reform and industrial relations being addressed by all stakeholders in firm partnership.

2. Introduction

2.1 The CFOA Submission

2.1.1 CFOA and its members welcome the opportunity that the Inquiry presents, particularly at this juncture, as this facilitates both a review of where we are now and what still needs to be done. This Inquiry will certainly provide a useful impetus to the modernisation and reform agenda. There is no doubt that much has been achieved through the leadership of professional fire officers and fire authority members, supported by other stakeholders which has resulted in safer communities.

2.1.2 CFOA and its members have a significant contribution to make particularly in terms of providing leadership, direction, technical expertise and support in taking forwards the FRS modernisation programme. The Association would also wish to see the development of stronger formal liaison, where cross-cutting issues, affecting a wide range of Government departments and ministries could be properly represented.

2.1.3 This inquiry focuses partly on the specific issues surrounding the introduction of Regional Control Centres and FireLink. The Association's views on these matters are in Section 3 below, however there is also a more general focus on a range of issues that are being moved forward as a part of the modernisation agenda. These matters, in the context of the general picture within the FRS are covered in Section 4 onwards.

2.2 The Chief Fire Officers' Association

2.2.1 CFOA is the professional organisation for principal fire officers in the UK. The Association was formed in 1974 following local government re-organisation to allow principal fire officers the ability to meet and discuss fire related or government influenced matters. Membership of the Association comprises almost all the senior management of fire and rescue services in the United Kingdom and is the driving force in managing change and implementing reforms in the service.

2.2.2 The Association provides the chair and secretariat to the Practitioners Forum, the body through which practitioners and stakeholders in the fire community work together to provide advice to Government on policy development, ensuring that specific policy initiatives are consistent with working practices on the ground and are deliverable.

2.2.3 CFOA strongly welcomes the opportunity to review the progress that has been made by the FRS since 2003. Much has been achieved but a significant amount remains to be done. CFOA and its members are actively promoting, implementing and delivering real changes in the Service and, working in partnership with all stakeholders, we remain committed to the process. The Association would welcome the opportunity to give professional oral evidence to the Inquiry.

3 Terms of Reference — Questions 1a & 1b

3.1 Regional Control Centres and FireLink

3.1.1 The Association is fully committed to the FiReControl and FireLink projects, and continues to support their implementation. The rationale behind these two initiatives is to secure national, regional and local resilience in the provision of our services as well as securing effective and efficient structures.

3.1.2 There is no doubt that the FiReControl and Firelink projects are an integral part of the modernisation agenda, as well as securing the essential levels of resilience

required by Government and the FRS. These projects should provide an operating framework that will act as an enabler of change, providing opportunities to develop new and efficient ways of working across regional boundaries. They should however, be seen in the broader context of change and modernisation within the FRS.

3.1.3 The successful implementation of FiReControl and FireLink should deliver tangible benefits to local communities and council taxpayers. CFOA remains supportive and is working with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and the Local Government Association (LGA) towards the delivery of a more resilient service to provide enhanced interoperability within the FRS and also with the Police and Ambulance Services. In addition we would expect to see resultant increases in operational effectiveness whilst providing greater value for money for taxpayers.

3.1.4 However, we do have a number of outstanding concerns with regard to the Full Business Case, the discharge of legal responsibilities, clarification on governance arrangements and the ultimate accountability for the service. Whilst we have no reason to doubt ODPN4's business case assumptions, we are disappointed that the absence of the Full Business Case gives rise to perceptions of a lack of transparency, reinforcing the arguments of those opposed to the project.

3.1.5 Our concerns include:

- Statutory duties of fire and rescue authorities - decisions expected without full information being available;
- Full acknowledgement of fire and rescue authorities' interests and concerns by ODPM;
- Final Outline Business Case - transparency of costs;
- National Resilience is not an individual fire and rescue authority responsibility, therefore they should not accrue additional costs;
- Additional costs of fire and rescue authorities not met in structured way through New Burdens process;
- Uncertainty and lack of ownership of governance arrangements;
- Capacity issues for individual fire and rescue authorities;
- Transparency in operational response - citizen confidence.

3.1.6 Whilst the successful implementation of FireLink will be a significant step forward in communication between fire appliances and emergency service control centres, the absence of hand-held radio communication at the scene of operational

incidents will potentially lessen the effectiveness of the FRS. It would therefore be prudent to review the overall expectations of the project in light of the increasing and evolving operational role of the FRS, with a view to including hand-held radio communication as an integral component of the FireLink project. Our concerns include;

- No business case for Firelink;
- No information on financial or other ongoing resource implications of Firelink;
- Lack of Business Case that underpins any proposed governance model for Fire Controls.

3.1.7 It is difficult to envisage and not realistic to expect that RMBs will have the ability, capacity or resources to meet Government expectations in delivering these projects.

3.1.8 A significant risk impacting upon the implementation of the FiReControl project is the continuing stance of the FBU and their resistance to any change to the existing 47 Fire Control Rooms. Resolution of issues surrounding their objections must be resolved at a national level, without resort to industrial action. The provision of cost effective, efficient and resilient services for our communities must be the determining factors.

4 Terms of Reference — Question 2a

4.1 The Fire Prevention Agenda

4.1.1 The Select Committee are seeking specific evidence of progress in terms of “Fire” Prevention work within the service. Much work has been done in this area and a great deal has been achieved. This is, however, a narrower focus than should perhaps be taken within this inquiry. The FRS has been making the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) a reality and has been expanding work aligned with its new statutory duties, including transport incidents and civil emergencies including the preparation for major or catastrophic events. This has been recognised by increased emphasis in the draft National Framework for 2006/8 currently circulating for consultation.

4.1.2 However, the terms of reference of this inquiry fail to recognise the work being done by the ERS in many other areas to manage local risks, which if not properly addressed, will only result in a partial assessment of the picture.

4.1.3 Through resilience forums and in partnership with local authorities and other emergency services, the ERS (Category 1 Responders under the Civil Contingencies Act) is engaging fully in this wider risk agenda. The rationale of the prevention activities of the service are to drive down risks in a way that is pertinent to local communities and not necessarily to be wholly focused on fire. To use scarce resources to input messages

about fire safety and ignore road safety in a community where road traffic collisions cause much more misery and death can not be an appropriate response.

4.1.4 In terms of ensuring that we have in place a FRS which is structured, equipped and resourced to meet the risk needs of our communities in 2015 it is essential that we agree a clearly defined vision of the service which enables the FRS to meet the future needs of our communities. There is an essential requirement for Government to have in place an inter-departmental working strategy, to ensure that across the ODPM — Health — Education — Treasury Social Inclusion/Exclusion; that the contribution the ERS makes to the wider agenda of safety and social well-being can be fully recognised.

4.2 Achievements

4.2.1 The thrust of this Inquiry is to determine whether the “prevention is better than cure” message has been implemented by the FRS. The statistics here speak for themselves. The Public Service Agreement (PSA) Fire Targets for 2010 require Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) *“To reduce the number of accidental fire related deaths in the home by 2000 averaged over the eleven year period to 31 March 2010”*. Similarly the target for Arson Reduction is *“To reduce by 1000 the number of deliberate fires by 31 March 2010...”*

4.2.2 The FRS are well on the way to achieving the first target within five years of the Agreement and have more than doubled the projected target for Arson Reduction within the first four years. In an agreement of this type, it is axiomatic that on reaching agreed targets., the FRS are afforded greater financial freedom and financial support and CFOA would wish to explore this process as part of the Inquiry.

4.2.3 In real terms we can claim that at least 78 more people are walking our streets today as a result of our fire safety initiatives. Recent statistics for 2004/05 clearly demonstrate that fire deaths and injuries are continuing to reduce. For example: deaths were down by 9% and injuries by 11%. In addition, during 2003/04 deliberate fires were down by 21% and road vehicle fires down by 25%.

4.2.4 An important underlying concern that needs to be continually addressed is the apparent lack of public awareness and understanding of the significant achievements that have been made. This is clearly a long term process and CFOA believe that greater emphasis needs to be placed on national awareness campaigns and local education initiatives to ensure that public attention is brought to the benefits of statutory change and modernisation in the FRS.

4.2.5 However, the challenge remains to continue to drive down fire deaths and injuries even more, whilst also recognising the service’s work in reducing the incidence and consequences of other emergencies. The modern FRS is the primary responding agency to civil emergencies and CFOA believe that this must be fully recognised, understood and appropriately resourced.

4.3 Sprinklers and Schools

4.3.1 The installation of life-safety sprinklers systems used in a variety of contexts will without question, result in immediate and sustainable improvement in the medium-term in the number of lives saved, as well as a reduction both in injuries and the cost of fire in our communities.

4.3.2 The likelihood of school fires remains very high due to a combination of social factors and the potential consequences of such fires are disastrous. This is one particular area of risk that CFOA is currently placing at the top of its agenda and will use every opportunity to promote.

4.3.3 It is our unequivocal view that every new school and major refurbishment to a school building must include the installation of sprinklers. As well as the primary life saving potential, reducing the cost of school fires and minimising the impact on children's education within our communities and the implications for the insurance industry and teaching professions.

4.3.4 We believe the business case for legislative support in this area is overwhelming and invite the inquiry to support this view. In the longer-term we would wish to see life-saving sprinkler systems fitted on a similar risk-assessed basis, to high-risk residential and other residential and domestic properties. Indeed, following the Government's recent announcements on the number of residential properties to be built over the next 20 years, particularly with over 500,000 houses in the south east alone, CFOA believe that there is an opportunity to consider fitting domestic sprinklers to all new homes. Evidence from the USA and New Zealand is unequivocal; in that domestic sprinklers save lives, protect property and reduce the resource impact on the NHS and social services.

4.4 A Balanced Approach — Prevention — Protection — Response

4.4.1 The Government has now streamlined fire safety arrangements with the introduction of a new framework that brings together more than a 100 different pieces of earlier legislation. These changes come into effect in April 2006 with the introduction of the Fire Safety Order, and will nearly double the number of premises subject to detailed regulation. FRAs are planning to deal with expansion within current resources by adopting a risk-based inspection regime where the frequency of visits to check premises reflects the assessed fire risk in those buildings, however the resource implications will need continual review as the new regime develops.

4.4.2 Fire Authorities are now in their third year of determining the allocation of resources on the basis of local risk, through IRMPs. These have been informed through wide stakeholder consultation and involvement of the general public. These plans take

advantage of the flexibility provided by the new Fire and Rescue Services Act to provide emergency cover which reflects the patterns of risk across our cities, urban and rural areas. However it is apparent that businesses, industry & commerce and the insurance sector still remain concerned about issues such as attendance times and the weight of attack, as balanced against other community fire safety initiatives.

4.4.3 The terms of reference for this inquiry separately address issues of resilience within the Fire and Rescue Service, which CFOA has provided in a specific response at paragraph 7 to this memorandum. However, the Association is concerned about the integration of IRMPs within resilience planning. Currently there is an apparent separation between planning for “day to day” risks (IRMP) and the planning for more significant resilience requirements for potential major and catastrophic incidents (Resilience Forums).

4.4.4 The bulk of the response resources that will deal with major/catastrophic incidents are also the same resources that address the background risks which suggests that separate planning is neither effective nor efficient. CFOA would like to see a requirement to include major and catastrophic incident planning within IRMPs. Some authorities already do this, however it would be far better for all to do so in a consistent manner. An integrated risk management plan can only be truly “integrated” if it seeks to address each of the FRAs resources to all of the risks that must be faced.

4.4.5 The new RRO to be introduced as the Fire Safety Order 2006 and IRMPs obviously provide a balance between prevention and response. This has involved extensive change in terms of culture for both the Service as an enforcing authority and the business community with whom it works. The impact of these changes upon the business community including many small to medium sized enterprises who rely heavily on advice and assistance from the fire and rescue service on fire safety issues, means that they will have to become much more self-reliant. It is essential therefore that Government and FRAs consider how best they can support not only businesses but also communities during this significant period of change.

4.4.6 This anticipated expansion and development of the legislative Fire Safety regime builds on the ERS and CFOA’s discreet contribution to the introduction of The Licensing Act 2003 and The Housing Act 2004 and the development of technical expertise and revised practises.

4.5 Differing Standards

4.5.1 Almost uniquely, and clearly without intent, the Government has introduced different levels of fire safety for different residents of the UK. It has affected these disproportionate standards with the introduction of the Scottish Building Standards with its positive risk assessed approach to the mandatory installation of life-safety sprinklers in certain properties. A similar provision would appear to be essential in the Revised Building Regulations and in particular, the Approved Document ‘B’.

5 Terms of Reference - Question 2b

5.1 Governance

5.1.1 The Association has outlined in previous submissions to Government, that the governance structure and funding of the FRS needs further reform. It is believed that the current structural models hinder the delivery of efficiency objectives through the duplication of effort and poor economies of scale.

5.1.2 The Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) review and CFOA have both commented that Fire Authorities serving larger but not necessarily denser populations do have the scope and resources to better meet the growing capacity requirements and demands now faced by the ERS, which can lead to improved performance. Although we recognise that a one-size model may not necessarily fit all economical, geographical and environmental circumstances, we do however, require Authorities which are able to organise and reform with appropriate resources in place, to secure the proper delivery of services.

5.1.3 It is quite clear that in this complex world a newer, more plural model of governance would serve us better than the current plethora of solutions. Issues of sound strategic advice, guidance and scrutiny are rightly provided by elected members and by national agencies and organisations such as ODPM and LGA. Nonetheless it would be appropriate to strengthen the existing governance model by encouraging the more formal involvement of co-opted members from the business community, insurance sector and other agencies. It is only in this more representative forum in a community partnership that the quality of decision making will be enhanced.

5.1.4 Like all public sector bodies, there are challenges to deliver value for money to which we must all rise. Taking waste and duplication out of the service by rationalising the structure or achieving economies of scale through collective procurement (FireBuy) will undoubtedly free up resources for other activities.

5.2 Institutional Reform

5.2.1 In previous submissions, CFOA called for radical reform of the institutional basis of the FRS and we were pleased to see that in many aspects, our concerns were addressed. Indeed the advent of the Practitioners Forum, the Business and Community Safety Forum, and importantly the Minister's Sounding Board have all proved to be of great benefit in moving the service forward in a dynamic and flexible environment. Nevertheless, we do have some small concerns regarding how the business and safety forum operates and interrelates with the other forums.

5.3 Staff Engagement and Leadership

5.3.1 The people who work in the FRS are its most important and valuable asset. For the service to be truly effective it must lead its staff towards new ideas and approaches. Local communities are served by local firefighters who must, in turn, build trust and engagement across a broad agenda within those communities.

5.3.2 Not all of the staff in the FRS yet understand the service's new direction and many are still not convinced that such change is even necessary. CFOA is fully aware of its leading role in setting clear direction for the service at a time of exciting change. The service needs to undergo a significant cultural shift from simply telling its staff "what to do" towards engaging them in "why" the change is fundamental and absolutely necessary.

5.3.3 To gain real commitment, staff need wherever possible, to believe in the change we are bringing about and to be able to see the purpose and direction of the service, understanding particularly how it affects them personally. Leadership is the key ingredient here and all the strategic stakeholders within the service have a role to play in securing a common direction. CFOA is committed to simplifying and communicating the message of change to FRS staff and this is seen as a fundamental issue.

5.3.4 In this environment of significant change, the importance of sound, open, transparent and respectful industrial relations cannot be over emphasised. In order to run a successful cost effective and efficient organisation there must be commonality of trust, integrity and respect which will provide an environment where all stakeholders can ensure that national, regional and local negotiations and consultation are conducted in proper partnership.

5.3.5 It is evident that change in terms of the NJC has been less than positive. Indeed some 18 months further on, its constitution has still not been agreed or reviewed. If the Service is to move forward within the present industrial relations climate it is essential that immediate reform of the NJC, its governance and structure, takes place as quickly as possible. In particular we would argue strongly for the simple step of ensuring that the RFU and Fire Officers Association (FOA) have seats, by right, on the NJC and play a full part in industrial relations, negotiation and consultation. Indeed it is already evident that many FRAs have provided recognition to RFU and FOA in their industrial relations processes.

5.3.6 Further we see as essential the creation of a separate negotiating body for middle managers. This would ensure that middle managers have the correct level of representation relevant to their role and that management issues are dealt with separately from general work force issues.

5.3.7 Similarly, with the introduction of wide ranging reforms in all government departments and ministries and their consequential impact and opportunity for partnership working with CFOA and the ERS, an inter-departmental/inter-ministry

forum would be a positive and welcome move. This forum would afford CFOA the opportunity to contribute in the earliest stages of strategy or policy formulation in areas such as Sustainable Communities, Regeneration, Crime Reduction, Health as well as Road Traffic Incidents and the Built Environment.

5.3.8 It is apparent that one of the major barriers to modernisation in the Service has been the stance of the leadership of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). The FBU continues to resist meaningful dialogue about change within the FRS, preferring to maintain the status quo and, on occasions, put the public at risk by taking industrial action in order to preserve dated working practices. It is hard to see how this best serves the interests of the FBU membership, the fire fighters, particularly when future pay negotiations in 2007, will be set against the backdrop of their limited delivery in the modernisation programme.

5.3.9 CFOA believes that the FBU leadership is distancing itself from the majority of its members and is being led by a radical minority with a political agenda, rather than being supportive of their members' interests. The service has very able, skilled and committed staff who have shown enormous flexibility when they have taken-on a range of new challenges~ Modern-staff require modern industrial representation and this is clearly not a present being provided.

5.4 Attacks on Firefighters

5.4.1 In support of the very difficult job that Firefighters execute, CFOA is extremely concerned about the levels of hindrance, abuse and physical attacks that frontline firefighters now have to endure as they go about their duties at operational incidents. The FRS has a duty to ensure the safety of staff in all situations and for some time the service has been investing significant resources in order to mitigate the effects of such attacks.

5.4.2 Despite a whole range of strategies being in place, that seek to prevent such attacks, through to protecting staff when they happen and finally ensuring whenever possible, that the most severe penalties are imposed on those found responsible; the situation continues to worsen. Many of the incidents involve interfering with FRS equipment and hindering firefighters as they go about their business and which could have significant safety implications through to intimidation, abuse and physical assault. Examples include water supplies being turned-off while firefighters are inside buildings extinguishing fires, gas cylinders being placed in vehicles which are then ignited, attacks using stones, fireworks, firearms, knives and other missiles and fires being set to draw in the FRS in a deliberate affront.

5.4.3 CFOA believes that time is right to call for immediate legislation making it a specific offence to hinder, interfere or obstruct not only firefighters but all frontline emergency workers in the execution of their duty. CFOA welcomed similar legislation

in Scotland and places full support behind Alan Williams MP and his private members bill seeking the establishment of such legislation in England and Wales.

5.5 Finance and Resources

5.5.1 Efficiency savings alone, will not allow us to deliver the stretching targets in this increasingly complex and operationally demanding landscape, which is the new reality in which we operate. This is not only about cutting the cake into bigger slices but also about creating a bigger cake.

5.5.2 The recent report of the Fire Expenditure Working Group and the Fire Finance Network has concluded “If the agenda is to progress at the rate needed in order to release the efficiency gains envisaged, it will require some investment and pump priming”. Both capital and revenue resources are needed to support the new and expanded functions in areas such as New Dimensions, Community Fire Safety and Community Safety and developing the broader based rescue role.

6 Terms of Reference - Question 2c

6.1 Promoting Diversity

6.1.1 Promoting diversity remains a key issue for the Association in terms of both the service delivery and fire authority roles as a key employer. We fully support the development of national policies and procedures as well as working with the LGA and Fire Authorities to ensure that the workforce properly reflects the diverse communities that we serve. This will not only help provide more responsive services, but will also help to build confidence in all parts of the community showing that we understand their particular needs and aspirations.

6.1.2 Local Fire Authorities have already established Recruitment and Diversity Teams with Elected members playing key roles in many aspects of these initiatives, including the appointment of diversity champions.

6.1.3 The proposed revisions to the national point of entry selection tests which are based on job related tests will help to facilitate the recruitment of more people from the target groups and this is to be welcomed, as long as there is a recognition that the role of the operational firefighter remains a physically demanding one that demands appropriate levels of physical strength and fitness.

6.1.4 The current national targets for the recruitment, retention and progression of women and ethnic minority staff are to be revised and expanded to include the whole of the FRS workforce which is a welcome move. CFA remains committed to both internal cultural change initiatives and also to a comprehensive community outreach programme as the best way to achieve our goal of a more diverse work force.

6.1.5 The overall commitment of the FRS to equality and diversity is without question. However there is a need to ensure that all stakeholders work in partnership to an agreed agenda, to ensure we have a workforce which reflects our commitment as well as recognising their specific cultures.

6.1.6 Innovative programmes of community safety initiatives designed to meet equality objectives take place throughout the UK, these have been developed in partnership with differing parts of the community, with different groups and particularly vulnerable people in Lard to reach areas. However the FRS are not complacent and recognise that much more needs to be done to ensure that we create a workforce which reflects and supports our communities - CEGA remains committed to these objectives.

6.1.7 The Association believes that some of the attention and scrutiny on diversity issues has been diluted by other major initiatives such as modernisation and civil resilience. CFOA feel that a renewed emphasis on diversity is required, by maintaining awareness and closely monitoring performance against the defined targets. The Association is keen to support the Government and other key stakeholders in moving the diversity agenda forwards and would welcome joint discussions about how this could best be achieved.

7 Terms of Reference - Question 3

7.1 Emergency Services Joint Working and Resilience

7.1.1 There are economies of scale to be realised through joint working between the Emergency Services. Indeed, there are examples of good practice around the country, particularly in terms of joint working between the Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service, such as the co-location of services, but there are tangible benefits yet to be realised in saving lives.

7.1.2 There is no doubt that the introduction of co-responding schemes and/or the use of defibrillators has benefits for the public. CFOA believe that if the FRS are to extend this role more formally, the ODPM and Department of Health should agree a Memorandum of Understanding on behalf of the ERS for a co-responding protocol.

7.1.3 The main barrier to joint working is the lack of co-terminosity between services, the different governance models, the different funding mechanisms and financial regulations and, more importantly, the lack of joint policies at governmental level.

7.1.4 In 2001, the Home Secretary (then Jack Straw) requested the Presidents of the three emergency services associations (ACPO, CACFOA, ASA) to prepare a joint report on collaboration working. The report was duly commissioned, agreed and compiled and presented to the Home Secretary. The report made 16 recommendations to improved

joint working, however, many remain outstanding today - not the least being Government's priorities, its vision of where it sees the "blue light" services in the future.

7.1.5 Given the speed and complexity of change facing the fire and rescue set—vice and the focus now being placed on prevention, CFOA believes it is fundamental to ensure that the operational response of the fire and rescue service continues to be resourced at a level that maintains not only the safety of our staff and the general public, but also the confidence of the communities that we serve and that of all other fire and rescue service stakeholders.

7.1.6 The joint working arrangements put in place between emergency services to deal with a terrorist incident were put to the first significant test on 7th July 2005 in London. CFOA members from London commented on the arrangements and events of that day being very similar to the preparatory development, exercises and testing that had taken place prior to that event. This is a testament to the work that had taken place up to that point. Similar arrangements are being developed in resilience forums throughout the country.

7.2 Investment to Date

7.2.1 CFOA welcomes the investment that has been made to support the New Dimensions programme and the opportunity to work in partnership with the Civil Resilience Directorate to provide an enhanced response for Chemical, Biological, Radiation and Nuclear incidents. Whilst there is much still to be done, the availability of Mass Decontamination Response Units, Detection, Identification and Monitoring equipment, Urban Search and Rescue, and High Volume Pumps provides for a far higher level of response not only to large scale terrorist incidents but also for local incidents that occur on a daily basis. It is clear that this new provision is becoming fully integrated into local response arrangements.

7.2.2 The success of the programme to date has been widely acknowledged, nevertheless there is still some way to go. For example, the coordination of New Dimension assets through a National Coordination Centre is still being developed together with the Long Term Capability Management of the New Dimensions assets to support sustainability through future years. CFOA will continue to play its part in ensuring that these important elements are brought to fruition.

7.2.3 We welcome the investment made to date in respect of the New Dimension programme and are pleased we have been able to work so closely with those responsible in rolling out new vehicles, new equipment and training to provide an enhanced service at local, regional and indeed national level to enable the service to respond to the unprecedented threats that are likely to arise.

7.3 Operational Assurance

7.3.1 Although the CPA process was only applied to the FRS for the first time in 2005, we were disappointed that it did not contain a specific element which looked at the effectiveness, performance and safety of its operational services and the way in which those services are delivered.

7.3.2 CFOA believe that to maintain the confidence in the service there needs to be a comprehensive, transparent and impartial review process to look at all elements of operational service delivery, which aligns with the CPA regime. We were keen therefore to work closely with Her Majesty's Fire Services Inspectorate and begin to develop such a process that could be applied to those English fire and rescue authorities by way of self assessment and in the longer term, as part of the next round of the CPA process. We would wish to see this work continue and be supported.

7.4 Operational Competence

7.4.1 The modernisation of the service has provided new opportunities not only for developing our own staff but also for attracting a more diverse range of staff from outside of the service. Whilst we welcome these changes in the knowledge that many of the duties of fire and rescue service managers can be discharged without having to have progressed through all of the roles within the uniformed service, we believe that the management of critical incidents at all levels, remains a key element of the role of many fire and rescue service managers.

7.4.2 We believe that it is important for fire and rescue authorities to be clear on the responsibilities of all fire service managers and the duties they perform. If authorities determine that their staff should undertake command of critical incidents, the personal skills, knowledge and attributes to do so will need to be identified and an appropriate development programme implemented to ensure competence in this vital area.

7.4.3 We believe that any lack of clarity about the role of staff or the placement of an individual in a critical decision-making position, without the provision of appropriate supporting mechanisms, will place the Authority and the individual at significant risk. CFOA would wish to work therefore with ODPM, LGA, the Fire Service College FSC and others, to research and design an appropriate programme to support the development of critical incident commanders as an element of a multi-tier entry system.

7.4.4 Further Work

7.4.5 There remain two areas of concern which need to properly addressed:

- **Water Rescue** - The resources to provide a national water rescue capability are within scope of the New Dimensions programme, however at this point in time no funding exists to develop this capability. In addition whilst we welcome the outcome of the consultation exercise on "Non Fire Emergencies for the FRS" we believe that there is a lack of understanding by the authors in to what constitutes Water Rescue and the

appropriate resources required to provide such a capability. CFOA wish to see the necessary investment and resources to allow the FRS to undertake this role safely and effectively

- **Support Arrangements** - The second area of concern relates to the support arrangements that are presently in place, by way of regional teams funded by CRL~, to support the New Dimensions programme. Whilst we acknowledge that any such support arrangements should be regularly reviewed to ensure they remain cost effective, we would want reassurances that any future structures will be robust enough to continue to deliver the necessary high level of support.

Summary

8 Summary

8.1 Vision for the Future

8.1.1 CFOA are already involved in the work to progress a 10-year vision for the FRS, however, it is important that this is developed sooner rather than later and that this development involves all stakeholders. The FRS of the future must be able to meet the risk needs of our dynamically changing communities in a cost effective and efficient manner. Future demands on the service will increase as will public expectations and in order that there is a clear agenda to meet these challenges, the 10-year vision of Government must be set out.

8.2 Conclusion

8.2.1 There is no doubt that the performance of the Service and its people in driving down the risks our communities face has been first class, however the pace of change in other essential areas has been limited.

8.2.2 We need to maintain the momentum of modernisation if we are to create safer communities; this will entail difficult major issues being addressed by all stakeholders in partnership. Issues regarding governance, structure, funding, institutional reform, industrial relations and a clear vision for the Service of the future must be actioned in the short term.

8.2.3 The Inquiry at this juncture in the modernisation and reform programme of the FRS is wholeheartedly welcomed by CFOA.

References

9 References

9.1 Listing

9.1.1 The following references support this memorandum:

- CACFOA Submission of Evidence to the Independent Review of the Fire Service —Communities at Risk (October 2002) - (Copy attached)
- CACFOA Final Submission of Evidence of the Independent review of the Fire Service —Communities Safety First (October 2002) - (Copy attached)
- CFOA Annual Report 2004/2005 — (Copy attached)
- Draft Strategy for Children and Young People (November 2005)
- The Scottish Building Standards
- Draft Approved Document associated with Building Regulations Part B — Fire Safety
- Fire Statistics Monitor — Issue No. 3/05

Glossary

Acronym	Definition
ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
ASA	Ambulance Service Association
CACFOA	Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers
CFOA	Chief Fire Officers' Association
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
FBU	Fire Brigades Union
FOA	Fire Officers Association
IRMP	Integrated Risk Management Plan

LGA	Local Government Association
NJC	National Joint Councils
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
PSA	Public Service Agreement
RFU	Retained Firefighters Union
RMB	Regional Management Board
RRO	Regulatory Reform Order (to become the Fire Safety Order)

Memorandum by the Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) (FRS 28)

Executive Summary

1. Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Select Committee on The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in respect of The Fire and Rescue Service Inquiry.
2. Our track record over many years demonstrates that we have been very proactive in implementing innovative changes to the way we work. These changes have resulted in significant improvements to the service we offer and in driving down fire deaths.
3. We have reviewed our strategic vision and mission statement in light of the Integrated Risk Management Plan and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process in order to provide a focus for modernisation. Our vision statement is “Making Greater Manchester a Safer Place by being a modern, community focussed and influential Fire & Rescue Authority”
4. We have championed the modernisation agenda; we have built on our successes; we are now looking to improve the service further. The modernisation agenda allows us to look for innovative ways of providing future services that are not as constrained as in the past. The introduction of the national framework and greater freedom to reach locally negotiated agreements has meant that efficient, economic and effective ways can be found to meet local needs using a risk based approach.
5. We have negotiated and reached agreement with the FBU on a number of modernisation issues, which has facilitated this Authority moving forward with tangible improvements. This has included rostering for duty, removal of beds, work routines and flexible resource deployment at night.
6. Our submission includes several examples of this philosophy and we trust it will be useful to the committee’s deliberations. We have provided suggestions at the end of each example that in our view would greatly assist UK Fire & Rescue Services in delivering a modern, flexible and innovative service. We believe that these examples of areas of work in GMF&RS are fundamental in delivering a modern service based on a sound approach to Integrated Risk Management planning.
7. We have always been a proactive and influential service in our contribution to national issues via the Chief Fire Officers Association and a variety of Government steering groups and committees. Our Chief Fire Officer is one of four in the country that is shaping the future of the British Fire & Rescue Service

by actively leading on national workstreams on behalf of CFOA. In our case these are New Dimensions and Operational matters. Other Chief Officers lead on such issues as e-fire, Firelink and FiReControl at national and regional level.

8. The modernisation agenda is intended to facilitate change and introduce improved ways of working. We are fully supportive of this. We feel however that in the drive to introduce more modern approaches there is the potential to lose sight of the operational aspects of the service. In particular the move from intervention to prevention should not compromise the ability of firefighters to effectively respond to operational incidents and operate safely. It is vital that operational competencies are a key part of the modernisation agenda.
9. It is recognised that the resources to provide a national water rescue capability are within scope of the New Dimensions programme. However at this point in time no funding exists to develop this capability. Whilst we welcome the outcome of the consultation exercise on “Non Fire Emergencies for the FRS” we believe that there is a lack of understanding by the authors as to what constitutes Water Rescue and the resources required to provide such a capability. Within this memorandum we have outlined the actions that this authority has taken to ensure that we can undertake this role safely and effectively. We would urge the government to consider and address the issue of funding water rescues for the FRS.
10. This authority is extremely concerned about the levels of hindrance, abuse and physical attacks that its frontline firefighters have to endure as they go about their duties at operational incidents. We have a duty to ensure the safety of our staff in all situations and for some time have been investing significant resources in order to reduce the number and effects of such attacks.
11. We believe this to be a national problem which is closely linked to social issues. We urge the Government to consider the introduction of legislation similar to that in Scotland that makes it a specific offence to hinder, interfere or obstruct frontline emergency service workers.

Introduction

12. The County Fire Officer & Chief Executive welcomes the opportunity to review the progress that has been made by this Authority since 2003 in its drive to address the Modernisation Agenda.

The Organisation in Context

13. In Greater Manchester we have driven down the number of fire deaths over recent years to the lowest level they have ever been. Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) is the second largest fire service in the country

employing around 2,700 people, 2,200 are operational staff, serving an area of approximately 496 square miles, containing a culturally diverse resident population of almost 2.5 million people, 1 million domestic properties, and a wide range of commercial and industrial complexes. There are a number of densely-populated centres within the area ranging from very modern inner city developments to traditional mill town communities that have expanded, diversified and developed.

Diversity

14. Within Greater Manchester there is a vibrant multi-cultural community, embracing a mix of people that contribute to the area's vitality and success. Almost 9% of our residents are from ethnic minorities. We are committed to providing a high quality service to all sections of this diverse community, ensuring equal and fair treatment in all aspects of our service delivery, and are working hard through positive action to recruit a more diverse, representative workforce.

Value for Money

15. We believe that our plans to make the community safer from fire are making a real difference. We believe that we operate in a most cost-effective manner which is reflected in the fact that we are one of the least expensive metropolitan fire authorities in the country

Industrial Relations

16. Over the past 15 years this Fire & Rescue Authority has operated in a turbulent, industrial relations environment where almost every change initiative was rejected by the majority trades union often with the threat of strike action. This did impede progress, although it did not prevent improvement in service delivery. The Authority is totally committed to modernisation and has adopted a flexible approach to overcome barriers and resistance to change.

Moving Forward

17. The Authority is keen to foster good industrial relations with all representative bodies and all parties and we are now working together to improve the industrial relations climate. We have formally agreed and are now operating a Joint Consultative Framework which is providing a structured forum for consultation and is allowing us to move forward together. The Authority has recognised the importance of effective communications within the organisation and in 2004 recruited a Head of Corporate Communications to operate at a strategic level within the Management Team.

18. We recognise that there are opportunities to move forward and have developed our vision. We are implementing significant and innovative changes to our organisation that will lead to a more efficient and effective service in line with the objectives set out in our Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP)
19. The Authority is confident that it is in a position to see tangible results based on the building blocks that it has put in place in previous years. With the modernisation agenda and the focus of the IRMP there is an enthusiasm throughout our service to complete and introduce the innovative initiatives that are necessary.

Partnerships

20. We are working closely with our partner fire services in the region, as part of the North West Fire and Rescue Management Board leading on procurement and resilience. We are also working closely at local level with the community through Local Strategic Partnerships, as part of our commitment to the crime and disorder agenda.
21. We have recently adopted a Borough Command Structure to align ourselves to the 10 Metropolitan Boroughs we serve. Each borough in Greater Manchester now has its own Borough Command team who ensure we respond effectively to the risks that the local communities face which facilitates partnership working in the community.
22. In order to gain maximum efficiency from our partnership working we are conducting a review in conjunction with Price Waterhouse Coopers our external auditors. This will provide a system whereby we can evaluate the specific benefits of each individual partnership.
23. The national framework encourages the use of regional teams for common services and as part of the North West Fire and Rescue Management Board workstreams we are actively exploring additional ways in which we can work together across the region.
24. An area of concern relates to the support arrangements that are presently in place, by way of regional teams funded by CRD, to support the New Dimensions programme. Whilst we acknowledge that any such support arrangements should be regularly reviewed to ensure they remain cost effective, we would want reassurances that any future structures will be robust enough to continue to deliver the necessary high level of support.
25. This Authority is concerned about the integration of IRMPs within resilience planning. Currently there is an apparent separation between planning for “day to

day” risks (IRMP) and the planning for more significant resilience requirements for potential major and catastrophic incidents (Resilience Forums).

26. The bulk of the response resources that will deal with major/catastrophic incidents are also the same resources that address the background risks which suggests that separate planning is neither effective nor efficient. We would like to see a requirement to include major and catastrophic incident planning within IRMPs.
27. We are working with other emergency services and exploring different ways in which we are able to cooperate and improve our service provision to develop an improved cost efficient service. We give examples within this memorandum of initiatives of this type.

Operational Competence

28. The modernisation of the service has provided new opportunities not only for developing our own staff but also for attracting a more diverse range of staff from outside the service. Whilst we welcome these changes in the knowledge that many of the duties of fire and rescue service managers can be discharged without having to have progress through all of the roles within the uniformed service, we believe that the management of critical incidents at all levels, remains a key element of the role of many fire and rescue service managers.
29. We believe that it is important to be clear on the responsibilities of all fire service managers and the duties they perform. Where staff undertake command of critical incidents, their personal skills, knowledge and attributes to do so will need to be identified and an appropriate development programme implemented to ensure competence in this vital area.
30. We believe any lack of clarity about the role of staff or the placement of an individual in a critical decision-making position, without the provision of appropriate supporting mechanisms, will place the Authority and the individual at significant risk.

Funding Issues

31. The resource base of the Fire and Rescue Service (both revenue and capital) needs to be sufficient to enable the wider role to be properly fulfilled. Without adequate long term funding and increases to enable any new duties to be properly implemented the Service will struggle to effectively manage and resource the transition towards Community Fire Safety whilst maintaining a high degree of operational readiness. Efficiency savings alone, will not allow us to deliver the stretching targets in this increasingly complex and operationally demanding environment.

32. The Service has made a very positive start to the efficiency agenda and will continue to seek opportunities for further improvement and reinvestment in the frontline service. However the general pressure to keep Council Tax levels to an affordable level can limit the ability to re-invest. The current changes to the national financial/resourcing framework for the service has created turbulence which will exacerbate this in individual authorities.
33. The recent report of the Fire Expenditure Working Group and the Fire Finance Network has concluded “If the agenda is to progress at the rate needed in order to release the efficiency gains envisaged, it will require some investment and pump priming”. Both capital and revenue resources are needed to support the new and expanded functions in areas such as New Dimensions, Community Fire Safety and Community Safety and developing the broader based rescue role.
34. It is important that the ongoing distribution of resources reflects need and whilst a number of formula changes have been introduced this year there are still anomalies to be addressed by the formula review group e.g. the COMAH element.

The Issues

Relationship between Dwelling Fire Frequencies and Casualties and Population

Socio-Dynamics

The Issue

35. As with all local authorities there is a series of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) for use by Fire & Rescue Services. Fire and Rescue Services are grouped into areas with similar populations and population densities so that performance comparisons within these groups are more valid. The BVPIs include measuring FDR1 (primary) fires per unit of population, accidental dwelling fires and injuries (excluding precautionary check-ups) and fatalities from accidental dwelling fires per unit of population. Previous research has shown that the probability of dwelling fires and casualties occurring is directly related to socio-demographic factors. This however is not currently taken into account in the BVPIs and the way they are reported.

What are we doing about the issue

36. Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service are working in partnership with the ODPM to undertake research to examine a number of possible factors such as the ODPM’s Indices of Multiple Deprivation and Mosaic classifications and relate these to the total number of fire casualties and dwelling fires in the relevant Fire and Rescue Services.

37. The project will also identify areas of Fire and Rescue Service activity that are not currently measured by a BVPI (such as special service incidents or casualties), and suggest possible indicators for these.

Suggested way forward

38. We would urge that based on this research Central Government adopt the principle of socio economic differentials in the application of Performance Indicators. This is the basis of how risks should be identified and managed at local level which reflects the differences that exist across the country.

Operational Assurance

The issue

39. The Audit Commission's CPA of FRAs did not directly assess operational effectiveness. Whilst the CPA process takes into account the output indicators and the management of some processes that contribute towards them, there are areas directly related to operational effectiveness that are not covered.

What are we doing about the issue

40. We believe that in order to maintain confidence in the operational aspect of our service delivery there needs to be a comprehensive, transparent and impartial review process. We are currently working with HM Fire Service Inspectorate to develop a self assessment model.
41. Operational Assurance is not seen as an isolated exercise but is about maintaining an ongoing commitment that demonstrates our operational capability. As part of this process, the organisation has devised a self assessment model as part of its operational assurance utilising the self-diagnostic 'toolkit' contained within FRSC 21-2005 which is now being deployed.

Suggested way forward

42. In our view the Government via the Audit Commission should include an assessment of operational capability in any future Comprehensive Performance Assessment process. In addition there needs to be clarity about what arrangements will be in place in the future to provide advice, assurance and guidance on operational policy and procedural matters. We are pleased to see that the latest correspondence indicates that consideration is now being given to this matter.

Changing Duty Systems – Rostering for Duty Project

The issue

43. Present duty systems in Fire & Rescue Services have been in existence since the 1970's and are very rigid. Under the current arrangements and due to the rigidity there is limited scope to recruit people in amore flexible way. The current system for wholetime operational fire fighters operates on a rolling pattern of two 9 hours days followed by two 15 hour nights. Everybody who is recruited works this system and there is no flexibility to accommodate people with different needs.

What are we doing about the issue

44. Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service have taken the lead role in developing new duty systems and flexible employment contracts as part of its Human Resources Modernisation Programme. The Rostering for Duty Project is an example of an organisation developing an efficient and effective workforce utilisation strategy that has delivered against a challenging efficiency target whilst at the same time improving Service performance aligned to the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan.
45. This project has delivered major change by introducing flexible contracts for wholetime firefighters combined with the introduction of a new duty system that delivers real value for money for the organisation and results in significant benefits and incentives for its employees. These employee benefits include real flexibility to choose when you work and a policy encouraging applications for flexible working that far exceeds the legal minimum requirements. The design of the new system incorporates opportunities for a wide range of employment contracts including, for the first time, the option of part time working. This forms an integral part of our equality and diversity strategy by removing many of the barriers currently associated with shift working.
46. The project incorporates a powerful web based technological solution for time, attendance and roster management with employees having access to the system to view their own roster, manage their time at work through duty swaps and make other changes to work patterns. By using the new technology it has been possible to centralise the management of crewing of appliances and this has produced further efficiencies through a reduction in the number of staff employed in this vital area.
47. The introduction of these major changes has been achieved in a very challenging industrial relations climate following the bitter national dispute. As a result of constructive dialogue with representative bodies at early design stage, followed by meaningful negotiation and employee engagement, a local Collective Agreement was signed by the Fire Brigades Union and the Fire and Rescue

Authority in September 2005. This has resulted in cashable efficiency savings in the form of direct salary costs of £2.3million and yet maintained or improved emergency response performance standards. The new duty system and flexible contracts also provide real opportunity for incremental continuous improvement. All this has been achieved within the existing National Scheme of Conditions of Service and without need for any intervention in the form of conciliation or arbitration through the auspices of the National Joint Council. We believe this project is a real example of true modernisation in the Fire and Rescue Service showing that, where employee and employer representatives enter into negotiation as equals, in a spirit of trust and co-operation, mutual benefits can be realised.

48. This new duty system has been designed taking account of fire fighter safety, in that we have made a decision to maintain a crewing level on fire appliances of 5 fire-fighters on the first appliance and 4 on the Second.

Suggested way forward

49. We have found that this system is more efficient, effective and economic when compared to the previous national duty system. We would encourage all Fire and Rescue Services to adopt a more flexible approach to duty systems and that Central Government via the various agencies identify and communicate good practice.

Working with other Emergency Services

The issue

50. The Fire & Rescue Services National Framework encourages Fire & Rescue Services to work together with other emergency services. One of the main areas of collaboration is using co-responder schemes and in some areas of the country this is being introduced. As a large Metropolitan Fire & Rescue Service with one of the best performing Ambulance trusts in the country we see many benefits from working together for the improvement of service delivery of the public.

What are we doing about the issue

51. We have recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Greater Manchester Ambulance Service (GMAS). The Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Authority believes that this is a significant step forward in the provision of services to the public by two blue light emergency services who have much in common. The MOU goes much further than “co-responding” which is being developed in some areas of the country.

52. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is intended to provide a framework to guide future working between the Service and GMAS and forms a mutual statement of intent towards partnership working.
53. The primary objective of the MoU is to ensure that the Service and GMAS work efficiently and effectively together, share best practice and where appropriate resources and facilities, in order to deliver improvements in the community's public health and safety.
54. The MoU relates to areas of potential interface between the Service and GMAS in performing their respective functions, it does not place additional responsibility on either party, nor does it imply any transfer of responsibility from one to the other or sharing of statutory obligations.
55. The MoU also recognises the opportunity for providing enhanced value for money by:
 - a) Researching the feasibility of the common use of resources and estates
 - b) Seeking opportunities to share education and training facilities and processes, identify common approaches to training and development and the sharing of expertise
 - c) Seeking opportunities to share support service functions such as maintenance of vehicles, procurement, ICT, HR Support and occupational health and physiotherapy services
 - d) Sharing information by working together on best practice in areas such as risk management, risk identification, management development and health and safety management
 - e) Sharing expertise and best practice on the modernisation of workforces and working practices, with an emphasis on improving working lives, and equality and diversity
 - f) Further enhancing the public safety of the population of Greater Manchester, through effective emergency planning and improved collaboration on major incidents and other incidents such as RTCs.
56. There are no financial implications at present. However, as specific projects are identified and realised there is potential for significant financial savings and efficiencies in the future.

57. GMFRA believes this specific partnership will realise significant advantage for both GMFRS and GMAS in the future which in turn will benefit our public and believe it important to bring to the attention of the Select Committee.

Suggested way forward

58. There are a number of possibilities in how emergency services can work together and the approach adopted by GMF&RS is one such way. We would hope that were co-responding is not a viable option that other ways are considered and communicated around the country.

Flexible Resource Deployment

The issue

59. A common factor for all Fire & Rescue Services is that the number of incidents that occur changes throughout the day and at night time there are generally less incidents than during the day. Resources are currently allocated based on the busiest time of the day matched to the risk and to meet response times. This is not the most efficient use of resources and there is no flexibility in the current arrangements. We are also determined that any changes we make to emergency cover are based on low risk, incremental evidence based judgements.

What are we doing about the issue

60. The introduction of flexible operational resource deployment into Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service means that each night, four appliances will be stood down and not crewed.
61. In order to balance out emergency cover, the same four appliances will not be stood down every night. The aim is to spread emergency cover as evenly as possible across the County proportionate to risk to life and property whilst recognising workloads of individual appliances. A software package (Phoenix) has been produced for GMFRS by Active Software of Basingstoke. It ranks appliances in order of value based on workload patterns by time and by geographical location over the previous three year time period.
62. We have determined which appliances to stand down using 3 data base systems, namely our own Management Information System; Phoenix and the Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) model supplied by the ODPM.
63. FSEC is a software package developed for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It evaluates resources according to their effectiveness as defined by cost, prevention of loss of life, and their contribution to the community. The results from Phoenix were validated against the risk in FSEC and there is a strong correlation which confirms the validity of the flexible resource approach.

64. The introduction of this new approach based on the introduction of the new software systems has helped to improve our efficiency without compromising our ability to achieve target attendance times.

Suggested way forward

65. We have found that our use of FSEC has been instrumental in informing our Fire Safety Campaign planning and identifying the appropriate allocation of resources particularly front line appliances. We would encourage other brigades to use the system we have developed whereby FSEC is used in association with the recently developed Phoenix Software package, or similar.

Youth Engagement Initiatives

The issue

66. We have recognised for a number of years the direct correlation between disengaged youths and anti-social behaviour which impacts on the work of the fire service. Examples of this are an increase in attacks on firefighters and in arson-related incidents which places in an avoidable burden on our resources. This burden is reflected in The ODPM's Strategy for Children and Young People: 2006 – 2010.
67. A significant area of the government's Community Cohesion agenda is directed towards working with Children and Young People. Involvement in this work is fully supported by Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service. Although not directly applicable to the Fire and Rescue Service, we feel that it is part of our wider role of community involvement. The introduction of The Children Act 2004 also presents significant opportunities for GMFRS to become involved with other agencies in a more structured way.

What are we doing about the issue

68. We have developed a strategy to elevate this burden by implementing various programmes through establishing partnerships. This work seeks to apply: a) early intervention with youths who are starting out on the road to anti-social behaviour and b) to connect with those young people who have an established history of anti-social behaviour. By utilising the image of the firefighter as a role model it is possible to access areas of the community which other agencies aren't able to. These programmes allow us to connect in a youth-friendly manner to get our message across.
69. There are three main established programmes within GMFRS which actively seek to engage young people, the Princes Trust TEAM programme, Young

Firefighters and FIREFLY. A number of other local projects are also delivered linked to our IRMP.

70. The Prince's Trust scheme runs three teams per year from six locations and has specific target groups in the 16-25 age range. The scheme is primarily funded by the Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council and delivered by dedicated full time uniformed and non-uniformed staff. Courses run each weekday for twelve weeks, with a five day residential phase. We would want to urge Government to ensure that, through the Learning & Skills Councils, a sustainable funding strategy is in place for this vital work.
71. The Young Firefighter initiative has developed over a longer period and is delivered by volunteer firefighters in four locations. It runs on one evening per week, with a one week camp in summer and various weekend activities. The age range is 11-16 and three schemes are funded by annual budget allocation, whilst one is funded by a grant.
72. Firefly is a more recent development aimed at addressing anti social behaviour amongst young people on the fringes of criminal activity, and in turn reducing hoax calls and acts of hostility against firefighters. It is currently run in the Oldham area in partnership with the youth offending team but there is a demand for this to be extended into other areas.
73. Firefly is delivered by one full time community liaison officer, with the assistance of six volunteer firefighters whilst each 5 day course is running, and has delivered very positive outcomes in reducing hoax calls and re-offending rates. Evidence provided by the youth offending team suggests that over 70% of young people who have attended this programme have not committed further offences.
74. National recognition has been received by our Firefly Co-ordinator who has been presented with a national award for Best Individual Contribution to Fire Safety for his work running the Firefly Scheme and his work in Oldham. He has worked on Firefly with youngsters from very difficult backgrounds which has resulted in excellent results as outlined above.

Suggested way forward

75. We have developed our approach to engaging with young people over a number of years and it is encouraging to see that the Government have now introduced a national strategy with the Strategy for Children and Young People 2006 -2010. We would encourage all Fire and Rescue Services to adopt this guidance as in our experience working with young people is one of the areas that a Fire and Rescue Service can make a difference.

Attacks on Fire-Fighters**The issue**

76. Attacks on fire fighters are increasing in many areas and although not a new problem for Greater Manchester or any other Brigade it is getting steadily worse. The figures below are for GMFRS.

2002	156 attacks
2003	264 attacks
2004	158 attacks
2005	211 attacks (up to November)

What are we doing about the issue

77. There is no doubt that there is a seasonal trend with school holidays and the time around Bonfire Night seeing a significant increase. November 2005 accounted for 48 of the 211 attacks.
78. The issue of attacks on firefighters is not just about protecting fire-fighters and emergency workers, it is also about tackling anti-social behaviour which is high on the Government's agenda.
79. Feedback we have had so far from government ministers is that sufficient protection is already provided by existing legislation and that specific offences of assaults on public sector workers are unnecessary. However, we believe that the problem is far wider than physical assaults – appliances and equipment have to be taken off the run because of deliberately inflicted damage. New legislation is required to provide an effective deterrent to the full range of nuisance, hindrance and intimidation that fire and other emergency crews increasingly face.
80. A key area of inconsistency seems to be over what constitutes an attack. It is not just about verbal or physical abuse but about fire-fighters being hindered or obstructed from doing their job. Examples of obstruction include razor blades being placed on the underside of banisters so fire-fighters cut themselves on the way up the stairs or youths setting off hydrants and preventing fire-fighters from getting to them to use them for operational incidents. There is often damage to equipment. A recent incident involved a BMX bike being thrown at the front of a fire engine. Damage to engines means that they may have to be removed from service. This can affect fire cover and ultimately could impact on community safety.
81. GMFRS have been at the forefront of developments relating to attacks on fire-fighters with robust reporting procedures and operational policies. Many other

Fire and Rescue Services have used Greater Manchester's policies as a model of best practice. We have also invested significantly in modifying some of our equipment to cope with the attacks. This has included fitting protective glass on the windscreens, central locking for cabs and most recently trialling CCTV on some appliances.

82. GMFRS fully recognise that this is not just about fire-fighters, it is about all emergency workers. We fully support the Proposed Emergency Workers Protection Bill put forward by Alan Williams MP. This applies to a wide range of emergency workers and is based on the recent legislation introduced in Scotland. It also recognises the issue of hindering and obstructing not only personnel but action against, "vehicle, apparatus, equipment or other thing."
83. Recent incident in Rochdale on 31 August 2005. This incident involved a settee on fire on the ground floor of an unoccupied flat. The cause was malicious ignition. While at the incident the crews came under attack from local youths hurling lumps of concrete, one of which hit a fire-fighter on the side of his head – luckily he was wearing a helmet – and knocked his visor down. He managed to catch a second lump of concrete which was also aimed at his head. However, a further disturbing incident occurred when the Firefighters were inside the building in full BA, the hoses kept cutting out leaving them without water. On investigation it was noted that one of the youths had entered the fire engine cab and turned off the water supply. Had this been inside a blazing building it potentially could have had very serious consequences for the firefighters.
84. We also continue to engage with those in our communities who we feel may be behind the attacks. We have an excellent success rate with a number of initiatives such as Firefly and the Prince's Trust to address this type of anti-social behaviour but sadly funding is limited for these and we are unable to reach everyone. The CFO has established a national group to consider the issue and make recommendations to address the problem on a national basis.
85. Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service has had considerable regional media interest in the issue and as a result is currently running a campaign with the Manchester evening News calling for specific legislation to be introduced to protect all Emergency Service workers.

Suggested way forward

86. This is a national problem that links with social issues and we believe that the time is right to introduce legislation similar to that in Scotland that makes it a specific offence to hinder, interfere or obstruct frontline emergency service workers.

Regional Controls and Firelink

The issue

87. GMFRS see that this is a regional issue and as a committed member of the North West Fire & Rescue Management Board fully endorse their response.

What are we doing about the issue

88. The North West Fire and Rescue Management Board acknowledge that there is a clear requirement within the National Framework to deliver the transition to Regional Control Centres. There are genuine concerns over several aspects of the project detailed below. The Authority believes that improving clarity in these areas would improve the potential to work with Government to secure the promised improvements to service delivery. These areas are:

Costs

89. There is a clear need to demonstrate that this project represents value for money for people in the North West. The business case has so far been based nationally, with indications that the larger existing control centres predominating in the North West will be advantaged less. The North West Fire and Rescue Management Board would benefit from having clarity and reassurance on when it will be provided with evidence that efficiency savings will offset the resources and time committed to the project since inception. There are indications that additional costs incurred will only be covered by 'new burdens' once they have been offset against any benefits that may be accrued. If this were to be the case surely these benefits cannot then be used to justify the viability of the Project.

Human Resources

90. The North West Fire and Rescue Management Board believes in a high level of commitment to all the constituent Authorities staff. The National Project has been slow to determine several key issues to allow progress with the Human Resources issues essential to support our staff through this difficult transition. The Board urges early progress on selection, terms and conditions, pay, relocation expenses and redundancy. It is recognised that many of these issues are linked to the new governance model for regional control centres. However management and staff are becoming increasingly frustrated at the lack of progress in these areas.

Timescales/Quality Control

91. There have been several examples of slippage in the project so far. It is difficult to reassure the public and staff that the proposed improvements to efficiency and effectiveness will be delivered when delays has been a feature of the FiReControl Project to date. The project would benefit from being more explicit on the guaranteed improvements that will be delivered and guarantees that these will not be sacrificed if the project faces financial pressures as it approaches completion. The project would also benefit for ensuring that robust commissioning and testing arrangements for the technical solutions are put in place given the crucial role of mobilising in service delivery.

FIRELINK

92. Some North West Fire and Rescue Authorities are becoming increasingly concerned with the proposed interim solution regarding feasibility and possible loss of functionality during the period involved. As this could be mission critical particularly during a terrorist attack this requires urgent attention. Whilst the successful implementation of FireLink will be a significant step forward in communication between fire appliances and emergency service control centres, the absence of hand-held radio communication at the scene of operational incidents will potentially lessen the effectiveness of the FRS. It would therefore be prudent to review the overall expectations of the project in light of the increasing and evolving operational role of the FRS, with a view to including hand-held radio communication as an integral component of the FireLink project.

Suggested way forward

93. We support the CFOA position in respect of this and urge that detailed and timely information is made widely available in respect of the outline business case, governance and funding arrangements of FiReControl and Firelink.

Water Rescue

The Issue

94. The Health and Safety Executive issued an improvement notice on GMFRS following a tragic incident in Ramsbottom which resulted in the loss of 2 lives, (one being a Firefighter attempting the rescue). This improvement notice had implications nationally throughout the Fire Service citing a lack of policy and procedures at a water incident. Five years after the incident the Health and Safety Executive pursued a prosecution of this Authority in the Crown Court which resulted in a not guilty verdict.

What are we doing about the issue

95. GMFRS formulated a Water Policy Group which produced a policy, procedures and recommendations all of which were accepted as best practice nationally. Some of which are included below;-
96. Every operational personnel have been trained in water awareness, which included practical sessions in a swimming pool. New equipment was purchased for every frontline pumping appliance. New equipment and in shore rescue boats purchased for the Water Incident Units.
97. GMFRS is seen a one of the national leaders on the subject of inshore water incidents, we have personnel who form part of national committees and are presently training the Police in the subject of Water Safety.

Suggested way forward

98. In our view this should be recognised as a national problem and we would encourage the Government to ensure that there is sufficient funding for Fire & Rescue Services to provide the right equipment, training and service provision to safely and effectively deal with incidents that involve rescues from water.

Conclusion

99. In conclusion we feel that our submission includes a range of evidence in support of the modernisation agenda within GMFRS we can demonstrate progress in many areas.

Memorandum by Humberside Fire Authority (FRS 29)

INTRODUCTION

1. This submission is made by the Humberside Fire Authority in response to a request for written evidence from interested organisations from the Select Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
2. The Authority welcomes this opportunity to comment on the progress on modernisation within the Service and in particular the specific issues surrounding Regional Fire Controls and Firelink.
3. The following comments are made whilst acknowledging the significant progress towards the objective of safer communities that has been achieved by the strong leadership of professional fire officers and elected members supported by other partners and stakeholders.
4. The areas that the Authority feel compelled to comment on relate to Regional Control Centres and Firelink; the fire prevention agenda; institutional arrangements and reform; and finance and resources.

Terms of Reference – Questions 1a and 1b

REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES AND FIRELINK

5. Humberside Fire Authority has previously stated its provisional support for a regional control centre project that would deliver enhanced resilience, improved interoperability between Fire and Rescue Services and other Emergency Services, and more effective operational focus. However, as the project has developed the members of the Authority have become increasingly concerned with regard to the robustness of the business case. Indeed, the lack of detail provided to date makes it impossible for members to commit positive support whilst doubts remain about its future impact on our finances and statutory responsibilities.
6. Without having access to detailed financial information, and with some lack of clarity over the extent to which New Burdens will influence the outcomes, the Authority has serious concerns as to the potential revenue costs that may fall on local tax payers. Coupled with this is the potential impact of the proposed new governance arrangements under which there may not be the opportunity for elected members from within the region to mitigate against any adverse impact. These concerns are shared by the members of all of the constituent authorities in the Humberside area with each of them (East Riding of Yorkshire, Kingston upon Hull, North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire) passing motions in council against the movement to a Regional Control Centre. Concerns at Fire Authority level are also shared by the members of the Regional Management

Board which recently wrote to the minister to ask for more detailed information on the Business Case and the proposed governance arrangements.

7. This Fire Authority is not opposed to a reduction in the number of existing Fire Controls, however as we have previously stated, prior to embarking on a project of this importance, a full and comprehensive Business Case that includes details of revenue and capital costs and apportionment of those responsibilities should have been made available for all stakeholders to consider. We have been given to understand that a seminar is to be held within the Region in the early part of 2006 in order to address some of the above concerns but this does appear to be too little too late.

FIRELINK

8. Humberside Fire Authority fully support the introduction of Firelink to replace the existing main scheme radio system and recognises the ODPM's resource and funding support in moving the project forward. It is felt that the introduction of the scheme will make a significant difference to the way in which fire appliances and emergency controls communicate. However, developments since the initial conception of the system make it necessary to reconsider certain elements of the project.
9. At the time of the initial specification the issue of hand-held communication on incident grounds fell outside of the scope and remit of the project, as did the alerting of Retained Duty System Stations. We believe that in light of the evolving role of Fire Authorities in supporting the civil resilience agenda, as well as the increasing role the Service now plays in responding to a wider range of civil emergencies, it would be prudent to revisit the initial specification with a view to including hand-held incident ground communication facilities. It would also be opportune to consider extending the functionality of the system to enable Retained Station Alerting to be included.
10. It is fair to say that Humberside Fire Authority also has some concerns regarding the impact of the system on subsequent revenue costs due to the lack of firm information on what charges will be made by the service providers to individual Fire Services. Discussions with our colleagues in the Police have revealed a wide disparity in charges for a similar commercial system making long term financial planning virtually impossible. It is strongly recommended therefore that a detailed business case for post installation functions and charges be produced at the earliest opportunity in order that the impact upon local tax payers may be determined.

Terms of Reference – Question 2a

THE FIRE PREVENTION AGENDA

11. The remit of the Select Committee is to determine whether “prevention is better than cure” and to what extent the message has been embedded into the culture of the service. In this case the results speak for themselves with a continuing reduction in calls to the service and a significant reduction in fire deaths and fire related injuries.
12. There is, however, some serious concern over the capacity of the Authority to effectively deliver the Community Safety message in the following areas;
 - The more rural areas of the Service utilising the Retained Duty System personnel - it must be acknowledged that demands placed upon our employees on the Retained Duty System are becoming unsustainable. These demands, which include initiatives such as the Integrated Personal Development System, make other ‘optional’ initiatives difficult to deliver. Whilst the implementation of the Integrated Risk Management Plans are generally leading to reduced calls within rural communities it is proving extremely problematic to accommodate the workload of RDS personnel within the time that they have available.
 - The delivery of a balanced approach between Community Safety and intervention by all Operational Personnel – again this is a question of capacity. Recent events have demonstrated that it is essential that all Operational Personnel maintain their competence and preparedness for intervention by both training and planning. The delivery of the Community Safety message must not be at the cost of losing Operational Assurance, even if this means the use of extra resources.
 - The ability of the Authority to influence the provision of life saving sprinkler installations in schools and domestic premises - The likelihood of fires in schools remains high due to a number of social factors and the potential effects of such fires are damaging to the fabric of our communities.
 - Whilst, in the main, Local Authorities are acknowledging our message in respect of the fitting of sprinkler systems in new build schools it is our unequivocal opinion that such installations should become a statutory requirement.
 - Furthermore, we believe that the case for considering the mandatory installation of sprinklers into new build domestic premises has been adequately evidenced by examples from countries such as Canada, New Zealand and USA.

Terms of Reference – Question 2b

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND REFORM

13. Almost every aspect of the Service is now in the process of change and that change is either refocusing resources to better address risk in our communities, be that risk from the traditional adversary of fire, or dealing with the impact/potential of other incidents involving hazardous materials, terrorist activities or climate change. Most of the current elements of modernisation assist the Authority to use resources more effectively and to utilise a more flexible approach to protecting local communities.
14. Unfortunately, there is one area that modernisation has failed to impact upon and despite numerous assurances that change is imminent the National Joint Council has steadfastly remained in a format that existed prior to the last national industrial action. The overwhelming evidence is that the change agenda will not be delivered in an effective way whilst these institutional arrangements remain in place because they do not serve the best interests of the service. It is essential that the NJC arrangements are reformed in a way that gives representation to all stakeholders whilst removing the mechanisms that allows the status quo to be implemented.

FINANCE AND RESOURCES

15. Whilst committed to providing Best Value and also acknowledging our responsibilities under ‘the efficiency savings regime’ we are concerned that the envisaged programme of change cannot be provided through these means alone. Both capital and revenue resources are needed to support the new and expanded functions in areas such as New Dimensions, Community Fire Safety and Community Safety and developing the broader based Rescue Role.
16. The recent grant settlement has demonstrated that those authorities that are prudent and produce efficiency savings are penalised through the realignment of a formula that favours other authorities more than them.

K L MARSHALL
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER & CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Memorandum by UNISON (FRS 30)

Promoting Diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service

1. Introduction

UNISON welcomes this opportunity to comment on the promotion of diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service

UNISON is itself a diverse Trade Union, whose membership spans across the Public and private sector, representing 1.3 million members. The majority of UNISON's members are women and we also have significant numbers of black and minority ethnic workers, gay and lesbian workers and workers with disabilities in membership. In addition many of our members are low paid.

This picture of our union is also reflected in our membership within the Fire and Rescue Service. Regretfully, within the Service, it is this diverse group of people who are most likely to experience inequality, demonstrating that diversity does not guarantee equality unless radical policies – and robust monitoring of their implementation – is undertaken.

2. Language

UNISON must first make the point about the importance of language when defining our membership. The use of terminology such as “non-uniformed “ and “support” staff continues to be perpetuate a vision that the members we represent, referred to by us as Fire and Rescue Service Staff (FRSS), are in some way inferior to the majority workforce. Yet the diversity of role and range of skills and professions that exists amongst our membership group suggests the Service could not function properly without them.

3. Uniformed Focus

UNISON must also express its disappointment that the emphasis of the diversity and equality agenda so far has been on the firefighting and fire control employee groups within the service. In his Independent Review of the Fire Service of 2002, Bain stated, “There should be no distinction between the value of.Uniformed and non-uniformed staff.”(para 4.12) Furthermore he advocated a new NJC body of which UNISON would be a member (paras 10.25 and 10.26). However, this theme was not pursued in the White Paper.

The White Paper, and subsequent Fire Service Frameworks for 2004/5 and 2005/6 made mention of IPDS for all staff. However, information UNISON has received from branches demonstrates that Fire Services have overall made very little progress in developing IPDS for FRSS. Whilst UNISON recognises that IPDS is role related – and FRSS might be included in the development of those occupying or aspiring to

managerial roles - there is an absence of any reference to FRSS occupying non – managerial roles, namely those on lower pay and amongst whom are the larger numbers of women, black and minority ethnic and disabled employees. Furthermore, even for those occupying managerial roles, there is no formal indication of how completion of the IPDS process would be linked to financial reward for FRSS. This demonstrates the point made earlier, that certainly for FRSS, diversity does not lead to equality.

4. Good Leadership Practice

UNISON is very disappointed that it was not invited to shape work on leadership under Bridging the Gap and most recently the work on Leadership shortly due for further consultation. UNISON has broad experience and knowledge of leadership across a range of disciplines and organisations within the Public Sector and would have made a very positive and constructive contribution to this work.

Nonetheless, UNISON has observed some good practice by the leadership of a number of Fire Services which our members believe has helped to create a working environment which will attract and support diversity. These include;

The adoption of more open and approachable and less militaristic management style.

The removal of the distinction between uniformed and non-uniformed, and individual ranks through the introduction of corporate wear in appropriate roles.

Linking FRSS pay to that of their fire fighter colleagues, albeit so far mainly at managerial levels

The opening up of selection processes throughout the Service, particularly at senior management team to introduce diversity and alternative professionalism to the leadership of the organisation.

5. Lack of Cultural Vision

Such good practice however is not being implemented across the Service in any systematic way. In some cases UNISON is seeing the re-introduction of some militaristic practises. This suggests that whilst successive documentation and recommendations speak of culture and changing the culture, there is not a common understanding or visualisation of that culture. Therefore, the organisation is embarking on a journey in which the destination is unknown. UNISON considers a national debate, which includes the Service, politicians, Trade Unions and the community need to occur to reach some a view that will provide the necessary direction.

6. HR Management

Such a vision cannot be delivered without effective organisational structures and expertise. UNISON has been supportive of proposals to improve the delivery of HR within the Fire Service; in particular the recruitment and development of HR professionals. UNISON is however disappointed that there are still a number of Fire Services whose HR lead at board level is not an HR professional, but a senior fire fighter with an HR portfolio.

7. Trade Union Engagement

UNISON has particularly welcomed the opportunity to influence the diversity agenda as a member of the Practitioners' Forum. UNISON has nominated a trade union official with a strong equality background to contribute to the work of the Forum. Having just completed a strand of research for the FireWorks project, she has been nominated to chair the newly established Equality Stakeholders Group which will link the Forum and the Diversity Happens Programme Board. Unfortunately, UNISON has not been able to secure funding to enhance the work of our Practitioners' forum rep from the Service, despite a number of bids.

8. Involvement of Other Stakeholders

UNISON wishes to see the EOC and CRE, who are included amongst the Practitioners' Forum's stakeholders, supporting it at a time when their advice, encouragement and ongoing scrutiny is most necessary. Their presence is also important given the culture of the organisation and its priorities, and in particular, how quickly the issue of diversity can fall off Fire Services' agenda when other important issues arise. UNISON observes Services engaged in flurries of activity to progress equality and diversity when directed i.e. the Thematic Review Action Plans, the White Paper proposals for modernisation and most recently the CPA; activity which history has demonstrated is rarely sustained.

In their comments to the Bain Review, the EOC drew attention to the equal pay gap between firefighters and the rest of the workforce. UNISON wants to see the Service tackle this equality gap, rather than just talking about diversity.

9. CPA

UNISON has been supportive of the introduction of the CPA process within the Fire and Rescue Service. We regard it as an opportunity to benchmark HR delivery against the best in the Local Authority community and to more systematically and publicly measure progress in achieving equality and diversity. UNISON considers however, that the people management strand of the assessment – in particular the diversity diagnostic – is not given sufficient weighting. UNISON is aware that the diagnostic was a late addition to the process and considers a lot more work needs to be done to refine this particular strand for inclusion in future CPAs. UNISON also considers that if Services

are to regard promoting diversity as a priority they should not expect to receive a good or excellent rating unless they have performed well in this area.

10. Equality Practitioners

Finally, UNISON must make reference to the group of people within the Service, fire fighters and FRSS, who are tasked with co-ordinating the delivery of equality and diversity – the Equalities Practitioners. UNISON has amongst its membership a number of practitioners and we note a worrying trend in the high attrition rate of this role. Where turnover in this role is particularly high, UNISON is attempting to progress an exit report prepared by a practitioner. This explores management support and identifies some issues of concern regarding the commitment of the Service to diversity. Attempting to work with management to progress the recommendations is proving problematic and little interest is being shown even in establishing the facts. This is not indicative of an environment in which diversity can be supported and can prosper. If such indifference is representative of the leadership of the Service then it demonstrates individual Services cannot be left to their own devices, because they have to deliver. UNISON will work positively and constructively with others to ensure they do.

11. Conclusion

The Service has a long way to go before it can claim to have turned the corner on diversity and more especially equality. UNISON is contributing to the diversity/equality agenda via the Practitioners forum, but is seeking better resources from the Service to fund this work. Our response sets out where we believe effort needs to be concentrated to deliver on diversity/equality.