



House of Commons

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

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# The Fire Service

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Third Report of Session 2003–04

*Volume I: Report*





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## Third Report of Session 2003–04

### *Volume I: Report*

*Report, together with formal minutes.*

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

The ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and its associated bodies.

### Current membership

Mr Andrew Bennett MP (*Labour, Denton and Reddish*) (Chairman)

Sir Paul Beresford MP (*Conservative, Mole Valley*)

Mr Clive Betts MP (*Labour, Sheffield Attercliffe*)

Mr Graham Brady MP (*Conservative, Altrincham & Sale West*)

Mr David Clelland MP (*Labour, Tyne Bridge*)

Mr John Cummings MP (*Labour, Easington*)

Mrs Eleanor Laing MP (*Conservative, Epping Forest*)

Mr Chris Mole MP (*Labour, Ipswich*)

Mr Bill O' Brien MP (*Labour, Normanton*)

Mrs Christine Russell MP (*Labour, City of Chester*)

Mr Adrian Sanders (*Liberal Democrat, Torbay*)

The following members were also members of the committee during the parliament.

Dr John Pugh MP (*Liberal Democrat, Southport*)

Mr John Bercow MP (*Conservative, Buckingham*)

Mr Gary Streeter MP (*Conservative, South West Devon*)

### Powers

The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at [www.parliament.uk/parliamentary\\_committees/odpm.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/odpm.cfm). A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Kate Emms (Clerk), Libby Preston (Second Clerk), Ben Kochan (Committee Specialist), Ian Hook (Committee Assistant) and Emma Carey (Secretary).

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## Summary

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The Committee broadly welcomes the proposals outlined in the Government's White Paper 'Our Fire and Rescue Service'. Some issues require further thought and consideration, and we make specific recommendations on these in our report, including:

- The introduction of sprinklers and smoke alarms
- The need for performance measures related to non-fire incidents where the Fire Service plays a rescue role
- The Firefighters' pension scheme
- Employment of women and ethnic minority staff
- The pay and shortfall in numbers of retained firefighters

At the centre of the White Paper is the introduction of a locally responsive, risk-based approach to fire cover. The current national fire standards were established in the 1930s. They strictly prescribe staffing levels, the location of firefighters, stations and appliances; they set out exactly how many appliances should attend a fire, and within what timeframe; and fire cover is determined according to how built up an area is. The Government proposals require each Fire Authority to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan which includes targets and objectives for reducing risks, balancing prevention and intervention and determining response standards and resource allocation. Since 50% of fire fatalities are dead before the Fire Service is called, the plans will enable Fire Authorities and Services to move resources into prevention. Implementation of these proposals will mean changes; some fire stations may be closed or moved and shift patterns altered. To avoid public misconceptions, Government must help Authorities explain why there may be changes to local Fire Services.

Government must carefully scrutinise the impact of Integrated Risk Management Plans,

particularly consistency; and should introduce performance indicators relating to risk management. Accurate and timely incident information must also be available; the information available currently will not enable assessment of Fire Service risk management. Review of fire incident forms is therefore vital.

The Government expects Integrated Risk Management Plans to generate savings, which will assist Fire Authorities in funding the recent firefighters pay award. Until such savings are produced, Government has provided a £30 million loan to Fire Authorities. We have concerns about the distribution and recovery of this loan. Government must ensure appropriate distribution and equitable recovery.

The White Paper proposes that the Audit Commission take over inspection of the Fire Service from HM Fire Service Inspectorate. We are concerned that the Government has failed to provide sufficient performance indicators to guide the Audit Commission's performance monitoring.

Prevention of fire is a key element of the White Paper, thus the Government's decision to relax its target to cut down the number of deliberate fires and extend the time available to meet the targets on accidental fire-related deaths is surprising. We are concerned that Government did not consult sufficiently with relevant parties before relaxing these targets.

# 1 Introduction

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1. This report examines the Government's proposals set out in its White Paper, 'Our Fire and Rescue Service', published in June 2003.<sup>1</sup> There have been many reviews of the Fire Service, as outlined in Table One. This report does not therefore seek to re-examine issues which have already been well documented. It focuses on examining the merits of the proposals outlined in the White Paper, and how they can be achieved.

2. The Committee announced its inquiry on 17 July 2003, calling for submissions of evidence on the following issues in particular:

- A move towards preventative working;
- The introduction of a new approach to risk assessment;
- Institutional reform;
- Changes to management; and
- Promoting diversity within the Fire Service.

Over 60 written submissions were made to the inquiry.<sup>2</sup> In 5 evidence sessions the Committee took oral evidence from 22 sets of witnesses including; Chief Fire Officers, Members of Fire Authorities, the Retained Firefighters' Union (RFU), the Association of Principal Fire Officers (APFO), the Fire Officers' Association (FOA), the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association (CACFOA), the Fire Brigades' Union (FBU), the Local Government Association (LGA), the Fire Service College, HM Fire Service Inspectorate, the Audit Commission, Sir George Bain, and the Minister responsible for the Fire Service, Nick Raynsford. At the start of the inquiry the Committee appointed two specialist advisors, Jeremy Beech and Tony Taig; we thank them for all their advice and assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003

<sup>2</sup> Written evidence received by the publication date was published on 20 October 2003 as HC 1168-II: Subsequent evidence is published with the transcripts of oral evidence in HC47-II

## 2 Context of Change

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### The Vision

3. The White Paper sets out the Government's vision for the Fire Service in England and Wales.<sup>3</sup> This vision includes;

- Renaming the service 'The Fire and Rescue Service' to reflect the wider rescue role the Service undertakes
- Placing the wider rescue and community role of the Service on a proper statutory footing
- Refocusing the Service on preventing fires occurring
- Reorganising staff, stations and appliances based on risk assessment through Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs)
- Repealing the Fire Services Act 1947
- Creating regional fire and rescue authorities in regions that choose to have elected regional assemblies, with regional management boards for other areas
- Overhauling fire institutions, and the creation of two forums, one for practitioners and one for business and community safety stakeholders
- Reforming pay negotiating bodies
- Introducing an Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) to bring about multi-level entry into the Service, reducing the number of ranks and accelerating development for the most able
- Reforming the working culture to promote diversity
- Ending bullying and harassment
- Reforming pensions, discipline and disputes arrangements; and
- Improving the conditions of retained fire fighters

4. Most submissions support the broad thrust of the White Paper:

“The FBU broadly welcomes the aims and objectives, as set out in paragraph 1.6 of the White Paper. The Paper raises a plethora of issues and areas for reform, which will mean the biggest and most radical shake up of the Fire Service and working practices for 50 years.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Government proposes in the White Paper that responsibility for the Fire Service should be devolved to Wales, nonetheless sets out a vision for England and Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland are responsible for their Fire Services.

<sup>4</sup> Ev 89 [The Fire Brigades' Union (FBU)]

“[...] the Fire Officers’ Association broadly welcomes the publication of the White Paper and its potential benefits for both the direct stakeholders within the service, and the communities we seek to serve.”<sup>5</sup>

“CACFOA very much welcomes the publication of the White Paper and the opportunities it provides for a Fire and Rescue Service “fit for purpose” in the Twenty First Century.”<sup>6</sup>

## Implementation

5. In the last 23 years there have been seven major reviews of the Fire Service, as set out in Table One. The White Paper acknowledges that “all these studies have pointed to the need to overhaul fire prevention and fire fighting, and to change the culture of the fire and rescue service.”<sup>7</sup> Yet it is clear from the evidence received that none of these reviews have led to substantial change in the Service. There is awareness that the same fate could face the proposals outlined in the White Paper:

“On too many occasions in the past, we have had reports and reviews published on the future of the service which have subsequently “gathered dust”, and have not gained either the acceptance or ownership of all the stakeholders. Whilst the assertions in the White Paper that ‘this time will be different’ are welcome, inertia must not be allowed to happen again if the safety of our citizens and firefighters is to be maintained, and, indeed, enhanced.”<sup>8</sup>

<b>Table One: History of Fire Service Reviews</b>	
	Source: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, <i>Our Fire and Rescue Service</i> , Cm 5808, June 2003, p1.3
1970	Report of the Departmental Committee on the Fire Service (Sir Ronald Holroyd)
1971	Report of the Cunningham Inquiry into the Work of the Fire Service
1980	Home Office Review of Fire Policy
1985	Report of the Joint Committee on Standards of Fire Cover
1995	Audit Commission Report “In the Line of Fire: Value for Money in the Fire Service”
1998	Fire Service Pensions Review: Home Office
2002	Independent Review of the Fire Service (Chaired by Sir George Bain)

<sup>5</sup> Ev 95 [The Fire Officers’ Association (FOA)]

<sup>6</sup> Ev 72 [The Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers’ Association (CACFOA)]

<sup>7</sup>Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p1.3

<sup>8</sup> Ev 72 [The Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers’ Association (CACFOA)]

6. Evidence from all stakeholders reveals support for the White Paper’s broad vision. As with any major reform, the details will be subject to more debate and disagreement. Some witnesses are concerned that, as with previous reviews, debate over the detail will act as a barrier to implementation of any of the proposals. Witnesses from within the Service believe that it is the responsibility of Government to ensure this does not happen:

“Early indications of the Government’s resolve to carry through the agenda of change are encouraging but they must remain resolute and continue to press Local Government to do the same. Strong political leadership is of the essence and the fire service has too often suffered from a lack of it in the past, evidenced by the array of reports and reviews confined to the shelf.”<sup>9</sup>

**7. The Committee broadly welcomes the reforms outlined in the White Paper and is hopeful that the Fire and Rescue Services Bill will bring about real reform in the Service. The Service needs strong political leadership to ensure successful implementation and management of change during a potentially very turbulent period. Government must lead by example, and must provide support at local level to ensure implementation of reform, even in the face of confrontation.**

## Timing

8. Some of the proposals outlined in the White Paper are based on current best practice. We received evidence from Authorities and Services who already conduct excellent fire safety work in the community, for example, operating free home safety checks, installing smoke alarms, initiating youth projects and many similar schemes. The Good Practice Examples below give two typical examples. With so much best practice readily available, implementation of the White Paper’s fire prevention aims should be made very quickly.

### Good Practice Example One: Community Cohesion and the Fire Service<sup>10</sup>

Cheshire Fire Authority capitalised upon the positive ‘brand’ image and identity of the Fire Service to build relationships with hard to access local communities. Their work aimed to reduce arson and hoax calls through developing community fire safety, as advocated in the White Paper. This work culminated in the Authority winning Beacon Council award for Community Cohesion in April 2003.

### Good Practice Example Two: Proactive Prevention of Fire<sup>11</sup>

In the last four years Merseyside Fire Service have given 200 000 homes in the region free home safety checks and fitted 250 000 free smoke alarms. This has resulted in;

<sup>9</sup> Ev 95 [The Fire Officers’ Association (FOA)]

<sup>10</sup> Ev 68-71 [Cheshire Fire Authority]

<sup>11</sup> Ev 156-160 [Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service]; Ev 160-163 [The Friends of Merseyside Fire Service]

- 40% cut in fire deaths since the scheme began (double national target)
- 49% drop in fire injuries
- 23% drop in cost of fire to the local economy, from £52m in 1999 to £40m in 2002, justifying the £400 000 annual cost of the campaign

There are four key elements in this scheme's success:

- creation of Fire Service Direct, a dedicated call centre that organises smoke alarm installations and appointments for home safety checks. The centre proactively seeks appointments, especially in areas identified as at high risk from fire.
- the use of bilingual advocates to access communities where English was not the first language
- creation of youth exclusion teams to tackle young people who may pose a fire threat
- a 'Friends of Merseyside' volunteer system to promote fire safety awareness and support fire victims

9. Other proposals are much more radical, and we received evidence highlighting concerns about the timing of these proposals:

“The South West believes that all fire brigades are currently being hampered by the lack of information surrounding the timetable for each aspect and development under this [modernisation] agenda. It also means that resources are probably being inappropriately prioritised. We urgently require an indication from the Government of what its intentions are in this area and for consideration to be given to a realistic timetable for implementation.”<sup>12</sup>

10. In oral evidence the Minister promised that much of the detail of the proposals in the White Paper would be made clear in the Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework. This was published on 11 December 2003, after the end of this inquiry. The draft Framework does indeed provide some of the detail absent from the White Paper. In particular it outlines clear expectations for regional management boards. By 1 April 2004 Government expect Authorities to establish boards with;

- Clear aims and objectives
- Delegated powers that are appropriate to those aims and objectives
- Plans for meeting the requirements in each of the six key areas listed in Table Two; and

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<sup>12</sup> Ev 56 [The South West Forum of Fire Authorities]

- Sufficient evidence to demonstrate the capacity – both resources and expertise – to deliver those plans<sup>13</sup>

<b>Table Two: Functions of Regional Management Boards</b> Source: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, <i>Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework</i> , December 2003, p2.9	
1	Integrate common and specialist services, e.g. fire investigation
2	Put in place effective resilience plans for large scale emergencies
3	Introduce regional personnel and human resource functions
4	Develop a regional approach to training
5	Establish regional control rooms
6	Introduce regional procurement within the context of a national procurement strategy

11. The draft Framework is also clearer on the proposals for Regional Control Rooms.<sup>14</sup> The Government accepts the conclusions of the Mott MacDonald and HM Fire Service Inspectorate reports<sup>15</sup> into control room efficiency, and outlines proposals for regional fire control rooms.<sup>16</sup> These are to be established by September 2007, and in the draft Framework there is a commitment for some capital support from Government: “For resilience purposes, all regional control rooms should operate the same call-handling and mobilisation technology, procured and paid for by ODPM. Where appropriate, ODPM should ensure the provision of accommodation for the regional control rooms through supported capital expenditure.”<sup>17</sup>

**12. The draft Fire and Rescue National Framework sets a tough timetable for implementation of some of the proposals outlined in the White Paper. We welcome Government’s desire to make swift progress. However, the draft Framework is open to consultation until 12 March 2004, only a matter of weeks before proposals must be implemented. Fire Authorities and Services are under extreme pressure to make progress on proposals which currently have no legislative authority. With imminent deadlines, for example, for Integrated Risk Management Plans, which must be**

<sup>13</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p2.7

<sup>14</sup> We refer to the subject of Control Rooms again in section 6

<sup>15</sup> Mott MacDonald, *The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales*, April 2003; Mott MacDonald, *The Future of Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales, Update 2003*, December 2003; HM Fire Service Inspectorate, *Analysis of the Best Value Reviews of Control and Communications*, November 2003

<sup>16</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p2.10-2.16

<sup>17</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p2.13

consulted on, redrafted and implemented by April 2004, it is unclear how Fire Authorities and Services are supposed to find the resources to respond to the draft Framework consultation. Government must be aware of the demands they are making, and provide support to those Authorities and Services which are struggling to make progress. They must also ensure swift progress of the proposed Fire and Rescue Services Bill to provide the legislative backing for many of the White Paper's proposals.

## Research

### Data

13. Where public safety is concerned there cannot be change for change's sake. There should be a clear evidentiary base for all proposals made in the White Paper. Several witnesses were concerned there was insufficient evidence for some of the Government's proposals:

"I think that we have had a lot of statements and the White Paper has built on some things that were done in the past, but I have not seen any evidence in support of any of the claims. I comment in the written submission about the comments on the size of fire brigades that have been made and about the larger the size, the more efficient they will be, but there is no evidence whatsoever to support that and there is no evidence, in my view, to support most of the things in the White Paper."<sup>18</sup>

"[...] we welcome the changes but that we regard some of the arguments put forward for things such as regionalisation as scant in evidence."<sup>19</sup>

14. The Fire Service collects a lot of data, especially relating to incident response. The draft Fire and Rescue National Framework emphasises the importance of research and statistics, and acknowledges that there is considerable scope for improving elements of current practice. For example, the response rate of a Fire Service is currently based on whether the fire engine is in the fire station at the time of the call. If the engine is already out then that call is not included in the response statistics. This situation exists because the statistics collected are based on the standards of fire cover devised in the 1930s:

"This comes back to the situation that prevails in relation to the standards of fire cover. [...] this is all related to the very strict laid-down relationship between standards of fire cover and the response times and the measurement that the Inspectorate made in relation to that. The standards of fire cover as we know are dated way back into the 1930s and all the associated gathering of information relates to them."<sup>20</sup>

The introduction of Integrated Risk Management Plans gives the fire service opportunity to reconsider the data they currently collect, and how it is used; "As we move into the Integrated Risk Management world then the statistical base will have to change entirely."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Q 117 [Dr Dennett, Independent Fire Expert]

<sup>19</sup> Q 138 [Mr Bonney, Secretary, The Association of Principal Fire Officers (APFO)]

<sup>20</sup> Q 248 [Sir Graham Meldrum, HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services]

<sup>21</sup> Q 248 [Sir Graham Meldrum, HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services]

15. Fire Service incident information is central to the reforms proposed by the Government in the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework. The information currently available to Fire Authorities will not enable them to assess how well Fire Services are managing risk, making beneficial change harder to justify. It is therefore vital that the Government review fire incident report forms and consider demands for inclusion of new incident data, as they promise in the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework. We welcome changes to the data collection process, using electronic capturing to improve data quality and produce more timely statistics. More accurate and more current statistics will help Fire Services and Authorities monitor progress against targets and performance indicators. In response to this inquiry we recommend Government outline progress with the review of fire incident report forms, and produce a timetable for implementation of new forms, and electronic data capture.

### **Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) and Service Delivery Agreement Targets (SDAs)**

16. With Integrated Risk Management Plans replacing national fire cover standards, performance indicators will become increasingly important in ensuring Fire Authorities and Services perform consistently. Fire Authorities and Services will use Best Value Performance Indicators and Service Delivery Agreement targets to ensure local performance meets Government set national standards.

17. The draft National Fire and Rescue Framework proposes very few changes to the Best Value Performance Indicators. It proposes the deletion of Best Value Performance Indicators 145 and 147, which measure compliance with national standards of fire cover, and amendment of 144 to remove references to the national risk categories. It introduces one new Fire and Rescue Best Value Performance Indicator; “Number of deliberate fires per 10,000 population.”<sup>22</sup> There is no proposal to introduce Best Value Performance Indicators relating to risk management, or non-fire incidents in which the Fire Service plays a rescue role.

18. The Service Delivery Agreement Targets in the draft Framework are the same as those proposed in the White Paper:

- To reduce the number of accidental fire-related deaths in the home by 20% averaged over the 11 year period to 31 March 2010 compared with the average recorded in the five year period to 31 March 1999, with no local authority fire brigade having a fatality rate more than 1.25 times the national average by 31 March 2010
- To reduce by 10% the number of deliberate fires by 31 March 2010 from the 2001-02 baseline<sup>23</sup>

19. These targets are less challenging than the 2002 PSA targets which aimed to:

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<sup>22</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, Annex B

<sup>23</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, Annex A

- Reduce fire-related deaths in the home by 20 per cent by 31 March 2003, from an average starting point of 380 a year
- Reduce the number of fires by 31 March 2002 to a level lower than those currently projected on long-term trends (projected levels: 608,100–633,500 pa)
- Reduce the incidence of accidental fire-related deaths in the home by 20 per cent averaged over the five-year period to March 2004 compared with the average recorded in the five-year period to March 1999; and
- Reduce by 30 per cent the number of deliberate fires by March 2009 from the 1998–99 baseline by, for example, supporting the work of the Arson Control Forum, and ensuring efforts to tackle deliberate fires are co-ordinated and new initiatives to reduce arson are developed. The first milestone is to arrest the upward trend in deliberate fires so that the number of cases reduces to the 1998–99 baseline by March 2004

20. The Committee pursued the reduction in these targets with the Minister in oral evidence sessions for both this inquiry, and for the ODPM Annual Report and Accounts 2003.<sup>24</sup> On deliberate fires the Minister denied that the target was less challenging, but argued it was more realistic:

“My view is that targets have got to be meaningful. We inherited this, we looked at this one, we came to the rapid conclusion that it was simply unrealistic, because of the combination of the changes in the scrap metal market and the impact of the End of Life Directive. We have therefore set new targets which require a very challenging reduction in the number of deliberately set fires in the light of the much higher level there now is - there has been a huge increase since the target was originally set - but with a realistic prospect of achieving it as and when the new End of Life Directive arrangements come into force from 2007. So it is a realistic target. Similarly, with the reduction in the number of accidental fires in the home, we are setting an extremely challenging target which will require something in the region of a thousand fewer deaths in accidental fires than would otherwise have been the case. So it is not in any way an attempt to soften the rigour of the target, but it is a realistic target in the light of current circumstances rather than sticking to a target which simply could not be achieved and would ultimately demoralise people that they were failing to meet a target rather than pushing very hard to try and reduce the number of accidental fires and deaths.”<sup>25</sup>

On the accidental death target he suggested demographic change had not been taken into account when the target was conceived:

“Mr Raynsford: The original target was based on a five year time frame, and we are saying we think there should be a longer time frame, quite simply because of a number of factors including demographic change which were not properly factored

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<sup>24</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, *ODPM Annual Report and Accounts 2003*, December 2003, Ev 30-31, Q 261-266

<sup>25</sup> Q 462 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]. For additional written information provided by ODPM please see footnote to HC43-II, Ev 83, Q 462.

in. The considerable growth in the number of the elderly population, who are those most at risk, and that was not properly taken into account in the original estimate.

Chairman: Explain to me the demographic change.

Mr Raynsford: The considerable growth in the number of the elderly population, who are those most at risk, and that was not properly taken into account in the original estimate.

Chairman: Wait a minute, we are going to achieve it in 12 years instead of in seven years?

Mr Raynsford: That is right.

Chairman: Surely we are going to lose some more lives of elderly people. If it is possible to do it in the future, surely it should be something we could accelerate and do quicker?

Mr Raynsford: We are committed under the new target to reduce the number of fatalities in the case of accidental fires in the home by a thousand below the level which would otherwise apply, so this is a very, very challenging target. We want it to be a realistic target, we do not want targets to become, frankly, derisory because there is no prospect of meeting them. We are absolutely committed - it is the whole thrust of our policy - to reduce the number of lives lost, the number of injuries, as a result of fire, and that is driving the whole of our policy not just the setting of targets.”<sup>26</sup>

21. Several submissions, including that from the Local Government Association, expressed disappointment at the less challenging targets:

“We note with regret that the targets set are less challenging than the targets set under the 2002 PSA. There was no consultation with stakeholders on this until the CFBAC [*Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council*] meeting held immediately before the publication of the White Paper. Concern was expressed by all major stakeholders on the proposals. We would urge the government to reconsider these.”<sup>27</sup>

**22. We support the withdrawal of Best Value Performance Indicators which relate to the old standards of fire cover but we are concerned that there are no plans to introduce performance indicators or measures relating to risk management. We recommend that Government introduce measures which will provide real assessment of the proposed changes. If Government needs time to develop new metrics, it should introduce interim indicators which could be optimised as they evolve.**

**23. If, as proposed in the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework, the Fire Service takes on a statutory rescue role, we would expect Government to introduce performance measures inclusive of non-fire incidents where the Fire Service has played a rescue role.**

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<sup>26</sup> Qq 464-7 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Mr Bennett, Chairman ODPM Select Committee]

<sup>27</sup> Ev 165 [The Local Government Association]

24. We welcome the introduction of a Best Value Performance Indicator that will measure the number of deliberate fires, but given that prevention of fire is a key element of the White Paper, the decision to set less ambitious targets aimed at reducing fires is inconsistent. As we highlighted in our report on the Department's Annual Report and Accounts 2003, we are disappointed that the Government has relaxed its target to cut down the number of deliberate fires and extended the time available to meet the targets on accidental fire-related deaths. We are concerned that Government did not consult sufficiently with relevant parties before relaxing the targets.

## 3 Investment for Reform

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### Transitional Funding

25. Several submissions highlighted concerns over how the proposals outlined in the White Paper were to be funded without additional resources:

“The scale of reform facing the Service, as has been identified, is considerable, easily matching that of other public services, and yet no "pump priming" fund, or other investment for the future has been made available. It is apparent that no other public service has had the expectation of major reform without investment. For example, in health and education, substantial money has been made available to produce change and modernisation, recognising the long-term benefits of reform. The Chancellor, in a number of budget speeches, has used the expression “investment in return for reform”. Whilst it is clear that the Government and National Employers expect savings to be realised, in support of the 16% pay increases for firefighters, at this stage it is very unclear how those savings will be achieved. Certainly, the speculative timetable for the legislative reform necessary, even to start to enable change, means that few savings will be realised in year one, i.e. 2004-05.”<sup>28</sup>

In oral evidence the President of Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers’ Association added:

“Other than for UK resilience etc, I am not aware that any money has been put up yet or received by any Fire Authorities, although there is a promise of transitional funding *that has to be paid back* for the pay award etc. We have concerns but, prior to this period of dispute/unrest, as a combined committee that looks at the finance of the Fire Service as an expenditure forecasting group, which has Treasury, ODPM, local councillors and CACFOA sat upon it, we have a funding gap recognised of approximately £145 million a year in the Service. That has not gone away, and that is why we are saying in our evidence we believe we need more than just a little bit of transitional funding to bring about improvements in community safety.”<sup>29</sup>

26. The Committee questioned Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chair of the Local Government Association, about availability of resources. He reiterated the need for up-front, short-term investment to fund the transitional period:

“There is likely to be some more money needed initially. For example, if you are going to encourage co-responding and the use of defibrillators you have actually got to provide the equipment and there is a cost to that. If you are going to establish joint control rooms, perhaps on a regional basis or jointly with other services - and I think the general feeling now is a more regional basis rather than necessarily linking to police and ambulance services - that is going to involve capital investment in terms of specialist equipment. There is some up-front money needed. Over time it is estimated that other changes will lead to some significant savings. If you rationalise

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<sup>28</sup> Ev 75 [The Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers’ Association (CACFOA)]

<sup>29</sup> Q 189 [Mr Ord, President, The Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers’ Association (CACFOA)] [*Emphasis added*]

control room operations, for example, there will be a saving there. There will be a saving on the new risk based basis if you equate the manpower on duty with the actual risks. It will take time to build up. The Bain forecast leads to £165 million annual savings in the third year, and that is where the transitional money will come in. The other aspect of the current arrangement, of course, is that retained firefighters are - perhaps not before time - being properly recognised in the pay structure and there is obviously a differential impact on the finances of authorities which are more heavily dependent on retained firefighters than full time fire fighters (that is in mostly rural areas). It is partly a question of investing to save and better, more efficient management of the resources which ought not necessarily lead overall - after the transitional period - to the need for larger resources.”<sup>30</sup>

27. The draft National Fire and Rescue Framework proposes joint regional fire control rooms, as Sir Jeremy highlighted in his evidence. The draft Framework suggests some capital support will be made available to fund these:

“For resilience purposes, all regional control rooms should operate the same call-handling and mobilisation technology, procured and paid for by ODPM. Where appropriate, ODPM should ensure the provision of accommodation for the regional control rooms through supported capital expenditure.”<sup>31</sup>

In addition, the Government have made £30 million available to cover transitional costs, to be recovered over a three year period. The Minister commented in evidence:

“Sir Jeremy Beecham has made it quite clear on a number of occasions that he regards the £30 million provision that we have made available as a fully satisfactory arrangement to enable the fire authorities to implement the arrangements that were set out both in the Bain Report and our White Paper and indeed in the agreement they reached with the Fire Brigades Union.”<sup>32</sup>

28. However Sir Jeremy’s apparent confidence is not consistent with the evidence we received from individual Fire Authorities and Services. For example, Cheshire Fire Authority commented:

“Despite Cheshire’s success in safety over a number of years, we have continued to be penalised through the funding mechanism. Additionally, the pension crisis is not really addressed at all in the White Paper. Whilst it is ‘neat’ to pass across the surface of these issues, and focus on the medium to longer term efficiencies which are possible, the reality is that significant savings are simply not achievable in the short term, because fire authorities will not have the appropriate means and powers to achieve these savings whilst a large pay rise will need to be met.”<sup>33</sup>

29. An additional concern is the capital funding investment which Integrated Risk Management Plans may reveal. Sir Jeremy Beecham highlighted the importance of

<sup>30</sup> Q 297 [Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chair, Local Government Association]

<sup>31</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p2.13

<sup>32</sup> Q 410 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>33</sup> Ev 68 [Cheshire Fire Authority]

Integrated Risk Management Plans, which are expected to bring about long term savings “Of course this is critically dependent on the Risk Management Plans; that is the cornerstone of the whole exercise.”<sup>34</sup> Although Integrated Risk Management Plans may produce savings in the long term, in the short term they may reveal additional capital costs. Integrated Risk Management Plans will review the location of firefighters, stations and appliances. If they reveal, for example, that a station is inappropriately located, costs will be incurred in relocating the station according to the change in risk.

30. In oral evidence the Minister told the Committee that no new funding for capital investment would be available because he had received no evidence “that there is insufficient capital available to deal with new investment.”<sup>35</sup> The draft Framework does not mention additional support for such expenditure. Few Fire Authorities have yet completed consultation on their Integrated Risk Management Plans. However should capital cost shortfalls be identified, Mr Raynsford has promised to look “very closely” at evidence presented to him.<sup>36</sup>

**31. As with any public service undergoing a substantial period of reform, there must be funds available to secure the Service during the transitional period. Government has promised £30 million of transitional funding to fund the pay award, but Fire Authorities will have to pay this back from savings generated through the Integrated Risk Management Process. It remains to be seen whether the expected savings will be realised. Chief Fire Officers and Authorities, especially those in rural areas, appear doubtful. Combined Authorities, who are able to raise funds locally will be prevented from doing so by the possible cap on local taxation.**

**32. Many of the proposals in the White Paper are based on the implementation of Integrated Risk Management Plans. If the philosophy behind these plans is to be practically supported, Authorities must make Government aware of their capital requirements, and Government must respond swiftly, making additional capital investment available if necessary.**

## Distribution of funding

33. Integrated Risk Management Plans will mean “each fire brigade can tailor its resources to the risks within its area and we believe that that will lead to a better match of resources to risk and will help very much in our primary objective which is to save lives and reduce the number of people who are injured as a result of fire.”<sup>37</sup> However Integrated Risk Management Plans will not lead to a redistribution of resources between different Authorities and Services across the country.

34. The draft Framework recognises that costs and savings of the White Paper’s proposals will not be equal; “The costs and savings of modernisation may fall unevenly across Fire

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<sup>34</sup> Q 297 [Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chair, Local Government Association]

<sup>35</sup> Q 407 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>36</sup> Q 408 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>37</sup> Q 391 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

and Rescue Authorities.”<sup>38</sup> We were told by the Chief Fire Officers of Merseyside and Cheshire that there are likely to be larger savings in urban Metropolitan areas because of the historic pattern of fire cover, and fewer savings in rural areas:

“I think that part of the issue is that we start from different positions. When we started as a Fire Service in 1974 those fire brigades were brought together; it was an expensive combination of fire brigades and continues to be expensive.”<sup>39</sup>

“I think there is a reality that the resources and costs of a fire service largely reflect the number of people it employs to ride the big red shiny fire engines. Cities and metropolitan areas have lots and lots of them because that was the basis of the old standard of fire cover. Shire counties and more rural areas have a much more dispersed fire risk and are therefore are able to deploy resources differently.”<sup>40</sup>

35. Some witnesses believe that rural areas, with higher percentages of retained firefighters, will face higher costs because of the new pay structure for the retained service. The South-West Forum representing eight Fire Authorities told us:

“It has been widely acknowledged by observers such as the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, Secretary of State [*sic*], Nick Raynsford, Sir Jeremy Beecham and John Ransford of the LGA that the savings to be realised through modernisation will not be consistently spread across English and Welsh fire authorities. The Integrated Risk Management Plan approach to the provision of fire cover has paradoxically on the one hand been seen to be the catalyst for the change which would produce savings but at the same time has been widely reported by Government and National Employers as a mechanism to “improve public safety”. We believe that the scope for the realisation of savings in South West fire brigades is extremely limited.”<sup>41</sup>

36. Other witnesses argued by contrast that services with fewer retained personnel will encounter greater cost because of the higher pay settlement for wholtime firefighters. The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority argued that they face additional costs as the service for a capital city: “LFEPFA would wish to see a new revenue grant distribution mechanism which takes account of true risk, including those risks relating to terrorism/resilience and other capital city issues. This is not as simple as a shift nationally in resources from urban to rural areas given the factors above.”<sup>42</sup>

37. The situation will be compounded by the distribution mechanism for the £30million of transitional funding that has been made available. In England this funding will “be distributed as grant pro rata to the existing Fire Formula Spending Share.”<sup>43</sup> Table Three reveals the disparities in the current funding. Merseyside spends the most per capita, yet has the highest fatality rate. The number of fatalities is so small that the difference is not

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<sup>38</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 7.7

<sup>39</sup> Q 32 [Mr A McGuirk, Chief Fire Officer of Merseyside Fire Service and Trustee of Friends of Merseyside Fire Service]

<sup>40</sup> Q 37 [Mr S McGuirk, Chief Fire Officer, Cheshire Fire Service]

<sup>41</sup> Ev 55-56 [The South West Forum of Fire Authorities]

<sup>42</sup> Ev 144 [The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPFA)]

<sup>43</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 7.6

statistically significant, yet the funding for broadly similar areas, like Merseyside and Manchester, is very different. Moreover, transitional funds will be recovered through reduction of the 2005/6 local government finance settlement for Authorities with responsibility for Fire Services. As the draft Framework acknowledges, “This would inevitably give rise to at least some difference between the amount of transitional funding that authorities receive and the amount later being deducted.”<sup>44</sup> Government recognises the inequalities in such a system, but appears unsure how to address them, commenting, “The Government is willing to consider any alternative mechanisms that can be identified.”<sup>45</sup>

**Table Three: Costs of a Fire Service in three Metropolitan areas compared to fatalities for 2000<sup>46</sup>**

Source: Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, *Fire Service Statistics 2000*, 2002, p 16-17

Metropolitan Fire Authorities	Net expenditure per 1000 population Apr 2000-Mar 2001 (excluding capital charges*)	Number of Fatalities in year 2000	Number of Fatalities per million population in year 2000
Greater Manchester	33,103	26	10
Merseyside	41,292	26	19
London F&EPA	38,736	56	8

**38. It is right that the Government recognises the problems with the current Fire Formula Spending Share. We welcome the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework’s proposal to create a working group, including Local Government Association and Fire Authorities’ members, to examine the current formula. However the draft Framework suggests that any changes to the formula would not come into effect until 2005/6. In the meantime, we are concerned that some Fire Authorities may have insufficient resources to implement change as a result of the current arrangements. Furthermore, we are very concerned that the Government’s proposals to recover transitional funding are**

<sup>44</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 7.6

<sup>45</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 7.6

<sup>46</sup> Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, *Fire Service Statistics 2000*, 2002, p 16-17. Data from 2000 is the most recent actual, as opposed to predicted, data available at time of writing.

**inequitable. In response to this report Government should outline membership and progress of the working group, and should demonstrate the efforts made to explore alternative ways of recovering transitional funding.**

## 4 Integrated Risk Management Plans

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### The Philosophy

39. The current standards of fire cover were set in the 1930s. These national standards dictate staffing levels, the location of firefighters, stations and appliances. This means that when a fire breaks out, a set number of appliances are dispatched in a set timeframe. Fire cover is based on buildings: the more built-up an area is, the more fire cover. The White Paper proposes to replace this nationally prescribed system with a locally assessed risk based approach: “[...] we will require locally generated plans for preventing and responding to fires and other emergencies, based on an assessment of risk.”<sup>47</sup> Each Fire Authority has to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan which includes long-term targets and objectives: “Authorities will take on new responsibilities for making judgements about the risks within their area, the balance between prevention and intervention, and for determining response standards and resource allocation.”<sup>48</sup>

40. The move to a risk based approach is welcomed by most: “At least 50 per cent, if not more, of fire fatalities are actually dead long before the Fire Service is even called. There has been evidence on that. What IRMP enables us to do is to move our resources into the area of prevention rather than just a different way of responding.”<sup>49</sup> Although the Fire Brigades’ Union is not convinced, believing that Integrated Risk Management Plans could lead to a ‘postcode lottery’ of fire cover. It notes:

“In the absence of any national guidance, which would guide a particular authority to give a minimum response to ensure whether your house was on fire in Somerset or the middle of London there is some sort of minimum weight of response (as we call it) then there is a real danger, with or without our opposition, that plans could get through which effectively mean you do get a different level of service or response - bearing in mind we are not talking about delivering a normal service, this is often about whipping people out of their bedrooms at three in the morning. We see that it would depend where you live, as opposed to a professional or technical analysis of what is required in terms of the Fire Service. Yes, we have coined that phrase it could be a “postcode” led Fire Service. It is a very real fear we have, which we hope is not realised but we do genuinely believe that with some sort of national strategy or national guidance to assist Fire Authorities in that process, that could be avoided, but at the moment that is not what is going to be pursued, I understand.”<sup>50</sup>

41. This criticism was rejected by the Minister who commented:

“Your Chairman’s opening questions focused on the existing postcode lottery in terms of the wide variations between fire brigades in terms of the current expenditure patterns and I, in my evidence, highlighted some of the consequences of

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<sup>47</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 3.29

<sup>48</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 3.30

<sup>49</sup> Q 181 [Mr S McGuirk, Chief Fire Officer, Cheshire Fire Service]

<sup>50</sup> Q 221 [Mr Gilchrist, General Secretary, The Fire Brigades’ Union (FBU)]

the existing standards that require far greater response to certain types of risk than others even though those Category A risks may not involve any risk to life at all and the importance, as I have stressed all the way through, is to focus the whole Service on reducing the number of fires, the number of people who are killed by fires and the number of people who are injured by fires as well as obviously meeting the other, wider responsibilities of the Fire and Rescue Service. That, in our view, is the right way forward and that is why Integrated Risk Management Plans are being introduced and we believe that it is a much more appropriate basis for meeting those risks than standards which date back 40 or 50 years and which are based on property rather than risk to life.”<sup>51</sup>

**42. Though widely accepted as outdated, the current nationally prescribed standards of fire cover are easy to explain, understand and apply. The Government proposes to replace them with a life-risk based approach where individual Fire Authorities will devise Integrated Risk Management Plans to determine local fire cover. The Committee welcomes the introduction of Integrated Risk Management Plans, and believes that moving to a life-risk assessed approach to fire cover can only improve public safety. However if Integrated Risk Management Plans are implemented, we recommend Government conduct careful scrutiny of their impact, assessing in particular the question of consistency.**

## The Reality

43. Fire Authorities published their draft Integrated Risk Management Plans in September and October 2003. These are open for consultation with local communities until January 2004. Fire Authorities then have 2 months to revise plans before implementation in the financial year 2004/05.<sup>52</sup> Although most stakeholders have welcomed Integrated Risk Management Plans, there is concern that local communities will be less convinced:

“What also needs to be emphasised, though, is that the public reaction to this shift should not be taken for granted as being similarly enthusiastic. There remains the perception that a fire appliance in a nearby station is an “insurance policy” and this provides a sense of reassurance for communities. Changing the public’s attitude towards fire will take a co-ordinated effort and resources beyond the means and control of fire authorities in isolation.”<sup>53</sup>

44. The Committee has been told that the Integrated Risk Management Plans produced for the financial year 2004/5 contain very few changes to the standards of fire cover, or location of stations, appliances and staff. This may be as a result of political pressure from locally elected representatives; it may be difficult for some members of Fire Authorities to implement changes resulting from Integrated Risk Management Plans. Another reason may be the lack of analytical tools available to Fire Services and Authorities. Government have been developing a sophisticated mapping package that will allow Authorities and Services to map out risk, based on locally specific historical data, and then predict the

<sup>51</sup> Q 416 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>52</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 1.5

<sup>53</sup> Ev 73 [The Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers’ Association (CACFOA)]

impact of any changes to fire cover patterns. This package will not be available until March 2004. Without it, there is a lack of evidence for Authorities to justify changes, putting them at risk of legal challenge. Ann Everton, Professor of fire law made reference to this in her evidence:

“It appears that Fire Authorities are to be festooned with duties. With duties come possible, potential legal liabilities. [...] And again, while we are in the arena of the feasibility of legal challenge, we may note the increased vulnerability thereto which is raised by the change from the existing national standards of cover to standards that are locally made and that rest on risk assessment. Whereas the former brings some certainty, the latter brings uncertainty, for it involves not simply adherence, but reason and justification, fields in which there is much more room for dispute.”<sup>54</sup>

**45. Integrated Risk Management Plans could produce the most radical changes to fire cover since the 1930s. However, these changes will only happen if Fire Authorities and Services have real confidence in their proposals and can demonstrate this to others through a strong evidence base and use of analytical tools. These were not provided for the Integrated Risk Management Plans of the financial year 2004/5, however Government must ensure they are available as soon as possible so that Authorities and Services can use them to justify change as they devise their Integrated Risk Management Plans for 2005/6. With sufficient evidence and appropriate tools we hope that Authorities will be more able to propose alternatives to current fire cover patterns. Government must ensure that public misconceptions and political fears do not prevent radical, creative Integrated Risk Management Plans that will improve public safety. We recommend the Government initiate public awareness campaigns to ensure local communities understand why there may be changes in their local Fire Service.**

## Skills

46. Moving from a nationally prescribed standard of fire cover, to a locally devised risk assessed standard will require new skills from Fire Service and Authority members. The Fire Brigades’ Union is concerned that some members may not have the necessary skills:

“If you are going to look at negotiating changes to the Fire Service as a result of an IRMP then you need to know what the risk based approach is all about, and some of it is very much a skills based approach. One of the problems (and this is not being gratuitously critical of senior managers in the Service) is that having had for many, many years quite a prescriptive approach to very quickly move in the way that is suggested without the use of pilots or tests of some of this process, it possibly is going to expect too much of people. I know some of this has been made official, but I think there have been concerns raised by Fire Authority representatives and Chief Officers in their professional capacity to say, “Hang on a minute, you are asking a bit too much, a bit too quickly here”. All we are urging, apart from what we say about the need for national guidance, if you are going to make this move then listen to what

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<sup>54</sup> Ev 136-7 [Ms Ann Everton, Professor of Fire Law]

people inside the Service are saying and do it at the speed we think will best benefit the public.”<sup>55</sup>

47. The introduction of the Integrated Personal Development System provides a mechanism to ensure Fire Service members receive training and advice on developing and implementing Integrated Risk Management Plans. The Fire Service College recognises its role in working with members who may be struggling to adjust to the new methods; “The big advantage that IPDS carries is that it is based almost entirely on assessment of people’s abilities and skills and that will provide a great advantage for us in that we will be able to identify those that are struggling with the modern way of managing the Fire Service and actually help them with that.”<sup>56</sup>

48. In relation to Fire Authority members, Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chair of the Local Government Association believes “there will need to be more training of members, more support for members, but perhaps because the task is likely to become more challenging it should therefore attract more interested members able to take a fresh look at this Service.”<sup>57</sup> He told us that any training needs would be fulfilled through Improvement and Development Agencies.<sup>58</sup>

**49. We are pleased that the Local Government Association and Fire Service institutions recognise that some members will need training in order to develop skills appropriate to their new responsibilities. We recommend that the Government ensure that this training is delivered.**

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<sup>55</sup> Q222 [Mr Gilchrist, General Secretary, The Fire Brigades’ Union (FBU)]

<sup>56</sup> Q 271 [Mr Currie, Chief Executive, Fire Service College]

<sup>57</sup> Q 294 [Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chair, Local Government Association]

<sup>58</sup> Q 295 [Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chair, Local Government Association]

## 5 Prevention

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### Automatic Fire Alarms

50. The Committee received some evidence suggesting that automatic fire alarm systems were responsible for an increasing number of false calls:

“The fire service is responding to an increasing number of false alarms generated by automatic fire detection equipment (although LFEPA is consulting upon a proposal to reduce its response to such calls as part of its Integrated Risk Management Plan). This is a drain on resources, diverting time and effort away from other more important activities, such as community fire safety and education work. It is also a drain on the building occupiers, as their activities are disrupted while the building is evacuated and the cause of the alarm investigated. Our approach is to continue to work closely with building owners and occupiers, and with the alarm companies, to make sure fire alarm systems are correctly designed, installed, commissioned and maintained and to promote good building management practices to reduce the number of false alarms. Fire alarm systems in commercial buildings should conform to the relevant British Standard. Over the years, this standard has evolved and improved but the latest version, which places a duty on alarm providers to reduce false calls, only applies to new and altered systems and there are older systems still in operation to which this duty does not apply. We have previously considered whether allowing fire authorities to charge when repeatedly called out as a result of equipment false alarms would assist in reducing unwanted calls, but recognise the weight of the counter argument that this might prompt the less responsible to turn the equipment off, thus creating more risk to occupants.”<sup>59</sup>

**51. While keen to reinforce the need for adequate fire protection and early detection, we are very concerned about the increasing number of false alarms generated by automatic fire alarms. False alarms cause disruption for property owners, occupiers and the Fire Service, and represent an unnecessary drain on resources. A balanced approach must be taken to reducing the number of false alarms, without deterring use of automatic systems. We recommend the Government establish a working party of all stakeholders to consider how this problem might be tackled. The group should consider whether charging would address the issue.**

### Building Regulations

#### *Sprinklers*

52. The World Fire Statistics Centre estimates that UK property losses from fire total around £1 billion annually. Some of these losses are covered by insurance, although this is not always the case with domestic property; but compensation cannot cover the disruption caused, particularly to schools and businesses.<sup>60</sup> The Association of British Insurers told us that:

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<sup>59</sup> Ev 143 [The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)]

<sup>60</sup> Ev 21 [The World Fire Statistics Centre]

“Fire material damage and related business interruption costs totalled £1.4 billion in the UK in 2002, rising for the third consecutive year. The cost of arson contributes £2.1 billion to the total cost of fire, and insurers estimate that arson results in insurance claims totalling £700 million each year in the UK, much of which is avoidable through the use of appropriate fire suppression and security measures.”<sup>61</sup>

53. Many witnesses believe the most appropriate fire suppression measures are sprinklers;

“LFEPFA has long campaigned for the introduction of domestic sprinklers, on a risk assessed basis, as a means for tackling fires in those residential property, where there is a high risk of death and injury from fire; for example, in sheltered housing and rented older houses in multi-occupation. We therefore welcome the decision by ODPM to commission research to consider their effectiveness when used in residential premises and look forward to early publication of its conclusions. [...] There is already a body of evidence that promotes the use of sprinklers in school buildings. Fires in schools in London, and nationally, 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. In view of the recognised benefits of sprinkler use in such buildings where there is usually a large amount of combustible material present, and the potential for rapid fire spread in the event of a fire, LFEPFA will continue to press for appropriate provision within Building Regulations.”<sup>62</sup>

“We believe that the use of sprinklers elsewhere in the world, especially in residential properties, has shown that a dramatic drop in the number of fatalities from fire is achievable. Given that sprinklers have been around for a number of years now and that standards are available elsewhere, we believe that there is an unacceptable delay in the review of Building regulations and the use of sprinklers, including the advances made in water mist technology. With the proposed Government house building programme for the next few years, there is a unique opportunity to provide fire safe dwellings that we cannot afford to miss.”<sup>63</sup>

“Building regulations have played a key role in reducing fire risk in both public and private buildings. We welcome the renewed commitment to review and to looking at the role played by domestic sprinklers. But we think the government is being too cautious and too slow. Research should be accelerated and the review undertaken as a matter of urgency.”<sup>64</sup>

“We believe that domestic sprinklers and other buildings such as schools should play a key role immediately in the Integrated Risk Management Plans. We regret the White Paper does not suggest this.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> FIR 59

<sup>62</sup> Ev 140 [The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPFA)]

<sup>63</sup> Ev 1 [East Sussex Fire Authority]

<sup>64</sup> Ev 165 [The Local Government Association]

<sup>65</sup> Ev 165 [The Local Government Association]

Apart from increasing public safety, the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority told us that sprinklers increase the safety of firefighters:

“A further concern relates to the protection of firefighters who may have to enter premises to fight fires once they have broken out. Particular problems have arisen in large un-compartmented buildings such as warehouses or large retail outlets, where rapid fire spread can increase the risk to firefighters. We believe that installation of sprinklers in such buildings would reduce these risks.”<sup>66</sup>

54. In the White Paper the Government commented:

“We are reviewing the potential for domestic sprinklers as a means for tackling fires in the home, and we have commissioned research to consider their effectiveness when used in residential premises. We will consider the results of that research in the forthcoming review of the Building Regulations.”<sup>67</sup>

The draft Fire and Rescue National Framework adds to this:

“Early in 2004, the Government will begin a comprehensive review of Approved Document B.<sup>68</sup> In particular we will look at the case for increasing the requirements for automatic sprinklers where risks are greatest, following the successful implementation of a requirement for such installations in large single storey retail buildings with compartments over 200 square metres.”<sup>69</sup>

In oral evidence the Minister explained that the department recognised the contribution sprinklers could make towards fire prevention, but was awaiting evidence on technical issues before coming to a decision:

“We are just coming to the end of a very detailed research programme relating to sprinklers in residential properties. I referred to the work we did earlier on sprinklers in commercial premises where we made a very significant change in the standards just three years ago and we are now completing the research because there needs to be an evidence base for work in this because there are some quite difficult technical issues which must be taken on board before decisions are taken. We certainly see potential contributions sprinklers can make for fire prevention and suppression in a number of circumstances. We want those decisions to be evidence based and we have already announced that there will be a review of Part B of the Building Regulations next year and that will allow that work to be taken forward.<sup>70</sup> [...] I think any decision on sprinklers must be taken on a proper evidence base and I did mention some of the complexities. One of the complexities is ensuring that the water supply is provided in a way that does not expose people to the risk of, for example, legionnaires disease if there was an inadequately maintained supply of water feeding

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<sup>66</sup> Ev 140 [The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)]

<sup>67</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 3.10

<sup>68</sup> Approved Document B (2000, amended 2002) of the Building Regulations deals with fire safety.

<sup>69</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 1.26

<sup>70</sup> Q 432 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

through a sprinkler system. That is a genuine anxiety which has been raised and obviously if you are talking about a population of elderly people, there is particular risk there, so there are technical issues which must be addressed. Those are being looked at the moment through the research programme and we expect to be taking decisions in the coming year in the light of that evidence, but I accept entirely that there is a potential role for sprinklers in certain circumstances and you have highlighted some circumstances where that might be appropriate and there are almost certainly others. I am conscious of the number of arson attacks on schools where very considerable damage has been caused. I am told that the cost of the installation of a sprinkler system could probably be recovered in something less than five years or around five years as a result of reduced insurance premiums. That is clearly a factor which needs to be taken into account and we need to talk to and are already talking to our colleagues in DfES about this issue, but a lot of these issues are being considered and we are going to be making progress, I hope.”<sup>71</sup>

**55. We received overwhelming support for the introduction of sprinkler systems in schools, houses of multiple occupation and the domestic properties of vulnerable groups, such as the elderly. We strongly recommend that in this year's revision of the Building Regulations, Ministers introduce a requirement for sprinklers to be fitted to all new build properties of these types, as this would have more impact on public and firefighter safety, than any other proposal in the White Paper.**

### **Smoke Alarms**

56. The White Paper highlights that; “when domestic fires break out, they can spread so quickly that, by the time the fire brigade arrives, even if it arrives within the five minute target set for highest risk areas under the current standards of fire cover, it can be too late.”<sup>72</sup> Consequently, if a fire does break out, early detection can save lives. The Minister praised the “[...] initiatives taking place in different fire brigades throughout the country in terms of getting more smoke alarms fitted in properties, concentrating on community fire safety work with some of the most vulnerable sections of the community.”<sup>73</sup> Analysis of fire deaths and injuries before and after the introduction of these initiatives proves that a functioning smoke alarm can save lives, as Good Practice Example Two demonstrates. The Association of British Insurers estimates that 81% of homes have smoke alarms.<sup>74</sup> There have been sustained high-profile media campaigns to increase smoke alarm ownership, and to encourage people to test their smoke alarms regularly.

57. The Building Regulations “ensure that new buildings, and alterations and extensions to existing buildings, incorporate reasonable measures to protect people from fire, such as, for example, the provision of hard-wire, interlinked smoke alarms in new buildings.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Q 434 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>72</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 3.2

<sup>73</sup> Q 392 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>74</sup> FIR 59

<sup>75</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 3.9

However, there is no requirement for landlords to install smoke alarms in existing properties, a situation some believe is unhelpful:

“I would like to see it a requirement for all tenanted property, for example, to have smoke alarms. That is not of course in itself a sufficient measure, but it would certainly be helpful. A number of authorities - including my own - are installing smoke alarms free of charge in all council properties. This could be extended to all rented properties, I suggest. There are measures like that which need to complement the day to day activities of the Service in terms of prevention.”<sup>76</sup>

**58. We believe that functioning smoke alarms save lives and reduce injuries. The Committee congratulates those Fire Services which operate initiatives to fit free smoke alarms for the vulnerable. We welcome the requirement for alarms to be hard-wired in alterations, extensions and new buildings. We recommend this requirement be extended to include all existing tenanted properties, housing of multiple occupation and housing for vulnerable members of society. If the design of such buildings makes installation of hard-wired alarms impossible, we recommend use of alarms fitted with 10 year batteries.**

## Role of the Voluntary Sector

59. The White Paper does not visualise a role for the voluntary sector in its outline of a modernised Fire and Rescue Service. The Friends of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service are critical of this omission:

“The Independent Review of the Fire Service, carried out by Sir George Bain identified the need for the fire service to engage in partnership working with a range of agencies to enhance its community fire safety work. The Government’s target is to increase voluntary & community sector activity, including increased community participation, by 5% no later than 2006 and it in turn looks to the voluntary sector to reform the operation of public services in the 21st Century. In addition, the Government has reacted positively by allocating funds to create the concept of “future builders”. Almost all public services including the emergency services have some form of voluntary arm contributing their time to assist in providing a service to the local community. The fire service, except in the most remote rural areas of the UK do not engage local volunteers. [...] Merseyside Fire Authority has acted positively upon previous Government initiatives and targets generated in 2000, which specify the need to increase voluntary sector activity within public services in order of enhancing its’ ability to achieve corporate objectives of reducing deaths and injury as a result of fire [*sic*]. Coupled with the matched funding allocation provided by the Home Office Active Community Unit, the Friends of Merseyside Fire Service has been developed in advance of the proposed National Fire & Rescue Framework and introduction of integrated risk management plans. The Friends of Merseyside Fire Service has satisfied thus far the targets set by the Home Office Active Community Unit and has received plaudits from within the Fire Service for its rapid development and success. However, disappointingly, its current contribution and potential future contributions by volunteers, has not been recognized within the

<sup>76</sup> Q 296 [Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chair, Local Government Association]

proposals outlined in the White Paper. [...] The White Paper suggests that the Fire and Rescue Service should develop its engagement of stakeholders to contribute fully to its modernization. Again, to clarify, it fails to recognise the potential for voluntary sector involvement as a potential development opportunity.”<sup>77</sup>

60. In 1996 Assistant Fire-master Robert Coke conducted international research into the use of volunteer firefighters. He concluded that the use of volunteers in the United Kingdom would “increase greatly” the efficiency and effectiveness of the Fire Service.<sup>78</sup> The submission from the Friends of Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service highlights successful examples of volunteering from abroad:

“Volunteering with the Fire Service is a new concept in the United Kingdom but has been very successful in other countries, for example USA. The United States has pursued and developed a volunteering culture historically. The Friends Charity conducted internal research in Fairfax Fire & Rescue, Virginia, USA on available volunteer opportunities in the USA. Volunteers carry out roles, which are a mixture of operational and administrative roles. Nearby Arlington Fire & Rescue have volunteers which are all non-operational. Historically, the fire & rescue service in Fairfax was voluntary and later developed in to a mixture of a paid and voluntary service. The non-operational roles involve the promotion of fire safety, the installation of car baby seats and the running of a canteen service. The canteen service encourages the integration of both paid and volunteer staff in an emergency scenario. Arlington Fire & Rescue had many volunteers undertaking several administrative roles and the promotion of fire safety issues. Policies and procedures have been developed and assisted in the creation of some of those at the Friends of Merseyside Fire Service. In addition, Fairfax Fire & Rescue are currently liaising with the Friends Charity to assist in the creation of a canteen service in Merseyside.”<sup>79</sup>

The Minister appears to recognise the potential: “So this is an area where there is scope to do more but I would not take a wholly negative view that there has not been any provision at all.”<sup>80</sup>

**61. We recommend that the Government make more effort to encourage partnership between the voluntary sector and the Fire Service. Volunteers can be especially useful in promoting fire safety awareness in hard to reach communities. Bilingual advocates have been used successfully to access communities where English is not the first language.**

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<sup>77</sup> Ev 161 [The Friends of Merseyside Fire Service]

<sup>78</sup> Coke, RD, *The use of volunteer firefighters in Metropolitan Areas*, BCC project, Fire Service College, 1996

<sup>79</sup> Ev 161 [The Friends of Merseyside Fire Service]

<sup>80</sup> Q 468 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

## 6 Response

### Control Rooms

62. The draft Framework clarified the White Paper's proposals for Regional Control Rooms. The Government has accepted the conclusions of the Mott MacDonald and HM Fire Service Inspectorate reports<sup>81</sup> into control room efficiency, and has outlined proposals for nine regional fire control rooms instead of the current 49 local level ones.<sup>82</sup> Regional control rooms are expected to bring economies of scale in call handling, addressing the current disparities shown in Table Five.

<b>Table Five: Examples of Brigade Cost per Incident</b> <sup>83</sup>			
Source: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, <i>Our Fire and Rescue Service</i> , Cm 5808, June 2003, Table 3			
<b>Brigade</b>	<b>Control Room Employee Expenditure</b>	<b>Incidents</b>	<b>Employee Cost per Incident</b>
London FEPA	£3,090,125	176,308	£18
West Midlands	£1,576,638	57,972	£27
West Yorkshire	£1,252,317	42,258	£30
Lincolnshire	£587,041	7,148	£82
Northumberland	£464,048	5,085	£91
Isle of Wight	£331,037	1,976	£168

63. Regional Management Boards, which are to be formed before 1 April 2004, will be responsible for establishing Regional Control Rooms by September 2007. The draft Framework includes a commitment for some capital support from Government:

“For resilience purposes, all regional control rooms should operate the same call-handling and mobilisation technology, procured and paid for by ODPM. Where appropriate, ODPM should ensure the provision of accommodation for the regional control rooms through supported capital expenditure.”<sup>84</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Mott MacDonald, *The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales*, April 2003; Mott MacDonald, *The Future of Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales, Update 2003*, December 2003; HM Fire Service Inspectorate, *Analysis of the Best Value Reviews of Control and Communications*, November 2003

<sup>82</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p2.10-2.16

<sup>83</sup>Data from 2000/1 figures

<sup>84</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p2.13

64. It is evident from the draft Framework that Government is not proposing to create integrated fire, police and ambulance control rooms. We received evidence supporting integrated control rooms from the South-West Forum, but all the other evidence we received highlighted concerns about such integration:

“The FBU has a long-standing policy in favour of dedicated Fire Service Control Rooms, which give specialist, technical and health and safety advice, as opposed to simply dispatching services. For example, fire survival guidance is given until the arrival of emergency crews, information on chemicals and other hazardous substances is given to members of the public and other emergency services and information is conveyed to firefighters while at the scene of the incident. These skills are crucial to saving the lives of the public and protecting firefighters and property. Any move to joint emergency service control rooms would need to take this specialist role into consideration if a diminution of service is to be avoided. Any change on this front must also be balanced against the possibility of a loss in function, for example, from terrorist attack, systems or power failures, where all emergency services could be lost at the same time. The Government’s own Mott Macdonald report [2000] advised against the establishment of joint emergency service control rooms.”<sup>85</sup>

65. The reactions we received to the proposals for regional fire control rooms were mixed. The most common concern was that larger scale control rooms would suffer from the loss of the local geographical knowledge of the control room operators. There was concern that a person reporting a fire may not be familiar with an area and unable to provide full geographical details. In this situation a control room operator with local knowledge might be able to recognise the location. In a regional control room, there would be less chance of assistance from the operator who would be unlikely to know the geography of the local area. Sir George Bain refutes these concerns:

“Well, there has been quite a bit of work done on this. First of all, there is obviously a question of how large, etc., and I am not competent to get into that, but I would point to a few things. [...] Secondly, as I understand it, local knowledge, etc., is not all that important. It is not the fact that somebody knows where Fox Lane is, down this corner and around here, etc. This is all very much computerised with very, very big systems and local knowledge is not a particularly critical aspect of it.”<sup>86</sup>

**66. The Committee accepts that integrated Fire Service regional control rooms will provide increased cost-effectiveness. However, in response to this report we recommend that the Government set out in detail what resources will be available to fund regional facilities, equipment and systems. In order to ensure regional operators’ lack of local geographical knowledge will not reduce their efficiency, we expect all Fire Services to use Global Positioning Systems. In addition we recommend utilisation of technology to identify the location of individuals reporting fires, verifying the accuracy of the geographical information provided.**

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<sup>85</sup> Ev 91 [The Fire Brigades’ Union (FBU)]

<sup>86</sup> Q 388 [Sir George Bain, Chairman of the Independent Review of the Fire Service]

## Co-responder Schemes

67. Under a “co-responder” scheme firefighters, when first to arrive at an incident, can administer first-aid in the absence of a paramedic. This entails training of firefighters in basic life-support skills, including use of automated defibrillators. We received several submissions supporting co-responder schemes. We also learnt of the impact one such scheme had: “A retained sub-officer in Devon who has been in 32 years said to me, “I have never ever saved a life in a fire but, in the last three years, we have been doing a co-responder scheme and I have saved four lives.”<sup>87</sup>

68. In the White Paper the Government boldly states that it wants “to see more co-responder partnerships developed and implemented more quickly”.<sup>88</sup> The draft Fire and Rescue Service National Framework adds little further information:

“The aim of an emergency response is to reduce deaths and the number and severity of injuries. If outcomes can be improved by adapting services or working with other service providers this should be pursued. For example, some authorities are already using defibrillation equipment which could save the lives of people who have suffered heart attacks. Fire and Rescue Authorities should therefore explore the benefits of implementing first an/or co-responder schemes.”<sup>89</sup>

69. Witnesses have criticised the lack of support for co-responder schemes in the White Paper. A former member of the Fire Service commented:

“There was almost no mention of medical co-responder work by the fire service in the White Paper. Bain recommended this development yet it appears only once in the White Paper, and then rather tentatively, in the box on page 31 referring to collaboration with other emergency services, the suggestion being it would only apply where the fire service attends a fire or other non-fire incident to which it would otherwise have been called. I feel the introduction of this work is surely fundamental to the future of the fire service because, if increased fire safety/prevention activity is successful, over the next 10 to 15 years the number of actual fire calls should decline to the point where it may be difficult to justify a fire service in its present form. In contrast the White Paper makes much mention of formalising existing fire service involvement in non-fire emergencies, environmental assistance and potential terrorist related work but these activities, while important, are relatively infrequent. Medical co-responder work is virtually the norm in the United States and Canadian fire services and works well, providing rapid assistance pending the arrival of an ambulance. In this country a handful of rural retained stations and one wholtime station have successfully undertaken this work which could be extended throughout the country – both wholtime and retained stations – to provide trained assistance to an overstretched ambulance service.”<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Q 146 [Mr Chadbon, National General Secretary, The Retained Firefighters' Union (RFU)]

<sup>88</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, 'Collaborative Working' box

<sup>89</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 3.13-3.14

<sup>90</sup> Ev 17 [W F Hickin, Former member of the Fire Service]

**70. We believe the Government should be conducting further research into the potential benefits of co-responder schemes, which give Fire Service personnel the training and equipment to deliver basic life-support skills when first to arrive at an incident. Introduction of such schemes nationwide would be dependent on securing partnership with the local ambulance service, and provision of equipment and training.**

## Charging

71. A Fire Authority currently has the power to charge for work that their Fire Service does which is not related to fire or other emergencies.<sup>91</sup> Use of this power is inconsistent across the country. For example, Greater Manchester Fire Service told us: “We have a policy for recovering costs wherever possible which I think is right, firstly to drive down unnecessary calls and ask people to go and seek help from other agencies. Wherever we use certain of our equipment on special service calls where there is no risk of fire and no risk to life, we actually recover our costs then.”<sup>92</sup>

72. The White Paper proposes that Fire Authorities retain this ability: “This power will continue, and we will consult more widely if there is any proposal to extend it.”<sup>93</sup> Opinion is divided over the extension of the power to charge. Some witnesses told us that once the Fire Service has a statutory duty to respond to a wider range of incidents, there will be greater need [and ability] for the Service to be able to charge for responding to some types of incident, particularly incidents where costs covered by recovered through insurance:

“The LGA believes that in general the service should not charge for core activities, which would mean that in future charging would not be applicable to a wider range of incidents. The exception would be road traffic accidents, where we have supported an examination of the feasibility of recovering costs from insurance companies.”<sup>94</sup>

“NHS hospitals giving treatment to a road accident casualty have the power to charge under the Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Act 1999 if an injured person makes an insurance claim arising from the accident. The amounts payable are fixed by regulations under the Act. We believe that, where the public now expects the fire service to attend and provide assistance at such accidents, we should be able to levy a charge in a similar way as the NHS hospitals. Indeed, it might be appropriate and economic for one body to collect the charges recovered by both sectors.”<sup>95</sup>

73. In addition to charging for response, some witnesses suggest extension of the power to charge for ‘non-response’ activities, such as the provision of advice on risk assessment. The White Paper’s proposed simplification of fire safety legislation, through a Regulatory Reform Order, will require building owners or occupiers to take responsibility for carrying out fire risk assessments and taking any necessary action to minimise the risks identified

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<sup>91</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 3.24

<sup>92</sup> Q 24 [Mr Dixon, County Fire Officer and Chief Executive, Greater Manchester County Fire Service]

<sup>93</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 3.24

<sup>94</sup> Ev 166 [The Local Government Association]

<sup>95</sup> Ev 143 [The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)]

during those assessments. This will apply to any premises used as places of work and/or to which the public has access. Government is keen for building owners/occupiers to complete risk assessments “in house” to promote ownership, limit financial implications and develop in-house knowledge through appropriate training. However, some people are likely to employ advisors and contractors to advise, supply and fit fire safety systems and equipment. The demand for such advisors is therefore anticipated to increase substantially from Spring 2004 when the Regulatory Reform Order is likely to come before Parliament. Fire Authorities will be unable to enter this market because under the Fire Services Act 1947 Fire Authorities are precluded from charging for services, except where specifically authorised.

74. The new Order will expect Fire Authorities to inspect premises to ensure fire safety risks have been identified and any necessary action taken. The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority believes that Authorities should be able to charge for this activity:

“This regime will, in our estimation, far outstrip the current workload under the fire certification process. This presents a major resourcing issue that must be addressed if our enforcement activity is to be anywhere near the level needed to fully/properly protect Londoners. We believe that provision of powers to charge for providing advice on risk assessment to help building owners/occupiers meet their responsibilities under the reformed fire safety legislation is fully justified. Currently we are allowed to recover part of the costs of activities such as fire certification and petroleum licensing and approximately £700,000 was raised by this means in 2000; this helps resource the fire prevention work we do (being the equivalent of some 25 firefighters). The principle of making charges is well established elsewhere. For example, applicants for building control permissions, liquor licences and petroleum licenses currently pay fees. LFEPA accepts that the concept of free advice is deeply rooted in the fire service ethic and has come to be expected by the public and business. But circumstances are changing rapidly and the range and reach of fire safety regulatory control is set to be greater than at any time in the past. More specifically: self-regulation is strengthening the concept of “do-it-yourself” “buying-in” professional skills where necessary. This means that safety is at last becoming accepted as an essential component of business activity that carries an overhead like anything else. This principle already applies in relation to general health and safety legislation: which operates on the same risk based self-compliance regime which is now proposed for fire safety legislation. In these circumstances, we believe that powers to charge for providing advice to building owners/occupiers in how they meet their new responsibilities becomes a practical and reasonable way to help support the expanding duties of fire authorities.”<sup>96</sup>

75. However, the Association of British Insurers argues that the business sector should be included in Fire Services statutory community fire safety work:

“Insurers are anxious that terms such as Community Fire Safety should include business and the voluntary sector, rather than the narrower definition that has been used to date in many parts of the country. Around 8 in 10 large fire losses occur in businesses with less than £100 million annual turnover. It is unlikely that many of

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<sup>96</sup> Ev 140-1 [The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)]

these businesses have in-house risk management expertise. This has implications for the promotion of fire prevention in businesses, particularly as regulatory reform leads to the new risk based approach to statutory inspections.”<sup>97</sup>

76. Government is visibly reluctant to come to any view on the issue of charging. In oral evidence the Minister commented:

“Well, this is one of the very few areas where we probably have not fully gone along with the Bain Review recommendations. Bain suggested that there was scope for a very substantial increase in revenue through charging. There are complex issues here and there are risks of deterring people from taking necessary safety measures if they decide that the cost is prohibitive and our wish is that each fire authority should consider carefully where there is a genuine and legitimate case for a charge that will not inhibit action to improve fire safety, but not pursue charging schemes that might have an adverse impact on that more important, wider objective.”<sup>98</sup>

He added:

“We want fire authorities to learn from the experience of their neighbours and other fire authorities and we do want this to develop in a pragmatic way in which the scope for charges is not removed or prevented, but where our primary objective remains on preventing fires and that there are not any artificial changes introduced that could inhibit that objective.”<sup>99</sup>

**77. We believe there needs to be more research conducted on the potential for Fire Authorities to charge for activities of the Fire Service. As the statutory role of the Service expands, we expect Government to support Authorities as they seek to recoup costs. The NHS can reclaim costs from insurers for treatment of Road Traffic Accident victims. It is possible this scheme could be extended to allow Fire Authorities to do the same. In relation to non-response work, we agree with the Minister that care must be taken not to inhibit action which improves fire safety. However, the Fire Service contains a wealth of knowledge and expertise and it makes sense for Fire Services to provide advice on risk assessed fire safety. Government should undertake consultation to explore whether the Fire Service should charge for this activity.**

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<sup>97</sup> FIR 64

<sup>98</sup> Q 438 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>99</sup> Q439 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

## 7 Institutional Arrangements

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### Regionalisation

78. The draft Fire and Rescue National Framework stresses the importance of “developing local solutions to local needs”.<sup>100</sup> It goes on to emphasise: “This is not a national blueprint. Giving Fire and Rescue Authorities the flexibility they need to meet the specific needs of their local communities is at the heart of the Government’s approach. The Framework is designed to give authorities a firm foundation on which to build local solutions.”<sup>101</sup> However, the Government believes “there are some challenges to which local Fire and Rescue Authorities working in isolation do not have the capacity to provide an efficient and effective service.”<sup>102</sup> These challenges include responding to terrorist incidents, training and procurement. To deal with these “specialist areas”, the Government proposes Regional Fire and Rescue Authorities for those areas of England that vote in a referendum to establish elected regional assemblies. This arrangement will be similar to the system in London where the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority comprises members of, and is overseen by, the Greater London Assembly. Elected regional assemblies will not be established before 2006. In the meantime, and for those areas that will not have elected regional assemblies, Regional Fire and Rescue management boards are to be established.

79. The key argument in the White Paper for a regional approach appears to be cost efficiency:

“Such a regional approach will ensure that service improvement and also greater savings are achieved from regional fire control rooms, from reducing waste in other areas—for example, procurement, training and vehicle maintenance—as well as from rationalising management effort. The Independent Review of the Fire Service estimated that savings of the order of £42 million over the first three years could be achieved in these areas alone. In due course, as elected regional assemblies are established, there will also be savings from regionalisation in terms of reducing the bureaucratic overhead as the number of authorities is reduced. These savings would be over and above those identified by the Independent Review, and so can be recycled into increased fire-prevention measures.”<sup>103</sup>

80. The White Paper does not explain how a regional approach would improve public safety, and help Government achieve its Service Delivery Agreement targets. Nor does it provide evidence that a regional approach would reduce bureaucratic overheads. It has indeed been suggested overheads could increase as an additional level of bureaucracy is added. The Local Government Association is sceptical:

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<sup>100</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 2.1

<sup>101</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 5

<sup>102</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 2.2

<sup>103</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 4.19

“We are somewhat apprehensive about the concept in the White Paper of effectively regionalising the Service in those areas which first of all have elected regional assemblies simply because much of the effort is going to depend on very close local working with other local authority services, not least on the building regulation side. Again, if you are going to engage members in that and make sure there is political accountability and drive there, it seems to us that it is more likely to take place at a more local level than at a regional level. We do have reservations about that. We also have a reservation about whether it might prove a distraction in terms of delivering what has to be done in such a comprehensive way on Risk Management and all the rest of the White Paper proposals if people are looking over their shoulder wondering what the structure is going to be, where their careers are going and so on in the context of regionalisation.”<sup>104</sup>

81. The draft Framework emphasises the importance of local solutions to local needs, and highlights that there is no national blueprint. Yet Fire Services and Authorities appear to have no choice about adopting a regional approach. The White Paper clearly states:

“We hope that such voluntary arrangements will succeed. But if these arrangements do not deliver modernisation quickly, we will use our powers to require combinations of fire authorities, in order to establish regional fire and rescue authorities. We will be strengthening these powers in the forthcoming fire legislation in order to ensure that such combinations can be achieved more quickly than at present, and to allow the Secretary of State to nominate some of the members of the regional combination authorities.”<sup>105</sup>

Cheshire Fire Authority is part of the North West Regional Fire Assembly, and recognises that regionalism can bring significant benefits in terms of efficiency. However they are worried by the imposition of a regional approach; “we do feel that there needs to be a greater recognition of regional and sub-regional variations in culture and community, and there are some pitfalls in trying to force a one-size fits all solution.”<sup>106</sup>

82. The evidence we received was mixed; one organisation was unable to reach a consensus of opinion among its members.<sup>107</sup> Some witnesses were concerned about the prospect of regionalisation;

“We made the point particularly that we welcome the changes but that we regard some of the arguments put forward for things such as regionalisation as scant in evidence and I think we would like to see more of a case made before we take such a fundamental step.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Q 312 [Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chair, Local Government Association]

<sup>105</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 4.18

<sup>106</sup> Ev 68 [Cheshire Fire Authority]

<sup>107</sup> Q 174ff [Mr Ord, President, Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers’ Association (CACFOA): Mr Doig, Vice-President, Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers’ Association (CACFOA)]

<sup>108</sup> Q 138 [Mr Bonney, Secretary, Association of Principal Fire Officers’ (APFO)]

“There is no desire for a regional fire authority in the south west generally but there is most certainly a need for clarity because if we are working towards that then we can work towards that regional fire authority concept.”<sup>109</sup>

“I am worried that if we had a very heavy regional structure that we would have a heavy bureaucratic cost which would be added to the county council tax payer in my county. I cannot see it finding any efficiencies so far as the operation of our service.”<sup>110</sup>

But others were supportive;

“The first thing to say is we understand from the White Paper that the regional assemblies are some way down the line, even if they ever occur. We do accept if they ever occur it probably makes sense to have regional Fire Services accountable to whatever that particular electorate is. The second thing is, what we are not opposed to, where it makes good professional sense, and again can be proved to enhance delivery of the service or the safety of our members, you can do things on a regional basis. There has been quite a bit of experience of that in the Service already.”<sup>111</sup>

“I think regionalisation is driven by the search for amalgamation of control rooms and I think that is driven by other new factors, particularly the threat from terrorism and to some extent the changes in technology. It is difficult to see how control rooms can be organised in the future other than on a regional basis and, if you regionalise the controls, then almost inevitably you seem to end up regionalising the fire brigades as well. I would say, from the retained point of view, that for local retained stations, of which there are 1,200 in the UK, it probably is not going to make a vast difference whether they are controlled by a single county borough brigade, a county fire service or a region.”<sup>112</sup>

**83. We recognise that there are cost advantages to a regional approach on issues like procurement and agree that there should be a regional approach to dealing with terrorism. We are less convinced that there is sufficient evidence to support the creation of Regional Fire and Rescue Authorities.**

## The Audit Commission

84. The White Paper proposes that the Audit Commission take over inspection of the Fire Service from HM Fire Service Inspectorate:

“External scrutiny plays a key role in raising performance. A new inspection regime will be introduced by the Audit Commission to help support improvement and to provide the building blocks towards the introduction of CPA.<sup>113</sup> In future, the level of inspection for each fire authority will reflect its performance profile identified

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<sup>109</sup> Q 73 [Mr Howell, Chief Fire Officer of Cornwall Fire Brigade and Secretary of SW Forum of Fire Authorities]

<sup>110</sup> Q 79 [Mr Hilton, Councillor for Gloucester Fire Authority]

<sup>111</sup> Q 223 [Mr Gilchrist, General Secretary, The Fire Brigades' Union (FBU)]

<sup>112</sup> Q 144 [[Mr Chadbon, National General Secretary, The Retained Firefighters' Union (RFU)]

<sup>113</sup> Comprehensive Performance Assessment

through the new CPA Framework. We will work with the Audit Commission to develop this new regime. The Fire Service Inspectorate will contribute to this process.”<sup>114</sup>

The Audit Commission have been tasked to develop a performance assessment framework, using the lessons they have learnt from local government Comprehensive Performance Assessment:

“The Audit Commission, in our view, is the right body to carry out the assessment of the performance of fire authorities against the expectations which we will set out in our national Framework which we will be publishing very shortly. Now, that is just the same as the work the Audit Commission does in relation to local authorities and to other public bodies. It is monitoring performance and assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of those bodies.”<sup>115</sup>

Most of the evidence we received supported the move of inspection responsibilities to the Audit Commission. Although there were some concerns about the costs of the new inspection regime.<sup>116</sup>

85. The draft Fire and Rescue National Framework was expected to outline Government’s specific expectations of Fire Authorities, in order that the Audit Commission could begin “the process of introducing the Framework for monitoring performance.”<sup>117</sup> We were told in evidence that the draft Framework would contain specific performance indicators which would allow monitoring of progress and improvements in the light of implementation of the White Paper’s proposals:

“Chairman: [...] You are saying very firmly they [the Audit Commission] are going to be the ones who measure the success of the indicators, but you are going to publish the indicators of the fire authorities’ success and failure in the national framework outline, is that right?”

Mr Raynsford: We will set out in the draft National Framework our expectations for the Fire and Rescue Service of the future, and we will also set out what the Government will do to deliver that. That will be for consultation. We will then be finalising our first framework document next year. The Audit Commission will be beginning the process of introducing the Framework for monitoring performance in the light of that National Framework and also in the light of existing performance indicators.

Chairman: So we are going to get some indicators in that. Can you give us any examples of those indicators you are thinking of putting into that document?

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<sup>114</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 6.11

<sup>115</sup> Q 445 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>116</sup> Q 59 [Mr S McGuirk, Chief Fire Officer, Cheshire Fire Service]. See also Q 342 [Mr Evans, Director of Audit Policy, Audit Commission]

<sup>117</sup> Q 448 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

Mr Raynsford: I cannot at this stage. The Framework will be published in the very near future and it will then be available for consultation but until it is published I think it would not be appropriate for me to talk about the detail in that document.”<sup>118</sup>

The performance indicators contained within the draft Framework vary little from those that existed before publication of the White Paper. The Audit Commission told us that it is hard to measure outputs, particularly ones related to fire prevention activity:

“It is relatively easy to measure inputs but it is harder to measure outputs. We can measure inputs through costing data and through bench marking one service against another, but it is particularly hard to measure the outputs and with the increased focus on fire prevention rather than simply firefighting it is going to be harder, arguably, in the future.”<sup>119</sup>

However without the ability to measure outputs we will have no way of knowing if the introduction of the White Paper’s changes is improving public safety.

**86. We do not believe that the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework is sufficiently specific to allow the Audit Commission to set a framework for monitoring performance of Fire Authorities. Government must bring forward performance indicators to guide the Audit Commission’s performance monitoring.**

### **Pay Award**

87. In addition to developing long term inspection mechanisms, the Audit Commission was asked to verify, in England and Wales, that some modernisation reforms had been implemented in local Fire Services. Stages 2 and 3 of the firefighters pay deal depended on successful verification by the Audit Commission:

“STAGE 1: With effect from 7th November 2002

All current pay rates and retained fees for all ranks will be increased by 4%. This increase will be paid as soon as possible after this agreement has been ratified and will be backdated.

STAGE 2: With effect from 7th November 2003

A new pay structure, linked to the IPDS role structure and producing average pay increases of 7%, will be agreed by the NJC by 31st October 2003. The NJC has already agreed a role-based structure to replace the current rank structure and also that, in developing the detail of a new pay structure, it will need to consider differentials between each role, increments within each role (including the 15-year long service increment) and protection arrangements for individuals, where they are needed. It is for this reason that the pay increase at this stage is expressed as an average of 7%.

STAGE 3: With effect from 1st July 2004

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<sup>118</sup> Q 448-9 [Mr Bennett, Chairman ODPM Select Committee: Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>119</sup> Q 324 [Mr Evans, Director of Audit Policy, The Audit Commission]

An increase of 4.2% will be applied to the new pay structure agreed at Stage 2. For qualified/competent firefighters this would produce a cumulative increase of 16% over stages 1 to 3 and an annual salary of £25,000.

The pay increases at stages 2 and 3 are subject to:

completion of all the negotiations and consultations referred to in this agreement and, where appropriate, their ratification by the Fire Service National Employers, the Fire Brigades Union and Government; and

verification by the Audit Commission (England and Wales), Accounts Commission (Scotland) and Government (Northern Ireland) that the intended benefits (including savings) of the various national changes are being delivered locally.”<sup>120</sup>

88. The Audit Commission was unable to complete verification of local improvements by 7 November; the pay award was therefore not given.<sup>121</sup> Some firefighters conducted ‘wildcat’ strikes in protest. The Audit Commission told us; “We were not consulted about the reference to the Audit Commission in the national pay award. The first we knew about it formally was in June when the deal was concluded. Given where we started from we have done well to get to the position where we are now.”<sup>122</sup> The Local Government Association confirmed this position:

“We believed it was properly understood by the Union and I was present at a meeting on 5 August with colleagues and other representatives of the Union in which it was made clear that the process had to be satisfactorily implemented and that it would be unlikely - given the late starting date of all this - that by 7 November the Audit Commission would be in a position to verify anything. Indeed the deal specifically referred to a figure of seven per cent being payable from - not on - 7 November. That was followed up by a joint circular, signed by the joint secretaries - that is the Union General Secretary and Mr Nolda representing the Employers - on 18 September, again making it very clear that the verification was a pre-requisite, that it would be unlikely to be available by November; that, as often has been the case in the past, there would be an element of backdating as from the date when, in this case, the verification actually occurred.”<sup>123</sup>

89. We questioned the Minister about the Audit Commissions role in the verification audits. He commented:

“Can I say on the Audit Commission, if I can add, the impression they have given us is not one of reticence or reluctance to take on this work. The Audit Commission have engaged very constructively with us about the ability to extend the lessons they have learnt from the CPA process for local authorities to a similar approach in

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<sup>120</sup> Fire Brigades National Employer, *Fire Service Pay and Conditions Agreement*, Circular Emp/22/03, May 2003, p2.1

<sup>121</sup> When verification is complete the full 7% will be backdated to 7 November 2003. In the meantime the Employers offered a 3.5% goodwill gesture, which was accepted after the Fire Brigades’ Union balloted its members.

<sup>122</sup> Q 336 [Mr Evans, Director of Audit Policy, Audit Commission]

<sup>123</sup> Q 284 [Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chair, Local Government Association]

relation to fire authorities. Certainly their chairman, James Strachan, has shown considerable enthusiasm for undertaking this role.”<sup>124</sup>

**90. It appears that the Chair of the Audit Commission accepted responsibility for a task which the Commission was unable to meet in the time required with the resources available. It is unlikely that any organisation could have completed the verification audits in the timeframe. This suggests a failure in planning on all sides, especially by the Government.**

## HM Fire Service Inspectorate

91. HM Fire Service Inspectorate “will be refocused and redirected to support the process of quality assurance and service improvement.”<sup>125</sup> The White Paper comments “The Inspectorate currently has over 100 staff. Yet its role is ill-defined and, as the Independent Review of the Fire Service observed, the fire service tends to have been over-inspected, but not effectively enough. Therefore, we intend to reform and redirect the work of the Inspectorate so that it is a smaller and more efficient body. It will, in future, have three distinct functions:

- Professional advice to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, from a small number of advisers who will identify good practice, advise on technical issues and assist in identifying the Fire Service leaders of the future
- Support to the Audit Commission in developing the new inspection function for the fire and rescue service as part of the new Comprehensive Performance Assessment; and
- Support to the new Service Improvement Team on how to increase efficiency in fire authorities. In particular, this will include advice on, for example, ensuring greater efficiency of procurement at a regional level.<sup>126</sup>

92. We received some evidence questioning the future role of the Inspectorate:

“There are still questions to be asked and answered about the future role for HM Fire Service Inspectorate, which, for a long time, has struggled to find an effective role and to adapt its culture and approach to keep pace with developments in the public sector in general and the fire and rescue service in particular. LFEPA Members have a combined body of experience of performance review and inspection activity, much of which has been derived outside of the Fire Service but which could be of benefit to it. LFEPA would welcome the opportunity for a vigorous debate about what needs to happen in order to support and sustain ongoing modernisation of the service. Such a debate would need to embrace questions about the experience, competencies and diversity which the Inspectorate needs to have to successfully deliver its new role.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Q 452 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>125</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 5.15

<sup>126</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 5.15

<sup>127</sup> Ev 141-2 [The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)]

93. The Minister defended the future role of the Inspectorate:

“There is a separate and very important role to provide the professional leadership, to develop the capability of the Service and the skills of employees in the Service and to ensure that there is expert advice available both to ministers and indeed to fire authorities on the way in which the Service develops and some of the new initiatives that Sir Graham is all the time assessing [...].”<sup>128</sup>

**94. We are sceptical about the White Paper’s proposed role for HM Fire Service Inspectorate. There seems to be some duplication between organisations: the Chief and Assistant Chief Officers Association currently provide professional leadership; skills of employees are developed by the Fire Service College; expert advice to Ministers will be provided by the Business and Community Safety Forum, Practitioners Forum and Service Improvement Team; and development of the capability of the Service is governed by Government legislation and policy. Moreover, evidence we received does not suggest that Fire Authorities view the Inspectorate as a source of expert advice. We recommend Government carefully consider the case for continuing an in-house Inspectorate.**

## Negotiating Mechanisms

95. The National Joint Council for Local Authorities’ Fire Brigades is responsible for negotiating the pay and conditions of service for Fire Service staff. It consists of representatives of the employers and the Fire Brigades Union. The White Paper and the Independent Review of the Fire Service were critical of this system: “It has proved unwieldy. It has struggled, through its collective bargaining procedures, to negotiate changes in conditions of service for firefighters to match changing operational demands and to ensure sufficient resource management.”<sup>129</sup>

96. The Government agreed with the Independent Review of the Fire Service that a new negotiating body should be formed, involving representatives of the Retained Firefighters’ Union, Fire Officers’ Association and the Association of Principal Fire Officers, in addition to the Fire Brigades’ Union. The White Paper proposes three separate negotiating bodies covering the different groups within the present grading structure:

- Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers
- Middle management; and
- Firefighters and control room staff

The composition and chair of each body will be determined by the Deputy Prime Minister. The White Paper reveals the Government’s commitment to changing the current

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<sup>128</sup> Q 445 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>129</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 5.3

machinery; “We see no prospect of such changes being made by agreement. That is why we intend to specify who should be involved.”<sup>130</sup>

97. The Association of Principal Fire Officers, Fire Officers’ Association and the Retained Firefighters’ Union welcomed these proposals;

The Association of Principal Fire Officers: “I think it is true to say that we are fortunate in one sense in that the Association has its own negotiating forum with the employers because of the fact that we are principal officers, but it is true to say that the Framework at the moment tends to push people down an adversarial approach. The limited representation of employee groups right across the spectrum means that it is one side or the other and a number of my colleagues here remain unrepresented in those forum, which is not actually very healthy for a plural approach to industrial relations.”<sup>131</sup>

Fire Officers’ Association: “The situation [*lack of advocacy*] has been there for a long, long time now. The middle and the middle to senior management of the Service has not had an independent voice with its employers in negotiating its own terms. That group of people, as in any other walk of life, has its own specific problems and ideals at its level in the organisation. Any part of business runs with a management structure, whether they be called supervisors, managers or whatever, and the proposals will have allowed that voice to be heard.”<sup>132</sup>

The Retained Firefighters’ Union: “Can I say that, on negotiating Framework, the reason why retained are second-class citizens, which I think nobody really disputes, is because they have had no advocacy in the past. That is intended to change under the Framework laid down in the White Paper and it will bring the situation where retained firefighters are, for the first time, going to be put on a par on conditions of service and advocacy with their whole-time colleagues. We do the same job and you cannot recognise the difference. If you go into a rural area, you will only get retained firefighters; we are not some sort of ancillary organisation, we are the Fire Service. Yet, the current pay restructuring that has just come in has brought in pay parity for retained firefighters with whole time. Why the heck have we waited for that to happen? We have been paid 60 per cent of the rate of pay of a whole-time firefighter for doing the same job. I will answer my own question. The reason it has happened is because we have had no advocacy to change that situation.”<sup>133</sup>

98. The Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association also welcomed the proposed changes.<sup>134</sup> However the Fire Brigades’ Union is less convinced by Government’s strong line:

“The White Paper proposes some fundamental changes to the current industrial relations Framework of the Service. It is not clear how the Government envisages

<sup>130</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 7.13

<sup>131</sup> Q 163 [Mr Bonney, Secretary, The Association of Principal Fire Officers (APFO)]

<sup>132</sup> Q 163 [Mr Setterfield, General Secretary, Fire Officers’ Association (FOA)]

<sup>133</sup> Q 163 [Mr Chadbon, National General Secretary, The Retained Firefighters’ Union (RFU)]

<sup>134</sup> Q 191 [Mr Ord, President, Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers’ Association (CACFOA)]

that changing the current negotiating structure will meet any of the key objectives [*as set out in para. 1.6 of the White Paper*]. The Government's intention to determine the number, composition and chairing of the new negotiating bodies, and to force through changes to secure its objectives, is at odds with good industrial relations practice. The FBU believes that it is for the social partners to agree on these matters. The proposal for three separate negotiating bodies is also contrary to current pay bargaining practice where for some years now, in both public and private sectors, there has been a move to single table bargaining as a reflection of modern working practices. In fact, in 1999, following a proposal from the Employers, the FBU supported the move from multiple to single table bargaining for these very reasons."<sup>135</sup>

**99. We welcome the changes to the negotiating Framework. The system proposed in the White Paper will enable all levels of the Fire Service to negotiate their own terms and conditions.**

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<sup>135</sup> Ev 92 [The Fire Brigades' Union (FBU)]

## 8 The Workplace

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### Discipline Regulations

100. The current discipline regulations are criticised in the White Paper as no longer compatible with the aims and objectives of a modern Fire Service.<sup>136</sup> They include no specific offences relating to bullying and harassment, problems the White Paper proposals seek to address.<sup>137</sup> Current regulations also allow appeal to the Secretary of State, in addition to the statutory right to appeal to a tribunal. All evidence we received supported the abolition of the current regulations:

“The discipline arrangements within the service at the moment are essentially military style. They are conducted like a court martial which means that something only gets treated seriously in a sort of investigative way. It prevents the normal management practices of a line manager attending to bad behaviour at an early stage and nipping things in the bud. I think the functioning of the military style disciplinary regulations has been one of the reasons why bullying, racism and very, very overt sexism has been allowed to continue in some areas of the fire service for many, many years.”<sup>138</sup>

101. Abolition of the current discipline regulations should make it easier to tackle bullying, harassment and other undesirable problems that have characterised some parts of the Fire Service in the past. We have been told that morale in the Service is quite low at present. Quick ‘wins’, such as the replacement of the discipline regulations, are therefore important to demonstrate commitment to reform from all parties.

102. The Government proposes to replace the current regulations with new ones based on Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) best practice guidance.<sup>139</sup> Some submissions, for example, that of the Local Government Association, do not think further regulations are needed; they argue that Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service best practice guidance would be sufficient. The draft Fire and Rescue National Framework argues that regulations will ensure national consistency.

**103. We welcome the Government’s commitment to abolish the current discipline regulations as suggested in the White Paper and the draft Fire and Rescue Service National Framework. Abolition of these outdated regulations would have a positive impact on the Fire Service, allowing more modern management methods to be introduced.**

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<sup>136</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 8.20-21

<sup>137</sup> Ev 142 [The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)]

<sup>138</sup> Q 6 [Ms Shawcross, Chair, The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)]

<sup>139</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 5.22

## Firefighters' Pension Scheme

104. The White Paper highlights that the firefighters' pension scheme is the most expensive scheme in the public sector. The present scheme was developed in 1948 when the risks posed to firefighters were much greater than at present. Firefighters currently contribute 11% of pay towards their pension, and earn full pension rights after 30 years service; hence the high number of firefighters who leave the service in their late forties and early fifties. The current arrangements discourage unfit firefighters from moving into other areas of the Service because such a move would remove them from the pension scheme.

105. We have had a great deal of evidence on the huge burden of pension liabilities for Fire Authorities:

“The LFEPA welcomes the commitment to address the shortcomings of current arrangements for funding of firefighters' pensions and the opportunity to participate in discussions about the reforms that are long overdue. The agreement on firefighters pay, which within a year will result in a corresponding increase in payments made under the pension scheme to retiring firefighters, will add to the already high proportion of fire authority expenditure on pensions. In global terms the growing increases and uncertainty around pensions costs of the current scheme are all managed by Fire Authorities, and can be the major cause of budget increases because of the unfunded nature of the scheme. In London we are already spending over 20% of our annual revenue budget on pensions for retired firefighters; and this proportion is expected to grow still further as firefighters recruited during the large intakes in 1974 and 1978 (when working hours and shift systems were changed) retire from the service. At the individual level the current scheme can actually provide a disincentive to people who would otherwise want to work on beyond the normal retirement age.”<sup>140</sup>

The same problem plagues Authorities outside London:

“The biggest single issue that could make a difference would be the pensions problem. It has been talked about for the 27 years that I have been in the Fire Service. We seem to be coming closer to solutions. They are going to cost money and the bill is going to have to be picked up somewhere. About twenty per cent of my budget is going to pay pensions; that is on the increase. If the Government were to financially address one single area, pensions would release a lot of opportunities.”<sup>141</sup>

106. The Minister emphasised that current pension rights would be respected:

“We have made some moves in relation to pensions but we have accepted there is a great deal more work to be done. This is a complex issue. We obviously have to respect existing pension rights, there is no question of that, but equally we have to recognise there are some perverse consequences in the current arrangements. For example, it is very difficult for people who are experienced firefighters, who may no longer be fully fit to act as firefighters but have a wealth of experience who could contribute enormously to the community fire safety agenda, because they currently

<sup>140</sup> Ev 144 [The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)]

<sup>141</sup> Q 62 [Mr A McGuirk, Chief Fire Officer of Merseyside Fire Service and Trustee of Friends of Merseyside Fire Service]

are under very considerable pressure to retire rather than to continue to work in that kind of community support role. So it is not just a question of pension provision, it does have to be linked in as well to the changes in the Service we are talking about, and that is on-going work but we are very conscious of some of the difficulties that apply in relation to pensions.”<sup>142</sup>

107. One Chief Fire Officer told the Committee that by 2008, 25% of the Fire Service budget would be allocated to pensions. He emphasised that the recent pay award would encourage people to stay longer to increase their pensions.<sup>143</sup> We were told that although a new pension scheme could ease the long-term burden, it would not help Authorities meet liabilities for current firefighters:

“For all new entrants I think there are a lot of opportunities to look at what should the scheme be like for the future. My concern is that whenever we talk about the pension the attention diverts into the future. If Government could fund the existing scheme what a wonderful idea it would be. The actual assessment I saw was in the billions so I do not think it is realistic. My concern is that we are forever focussing on the future and actually I think it is quite an easy problem to solve for future entrants. The problem is now; the problem is this year, next year and the year after when we have hit our pensions time bomb and huge chunks of revenue are going to pay that pensions bill. It is a legitimate expectation of firemen.”<sup>144</sup>

108. The Government has made some efforts to tackle the issue of public sector pensions; “The Government’s proposals in *Simplicity, Security and Choice* for example deal with the age at which people can retire, age of deferred pension options, and those apply equally to the firefighter service in the same way as do other public service pension schemes.”<sup>145</sup> However Government are now reviewing pension arrangements specifically for firefighters, as the draft Framework highlights; “Work is under way on the development of new pension arrangements which will reflect: the changes in the nature of fire fighting duties under modernisation proposals; the changes in the regulatory and tax Framework for pensions generally; and equality and diversity issues.”<sup>146</sup> The Government proposes to issue proposals for consultation in 2004, with implementation from 2005. However the issue of funding current pension liabilities is more complex. The White Paper proposals promise that Government will “introduce alternative arrangements for local authority funding of service pensions, in consultation with the fire and rescue authorities.”<sup>147</sup> However six months on from the White Paper, the draft Framework provides no further

<sup>142</sup> Q 484 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]. For additional written information provided by ODPM please see footnote to HC43-II, Ev 86, Q 484.

<sup>143</sup> Qs 60 and 63 [Mr A McGuirk, Chief Fire Officer of Merseyside Fire Service and Trustee of Friends of Merseyside Fire Service]

<sup>144</sup> Q 64 [Mr A McGuirk, Chief Fire Officer of Merseyside Fire Service and Trustee of Friends of Merseyside Fire Service]

<sup>145</sup> Q 485 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>146</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 5.29

<sup>147</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 8.19

details commenting only that “The Government is also reviewing the financial arrangements for funding firefighters’ pensions.”<sup>148</sup>

109. We welcome the Government’s long overdue review of the pension scheme. We are pleased that measures have been outlined to tackle inappropriate early retirement, and to implement a new, more suitable scheme for newcomers to the Service. However we are extremely concerned about the ability of Local Authorities to meet current pensions’ liabilities. The White Paper and draft Fire and Rescue Service National Framework fail to address this issue; the Government must urgently bring forward proposals for alternative funding.

### Rank to Role, Multi-Level Entry and Accelerated Promotion

110. In 2003 ODPM formally approved a new system of training and development for the Fire Service based on national standards and a framework of skills and competencies - the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS). To complement the Integrated Personal Development System the White Paper proposes three changes to recruitment and development in the Service:

- Replacement of the 12 ranks of the fire and rescue service with seven ‘roles’, which reflect the work that firefighters actually do (see Table Four)

<b>Table Four: Proposed roles of the Fire and Rescue Service</b>		
Source: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, <i>Our Fire and Rescue Service</i> , Cm 5808, June 2003, Table 4.		
<b>Supervisory Management</b>	<b>Middle Management</b>	<b>Strategic Management</b>
Firefighter/control operator	Station management	Area management
Crew management	Group management	Brigade management
Control management		

- Introduction of multi-level entry, so that people can enter the fire and rescue service at a level appropriate to their qualifications and experience, including the most senior levels; and
- Introduction of accelerated development schemes, so that members of the fire and rescue service who have been identified as having the potential to progress to strategic management levels can receive appropriate development at an early stage in their careers<sup>149</sup>

Evidence we received showed broad support for each of these measures, although there was some concern about the proposals for multi-level entry.

<sup>148</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 5.29

<sup>149</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 8.6

## Multi-Level Entry

111. Currently applicants to the operational service need only to pass a fitness test; no academic qualifications are required. Applicants can only join as trainee firefighters and work their way up the ranks. It is suggested that this system acts as a disincentive to graduates or others with qualifications or experience outside the Service. The Independent Review of the Fire Service found that only 2% of those employed in the Service were graduates, compared to 25% in the police, which has a graduate entry scheme.<sup>150</sup> The White Paper's proposals would mean that applicants could apply to any level of the Service if they had the requisite skills and experience. We were told this would increase diversity in the Service and help break down some of the negative elements of Fire Service culture.<sup>151</sup> However we were also told that senior officers in the Service must be able to take charge of serious incidents, hence the importance of operational experience:

“Our primary concern is to ensure operational safeguards, which mean that ‘hands on’ roles are carried out by staff with relevant experience, are maintained. The Union will therefore rigorously oppose any steps that put these safeguards in jeopardy. The number of staff required at ‘operational level’ will be determined through the introduction and delivery of IRMPs and should not be superseded or overridden by changes to recruitment and Human Resource practices. The introduction of IPDS means that competencies are now rightly the focus for recruitment and roles. The FBU is not opposed in theory to the proposal that ‘working up through the Service and gaining promotion via that route will, in future, be only one of a number of routes to higher levels in the Service and should depend on the acquisition of skills rather than the length of time served’. However, in reality, sometimes the only way that skills can be gained is by serving a certain length of time, during which a wide variety of circumstances are encountered, understood and mastered. Building in such safeguards will be crucial if standards are to be maintained and the health and safety of our members protected.”<sup>152</sup>

**112. We welcome the Government’s proposals to introduce more flexibility in recruitment and development in the Fire Service. However we believe that applicants to senior positions must be able to demonstrate ability to take operational command of a serious incident. This does not necessarily mean that applicants must have been promoted through the ranks of the Fire Service.**

## Diversity

### Women in the Fire Service

113. In 2002, women accounted for only 1.74% of the operational Fire Service workforce.<sup>153</sup> The White Paper suggested this figure could “partly be explained by the shift system, which

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<sup>150</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 8.2

<sup>151</sup> Q 8ff [Mr Knight, Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA): Mr James, Brigade Training Officer, Greater Manchester County Fire Service]

<sup>152</sup> Ev 91 [The Fire Brigades’ Union (FBU)]

<sup>153</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p. 8.3

is neither operationally efficient nor family friendly.”<sup>154</sup> However few submissions agree with this explanation, Networking Women in the Fire Service comment:

“We are concerned about the inference of the White Paper that the shift system is problematic and family unfriendly. Our sense is that this is being overstated and that many are ambivalent about it. The main point surely is about stability, i.e. advance knowing of when one is working which makes life and caring responsibilities manageable.”<sup>155</sup>

114. The memorandum from Networking Women in the Fire Service suggests a number of other issues which could explain why the numbers of women remain low in the Service:

- *Fitness requirements:* We were told that these are the most significant barrier to women, and several witnesses highlighted the unacceptability of the current system:

“My commissioner has talked about the recruitment regulations. It is pretty clear to me that the physical entry tests were written in a way that would make it incredibly difficult to appoint women. We are expecting people to have a level of fitness at the point of entry, whereas actually normally for other services you train them up during the training period, and what you are testing for is potential. The hurdle was set at a high level to keep women out a number of years ago and that needs to be changed. We will not attend to the culture that precludes women from this service properly until officially we do get rid of these practices.”<sup>156</sup>

“There has been a good deal of well conceived and outcome focused work to examine the impact of the current physical entry tests on the recruitment of women into the operational service. This work needs to be brought to a conclusion and changes urgently implemented. The achievement of the national target for the recruitment of women is seeming less viable as time progresses and it is this kind of practical change, which would do no harm whatsoever to the calibre and competence of new-comers, which is needed.”<sup>157</sup>

- *The Training Programme:* a longer and modular-based programme would enable fitness levels to be developed over time. A programme which included community fire safety and enforcement would also develop a more fully skilled firefighter:

“The current training programme for new entrants is designed on a block basis. The intensive nature of this programme places particular physical demands on women. This results in a disparity between the level of fitness required to perform the job and the level of fitness needed to complete the training programme; with the latter often being higher than the former. This can lead to the introduction of an exhaustion factor which in turn can lead to a comparatively higher failure rate for women during the training period. [...] A key consideration in making such a change relates to the pressure to have operational people working on stations in the shortest

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<sup>154</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p. 8.3

<sup>155</sup> Ev 39 [Networking Women in the Fire Service]

<sup>156</sup> Q 7 [Ms Shawcross, Chair, The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)]

<sup>157</sup> Ev 142 [The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)]

possible time after their recruitment. An impact assessment which takes account of current projected retirements and the subsequent demand for staff should be undertaken in order to identify the best time to implement any changes which lengthen the initial training programme.”<sup>158</sup>

- *Provision of basic facilities:*

“There continues to be problems about dignity and privacy at work for all although these are mostly being addressed now through capital works programmes. Overall, whilst facilities are improving (progress is slow), women have experienced a ‘backlash’ to the improvement of the facilities. However, there is an increasing understanding about how to meet the dignity needs of women whilst not completely segregating them for male colleagues. Priority must continue to be given to issues about uniform, maternity arrangements and the provision of facilities. These are basic needs which all too often become problematic issues and are dealt with by women themselves rather than managers. Failing to mainstream these concerns into everyday custom and practice leads women to feel they are the exception to the rule and being difficult rather than a regular member of the Service.”<sup>159</sup>

- *Inequality of status and pay:*

“In many Authorities, gender diversity has been increased through the appointment of qualified women into support (non-uniformed) roles, where previously these had been undertaken by men in uniformed positions. Notwithstanding the premium paid to operational staff maintaining equity of status and equal pay is important to the principle of gender equality.”<sup>160</sup>

- *The Retained Service:* A more flexible and innovative approach to the retained service, including increased flexibility in the amount of cover provided, would attract more women into this service.

- *A preventative approach to bullying and harassment:*

“The long-term aim of eliminating harassment and bullying will come through awareness raising, active prevention, early informal resolution and the provision of support.”<sup>161</sup>

115. This evidence highlights some of the reasons why the number of women in the operational Fire Service remains low. It has been suggested that the key problem may be an insufficient number of women who want to join the operational Fire Service. However, if some of the issues raised by Networking Women in the Fire Service are tackled, the appeal of the Service to a wider variety of women may be increased.

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<sup>158</sup> Ev 38 [Networking Women in the Fire Service]

<sup>159</sup> Ev 39 [Networking Women in the Fire Service]

<sup>160</sup> Ev 37 [Networking Women in the Fire Service]

<sup>161</sup> Ev 38 [Networking Women in the Fire Service]

### **Race Equality in the Fire Service**

116. Since the 1980s there have been a number of reports and initiatives aimed at increasing equality of opportunity in the Fire Service.<sup>162</sup> Yet in 2002, ethnic minority staff still accounted for a small fraction of the total workforce in the Fire Service, just 1.8%.<sup>163</sup> The Commission for Racial Equality is critical of the Fire Service's record:

“In July 1999, when the service came under the Home Office, the Secretary of State, after consultation, set a series of targets for recruitment, retention and progression in the fire service (as well as the police, probation and prison services and other agencies) to be achieved by 2009. The recruitment targets were calibrated according to the ethnic minority population of the areas covered by brigades. A milestone review was planned for 2002. In the fire service, the targets were supported in 2001/03 by £10 million in supplementary credit approvals for projects promoting equality and diversity. The Home Office published reviews of progress in 2000 and 2001, and a milestone study in January 2003. Although the fire service had been transferred to the DTLR (and later to the ODPM), the 2001 review included coverage of the data, etc for the service. Of the four main services, the fire service was the only one to record no progress in ethnic minority representation from 2000 to 2001. No milestone check has been published for the fire service for 2002. Unpublished figures from ODPM indicate a very slow rate of increase: 31 of the 49 services showing—mostly very small—advances in the representation of ethnic minority people in whole time, retained and control staffing.”<sup>164</sup>

117. Although the Commission for Racial Equality welcomed the White Paper, it was concerned that the paper did “not properly reflect the race equality duty of fire authorities, the ODPM or the other national institutions”.<sup>165</sup> Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the ODPM is responsible for assessing any negative impact and consulting on new policies set out in the White Paper. The Commission for Racial Equality allege that the White Paper, and its policies have not been subjected to impact assessment as they should have been under Government's race equality duty.<sup>166</sup>

### **Government's Policy**

118. ODPM inherited targets to achieve 7% ethnic minority representation among operational and non-operational staff by April 2009; and 15% for female operational staff by the same date.<sup>167</sup> At current progress these targets will not be met. In addition to more flexible patterns of working, ODPM have therefore outlined support for a strategy on equality and diversity which includes:

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<sup>162</sup> FIR 62

<sup>163</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p. 8.3

<sup>164</sup> FIR 62

<sup>165</sup> FIR 62

<sup>166</sup> FIR 62

<sup>167</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 5.14

- The production of core values for the Fire and Rescue Authorities in early 2004
- The development of self-assessment questionnaires on equality and diversity issues by Spring 2004
- A review of equality training and the role of equality advisors by Spring 2004, and promulgation of good practice
- A review of national recruitment, progression and retention targets for ethnic minorities by Spring 2004, and for women by the end of 2004; and
- A programme of peer review between Fire and Rescue Authorities, and between Fire and Rescue Authorities and other sectors and local government services, on equality issues<sup>168</sup>

This strategy will result in a series of measures which Fire and Rescue Authorities' performance will be assessed against as part of their Comprehensive Performance Assessment process. In addition, Fire and Rescue Authorities through Regional Management Boards will have to produce an 'equalities strategy', including targets, as part of their regional Human Resources strategy.<sup>169</sup>

**119. The Committee welcomes the Government's intentions to produce a strategy on equality and diversity, and is pleased that Government have outlined specific details as to how this strategy will lead to actions for Fire and Rescue Authorities. The Committee are very concerned that the Fire Service is well below its 2009 targets for women and ethnic minority staff. We do not believe the key barrier to women is the shift system, but accept that more flexible working will broaden the appeal of the Service to all groups. We believe that Government could be making swifter progress in reducing the barriers to equal opportunities in the Fire Service; for example, new selection tests, currently promised for 2005, could be implemented sooner with more appropriate fitness requirements; and a more modular training system could be introduced to reduce the drop-out rates of women. However, the key aim for Government must be the mainstreaming of equality and fairness. Setting targets and policies to increase representation of particular groups in the Service marks members of these groups as 'special', requiring different treatment. The intention of these policies is to ensure fairness and equality, but while these individuals are marked out, fairness and equality will never become part of the mainstream of the Service. The reality is that while we urge Government to reduce barriers and increase opportunities; culture, attitude and behaviour are what really must change.**

**120. HM Fire Service Inspectorate produced a report 'Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service' in 1998/99 which recommended a full thematic review to report in 2003. This review was postponed as a result of industrial action, thus there has been no systematic review of progress against the other 22 recommendations. We recommend Government set a date for this review as soon as possible. Government should also**

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<sup>168</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 5.14

<sup>169</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 5.14-5.16

**ensure that any papers published have been subject to impact assessment, as outlined under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.**

## 9 Retained Service

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### An undervalued service

121. The Retained Fire Service provide 60% of fire cover in the UK.<sup>170</sup> In England there are approximately 13 062 retained firefighters, who provide 10 599 units of twenty-four hour cover.<sup>171</sup> The Government authorised number of retained personnel is 13 191 providing 24 hour cover, this means the Service is currently under resourced by 2 592 twenty-four hour units. Retained firefighters have other primary employment but respond to fires and incidents from their homes or workplace as required. In many rural areas, retained personnel provide the only source of fire and rescue cover. In the recent industrial disputes two-thirds of retained firefighters continued to respond to incidents.<sup>172</sup>

122. Unlike the wholetime Fire Service, where there are large numbers of applicants for each post, few people are applying to be retained firefighters, as we were told:

“There is a high turnover. The average time a retained firefighter serves is about eight years. There is a 20 per cent shortfall at the moment; it does not seem to be getting any better. I think it is part of the second-class service. We have 40 applicants for every whole-time post and a 20 per cent shortfall in the retained. I am minded, for an example, to look at a recruitment document that came out of the ODPM a couple of months ago for the Fire Service, 24 pages, 23 of which were devoted to whole-time recruitment and one page devoted to retained recruitment. Now, it does not add up when you have 40 applicants for every whole-time post and a 20 per cent shortfall. There is a great deal of problems and a number of different ways in which you resolve the shortage of retained personnel and undoubtedly a refocusing of the Service, which has always been focused on the whole time, has to be part of that process.”<sup>173</sup>

123. There is firm agreement from all groups that the contribution made by the Retained Service is under-recognised and under-valued. The White Paper clearly acknowledges the problems:

“A major problem for the fire and rescue service is the recruitment of retained fire fighters. Nationally it is about 20% short of complement. [...] The recruitment problems stem in part from the level of pay, the lack of a pension, the lack of development opportunities, and the often inflexible availability system—in short, a lack of recognition of their contribution.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Ev 27 [The Retained Firefighters' Union (RFU)]

<sup>171</sup> Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, *Fire Service Statistics 2000*. 2002. Data from 2000 is the most recent actual, as opposed to predicted, data available at time of writing. A retained firefighter may not offer 24 hour cover, therefore 24 hour unit figures calculate the fractions of time committed to form 24 hour units. This offers a more realistic impression of cover than counting the number of personnel.

<sup>172</sup> Ev 27 [The Retained Firefighters' Union (RFU)]

<sup>173</sup> Q 150 [Mr Chadbon, National General Secretary, The Retained Firefighters' Union (RFU)]

<sup>174</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 8.27

124. A number of proposals outlined in the White Paper aim to tackle the ‘second class’ status from which the Retained Service has suffered. These include:

- Considering the case for alternative pay arrangements linked to wholetime pay for the retained firefighters
- Introducing an appropriate pension scheme for retained firefighters, recognising the variety of personal circumstances involved
- Within Integrated Personal Development System, providing a harmonised training platform so that retained personnel can be used more flexibly in combination with wholetime staff
- Supporting development and promotion opportunities for all firefighters; and
- Encouraging a variety of working patterns using a flexible roster approach<sup>175</sup>

Although these aims are a positive step forward, they will not tackle the immediate problem of a 20% shortfall in personnel. In some areas where retained personnel dominate; a shortfall in personnel can mean appliances are unable to respond to incidents. The Retained Firefighters’ Union warn, “This shortfall threatens the whole modernisation process and the reliance on Integrated Risk Management Plans to drive through the economies to pay for the recent pay deal.”<sup>176</sup>

**125. We understand the Government is conducting a review of the Retained Fire Service. However this review is not due to report to the Minister until this summer.<sup>177</sup> There is immediate pressure on Fire Services because of the shortfall in retained personnel. Swift action must be taken to address the shortfall. We are disappointed that the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework paid such little attention to this issue; Government must double their efforts to find solutions. As a start, we suggest immediate implementation of the following measures, which require no legislation:**

- **Introduction of a more flexible retirement age.** Currently retained personnel have to retire at 55, regardless of their ability or desire to remain in the service. We were told of occasions when appliances were taken out of service because forced retirements of retained firefighters had produced a shortfall in the crew.
- **A national recruitment campaign, along the lines of that used for the Territorial Army and other Reserve Forces.**
- **Faster processing of applications:** We were told it can take over eight weeks for an applicant to secure a medical appointment.<sup>178</sup>
- **Leading by example: Government and the public sector should set a positive example by encouraging staff who want to undertake such a role.** We were told in oral

<sup>175</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003, p 8.28

<sup>176</sup> Ev 28 [The Retained Firefighters’ Union (RFU)]

<sup>177</sup> Q 477 [Mr Norris, Director, Fire, Health and Safety, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>178</sup> Ev 28 [The Retained Firefighters’ Union (RFU)]

evidence that some local councils are not prepared to release staff to act as retained firefighters.<sup>179</sup>

**Other issues must also be considered as part of the Government’s review:**

- **Job Seekers Allowance Guidelines:** We have been told that unemployed retained firefighters are being forced to pursue employment beyond the call out range of their station, forcing them to leave the service or lose their allowance. The cost of a retained firefighter is significantly lower than a wholetime firefighter. Government should consider the balance of these costs in an immediate review of the Job Seekers Allowance guidelines.
- **Entitlement to paid leave:** Existing legislation requires employers to release workers for public duties, for example as councillors, magistrates and school governors. Government should consider extending this entitlement to retained firefighters.
- **Incentives for meeting fire prevention targets:** Retained firefighters help disseminate fire prevention skills in their community and primary workplace. If a Local Authority meets its fire related Service Delivery Agreement Targets and Best Value Performance Indicators, retained firefighters in that Authority should receive a bonus payment.

**We recommend that in response to this report the Government respond in detail to each of these seven proposals.**

## Primary Employers

126. Retained firefighters are dependent on the goodwill of their employers to release them to attend incidents. It is not an insignificant gesture, at certain times of the year employers can regularly be short-staffed:

“At one stage we had five retained fire fighters out of forty-five employees. The worse problem you have is summer time when there are moorland fires, or winter when there are floods and you actually lose them for a complete day. You cannot make that up, but what we do is that we structure their jobs around what they do.”<sup>180</sup>

Employers receive no compensation for releasing retained firefighters for duty. In many areas it is only local businesses committed to their communities who are prepared to release personnel. We were told that fewer and fewer employers are prepared to release staff to undertake retained duties: “There were ten employers thirty years ago, now there are three of us.”<sup>181</sup> The Retained Firefighters’ Union highlighted their disappointment at the lack of consultation with employers of retained firefighters to determine their thoughts and needs.<sup>182</sup> They told us that: “[...]now is the time to consider a proper remuneration and compensation policy, particularly for those employers who are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain the release of staff.”<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Q 86 [Mr Merritt, employer of retained firefighters in Devon]

<sup>180</sup> Q 84 [Mr Merritt, employer of retained firefighters in Devon]

<sup>181</sup> Q 84 [Mr Merritt, employer of retained firefighters in Devon]

<sup>182</sup> Ev 56 [The South West Forum of Fire Authorities]

<sup>183</sup> Q 84 [Mr Merritt, employer of retained firefighters in Devon]

127. However not all employers want financial rewards, we were told that employers want recognition:

“Many local employers are happy to support local organisations through sponsorship, in return for some acknowledgement of their involvement, for example providing the “strip” for local football teams. Businesses would be more likely to support an employee being a retained firefighter if there was some similar tangible acknowledgement of their involvement, for example on a board at the front of the fire station, or even suitably placed on fire appliances or equipment.”<sup>184</sup>

128. The Retained Service, as we have established, is under valued. Many employers are probably unaware of the benefits employment of a retained firefighter can bring. The Retained Firefighters’ Union believe that employing retained personnel can offer many advantages:

“I also think we ought to be going actively/pro-actively to companies and firms through organisations like the Business Forum and say, ‘Do you realise what benefits you get out of employing a retained firefighter? They are loyal, they do not move around, they bring an awful lot of knowledge on safety and risk assessment, they can bring huge benefits to you as a company and of course you are also helping the community.’ Many companies really want to get involved in community activities and this is an absolutely wonderful way of doing it and acknowledging what they are doing in supporting the local fire station.”<sup>185</sup>

One employer of retained personnel reinforced this view. He told us that there needs to be more proactive engagement with employers:

“Someone from the Fire Service actually has to go and see those employers to see if they can persuade them. I am sure if you work around someone’s work schedule, for instance someone working in Tesco’s stacking shelves, why could he not be released? But nobody actually goes to see them. Nobody goes to Tesco’s, for example, to see the manager. There is nobody from the Fire Service actually involved. It is all done from the local station office.”<sup>186</sup>

129. The draft Fire and Rescue National Framework recognises some of these issues and includes a promise from Government to work with the business community to:

- Highlight the benefits of having in their workforce the skills which retained firefighters can bring
- Find out the barriers to releasing retained staff for their fire and rescue duties; and
- See what can be done to remove those barriers<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Ev 29 [The Retained Firefighters’ Union (RFU)]

<sup>185</sup> Q 158 [Mr Chadbon, National General Secretary, The Retained Firefighters’ Union (RFU)]

<sup>186</sup> Q 89 [Mr Merritt, employer of retained firefighters in Devon]

<sup>187</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p5.6

However there are no details as to how Government intend to deliver any of these promises. None of these issues are new: it is disappointing that Government were not able to produce more detailed proposals.

**130. We congratulate those employers who release staff to attend incidents as retained firefighters. However too few businesses are prepared to let staff undertake activities as retained firefighters. With a 20% shortfall in retained personnel, this situation must be addressed. Government's promises to work with the business community are encouraging, but vague. We suggest Government use the Business and Community Safety Forum it proposes in the White Paper, to investigate why so few businesses employ retained firefighters. The Forum should examine whether the Fire Service needs to be more proactive, targeting employers to extol the benefits of employing retained firefighters; whether businesses want more recognition and whether there should be more incentives, potentially through tax and business rate concessions. In response to this report we expect Government to describe detailed proposals for tackling the problems we, and others, have outlined.**

## Payment

131. Retained firefighters are paid a small annual retainer fee<sup>188</sup> but earn most of their pay from *attending* incidents. This conflicts with the philosophy outlined in the White Paper which refocuses the Fire Service on *preventing* incidents. These conflicting philosophies are not ideal, especially when there is a danger that the income of retained fire fighters will reduce dramatically if a preventative approach is successful.

132. There have been a number of trials experimenting with the payment of retained firefighters. These experiments focus on rewarding retained firefighters for providing a guaranteed commitment to attend, rather than payment for attendance. One trial of this type in South Wales resulted in a 35% increase in costs. The Retained Firefighters' Union argue that "there is no 'one size fits all' for retained pay".<sup>189</sup> They told us:

"We do not see any one option that is suitable to be used across the country. The pattern of availability, employment, turnout and call-outs is different from one fire station to another. You have very quiet stations in parts of the country that are doing 30 or 40 calls a year and you have others that are doing 800 or 900 calls a year. So, there have to be different payment systems. I think we are moving gradually to an acceptance that there is a perverse incentive in paying retained firefighters according to the number of calls they attend. When I joined, it was on the basis that the more calls the merrier and we are all happy, but it is not actually a particularly good thing from the point of view of the public, so we are changing to the idea that it should be availability that should be rewarded. Having said that, I think the current pay restructuring for the retained that has just come out recently is an absolute dog's breakfast and does not achieve any of the objectives at all."<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Currently between £1969 and £2396/annum for a retained firefighter providing 24hour cover. The higher figure includes the recent 7% pay increase, although most retained firefighters have not received this increase yet.

<sup>189</sup> Ev 30 [The Retained Firefighters' Union (RFU)]

<sup>190</sup> Q 149 [Mr Chadbon, National General Secretary, The Retained Firefighters' Union (RFU)]

133. We have concerns that the White Paper advocates prevention, whilst retained firefighters are paid on attendance. The current Government review of the Retained Service should consider how retained firefighters are paid and should assess lessons learnt from the recent pay trials. Retained firefighters should be consulted as part of this review.

## Training

134. The White Paper will give the Fire Service statutory responsibility to respond to a whole range of incidents, including water and animal rescues and terrorist emergencies. Although many Fire Services already carry out these activities, statutory responsibility is likely to bring increased training requirements to satisfy legal and Health and Safety Executive pressures.

135. Fulfilling these training requirements may be more difficult for retained firefighters because of the pressures of time and their primary job:

“[...] the current arrangements not only whereby an employee is giving up their holiday (which is when they are supposed to rest) to actually work (because that is what the training entails) is just not sustainable. [...] there are a lot of employers, certainly in my area, who are now saying that they just cannot afford to allow people to be lost from the workforce for however long it is. [...] We have to ease the demands on those fire fighters so they do not spend all their spare time training and that will be a challenge.<sup>191</sup> Indeed one employer told us, “Releasing them for fires is bad enough, but to release them for two weeks’ training would be impossible.”<sup>192</sup>

136. In oral evidence the Minister acknowledged the importance of this issue and promised it would be examined in the review of the Retained Service.<sup>193</sup> In addition, the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework promised that Government would:

“Examine ways in which it can best meet the needs of retained staff, who, by virtue of being part-time, may not have the same opportunities for workplace development as wholetime staff. We will look at the scope for more use of, for example, e-learning and weekend training.”<sup>194</sup>

137. **All firefighters, wholetime or retained, should be adequately trained. We welcome the Government’s commitment to examine how training can best be achieved with retained firefighters. We look forward to receiving full details of the Government’s plans.**

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<sup>191</sup> Q 92 [Mr Howell, Chief Fire Officer of Cornwall Fire Brigade and Secretary of SW Forum of Fire Authorities]

<sup>192</sup> Q 85 [Mr Merritt, employer of retained firefighters in Devon]

<sup>193</sup> Q 478 [Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister]

<sup>194</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, *Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework*, December 2003, p 5.5

# Conclusions and recommendations

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## Context of Change

1. The Committee broadly welcomes the reforms outlined in the White Paper and is hopeful that the Fire and Rescue Services Bill will bring about real reform in the Service. The Service needs strong political leadership to ensure successful implementation and management of change during a potentially very turbulent period. Government must lead by example, and must provide support at local level to ensure implementation of reform, even in the face of confrontation. (Paragraph 7)
2. The draft Fire and Rescue National Framework sets a tough timetable for implementation of some of the proposals outlined in the White Paper. We welcome Government's desire to make swift progress. However, the draft Framework is open to consultation until 12 March 2004, only a matter of weeks before proposals must be implemented. Fire Authorities and Services are under extreme pressure to make progress on proposals which currently have no legislative authority. With imminent deadlines, for example, for Integrated Risk Management Plans, which must be consulted on, redrafted and implemented by April 2004, it is unclear how Fire Authorities and Services are supposed to find the resources to respond to the draft Framework consultation. Government must be aware of the demands they are making, and provide support to those Authorities and Services which are struggling to make progress. They must also ensure swift progress of the proposed Fire and Rescue Services Bill to provide the legislative backing for many of the White Paper's proposals. (Paragraph 12)
3. Fire Service incident information is central to the reforms proposed by the Government in the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework. The information currently available to Fire Authorities will not enable them to assess how well Fire Services are managing risk, making beneficial change harder to justify. It is therefore vital that the Government review fire incident report forms and consider demands for inclusion of new incident data, as they promise in the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework. We welcome changes to the data collection process, using electronic capturing to improve data quality and produce more timely statistics. More accurate and more current statistics will help Fire Services and Authorities monitor progress against targets and performance indicators. In response to this inquiry we recommend Government outline progress with the review of fire incident report forms, and produce a timetable for implementation of new forms, and electronic data capture. (Paragraph 15)
4. We support the withdrawal of Best Value Performance Indicators which relate to the old standards of fire cover but we are concerned that there are no plans to introduce performance indicators or measures relating to risk management. We recommend that Government introduce measures which will provide real assessment of the proposed changes. If Government needs time to develop new metrics, it should introduce interim indicators which could be optimised as they evolve. (Paragraph 22)

5. If, as proposed in the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework, the Fire Service takes on a statutory rescue role, we would expect Government to introduce performance measures inclusive of non-fire incidents where the Fire Service has played a rescue role. (Paragraph 23)
6. We welcome the introduction of a Best Value Performance Indicator that will measure the number of deliberate fires, but given that prevention of fire is a key element of the White Paper, the decision to set less ambitious targets aimed at reducing fires is inconsistent. As we highlighted in our report on the Department's Annual Report and Accounts 2003, we are disappointed that the Government has relaxed its target to cut down the number of deliberate fires and extended the time available to meet the targets on accidental fire-related deaths. We are concerned that Government did not consult sufficiently with relevant parties before relaxing the targets. (Paragraph 24)

### Transitional Funding

7. As with any public service undergoing a substantial period of reform, there must be funds available to secure the Service during the transitional period. Government has promised £30 million of transitional funding to fund the pay award, but Fire Authorities will have to pay this back from savings generated through the Integrated Risk Management Process. It remains to be seen whether the expected savings will be realised. Chief Fire Officers and Authorities, especially those in rural areas, appear doubtful, yet Combined Authorities, who are able to raise funds locally will be prevented from doing so by the possible cap on local taxation. (Paragraph 31)
8. Many of the proposals in the White Paper are based on the implementation of Integrated Risk Management Plans. If the philosophy behind these plans is to be practically supported, Authorities must make Government aware of their capital requirements, and Government must respond swiftly, making additional capital investment available if necessary. (Paragraph 32)

### Distribution of funding

9. It is right that the Government recognises the problems with the current Fire Formula Spending Share. We welcome the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework's proposal to create a working group, including Local Government Association and Fire Authorities' members, to examine the current formula. However the draft Framework suggests that any changes to the formula would not come into effect until 2005/6. In the meantime, we are concerned that some Fire Authorities may have insufficient resources to implement change as a result of the current arrangements. Furthermore, we are very concerned that the Government's proposals to recover transitional funding are inequitable. In response to this report Government should outline membership and progress of the working group, and should demonstrate the efforts made to explore alternative ways of recovering transitional funding. (Paragraph 38)

## Integrated Risk Management Plans

10. Though widely accepted as outdated, the current nationally prescribed standards of fire cover are easy to explain, understand and apply. The Government proposes to replace them with a life-risk based approach where individual Fire Authorities will devise Integrated Risk Management Plans to determine local fire cover. The Committee welcomes the introduction of Integrated Risk Management Plans, and believes that moving to a life-risk assessed approach to fire cover can only improve public safety. However if Integrated Risk Management Plans are implemented, we recommend Government conduct careful scrutiny of their impact, assessing in particular the question of consistency. (Paragraph 42)
11. Integrated Risk Management Plans could produce the most radical changes to fire cover since the 1930s. However, these changes will only happen if Fire Authorities and Services have real confidence in their proposals and can demonstrate this to others through a strong evidence base and use of analytical tools. These were not provided for the Integrated Risk Management Plans of the financial year 2004/5, however Government must ensure they are available as soon as possible so that Authorities and Services can use them to justify change as they devise their Integrated Risk Management Plans for 2005/6. With sufficient evidence and appropriate tools we hope that Authorities will be more able to propose alternatives to current fire cover patterns. Government must ensure that public misconceptions and political fears do not prevent radical, creative Integrated Risk Management Plans that will improve public safety. We recommend the Government initiate public awareness campaigns to ensure local communities understand why there may be changes in their local Fire Service. (Paragraph 45)
12. We are pleased that the Local Government Association and Fire Service institutions recognise that some members will need training in order to develop skills appropriate to their new responsibilities. We recommend that the Government ensure that this training is **delivered**. (Paragraph 49)

## Prevention

13. While keen to reinforce the need for adequate fire protection and early detection, we are very concerned about the increasing number of false alarms generated by automatic fire alarms. False alarms cause disruption for property owners, occupiers and the Fire Service, and represent an unnecessary drain on resources. A balanced approach must be taken to reducing the number of false alarms, without deterring use of automatic systems. We recommend the Government establish a working party of all stakeholders to consider how this problem might be tackled. The group should consider whether charging would address the issue. (Paragraph 51)
14. We received overwhelming support for the introduction of sprinkler systems in schools, houses of multiple occupation and the domestic properties of vulnerable groups, such as the elderly. We strongly recommend that in this year's revision of the Building Regulations, Ministers introduce a requirement for sprinklers to be fitted to all new build properties of these types, as this would have more impact on public and Firefighter safety, than any other proposal in the White Paper. (Paragraph 55)

15. We believe that functioning smoke alarms save lives and reduce injuries. The Committee congratulate those Fire Services which operate initiatives to fit free smoke alarms for the vulnerable. We welcome the requirement for alarms to be hard-wired in alterations, extensions and new buildings. We recommend this requirement be extended to include all existing tenanted properties, housing of multiple occupation and housing for vulnerable members of society. If the design of such buildings makes installation of hard-wired alarms impossible, we recommend use of alarms fitted with 10 year batteries. (Paragraph 58)
16. We recommend that the Government make more effort to encourage partnership between the voluntary sector and the Fire Service. Volunteers can be especially useful in promoting fire safety awareness in hard to reach communities. Bilingual advocates have been used successfully to access communities where English is not the first language. (Paragraph 61)

## Response

17. The Committee accepts that integrated Fire Service regional control rooms will provide increased cost-effectiveness. However, in response to this report we recommend that the Government set out in detail what resources will be available to fund regional facilities, equipment and systems. In order to ensure regional operators' lack of local geographical knowledge will not reduce their efficiency, we expect all Fire Services to use Global Positioning Systems. In addition we recommend utilisation of technology to identify the location of individuals reporting fires, verifying the accuracy of the geographical information provided. (Paragraph 66)
18. We believe the Government should be conducting further research into the potential benefits of co-responder schemes, which give Fire Service personnel the training and equipment to deliver basic life-support skills when first to arrive at an incident. Introduction of such schemes nationwide would be dependent on securing partnership with the local ambulance service, and provision of equipment and training. (Paragraph 70)
19. We believe there needs to be more research conducted on the potential for Fire Authorities to charge for activities of the Fire Service. As the statutory role of the Service expands, we expect Government to support Authorities as they seek to recoup costs. The NHS can reclaim costs from insurers for treatment of Road Traffic Accident victims. It is possible this scheme could be extended to allow Fire Authorities to do the same. In relation to non-response work, we agree with the Minister that care must be taken not to inhibit action which improves fire safety. However, the Fire Service contains a wealth of knowledge and expertise and it makes sense for Fire Services to provide advice on risk assessed fire safety. Government should undertake consultation to explore whether the Fire Service should charge for this activity (Paragraph 77)

## Institutional Arrangements

20. We recognise that there are cost advantages to a regional approach on issues like procurement and agree that there should be a regional approach to dealing with terrorism. We are less convinced that there is sufficient evidence to support the creation of Regional Fire and Rescue Authorities. (Paragraph 83)
21. We do not believe that the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework is sufficiently specific to allow the Audit Commission to set a framework for monitoring performance of Fire Authorities. Government must bring forward performance indicators to guide the Audit Commission's performance monitoring. (Paragraph 86)
22. It appears that the Chair of the Audit Commission accepted responsibility for a task which the Commission was unable to meet in the time required with the resources available. It is unlikely that any organisation could have completed the verification audits in the timeframe. This suggests a failure in planning on all sides, especially by the Government. (Paragraph 90)
23. We are sceptical about the White Paper's proposed role for HM Fire Service Inspectorate. There seems to be some duplication between organisations: the Chief and Assistant Chief Officers Association currently provide professional leadership; skills of employees are developed by the Fire Service College; expert advice to Ministers will be provided by the Business and Community Safety Forum, Practitioners Forum and Service Improvement Team; and development of the capability of the Service is governed by Government legislation and policy. Moreover, evidence we received does not suggest that Fire Authorities view the Inspectorate as a source of expert advice. We recommend Government carefully consider the case for continuing an in-house Inspectorate. (Paragraph 94)
24. We welcome the changes to the negotiating Framework. The system proposed in the White Paper will enable all levels of the Fire Service to negotiate their own terms and conditions. (Paragraph 99)

## The Workplace

25. We welcome the Government's commitment to abolish the current discipline regulations as suggested in the White Paper and the draft Fire and Rescue Service National Framework. Abolition of these outdated regulations would have a positive impact on the Fire Service, allowing more modern management methods to be introduced. (Paragraph 103)
26. We welcome the Government's long overdue review of the pension scheme. We are pleased that measures have been outlined to tackle inappropriate early retirement, and to implement a new, more suitable scheme for newcomers to the Service. However we are extremely concerned about the ability of Local Authorities to meet current pensions' liabilities. The White Paper and draft Fire and Rescue Service National Framework fail to address this issue; the Government must urgently bring forward proposals for alternative funding. (Paragraph 109)

27. We welcome the Government's proposals to introduce more flexibility in recruitment and development in the Fire Service. However we believe that applicants to senior positions must be able to demonstrate ability to take operational command of a serious incident. This does not necessarily mean that applicants must have worked their way through the ranks of the Fire Service. (Paragraph 112)
28. The Committee welcomes the Government's intentions to produce a strategy on equality and diversity, and is pleased that Government have outlined specific details as to how this strategy will lead to actions for Fire and Rescue Authorities. The Committee are very concerned that the Fire Service is well below its 2009 targets for women and ethnic minority staff. We do not believe the key barrier to women is the shift system, but accept that more flexible working will broaden the appeal of the Service to all groups. We believe that Government could be making swifter progress in reducing the barriers to equal opportunities in the Fire Service; for example, new selection tests, currently promised for 2005, could be implemented sooner with more appropriate fitness requirements; and a more modular training system could be introduced to reduce the drop-out rates of women. However, the key aim for Government must be the mainstreaming of equality and fairness. Setting targets and policies to increase representation of particular groups in the Service marks members of these groups as 'special', requiring different treatment. The intention of these policies is to ensure fairness and equality, but while these individuals are marked out, fairness and equality will never become part of the mainstream of the Service. The reality is that while we urge Government to reduce barriers and increase opportunities; culture, attitude and behaviour are what really must change. (Paragraph 119)
29. HM Fire Service Inspectorate produced a report 'Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service' in 1998/99 which recommended a full thematic review to report in 2003. This review was postponed as a result of industrial action, thus there has been no systematic review of progress against the other 22 recommendations. We recommend Government set a date for this review as soon as possible. Government should also ensure that any papers published have been subject to impact assessment, as outlined under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. (Paragraph 120)

### Retained Service

30. We understand the Government is conducting a review of the Retained Fire Service. However this review is not due to report to the Minister until this summer. There is immediate pressure on Fire Services because of the shortfall in retained personnel. Swift action must be taken to address the shortfall. We are disappointed that the draft Fire and Rescue National Framework paid such little attention to this issue; Government must double their efforts to find solutions. As a start, we suggest immediate implementation of the following measures, which require no legislation:
- Introduction of a more flexible retirement age
  - A national recruitment campaign, along the lines of that used for the Territorial Army and other Reserve Forces

- Faster processing of applications
- Leading by example. Government and the public sector should set a positive example by encouraging staff who want to undertake such a role

Other issues must also be considered as part of the Government's review;

- Job Seekers Allowance Guidelines
- Entitlement to paid leave
- Incentives for meeting fire prevention targets:

We recommend that in response to this report the Government respond in detail to each of these seven proposals. (Paragraph 125)

31. We congratulate those employers who release staff to attend incidents as retained firefighters. However too few businesses are prepared to let staff undertake activities as retained firefighters. With a 20% shortfall in retained personnel, this situation must be addressed. Government's promises to work with the business community are encouraging, but vague. We suggest Government use the Business and Community Safety Forum it proposes in the White Paper, to investigate why so few businesses employ retained firefighters. The Forum should examine whether the Fire Service needs to be more proactive, targeting employers to extol the benefits of employing retained firefighters; whether businesses want more recognition and whether there should be more incentives, potentially through tax and business rate concessions. In response to this report we expect Government to describe detailed proposals for tackling the problems we, and others, have outlined. (Paragraph 130)
32. We have concerns that the White Paper advocates prevention, whilst retained firefighters are paid on attendance. The current Government review of the Retained Service should consider how retained firefighters are paid and should assess lessons learnt from the recent pay trials. Retained firefighters should be consulted as part of this review. (Paragraph 133)
33. All firefighters, wholetime or retained, should be adequately trained. We welcome the Government's commitment to examine how training can best be achieved with retained firefighters. We look forward to receiving full details of the Government's plans. (Paragraph 137)

## Glossary

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ACAS.....	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
APFO.....	Association of Principal Fire Officers
BVPI.....	Best Value Performance Indicator
CACFOA.....	Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association
CRE.....	Commission for Racial Equality
DfES.....	Department for Education and Skills
DTLR.....	Department for Transport, Local Government and the .....Regions
FOA.....	Fire Officers' Association
FBU.....	Fire Brigades' Union
HSE.....	Health and Safety Executive
IPDS.....	Integrated Personal Development System
IRMP.....	Integrated Risk Management Plan
LFEPA.....	The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
LGA.....	Local Government Association
ODPM.....	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; Housing, .....Planning, Local Government and the Regions
SDA.....	Service Delivery Agreement
RFU.....	Retained Firefighters' Union

## Formal minutes

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**Wednesday 21 January 2004**

Members present:

Andrew Bennett, in the Chair

Mr John Cummings  
Chris Mole

Christine Russell  
Mr Adrian Sanders

The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report [*The Fire Service*], proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 137 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Third Report of the of the Committee to the House

*Ordered*, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That the provisions of Standing Order No. 134 (Select Committee (reports)) be applied to the Report.

*Ordered*, That the Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee be reported to the House – (The Chairman.)

[The Committee adjourned.]

## Witnesses

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### Tuesday 21 October 2003

Printed as HC 1168-i Session 2002-03

**Mr Barry Dixon**, County Fire Officer and Chief Executive, **Mr Russ James**, Brigade Training Officer, Greater Manchester County Fire Service

**Mr Peter Coombs**, Chief Executive and Chief Fire Officer, **Mr Charles Kerr**, Assistant Chief Officer, Kent Fire Brigade

**Ms Val Shawcross**, Chair, and **Mr Ken Knight**, Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority

**Mr Anthony McGuirk**, Chief Fire Officer of Merseyside Fire Service and Trustee of Friends of Merseyside Fire Service, and **Mr Mike Hagen**, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service/Friends of Merseyside Fire Service

**Ms Caroline Hindley**, Business Development Manager, Loop Customer Management Limited - Fire Service Direct

**Mr Steve McGuirk**, Chief Fire Officer, Cheshire Fire Service

**Mr Mick Howell**, Chief Fire Officer of Cornwall Fire Brigade and Secretary of South West Forum of Fire Authorities, and **Mr Jeremy Hilton**, Councillor for Gloucester Fire Authority, South West Forum of Fire Authorities

**Mr Barry Merritt**, Employer of Retained Fire Fighters (Devon)

### Tuesday 4 November 2003

Printed as HC 1168-ii Session 2002-03

**Dr Mike Dennett**, Independent Fire Consultant

**Ms Ann Everton**, Professor of Fire Law

**Mr Derek Chadbon**, National General Secretary, Retained Firefighters' Union

**Mr John Bonney**, Secretary, Association of Principal Fire Officers

**Mr Graham Setterfield**, Chief Executive, Fire Officers' Association

**Mr Jeff Ord**, President, **Mr Alan Doig**, Vice-President, and **Mr Steve McGuirk**, Lead Officer on White Paper working group, Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association

**Mr Andy Gilchrist**, General Secretary, **Ms Ruth Winters**, President, **Mr Mike Fordham**, Assistant General Secretary, the Fire Brigades' Union

### Tuesday 11 November 2003

Printed as HC 1168-iii Session 2002-03

**Sir Graham Meldrum CBE**, HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services, and **Mr Peter Morphew**, HM Senior Inspector of Fire Services, HM Fire Service Inspectorate

**Mr Robin Currie**, Chief Executive, Fire Service College

**Ms Marie Winckler**, Head of Fire Service Effectiveness Division, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

**Sir Jeremy Beecham**, Chair, LGA and **Mr Ken Knight**, LGA advisor and Commissioner for Fire and Emergency Planning, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority  
**Mr Martin Evans**, Director of Audit Policy and **Ms Mollie Bickerstaff**, Director of Fire Services, Audit Commission

### Wednesday 19 November 2003

Printed as HC 1168-iv Session 2002-03

**Professor Sir George Bain**, Chairman and **Mr Bob Evans**, Secretary, Independent Review of the Fire Service

### Thursday 20 November 2003

Printed as HC 1168-v Session 2002-03

**Rt Hon Nick Raynsford**, a Member of the House, Minister for Local and Regional Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

**Mr Clive Norris**, Director, Fire, Health and Safety, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

**Sir Graham Meldrum**, HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services

## List of written evidence

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The following memoranda were published in HC 1168-II of Session 2002-03

- 1 East Sussex Fire Authority (FIR 01)
- 2 Kent and Medway Towns Fire Authority Fire Brigade (FIR 02)
- 3 The Institution of Fire Engineers (FIR 03)
- 4 W.F. Hickin (FIR 04)
- 5 Lincolnshire County Council (FIR 05)
- 6 G W Herbert, Chief Fire Officer, County Durham & Darlington Fire and Rescue Brigade (FIR 06)
- 7 G. G. Edwards (FIR 07)
- 8 World Fire Statistics Centre (FIR 08)
- 9 Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Fire Authority (FIR 09)
- 10 Association of Principal Fire Officers' (APFO) (FIR 10)
- 11 Retained Firefighters Union (FIR 11)
- 12 Fire Service Research & Training Unit, Cambridge (FIR 12)
- 13 Networking Women in the Fire Service (NWFS) (FIR 13)
- 14 Gloucestershire County Council Fire Authority (FIR 14)
- 15 Avon Fire Authority (FIR 15)
- 16 Hertfordshire County Council Fire Authority (FIR 16)
- 17 Greater Manchester Fire Service (FIR 17)
- 18 Fire Safety Development Group (FSDG) (FIR 18)
- 19 South West Forum of Fire Authorities (FIR 19)
- 20 Emergi-lite Safety Systems (FIR 20)
- 21 Dr. M. F. Dennett, Independent Fire Consultant (FIR 21)
- 22 Chief Fire Officer Steve Seaber (FIR 22)
- 23 Cheshire Fire Service (FIR 23)
- 24 Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association (CACFOA) (FIR 24)
- 25 Greater Manchester Fire Authority (FIR 25)
- 26 Cornwall Fire Authority (FIR 26)
- 27 Atlas Fire Engineering Ltd (FIR 27)
- 28 Kidde Plc (FIR 28)
- 29 Chief Fire Officer J. M. Elliott, Cumbria Fire Service (FIR 29)
- 30 The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) (FIR 30)
- 31 London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) Conservative Group, Greater
- 32 London Authority Conservative Group and Conservative Leaders of London Borough  
Councils (FIR 31)
- 33 Fire Officers' Association (FOA) (FIR 32)
- 34 Fire Industry Confederation (FIC) (FIR 33)
- 35 Wormald Ansul (UK) Ltd (FIR 34)
- 36 Vimpex Ltd (FIR 35)
- 37 Luxfer Gas Cylinders (FIR 36)
- 38 The Fire Service Research & Training Unit, Anglia University and Loop Customer  
Management, Bradford (FIR 37)

- 39 Fulleon Ltd (FIR 38)
- 40 County Council's Network of Chief Fire Officers' (FIR 39)
- 41 Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service (FIR 40)
- 42 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FIR 41)
- 43 Supplementary Memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FIR 41 (a))
- 44 Supplementary Memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FIR 41 (b))
- 45 Supplementary Memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FIR 41 (c))
- 46 Supplementary Memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FIR 41 (d))
- 47 Ms Ann Everton, Professor of Fire Law (FIR 42)
- 48 Mr Don Scott, Fire Engineering Consultant (FIR 43)
- 49 London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) (FIR 44)
- 50 Michael Hamilton, Managing Director, Apollo Fire Detectors Ltd (FIR 45)
- 51 Derbyshire Fire & Rescue Service (FIR 46)
- 52 Devon Fire Authority (FIR 47)
- 53 Fire Protection Association (FPA) (FIR 48)
- 54 Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service (FIR 49)
- 55 Friends of Merseyside Fire Service (FIR 50)
- 56 Local Government Association (LGA) (FIR 51)
- 57 The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) (FIR 52)
- 58 Mr. John Wellborne, Firemaster Extinguisher Ltd (FIR 53)
- 59 Haven Fire and Security Consultants (FIR 54)

The following memoranda will be published in HC 43-II of Session 2003-04

- 60 Wessex Fire and Security (FIR 55)
  - 61 Trinity Protection Systems Ltd (FIR 56)
  - 62 Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) (FIR 57)
  - 63 North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority (FIR 58)
  - 64 Association of British Insurers (ABI) (FIR 59)
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# Reports from the ODPM Committee since 2003

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The following reports have been produced by the Committee since the start of the 2003-04 Parliament. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

## Session 2003-04

First Report	ODPM Annual Report and Accounts 2003	HC 102-I
Second Report	Annual Report to the Liaison Committee	HC 221