

Fire Futures – National Interests Workstream

Decentralisation in the fire sector

Empowering and protecting the citizen

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This paper provides an overview of the work done under the National Interests Workstream, made up of a core team of fire sector specialists. I would not like to go any further without thanking everybody who contributed for their valuable input into this work. In particular, I would like to thank the sub stream leads: Mike Wood (Built Environment); Jon Hall (Interoperability); Paul Hancock (Risk Assessment); Ian Hayton (Pan-FRA Arrangements); Louise Craig (Knowledge Management); and Martin Day (Procurement) for their contributions. They in their turn consulted and engaged a wide range of people and some 70 organisations, to whom I am very grateful.

For my part while overseeing the work stream, I was responsible for the decentralisation paper. I am extremely grateful for the support I got in producing this, not least to Jeff Masters of the Royal Society of Arts (who gave his time generously and freely), Nick Collins of the Audit Commission, Hilary Thompson of the Office for Public Management and Tom Shirley of the Cabinet Office.

Overall we have produced a document which provides a coherent theme linked to the Government's expressed objectives. Naturally, I do not expect everyone who contributed to agree to all that is in it, but I have attempted to represent all views as fairly and comprehensively as I can.

Brian Robinson

➤ FOREWORD

At its first meeting, the National Interests working group which I chaired agreed that, having in mind the Government's localism agenda and anticipating the Localism Bill, our thinking needed to develop around the following broad key questions: *How do we empower citizens for active community participation? And, crucially, how do we secure national resilience and civil emergency services capability to defend the interests of the State? How do we ensure that national threats are effectively handled at the local area? How do we ensure that the service is interoperable across the United Kingdom? And how do we continue to provide an effective service at a time of constrained public expenditure?*

The group strongly believed that improvement to the work of the sector could only happen if those fire organisations outside the Fire and Rescue sphere were effectively part of this process. For this reason, I invited colleagues to participate with their knowledge and expertise to contribute on matters of built environment, knowledge management, the fire service college and procurement.

Throughout this work, my group has taken great care to ensure that the outcome was not only well informed and thought provoking, but was also widely consulted on. As a result, we produced eight working papers and commissioned a number of think pieces which I have listed at the back of this paper.

To understand what the Big Society could mean to the sector of the future, I contributed with a paper in which I explored a new structure for the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) shaped around the Government's vision of localism and decentralisation. To achieve this, I ensured that key contributors added innovative and cutting edge thinking on decentralisation, and identified what this new vision which is currently being explored across public sector services could mean to the fire sector as a whole.

To support this vision, I made sure that serious consideration was given to the important issues of interoperability, national threat and risk management, knowledge management and the future of the nationally based training at the Fire Service College. We have also taken a close look at the built environment in which the fire and rescue service works and effectively determines the nature and the level of risk it faces. That key part of the sector, the industry involved in protecting the built environment from fire, have produced a seminal paper on the built environment.

In essence this overview argues for decentralisation of the responsibilities of the fire and rescue service to the lowest level, empowering local communities and individuals. It argues for separating delivery from commissioning, to provide a more efficient service which directly addresses local needs. It calls for greater choice in the nature of provision, including employee mutuals, and the ability of communities to consider fire amongst the other priorities they have in determining resources. Underpinning this, we need a new and in some ways more professional approach from the service in dealing with the built environment, reducing risk, fires, and property loss.

To support increased localism, there will need to be assurances regarding interoperability, a collective and responsive understanding of national threat and risk, and transparent standards. Until the sector is fully mature enough to take responsibility for these aspects itself, there will be a need for continuing central government involvement in these areas. These issues need to be addressed in the global context of the decentralisation agenda.

The fire and rescue service faces many challenges. It consists of many highly dedicated and professional people working hard to protect the communities they serve. But much more needs to be done to ensure that the service can adapt to a rapidly changing society, and a demanding financial climate. The hard work provided by the work stream leads gives you a road map for the future, and I commend their reports to you.

Finally, at a meeting held on 8th December involving the wider industry to discuss issues arising from Fire Futures, those attending agreed to proceed with a number of commitments at no cost to the Government. At their request, I have added their commitment at Section 9 of this report. Notably, the wider industry has committed to resource and publish guidance on the built environment; to disseminate knowledge through structured learning programmes; to lead an independent research panel with sector organisations voluntary contributing with expertise; and to provide a Fire Knowledge website with free access to available data.

Brian Robinson
10 December 2010

➤ 1. INTRODUCTION

Current Situation

The fire sector, or more precisely 'Fire UK', encompasses a vast array of talent and vocations across the breadth of the public and private sectors. It must be taken to include a variety of participants including the fire safety industry, building control bodies, government departments, design specialists, architects, professional bodies, insurance, BSI standards, testing and research organisations.

This diversity represents a great strength. The fire sector as a whole has made great strides in recent times to prevent fire deaths which have continued to a fall since 1981/82. At a ratio of about 8 deaths in building fires per year per million of population performance can be said to be amongst the best in Europe (where the number lies generally in the range 4 to 20 per million inhabitants)¹.

Fire safety in the UK can point to a relatively good record of improvement over the last twenty years in particular. This has been achieved, in the main, by a progressive and accumulative process of evolutionary development, partly in response to significant events and partly in tune with developing fire safety concepts.

However, there are signals from a variety of sources that, when taken together, caution against complacency. A good fire safety performance in the past is no guarantee for continuing that performance into the future.

- a) The five years from 2003 to 2007 show more firefighter deaths than for any previous consecutive 5 year period since the 1970's (even excluding four deaths in the Atherstone fire).
- b) The numbers of large loss fires reported by the Fire Protection Association (FPA) are increasing and the Association of British Insurers (ABI) quote insured losses in 2009 of £1.3 billion, increasing at 16% on the previous year on a rising trend. Figures for uninsured losses are variously estimated to be several times the insured loss.
- c) Rising levels of arson continue to cause concern, not only in domestic situations but also affecting public buildings such as schools and care homes
- d) The ABI reference research by AXA Insurance which suggests that 80% of businesses that suffer a major catastrophe fail within 18 months, 69% of SMEs have no contingency plan to cope with serious incidents that could affect their business, and 41% have no business interruption or loss of earning insurance. The ABI also notes

that approximately 50% of national income and employment comes from SMEs.

- e) Regular reports from the fire safety industry provide a disturbing picture of an increasing tendency at large to think that fire safety can be relegated to a lower order of priority, even substantially dispensed with as specifications are modified and pared down in a search for the minimum rather than the optimum. There is also significant evidence of deterioration of the inbuilt fire protection in buildings, coupled to a lack of effective enforcement arrangements.

There is also indication of a fundamental inability to co-operate across the sector and indeed argument has been raised in Fire Futures reports that the current fire and rescue service cannot operate as a joined up service.

Key concerns are:

- There are differences in training, assessment and operational capability.
- Operational doctrine has not been updated, and it has been left with central government to take this forward.
- Interoperability and risk protocols applying to national, local and generic risk have no common understanding.
- The linkages between national threat and FRS risk planning are neither clear nor consistent.
- The existing arrangements do not provide the coherence and authority to co-ordinate national functions effectively.
- There has been a proliferation of training institutes, while the central training school at the Fire Service College, remains underutilised and in need of on-going state subsidy.
- Centrally operated collaborative procurement has all but collapsed.
- The service's approach to the built environment varies from place to place, as do shift systems and response times, apparently unrelated to local conditions.
- There is little evidence that IRMPs are either fully costed or based on the needs of the citizen, but more often reflect the interplay between the interests of the workforce, the service itself, and the authority.

1. Table 4, World Fire Statistics 26, October 2010, originally presented as a rate per 100,000, <http://www.genevaassociation.org/PDF/WFSC/GA2010-FIRE26.pdf>

- The service and its leadership bodies have shown little capacity to work together without central government encouragement, support or resources.
- Fire safety provisions in buildings need to be based on a consistent and connected process, but the process as it currently operates is fragmented and disjointed and the guidance is either absent or disconnected from one stage to the next, significantly lacking consistency and profile.

These concerns have been freely expressed over several years.

On top of these difficulties, we have identified areas where increased pressure will emerge over the coming years. These include:

- Economic: lower levels of funding, while not as severe as those facing other services, will require the fire and rescue service and supporting industries to look for innovative ways to deliver the service and to develop financial architecture which will enable the reconnection of finance with purpose.
- Social: changing risk profiles through an ageing population and changing living patterns and reflecting a change from social dependence to social accountability and involvement.
- Structural: public services will need to be more closely shaped around the lives of individuals – decision making and commissioning should be brought much closer to citizens and communities, with political institutions and accountability reshaped to support this.
- Environmental: added stress caused by increased CO₂ emissions and the possibility of an increase in long hot summers and wetter spring and autumns.
- Leadership: the sector must become more cohesive and coherent. It has to be more diligent in overcoming internal boundaries in a more collaborative manner, also in looking outwards towards the development of an improved fire safety culture.
- Terrorism, instability and hostile technology are an ever present and growing threat which will require national arrangements for effective technical and process interoperability.

In meeting these challenges the fire and rescue service in particular is expected to meet public expectations on localism, accountability, and

transparency through strengthening the means to empower citizens. Fire UK is well placed to deliver on this and has the ability to become fully outward looking whilst providing services that are genuinely citizen shaped.

➤ 2. DECENTRALISATION, COMMISSIONING, MUTUALISATION AND THE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Moving power closer to the citizen, creating a split between commissioning and delivery and reconnecting finance with purpose. A new model for the Fire and Rescue Service.

The government's localism agenda seeks to take power away from the centre and disperse it to a level as close to the citizen as possible. Centralisation prevents innovation and makes citizens too passive. Independent observers have advised that this is the case with the FRS in which the sector operates in too narrow a silo which is overly focussed on emergency response to the detriment of fire prevention.

Commissioning and Delivery in the Fire and Rescue Service

We propose that the first and the most important step in citizen empowerment, is to break the link between the commissioning of a fire service and its delivery.² While the model presented under this option is innovative in terms of the FRS, these arrangements are common in the health service, the prison service and overseas – for example in fire services in Denmark, and ambulance services in Sweden³. In the modern world the current arrangements whereby fire and rescue authorities both commission the service, and deliver it, are increasingly untenable and unsustainable. They undermine effective accountability and transparency, frustrate innovation, and over duly focus on those who deliver the service rather than those who receive it.⁴

To achieve full accountability and responsiveness the commissioning agent must be separate from

2. For more details on this section, see Robinson, B., Decentralisation and the National Framework in the Fire and Rescue Service [NI-BR]

3. http://www.falck.com/business%20areas/Emergency/Pages/International_Fire_Services.aspx

4. Jeff Masters has contributed with a paper on how the fire and rescue service can move towards the vision set out by the trust in its recently published Commission on 2020 Public Services, a major cross-party inquiry into how public services might respond to the significant challenges of the next decade.

the delivery agent. The service itself must be actively commissioned, and must be fully accountable to the commissioning authority. The commissioning authority must set out key standards it expects to be met, and should seek the best value in achieving them. The service, separate to the commissioning authority, will be responsible for delivering to contract, producing transparent key performance indicators, and seeking and sharing savings wherever possible. The commissioning authority should be free to obtain the service from wherever it likes, although separate arrangements will exist where the establishment of mutuals is proposed.

Effective Governance in Decentralisation

The key to effective governance is bringing the service as close as possible to the eventual user. In the decentralisation paper it is indicated that district level or borough level is appropriate for this type of work. Where desired, districts and boroughs should break away from the existing FRA, and become their own commissioning unit. We would expect that many of the smaller new FRAs would band together with others in the locality, to procure services from a single service provider. Each FRA would maintain its statutory responsibilities both to the local community, and its wider responsibilities to society at large. It will also be essential that appropriate standards are maintained. In this respect, ensuring that an FRA continues to fulfil its own local and national obligations will be a key function of the National Framework.

Required government action to enable implementation of this model include: possible legislation to enable a shift in powers and structures to take place – although the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 offers the ability to transfer functions. It is hoped that the Localism Bill will enable people to take these powers into their own hands.

We believe that the difficulty in bringing services together to act co-operatively arises from the lack of separation between the commissioning and delivery roles, where clear expectations have not been clearly set out. In awarding services the commissioning authority will need to ensure that the delivery agent has adequate training and operational procedures. These will need to be underpinned by requirements under the National Framework.

The Government would need to establish, under the framework mechanism, appropriate standards for fire commissioning, and in particular it will need to ensure the appropriate mechanisms for national resilience are maintained.

Finally, and of considerable importance, the Government will need to maintain an independent assurance mechanism ensuring the effectiveness of the whole system, particularly in relation to interoperability and national resilience, and the ability to intervene in the case of service failure. It would make absolute sense to have this final assurance role placed with the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser. This role would focus on light touch assurance, but would have the capacity to intervene in cases of possible service failure. The role of the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser would be supported in this by a regime of self-assessment and peer review, led by the sector. However, we also feel that there is a role for consumer based involvement in this process similar to HealthWatch, that proposed by the Department of Health for the National Health Service. We would expect both individual citizens and the industry to contribute to this.

Introducing Mutualisation and Social Enterprises into the Fire and Rescue Services

A mutual, mutual organisation, or mutual society is an organisation which is owned by its members and with no outside shareholders who need a cut of the profits. Mutualised public services, in contrast to centralised state funded services save money in many cases because they are able to generate income and raise private finance, including grants and social investment.⁵ Mutuals are also by their nature social enterprises.

In August, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Francis Maude, announced the first wave of Pathfinder mutuals, to be run by public sector staff. These pathfinders will be trailblazers for the rest of the public sector – helping government to establish, by learning from the front line, what type of support and structures will best enable the development of employee-led mutuals on an ongoing basis. We understand that some fire services have already expressed an interest in this agenda.

To further inform this thinking, we have engaged with the Office of Public Management (OPM), the Cabinet Office and Public Services 2020 to discuss emerging policy and practical opportunities related to employee mutuals and joint ventures. Recent studies by the

5. Mayo E. and Moore H, (2001) 'How local communities can run public services', New Economics Foundation, p.2

6. Office for Public Management, (2010) New Models of Public Service Ownership. A guide to commissioning, policy and practice. Public interest research report, p.5

OPM suggest that alternative ownership models offer three potential benefits for public services⁶:

- Improved organisational performance and efficiency
- Employee and user engagement, with its resulting influence on service improvement
- Wider benefits to society resulting from a greater sense of citizen empowerment and responsibility.

For potential commissioning authorities and policy makers, or for provider organisations considering a transition from existing public services to new ownership forms, three models are likely to be most relevant:

- Employee-owned organisations
- Community ownership
- Employee plus.

OPM suggest that the transition to shared ownership has four main stages, which we can think of in terms of the whole system and the local systems. These are⁷:

1. Options appraisal
2. Negotiating the terms of the transition
3. Transition
4. Post-transition

At each of these stages, there will be issues about supporting change, developing the business model, engaging with staff and dealing with HR issues like pensions, legal forms of ownership and governance structures, and leadership.

We think that mutuals should be encouraged in the fire and rescue service. We consider that this would be of particular interest to the retained service, where there is a view that the current arrangements have not served them or their communities well. By allowing communities to once again be responsible for their own stations, not only will there be a renewed sense of pride in the services offered, but a new focus for the community, ensure an adequate supply of firefighters, make full use of the station facilities and raise funds for future development.

However, these proposals are not limited to the retained, and there are significant opportunities for wholetime staff to take control of their own destinies, and operate their own fire and rescue services. On this basis we think that it should be a requirement for FRAs to consult their staff on the formation of mutuals. We also think that FRAs should be required to consider commissioning their fire and rescue service from other providers. This will help to act as a catalyst

for this and other important changes, and may spark alternative forms of delivery, such as management buy-outs based on a social enterprise philosophy.

Decentralisation and Localism to be Underpinned by a new National Framework

The need for the National Framework to underpin standards has already been mentioned. We have given considerable thought to the role of a National Framework, within a decentralised sector.

We see a strong case for retaining the National Framework and the national and government roles should be more about enabling public accountability to flourish by facilitating better local leadership, well designed public engagement, and integration of effort with other local public services and the private sector. Service delivery should also consider what the public can reasonably expect. This means matching the roles of public safety organisations with community risks, making sure that those risks are managed by working collaboratively.

The starting point for any change would be an understanding of public expectations about the service that is delivered to them and there are a set of reasonable expectations that appear time and time again. The expectations include⁸:

- A quick and effective high quality **response** and an expectation that all services can work together at emergencies;
- Being **resilient** and deal with threats to national security – to respond effectively and work together with other safety services so our communities and our way of life, including our important infrastructure is protected;
- Helping them understand how to **prevent** incidents, by being educated, informed and involved in improving their own safety;
- Being cost effective and deliver **value for money**. They expect that local leaders are held to account for the quality and cost of the service;
- Helping them to **influence** their public services and exercise a degree of choice and to do this in an informed way through knowing and understanding the level of local risk and what this means for them.

7. Hilary Thompson, OPM, personal communication.

8. See here Collins, N., From prescription to empowerment – the development of a new Fire and Rescue Service National Framework [NI-NC]

The implications of this paper for the role of government primarily include:

- The removal of prescribed tasks from the National Framework;
- A review of the funding architecture for FRAs to place fairness and choice at the heart of commissioning services that meet the needs of all communities;
- Governance arrangements should be changed to strengthen the role of its members;
- Government should clarify its expectations of what local services should do to ensure the security and resilience of the UK;
- The Government should have a role working with the sector to identify signs of service failure, working with the sector to intervene only as required.

Objectives for the sector are primarily to:

- Further develop engagement with local people and give them a say in the services provided and enable them to make informed choices;
- To demonstrate that fire and rescue services deliver services that meet citizens' need;
- Involve people more in their own safety through the concepts of localism and the Big Society;
- Move service provision from direct ownership towards a commissioned approach involving a wider group of providers;
- Revitalise IRMP – including the contribution to national resilience requirements and the wider local community safety agenda;
- Engage with the fire safety industry to improve skills, knowledge and competence;
- Take a holistic view of value for money and evaluate the cost to society of fires and emergency events to develop a better business case to improve fire protection to buildings and infrastructure.

Changing the Financial Architecture

The financial architecture by which budgets are allocated needs to be reformed to place budgets as close to the citizen as possible, and to free those budgets, as is the case with county FRAs, to spend them as they see fit. Any funding will need to take account of national responsibilities that the FRA would be expected to undertake. The physical contribution to these national services will be determined through a revised National Framework.

Freedom and power emerges with the devolution of funding. Districts or boroughs should be free to remain within an existing FRA and simply make the funds available, or they could seek to break away and negotiate the level of service they require from the existing supplier or alternatives. Some may wish to procure from existing fire and rescue services, others may seek to involve the private sector. For fire and rescue services to receive funding directly they need to have the functions to them transferred which can be achieved under the Sustainable Communities Act 2007, as was proposed for Windsor and Maidenhead in 2008.

We also understand that formula grant is provided to those receiving authorities which exist as at 1 April of the year in question, and takes into account the services that they provide. If therefore there is a transfer of functions, then the grant will take this into account. We would hope that the Localism Bill, as well as underpinning the opportunity for firefighters to set up their own mutuals, will enable new FRAs to develop as the local community wishes.

A Road-Map for the Future

In taking these proposals forward, we would expect the Government to set a permissive regime in train. In essence, we would see change being driven through the desire by local communities for greater control over their fire and rescue services, and by the ability of individuals to form their own mutuals to provide that service.

As a consequence to underpin the process, we would expect the Government to allow individuals districts and boroughs to become fire and rescue authorities in their own right, and for firefighters to have the right to set up their own mutuals. Therefore those FRAs and constituent bodies who feel that the current system works for them, can remain with it, while those who are more enterprising can break away, and become pacesetters for the rest. However, we do believe that there should be a requirement in the national framework for FRAs to consult their staff on the possibility of forming mutuals, and to also consider the scope for separately commissioning all or part of the services they receive. The mutualisation process will need to be underpinned by appropriate detailed advice and support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

National Framework

A second stage of work is undertaken by the Department and National Interest Workstream together with contributors to the Fire Futures National Framework review. This will build upon the work to date and will develop further the extent and content of the next National Framework and will encompass the expectation set out above. This recommendation ties in with other recommendations set out in the rest of the report

Decentralisation

That the Localism Bill allows districts and boroughs to form their own FRAs subject to whatever safeguards the Secretary of State wishes to put in place. That further work is undertaken by the Department, and National Interest Workstream together with contributors to the Fire Futures Decentralisation Review in consultation with the wider sector to address the practical implications of decentralisation and the support needed to achieve the goal. DCLG may wish to consider putting pilots in place with willing district or borough councils. It will be important to ensure that the appropriate funding architecture is put in place to support this. This project should be DCLG led.

Mutualisation

DCLG should liaise closely with the Cabinet Office regarding the setting up of mutuals in the service, with a view to ensuring the necessary support, guidance and safeguards are in place. This process should commence as soon as possible and have regard to the suggested transition arrangements set out in the report. Where firefighters wish to form their own mutual, this should have precedence over any other form of service delivery. The preparation of comprehensive advice, and provision of the necessary support will be essential. It would be vital to consider the full impact of any legal issues.

Commissioning and Delivery

It should be a National Framework requirement that each FRA should consider commissioning fire and rescue services within the financial year 2011/12, and engage with their workforce on the possibility of them setting up mutuals, either collectively, or in parts of the service. Where there are proposed station closures, communities should be allowed to consider the setting up of mutuals to retain the service if they wish.

Assurance

Assessment and assurance should be built upon sector led initiatives, with the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser maintaining an independent overview role. Consideration should be given to setting up citizen based assessment systems not unlike HealthWatch. The industry could place a role in such 'watch-dog' organisations. The Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser could be asked to oversee the putting in place of appropriate assurance arrangements.

➤ 3. SECURE PLACE TO LIVE AND WORK: THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment is the area where most fire and rescue service activity is undertaken. A greater knowledge of that environment is needed, along with closer working with the wider fire sector.

The built environment continues to become more complex and the threat of fire more difficult to counter. We have found that there is significant evidence that fire safety is currently lagging behind these changes and needs to catch up, otherwise there is a major risk that fire safety problems are simply inadvertently created and locked up in the built environment to cause problems for fire safety in the future.⁹ A national overview is essential, translated to the local level substantially through the effective process of Integrated Risk Management Planning.

The regulatory framework is seen as substantially fit for purpose. The key issue, however, is securing compliance with the regulations and guidance. That is one of the biggest concerns of the sector. It is also evident that there is a significant lack of respect for the regulations, outside the core fire safety sector, which is also substantially responsible for a failure to follow compliance.

There is currently a perceived low level of competency within the sector in relation to fire safety and built environment, not helped by the fact there is no common qualifications' framework that covers building and fire safety competencies. Whilst the FRS undertakes building safety checks, no single organisation can take on responsibility for awareness of fire safety amongst building designers, constructors, owners and occupiers. This campaign can be taken on by that part of Fire UK, normally referred to as the 'industry'. That part of the sector needs to come together more closely and be less introspective, and there must be a much better dialogue, in particular, with those outside the core specialist fire safety sector who are not fire specialists but who in practice are responsible for delivering fire safety in practice (eg general design, specification, and construction, owners).

It has been estimated that there are, at least, 4 million businesses that fall under the Fire Safety Order (FSO) and it is therefore quite clear that the sheer volume and level of the potential workload is excessive. There is an also unreasonable expectation that the FRS is equipped and resourced to take on the burden of advice and policing that goes with the FSO, and is needed to fully follow through the enforcement requirements.

It could be considered that the prime role of FSO enforcement could be delegated, in part or wholly, to the private sector – and that indeed may be a developing outcome, however it is unlikely to be a reasonable and practical, complete solution in the short term. It is something to be worked towards. Enforcement of the FSO should remain with the FRS. That is not to say that there is no role for the industry segment within the fire sector in backing up the frontline enforcement role of the FRS, and industry associations are ideally placed through their contacts with members who are engaged in the market to act as a watchdog on progress and problems.

One of the greatest challenges for the sector as a whole is to fully mobilise and apply the collective sector knowledge that is available. Dissemination of information and best practice is a growing imperative given the complexity of the built environment and the challenges that the varied levels and type of occupancy present across communities. In that context, central and critical to the sector knowledge base, is to have a much better database.

Added to this mix of change is also the increasing development and application of risk-based design approaches under the banner of fire safety engineering or expert judgment. Where the building is too big, too complex, or too innovative to fit comfortably within the more rigid standard and there is a tendency for the techniques to be applied, more and more, beyond their limits of applicability, without adequate scrutiny, and essentially outside the scope of approved practice. The concern is that the boundaries are being increasingly pushed into areas of uncertainty, where applicable supporting knowledge is at best weak, at worse non-existent. The risk is that fire safety margins are being increasingly squeezed, with much less room for error should the unexpected happen.

There is undoubtedly an important role for industry-endorsed third party certification schemes. But the schemes must themselves be fit for stated purpose and properly accredited. The optimum effect will only be achieved by officially mandating third party, independent schemes - or by receiving much wider specifier and client endorsement by insisting on third party schemes to mitigate risks by specification.

The core strategy for reducing fire risk through the built environment should consist of five main elements:

9. For more details on this section, see Wood, M.W., The Foundations for Building Fire Safety [NI-MW]

- First improvements can be made through better application of what is already known.
- Second a better understanding of fire behaviour and building response to fire is required.
- Third, there needs to be improved compliance with regulation, legislation and industry driven best practice.
- Fourth, the strategy needs to take a wider view on the impacts of in line with requirements to lower the costs of fire damage taking note of community needs.
- Finally, there needs to be better collaborative working for connected fire safety from design to occupation of the building.

➤ 4. EVIDENCE-BASED RESPONSE TO RISK

The need to ensure data is freely available and research properly co-ordinated, is at the centre of effective risk management.

Data and other evidence is fundamentally important to the proper delivery of risk based services. We found nothing to indicate that there is concern about the reporting burden of data in the Fire Sector. Most respondents to our general survey on knowledge management issues agreed data collection is necessary to inform better training and education.¹⁰ There is also a strong demand for greater pooling and dissemination of information as conducive to better practice. For instance most agreed that facilitating co-ordinated access to integrated risk management plans is essential. There is also a strong belief that incident recording systems data should be shared widely and be integrated with costs of fire derived from the insurance sector. The respondents also raised concerns that experimental data from the Fire Experimentation Unit was not being sufficiently disseminated and that firefighters' operational knowledge was declining due the prioritisation of fire safety for resources. Arising from this are the following recommendations:

- A partnership arrangement between government, private sectors and the third sector should be established with a view to sharing data and research;
- Co-ordinated access to Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) would facilitate sharing of good practice, lessen 'reinvention of the wheel' and reduce associated local risk planning costs;
- A national Integrated Risk Management Plan should be available and be an integrated part of local IRMPs to support national resilience;
- A sector-led Research Panel (not restricted to Fire and Rescue Services) should prioritise research;
- Responsibility for Operational Doctrine should remain within government, but production and dissemination should be co-ordinated by an appropriate organisation.

The possible action arising from this response is for government to facilitate or encourage the formation of a sector led hub for the dissemination of sector knowledge. However, this is not a role for DCLG but rather a function for a voluntary association of fire

RECOMMENDATIONS

The built environment

There is no need for further legislation, however:

- The sector should lead on the application of knowledge, linked to competency, certification, data sharing and awareness programmes. The Government should endorse this process and ask that part of the sector for a formal plan of action.
- The programmed review of Approved Document B should continue, but with a view on new and emerging practices, as well as broader community needs and the wider dimensions of fire which are likely to become more prominent.
- Building control should take a proactive co-ordinating role involving the FRS. To facilitate that agreement it may be appropriate for a representative building control body to form a cooperative agreement with CFOA.
- The sector should continue to disseminate information to promote awareness, education, training and competency accreditation programmes.

10. Craig, L., Knowledge Management Consultation [NI-LC]

researchers and academics. A potential threat to the viability of this is the lack of cohesion amongst the various elements of the fire sector for hub.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Knowledge management

- A working group should be set up to review the scope for setting up a national data function, what data would be included, who would finance such a venture, what access would be allowed, and what governance structure should be set in place. This group should also review the feasibility of placing all IRMPs online.
- A working group should explore the scope for a sector led research panel, and develop proposals for a shared work programme.
- The IRMP committee should look at the feasibility of creating a national IRMP based on national risks.
- Technical and operational guidance should be written by experts in the fire and rescue service. This should be included in the national functions work mentioned above.

➤ 5. A FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE THAT CAN OPERATE TOGETHER

While services operate primarily at the local level, they often need to respond outside their own areas, not least when dealing with major incidents. It is essential that such services are interoperable when they come together.

We have considered an on-going concern of government, and that is how we ensure interoperability assured across a range of services, each operating entirely independently.¹¹ Their conclusions indicated that this is in part should be dealt with by means of the National Framework, which should set out expectations - however this will need to be underpinned by practical activity. Whilst the localism agenda aims to devolve power to as small a unit as possible there is a role for central government in facilitating interoperability, and ensuring that at major incidents both equipment and personnel can effectively operate together.

In order to create interoperability across geographical and functional boundaries, an unequivocal expectation amongst the population that this will be delivered needs to be generated, and then met by fire and rescue services. This involves development of the National Risk Assessment process, underpinned by National Framework requirements. This in itself will be further underpinned by an appropriate level of assurance, feeding into local Integrated Risk Management Plans. In taking this forward it is recommended that there should be a common risk assessment protocol applied to national, local and generic risks, to enable category 1 and 2 responders to have a common understanding of the risk identified.

There should be a mechanism by which the sector itself can redirect resources in support of the national interest and better use be made of commercial support options for deployment. Less onerous and bureaucratic arrangements to access latent military capabilities and assets should be established and there undoubtedly exists greater scope to involve private sector suppliers in the provision of logistics support to FRSs.

In terms of assurance, it is recommended that what is currently delivered to Ministers by the National Resilience Board, should be sought for all aspects of interoperability. Assurance mechanisms should be in place for the full range of FRS service, most notably fire cover and flood and water rescue.

11. Hall, J., Interoperability Headline Review [NI-JH]

The Group has also recognised that England does not operate in isolation. As a consequence it was agreed that some headline assurance levels should be established to ensure interoperability throughout the United Kingdom.

In terms of community resilience, a range of measures have been put forward to build resilient communities, including involving communities in assessing risk, exercising their emergency plans, and using the FRS with its resources and personnel, to act as go-betweens with other organisations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interoperability

- Government should set unequivocal expectations for interoperability across the service in the National Framework, and the local response to this should be transparent and demonstrable to the public.
- There should be a time limited working group set up looking at interoperability issues, in particular:
 - the feasibility of FRAs themselves drawing more easily upon military resources;
 - making better use of commercial delivery models;
 - providing assurance on interoperability at a level provided by the National Resilience Board for a full range of services;
 - to have mechanisms in place to ensure interoperability across the United Kingdom;
 - promoting community resilience;
 - and developing further standards for the Multi-Agency Interoperability Work.
- This working group should include the wider sector and other government departments

➤ 6. PROTECTING THE NATION – MANAGING THREAT AND RISK

How do we deal with national threats at the local level? Are we adequately prepared for major risks?

A significant question that the group asked itself, is how are the linkages between National Threat and FRS risk planning created. Currently they are not sufficiently clear and the creation of a sector-led, and more effective mechanism needs to be put in place to ensure that there is more consistent planning in relation to national risks.¹²

The Coalition Government’s new National Security Strategy states that the Government’s response to national security must encompass two complementary strategic objectives:

- ensuring a secure and resilient UK
- shaping a stable world

The fire sector is an important contributor to the delivery of this National Security Strategy by addressing local risks, and making sure this contribution is integrated with other emergency services.

It is clear that the Cabinet Office are very heavily engaged in work at the national level, but how this impacts locally is far from clear. There needs to be much closer working relationship between the sector as a whole and the Cabinet Office in identifying and responding to threats and risks. It is suggested that a revised IRMP Steering Group could ensure national benchmarking, share and disseminate best practice and provide a gateway for the oversight and coordination of proposals to mitigate the effects of national risks and threats – especially for cross border and cross partner arrangements. It would be essential to have a strategic presence from the Cabinet Office (CCS) on this Group.

In undertaking this, it is envisaged that a national plan will be created by lifting the most relevant and critical elements of IRMPs, relating to national threats and risks and holding such information centrally. This will form a UK-wide plan that will be aligned closely to the National Resilience Planning Assumptions and LRF Guidance. Ensuring closer links to these critical national elements through local IRMPs will ensure a more robust national response to major events. The links between risk at every level and resulting resolution capabilities should be entirely transparent and demonstrable to the public.

12. Hancock, P., Risk and National Functions [NI-PH]

A common assessment protocol should be applied, and local IRMPs should provide local users of services with an assurance that those services are equipped to address the range of risks.

There is a need to more closely integrate prevention, protection and intervention. Greater emphasis must also be given to risk in the built environment. IRMPs must be intelligence-based and led and have appropriate mechanisms capturing national risks through better links to the Civil Contingencies Secretariat and LRA Guidance. Local IRMPs must recognise national threats and consideration must be given to the links between Local Resilience Forums and IRMPs.

In addition DCLG must be prepared to fully share the IRS data sets. The principle behind localism is to allow FRSs to measure what is important to them and allowing them access to the full data set would enable this and provide the ability to benchmark it as well. There is also the potential to allow public access to some of the data (subject to Data Protection issues) and so reduce the growing number of FOI requests received.

Collectively, CFOA, the Fire Service College, CFRAU, as well as partners in the fire industry, might be able to provide a more effective lead in developing national operational doctrine, as well as other functions as part of a national hub.

This would include the development of standard operating procedures for operational responses to risk, operational doctrine, mechanisms for ensuring command competence, other control measures, safe systems of work and the safe person concept and setting the requirements for operational training. From a central point, most appropriately at the College itself, this hub would be able to ensure national consistency across the whole sector – importantly it was also agreed that the Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE) should provide the academic qualification and accreditation mechanism to support the role of the national hub and the wider training agenda.

Vitality, the group recognised that an absence of a national methodology and template for assessing premises risk and 7(2)(d) as a key risk. Such a model should be developed as a priority for any new national policy group created and should operate in a similar way to the model established for the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO). It is envisaged that the Civil Contingencies Secretariat will continue to set out guidance and map the relevant national

threats, but by expanding the role of the FRS sector within a national IRMP Steering Group there should also be greater scope to ensure local plans capture critical and cross border issues, risks and ensure the effective tie-in of national risks to IRMPs.

The issue of flooding has been raised by the Group. The Group recommends a resolution of the ambivalent situation FRS find themselves in with regard to flood and water rescue and urge the Minister to make these Statutory Duties, funded through New Burdens, and to grant FRS the statutory power to control the inner cordon at these events.

RECOMMENDATIONS

National Risk Assessment, Threat and Risk

- A high level committee be formed, possibly based on the IRMP steering group, to link national to local risks. This should have a senior figure as chair, and appropriate secretariat facilities. This should be formed as soon as possible.
- A common assessment protocol should be applied, and local IRMPs should provide local users of services with an assurance that those services are equipped to address the range of risks.
- Local IRMPs must recognise national threats and consideration must be given to the links between Local Resilience Forums and IRMPs.
- A national model should be developed for assessing premises risk.

➤ 7. FUNCTIONS BEST PERFORMED AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

Even within a decentralised system, some functions are best performed collaboratively and at a national level.

We have undertaken a comprehensive review looking at a range of Pan- FRA issues, including standards, assurance and assessment which needed to be taken forward in partnership with government.¹³ Key consideration included, how can key fire and rescue functions be assured in terms of the level of standards to be expected, and the general coherence of the service. The group commented in relation to the governance of such arrangements:

'In recognising that the existing arrangements do not provide the coherence and authority to coordinate national functions efficiently and effectively the creation of an appropriate national body within the "delivery chain" which sits between central government and individual FRAs would be strongly supported.'

Clearly these are issues which have existed for a long period of time, and no viable solution has yet been found. However, given that the current arrangements are not working, this situation urgently needs to be addressed. It is likely in time that the sector as whole will be able to address these issues without the guiding hand of government, but we are not at that stage yet, and are not likely to be for some time. As a consequence, a national level body which interfaces, with central government, should be established to be responsible for the consistent delivery of the recommended set of national functions. The appropriate sector-led body could be constituted under various structural arrangements. While a number of potential structural models exist, the Group has concluded that the following are worthy of further investigation and serious consideration:

- A new multi stakeholder institutional body
- A new partnership owned by CFOA and the LGA
- Creation of a social enterprise partnership model

The above options for consideration will need to be fully evaluated.

In decentralising power from Whitehall to local councils, it is imperative to clearly define the respective roles of central government and local Fire and Rescue Authorities.

The Pan FRA group feel that the role of central government in this National Functions section should include: national policy; the legislative framework

supporting the fire industry; the assurance and audit of FRAs; and the national resource allocation.

In pursuing this model, the role of the FRAs should include: the accountability for operational delivery of services; local policy; resource management, and local partnerships.

The Group recommends the following set of national functions to be developed and provided nationally by an appropriate body for the collective benefit of not only all fire and rescue services but other stakeholders:

- risk horizon scanning;
- policy issues;
- capability management for national resilience arrangements;
- knowledge management;
- service standards;
- EU/UK technical improvements;
- assurance and audit;
- improvement and support;
- collaborative procurement;
- equality and diversity;
- national campaigns;
- workforce development.

In financing such an arrangement, the following funding issues need to be further evaluated/ developed:

- Establishment of private/public sector (joint ventures) commissioned functions;
- FRA funding based on commissioned transfer of functions delivered nationally; to achieve economies of scale and elimination duplication and waste
- Establishment of a Trading Revenue;
- Central government funding based on commissioned transfer of its responsibilities.

Serious further consideration needs to be given within the Fire Futures review of the opportunity to recognise the need for effective sector funded national structures and arrangements that support FRS improvement and delivery and the potential that exists to secure them.

13. Hayton, I., Pan-FRA arrangements (including and Executive Summary) [NI-IH]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overarching National Functions

That the Government supports the creation of a national functions body, and be generous in getting it onto its feet. While the body should be sector led and funded, it will require some support to prove its worth, get going and generate its own income.

Whatever arrangements are set in place, the Government should ensure that the body does not become some form of quango. We see strong links between such a body and arrangements already in place for National Resilience assurance.

➤ 8. THE FUTURE OF THE FIRE SERVICE COLLEGE

What is the future of the Fire Service College and what is the best way to ensure its ongoing viability.

We have looked at the viability and future role of the Fire Service College (FSC).¹⁴ It is apparent from a number of comments in the Fire Futures document portfolio that there is no appetite within the Fire Service to lose the resource. However, the College is an Executive Agency/Trading Fund and it has not performed well over the years since it was established. Its market share is low, and competition from other FRA training establishments has grown. All of which prompted a strategic review in 2008/09. This review concluded that the College could achieve financial sustainability and generate profits by operating on a fully and explicitly commercial basis.

The College is planning to break even this financial year. With improved marketing and sustained improvement to the College's brand, this should result in increased training revenues, and overall, these cash measures should lead to an increase in profitability. Such improvements will potentially make the College operation more attractive to buy-in by the private sector and other potential partners, although financial investment by others to achieve return on investment will surely be dependent on an increase in market share and diversification and extension of product not with-standing debt and asset value issues.

The College operates in a competitive training market in which a number of customer FRS bodies directly compete with it, leading to over-supply in the market. The local training facilities and staff at these FRS are generally funded by the tax payer/rate payer and represent additional cost to the public purse – this does not appear to represent value for money in any way. Nor is the playing field for pricing a level one: the College must consider its full overheads in its prices, whilst competitor FRSs do not appear to factor in those ongoing overheads which are paid for out of their grant, such as training facility maintenance and staff costs. In addition, this landscape has led to fragmented standards of training, as identified in the recent HSE report, especially around incident command.

14. Day, M., Procurement and the Fire Service College [NI-MD]. For more details about procurement in the fire sector, please refer to the work done under the Efficiency, Effectiveness and Productivity workstream, EEP-RP.

The question is whether the current Trading Fund model is the best model to achieve the greatest success. There is little doubt that greater commercial freedom of manoeuvre would be of significant benefit whilst transforming the College's operation. Our recommendation would be a more pragmatic and financially viable Joint Venture model which is sector partnered with service delivery separated from governance/commissioning and exposed to the market-place.

A possible way of piloting this would be to re-establish the Fire Service College as a Joint Venture with the private sector. One half of the joint venture would be an employee owned mutual that is partly owned in the public interest. It is suggested that if there were a demonstrable success with this joint venture, this would facilitate consideration of whether the model was applicable elsewhere in the sector, including the running of brigades to the extent that lessons learned are applicable to organisations with different accountability and financial structures.

Joint ventures can access new markets and distribution networks. Joint ventures increase capacity by having more resources, technology, specialised staff and capital to leverage. Thirdly risks and costs can be shared with the partner. The joint venture can also offer flexibility, because it can run with a limited life span. The FSC's annual report cites a specific objective for the FSC is to 'progress towards a sustainable basis, achieving a trading surplus of £0.8 million'. According to the assessment made in the annual report this has yet to be achieved, (34%) of total revenue came from the private sector and by the FSC's own assessment this is an underutilisation of capacity. That said, with its unique facilities for training national security emergency response, one might expect public sector organisations to be the main focus of the FSC's work. Hence there is scope for improvements to be made as a result of greater private sector involvement and expertise. However, given the role of the College in operating for the national interest in achieving joint operability in disaster situation, it might be inappropriate to have the FSC operating on a 'for-profit' basis in its entirety.

Closure is not a viable option for the Fire Service College because in the current climate its assets would be undervalued. However, there may be a greater role for the FRS in facilitating joint-operability with other services and the College could be developed to fulfil this function. The footprint of the College could also be potentially reduced and the sale of some of its assets could improve its financial viability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Fire Service College

- The Government should set in train an immediate assessment of the potential of the College with a view to securing its long term survival and stability by means of a joint venture arrangement.

➤ 9. THE WIDER INDUSTRY COMMITMENT TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

At the meeting of the Industry group, including professional bodies, on the 8th December, they agreed to proceed with a number of commitments relevant to the built environment and the management of knowledge, at no cost. They asked for the following comments to be included in this report:

Fire safety provisions in buildings need to be based on a consistent and connected process with continuity along the chain from design through specification and construction to occupation, including extension of the best practice principles to existing buildings and refurbishments. Unfortunately, the process as it currently operates is fragmented and disjointed. Likewise, the guidance along the chain is either absent or disconnected from one stage to the next, significantly lacking consistency and profile, such that the guidance that does exist can be too easily dismissed and ignored.

The report on the built environment highlighted that despite a regulatory framework that is considered generally fit for purpose in respect of fire safety particularly with the improvements secured by the codification of legislation in the fire safety order, there does continue to be problems with compliance and enforcement. It is the sector's view that there is a disconnect between enforcement and enforcing authorities in applying the framework for the design, construction and the occupation of buildings much of which has been attributed to the plethora of confusing and often contradictory guidance that has been produced. The sector recognises much of the guidance and expertise to support the guidance resides within the sector itself and has committed to:

- Resource, review, codify, rewrite and where required publish guidance supporting existing legislation but encompassing the entire process from building design to end use.
- Using its own resources and expertise to train educate and disseminate its knowledge through campaign marketing and structured learning programmes to ensure that the guidance is fully understood by enforcers and end users alike.
- Through the knowledge management stream, which will be discussed in the next section, the sector has also committed to work directly with FRSs to support training and qualifications, without the need to publicly fund intermediary Sector Skills Councils. This will be achieved using the natural position of the Institution of

Fire Engineers as a meeting place for the FRS, industry involved in building design and the evaluation of building technologies and materials, awarding bodies and training providers

- The knowledge management stream recognised the importance of supporting an intelligence-led approach and has committed to provide a sector-led Independent Research Panel, working with the DCLG but not led by it, to which sector organisations voluntarily contribute expertise.
- It has agreed to provide a Fire Knowledge website that provides free access to available data, information and research findings and to lead an independent sector analysis of the knowledge gaps in fire behaviour in buildings, through our technical groups, and facilitate the sector response in seeking to address those gaps. The sector will then commit to produce codes of conduct and practice and expected standards of behaviour and principles to ensure the circle is complete.

➤ CONCLUSIONS

In trying to find answers to the significant questions raised in the production of this report, we have looked into a range of options for the future. Naturally these will require greater detailed assessment, and some will require further consultation.

The future for the fire and rescue service, and Fire UK as a whole is bright, and it has almost unlimited talent within it waiting to be unleashed. This report highlights a number of ways in which that talent can be brought to the surface, and create a better and safer nation in which to live.

A number of these recommendations will require resource to be spent – others will necessitate simply a guiding hand on the tiller. Some need to be actioned by government, more need to be developed by the sector – and as you will have seen work has already started on this. Whatever the action or recommendation to be pursued, we stand ready to discuss them with you, and work hard to help ensure they are effectively implemented.

➤ REFERENCES

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- Hall, J., Interoperability Headline Review, including 2 annexes (Annex A – Consultation; Annex B – Acknowledgements) [NI-JH]
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