

RISCAuthority at work



Dr Jim Glockling outlines the positions of the FPA and RISCAuthority on whether there is a need to cut the number of fire and rescue services in the UK

RISCAUTHORITY HAS always invested heavily in analysing, understanding and reporting to insurers the current state of fire and rescue service resource provision, attendance capability, risk appetite, policy, and local operational constraints. It has defended against factors that might act to reduce their support for property protection. This information, although pertinent to risk pricing has a major role in revealing to insurers' clients how much help to expect from the local authority fire service, to establish what self-sufficient risk control measures might be required to support their resilience planning.

Funding for the fire and rescue services has been cut year-on-year and this will certainly continue in the years to come. While individual fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) have achieved some quite major savings locally using innovative approaches, the elephant in the corner remains the fact that in England there are still 46 individual FRAs and that perhaps economies of scale associated with a lesser number are not being fully exploited. Routes to potential savings were outlined in the Knight Review, published in May 2013, which looked at options for greater efficiency savings. The report identified around £200m of savings across the 46 FRAs with recommendations on how they should be achieved. While many recommendations can be seen in operation today, the 'big ones' of reducing the number of FRAs, and co-responding and co-locating with other emergency services have seen very limited or no uptake.

Along with other stakeholders in UK fire, the FPA has been requested by shadow fire minister Lyn Brown MP to participate in a survey on 'The future of the fire and rescue service in England', which has a specific remit to investigate opportunities for change in its structural organisation.

The questions, which fall into four simple categories, ask for views on the likelihood of success and what it might mean to your organisation and the people you represent from:

- locally determined mergers
- larger scale mergers
- the single service model
- any other model you might care to suggest

From a property protection perspective, what we crave from our fire service is it being appropriately resourced; an appreciation of the community value of protecting property and business on its patch; consistency in approach; and as few points of contact to express our

views and negotiate with as possible. This might suggest our support certainly for a lesser number of FRAs and, to be perfectly honest, our engagement with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service has become much improved and simplified since its merger.

However, we must not forget that the 'many' fire authority model probably arose and prospered for some good and disparate reasons – possibly borne from the needs of local industry and geography, then moulded and shaped further by ownership and funding means. But ultimately, we have a service that caters at the local level, appreciating local challenges and with a local pride to do well by fellow citizens. The challenge to reducing the number of FRAs is to not lose these beneficial factors.

So what will FPA and RISCAuthority's response be to this survey? Support for a lesser number of FRAs, yes, but not at the expense of loss of local knowledge and job pride ■

Dr Jim Glockling is technical director of the FPA and director of RISCAuthority

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