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Local Government and the
Regions Committee

The Fire and Rescue Service

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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.

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Oral evidence

Taken before the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister:

Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee
on Monday 30 January 2006

Members present:

Dr Phyllis Starkey, in the Chair

Sir Paul Beresford
Mr Clive Betts
Lyn Brown
John Cummings

Anne Main
Mr Bill Olnier
Dr John Pugh
Alison Seabeck

Witnesses: **Mr Alun Evans**, Director of Fire and Resilience, **Sir Graham Meldrum**, Head of HM Fire Service Inspectorate, **Mr Dave Lawrence**, Head of Fire Service Improvement Team, and **Mrs Marie Winckler**, Head of Fire Service Effectiveness Division, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: If I could welcome you to the meeting. Would you introduce yourselves one after the other and your positions?

Mr Evans: I am Alun Evans. I am the Director of the newly formed Fire and Resilience Directorate within ODPM.

Sir Graham Meldrum: Sir Graham Meldrum, the Chief Inspector of Fire Services.

Mrs Winckler: Marie Winckler, Head of the FiReControl project.

Mr Lawrence: Dave Lawrence, Head of the Fire Service Improvement Team.

Q2 Chair: Thank you very much. Can I start off by asking you to clarify the Department's attitude towards regionalisation. A number of the reforms, obviously the introduction of the Regional Control Centres and the establishment of regional personnel, training and procurement functions, suggest a deliberate regionalisation agenda and yet in your memorandum you have stated very clearly that you have no intention to "regionalise the Fire and Rescue Service". Could you clarify these two apparently contradictory statements?

Mr Evans: I hope they are not contradictory. The statement in the submission is very much about ministers' views that they do not believe in regionalisation of the service. The last time there was a statement about regionalisation was in the White Paper of 2003 which made clear that regionalisation would only take place if there was a demand for it within any region that voted for an Assembly, and following the North East vote there is clearly no political wish for regionalisation, so ministers have made it clear that there is no compulsory regionalisation. The only exception to that is where there are voluntary agreements on areas where the Fire and Rescue Service feel it would be a good idea to have a regional approach. The most commonly cited one of these is around the resilience and New Dimension planning for responding to mass incidents. All stakeholders within the Fire and Rescue Service agree with that voluntary approach. In addition, if there are areas where in terms of

national resilience, and no doubt we will get on to FiReControl, the ministers believe there is a case for regionalisation, we are pursuing that. In terms of any joining up, unification, of Fire and Rescue Service, ministers are adamant that will only be on a voluntary basis. There have been one or two examples of expressions of interest in merger and we are following those carefully.

Q3 Mr Olnier: Can I ask in this brand new life, perhaps it depends which side of the map you look at to see where we are going. Police forces are going to be regionalised and it follows that Fire Authorities will as well, but that is another story. In this brave new world, what is the role of the HM Fire Service Inspectorate now that the Fire Authorities are subject to Comprehensive Performance Assessment?

Mr Evans: On the first point, if I may. The fact that there is a proposal that the police might be regionalised does not affect what happens on the Fire and Rescue Service.

Q4 Mr Olnier: Not today but it might tomorrow.

Mr Evans: It might do, although in terms of local resilience and regional resilience we have worked across boundaries and across organisational designs of different organisations in the Health Service, the Ambulance Service and in local government, so I think the important thing is to have systems of co-operation at whatever level it is and according to whatever organisation particular emergency services have. I do not think it follows that every emergency service must be organised along the same boundary. Sir Graham might want to say more about the role of the Fire Service Inspectorate, which is changing as well.

Sir Graham Meldrum: The role and, indeed, the title will be changing. Since the Audit Commission have taken up inspection work, we have worked very closely with them. We have adjusted the establishment and the size of the Inspectorate to meet the new demands placed upon it. From previous staff levels we are about 50% of the size we

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were before with a staff of 86 when we were carrying out the full inspection work and that is now 40 staff, 15 of whom are dedicated to the Crown Premises Inspection Group. We are left with a very small core working with the Audit Commission. The role in the future will be to continue that work. Indeed, next year's follow-up to CPA has got a service delivery focus on it and at the moment to that end we are recruiting seconded staff to work with us to carry out the service assessment work, operational assessment as we term it, to ensure that the Fire and Rescue Service is meeting the operational requirements within the Fire and Rescue Service Act.

Q5 Mr Oler: Sir Graham, is that going to remove the tension that exists in many Fire Authorities, particularly with county councils and what have you where your Inspectorate comes along and says there should be a certain level of service and yet the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister funds it slightly differently from what you say is required? Will the new system straighten that out?

Mr Evans: Can I say something on the new system. One of the things we are trying to do in terms of what you have described as the new system, which we are calling a new professional advisory service from April 2007, is to use the expertise of Sir Graham and some of his colleagues but also to look ahead to recruiting a professional advisory service on secondment from the Fire and Rescue Service. So we will have experts from the service coming in to work with ODPM and, rather than as you have described it, which certainly was the traditional way in which inspection went, of Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate going in and saying "This is how it should be done", we have developed what is called a toolkit so that Fire Authorities can come up with their own proposals on how best to meet fire requirements within their authorities and the role of the advisory service will be to work with that process and also use the Audit Commission to audit it according to Audit Commission process and practices.

Q6 Mr Oler: Is that a yes or a no?

Mr Evans: It is partly a yes and a no.

Q7 Mr Oler: There were real tensions before and in any new scheme you bring forward those tensions should be removed.

Mr Lawrence: I think that is absolutely right and the tensions will be removed because the new process is about asking questions about whether Fire Authorities have got a robust process in place, whether it is evidence-based, whether they have done the necessary research and back-up, *et cetera*. What it will not be doing is going in and coming up with a second opinion as to whether the resources or the assets were right or not, that is a decision for the local Fire Authority. What Graham's team and my team will be doing as part of the follow-up process to CPA is making sure that is a robust evidence-based set of decisions but it is not to second-guess the Fire Authority.

Q8 Mr Oler: How far down the road are you with progress on the transfer of your advisory and other functions? It will cease to exist in 2007, are you on target?

Sir Graham Meldrum: We are. A lot of action has been taken already. As I say, we have had to deal with some quite sensitive staffing issues to get down to the 50% level. We have now got a project-based programme to consider the rest of the work that we have got to do, which is obviously the professional advice to both the ministers within the ODPM and the senior Civil Service, and we have got to keep that going, and the work associated with the operational assurance. We see that the programme is on time to deliver.

Mr Evans: The target is to deliver by April next year, 2007.

Q9 Sir Paul Beresford: If I could follow up on what Mr Oler was saying. If I was on a Fire Authority I would be desperately confused. We have got the CPA, we have got the Director of Fire and Resilience, we have got the Head of the Fire Service Inspectorate, we have got the Head of the Fire Service Improvement Team and we have got the Head of the Fire Service Effectiveness Division. This sounds like the Marx Brothers' *At the Opera*. You have got all these different bodies, would they not be better together, working together as one team, talking to each of the authorities at the appropriate stage? I have not thrown the Audit Commission in yet either.

Mr Evans: One of the things we have done is ministers have set up a new Fire and Resilience Directorate which brings together the previous resilience and Fire and Rescue Service Directorate arrangements into one. I agree with you that some of the actual titles are perhaps not the best we might have, so we are trying to have something that expresses that better. In terms of the function of the Inspectorate, as Sir Graham said beforehand, we are trying to have an advisory service which works with us and works with Fire and Rescue Authorities. The Audit Commission—to pick up your other point—had a very clear remit under Comprehensive Performance Assessment, which was to assess the management capabilities of authorities, and under the process that we will be starting as from next summer we will also be assessing the operational capabilities of Fire and Rescue Authorities.

Q10 Sir Paul Beresford: Okay. If you go and assess those presumably you are requiring your local Fire Authority to produce figures to do assessments, to use their own team to provide information for you. One of the things the local authorities find is that when the CPA arrives it kills any work at the top echelons of that local authority for weeks. With potentially the four of you, plus the Audit Commission arriving, you are just going to swamp them with bureaucracy.

Mr Evans: We are working hard to design a system which is not over-bureaucratic and, as I said earlier on, we rely on something called a toolkit.

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Q11 Sir Paul Beresford: It is over-bureaucratic now?

Mr Evans: I think in the past it has been rather, yes.

Mr Lawrence: There is no case for any of us arriving en masse at a Fire Authority. In fact, what the Fire Authority had in CPA terms is a single team and that CPA team comes in, does its job and produces its report. What we then do is pick up and discuss with the Fire Authority how to handle the performance improvement and drive that forward. It is an holistic approach. They certainly do not see three or four different people arrive, they see a single team that produces a report and then another single team that talks with the Fire Authority as to how to take it forward.

Q12 Sir Paul Beresford: So it is this week Team A, next week Team B and so on?

Mr Lawrence: No, I am sorry, I am saying it is not. I am saying it is a single team.

Q13 Sir Paul Beresford: You just said the CPA and the Audit Commission go in, they produce a report, you pick it up and you go in.

Mr Evans: The CPA reports were done last year and the operational assessment will be done this year, so there has only been one a year.

Sir Graham Meldrum: We will work with the Audit Commission on the service delivery assessment. As they do with the Social Services and Education, the service delivery element will be one of a number of elements forming part of the Audit Commission's service assessment. The burden of inspection has been lifted from Fire Authorities. We used to go and spend a week in a Fire Authority inspecting in-depth, that has gone.

Q14 Sir Paul Beresford: That has been replaced by the CPA.

Sir Graham Meldrum: The Audit Commission's assessment is one assessment that will be produced with our people we have seconded working with the Audit Commission. There is only one team and that is it.

Chair: Can we move on to FiReControl and Firelink.

Q15 Alison Seabeck: Just to set the scene for the Committee, could you explain to what extent the FiReControl and Firelink projects are interdependent and how they will be managed within the Department?

Mr Evans: I think one of the things we have done which is a very positive step forward as part of the merger of the two directorates is to bring together Firelink and FiReControl under one senior responsible manager, which is me. Clearly these two projects developed from different backgrounds. One went back to when the Fire Service was in the Home Office when there was a desire for a unified fire radio system and on the other side was the Fire Control, the Regional Control Room system that came out of the Mott MacDonald report more recently. Ideally, we would not have started from the place we are. What we have done is unified the two projects under one senior manager, ie me, we have brought together

one level of governance for both projects reporting to me. When we get to the stage of roll-out, we will have one unified testing system so that the system is tested end-to-end from the radio system to the control room and we are looking at other ways of unifying the two projects. If your question is why are there two, ideally there would not be but we are where we are.

Q16 Alison Seabeck: Has it not taken rather a long while for you to reach the conclusion that they ought to be integrated more closely? A lot of the submissions we have received expressed concerns, and some of those concerns go quite a way back. Why has it taken ODPM such a long time to think perhaps they ought to be more closely linked?

Mr Evans: I may be the wrong person to answer that because I have been pressing for the two to be unified for a long time within the Department and ministers and the Permanent Secretary have now taken this decision to unify the two. I do not know whether Marie wants to add anything more about this. I would agree with the Committee's view that the two need to be treated as one programme and that is what we are trying to do at the moment. There are clearly benefits from that.

Mrs Winckler: I think there is still a lot of work to be done at regional and at local level. Now that we are part of the same directorate we are working on the detail of that. We are aware that we are less united, or we have appeared less united, at headquarters and less unified than the Fire and Rescue Services have at local level and at regional level. Now we want to work with them in detail on setting up arrangements that are absolutely streamlined all the way through.

Q17 Alison Seabeck: Is it your view that coming to this decision on the need to unify the two as late as you have, you have allowed the local authorities or other elements in the package at times to obstruct and delay in a way which is now less possible because you are able to drive it through from the centre?

Mr Evans: I do not agree with that. What we have done on Firelink is drive through a quite complex radio communications project with support across most stakeholders within the Fire and Rescue Service and now we are coming up to the contract award on that project with a clear roll-out timetable for it. FiReControl has been more complex because there has been greater opposition within parts of the service to it. The two parts of the organisation, either in one directorate as we are now or the two beforehand, have worked very closely at strategic level, at regional level and in terms of communicating the benefits of the two. Certainly we do have a difference of approach within the service as to how much acceptance there is for each of the two projects and that is something we are working on.

Q18 Alison Seabeck: In relation to the delays to Airwave which were obviously linked into the Firelink project, you are now expecting

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that announcement imminently, are you, as to confirmation of the bidder?

Mr Evans: We agreed who the preferred bidder was back in November and we are now going through the final stage of the negotiations. We expect to announce the agreement on the contract within the next month.

Q19 Anne Main: You said you have been pressing for a considerable period of time for integration and it was being resisted. Who was resisting it and why?

Mr Evans: I did not say it had been resisted. I said I had been pressing for it for some time and the resistance, if there was some, was partly due to the inertia of the system because for the historical reasons that I set out—we now get rather into the theology of the way in which the ODPM was set up—the Firelink project was in one directorate and FiReControl was in another. The point that I made was that I thought it was a good idea to put the two together in one directorate, which they have now done.

Q20 Anne Main: So they were not communicating with each other?

Mr Evans: They were communicating but you can always improve communications.

Q21 Mr Betts: How much is the FiReControl project going to cost?

Mr Evans: About 500 million over a ten year period. I cannot answer that question exactly because we have not yet signed the contract. Sorry, FiReControl you said. I beg your pardon. 988 million over a 15 year period.

Q22 Mr Betts: That is capital?

Mr Evans: No, in total. That is capital and resource costs of local authority running costs.

Mrs Winckler: That is the total cost of running the fire control service over that period including the costs of the project.

Q23 Mr Betts: So is there a split between capital and revenue?

Mrs Winckler: There will be, yes.

Q24 Mr Betts: Is that available?

Mr Evans: The capital cost is not available on Firelink or FiReControl until the contract is agreed and the nature of the negotiating contract procedure we have is in order to get best value for money one is still negotiating up until one signs the contract and that is a perfectly normal procurement procedure. It is not a reason for keeping figures back; I do not even have them.

Q25 Mr Betts: How long will it be before you do have them?

Mr Evans: On the Firelink side I would think—

Q26 Mr Betts: FiReControl.

Mrs Winckler: We are in discussions with bidders at the moment but we would hope to have final costs later this year. We do not want to be too precise about timing when we are in discussions with bidders.

Q27 Mr Betts: If you have not got the final costs, have you got the Final Business Case?

Mr Evans: We have got a strategic outline business case which is the top level business case which we have shared with the service and that makes a number of assumptions about costs but, again, I come back to my earlier answer that you will not have a Final Business Case until we have finished negotiations with the three competing bidders and reached a contract and that will be in mid-summer, early autumn.

Mrs Winckler: You were asking about capital. We gave a figure when we were asked for capital costs of £160 million as the one-off costs of the project, but that included some resource items like the “new burdens” given to local authorities.

Q28 Mr Betts: It might seem a little strange given the degree of concern in the service and people have different views about Regional Control Centres that you have not got a final cost or a Final Business Case but you are absolutely certain it is going to work.

Mr Evans: Again, we do have a strategic outline business case as it is called, and that is all you can have at this stage. By the nature of the negotiations you will not have a full business case until you know the costs.

Q29 Mr Betts: Is that publicly available?

Mr Evans: Yes, and it has been consulted on very widely with Fire and Rescue Authorities.

Q30 Mr Betts: So we could have a summary of that?

Mr Evans: Certainly. You could have the whole thing if you want.

Q31 Mr Betts: That is probably quite long.

Mr Evans: In answer to your other question, which was the important part of it, you said will you go ahead regardless of what the figures are, no, one would not if the negotiations proved it was not value for money. The whole point of this negotiation process is to use three bidders to work with them, to work with the Fire and Rescue Service on determining the specification of the project, and at the end of that using competition to negotiate the best possible deal. If that did not deliver value for money then of course one would not go ahead, but we are fairly confident that the business case will deliver that value for money, which is why we are committed to it.

Q32 Mr Betts: Why did the FBU in its evidence to us say that the outline business case identified “a high risk of total project failure”?

Mr Evans: I am not responding to what the FBU said in their submission.

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Q33 Mr Betts: I am asking you to, I think that is reasonable.

Mr Evans: Of course it is reasonable, but as I said—

Q34 Mr Betts: The FBU have said that is what is in the outline business case, “a high risk of total project failure”. Are you saying they are wrong?

Mr Evans: I do not think there is a high risk of business failure as the FBU put in their business case. They made a number of statements about Government IT projects which I think were not necessarily accurate. Where there is a challenge, which I would agree with them, is in delivering business change within the Fire and Rescue Service, which is the big challenge of this project as well as the IT.

Mrs Winckler: There was a section of the business case which discussed projects in general and that paragraph referred to high risk of total project failure, not in relation to this specific project but in a discussion of projects in general and it was taken as though that applied to the whole business case but it did not, it was taken just from that paragraph which was a general discussion of projects as a whole.

Q35 Mr Betts: You would accept it is one of the most complicated IT schemes the Government has introduced, or is thinking of introducing.

Mr Evans: No. I think the challenge of FiReControl is to get an IT system which is deliverable across regional level. If you go around the country, and I think we probably have not made enough of this, there are systems in Norfolk, West Midlands, Merseyside, which deliver this type of capability. There are systems overseas, in Sweden, which have a regional control type system. The challenge of this project is to deliver an IT system which replicates the type of system that works in those small authorities I have named on a larger scale and are backed up and more resilient.

Q36 Mr Betts: One further question on FiReControl. We have talked about the costs and you have not got them absolutely but you have indicated the region that the costs are likely to be in. Those costs are going to be borne by Central Government, are they?

Mr Evans: The costs will be borne by a combination of Central Government and local government. Central Government will meet all of the new costs of the capital investment and the IT and fitting out and all of the new burdens cost that will fall to local authorities under FiReControl.

Q37 Mr Betts: How much is that of the 988 million?

Mr Evans: £160 million is the total one-off costs and the rest is running costs on 15 years.

Mrs Winckler: The costs of the accommodation lease will be borne by Fire and Rescue Authorities.

Q38 Mr Betts: How much will this scheme cost local authorities out of their own resources over that 15 year period?

Mr Evans: I do not have that figure but nothing more than they are paying at the moment.

Q39 Mr Betts: So there will be no extra costs at all to local authorities?

Mrs Winckler: There will be additional transitional costs—

Q40 Mr Betts: How much?

Mrs Winckler:—which the Government has agreed to bear.

Q41 Mr Betts: Is there any cost to local authorities which Central Government is not bearing?

Mr Evans: In addition to what they pay for at the moment for Fire and Rescue Control Rooms?

Q42 Mr Betts: Yes.

Mr Evans: No.

Q43 Mr Betts: Absolutely nil?

Mrs Winckler: The Government has said it will bear the transitional costs and it is bearing the costs of the installation of the technology. The Fire and Rescue Authorities will be paying the costs of running the Regional Control Centres.

Q44 Mr Betts: And that will be no greater than it is now?

Mrs Winckler: That will be no greater than it is now.

Q45 Mr Betts: That is an absolute guarantee, is it? These projects have a habit of over-running from time to time. Any overrun costs will be borne by Central Government, will they?

Mr Evans: That is what we said, yes.

Q46 Mr Betts: Every single penny of every cost will be borne by Central Government?

Mrs Winckler: The Government is paying for the technology.

Q47 Mr Betts: If the technology costs go up, if the transitional costs go up and in the end it proves more expensive to run, that cost is picked up by Central Government, is it?

Mr Evans: If the additional costs falling on Fire and Rescue Authorities go up beyond the existing amounts that they pay for Fire Control Rooms the Government will meet those costs.

Q48 Mr Betts: Let us go to Firelink now. You were talking about having a system of Regional Control Centres which you said has worked in other places and you are pretty confident about the technology. We know, do we not, given the course you have chosen to go down with Firelink that the communications system the police have got, which is the same technology, has been an absolute disaster in many parts of the country?

Mr Evans: I am not sure the police would say it has been an absolute disaster but—

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Q49 Mr Betts: My constituents who try and contact South Yorkshire Police's control centre would and the police have acknowledged it is bad, they have had major problems with it.

Mr Evans: Certainly there are some complaints about Airwave in police forces, I readily accept that.

Mr Betts: Not some complaints. If you go and talk to the Assistant Chief Constable, who has been responsible, he will demonstrate the system was a complete disaster when it was first installed and it did not run properly for months and still does not run totally effectively.

Q50 John Cummings: That situation is reflected in Durham, so it is not just a one-off in Sheffield. There is an awful lot to be learned from mistakes that are being made at the present time. I hope you are taking them on board.

Mr Evans: We certainly are taking them on board. What the Fire and Rescue Service did and what we did was in terms of learning the lessons from the police procurement because there were a lot of criticisms of the Airwave procurement in the NAO report and from the Public Accounts Committee and they said the best way in which these lessons can be learned and the shortcomings avoided is by competition. We negotiated up until the end of last year with two competitors, one of whom was Airwave and the other was EADS, and I can assure you we got much better output performance specifications and commercial terms, project management terms, from Airwave negotiations than the police negotiation got.

Q51 Mr Betts: So this system is going to work a lot better than the police communication system, is it?

Mr Evans: Yes.

Q52 Mr Betts: Will there be any cost to local authorities through that?

Mr Evans: The answer is the same as with FiReControl. There will be costs but we will meet any additional new burdens. In actual fact, there will be a number of savings to local authorities because we are meeting all of the capital costs of the system which will save them a lot of costs they currently have to pay on renewing and renovating their clapped out systems.

Q53 Mr Betts: We will know what the total costs are very shortly when you complete your business case.

Mr Evans: As I said when I answered the other question wrongly, the total costs are about 500 million over a ten year period. Ten years because that is roughly the assumption we are working on on the lifespan of the technology. As with FiReControl, once we have gone through the final negotiations we will know a figure from the contract and then we will be able to answer exactly that question.

Q54 Mr Betts: When will that be?

Mr Evans: I would think early summer. May, something like that.

Q55 Anne Main: Briefly on the point you have raised so well, Clive. I really would like an in writing assurance about the costing because it seems to me the police have been asked—I had this confirmed last week—to pay £17 million towards the start-up of the amalgamation of police forces and that is going to fall on them taking out a loan and ultimately on the taxpayer. I remain a little sceptical that the Fire Service would have a different degree of treatment in terms of similar sorts of start-up costs that the police have got. You are saying there is a categorical assurance there will be no extra burden on the taxpayer but the police will have to pass one on. I just wonder why you can give us that assurance.

Mr Evans: I can give you that assurance but—

Anne Main: The police—

Q56 Chair: Can we stick to the Fire Service.

Mr Evans: I cannot answer questions on police financing.

Anne Main: But we are talking about similar systems.

Q57 Chair: Can you let him answer, Anne, please.

Mr Evans: I will answer it again. I thought I gave it clearly to Mr Betts. I will guarantee that additional burdens falling on local authorities from the implementation of Firelink will be met by Central Government. If you want it in writing I will—

Chair: We will have it in writing because it will be in the evidence which the Department will agree is a true record.

Q58 Mr Betts: In terms of the actual impact on the ground of the Regional Control Centres, what impact will there be on the number of staff employed? Are we going to see a significant reduction?

Mr Evans: I will ask Ms Winckler to confirm but I think the current number of staff employed in Fire and Rescue controls is about 1,500 and the number we envisage under FiReControl is about 1,000 nationally, so it is 500 less.

Mrs Winckler: Those are full-time equivalent numbers. There are about 1,500 at the moment and we expect it to go down to about 1,000 but the decisions on the final staffing levels are not for the Department, they are for the Fire and Rescue Authorities as employers.

Q59 Mr Betts: Are those figures, roughly speaking, agreed with the various Fire Authorities up and down the country?

Mrs Winckler: They are based on an organisational design for the new centres which has been agreed with the Fire and Rescue Service in a series of discussions and consultations, yes.

Q60 Mr Betts: Will the Regional Control Centres perform all the tasks and duties that are currently performed within the various authorities' control rooms?

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Mrs Winckler: They will perform all the functions that are related to the control service. They will not perform what are currently deemed to be out-of-scope functions because at the moment control rooms do some functions to use up spare capacity which are not related to the control service. The new centres will do all the functions related to the control service itself but they will not do what are called out-of-scope functions.

Q61 Mr Betts: So some extra duties are going to have to be passed on elsewhere in the Fire Service?

Mrs Winckler: They will be functions for which the Fire and Rescue Service will have to find a home, yes.

Q62 Mr Betts: And staff. So the saving of 500 staff in the control room is not a true total saving, is it?

Mrs Winckler: How they choose to fulfil those functions is up to them.

Q63 Mr Betts: You are saying there are 1,500 staff doing a particular job in control rooms at present, there will be 1,000 staff doing some of that work in the Regional Control Centres in the future. You are going to need some of those staff who are supposedly being saved to carry on doing the jobs that will no longer be done in the Regional Control Centres, are you not?

Mr Evans: It depends which authority you are in. If you take London, for example, which has probably the highest call volumes, they are taking a call roughly every 30 minutes per operator so they are pretty much fully occupied. In some authorities control room operators will be taking a call per operator once every two hours or so, so that is five or six calls a day. In some of those authorities there are other activities that they do. In terms of answering your question on the number across the country, one cannot do it because it depends how each individual Fire and Rescue Service manages their service.

Q64 Mr Betts: Wait a minute. You are deciding centrally we are going to have these Regional Control Centres throughout the country, it is a central decision, the implications are worked out locally but the total cost of the project has to take account of the extent to which some of the functions currently carried out in control rooms are displaced within the service. It has to do that otherwise it is not a proper cost.

Mrs Winckler: The business case does take account of—

Q65 Mr Betts: How many people will have to do the displaced tasks? You must have a number in there of whole-time equivalents to do the costings.

Mrs Winckler: At the moment I cannot recall a specific figure for the number of people doing out-of-scope functions.

Q66 Mr Betts: Can we have a figure?

Mrs Winckler: We can certainly go back and look into that but I cannot give it to you off the top of my head.

Mr Betts: Can we have a note on that.

Q67 Dr Pugh: A very quick question. The Fire Minister, Jim Fitzpatrick, said that the move to Regional Control Centres will improve response times. We are in an age of evidence-led policy now so you must surely have presented him with some clear evidence that indicated that was the case because it was not just a guess, was it? What was the evidence?

Mr Evans: FiReControl will improve response in three ways at least: firstly, it is more resilient so the system will be—

Q68 Dr Pugh: I am not asking for the case to be made, I am asking what research base you produced to Jim Fitzpatrick which made him say Regional Control Centres will necessarily improve response times. What evidence was shown?

Mr Evans: The research base was around response times at the moment plus capability of technology in particular areas compared with the response times and the known capability of the technology that we are developing.

Mrs Winckler: At the moment response times are not measured in the same way as they are going to be measured in future. Response times are measured from the time a call is received in the station and the appliance gets the call in the station and sets out. The situation is going to be very different in future, not least because of the introduction of Integrated Risk Management Planning and the fact that appliances are not all going to be in the station, they are going to be out on the road where there is the greatest risk and there will be dynamic mobilising direct to the appliance. So you are not comparing like-with-like, you are moving into a new situation.

Dr Pugh: I totally accept that. I do note that what you have not said is that there have been any extensive pilot studies done or large international comparisons made before the theory of Regional Control Centres was put forward. Thank you.

Chair: We are really short of time and I want to get to resilience. John, can I ask you to only ask question seven, we will leave question eight to ministers I think.

Q69 John Cummings: Would you tell the Committee what criteria have been used to decide where the Regional Control Centres will be located, please?

Mrs Winckler: There was a public consultation on the criteria which related to resilience to such characteristics as whether the site was on a floodplain or whether it was in sight of low-flying aircraft, proximity to fibre-optic network, those sorts of criteria, and we went out to consultation on those criteria. Those were the criteria that applied to the consultation.

Q70 John Cummings: How extensive was the consultation?

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Mrs Winckler: We consulted Fire and Rescue Authorities and Regional Management Boards and the Practitioners' Forum.

Q71 John Cummings: How will the location of the RCCs affect joint working in the future? Will the new RCCs be co-located with police stations or other emergency service control centres?

Mr Evans: There are no plans to do that at the moment. The liaison between the new RCCs and other agencies will work the way in which it does now but it will be improved because of the technology. The only example that is different from that is in terms of when the London control room comes in we are working on whether or not there is any extra co-operation we need in terms of preparing for the London Olympics.

Q72 John Cummings: I want to come back very briefly to the consultation. It was basically a closed form of consultation, you did not go out to public consultation, was it not?

Mrs Winckler: We consulted Fire and Rescue Authorities and Regional Management Boards. It was a stakeholder consultation.

Q73 John Cummings: But not a public consultation. It was an incestuous sort of consultation.

Mr Evans: With the main stakeholder within the service.

Mrs Winckler: The documents are on the website.

Q74 John Cummings: Who did you consult with? The police? Ambulance?

Mrs Winckler: We did not consult—

Q75 John Cummings: Local authorities? Councils?

Mrs Winckler: We consulted the Fire and Rescue Authorities. We did not consult the police and the ambulance but the criteria were drawn up in conjunction with those who deal with national security, so to the extent that those affect police and ambulance they would have been relevant.

Q76 John Cummings: So was it just a paper exercise to give it a smattering of consultation?

Mr Evans: No. It was consultation with those members of the stakeholder community who are most interested in it.

Q77 John Cummings: Not the public? Not the local authorities representing the public?

Mr Evans: Local authorities, elected members contributed to it.

Q78 John Cummings: They were invited to?

Mrs Winckler: Yes.

Q79 John Cummings: So local authorities were invited, that is the question I am asking?

Mrs Winckler: Yes, they were consulted and did respond.

Q80 Anne Main: What lessons have been learnt for the Fire and Rescue Service from the attacks on London on 7 and 21 July and also the Buncefield disaster? How has the Government responded and how has the Fire Service responded?

Mr Evans: The Fire Service responded extremely well to both of those incidents you mentioned. In terms of London there has been a lessons learnt process on all of the issues from command and control, from multi-agency working, from sustainability of resources. In Buncefield we have done a lot of work on the mobilising of other Fire and Rescue Services from throughout the country, liaison with local authorities, regional working in response to major crises, effects of that crisis on the oil supply industry and aviation fuel to Heathrow, and there will be a full lessons learnt document on that within a few months.

Q81 Anne Main: What tests have been made of the equipment procured under the New Dimension programme? Have staff had sufficient training in using this equipment? Does that training extend to retained firefighters?

Mr Evans: There is an enormous programme of training and testing of the equipment to test its robustness, and that is carried out in partnership with the Fire and Rescue Service, they have come and looked at all of the equipment in prototype before we bring it in. We have a full programme of training funded by the Department so that Fire and Rescue Services do not have any extra costs incurred. The Retained Fire Service is involved in this process.

Q82 Anne Main: Many of the current reforms have been framed against the backdrop of 9/11 and 7/7. What evidence does the Government have for believing that these reforms are equally appropriate say, for example, in rural areas as they are in metropolitan areas which might be perceived as having a greater risk of a terrorist attack but rural areas have their own particular needs?

Mr Evans: I think that is quite a good point. Rural areas have just as much threat, if not possibly more, from natural disaster, floods and things like that. If you look at the experience of the last 18 months, we had the Boscastle floods in the summer of 2004, the Carlisle floods in 2005, we had 7/7 in the summer and we had Buncefield. Three of those were outside of Central London and one was in Central London. I think the response has been equally good from the Fire and Rescue Service and other agencies working together in all of those. I would say that we have a flexible and appropriate response mechanism and that New Dimension equipment, for example the high volume pumps, has been used at Carlisle and Buncefield and if they had not been there we would not have had the capability to deal with those two disasters.

Q83 Mr Olnier: Is it not frightening that the larger you grow, you only have one form of resilience? The fact is if you have got many Fire Authorities and they all build in some resilience that means you are

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able to tap on a national basis the spare of all those little bits but if you have just got a few big bits there is not going to be enough resilience to go round, is there?

Mr Evans: I think there is a balance between how much you want to have capacity in every Fire and Rescue Authority and how much you develop this on a risk basis. As I said right at the beginning, one of the things on New Dimension, which is accepted across the piece from fire officers to local authorities to FBU, is the need to plan for New Dimension type incidents on a regional basis. In the crises that we have had, like Carlisle, like Buncefield, we have needed to bring in resources from across the country but we have always had enough resources.

Q84 Mr Oler: Will you in the future when you have not got so many Fire Authorities? Will you have enough resilience in the future?

Mr Evans: We believe we will have.

Q85 Mr Oler: It is only a belief?

Mr Evans: I cannot give you a cast iron guarantee, we do not know what crises we are going to have. The interesting thing about Buncefield was the risk assessment had been for a fire with one tanker blaze but in actual fact we had 20 and Hertfordshire and other Fire Services put that out and we had enough foam from across the whole country. I do not know whether Sir Graham wants to say anything more on preparing for disasters we have not yet thought about.

Sir Graham Meldrum: I think the proof of those major disasters so far has been the value of providing the equipment for the New Dimension of terrorism project regionally provided throughout the whole of the Fire and Rescue Service. What we have done is supplemented the capability for dealing with incidents. Before 9/11, and questioned by the minister after 9/11, we had to admit for that huge scale of incident we did not have the equipment that would have met that demand for high volume pumping, for instance. Now it has been provided it was possible to deploy it at Buncefield and extinguish the fire. Previously in a number of areas we had to address the situation on a new scale, such as mass decontamination of the public. I think we have gone from having a very limited capability prior to 9/11, because that was how it was perceived as a risk, to now possibly the best in the world in terms of our capability for dealing with such an incident.

Q86 Dr Pugh: Moving to fire prevention, your written evidence says that prevention culture is now “embedded in the FRS”. Is that a pious hope or are you looking at some real evidence that shows that is so?

Mr Evans: The fire prevention mechanisms that we have done and the investment in fire prevention, arson control and other initiatives show that there is wide experience across all different authorities in fire prevention and our challenge, if there is one, is to

ensure that best practice is shared as widely as possible because not all 46 authorities are as good as each other.

Q87 Dr Pugh: It is differently embedded in different places?

Mr Evans: Different qualities of embeddedness, yes.

Sir Graham Meldrum: In the last ten years we have seen the move away from the Fire Service looking at purely legal fire prevention, fire safety measures and looking at the role simply from intervention to one of being prevention in the true sense of the word. We have made a huge commitment towards the whole of preventing fire in the first place with the formation of the Community Fire Safety Centre. That has resulted in the very pleasing result of seeing a fall taking place in fire deaths to the lowest this year we have seen for 45 years.

Q88 Dr Pugh: In terms of that very desirable development, do you think the new resilience duties the FRS have got are going to impact upon or distract from that mission, as it were?

Sir Graham Meldrum: I think the fact that out of all the changes that have taken place the new Fire and Rescue Service Act, the 2004 Act, put a requirement upon the Fire and Rescue Authorities to ensure they carried out community fire safety changed the whole way people look at this. In the past it was something you could do, it was an add-on, now it is a duty on every Fire and Rescue Authority in the country to carry out community fire safety work. It is not something people are doing reluctantly. There are some amazing initiatives taking place up and down the land. There have been 330,000 home fire safety visits taking place where smoke detectors have been fitted into people’s homes, particularly people who vulnerable, the elderly. There have been some amazing initiatives with young people in the community as well. It is an amazing change of culture that has taken place in the Fire Service over a very short period indeed.

Q89 Sir Paul Beresford: Is there prevention built into the funding formula?

Mr Lawrence: Yes, there is. One of the huge changes, both in terms of the finance and the activity of FRAs, is the prevention role is now seen as being equal and in some areas more important than the intervention role. In other words, if we can prevent it happening in the first place this is clearly the way forward. Local Risk Management Plans and the results of those do feed into the finance formula.

Q90 Sir Paul Beresford: So the old system of more fires, more money is sliding to one side?

Mr Lawrence: Indeed so.

Q91 Dr Pugh: Just to pick up on some minor issues relating to prevention. Is there a greater role for the retained firefighters in this particular line of work? Is there not an importance to be attached to how firefighters are trained because obviously teaching

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people how to prevent fires is rather different from rescuing people from fires and different personal qualities are required?

Mr Evans: In addition, some of the activities of the Fire Service are now made a legal duty, including rescuing people from road traffic accidents, for example. They take up more time than fighting fires. It is important to get the balance of training right between traditional fire fighting and these other duties and preparing for New Dimension type disasters.

Sir Graham Meldrum: It is true to say that in the new entrant training course the community fire safety aspect plays a big role. Also, the Government has put a lot of money into it. There has been a £25 million grant to Fire Authorities to fund smoke detectors in vulnerable communities, 11.3 million put into arson and, of course, the national television advertising campaign, one of which is running at the moment, which we found have had a considerable impact on the reduction of fire deaths.

Q92 Dr Pugh: I am not sure if you dealt with the issue of retained firefighters.

Sir Graham Meldrum: The retained firefighters in many ways are the true community fire safety officers because they are part of the community. We have found throughout the country some very good initiatives have come forward from retained firefighters to take forward community fire safety within the area they serve.

Q93 Dr Pugh: It is an increasing role.

Sir Graham Meldrum: It is an important part of their work.

Mr Lawrence: We did have a major review of the Retained Service which reported in January 2004 and that is now with the Chief Fire Officers Association and ourselves to drive forward. I would like to echo that, I think the retained are an absolutely vital part of the service for the future and how we develop that from the community safety perspective is one of the key challenges over the next year or two.

Q94 Chair: How soon do you think we can see concrete changes as a result of the discussions that you are having with the chief fire officers?

Mr Lawrence: On the retained?

Q95 Chair: Yes. Is that just going to sit there or are we going to see some action?

Mr Lawrence: We are going to see some action.

Q96 Chair: How soon?

Mr Lawrence: The position at the moment is that the Chief Fire Officers Association are preparing a business case for putting in priority order what came out of the retained review. I would expect that to be with us in a matter of weeks.

Q97 Chair: And then?

Mr Lawrence: Then there will go from that an action plan to be discussed on taking it forward. I would expect over the next month or two to see some real developments on that front.

Mr Evans: If I might add one final point on the retained. One of the issues is recruitment of retained and it is a big challenge to make sure we keep up the level of recruitment because it has become increasingly difficult to encourage people in some areas into the Retained Service.

Q98 Lyn Brown: Despite the fact that diversity was specifically mentioned in this Committee's Terms of Reference, there is no mention made in the ODPM's written submission of this issue. Furthermore, the ODPM Annual Report for 2005 states that the Service Delivery Targets to increase the percentage of black and minority ethnic communities' representatives and women amongst staff was not met. Can you tell me why the Department did not meet its SDA 2000 targets on increasing the numbers of women and ethnic minority within the service?

Mr Evans: Progress on meeting the targets clearly has not been good enough and is something we have got to address over the coming years. The one thing I would say in response to your question, which is not ducking the issue, is that there are some authorities, and I will pick out London in particular, who have done very good work of going into the ethnic communities and recruiting from those areas. Although the progress has not been good enough, has not been nearly good enough, there are pockets of good performance and good practice around the country and one of the big challenges is to make sure those aspects of good practice are replicated much more widely. It is a long-term problem and it is something that needs extremely good communication and good project management from the centre working with local authorities.

Q99 Lyn Brown: Why did the Department not set itself new targets?

Mr Evans: I am not sure I can answer that.

Sir Graham Meldrum: We are actually reviewing the targets now with the stakeholders. They have examined the previous targets, looked at the progress that has been made and there have been a number of reasons for this, one of which is there has been quite a reduction in recruitment that has taken place because of changes in the Fire and Rescue Service. As we speak we are preparing a report that will go to our ministers within the next few days which will look at the employment target strategies and do a milestone review, point out where we are and suggesting that working with the stakeholders we need to review the targets, not to make them stretched targets but achievable targets. Particularly with the recruitment of women firefighters, the target was set ambitiously at 2010 at 15% of the workforce and it has not been met, and is not going to be met. Rather than a target where everybody just says, "We are not going to meet it", because of the

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change in the way recruitment is taking place, we want to set a target that will stretch but will be achievable.

Q100 Lyn Brown: You say that there is going to be a report ready in a matter of days. Is it possible for this inquiry to receive a copy of that report? Secondly, can you and do you use the CPA process to take action on issues around diversity? Would you not accept that in order to make progress on issues of diversity there needs to be a real change of attitude throughout the whole of the Fire Service? Can you tell me what you are doing in order to make that change of attitude happen?

Sir Graham Meldrum: We have got the CPA process to include the diagnostic area relating specifically to equality and diversity, so that was part of the CPA process. We have also done a lot of work with the Commission for Racial Equality in relation to ensuring that the service is delivering its requirement under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act. It is true to say that in many areas we are finding that progress has not been made as quickly as it should have been, that there is a need to re-examine quite a number of areas. We cannot sit here and say that we have made great progress in equality and diversity when you are talking about 2.4% of a workforce, both in relation to women and to members of the black and ethnic minority community. That is not good enough. I chair the Diversity Happens Programme Board which is a board made up of stakeholders. We are now re-examining the way to take all of this forward in the light of the lack of progress that has been made in order to get the stakeholders to sign up to ensure that this is driven forward in the future.

Mr Evans: There is an issue, and it is an important one, about the way in which you manage this in that there is a limit to what the ODPM can say has got to happen and will happen. This is about a cultural change out there in the service. In other areas we are criticised for having too much intervention and too many targets. What we have to do is set the right culture, the strategy from the centre, but it must be for local rescue authorities to make the changes and then we have to encourage those and show where there has been good practice, and I mentioned London, and show people that this can be achieved, but it is not something that can be done entirely from the centre.

Q101 Lyn Brown: Given that you failed to mention it even in your submission and given that it was within the terms of reference of this committee, are you confident that you are setting the right culture and a strategy to obtain the changes needed?

Mr Evans: I am confident that from now on the things that Sir Graham has set out and the fact that we will set new targets from the centre but working with authorities will give us the ability to do this. I come back to the fact that the proof of this will be in how well the service at grass roots levels responds to this, not in how many targets we set from the centre.

Mr Lawrence: We did make this a clear part of the CPA. We are certainly not happy with the results. It is part of the performance improvement planning for the CPA process and we certainly expect that the next round of CPA action will pick up on this. We are recognising that there is an awful lot more work that we have to do in order to encourage FRAs to be more successful than this.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. If you could make sure that you provide the written additional material that was asked for earlier on, we would be grateful.

Witnesses: **Mr Derek Chadbon**, National General Secretary, **Mr Robert Cameron**, President of the RFU and serving retained firefighter in Essex, and **Mr Adrian Hughes**, RFU Vice-President, Serving Retained Fire Officer in Charge, Reynoldston, Mid and West, Retained Firefighters' Union, gave evidence.

Chair: I am sorry that we are starting late but you will understand that we wanted to explore fully the questions with the ODPM officials and I thought it was more important to do that than stick rigidly to time.

Q102 Lyn Brown: In your view why has so little progress been made on the retained review and what do you think are the key aspects for reform?

Mr Chadbon: Good afternoon, everybody. It is a difficult problem. We start from the background where the focus of the Fire Service has always been on the full time service; that has always been a problem. The retained service part of the Fire Service is very important. As you probably know, it covers 60% of the fire stations in the UK and about 95% of the land mass but until now, and it is still the case, retained have had no involvement in brigade planning and no involvement in the setting of the policy, and that is reflected in what I think all the

observers have referred to over the last few years as the second class status of people in the retained service. We had some very encouraging prospects in December 2003 when the then Minister set up the retained review which we contributed to and supported. Unfortunately, it has not yet gone anywhere and I think the reason why it has not gone anywhere is partly because of the status of the retained and the fact that they are still not seen as a priority. They are seen in some brigades unfortunately as a necessary evil and that is not in any way being derogatory. The problem now is that the review has taken place but there does not seem to be the commitment out there in the service to do anything about it. We have been heavily involved in it, and I had a meeting recently with CFOA and the ODPM to see where we could get the thing moving. CFOA have done a review of brigades to see what action they have taken themselves on the retained review. Only 48% of the brigades responded to that inquiry, which I thought was pretty appalling. They

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were asked, “What have you done about implementing the changes in the retained review?”, and only 48% responded to CFOA. Of those the majority said they had not done anything. What you come back to is the lack of impetus within the service because of the imbedded nature of the culture of the service. The culture of the service is that principal officers are generally drawn from the whole time service. The focus is on the whole time service. I can speak from personal experience, if it helps, because I worked in the Fire Service at one stage before doing this job as a principal officer, the head of the non-uniform staff, but also as a retained firefighter. Constantly you had to push the fact that the principal officers’ management team did not consider the retained when they were dealing with strategic issues. I used to have to say, “Hang on a minute. You have agreed a policy. It will not work for the retained”. This was a brigade where 38 of the 40 fire stations were retained. That is the culture that exists in the Fire Service, I am afraid.

Q103 Lyn Brown: What are your priorities for reform? If there was just one thing you could change what would it be?

Mr Chadbon: I would put retained personnel into a position where they could advise on and ensure that strategic thinking took account of the retained perspective.

Q104 Alison Seabeck: Where do you think the main obstacles have been to the successful rank to role assimilation process?

Mr Chadbon: The obstacles are similar to those that we have talked about, the problems of the focus of the Fire Service being on the whole time service, but it appears that in a number of brigades, and we gave some examples of this in our submission, this has been used as an opportunity to downgrade in particular the role of retained officers in charge. There has always been some difficulty on the fire ground, particularly in rural areas, where, on a station area which is retained, a retained pump turns up with a retained officer in charge, and then if there is a larger incident you get more appliances turning up, one of which may be a whole time pump with somebody of equivalent rank, and sometimes, not always, that causes tensions. What is happening is that in rank to role many brigades (not all of them) have brought in retained officers in charge, some officers as watch manager B, but many have made them watch manager A so that they can be slightly below the position of whole time officers. It is this cultural issue again, I am afraid.

Q105 Chair: If your two colleagues wish to respond please feel free to do so.

Mr Chadbon: Adrian Hughes is the officer in charge of a retained station and perhaps there is something he would like to mention about that.

Chair: Maybe in answer to one of the questions.

Q106 John Cummings: To what extent has the retained service been involved in or consulted upon the development of the Integrated Risk Management Plans?

Mr Chadbon: We as the Retained Firefighters’ Union have been consulted by some brigades but it depends whether we are recognised by those brigades or not.

Q107 John Cummings: When you say “recognised” what do you mean?

Mr Chadbon: Recognised for consultation or negotiation. Some brigades recognise us for consultation; some recognise us for negotiation and consultation. Where we are not recognised for either it is very difficult for us to get our point of view over. We can do it through the public consultation but on the ground retained firefighters have been involved in some brigades in the local input but generally we have found that it is not retained-friendly. The IRMP process up until now has been largely about maintaining the status quo.

Q108 John Cummings: Does the question of consultation rely upon the whim of the authority of a particular Fire Authority or chief officer?

Mr Chadbon: Yes.

Q109 John Cummings: Or the particular committee?

Mr Chadbon: It relies upon the committee and the Chief Fire Officer in the brigade.

Q110 John Cummings: In your experience where does the decision not to involve you come from? Does it come from the chief officer?

Mr Chadbon: The Chief Fire Officer usually but sometimes we have had chiefs who have recommended, or have said they have recommended, that we be recognised and it has been turned down by the Fire Authority. I think a lot of this is down to pressures locally and the pressures come from the other main union, the Fire Brigades Union. If they are against us being recognised in some cases that stops it happening.

Q111 John Cummings: So obviously they have not been making adequate use of the retained service in relation to the IRMPs?

Mr Chadbon: We feel that experience recently has shown, and particularly in some recent strikes (and the one in Suffolk was the most recent), that there are huge opportunities for the more flexible use of retained firefighters. We had the situation in Suffolk where the retained ran the brigade and covered the whole of the county on 22 occasions when the FBU were on strike, and that did not involve any troops or anybody else, and we feel that the automatic response from that should have been a review of the IRMP in that county on the basis of, “Hang on a minute. This makes one heck of a difference to the assumptions that we have made in the past”. We feel there is a huge opportunity there. I would go as far as to say it probably underpins a major opportunity

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for making a more effective and efficient Fire Service outside the metropolitan areas by making better use of retained under IRMPs.

Q112 John Cummings: Can you give any practical examples of the problems you have experienced with the implementation of IRMPs?

Mr Chadbon: We have had generally an unwillingness to consider more flexible use of retained personnel and I will give you an example. In Norfolk there were plans to change a day crewing station into a shift station. We responded to the IRMP and said that we believed the station could effectively and efficiently be run on a retained basis completely. In the last couple of weeks, because of the announcement of the Government grants, that particular brigade has had a shortfall and needs to consider what it is going to do with its council tax in the future, and immediately (it was not in the IRMP) out of the air was plucked doing away with four retained appliances. We said, “Hang on a minute. Where did that come from because that was not in your IRMP in the first place?” As a result of a number of people having a go at that, that has now been stopped but we have still got this day crewed station which we believe could be run far more effectively by retained.

Q113 Chair: Could you clarify which authority it was you were talking about?

Mr Chadbon: That was Norfolk.

Q114 Anne Main: Could I particularly ask Mr Hughes and Mr Cameron to give me some input into this? We have been assured that all the key stakeholders were involved in consultation processes. Are you telling us that the Retained Fire Service has sometimes been excluded from a consultation process that you think you should have been involved in?

Mr Hughes: Almost certainly. It happened on a national basis. There is a lot of good practice in the UK Fire Service and there is an awful lot of bad practice as well. Where you have a management structure that is primarily based on whole time employees, where your chief officers and senior management work their way up through the ranks from firefighters and they have all been whole time, they have got a very limited understanding of the needs and capabilities of the retained service. We continually find that policy has been developed which works very well for whole time employees but when that is just bolted on to the retained service it does not work as well or it is very difficult to work.

Q115 Anne Main: Are you saying that perhaps the ODPM is not aware that you have not been included or fully included in this consultation process?

Mr Cameron: There are difficulties for brigades to communicate correctly and thoroughly with the retained because they do not have the experience of doing the job in the first place in many instances. That gives them a communication problem about how to involve them and drive something through to make change for the better.

Mr Chadbon: Can I give you an example? I know you are going to see this Fire Authority tomorrow. One of the recommendations in the retained review, which has been around for nearly three years now, was that there should be a retained liaison officer in each brigade. Going back to the previous question, I believe that would be a key way of moving the retained forward. A number of brigades have appointed retained liaison officers but they are all full time personnel. We had a situation where, when this came out in February last year, one of the retained liaison officers in Devon was asked about this and he said, “I do not know anything about it”, so we gave him a copy. We had to give the retained liaison officer in that brigade a copy of the retained review team report.

Chair: We will bring that up tomorrow. The Clerk is noting it so that one of us will definitely bring it up.

Q116 Alison Seabeck: We have listened to evidence from the ODPM who described the retained firefighters as being the true community firefighters, but the evidence you have submitted, including stories from places like Halstead and others, suggests that actually you are being left out of the loop. Why do you think you are not being involved in the community safety work as you feel you should be?

Mr Chadbon: Again, I think it is a focus issue, and a financial issue as well, which is an interesting one because generally retained income has gone down over the last two or three years. The effectiveness of community fire safety has essentially driven down call management by introducing automatic fire alarms, reducing the attendance, and has considerably reduced the income of retained firefighters. That money in many cases has been used elsewhere. Again, we know of brigades where they have had surpluses and my colleague, Rob Cameron, comes from Halstead in Essex, which is one of the examples that we used. The example we gave was where the station wanted to get involved in community safety in the early days and met with very little support. They are now doing it but there are financial problems so perhaps Rob would like to expand on that.

Q117 Alison Seabeck: You would like to see the money that you are saving because of the success of prevention recycled?

Mr Chadbon: Yes, because it is about recruitment and retention of retained firefighters with awards and incentives, is it not?

Mr Cameron: I am glad to say that we have now become very involved in community fire safety and do home fire safety visits; that has been most successful. The new personnel that have joined stations have come from a different background where this has now become the norm for them. We are not getting quite as many fire calls but they are doing an awful lot of home fire safety visits. Over the Christmas period we did a little community event in the high street of our town and from that our fire

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appliance took on 24 or 25 home fire safety visits just from our asking members of the public. In go the teams, in go the smoke detectors, and that is making a terrific difference. Unfortunately, on the funding side of this the pay that is then claimed by the retained firefighters can often mean that the money that the fire station is then claiming out of the budget will be increased quite substantially and I have some concern that for this to carry on in the present format it will mean that we will require an additional bit of funding.

Q118 Chair: Is your fire station entirely made up of retained firefighters?

Mr Cameron: Our fire station has approximately 23 personnel and is entirely retained.

Q119 Mr Olnier: Before I come on to regional control centres, for the record and to give the committee a feel for this could you give us the percentage in the UK between retained firefighters and ordinary brigade personnel? Do you make up 25% of firefighters or 30% or what?

Mr Chadbon: Roughly one-third of firefighters are retained covering two-thirds of the fire stations in the UK, because retained are obviously on duty all the time whereas whole time are working shifts. One third of firefighters are retained, two-thirds of the fire stations are covered by retained and about 95% of the land mass is covered by retained, but that is because the city centres are covered by whole time employees.

Q120 Mr Olnier: Thank you. It is useful to get that on the record, Chair, so that we know what we are dealing with. On the regional control centres do you think that is going to affect retained firefighters? You have said before that retained firefighters tend to be fairly locally based. How are your members going to feel if they are suddenly dragged some considerable miles away from home?

Mr Chadbon: No, I do not think so. Retained firefighters are fairly used to reorganisation within fire brigades. We find that that happens every two to three years. The officers that we report to and the headquarters that we report to on a local basis change every time brigades have reorganisations, which seem to have been fairly frequent over the last few years. I do not think that regional fire control instead of local individual brigade control will make a lot of difference to retained firefighters. It is not something that we have found is a problem. I would add that a few of us who are a bit long in the tooth were around in the last big reorganisation of control rooms in 1974 when we went from over 200 control rooms down to the current numbers and we heard some of the same concerns raised then but generally they have not come to fruition.

Q121 Mr Olnier: So there are absolutely no problems as far as you can see? There will be no impact from regional control centres on rural areas?

Mr Chadbon: No, none at all.

Q122 Mr Olnier: You state in your written evidence that the whole control centre restructuring project is being adversely affected by the “failure of all parties to engage in the process”. Can you elaborate on what you mean by “all parties”?

Mr Chadbon: Everybody except us, I think. There seems to be a concerted effort by other unions, by Fire Authorities, even within CFOA (the Chief Fire Officers’ Association). I have seen individually many Chief Fire Officers speak out against regional controls but the Chief Fire Officers’ Association as a professional association has spoken in favour of them. My understanding is that they do not have the support of all of their own members and I think this is what has added to the complications and the difficulties over control changes, that it has been a process that has not taken everybody along with it. It seems to me very concerning as to how it is going to operate. Is it going to work if so many people who are vital to that process are not keen on the outcomes?

Q123 Mr Olnier: So how can the ODPM convince firefighters of the benefits of regional control centres?

Mr Chadbon: I think they are going to have great difficulty because the main opponent, the Fire Brigades Union, is demonstrating its opposition to any change, any modernisation, and I do not think controls are any different from that.

Q124 Mr Olnier: Can I stop you there, Mr Chadbon? As I understand it, the Fire Brigades Union is not the dominant trade union in the control centres.

Mr Chadbon: I do not know. I would have thought it probably was. I do not know for certain.

Q125 Mr Betts: Can I follow up on Firelink, which obviously goes hand in hand, I should think, with the control centres? Have you had any involvement or consultation in terms of the new communications systems that we are looking at for the future, because your members are going to have to use them, are they not?

Mr Chadbon: Yes. The technology is starting to come on, again, in a brigade that just happens to be the one that I know well. Norfolk has been at the forefront of testing out the new arrangements. It is a rural brigade but they have got most of the technology already up and running and I understand it is running very well, but our involvement has been minimal.

Q126 Mr Betts: So you have not officially or formally been consulted? It is just that you happen to know about that because your members are involved in it?

Mr Chadbon: Yes.

Q127 Mr Betts: Have they been consulted at local level in Norfolk?

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Mr Chadbon: No, and to some extent I can understand why. I think it is an area that our members are not going to be too bothered about. They just want tools that work and we do not have members in the control room. The whole thing on controls and radios has been focused on the personnel themselves in the control room. It has not focused on the rest of the people in the Fire Service. There are 60,000-odd people in the Fire Service and you heard earlier that there are 1,500 in control. I feel very sorry for those people because it has not been handled in a way that is in their best interests. We have got consequences for 1,500 people dominating the outcome for 60,000 people. There is something wrong somewhere.

Q128 Anne Main: Just following on from that, do you think that on the consultation and, as you say, listening to people this is a case where the Government is getting a full picture of what it is really like on the ground in how to use these things or do you think they are getting selective evidence which they are forming a view on? Do you feel that we are getting a rounded picture to make an informed decision on this? That is really what I want to know.

Mr Chadbon: No, I do not, but I do not think that applies generally on the reform of the British Fire Service either. It is not just concentrating on controls.

Q129 John Cummings: Would you tell the Committee what your assessment is of the CPA process which has been conducted by the Audit Commission? Do you think the CPA effectively provide for a Retained Fire Service perspective?

Mr Chadbon: It is an interesting one. We did an exercise on just one involvement there was by the retained in the CPA process because, as I say, we tend to get left out—second-class citizens. The feedback we had from our members was that in some cases they had been involved on a local basis and they had seen some good outcomes. In a number of cases they were not involved. We had a couple of brigades where the retained who said they were expecting a visit from the CPA all went on leave on that drill line rather than face up to the process for fear of getting it wrong. Others in the same vein tried to have an input into the CPA process but were shouted down by the brigade officers who were there, who kept intervening and saying, “I do not think these retained really understand what you are asking. Let me answer the question on their behalf”, so there was very much a process of stage management as far as the retained were concerned. My local station were supposed to produce a station plan for the auditors when they came down. The evening the auditors came down to the station the station plan was presented to the officer in charge by one of the whole time officers who said, “Here is your station plan. Just make out that you wrote it when the Audit Commission come down”. That was the process that went on. In some it was very good. Some brigades said yes, it was excellent. They did have a confidential process. There was nobody else

there. In other places it was very much stage-managed by brigade management who wanted to ensure that the answers that the retained gave were in accordance with brigade policy.

Q130 John Cummings: So is the report worth anything at all?

Mr Chadbon: We think it is. We think it is a start but we do not think it goes far enough. It needs to start looking at areas like making maximum use of retained, having more flexible working arrangements, more flexible duty systems, ensuring that IRMPs reflect the opportunities that are there. We are not sure that that is going to happen even under the new inspection process because at the end of the day the decision is still down to the Fire Authorities and if they decide to do what they want then that will be it.

Q131 John Cummings: Are you satisfied with the arrangements that will take the place of the Fire Service Inspectorate?

Mr Chadbon: Yes. I think the inspectorate as it is at the moment has outlived its purpose and has to change.

Q132 Alison Sebeck: Your written evidence highlights progress in co-responder arrangements in areas covered by retained firefighters. Many of those are rural so there is a good chance that you are likely to be first on the scene and therefore the use of co-responder arrangements seems to make sense. Could you give us some examples of how that is working and your wider experience with it?

Mr Hughes: My own station has been carrying out co-responder duties since 1998 and it has been tremendously successful. There are widespread benefits to the community, to the Fire Service and to members of the crew on each station in doing that. My own service, Mid and West Wales, now operates 14 co-responder stations. It is a partnership with the Ambulance Service. We have a greater understanding, the Ambulance Service have a greater understanding and the Fire Service directly, because of co-responder. It is very difficult to quantify success but I think it is reasonably safe to say that each co-responder station saves between five and ten lives a year and that is just the high profile ones.

Q133 Alison Sebeck: Do the people you are working with who are using co-responders feel that they are being asked to be an alternative to the Ambulance Service?

Mr Hughes: Not at all. We are working with the Ambulance Service in partnership. There is always a paramedic response immediately, as there would be normally. We are working over and above that with the Ambulance Service. It is not trying to do anything instead of the Ambulance Service. It is very important to realise that. It is an extra level of service.

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Q134 Alison Seabeck: Has joint working with the rest of the Fire Service, knowing that there are elements within the rest of the Fire Service which feel uncomfortable about working with co-responders, inhibited the retained firefighters from doing this?

Mr Hughes: Oh yes. The Ambulance Service drive the location of the stations, depending on needs and their cover, and quite often where they have a gap in the cover there is a fire station. There have been quite a number of instances where the Ambulance Service would have liked a station to become a co-respondent station and, for a number of reasons, they have decided that they are not going to take part in the scheme, historically at least, because since the new Fire and Rescue Services Act there have been a lot of changes. Earlier on, yes, definitely that was the case.

Q135 Alison Seabeck: So on the basis of your experience where you can identify a number of lives saved every year, where co-responders are not being used you can probably say that there are a number of lives being lost every year because the Fire Service are not working with the Ambulance Service in some areas?

Mr Hughes: I think it is safe to say that about some areas, possibly because the Fire Service co-responders are only one of a whole range of co-responder schemes the Ambulance Service utilise. There are instances, which are quite ridiculous, of a fire station that has not participated in the co-responder scheme whereas the local postmistress and a number of local residents have taken up the co-responder scheme, and when somebody is seriously injured or has a heart attack or a life-threatening emergency the local community scheme comes along with better equipment and training than the Fire Service. It is very difficult sometimes under those circumstances, because it is subjective, to prove that a co-responder intervention saves a life. Sometimes it is quite clear but it is a subjective assessment of the value. I think it is quite safe to say that at least five and perhaps even ten lives a year per scheme are saved.

Mr Chadbon: There is a pattern there, I hope you can see, that retained firefighters are community firefighters living and working in their community. They want to make things happen, they want to be flexible, they want to see things happen that are the best for their community. They have been restricted from doing that in the past because of their lack of involvement at strategic level. They have been restricted because of restrictive practices in the Fire Service. They have been stopped in many places

from doing co-responders and other flexible ways of working. They are not fully engaged in community safety, so therefore we have a bunch of men and women in the British Fire Service who are very willing, whose work role is changing and whose income is changing; generally their income has dropped. We do not know where that money is going, but we can see great opportunities for feeding that back into the system for the benefit of the local community by enhancing the service. This is where the British Fire Service is getting it wrong at the moment.

Q136 Dr Pugh: Can we briefly touch on civil resilience? Have retained firefighters been offered training in the operation on New Dimension equipment? If I could generalise the question a little bit, how will the new duties on firefighters under the Civil Contingences Act affect you on a day-to-day level?

Mr Chadbon: It is a mixed bag. I would say that generally retained firefighters are not being used and trained and made operationally responsible for New Dimension because the Fire and Rescue Service is largely retained. In places like Lincolnshire and the Isle of Wight, for example, retained are very heavily involved and form a major part of the resilience response. In other areas the additional ODPM money has been used to recruit additional whole time firefighters and build new fire stations completely for housing and training on resilience where the alternatives have not been considered.

Q137 Dr Pugh: So it could be said, say, in an urban area where, because they have an adequate number of whole time firefighters, that the retained firefighters in those circumstances could be completely cut out of the loop?

Mr Chadbon: Yes, and it has happened in a number of authorities. I do not know what my colleague Robert Hughes' experience is here.

Mr Hughes: If there was an incident in London we would attend as a support, plus we have had training on that.

Q138 Dr Pugh: But in the circumstances there, the specific urban environments we are talking about where you are not involved to any great extent in planning for resilience, you would attend but you would be attending in an untutored or unprepared fashion; is that right?

Mr Hughes: Yes, I would agree with that.

Mr Chadbon: It is a very mixed bag.

Chair: Can I thank you very much for your evidence. It has been most useful.

Tuesday 31 January 2006

Members present:

Dr Phyllis Starkey, in the Chair

Sir Paul Beresford
Lyn Brown
John Cummings

Mr Greg Hands
Dr John Pugh
Alison Seabeck

Witnesses: **Mr Paul Young**, Chief Fire Officer, **Councillor David Browne** and **Mrs Sue Smith**, Deputy Chief Officer, Devon Fire and Rescue Service, gave evidence.

Q139 Chair: May I thank you for coming to this session and explain that we have of course received your written submission, so there is no necessity to repeat points which are already in the written submission because we have that and can use that in our report? What we are seeking to do here is explore other areas or clarify issues. May I start by taking up the points you made in your memorandum criticising the ODPM on the FiReControl project and highlighting the difficulties that it was causing for your planning? I wonder whether you could expand. Is that your only reservation on the introduction of Regional Control Centres?

Mr Young: Councillor David Browne may wish to express a view in relation to the political viewpoint on this issue. We have been very pragmatic and taken the view that it is the intention of ODPM to introduce Regional Control Centres and our role will actually be to make them work from a professional standpoint. We have been disappointed in relation to the management of the project to date in a number of ways, not least of which has been the lack of information at various points in the development of the project on issues such as funding arrangements. There is some concern about the absence of adequate information about the financial implications to budgets in Fire Authorities and hence the impact on council tax. I suppose the other example we gave was, whilst recognising issues of commercial confidentiality, the information and the promptness of information being made available to Fire Authorities to advise staff, and we touched on this in the submission, has been very late and has produced some real management difficulties in being able to deal with some of these very practical issues on the ground. There are all sorts of issues in relation to the Regional Control Centres and there are arguments about the importance of local knowledge and all sorts of other issues. Our view has been, from a professional standpoint, that we assume this project is going forward; it is clearly going to happen from ODPM's point of view. What we want to try to do professionally is make it a success. Our view is that we desperately need, from a service delivery standpoint, confidence that we are going to get at least as good a service from the Regional Control Centre as we are able to deliver ourselves and we need to be a partner in this to ensure that that is indeed the case.

Q140 Chair: So it is not simply the lack of clear financial and funding information, although yesterday the ODPM officials did say that they

would essentially underwrite any additional cost to Fire Authorities. It is also a lack of confidence in the projects being delivered on time, is it?

Mr Young: Certainly we have been disappointed in relation to the slippage which is taking place in the project, because that has a direct impact on our ability to continue to deliver the service between now and the point at which the project goes live. Another issue that we touched on in our submission was that we have to be confident that the existing arrangements will be 100% effective until the very second at which the switch is thrown to transfer the function from our existing control to the new Regional Control Centre. That brings with it a number of different issues that we have to pay attention to, one of which of course is staff retention. We need to be confident that we have the skilled staff in place and willing to remain there up until the point at which that happens and, of course, that the equipment and systems are effective as well up until that very point. The slippage is causing some problems for us in terms of costs. Had the project been on target, some of the equipment costs that we will now incur would not have happened and we are likely to incur costs to meet the longer time of operational effectiveness that will now be necessary. ODPM has taken the view that they will not meet those costs, so clearly there are some concerns about that.

Q141 Chair: But those particular costs would have arisen in any case if FiReControl had not been on the horizon.

Mr Young: That is true. However, in the context of FiReControl taking place, those costs would not have arisen because the regional control room would have gone live.

Q142 Chair: What impact do you think the introduction of Regional Control Centres will have on your response times?

Mr Young: On the basis of the information we have been given to date, it ought not to have an adverse impact. The information we are being given through the regional project team is that the capacity and capability of the Regional Control Centre will be at least as effective as the current local control centre. So in terms of response times, it ought not to have an adverse impact, if that is true.

Q143 Chair: But not any more effective. It would not shorten the response times.

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Mr Young: No, I do not have sufficient information available to me to indicate whether indeed it will be more effective.

Q144 John Cummings: In your evidence, you indicate that you are critical of the ODPM's management of the FiReControl project. What impact does its performance have on your ability to maintain morale among staff and confidence in the service on the part of the public?

Mr Young: I do not know whether Councillor Browne might wish to comment about public expectations. In terms of staff, morale of staff in our existing control rooms has been adversely affected by the project; I could not possibly deny that. Clearly the threat to jobs and the implications for long-term security of employment has an adverse impact on morale; that is inevitable frankly. The difficulty at the moment is that the view is that pay and terms and conditions of employment particularly are something which we understand will reside with the companies which are to be established to run the Regional Control Centres. At the moment, from a staff perspective, the one thing they want to know now more than anything else, now that they know where the Regional Control Centre is going to be, is what the conditions of employment will be for them in that new role. That is the very information we cannot give them at the moment, because the view has been taken that that is a matter for the public company which will be established and the longer there is a delay in establishing that company, the longer it will take to give that sense of security to staff about their future conditions.

Q145 John Cummings: Do you see any redeeming features in the project?

Mr Young: I certainly should not wish to sound entirely negative, because my view is that there are some strengths with the project. We have tried to be pragmatic and have tried to take the view that it is the intent of the Government to have Regional Control Centres so, from a professional standpoint my task is more focused on trying to make it a success. My job is to ensure that my employing authority have confidence in their ability to deliver the service to the public.

Q146 John Cummings: And the confidence of the public?

Councillor Browne: Our concerns from the political side are about the complexity of the IT that is involved in this and whether it will be rolled out on time successfully.

Q147 John Cummings: How have you reached this conclusion? How have the public responded? What particular methods have you used to assess public concern?

Mr Young: We have certainly not actively sought to measure public concern about the project. We, as an individual Fire Authority, have not explored that issue. We can only give anecdotal evidence about

public opinion and frankly that has been mixed. We have seen expressions of concern in the local media from the public.

The Committee suspended from 4.45pm to 4.52pm for a division in the House

Q148 Chair: May I turn to the issue of FireLink and ask whether you are convinced by the business case for FireLink, either for your area or for the Fire and Rescue Service nationally?

Mr Young: Our view is that we do support the FireLink project; it is the right project for the Fire Service. Our concerns are more issues of detail, particularly in the context of funding arrangements and again it is something we touched on in our written submission. The fact that the police in our part of the country will migrate to a digital network at an earlier stage than the Fire Service means that we shall then inherit all of the costs of that part of the radio infrastructure that we currently share with them. Had the original approach continued, which would have been a regional approach to radio replacement, we should not have incurred those costs. It is an issue we are trying to pursue with ODPM, because we feel that those financial burdens ought not to fall on the authority. It is something we are trying to persuade them on.

Q149 Sir Paul Beresford: You mentioned a number of issues which you are pursuing with the ODPM. Was there a positive response or are there Jaguar tyre marks over everything?

Mr Young: The response from ODPM in relation to the earlier issue that I touched on is that they would not reimburse those replacement equipment costs for the existing control rooms. We should like to see them reconsider that. In terms of the issues around radio infrastructure costs as a consequence of us inheriting the upkeep of radio infrastructure because the police are vacating that, there is an opportunity for us to bid to ODPM for financial support to meet those costs. Whether indeed ODPM will be positive about that, of course we do not know at this time.

Q150 Sir Paul Beresford: Bidding against whom?

Mr Young: Bidding under New Burdens and seeking a bid under the New Burdens scheme to get ODPM funding for that. Whether that will receive a positive response, we simply do not know at this time.

Q151 John Cummings: What evidence do you have which leads you to suspect that there could be slippage in the implementation of FireLink? What would be the consequences for your authority, if it had to meet all the costs of maintaining the current microwave radio system on its own?

Mr Young: At this time I cannot recall whether ODPM have actually expressed a view on whether there is further slippage in FireLink. Our concern, in relation to the point I have just made about funding, is not in relation to slippage but to the relative timing of two emergency services, that is police and fire, migrating onto the new system.

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Q152 John Cummings: But in your evidence you say that any slippage in the FireLink project would mean your authority, and presumably Cornwall County Fire Service as well, would have to continue to use a now redundant system and carry the entire costs of doing so, estimated to be an additional £214,000 per annum.

Mr Young: Yes, that is right. I am not saying that there is slippage, but should there be slippage, then obviously those costs will continue longer than would otherwise be the case.

Mrs Smith: May I just come in? There has already been slippage with the FireLink project and part of that was to bring FireLink together with the FiReControl project, so both have been subject to slippage. That is one of the issues for us, in Devon particularly, and with other authorities in the South West Region.

Q153 Chair: Just to clarify, you do not have any evidence that there will be any further slippage, but you fear there may be and you were just spelling out the consequences.

Mr Young: Yes, that is right.

Chair: You have already explained that you have now put in a bid to the Government. We have explored that issue.

Q154 John Cummings: Have you had any response back from the Government yet in relation to your request for additional costs?

Mrs Smith: No.

Mr Young: No, we have not; no.

Q155 Dr Pugh: In your memorandum you draw attention to the fact that small Fire Authorities in rural areas are going to have specific problems with the Government's modernisation agenda. Is it just smaller Fire Authorities or is it rural authorities? Can you be more specific as to where these problems lie?

Mr Young: The conclusions of the Audit Commission in their recent publication about the outcomes of CPA inspections in Fire Authorities indicate that they believe that smaller Fire Authorities find it more difficult to take forward the agenda because of capacity constraints. On the basis of the information we are seeing from the Audit Commission, it is not a distinction about rural versus metropolitan: it is an issue to do with size, which is about organisational capacity.

Mrs Smith: And models of types of Fire Authority. There are several different models of Fire Authorities: county council departments' Fire Authorities or standalone Fire Authorities such as Devon is, as a combined Fire Authority and that causes differences. We are standalone. We are bigger. We run our own show. Our neighbours are county council departments and therefore have less capacity to deal with the issues.

Q156 Dr Pugh: How do you define a smaller Fire Authority? Which are the smaller Fire Authorities?

Mr Young: That is a good question. There is no such definition. You cannot simply turn to something and say that is small and that is not.

Q157 Dr Pugh: The authorities which are likely to have most difficulty. Put it like that.

Mr Young: Typically the smaller authorities in the South West are authorities such as Somerset, one of our neighbours, such as Gloucestershire and, of course, as Mrs Smith has touched on, the different kinds of constitutional model have an impact as well. In the case of a small authority which is part of a county council, they can of course draw on the corporate support of the larger organisation. If you are a combined authority and are small, you cannot do that. You are an independent organisation in your own right, so capacity constraints become more acute.

Q158 Alison Seabeck: You have expressed reservations about the establishment of a regional Fire and Rescue Service. It would be helpful to understand what those reservations are and therefore what is driving you towards looking at a sub-regional establishment between you and Somerset?

Mr Young: There are probably two dimensions to the reservations in Devon about a regional solution: one is a political reservation and the other one is a professional reservation. May I deal with the professional reservation? There is a concern that the sheer size of an organisation the size of the South West Region, extending from Land's End to Tewksbury in Gloucestershire for example, is so large that it provides some real practical obstacles for the effective and efficient management of the organisation. There are real concerns about that, not only on the part of myself but on the part of my colleague chief officers in the South West as well.

Q159 John Cummings: Could you give any practical examples, so I can truly understand your worries?

Mr Young: My colleagues in the Police Service express similar views about proposals for regionalisation of the Police Service.

Q160 John Cummings: They certainly have not done that in Durham or Northumberland.

Mr Young: No, but in terms of geographical size there are some very different circumstances in the South West. You are talking of literally hundreds of miles from one end of the region to the other; hundreds of miles, a very, very large geographical area with very, very sparsely populated rural communities, with certain urban areas as well, such as Bristol and Plymouth. There are some practical problems in day-to-day management, in trying to maintain a relationship with staff, in trying to give a sense of identity with the organisation to local communities who want to have a sense of identity with their local Fire Service. Some of those things are practical problems which are very difficult to overcome in a region the size of the South West.

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There are political opinions as well that Councillor David Browne might wish to touch on, which are an issue for the Fire Authority as well.

Councillor Browne: To give you an illustration, if you stand at the north-east corner of the South West Region, you are nearer to Scotland than you are to the other end of the region; it is that sort of size and the political dimensions vary across the region. The Cornish, for example, feel that they are a region on their own and they agitate for that. We have taken a slightly more pragmatic view in Devon, but it varies by political party. That is why we have been looking, with Somerset, at a mutual solution of combining with Somerset.

Q161 Chair: Is it that Somerset is more amenable to cooperation than Cornwall?

Councillor Browne: Yes, there is that. Somerset and Devon are very similar in terms of their sparse population and their structures, so we see a good fit there.

Q162 Alison Seabeck: In your note you also expressed some concerns about the inadequacies of constitutional arrangements for the Regional Management Boards. Would you like to elaborate on that and where you think those inadequacies are?

Mrs Smith: The Regional Management Board is a local government joint committee and that is all it is. It is not a corporate body in its own right, it is not an employer in its own right, it does not have any separate legal status; it is just a joint committee. I think there is a misconception in central government within the Civil Service that it actually has more powers than it really has in terms of directing anything. The direction has to come from the individual Fire Authorities through the Regional Management Board, maybe as a joint committee. That is what we mean by constitutional arrangements.

Q163 Alison Seabeck: Finally, there are proposals in place to regionalise police and Ambulance Services. I know that the police are looking at a Devon and Cornwall option, particularly around where I am. How will that intermesh with what you are doing with Somerset and will there be problems?

Mr Young: There is already an absence of alignment between boundaries on blue light services. If you pick the police, of course, we have Devon and Cornwall, we have Avon and Somerset and so on. If you pick the Ambulance Service, we have West Country Ambulance which covers Cornwall, Devon and Somerset. If you pick fire, each county has its own Fire Service still. So there is already an absence in terms of those boundaries. As far as the work that we are doing with Somerset is concerned, clearly it will perpetuate that, there is no doubt, but it will not make any significant difference in terms of the relationship between us and our colleagues in the other services.

Q164 Dr Pugh: Why is co-responding such a divisive topic for the FRS?

Mr Young: Well it is not divisive within Devon Fire and Rescue Service because we very much support the project. We are very committed to it. It is one of the most exciting things which has happened in the Fire Service for a long time and it is about meeting the needs of local communities. It is divisive in the sense that the largest representative body in the Fire Service has a stance of opposition to it; so in that sense, it is divisive. Certainly we, as an organisation, and I know the authority as well, are very committed to it.

Q165 Dr Pugh: Is the difficulty anything to do with the apportionment of costs? Who will pick up the tab if the FRS attends a medical emergency? Does that money come to you from the Ambulance Service because you are in a sense doing their work?

Mr Young: This is something we should like to see addressed by a dialogue between the ODPM and the Department of Health because the current arrangement is that there is no single financial framework to facilitate the operation of co-responders. Everything depends entirely upon a local arrangement between an individual Fire Service and its local Ambulance Service. In some areas you find that there is reimbursement of costs from ambulance to fire and in other areas there is not. What we believe is that if ODPM wish to see the further development of co-responders, and of course it is in the national framework document, the LGA is supportive, the national employers are supportive and an increasing number of Fire Authorities are supportive, then ODPM and the Department of Health need to have some joined-up thinking about how they can actually facilitate that.

Q166 Dr Pugh: That sounds like a very sensible suggestion and it will take a lot of friction out of the process. Can we move to another area of possible friction, integrated risk management plans and the culture of prevention which we looked at yesterday, which we were all told were very much embedded in the service. One restraint appears to be in some areas that the retained service seems less involved in it than it might be. What is the position in your neck of the woods and are you making adequate use of the retained service?

Mr Young: I would not agree that the retained service is less involved. The integrated risk management plan is about the service as a whole and in Devon, for example, retained firefighters and retained fire stations are an essential and a fully integrated part of the organisation. They feature within our integrated risk management plan completely.

Q167 Dr Pugh: The Retained Firefighters' Union told us yesterday that they were not always consulted in all areas. Are you a model of good practice then?

Mr Young: I would not suggest that. Certainly the issue of consultation is a separate issue from the involvement of the retained firefighters. In terms of using retained firefighters as a resource within the Fire and Rescue Service, there is absolutely no doubt

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in my mind, that they are fully utilised. If there is a view that there is lack of consultation, then clearly that is an issue which will vary from one authority to another. We believe that we are very much engaged with the Retained Firefighters' Union, as we are with all representative bodies and Mrs Smith may well wish to comment on that.

Mrs Smith: We have a very good relationship with the Retained Firefighters' Union. We have been working very, very closely with them recently on a new salary-based retained duty system.

Q168 Dr Pugh: Do you consult with them?

Mrs Smith: We have consulted with them almost weekly in the last six months actually, but at least monthly and specifically about the new retained duty system. Yes, I personally consult with them. I have regular meetings with John Barton and occasionally Derek Chadbon, who I know was here yesterday; they know me very well and I know them very well. It would be unfair to say that in Devon they are not consulted. They actually do have local negotiating rights with Devon as well, which is a new departure, so they have very strong representation.

Q169 Dr Pugh: So you are a model of good practice then.

Mr Young: Quite possibly.

Q170 Lyn Brown: The Audit Commission reports that you are being successful in increasing the numbers of women in the workforce. What are you doing that is so right? My second question is: given that you are on course to meet the targets, why do you think that the ODPM targets are unachievable?

Mrs Smith: In answer to your first question, the reason why we are actually doing better than some—and I should actually say that we are still not doing as well as we should like—is that we have had a great increase in recruitment of women to the retained workforce and that is about trying to make the job seem more family friendly. Part of the new retained salary scheme which I just mentioned is about changing the culture, so you actually know that you have a job to do as a retained firefighter, you know what you are going to be paid and you can do it for a reduced-hours contract as well. All those issues in terms and conditions of service for the retained workforce have actually emphasised to members of the public who might want to join the retained workforce what the benefits are. We have actually proactively campaigned within small towns and focused on particular small towns where we have had a recruitment problem which has generated additional women into the retained staff. The bigger issue for us really is recruitment to the whole-time service and part of that is limited by the numbers that we need to recruit at any one time and the numbers that apply at any one time. For every time we advertise for a whole-time firefighter, we get thousands of applicants literally on the whole-time service and obviously they all go through a set process. We have to start that off with some positive action to encourage women to apply, but even if they

apply, there is quite a regime to go through in terms of actually getting to the end result. We are still getting more women firefighters, but not enough.

Q171 Lyn Brown: May I ask what your retention is like, when you get your women firefighters there?

Mrs Smith: It is not bad. I would not say it was any worse for women, particularly in the retained service, than it is for the men.

Q172 Lyn Brown: What are the barriers to staying once they are there?

Mrs Smith: It is about the critical mass really, is it not? If you are only 58 out of 1,400, then there is an issue in terms of being accepted as the norm. As I said, we are trying to overcome all the barriers which people identify like physical amenities and all those sorts of things; the Fire Authority is putting resources into those.

Mr Young: May I just add a pragmatic point to that? You asked why we still think that the target is unachievable and the reason we think the target is unachievable is because when the target was originally published we took the view, even then, that it was unachievable because, although our staff turnover rates in retained firefighters are high, and that is not peculiar to Devon, the staff turnover rates in whole-time are very low. We knew that if we were to meet that target, there would be one particular year when 50% of all of our recruitment would have to consist of women and, from experience, we knew it was unrealistic frankly. Therefore we still do not think it is achievable. We are doing adequately, not as well as we should like, but we still do not think it is achievable.

Q173 Lyn Brown: Your black and minority ethnic staff also do not reflect your local population. Why do you think that is and do you think you are doing as much as you possibly can to promote diversity?

Mrs Smith: They do not quite reflect the population. They are not too far adrift but they do not quite reflect and the numbers in Devon's population have increased over the last year or so. There was a time when we were closer than we are now actually, but we are talking about 1% in the population against 0.7 previously, so it is fairly small in terms of numbers.

Q174 Lyn Brown: Point seven?

Mrs Smith: It was point seven but it is now one point something.

Q175 Alison Seabeck: I was interested in your comments about women coming into the retained force. Is there an element of them finding that slightly more attractive because the shift patterns or the arrangements are generally more flexible?

Mrs Smith: One of the points of the new duty system that we are hoping to implement—and I am still waiting to hear from the Retained Firefighters' Union whether they support it or not—is that we are offering different contracts, more flexible contracts, shorter-hours contracts, those sorts of facilities to help recruitment.

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Q176 Mr Hands: A question on comprehensive performance assessment or CPA. Do you think the CPA process, in its interaction with Fire Authorities, has given a thorough and robust assessment of yourselves and other authorities?

Mr Young: In terms of the remit that CPA had, which did not embrace all aspects of the Fire Service, in the context of that, we believe it was robust, yes. We really felt as though we had been assessed at the end of the process. Because we got a good rating, we feel that it was an accurate one as well. The issue that it did not deal with, which has yet to be addressed and we realise will be addressed, is the issue of the operational service delivery dimension of the service. Ironically, from the general public's point of view, to be frank that is the bit they are more interested in.

Q177 Sir Paul Beresford: How much did the CPA cost?

Mr Young: That is a good question.

Mrs Smith: To us, it is actually the loss of time in terms of managing the process rather than actual cost to the authority.

Q178 Sir Paul Beresford: I was hoping you would include that.

Mrs Smith: I do not have a figure for you on that one.

Sir Paul Beresford: What is your gearing?

Q179 Chair: Would it be possible for you to provide us with a figure afterwards, without wasting a lot more of your time on it?

Mrs Smith: Yes.

Chair: We do not need it to be accurate but a ballpark estimate would be helpful.

Q180 Sir Paul Beresford: Would you include your gearing, please?

Mr Young: Yes.

Q181 Mr Hands: Just coming back to the operational service, would you have preferred it to have included those considerations?

Mr Young: From a personal point of view, I should have liked to have seen an holistic approach to the assessment which actually dealt with all aspects of the service. That is purely a personal point of view.

Q182 Sir Paul Beresford: Is that not likely to come? Yesterday we had a group of officials. We had the Director of Fire Resilience, we had the Head of the Fire Service Inspectorate, we had the Head of the Fire Service Improvement Team and we had the Head of the Fire Service Effectiveness Division. They sound like a bunch of hornets coming down on you in addition to CPA.

Mr Young: We are quite used to being inspected and we have been inspected for many years. There are some advantages in actually it taking an holistic approach because, frankly, from a practitioner's point of view on the ground, it gets it done and finished rather than repeating the inspections over time.

Q183 Sir Paul Beresford: They ought really to all come together and come to see you for less time.

Mr Young: We have always had the view that the degree of inspection from all sorts of different organisations has been excessive. Of course we would say this would we not? The more that can be rationalised and the impact on staff time minimised, from an organisational standpoint, the better.

Mrs Smith: I think I would emphasise that we are a fairly small organisation as a combined Fire Authority and yet we are subject to the same regimes as a large county council. In terms of audit, that is an issue.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Witnesses: Ms V Shawcross, Chair, Mr Ken Knight, Commissioner for London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority and Mr Ron Dobson, Acting Deputy Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, gave evidence

Q184 Chair: Good afternoon, would you like to just say who you are?

Ms Shawcross: I am the Chair of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority.

Mr Knight: Ken Knight, London Fire Commissioner.

Mr Dobson: Ron Dobson, Acting Deputy Commissioner.

Q185 Chair: May I start off? Your memorandum outlines the reasons for your decision to commit to the FiReControl project. To what extent did you really have a choice?

Ms Shawcross: The Fire Authority recently took the decision that we should join in the FiReControl project and the feeling of the members was that, although we do have a new regional fire control centre which only opened in 2004 and it is functioning extremely satisfactorily and efficiently,

it would very much add to our resilience as a service if we had complete inter-operability with the regional control rooms which would by then be created in the rest of the country.

Q186 Chair: So it was advantageous for you to be part of the national project?

Ms Shawcross: It is advantageous for London to be able to call upon other regions within the service if we have problems, but we should also want to make a contribution to our national resilience by being part of a national network.

Q187 Chair: Would the national network have been able to function without London being part of it?

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Ms Shawcross: It would function without London; that would be the point. There could be occasions on which we should need to call in the support of adjacent control rooms and it would undermine our ability to do that.

Mr Knight: It is mutually an advantage, both to the regional project and to London, that it has interoperability technically, not just for London events but for events which are nationwide and we have seen the deployment of vehicles from Maryhill in Glasgow to the Buncefield oil terminal. Interoperability technically and the similarity of equipment are helpful. It is also a great advantage to us to be able to spread calls in what we call spate conditions. We currently shed those calls to places like the Metropolitan Police Service at Scotland Yard. Interoperable regional controls means they can be handled by another Fire Authority, by fire control operators and that gives us an advantage as well. We operate, as you know, a very large control already, a regional control. It handles something like 270,000 emergency calls a year, about 30 emergency calls an hour and we are very comfortable with the regional control concept and very comfortable to link in with the regional control project which is being proposed.

Q188 John Cummings: In your evidence you state that your commitment to FiReControl is subject to future review. Why are you unable to commit to the project unconditionally?

Ms Shawcross: Although the authority has a track record of tremendous change management over the last five years, we have always done it cautiously. We like to see business cases. We want to be sure that the technology is stacking up, that it is performing. Since the single strongest piece of value that this project adds to London is our ability to inter-operate and pass on demands to other authorities, to other regional control rooms, it is obviously important that we know the whole system.

Q189 John Cummings: When will the review take place?

Ms Shawcross: The Fire Authority is a hung authority and we are subject both to borough elections and assembly elections. It is something we should need to fit in with both our technical and our political timetable.

Q190 John Cummings: Well it is obvious that you do not command all-party support.

Ms Shawcross: I think it was unanimous; we agreed that we should support the regional control room. The experience of all of our members has been that the regional control room is absolutely uncontroversial in London.

Q191 John Cummings: The Committee have been advised that your decision did not command all-party support.

Ms Shawcross: I think it did. We may have had a dissent from a member of UKIP on the authority who is concerned that regionalism is connected with the European Union.

Q192 John Cummings: So is it causing difficulties in implementing the project?

Ms Shawcross: The Fire Authority has had a single control room in London since 1988; previously there were several control rooms in London. There has been a single control room in London since 1988 with a fall-back, which is kept warmed up in case of technical failure. The technology started to age and in 2000 we initiated the project to replace the control room we had. That was with all-party support. The new control room has functioned incredibly successfully and certainly it stood up extremely well during the incidents of 7/7. In fact I doubt very much that we could have commanded our resources as well as we did in July had we not had a regional control room.

Q193 John Cummings: Just for the record, are you saying that there is not a split?

Ms Shawcross: The Fire Authority is very strongly in favour of this project.

Mr Knight: May I just say that in operational terms we have laid down some caveats and we want to have discussions with the ODPM. We have had a very successful single fire control since the beginning of the 1990s, having previously had multiple controls in London and now have a regional control and moving to a new regional control in 2002. The current fire control is due for refresh in 2011. It is timely therefore for us to be at the end of the regional control project, but particularly to be live and ready for the important event of the 2012 Olympics. That is critical in our discussions with the ODPM.

Q194 John Cummings: So you do not foresee any difficulties in implementing the project and you are confident that you will continue to maintain public confidence in the modernisation programme despite the split within the authority.

Ms Shawcross: I am sorry; we have obviously given some misimpression here. The Fire Authority is very committed to our regional control room and would like to see us playing a part in a national network of regional control rooms. We should like the rest of the country to enjoy the benefits that we very strongly enjoy and that includes efficiency benefits, ability to provide better training and career structures for the many women who work in the Fire Service in the control rooms and the ability to handle large-scale and critical situations very competently. It makes absolute sense to me that the Fire Service should have a network of regional control rooms. The only thing I find peculiar is that we do not have them yet.

Q195 John Cummings: Would you be more likely to commit unconditionally to the FiReControl project if the Government were to publish a more detailed business case?

Ms Shawcross: We do not commit to anything unconditionally at all until we are clear about the legal and financial and operational requirements. As more detail becomes available, we shall be confirming our level of commitment.

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Q196 John Cummings: What would the business case have to demonstrate in order to gain your support?

Ms Shawcross: The business case would have to show that there was no undue financial disadvantage to the Fire Authority, but we do not expect that to be the case.

Q197 Alison Seabeck: Just picking up on some of the points John has made about the success, in your view, of the Regional Control Centre in London, you talk about delivering a cost-effective service. Have you been able to quantify exactly what the savings have been to the service since you moved to the new control centre? Do you think that that will translate across to Regional Control Centres across the country, given that some of them are very rural and are quite different from London?

Ms Shawcross: We certainly can show that per incident handled, London is vastly cheaper than the other Fire Authority control rooms around the country. In terms of the latest upgrade of our control room, we actually benefited in terms of some technical improvements. Perhaps Ron could explain?

Mr Dobson: I can certainly demonstrate that there have been significant efficiencies between when we had three separate divisional controls and we moved to one regional control in the early 1990s. We can certainly demonstrate too that having moved to our very modern control a couple of years ago, there are certainly efficiencies there in terms of call-handling times, efficiency of calls and time taken to handle calls. There are several efficiencies. I am afraid I could not give you figures right this moment, but there is certainly a range of areas where we have achieved significant efficiencies by moving to a regional control and then updating that control recently and having the very modern, state-of-the-art control room that we have now.

Q198 Chair: Would it be possible, without much trouble, for you to provide us with some figures subsequently?

Mr Knight: I am sure we can. The ODPM Mott McDonald report also shows calls handled per operator and the effectiveness and efficiency of regional controls.

Q199 Alison Seabeck: In your paper you talk about the reduction in malicious calls and false call-outs. How has that been achieved? How are you identifying and managing those calls as they come in?

Mr Dobson: We restructured our brigade a few years ago now on a borough basis and we have a borough commander at group manager level who is responsible for performance in each borough in London and the City of London. We have managed the reduction in malicious calls particularly via engaging with the local boroughs and the police locally as part of the crime and disorder partnerships to identify those areas where we are getting the most malicious calls, engaging with them through the police and other partnerships within the borough and actually getting in touch with those people and

reducing it by personal contact. We have also run a range of local intervention schemes to engage particularly with youths within London where most of the malicious calls have actually come from. We have achieved some really significant reductions across London generally and in particular boroughs we can demonstrate that the interventions that we have done on a local level with partners in the borough have been really effective.

Q200 Alison Seabeck: Are they cost effective?

Mr Dobson: Absolutely; yes.

Q201 Chair: So it is not related to the Regional Control Centre at all? It is not a technological fix.

Ms Shawcross: The technological aspect is that we have started to use mobile phone technology, talking to the mobile phone operators. We do now have an arrangement for mobile phone abusers to be warned and then cut off. That has been extremely helpful.

Q202 Alison Seabeck: You have expressed concerns, a slight impatience almost, that the system is a tad overdue. Are you clear what arrangements will be put in place to meet the interim gap which is likely to occur here?

Mr Dobson: London had already instigated a project to replace our analogue mobile communication system prior to us being involved in the FireLink project. A couple of years ago we stopped that procurement and engaged in the FireLink project. The abortive costs were picked up by the ODPM. We are keen for FireLink to be delivered on time in 2008 because we see a range of operational benefits in relation to the delivery of that system, but in the meantime we have a requirement to ensure business continuity and operational continuity and therefore we have been maintaining our existing analogue system. We have also recently extended the lease on our hilltop sites, so that if there is a further delay, there will be no impact on our business continuity; we can still continue to deliver our service.

Q203 Alison Seabeck: But there will be cost implications.

Mr Dobson: Yes, there could be some cost implications. I do not have the exact figures, but there certainly could be some cost implications.

Q204 Alison Seabeck: In terms of the delay and your discussions with ODPM, once they give the go-ahead, what is your feeling about the precise time lapse before the roll-out will actually happen and when it will actually be on stream?

Mr Dobson: From our discussions with ODPM, we are hopeful that we should be one of the first authorities which actually gets rolled out as part of FireLink. We are hopeful that if the project does deliver on time, which we hope it will, we shall also be rolled out during 2008; as early in 2008 as we can be.

Q205 Alison Seabeck: Have you had any reassurances from ODPM that they will meet any of the additional costs?

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Mr Dobson: Not at the moment. We are continuing to press for those.

Q206 Lyn Brown: The ODPM argue that FireLink, FiReControl and New Dimension are essential factors to strengthen our fire resilience. Do you agree or do you think it could have been done better?

Ms Shawcross: The Civil Contingencies Act and the New Dimension programme have been absolutely central to driving forward our ability to deal with resilience issues, but that is not the end of the story. Now we have an integrated risk management planning process which allows us to collect data and plan on it and act on it, which is not how it used to be in the Fire Service, we also have our own risk assessment which means that we took the view that equipment and training would be required which would be complementary to the national programme but specific to London and I am sure that would be the same elsewhere in the country. To some extent, that is reflected in the financial split. The Government have provided certain kinds of equipment and training and we have been very much involved in that programme and supported it. Equally, we have upgraded and increased some of our own equipment which was prepared to deal with the Tube in particular, because we see that as a particular risk.

Mr Dobson: Part of our intervention in the risk management plan, the London Safety Plans one and two, is that one of the risks that London has faced, and we are there to assist with, is the terrorist threat. What we have done is to make sure that in London's Safety Plan the deployment of our resources, and additional funding which we have attracted in order to increase our resilience, is focused towards that terrorist threat.

Mr Knight: Alongside the Government's New Dimension programme, of which you have heard, which we are a key part of as clearly much of the critical risk still is in the capital city, we also have quite separately a London resilience programme, which has identified additional equipment and resources, as you might expect.

Q207 Lyn Brown: Have you been adequately consulted over the programmes? Do you think you have been involved?

Ms Shawcross: We have been involved both politically and technically very centrally right from the beginning of the programme and we have had no difficulties of communication. The only issue there has been for the Fire Authority has been that of finances. There is a view in the Fire Authority, which I share, that we think there should have been a greater level of subsidy coming from the national pot to London because at the moment we do not get a capital city allowance as part of our programme of funding, as the Metropolitan Police do. Certainly there are special risks in London and we also play a particular role in supporting the rest of the country when there are major incidents.

Q208 Dr Pugh: You are saying you are dealt with on differentially worse terms than the Metropolitan Police. Is that the point you are making?

Ms Shawcross: There is not a component of the Fire Authority's funding in London that is specific to the fact that we have a capital city risk, whereas there is for the Metropolitan Police. Whether or not the Met get enough, I do not know.

Q209 Dr Pugh: But you are not a security force in the same way the police are.

Ms Shawcross: No, but we are of course looking after sensitive national institutions in the same way that the police are. We attended the fire at Buckingham Palace.

Q210 Dr Pugh: Would you accept that people in the northern cities who have funded fire brigades and things like that, which they probably believe are under-funded in many respects, would in a way regard it as special pleading by the capital city, would they not?

Mr Knight: The risks remain throughout the United Kingdom, but it is generally accepted in the security service and elsewhere that the predominant risk, in fact the predominant population, is here in the capital city and that is why there is a special arrangement in place for the London resilience programme. The point being made, and it has been a cross-party point being made within the Fire Authority, that the additional expenditure, for example, on the equipment used on 7 July, none of which was New Dimension equipment, was all London resilience equipment, funded from LFEP A and it is felt that actually there ought to be some recognition of the capital city role in terrorist attacks.

Q211 Dr Pugh: Do you think, on an evidence basis, mile for mile, you could demonstrate that there are in fact additional costs incurred simply by virtue of being a capital city that are not there by virtue of being a city.

Mr Knight: I am confident.

Ms Shawcross: Yes.

Q212 Dr Pugh: Have you submitted the evidence to ODPM and tried to sustain that argument?

Ms Shawcross: We constantly try to sustain that argument, but we have never persuaded them of the principle.

Q213 Dr Pugh: And what do they say?

Ms Shawcross: We have never persuaded them of the principle.

Q214 Sir Paul Beresford: Do you know the cost of CPA and other inspections?

Ms Shawcross: We were not subject to CPA. We were inspected as part of an IPA project which was looking at us in the context of the Greater London Authority. There was an attempt to translate those scores and those findings into CPA terms, but there was some mismatch. I could not tell you the costs off the top of my head, but we can report that.

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Q215 Mr Hands: Going back to resilience again, what specific operational changes were learned or came about as a result of 7/7 and 21/7 in terms of reacting to major events? One of the things that strikes me is that the nature of the two attacks was actually fairly close to what had been trained for and what many commentators and outsiders had predicted. How well set do you think you are for something that is really totally unprepared for, that people have not really thought of yet?

Mr Knight: You are absolutely right that the exercises and training that we did before that event and continue to do with the other agencies not only showed their worth but worked extremely well. You are absolutely right that the Osiris exercise in Bank Underground was a very similar exercise to the reality; same number of crews and so on. What it showed us was that four multiple major incidents, requiring some 200 firefighters simultaneously deployed, required a very fast strategic response to an incident of that type and that the command and control facilities put in place effectively. What it also showed us is that our integrated risk management planning of moving pumping appliances from the centre of London on the old wartime standards to a risk-based approach to some outer London areas also proved its worth and worked extremely well and we had a very fast response from the whole of London. Where we were found wanting, and we have highlighted this to the Fire Authority, was that although we recognised we had taken delivery of ten fire rescue units for the London resilience programme, which are not part of the New Dimension programme, we advised the authority that a further six would be required in order to maintain the appropriate level for an escalating level of attack. I am pleased to say that with the authority's support, and indeed the Major of London's support, that is now part of the forthcoming budget. I would just ask Mr Dobson, who has led on London resilience throughout the process, to add any points.

Mr Dobson: The point I should like to make really is just how integrated we are in terms of the threat assessment of the risks that London faces with the other emergency services, particularly the Metropolitan Police and also the security services. The sorts of other threats, if you term the attacks of 7/7 and 21/7 as conventional explosives or conventional attacks, the other sorts of unconventional attacks which may involve chemical agents, are the sorts of things we have also been planning for and training for and the brigade has been equipped through the New Dimension programme and through the authority's own provision of resources to deal with those threats as well. If you take Osiris in September 2003 as an example, it was not just an attack on the Tube system, it was also an attack involving a chemical agent. All the firefighters who were involved in that were using gas tight chemical protection suits and other chemical procedures. The exercises we have run in London over recent years show we are aware of the other threats, we have prepared for those and we are prepared for them.

Q216 Mr Hands: In terms of preparing for the unexpected, which I know sounds a bit of an oxymoron, has anybody studied the work last year of the 9/11 Commission which was almost a case study in the unexpected and at that time, in a totally different city, but the complete breakdown of fire and police interaction in New York City and whether that might be repeated in the event of a similarly unexpected catastrophe here?

Mr Knight: I am confident it will not and I am very well aware, not only of that report, but of that relationship. Just to reassure you, we have very active contacts with the other capital cities such as Paris, Berlin and Madrid and we are mirroring that sort of activity. I say why I am confident: we have a longstanding arrangement through the London Emergency Service Liaison Panel, LESLP, which has a clarity about the roles of emergency services and local authorities and others and it was clear that no-one was tripping over each other on 7 July or 21 July as everyone was clear what their role was. We have since had many visits from all parts of the world to share that experience with them and we have a duty to do so. I am confident we do not have those same tensions regarding primacy at a major incident of that kind.

Q217 Mr Hands: You state in your submission that you have made good progress in improving resilience. How easy is that to say in the absence of another major incident?

Mr Knight: We should not at all be complacent to say that we are at the end of such attacks. We would say, professionally, that we are probably in the middle of such attacks and we have to remain prepared and prepared for a very long time. Our continuous improvement in equipment, in training and preparedness, along with all the other emergency services and through the London Regional Resilience Forum which is particularly dynamic in looking at a range of risks, sometimes natural disasters, sometimes terrorist attack, will continue to maintain that readiness. We were not found wanting on 7 July, I am pleased to say, and I am confident we shall not be found wanting in the future.

Q218 Lyn Brown: In your evidence, you state that you have a target to reach level five of the local government equality scheme as soon as is practical. That is a fairly long timescale. I just wondered what level you are at now.

Ms Shawcross: The Fire Authority does have a very strong equalities function department and a programme and we took a view that we were not in the business of ticking boxes and jumping other people's hurdles. We are in the business of really changing the culture of our organisation and its recruitment and improving its outreach and making sure the community fire safety work we were doing and the social engagement programme have really met people's genuine needs. We decided that the

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change management that that needed would have to be paced. We could have accelerated and ticked the level five box very quickly, but we are not going to do that until we are confident that we have successfully implemented the change we needed to make all the way through the service. If the Committee wanted to visit the service, you would be confident that what we are actually doing is not just superficial, on paper; we are actually making a change.

Q219 Lyn Brown: Why do you think it is harder to achieve a workforce which is representative of the community it serves for uniformed staff rather than non-uniformed staff?

Ms Shawcross: It will get easier. It is important that you look at equalities issues as part of a diagnosis of the core health of the management of your organisation. Since we now have the Fire Services Act, under the new settlement a lot of old human resources practices which were imposed on us have gone. For example, there used to be a disciplinary code which meant that there was a sort of court-martial style procedure, an external officer would come in to investigate a complaint and it would almost be dealt with between the firefighter and their watch manager or whoever it was, as though it was an argument rather than an issue of line management. We have now been able to make those basic legal and structural procedural changes, which will give us the possibility of improving the grass-roots quality of our human resources management. That, in my view, has been where the problem is and so, 18 months on from that, that is where we shall start to see the improvements. The uniform service has, in the past, suffered from bullying, sexism, a culture which excluded people and we can only address that culture by actually improving the quality of the line management, improving the skills and the empowerment of the line management all the way through the organisation and therefore become able to implement the policies that the Fire Authority has. I see it as a key indicator of the health of the organisation and we are moving on with it now; we are starting to make some very good progress.

Q220 Lyn Brown: Do you think you have lessons for other Fire Authorities to learn?

Ms Shawcross: Obviously we do share practice within the Fire Service and we go on visits and we look at what other services are doing and we invite people to look at what we are doing; not just within the ODPM's beacon project, but outside it. Sometimes that is more interesting, because it is less structured and you can go where you need to go. We have tried to target people with some specific outreach programmes and given women taster events, that kind of programme. I have to say, to some extent the equal opportunities law is not terribly helpful because it does put an iron curtain down in front of some of the practices you would want to carry out. We took legal advice, counsel's opinion, very early on as to how far we could go in trying actively to promote recruitment of women and ethnic minorities. A core issue, from talking to

the women in the service, has always been what experience women get when they work in the service. They have always had a really appallingly bad experience and it is only now that we are starting to improve that experience. Women are not stupid and they talk to each other and they ask women who work in the service what it is like. I feel confident now that we are getting to grips with the culture of the organisation and, with improved management, that the women are starting to get a better experience and that will flow through into better recruitment. We have nearly doubled the number of women we had five years ago, but it was from an extremely low base.

Q221 Lyn Brown: You state that you wanted the Government to review their national targets and to ensure they are based on empirical evidence. What leads you to think that the targets are not based on empirical evidence and how precisely would you change those targets?

Ms Shawcross: We noticed very early on and I would echo the comments of our colleagues in Devon, that the targets did not seem to be based on any understanding of how there was a flow-through of staff within the service and what mechanisms for change were available to us. They are simply unrealistic because they do not reflect the number of posts that we are advertising and recruiting. Equally, they do not reflect the fact that, as my colleague from Devon said, when you advertise a job you do get a majority of traditional workforce white men applying; it is an extremely popular career amongst that group and you cannot dismiss those applications. They have to be looked at and dealt with. The point we would make is that not all the tools we needed went with the targets.

Q222 Lyn Brown: How would you change the targets?

Ms Shawcross: We should want to—

Mr Knight: It is that lack of empirical evidence. We are absolutely committed to the diverse workforce just to deliver the core business we want to. We are having discussions with the ODPM and certainly more realistic targets for us would be around the number of joiners, not the number in the establishment. So, for example, we would be more satisfied to talk about 25% BME joiners and 12% women joiners by 2009, not the proportion of the workforce which is so static.

Q223 Lyn Brown: Given the evidence of your Chair, maybe another one would be how many you were able to retain.

Ms Shawcross: The retention has improved; that has been something we have been looking at all the way through and retention has improved. We also looked at the disproportionate number of ethnic minorities who were suffering disciplinary action. We have tried to be very open about all of that programme. I agree with the Commissioner, that we should much prefer to have our targets cast around

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what we are actually doing. If we have a year when there is no recruitment, then—

Mr Knight: There needs to be some sophistication there as well. How many are attracted to join? How many join? How many stay? It is a very blunt instrument just to talk about such targets as the number in the establishment. It is joiners and the sub-set below that counts drilling down into what makes people want to join and stay.

Chair: Thank you very much for your evidence. I am sure the Committee would like to take the opportunity of expressing our thanks to you and the other emergency services for dealing with 7/7 and 21/7. All of us were here in London and fortunately, as far as I know, no Member of this House suffered harm. Clearly we are very appreciative of the way in which the emergency services responded to those two events.

Witnesses: **County Councillor Bob Wilkinson**, Chair of Lancashire Combined Fire Authority, **Mr Peter Holland**, Chief Fire Officer and **Mr Chris Kenny**, Director of Support Services, Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service, gave evidence.

Chair: Thank you very much for joining us. My colleague, John Pugh, will start off the questions.

Q224 Dr Pugh: In your memorandum you state that there is a case for Regional Control Centres but you state categorically that there are going to be special problems in the North West. May I ask you a two-part question? Are you convinced of the need for Regional Control Centres and their benefits, or are you just convinced that they might have benefits for other parts of the world apart from the North West?

Mr Holland: Perhaps we should just introduce ourselves first. I am Peter Holland, Chief Fire Officer.

County Councillor Wilkinson: Bob Wilkinson, the Chair of Lancashire Combined Fire Authority.

Mr Kenny: Chris Kenny, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer.

Mr Holland: May I start first in terms of the controls? Yes, we are convinced from the Government's perspective and it was built into the national framework, we have supported the project 100% from its start-off point. Our concerns really emanate from the costs associated with the project and the estimated savings that will be made. In the ODPM's own circulars, they pointed out that the larger busier services will not save as much as the smaller quieter services. Certainly we in the North West are the next biggest in operational terms to London, hence the concerns of the North West and ourselves in Lancashire. We need to see the sums worked out locally just so we know how it is going to impact from our point of view.

Q225 Dr Pugh: It is not so much a regional point but a financial point you are making here; it is to do with the size of the authority.

Mr Holland: It is certainly a financial point from the authority's perspective.

County Councillor Wilkinson: From the authority's perspective we do not see any financial benefits to a regional control, because of the amount it is costing now and the amount it will cost in future. What we do not want to see is the public paying more for a worse service.

Q226 Dr Pugh: Do you see any service benefits?

Mr Kenny: There are lots of benefits with the proposals for regional controls. When you look at the technology that is going to be included in the regional controls, the automatic vehicle location, the caller identification, the more robust inter-operability, we do see benefits. One of the problems we face is that the business case that has been done has been a national business case and we cannot translate those national figures into how it will affect the region or in fact Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service.

Q227 Dr Pugh: It is not so much the project you are bothered about, it is how the finances will stack up and impact on the general level of service you can offer.

Mr Kenny: Correct.

Q228 Dr Pugh: Forgive me for saying so, but that sounds like positioning which local authorities will go in for at a certain point in order to enhance their position. Have you had a discussion with the Government over this and if so, what has been the result of it?

Mr Kenny: We have got the FiReControl project regionally, in which we engage with the national project. We are keen to produce clarity because when we are trying to sell the benefits, people will ask at what cost it comes. We are trying to engage nationally to ask what exactly the FiReControl project will deliver. Is that written in stone, will that be reduced in the future and what will that cost be for both the region and Lancashire Fire and Rescue Services?

Q229 Dr Pugh: Yesterday we seemed to get a degree of clarity because the Government officials were very keen to say that whatever additional cost there was, you would not pick up the tab, the tab would be picked up by the Government. On that basis, is that the kind of clarity you are looking for and would that satisfy you?

Mr Kenny: The concept of New Burdens is something that is quite easy to trot out, that these will be the benefits and this will be picked up if it is a New Burden. Defining New Burdens is more complicated. A full business case was never presented: it would be very helpful to be able to say

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we are now totally clear on which costs are ours, which costs are theirs. New Burdens seem to be allocated more on a piece-meal case-by-case basis, rather than strategically, exactly defining who picks up what and when.

Q230 Dr Pugh: So you are suspicious of the Government. You think that they may introduce new costs but then tell you that they are not actually New Burdens at all, they are burdens you have traditionally shouldered in another form.

Mr Kenny: It would certainly benefit both ourselves and the public we represent to have that clarity from the start.

County Councillor Wilkinson: I attended a meeting this morning and asked how these New Burdens would be paid.

Q231 Chair: Sorry; a meeting with . . . ? Was it with ODPM? We do not need to know exactly who.

County Councillor Wilkinson: With the ODPM; people from the ODPM. I asked how these New Burdens would be paid and the stock answer, which I expected, was that it will be built into our grant. That did not give me a lot of confidence.

Q232 Dr Pugh: You have heard that before.

County Councillor Wilkinson: I have heard it a few times before.

Q233 John Cummings: Many FRAs have expressed reservations about the benefits and efficiency savings that will derive from the shift to Regional Control Centres. Are you aware of any impact this is having on public confidence in the fire and rescue services and, in turn, the fire and rescue services' ability to perform well?

Mr Holland: Certainly issues have been raised in newspapers. Some lobbying has been going on by the staff; quite understandably. The staff are concerned about their futures; these are very professional dedicated staff who do a first class job. They are involved in saving people's lives, handling calls and keeping callers on the end of 999 calls. They are concerned about their future so they raise issues, quite understandably, with the local media. In terms of consultation, it is not an issue for us to go out locally and consult with the public on. We are involved in a national project here, but we are engaged very closely with our staff to try to reassure them and help them work through the future. This is why, in our response, we have talked about how we deal with the human resources aspects and have put in a plea—and I am delighted that we are here to be able to make that plea so that you can assist us—for some speed in deciding just what pay the staff are going to receive, what conditions of service they are going to receive, how they are going to be selected, how redundancies, if any, are going to be dealt with. The staff do not know that and clearly that it going to help them plan their futures when that is determined. Also, importantly, going back to the first issue about costs, it helps us sort out the financial situation. Clearly redundancy costs are a major issue.

Q234 John Cummings: So you believe it is affecting performance?

Mr Holland: I do not believe it is affecting performance. These are very professional people. The staff are continuing to work remarkably well, given the fact that morale has undoubtedly gone down.

Q235 John Cummings: You are certainly very critical of the FiReControl project for the tardy manner in which certain human resource issues such as selection, terms and conditions, pay, relocation and redundancies have been addressed. Can you explain the impact in your area of the failure to address these issues in a constructive and timely manner?

Mr Kenny: At the minute, because of ownership of the project, the project sees those terms and conditions issues sitting with the new employer, so that is dependent on defining who the entity is. At the minute we are at an impasse, awaiting clarification of those things. Once those things are clarified, they will feed back into the costs which will allow the project—

Q236 John Cummings: Are you confident that they are going to be clarified?

Mr Kenny: There has been a major step forward recently in that a more strategic working group has been set up with regional HR directors and Lancashire is certainly involved in that. We are hoping that that might provide a trigger to enable the ODPM and the employers to engage and move this subject forward.

Q237 Lyn Brown: Do you think the move to the Regional Control Centres is going to have a negative impact upon your equality targets?

Mr Holland: In respect of the staff that we employ?

Q238 Lyn Brown: Indeed. Do you think you will be laying off lots and lots of women? Do you think it is going to have a—

Mr Holland: We employ 41 members of staff in our control room: there are two men and the remainder are females. It is certainly going to reduce the number of uniformed females in Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service sadly.

Q239 Chair: May I turn to FireLink and ask whether you are convinced by the case for FireLink for your area and for the Fire Service nationally?

Mr Holland: As you probably picked up from our response, we moved over to the Airwave system three years ago and it has worked extremely well for us. We are concerned more about the transitional period, that we might lose the enhanced functionality that we have enjoyed over these last three years and indeed we have developed the system. We are going to have to move slightly; we are still going to have Airwave, but there is going to be a transition onto a new model of radio and that potentially could cause us to lose some operational functions within the system.

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Q240 Chair: Is the new system less flexible than the one you have at present then?

Mr Kenny: Our provider is now the preferred provider for FireLink, so we are now in a situation where we are very hopeful that the technologies are very, very similar, if not identical. Before then, we thought we might lose a lot of technology in this solution.

Q241 Chair: So the concerns that you did have were before you knew that the preferred supplier was essentially the person that you were already being supplied by?

Mr Kenny: The concerns still remain about how that transition is managed, but certainly our concerns are more to do with the difficulties we faced in bringing in Airwave and knowing that those same challenges will be faced by the national project with FireLink. We are keen to help and support the national project to ensure the lessons that we have learned are not going to create difficulties for the national project.

Q242 Chair: Do you think it would be possible for the national roll-out to avoid some of the problems you experienced because of learning from your experience?

Mr Holland: We certainly hope so.

Mr Kenny: We are engaging with the project and we do have good relations with the FireLink project to be fair. One thing we fear is that the amount of change that is going to occur in quite a short period of time will be a challenge for any organisation to absorb with FireLink and regional controls and change in procedures all happening simultaneously.

Mr Holland: May I just make one other plea, because it is something which is not included in the FireLink project at the moment? The handheld radios which we use on what we call the fire ground, when we are at an incident, are not part of the FireLink project at the moment and from an interoperability point of view, it is essential that they are brought within the FireLink project for the future; that gives us the ability to talk to adjoining fire and rescue services.

Q243 Alison Seabeck: You say you have had Airwave and you were very positive about it, about how it worked and you are competent in that system. We heard evidence yesterday from people who said that, where police forces had a similar system, they have had an awful lot of problems. Did you have any initial teething problems with it which were worrying or has it been plain sailing?

Mr Holland: Yes, we did have teething problems, but they were soon ironed out. We rolled out just after the police did. The reason we moved over was because the police were moving over. We were going to be losing our radio if we did not move with them.

Q244 Alison Seabeck: So your experiences generally were positive?

Mr Holland: Extremely positive.

Q245 Alison Seabeck: On the interoperability element and the handheld units, I assume this is just purely for the Fire Service. You would not want to have that open to other services like the police to feed into your system. That would need to be separate.

Mr Holland: No, we do feed into the police. We can talk to the police on our mainstream radio. The handheld radios that our officers have can talk to the police, but we do not have it for wider use on every fire engine, for example. Those radios are really for talking to—

Q246 Alison Seabeck: Are there clear lines of command at an incident? The last thing you want is somebody from the police force trying to tell you what to do.

Mr Holland: You would be on a different channel.

Q247 Chair: Pursuing the argument about these hand-held appliances, presumably you are not alone in Fire Authorities in believing that it should be part of the system.

Mr Holland: I read through the submissions before I came here today and several of the submissions that you have are actually in support of that.

Q248 Chair: So why have you been unable to persuade the ODPM?

Mr Holland: It is cost. You are talking about a significant amount of additional money on the project.

Q249 Chair: If it is not implemented at the start, would that prevent it from ever being implemented, or could it be added on afterwards?

Mr Holland: It could be added on, for sure, yes.

Q250 Lyn Brown: Does your recruitment freeze extend to the retained firefighters?

Mr Holland: No, it does not. It was brought in in August 2003, with some reluctance I might add, but it certainly impacted on our ability to work towards our targets.

Q251 Lyn Brown: Do other Fire Authorities have frozen recruitment amongst front-line staff?

Mr Holland: Almost every fire and rescue service has reduced the number of whole-time staff they employ over the last couple or three years. Yes, it would be fair to say that.

Q252 Lyn Brown: Can you tell me whether or not your Fire Authority faces particular difficulties trying to increase representation of black and minority ethnic communities?

Mr Holland: We certainly do and I am clear that the freeze in recruitment was a major setback. We had just started recruiting about three months before that and we had been very successful in getting applications from under-represented groups, so it was really a very difficult decision, as you might imagine. We have recently increased our staffing in community fire safety work. These are non-operational members of staff who wear uniforms

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and go out into the community. Of the 26 we have recently taken on, 10 are females and five are from black and ethnic minority communities; we are really pleased about that, and hopefully, when we lift the freeze on recruitment, which will be very soon, we shall be able to extend that to the whole-time staff as well.

County Councillor Wilkinson: We have to support the view that London had, that the target should be the people we are going to employ, rather than the total service now. Especially in our case, we are employing people on a contract which is different from a firefighter's contract. They are only small numbers but there are large numbers of ethnic minorities and females within that small number.

Mr Kenny: May I bring in another point as well? The thing about modernisation is matching skills to posts, so not all new posts are going to be operational firefighter posts. When you look at increasing diversity in the organisation, to limit those performance indicators just to firefighter posts is flawed. A great benefit could be got from widening those parameters.

Mr Holland: If you look at why the targets are there, it is for the wider community's perception of the Fire and Rescue Service. These people are working out in the community, so from a perception point of view they will see black and Asian firefighters, female firefighters out in uniform. It is really important to include them.

Q253 Chair: Is there not a danger that it might encourage further segmentation in the workforce so that you would have good representation of women and ethnic minorities in the lower paid part of the workforce, common in many organisations I have to say.

Mr Kenny: One thing I should say is that you often get a transition from those posts into the operational side. It is a way of introducing people to the organisation; it is certainly a stepping stone. You often find that is the case with the retained service, for example, so I still think it is very much a positive step.

Mr Holland: We should certainly not want it to be seen in any way as a negative. So long as it is taken into account in the overall numbers, you could separate whole-time staff, separate non-operational staff if you like, but I am very happy to be measured on our performance on recruiting firefighters once we start recruiting.

Q254 Lyn Brown: In the London evidence one of the things they talked about very bravely and openly was the culture of sexism and racism which prevailed. Do you have similar experience?

Mr Holland: We did a cultural audit about four years ago in the service and, not surprisingly, the Fire and Rescue Service reflects society. What the audit did show was that behaviour is much better in the Fire and Rescue Service whilst people are at work than outside. There is a management inevitability around that which is good news, but you are talking about a huge cultural change.

Q255 Lyn Brown: London talked about changing the way their human resources operated and dealt with issues. Instead of considering something to be an argument between two individuals, they saw it as something which might need to go into a disciplinary process. Have you gone through the same cultural change?

Mr Holland: Yes, we have. We would rather things did not end up going down a disciplinary route, but it depends on the nature of the issue. We have spent a lot of time and effort in the six and a half years I have been Chief of Lancashire engaging with staff and having workshops and discussion groups to try to change people's perceptions.

Q256 Alison Sebeck: You talked about the difference between behaviour at work and behaviour out of work. Were you talking about behaviour out on a shout as compared with behaviour in the downtime in the station? Are you talking outside the station?

Mr Holland: There is absolutely no evidence at all of any sexism, racism, homophobia when people are—

Q257 Alison Sebeck: It is just that it was not clear.

Mr Holland: I am sorry, it was badly worded.

Q258 Dr Pugh: May I ask you about the restructuring which is taking place in the other emergency services which could create a problem, a headache for you? Do you see co-terminosity between emergency services as the ideal? If it is the ideal, how much of a disadvantage is its absence?

Mr Holland: We have co-terminosity in Lancashire with all three services and it works extremely well. We are about to lose the Ambulance Service; on 1 July they are becoming a North West Ambulance Service and it looks as though the police are going to combine with Cumbria. That disappoints me and it is a challenge for us to ensure that we do not lose the effective relationship that we do have across the services. It makes it more difficult, but it happens in other parts of the country now. There are only six or seven services where there is co-terminosity across all three services.

Q259 Dr Pugh: So you are testifying to the benefits of co-terminosity. You do presumably accept that it is an ideal, but there is going to be a fair amount of discussion, a fair amount of consultation before the position resolves itself in Lancashire or anywhere else and meanwhile you are going to have to make plans for the future within your own service. Is the uncertainty with regard to other types of restructuring going to be a handicap whilst you are trying to think ahead?

Mr Holland: Long-term planning is clearly a concern. We are reassured and our Chairman was told this morning by ODPM officials that there will not be a regional Fire and Rescue Service. It seems difficult to comprehend when regional control rooms are being built and the Ambulance Service is becoming a regional one. It seems almost inevitable

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that it is going to happen to the Fire and Rescue Service in future. It does create uncertainty, there is no question.

Q260 Dr Pugh: If there is going to be a North West Police Force, or something larger than you currently have at the moment, would you sooner have it decided earlier than the Government intend to have it decided?

Mr Holland: I should certainly want to be involved in the discussions. The issue professionally from a Fire and Rescue Service point of view is that there is no evidence that larger Fire and Rescue Services are more efficient than smaller Fire and Rescue Services, in fact there are some very efficient smaller Fire and Rescue Services in existence now.

Q261 Mr Hands: A question on comprehensive performance assessment or CPA, do you think the recent CPA review and process has enabled a robust and thorough review of the Fire Service in your case?

Mr Holland: We found it extremely helpful in focusing our efforts towards modernising the service on the issues it focused on. It was clearly lacking in that it did not look at the thing which is most important to the public, that is delivery of service to the public, other than judging us on outcomes, clearly very important outcomes, on reducing fire deaths and injuries and fires generally.

Q262 Mr Hands: On balance did you find it beneficial compared with the additional costs involved? How much do you think it cost the authority?

Mr Holland: In cash terms we spent around £20,000, but officers' time was involved which we have not quantified. We could try to put some numbers on that for you, if that would be helpful.

Chair: It would be, if you would not mind. Just drop us a note about it. Thank you very much indeed, it has been very helpful.

Monday 6 February 2006

Members present:

Dr Phyllis Starkey, in the Chair

Mr Clive Betts
Lyn Brown
John Cummings
Mr Greg Hands

Martin Horwood
Anne Main
Mr Bill Olnier
Alison Seabeck

Witnesses: **Mr Matt Wrack**, General Secretary, **Ms Ruth Winters**, President, **Ms Val Salmon**, Executive Council Member, Control Staff National Committee, and **Mr Jack Ford**, Executive Council Member, Officers National Committee, Fire Brigades Union (FBU), gave evidence.

Q263 Chair: I welcome you to the Committee. It is entirely up to you which member of your team answers the various questions that we are going to ask and I will leave it to you to orchestrate it from your end. Every Member of the Committee has had your written evidence so there is absolutely no need to repeat matters which are within the written evidence although you may wish to draw attention to parts as appropriate. If I could start off with some questions about your attitude to the regional control centres, in your written evidence you have said that one of your concerns about FiReControl is that it is a “blueprint—without any public debate—for the beginnings of regional fire services”. I know that you had your representatives in the evidence sessions so you will be aware that ODPM officials said very clearly that the Government did not have a regionalisation agenda. Does that allay your concerns on that matter?

Mr Wrack: No, it does not. We think that the regional project on controls is unsupported by other fire service examinations such as the Bain Review, the Government’s own White Paper, and therefore our view is that the process is driven by an agenda around even wider regionalisation. We feel that that is in fact reflected in the concerns of a number of stakeholders within the Fire and Rescue Service. The statements from the ODPM have not allayed our fears.

Q264 Chair: Why exactly are you opposed to a regionalisation, if it were to occur?

Mr Wrack: We support the principle of locally-controlled with locally-accountable fire and rescue services. There are a number of models already within the UK Fire Service for how fire services operate in relation to local authorities. It is our view that if the Government was to consider a wider regionalisation of the fire service then there must be some wider regionalisation of local governance and there would have to be a wider debate around that before any regionalisation of the service itself was proceeded with.

Ms Winters: In terms of regionalisation, we also feel that this is one of the first steps of a core operational aspect of the fire service that regional control rooms is guided and pursued particularly by Westminster and the ODPM and that that would be the first time that other issues that we have certainly been supportive of in terms of regional assistance, in

terms of regional purchasing, in terms of regional training, which we have certainly been part of and encouraged and been behind, but we feel that this would be a detrimental move in terms that it would be the first core element that is absolutely central to the operations of any fire and rescue service which is locally accountable and also deals with local risk and to deal with local risk properly you need to have local services.

Q265 Mr Hands: I am still unclear on your objection. Your objections seem to be because it is coming from the ODPM and because it will not coincide with local government boundaries. Are there any operational objections to having regional control centres?

Mr Wrack: Yes, there are a whole range of operational reasons why we have concerns. Primarily, if we look at the development since 2004 of local integrated risk management plans, they are based on plans developed within each individual fire and rescue service for the assessment of risk within the local fire and rescue service and then plans for how the local fire and rescue service would deal with those risks. The concern we have is how that interacts with a regional control centre. A regional control centre may have to deal with six, seven or more local fire authorities each with their own separate risk management plan. There is a major concern about how the regional control centre would therefore impact on the application of those local risk management plans.

Q266 Lyn Brown: If I remember your evidence correctly, did you not talk about the geographical difficulties you think will come from regionalism? You said, if I remember your evidence correctly, that London was different because it was more compact and it was smaller than the size of Devon. Could you expand upon that so we can understand it a little better?

Ms Winters: I am a fire control operator and have been for the past 21 years. The majority of staff who work in these fire control rooms are very tied into the ethos of delivery of local services. It is true to say that they call themselves a regional control centre. It is our view that it is a fire authority-controlled centre which deals with one fire authority in a small geographical size. The South West is two-thirds the size of London geographically. Not everything fits

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into the “one size fits all” and not everything fits into the scenario that would suit London. London has one police force to work with, one ambulance service to work with and I can assure you from experience of working in fire control rooms you need to be at the heart of any incident, be it a local, regional or national incident, and having been on duty at Lockerbie I know exactly what that is like.

Mr Wrack: If I could develop the point in relation to the issues I raised earlier around the integrated risk management plans, London has a single integrated risk management plan to deal with whereas the South West proposed regional control would be a number of integrated risk management plans to coordinate emergency responses and those policies may differ between each individual fire and rescue service. The regional control centre may have different mobilising procedures to operate for the different local fire authorities.

Q267 Alison Seabek: Do you have a view on sub-regional partnerships? Clearly Devon and Somerset are looking at it. It seems to make a lot of sense from their point of view. It does not seem to me that it is necessarily a step towards any wider regionalisation.

Mr Wrack: We would be keen to engage with those authorities in a discussion around what is being proposed and our local officials will do so. There would be concerns that we would like to flag up—the ones that we have mentioned already in relation to whether separate integrated risk management plans would continue to operate in those cases, or whether there would be a wider integration of the service as a whole—but we are certainly open-minded about those sorts of discussions and we would engage with the people involved.

Ms Winters: One of the things that is key to us in terms of where we would move if that was a proposal and, that is right, we would look openly at that. We do not feel that that would not fit into our national resilience suggestion as an alternative if two authorities did merge. The other thing that we have to be very clear about in an operational sense is communications is key; lines of communications, lines of command and compatibility will be key and obviously the ultimate is fire ground safety.

Q268 Mr Oler: You have articulated your view in your written evidence about a reduction in frontline services but you also talk about the assumption that it will lead to increased costs. That is your view but it is not a view that is shared by the fire authorities or the Chief Fire Officers’ Association. How is it that you remain unconvinced when others are?

Mr Wrack: The concerns that we raised have increasingly been reflected by a number of fire and rescue authorities. In some of the evidence that has been submitted in writing to you, you will find that a significant number of fire and rescue authorities have expressed a view to varying degrees that, while they may be supportive of the principle, they have a number of concerns. One of those concerns is in terms of cost and the possible cost implications for them as local fire and rescue authorities. Where we differ substantially with the ODPM relates primarily

to the issue of what is called “out-of-scope” work. There is a whole range of work currently carried out by local emergency fire controls which has not been included in the proposals for FiReControl for the regionalised controls. That work will still have to be done. Estimates range between 30% and 70% of the work currently done by local fire controls. That work will have to carry on following any regionalisation and the question that arises is how will the costs for that be carried? It is, in reality, a cost of the fire control and therefore any savings that are claimed would have to take account of those additional costs.

Ms Winters: The other thing on costs which is extremely important is the fact that the costs of the FiReControl Project alone have soared already and there is no confidence on our behalf that these could not possibly soar in the future. Whether it is council tax payers or taxpayers in general, that is taxpayers’ money that will be spent on it. Again, we think our solution on national resilience controls would be able to come at a more cost-effective aspect in that. We have also been party to in the past best value reviews. Every FiReControl was part of a best value review passed—a best value review in terms of efficiency and effectiveness—and we feel that that has been ignored basically by this project. In terms of FireLink, it does not even have an outline business case so nobody is actually sure what the cost of that is to anyone.

Q269 Mr Oler: Given the fact that you just said you are not utterly and totally opposed to it—reading into it in the Thatcher Room there is room for negotiation hopefully somewhere—how would you make sure that those concessions are made? How would you put forward those concessions so that the total plan is not obstructed? You said in principle that you agree but you do not agree with the detail. How would you ensure that some of the detail could be negotiated on?

Mr Wrack: We do not agree in principle with the current proposal on regional controls. We think that some of the issues that are addressed by the projects do need to be addressed, in particular the question of resilience. In terms of how we would address it, we have put forward a proposal. We are not simply saying no, no, no. We have put forward a proposal which we think is well-thought-out, it is based on the actual experience of the fire service and of the people who work within it, it is a relatively simple idea which many strong ideas are relatively straightforward, and we think it addresses many of the issues raised within the FiReControl project in a better way.

Ms Winters: The situation of regional control rooms proposed at the moment deal with regional and national resilience, not to the standard we would like to see done. The difference is our alternative proposal rather than opposition is that this would deal with marrying-up national resilience proposals and integrated risk management plans which is a keystone of the Government’s modernisation agenda and that has been shown to be in the report that we put forward.

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Q270 Mr Olnier: What I am seeking to get, Chairman, is the feel of the thing. You have mentioned London which is a huge area with a larger population than Devon and Cornwall, but Devon and Cornwall are thinking about having an integrated system. I come from Warwickshire in the West Midlands. Would we be looking at something like West Midlands, Warwickshire, Staffordshire? What sort of strategic clump are you looking for that needs to provide the protection that the public need?

Mr Wrack: What we suggested in our resilience documents is that you could actually address the resilience issues raised by the ODPM using current local emergency fire controls. What we have suggested in there is that within each of the ODPM regions you would have one of those local emergency fire controls designated as a resilience control; that that resilience control would then be able to take responsibility for dealing with New Dimensions-type incidents within the region, and we suggest also that that plan could then be adopted by the jurisdictions—by Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland—and you end up with an integrated UK-wide plan which addresses all of those New Dimensions and resilience-type issues.

Q271 Mr Olnier: You mentioned in your written submissions that you are currently surveying the membership on the strength of their interest in the FiReControl issue. When will the results of that survey be made known?

Ms Winters: We have it and I think we have got it today. We do know that 96% of those surveyed were against the regional control centres. The 96% surveyed also said that they felt it would not improve the safety of either firefighters or the public.

Q272 Mr Olnier: What percentage of the membership took part in that survey?

Ms Winters: It was a UGOV survey. It was 2,500.

Q273 Mr Olnier: What is that as a percentage?

Ms Winters: It was a proper sample. UGOV surveys are recognised by all organisations. It is a representative survey.

Mr Wrack: If I may add something on the survey, it was significant in our view that the opposition to the regionalisation project increased the further up the rank structure people were; ie those in middle management positions had greater concerns than those further down the organisation.

Q274 Mr Olnier: Did that surprise you?

Mr Wrack: No, it did not. It may surprise yourselves.

Mr Olnier: Could I ask that that evidence be written so that it could be included?

Chair: Yes, certainly.

Q275 Mr Betts: There must be a suspicion around, must there not, that once again we have a significant proposal for reform in the fire service and, once again, the FBU comes out against it. Surprise, surprise, is that not par for the course some people would say?

Mr Wrack: I have heard all sorts of views expressed in some of the evidence about the Fire Brigades Union stance on reform. The Fire Brigades Union welcomes reform if it is genuine reform and if it genuinely takes the service forward. Our approach to the Control project highlights that we are not a trade union that is simply saying no, no, no in some sort of Luddite manner. We have looked at the issue, we have looked at it with people who have huge experience within the service in terms of dealing with these issues and we have come up with a proposal which we think here is better. If you look at other issues around the reform of the service, we are fully involved in a whole number of those projects. If you take New Dimensions, for example, we have some excellent working relations around the issue of New Dimensions. That does not mean that we do not have concerns on particular issues, as you would expect us to have. It is simply not the case that the Fire Brigades Union is obstructing those measures.

Ms Winters: I am sure that the Committee would not be held up with some of the propaganda that was unfortunately perpetuated in the pay dispute in terms of modernisation and I would hope that you would not take that on board. What we need to be clear about in modernising the fire service is getting rid of some myths. The Fire Brigades Union have had policy and have carried defibrillators since the early Nineties in the fire service prior to the pay dispute. We led on the Fire Safety Bill prior to the fire service dispute which rolled up to the regulatory reform orders and fire safety. We signed up to risk-based fire cover in the late Nineties, we signed up to IPDS training, all part of the modernisation agenda in the late Nineties. Community fire safety—we have set up a joint protocol with the Chief Fire Officers in the late Nineties, all prior to the pay dispute. It needs to be clear that collaborative working is something that we absolutely welcome and encourage development of, but to do it in a safe manner is not just opposition.

Q276 Chair: I am sure we will come back to the co-responder questions later on. Can I just put this question a different way round? The ODPM has put forward a proposal for regional control centres; you have put forward completely alternative proposals. If the ODPM persists with its proposals and your union refuses to cooperate, that would clearly put the implementation of those proposals at risk. What is needed to *modify* the ODPMs proposals to at least water down your opposition?

Mr Wrack: What we would be seeking is a genuine dialogue.

Q277 Chair: Specifically what amendments to what the ODPM is proposing would at least meet with your tacit support, if not enthusiasm?

Mr Wrack: What we would seek is the ODPM engaging in dialogue around some of our proposals. We do have different points of view on the issue of regionalisation of control itself.

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Q278 Chair: It is not possible to have a hybrid proposal between yours and the ODPM; it is one or the other. What modifications of the ODPM proposals would you be prepared to consider?

Ms Winters: We would be prepared to consider the fact that we looked and have come up with some solution that deals with local planning and local safety which is not wiped out to merge and push forward a regional agenda. If there are other proposals put forward we would look at any proposal. To say that the Fire Brigades Union have not participated in looking at any other proposal concerning regional control is just not the case. This is a proposal and we must remember that it came from a Mott MacDonald report in 2000, prior September 11. It is based on call-handling centres based around a formula used in the RAC controls. We would look at any proposal put forward that had built-in safety that convinced us and gave us the confidence that we could deliver the same standard of service, safety of firefighters and safety of the public. The second Mott MacDonald report that came in—we have already had the two of them—came in prior to September 11 and another one came out after. Our power as a trade union representing members on the frontline in the fire service and an emergency service is to protect their safety and protect public safety.

Q279 Chair: We understand that.

Mr Ford: It is important to make the point here that it is not simply a question of the position that the Fire Brigades Union takes in terms of what puts the project at risk; there are plenty of factors that put the project at risk that are derived from the way it has been structured to the way it does not conform to accepted project management process. There still is not a business case for goodness sake. A business case comes at the start of the process.

Q280 Mr Hands: On the resilience controls, you have suggested a system of resilience controls which would designate resilience coordination duties to some existing control rooms. Have you discussed this idea with the ODPM and have you had dialogue about this?

Mr Wrack: We launched the document publicly last week and the document has gone to all key stakeholders within the fire service community. We are extremely keen to discuss it with them and some of those discussions are about to take place over the next few days.

Q281 Mr Hands: In terms of the location of the control centres, and I appreciate you are opposed to the regional control centres, you mentioned in your evidence there are various cases where they are close to nurseries, close to airports, et cetera. Is there any sort of general principle in your mind as to where a regional control centre, if you approved or agreed with one, should be located? What sort of location?

Mr Wrack: We would raise the issue of security of any such location. One thing we have highlighted is that if you compare some of the current local emergency fire controls and their locations, their

security and so on, and compare those with the proposed regional sites, the existing sites are far more secure and if one of the things we are doing is protecting our fire controls against possible terrorist attack themselves, then there is actually a risk by the actual proposals in relation to location.

Q282 Mr Hands: Have you outlined some specific examples—I do not want you to go through them now—in objection to it?

Mr Wrack: Yes, we have engaged in that discussion both at national level and locally.

Ms Winters: One of the things in our resilience plan that needs to be borne in mind, we have identified sites at the moment, but if after discussion other sites are deemed more appropriate in terms of security then we would be happy to look at that. The key point in our document is that there should be one resilience control within each regional management board area still backed up with the safety of your local fire control still run by your fire and rescue authorities. It has to be made clear that local fire and rescue authorities are the only ones with statutory responsibilities for any part of the fire service; the regional set-up will not.

Mr Ford: The other point to note on your question is that a long way back in this process the ODPM put out certain criteria which would apply to prospective sites. Of the sites that have since been chosen, very few, if any, comply with that criteria.

Q283 Anne Main: You written evidence raises doubts that lessons have been learnt from the experience of the London bombings and the Buncefield fire. What are your concerns based on?

Mr Wrack: In terms of the London incident, we go back to the London Fire Authority's integrated risk management plan. One of the issues raised at the time by the Fire Brigades Union was that the plan, for example, to move fire appliances out of Central London in the event of a terrorist attack would mean that Central London was suffering from a reduced number of appliances and would therefore struggle to attend those incidents. We highlighted at the time that there would likely be traffic gridlock, for example, and there was some evidence of that happening on that day. Certainly there were press reports of firefighters having to run down the road to attend the incident and having to leave their appliance in the street. In terms of Buncefield, there are a number of lessons. The first one that directly relates to the regionalisation issues is that the local emergency fire control coped perfectly adequately with the Buncefield incident: large numbers of calls coming in, the emergency fire control coped; large numbers of calls being dealt with in other fire authorities, again the current system coped with that. In terms of a wider lesson in relation to Buncefield, what we would flag up is the need for joined-up thinking in relation to planning. One concern we had is that the local fire authority reported that it had not planned for an incident on that scale. We believe that in this day and age, with the possible threat of terrorist incidents, then we

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should precisely be planning for incidents on such a scale and the Fire and Rescue Service needs to be planning on that sort of level.

Ms Winters: In terms of Buncefield in particular the lesson is that the current control room there and the assistance from other local controls and fire authorities shows that they are resilient. That is not to say that some improvements could not be made because of course they could be, but they are resilient. They dealt with something in the region over a three-day period of 220 other calls apart from the call to Buncefield. It was the experience and knowledge of the local fire control that actually when they took the call it did not come into the oil depot, it came in as an explosion in Mason Road in the area. The first call did not specifically come in as the oil terminal. On the volume of calls alone, the experienced officer in charge of control immediately mobilised an extra six fire appliances at the time. The one thing we have to learn about that whole scenario is that the 999 centres—when you phone 999 you get through to the first level before they pass it to the Fire Brigade—could not cope and in some situations you were waiting half-an-hour to get through to the emergency service you wanted. Those centres have already been through the process that they are proposing that regional fire controls go through. One lesson we should be learning is that that is a dangerous process for us to go to. The other lesson to be learned from Buncefield is that the local IRMP which was put out before the incident happened—integrated risk management plan—it was proposing cuts in Hertfordshire at this very moment which have been put off temporarily until March. I believe they were actually approved by the Scrutiny Panel today which would mean that two of the retained stations who attended in the first 20 minutes of that incident are going to be closed and disappear. Possibly what also has to be learned is the fact that local IRMPs have to take in more than just the normal day-to-day things. They have to take in resilience accountability as well.

Q284 Anne Main: Has the FRS now got sufficient equipment? You mentioned about taking fire engines out of London when we had the bombs. Do you think the FRS staff has sufficient training to use the new equipment?

Mr Wrack: There have been a number of new appliances and pieces of equipment provided to the Fire and Rescue Service by the ODPM and we welcome that. We are not convinced that that is the end of the story. There is further equipment required. We know that the London Fire Brigade itself has recently called for additional incident response units for decontamination. The concerns we would flag up are relating to training. Yes, there has been a certain amount of training and of course that training needs to be ongoing. Related to the issue of training is the question of the long-term funding of training and the resources that have been provided—it is an old point—in the ODPM providing a new vehicle to the fire service for New Dimensions-type incidents and then leaving it there. They need to provide the funding for the additional

staffing that would be needed and they need to provide the funding for the training which is going to be an ongoing requirement.

Q285 Alison Sebeck: Your written evidence focussed on prevention and effectively sidelines the intervention and rescue role of the service. Are you suggesting therefore that because you have been undertaking prevention work you have been unable, on occasion, to provide the appropriate rescue service?

Mr Wrack: What we are highlighting is a difference in emphasis. We support the broad approach and that involves preventative measures. We have always supported preventative measures and we have outlined our role in that over a number of years, joint protocols signed with the Chief Fire Officers' Association and so on. We have to look at what preventative measures actually do. Take the example of a smoke alarm: a smoke alarm does not put out a fire. What a smoke alarm does is alert the occupants of the premises and that allows the occupants of the premises to call the fire service and the fire service therefore to intervene to deal with the fire quickly and to save lives. That is the approach that needs to be adopted.

Q286 Alison Sebeck: That seems slightly contradictory. Do you expect the numbers of people rescued as a result of prevention measures to either increase or decrease, given that there is now a greater emphasis, actually physically rescued from fires as opposed to people walking out by themselves?

Mr Wrack: Our evidence suggests that there has been an increase in the number of people rescued. That directly links with the community fire safety strategies that fire services have been adopting. We have provided statistics in our written evidence for an increase in the number of rescues by firefighters over a ten-year period.

Q287 Chair: I thought we had had evidence that the number of fires had gone down; rescues from road traffic accidents have gone up greatly, but fires have gone down. I would be surprised if you can be rescuing more people from fewer fires.

Mr Wrack: Interestingly, and Ruth will provide the figures in a second, the statistics unfortunately are no longer published as a matter of course. We obtained the statistics by means of a parliamentary question but they clearly show a 42% increase in the number of rescues carried out by firefighters over a 10-year period. At the same time fires have not declined which suggests, in our view, that what the community fire safety strategies are achieving is alerting people sooner to the fire, allowing the fire service to intervene and thereby allowing a greater number of rescues to take place.

Ms Winters: The statistics is on fires and that does not even count the ones from road traffic accidents.

Q288 Alison Sebeck: You expressed concern about the differentiation between preventable fire deaths and non-preventable fire deaths. Is it not important that we understand the nature of deaths in order to

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better prepare strategies to deal with, and work on, minimising the number of deaths? What is the problem there?

Mr Wrack: We are very keen that strategies are developed. The problem we have in terms of the use of the word “preventable” is that it is a purely subjective view. There is no guidance from the ODPM in relation to the use of the word “preventable”. The ODPM refers to “accidental fires” and “non-accidental fires”. What seems to have happened at local level is that a number of local fire and rescue services have adopted the use of preventable fire deaths and we have concerns about that because there are no guidelines as to when that term should or should not be used.

Q289 Alison Seabeck: The ten-year rescue statistics which you cite in your document seem to reveal that changes to the positioning of fire stations and the replacing of appliances, something which inevitably there has been opposition to over many years when people want to move appliances around, seems to have had a positive rather than a negative effect in terms of the number of people rescued and fires attended, and so on.

Mr Wrack: In terms of the movement of appliances that is something that takes place on a regular basis within each fire and rescue service. While the proposals may be examined in great detail by our local officials, we have no opposition to the movement of fire appliances and we have engaged in that process in many areas. Where we would have a problem obviously is in the reduction in the number of fire appliances and unfortunately that seems to be what is happening in a number of areas under the IRMP process.

Ms Winters: We really have to re-emphasise this that there has never been an opposition. We did, as I stated earlier, take part in many aspects of community fire safety. What we are not wanting is that frontline fire service, frontline intervention, should not be sidelined by community fire safety or any other preventative measures. They should be worked alongside each other. If we ever get to a stage in the fire service where there is evidence to show that we should have a reduced standard in terms of fire intervention, then we would reassess that. The one thing that those figures show in terms of the people rescued is that intervention is still one of the heights of the fire service’s uses. There is nothing more clear than that in the rescued casualties put forward in that period we have told you about. What we do not want to see is that reduced which is what would appear to be getting done in areas where so many IRMPs are producing reports where jobs are going. In Hertfordshire, as I said before, there is minus 54 firefighters’ posts and minus 54 firefighters’ posts is something that we do not wish to see. Because we do not wish to see a reduction in intervention does not mean that we are not supportive of any community fire safety projects, any reduction in safety and of course we have been participating in that. One thing you see a lot in the evidence about the FBU being a barrier, if the FBU was such a barrier then fire and

rescue authorities would not be getting a good rating in their Audit Commission reports because the Fire Brigades Union represents 84% of the fire service.

Q290 Mr Betts: For members of the public the most important thing for them is that when they dial 999 how long does it take to get the fire engine there. That is what they are worried about. ODPM are saying to us these new control centres together with the FireLink including improved communication systems are going to deliver quicker response times; they are going to be much more effective and efficient and the fire engine will arrive there quicker and that is what the public wants. You are saying that is not true?

Ms Winters: What we first saying is that we are certainly not opposed to Firelink. We have never been opposed to FireLink. FireLink are a national radio system. I sat on one of the initial committees on that almost seven or eight years ago. We have never been opposed to it. We certainly had concerns on the health and safety aspects, but that does not mean we are opposed to a national radio strategy and we would support that. In terms of safety, of course we have great concerns about safety in that sense. What we are quite clear about is that FiREControl is dependent on FireLink, but FireLink is not dependent on fire control rooms. The current scenario in our national resilience scenario would see it work alongside, and along with, FireLink as a project.

Q291 Mr Betts: As a lay person, if you have a control centre now with a given number of staff there, there may be times when queues develop for those people to handle it. If you have more staff because they are all pooled together in one big room, the likelihood is, by the law of averages, that there will be fewer occasions when you get a queue develop because things will tend to even out across the regions. Is that not going to happen?

Ms Salmon: On the basis of that, how on earth do you get a faster response to a fire call answering the 999 system with less staff? That is what the proposal has been. There is nothing that is proposed within those technologies that is much different than we already use.

Q292 Mr Betts: If you had the same number of staff as now at regional centres everything would be okay?

Ms Winters: No.

Q293 Mr Betts: The answer I just had was that there was a problem with regional control centres because the calls would be answered more slowly because there would be fewer staff than there are now. If there are as many staff in the future in the regional control centres as there are now then you would not have a problem.

Ms Salmon: No, if I can complete the answer, that is one of the proposals that ODPM are clearly stating that the staff will be reduced. We are not saying that call answering times cannot be improved marginally, and we mean very marginally, but the

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point is balanced against an IRMP that is a local IRMP that is stretching the attendance time to eight or nine minutes, the slight reduction for regionalisation and the loss of a local service it does not balance out across.

Q294 Mr Betts: I have experience of this so I take the point about in some places some of the target response times have been increased but if they were not, everything else being equal, then there would not be a problem with regional control centres increasing times for response, would there?

Ms Winters: There is no evidence been given by anyone to say that regional control centres will reduce times. If you have a 46-lane motorway and you reduce it to nine and you still have the same volume of traffic going through, it will go through a bit slower.

Q295 Mr Betts: I would not take the analogy; I think it is a bit of a difficult one to follow.

Ms Winters: I will put it another way then. If you have fewer control rooms, even with the same amount of staff dealing with local IRMPs, there is no guarantee that you are going to increase attendance times at all.

Q296 Mr Betts: There may be an argument that you do get bottlenecks and they are more spread out in a bigger centre. Can I come back to one point: your argument therefore is simply that there is no evidence that response times will improve?

Ms Winters: The argument is that we have a system at the moment which is one of the highest performing public services in the public sector at the moment. We do not feel that regional fire control rooms, whether there is enough, and the proposal is not that there is going to be the same amount of staff in it for a start; that is not proposed.

Q297 Mr Betts: Can I take you on to one of the issues you mentioned you had no problems with and that is the FireLink Project. Some of us might be very wary indeed from what we have seen in the police authorities where a similar system for communications was introduced a few years ago how response times have actually gone out of the window because the system does not work and, despite recent improvements, still does not work properly. Have you been involved in any consultations about the nature of the system to be introduced with FireLink? Have you talked to your colleagues in the police about the problems they have had at all? Have you any information about that for us?

Mr Ford: The point about FireLink is that we did not say we had no problems with it at all. What we said was that we are broadly supportive of national radio replacement; indeed, we have been involved in the process for many years and from the outset we have flagged up that it did not go far enough because it only deals with main scheme radio replacement and tinkers around the edge of incident ground communications replacement. Rather than being non-supportive of it, we are indeed supportive of it

but we have a great number of concerns about some elements within it, not least of all is the one about the technologies and there are some fairly huge unanswered questions about safety.

Mr Wrack: One of the issues which other people have flagged up in the evidence which concerns fire ground radio communications themselves; i.e. the ability of people on the ground at an incident to communicate with each other, which is not currently addressed within the project.

Q298 Mr Betts: This is merely about communications in the control centre rather than people on the ground?

Mr Wrack: No, between the people on the ground at an incident.

Q299 Mr Olnier: Could I start to look into the area of joint working, particularly co-responder schemes, and to write on the record that the co-responder scheme is a joint mobilisation of ambulance and fire and rescue services to someone suffering a life-threatening event. We have had some significant evidence placed before us, both from the Devon Fire Authority and from Merseyside about the life-saving benefits of such schemes. Why do you continue to oppose them?

Mr Wrack: Our opposition again is not simply based on the Fire Brigades Union saying no to something.

Q300 Mr Olnier: You have expelled 24 members up on Merseyside.

Mr Wrack: It is based on a number of particular concerns. Those concerns relate to issues around training, issues related to insurance matters, issues related to the impact on the fire service of attending ambulance calls when other fire service calls come in. I want to be absolutely clear—we have had no national approach on the issue of co-responding from our employers. We have made it quite clear—myself and Ruth have attended meetings recently with the national employers—that we are willing to discuss anything with our employers.

Q301 Mr Olnier: If it should come to it, if there was a national approach and there was funding and training given, you would accept that?

Mr Wrack: We would have to look at the proposals in detail. If you take the question of training, for example, we have evidence from a large number of fire and rescue authorities where firefighters are not even able to keep up with their first-aid at work qualifications, yet we have fire authorities at the same time saying they want people to attend ambulance calls which should normally be attended by paramedics.

Q302 Mr Olnier: It is a joint mobilisation.

Ms Winters: We have examples again from our experience of firefighters attending ambulance calls and waiting for 20 to 30 minutes for ambulances to turn up dealing with a whole range of incidents which were never part of the original protocol. Normally the co-responding scheme is aimed at dealing with victims of heart attacks and so on, but

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what actually happens on the ground is a whole number of category A ambulance calls—they can include people being drunk in the street, people under the influence of drugs, trauma, penetrating injuries to the head and trunk, obstetric haemorrhage—a whole range of incidents which firefighters simply have not got the training to deal with. Those are some of our very genuine concerns. We would be interested in seeing the evidence, rather than the claims of certain people, for the success that is claimed for co-responding schemes. On a final point I would like to reemphasise the point that Ruth made earlier which is that firefighters have carried defibrillators in a number of authorities for a number of years. To answer one of the points which I think is in one piece of written evidence, firefighters have always performed first-aid on members of the public when they have come across them at incidents.

Q303 Mr Olnier: I accept that entirely but the scheme particularly up in Merseyside has been independently evaluated in a report given by Professor John Ashton, Director of Public Health in the North West, and he concluded that it was a success and that lives had been saved, and yet because the fire authority up in Merseyside wanted that to happen you expelled 24 of your members for participating in that. That to me seems to be a stonewall that says you do not want to know about it.

Mr Wrack: To clarify the point, those members have not been expelled from the Fire Brigades Union; we need to be absolutely clear on that. That process is not exhausted and there are appeals and there will be a process which I do not think it is correct to go into here. We have policies and we expect our members to abide by those policies. Our concerns on co-responding are felt widely by firefighters. Firefighters want to serve the public, want to assist the public in whatever way they can. However, what they are concerned about is being sent to incidents for which they do not have the training, they do not have the equipment and where they may be left for long periods of time without the assistance of an ambulance.

Ms Winters: Our policy is not just plucked out of the air. It is based on how our members feel and was debated as late as the last conference last May where we had a very large debate about it in a democratic fashion in terms of what they feel is best and what they feel is not best for themselves and for the public and their own safety. One thing that has to be put forward in terms of the ambulance trust, they used to have a target of reaching a first category incident within eight minutes on 90% of occasions. That has now been reduced to meeting their category A targets within eight minutes on 75% of occasions, so because the ambulance service have reduced their service we are also of the view that they are trying to use the Fire Brigade as a sticking-plaster for an under-funded ambulance service and nobody has given any response to us of what happens when you send a fire engine to a co-responding call and a fire call comes in.

Q304 Mr Olnier: Does it not make sense to you that fire and rescue and ambulance should work together because you are both usually at the same place at the same time?

Mr Wrack: Yes.

Q305 Mr Olnier: Why do you not move towards doing that when it has proved to be a success in other places?

Mr Wrack: We do work very closely with our colleagues in the ambulance service and we always have done. We have very good working relationships with our colleagues in the ambulance service. This is a different proposal. This is about mobilising firefighters to attend ambulance calls. Calls which should be attended by a fully-trained paramedic are being attended by people who simply do not have that level of training, nor do they have the equipment that would be necessary.

Ms Winters: If you had a fire in your property I do not think you would want an ambulance turning up with some water in the back and a small hose. You would want a fire engine.

Q306 Mr Olnier: You would expect them both to do a good professional job, which you do.

Ms Winters: Yes, which we do.

Q307 Chair: Could I clarify something that you said earlier, Ms Winters, about defibrillators on fire appliances. The example you cited, were those defibrillators being carried for the benefit of the firefighters should they require them, or to be used on members of the public should your appliance turn up before an ambulance and the person be in need of a defibrillator?

Ms Winters: Obviously both. If you turned out to a fire incident, if you know how to use the defibrillator it would initially be for the safety of your own crew, but the nature of our service if you have turned up and there is somebody having a suspected heart attack and you were trained to deal with that equipment when you had turned out to a fire call and it happened there, then you certainly would not ignore the casualty. You would deal with it in the best way you could.

Q308 Chair: Am I now understanding that fire appliances have defibrillators on board in case the staff themselves require them, in which case there must be somebody on board who has been trained to use them, in which case what is the problem with them being trained to use them on members of the public?

Mr Wrack: You have misunderstood the issue. Firstly, not all fire authorities have introduced defibrillators; that is a matter for each individual fire authority. Some have and since the early 1990s a number of fire authorities have carried defibrillators and have provided training for firefighters in the use of those defibrillators. As we have explained, if we were to attend an incident, as we have done throughout the history of the service, we would provide first-aid and if our members were carrying a defibrillator that would include the use of that

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defibrillator on members of the public. That is somewhat different to co-responding schemes which mean specifically mobilising firefighters to what is a medical emergency call. That is the difference between the two.

Q309 Martin Horwood: I wanted to go back to response times, following on from Mr Betts' question. I am not sure that we quite got to the bottom of what your position was on something. Are you saying that, irrespective of the capacity issues on which there seem to be differing views, there is something inherent about a regional control centre which means that it will respond more slowly? That seems to be what you were implying at one stage.

Mr Wrack: There are a number of points. First of all, if there is, because of technological improvements, a possible reduction in the ability to handle a call, there is a contradiction between that and at the same time local fire authorities increasing attendance times as a matter of policy. We would have under the old system a number of calls which would be expected to be answered within five minutes, for example.

Q310 Martin Horwood: I thought you were making the point that technology is a separate issue as well that you could have the technology at any level.

Mr Wrack: Nobody has made a convincing case to us, and I do not believe they have made it in the evidence provided here, that the technology would reduce call-handling.

Q311 Martin Horwood: There is nothing else inherent in a fire control centre at regional level that makes it less able to respond?

Mr Wrack: There are other issues which we have highlighted; for example, the proposed regional control centre may have to deal with six different mobilisation policies and that in itself could cause additional delays.

Mr Ford: We should also not lose sight of the fact that many of the benefits that are being advertised in the regional control project are actually inherent in the FireLink Project.

Q312 Martin Horwood: You have made that point very clear. I was trying to get to the bottom of it.

Ms Winters: I cannot over-emphasise the difficulties that would be incumbent in a fire control room, no matter how many staff are in it, which may be dealing with five, six, seven different local IRMPs.

Q313 Chair: We have understood that point.

Ms Salmon: Some of the things that are cited as being a positive benefit to the regional controls—automatic call location to give you one example—is actually in place now and has been so for a substantial number of years. There is no time benefit to the things that they are claiming time benefits on. Automatic call location tells you where the caller is; it does not tell you where the incident is. Nothing can

replace the operator's knowledge and experience in gaining the information that is required as to where the incident is and that is crucial.

Chair: Given the time constraints, I want to skip to the question on Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

Q314 Lyn Brown: You made reference to the CPA earlier in your evidence. Do you think that the CPA process covers the right performance measures to enable a thorough and robust assessment of fire authorities?

Mr Wrack: No, we think that currently the CPA ignores key areas of fire service performance, the ones that the public are interested in, which is, as a Committee Member mentioned earlier, when you dial 999 do the firefighters get there quickly and are they able to put out the fire quickly and are they able to save lives? Those are what the public are really interested in, the performance of the fire service, and we are concerned that the CPA does not address that. However, that in turn raises a further concern which is if you were to assess that what measures would you use to make such an assessment? One of the concerns that we have is the move away from national standards. Previously the fire service had national standards to operate to. Since the introduction of local integrated risk management plans there are no national standards. We are concerned that you could end up, and are increasingly ending up, with effectively a postcode lottery. We do not see why, if you have a fire in a tower block in Birmingham, you should get a different standard of response than if you have a fire in a tower block in London. Unfortunately, because of IRMP, at the present time that is perfectly possible.

Q315 Lyn Brown: What do you think the improvement or changes that we need to make to our fire services given, and I know it is a good figure, but 47% were considered to be good and excellent; that means that 53% did not get to good. What improvements do you think we need to make to that 53% to move them up to good in the CPA?

Mr Wrack: We are concerned about what the CPA is measuring at the present time. We would seek that it looks at all aspects of the performance of the Fire and Rescue Service. Lots of these questions come down to the question of investment in the service. Unfortunately fire and rescue authorities are increasingly reporting that they are financially squeezed and under IRMP as a result of that they are making what amount to old-fashioned cuts. Sometimes what is called modernisation simply amounts to cuts. We need investment in the service and particularly investment in the people that are providing that service. That means training as well as equipment and so on.

Q316 Lyn Brown: Is there one thing that you think the CPA measures that it should not measure?

Mr Wrack: No, we do not have any particular concern initially.

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Ms Winters: When you are measuring the modernisation agenda, which it does, fine, if you want to measure that, but you also have to measure operational preparedness as part of that otherwise there is no real meaning to the measurement in the first place. Also with the dissolution of the Central

Fire Brigade Advisory Council in terms of national guidance coming out in all aspects of operations, fire safety and whatever, in the fire service, I do not think that has assisted and how the fire service inspectorate manages itself needs to be more rigorous as well to back that up.

Chair: Thank you very much.

Witnesses: **Mr Tom Carroll**, President of CFOA and Chief Fire Officer Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, **Mr Phil Toase**, Vice President of CFOA and Chief Fire Officer West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, and **Mr Steve McGuirk**, Vice President Elect of CFOA and Chief Fire Officer Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, gave evidence.

Chair: May I welcome you as well and make the same points I made with the previous panel that it is entirely up to you which one of you answers which questions; we leave you to decide.

Q317 Mr Betts: Regional control centres—looking at the evidence provided to us, it seems that you are fully in support of regional control centres, fully in support of the FireLink Project. You have some concerns about the costs and you are not really sure that the benefits have been proven. Normally I would expect senior officers in local government to first of all assess the costs of a project and then see whether the benefits are proven and then decide whether they support it rather than the other way round.

Mr Carroll: I think that is a very fair question. Firstly, yes, we do support the principle of both regional control rooms and FireLink and we have said that from the beginning. We can see the very definite benefits they can bring. We are also very keen to see the successful implementation, not just to talk about it being good, but to see it in action. We have outlined in our submission a number of concerns also which includes the fact that there is absence of a business case for us to qualify that situation and also that the financial figures have not been made fully available. It is not within our domain to calculate or qualify because it is an ODPM managed and run project.

Q318 Mr Betts: How can you support something when you do not know how much it is going to cost and presumably if that money is around it might be spent on something else, it would be even more beneficial, and there is not actually a business case because some of these benefits have not been proven either? How can you support something which is as vague as that?

Mr Carroll: We support the principle on the grounds of resilience and on the grounds that with the greater user of personnel we believe there will be the opportunity to perform and to provide a much better service.

Q319 Mr Betts: In what sense? Can you explain precisely what level of improvement of performance you expect to see?

Mr Carroll: First of all, a far better level of equipment, hopefully with that the greater use of technology, faster response times.

Q320 Mr Betts: You have sat down and looked at this objectively. Your members are there in all authorities. For members of the public, what better service precisely do you expect them to receive when these two improvements—the control centres and FireLink—are brought in?

Mr McGuirk: It is true to say depending upon the area in which you live depends upon the level of improvement that you will see. It is true to say that in a number of existing fire and rescue authorities the current technology and the control rooms are very much state-of-the-art and that is exactly what the control project is purporting to build upon, those state-of-the-art facilities, technology and the size of the room to be able to deal with the number of calls. It is also true to say, however, that a large number of fire authorities have much smaller rooms, and this point has already been made to the Committee that there will be occasions quite frequently where the numbers of calls overwhelm the numbers of call operators. So the capacity to handle a high volume of calls will be improved by the new control centres. In terms of the technology, it is also true to say that some of the technology in some control rooms is very much not state-of-the-art.

Q321 Mr Betts: If all the control rooms that are there now were brought up to state-of-the-art technology would that be an alternative solution?

Mr Carroll: It is an alternative solution.

Q322 Mr Betts: Would it work?

Mr Carroll: I presume it would. We would just have more controls and more equipment.

Q323 Mr Betts: Would it be more costly, or does nobody know?

Mr Toase: That is one of the key things is whether or not that would be as efficient and as effective.

Q324 Mr Betts: Nobody knows because there is not a business plan to model against. Has anyone looked at the different alternatives?

Mr Carroll: The two reports considered all of the viable alternatives a couple of years ago. It is true to say there was a contested debate at the time. All

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individual fire and rescue authorities took Best Value Reviews against those different options proposed and many did advocate staying as they were and making better use of control staff. Most ducked the reality about how they were going to afford to fund state-of-the-art technology.

Q325 Mr Betts: If we had three of your colleagues here today from other brigades throughout the country it might be that we would get completely different answers, would it?

Mr Toase: It is a fact that not every single member of the Chief Fire Officers' Association would support the project, but in any professional association, or indeed any political party, there are times when people have a different opinion on a particular issue, but the actual stance with regards to the support for the rationale behind regional control centres, the majority of our members are supportive of that.

Q326 Mr Betts: What about the actual control of these control centres? Who are they going to be accountable to if you have got different policies of working in each of the fire services who are being covered by these control centres?

Mr Toase: It is one of the areas where we are asking for greater clarity on some of the governance issues.

Q327 Mr Betts: We do not know is the answer?

Mr Toase: Some of the issues with regards to governance there is not complete clarity in that respect because there are differing opinions within regional management boards.

Mr Betts: We will come on to that point in a minute.

Q328 Anne Main: To take you back to something you have just said, which is you can see there are very definite benefits and depending on which area the level of benefit improvement will be variable and that the majority of your members would support that. Can I ask you (a) how you quantify the definite benefits that you have seen; (b) do you have some sort of table where the levels of improvement would be variable, or facts and figures to support that; and (c) do you survey your members to know how many of them would be supportive in the main of these proposals?

Mr McGuirk: Could you go back to (a)?

Q329 Anne Main: You said you could see very definite benefits in this proposal. How definite? Have you got some way of quantifying the definite benefits because we have had a different viewpoint from the FBU? You feel it is definite. I wondered how you quantify those definite benefits?

Mr McGuirk: The dilemma here is the use of the expression "business case" which brings with it some question of quantitative analysis. Our stance all along has been that we accept fully we have not yet seen the business case and, as we have set out in our submission, we have a large number of concerns yet to be answered about the quantitative dimension of the business case for the FiReControl Project. Our support is on the basis of resilience, but the scale of

incidents that we can now anticipate and the technology and the wherewithal to support those incidents have changed since September 11. We have had evidence over the last couple of years to support that. While our proposition is that we are participating in the project, we are working with colleagues in the fire and rescue services to draw out the benefits that we know exist in the existing systems that are state-of-the-art—caller ID, et cetera—and we are prepared to sit down and keep an open mind about the financial and other benefits yet to be realised.

Q330 Anne Main: There are certain quantified benefits but not all benefits. Could you tell me how many of your members are supportive? Have you done any sort of survey? You said there would be some who would not be supportive. Have you got any percentages?

Mr Toase: We do not have any percentages of members, no.

Q331 Anne Main: You just feel that members would be supportive?

Mr Toase: No, we have done an extensive consultation through our various mechanisms within the Association through the members' sounding board and through the actual Board itself consulting members and we have produced a position statement vis-à-vis our position re the rationale for regional control centres.

Q332 Anne Main: Can I just take you back to the other one I asked, which is depending on an area's different level of benefit improvements have you got any table or figures that quantify how you have made that statement?

Mr McGuirk: In terms of a table of which authorities would benefit as opposed to which authorities which would not benefit?

Q333 Anne Main: You said some would benefit more than others.

Mr McGuirk: No, we have not done that because it is an ODPM project. We should be clear about the role of the Chief Fire Officers' Association. Within the project itself we provide the officers for a consultative body called the team masters' group where members of the Association work almost daily, certainly weekly, with colleagues in the ODPM project team to challenge, test and work through the problems as they arise. It is true to say that this project has never been attempted on this scale ever before to a degree where the Fire and Rescue Service is breaking new territory. In a professional sense we are working with colleagues to work through some of those issues. As each individual authority puts forward its proposition, its officers, the regional management boards, all that information about the benefits are fed through into the national project. As we stand at the minute there is a working group to develop a more quantitative and qualitative presentation of the benefits to support the wider Business Case. We are very comfortable about caller ID and all of those

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operational benefits from a number of colleague services around the country and we are working with them now.

Q334 Martin Horwood: I just want to pick you up on this statement that it depends on the geographical area as to what level of benefit you are going to get from this regionalisation. You seem to be implying that it is only those without state of the art facilities at the moment that will benefit most. I represent Gloucestershire, which has a brand new tri-service centre with technologically good kit, with good joint working, which is going to be abandoned by the Fire Service under these proposals. Are you saying there is not any benefit to us at all, that it will benefit the areas that have less good facilities?

Mr McGuirk: I do not know the details of turn-out times and response standards et cetera in your tripartite service but I appreciate it has got a very positive image. In terms of your operational benefits, the benefits are linked to the resilience obtained from working within the wider fire and rescue community and if your system goes into fallback, et cetera, you are part of that wider community. In terms of how quick the technology is, I really cannot comment. I would be surprised if the technology—

Q335 Martin Horwood: It has been suggested to us in other areas that technology is not a fundamental point because the technology could be applied at local level, is that not right?

Mr McGuirk: Which technology?

Q336 Martin Horwood: The new fire technology.

Mr McGuirk: The technology solution is still in the process of going through a tender situation. At the minute there are the operational principles and the operational principles are not breaking such new ground as to use the new technology, the principles at the minute are to build upon the existing skills in this kind of technological field.

Q337 Martin Horwood: So what is the benefit to us of the regionalisation itself as opposed to the technology?

Mr McGuirk: I am not arguing for the benefits of regionalisation for yourselves, I am simply advising you of the benefits of the software system.

Martin Horwood: You are saying you support the proposals.

Chair: I think Mr McGuirk is saying he cannot comment on one particular fire authority, which is essentially what you are asking him to do.

Q338 Martin Horwood: Taking us as a proxy for those fire services where we do know there is technology in place, good joint working, in principle what is the benefit to us?

Mr McGuirk: In relation to the speed with which your technology can produce new incidents and mobilise, then for some Fire and Rescue Services the advantages to be gained from new technology are marginal, that is true to say. For the majority there are big advantages to be gained from the technology.

Q339 Chair: I think Mr Toase wanted to make one point.

Mr Toase: First of all, it is important to note that it was not the Chief Fire Officers' Association who said we should move away completely from the tri-service centre in Gloucestershire. I think it is important to make that point. It is worth looking back historically to when the Chief Fire Officers' Association came up with its support for the rationale of the regional control centres. When one looks back to the independent review of the Fire and Rescue Service, the Fire Service as it was then, by Sir George Bain we put certain submissions in to that process and what came out of that was the White Paper. The concept of regional control centres was embedded in that modernisation of the Fire and Rescue Service and the concept of that was something that the Chief Fire Officers' Association found we could positively support, the rationale was sound. Issues with regard to faster response times, greater technology, and I know the Fire Brigades Union made mention of caller identification, that now has advanced as I understand it with regard to mobile phones, et cetera, and the issue with regard to automatic vehicle location, for instance, means the technology will be able to pinpoint exactly where the nearest fire appliance is once a call is received. It is not necessarily the fire station, they will be able to tell you exactly where the nearest fire appliance is and mobilise on that criteria.

Q340 Martin Horwood: With respect, we keep on asking about regionalisation and you keep on telling us about technology. Surely the technology could be implemented at local level using models like Gloucestershire's tri-service centre as a way forward?

Mr Toase: I am sorry, perhaps I did not say what I wanted to say about the modernisation process. Part of this is about economies of scale and efficiency and that cannot be avoided.

Q341 John Cummings: In your evidence you highlighted, indeed quite scathingly, the role of the Fire Brigades Union, as you see it, as a barrier to the modernisation of the service. What will be the implications if the FBU and the Fire and Rescue Service more generally are not in support of the move to regional control centres?

Mr Carroll: Firstly, with regard to the Fire Brigades Union, I think I would want to qualify what we said by saying that we also acknowledge that the Fire Brigades Union over the years has a long and very, very proud tradition and has contributed quite positively to the fire safety and fire service agenda.

Q342 John Cummings: That is certainly not what your evidence says. Your evidence is very, very—

Mr Carroll: What I would like to go on to say is that all too often we have seen some FBU officials who continue to resist change, usually preferring to preserve the status quo rather than embracing the opportunities to change that in our view would be better for the Fire and Rescue Service, better for the taxpayer and better for their own members.

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Q343 John Cummings: So there are only certain leaders, not all leaders, to whom you were referring in your evidence?

Mr McGuirk: If we take it back, as my colleague mentioned, to the independent review of the Fire Service, in CFOA's submission to that review we accepted the reality, disappointingly, that management had lost the right to manage and to a degree, arguably, it was given away.

Q344 John Cummings: I remember that from the pits when the colliery manager used to say a manager had no right to manage.

Mr McGuirk: I cannot really comment on the pit.

Q345 John Cummings: I can.

Mr McGuirk: The corollary of the independent review evidence was that there needed to be a repositioning of people to make both professional and political decisions and an institutional framework put in train to do that repositioning. I think our proposition is that the reordering of who makes decisions is taking time to bed in and some colleagues in the trade union are struggling with that concept.

Q346 John Cummings: You also state your commitment to simplifying and communicating the message of change to the Fire and Rescue brigade staff. How are you communicating the benefits of the change to the regional control centres to FRS staff?

Mr McGuirk: The Chief Fire Officers' Association?

Q347 John Cummings: Yes. What are you doing to get your message over?

Mr McGuirk: I think it is fair to say, and I think this is where the confusion exists, it is not the Chief Fire Officers' Association's project. As we have said on a number of occasions, we are supportive of the principles of rationalisation and so on because we can see some operational benefits, but we have also seen some concerns and, therefore, our support is not unqualified. We do not see ourselves in the position of being absolute advocates and champions of the project that as yet has some unanswered questions. We are supportive and we have communicated the positive benefits to staff in our control centres but at this juncture it is not an absolutely unqualified championing of the project just yet. We are supportive of the ODPM communications mechanisms, the various newsletters, CDs, websites and so on that provide the vehicle for technical staff to give feedback which we will also respond to accordingly.

Chair: Lyn, can you just deal with the issue of the retained firefighters rather than diversity because we need to move on.

Q348 Lyn Brown: Okay. I am only going to deal with retained firefighters and not deal with diversity, which I really wanted to do. Can you tell me why there has been no real progress implementing the Bain report and subsequent reviews around the Retained Fire Service?

Mr Carroll: The retained review started in 2003. I know it was reported eventually in 2004 with over 50 recommendations. It has come through the Practitioners Forum and was accepted in principle. At the Practitioners Forum in January of this year a small group was set up to work to move the retained review on. It was not CFOA's responsibility but we were one of the stakeholders involved with it along with many others, including the Retained Firefighters Union. I think we recognised that in trying to attack the 51 points that were made in the initial report it was just too hefty to deal with. It is being moved forward and it is being acted on at present.

Q349 Lyn Brown: Forgive me, but it seems to me that you are representing the people who are managing this process and what you have spoken to me about has been process rather than actualities and there does not appear to have been a fundamental change caused by the ethos of the Bain review at all. We heard from the retained firefighters last week how they are still not involved by your members in basic consultations or discussions around the plans, et cetera. I just wondered why it has taken so long even for basic measures, like consultation, to become part of the process.

Mr Carroll: I would have to disagree with that point of view because I do not think that is the case. We have tried to be, and move to be, as inclusive as we possibly can which includes involving not just the Retained Firefighters Union but all the representative bodies, whether it be Unison, the Fire Brigades Union or the Retained Firefighters Union. I am disappointed that is how they feel.

Mr McGuirk: I think it is important to add that the Retained Firefighters Union does not represent all the retained firefighters in the Fire and Rescue Service. There are some areas around the alterations to the constitution of the NJC where individual fire authorities are moving between union recognition and consultation and negotiation with the Retained Firefighters Union. I think the position is that it is mixed at the moment. In terms of the retained firefighters themselves, I would agree that the actual detail of the retained view has not been moved forward as quickly as it might have been but there has been a massive reform agenda in the rest of the Fire Service, which we may well go into. I think if you do a bit more of a detailed survey and seek evidence from the brigade specifically on the retained firefighters' point you might get a slightly different picture.

Q350 Lyn Brown: I have to say we were given fairly clear specifics about non-involvement with the retained firefighters. Again, I make the point to you that it is your members who are responsible for the management of that. Given the time, I am not allowed to ask you why your chief officers have failed to implement a number of the issues around diversity but it does feel to me that there does seem to be a failure on the part of management in implementing change.

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Mr Toase: It is probably worthwhile adding that we are well aware that the Retained Firefighters Union were critical of ourselves in this retained review when they gave their evidence. I have got to say the reality is something different. The drive and the work that has been done in the retained review has come from members of the Chief Fire Officers' Association.

Q351 Mr Betts: On control centres it seemed to me you were saying largely we can put technology into all the existing centres but there are economies of scale to go with regional control centres which might make them more cost-efficient. You have also been critical of the current models of governance and funding of the Fire Service which you describe as duplication and poor economies of scale. Are you looking across the board for regionalisation and having regional fire authorities as well?

Mr Carroll: The comment we made within our submission was not about governance at a regional level, it was about governance of fire authorities as they exist at the moment and I believe also referred to the number of models. It is not something we have not said before, it was included in our submission to Bain and to the White Paper. It was referring to the fact that we want to see responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service remaining embedded within the local community but there are advantages to be gained by looking at wider involvement of that community sitting alongside our elected members who we say we recognise do a very good job, but to look at attracting people from business and commerce alongside our politicians.

Q352 Mr Betts: So a model like the police authority?

Mr Carroll: A model similar to the police authority.

Q353 Mr Betts: So you are not about changing the boundaries in that sense?

Mr Carroll: Not in there, no.

Q354 Mr Betts: I come back to my previous point. If you have, as you will in some cases, county councils and a fire authority which is an amalgamation of county councils, or in metropolitan areas an amalgamation of district councils, then a regional control centre on top with presumably another tier of governance of some kind because someone has to be responsible, is that not further complicating the situation?

Mr Toase: What we are saying with regard to governance is that there are issues. You said yourself there are county councils, CFAs, metropolitan authorities, different types of metropolitan authorities even. The governance arrangements currently perhaps are worth looking at to see if there could be some consistent model arrived at that would better serve us all. The issue, as Mr Carroll has said, was in our submission to Bain in the past. We have long said that there is a real need for elected member involvement at local level but we have also said that perhaps the size of Fire and Rescue Services needs to be looked at. That does not necessarily mean that you immediately leap to regionalisation and nine Fire and Rescue Authorities throughout

the country. What we are saying is that if we are to truly look at economies and efficiencies of the Fire and Rescue Service one has to consider whether the current 46 Fire and Rescue Services in the country is still appropriate.

Q355 Mr Betts: Just to come back to the point, who is going to run the regional control centres and to whom are they going to be accountable?

Mr McGuirk: In terms of their accountability, the statutory duties will remain with the local fire authority. The day-to-day management of the new facilities will be through a newly created entity, currently proposed to be some kind of local authority arms' length company.

Q356 Mr Betts: Which will be accountable to?

Mr McGuirk: One presumes at the moment, and this is one of the areas of concern that we want to work through in more detail, accountability will remain with no proposed changes in legislation with local fire and rescue authorities.

Q357 Mr Betts: All of them, collectively?

Mr McGuirk: As it stands at the minute individual fire and rescue authorities will retain responsibility for their statutory function.

Q358 Mr Betts: You will have several local fire authorities all collectively and individually accountable for this one control centre?

Mr Carroll: Through a board with representatives of those authorities.

Q359 Mr Betts: Is this laid down? Is this agreed?

Mr Carroll: It is not laid down. The consultation period on governance is not completed yet. There was a preferred model floated by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and, quite honestly, having had the chat with you a moment ago, it would be better if there was just one model but it has not been decided yet exactly what that model will be.

Chair: I think this is something we will need to pursue.

Q360 Mr Hands: A very quick question on the CPA. Do you think the CPA process has covered the right performance measures and do you think it has placed too much of a burden on fire authorities?

Mr Carroll: Firstly, we welcome the CPA. We were disappointed with how the final report emerged because, despite the fact almost half were good or excellent, the report really homed in on a lot of negative areas. We had mentioned the fact that operational assurance had not been included in the CPA process but we are now glad to see there is a measure in place for that. Bearing in mind that we had just gone through two pay verification processes followed by CPA followed by the other inspections that we go through, there was a feeling of audit fatigue, for want of a better phrase, and obviously we would like to see inspection or audit rationalised.

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Q361 Mr Hands: You say that you are keen to work with Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate to develop an assessment process for operational service delivery. What will be the implications of the planned closure of HMFSI in 2007 for your hopes to develop a new assessment process?

Mr Toase: I am sorry, could you just repeat the last part?

Q362 Mr Hands: What will be the implications of the planned closure of HMFSI in 2007 for your hopes to develop a new assessment process?

Mr Toase: I think Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire Service has already put something in place where certain people have already been seconded to carry out work on operational assurance to look at the next stage of CPA as far as service delivery is concerned. Again, members of the Association are contributing significantly to those work sets.

Q363 Mr Hands: Are you satisfied that the arrangements that will replace the Inspectorate will adequately replace and improve the functions it used to perform?

Mr Toase: In all honestly, I think we are waiting for greater clarity in that respect with regard to the transitional arrangements.

Q364 Chair: What would you be requiring in the transitional arrangements which are not currently clear?

Mr Carroll: CFOA is working with the existing Inspectorate and members of the ODPM to discuss precisely that. We are in the process of putting a project team together so that we can discuss that and outline problems from whatever proposals are brought forward to try to ensure that we do not have a gap there. We are urging that happens earlier rather than later because 2007 is rushing at us at present.

Q365 Mr Betts: Everybody thinks joint working in principle between the various Emergency Services is a great idea but my understanding is in 2001 there was a report to the then Home Secretary, Jack Straw, with 16 recommendations about improvements in joint working, most of which still remain not implemented. Why?

Mr McGuirk: Is that the *Shared Ambitions* report you are talking about?

Q366 Mr Betts: 2001. It was the report requested of the three Emergency Services associations.

Mr McGuirk: We had a fairly active 2003-04 and 2005 in terms of industrial action and the Fire Service—

Q367 Mr Betts: So it is all the FBU's fault?

Mr McGuirk: No, I did not mention the FBU at all. We have had a fairly significant reform and reorganisation agenda and the reality is we are now coming back into looking at the manner in which we can work collaboratively with all of our partners, not just the Emergency Services. The partnership agenda has changed quite significantly since 2001.

We are now broader, into local strategic partnerships, crime and disorder partnerships, there is a whole new package of partnership working of which working with the Emergency Services is just one element. Those have not gone away and in a number of areas they are going to be implemented and we have already discussed briefly in our evidence the correspondence schemes, for example, but there are other examples where there is joint working in youth initiatives and so on.

Q368 Mr Betts: You also refer to the fact that problems of lack of co-terminosity and difference in governance and funding structures are major problems. Does it still concern you that perhaps we are talking about major significant reforms of police structures now and reforms of structures in the Fire Service, particularly with this regional level of control centre, and we do not seem to be talking together about how those relate to each other.

Mr McGuirk: I think the nirvana of joined up government is a wonderful thing but probably beyond the realm of the Chief Fire Officers' Association to deliver. I think it is true to say that it is an enormously complex set of issues when different agencies are trying to work together on the ground and you have highlighted some of the problems in doing that.

Q369 Mr Betts: Given when we are talking about police reform one of the issues is how do you cope with major terrorist incidents as being a reason for amalgamations at regional level, do you not get talked to and consulted on those sorts of reforms bearing in mind the need to work collectively on some of these major issues? No is obviously the answer.

Mr McGuirk: We are one consultee out of many.

Anne Main: Just on that point, the police in Hertfordshire have expressed absolute fundamental disagreement with regional police forces. Does that colour your thinking at all?

Chair: I do not think that would be an appropriate argument to get into. Can we move on?

Q370 Alison Sebeck: Your written evidence suggests that fire prevention is only part of the story in terms of FRS activity in managing local risks. Can you elaborate, please?

Mr Toase: I am sorry, I did not hear that.

Q371 Alison Sebeck: Your written evidence sets out clearly that fire prevention is only part of the story of the Fire and Rescue Service's activities in terms of managing local risks. Could you elaborate, please?

Mr Toase: I think what we are saying there is that Integrated Risk Management Planning is exactly that, it is about operational intervention as well as the community safety interventions that we have in place. Those initiatives, as I am sure you are aware from the raft of evidence that has been submitted, particularly in the last four or five years, have really changed the face of service delivery in the Fire and Rescue Service. The statistics on reduction in deaths, reduction in injuries, reduction in the numbers of

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fires, reduction in arson, are all evidence that the strategies that have been employed are indeed working.

Q372 Alison Seabeck: What is the FRS's role in addressing, or trying to address, the high level of death and injury in relation to road traffic accidents? What do you think you are able to do?

Mr Toase: Again, as far as the community safety agenda is concerned, there are those who perhaps in the past have ignored that road safety aspect. The Chief Fire Officers' Association currently is very much moving this up the agenda. We have various working groups throughout the country which are being co-ordinated at present by a colleague of mine, Mr Doyle in Cleveland, and your deputy, Steve, in Cheshire, which is very much an inter-agency programme where we are working with the police, et cetera, and taking a roadshow around the country as to what the devastating effects of road traffic collisions are and working with target groups who evidence suggests are the ones who are young males who are involved in road traffic collisions.

Q373 Alison Seabeck: What proportion of the work that the FRS does is specific to road traffic accidents? Has there been a shift away from managing fire and fire risk towards road traffic accidents?

Mr McGuirk: I do not think there has been a shift. Prior to the reform we identified a position where we were responding to road traffic collisions as the Emergency Service in any event, it just was not on a statutory footing. I do not think the actual level of operational activity has changed fundamentally since the new legislation has come in but I think it is true to say that it is because the reform and the move towards partnership has held. As Phil was saying, in my own authority we now lead in a local Public Service Agreement for accident reduction where for the first time, I suppose, we have got the mutual respect of colleagues in the local authority and the police to recognise that fire can take a lead in what is really breaking new ground.

Q374 Alison Seabeck: We heard earlier evidence from the FBU around the issue of the definition of preventable and non-preventable deaths. Do you have any concerns about the breakdown of the definition? Is that a problem for you?

Mr McGuirk: No. I can see the implication that in some way or another individual authorities might seek to use the definition for some reason of statistical advantage or statistical disadvantage. The bottom line comes back to when you have a fire in your area you want to know what caused the fire death and is there anything you can do to prevent it and that is the focus of all Fire and Rescue Services rather than a kind of almost baseline definition. It is important to understand as a service, to get to root causes, to understand better what happened and perhaps there are some better definitions that we can take forward but I do not think it is in any way significant.

Q375 Alison Seabeck: Finally, very quickly, and it is hopping around a bit, can I ask about Public Service Agreement targets and your view that the FRS should be given greater financial freedom and support if those targets are reached. How far have you got in your discussions with the ODPM in this area? Have you had discussions with ODPM in this area?

Mr Carroll: We have had discussions, I could not say that they have gone very far. Yes, we have had discussions but we have not seen many freedoms emerging as a result of those.

Alison Seabeck: That is obviously an issue we need to pursue further.

Q376 Martin Horwood: Still on prevention, you mentioned the Integrated Risk Management Plans but neither here nor in your evidence are you very expansive on how well you think those are going. Do you want to give us an assessment?

Mr McGuirk: I think they are going very well indeed actually. It is true to say that it was new ground for the Fire and Rescue Service when we moved forward and it was a dramatic change from where we had been in the context of fire cover. It is probably true to say if you look back over the previous reviews you can definitely see a mature process of thinking as those were going on. The misunderstanding is that it is not cuts by the back door, it is about having to grapple with a new way of thinking where the understanding of the risk and how you deploy an emergency response to handle the risk may well be different from the different types of risk we had to deal with in the past but at the same time reducing that not just through community safety but through the new Fire Safety Enforcement and Regulatory Reform Order that hopefully will be on the statute books later on. It is a complete holistic package of prevention, detection and enforcement of legislation and an emergency response when all else fails. If you balance those three things together and look at the success that we have seen on our television screens over the last few years, I think it is going well.

Q377 Martin Horwood: Is that consistent across the country? How does it compare between fire authorities?

Mr Carroll: I would say the vast majority of people would say it is working very well. One of the issues that have been very beneficial was the setting up of the IRMP steering group so that the differences that could happen if everybody was left to their own resources were pulled back in together. I see that as an extremely important stakeholder group which irons out a lot of the concerns that were there initially when IRMPs were launched.

Mr McGuirk: If you look at the Audit Commission report, I do not think there was too much criticism of authorities being too cautious. I do not think there is much criticism of IRMPs, if anything the criticism was about the need to move to those more quickly with the changing agenda. I think that is a really good litmus test of a more objective view.

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Q378 Martin Horwood: Do you think they have helped to embed the resilience agenda at all?

Mr McGuirk: I certainly think they have helped to embed the thinking about resilience. There is no doubt whatsoever at local level part of the thinking is featuring not just what happens at local level but how you fit into the regional and national agenda as well.

Q379 Martin Horwood: In that sense, do you the planning for major catastrophic incidents is joined up with this broader resilience and prevention agenda or not?

Mr Toase: I think that should be integral to the Integrated Risk Management Plan. The major disaster or catastrophic incident was something that we had to have in our planning scenarios in the past and it is my view that this should feature in Integrated Risk Management Plans.

Mr McGuirk: I think it is fair to say that it is part of the planning in the operational assurance work that is going on that capacity to cope with catastrophic incidents is part of the operational assurance work that is being developed now.

Q380 Martin Horwood: Is that an aspiration rather than a reality now in terms of IRMPs?

Mr Toase: It possibly is an aspiration rather than a reality around the country.

Mr McGuirk: I think it is fair to say the Buncefield incident as an example of a major incident was handled in a national context very well.

Q381 Chair: I am not sure if you were in the room when the FBU were giving all of their evidence. They cited response times being lengthened in some IRMPs. Do you want to comment on that?

Mr Toase: I honestly do not know where that figure has come from. It may have come from one particular Integrated Risk Management Plan and without knowing where that comment has come from it would be difficult to comment on that.

Mr McGuirk: I think the other problem is standards of fire cover have gone, so it is probably inappropriate to compare it with what there was before because we have moved into a completely different world of risk management planning. There is a before and after, it is a different approach to response times.

Mr Toase: This now enables us to manage our resources effectively so we can put them where they are needed most and when they are needed most.

Q382 Anne Main: Sprinklers in schools. You are strong advocates of the installation of sprinklers in all school buildings, so what are the obstacles to this measure?

Mr Carroll: Obstacles is really a misnomer about the value of installation against the value of intervention of the sprinkler systems themselves. There is also a lot of—I do not want to dismiss it—nonsense about the fact that they go off all the time, if one operates they all operate and the school books would be

drenched. All of the time that is going on we know for a fact there is over £100 million worth of school that is going up in smoke every year.

Q383 Anne Main: Who is saying that misinformation?

Mr Carroll: In a nutshell it would be the DfES generally.

Q384 Anne Main: So the DfES is telling people who want to know about sprinkler systems in schools that generally speaking they are more trouble than they are worth?

Mr Carroll: That is where our main opposition lies.

Q385 Anne Main: Okay. You stated the need for 'legislative support' to ensure that all new school buildings have sprinkler systems. What exactly would be needed to override opinion, as you have just said, in legislation to ensure this would happen if you believe it is the right thing to happen?

Mr Carroll: From my point of view, seeing the requirement built into the Building Regulations for schools would be one method of achieving it. I have come from a sprinkler seminar across the way today and, unfortunately, what will probably bring it forward is when a number of children die in a school. That is how our legislation seems to have changed over the years.

Q386 Anne Main: Can I just follow that from schools to would you support sprinklers in each individual housing unit, for example, in all growth areas where there are lots of houses and you could get the costs down? Would you go that far?

Mr Carroll: I was hoping someone would ask that. Somebody is going to accuse me of writing lines for you. Absolutely. We are very much in favour of that. A lot of today's seminar across the road at the House of Commons was very much about that.

Q387 Anne Main: You did say, unfortunately, that DfES was less than helpful in this view on increasing sprinklers. Have you spoken to the ODPM and DfES on this particular issue?

Mr Carroll: Not at the same time.

Q388 Anne Main: So you have not got them both in a room together, you have spoken to them separately?

Mr Carroll: We have attempted to get both responsible people together and we have not succeeded yet but we will continue to work on that.

Q389 Anne Main: Why is that? Who is resisting?

Mr Carroll: It is mainly a matter of diaries.

Q390 Chair: It always is!

Mr Toase: Can I just add something to that. This is really a big issue for me personally. I gave a paper to the Fire Conference last November and I have done various ones since and circulated a DVD to all MPs throughout the country, which is being co-ordinated by the National Fire Sprinkler Network, which illustrates very graphically what can happen in school fires. The major concern to me, and Tom

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touched upon it, is that there is growing evidence of school fires starting during the school day. The last thing that the Chief Fire Officers' Association wants to see is fatalities in schools. If somebody was to ask me as a Chief Fire Officer potentially where is the nearest major fire tragedy, I would have to say it could be in a school.

Mr McGuirk: Could I add one very final quick point. Currently PFI credits do not encompass sprinkler systems and I think some simple steps like changing that would be very helpful.

Q391 Anne Main: You would like people to knock diaries together, so to speak, to make sure you can get these people in a room.

Mr Carroll: One other thing whilst we are on PFI credits. It becomes a double-whammy for those authorities who have PFI credits for school

buildings because when they say that will not include sprinklers and the local authority have offered to install sprinklers from their own cash they have had their credits reduced by the equivalent amount, so it costs them twice and becomes an impossible situation.

Q392 Alison Seabeck: Can you confirm that the unit cost of sprinklers now is significantly less than it was, say, last year or the year before often cost is the reason that is given.

Mr Toase: It is something like 3% of the total cost of building new build and about 5% of major refurbishments.

Mr Carroll: With regard to domestic property, we are hoping that a system will emerge in the very near future which will be much less than £1,000 per property.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Monday 13 February 2006

Members present:

Dr Phyllis Starkey, in the Chair

Mr Clive Betts
John Cummings
Martin Horwood

Mr Bill Olnier
Dr John Pugh
Alison Seabeck

Witness: Ms Judy Foster, Union Convenor, Unison representative on the Practitioners Forum, UNISON, gave evidence.

Chair: Good afternoon, Ms Foster. May I thank the representative of Unison for coming.

Q393 Mr Olnier: Do you think that somehow the use of the terms “non-uniformed” and “support” staff creates real problems when we are talking about regional control centres? Would it be better for all of you if perhaps you were called “operational”?

Ms Foster: I think that there are difficulties with terminology in the context of any issue in the Fire Service, not just control rooms. The terminology that is current used, which is occasionally “non-uniformed” or “support” staff, has been found to be very divisive. In any context, we find that the current terminology being used is not really satisfactory.

Q394 Mr Olnier: If you were making a plea to us for our recommendations, you would say that in the future there should be no such thing as “uniformed” and “support” staff; they should all be one?

Ms Foster: I think the move to a unified and a one-organisation culture would be very welcome, but the reality is that at the moment there are groups of staff on different conditions of service, and so some distinction is needed for bargaining purposes as conditions of service are at the moment. We are looking to alternative terminology. In fact, Unison, through its role on the National Practitioners’ Forum, has managed to obtain the support of the other stakeholders in changing its terminology to that of Fire and Rescue Service staff, and that is to be taken through the NJC structures.

Q395 Mr Olnier: Indeed, that is what Bain supported or suggested a while ago when he gave his report. Has there been any move whatsoever towards eliminating this distinction?

Ms Foster: No, not really. The Bain Report, as you may recall, did make recommendations for development to be linked to reward, as it was for operational staff, but that has not happened for the group of staff that I represent. The link between development and reward is still very unclear and has not been developed in any significant way.

Q396 Mr Olnier: Do you think as we look towards regional control centres, or whatever or any new operating working within the Fire and Rescue Service, this should be used as an opportunity perhaps to right those dissimilarities?

Ms Foster: That would be very welcome. I think we should at least review the possibility of aligning conditions of services between groups of staff. That would be very welcome.

Q397 Alison Seabeck: I come on to the equality practitioners. Could you clarify for me if equality practitioners are Fire and Rescue staff with other duties or is delivery of the diversity/equality agenda their full-time job?

Ms Foster: It varies from service to service. There are services with practitioners whose role is totally dedicated to ensuring that there is provision of equality across the service. There are others for whom equality is part of their portfolio. For example, they may be in human resources and equality is part of that particular role. They may be uniformed but they may be non-uniformed. They may be attached to human resources; they may be in a separate department. It varies across the service.

Q398 Alison Seabeck: There are a couple of questions arising from that. You talk about a high attrition rate of staff. Do you have any evidence that the attrition rate is higher in those where it is not their specific role but where it is an add-on and therefore an additional workload, if you like, or is there higher attrition across the piece? How would you define high attrition?

Ms Foster: Perhaps I can give you an example of high attrition. In my Unison role, I was invited as a guest researcher to do a strand of research for the FireWorks project. Part of that role was to pick up some research that had already been started 12 months previously and to re-visit that research. I re-contacted the equality practitioners who had originally been involved 12 months previously to update some of the information that had been given. I found that over half of those who had originally been in post were no longer in post.

Q399 Alison Seabeck: Had they been replaced?

Ms Foster: In most cases, yes, they had.

Q400 Alison Seabeck: What difficulties have you experienced in progressing the recommendations of these equality practitioners? I assume they are coming forward with recommendations and possibly feeding into your representative on the National Practitioners’ Forum. How receptive are they?

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Ms Foster: Unison's position in terms of practitioners is that some of them are our members, and clearly some of them have concerns about their experience at work and some of the work they do they find very challenging on occasions. Unison is not taking forward issues arising from equality practitioners *per se*. That is already part of the FireWorks project, which is coming through Anglia Ruskin University that I believe has already submitted evidence separately.

Q401 Chair: Going back to the question Mr Olnier was asking about the distinction between uniformed and non-uniformed staff? The ODPM targets for achieving diversity refer at the moment to the uniformed staff. Do you think if that was applied across the piece that that would lead to diversity increasing among the non-uniformed staff but taking the pressure off the uniformed staff?

Ms Foster: Potentially, yes, and that could be a disadvantage because clearly there are areas within the workforce which are more diverse than others. Clearly the group of staff that I represent is a fairly diverse group. Most of our members within the Fire Service are women on low pay. We have a significant number of black and minority ethnic members as well concentrated within the groups of staff that I represent. To try to focus diversity on that group of staff might, in a way, let services off the hook in terms of where they do not have diversity at the moment but where they need it, which is on the uniformed operational side. What Unison's submission says is that diversity does not guarantee equality. We have a number of services where the non-uniformed/support side is diverse, but that does not guarantee them equality within the workforce.

Q402 John Cummings: You state in your evidence that the service has a long way to go before it can claim to have turned the corner on diversity and equality. Would you tell the committee where you believe the obstacles lie to progress or lack of progress?

Ms Foster: I have already mentioned one, and that is the fact that there are differences in conditions of service between groups of staff within the workforce. The group of staff that I represent, which is the most diverse within the workforce, obviously is experiencing worse conditions and lower rates of pay than the predominant workforce. That is certainly one issue that needs to be addressed. Another issue that equality practitioners and our members are faced with is the culture of the organisation, and the culture can vary from service to service in terms of how accommodating of diversity and of non-fire fighting staff a particular service may be. The actual culture can be an obstacle. The quality of leadership on diversity can vary as well. Certainly, a number of equality practitioners have shared with me information which gives an indication that there is a difference in commitment of leaders throughout the service on the particular issue of equality and diversity.

Q403 John Cummings: Recognising that the ODPM currently does not have its own diversity target, what do you believe is most needed to deliver the diversity and the equality agenda?

Ms Foster: I think what is most needed to deliver the agenda is, first, to have a discussion about what that culture and that diversity agenda will look like in the service. There is not one clear vision across the service of what equality will look like in the Fire Service. Services differ very much in their cultures and, for example, the extent to which they are militarised or de-militarised.

Q404 John Cummings: Many fire authorities have told the committee that it is difficult to achieve diversity because of recruitment cuts or freezes. How do you square this with achieving the aims and objectives that you are actively seeking in relation to diversity and equality? Do you think that the Fire and Rescue Service is really embracing the idea or are they putting up excuses why they ought not to move in that direction?

Ms Foster: My view, and I give my observation as a trade union representative but also as somebody who has been an equality practitioner for seven years, is that fire authorities will invest in diversity and it will be a priority, but, when other things happen and other important issues arise, it can slip down the list of priorities.

Q405 John Cummings: Will you please be quite specific? Am I on the right track, that there is an inbuilt thought, an inbuilt philosophy, within the Fire and Rescue Service against moving in that particular direction?

Ms Foster: My observation is that commitment varies from service to service. It would be unfair to say that there is no commitment across the whole service. The commitment varies from service to service.

Q406 Mr Betts: Regional control centres: obviously you have concerns because there are going to be job losses. Are you currently aware of the extent to which there will be job losses, how many and in which areas?

Ms Foster: We are not aware of that. We have very few, if any, members directly working in fire controls. We have members whose work is to support delivery of the service of fire controls. We are concerned about job losses and about the impact on workload. To a certain extent, we are satisfied that there has been mention of redeployments in respect of fire controls.

Q407 Mr Betts: Do you have any particularly concerns as a union about the setting up of regional control centres? Are your members not sufficiently involved with some of the key operations to have any particular concerns about it?

Ms Foster: On the latter point you have made, members' views are not sufficiently well-developed for me to give a consolidated view. Naturally, we are

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concerned about the impact on workload and would be reassured if redeployments were able to take place.

Q408 Mr Betts: One thing that has been flagged up is that the new regional control centres may not do all the functions that are currently done by control centres, and some of those may be moved into the rest of the service. Again, has that been flagged up with you? Presumably some of your members might be affected by that?

Ms Foster: That has not been flagged up with us.

Q409 Mr Betts: You have had no consultations about that at all?

Ms Foster: No.

Q410 Mr Betts: Are you aware of any of those functions that may affect your membership?

Ms Foster: I am not.

Q411 Dr Pugh: Comprehensive performance assessment: can I have your take on that in general and also to what extent Unison as a union is involved in the process of it in the Fire Service?

Ms Foster: First, I would like to say on behalf of Unison that we welcome the CPA process. We welcome a process that benchmarks the service against other organisations in the public sector and not just between one service and others. We welcome in particular the emphasis being on human resource management; we feel that is important. We were disappointed that diversity was an issue only raised at the eleventh hour and introduced as a line of inquiry fairly late on.

Q412 Dr Pugh: In your experience as a union, when the CPA process hits town, as it were, is there a prolonged examination of this area? Do they ask searching questions? Do they look into it or is it simply another tick box exercise?

Ms Foster: No, we have been engaged in the CPA process within Fire Service. We have found the audit team to be very receptive; they have been keen to speak to Unison; they have been keen to speak to our members delivering services; and they have taken on board comments we have made.

Q413 Dr Pugh: If when looking into the service they find that diversity is an issue within the service, in your experience, does that seem to affect the overall rating of the fire authority?

Ms Foster: No, it does not. One of our criticisms of the CPA process at the moment is that neither diversity nor human resources management is given sufficient weighting. Unison considers that no authority should get a “good” or “excellent” rating unless it has also performed well in diversity and people management.

Q414 Dr Pugh: Have you made representations to the people conducting the CPA process?

Ms Foster: We have. (*Verbally*)

Q415 Dr Pugh: Is it because assessing diversity is a rather complex process that it is somewhat glossed over and not gone into in sufficient depth? Is there an adequate way of assessing diversity on a comparative basis between one authority and another?

Ms Foster: In fairness to the Audit Commission’s CPA process, this was a first attempt at assessing diversity within the Fire Service.

Q416 Dr Pugh: So the process could be improved and made more sophisticated?

Ms Foster: I think it could be improved, and Unison would welcome being part of any discussions that would bring about an improvement in the process.

Q417 Dr Pugh: Do you have any particular suggestions for improvement?

Ms Foster: We have a number of suggestions, one of which would be perhaps to dig further and to ask more detailed and searching questions about how staff experience diversity and the different groups of staff within the workforce, whether they be black and ethnic minority members, whether they be members who are gay or employees who are women. We would welcome more detailed discussion and a more detailed look across the workforce at the experience of existing staff.

Q418 Dr Pugh: You have given one example. The ethnic origin of someone can be immediately identifiable from looking at the employee records, can it not?

Ms Foster: Not necessarily, no.

Q419 Alison Seabeck: Linking in the presence of CPA to some of your earlier comments, clearly leadership is an important issue—leadership in terms of the quality of the organisation that the CPA is looking at but also leadership in terms of driving through the diversity agenda. Unison were not invited to work on the Bridging the Gap project.

Ms Foster: No.

Q420 Alison Seabeck: Do you know why that was?

Ms Foster: I have no idea. From the preface to the report, I got an indication that perhaps there was not time. I think that was the reason given.

Q421 Mr Olnier: Unison as a union obviously is well skilled in dealing with comparing performance assessment figures and the other roles you play within local government. This is a brand-new thing that is being brought to the Fire and Rescue Service. Do you think it will be successful in replacing the current Fire Inspectorate procedure that goes on?

Ms Foster: Eventually, yes, I think so.

Q422 Mr Olnier: How long is “eventually”?

Ms Foster: I would hope that by the next round of CPA assessments there will have been discussions and consultation with the various stakeholders and we will have a more robust process in place, which can more effectively assess authorities’ performance in diversity and human resource management.

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Q423 Mr Oliner: What do you think in particular Unison will be able to bring to that table?

Ms Foster: As you rightly pointed out, Unison has members right across the public sector. We also have members in the private sector where, for example, services have been contracted out. We have extensive knowledge of what constitutes good practice and what constitutes not such good practice. We would be very happy to contribute to any review or look at the process as it stands.

Q424 Dr Pugh: In terms of the comparative of basis with other public services and maybe the private sector, you obviously will have some feeling for

where the Fire Service stands on this particular issue. Where does it stand relative to the private sector and to other branches of the public sector?

Ms Foster: It is very difficult to respond to that because again the level of achievement in equality and diversity varies from service to service. It is not easy to compare the Fire Service as an entity with another entity. I can say that, for example, if you were to compare the Fire Service with the police, then the Police Service has made better progress than the Fire Service overall with some strands of diversity, possibly because of the scrutiny that the service is under because of the direct delivery of the service that it provides to the public.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. That has been a most helpful contribution.

Witnesses: **Mr Phil Woolas**, a Member of the House, Minister for Local Government, and **Jim Fitzpatrick**, a Member of the House, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, gave evidence.

Q425 Chair: Thank you for coming. Can I start, Minister, and I leave it up to whoever of you wishes to respond to whichever question, with evidence that was given to us earlier by the Fire Brigades Union that highlighted cuts in investment to the Fire and Rescue Service and ask you whether you recognise that as an accurate reflection?

Jim Fitzpatrick: Certainly it would not give me reason to reflect that it is accurate. The investment that we have made in recent years in respect of the New Dimensions shows some clear examples and we paid: £188 million for equipment and crewing; we announced an investment to fund regional fire controls and Firelink projects; we made £25 million available for home fire safety checks for the 1.25 million most vulnerable households in the country through fitting smoke detectors or other systems to protect the most vulnerable in our community; we announced £11.4 million last month in revenue costs for additional fire safety activities in the community. All that would be contrary to any impression that may have been given that there is a lack of investment or lack of commitment. There is also the additional normal investment through the local government financial settlements of which the Fire Service benefited in similar fashion to the rest of local government with real term increases year-on-year since this administration of Labour was elected in 1997. In general terms, I think we have provided fair settlements and in specific payments, grants and projects, we have clearly put our money where our mouth is to back the modernisation of the service.

Q426 Chair: May I pick you up on one particular aspect, which is the £30 million as transitional arrangements which fire authorities are expected to pay back over two years? Are you confident that they will be able to pay that back without the service suffering?

Jim Fitzpatrick: We are as confident as we can be, and certainly were we not confident, then we would not have arrived at a conclusion that it was appropriate to seek repayment of that money. There

was some natural lobbying from the Fire and Rescue authorities to defer payment once again, but we felt that as this was money that had been deferred previously, it was a fair conclusion to split the payment over two years to make it more fair and more tenable for fire authorities to pay back. This was money which Government had loaned the service as part of the modernisation programme, as part of the post-strike settlement, to ensure that it was able to equip itself with the tools to be able to make the progress that was expected in the 2004 Act as a result of the Bain Report, in the wake of the fire strike, and in respect of determining that there was a floor and certainty of finances over two years. We thought we were doing enough to protect fire authorities against that. The number of fire authorities that came to us as part of the normal process of appealing against the amount of grant that they were going to be given tends to reflect that we were not that far short because it was only a minority of fire authorities that actually took time to make submission or indeed to come in and speak to ministers, although there was a number, of which I am sure, Chair, you are familiar with at least one.

Q427 Chair: Indeed, I am. Can I turn to FireBuy? First, could you explain what exactly was funded by the £1.8 million in 2006–07 and 2007–08; and, secondly, do you know the total procurement costs for the Fire Service before and after the imposition of the FireBuy central procurement system? In other words, can you demonstrate any savings from central procurement?

Jim Fitzpatrick: The estimated spend on procurement of the Fire and Rescue authorities is around £300 million per annum. We do not have central figures. There is no requirement on authorities to submit figures, and so these are estimates for the Audit Commission by ourselves. What we have identified through the setting up of FireBuy, with the £1.8 million for the running costs to set up the arrangements, is that, given that this was something that started from scratch, it was a

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national procurement instruction we were putting in place, which has been welcomed by the suppliers to the Fire and Rescue Service. I had a meeting last week with FIREsA, which is the new trade body set up by the companies that supply everything to the fire authorities from fire engines through to ladder gantries and the rest of it. They now have 45 different companies in membership. They came in to articulate their support for FireBuy as an initiative. It has allowed them as companies (and these companies are as small as half a dozen employees right the way through to Kidde International which is an American transnational corporation) to be able to focus in on the requirements of the service without 15 or 20 companies all going off making prototypes on the same piece of kit. They can identify what is going to be required by the service, and only two or three companies will compete in the marketplace for a particular piece of equipment. They think this saves them time and money in research and development. The service believes this gives them a better deal because bulk buying means that savings can be made by buying things in greater numbers.

Q428 Chair: That is the point, Minister, that I was trying to get at. If you do not know the total procurement costs of the Fire Service before you institute the system, how will you know whether the Fire Service has actually benefited financially from the implementation of central procurement?

Jim Fitzpatrick: One simple example has been the purchasing of smoke detectors for the 1.25 million home fire safety checks we have been undertaking. I think the latest figure for the service is of something like 350,000 home visits and over 400,000 smoke detectors. The purchase of those detectors for the service across the country has enabled us to purchase them much cheaper than if 46 different fire brigades had purchased them for themselves. The savings for that particular project are identified as tens of thousands of pounds; the expectation is that every project worth more than £100,000 is going to produce savings of X. We have those figures to say that the services make these estimates without the national returns that we do not have. There are savings to be made within the estimates of national procurement spend.

Q429 Chair: You will be basing it on a project-by-project analysis of the estimated spend and then the actual spend?

Mr Woolas: The Gershon requirement for the Fire Service for 2007-08 is £105 million in cashable efficiency savings, all of which go back into the Fire Service. The procurement strategy for the fire authorities, as it is for local authorities, is a central part of that and the £1.8 million that you have referred to is a mechanism by which we can help them deliver efficiencies on procurement. It is not possible to say what those savings will be, but of course it is tautological that gross savings can only be made through the aggregate, if you like, of central purchasing. It is not quite central purchasing but I will use that phrase so it is understood. If there are

procurement examples that do not meet efficiencies by doing it through that mechanism, then they will not do it.

Martin Horwood: My question is really the same. It seems to me like a leap of fantasy because you do not really know the national figures.

Q430 Mr Oler: Before coming to the questions I want to ask, following up the Chair's questions, I would be interested to know and to have on the record: how companies get on and off this preferred bidding list; how transparent is it; and where can people who want to look at these things learn what companies are listed?

Mr Woolas: One of the advantages of it, apart from the financial efficiency, is that it is more transparent. A company has been established. It is covered by European procurement regulations, as you would expect it to be. The rules of procurement apply as they do elsewhere. Of course members of the committee will be aware of the general debate about procurement procedures. Our goal overall is to ensure that procurement is part not just of the efficiency savings but of the general policy towards sustainable communities. This is not a straightjacket we are putting on; it is a mechanism, a device, a vehicle if you like, through which authorities can come together to make savings. The rules on transparency are covered as they are elsewhere in the public sector.

Q431 Mr Oler: I understand that. It is important to put this on the record. If I was a supplier, say, of firemen's helmets and I wanted to push my product to all the fire authorities, how would my company get on the list/ If I was found to be wanting, how would you kick me off the list? We need to know this on procurement.

Jim Fitzpatrick: That was one of the reasons for FIREsA coming about. When we were trying to consult with suppliers, companies that supplied to fire authorities, there was concern that there was no formal arrangement for consultation. That was because there was no trade association that could represent the companies. The companies in the main are the bulk suppliers of all manner of equipment to the fire service. They have now banded together and formed FIREsA. They have created a framework; they now have an executive and a board and they come to meet with us. With regard to the figures that you asked about, the Audit Commission's estimates show an immediate saving of £5.5 million through a reduction in procurement overheads, so that 47 different brigades are not all going off and doing 47 different things, and more efficient procurement of commodities such as fuel, energy and clothing. On smoke detectors, there is a saving of 43 pence per smoke detector, and we purchase 1.25 million of those. You can extrapolate from that and feed that back into brigades. The European Union's official journal *Threshold* states that there should be a £135,000 threshold, that there would be a saving to each fire authority of approximately £5,000 and a saving of £0.25 million per contract issued by the service. In terms of bureaucracy, collaborative

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arrangements and research and development savings for the companies, as I mentioned, they came to me and said that instead of 17 companies each designing a ladder gantry, they will know that there is a ladder gantry out there, and two or three will offer to do it. That means that they can then target and focus their research and development budgets much more effectively, which means the service is better equipped because money is not being wasted.

Q432 Mr Oler: I move on to written and oral evidence we have had from the Chief Fire Officers' Association. They have highlighted the confusing governance structure for the Fire and Rescue Service. First, do you agree that there is some confusion out there and what do you intend to do to review these arrangements?

Jim Fitzpatrick: There is a lack of awareness about what the Government's arrangements for regional control centres are going to be because we are in the process of consulting on exactly how they should be formed. In that instance, it is not surprising there is some confusion because we are only consulting having identified that the best way forward from our point of view, having consulted other government departments—Treasury in particular—and the appropriate vehicle would be for a local government company structure to be formed. That is the template. Now it is a matter of how we identify the nature of the local government company structure in each region. That is what we are consulting on at the moment. The details of the Government's arrangements will become clear as we go through the consultation period and make an announcement in due course.

Q433 Mr Oler: Minister, could I ask whether you have considered the need to coordinate the changes to the Fire and Rescue Service with the Home Office's plans for the future restructuring of policing in England, and indeed the Department of Health's possible restructuring of the Ambulance Service?

Jim Fitzpatrick: I do not think there has been formal discussion but certainly the different arrangements taking place have been discussed informally by ministers. Of course the Fire and Rescue Service has its own distinct structure. We are constantly being asked whether or not it is the policy of ODPM to impose regionalisation on the service. We have clearly said that there is a degree of dilemma in that we have no wish to impose regional structures on the Fire and Rescue Service. However, in the Bain Report and in the examination of the modernisation of the service, it was clear that there were recommendations for collaborative arrangements by brigades, some on a regional basis, to ensure better efficiency and better use of resources. Generally that was along the lines of procurement; recruitment (some of the smaller brigades do not have the training facilities or do not train all year round); fire investigation and several others. The subject of regional control centres was clearly the most controversial of those. The resilience of a regional management board structure in the country

demonstrated that we are talking about brigades collaborating at the appropriate level. We are not going to force through any imposition on regionalisation. We did not see that as necessary but we did see and do support and encourage collaborative and cooperative working by brigades where that is appropriate for the better running of the service.

Q434 Mr Oler: Given that the Government has said that is not good enough for the Police and it is not good enough for the Ambulance Service, why is it good enough for the Fire and Rescue Service? Is there any collaboration? Is there not something done on a formal basis?

Mr Woolas: The Government's policy as far as possible is to achieve coterminosity on geographical boundaries at upper tier, local authority level. Where there are exceptions to that, it is to pass three tests. The first is to ensure that there is strategic capacity. The police authorities that are discussing merger will fall under that category. The second is where one can see tangible value for money efficiency gains. The third, which I personally believe is the most important, is to deliver the neighbourhood service. If you look for example at the police, the coming together of authorities is subservient to ensuring that each neighbourhood policing unit has the ability to cover its neighbourhood without having to be pulled away in the event of a level 2 or level 3 crime. What is driving the Government's policy on reconfiguration is not, as is commonly commented upon, regionalisation, and indeed the arrangements that Jim has described in terms of the control centres can be covered under those three categories. The discussions between the various departments about how we can best achieve coterminosity are of course also driven by the local area agreement financing arrangements in the local strategic partnerships. The Department's White Paper, which will be published in June, for local authorities will be part of that process. In short, that means by summer it will all become clear!

Q435 Mr Oler: Hopefully, our report will be out before the summer. For the ordinary ratepayer or council tax payer, if there are to be benefits from looking at mergers of police forces as well as the co-working that has been done over a number of years, why are there not any similar sorts of benefits that can be gained by the Fire and Rescue Service?

Mr Woolas: There may be.

Q436 Mr Oler: If you are saying to the committee that there is going to be no further regionalisation of the Fire and Rescue Service, nothing is going to happen.

Mr Woolas: As we all know, there is a difference between regionalisation and forces coming together. There are arguments at county to county level that may see benefits at the strategic and efficiency level.

Q437 Mr Oler: You could have units smaller than regions if they agree to cooperate?

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Jim Fitzpatrick: Discussions are going on between brigades to share services: human resource services and financial services. I mentioned others in terms of fire investigations. Discussions are going on about what services could be shared jointly because we do not necessarily need 47 across the piece. If it is efficient and if it can work to the benefit of the taxpayer and ensures that the service can be improved, then we are certainly encouraging that. Some of these discussions are going on in a number of brigades across the country.

Q438 Martin Horwood: I am sure if there were any Conservative members of this committee present, they would take you up on the regionalisation conspiracy, but they may have missed their moment! Minister, I would like to pick you up on your assertion that none of this is being forced through, even at the collaborative level. Certainly from the Gloucestershire's example of the tri-service centre, which I hope to come back to in detail later, this is opposed by the Fire and Rescue Service, by the fire and rescue authorities and by MPs of all political parties and public and political opinion of all political parties. To that extent, it is being forced through, is it not?

Jim Fitzpatrick: In terms of regional control centres, you accurately describe a degree of opposition to our proposals but we do believe that they are in the best interests of the service. Certainly in the area that you describe, the tri-service centre in Gloucester, that is not a joint centre—it is just three services sharing the same building; they are not sharing the same services—and they have a different way of working. It is an improvement on what went before. They think it is going to be detrimental to a certain extent. We do not agree with them.

Q439 Dr Pugh: We come now to the pounds, shillings and pence here. When we interviewed the civil servants, we discussed the cost of the reorganisation and the concept of “New Burdens”. They said very categorically that “New Burdens” were going to be imposed by central government. This was delightful and magnanimous and we were all pleased to hear it. Then we told the local authorities that this was indeed the case. They were somewhat churlish in their response. They suggested there might be quite a debate about what were in fact “New Burdens”. Would it not be a good idea now to define “New Burdens” and what they might be and maybe cost them a bit later?

Mr Woolas: I have never had a representation, and I do not think my predecessor did, from any local authority, fire authority, police authority or transport authority that said that there were net New Burdens that were not costing them extra. We have never had a cheque lack from them when the net New Burden has increased efficiencies. Let me be very clear what a net New Burden is, and I emphasise the word “net” in New Burden. In some instances, for understandable reasons, fire authorities and others have put forward gross New Burden figures, sometimes based on average costs rather than marginal costs, which of course paints a different

picture altogether. The principle is that if a New Burden by way of government policy or regulation, including incidentally European regulation, results in an additional cost, we will meet that cost from central government. We have a dialogue with the Local Government Association to identify jointly what those costs are. That should not, as I am sure the committee is aware, be confused with an inflationary burden that comes upon a fire authority or other authority from the circumstances in which it operates.

Q440 Dr Pugh: You will appreciate that if there is not a perfectly transparent process, where the burdens either new net or gross are not spelt out, they would feel themselves vulnerable to a device often used by central government to say, “This is all taken account of in the general settlement”. They may be able to point to additional costs which they feel central government is not bearing. Would it not be a good idea, whether net or gross, actually to flesh it out a bit more or agree with the local authorities exactly what is going on?

Mr Woolas: Through you, Chair, is that in relation to control centres or generally?

Q441 Dr Pugh: With regard to the regional control centres, yes.

Mr Woolas: As Jim was saying, that is at the moment being discussed and negotiated. Our policy is based on our very strongly held view, which is backed up by the financial advice that we have, that the strategy of the regional control centres is financially better than the upgrading and updating of the existing control centres. One point that is often lost from the debate is that our choice is not whether or not to have new regional centres. Our choice is either to upgrade the existing ones or form the new regional ones. That is where the financial comparison really kicks in. From all the evidence and advice we have on the new scheme, although obviously you will push us for specific figures which we are not able to give because the negotiations are in the process and tendering is going on, we are more than confident that that is the better financial option compared to the upgrading of the existing centres.

Q442 Dr Pugh: On specific figures, you are expecting to get a 30% reduction in annual running costs, which will be good if it happens. If it does not happen, can you identify that it has not happened and will you then make financial adjustments for the fire authorities accordingly?

Jim Fitzpatrick: New Burdens is almost an ongoing negotiation. We have spent £2.1 million this year funding New Burdens that we believe have been encountered by local authorities on regional control projects. We have a bid in for a 20% increase in staffing costs of the New Dimensions equipment from local authorities, which they say is a New Burden. We have not accepted that one yet. We are discussing it. It is almost a negotiation with local authorities because they will identify that which they think may be a New Burden; we will have to assess that for the taxpayer, whether it actually is a New

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Burden or it is something that they would have had to pay for whether they thought it appropriate or not. There will be some give and take in due course about this. In respect of the overall savings that have been identified, your assessment is correct: this is an estimate but it is an estimate of the numbers of staff that will be required in the new regional control centres compared to those which are in place at the moment; it compares the size of London to the other eight centres outside. We assess, and it is an assessment, that there will be a requirement for around 1,000 staff. At the moment there are 1384 full-time equivalents and therefore there will be a reduction in the numbers of staff. Given that the service costs generally are 85% staff costs, then there will be a reduction in costs. As Phil Woolas has said, this is not driven by savings *per se*. The savings are almost incidental. This is driven by providing a service to the country which will be resilient, fit for purpose, and provide the most efficient mobilising arrangements for the Fire and Rescue Service that exist.

Q443 Dr Pugh: Finally, in order to give a little more certainty for local authorities, will the Fire Service in larger regions be expected to cross-subsidise regional control centres in smaller regions. Buckinghamshire have suggested that that may very well be the case.

Jim Fitzpatrick: The expectation is that the payment for the use of the centres will be based on the numbers of calls that are responded to by the different brigades. The detailed negotiations will be worked out through the governance arrangements and the regional management boards. The local government companies at local level will determine how the centres are going to be financed. After we have paid the initial costs of set up, the local authorities will then take on the running costs. The local authorities are paying at the moment for the communications and mobilising costs of the existing centres. They will pay for the same costs of the new centres. The exact arrangements as to how much each authority will have to bear will be a matter of negotiation between now and the actual operation of the system.

Q444 Dr Pugh: It would be fair to say that the local trading arrangements are not a necessary cross-subsidy?

Jim Fitzpatrick: I cannot imagine that there would necessarily be a cross-subsidy. My expectation is that because we are seeing an overall cost reduction, then there are overall savings to each authority. That will provide money for them to be able to spend on other fire-related activity.

Q445 Mr Betts: As we all know, there are one or two examples around in government of wonderfully designed computer systems that occasionally have not worked out quite as anticipated and the costs have risen significantly. Has Government given an undertaking that any such increase in costs will be borne by Government and not by fire authorities?

Jim Fitzpatrick: The only undertaking that we can give is that we will do everything we can to provide value for money for taxpayers. We are in negotiations with three separate bidders at the moment in respect of that which we expect to be able to put in place by 2008. If, for some reason, the tendering arrangements did not work out and were not providing value for money, then obviously we would have to re-visit the scheme. The expectation is that the overall business case, the overall costs that we have estimated and that we have published on other website, which I am sure the committee has seen, demonstrate that this is viable, that it does provide a better service and also savings. That is where we are now. We only started serious negotiations with the companies with whom we will be engaging that want to tender for the new service.

Q446 Mr Betts: What I think I hear you saying is that you assume, through these tendering arrangements, that there are going to be cost savings, and therefore you will go ahead with the project. If there are no savings, you will have to reconsider, but there is a scenario that the cost savings appear as result of the tendering negotiations. You set off down the road of implementing the project and extra costs then arise in due course. Will those extra costs be borne by central government, as it is essentially a central government driven project, or will any of those extra costs fall on the fire authorities?

Mr Woolas: Chair, if I can ask your indulgence, we are in the middle of those negotiations and discussions and that tendering process. We are trying to achieve best value for money for the taxpayer. We are confident in the technology. I hear what you say about the record not just of government IT projects but IT projects across commerce and public services and other projects. We can say to the committee that we are very confident in the technology, obviously, as to the way we are going. We will not go live with FiREControl until it has been thoroughly tested from end to end. Of course reliability will be part of the contract that we have.

Q447 Mr Betts: I do not think that quite answers the question. I am not trying to put you in a position where you have to compromise the commercial sensitivities of the negotiations you are currently having with potential suppliers. That is not the issue. Whatever comes out of those negotiations, you will obviously try to maximise savings to the taxpayers. Ultimately, if for any reason any extra costs arose, would Government be paying for those? What fire authorities are looking for is an assurance that if something happens further down the line, they would not have to pick up the bills. Many of them are still a bit concerned this is not really the right way to proceed.

Jim Fitzpatrick: We have said that we will be paying for the set-up costs. The initial outlay of money for regional control centres will be paid by central government. The fire authorities will only start making contributions when it comes to the running

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of the centre. In that instance, there should be a clear demarcation between what is being paid for, what is a New Burden and what local authorities will have to pay for. In that instance, we can give certainty that the local authorities will not pick up any costs, for example, if something went wrong and we decided to change the policy and ago somewhere else.

Q448 Mr Betts: That therefore must also include, to be fair to the fire authorities, any extra running costs which could result from the savings that you anticipate not materialising. It may not simply be an increase in up-front costs, but if things go wrong with the computer systems or new technology, as often happens, that can occur further down the line and running costs in the service can increase. Is Government accepting that it would have to pick up responsibility for that? Your civil servants told us last week that there would be no possibility of fire authorities in that circumstance having to pick up any extra costs. It was very clear.

Mr Woolas: Let me put it this way. As Jim has said and as our officials have said, the set-up costs will be met by us. When it is up and running, the running costs will be met by the fire authorities. Your question really is about running costs increasing as a direct consequence of failures or unanticipated increases as a result of the way in which it was set up. I would expect either that would be covered by the contract we have with the suppliers or we would have to enter into discussions with the fire authorities, because that problem of course exists at the moment with all the procurement of other facilities. I do not think we could say here that in all circumstances we could undertake to cover all costs because we would have to have discussion as to whether or not there was a direct consequence of a failure of the project.

Q449 Mr Betts: One of the difficulties is that we have not seen the business case, have we, for this. We are working a bit in the dark through all this. One of the criticisms we have heard repeatedly, not just from the FBU but from the Chief Fire Officer as well I think, is that they are still not quite sure what they are being asked to deal with because there is not a business case. Normally you would expect a business case to be prepared before Government made a commitment to go down a certain route.

Mr Woolas: We are in the process of finalising the business cases. We cannot produce those in detail until the final infrastructure costs are known. The strategic outline business cases are already publicly available. Phil Woolas has mentioned that they are on the website and are in the public domain. We have provided a summary of those to the committee. As has been said, the major operational costs are for staff. The figure, as Jim has said, is 85%. You ask a fair question: how can we be confident of support from the authorities for the business case until it is finalised? Until we are confident of the business case, we will not sign the contracts. That is life. That is how you have to proceed in this business. The alternative would be to be reinvesting the existing

control centres and the very same fair question that you have asked could be put in relation to those existing centres.

Chair: Minister, can I press you on the point about extra costs? There are two specific instances that have been brought to us where a delay in the implementation of FireLink has led to the authority incurring additional costs. One is in relation to Devon where they are having to bear additions costs on the O2 Airwave radio system because of the slippage on FireLink. There is another one but I am not sure which fire authority it is. It was a fire authority whose own equipment was becoming obsolete. Had FireLink been delivered on time it would have been okay, but because FireLink was late, they are having to renew the equipment. Would you pick up those extra costs or would you be expecting the fire authority to bear them? Alison Seabeck wants to amplify this.

Q450 Alison Seabeck: Your own official described problems of renewing and renovating their clapped out systems. There is no doubt, from the evidence, as the Chair has pointed out, that a number of people suggest they do have clapped out systems. If those systems conk out they will have to be repaired and probably at a significantly larger costs than might have been because they are renewing contracts that they did not think they would have to renew. On the back of that, I know my own force in Devon have real worries.

Mr Woolas: May I say three things? First, I think this rather proves that our policy is the best policy. You do not want to be in a position whereby a single fire authority does not have the resources to invest in its control centres and its equipment, which would jeopardise the public. Secondly, when we talk about New Burdens, we mean it. We have spent £2.1 million on New Burdens. Thirdly, we are covering the costs referred to and about which you have asked.

Q451 Alison Seabeck: To come back to regional control centres, how are they expected to coordinate fire authorities with potentially different conflicting policies and priorities? We heard evidence about the differences between integrated risk management plans and concerns that there was not clarity in terms of accountably. How would you answer those concerns?

Jim Fitzpatrick: In respect of the first question, mobilising arrangements, at the moment the mobilising arrangements for response to any 999 call is determined by the location and the origin of the call, which is based on address and postcode. Whatever the address and postcode, there is a pre-determined attendance worked out by the local authority as to how many fire engines to send to a particular address. The new mobilising centres will work in exactly the same position. If they are called out to 1 Parliament Square, if the London Fire Brigade decides that the attendance to 1 Parliament Square needs three fire engines, the operator pushes a button and three fire engines are mobilised to 1 Parliament Square. There is no difference. They

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will be mobilising five, six or seven brigades. They will have the input data from those brigades as to what the appropriate attendance is for each different address which is specified in that area.

Q452 Alison Seabeck: If there are significant differences between the different integrated risk management plans of the different fire brigades, who ultimately is going to take the decision about which one of those is paramount?

Jim Fitzpatrick: Every one will be different. There is a different attendance to Portcullis House and the Palace of Westminster and that is worked out by the chief fire officer recommending to the London Fire Emergency Planning Authority, “This is my overall game plan and my integrated risk management plan for London; this is where we should have fire stations; this is where we should have fire engines; this is where we should have staff. I will work out the mobilising arrangements and report to you on an annual basis.” The chief fire officer, in conjunction with local authority councillors, determines the IRMP for their own area. There is no difference now to that which will happen under the original controls. The chief fire officer will determine, in conjunction with the officer corps *et cetera*, what the risk is and how many machines to send. That will be done automatically.

Q453 John Cummings: Would you tell the Committee which existing control room duties will be deployed elsewhere in the Fire and Rescue Service?

Jim Fitzpatrick: You mean which will be done by the local fire risk authority after the regional control? There are a number of different arrangements which have been worked out, on my understanding, by different authorities, everything from routine administrative duties, filing duties, first aid duties and the rest of it. The Fire and Rescue Authority will have to work out who will undertake these duties as and when control room staff are occupied to use their professional skills as control room operators and not as admin staff, because they are being paid 95% of fire fighters’ wages to be able to use the skills to handle people in distress. They are not being paid 95% of fire fighters’ wages to do routine clerking jobs.

Q454 John Cummings: Are you offering any guidance on this?

Jim Fitzpatrick: I would have thought that local authorities would be able to determine those duties which are being undertaken at the moment by existing staff and which ones will have to be undertaken by other existing staff in different departments or may have to be given over to other people.

Q455 John Cummings: Who will be the final arbitrator?

Jim Fitzpatrick: The final arbitrator will be the negotiations between the local authority employer determining what jobs have to be done. At the moment, many of our very well qualified, very

professional control room staff are doing duties which are not, to be straightforward, answering 999 calls. They are doing other stuff. The new regional control centres will make greater use of their professional skills, handling 999 calls. At the moment, the busiest control room in the country is London which has a call per operator round about every half hour. The quietest control room in the country, I believe, is the Isle of Wight which has a call per operator on average about every two hours and 48 minutes. The new regional control centres will level that playing field in that each operator will be expected to handle about a call every half hour, which will be much more efficient use of their professional training and their professional skills because they will be doing that which they are good at, dealing with people in distress, calming them down, getting the important information and mobilising the nearest appliance to respond to that 999 call.

Q456 John Cummings: Are you saying that the redeployment of these functions constitutes part of the annual £20 million savings?

Mr Woolas: Another big advantage is that it increases our capacity as part of our resilience strategy.

Q457 John Cummings: Are you saying it is not part of the £20 million saving?

Mr Woolas: It is not driven by inefficiency.

Q458 John Cummings: What is driving it?

Mr Woolas: It is not driven by inefficiency in that regard.

Q459 John Cummings: In which regard is it being driven?

Mr Woolas: Partly, as we have explained I hope already, in relation to the fact that it is a more efficient option than the renewal of the status quo; partly in that it allows those staff reductions which have the impact of using the professional skills better and partly it increases the capacity in each region to cope with major situations. Thank goodness it has never happened but at the moment the capacity in some of our control centres is quite low and, in the event of a major incident, the regional control centres backed up by the resilience planning allow us to cope with a much greater volume of calls.

Q460 John Cummings: Would it be correct to say that you only circulated the questionnaire to determine what work was being carried out by fire control staff after your key decisions had been made?

Jim Fitzpatrick: I think it is very straightforward: because we anticipate that the control room staff will be undertaking control room duties. The principal decision is do we improve control mobilising arrangements by going to regional control centres or not. Yes, we do, so we will do that. What were the control room staff doing that will have to be undertaken by other staff as and when that happens? They are not going to be moving for another year or two years. We can look at this in second light

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because it is less of a priority. It is not going to happen tomorrow. It is going to happen down the line so we can afford to do it as a secondary activity. The important thing is what are the best arrangements for mobilisation and communications. We believe that regional control is the best way forward so let us get that on the road. How do we work it out? What are the governance arrangements? What are the negotiating arrangements? What are the staffing arrangements? These are very important, very detailed questions. We have not got to that stage yet. That is starting now.

Q461 John Cummings: You say it is an ongoing exercise and it is going to take a considerable time?

Jim Fitzpatrick: Yes.

Q462 Mr Oler: I take it you are circulating that questionnaire to all trade unions who are involved with control centres, because I distinctly got the view from UNISON earlier on when they were giving evidence that they had somehow been left out of the loop.

Jim Fitzpatrick: If they have, that is inappropriate because there are different trade unions representing control room staff in different parts of the country. All unions should be involved in those discussions. Yes, we will be circulating it to all.

Q463 Mr Oler: Could I move on to the evidence we heard from the FBU, particularly about the excellent work that they and all the fire fighters did in dealing with the Buncefield fire, one of the largest peacetime fires that we have had in the UK, certainly throughout Europe. They did a most remarkable job in bringing it under control without having regional fire centres so why do we need them?

Mr Woolas: Our view is that the resilience fora that have been put into place in this country as a result of the Civil Contingencies Act, which provides for a regional framework to meet that capacity point which has been operating in London for some time, operated very effectively in the instance of Buncefield, as shown by the initial evidence. The lessons learned are part of the ongoing process in the regional resilience fora which I am responsible for. The initial lessons show that that regional capacity was one of the reasons why we were able to mobilise the resources, including the new dimension pumping equipment, from across the region and indeed other regions. We would not have been able to do that as quickly and as effectively without that regional gold command structure.

Q464 Mr Oler: I accept that entirely. One of the fears I have in particular and I think the Committee might well have is that all the individual brigades build in resilience. I would suggest that we coped with Buncefield because of all the added on little bits of resilience. If we do not have all the little bits of resilience, are we going to have the resilience to deal with a major disaster at the end of the day?

Mr Woolas: We are very proud of the emergency services and the other non-999 services involved. We are also privately very proud of the resilience infrastructure that has been put into place in the last few years. Let me just give you some figures. On the 999 system in response to Buncefield, during the first hour after the incident, the Hertfordshire control room took 54 calls. The control rooms of neighbouring fire and rescue services took 152. There is no evidence to support the allegation that rerouting centres failed during the incident but we are looking into that. There is no doubt that the combination of the new dimension equipment and the regional resilience framework enabled us to get particularly the high volume pumping equipment—it is not the first occasion on which it has been used through the regional resilience forum—and it was one of the major reasons why they were able to address the fire quickly. That does not answer directly the point that you are making because of course it was done without the regional control centres being in place. One of our objectives—we have already established the first one in Yorkshire, the National Coordinating Centre—is to provide for regional resilience command and control through the regional centres as well. All of the evidence, we think, and all of the arguments are showing that pointing that increased capacity at regional level is the best way forward and Buncefield, we think, is an argument for that.

Q465 Martin Horwood: I am concerned within this process that some very important babies may be being thrown out with the bathwater. I have already told you the example that I am going to cite which is the triservice centre in Gloucestershire. The 2000 Mott Macdonald report into the future of fire service control room communications in England and Wales concluded that the pilot projects in Cleveland, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire should continue to be strongly supported and encouraged. The lessons learned from these pilots have already proved useful and have informed the study. More will be learned as these projects are implemented. They will provide an invaluable input to future control room strategy. Clearly things have changed since 2000 and the importance of resilience is now very high up the agenda and yet that model has been praised as recently as last year by the Audit Commission in its comprehensive performance assessments. Is there not a danger that you are abandoning something which could have enhanced emergency resilience and is still at an innovative stage by moving to these regional control centres which have less potential for local coordination in emergency situations?

Jim Fitzpatrick: What we are not saying is that there are not some very good control centres across the country. Therefore, there will be disappointment that some benefits and experiences will be lost. What we are saying is that the regional control centre framework that we are proposing will be better for the whole country. With the tricentre that exists in Gloucester, as I mentioned earlier, people get the impression that for some reason this is a coming together of the emergency control centres for fire,

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police and ambulance, which obviously as you would know, Mr Horwood, it is not. It is the three centres sharing a building with glass partitions between the three, where there is no common mobilising arrangement because there are different requirements on the different services in terms of turn-out times, in terms of attendance, in terms of all manner of different things. They do at least share the building so there is a coming together. We have been asked the question several times during the course of recent months, when are we going to be in a position to physically and technologically bring fire, ambulance and police emergency control rooms together. I think that is an ambition. It is an aim and it is a laudable one. If it could be technically feasible, it should be done but we are probably a generation or two off of that. At this point of time, we had been faced with the dilemma which is that following on from the first Mott Macdonald report and subsequent ones after 11 September, after the resilience requirements laid down by civil contingencies legislation and the rest, an examination of the regional control centres across the country demonstrated that many of them did not have the latest technology, let alone the arrangements that you are talking about for Gloucester. They were in buildings which were not fit for purpose and they were being underused. We have a template whereby we can have more professionalism because we will be giving staff exclusively control room duties to do, not the additional, separate duties they are employed in, because there is a recognition that there is not enough to keep them occupied fully by just answering emergency calls. We will be providing the latest equipment and the ability to make sure that we have backup in the event that there is any difficulty with any of the controls, through interoperability and the arrangements of inter-networking that we will be putting in place in due course.

Q466 Martin Horwood: I think you are wrong. For a start, there are economies to be achieved at local level as opposed to regional level in the triservice model. I am not just talking about Gloucester; I am talking about the model which was being pioneered only in three places, so I do not see how you can be properly assessing it at this stage in the process and undermining it now when you have not really seen it through. One of the advantages was the ability to achieve a common location for command and control with cross-agency working in an emergency situation. The fire service's opinion in their written evidence is that it has improved resilience and the ability to link up with national, regional infrastructures and that multi-agency command facilities offer maximum operational flexibility. Their opinion is very strongly that it improves resilience, not decreases it.

Mr Woolas: This is a very serious policy discussion and obviously we have had this discussion internally. The update Mott Macdonald report, *The Future of Fire and Rescue Control Rooms in England and Wales*, did recommend the nine centres as the best option in the post-9/11 period. The dilemma is

this: it is clearly our goal that the 999 blue light services should be able to talk to each other and we should have a capacity to mobilise. In fact, there are some 54 agencies in the London Resilience Forum that we mobilise. We are developing computer technology communications for all of them to talk to each other in the different scenarios that they may face. Given that everybody will agree that it is desirable that you have a common communication and common command and control in these situations, you then face a dilemma. Do you join it up locally first or do you have the police, fire, ambulance, coastguard and liaison with military upon systems that work nationally before you then are able to join them together? Two things drive this policy. One is the availability of the technology. It is not possible at the moment to achieve that joining up between the services. It would be with huge expenditure. The development of technology we believe means that the fire control and the FireLink projects will provide the route for that joining up in the future. The second, big point is this: all of the advice that we get—this is not in any way a political point—is that you can only in this country have the capacity to deal with major incidents at a regional level. In my period, we have triggered that gold command, I think, on six occasions. Even in fairly small incidences, Glastonbury flooding was one example where there was a danger because of contamination caused by the flooding of the chemical toilets. We did use the Regional Resilience Forum to mobilise resources. In the Carlisle flooding, the Carlisle authorities did not have the capacity to deal with that scale and it was only because we had the regional resilience. This is inbuilt into our strategy. The capacity issue at regional level, we think, is the responsible thing to do but I do recognise that there is an alternative policy you could pursue. That was our logic.

Q467 Dr Pugh: Co-responding and cooperation between emergency services is obviously very good practice and the FBU have said that they would like to see it at national level. Could we have your take on that and also your take on what is the issue that dogs that? That is that, when a fire service turns up and does work which essentially is health service work or something an ambulance service would do, there is a cost incurred by the fire service which they may wish to recharge somewhere else. If there is not a standardised way of doing that, it obviously creates a certain amount of friction. A third possible aspect to this question is: is not any arrangement of co-working to some extent spoiled by the lack of coterminosity between various authorities? Three things: what is your approach? What is the view on the cost basis for it and how costs can be recharged? Coterminosity is the other issue.

Mr Woolas: I keep hearing this word “coterminosity”. This is the sharing of geographical boundaries between different authorities. As I said before, our policy is to achieve coterminosity at local authority level wherever possible, consistent with the three criteria I set before. Our policy on this is that we obviously fully support the schemes and wish to

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see all of the fire and rescue authorities working in partnership with their local ambulance service NHS trust to introduce such schemes. We are in close, regular contact with the Department of Health through our own department, the ODPM, to consider what can be done to encourage the two emergency services to pursue co-responder schemes and the use of defibrillators by fire fighters. For information, a total of 221 automated external defibrillators have been provided to fire and rescue authorities under the second phase of the national programme. The Draft Fire and Rescue Framework 2006-2008 proposes that fire and rescue authorities should actively review the opportunities for improving community safety by implementing co-responder schemes in partnership with other agencies. Obviously, the financial arrangements across authorities can be a bar, organised where there is not coterminosity, but part of our local area agreement framework, which is done at the operative area, is intended to benefit exactly such cooperation.

Q468 Dr Pugh: Rather than have a national system you prefer local agreements which could lead to different regimes operating in different areas of the country?

Jim Fitzpatrick: Because there are different pressures in different localities. What we have in different parts of the country are some fire authorities operating first responder schemes, some co-responder schemes and some just carrying defibrillators for which they do not have an agreement or an arrangement. It is good to hear that the Fire Brigades Union is being supportive just as they are not being supportive on the new dimensions kit. They have not always been but they have had some genuine concerns and still have some concerns about health and safety issues.

Q469 Dr Pugh: To be fair to them, they said they would like to see national proposals on co-responding.

Jim Fitzpatrick: In Devon, for example, and in some of the retained areas, the provision of ambulance cover is much more sparse than it is in other parts of the country. When I was there recently, I met one crew who very proudly told me of their first responder scheme. They turned up at an incident and were called to a victim of a suspected heart attack. They said, "This was one of the best things we ever did." I said, "Did you save the person?" They said, "No, we lost him." I said, "How is that one of the best things?" They said, "Because of the grieving process that we were able to help with. We were there within three and a half minutes because we are the local village. We are neighbours. We are friends. We are family. We got there. That family will not be asking, 'What would have happened if a defibrillator had turned up?'" A defibrillator did turn up because Devon retained fire and rescue personnel were able to bring it and that family can get on with their lives knowing that everything that could have been done by the emergency services was done to try and help that person. From my point of

view—and the Department is supportive of this; most fire and rescue authorities are—it is about what is the best template that fits different localities. They will all be different. In some instances, first responders are better. In some instances, co-responders are better, but every fire appliance in the UK—certainly in England and Wales—should be carrying a defibrillator. There is no reason for them not to be doing so.

Q470 Mr Oler: I am sure, Minister, your officials will have read the evidence that was given to the Committee last week by the FBU, particularly on co-responding. I certainly did not get the view that the FBU were in favour of seeing this at a national level. I felt it was just the opposite. At that meeting, there were 20 FBU members who had been expelled in Liverpool for trying to operate a co-responding unit. What action is the government trying to take to make sure that these very, very essential, life saving schemes get put into place? This is not the government or politicians dreaming it up; it has been researched and audited by a professional person and it saves lives. When is it going to be rolled out so that all of our constituents can get the benefit of that?

Jim Fitzpatrick: We are engaged with the Department of Health. I and Rob Warner wrote to the chair of the Local Government Association Fire Committee in December last year to try and make sure that we can move this forward because we do think it is a positive move. I cannot understand why any trade union was expelling people for using defibrillators. It does not make sense to me but that is a matter of internal discipline for the Fire Brigades Union. From our point of view, there should be arrangements in place. Fire fighters should be carrying defibrillators. We should be able to save people. The estimate so far in the past 12 months is that 18 lives have been saved by fire fighters using defibrillators. I take the point we did not respond to in terms of Dr Pugh's question. This is not about mobilising the fire service to deal with ambulance duties; this is about saving lives and if we can save lives surely that is what we all want to see.

Q471 Alison Seabeck: Clearly, there is a lot of research going on and sprinklers are getting cheaper by the day almost, I suspect. Your own PSA targets on fire prevention and sprinklers play a part in that. Building regulations are an important element as well but how much work are you doing in order to persuade DfES, about whom we had nothing but criticism in a previous session, to ensure that schools are built with sprinkler systems in?

Jim Fitzpatrick: In general terms in the first instance, the culture of the service, as the Committee knows, is moving into being much more fire safety orientated and much more a culture of fire prevention than it ever has been. From the service's point of view, this is unfinished business. This goes back to the 1960s and 1970s. This is the Holroyd Report, the Young Commission, the 1971 Fire Precautions Act. This is a culture that was supposed to be brought in 35 years ago but it has now been brought in much more effectively than it has been in

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the past 35 years. It is business that has been waiting to happen. Going back to the original exchange we were having about home fire safety checks, that is a very clear example of how the service is moving much more effectively to protecting the most vulnerable people in our community by the introduction of detectors to alert them to a fire. The ODPM has financed the research into low cost sprinkler systems in the UK. We have had a test rig at Lower Brissington in the Cotswolds for the best part of a year. We set a challenge to the industry to identify the ability to reduce the costs of an ordinary sprinkler system because a sprinkler system in the UK, roughly per house, was costing between £3,000 and £5,000. For a school, it is estimated at between £10,000 and £20,000. To be able to move the agenda forward on sprinklers, we identified that we needed a low cost sprinkler system. We scoured the world. The New Zealand system seemed to offer the best prospect of success. We have paid for the test rig and the research which has now come through and there is real evidence that we might be able to certify in some respects a domestic sprinkler system for about £500–£600 in due course. We are consulting at the moment on the building regulations. That is just finalised. We will be producing our report later on this year for domestic premises and for implementation in 2007. In respect of schools, we produced very robust correspondence to the Department for Education and Skills because schools are not a matter for us. They are in the process of producing Building Bulletin 100 which will be their new standard for schools in due course. I know that they are seriously looking at the question of sprinklers in schools because of the correspondence that we have sent them, because of the consultative submissions that they have had. There have been criticisms about no sprinklers in schools previously but at the moment they are consulting. This is an opportunity for them to revisit that. As with any government policy, there is a determination of cost benefit analysis whether or not it is desirable and, if it is desirable, how much it will cost and whether or not it is better to do that than to do something else. Sprinklers are not a complete panacea. They are not going to stop everybody from dying in fires but they will protect the most vulnerable and in a school situation they could be a very useful tool, but that is for the DfES to conclude.

Q472 Alison Seabeck: In relation to sprinklers, it is the problem in retrospectively fitting them to existing buildings. My understanding has always been that there are real difficulties in doing that. It is a long time since I have looked into these things but has the thinking on that moved on? Will it be possible to retrospectively fit them to schools or is that still a problem?

Jim Fitzpatrick: The easiest way to explain the technical difficulty is that if your house is being rewired it is easier to do it when you are undertaking major building works. If you decide that you want to rewire it because you think it is suitable, you have to rip up the floorboards, so it is a much more complex task and much more expensive. It cannot be cheaper,

whatever the technical solution. The low cost sprinkler system that we have been examining will only be good for domestic premises, for buildings of one and two floors. We will have to incorporate major changes to the mains network possibly, the size of the supply pipe from the main to the house, to make sure that we have the pressure. Otherwise, we need to have an engineering solution to fit the pump within the house which will make it work, which puts another £100 onto the cost. You cannot have a low cost sprinkler system for a school. It has to be gold standard. It has to be British Standard certified and, in that instance, there is no cheap way of sprinkling in schools. My understanding is that it is between £10,000 and £20,000 and I might be entirely wrong but forgive me. That is off the top of my head.

Q473 Chair: Since your Department seems to have had little success in persuading the DfES to take the sprinkler issue seriously, why have you not imposed it on them through building regulations?

Jim Fitzpatrick: I am not sure that we have had little success in impressing upon them. We have corresponded with them. We think that they are taking the matter very seriously. I know that colleague ministers are looking at this. They are waiting for submissions at the end of the consultation period. The DfES are responsible for schools. They are responsible for the building programme, the refurbishment and building standards which is why BB100 is their baby and not ours. The building regulations that we are coming forward with in due course will not be in effect until April 2007 and mainly deal with domestic and care homes.

Chair: We are going to be following it up directly with the DfES anyway so maybe we might add to your success.

Q474 Mr Betts: On the filing project, we are aware that police services up and down the country have had major problems in south Yorkshire and other parts of the country as well with their communication systems and the technology, which has almost got to the point of losing public confidence in the police service's ability to respond. It has been that bad. You are now intending to use the same technology for filing. Does that not give you sleepless nights?

Jim Fitzpatrick: The police scheme is several years, to my understanding, I think up to five years old. The air wave scheme, I understand, that is in operation in Norfolk and in another brigade in East Anglia, as the Committee has already been told, works very well. We have built in technical specifications and penalty clauses in the event that there are any difficulties with the air wave system. We have not concluded the contract fully because we are still waiting for final sign-off but, because of the improvements in the system, because of the technical specification that we have laid down, learning from the mistakes that the police made because they were not working to the same technical specification and

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because of the clawback in penalty arrangements that we have written into our contract, we are not going to pick up the tab if it does go wrong. Because they are able to meet the new technical specifications, because of the improvements that have been made over recent years, we are confident that the air wave system will provide the wide area, digital, national radio network that the fire service in England and hopefully the rest of the country absolutely deserves.

John Cummings: Having gone through the experience in Durham where it has been absolutely appalling, yes, the equipment is several years old now but it was not when it was put in. We were told it was brand new, state of the art technology. I hope this Committee does not have recourse to call you back here to answer for the assurance that you have

given us. It will be detailed in the minutes here so I hope that the people advising you are advising you correctly.

Q475 Chair: On that happy note, do you have anything you want to add?

Mr Woolas: We want to pay tribute to the Fire and Rescue Authority and our own staff who are putting this strategy into place. The test of our policy is in the number of fires and, in particular, the number of fire deaths. We do not publicise and promote because we do not want to be complacent, but the statistics show that the strategy is working with a reduction both in the number of fires and in the number of deaths and serious injuries over the years.

Chair: Indeed. A happier note to close on. Thank you both very much.

Written evidence

Memorandum by Helen Mason (FRS 01)

I would like to comment on Regional Fire Control Centres.

BACKGROUND

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

My fears for the public are:

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

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

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

2. *Every day occurrences*

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

Consider the rush hour in Britain.

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

When a car catches fire at rush hour time, it is not unusual to receive 50 to 60 calls for this one incident. (Due to mobile telephones) This means that if there are two incidents on motorways, during the rush hour, somewhere in Britain, every call handler in the Country will be tied up and the callers will be stuck in a loop between the nine fire control rooms. (Currently there would be three times this amount of call takers available in the UK) What would happen to the person stuck in a burning building at this time? How will their call be answered as quickly as today?

3. *Covering adjacent RCCS in spate conditions*

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

4. *Knowledge*

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

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

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

Concerning the Regional Fire Control Centres and diversity in the Fire and Rescue Service—as far as I am aware there are only nine staff out of approximately 120 in the Eastern Region who are even willing to consider working in the new RCCs. This is because the Change Management team have not been able to get the “buy in” from Control staff and the majority want no part of it. Bearing in mind that Control is by far the largest area within the Uniformed Fire Service, where women are employed, how is losing all of these people going to help improve the number of women in the Fire Service? It’s ironic that Control have been used to achieve the modernisation of the Fire Service when it is the very department which attracts women to the Uniformed Fire Service!

My biggest fear is that none of the excellent Fire Control room staff that we have in this Country, will want to have any part in these dangerous plans. If we lose these staff, (and we have already lost some in our County) their vital experience and local knowledge will be lost. This will be to the detriment to the Public, Firefighters and other emergency services. Every Fire Service performance indicator will suffer, from the number of fire deaths, to turn out times for appliances.

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

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

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

Mrs Helen Mason

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

Regarding regional fire controls:

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

Memorandum by David J H Smith (FRS 02)

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

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

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

Memorandum by Mrs Jennifer Kissel (FRS 03)

1(a) So far as citizens in Gloucestershire are concerned I believe the introduction of a Regional Control Centre away from its present new tri-centre would be detrimental because the Fire and Rescue Service is already operating with the other emergency services from this building. To move Gloucestershire to

Taunton will slow down many responses. In particular, in the countryside local knowledge can be invaluable in ascertaining and identifying the whereabouts of a caller in shock seeking assistance and this knowledge will be lost if the control centre is moved to Taunton.

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

2. No comment.

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

Memorandum by VectorCommand Ltd (FRS 04)

1. INTRODUCTION

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

2. MULTI-AGENCY TRAINING FOR CIVIL RESILIENCE

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

3. LOCAL RESILIENCE FORUM TRAINING AND EXERCISE PROGRAMMES

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

4. INCIDENT COMMAND SYSTEM (ICS) AND A NATIONAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

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

Memorandum by Lancashire Combined Fire Authority (FRS 05)

1. REGIONAL CONTROLS AND FIRELINK

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

Costs

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

Human resources

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

Timescales/quality control

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

Firelink

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

2. FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE REFORM*Diversity*

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

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

Institutional reform

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

3. WORKING WITH OTHER EMERGENCY SERVICES

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

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

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

REGIONAL CONTROLS AND FIRELINK

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

Governance and procurement

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

Costs

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

The RCC Finance Working Group has been well supported by the North West. Recent developments would indicate that "value engineering" is varying the original specification, reducing the cost to the central project. The North West is concerned over clarity regarding the costs and rationale for these changes. Fundamental questions on project governance are raised when the ODPM make changes to a technical specification that they have previously deemed essential without consultation with Fire and Rescue Authorities or their representatives. If an item such as compliance with the Critical National Infrastructure is removed, then the potential exists that the remaining facility may be over specified and the leaseholder (and ultimately Fire and Rescue Authorities) left paying for functionality or resilience that is unnecessary. There is currently no independent scrutiny of the rationale and detail over how the cost savings for the ODPM are determined. These decisions ultimately affect the management of risk for the new RCC. To secure robust arrangements the North West would also urge early consideration of insurance arrangements for the new RCCs. An apparent saving on building costs may not even offset the increased potential insurance costs making it impossible to view these issues in isolation.

Human resources

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

Timescales/quality

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

FIRELINK

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

DIVERSITY

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

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

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

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

WORKING WITH OTHER EMERGENCY SERVICES

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

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

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

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

GLOUCESTERSHIRE TRISERVICE CONTROL CENTRE: THE CASE FOR RETENTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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

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

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

SUMMARY KEY POINTS FOR RETAINING THE TRISERVICE

1. *TriService*

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

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

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

3. *TriService can be preserved within a regional control framework*

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

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

4. *TriService is delivering*

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

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

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

6. *TriService is making Gloucestershire a safer place*

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

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

7. *TriService is cost effective*

- The Audit Commission confirms that this project is delivering value for money.
- All partners and the people of Gloucestershire have gained enormous benefits from this co-location and working.
- Reduced “over-mobilising” to incidents.
- Greater understanding of issues has enabled the continuous pursuit of improvement through shared incident performance monitoring.
- Joint procurement efficiencies achieved in areas such as facilities’ management.
- Has lead to a single workshop with the other emergency services and other shared initiatives (eg Arson analyst).
- Closing the TriService Centre would mean that £6 million of public money would have gone to waste.

1. INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

2. THE MOTT MACDONALD REPORT—THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION

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

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

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

The report recommended:

- a medium to long term plan that considered the integration of TriService into regional arrangements “at a future point”.
- Mott MacDonald said this could be achieved, if considered appropriate, by using the Invest to Save pilots including Gloucestershire as the control room for the region in which it is located.

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

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

3. BACKGROUND

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

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

3.2 The TriService objectives were:

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

3.3 The centre was officially opened in May 2003 on a purpose built site just off the A38 outside Gloucester, in a highly accessible location. It incorporates fire, police and ambulance joint control, ambulance patient transport, and police non-emergency 0845 response teams. Fire and ambulance headquarters are accommodated on separate floors in the same building and a new police headquarters has just been opened next door. TriService vehicle workshops were opened on the same site in March 2004. All emergency service partners remain committed to the TriService.

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

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

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

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

Progress with the National Framework’s six priority areas is being made with effective engagement with the Regional Management Board (RMB).

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

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

4. MAKING THE COUNTY SAFER AND STRONGER

The value of the TriService

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

4.2 The value of the TriService can be clearly demonstrated through:

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

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

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

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

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

5. TRISERVICE IMPACT

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

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

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

5.3 The Fire and Rescue CPA assessment for Gloucestershire noted that:

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

The authority achieved a “good” rating.

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

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

5.5 Other commendations include:

The Rt. Hon Ian McCartney MP who, on a visit to TriService, said that he was “very impressed with the facility and the attitude of staff . . . strong partnership ethos to deliver services through the operational advantage of working together . . . isn’t this what we have been asking fire services to do?”

5.6 The Local Government Association:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. TRISERVICE FACTS AND FIGURES

7.1 *Staffing.*

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

7.2 *Fleet assets*

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

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

7.3 *Response statistics*

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

7.4 *Budget*

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

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

8. FINALLY

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

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

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

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

9. SOURCES OF REFERENCE

- (a) The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales: Mott MacDonald 2000 Management Summary, p 7.
- (b) Mott MacDonald 2000 final report, p 126.
- (c) Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service Best Value Review of Control and Communications, March 2001: Summary, p 27.
- (d) Post evaluation of Joint Emergency Communication Centre Project, Audit Commission January 2005-12-07.
- (e) The Future of the Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales: Mott MacDonald 2003, p 53 and p 55.

- (f) Letter from Ian McCartney MP to Nick Raynsford MP, 30 October 2003.
- (g) CFA Press Statement 24 March 2004.
- (h) Fire and Rescue Comprehensive Performance Assessment: Audit Commission July 2005.

Memorandum by McCartney Associates (FRS 08)

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

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

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

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

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 If the pessimists are to be believed, the UK Fire and Rescue Service are in turmoil. For the last half century this traditional, pseudo-militaristic organisation has only been tasked with reacting to fires—dealing with whatever is thrown at it at the time (as best as it can) and, for the remainder, waiting for the next incident to happen. But as a result of the settlement that followed the national strikes in 2002–03 and new global terrorist threats, individual Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA's) now have to ensure their services can effectively plan ahead, prevent emergencies as well as respond to them, engage in wider local and national government agendas, show robust governance frameworks and strong leadership as well as effectively managing their performance—whilst, at the same time, demonstrating value for money. In addition, all of this has to be achieved in double-quick time with a de-motivated workforce and the continuing opposition of wounded trade union. CPA and the National Framework Document are seen as tools introduced in order to keep this modernisation process on track.

1.2 From an external viewpoint, there is some truth in all of these statements, but this perspective is essentially myopic in nature. It is true that the Service is currently the subject of a fundamental change programme—not just relating to what it does, but also in respect to its culture and its core values. However, the modernisation agenda did not appear overnight and many FRA's have spent the last 20 years or more diversifying their services in order to respond more effectively to local needs, as well as establishing strong partnerships and in-house teams aimed at promoting prevention and community safety—despite the lack of leadership, financial support and statutory provision from government. Furthermore, public satisfaction remains consistently high, even after the industrial action, which suggests the Service has successfully met the expectations of local communities over a long period—not something many other public sector organisations can boast. In fact, there are many examples of good and even best practice within the Fire and Rescue Service arena that other public sector organisations could greatly benefit from. However, a large amount of this innovative work may be sidelined or even hamstrung as individual services try to tackle the scale and pace of the modernisation agenda.

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

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

2. REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES (RCC'S)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

3.1 The government believe that the development of closer working relationships between FRS's on a regional level (besides RCC's)—in areas such as procurement, resilience, training, specialist services and human resource management—will improve the effectiveness, efficiency and value for money of services in the medium term. In relation to procurement, it has also created a national procurement company (FireBuy Ltd), which it expects individual FRS's to use when procuring major service-specific items (Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006–08, para 2.20, page 20). However, there are growing concerns within FRS's that this move towards more regional and national agendas is bringing with it additional responsibilities and financial burdens that it is expected to assimilate into its current structures and budgets.

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

already provided by firefighters working the retained duty system, the ability for FRS's to divert resources into other services is extremely limited and would also require a detailed case to be made which addresses any rural proofing issues.

3.3 On the issue of procurement in more general terms, the economies of scale brought about by regional and national working do not appear to be capable of delivering the savings first anticipated, because well-established relationships in certain areas are already achieving these cost-reductions. For example, the South West FRA's have been collaborating for some time on regional procurement issues, most recently in relation to its Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Breathing Apparatus (BA). In contrast, the national Integrated Clothing Project continues to run into legal and funding difficulties, despite its apparent endorsement by government (Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006–08, para 2.19, page 20).

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

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

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

4. FINANCE

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

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

4.3 More importantly, as a result of the first round of CPA, services are now faced with implementing significant changes and improvements to both their service provision and organisational culture against a backdrop of diminishing financial flexibility—as "Gershon" savings totalling £105 million nationally are needed by 2007–08 and the majority of investment following the industrial action has gone on firefighters' wages. Adding to these pressures is the possible longer-term impact of having to self-fund aspects of the national resilience programme from local budgets.

4.4 Overall, the scale of the modernisation agenda—compounded with the compressed timelines for implementation and the restrictions on finances—adds up to a cocktail of unsustainable pressures on the Service. In simple project management terms, cost, quality and time need to be balanced if a desired and sustainable end-product is to be achieved.

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

5. JOINT WORKING

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

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

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

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

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

6. CONCLUSIONS

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

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

1. CHESHIRE OVERVIEW

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

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

2. CONTEXT

2.1 Cheshire Fire Authority and Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service are widely seen as forward looking and the Authority recently achieved a "Good" rating in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process. The Service has consistently shown that it is keen to embrace the changes and opportunities presented through the modernisation agenda. This was demonstrated in autumn 2002, when the Service was visited by Professor Sir George Bain and his team as part of the evidence gathering phase of their inquiry into the state of the UK fire and rescue service. The team visited Cheshire because of its well developed community safety activities, and not, as was the case stated for several other authorities, the result of composition or structure. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service has also previously submitted written and oral evidence to this Committee during a previous inquiry in 2003-04.

3. SUMMARY

3.1 Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service greeted the recent announcement of the Minister, in relation to the introduction of Regional Control Centres, as a positive development both in terms of the impact on the local economy (the selected site lies within the Cheshire Fire Authority area) and from a public service perspective. It is felt that the new centre will improve resilience and service delivery within and between fire and rescue services, but also with other emergency services.

3.2 The Service also feels that the FireLink project presents an opportunity to develop a much more integrated means of communication that can only benefit the community and be more effective. However, we would express concern at the slow progress in assembling the FireControl project and the FireLink project into a single programme of change; given the vital requirement that both projects require a high level of interoperability and are implemented in a complementary way. We would also suggest that the Committee considers the issue of handheld or fireground communications. Previously these have not been truly considered as part of either project, being viewed as "out of scope". We feel however, that this may cause communication problems in the future and pose a significant threat to resilience, particularly at the scene of major incidents where the need is greatest. The extent of this risk was demonstrated through the terrorist attacks on London in July 2005.

3.3 With regard to the second part of the Committee's Inquiry, the Fire Service's Act 2004 and the National Framework documents have enabled Cheshire to pursue many wider projects and work-streams than was possible under the constraints of the old 1947 Act; especially in the area of community risk reduction and partnership working. The Service has developed a number of innovative programmes designed to improve engagement with local communities and to emphasise the fire safety message. However,

the Service expresses some concern at the narrow use of the concept of “fire prevention” that continues to hold sway in some areas of government and at the wider national level. This narrow concept does not reflect the reality or the true potential for the fire service nationally to develop its services to meet modern community needs and risks; for example the Service in Cheshire has recently led on an ambitious strategy to combat death and injury on local roads, where we currently rescue three times as many people than from fires.

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

4. KEY ISSUES

4.1 *FireControl*

4.1.1 As outlined above, the announcement of the Minister with regard to the implementation of the FireControl project was greeted in Cheshire as a broadly positive development in two respects. Firstly, the location of the new site has been announced as Lingley Mere Business Park near Great Sankey in Warrington. This is seen as a good development for Cheshire as the site is within the Fire Authority area and there will be a positive impact on the local economy. Secondly, from a professional and public services perspective, the Service feels that the implementation of Regional Control Centres (RCC’s) will provide a more resilient and responsive service to people across the North West. Additional staff and resources will ensure that calls are answered more quickly and there will be less danger of calls backing-up in the event of major or high profile incidents. The prevalence of mobile telephones means that even quite small incidents in high profile locations can result in a volume of

4.1.2 The Service and Authority also acknowledge public concern over the potential loss of local knowledge involved in setting up a new control centre in a new location. We believe however, that this will not be borne out in reality, as the enhanced technology supporting the centre will automatically identify the nearest available fire appliance, when a call is received. Modern GIS systems and mapping technology also means that locations are more easily and quickly determined than ever before, removing the need to rely on local knowledge. A more valid concern involves the political issues surrounding the implementation of such a high profile regional project and its implications for local accountability and for democratic control of the governing entity. A number of elected Members remain concerned at the dilution of local councillors’ influence on key projects of this nature.

4.1.3 The Service and the Authority ask for a wider recognition of these concerns on the part of government and a more open approach with regard to their plans and ambitions for the roles of regions. It is also suggested that the role of the Regional Fire and Rescue Management Boards be further clarified, especially in the light of developments with the Police and Ambulance Services. Finally, we remain concerned with the funding arrangements and the business case for RCC’s, both in the short and long term and believe that the true cost of the resilience dimension of the project is not currently being fully recognised or acknowledged. These are real risks for the reputations of local fire authorities who retain responsibility if not control.

4.2 *FireLink*

4.2.1 Firstly, the Service strongly believes that this issue should not be considered in isolation from the implementation of regional control centres. Indeed, such is the level of interoperability between the two issues that the Service considers it vital that the projects be combined and their implementation be brought together in more coordinated way. The Service cites the sophistication of the technology involved in both projects and the level of integration required, as a concern in terms of ensuring effective resilience, both within the region and between the nine proposed centres. We would also suggest that particular consideration be given to the potential problems resulting from the number of contracts and sub contracts involved in delivering the project; we feel that there are too many points of failure in the system and further consideration needs to be given to simplifying the processes involved, to reduce these risks and enable better project management.

4.2.2 On a wider issue, we feel that consideration should also be given to the implications for the operational procedures of individual fire services, resulting from the reality of several services liaising with a single control centre. We feel that there needs to be recognition at the national level of the need to simplify and harmonise mobilising procedures in order to ensure interoperability and resilience. Additionally, we also feel it necessary to highlight the fact that fireground radios and handheld communications have not been considered as part of either of these two national projects, which means that there are important implications for the effectiveness of both. We stress the importance of the ability of all communications to be compatible and therefore, this is a vital issue with implications for resilience and future effectiveness of both FireControl and FireLink.

4.2.3 The final issue which we wish to raise in relation to the first part of your inquiry relates to the perceived disparity over the future direction of the national fire service. This is highlighted through the recognition of “localism” through Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMP’s) and the perceived need to develop harmonised procedures at the regional and super-regional level as a result of the development of regional control centres and the requirements of national resilience.

4.2.4 We feel some further clarity is required in this area from the government as this discrepancy will lead to confusion as to the type of fire service emergency response the public can expect.

4.3 *Progress on wider fire and rescue service reform*

Fire Prevention

4.3.1 The continuing use of the narrow concept of fire prevention at the national level has convinced Cheshire that there is still an inability on the part of government to appreciate the effect, or to see the future potential, of the huge amount of work undertaken in the field of community safety and risk reduction since the introduction of the Government White Paper; and especially in the last twelve months.

4.3.2 The narrow description of Fire Prevention used by the Committee and elsewhere at the national level, demonstrates the short distance that perceptions in the centre have travelled, when compared to the reality of the wide-ranging work undertaken by fire and rescue services nationally. The Service acknowledges the concerns over “mission creep” for fire and rescue services, but asks that the Committee considers the potential of the fire service to support wider government aims with its partners in local government and based on existing examples of good practice seen around the country. Special consideration should be given to areas such as youth engagement, where Cheshire have pioneered several successful schemes such as Fire Cadets, Kooldown, Drive-Survive, Community Safety Teams and the country’s first Fire Cadet unit inside a Young Offenders Institute. This is helping to change attitudes and improve young people’s prospects, as well as helping to preventing the occurrence of future problems such as arson.

Institutional Arrangements

4.3.3 After considering the institutional arrangements, which support the work of local fire and rescue services, several major issues have been highlighted as requiring further consideration to allow services to be delivered more effectively.

4.3.4 Firstly, following a protracted period of negotiation with our representative bodies locally, Cheshire has managed to secure the implementation of a new duty system for our whole-time personnel. However, this has not been without considerable delay and negotiation difficulties. Although we have maintained positive relationships with trade union colleagues locally throughout the process, it would be true to characterise the FBU’s organisational approach to change as one of resistance. Accordingly, it is our suggestion that the negotiation protocols be reconsidered by government as there remains the potential for stagnation and stalling tactics, but nevertheless, we welcome the freedom of local negotiation.

4.3.5 In addition to this issue, it is also requested that fire and rescue services receive further clarification on the future role HM Inspectorate of Fire Services and the basis on which operational assurance will be provided locally. The Service acknowledges the role of CPA in providing an assessment and a benchmark for the effectiveness of a service’s governance protocols and processes, but the exclusion of operational effectiveness from that procedure, and the corresponding changes to the name and role of the Inspectorate, leaves a gap which needs to be filled to give public confidence in an effective emergency response.

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

Diversity

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

4.4 *Joint Working*

4.4.1 The Fire Authority takes a leading role in engaging with the North West Regional Management Board. The Chairman of the Regional Board is the Vice Chair of Cheshire Fire Authority and Leader of the North West Regional Assembly. It is our view that there are many benefits to working in partnership with our partner fire and rescue services in the North West. As mentioned in an earlier part of this memorandum however, openness and clarity of purpose are seen as key to enhancing regional working, and for this there needs to be movement on the part of government to set out clearly its intentions and expectations for the regions. Only a clear message on regionalism will allow Regional Boards to work together to deliver the many benefits offered by collaboration without the suspicion of the introduction of regional fire authorities by the back door.

4.4.2 It is an emerging theme that structural change is likely given the situation with both the police and ambulances services, therefore, there needs to be a requirement and position from government on the way forward. It is fair to say that RMB's are rapidly approaching a crossroads of achieving almost all that can be achieved through collaboration. The next step will necessitate further structural reform and constitutional clarity. We are not necessarily advocating this step; rather we are seeking clarity in order to avoid wasting time, effort and resources in fruitless collaborative reviews as a prelude to "extinction".

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

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

THE BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY FORUM

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

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

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

GENERAL

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

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

HOME RISK FIRE CHECKS

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

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS STRATEGY

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

MAKING LINKS WITH HOUSING SUPPORT AND SOCIAL CARE

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

LEAD AUTHORITY PARTNERSHIP SCHEME

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

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

should be considered and/or encouraged as an alternative.

REGULATORY REFORM (FIRE SAFETY) ORDER

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

- (a) the timely launch of the eFire Portal on 19 April 2006, which will give ready access to fire safety information and gateway to other links for building managers and owners of small and medium enterprises, who will have fire prevention and fire safety obligations under the new RRO; and
- (b) existing local initiatives to raise awareness of the impending RRO by visiting commercial premises. The BCSF would encourage these and other RRO related proactive initiatives.

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

INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLANS

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

CHARGING

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

GENERAL

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

BUILDING BULLETIN 100

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

- (a) The installation of sprinkler protection and other fire suppression systems in schools. However, the BCSF wishes to see the installation of sprinklers or equivalent fire suppression systems in all schools, as standard, not on a risk assessment basis; and
- (b) Fire prevention, as part of fire and life safety, should be considered during the school design process. Thoughtful pro-active infrastructure design could involve input from:
 - (i) local Fire and Rescue Services and their Integrated Risk Management Plans;
 - (ii) future occupiers and managers of schools, future insurers; and
 - (iii) other sources of local knowledge.
- (c) The use of retardation materials, which are sufficiently robust to withstand considerable abuse, and which are regularly maintained and promptly repaired.

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

APPROVED DOCUMENT B

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

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

MODERN METHODS OF CONSTRUCTION

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

Memorandum by Devon Fire and Rescue Authority (FRS 11)

INTRODUCTION

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

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

THE INTRODUCTION OF REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES

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

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

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

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

THE INTRODUCTION OF AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS FOR FIRELINK RADIO SERVICES

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

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

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

PROGRESS ON FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE REFORM

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

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

Transitional funding has been of assistance to Fire and Rescue Authorities in supporting the not insignificant increase in budget necessary to deliver the pay agreement 2003. This was particularly burdensome for rural authorities with more retained firefighters than wholtime firefighters. A fact that appeared to have been overlooked at the time. Although the ethos of the pay agreement was that management and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) would work together to deliver the required changes in return for the high settlement, as can be seen from the industrial action taking place around the country this is taking longer to deliver than anticipated. We believe that it is essential, therefore, that ODPM agrees to delay the repayment of the transitional funding for a further year.

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

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

FIRE PREVENTION

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

PROMOTING DIVERSITY

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

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

The ODPM target is to ensure that 15% of the uniformed workforce is female by 2009. However, it is important to realise that we are working from a very low base. Only in recent years have we seen the repeal of the statutory controls on the minimum height of firefighters that excluded 80% of the female population. It is important, therefore, to recognise that Fire Authorities are not to blame for the current position. Nevertheless, more needs to be done and we are working hard to improve female representation in the workforce. However, ODPM should recognise that the target of 15% by 2009 is simply unachievable.

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

JOINT WORKING

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

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

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

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

CIVIL RESILIENCE

The ODPM is to be congratulated on the development of the New Dimension programme, which is considerably enhancing the capability of the Fire and Rescue Service to respond to a major terrorist attack or other disaster. Devon Fire and Rescue Service is one of 20 strategically located Fire and Rescue Services around the country with an Urban Search and Rescue Team. The vehicles, equipment, training facilities and staffing costs are all being met by ODPM and we warmly welcome that. However, the property requirements for the establishment of the team mean that we do not have existing suitable property. Unfortunately, ODPM has taken the view that it will not meet the costs of such property needs leaving individual Fire and Rescue Authorities in the impossible position of having to meet those needs from existing resources. It is essential that the ODPM reconsiders this position to ensure that Fire and Rescue Services can meet the ODPM target date of March 2007 for full operational availability of Urban Search and Rescue Teams.

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

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

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

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

Memorandum by Cornwall County Fire Brigade (FRS 13)

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

REGIONAL FIRE CONTROL

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

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

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

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

The position of my Authority has not changed.

FIRELINK

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

PROGRESS ON FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE REFORM

Cornwall County Fire Brigade is a small organisation, with just 203 whole time personnel and with just 144 of these personnel attached to fire stations to provide community safety activity and front line operational response. The Brigade also has an establishment of 425 retained personnel, an establishment which it struggles to maintain, the actual numbers being around 400. There are two whole time shift stations and five whole time day crewed stations, the whole time personnel on both the shift and day crewed stations are backed up by retained personnel. The remaining 24 stations are fully retained.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Chief Fire Officer

Memorandum by Paul Holmes MP (FRS 14)

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

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

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

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

The East Midlands FBU has drawn to my attention the ODPM’s Outline Business Case. This states that there is a “high risk” that spiralling costs will lead to pressure to cut frontline services and could push up council tax. It also states that the risk of “delay or even total project failure” is “high” with a “very high” impact if it does fail.¹ The risk is so high because of “the recent history of delivering IT/change projects in the public sector has demonstrated a less than 50% success rate”.² There is a high risk that “the current provisional timescales may not be achieved” which would “increase project cost” at an estimated £11.4 million per six month delay per region.

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

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority are pleased to be invited to contribute to the inquiry into the Fire and Rescue Service. Whilst it is hoped that the evidence submitted to the Select Committee, within this document will be clear and readily understood, Members of the Authority and Officers of our Fire and Rescue Service would be pleased to supplement this information should the Select Committee require additional details or clarification.

1.2 Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority is recognised as being innovative and at the leading edge of fire and rescue service reform. We have also demonstrated that through changes in our approach to protecting communities, real, tangible and measurable improvements can be made. For example, by taking responsibility for making communities safer from the perils of fire, the number of people killed or injured in accidental domestic dwelling fires fell by more than 69% in the period 2001–02 to 2004–05. That equates to around 140 people living without the effects of being harmed by fire.

1.3 In addition, we recognise the advantage to be gained if the issues that our Service deals with on a daily basis are progressed in partnership with the many other agencies, that face the similar issues at strategic and operational levels. Essentially, we have demonstrated that there are clear links between the specific problems a range of agencies have to deal with in certain communities and a wider ranging root cause—social exclusion.

¹ Outline Business Case, p 42, Resilience Risk Profile table, para 141.

² Ibid.

1.4 Consequently, we have invested significantly in developing positive working relationships with all of those agencies operating in these areas, which has led to effective working partnerships which are delivering real improvements.

1.5 Arson reduction is a key challenge facing our communities. The Fire and Rescue Act 2004 assists in developing the Service role in fire investigation, but the degree to which this is occurring is variable and reflects often limited investment in this critically important area. Aligning priorities and targets across Government Departments, in particular ODPM and Home Office would enable a more integrated approach at a local level, to the development of effective arson reduction strategies

1.6 Our focus is not just on fire related issues. We recognise that the impact of our work is much wider than is generally appreciated and that we have a valuable contribution to make to the broader social inclusion, community cohesion and neighbourhood renewal agendas.

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

2. RESPONSES TO SPECIFIC AREAS OF INQUIRY

2.1 *Regional Control Centres and Firelink Radio Services*

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

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

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

2.2 *Fire Prevention*

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

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

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

2.3 *Institutional Arrangements and Reform*

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

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

2.4 *Promoting Diversity*

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

2.4.2 We have pursued the achievement of diversity with enthusiasm and have achieved limited success. Our workforce is increasingly diverse. However, the data used to measure this area of performance fails to recognise what has been achieved as it is sharply focussed on only one group of employees—operational firefighters. Whilst this is an important measure, it is not the only indicator of levels of diversity within an organisation. Consequently, we believe that diversity of the whole workforce, not just one element of it, should be measured and reported.

2.5 *Joint Working with other Emergency Services*

2.5.1 Undoubtedly, there is a great deal of benefit to be realised through effective joint working with other emergency services. In Staffordshire, we have a good record of effective liaison, with all responding agencies being committed to the Staffordshire Integrated Emergency Planning (SIEP) arrangements, that have now been transformed into the Local Resilience Forum following the introduction of the Civil Contingencies Act. A revised Staffordshire Resilience Forum/Civil Contingency Unit has been established and is collaboratively resourced, demonstrating a real commitment by all Staffordshire Cat 1 Organisations to improve resilience across the County.

2.5.2 This joint working relationship has delivered effective operational response capabilities together with other benefits. For example, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service have shared wide area radio facilities with the local Police. Whilst this arrangement is soon to end with the introduction of the Firelink solution, it has provided a cost effective and reliable service for many years. Beyond the operational levels, close and effective working relationships are maintained by regular meetings of the political and professional leaders of the Emergency Services in Staffordshire.

2.5.3 Although co-responding schemes with ambulance services is viewed by many, as a critical element of modernisation, the Fire Services contribution is dependant on the requirements of the Ambulance Trust, which remains responsible for emergency intervention standards and protocols. In Staffordshire, the Ambulance Trust/Service strategy is well established, based on extensive development of a wide network of community first responders. The provision of one corresponding station in a rural location continues to be the Fire and Rescue Service's expected contribution. Limited as this provision is, the scheme, which has been in operation for many years and has saved the lives of a number of local people.

2.5.4 A key feature of our effective collaborative partnerships is co-terminosity. This relates not only to our work with other emergency services, but also with the many other agencies, in particular local authorities with whom we are working increasingly to address a wide range of social problems. As highlighted above, it is important that any reorganisation of other Services enables and facilitates close and effective local partnerships.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 There can be no doubt that the effectiveness of the fire and rescue service has improved markedly since the reform programme commenced. Indeed, many of the changes made nationally reflect the work that were already progressing in Staffordshire, albeit within the constraining environment of the previous national standards of fire cover and regulatory framework.

3.2 We welcome the modernisation of the Service and are energetically pursuing reform. However, there are some areas of concern, which we have highlighted above. There is nevertheless, no doubt that these issues can be overcome, allowing our fire and rescue service to realise its full potential and make an even fuller contribution to the development of well being and prosperity in all of our communities.

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

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANISATION

1. This memorandum is submitted on behalf of the West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority which is the fourth largest such Authority in England responsible for the provision of fire and rescue services to a population of over 2.1 million comprising the metropolitan districts of Leeds, Bradford, Kirklees, Wakefield and Calderdale, from whose Councils the 22 Members comprising the Authority are drawn. The Authority employs nearly 1,600 full time firefighters plus 199 retained firefighters and 265 non operational support staff

INTRODUCTION

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

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

3. It is reasonable to state that not all elected Members enjoy total confidence over the manner in which the FiReControl project is being managed at a national level, especially with regard to the provision of information they feel is essential for local debate and democratic accountability where decisions are sought from the national body.

4. It is apparent that concerns over financial clarity and the limited identification of tangible benefits to the FRA are overshadowing the purported operational FRS benefits the RCC project may deliver. An iterative process of constructing the project business case has not been received well at both local or regional political levels with elected members remaining concerned about the true costs of the project itself and the ongoing running costs that will need to be met by individual FRA's following implementation of the RCC. It is essential that the full extent of these extra costs be identified and met by central government under "New Burdens" principles.

5. To enable elected members to fully engage in communicating the benefits of the project to service users and the wider populace they represent, it is imperative that the current low confidence is addressed and that the representatives of the general public feel they have been fully engaged in the planning, delivery and implementation processes.

6. There is little argument with the guiding principles of the project that the new national network of control centres should help deliver an even better service to the public than at present. Indeed, there remains a compelling need to modernise the control centre function, especially in the wake of events such as 9/11 and 7/7. While existing control rooms continue to provide a good service, they are not designed to deal with major regional or national events that now require a resilient, co-ordinated and technically capable delivery infrastructure to cope with new modern-day demands.

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

7. O2 Airwave Ltd has very recently been announced as the preferred supplier against the Firelink contract. Airwave is a resilient national digital radio communications network dedicated to the emergency services and other authorised public safety users. It is constructed on technology that is proven and the network is already built and designed to meet the demands of public safety users. The addition of the FRS customer base should have minimal impact on the overall network.

8. Airwave is built specifically to deliver operational services. A guaranteed nationwide network that includes remote areas has been created. It is not reliant upon a relatively few number of masts, where each would be responsible for covering enormous geographical areas. Instead, Airwave has 3,300 masts around the country, most providing overlapping coverage with its adjacent mast, therefore offering unrivalled resilience in the event of mast failure.

9. Airwave is designed to provide a guaranteed fast response with push to talk communications between users. It also provides data and voice capability, which should allow the FRS to manage operational and command teams and resources effectively and get critical information quickly and accurately to crews.

10. Resilience is built into the network through route and component duplication and attack protection. Airwave is an encrypted network therefore malicious eavesdropping should not occur. Importantly, Airwave delivers interoperability between emergency services and between emergency services and other public safety agencies. Multi-agency talk groups can be pre-set like any other talk group for immediate use.

11. Airwave has already been chosen by the UK Police Forces. The Airwave network has over 150,000 current users, making it the largest network of its kind in the world. Airwave employs TETRA technology, which has been internationally proven. Lancashire FRS has been using Airwave for three years and apparently enjoy the additional functionality the system presents.

12. Regional roll-out programmes will take place over a 15–18 month period prior to FRS cut over from current control rooms to the new RCC's. The resource requirements during the roll-out will be quite significant for each of the constituent FRS's, including the need to arrange for permanent day to day Firelink contacts, control centre management contacts, operations department management contact, transport management contact, transport personnel, vehicle drivers and communications/IT management contact. A regional Roll-Out Board will be established in each region to ensure that the necessary structures and responsibilities are in place.

13. Activities that have been highlighted in advance that will form part of the roll-out programme include vehicle provision for equipment fitting, provision of information to suppliers, testing arrangements, fleet mapping, training provision, technical security arrangements, matters relating to legacy equipment and also charges for additional installation requests. Such call-off contract works will pose additional implications to the overall programme of works.

14. As part of the overall preparations, the regional FiReControl and Firelink projects must now be pulled together to aid information sharing and improve communications. A merger of the two projects at local and regional levels has been aided by the announcement of the proposed amalgamation of the Fire and Civil Resilience directorates within the ODPM under the leadership of one Senior Responsible Officer. WYFRS continue to act as the lead authority for both projects in the Yorkshire and Humber region, however, there will be a need to bring about structural revisions to the project once the full extent of the Firelink implementation programme is known and the new burdens issues relating to the FiReControl project have been finalised.

Progress made on Reform Post 2003 on

FIRE PREVENTION

15. West Yorkshire's Integrated Risk Management Plan is a key building block of the Authority's modernisation programme. Priority is given to the protection of life as well as the safeguarding of property and the environment. The plan is not just about responding to fires and other emergencies, that is only one part. Of equal importance are the other two pillars to our approach, prevention and protection.

16. Prevention is being best achieved by ensuring that everybody understands the danger of fire and takes simple action to limit the chances on one occurring. Protection is being achieved by the use of statutory powers to ensure buildings and people in them are safe and by use of the new statutory duty to promote fire safety, such as fitting of smoke detectors in homes across the county. The impending introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 is very much welcomed by this Authority.

17. Improvements in service delivery are now judged by how successful the Authority is at reducing the risk of fire and other accidents within the communities it serves. Risk reduction is the theme that now dominates our strategic aims and objectives. In addition to the home fire safety check workload the Authority is committed to reduce the number of deliberate fires. Arson affects everyone. It invades communities and threatens social and economic well-being. To tackle deliberate fire-setting and create safer places to live and work we continue to invest in local arson reduction projects.

18. We actively seek to work jointly with local partners in health, social services, housing, education, the voluntary sector and with other emergency services to reduce risk to vulnerable groups in line with our vision. It is essential that fire related issues are absorbed into the general programme and plans of action for regeneration, neighbourhood renewal and community cohesion. It is only through such forums and strategies that the Authority has become to contribute more effectively and become committed to the broader needs of the communities it serves.

19. The modernisation programme, which has so far included revision of key legislation and the formulation of a guiding national framework, is allowing this Authority to drive forward its local agenda for change that relates directly to the creation of safer communities. For instance, this Authority now commits resources to undertake as many as 60,000 home fire safety checks per year, whereas previously it was achieving approximately 10,000 per year.

20. The Chief Fire Officer and Authority are now confident that by 2010 accidental fire deaths in the home will have been reduced in line with the Government's Public Service Agreement targets. The Authority is now determined to harness its resources to extend access to all parts of the community. By establishing dedicated teams and capitalising on our network of community fire stations we are becoming educator, mentor, role-model, and source of information. This interaction with an increasingly wide range of individuals, groups, and organisations helps us redefine the traditional function of the service and breaks down barriers to further success.

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND REFORM

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

22. Whilst this Authority supports the overall purpose of the modernisation agenda including the creation of Regional Management Boards to share best practice and achieve benefits from greater collaboration between local fire and rescue authorities at regional level the Authority nevertheless strongly supports maximum flexibility and freedom of choice in decision making at local level and is concerned that some developments such as the proposed governance arrangements for FireBuy and for the future governance of the new regional control centres do not reflect and protect the leading role of local elected members and are likely to lead to the dilution of local accountability to the community. It is of vital importance that the democratic responsibility and accountability of local fire and rescue authorities to their local communities and the representative role of elected members are both fully recognised by central government when developing new strategies and creating new institutions pursuant to the modernisation agenda

23. *Financial Issues*

This Authority continues to deliver significant cashable efficiency savings the majority of these being redirected to fund the increasing and widening demands on the Authority.

24. There is concern over the funding of the fire service in particular that the Fire element of the Formula Spending Share does not truly reflect the cost of service provision. This is particularly stark in West Yorkshire where despite having the third lowest precept in the country it continues to receive the minimum revenue support grant protected only by the floor.

25. The Authority welcomes the revised funding mechanism for the firefighters pension scheme in principal. However exemplifications produced by the ODPM suggest that the loss of Revenue Support Grant in this Authority will exceed the reduction in pension costs by significant amounts placing a huge additional burden on the local council taxpayers. It is vital that the implication of the transfer of pension funding is monitored at authority level so that the transfer of the pension liability does not impact on the ability of Authorities to provide the core service.

PROMOTING DIVERSITY

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

27. *Equality and Diversity*

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

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

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

30. *The Grey Book*

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

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

32. *Discipline Procedures*

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

33. *Consultation and Negotiation Procedures*

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

34. *Rank to Role*

The purpose of rank to role is to rationalise the hierarchical structure into seven key roles. This will allow individuals to reach senior management positions before they are at the very end of their service.

35. The actual outcome of rank to role is that in fact, that many FRS have now more ranks than under the previous rank structure adopted. Essentially rank to role has created different ranks within a single role. The change has not realised any benefit, and has in fact created additional financial and procedural burdens to implement. The very fact of the necessity of the use of A and B within roles highlights the limitations of seven generic “Roles”.

36. *IPDS*

Assessment and development centres (ADCs) do not necessarily deliver better candidates than previously, this being primarily supply and demand driven as before. As they only test an individual’s managerial potential and do not test potential for command, they do not identify potential incident commanders. The ADCs have replaced the role-based exams already in place, with a more resource intensive set of selection tests. This represents a significant additional burden on FRS.

37. *Multi Tier Entry*

Within IPDS there is a requirement for existing operational staff to prove competence in their present role before progressing, yet individuals applying from outside the fire service, with no command experience whatsoever only need show generic management qualifications.

38. The implication that all the required command competence can be gained through a “development module” takes no account of the need for a commander at silver level, for example, to make operational judgments through the application of gained experience and proven competence, either of which cannot be easily taught to anyone entering the organisation without a grounding operationally and in the Incident Command System.

39. Other emergency services, such as the Police, are well aware of this fact and use a system of graduate or accelerated promotion, in which an individual must first prove competence as a uniformed operational Constable, before progressing to senior management. Such a system would be of value to the FRS and would allow the service to attract a better quality of candidate at point of entry were a graduate entry program available.

JOINT WORKING WITH OTHER EMERGENCY SERVICES

40. Joint emergency services working in the UK has been good for many years, and progressively opportunities have been taken to improve it, eg, post Clapham Rail Crash, Lockerbie, the widespread public disorder incidents in the early 1980’s; terrorist incidents and the like. The government publication “Dealing with Disaster” was based and updated on those lessons. Following the implementation of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, that guidance has now been improved considerably and renamed “Emergency Response and Recovery”.

41. Whereas the FRS modernisation agenda has itself not exclusively driven these changes, there is the clear area of common interest and focus of Resilience. The FRS New Dimension (ND) project, which addresses resilience from the FRS perspective, depends a lot on effective inter-agency working. This is progressing well but there are two areas that may benefit from scrutiny.

42. First, whereas the other emergency services and the FRS work well together, the FRS does not yet seem to have as robust a national mutual aid arrangement in place as, say, the police do with their national mobilisation plan.

43. FRSs are able, through the 2004 FRS Act, to make mutual aid arrangements with neighbouring, or other authorities or firefighting services providers, to ensure the provision of mutual assistance in times of need, or to discharge some or all of their statutory functions. In practice, this predominantly happens with immediate neighbours and only rarely with brigades further afield. This was understandable given the nature and extent of the expected operational challenge pre-9/11.

44. Now, however, there is a need for a wider sign-up to assist each other in times of crisis. Although the issue has been flagged up through ND channels, and appears as an issue in the Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006–08 (para 4.26) progress is slow and lacking in ownership between key stakeholders, ie, ODPM, LGA as employers, and CFOA as the professional advisors. Without a joined up, transparent scheme which describes, and underpins, powers of commanders, extent of duties of supporting authorities, consequent extent of liabilities, insurance issues, personnel welfare etc, then when the catastrophe occurs, valuable time will be spent in building structures and protocols which should already have been in place.

45. Second; although Regional Management Boards are attributed with a responsibility in the Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006–08 for “put(ting) in place effective resilience plans for large scale emergencies”, this responsibility appears to be poorly underpinned by an RMB’s constitution and powers. Even the Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006–08 itself, after outlining this duty on page 18, and referring for more detail to chapter 4, in fact never mentions the RMB again. This is not a case of a duty failing to be complied with, or of a gap in provision, rather of a potential for duplication and dilution of effort. In fact, all FRAs have the duty to do these things as Category One Responders under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004; thereafter to work with partner agencies within the local resilience forums, and after that to refine and harmonise these same plans at the multi-agency regional resilience forums. This all makes good sense and works well. Given the fact that all of the resilience functions of the FRS as described in para 4.9 of the Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework 2006–08 are discharged effectively through these statutory multi-agency forums, the role of the RMBs in FRS resilience is, therefore, unclear and possibly unnecessary.

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

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

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

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

SUMMARY

Regional Controls:

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

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

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

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

Modernisation:

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

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

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

THE INTRODUCTION OF REGIONAL FIRE CONTROLS

1. The objectives which ODPM have defined for this project are ones we would all share, in terms of improved resilience and greater interoperability. However there are a number of serious concerns about the way the project has been devised and has developed, which centre, in essence, on whether it has been an answer in search of a question. Rather than defining the objectives clearly from the outset, considering the current situation in detail and analysing the possible solutions, the project has suggested a number of regional centres and worked backwards from that position to find a rationale.

1.2 The practical result has been that important issues, such as legislative liability, are stumbled on late in the process. The lack of a clear project plan has resulted in *ad hoc* consideration of such issues and awkward attempts to fit them into a pre-determined result.

1.3 As with all major projects of this nature, there are issues and concerns that affect all stakeholders, and ultimately, our citizens and our communities. At this stage in the process, our concerns embody the following, which we wish to draw to the Committee’s attention:

1.4 *General*

1.4.1 There are statutory duties of fire authorities to safeguard the communities they serve, yet we are being forced to take decisions without full information being available and the responsibilities of authorities and Members remain unclear.

1.4.2 The lack of full acknowledgement of fire authorities’ interests and concerns by ODPM. There would appear to be little feedback when authorities comment on ODPM proposals.

1.4.3 The lack of a full Business Case and the absence of transparency of costs. Authorities have not seen the final business case and believe that it does not include all FRA costs involved in the project.

1.4.4 The OBC does not reflect the “out of scope” costs remaining with fire authorities.

1.4.5 National resilience is not a fire authority responsibility; therefore they should not accrue additional costs.

1.4.6 Additional costs of fire authorities only partly and unpredictably addressed through an unstructured “New Burdens” process.

1.4.7 No realisation by the ODPM of the effect on fire authority staff of the project, in terms of retention and continuance.

1.4.8 Uncertainty and lack of ownership of governance arrangements.

1.4.9 Capacity issues for individual fire authorities. There appears to be little realisation that fire service personnel have a “day” job outside of the project. Technical staff are required to work on the project because of imposed time constraints, without giving authorities the ability to back fill.

2. *Project Strategy*

2.1 Project vision is broad-brush, but complete neither in extent (logic suggests it leads to a regional/national fire service) nor in detail.

2.2 Concerns about whether the technological vision is achievable are as follows:

- (a) The components of the solution are mostly tried and tested technology, but have not previously been used at this scale (nine interchangeable systems serving 46 different services).
- (b) Management of this national solution to ensure all nine copies function fully and in the same way from the start, agreeing, testing and then implementing a programme of enhancements over the next 15 years will be potentially slow, expensive, and require considerable staff resource.
- (c) A linked configuration of nine identical systems introduces the possibility of total national computer failure, which in the current set-up of 46 varied and unconnected systems is small.
- (d) By the time the RCCs go live, they will actually constitute a step backwards for many of the more advanced services.

2.3 By establishing control centres for the Government Office Regions, the assumption is that “one size fits all”, regardless of geographic area, size of the requirement, or number/size of Fire and Rescue Authorities involved.

2.4 *Costs:* Cost and benefit analysis has not been adequate. The ODPM believes that the project will deliver nationally average savings of 30% but it is difficult to have confidence in this given the lack of definition of the project at this stage. In addition, there is little recognition of the hidden costs for fire authorities who will now need to manage “out of scope” issues and the impacts this will have on other services within the Fire and Rescue Service or other local authority services. Current estimates for these, admittedly based upon an incomplete picture of how the RCC will operate, vary between £170,000 and £575,000 per annum per FRS (depending on size of service). For the South East as a whole, this could mean additional costs of up to £3m. Clearly these will make achievement of 30% savings an impossibility and, therefore, drastically reduce the amount of money which will be available for reinvestment in the Service.

3. *Project Implementation*

3.1 Assumption of a regional structure eg a seminar arranged by the national project for “Regional ICT Managers”. In fact, no ICT Manager, or other manager, has any authority outside of their own FRS.

3.2 The national project team has stated that it is using an accepted project management methodology, PRINCE2, and related OGC guidelines to reduce the risks of the project, but this is not apparent to the regional teams, who therefore cannot themselves apply PRINCE2 meaningfully. Few of the national project team are PRINCE2-qualified.

3.3 *Timescales:* These appear to have been determined based upon the financial model for the project, rather than on a detailed assessment of what needs to be done and how thoroughly. Indeed, the national project team has not yet managed to keep to any of its own target dates.

3.4 Due to the lack of a detailed plan (see below) and persistent unreliability of dates given by the national project team, regional project teams are unable to plan and allocate resources to do the necessary work. This has an impact on the quality of the work and makes it difficult to provide strategic oversight due to the piecemeal approach of the national project team. It also increases the stress experienced by staff, who take the service they provide very seriously and who often have to choose at short notice whether to compromise the quality of the returns they make to the national project on their FRA’s behalf, or to compromise their day-job of keeping the existing 999 service running, knowing that either might have a most serious impact on their FRA’s statutory responsibilities and public safety.

3.5 The uncertain timescales mean it is more difficult for regional project teams to involve locally-elected members in any discussion. This is exacerbated by the slowness (months) of response to any points the FRAs or Regional Management Board put forward.

3.6 *Engagement of national organisations:* The project has failed to engage the LGA/National Employers to provide timely information and leadership. This means uncertainty for affected staff, and duplication of effort for FRAs.

3.7 *Communication*: In spite of its expressed preference for cooperative working and open communications, the national project has persistently been unable to circulate documents for meetings in a timely manner or through the agreed co-ordinating points of contact in regional teams. It has also failed to clarify to regional teams what information can be shared with FRAs. Finally the national project has failed to set up the ODPM-standard collaborative software that would allow teams within the national project to access key documents, and would make communication with regional teams simpler and more reliable. All of this affects the ability of the FRAs and regional teams to deliver a considered response to the national project, accept the results of consultations and “work smarter” to overcome resource issues.

3.8 *Project Plan*: In spite of repeated urgent requests from this regional team and others, through various stakeholder fora, the national project has not been able to provide an up-to-date plan or assessment of the “critical path” ie which tasks are prerequisites for other work.

3.9 *Funding*: Given their different sizes, regions have established teams with a different balance of work between “regional” teams and FRA staff. Regardless of which approach has been taken, funding provided by ODPM has been too short-term and inadequate to build up the necessary underpinning capability.

3.10 Principles of “New Burdens” apply, but the national project’s definitions of what constitutes a new burden, does not match the additional work required to deliver this project. Whilst this is not affecting council tax levels at present, it is affecting FRAs’ ability to deliver this project as well as do other improvement work.

3.11 *FireLink*: The FiReControl and FireLink projects have been set up very differently by ODPM, which does not make it easy for the FRAs to coordinate the demands on their staff (and both projects have a critical dependency on the same very small number of key specialists).

3.12 *Financial/Legal*: although numerous questions and concerns have been asked as early as December 2004 on:

- the Tax and VAT implications of the proposed governing entity; and
- effects of the RCCs on Chief Fire Officers’ and FRAs’ statutory responsibilities.

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

THE INTRODUCTION OF AND IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS FOR “FIRELINK” RADIO SERVICES

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

PROGRESS ON FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE REFORM

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

5. *Service “Freedoms”*

We welcome the removal of some of the constraints placed on fire authorities in terms of fire/incident cover assessment and the introduction of local conditions consultation and negotiation. This is making a real difference to the way the service is delivered. However, that “freedom” places a great emphasis and responsibility on individual fire authorities to develop local policies and procedures. The missing element is a national co-ordinating and advice centre allowing authorities to “pick and mix” policies for local implementation without high development costs. The embryonic system with CFOA and the ODPM, whilst helpful, does not currently meet our needs.

6. *Fire Safety*

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

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

7. *Institutional reforms*

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

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

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

7.4 As the Committee will be aware, there are now a number of governance structures applying to fire authorities—Combined Fire Authorities, County Councils and the various Metropolitan options. We believe this leads to confusion and hinders “like for like” comparisons between authorities for CPA or similar purposes. It is our belief that the “county” model offers the most effective structure.

8. *Finance*

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

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

9. *Partnership Working*

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

10. *Civil Emergencies*

As the work of the Fire and Rescue Service has evolved in recent years to encompass a wider civil emergency response, we have been grateful for the government's support for the New Dimension agenda. We hope the government continues to support this additional work, which is crucial to effectiveness of the Critical National Infrastructure. In addition, we believe that the issue of co-responding is one which the Fire and Rescue Service should engage in through partnerships with the Ambulance Services. We are aware of the FBU's opposition to co-responder schemes, but cannot agree with their view that this is not the responsibility of the Fire and Rescue Services. We would be pleased to see government put into place the necessary arrangements to support Fire Authorities in implementing co-responder schemes where there is an identified community need.

11. *Introduction of the Integrated Personnel Development System*

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

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

The South West Regional Management Board continues to fully support the work of the Modernisation Agenda. The South West will be one of the first regions to move into a Regional Control Centre currently expected during 2008–09. This region considers that FiReControl and Firelink are the most crucial elements of this agenda, and therefore continues to prioritise as such.

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

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

BACKGROUND

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

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

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

THE ISSUE

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

1. Recent history of delivering IT change projects in the public sector has shown a less than 50% success rate. If the two projects continue to be run independently, there is a greater risk of project failure due to reduced coordination.

2. The FiReControl Outline Business Case makes reference to an inextricable link with the Firelink project. The projects' lack of full integration remains a significant barrier to efficient operation of both projects.

3. Both projects require regional level structures with Principal Officers and other technical personnel needing to attend, depending on the level. The two projects involve similar people but the misalignment of projects at a national level sometimes requires two separate meetings at regional level, particularly at project team level. This introduces inefficiencies and duplication of effort, as well as, misinformation, and lost opportunities caused by assumed knowledge that is not in fact there. If the two projects were combined this would introduce efficiencies and greater knowledge and appreciation of both projects. Closed agenda items could be used if necessary for commercial reasons.

4. Currently both projects employ significant delivery and project management resource which could be rationalised creating substantial savings if the two projects were merged.

5. The workloads that the two projects put on Fire and Rescue services often compete for the same FRS resources at the same time. This has the potential to cause conflict and is inefficient if not managed in a coordinated manner. If the two projects were combined or formally run as a programme, an integrated plan could be developed identifying "clashes" and pinch points. An early resolution could then be sought, to prioritise the work according to the needs of the programme to support the successful delivery of both projects.

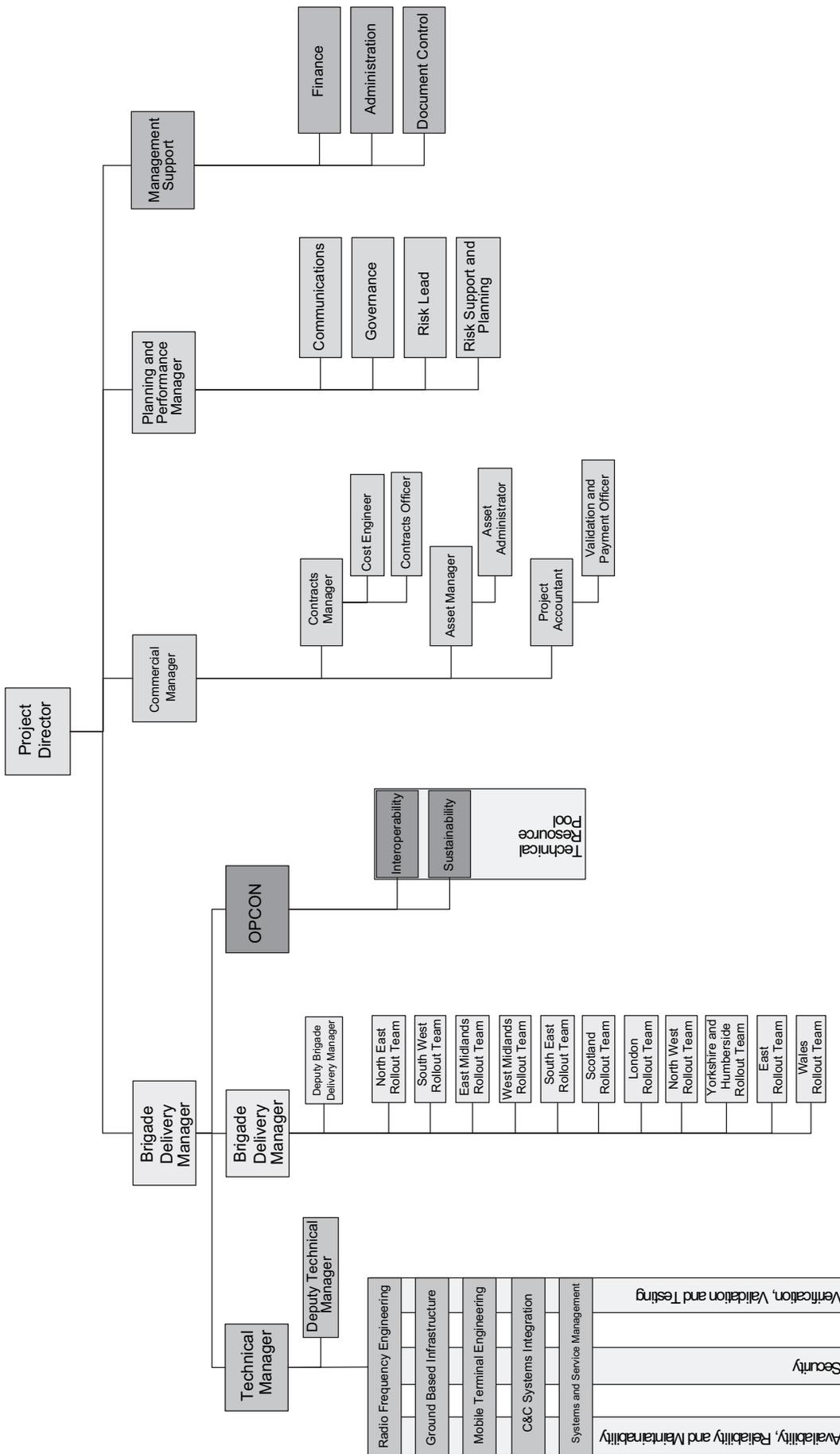
6. FiReControl are providing software to go onto Firelink hardware. An agreement to allow FiReControl contractors access to Firelink hardware will be needed. At present, because the two projects are operating separately, how this might be operated at a practical level has not been considered and this will only serve to introduce problems later. If the projects were integrated such problems could be resolved before contract award therefore reducing the potential cost to both projects.

CONCLUSION

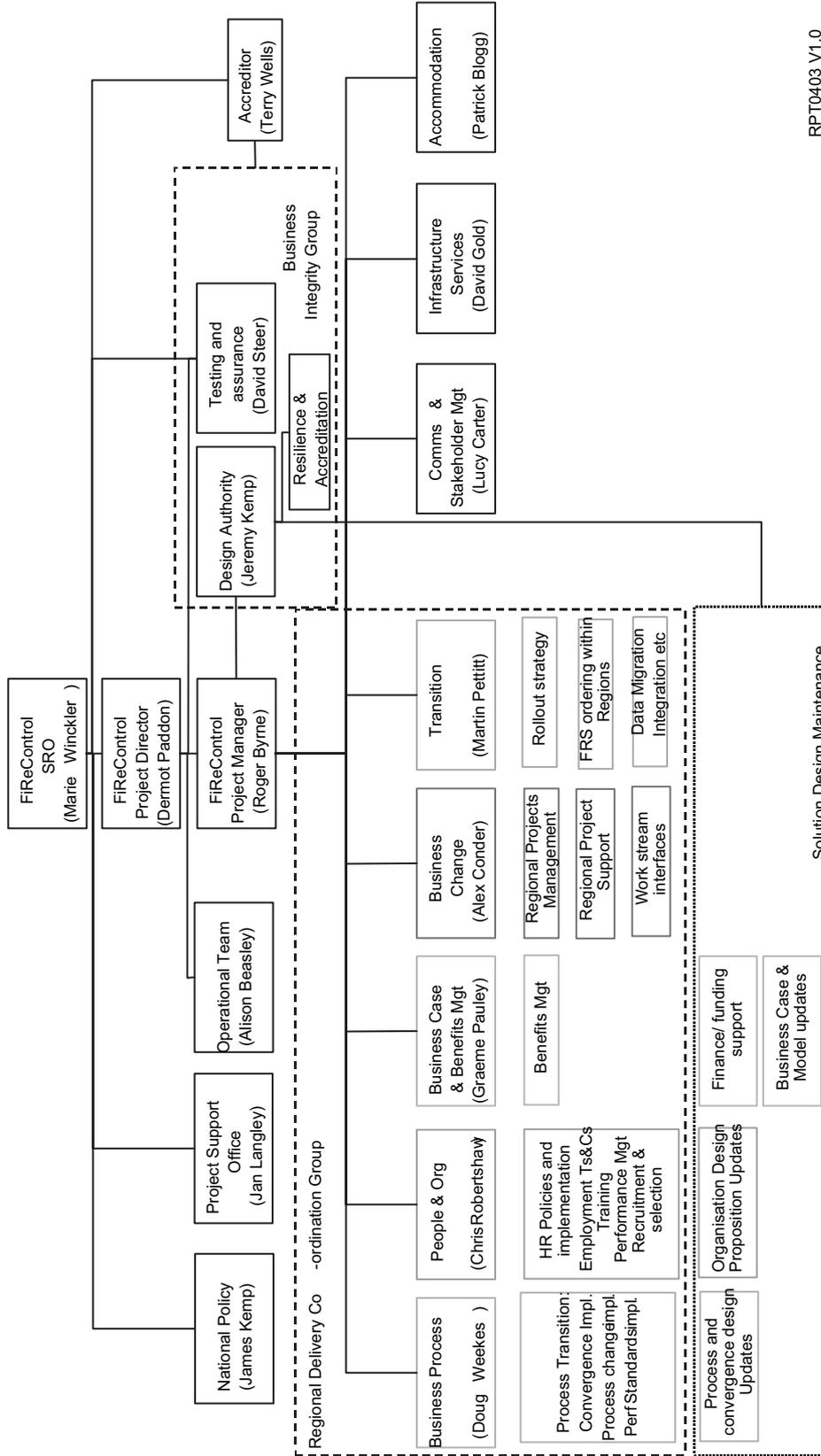
This is a risk critical project upon which, the lives of the general public and firefighters will depend. For the whole of the project to be successfully delivered there needs to be an open and transparent information exchange. This is certainly not occurring at present. The best way to achieve this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

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

**Governance of Delivery Team
Routine and Scheduled Information Flow**



FiReControl national work streams for Development Stage



Memorandum by Ordnance Survey (FRS 19)

1. INTRODUCTION

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

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

2. THE IMPLICATIONS FOR CITIZENS AND THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE OF THE INTRODUCTION OF REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.11 In addition to the timely mobilisation and real time resource management a GIS can provide an understanding of the pattern of where incidents occur. This creates opportunities to help in station planning and to identify stand-by locations resulting from “hotspot analysis”. It can also be used to target education, for example on fire safety, and gain a better understanding of certain criminal activity. When arson crime data is combined with other police and fire data, more detailed fire patterns can be identified. This enables educational and social services programmes to be developed to help reduce future incidents. See Annex C. Accurately locating incidents will support service improvement targets.

3. CONCLUSIONS

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

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

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

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

Memorandum by Dorset Fire Authority (FRS 20)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FINANCE

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

SERVICE DELIVERY

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

THE PROJECT

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

- The delay in timescales of the project and the prospect of further delays is having an adverse impact on our staff as it provides them with uncertainty for the future and the ability to plan their lives ahead.

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

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

1. The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) welcomes this Inquiry and the opportunity to submit evidence to the Select Committee. It would be willing to attend the Committee to provide oral evidence if this would be helpful.

2. The Authority strongly supports, on a cross party basis, the modernisation of the fire and rescue service. Indeed, prior to the Government's White Paper "Our Fire and Rescue Service" and the passage of the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004 the Authority had consistently argued for the service to be modernised. It had identified that the legislation and national framework within which the service then operated was outdated and no longer met the needs and aspirations of those it was seeking to protect. In particular it argued that individual fire and rescue authorities should be given the flexibility to plan and deliver services according to their knowledge and understanding of local risks, and that the role the public had come to expect the service to play in responding to non-fire emergencies should be recognised as part of its core functions.

3. It therefore welcomed the provisions of the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004, in particular the extension of fire and rescue authorities' statutory powers and duties, and the introduction of integrated risk management planning into the service.

PROGRESS WITH MODERNISATION OF THE SERVICE IN LONDON

4. The Committee will be aware that the Audit Commission carried out two exercises in 2004 to verify the progress being made by individual fire and rescue authorities in implementing modernisation of the fire and rescue service and the national pay and conditions agreement with the Fire Brigades Union. Subsequently the Audit Commission assessed this Authority as a "good" authority under the Initial Performance Assessment. A reconciliation exercise then confirmed that "good" rating under the Comprehensive Performance Assessment for the fire and rescue service.

5. This verification work looked at progress in a number of areas of modernisation:

- integrated risk management planning;
- the move from rank to role for operational staff;
- delivery of the integrated personal development system for staff;
- use of overtime;
- changes in duty systems;
- introduction of part time working;
- delivery of the wider modernisation agenda; and
- financial issues, including delivery of anticipated savings from modernisation.

6. We are proud that on both occasions the Commission found that no fire and rescue authority was making better progress than LFEPA in implementing modernisation of the service.

7. This change has, of course, taken place at the same time as the need to enhance our resilience to respond to a terrorist attack, or other major catastrophic incidents. As the capital city, London faces a higher risk of such an event than the rest of the country, as was tragically shown by the July bombings.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

8. The pace of change has been fast, and a great deal has been achieved in a small amount of time. We would wish to highlight the following achievements in London.

9. Over the last five years, London has seen a 20% reduction in deaths from accidental dwelling fires. There has also been a 23% reduction in deaths from non-accidental fires in the home. Total injuries from fire have reduced by 20%, and hoax calls by 30%, exceeding the 20% target reduction set by government.

10. These improvements picked up speed last year, when we saw a 13% reduction in the more serious fires in London—for example, those in buildings—over the previous year; dramatic reductions in total fire deaths, from 86 in 2003–04 to 40 in 2004–05; and in accidental fires in dwellings from 60 to 22.

11. London now has the lowest number of fire calls per 10,000 population when compared to England's other major cities. It has the lowest number of deaths from accidental dwelling fires per 10,000 population and the lowest number of serious deliberate fires per 10,000 population. It also has the lowest number of false alarms from automatic fire detection systems per 10,000 population.

12. We are confident that it is no coincidence that these improvements have happened as we have increased our emphasis on prevention work, which has been a major priority for the Authority since it was set up in 2000.

13. We have introduced a programme of home fire safety checks, linked with a programme to install smoke alarms where they are not already fitted.

14. We have also rolled out a range of innovative schemes to work with young people to improve fire safety awareness, reduce the incidence of anti-social behaviour, such as deliberate fire setting or making false alarms, and to develop their self confidence as part of wider efforts to tackle social exclusion. We have also continued and improved our programme of working with schools to increase fire safety awareness among children.

15. We have brought together the full range of our services (community fire safety, fire safety regulation and the emergency response) together within Borough teams, under the management of a Borough Commander. This has helped us to develop much better joint working with the London boroughs, other emergency services and other local agencies, community groups and businesses at a local level to tackle common problems and improve community safety.

16. We have made massive investment in additional vehicles, equipment and training for staff to be ready to respond in the event of a major terrorist attack or other major emergencies. The bombings on 7 July showed that this investment had proved worthwhile, when some additional vehicles, equipment and training were used to good effect.

17. At the same time, we are demonstrating innovation and creative problem solving on some of the largest construction projects in the world. Heathrow's Terminal 5, together with major transport intersections, will accommodate 30 million passengers a year and we are working closely with BAA to ensure effective fire safety measures are built into the new terminal. Thames Gateway is one of the largest development opportunities, and we are working to ensure that not only the new developments have appropriate fire detection and suppression systems fitted, but also that we are prepared to provide effective emergency cover that reflects population growth and changing risks. Major transport developments such as the Channel Tunnel link and Crossrail pose their own challenges and again we are working with the developers to make sure that effective fire safety measures are built in.

18. The government has now streamlined fire safety arrangements with the introduction of a new framework that pulls together more than 100 different pieces of earlier legislation. These changes come into effect in April 2006, and will nearly double the number of premises subject to detailed regulation. We are planning to deal with this expansion within current resources by adopting a risk-based inspection strategy, where the frequency of our visits to check premises reflects the assessed fire risk in those buildings.

19. We have prepared two Integrated Risk Management Plans, consulting widely on both of them, and are now consulting on a further Action Plan for 2006–07. These Plans took advantage of the flexibility provided by the new Fire and Rescue Services Act to provide emergency cover which better reflects the patterns of risks across the capital. We have set new attendance standards which apply across all of London, and by moving some fire engines we will be able to improve our performance. This means that for those incidents that need two or more engines, both engines will arrive within eight minutes in over a thousand more cases a year than has been the case until now.

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

REGIONAL CONTROLS AND FIRELINK

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

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

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

- (a) receipt of the final business case from the ODPM and confirmation of the benefits of the project to this Authority;
- (b) satisfactory resolution of abortive and any other costs issues;

- (c) the Authority's position in the rollout programme being appropriate and agreed with the ODPM; and
- (d) the Authority's current and proposed IT and information systems integration and architecture not being disadvantaged by adopting a regional mobilising system delivered by the Regional Fire Control Room Project.

Advantages and disadvantages of FiReControl

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

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

- (a) immediate support from the other regional controls in spate conditions, ensuring that all calls are answered within 20 seconds;
- (b) in the event of the London's control centre becoming unavailable for any reason, any one of the other regional controls would be able to immediately take over the receipt of emergency calls and the management and mobilisation of London Fire brigade resources. Among other things, this could also remove the requirement for a dedicated London fallback control, with consequential financial savings; and
- (c) common processes and procedures will improve interoperability between regions and Brigades which will be of particular benefit when responding to large scale, cross border emergencies.

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

- (a) the long term solution developed as part of the regional control project must support the integrated risk management planning process. In London we are not currently using the FSEC tool developed by the ODPM, but have developed an alternative approach which we believe better meets our needs. We would wish to continue to have the flexibility to develop and use those tools best able to support our approach to integrated risk management planning;
- (b) the Authority's current and proposed IT and information systems integration and architecture are well advanced and it will be essential that any potential problems with (a) meeting critical national infrastructure requirements and (b) interoperability between these systems and the FiReControl systems are identified early and that they are capable of being resolved; and
- (c) our current mobilising arrangements became operational in April 2004 and it is estimated a major technology refresh or replacement system would be due in 2010–11. The premises for the new control are leased until 2011 with provision for a five year lease extension. With London being awarded the 2012 Olympics any new system should be in operation some 18 to 24 months earlier. There has already been some slippage in the FiReControl project, and already the earliest date for implementation would be early in 2009. FiReControl is however a very complex project and is intricately linked with the complex FiRelink project. Some further slippage seems likely, if not inevitable and this could result in the Authority having to consider the accommodation options as the current lease on the control building expires in October 2011.

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

28. The Authority also noted a number of drawbacks to not committing, in principle, to the FiReControl Project. The major ones are:

- (a) the location of London's mobilising centre (primary control) and its fallback control would not meet the requirements of critical national infrastructure;
- (b) there would be more limited scope to develop common processes and procedures with other Fire and Rescue Services and their controls, which could result in difficulties with cross border mobilisation and operations, including those to major cross border incidents;
- (c) a fallback control would have to be maintained, and service delivery and attendance times in London could be affected during the transition from the primary control to the fallback control; and
- (d) London would be outside of the national procurement arrangements and, if we had a different supplier, would bear the full costs of software development and upgrades.

29. On balance therefore, the Authority decided to commit, in principle, to participate in the FiReControl project subject to the qualifications set out in paragraph 23 above. However, unlike other aspects of the modernisation programme, this decision did not command all party support.

30. The Authority decided in 2002 to support and participate in the national FiReLink project. The replacement of the current radio scheme in London is now overdue and the Authority is anxious that the new national scheme is available in London as soon as possible, particularly as it impacts directly on the Authority's planned move to a new Headquarters. We are therefore anxious that the timetable for implementation of the national scheme does not slip further and that it is rolled out in London, as planned, in 2008.

31. However, it is essential that the new control arrangements and the new radio scheme are in place well before the 2012 Olympics. The new systems need to be operating (and any initial problems with their operation resolved) before we meet the major challenge of ensuring that the Games pass off safely, given the particular profile they may present as a potential terrorist target.

PROGRESS WITH IMPLEMENTING FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE REFORM

Fire prevention

Fire safety regulation

32. The main challenge facing the fire and rescue service on fire safety enforcement is the impending implementation of the Fire Safety (Regulatory Reform) Order 2005 in April 2006. This will involve a change of culture for both the service as the enforcing authority and the business community with whom we work. It will also considerably increase the number of premises that the service has detailed enforcement responsibility, which has potential resource implications.

33. The Order will replace the prescriptive regime of the Fire Precautions Act 1971 with a risk based approach where the onus rests with the person responsible for the building to comply with the legislation and secure public safety. Effectively this change will extend the approach already adopted in the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations.

34. It will mean that fire officers involved in regulation work will have to move away from reliance on codes to dealing with cases on an individual, risk assessed basis. This will have considerable training implications to equip those officers to use risk based techniques and deal at a professional level with architects, fire safety consultants etc In effect they will have to be able to think "outside of the box".

35. The Authority has long argued for changes along these lines, and we welcome the new Order and its introduction next April.

36. In line with the provision in the new Order, this Authority will be putting in place new inspection regimes for different categories of premises, based on the risks they present. Our approach will be to set inspection frequencies in line with assessed risks, and we expect that this will allow us to handle the much greater number of premises covered by the new Order without significant increase in our dedicated fire safety teams.

37. The change in legislation will also impact on the business community. Many small and medium sized firms rely heavily on advice and assistance from the fire and rescue service on fire safety issues in their premises. In the future they will have to become more self reliant. However, during the transitional period while the new approach is bedding down, we expect that fire and rescue authorities will need to supply a degree of support to the business community.

38. The increasing reliance on fire engineered solutions in modern buildings will also increase the need for the fire and rescue service to have professional officers, with the requisite skills and knowledge to assess such innovative solutions and to negotiate with architects, fire safety consultants about their proposals. In London, this is a particular challenge given the increasing number of very large and complex developments such as Heathrow Terminal 5, the new Wembley stadium, White City and the Olympic sites.

39. As well as managing the changes arising from the new Fire Safety Order, other legislation such as the new Licensing Act 2003 and recent changes to housing legislation also pose challenges to the fire and rescue service. We will need to work in partnership with other enforcing agencies, and agree new working relationships with them to achieve our common goal of improving public safety and minimising risk. Again, this widening of our responsibilities could have resource implications, especially as it comes at the same time as we are coping with the increased number of premises covered by fire safety regulation.

40. There are some other issues relating to fire safety regulation which we would wish to highlight:

- the experience of the introduction of the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations shows that the Government needs to do more to publicise changes in fire safety legislation. Their commitment to do so will be tested with the new Fire Safety Order;
- the advent of the e-Fire portal next year will change the way in which the fire and rescue service interacts with its users. E-Fire is however only a start and we will need to develop further ways in which we can make better use of modern technology to improve our service delivery;

- as the complexity of fire safety regulation activity grows, and we move away from a very prescriptive or “tick box” approach, we will need to keep under review how best to make sure that staff have the necessary skills and competencies for this new rule. This will involve looking at the balance between specialist fire officers and use of station based or other staff, and the appropriate mix of uniformed and non-uniformed staff within those dedicated teams;
- it is essential that the Government continues to support our efforts to persuade, or where the risk justifies it to require, developers to include domestic sprinkler systems in new or refurbished premises. There has been a sustained campaign in which we and other informed organisations, such as the Local Government Association, have pressed for the introduction of sprinklers on a risk assessed basis as a means of tackling fires in those classes of residential and other property where the potential for fire is known to be high. Examples of premises where we believe the building regulations should include a requirement to install sprinklers would include schools, new homes in major developments such as those in Thames Gateway, and rented older houses in multioccupation or care homes. Modern sprinkler systems are reliable and rarely cause unwanted damage through malfunction, but are very effective in limiting fire spread and fire damage and ensuring that people have the time to leave premises safely if fire does break out. Nationally, fires in schools continue to represent a huge cost counted in tens of millions of pounds, not to mention the serious educational disruption and upset that often results from them. Yet, one major insurance company has estimated that the cost of installing a sprinkler system in a school can be recouped within seven to eight years through reduced insurance premiums. Overall, we think the Government has been too slow and cautious in responding to the potential that smarter use of sprinklers offers as a means to mitigate known fire risks, and we would welcome recognition of their benefits in future changes to Building regulations;
- the service will continue to discuss with Government, the building insurance and fire protection industries how to promote the use of UKAS accredited third party certification for fire safety products to improve their competence and reliability;
- we will continue to lobby for improvements in standards and building design codes to incorporate proven fire safety technologies, particularly where this can help to ensure effective fire safety design in new and complex building projects in London; and
- we believe the relationship between the fire and rescue service and local authorities on a range of enforcement work (building control, entertainments licensing, environmental health etc) should be reviewed with a view to improving joint working where this can improve community safety or reduce burdens on business.

Community Fire Safety

41. We welcome the provision in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 of a statutory duty to promote community fire safety. Unlike fire safety regulation work however, there is little in the way of detailed central guidance as to how this new duty should be discharged. The demise of the National Community Fire Safety Centre will not help to remedy this situation.

42. We would agree that to some extent community fire safety initiatives should reflect local circumstances, risks and needs. However, we also believe that there is scope for greater collaboration between individual fire and rescue authorities and for more effective involvement by the ODPM—not just in providing direction but in providing resources such as support materials etc. In addition, experience has shown that national campaigns require a greater degree of co-ordination than at present to ensure that the service is given adequate notice of these campaigns, can align them with local initiatives, and receives sufficient supplies of materials etc.

43. In harmony with our new statutory responsibilities to promote community fire safety this Authority is increasingly demonstrating its influence and potential in wider community concerns; supporting strategies which impact on neighbourhood renewal, health inequality, crime reduction and social exclusion.

44. The fire and rescue service enjoys unique public respect and support, and we have shown that we can use that trust and our record of helping people in a variety of ways to lead and inspire members of the community in projects which make a difference. This is not entirely altruistic, since there is a strong positive correlation between improving quality of life in local neighbourhoods and lower levels of nuisance and the frequency and consequences of fire.

45. Community fire safety work is resource intensive. Our approach has been to make more effective use of the time of our trained fire officers at fire stations, and increase the time they spend in their local communities spreading fire safety messages. This has enabled us to make a real impact in improving safety, without substantial additional investment.

46. However, this is not the whole story. Some of our initiatives are supported by volunteers from among staff across the whole organisation, often working in their own time because they believe in the positive outcomes that can be achieved. Some of our key youth engagement activities, eg our successful Local Intervention Fire Education (LIFE) scheme or our work with the Prince’s Trust, are supported by external funding from agencies and are therefore at jeopardy should that funding cease or be reduced. Securing

external funding is itself also resource intensive and the project based nature of such funding can cause uncertainty and, on occasions, disappointment when we are unable to meet expectations which we have helped to raise.

47. Similarly the Government's support for Operation Scrap It (the scheme to remove abandoned vehicles from the streets promptly) has helped to achieve a substantial reduction in the number of such vehicles on the streets. This has not only helped to improve the environment in the locality but, as these vehicles are a target for arson, has also helped us to achieve a dramatic reduction in the number of fires in derelict vehicles. The withdrawal of Government financial support for this scheme is a cause for concern, lest it results in a reversal of recent improvements and an increase in derelict cars on London's streets and the number of fires they attract.

48. As the number of these schemes grows, as they are rolled out more widely and as they are sustained over years, rather than months, there will be long term resource implications which will impact on fire and rescue authorities' budgets and therefore on precept demands for the council tax payer.

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

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

Institutional arrangements, including finance

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

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

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

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

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

55. Given that the actual costs of pensions will ultimately be borne by fire and rescue authorities through the employers' contribution rate, the effect of the deduction from the Fire Service Settlement for pensions if it turns out to be too high is that council tax payers are being asked to pay "up front" for a cost which may not actually materialise, and which, if it did, could be included in considerations influencing the next actuarially reviewed employers' contribution rate.

56. Therefore, we have asked that the Government either give further consideration to the amount which it is deducting from fire and rescue authorities' grant to pay for pensions cost in the future, or alternatively consider lowering the employers' contribution rate initially and stepping it up over a period (as, for example, local authorities often do when responding to actuarial valuations). Such a review should have regard to the risk, which central government, rather than individual fire and rescue authorities, might reasonably bear when making suitable provision for future pensions liabilities.

57. We have already referred to the changes which the Government proposes to the Firefighters' Pension scheme from next April. The Authority is generally in favour of these changes, but we have commented to Government that we have some reservations about increasing the age of retirement for some existing firefighters. We feel that such an increase—from 50 to 55 for those not eligible to retire by March 2013—is rather arbitrary and that it is unfair for the terms of the scheme to be varied for existing staff, thereby disrupting the plans individuals may have, and appears to be out of step with the review of arrangements for other public sector bodies—such as the Civil Service, Teachers and Health Service pension regimes—where the normal retirement age is apparently to remain unchanged in so far as existing staff are concerned.

58. We welcome the significant funding we have received from Government for improving our resilience to respond to major catastrophic incidents, such as terrorist attacks. This amounted to some £2.5 million in 2004–05 for example. However our costs are substantially higher than this, £11.6 million in total in 2004–05 mainly in respect of equipment which was not provided by central government and which they have not, before now, seen as within the remit of their national New Dimension programme.

59. We believe that London faces particular risks, given its role as a capital city, and that this should be fully recognised by the Government by meeting the full costs of the additional investment we consider essential to improve our resilience. The need to invest in additional Fire Rescue Units (FRUs) is a prime example where we consider an unfair share of the burden would fall on Londoners under present arrangements. Experience of the attacks on 7 July has shown that at one time all the available FRUs were deployed to the four separate bombing incidents. The deployment to the bombings necessitated redirecting one FRU on its way to a road traffic collision. Conclusions from the review of the events surrounding the July bombings are that an additional six Fire Rescue Units would further strengthen our resilience to respond to catastrophic incidents, while maintaining the capacity to continue to respond to other incidents (such as road traffic collisions).

60. The costs of providing this additional equipment to further improve our resilience are £3.3 million in 2006–07, £8.3 million in 2007–08 and £9.9 million in 2008–09. We welcome the indications from the Mayor and London Assembly that they support the need for this additional investment but both the GLA and LFEPa believe strongly that these costs should be met in full by the Government, and should not fall on London's council tax payers.

61. We have repeatedly raised the matter with central government, and would hope that the Select Committee would support our case for such costs to be met by Government.

Procurement

62. This Authority has taken a very clear role in recognising the importance of procurement to the fire and rescue service. We produced the first procurement strategy for a fire and rescue service in the country four years ago and have recently approved a second three year procurement strategy. The Procurement Department has also achieved Investor in People and ISO 14001 accreditation, the first time either of these awards have been made to a procurement function in the fire and rescue service. In addition the Procurement Department has received funding from the London Centre of Excellence to undertake investigations into the state of contract management through local authorities in London and recently won an award for “Most Innovative Organisation” for procurement recycling initiatives from the Mayor's London Remade programme.

63. LFEPa initiated the Integrated Clothing Project which has since been adopted as a national project and worked on the development of the national procurement strategy for the fire and rescue service that has recently been published. We have seconded a number of procurement staff to the interim Firebuy company to assist with the start-up arrangements for national procurement.

Industrial relations issues

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

65. Our objective is to have a robust and effective working relationship with the Fire Brigades Union. However, regrettably, they are currently refusing to attend meetings set up as a result of the revised industrial relations procedures because they refuse to sit at a table with the Fire Officers' Association, who are one of the Authority's accredited trades unions. The FBU has been advised that their seats within the revised procedures are available to them and they continue to be invited to meetings. The Authority would wish a speedy resolution and the full engagement of the FBU within the Authority's procedures.

66. In October 2005 we successfully introduced one of the most far reaching changes in the fire and rescue services for many years, when we moved from the old rank structure for the Brigade to a new role based structure. However discussions with the FBU on this change (which was a key part of the agreement which settled the pay dispute) were protracted and difficult, both nationally and locally.

67. Another aspect of modernising the way that the service operates and which was included in the agreement was the removal of the FBU's objections to pre-arranged overtime and the introduction of appropriate arrangements for such overtime working in individual fire and rescue authorities. However, in the first quarter of 2005 FBU in London balloted for industrial action in an attempt to undermine the application of the Authority's pre-arranged overtime policy. Protracted discussions were required before the threat of industrial action was lifted and the Authority was able to implement its policy for pre-arranged overtime.

Promoting diversity

68. Promoting diversity remains a key priority for this Authority; in terms of both our service delivery and our role as an employer.

69. The Authority is committed to developing a workforce which reflects the diverse communities we serve. This will not only help us to provide more responsive services, but will also help to build confidence in each part of the community that we understand their particular needs and aspirations.

70. We have joined with the rest of the GLA Group in setting a target to reach Level 5 of the Local Government Equality Standard as soon as practicable. We will continue to work towards meeting this challenging target. We have also joined with the GLA and other partners to provide access for members of the public and for our staff to a community language service, which includes British Sign Language, to improve how we can communicate with those members of the community who do not speak English as their first language.

71. The Authority supports a programme of community events, designed to support achievement of our overall equalities objectives. This programme is developed in consultation with different parts of the community, and with different groups among our own staff. We make sure that each of our Borough teams supports at least one major event in their area each year, as well as maintaining continuing links with different parts of the community.

72. Arrangements are in place to monitor the impact which this programme has in helping to meet our goals and we carry out assessments on the impact of our plans on different parts of the community. For example, some 35% of the home fire safety checks we have carried out this year have been to black and minority ethnic households. We will use these impact assessments to review and improve our programme in later years.

73. The Authority's procurement strategy makes sure that contractors are sensitive to the needs and aspirations of London's diverse communities and we promote equality of opportunity to all our contractors as well as seeking evidence of their own commitment to this goal. We continue to encourage businesses from across London's diverse communities to apply for contracts with the Authority and make sure that the way in which we structure and let these contracts places no unnecessary obstructions in the way of such applications.

74. It will be important that the new national procurement agency for the fire and rescue service (FiReBuy) continues to ensure that equalities and diversity issues are fully reflected in its structure and how it goes about its work.

75. The Authority continues to make good progress in developing a more diverse workforce, although we accept that still more needs to be done. Our non-uniformed workforce continues to be broadly representative of the communities it serves. Black and minority ethnic fire officers now represent 8.78% of our operational workforce, and 2.84% of the operational workforce are women.

76. This has been achieved by:

- changing our selection tests to ensure that these are explicitly job related, and that they have no unintended adverse impacts on any particular group, particularly those currently under-represented in our workforce;
- continuing our programmes of outreach work to encourage people from under-represented groups (who may not traditionally have considered the fire service as a career) to apply to join the fire & rescue service; and
- continuing to run positive action programmes to support applicants from among parts of the community currently under-represented in the Brigade, recognising that they may have been disadvantaged by historical discrimination, whether overt or indirect.

77. We welcome the Government's efforts to review national entry selection criteria for the service, and hope that they will learn from the best practice developed in this Authority in recent years.

78. We would also urge the Government to review the national targets for workforce composition in the service to make sure that, while they should remain challenging, they are based on empirical evidence (particularly in relation to the number of women entrants) and are achievable.

79. The modernisation of the service has provided the opportunity to develop more flexible ways of working, and to provide opportunities for staff to work flexibly, through the introduction of prearranged overtime, part time working, different shift patterns which may be better suited to some people's working lives, multi-tier entry to the operational service, and developing more specialist roles to increase the range of job opportunities in the service. We have also modernised other aspects our human resources management, with the implementation of the Integrated Personal Development Scheme for uniformed staff (including NVQ accreditation), development of an appraisal scheme, an updated selection process to match the new role maps and programmes for mentoring and targeted development which it is hoped will particularly benefit staff from groups currently under-represented in the service.

80. The Authority is fully committed to providing a work environment which is free from harassment and bullying; one where every employee is treated with respect and dignity. We continue to challenge any example of harassment or bullying among staff, taking a victim centred approach when we come across unacceptable behaviour and seeking to take action which would help to prevent such problems happening again.

81. We provide support to groups of staff who are currently under-represented in our workforce and when they have set up networks and mutual support arrangements and support the involvement of our staff in national support networks, such as Networking Women in the Fire Service.

82. The Authority has been granted the government employment service's 2 tick symbol accreditation, and will now use the disability symbol in all relevant literature.

83. We welcome the extension of the Disability Discrimination Act to apply to all of our staff, including operational staff, although this has raised considerable challenges in ensuring that our policies and procedures are compliant.

84. The Authority continues to be part of the Stonewall Champions initiative, and has applied for the first time for a place in Stonewall's Corporate Equality Index for 2006. This index ranks the top 100 employers on lesbian and gay issues. Competition for places in the index is high, but although the rankings will not be confirmed until January 2006, we understand that the Authority will appear in the index next year.

85. This commitment to develop a diverse workforce and a supportive working environment is underlined by programmes of work such as:

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

JOINT WORKING WITH OTHER EMERGENCY SERVICES

86. We work closely with the neighbouring fire and rescue authorities to make sure that effective arrangements for cross border working are in place and that we can support each other when this is needed at major incidents. This includes regular liaison with each of the six fire and rescue authorities with which we share a boundary and carrying out joint exercises periodically.

87. We make sure that our procedures, equipment and working arrangements are compatible so that safe systems of work are not compromised when crews from more than one brigade are working at the same incident.

88. The arrangements to improve resilience in response to the increased threat of terrorist attack or other major incident have been planned on a national basis, and we are ready to use the resources based in London anywhere in the country if needed. The Authority has therefore signed a national mutual aid agreement under which all brigades agree to do all they can to help each other in a major emergency.

89. Care is taken to make sure that effective command and control arrangements are maintained when Joint working takes place, in line with the national guidance on incident command.

90. London has developed exemplary arrangements for joint working between the emergency services, which we believe provide a model for other parts of the country in this key area. The London Emergency Services Liaison Panel (LESLP) brings together the police, ambulance and the fire and rescue services together with representatives from the London boroughs. It has agreed the respective roles and responsibilities of these agencies at any major incident, and has developed arrangements and procedures for command and control at such incidents.

91. These arrangements are tested at major exercises such as Atlantic Blue, to make sure that the arrangements work as intended and that lessons can be learnt to improve arrangements for the future.

92. These were tested for real in the response to the bombings on 7 July, and the attempted attacks on 21 July. These showed that the emergency services were well prepared to deal with such incidents, and that the arrangements for co-ordination and joint working to respond to these tragic events worked well.

93. As part of the efforts to co-ordinate responses in the event of a major catastrophic incident, the London boroughs have agreed to work together to provide effective arrangements to respond to such an event. These arrangements are known collectively as "Local Authority Gold". They are designed to manage

the collective response of the London boroughs to a catastrophic incident, recognising that it will have an impact which cuts across borough boundaries and which requires a rapid and coordinated response from London's local authorities.

94. This co-ordination is provided by one of London's local authority chief executives attending the Gold Coordination Group. This chief executive represents the boroughs at this group, and is supported in this role by the London Local Authority Coordination Centre. Chief Executives from a number of boroughs are on call, in rotation, to attend the Coordination Centre and manage the local authority response.

95. At the request of the boroughs, this Authority has agreed to provide logistical support to LA Gold, which involves maintaining the rota and call out arrangements, provision of training to the Chief Executives involved, and establishing and maintaining a databases of relevant information such as contact details, protocols, procedures, manuals and handbooks.

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

RESILIENCE

97. The Authority, with support from the Mayor and London Assembly and from the Government, has made good progress to improve our resilience to respond to major catastrophic events, including terrorist attacks.

98. We will continue to make significant investment to improve our resilience, working closely with the Government to introduce new vehicles and equipment including bulk foam carriers, hose laying lorries and bulk water carriers. This equipment will also be available to enhance our day to day operational capability.

99. The Authority has doubled the number of its Fire Rescue Units (from five to ten) and expanded their role and all of these appliances are now ready to respond to emergency calls. However, we have already commented earlier in this evidence (paragraphs 55 and 56 refer) on the need for an additional six of these appliances, together with funding for the expenditure this will involve, in order to improve our resilience.

100. The first high volume pump has been received (with five more to follow shortly), 10 interim Mass Decontamination Units are currently operationally available and the first of the Urban Search and Rescue units has been received.

101. The programme of familiarising, training and qualifying drivers in the extensive range of New Dimensions and London Resilience vehicles and their operating systems continues and over 430 drivers have now been trained and qualified in various aspects of London Resilience requirements. Progress is also being made in training personnel on the wide range of specialist equipment and also on safe systems of work in specific high risk environments. The programme includes a series of seminars for senior officers on incident management techniques and training in the IT equipment and software that supports many of the specialist vehicles.

102. We have worked with partner emergency services to identify the most likely areas that an attack might take place. We have put our specialist vehicles into stations that are outside of these areas, but in a position to be able to respond quickly to them. In this way we can reduce the chance of our important response vehicles and equipment being affected by any attack, thereby making them unusable.

103. In 2004–05 a multi-agency initial assessment team was set up on a trial basis to provide a rapid initial assessment at catastrophic incidents. The trial was due to end in July 2005 but was extended until the end of November in the light of the London bombings. Assessments by these trained personnel from across the emergency services helped to minimise the risks to the public and emergency service staff from such incidents. This team brought together staff from the police, ambulance and fire and rescue services in liaison with the Health Protection Agency and was staffed 24 hours a day throughout the year and was available to attend major incidents within 15 minutes across central London. This Authority provided the accommodation from which the team operated and, with Home Office funding, made available a lorry and a personnel carrier to enable the team to operate as intended.

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

Memorandum by the Avon Fire Authority (FRS 22)

INTRODUCTION

1. The Avon Fire Authority welcomes the modernisation of the Fire and Rescue Service. The process of modernisation began locally long before the recent industrial relations difficulties, and before the Fire and Rescue Service became higher on the Government's agenda.

2. The drive for modernisation has given impetus to the changes we have been introducing, and noticeable improvements have resulted on the ground. Our local communities now receive our preventing, protecting and responding services to a much higher standard.

3. Whilst we are not resistant to change, there are elements of the modernisation programme that remain of concern.

4. We wish to focus on the FireControl Project. We want to emphasis from the outset that this authority has never opposed government policy on this issue, and we remain committed to the principle of establishing a Regional Control Centre for the South West. However, we continue to hold serious concerns about the process that has been used to get us to the current position.

REGIONAL CONTROL ACCOMMODATION

5. The Avon Fire Authority has been involved in protracted and prolonged correspondence with the Minister(s) and the ODPM on this issue for two years. This has significantly impaired the working relationship.

6. Avon Fire Authority has clearly and consistently set out its position from the outset of this project. Avon has, in its ownership, an existing control centre at Lansdown, near Bath. This control centre was designed and built with a regional capability very much in mind. The concept of regional controls is not new, and was an issue under consideration when Avon acquired the site in 1994.

7. Whilst the control centre at Lansdown has the capacity and functional capability of operating as a Regional Centre, it has never been used for this purpose. Despite Best Value Reviews conducted in 2000 confirming that Lansdown had the capability of providing the control function for one or more other Authorities, none were minded at that time to use our existing facilities.

8. When the FireControl Project was announced, we naturally believed that change would result, and that the Lansdown facility could be used to full potential.

9. It became evident from the outset that the procurement route chosen by the ODPM Project Team was going to make that impossible. The original OJEU Notice was clearly biased towards private developer bids. From the beginning this was the only route open for establishment of Regional Controls. This excluded existing facilities from being considered which we believed was unfair.

10. Following representations made by Avon Fire Authority, the process was amended to allow for Authorities to submit bids, which had to be agreed by Regional Management Boards. Avon put forward Lansdown for consideration as an existing facility. The submission included proposals for minor modifications that could have been made to enable the Regional functionality. The bid was supported by the Regional Management Board, together with other green field sites identified by other Fire Authorities in the South West.

11. The Avon bid was rejected at the first stage of the procurement evaluation process. The reasons given were that it had failed the first "mandatory" criteria of site size. When questioned, the ODPM Project Team confirmed that the Avon bid had been ruled out because the land area was of insufficient size to accommodate the building design they had previously commissioned. Being ruled out on site size was increasingly frustrating as we would contend that the control room within the Regional Control Centre has been over specified. The number of operator positions provided bear little resemblance to the volume of work likely to be required in the south west region.

12. This was clearly not the intention of our submission. We did not submit Lansdown for consideration to be given to accommodating a new building. Our intention was to secure a proper evaluation of the existing building and facilities as an alternative option to a new build. We had hoped this would have then been included in the business case.

13. Following further representations, ODPM eventually agreed to offer an "evaluation" of Lansdown, but subject to Avon accepting that if this was accepted, nothing would change. We saw little point in such an exercise at that time and declined the offer.

14. An "evaluation" report was subsequently sent to Avon Fire Authority in August 2005. We continue to dispute that this was in any way a thorough evaluation. The report was attached to a letter which stated that the two main conclusions were that:

- (a) the building works required would seriously impact on our ability to provide a service; and
- (b) the costs involved would not represent value for money.

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

15. We have argued long and hard that the process has had the unfair effect of excluding existing facilities from consideration. Our reasoned arguments have never been accepted.

16. We remain concerned over the additional costs that will be incurred by pursuing the new build option, when there were alternatives that were not even considered. We now accept that our position does not coincide with the Government's preferred option.

17. We would contend that the process used was significantly flawed from the outset. This Authority has volumes of correspondence and evidence to demonstrate what we believe is a genuine grievance. Out of sheer frustration on getting no satisfactory responses from ODPM over a two-year period, we recently submitted a formal complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The Ombudsman has advised us that there are no powers to investigate complaints by public bodies.

18. We are submitting this Memorandum because we believe there must be accountability somewhere. We hope the Inquiry will look further into the issues we have identified. We believe there are pertinent questions to be asked of the ODPM FireControl Project Team, the answers to which we believe will demonstrate that our grievance is genuine. Such questions could include:

- At the outset of the project, was any assessment made of existing control centre facilities?
- If so, then precisely when were such assessments carried out?
- Did anyone from the project team consider the facilities that exist at Lansdown, in Avon at that time?
- What was the conclusion of the project team following the existing facilities assessment?
- Precisely when was the conclusion to exclude existing facilities reached?
- Precisely when was the OJEU Notice for Fire Control issued?
- Precisely when were Fire Authorities invited to submit bids via Regional Management Boards?
- Why was this change to the procurement process introduced?
- How many regions submitted bids?
- How many Authorities put forward existing facilities in their bids?
- What was the outcome of the evaluations of the Regional bids?
- Avon Fire Authority claim they were advised by the ODPM Project Team that their submission was ruled out on "site size". Is that correct?
- Can the Project Team specifically explain what was meant by the "site size" criteria?
- Precisely when was the Avon Fire Authority debriefed on its bid?
- What was the outcome of the debriefing of Avon Fire Authority?
- Precisely when were the Avon Fire Authority sent an evaluation of their existing facilities at Lansdown?
- What were the main conclusions from the evaluation of Avon Fire Authority facilities?
- Has anyone from the ODPM Project Team ever visited the Avon fall back control at Kingswood in Bristol?
- Were any costings or financial comparisons included in the evaluation report sent to Avon?

19. As an Authority, we accept that we are unlikely to see any significant change as a consequence of this Memorandum. We do believe however that if the process had been managed differently, and that assumptions made at the outset tested properly, then the FireControl Project would have gained fuller support from the Elected Members and Officers of this Authority. We would be grateful if this could be acknowledged by this Inquiry.

20. The Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive of Avon Fire and Rescue Service has all the detailed documentations and evidence if required by the Inquiry.

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

REGIONAL CONTROL GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

22. In response to Government Consultation earlier in the year, Avon Fire Authority, and the South West Regional Management Board, expressed their preference for the Lead Authority option for the governance of the Regional Control Centre in the South West.

23. In September fire and rescue authorities which had previously expressed such a preference were asked to reconsider their previous decision and to accept the government's stated preference for a Local Authority Company solution. That request was accompanied by very little financial or other information upon which to base a decision; no proper cost/benefits analysis of the options was provided.

24. Members of the Authority were concerned that the government's preferred approach might lead to increased costs with no perceived improvements in service expected. Moreover, Members were concerned that this approach would further distance the Control function from front-line service delivery and from the Fire and Rescue Service itself.

25. The problems faced by members are not limited to governance issues alone.

26. The Authority has certain duties under the Fire & Rescue Services Act to make arrangements to deal with emergency calls and to mobilise its resources. It also has duties in relation to Best Value. On all these matters the Authority is required to make proper and rational decisions. The Authority has very real difficulties at present in complying with those obligations, in relation to the Regional Control Centre Project.

27. In reality, all major decisions on the project are being made by government. We understand that the government's objectives extend beyond meeting the needs of individual Fire and rescue authorities and that the government therefore wishes to run this as a national project under its control and direction.

28. All we as Fire and rescue authorities are being asked to do is to endorse decisions which the government has made. There is no effective choice for Fire and Rescue Services, now, nor will there be in the future after implementation of the project. In many cases, the government's choice does not accord with the Authority's preferences and, in others, quite simply we do not have sufficient and reliable information on the government's choice and the competing options to make a valid judgement. For the Authority to adopt the decisions of the government as its own without applying its own mind to all the relevant issues would leave it open to serious challenge both with the local Council tax payers and indeed in the Courts.

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

INTRODUCTION

1. The Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority was constituted in 1998, following local government reorganisation. It is responsible for the delivery of fire and rescue services to the people of Kent and Medway, which together have 1.6 million residents and cover an area of just over 3,700 km². The Authority has specific responsibilities for safety in the Channel Tunnel, and is also a member of the Marine Incident Response Group, which deals with incidents at sea at the request of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. It is one of the largest of the non-metropolitan fire and rescue services, with 66 fire stations and over 2,000 staff in total. As a result of the 2005 comprehensive performance assessment of the fire and rescue service, KMFRA was one of the two authorities nationally to be rated excellent.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE INTRODUCTION OF REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES AND FIRELINK RADIO

2. While the Government's intention to improve national resilience in creating the regional fire control centres is clear, the Authority has some concerns about the implications of the change on sustaining the quality of service delivery locally. High performance in the control room is a key component in achieving a high standard of performance in the service, particularly in relation to local policy aims, which may require changes in working methods. For this reason we regret the loss of our control room, which has made a

significant contribution to the overall rating of the service among the best nationally. Essentially this leaves the Authority in the position of having to contract out one of its core services, and the first interface with the public.

3. A key issue here is that of governance and accountability for the new arrangements. The Authority expressed a preference for a local authority company, of the limited options on offer, but we have concerns over the way in which this would operate in practice. The current consultation on the National Framework suggests that the contractor should be a partner in the proposed “roll-out board”, which we believe would muddle the client/contractor role during development. Even more critically, when the RCC is actually in place, the Authority requires robust arrangements for managing its part of the “contract” which are hard to secure with a monopoly provider, despite the fact that the duty to secure the provision remains with the Authority. An example of the way in which these roles can be blurred is the recent proposal in the working group that the RCC should have powers to deploy resources to incidents outside an Authority’s area without reference to the owning body.

4. KMFRA has also had as yet no opportunity to review the business case for the SERCC, so we have to date not been able to assess the impact on our medium-term budget position as we would have wished. One consequence of the inevitable delays in the programme has been financial, as suppliers increasingly recognise the need to sustain existing ageing systems. The Authority welcomes ODPM’s assurance in the recent draft national framework that it will plug this gap with additional funding.

5. The geography of the region is a significant factor in the consideration of this issue. The Government Office for the south-east region includes nine fire authorities and stretches from Margate to Banbury via Fordingbridge. The south-east region is generally recognised to be a less cohesive region than others, with no strong sense of identity. It has a much larger population than most regions with higher projected growth. In terms of emergency services, managing it as a single entity causes significant problems, not least because the road network is so dominated by London, with very high traffic volumes. In consequence, KMFRA is considering how it would deal with the “Gold Command” element of major incidents, as it may not be practicable for senior officers to reach Fareham, the site chosen for the RCC.

6. The Authority has of course been co-operating in the development of the RCC and its supporting systems, but still believes that the option of two or three sub-regional controls, which was suggested in the White Paper on the Fire Service, would have been more appropriate for the south-east in providing real resilience.

7. There are some concerns over the impact of the RCC on service delivery and management once it is operational. Inevitably the specification for call and data handling is tending towards common denominators, but the Authority would not wish to compromise its present capacity to use performance information drawn in part from the mobilising system. It is also of the view that it will be harder to sustain the current level of public engagement with the service once calls are being remotely handled, as this is likely to affect identity.

8. The Authority also questions the assumptions being made about the resilience of the new ROC network, given that it will be a network with an integrated operating system. Although the current control rooms are individually small, their functional separation gives an additional level of resilience to the present system which will be absent in the new one. The current stand-by control for KFRS is located in the Kent Police Control Centre, a distance of only two miles, which is also the local “Gold Command” location for major emergencies. However, in the event of a local problem affecting both these controls, there is also the option of switching calls to East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service Control in Eastbourne.

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

PROGRESS ON FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE REFORM SINCE JANUARY 2004

Community Safety and partnerships

9. The Authority has been actively engaged in a range of local partnerships over a period of some years, and has achieved demonstrable benefits through this approach. It was a party to the Kent Public Service Agreement in 2001, in the first round of national pilots, and achieved a reduction over four years of 75% in accidental fire deaths and casualties—well over the target set of 20%. This year the Authority was a signatory to the second Kent PSA, with a target of reducing loose rubbish fires, as part of a set addressing the “cleaner, safer, greener” Kent objective. We will be using the reward grant of £2.1 million resulting from the 100% achievement of the first target to support activity directed at achieving the second. This will also help to reduce the number of deliberate fires, as most rubbish fires are deliberately started.

10. Success as a partner in the Kent PSA has led to membership of the Kent Public Service Board, and the Local Area Agreement. The LAA includes targets on the reduction of road accidents and casualties, and we are using this route to assist us with the new statutory duty in relation to road traffic accidents. The Authority is an active player in the Medway Local Strategic Partnership and the district-based Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. It has an extensive education programme, which has been funded in part

through the Arson Control Forum. While we welcome the Government's support of such initiatives, it is to be hoped that national guidance in this area will not become too prescriptive, as much is dependent on the activity and engagement of other partners, particularly local authorities.

11. The Authority also embarked on a programme of home fire safety checks in 2001, using firefighters to install smoke alarms in high risk homes. This has now been extended, funded in part by specific grants from ODPM, to include dedicated staff for this purpose, in addition to the provision of alarms for use by local authority schemes, mainly targeting elderly people. We have also had some success in encouraging local authorities and developers to install sprinkler systems in schools and housing projects. However the Authority regrets that the Government has not made this a requirement both in schools and social housing, particularly for new developments, given that such buildings are at higher risk, and publicly funded.

12. The possibility of applying this to the major housing growth areas within Kent and Medway is currently being explored with the Government Office for the South East to see whether the new developments could incorporate higher standards of fire suppression when built. This would help to reduce fire risk at the design stage, and also mean that standards of fire cover could be maintained without the need to build additional fire stations. This approach has been successful overseas in significantly reducing deaths and casualties.

Regional Management Board activity

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

Workforce modernisation

14. Much of the modernisation agenda focused on working arrangements. While this is wholly understandable, the issues identified in relation to working arrangements by the Bain Report and consequent legislation is too dominated by metropolitan practices. For example, the impact of the 24 hour shift system is less rigid in shire areas where it forms part of a mixed economy of shift, day and retained crewing. The pressure to use overtime more also runs counter to the tenor of the Working Time Regulations, and targets being set in other public services to reduce overtime working in the interests of more family-friendly policies. Critically, however, the Authority believes that it is wrong to regard changing working arrangements as an end in itself: change should be led by service improvements, with revised working arrangements being used to deliver these improvements where appropriate.

15. The Authority recognises that equality and diversity are still clear weaknesses across the service as a whole. It is currently undertaking a Best Value review of its approach to equality and diversity, both in terms of employment and community engagement, but would welcome any national developments in support of local initiatives. One useful approach could be a further national advertising campaign to support continuous rolling recruitment in the future, to promote the fire service as an employment opportunity, particularly for women and members of ethnic minority groups. It is difficult to have this kind of impact at a local level.

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

Management issues

17. The Authority welcomes the extension of the fire service's role by the addition of new statutory duties and believes that the 2004 Act provides a much more robust framework for the service. It has ironed out many of the anomalies and obstacles which were increasingly resulting from the 1947 Act provisions remaining in force long after they had ceased to reflect the environment of the service. However some of the old centralised controls are still in place and have not been reviewed in the light of the new legislation. An

example of this would be the continued requirement to submit large volumes of detailed establishment information, after the repeal of S19 of the old Act, which required establishment changes to be submitted to the Secretary of State for approval. In 2004–05, 104 establishment-related forms had to be completed, one of which runs to 66 pages—one for each fire station, and the number is going up in 2005–06.

18. A related point is that some of the targets for the service are not keeping pace with the modernisation agenda. For example, the Authority believes that the specialist community fire safety teams should be counted against the performance indicators for women and ethnic minority staff. They are as much in the front line as firefighters, and spend more time actually engaging with the public.

JOINT WORKING BETWEEN THE FRS AND OTHER EMERGENCY SERVICES

19. The Authority works closely with other emergency services especially on plans for strategic risks such as the Channel Tunnel. The requirements for joint planning and working under the Civil Contingencies Act can be met much more easily with coterminous agencies, especially the Police, with whom the fire service has the closest relationship for planning for and responding to major disasters. Current proposals for amalgamating police forces nationally could adversely affect these arrangements, particularly as the OCA bases the response groupings, such as the local resilience groups, on force areas.

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

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

1(A) REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES

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

1(B) FIRELINK RADIO

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

2(A) FIRE PREVENTION

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

2(B) INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

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

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

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

2(C) PROMOTING DIVERSITY

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

3. JOINT WORKING BETWEEN EMERGENCY SERVICES

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

GENERAL

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES

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

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

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

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

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

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

FiReCONTROL AND FIRELINK

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

FIRE SAFETY REGULATION

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

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

GOVERNANCE

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

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

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT AND INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLANS

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

REFORM OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

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

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

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

REDUCING FIRE AND THE IMPACT OF FIRE

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

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

DIVERSITY

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

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

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

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

There is a need for the ODPM to recognise the need for up front investment to be provided to fire and rescue authorities, ahead of delivering savings in the future. The management of transitional funding has not been a good example of ODPM/Local Authority working. For some authorities the transitional funding has been a nuisance not a benefit.

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

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

Bilingual Advocates:

reaching the Somali, Yemini, Chinese and Asian community

Older Persons Advocates:

Reaching this most vulnerable group

Deaf Advocates:

Reaching the one in seven in the community who have hearing challenges

Drug and Alcohol Dependency:

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

Disability:

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

District Community Safety Advocates:

Forging partnership with the caring agencies in local authorities

Carer Trainer:

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

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

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

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

Five District Local Authorities:	Arson reduction schemes, youth engagement, school protection, anti-social behaviour reduction, vehicle crime.
Health Services/PCTs:	Health visitor domestic fire safety training, child obesity clinics on fire stations, attendance at flu clinics, drug and alcohol dependency referrals.
Social Services:	Carer domestic fire safety training, portable one room sprinklers to vulnerable clients, juvenile fire setter referral.
Police:	Arson Task Force, Firework Incident and Research Safety Team (FIRST), Youth Engagement.
Merseyside Centre for Deaf People:	Accessing the deaf community through our deaf advocates.
Aged Carers/Help the Aged:	Accessing older people
Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation:	Joint anti-smoking campaigns.
Fire Support Network:	Our very strong volunteer charity providing support in the community through 300 volunteers.
Mersey Regional Ambulance Service:	Co-responding

And there are many more.

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

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

CO-RESPONDER

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

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

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

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

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

EMPLOYER/EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

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

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

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

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

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

FIRE AND FINANCE

The Metropolitan areas provide a fire and rescue service that:

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

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

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

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 *Executive summary*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 *The CFOA submission*

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

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

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

2.2 *The Chief Fire Officers' Association*

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

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

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

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTIONS 1A AND 1B

3.1 *Regional Control Centres and FireLink*

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

3.1.2 There is no doubt that the FiReControl and Firelink projects are an integral part of the modernisation agenda, as well as securing the essential levels of resilience required by Government and the FRS. These projects should provide an operating framework that will act as an enabler of change, providing opportunities to develop new and efficient ways of working across regional boundaries. They should however, be seen in the broader context of change and modernisation within the FRS.

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

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

3.1.5 Our concerns include:

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

3.1.6 Whilst the successful implementation of FireLink will be a significant step forward in communication between fire appliances and emergency service control centres, the absence of hand-held radio communication at the scene of operational incidents will potentially lessen the effectiveness of the FRS. It would therefore be prudent to review the overall expectations of the project in light of the increasing and evolving operational role of the FRS, with a view to including hand-held radio communication as an integral component of the FireLink project. Our concerns include;

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

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

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

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTION 2A

4.1 *The Fire Prevention Agenda*

4.1.1 The Select Committee are seeking specific evidence of progress in terms of “Fire” Prevention work within the service. Much work has been done in this area and a great deal has been achieved. This is, however, a narrower focus than should perhaps be taken within this inquiry. The FRS has been making the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) a reality and has been expanding work aligned with its new statutory duties, including transport incidents and civil emergencies including the preparation for major or catastrophic events. This has been recognised by increased emphasis in the draft National Framework for 2006–08 currently circulating for consultation.

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

4.1.3 Through resilience forums and in partnership with local authorities and other emergency services, the ERS (Category 1 Responders under the Civil Contingencies Act) is engaging fully in this wider risk agenda. The rationale of the prevention activities of the service are to drive down risks in a way that is pertinent to local communities and not necessarily to be wholly focused on fire. To use scarce resources to input messages about fire safety and ignore road safety in a community where road traffic collisions cause much more misery and death can not be an appropriate response.

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

4.2 *Achievements*

4.2.1 The thrust of this Inquiry is to determine whether the “prevention is better than cure” message has been implemented by the FRS. The statistics here speak for themselves. The Public Service Agreement (PSA) Fire Targets for 2010 require Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) “*To reduce the number of accidental fire related deaths in the home by 20% averaged over the 11 year period to 31 March 2010*”. Similarly the target for Arson Reduction is “*To reduce by 10% the number of deliberate fires by 31 March 2010 . . .*”

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

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

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

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

4.3 *Sprinklers and schools*

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

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

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

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

4.4 *A balanced approach—Prevention—Protection—Response*

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

4.4.2 Fire Authorities are now in their third year of determining the allocation of resources on the basis of local risk, through IRMPs. These have been informed through wide stakeholder consultation and involvement of the general public. These plans take advantage of the flexibility provided by the new Fire and Rescue Services Act to provide emergency cover which reflects the patterns of risk across our cities, urban and rural areas. However it is apparent that businesses, industry & commerce and the insurance sector still remain concerned about issues such as attendance times and the weight of attack, as balanced against other community fire safety initiatives.

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

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

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

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

4.5 *Differing Standards*

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

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTION 2B

5.1 *Governance*

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

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

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

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

5.2 *Institutional Reform*

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

5.3 *Staff engagement and Leadership*

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.3.7 Similarly, with the introduction of wide ranging reforms in all government departments and ministries and their consequential impact and opportunity for partnership working with CFOA and the ERS, an inter-departmental/inter-ministry forum would be a positive and welcome move. This forum would afford CFOA the opportunity to contribute in the earliest stages of strategy or policy formulation in areas such as Sustainable Communities, Regeneration, Crime Reduction, Health as well as Road Traffic Incidents and the Built Environment.

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

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

5.4 *Attacks on Firefighters*

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

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

5.4.3 CFOA believes that time is right to call for immediate legislation making it a specific offence to hinder, interfere or obstruct not only firefighters but all frontline emergency workers in the execution of their duty. CFOA welcomed similar legislation in Scotland and places full support behind Alan Williams MP and his private members bill seeking the establishment of such legislation in England and Wales.

5.5 *Finance and Resources*

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

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

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTION 2C

6.1 *Promoting Diversity*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTION 3

7.1 *Emergency Services Joint Working and Resilience*

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

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

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

7.1.4 In 2001, the Home Secretary (then Jack Straw) requested the Presidents of the three emergency services associations (ACPO, CACFOA, ASA) to prepare a joint report on collaboration working. The report was duly commissioned, agreed and compiled and presented to the Home Secretary. The report made 16 recommendations to improved joint working, however, many remain outstanding today—not the least being Government's priorities, its vision of where it sees the "blue light" services in the future.

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

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

7.2 *Investment to Date*

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

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

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

7.3 *Operational Assurance*

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

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

7.4 *Operational Competence*

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

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

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

7.4.4 *Further Work*

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

- *Water Rescue*—The resources to provide a national water rescue capability are within scope of the New Dimensions programme, however at this point in time no funding exists to develop this capability. In addition whilst we welcome the outcome of the consultation exercise on “Non Fire Emergencies for the FRS” we believe that there is a lack of understanding by the authors in to what constitutes Water Rescue and the appropriate resources required to provide such a capability. CFOA wish to see the necessary investment and resources to allow the FRS to undertake this role safely and effectively.
- *Support Arrangements*—The second area of concern relates to the support arrangements that are presently in place, by way of regional teams funded by CRD, to support the New Dimensions programme. Whilst we acknowledge that any such support arrangements should be regularly reviewed to ensure they remain cost effective, we would want reassurances that any future structures will be robust enough to continue to deliver the necessary high level of support.

8. SUMMARY

8.1 *Vision for the Future*

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

8.2 *Conclusion*

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

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

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

9. REFERENCES

9.1 *Listing*

9.1.1 The following references support this memorandum:

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

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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Select Committee on The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in respect of The Fire and Rescue Service Inquiry.

2. Our track record over many years demonstrates that we have been very proactive in implementing innovative changes to the way we work. These changes have resulted in significant improvements to the service we offer and in driving down fire deaths.

3. We have reviewed our strategic vision and mission statement in light of the Integrated Risk Management Plan and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment process in order to provide a focus for modernisation. Our vision statement is

“Making Greater Manchester a Safer Place by being a modern, community focussed and influential Fire and Rescue Authority.”

4. We have championed the modernisation agenda; we have built on our successes; we are now looking to improve the service further. The modernisation agenda allows us to look for innovative ways of providing future services that are not as constrained as in the past. The introduction of the national framework and greater freedom to reach locally negotiated agreements has meant that efficient, economic and effective ways can be found to meet local needs using a risk based approach.

5. We have negotiated and reached agreement with the FBU on a number of modernisation issues, which has facilitated this Authority moving forward with tangible improvements. This has included rostering for duty, removal of beds, work routines and flexible resource deployment at night.

6. Our submission includes several examples of this philosophy and we trust it will be useful to the committee's deliberations. We have provided suggestions at the end of each example that in our view would greatly assist UK Fire and Rescue Services in delivering a modern, flexible and innovative service. We believe that these examples of areas of work in GMF&RS are fundamental in delivering a modern service based on a sound approach to Integrated Risk Management planning.

7. We have always been a proactive and influential service in our contribution to national issues via the Chief Fire Officers Association and a variety of Government steering groups and committees. Our Chief Fire Officer is one of four in the country that is shaping the future of the British Fire and Rescue Service by actively leading on national workstreams on behalf of CFOA. In our case these are New Dimensions and Operational matters. Other Chief Officers lead on such issues as e-fire, Firelink and FiReControl at national and regional level.

8. The modernisation agenda is intended to facilitate change and introduce improved ways of working. We are fully supportive of this. We feel however that in the drive to introduce more modern approaches there is the potential to lose sight of the operational aspects of the service. In particular the move from intervention to prevention should not compromise the ability of firefighters to effectively respond to operational incidents and operate safely. It is vital that operational competencies are a key part of the modernisation agenda.

9. It is recognised that the resources to provide a national water rescue capability are within scope of the New Dimensions programme. However at this point in time no funding exists to develop this capability. Whilst we welcome the outcome of the consultation exercise on "Non Fire Emergencies for the FRS" we believe that there is a lack of understanding by the authors as to what constitutes Water Rescue and the resources required to provide such a capability. Within this memorandum we have outlined the actions that this authority has taken to ensure that we can undertake this role safely and effectively. We would urge the government to consider and address the issue of funding water rescues for the FRS.

10. This authority is extremely concerned about the levels of hindrance, abuse and physical attacks that its frontline firefighters have to endure as they go about their duties at operational incidents. We have a duty to ensure the safety of our staff in all situations and for some time have been investing significant resources in order to reduce the number and effects of such attacks.

11. We believe this to be a national problem which is closely linked to social issues. We urge the Government to consider the introduction of legislation similar to that in Scotland that makes it a specific offence to hinder, interfere or obstruct frontline emergency service workers.

INTRODUCTION

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

The Organisation in Context

13. In Greater Manchester we have driven down the number of fire deaths over recent years to the lowest level they have ever been. Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) is the second largest fire service in the country employing around 2,700 people, 2,200 are operational staff, serving an area of approximately 496 square miles, containing a culturally diverse resident population of almost 2.5 million people, one million domestic properties, and a wide range of commercial and industrial complexes. There are a number of densely-populated centres within the area ranging from very modern inner city developments to traditional mill town communities that have expanded, diversified and developed.

Diversity

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

Value for Money

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

Industrial Relations

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

Moving Forward

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

18. We recognise that there are opportunities to move forward and have developed our vision. We are implementing significant and innovative changes to our organisation that will lead to a more efficient and effective service in line with the objectives set out in our Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

19. The Authority is confident that it is in a position to see tangible results based on the building blocks that it has put in place in previous years. With the modernisation agenda and the focus of the IRMP there is an enthusiasm throughout our service to complete and introduce the innovative initiatives that are necessary.

Partnerships

20. We are working closely with our partner fire services in the region, as part of the North West Fire and Rescue Management Board leading on procurement and resilience. We are also working closely at local level with the community through Local Strategic Partnerships, as part of our commitment to the crime and disorder agenda.

21. We have recently adopted a Borough Command Structure to align ourselves to the 10 Metropolitan Boroughs we serve. Each borough in Greater Manchester now has its own Borough Command team who ensure we respond effectively to the risks that the local communities face which facilitates partnership working in the community.

22. In order to gain maximum efficiency from our partnership working we are conducting a review in conjunction with Price Waterhouse Coopers our external auditors. This will provide a system whereby we can evaluate the specific benefits of each individual partnership.

23. The national framework encourages the use of regional teams for common services and as part of the North West Fire and Rescue Management Board workstreams we are actively exploring additional ways in which we can work together across the region.

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

25. This Authority is concerned about the integration of IRMPs within resilience planning. Currently there is an apparent separation between planning for “day to day” risks (IRMP) and the planning for more significant resilience requirements for potential major and catastrophic incidents (Resilience Forums).

26. The bulk of the response resources that will deal with major/catastrophic incidents are also the same resources that address the background risks which suggests that separate planning is neither effective nor efficient. We would like to see a requirement to include major and catastrophic incident planning within IRMPs.

27. We are working with other emergency services and exploring different ways in which we are able to cooperate and improve our service provision to develop an improved cost efficient service. We give examples within this memorandum of initiatives of this type.

Operational Competence

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

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

30. We believe any lack of clarity about the role of staff or the placement of an individual in a critical decision-making position, without the provision of appropriate supporting mechanisms, will place the Authority and the individual at significant risk.

Funding Issues

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

32. The Service has made a very positive start to the efficiency agenda and will continue to seek opportunities for further improvement and reinvestment in the frontline service. However the general pressure to keep Council Tax levels to an affordable level can limit the ability to re-invest. The current changes to the national financial/resourcing framework for the service has created turbulence which will exacerbate this in individual authorities.

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

34. It is important that the ongoing distribution of resources reflects need and whilst a number of formula changes have been introduced this year there are still anomalies to be addressed by the formula review group eg the COMAH element.

THE ISSUES

Relationship between Dwelling Fire Frequencies and Casualties and Population Socio-dynamics

The Issue

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

What are we doing about the issue

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

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

Suggested way forward

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

Operational Assurance

The issue

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

What are we doing about the issue

40. We believe that in order to maintain confidence in the operational aspect of our service delivery there needs to be a comprehensive, transparent and impartial review process. We are currently working with HM Fire Service Inspectorate to develop a self assessment model.

41. Operational Assurance is not seen as an isolated exercise but is about maintaining an ongoing commitment that demonstrates our operational capability. As part of this process, the organisation has devised a self assessment model as part of its operational assurance utilising the self-diagnostic "toolkit" contained within FRSC 21-2005 which is now being deployed.

Suggested way forward

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

Changing Duty Systems—Rostering for Duty Project

The issue

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

What are we doing about the issue

44. Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service have taken the lead role in developing new duty systems and flexible employment contracts as part of its Human Resources Modernisation Programme. The Rostering for Duty Project is an example of an organisation developing an efficient and effective workforce utilisation strategy that has delivered against a challenging efficiency target whilst at the same time improving Service performance aligned to the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan.

45. This project has delivered major change by introducing flexible contracts for wholetime firefighters combined with the introduction of a new duty system that delivers real value for money for the organisation and results in significant benefits and incentives for its employees. These employee benefits include real flexibility to choose when you work and a policy encouraging applications for flexible working that far exceeds the legal minimum requirements. The design of the new system incorporates opportunities for a wide range of employment contracts including, for the first time, the option of part time working. This forms an integral part of our equality and diversity strategy by removing many of the barriers currently associated with shift working.

46. The project incorporates a powerful web based technological solution for time, attendance and roster management with employees having access to the system to view their own roster, manage their time at work through duty swaps and make other changes to work patterns. By using the new technology it has been possible to centralise the management of crewing of appliances and this has produced further efficiencies through a reduction in the number of staff employed in this vital area.

47. The introduction of these major changes has been achieved in a very challenging industrial relations climate following the bitter national dispute. As a result of constructive dialogue with representative bodies at early design stage, followed by meaningful negotiation and employee engagement, a local Collective Agreement was signed by the Fire Brigades Union and the Fire and Rescue Authority in September 2005. This has resulted in cashable efficiency savings in the form of direct salary costs of £2.3 million and yet maintained or improved emergency response performance standards. The new duty system and flexible contracts also provide real opportunity for incremental continuous improvement. All this has been achieved within the existing National Scheme of Conditions of Service and without need for any intervention in the form of conciliation or arbitration through the auspices of the National Joint Council. We believe this

project is a real example of true modernisation in the Fire and Rescue Service showing that, where employee and employer representatives enter into negotiation as equals, in a spirit of trust and co-operation, mutual benefits can be realised.

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

Suggested way forward

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

Working with other Emergency Services

The issue

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

What are we doing about the issue

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

52. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) is intended to provide a framework to guide future working between the Service and GMAS and forms a mutual statement of intent towards partnership working.

53. The primary objective of the MoU is to ensure that the Service and GMAS work efficiently and effectively together, share best practice and where appropriate resources and facilities, in order to deliver improvements in the community’s public health and safety.

54. The MoU relates to areas of potential interface between the Service and GMAS in performing their respective functions, it does not place additional responsibility on either party, nor does it imply any transfer of responsibility from one to the other or sharing of statutory obligations.

55. The MoU also recognises the opportunity for providing enhanced value for money by:

- (a) Researching the feasibility of the common use of resources and estates;
- (b) Seeking opportunities to share education and training facilities and processes, identify common approaches to training and development and the sharing of expertise;
- (c) Seeking opportunities to share support service functions such as maintenance of vehicles, procurement, ICT, HR Support and occupational health and physiotherapy services;
- (d) Sharing information by working together on best practice in areas such as risk management, risk identification, management development and health and safety management;
- (e) Sharing expertise and best practice on the modernisation of workforces and working practices, with an emphasis on improving working lives, and equality and diversity; and
- (f) Further enhancing the public safety of the population of Greater Manchester, through effective emergency planning and improved collaboration on major incidents and other incidents such as RTCs.

56. There are no financial implications at present. However, as specific projects are identified and realised there is potential for significant financial savings and efficiencies in the future.

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

Suggested way forward

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

Flexible Resource Deployment

The issue

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

What are we doing about the issue

60. The introduction of flexible operational resource deployment into Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service means that each night, four appliances will be stood down and not crewed.

61. In order to balance out emergency cover, the same four appliances will not be stood down every night. The aim is to spread emergency cover as evenly as possible across the County proportionate to risk to life and property whilst recognising workloads of individual appliances. A software package (Phoenix) has been produced for GMFRS by Active Software of Basingstoke. It ranks appliances in order of value based on workload patterns by time and by geographical location over the previous three year time period.

62. We have determined which appliances to stand down using three data base systems, namely our own Management Information System; Phoenix and the Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) model supplied by the ODPM.

63. FSEC is a software package developed for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. It evaluates resources according to their effectiveness as defined by cost, prevention of loss of life, and their contribution to the community. The results from Phoenix were validated against the risk in FSEC and there is a strong correlation which confirms the validity of the flexible resource approach.

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

Suggested way forward

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

Youth Engagement Initiatives

The issue

66. We have recognised for a number of years the direct correlation between disengaged youths and anti-social behaviour which impacts on the work of the fire service. Examples of this are an increase in attacks on firefighters and in arson-related incidents which places in an avoidable burden on our resources. This burden is reflected in The ODPM's Strategy for Children and Young People: 2006–10.

67. A significant area of the government's Community Cohesion agenda is directed towards working with Children and Young People. Involvement in this work is fully supported by Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service. Although not directly applicable to the Fire and Rescue Service, we feel that it is part of our wider role of community involvement. The introduction of The Children Act 2004 also presents significant opportunities for GMFRS to become involved with other agencies in a more structured way.

What are we doing about the issue

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

69. There are three main established programmes within GMFRS which actively seek to engage young people, the Princes Trust TEAM programme, Young Firefighters and FIREFLY. A number of other local projects are also delivered linked to our IRMP.

70. The Prince's Trust scheme runs three teams per year from six locations and has specific target groups in the 16–25 age range. The scheme is primarily funded by the Greater Manchester Learning and Skills Council and delivered by dedicated full time uniformed and non-uniformed staff. Courses run each weekday for 12 weeks, with a five day residential phase. We would want to urge Government to ensure that, through the Learning & Skills Councils, a sustainable funding strategy is in place for this vital work.

71. The Young Firefighter initiative has developed over a longer period and is delivered by volunteer firefighters in four locations. It runs on one evening per week, with a one week camp in summer and various weekend activities. The age range is 11–16 and three schemes are funded by annual budget allocation, whilst one is funded by a grant.

72. Firefly is a more recent development aimed at addressing anti-social behaviour amongst young people on the fringes of criminal activity, and in turn reducing hoax calls and acts of hostility against firefighters. It is currently run in the Oldham area in partnership with the youth offending team but there is a demand for this to be extended into other areas.

73. Firefly is delivered by one full time community liaison officer, with the assistance of six volunteer firefighters whilst each five day course is running, and has delivered very positive outcomes in reducing hoax calls and re-offending rates. Evidence provided by the youth offending team suggests that over 70% of young people who have attended this programme have not committed further offences.

74. National recognition has been received by our Firefly Co-ordinator who has been presented with a national award for Best Individual Contribution to Fire Safety for his work running the Firefly Scheme and his work in Oldham. He has worked on Firefly with youngsters from very difficult backgrounds which has resulted in excellent results as outlined above.

Suggested way forward

75. We have developed our approach to engaging with young people over a number of years and it is encouraging to see that the Government have now introduced a national strategy with the Strategy for Children and Young People 2006–10. We would encourage all Fire and Rescue Services to adopt this guidance as in our experience working with young people is one of the areas that a Fire and Rescue Service can make a difference.

Attacks on Fire-Fighters

The issue

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

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

What are we doing about the issue

77. There is no doubt that there is a seasonal trend with school holidays and the time around Bonfire Night seeing a significant increase. November 2005 accounted for 48 of the 211 attacks.

78. The issue of attacks on firefighters is not just about protecting fire-fighters and emergency workers, it is also about tackling anti-social behaviour which is high on the Government's agenda.

79. Feedback we have had so far from government ministers is that sufficient protection is already provided by existing legislation and that specific offences of assaults on public sector workers are unnecessary. However, we believe that the problem is far wider than physical assaults, appliances and equipment have to be taken off the run because of deliberately inflicted damage. New legislation is required to provide an effective deterrent to the full range of nuisance, hindrance and intimidation that fire and other emergency crews increasingly face.

80. A key area of inconsistency seems to be over what constitutes an attack. It is not just about verbal or physical abuse but about fire-fighters being hindered or obstructed from doing their job. Examples of obstruction include razor blades being placed on the underside of banisters so fire-fighters cut themselves on the way up the stairs or youths setting off hydrants and preventing fire-fighters from getting to them to use them for operational incidents. There is often damage to

equipment. A recent incident involved a BMX bike being thrown at the front of a fire engine. Damage to engines means that they may have to be removed from service. This can affect fire cover and ultimately could impact on community safety.

81. GMFRS have been at the forefront of developments relating to attacks on fire-fighters with robust reporting procedures and operational policies. Many other Fire and Rescue Services have used Greater Manchester's policies as a model of best practice. We have also invested significantly in modifying some of our equipment to cope with the attacks. This has included fitting protective glass on the windscreens, central locking for cabs and most recently trialling CCTV on some appliances.

82. GMFRS fully recognise that this is not just about fire-fighters, it is about all emergency workers. We fully support the Proposed Emergency Workers Protection Bill put forward by Alan Williams MP. This applies to a wide range of emergency workers and is based on the recent legislation introduced in Scotland. It also recognises the issue of hindering and obstructing not only personnel but action against, "vehicle, apparatus, equipment or other thing."

83. Recent incident in Rochdale on 31 August 2005. This incident involved a settee on fire on the ground floor of an unoccupied flat. The cause was malicious ignition. While at the incident the crews came under attack from local youths hurling lumps of concrete, one of which hit a fire-fighter on the side of his head. Luckily he was wearing a helmet and knocked his visor down. He managed to catch a second lump of concrete which was also aimed at his head. However, a further disturbing incident occurred when the Firefighters were inside the building in full BA, the hoses kept cutting out leaving them without water. On investigation it was noted that one of the youths had entered the fire engine cab and turned off the water supply. Had this been inside a blazing building it potentially could have had very serious consequences for the firefighters.

84. We also continue to engage with those in our communities who we feel may be behind the attacks. We have an excellent success rate with a number of initiatives such as Firefly and the Prince's Trust to address this type of anti-social behaviour but sadly funding is limited for these and we are unable to reach everyone. The CFO has established a national group to consider the issue and make recommendations to address the problem on a national basis.

85. Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service has had considerable regional media interest in the issue and as a result is currently running a campaign with the Manchester evening News calling for specific legislation to be introduced to protect all Emergency Service workers.

Suggested way forward

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

Regional Controls and Firelink

The issue

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

What are we doing about the issue

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

Costs

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

Human Resources

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

Timescales/Quality Control

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

Firelink

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

Suggested way forward

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

Water Rescue

The Issue

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

What are we doing about the issue

95. GMFRS formulated a Water Policy Group which produced a policy, procedures and recommendations all of which were accepted as best practice nationally. Some of which are included below:

96. Every operational personnel have been trained in water awareness, which included practical sessions in a swimming pool. New equipment was purchased for every frontline pumping appliance. New equipment and in shore rescue boats purchased for the Water Incident Units.

97. GMFRS is seen a one of the national leaders on the subject of inshore water incidents, we have personnel who form part of national committees and are presently training the Police in the subject of Water Safety.

Suggested way forward

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

CONCLUSION

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

Memorandum by Humberside Fire Authority (FRS 29)

INTRODUCTION

1. This submission is made by the Humberside Fire Authority in response to a request for written evidence from interested organisations from the Select Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

2. The Authority welcomes this opportunity to comment on the progress on modernisation within the Service and in particular the specific issues surrounding Regional Fire Controls and Firelink.

3. The following comments are made whilst acknowledging the significant progress towards the objective of safer communities that has been achieved by the strong leadership of professional fire officers and elected members supported by other partners and stakeholders.

4. The areas that the Authority feel compelled to comment on relate to Regional Control Centres and Firelink; the fire prevention agenda; institutional arrangements and reform; and finance and resources.

Terms of Reference—Questions 1a and 1b

REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES AND FIRELINK

5. Humberside Fire Authority has previously stated its provisional support for a regional control centre project that would deliver enhanced resilience, improved interoperability between Fire and Rescue Services and other Emergency Services, and more effective operational focus. However, as the project has developed the members of the Authority have become increasingly concerned with regard to the robustness of the business case. Indeed, the lack of detail provided to date makes it impossible for members to commit positive support whilst doubts remain about its future impact on our finances and statutory responsibilities.

6. Without having access to detailed financial information, and with some lack of clarity over the extent to which New Burdens will influence the outcomes, the Authority has serious concerns as to the potential revenue costs that may fall on local tax payers. Coupled with this is the potential impact of the proposed new governance arrangements under which there may not be the opportunity for elected members from within the region to mitigate against any adverse impact. These concerns are shared by the members of all of the constituent authorities in the Humberside area with each of them (East Riding of Yorkshire, Kingston upon Hull, North Lincolnshire and North East Lincolnshire) passing motions in council against the movement to a Regional Control Centre. Concerns at Fire Authority level are also shared by the members of the Regional Management Board which recently wrote to the minister to ask for more detailed information on the Business Case and the proposed governance arrangements.

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

FIRELINK

8. Humberside Fire Authority fully support the introduction of Firelink to replace the existing main scheme radio system and recognises the ODPM's resource and funding support in moving the project forward. It is felt that the introduction of the scheme will make a significant difference to the way in which fire appliances and emergency controls communicate. However, developments since the initial conception of the system make it necessary to reconsider certain elements of the project.

9. At the time of the initial specification the issue of hand-held communication on incident grounds fell outside of the scope and remit of the project, as did the alerting of Retained Duty System Stations. We believe that in light of the evolving role of Fire Authorities in supporting the civil resilience agenda, as well as the increasing role the Service now plays in responding to a wider range of civil emergencies, it would be prudent to revisit the initial specification with a view to including hand-held incident ground communication facilities. It would also be opportune to consider extending the functionality of the system to enable Retained Station Alerting to be included.

10. It is fair to say that Humberside Fire Authority also has some concerns regarding the impact of the system on subsequent revenue costs due to the lack of firm information on what charges will be made by the service providers to individual Fire Services. Discussions with our colleagues in the Police have revealed a wide disparity in charges for a similar commercial system making long term financial planning virtually impossible. It is strongly recommended therefore that a detailed business case for post installation functions and charges be produced at the earliest opportunity in order that the impact upon local tax payers may be determined.

Terms of Reference—Question 2a

THE FIRE PREVENTION AGENDA

11. The remit of the Select Committee is to determine whether “prevention is better than cure” and to what extent the message has been embedded into the culture of the service. In this case the results speak for themselves with a continuing reduction in calls to the service and a significant reduction in fire deaths and fire related injuries.

12. There is, however, some serious concern over the capacity of the Authority to effectively deliver the Community Safety message in the following areas:

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

Terms of Reference—Question 2b

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND REFORM

13. Almost every aspect of the Service is now in the process of change and that change is either refocusing resources to better address risk in our communities, be that risk from the traditional adversary of fire, or dealing with the impact/potential of other incidents involving hazardous materials, terrorist activities or climate change. Most of the current elements of modernisation assist the Authority to use resources more effectively and to utilise a more flexible approach to protecting local communities.

14. Unfortunately, there is one area that modernisation has failed to impact upon and despite numerous assurances that change is imminent the National Joint Council has steadfastly remained in a format that existed prior to the last national industrial action. The overwhelming evidence is that the change agenda will not be delivered in an effective way whilst these institutional arrangements remain in place because they do not serve the best interests of the service. It is essential that the NJC arrangements are reformed in a way that gives representation to all stakeholders whilst removing the mechanisms that allows the status quo to be implemented.

FINANCE AND RESOURCES

15. Whilst committed to providing Best Value and also acknowledging our responsibilities under “the efficiency savings regime” we are concerned that the envisaged programme of change cannot be provided through these means alone. Both capital and revenue resources are needed to support the new and expanded functions in areas such as New Dimensions, Community Fire Safety and Community Safety and developing the broader based Rescue Role.

16. The recent grant settlement has demonstrated that those authorities that are prudent and produce efficiency savings are penalised through the realignment of a formula that favours other authorities more than them.

K L Marshall
Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive

19 December 2005

Memorandum by UNISON (FRS 30)

PROMOTING DIVERSITY WITHIN THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

1. INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

2. LANGUAGE

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

3. UNIFORMED FOCUS

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

The White Paper, and subsequent Fire Service Frameworks for 2004–05 and 2005–06 made mention of IPDS for all staff. However, information UNISON has received from branches demonstrates that Fire Services have overall made very little progress in developing IPDS for FRSS. Whilst UNISON recognises that IPDS is role related—and FRSS might be included in the development of those occupying or aspiring to managerial roles—there is an absence of any reference to FRSS occupying non managerial roles, namely those on lower pay and amongst whom are the larger numbers of women, black and minority ethnic and disabled employees. Furthermore, even for those occupying managerial roles, there is no formal indication of how completion of the IPDS process would be linked to financial reward for FRSS. This demonstrates the point made earlier, that certainly for FRSS, diversity does not lead to equality.

4. GOOD LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

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

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

- The adoption of more open and approachable and less militaristic management style.
- The removal of the distinction between uniformed and non-uniformed, and individual ranks through the introduction of corporate wear in appropriate roles.
- Linking FRSS pay to that of their fire fighter colleagues, albeit so far mainly at managerial levels.
- The opening up of selection processes throughout the Service, particularly at senior management team to introduce diversity and alternative professionalism to the leadership of the organisation.

5. LACK OF CULTURAL VISION

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

6. HR MANAGEMENT

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

7. TRADE UNION ENGAGEMENT

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

8. INVOLVEMENT OF OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

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

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

9. CPA

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

inclusion in future CPAs. UNISON also considers that if Services are to regard promoting diversity as a priority they should not expect to receive a good or excellent rating unless they have performed well in this area.

10. EQUALITY PRACTITIONERS

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

11. CONCLUSION

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

Memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FRS 31)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The fire and rescue service (FRS) has made major progress and delivered significant improvements since the Select Committee's last Inquiry, through the modernisation programme implemented in partnership with the ODPM.

2. *The Independent Review of the Fire Service* in 2002³ stated that “The fire service needs to be changed from top to bottom and every aspect of its work reformed to bring it into line with best practice at the start of the twenty-first century”.⁴

3. The White Paper—*Our Fire and Rescue Service*⁵—was published in response to this and set out a vision of a modern, effective and efficient service for the twenty-first century. It signalled the importance of a shift towards preventing fires, and acknowledged the wider role of the service.

4. The vision of the White Paper was of a reformed FRS which:

- Placed the wider rescue and community role of the service on a statutory footing;
- Moved from a prescriptive set of national standards of fire cover to the more flexible system of integrated risk management plans (IRMPs) where decisions about fire cover are made within a strategic framework set by locally elected members;
- Overhauled fire institutions and the pay negotiating bodies;
- Looked at improving working conditions; and
- Moved towards a culture which promoted diversity.

5. The modernisation agenda is now underpinned by the legislative framework provided by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. The Act represents a comprehensive reform of the statutory framework. In particular, it places the prevention of fires at the heart of legislation, for example with the creation of new duties to promote fire safety; and gives fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) powers to work with other partners in the community to deliver this duty. The Act gives statutory effect to other roles FRAs already undertake, such as attending road traffic accidents and, by Order, their new responsibilities in relation to terrorist threats and other activities, such as responding to serious flooding (subject to stakeholder consultation and Parliamentary scrutiny). The Act also gives FRAs wide discretion to plan, equip and take action to meet local risks and priorities.

³ Chaired by Sir George Bain and presented to the House on 16 December 2002.

⁴ Foreword to *The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives*.

⁵ June 2003.

6. The ODPM works in partnership with the FRS to implement the modernisation and resilience agenda, taking advice from key stakeholders including the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) and the Local Government Association (LGA).

7. Since 2003, some significant changes have been made, both at the front line and at the centre, in order to deliver modernisation. For example:

- Since April 2003 every FRA has been required to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). They are now consulting on their Year 3 plans covering 2006–07;
- The Home Fire Risk Check Initiative, which the Government will fund to the sum of £25 million by 2008, has led to some 278,000 home fire safety checks being carried out and 330,000 smoke alarms being installed. This supports, in particular, our target to reduce accidental fire-related deaths; and
- The three major resilience programmes of the FRS are now being rolled out and are helping raise the capability of the service.

At the centre, ODPM has recently combined its work on fire and civil resilience into one directorate—the Fire and Resilience Directorate (FRD). This will ensure that FRS modernisation and resilience go hand-in-hand as we move to implementation of key projects and the move towards including them in core business. The department will therefore present a single face to the wider stakeholder community.

8. This memorandum outlines the progress that has been made in implementing the vision of a modern service.

OUR AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

9. The overarching aims of the department in relation to fire modernisation and civil resilience are as follows:

- To help transform the way the FRS works;
- To develop a more flexible response focused on high risk areas so as to save more lives;
- To respond better to future issues such as demographic shifts, global threats and climate change;
- To build capacity at a regional and local level by engaging better with our partners;
- To strengthen the country's resilience in partnership with others, in particular by enhancing the capability of the FRS to respond to major incidents through our fire resilience programme (Firelink, FiReControl and New Dimension).

10. The Directorate also contributes to wider ODPM and cross government priorities, including:

- Acting in support of the Government's wider agenda of social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal, crime reduction and respect;
- Helping to develop planning, and adapting to changing circumstances, including the threat of terrorism and environmental disaster; and
- Supporting relevant workstreams as part of the Government's overall capabilities programme, led by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS).

OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

11. The fire Public Service Agreement (PSA) target for England, which came into effect on 1 April 2005 is:

- By 2010, to reduce the number of accidental fire-related deaths in the home by 20% and the number of deliberate fires by 10%.

This includes a floor target:

- That no local fire and rescue authority has a fatality rate, from accidental fires in the home, more than 1.25 times the national average by 2010.

12. The National Framework for the FRS supports the delivery of this target by setting out:

- The Government's expectations for the FRS;
- What FRAs are expected to do; and
- What support the Government will provide.

13. The National Framework is a statutory document which, in effect, acts as a "contract" between the ODPM and the FRS. The Framework sets out both a broad context for the work of the service, which is flexible and can be adapted to suit local circumstances, and specific aims and requirements which each FRA must deliver. This facilitates both local flexibility to meet local circumstances and clear, transparent communications between central government and the FRS on critical issues.

14. The approach set out in the Framework has been delivering results. It is estimated that the FRS currently saves some 1,650 lives per year from dwelling fires alone. The latest provisional figures show that there were 16% fewer accidental fire deaths in 2004–05 than a year earlier. Deliberate primary fires have also

fallen to 23% below the 2010 PSA target. It is critical that momentum is now maintained to consolidate these indicative figures into sustainable trends, particularly as fire incident reports confirm that around 80% of victims can be classified as “hard-to-reach” groups.

15. The FRS also contributes to the ODPM efficiency target to deliver £105 million gross cashable efficiency savings in 2007–08. FRAs’ first Annual Efficiency Statements confirm that they are well on track to meet their efficiency target, predicting that they will have delivered efficiencies of more than three times the predicted trajectory by the end of 2005–06. The challenge now will be to continue to make savings.

16. The benefits of resilience projects are clear, with New Dimension equipment being deployed in response to the flooding at Carlisle and the fire at Hemel Hempstead, and to assist with urban search and rescue in the aftermath of the Pakistan earthquake.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Resilience

17. The fire resilience programme aims to enhance the capability of the FRS to respond to major incidents. It comprises three main projects:

- Firelink—which will deliver a wide area radio network enabling FRAs to communicate with each other and the other emergency services;
- FiReControl—which will deliver a modern, cost effective and resilience command and control network to ensure the efficient and effective deployment of FRS capabilities; and
- New Dimension—which will deliver enhanced capabilities to respond to incidents requiring the mass decontamination of the public, the rescue of the public from collapsed structures and flooding.

18. Together, these projects are delivering major change in the FRS as part of its modernisation and will lead to the integration of resilience into core business. New Dimension has already delivered much of the equipment that FRSs use to respond to major incidents. Government is investing over £200 million⁶ in this part of the resilience programme alone. The Firelink and FiReControl projects are already reaching major procurement milestones to achieve the goal of regional control centres from which FRSs will be able to work more flexibly across borders and communicate with the other emergency services using the same radio system.

19. This investment also brings substantial benefits for the local tax payer where regional control functions and equipment deployment result in efficiencies without compromising local autonomy. This complements the regional and local approach to resilience through inter-agency forums, which provide a vital voice for the FRS to contribute to effective multi-agency planning and response. We are ensuring that change is fully embedded in the service through our collaboration with FRSs, through the secondment of officers from the service to the projects and through the wider involvement and commitment of CFOA. On the ground firefighter roles are changing, providing a receptive environment for the development of new skills to use New Dimension equipment, modern call handling technology and digital radio systems—all of which attract new recruits and provide improved career paths for those already in the service. In all, the FRS is benefiting from major investment in its future.

FIRE PREVENTION AND RISK MANAGEMENT

20. The White Paper⁷ signalled the importance of a shift towards preventing fires, rather than simply responding to them. This culture is now embedded in the FRS, and has been supported by a number of initiatives, implemented in partnership with the FRS and other stakeholders.

- IRMPs are entering their third year, and a strategic steering group has been established to ensure that stakeholders are content that correct processes have been followed, and that a robust risk analysis has taken place. The Government is committed to providing ongoing support for the implementation of IRMPs.
- Community Fire Safety is an important tool in our drive for fire prevention. Government has invested heavily in initiatives such as the provision of £4.5 million (funding until March 2006) under the Community Fire Safety Innovation Fund. This is in addition to the £11.3 million we have made available over the same period as part of the Arson Control Forum’s Implementation Fund to support local arson prevention projects.
- Initiatives supported by the Arson Control Forum have had positive results. In the year ending March 2005, deliberate primary fires in England fell by 23% to 72,700, a figure which included a decrease of 25% in the number of deliberate vehicle fires to 46,400. This is 30% below our baseline target.

⁶ £188 million in capital and up to £16 million annual crewing cost.

⁷ Our Fire and Rescue Service, 2003.

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- The FRS has also been undertaking work with children and young people, and a strategy for progressing this work has recently been released for consultation by the ODPM.
 - The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005⁸ will come into force on 1 April 2006. This will underpin the fire prevention agenda by providing guidance to the public.
 - The e-Fire national project (an internet “portal” for the FRSs in England) will carry safety information and interactive content to assist members of the public and premises operators in improving their own safety as well as in requesting the delivery of services locally. It will also help FRAs to engage with communities. The launch is planned for April 2006.
 - We are looking closely at the fitting of sprinklers in new and altered premises where occupants are vulnerable to fire, including schools, residential care homes and houses of multiple occupation.

WORKING TOGETHER

21. Regional management boards (RMBs) were set up in each English region outside London by 1 April 2004 and have taken responsibility for the six workstreams⁹ set out in the 2003 White Paper. The Government has, however, continued to make clear that it has no plans to regionalise the service.

22. The National Procurement Strategy for the FRS 2005–08 sets out the ODPM’s strategy for FRS procurement. FiReBuy Ltd has been established to drive this strategy forward.

23. The principle of working together is also being related to other issues. For example, the FRS IT infrastructures have been reviewed. A Communications Technology “roadmap” has been produced for implementation in partnership with CFOA and the LGA. This should facilitate the sharing of information between FRAs, other agencies and central government.

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

24. The following institutional arrangements are now in place and provide advice to the Government:

- the Practitioners’ Forum, Business and Community Safety Forum, Central Local Partnership Fire sub-group and Ministerial Sounding Board continue to provide advice to officials, complementing input from FRS personnel and professional bodies;
- A review of the service’s main negotiating body, the National Joint Council (NJC), has been undertaken and we have seen limited improvements. We continue to press for further reform, such as the inclusion of smaller unions (eg the Retained Firefighters’ Union) on the Council; and
- HM Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) will be replaced in March 2007 by a core team of professional FRS advisors, supported by FRS secondees. This team will provide professional advice to ministers and officials, advice to the Secretary of State in respect of powers of operational direction and intervention, operational assurance, and guidance to the FRS in support of government initiatives.

FIRE AND RESCUE STAFF

25. The Government recognises the need, highlighted by Professor Sir George Bain in his review, for FRSs to have an effective professional human resource function. The 2005–06 National Framework states that the Government will work with FRAs, CFOA and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development to stimulate the development of a skilled, professional and strategic HR function by developing the workforce, and encouraging networking and the sharing of best practice.

26. Through RMBs, FRAs are required to take responsibility for the development and welfare of their staff and to plan for this. There is also support from the centre, including initiatives such as:

- the Diversity Happens programme, providing the service with strategic focus and guidance;
- new firefighter selection tests to tackle direct and indirect discrimination; and
- literature encouraging under-represented groups to consider a career with the FRS

27. A number of tasks still need further work. For example, FRAs have been asked to develop and implement new disciplinary procedures. Sickness levels are also a cause for concern and remain relatively high. The ODPM is working with the Health and Safety Executive to address this, and a report is due in spring 2007.

⁸ SI 2005 No 1541.

⁹ Ensuring resilience to emergencies; establishing regional control centres; introducing regional procurement; integrating common and specialist services; developing regional training; and introducing regional human resource functions.

28. Government is working with unions with the aim of bringing a new pension scheme into operation for new entrants to the FRS from April 2006¹⁰. One of the benefits of this new scheme is that FRS staff on role-related duties rather than firefighting, who were formerly eligible for ill health retirement, will be able to remain in employment. Early indications are that this is helping FRAs to reduce the level of ill-health retirements from 62% of all retirements in 2002–03 to 25% (provisional) in 2004–05.

29. The report by the Retained Review Team was published by the ODPM in February 2005. A stakeholder task group is taking forward the recommendations from the report and FRAs will self audit and take necessary steps to bring themselves in line with central guidance. Government is committed to the promotion of the role of retained firefighters, and a press and regional workshop campaign is planned for 2006 to publicise this.

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

30. As set out in the White Paper, we believe there is a strong case for developing a Centre of Excellence for the fire and rescue service. This would build on the strength of the Fire Service College but also expand its current role to encompass good practice, promoting excellence and distance learning. We expect to make an announcement early in the new year.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

31. The Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) provides a competency-based approach to workforce development. Central work on the implementation of IPDS is largely complete. This will now be incorporated in core business under the leadership of the Fire Service College. In the longer term, we expect that this will become a function of the proposed Centre of Excellence.

32. The National FRS Learning and Development Strategy for England was published in November 2005 and sets out a framework for the next ten years which will ensure that staff and elected members have the opportunity to gain the skills and competencies they need at the heart of FRS modernisation. It is important to improve access to learning, particularly amongst retained duty system and non-firefighting staff. Another key issue for staff development is leadership. The ODPM will shortly go out to consultation on the introduction of a programme of leadership initiatives applicable to all FRS staff developed by task groups involving key stakeholders.

FINANCE

33. The Government recognises that the modernisation and resilience programmes and the associated agreement on pay and terms and conditions has, and will continue to have, significant financial ramifications. There are increased costs to fund the pay award and potentially some aspects of the modernisation agenda, such as the increased emphasis on prevention¹¹. However, the Government also believes it is right that FRAs continue to support the service in its modernisation programme. Government has made significant investment in the FRS:

- At the LGA's request, we paid £30 million transitional funding to English and Welsh FRAs in 2004–05. Half of this funding will be recouped in 2006–07 and half in 2007–08. FRAs, through the LGA, have reassured us that this is achievable;
- The first two-year provisional local government finance settlement for 2006–07 and 2007–08 was announced on 5 December 2005. This will maximise the benefits of three year spending plans for central government departments by cascading them down to the maximum extent possible;
- Over the past seven years nearly £325 million has been invested in the FRS under the PFI programme. We also recently announced that five authorities are to take forward new PFI schemes worth around £125 million;
- We have made £25 million available to FRAs in England up to March 2008 to enable home fire risk checks to be undertaken and to provide free smoke alarm installation for vulnerable, high risk households;
- Over £200 million has been invested in equipment, training and crewing for the New Dimension programme; and
- The ODPM will fund up to £1.8 million in 2006–07 and 2007–08 for running FiReBuy Ltd.

¹⁰ The cost of the new scheme will be about 22% of pensionable pay against 37.5% for the existing scheme. The new scheme will be open to firefighters on the retained duty system. Under the new pension arrangements, employment after age 60 will be subject to fitness.

¹¹ Where a central government department's policies or initiatives increase the cost of providing local authority services, the "new burdens" principle means that the Government will fund the additional expenditure, providing that the aggregate value of the burdens across all authorities in any financial year is greater than £100,000.

34. Significant savings are also available, for example, through better targeting of resources to match risks, regional collaboration and more efficient working practices. The Independent Review of the Fire and Rescue Service said “we are confident that, within the foreseeable future, benefits will more than exceed additional costs, including those of the pay increases we propose.”

35. Current figures show encouraging trends. For example:

- Initial analysis of the annual efficiency statements submitted by FRAs on 17 November suggests that FRAs made £38 million cashable efficiency savings in 2004–05 and that they expect to make cumulative cashable efficiency savings of £90 million in 2005–06¹². This is significantly ahead of the expected trajectory;
- Changes to the pension scheme will counter the yearly volatility in pensions expenditure which has influenced council tax precept increases, and increases transparency in authorities’ budgets.
- The use of capping powers means that we expect to see average council tax increases in each of the next two years of less than 5%¹³.

36. There is still work to be done in the coming years. For example, in spring 2006 we will revisit the potential for charging for false alarms in light of work which has been undertaken since the Inquiry of 2003. We will also start a review of charging for Road Traffic Accidents in spring 2006, as suggested by the Select Committee, drawing on the experience of the NHS.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

37. Comprehensive Performance Assessments of all English FRAs were carried out during 2005. The ODPM has put a support team in place to work with those authorities assessed as “weak” or “poor” to advise and support them through the improvement planning and recovery processes. The Audit Commission will be taking this work forward and will, in due course, measure movement against the CPA baseline.

38. A suite of best value indicators has been developed, in consultation with a stakeholder working group, to reflect the performance expectations of the National Framework and the White Paper and underpin performance assessment in the FRS.

39. Local area agreements enable the FRS to tap into a much wider range of partnerships, and possibly funding, to support work on key priorities and outcomes¹⁴ through their participation.

RESEARCH

40. The ODPM commissions a wide range of research to underpin all aspects of fire and civil resilience policy. Recent projects include the development and implementation of the fire service emergency cover (FSEC) toolkit to support IRMP and the evaluation of arson and community fire safety projects. Scientific research projects include the evaluation of suitable personal protective equipment and detection equipment to improve the FRS capability to respond effectively to a chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incident.

41. Current research priorities include the development of lower cost domestic sprinkler systems in support of our PSA target, and the creation of a national FRS strategy and academy to ensure greater collaboration and communication between the whole research community. We will be taking forward work to ensure that regional control centres can take advantage of FSEC toolkit data, and have recently begun a scoping study looking at the potential benefits of co-responder schemes.

CONCLUSION

42. Since the Select Committee’s last Inquiry into the FRS and the publication of the White Paper in 2003, the FRS has gone through a process of fundamental change. The FRS is now focussed on preventing, not just responding to fires. This is already achieving large reductions in the number of fire deaths. The FRS has been through cultural change—moving from rank to role. A competence-based approach to training at all levels has been introduced and the FRS is striving to become a more diverse and flexible organisation and employer. The FRS has taken on and developed expertise in dealing with a range of resilience issues professionally and efficiently, working across individual FRA boundaries to achieve results.

¹² This £90 million represents total efficiency gains of 4.4% against the provisional 2004–05 baseline (including capital charges). All figures are provisional, subject to possible revision by some FRAs.

¹³ We made clear in our General Election manifesto that we would not hesitate to use our capping powers to protect council tax payers from excessive rises in future years.

¹⁴ Children and young people; safer and stronger communities; healthier communities and older people; and economic development and enterprise.

43. The ODPM has laid the foundations and supported the service through all these changes as we have set out in this memorandum. We are well on the way to having a fire and rescue service that is fit for purpose in the 21st Century. We remain firmly committed to the modernisation programme and driving change in each fire and rescue authority.

44. There are a number of challenges facing the service in the next 10 years, not least the aging population; the number of single person households; the construction of 4 million new dwellings; and the increasing threat from terrorism and natural disasters. So the FRS will need to continue to adapt and change. Looking ahead, we are developing a vision to meet these challenges and the role that the FRS will need to play in the future. We have already enhanced the capability of the service to respond to major incidents, such as terrorist attacks and those caused by climate change. We are enhancing these capabilities still further. We have already asked fire and rescue authorities to prioritise their community fire safety work with vulnerable groups and we are also asking authorities to work in partnership to deliver their functions more efficiently and effectively. We are encouraging them to look at their structures to ensure they have the capacity to meet the challenges ahead.

45. There is more to do. But, in the last two years, the fire and rescue service has become a more modern, more dynamic service. It is now better equipped to protect the public against the changing and growing threats that we face. And it is ready to respond to the new challenges it now faces.

Supplementary memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FRS 31(a))

With relation to our written evidence for the Fire and Rescue Service inquiry, I would like to clarify a paragraph which is not entirely clear in its current form.

Under the heading Institutional arrangements, paragraph 24, a bullet point on the National Joint Council (NJC) may be misleading in the current context. The NJC is an entirely independent body, being made up of representatives for the Local Government Association (LGA), Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, Fire Authority for Northern Ireland and the FBU. I hope that the following paragraph clarifies the matter for the Committee:

“Under the 2004 Act, Government has taken reserve powers to set up new negotiating machinery for the service although it has consistently made clear that its preference is for voluntary reform. The 2003 pay and conditions agreement between national employers and the FBU provided for a review of the service’s main negotiating body, the National Joint Council. Whilst we have seen limited improvements in terms of a reduction in the number of seats on the employers’ side of the NJC, Government still wishes to see other reforms including a separation of the machinery for middle managers and the inclusion of smaller unions within national negotiating arrangements.”

Alun Evans
Director
Fire & Resilience

Memorandum by Cumbria Fire & Rescue Authority (FRS 32)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 At this time of unprecedented change, Cumbria Fire & Rescue Authority welcomes the opportunity that the Select Committee is taking to examine progress on Fire & Rescue Service reform.

1.2 Cumbria has embraced the modernisation agenda and believes that its Fire & Rescue Service has been at the forefront of a range of initiatives. However, the sheer scale and pace of reform is of concern. That concern is increased when you consider the different starting position of many individual fire and rescue authorities and particularly the issues surrounding the differing governance models that exist. That different starting point will, in a number of cases, affect the ability to move both resources from intervention to prevention and achieve the level of efficiency savings required by Government.

2. REGIONAL CONTROLS AND FIRELINK

2.1 The Fire & Rescue Authority acknowledges the clear requirement within the National Framework document to deliver the Regional Control project. There are, however, genuine concerns over several aspects of the project, not least the public belief that the rural nature of Cumbria has not been adequately addressed. This is exacerbated by the distance of the proposed Control from Cumbria and which has undoubtedly raised real fears in the minds of ordinary people.

2.2 The full business case has not yet been made available to individual fire and rescue authorities, which add to those genuine concerns outlined above. At no stage yet has it been demonstrated that this project represents value for money for the people of Cumbria.

2.3 There is already slippage within the project and if the timescale for the North West of 2008 is to go back further, then Cumbria Fire & Rescue Authority will be unable to maintain its existing Command & Control system. An approach has been made to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) asking that if this does happen then could the costs of a replacement Command & Control system be considered under New Burdens funding. If we are to finance a replacement Command & Control system ourselves, then it would not deliver best value simply because the lifespan that we would obtain from it would be extremely limited due to the move to a Regional Control. We understand that this request has been refused following replies to individual Members of Parliament who had supported out submission.

2.4 There are increasing concerns following the announcement by Government that the preferred governance model for the new Regional Fire Control is to be a local authority company and that this must be established by Spring 2006. There are a number of risks in doing this for individual authorities, particularly in relation to financial obligations and aspects of the European Procurement Directive.

2.5 The Human Resource aspects of this project are also ambiguous and there is a distinct lack of clarity. This Authority is committed to its staff but it is impossible to provide them with any information. Now that the location of the North West Control is known and, taking into account the distances involved, there is a realistic possibility of redundancies.

2.6 The Authority is also greatly concerned about the continuing slippage to the Firelink project. The decision by Government to procure a national system is to be commended. However, the continuing delays with this project will now result in this Authority having to incur the financial burden of investing in the existing radio infrastructure which is becoming increasingly unreliable. The existing system was shared with Cumbria Police who have now moved to Airwave and the entire cost of that existing system have now fallen to this Authority. That will result in additional costs of around £100,000 per annum for the next three years together with the whole costs of decommissioning in Year 3. Again, this was submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to be considered under New Burdens and we understanding that request has been refused. These additional costs, together with the potential costs of replacement elements of the Command & Control system (para 2.3) are not one that this Authority has brought about and it is extremely difficult for Members to justify in terms of best value this additional expenditure for local Council Tax payers for what are obsolete systems. The Government should give greater considerations to New Burdens funding for where these two important projects of a Regional Control and Firelink are impacting financially on individual authorities.

2.7 There must be greater consultation and clarity from Government with individual authorities. If these vital projects are to be delivered in a timely and cost effective manner, then the Government must recognise this position and should not impose additional costs at a local level.

3. GOVERNANCE

3.1 The differing governance models do not best serve the needs of the Fire and Rescue Service in this country.

3.2 Cumbria County Council, as the Fire & Rescue Authority, are acutely aware of the difficulties of adequately funding its Fire & Rescue Service against the need to passport Education funding, the requirement to establish Childrens and Adult Services at this time, together with other competing demands of the County Council.

3.3 Those competing demands are not faced by stand-alone fire and rescue authorities. To an extent the outcome of the recent Fire Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) reflected that capacity and funding are real issues for some fire and rescue services who are still part of a County Council.

3.4 That position also impacts upon the Regional Management Board and the ability of a County Council Service to play a full role in certain aspects of joint working. If we take the example of procurement, Cumbria Fire & Rescue Service is part of a much larger organisation than all of the remaining fire and rescue authorities within the Region put together. Through being part of a County Council, the fire & rescue service is tied to corporate contracts which deliver best value to the organisation as a whole. Other than joining with the other fire & rescue services for the procurement of specialist equipment it is not cost effective to step outside of those County Council contracts.

3.5 That is also the position in relation to the provision of Legal Services, Human Resources, ICT and Property. This effectively leaves us as the only County Council Fire & Rescue Service within the Region on the periphery of some aspects of joint working within the Regional Management Board.

4. FINANCE

4.1 The funding formula for the Fire & Rescue Service in this country has, to a degree, disproportionately rewarded the more urban services at the expense of largely rural retained services. To an extent the current formula rewards similar aspects twice over whilst aspects of sparsity are not included.

4.2 That position is exacerbated for a Service such as Cumbria who, as part of a County Council, have to compete for scarce resources and who unlike the majority of fire & rescue authorities are not a precepting authority in their own right.

4.3 The Audit Commission made reference during the recent CPA for Cumbria Fire & Rescue Authority that it had to operate within tight financial constraints and meagre resources. A largely retained service does not have a similar ability to move resources from intervention to prevention or to achieve the level of efficiency savings required by Government as a more urban fire and rescue service with large numbers of Regular firefighters.

4.4 Reference was made in the opening paragraphs of this submission to the different starting points of individual fire and rescue services in relation to the modernising agenda. Where authorities started from a low financial base and had already embarked upon aspects of modernisation and the re-direction of efficiencies prior to the industrial action, then they are as a consequence at a disadvantage when additional efficiencies are now required.

4.5 That financial position has been significantly worsened by the recent changes to the funding of both existing and the new pension schemes for the fire and rescue service.

4.6 It is acknowledged that changes had to be made to the pension scheme and the ability finally for retained firefighters to join the new scheme, is to be applauded.

4.7 What should have been a cost neutral change to the funding mechanism has resulted in potential oncosts to this authority in the revenue budget for 2006–07 of up to £1 million.

4.8 Verbal assurances had been provided by the ODPM that the impact of retained firefighters joining the new pension scheme would be reflected in the funding mechanism. That impact, together with the changes to the existing scheme, have undoubtedly not been reflected in the grant settlement for this Authority and will have to be borne by local Council Tax payers with no visible improvement to levels of service.

4.9 These unprecedented oncosts will clearly affect a service that the Audit Commission stated was already operating within tight financial constraints. In light of what can only be described as a financial hammer blow, it is difficult to see how this Authority can possibly invest further resources in its Fire & Rescue Service at this time in order to improve service delivery and to take forward the reform agenda. Unlike many urban fire and rescue services, there is little scope that these costs can be offset through reducing the number of Regular firefighters. In financial terms the reform agenda has impacted disproportionately on the citizens of Cumbria.

5. RETAINED

5.1 The reform agenda and the demands upon the Service in terms of community safety, civil contingencies and additional statutory duties for the fire and rescue service, have immense implications for the retained service.

5.2 Around 60% of fire cover in this country is provided by retained firefighters. Yet the basis of their employment and reward mechanism remain an anachronism.

5.3 There has to be recognition by Government of the vital role of the retained service and the extent that large areas of this country is dependent upon them. If the Fire & Rescue Service is increasingly expected to fulfil a civil protection role, then increased levels of investment in recruitment, retention and training must be provided.

5.4 Cumbria, as many other rural fire and rescue services, are experiencing real difficulties in recruiting and retaining retained firefighters. Increasing levels of commitment required to meet training and health and safety requirements of a modern emergency service, a changing culture away from intervention to prevention are placing significant demands upon our part time workforce and their conditions of service have not kept pace with the reform agenda.

5.5 A number of services are looking at alternative methods of payment for their retained firefighters and are looking to move to a salaried scheme which rewards cover provided rather than being based on response to incidents. Such a move will also reflect the change in society where greater emphasis is now placed upon leisure time and where people do not want to be tied for significant periods of time and which at present form a fundamental element of any retained firefighter contract. Such changes of employment have to be a priority if the cultural change from intervention to prevention is to be achieved and if we are to ensure the basic provision of fire cover in many areas.

5.6 The ability to bring that about has not been assisted in the changes to the funding mechanism of the pension scheme. As a result the people of Cumbria will see additional oncosts for no improvement in service delivery.

6. JOINT WORKING WITH OTHER EMERGENCY SERVICES

6.1 The recent Government announcement for the restructuring of the Police and Ambulance Services in this country will have undoubtedly moved their focus away from areas of joint working. It is hoped that the Government can complete this process as quickly as possible to allow partnership and collaboration between the emergency services to again move forward. The advent of Local Area Agreements gives even greater impetus to that joint working.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 The terms of reference of the Select Committee, as set out, is to examine the implications for citizens and the Fire & Rescue Service of the reform agenda and to gauge progress at this time of unprecedented change. We would ask that the Government recognise and address the issues included within this submission and that in moving this agenda forward also recognise that there is a fundamental difference between the governance models of fire and rescue authorities in this country and the financial basis upon which they operate. We believe that there is a growing understanding by Government of those issues and of the unique difficulties facing many retained rural fire and rescue services and for the citizens they serve. We also believe that if the reform agenda is to succeed then there has to be more openness and consultation between all parties.

Only through partnership and an open dialogue will we achieve the level of change required.

Memorandum by Bedfordshire and Luton Combined Fire Authority (FRS 33)

INTRODUCTION

1. We are pleased to have this opportunity to submit evidence to the inquiry which provides a useful stock-take of progress and success, whilst also identifying some of the barriers to that in an environment of almost unprecedented change.

2. We wish to take this opportunity to express our view in each of the areas indicated as of interest in the Select Committees' November press release.

3. Fire Authority Members and the Fire Chief Officer will be pleased to give further evidence to the Committee on these or any other matters that it may wish to explore.

1(a) *The Introduction of Regional Control Centres*

1.1 This Authority is ambivalent about the development of regional control centres because we believe that this is a matter of output. It is imperative that the fire and rescue service has access to high quality mobilising and operational resource management facilities and if that can be achieved effectively, the scale of the organisation providing it is of no consequence.

1.2 Once this Authority can see a tangible improvement in our existing in-house service, we will be happy to migrate.

1.3 We do, however, have some concerns as to whether this is achievable:

- (i) The Business Case is not clear, and we do not feel all options have been explored;
- (ii) Funding arrangements are not fully resolved in respect of the burden which will fall on our taxpayers;
- (iii) There is insufficient detail available concerning the governance model, accountabilities and responsibilities which will remain with local fire authorities and those that will not. The consequences of miscalculations could be met in lives;
- (iv) We believe that the future of control centres should be decided on the practical decisions of functionality, cost and most effective service delivery, and not on any local or national political consideration;
- (v) In view of the doubts surrounding (i), (ii) and (iii) above, this Authority has some reservations as to whether this direction will actually deliver improved value for money. We do, however, recognise that genuine improvements to our services are worth paying for.

1(b) *Firelink*

1.4 There is no real doubt that a national radio scheme which is fully interoperable and provides improved data transmission is overdue within the fire and rescue service.

1.5 We are concerned about the growing complexity of the project which is probably due to a lack of clarity in the business case or the product methodology.

2(a) *Community Fire Safety and Fire Prevention*

2.1 There is no doubt that the expansion of our fire prevention role to include a wide range of community safety initiatives is already paying dividends. Reduction in fire deaths and injuries, primary fires and arson are very good indications of this, as are increases in smoke detector ownership and the prominence of the service working in our community with youth and road accident reduction.

2.2 Most of this new work is funded by careful examination of our resources and effectively delivering more with similar resource levels.

2.3 We are pleased with our achievements in this area, but recognise that there is still much more preventative work to do and future funding must recognise these demands and increased responsibilities based on demographic research which balances each aspect of service delivery. It is simplistic to suggest that these new measures can be met from efficiency savings indefinitely.

2(b) *Operational Service Delivery*

2.4 Our communities enjoy an increasingly high level of operational service across a wider range of activities, including specialist rescue, civil resilience, and mass decontamination. The Service also maintain the ability to deal with the completely unexpected or unthinkable. This requires good equipment, a high level of effective training and constant operational preparedness.

2.5 It is our view that whilst we strive to constantly improve our fire prevention services we will not do so to the detriment of that operational efficiency. It is equally our view that it is our reputation for high quality response which gives us the public confidence to engage in all of the much-wider community safety agenda. This is a credibility that some public services are apparently losing.

2(c) *Institutional Arrangements*

2.6 We welcome the new freedoms and greater local flexibility that come from the new Fire and Rescue Services Act and resultant changes to fire service institutions and procedures.

2.7 This is already accruing great benefit to improving service delivery and balancing our strategy through integrated risk management planning based on well-researched risk assessment.

2.8 Regional Management Boards, whilst delivering against some of their objectives are questionable in creating sustained, measurable cost efficiencies. We believe it would be far more effective to drive a higher level of inter-service collaboration through an additional set of best value performance indicators for each fire authority or fire and rescue service in the six key themes.

2.9 We are disappointed with the lack of progress in developing negotiating machinery to replace the National Joint Council, and in the development of a negotiating and consultative body for senior officers below Assistant Chief Fire Officer grade.

2.10 This is, in some way, reflective of the reluctance of the Fire Brigades Union to engage in the development of reforms, other than those which fulfil their own specific aspirations.

2(d) *Governance*

2.11 This Authority believes that there should be a single governance model for fire authorities and that this model should be reflective of the current combined fire authority or metropolitan fire authority model which are broadly similar.

2.12 We believe this model creates the following opportunities:

- (i) Precepting and direct accountability;
- (ii) An identifiable, stand-alone authority;
- (iii) Greater flexibility in the local deployment of resources;
- (iv) Allows more effective financial planning and the management of reserves and balances;
- (v) creates greater public ownership.

2.13 This Authority believes that quality service delivery is related to effective governance and management, together with appropriate resourcing. There is some speculation that many authorities are too small. Unfortunately this is not supported by any evidence. Indeed, successive government reports, (such as : the report of Sir John Banham; Audit Commission reports “Streamlining The Cities” 1993, and “In The Line of Fire”; The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors Memorandum 1984, and “The Independent Enquiry” by Sir George Bain 2002), suggest the contrary but have been misinterpreted by some. The concept that the fire and rescue service is a local service provided locally is the right one. This is further supported by the fact that here in Bedfordshire and Luton, we exceed national average performance in all service delivery indicators, despite reducing council tax in the current financial year.

2.14 The publicised position of ODPM is that combination to create larger fire and rescue services and authorities is a matter for local determination where it provides a clear case for sustained capacity improvement. We believe that this is the right approach, and decisions should be based on clear evidence. We deplore any politically or otherwise-motivated imposition of structural review.

3(a) *Finance*

3.1 As discussed previously, we believe that the self-precepting model offers the greatest opportunity for financial stability and planning with direct accountability to the council taxpayer.

3.2 It also offers greater monitoring opportunity by central government and a more realistic indication of “whole service” costs.

3.3 Whilst we welcome the improvements to grant allocation we remain concerned that the overall percentage of fire service funding provided by grant is comparatively very low. This places a disproportionate burden on the taxpayer in relation to the fire and rescue service, but we recognise as well that the overall effect is still relatively small in cost per capita.

4(a) *Management*

4.1 We believe that the safe and effective management of a fire and rescue service is best provided by officers that understand critical incident command balanced with high quality development in managerial skills.

4.2 We have deep reservations about the long term effect of fire services being managed by non-operational people. Conversely, we are concerned that the current void left by the abolition of the “Brigade Command Course” and, more importantly, its selection procedure, has left us without recognised means to develop operationally-competent personnel into top management positions.

4.3 We have no difficulty with fast tracking talented people more quickly to top positions through IPDS, provided that such fast tracking includes incident command competences.

4.4 We believe that the organisational risk is too high to put untrained people into vulnerable positions simply to demonstrate intent or tokenism.

5(a) *Promoting Diversity*

5.1 We believe that more must be done to enrich our workforce with women and minority ethnic people, despite the fact that we are one of the top performing services in the country in terms of representation in the workforce by those groups.

5.2 We welcome stretch targets even though they are practically unachievable, but would like to see the performance indicator widened to include all staff. We believe this would enable us to demonstrate “critical mass” in terms of potential recruits feeling that the fire and rescue service is genuinely seeking their interest.

6(a) *Civil Resilience*

6.1 We welcome the government’s investment in civil resilience and the wider role it presents for the fire and rescue service.

6.2 This Authority would have been pleased to be hosting more of those resources and now have an impending concern about how we would meet a new public expectation without resources to do it. An example is the capabilities of the urban search and rescue units, which have become public knowledge but are actually only available in a limited number of services as a regional resource. We now have to consider how to resource for an incident which is too small for a regional response but beyond our existing technology and training.

6.3 Notwithstanding this, in terms of large scale resilience we believe the fire and rescue service has worked hard to develop new procedures and understandings that have been successfully rehearsed and enhance our existing mutual aid arrangements.

7(a) *The Future—10 Years On*

7.1 We believe that over the next 10 years a number of key factors will impact on the fire and rescue service :

7.2 People:

The combination of demographic and sociological change together with developments in human resources and recruitment practices will have impacted on our workforce in the following ways:

- Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) workplace assessment/development and integral.
- More diverse workplace/small recruitment pool.
- Greater flexibility of duty systems in place.
- Integration of core skills, regardless of duty system.

7.3 Operations:

A wide range of factors will impact on operations over the next ten years, these may include: increased population, more housing, higher divorce rate, later average marital age, greater longevity, more emphasis on leisure and work/life balance, increased care in the community and personal independence, more road traffic, greater inter-service collaboration, developments in operational techniques and equipment design, new policies, procedures and risk analysis techniques will have become effective. The result of these factors may be:

- More targeted response.
- Older population.
- More single occupied dwellings—increased risk aversion, more calls for help.
- Increased call rate.
- Increased road traffic collisions.
- Automatic fire alarms (AFAs) reduced.
- Malicious calls reduced.
- Joint operations response.

7.4 Resources:

The direction of the National Framework and in some cases work that is currently underway, indicates that the way we use and secure our resources will evolve over the next ten years. These examples give some idea of what that evolution may produce:

- Community fire stations.
- Regional Control.
- Key support services outsourced or collaborative.
- Specific equipment designed for risk.
- Creative use of technology.
- Embedded National Procurement strategy.

7.5 Finance:

Assuming that current economic pressures and developments in local government financing continue, many of our key cost drivers may change or result in change to the way we are funded. Within ten years we will have to have considered and accommodated the effects of issues including:

- Realising maximum benefits from Regional Management Board (RMB).
- Continued cost effectiveness.
- Greater use of challenge funding.
- Review of local tax mechanism.
- Less pension burden.

7.6 Fire Safety:

The use of community and statutory fire safety as part of risk management, together with technological advancement and legislative change, will have significant impact on our fire safety role over the next ten years. It is reasonable to expect a number of additional developments to be in place:

- Regulatory reform.
- Increased advisory and educational role/less enforcement.
- Less technical staff.
- Regional enforcement/technical task group.
- Smoke detector in every home.
- Sprinklers in high risk premises and dwellings.
- Integrated fire protection in all new buildings.

7.7 Governance:

Increasing emphasis on performance audit, political accountability and public scrutiny, coupled with the full impact of legislation such as freedom of information—may drive development in governance, or the way in which the organisation is governed rather than managed, in a number of key areas:

- New governance model.
- Community forum.
- Regional policies.
- More focussed political engagement.

8(a) *In Summary*

8.1 Bedfordshire and Luton Fire & Rescue Service are committed to modernisation, value for money, and continuous improvement.

8.2 Much has already been delivered but we need measured and consistent support from government to allow us to make considered and evidence-based decisions on the provision of services which best suit our local communities.

Memorandum by Derbyshire Fire Authority (FRS 34)

INTRODUCTION

Derbyshire Fire Authority welcomes the inquiry into the Fire and Rescue Service. It is hoped that the inquiry will help to further progress the modernisation of the service.

There is no doubt that much has been achieved in recent years through the leadership of fire authority members and professional fire officers, against a difficult industrial relations backdrop, which has resulted in improved services and safer communities. We are, for instance, very proud of the reduction in accidental fires, deaths and injuries that have been achieved through the efforts of all our staff.

Furthermore, as the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister recently recognised in its PSA report, Fire and Rescue Authorities are making real progress in delivering efficiencies at the frontline, in areas such as the better allocation of resources to risk, more efficient working practices, reducing responses to false alarms and procurement.

Nevertheless, we recognise that there is still scope for further improvement, particularly with regard to matters such as civil resilience, arson reduction and equality and diversity. We are also concerned to address matters relating to the recruitment and retention of staff on the retained duty system.

REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES AND FIRELINK

This inquiry focuses initially on the specific issues surrounding the introduction of Regional Control Centres and the FireLink radio project. This Authority is fully committed to the FiReControl and FireLink projects, and continues to support their implementation.

There is little doubt that the FiReControl and Firelink projects have the potential to secure improvements in levels of resilience for major incidents, terrorist attacks and natural disasters. These projects should provide an operating framework that will enable improvement, providing opportunities to develop new and efficient ways of working across regional boundaries.

However, we do have a number of outstanding concerns with regard to the Full Business Case, the discharge of legal responsibilities, the clarification of governance arrangements and “out of scope” implications for the Fire Authority. We remain frustrated with the absence of a Full Business Case.

Our concerns include:

- Full acknowledgement of Fire Authority interests and concerns by ODPM;
- Statutory duties for Fire Authorities—difficulty in making decisions when information is not available;
- Final Business Case;
- National Resilience is not an individual fire and rescue authority responsibility. Additional costs should be met centrally;
- Additional costs for Fire Authorities not met in a structured way through the New Burdens process;
- Uncertainty and lack of ownership of governance arrangements;
- Capacity issues for individual Fire Authorities;
- Maintaining public confidence.

Our concerns with regard to Firelink include:

- The absence of a Business Case;
- The lack of information on financial or other ongoing resource implications arising from Firelink.

Furthermore, we are concerned that Government does not appear to want to recognise both projects as “new burdens” and as such ensure funding for the implementation phase is maintained. Any reduction to, or non-acknowledgement of such costs will restrict the ability of fire and rescue authorities to complete the projects successfully.

RESILIENCE

This Authority recognises the considerable progress in improving civil resilience that has been achieved by the New Dimensions programme. This has been achieved by an effective working partnership between ODPM, individual authorities and Regional Management Boards. The effectiveness of such arrangements were recently confirmed by the local, regional and national response to the major fire at Buncefield fuel supply depot, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. Staff from Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service readily volunteered to attend the incident, and stay away from home overnight, with the High Volume Pumping unit that had been previously supplied by ODPM.

Notwithstanding the good progress made so far, there is clearly still some way to go before the New Dimensions programme is properly completed. Work is still ongoing, for instance, with regard to CBRN, Urban Search and Rescue, long term capabilities management and the establishment of a National Coordination Centre.

We are therefore very concerned by ODPM’s decision to greatly reduce support for the programme from April 2006 onwards. This poses a significant threat to the proper completion of the programme as individual Fire Authorities who are faced with many competing priorities may lack the resources to complete the work within the intended timescales. National resilience should be properly resourced and sustained, not left to the uncertainty of local decisions. ODPM should continue to support the New Dimensions programme until it is properly completed. Individual Fire Authorities and Regional Management Boards will then be able to sustain their contribution to the partnership, providing the country with the level of local, regional and national resilience that the public expects.

The lack of clarity with regard to water rescue from inland waterways remains a concern and the recently published response to consultation on the draft Emergencies Order has only served to create further ambiguity. The Fire and Rescue Service should have a statutory duty to respond to such incidents, as it is the agency best placed to provide such a service, and be properly funded to do so.

FIRE PREVENTION

The Fire and Rescue Service has made considerable progress in reducing the risk to communities arising from fires in the home. The new statutory duties included within the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 have given further emphasis to a broad range of education, prevention and protection activities there were already being progressed prior to being required.

Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service has achieved considerable success in reducing fires, deaths and injuries in the home. For example, no preventable fire deaths have occurred in dwellings in our area over the past fourteen months. Whilst we are not complacent about future risks, we believe that such achievements have not been fully recognised by central Government.

We welcome the recent publication of a Strategy for Children and Young People specifically designed for the fire and rescue service. This will complement our involvement with Local Area Agreements and other partnership working.

The Fire and Rescue Service has much to offer in addressing community issues such as anti-social behaviour and youth crime. This is now starting to be recognised and government departments should work together to reinforce the role of the service in such activities.

Many fire and rescue services are now working with partner agencies to prevent road accidents. The value of such work also warrants greater recognition and support.

We remain frustrated that the value of sprinkler systems in domestic property, schools and high risk premises has not been fully recognised by building legislation. The evidence of their value is overwhelming and central government should make the necessary legislative changes to ensure the wider use of sprinklers. We also recommend that central government legislate to ensure that all new homes built in the UK have an integral sprinkler or stored pressure water suppression system.

Memorandum by the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (FRS 35)

Further to the invitation inviting submissions to the ODPM Select Committee on Fire & Rescue Service modernisation, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority met on 14 December 2005 where this matter was discussed.

As the Chief Fire Officer I have been tasked to bring the following points to the attention of the Select Committee:

1. With regard to the first of the two main issues to be considered by the inquiry, Regional Control Centres, this Authority has already expressed its concerns regarding the regional fire control project and can reiterate the main issues that it has with this project:

- The unacceptably short time for consultation.
- The lack of effective consultation.
- The ambitious timescale for the RCC project.
- The lack, even at this advanced stage, of a full business case.
- The failure to acknowledge the full transitional costs.
- Our concerns regarding the technical issues—will it be done?
- Our concerns regarding the governance issues—how will it be run?

In addition to these concerns, which are on record from previous Authority meetings, we would add the corrosive effect that the long delays have had on the morale of our Control staff, who are still providing an effective 24/7 service to the public.

2. The second key issue for the inquiry, FireLink, raises similar concerns. Although it is clear that the ODPM is directing and funding the roll out of the FireLink project the ultimate funding for the project is likely to fall upon Fire and Rescue Authorities. Once again there is insufficient detail on funding and governance issues for Fire and Rescue Authorities to make effective decisions for future arrangements.

3. Similar issues also arise with other modernisation initiatives: the funding and governance arrangements of the FireBuy project are equally unclear. And whilst the ODPM's commitment to public safety in supporting improved resilience through the New Dimensions initiatives is welcomed there has only been limited consultation with Authorities over the actual impact that deploying such assets will have.

4. A key issue for this Authority, as with nearly all Fire and Rescue Authorities, is that of capacity. The Audit Commission noted that capacity was an issue for FRS's overall and felt that effective planning for improvement was being hindered by a lack of resources. The current tight financial strictures imposed on fire and rescue authorities bring about a "Catch 22" situation where improvements required by government cannot be implemented without incurring sanctions from the same government. Although transitional funding was given for this purpose it was applied on a one size fits all basis and took no account whatsoever of how effectively an Authority was already being run. Although efficiencies of scale do exist the initial estimates of the savings that could be made were general not specific and were based in many instances on little more than anecdotal evidence. On this issue the previous inquiry reported, in January 2004, that: "We have concerns about the distribution and recovery of this loan. Government must ensure appropriate distribution and equitable recovery". For us those concerns remain. The recent, welcome, announcement that the transitional loan can be paid over two years does not address the inequity of the notional loan.

5. Other issues also remain unresolved from the January Inquiry.

- The government have yet to run any widespread information campaigns to prepare the public for the changes that are occurring through the IRMP process (paragraph 45).

- The government would appear not to have addressed the inquiry’s proposal.
“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)
- There is no standard measure of consistency for IRMP’s as suggested in paragraph 42, although an operational toolkit is being trialled by this and other Authorities.

6. The funding mechanisms for FRA’s are also in need of review. The FSS process is unclear, apparently arbitrary, and again places little or no emphasis on the base cost per head of a Fire and Rescue Authority.

7. This Authority, like many others, is delivering against the targets set for it by the ODPM. Currently we are recording an average of 0.125 accidental fire deaths in dwellings per 100,000 population, (BVPI 143(i)) and have reduced the number of deliberate fires by 27% in five years—against a target of 10% in 10 years. We have also demonstrated our corporate health by scoring one point off excellent in the recent, rigorous, CPA process. It is against this background that we would submit to the committee our concerns that genuine, often innovative, improvements that are evidence led and based on improving our service to, and the safety of, the public are being marginalised by an overly prescriptive approach. We would contend that the National Framework should indicate the outcomes that the government rightly and understandably wish to see the Fire & Rescue Service deliver rather than seeking to prescribe the means that are to be used to achieve those aims.

Memorandum by David Taylor MP (FRS 36)

CONTEXT

1. I am submitting evidence to the Select Committee’s inquiry on the Fire and Rescue Service owing to my interest in the government’s programme of public service reform, government’s public procurement methods and record, local government finance and the proposed location for the Regional Control Centre (RCC) for the East Midlands being Castle Donington, in the North West Leicestershire parliamentary constituency.

2. The FiReControl Project proposes to close ALL existing emergency fire control rooms in England (46) and replace them with nine regional centres in the next few years. It is accepted that the current arrangements provide a very high standard of service. The Government claims their plans would provide an improved service.

STANDARDS OF PERFORMANCE IN THE NEW FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

3. There are justifiable concerns among both firefighters and the public about the future responsiveness and standard of service the new Fire and Rescue Service the government envisage as being co-ordinated by the nine new RCCs will be able to provide.

4. Staff cuts are inevitable. Out of the existing 15,000 control staff, estimates vary as to how many will be lost as a result of the creation of the RCCs and disbanding of the existing network Fire Control Rooms. This lack of certainty and transparency has increased opposition to these proposals within the service and elsewhere.

5. The government’s claim that “regionalisation” of the fire and rescue service will lead to a better service is with out evidence or international precedent.

6. In the East Midlands there are currently five Emergency Fire Control Rooms, one for each fire brigade. The government’s proposal to replace these five Fire Control Rooms with one RCC is likely to lead to an increase in response times to major accidents and fires across the East Midlands.

7. With one RCC covering the East Midlands, the IT system connecting RCCs and Fire and Rescue staff will have to be infallible.

8. To date, however, the government’s record in procuring public sector IT projects has been poor. The public sector IT systems contracted out for the Benefits Agency (as was), Magistrates Courts, Child Support Agency, DEFRA, Criminal Records Bureau (Home Office), Individual Learning Accounts (DfES), Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Passport Agency (both Home Office), Air Traffic Control System (DTLR, as was) and others have all failed to work properly or been cancelled at huge cost to the taxpayer and to the people relying on and working in these departments.

9. The government have ignored calls from the Fire Service, the public and parliamentarians to conduct an independent inquiry into these proposals. The public sector will operate the new RCCs but will carry the can if the IT system connecting them and staff fails people in emergency situations.

COST

10. The projected cost of the nine RCCs shot up over the summer. As late as June this year, the government predicted the RCCs as costing £988 million to establish. By August 2005, the Minister, Jim Fitzpatrick MP, was prepared to confirm press reports that the cost could be £2 billion.

11. As with other public sector reform projects (the sale of local authorities' housing stock and all PFI/PPP projects, for example), the use of private sector consultants rather than civil servants to push the government's agenda has made a significant contribution to these escalating costs. Details secured by the FBU under Freedom of Information legislation discloses a figure of £44 million in consultancy fees and this is likely to rise.

12. Neither the Strategic Outline Business Case nor the Mott MacDonald report is a reliable indicator of the cost of establishing /or running the RCCs.¹

LOCATION OF EAST MIDLANDS RCC (WILLOW BUSINESS PARK, CASTLE DONINGTON)

13. The choice of a business park does not inspire professional or public confidence.

14. As with proposed locations for some of the other RCCs, Willow Business Park is on a flood plain and heavy rains could well jeopardise emergency, as well as training, operations in and from such locations.

15. Proximity to Nottingham East Midlands Airport (NEMA), whilst clearly advantageous in the event of a major aircraft accident or terrorist incident, also creates the risk of being cut off from the rest of the region (and the eight other RCCs) in the event of a major emergency incident.

16. Proximity to NEMA also increases the possibility of RCCs being disabled by terrorist activity, as with the location of London's RCC—Canary Wharf.

REFERENCES

1. *Hansard* 27 October 2005, Column 486W.

Memorandum by the Local Government Association (LGA) (FRS 37)

SUMMARY

1. There have been considerable changes in the fire and rescue service since the ODPM select committee published its last report in this area in January 2004. The LGA wishes to take this opportunity to set out the distance we have already travelled, as well as highlighting a number of areas where considerable work is still needed if we are to achieve the aim of a modern, effective fire and rescue service.

2. In considering areas of progress, we note particularly:

- the development of Integrated Risk Management Plans;
- success in tackling fire and the impact of fire;
- changes to negotiating machinery;
- impressive progress towards efficiency targets;
- the move to a new pensions scheme for firefighters;
- the greater clarity over the roles and responsibilities of Regional Management Boards; and
- the increasing numbers of co-responding schemes.

3. We would then wish to draw to the attention of the committee a number of areas on which we consider further work to be needed if the Fire and Rescue Service is to continue to develop and improve, in particular:

- the need for transparent governance arrangements and accountability in the regional dimension;
- the importance of sustainable, long-term solutions for the range of modernisation projects to which ODPM is currently heavily committed;
- the continuing lack of a coherent strategy from central government to support the installation of sprinklers in schools and other buildings where vulnerable people are situated;
- the need to recognise the considerable demands on the fire and rescue service in driving through a major programme of change, while continuing to provide a first class service to the public;
- the slow progress being made in achieving greater diversity within the service;
- the pressures on the retained service; and
- the need for effective action to reduce attacks on firefighters.

4. In view of the focus of the committee's inquiry, our submission then makes some specific remarks on FiReControl and Firelink.

ABOUT THE LGA

5. The LGA was formed on 1 April 1997 from the belief that one voice was needed to present the case for local government. As the national voice for local government, the LGA speaks for just under 500 local authorities representing over 50 million people and spending £65 billion a year on local services. We exist to promote better local government and represent the local authorities in England and Wales.

6. This memorandum has been agreed by the lead members of the LGA's Fire Services Management Committee, the body delegated to deal with the fire and rescue service issues on behalf of the LGA's Safer Communities Board. We should be happy to provide further information on any of the points raised here, either in writing or at an evidence session.

MODERNISATION: THE STORY SO FAR

7. The 2004 pay deal set out a clear framework for the future of the fire and rescue service: new roles for authorities, and enhanced pay for firefighters in return for modernised working practices—in particular, the flexibility to manage service provision to meet local needs. Local government is at the sharp end of delivering on this agreement, and the leadership offered by elected members has played a crucial role in driving change. The challenges they face in doing so are considerable (as recent industrial action demonstrates), but the political will to drive improvements for the benefit of local communities is strong, and good progress is being made.

8. The results of the Fire CPA demonstrated the importance of strong leadership from elected members in driving performance. The LGA is working closely with the Improvement and Development Agency to take forward work to develop leadership capacity, building on existing resources such as councillor mentoring, the Leadership Academy, IDeA Knowledge (an online information sharing service) and bespoke support. In addition, we are working with CFOA and the ODPM to disseminate examples of notable and innovative practice to support future improvement.

9. The cross party Fire Services Management Committee, formed earlier this year, meets formally bi-monthly (and communicates regularly between meetings) to consider the key issues facing fire authorities and how best the LGA can support delivery. In addition, our Fire Forum provides a valuable opportunity for elected members from all fire authorities to meet on a regular basis to share information and good practice.

10. The LGA will continue to support fire authority members in their leadership role, and to work constructively with ODPM, CFOA, the IDeA, the Audit Commission and other stakeholders to drive forward modernisation. The following paragraphs provide a flavour of what has been achieved so far.

Integrated risk management planning

11. Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) are at the heart of the modernisation agenda. We are now in the second year covered by the plans, and fire and rescue authorities have embraced the opportunities they offer to work in partnership to deliver a better service more efficiently. There is always scope to improve still further, and the LGA will continue to work closely with fire and rescue authorities, the Chief Fire Officers' Association, ODPM and other stakeholders to disseminate examples of positive practice and to support authorities in developing their action plans and preparing future IRMPs.

12. The timing of the publication of the National Framework does, however, present some problems for authorities. We understand that ODPM's intention had been to publish the draft Framework each September to allow authorities to consider the implications in their own IRMP consultation documents. This year, however, the draft framework was not issued until November, with a closing date for consultation of 18 February 2006. For many authorities, this year's IRMP consultation period will have now closed, or will be closing shortly, and budgets must be agreed in February. The late publication of the draft framework means, therefore, that they will not now be able to consult on how its implications should be reflected in their IRMPs, and will severely limit the extent to which they can be considered in the budget setting process. While we welcome the move to National Framework covering a two-year, rather than a one-year period, it will be important that future publication schedules are better co-ordinated with authorities' planning processes.

Reducing fire and the impact of fire

13. A crucial outcome of the range of work being undertaken to improve the effectiveness of the fire and rescue service is the continued progress in reducing fire deaths and injuries. Increasing levels of community fire safety work, often undertaken in partnership with other local agencies, has been an important factor in driving progress. The provisional total number of fire deaths recorded in the UK in 2004–05 fell to its lowest in 45 years, while the number of injuries in fires fell by 11% from the previous year. That this has been achieved in the midst of the biggest reform of the service for 30 years is a credit to the work of fire authorities and fire service personnel at all levels.

14. But we cannot be complacent. The future holds considerable challenges if we are to continue this trend: demographic shifts, with an increasing older population, statistically more vulnerable to fire; higher property densities in urban areas; environmental change; and the threat of terrorism. A clear framework from central government (which should set out how the National Framework will fit with the greater flexibilities offered by Local Area Agreements), appropriate funding (including for investment in fire safety research), continued joint working with local delivery partners, and the power to take risk-based decisions at a local level will remain crucial in equipping our fire and rescue services to respond to these challenges.

Negotiating machinery

15. Pay and nationally determined conditions of service for uniformed personnel in the Fire and Rescue service are consulted upon or negotiated, as appropriate, within the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (the NJC). Considerable change has been negotiated through this body, including the most recent Pay and Conditions Agreement (2003), and the detail supporting that agreement. Such changes include:

- a new pay structure, linked to the Integrated Personal Development System, that rewards competence rather than time served;
- pay parity for employees on the retained duty system;
- a contractual obligation on employees to carry out any reasonable activity within their role map, and the ability to require employees to work at different locations;
- deletion of the local disputes procedure and replacement with a local consultation and negotiation procedure that narrowed the scope of potential disputes to issues that require collective agreement. Third party involvement is subject to the agreement of both parties as is any reference to arbitration (previously unilateral);
- agreement that fire authorities can introduce any duty system subject only to four basic requirements (42-hour week, two days off every week, compliance with legislation, being family friendly), and that employees can work combinations of duty systems;
- the FBU has lifted its ban on pre-arranged overtime, and part-time working has been introduced;
- jointly agreed grievance and disciplinary procedures, the latter for the first time recognising absence and unsatisfactory performance issues, and providing a process to deal with such cases;
- agreement that an authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan, including the number of personnel on duty at each location at different times of day, is the decision of the fire authority, having consulted with the appropriate parties, and does not require any formal collective agreement.

16. Currently, employees are represented on the NJC by the Fire Brigades Union. Since the Pay and Conditions Agreement was reached a working party—chaired by the Chair of ACAS, Rita Donaghy—has undertaken a review of the existing constitution of the NJC. The report contained a number of recommendations including the introduction of a mechanism to provide for representation of other trade unions, including:

- a low threshold of 8.33% of the workforce to secure one of the 12 seats on the Employers' Side. Each of the remaining seats to be allocated on multiples thereof;
- the introduction of separate negotiating arrangements for middle managers (station manager to area manager).

17. The Fire Brigades Union have accepted all of the recommendations contained within the report. Whilst the Employers' Side are content with the majority of the recommendations, there are some areas where they would wish to see change. Discussions will continue with the Fire Brigades Union in January 2006 to endeavour to secure agreement within the NJC on a revised constitution covering the issues of: any proposed threshold; whether an entirely separate NJC for middle managers would be preferable to the Middle Managers Negotiating Body (as part of the overall existing NJC) recommended by Rita Donaghy; and the question of whether the clause in the constitution concerning reference of disagreements to ACAS should be on a unilateral or bilateral basis.

18. In the interim, the Employers have recognised both the Retained Firefighters Union and the Fire Officers Association for consultation purposes and three meetings have so far taken place.

Efficiency

19. While modernisation brings costs as well as savings, it is clear that efficiencies are already being delivered. The ability to respond to local circumstances through Integrated Risk Management Plans has seen a number of authorities implement changes to station deployment, shift patterns and new types of appliances, and utilise front line staff on fire safety work.

20. While authorities will all clearly have different starting points, initial analysis of their annual efficiency statements suggest that £38 million cashable efficiency savings were made in 2004–05, and cumulative cashable efficiency savings of £88 million are expected in 2005–06. While these figures are at this stage provisional, they nevertheless indicate that authorities are already significantly ahead of the savings of £25 million projected to have been achieved by the end of the next financial year. In addition, all fire authorities have recently submitted efficiency plans covering the three year period to 2007–08, which aim to deliver aggregate annual savings of £105 million by the end of the period. This is equivalent to nearly 5% of current budgets.

Pensions

21. The new firefighters’ pension funding scheme, due to be implemented in April 2006, is broadly welcomed by the LGA. It responds to the concerns we have expressed for many years about the existing “pay as you go” arrangements and should put in place a secure and sustainable basis for pensions in the years to come.

22. There are three points we would make about the move to the new scheme:

- it will be important that central Government ensures that adequate provision is set aside in national budgets to cover the impact of the forecast real increase in total pension costs;
- the 2006–07 and 2007–08 grant settlements must protect individual authorities from unacceptable levels of volatility in grant receipts arising from changes to formula allocations; and
- the initial transfer of grant from Fire Service to national budgets is monitored to ensure that Fire Service funding levels for non-pension costs are protected.

Regional management boards

23. Fire and rescue authorities have long recognised the importance and value of working across boundaries and the establishment of Regional Management Boards formalises this approach. ODPM’s clarification of the role of RMBs is welcome.

24. The LGA remains clear that RMBs are the appropriate vehicle for gaining the benefits of cross-authority collaboration, while maintaining effective links with the local community and clear accountability to local people through elected members. We will continue to support RMBs in this role, including by hosting the regular meeting of RMB chairs to facilitate problem solving and the sharing of good practice.

Co-responding

25. 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. An ambulance is still dispatched to every co-responder call. As such, the role and workload of ambulance staff is in no way affected by the scheme, but patient care is greatly improved and lives can be saved by the rapid availability of first-aid (particularly the use of defibrillators for victims of heart attacks). As such, the LGA strongly supports the promotion of co-responding schemes.

26. Despite the continuing and disappointing opposition from the Fire Brigades Union, a recent survey by the Chief Fire Officers’ Association found that 37% of Fire and Rescue Authorities in England had initiated co-responder schemes, and that 80% of those who had not done so planned to initiate a scheme at some point in the future. The LGA welcomes the stronger line on co-responding in the draft National Framework for 2006–08, which notes that “Fire and Rescue Authorities should actively review the opportunities for improving community safety by implementing co-responder schemes in partnership with other agencies.” We will continue to work with fire and rescue authorities, and to support joint working with health partners, to promote co-responding as a key means to reduce deaths and injuries.

KEY ISSUES FOR FUTURE PROGRESS

27. Notwithstanding the good progress on the issues outlined above, there remain, however, some key areas where considerable work is needed if the momentum of modernisation is to be maintained.

Governance and accountability in the regional dimension

28. As noted above, the importance of working across fire authority boundaries is accepted, both in terms of improving efficiency and for reasons of civil resilience. In working towards greater collaboration, however, it is important that the role of elected members in representing and being accountable to their constituents is fully recognised. Governance arrangements for new structures such as FiReControl and FiReBuy must reflect the leading role of elected members.

29. The fact that FiReBuy is likely to be designated a non-Departmental public body, with appointments to its board subject to the rules of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, must not be allowed to result in a board that is entirely unaccountable to the electorate. The skills and experience of elected members mean that they are well positioned to meet the selection criteria for board members, and the LGA would expect this to be reflected in its final composition. Cllr Les Byrom has, in addition, accepted the invitation to take up an ex officio appointment as director on the board, in his capacity as chair of the Fire Services Management Committee.

30. The continuing development of the organisational structure underpinning FiReControl has the potential to raise similar issues of accountability. As for FiReBuy, the leading role of elected members must be reflected in the governance arrangements for regional control centres.

31. The restructuring of the police and ambulance service have given rise once again to the prospect of regionalisation of the fire service. We note ODPM's assurances that this is not under consideration. The LGA remains firmly of the view that Regional Management Boards provide an appropriate mechanism to maintain accountability through the leadership of elected members, whilst facilitating collaboration, for example on resilience issues.

Sustainability

32. Many of the projects forming the modernisation programme are being set-up with funding and support provided directly by ODPM: examples include the regional control centres, New Dimension, the e-Fire portal and FiReBuy. It will be important that, in seeking to put in place sustainable arrangements to manage these resources in the longer term, we avoid setting up a plethora of uncoordinated bodies with the potential to cause confusion and duplication and reduce transparency and accountability to the public. Authorities will also need to be confident that the real costs of these projects will be reflected in their settlement when responsibility for ongoing work transfers to them.

33. The LGA stands ready to work closely with ODPM and other stakeholders in taking forward this work—particularly in relation to the proposed Centre of Excellence. We have some concerns, however, that the pace of the various projects is such that we risk developing and implementing separate solutions without the strategic overview and co-ordination necessary to produce the most sensible outcome. The recently announced merger of the Fire and Civil Resilience Directorates at ODPM offers an opportunity to address this.

Sprinklers

34. It remains a cause of serious concern to the LGA that, despite the convincing evidence of the benefits of sprinklers—particularly in schools and other buildings housing vulnerable people—there does not appear to be a coherent response from central government.

35. Each year, more than 2,000 schools in the UK suffer fires large enough to need action by local brigades. Leaving to one side the social impact of such fires, the annual cost of replacing school buildings damaged by fire has doubled to more than £93 million since 1998—a cost equivalent to building around 45 new primary schools or employing nearly 3,750 teachers. By contrast, the costs of installing sprinkler protection to a new school is as little as 1.8% of the total building cost. In the face of what seems to be unanswerable logic, schools up and down the country are still being built without sprinklers.

36. Nick Raynsford's evidence to the select committee's last inquiry into the fire and rescue service noted that ODPM were in discussions with DfES and hoped to make progress on this issue. Phil Woolas also appeared to accept the argument for sprinklers in schools wholeheartedly when he attended the Fire 2005 conference in Manchester in November. There has so far not, however, been any sign that this acceptance is being matched with coordinated action between ODPM and the Department for Education and Skills. While some £5.1 billion is being spent on new and renovated schools and classrooms for 2005–06, there remains no requirement in Building Regulations for sprinklers to be fitted (a revision of the Regulations that was supported by the select committee in its January 2004 report), nor any sign that DfES are prepared to make funding available for the provision of sprinkler systems.

37. With the emphasis on prevention a key theme of modernisation, central government must demonstrate that it can fulfil its end of the bargain. The LGA remains strongly of the view that the revised Part B of Building Regulations and Approved Document B, due to be published towards the end of 2006, must require sprinklers to be fitted in new and altered premises—including schools and high risk domestic dwellings—where people are considered to be most vulnerable.

Capacity

38. Fire authorities are taking forward a modernisation programme that is both very broad and being delivered to an ambitious timetable. They are doing this at the same time as continuing to deliver a high quality service to the public. This presents a considerable challenge to both elected members and senior officers. Authorities must receive the support they need—both in terms of resources and information from

central government—if they are to continue to meet this challenge. We would highlight specifically the need for capital investment in infrastructure and equipment, pump priming resources to develop new collaboration initiatives, and funding for research and development.

Equality and diversity

39. It is unfortunate that little progress has been made to date in addressing the lack of diversity in the fire and rescue service. The LGA remains committed to achieving greater diversity, and will continue to work with central Government and other stakeholders to disseminate lessons from other sectors (such as the ambulance service) and to promote the service to women and under-represented groups.

The retained duty system

40. Much of the country relies on retained duty system personnel to maintain services for public safety, and there are sound financial incentives for this arrangement. There have, however, historically been issues relating to the ability of many authorities to attract and keep retained duty personnel. A number of reviews have taken place over the last 25 years to examine these issues, with another currently underway. Many of those reviews have called for Government assistance to make the system more attractive both to individuals and primary employers, and many of their recommendations remain relevant today. More investment is required on the part of central Government to take forward this work and to bring long-term stability to the retained system.

Hostilities towards firefighters

41. The increasing incidence and severity of attacks on firefighters being experienced by a number of authorities is cause for considerable concern. It is important that the seriousness of these offences is reflected in appropriate penalties for offenders. We note the Private Member's Bill tabled by Alan Williams MP, and welcome the increased profile it has afforded this issue. The LGA wishes to take this opportunity to emphasise its commitment to working closely with ODPM, CFOA and other stakeholders to explore the best approach to addressing this issue, whether through legislation, guidelines to the Crown Prosecution Service, or another mechanism.

FiReCONTROL AND FIRELINK

1. Regional control has been a high priority for the LGA and the fire community as a whole since the Government set out its policy direction in the June 2003 White Paper. The LGA supports the implementation of an agreed and effective FiReControl project that is affordable for fire authorities. We remain clear that FiReControl must deliver:

- increased resilience;
- enhanced inter-operability and support between FRS control centres;
- more effective working with other emergency service partners, in particular the police and ambulance services;
- greater operational effectiveness in terms of call handling and incident response; and
- better value for money for local tax payers.

We are working closely with ODPM to take forward work, including through participation in the project board and various working groups.

2. We note the fact that some fire authorities have invested considerable effort and expense in pursuing tri-service control centres (ie joint controls with the police and ambulance service). While we understand the Government's reasons for proceeding with regional controls for fire, it will be extremely important that financial commitments that were entered into in good faith can be honoured; and that authorities have timely information to allow them to keep staff who have already undergone significant upheaval informed as plans develop.

3. The Government has committed to providing financial support to fire authorities where new burdens are incurred during the transition to regional control. Authorities face an obvious difficulty in forecasting financial commitments on a project of this kind, and we remain keen to see an assurance from ODPM that applications can be revisited retrospectively in the event that actual costs exceed estimates.

4. Retaining sufficient, skilled staff in existing control rooms to the point of transition will be a significant challenge for all authorities. They will need to have sufficient, early information from ODPM to be able to provide staff with a clear route map for the move to the new arrangements. In addition, where the Best Value approach to retaining staff involves additional costs that would not have been incurred but for the establishment of regional control centres, we would expect ODPM to meet these in line with new burdens principles.

5. The timetable for implementation of regional control centres is an ambitious one, and it will be important that it allows for authorities to be confident both in the technology to be used, and the robustness and accountability of the governance arrangements being put in place. Elected members will need to be confident, for example, that they have sufficient information on the responsibilities and liabilities of their authorities (and themselves, if they are to act as directors) to take an informed view on the appropriateness of the proposed local authority company structure.

6. It will be essential to the effective operation of the new centres that the links with the implementation of Firelink are fully understood and that the timing of both projects is properly co-ordinated. The different project management structures which have until now been in place have caused some operational difficulties for the staff charged with implementing both projects at a regional level. A more coherent project management approach would significantly increase the likelihood of successful delivery, and we are hopeful that the merger of ODPM's Fire and Civil Resilience Directorates will facilitate this.

7. Elected members have an essential role to play in explaining the case for regional control to local communities. We welcome ODPM's commitment to a series of regional events to provide the opportunity for members to discuss the proposals and hear the positive case for FiReControl.

Memorandum by Oxfordshire Fire Authority (FRS 38)

Oxfordshire (County Council) Fire Authority welcomes the opportunity to comment on this Select Committee. To minimise bureaucracy and allow the committee to identify issues that are of primary concern to the authority the following bullet point format has been chosen. This is supported by a more detailed appendix which covers the FiReControl and Firelink projects.

- We support the introduction of a statutory requirement to incorporate “life-safety sprinklers” as an active fire protection measure in key buildings, particularly new builds and substantial alterations. (eg: Schools, places of public assembly and Houses in Multiple Occupation)
- In addition to the introduction of legislation, we support a regulatory requirement to provide “life-safety sprinklers” in domestic dwellings, on a risk-assessed basis. Protecting those assessed, as “vulnerable” will reduce fire fatalities and injuries and contributes to the wider social inclusion agenda.
- Central Government should provide a statutory basis for developing strategic partnerships with relevant public authorities to address common themes and mutual objectives across the community safety/public health agenda.
- This Authority has a number of concerns in respect of the FiReControl and FireLink project that remain to be resolved, including:
 - The robustness of the business case and impact on our local “value for money” priority;
 - Its contribution to increased resilience;
 - The ongoing funding arrangements and local impact of revenue costs, once established;
 - The structure of governance for the Control Centre;
 - The impact of “out of scope” issues on our existing capacity;
 - Legal liabilities, accountabilities and implications for this Authority;
 - Consideration for extending the scope of the FireLink project;
 Detailed commentary on this position is attached as Appendix “A”.
- We believe that there are a number of institutional issues require urgent review. Issues include the reform of the National Joint Council and its negotiating “machinery”, and the future structure, governance and funding of the Fire and Rescue Service.
- We consider that there is a need to provide representative arrangements for “middle managers” and secure their ability to influence and contribute to the strategic vision and direction of the Service.
- This Authority will actively promote access to and diversity within the Service whilst recognising the need to maintain operational command competences in support of an effective Incident Command Structure.
- We believe that Central Government should provide a coherent, long term “vision” for the provision of the UK's Fire and Rescue Services. The vision should be supported by clarity in respect of future funding and governance arrangements.

- More specific direction should be provided in respect of the Service’s emergency response provision (incorporating planning and preparedness) include:
 - Resilience arrangements for local, regional and national response;
 - Operational assurance arrangements;
 - Competence (including command and specialist skills/knowledge);
 - National/Local Response Standards;
 - Implications of the “Emergencies for Fire and Rescue Authorities Order”;
- The future of Fire and Rescue Comprehensive Performance Assessment needs to be determined. Specifically, arrangements for auditing the effectiveness and governance arrangements of Fire Authorities that are County Councils should recognise those features relevant to that structure.
- This Authority believes that central funding arrangements should be reintroduced for the Fire Service College. Additionally, the leadership and management of the College should return to uniformed officers who are best placed to maximise the facilities as a centre of excellence for Incident Command and specialist Fire and Rescue Technical training.

APPENDIX “A”

FiReCoNTRoL AND FiReLiNK

The Authority acknowledges that the benefits identified by the ODPM in terms of resilience and greater interoperability can improve the safety of personnel and our communities, but contend that these will accrue if and only if, the outcomes suggested by Government are reached. We have several deeply held concerns related to how the projects are developing and the implications for fire authorities in financial, capacity and interim continuity terms.

It is not surprising that as primary stakeholders, fire authorities have concerns over the successful delivery of these projects and the modernisation agenda in general as failure to do so would indicate an abdication of the statutory duties that not only currently but in the future will continue to fall on individual fire authorities.

The current concerns of this authority that we wish to draw to the Committee’s attention include the following (it should be noted that these concerns have not been assuaged by the previously given responses to repeated enquiries at all levels of the project).

1. *The robustness of the business cases and impacts on our local “value for money” priority*

It is noted that it was intended to provide a regional breakdown of the FiReControl Outline Business Case in the summer of 2005. This has not been forthcoming and there appears to be no intention of providing greater clarity of financial issues at the regional level at this time. The FireLink project has only issued limited financial information on the capital costs of provision of additional equipment beyond the current scope of supply. It is understood that Ministers are currently reviewing revenue implications. Failure to provide sufficient information on both of these projects is causing significant concern as the recent announcement of the two-year settlement for local government (inequitable from the point of Oxfordshire County Council) cannot address these unannounced costs. The lack of timely information with which to plan for the future, whilst government highlights the spectre of Local Authority capping, militates against the successful implementation of both projects.

2. *Increased costs of local project delivery and interim business continuity (including new burdens issues)*

The level of New Burdens funding remains a significant area of concern. It is acknowledged that recent statements have clarified that “net additional expenditure” may be met eg for redundancy but only if all alternatives are exhausted and if the decision is identified as Best Value. However, there remain areas of uncertainty and disagreement. These primarily relate to the costs of ensuring the existing control rooms remain fully functional until cut over to the RCC eg retention schemes for staff and support for interim technical upgrades required due to the extended project timetable and the revenue costs associated with the migration eg training for a wide range of staff due to changes in procedures and new technology. Training costs for are currently limited to ODPM funding a “train the trainer” level not the full costs of training.

As yet there has been little indication that any new burdens funding is available for the rollout of the FireLink project. It is understood that the project has provided outline guidance of their expectations for resourcing successful local rollout. This authority would welcome clarification of this and other funding issues relating to FireLink.

3. *The ongoing funding arrangements and local impact of revenue costs, once established*

The headline average saving of 30% claimed by ODPM for FiReControl is considered to be as yet unsubstantiated. Two main issues can be identified, additional costs relating to higher security standards that currently are in place and residual costs of “out of scope” activities remaining in services.

Recent indications are that the ODPM now believe there are no additional costs relating to the requirement for higher security standards as part of the Critical National Infrastructure. The requirements, although modified, still remain as do their cost. As a result costs shown in the Draft Outline Business Case formerly paid centrally, will be transferred to FRS’s (possibly 10% of anticipated rental payable on each building). Such transfers of costs must inevitably have an impact on the headline 30% “saving”. This fire authorities position remains that as National resilience is not a fire authority responsibility any additional costs should not be accrued.

Of greater concern is the ongoing revenue effect of those tasks currently carried out in the Control Room, which will not be transferred in totality by the Regional Control Centre. Such out of scope activities have only recently been investigated fully and fire authorities have recently resubmitted information that indicates the level of current expenditure that cannot be included in the full national / regional business case. The original ODPM outline business case did not fully take account the tasks that would remain with Brigades and thus the basis of the business case must be revisited. The current work, and therefore costs that will still be incurred by fire authorities locally will be further refined once the detailed processes and technology to be used by the Regional control Centre are finalised. This will require a further examination of the business case and again calls into question the headline savings previously claimed.

4. *Legal liabilities, accountabilities and the structure of governance for the Control Centre*

This authority has grave concerns over the undeniable complication of the governance structures at a regional level and the remaining legal liabilities that will continue to fall on individual fire authorities.

Whilst the consultation on the governance arrangements for the RCC is eagerly awaited, there remains the issue of the transfer of legal liabilities of operational failure at the regional level to the constituent fire authorities who individually appear to have little direct control over the regional entity. There is, as yet, little statutory basis for the regional management board or the local government company limited by guarantee. Clarity of legal responsibilities is essential. In addition the costs for each individual fire authority to establish that the arrangements for all wider corporate governance issues are adequate are currently not identified and sufficient new burdens funding must be forthcoming for these necessary activities.

5. *The effect on fire authority staff of the project, in terms of capacity, retention and continuance*

This fire authority is concerned that the national project has not given sufficient cognisance of the limited capacity available in individual brigades to successfully complete both projects with their inter-related (but as yet) indistinct project timetables.

While the location of the Regional Control Centre is known, many employment issues remain for the staff involved and uncertainty remains. Staff and managers responsible for the project remain frustrated with the apparent lack of information over employment issues. Several of these may be resolved when the governance issues are addressed allowing an employing entity to be created. Meanwhile the uncertainty is debilitating for staff and adversely affecting morale. Maintaining the current Fire and Rescue service is the Service’s key concern and therefore retaining existing staff and their expertise is the greatest challenge in Oxfordshire. Whilst it is acknowledged that the responsibility for maintaining existing control rooms remains with FRA’s, staff consider that the national project have little understanding of the impact of delay and uncertainty on them and the authorities ability to continue to provide what is a key statutory duty.

6. *Project Delivery Issues*

The alignment of the FireLink and FiReControl projects is welcomed, particularly as they are closely related and interdependent. Issues of cost transfer between the projects remains a concern, particularly with the relative absence of information due to no full business case for either project before their alignment.

The adoption of a PRINCE2 project methodology is welcomed, as this should reduce risks to all stakeholders. However, it is apparent that the methodology is not being applied consistently and as a result regional and local teams cannot fully utilise this best practice approach.

The effect of delay to the project (the national project team has not yet managed to keep to any of its own target dates) is causing difficulty in services due to our inability to plan resourcing arrangements meaningfully. This has effect on the quality of work that can be accomplished in often limited timescales, increases stress on the very staff who are facing potential redundancy and is inefficient in that staff resources provided at the expense of the authority (and not supported by new burdens) could be underutilised.

Well-planned and executed communications are essential to successful project delivery. Whilst it is accepted that communications will never meet all needs the national project team project has consistently failed to:

- Send documents out for meetings in a timely manner;
- Circulate documents through the agreed coordinating points of contact in regional teams;
- Make clear to regional teams what information can be shared with FRAs;
- Set up the ODPM-standard collaborative software that would allow teams within the national project to access key documents, and would make communication with regional teams simpler and more reliable;

This does affect the ability of the FRAs and regional teams to:

- Deliver a considered response to the national project
- Accept the results of consultations
- Work efficiently to overcome resource issues

FIRELINK—SPECIFIC ISSUES

The authority is aware that several stakeholders and potential respondents to the select committee are lobbying for the remit of the FireLink project to be extended to accommodate incident ground communications, potentially in support of ICS and CCBRN considerations. This is understandable and as a matter of principal should be seriously considered. However, there are a number of issues that must be fully addressed prior to any decisions made concerning this development which could adversely effect the continued provision and commercial viability of current incident ground (largely UHF based) radio communications. These are:-

- The current technical limitations of TETRA based systems in direct mode operation (DMO) and in point-to-point (via the nearest cell base) mode. Current users of the Airwave Service informally advise that coverage and reliability issues are of concern (NOTE the current operation assumptions for FireLink never included “in building” coverage and were based on vehicle mounted systems)
- Capacity concerns if the system requires significant cell capacity when working on a point-to-point basis

The absence (as identified above) of detailed revenue costings for in use charges. Current systems are very cost effective and are based primarily on a cost of ownership arrangement without significant revenue effect. The reliance on an external contractor to provide all communication needs must be questioned until all information is available for fire authorities to undertake a detailed business case.

CONCLUSION

This authority has deeply held reservations concerning both the FiReContol and FireLink projects and welcomes the select committee’s inquiry as a useful mechanism to increase the project transparency and level of understanding of all stakeholders involved.

Memorandum by Northgate Information Solutions (FRS 39)

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. Northgate warmly welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee’s inquiry on the fire and rescue service.
2. We need a service than responds effectively to emergencies, but also works to promote safety, reduce risk and prevent fires. It is essential that the structures are in place to enable effective delivery of planned reforms and a speedy response to new threats.
3. Our response focuses in particular on delivering a citizen-centred service, effective joint working and risk management. Strong leadership is needed at all levels to ensure success in a multi-agency context and sustain continuous improvement.

NORTHGATE'S PHILOSOPHY

4. Northgate' approach to the fire and rescue services focuses on the 4 "P"s—partnership, prediction, prevention and performance management.

Partnership

5. Partnership is critical to the new ethos of the fire and rescue service. New relationships need to be formed on the basis of mutual respect and trust. They need to be forged both internally and externally: between new and developing forms of collaborative leadership with employees, other agencies and public bodies; and the community.

6. Effective delivery requires careful balancing of national and local priorities and clear and transparent accountability between national government, regional management and local services.

Prediction

7. Prediction through risk identification is critical to prevention. Clear and detailed information is crucial to knowledgeable decision making. All too often communities are let down by the fact that local service providers do not have or do not share intelligence and information in a timely and cost effective manner and fail to connect with their communities in delivering permanent change.

Prevention

8. A citizen-centred approach to preventing fire must focus on local delivery. This needs to draw upon the best resources available and achieve the correct balance of these whether they are local, regional or national.

9. Northgate believes that the notion of subsidiarity should be the principle upon which practice is judged. Local knowledge and information is critical to responding quickly and appropriately to emergencies. So too is local deployment of resources backed up by effective risk strategies.

10. Local integrated risk management plans (IRMPs) are playing a critical part in establishing effective prevention strategies at a local level which respond to the diverse needs of local communities.

11. Where incidents occur on too large a scale, or require specialist resources beyond the capability of local service, it is crucial that there are regional and national policies and plans to tackle such events.

Performance management

12. Effective performance management systems are an integral part of good organisational governance. These must be capable of providing a picture of performance; identifying gaps in performance; of indicating areas for improvement; and developing corrective action plans.

13. Understanding the needs of the local community is as integral as gaining consensus amongst stakeholders on key indicators of success. Too much measurement can strangle services; too little can lead to lack of public accountability and a diminishing sense of public ethos.

CITIZEN-CENTRED SERVICES

14. The fire and rescue service must develop proactive, preventative services in a multi-agency context. It must shape and enhance a strong community fire safety agenda. This must involve even the most vulnerable of our communities in a shared dialogue to achieve greater community well-being.

15. Northgate believes that a citizen-centred approach to preventing fire must focus on local delivery. This needs to draw upon the best resources available and achieve the correct balance of these whether they are local, regional or national.

16. New technology can assist in this process so long as individuals and organisations are adequately prepared for change and there is a clear focus on local priorities and judgements about different types of risk. Too little consideration is given to the joining up of systems and the impact of new working methods on communication—to employees, to public service users or the general public.

17. If new technology provides citizen-friendly services which are highly accessible, it is likely that satisfaction will increase and demand may be raised. Only if the relevant change management strategies have been put in place can technology really add value. Prior to new services being introduced, staff need to be prepared, the impact on service development analysed and planned and pre-emptive measures put in place to deal with any new demand.

Public information and self-service

18. We fully support the development of the e-fire project as a method for improving information provision for local citizens and businesses alike. We welcome the recent “Prevention” campaign addressing all aspects of fire safety for domestic householders, and look forward to the inclusion of such fire safety resources on the e-fire portal. This portal will also support increased public self-service, for example in requesting home fire risk assessments.

19. Consideration could be given to encouraging local fire and rescue services to introduce a greater degree of self-service for their employees. Many standardised queries and routine tasks can be dealt with by the individual employee through the use of user-friendly electronic systems. Self-service information systems give employees potentially faster access to information and greater control over their working conditions, whilst relieving the HR function of some of the routine tasks.

20. If individuals have greater control and access to information about their working conditions including terms and conditions governing flexible employment, job-sharing, part-time working, family-friendly policies and equality policies, this will help to create a positive climate in which diversity is welcomed and celebrated.

EFFECTIVE JOINT WORKING

21. As the regional fire control centre programme moves forwards, our concern is that there must be clear procedures and clear responsibilities between local, regional and national bodies. There must also be national leadership focused on providing the mechanisms for inter-agency working based on the principle of collaboration.

22. Multi-agency working requires new forms of leadership based on co-operation and collaboration. Collaboration is an essential part of encouraging innovation at both a national and local level. At its best, collaboration encourages an open learning environment where people can experiment, learn from experience and share information to help drive through continuous improvement to add to the public value.

23. Collaboration should be based on recognition of what works well, and what needs changing. There is a need to build and share best practice, as well as identify and solve problems relating to national and local issues. A collaborative approach involving a range of public authorities, businesses and voluntary organisations is vital. By sharing expertise, knowledge and resources with a range of partners, the fire and rescue service can develop a holistic prevention strategy based on the effective management of risk. Northgate supports the introduction of work programmes aimed to developing a culture as well as a practice of multi-agency working.

24. Effective joint working is essential to civil resilience, and we support the development of clear guidance on the responsibilities of all Category 1 responders, in particular on how information can be shared in appropriate formats and at appropriate times—real-time or otherwise—between the fire and rescue service, local authorities and the police.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

25. Our experience is that too much time is wasted in duplicating records, in carrying out routine tasks and finding, rather than on acting upon, information. Information technology can assist through integrating operational systems; generating management reports on key strategic issues; and providing more efficient systems for performance management.

26. We should ensure that centrally held information and analysis can effectively enable local corrective action. Critical to the success of such systems is that there is strong and robust local input and involvement, not only in collecting data but in defining and constantly refining central information and analysis. It is critical that regional controls or decision making do not override local information and local policy decisions.

27. Effective decisions about risk rely on achieving the highest confidence in the accuracy and consistency of underlying information. It is also crucial to ensure that processes are established to sustain accurate data collection on an ongoing basis.

28. Northgate believes that fire and rescue services need to undertake a thorough analysis of their current resources and their ability to meet future requirements. This requires a modelling process for future options to be tested. This process should help to maximise the effectiveness of available resources and ensure consistency is applied in balancing the efforts between traditional intervention strategies and the need to refocus effort on prevention and match resources accordingly.

29. Clear lines of responsibility must be backed up by integrated information systems to ensure that local flexibility can operate seamlessly alongside regional control, delivering the best use of resources for any incident.

Memorandum by the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority (FRS 40)

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority would like to thank the Select Committee in providing this opportunity to contribute to this inquiry. Having had the opportunity to discuss this inquiry as part of the East Midlands Regional Management Board (EMRB) the Fire and Rescue Authority within Leicestershire fully support the submission provided by Mr Paul Woods on behalf of the EMRB.

Furthermore the Fire and Rescue Authority within Leicestershire also accepts and welcomes the changes in the legislative framework and the freedoms and flexibilities it provides. These changes will enable for better service delivery amongst the communities within Leicestershire.

In summary the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority looks forward for further opportunities in the future to provide comment on the service, at all levels.

Ian Cartwright

Director of Organisational Development

Memorandum by David Elwell MBE, Communications Manager, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service (FRS 41)

I have been the Communications Manager for Essex Fire and Rescue Service since 1981 and obviously seen many changes many have resulted in improvements to the service in general, However I would like to make the following observations for committee consideration concerning the Regional Fire Control Project.

Whilst I am directly involved with both the Fire Control and Firelink Projects and the convergence issues arising from the respective projects and will support whatever the ODPM and our local management ultimately dictate, I have serious concerns about the Regional Control project.

The proposal to consolidate the six Fire Service Controls including the one in Essex to form a regional control centre in Cambridge will in my opinion not provide the required resilience and efficiency. The new control will resemble a technology driven call centre and not be conducive with all of the elements of fire controls activities, many of which will not apparently be undertaken by the control in any event, probably resulting in Brigades having to effectively set a up a 24/7 ops room to liaise with the regional control centre.

The policy to site the Eastern Region Control at Cambridge Business Park in Cambridge on what is essentially a busy industrial estate is not conducive with ideals set out for such a centre. It is located near to one of the busiest road traffic blackspots in Eastern England near to the A14. This could result in staffing difficulties during bad weather and above normal heavy traffic conditions. (Although I would reiterate that the normal in that area is heavy in any event). It is apparently considered that Local Knowledge is not important, whilst to some degree this may be true in the event of a technology failure at one or more regional controls local knowledge would come into its own.

The whole concept of the regional controls is technology driven and fraught with danger, The most likely time to lose Landlines/Telecoms Infrastructure, Electrical Power and Radio Aerial Sites is during severe conditions where the use of the former facilities are in maximum demand. It is appreciated that the design concept will take into account the stated failures, however I doubt that any resilience measures will be adequate in the event of serious spate conditions.

The Fire Service considers it is a Community Based Service with a requirement to educate and liaise with the Community, however moving the control room away from the community based activates contradicts the concept.

It is appreciated that projects such as Firelink will improve radio communications, but it is imperative that fall back solutions are implemented from the outset and not as in the case of the police retrospectively.

In summary the whole concept of the Fire Service Control Project is Technology Driven and it is well known from major events such as the Major BT Southampton Exchange Failure, fires involving other BT exchanges causing national connectivity problems, and connectivity problems with networks resulting from 7 July that Communications Infrastructure will and does fail at the optimum time for its usage.

There is no apparent cost benefit analysis available for the original conception of the idea of regional control and it is considered that any savings will be taken up in supporting unnecessary high levels of technology with little or no manual back up mechanism. A significant number of concerns and issues have been raised as a direct result of convergence work being undertaken by this region, brigades in different areas currently work in different ways with variations in procedures, it is appreciated that convergence will rationalise many issues, however IRMP variations will occur and the attendance prescribed by the regional control will deal with them but only if the technology is efficient or in fact working. I appreciate that there will be many counter arguments from government and in particular from consultants about my views, but my assumptions are based on experience and there are serious concerns both from my self and my colleagues in our control room about the whole concept of control room regionalisation.

Memorandum by Austin Mitchell MP (FRS 42)

I'm pleased that you are holding an enquiry and grateful for the opportunity to submit evidence.

My concerns echo those of the Fire Brigades Union but with a special emphasis on the needs of South Humberside.

1. Grimsby is part of South Humberside, an area which is always tagged onto the end of the bigger units of regional government. We do not fit naturally in either Yorkshire, which we belong to for regional government purposes, or the East Midlands to which the South Bank of the Humber was previously attached. This remoteness from any regional centre in a reorganised fire service is going to cause problems and may cause delays and difficulties.

2. These problems stand to be heightened by the industrial make-up of the area. The South Bank is a concentration of oil refineries, chemical industries, gas generators which pose unique dangers already indicated by the Flixborough explosion in the Seventies, the Conoco fire more recently, and intermittent problems with emissions and the storage of dangerous chemicals.

3. It is a coastal and riparian area subject to occasional flooding.

4. In this situation a centralised control system which is rapidly increasing in estimated costs (already doubled in ministerial estimates) which are going to absorb a substantial part of the fire service budget and, therefore, weaken other services is a risk too far.

5. Because this concentration is a large new technological project the danger is that the early days will see the generation of problems. The system will be complex, risky and subject to a long settling in and proving time which heightens risk and danger in an area like mine.

6. Regional concentration may make co-operation with neighbouring forces to the south more difficult than it has been.

7. As a great believer in the maxim that if it ain't broke we shouldn't try to fix it, I am not convinced that the case has been made out. I have seen no demonstration of inadequacies in the present system which would justify such a massive change and certainly none to justify the job cuts which seem to be an implicit part of the claimed cost savings.

Finally, I must comment that the pace of change should not be rushed. We make our worst mistakes as a government and as a country when we rush into large changes, particularly in such a complex technological field as this. The risks, delays, indeed disasters which have attended other IT changes cannot be afforded when we are dealing with such a vital service as fire and emergencies.

Memorandum by the Fire Service Research and Training Unit at Anglia Ruskin University Cambridge (FRS 43)

1. ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

Anglia Ruskin University seeks amongst other things to:

- Be an exemplar for partnership with commerce, the community, public sector, industry and the region.
- Develop recognised centres of research excellence.
- Achieve satisfaction that exceeds expectation.

As part of this mission Anglia Ruskin University established in 2001 a Fire Service Research and Training Unit (FSRTU), and a Foundation and BA Honours degree in Public Service. Dr Dave Baigent leads on both of these initiatives. Dave probably has a unique experience for this role; his PhD research on fire service culture provides groundbreaking evidence of the way that formal and informal cultures operate (Baigent 2001) and his 12 years academic experience is grounded by his previous career as a firefighter for over 30 years.

2. FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE CULTURES

The main argument of this submission concerns the complicated cultural arrangements operating in the fire and rescue service. Many of the difficulties in the fire and rescue service are blamed on "the culture." This appears to be a catch all phrase to almost pass the blame for all the fire and rescue service's ills to something that occurs as if naturally. Few people appear to have any real understanding of the issues surrounding cultural influences and even less people recognise that culture is a quantifiable phenomenon capable of study and change.

3. INFORMAL HIERARCHY

Fire and rescue service cultures can be split into two groups:

- the formal culture (that set by managers);
- the informal culture (organised in the workplace by the watch/peer group).

It is argued that each watch on a fire station has an informal hierarchy (culture) through which older firefighters pass onto the next generations the skills required to be a firefighter (Baigent 2001). New trainees soon recognise that work, talk and learning can become something to look forward to—including firefighting because this risk associated atmosphere provides an opportunity for firefighters to prove they can overcome fear and not let their “mates” down. This process of “fitting-in” the next generation is both positive and negative; for the majority of firefighters the watch is their primary reference group for understanding the world and through which they develop their identity.

4. THE IMAGERY OF FIREFIGHTERS

But the public do not share firefighter’s enjoyment of risk and danger. The public are frightened of fire and the fact that firefighters “go into buildings as everyone else is running out” gives firefighters a special public image. Firefighters in effect become a White Knight that overcomes the Red Devil—fire (or anything else that endangers the public). As a result firefighters can be feted and their work has a masculine image. Many of those men who join the service do so to benefit from this imagery. In the UK this has led to a situation where the fire and rescue service employs mainly white working class men. Despite such a situation being unacceptable in the 21st century, the informal culture operating in the fire and rescue service resists attempts to create a more diverse workforce.

5. NEGATIVE INFLUENCE OF INFORMAL CULTURE—AN EXAMPLE PROVIDED BY THE HARASSMENT OF WOMEN

The process of socialisation of new firefighters by fitting them in can be positive. However, if managers try to impose changes that threaten the way peer group leaders believe their fire and rescue service should be organised—or challenge the current white male identity of firefighters, the informal culture can become a platform for resistance. This became clear when, in the face of a recorded history of the harassment of women (Baigent 1996; Baigent 2004a) the Home Secretary set employment targets to improve the employment of women and ethnic minorities (Straw 1999). The outcome was a considerable support for the employment of a diverse workforce (HMCIFS 1999)—but little has changed. Despite additional pressure from government (Bain 2002; ODPM 2003) and a wake up call from within the fire and rescue service (McGuirk 2002), women are still harassed (Caplen 2004; Kaplen 2004; Wright 2005). In addition I would add that so many cases of harassment come across my desk that I am currently organising a second national survey of women firefighters to identify the changes since my 1966 survey (Baigent 1996).

6. RESISTANCE TO DIVERSITY ALSO OPERATES AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS

In the same way as the fire and rescue service has resisted the employment of women (and to a large extent those men who do not conform to the image that the majority of current firefighters have of themselves), many in the fire and rescue service still appear to resist the employment of ethnic minorities. At the Local Government Association Annual Conference a paper on the likely outcomes of a “Secret Firefighter” documentary (in similar terms to the one the BBC screened on the police) received a muted reception (Baigent 2004b). Given the very difficult statistics for the employment of ethnic minorities in some areas of the country, it may be possible to argue that the rebuke of “institutional racism” that was levelled against the police (Macpherson 1999) may well apply in the fire and rescue service.

7. CULTURAL RESISTANCE TO MODERNISATION

There are many changes planned for the fire and rescue service (ODPM 2003). The Government have taken a strategic view by setting the boundaries and left the fire and rescue service to achieve them. The Chief Fire Officers Association’s new core values (Hurran 2005) are designed to bring about the type of revolutionary change that management consultants would applaud (Burke 2002). However, without a firm understanding of the complicated array of cultural arrangements operating in the fire and rescue service (in particular their cell-like organisation and how this acts to protect its legacy for the next generation of firefighters), having a bureaucracy in place (including IPDS) may not lead to the cultural colonisation that modernisers would hope for.

8. THE CONUNDRUM OF CULTURAL INFLUENCE

Firefighters' informal culture hangs onto the past. Male firefighters in particular have much invested in ensuring that this remains so. Many of these male firefighters join the fire and rescue service to be seen in the heroic image that the public have of firefighters—and it is only at emergency incidents that they can prove to themselves equal to this image. It is important not to forget that when called upon, firefighters actually do live up to their heroic (masculine) identity. In so doing they set themselves apart from those “others” that many in the fire and rescue service believe cannot fit-in. It is here that the conundrum lies, because the only reason that some groups cannot fit-in is because firefighters will not let them.

9. ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY AND CAMBRIDGESHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE SEEKING TO BREAK THE CULTURAL LOCK-IN

To assist with breaking this cultural lock-in, with the help of the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, the FSRTU was formed by Anglia Ruskin University in 2001. There have been several pieces of research but the most notable to date is their cultural audit of initial training. During the year long research, 15 training establishments within the UK were audited. Three arguments became clear from this research:

- new entrants to the fire and rescue service came to serve;
- it was up to the training centre how trainees' view of “service” was operationalised; and
- that many training establishments were perpetuating negative informal cultural beliefs.

The subsequent “Sunrise Report” provided ways of both unpicking the cultural lock-in of fitting-in and for increasing the profile of fire prevention (Baigent 2003). This report provided an industry standard for those fire and rescue services looking to resist the perpetuation of informal cultures during training (and received the support of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and rescue service).

10. PUBLIC SERVICE DEGREE

At the same time as FSRTU was established Anglia Ruskin University also supported me in writing the first foundation degree in public service (ARU 2001). The degree, now in its fourth year, was planned with the help of the emergency services to take a critical view of public service delivery. Two degrees are now offered and they provide academic capital from a mix of sociology, politics, cultural studies, law, forensic science, as well as the newly developing subject of public service. The degrees also anticipated the need for increased multi agency working within the emergency services by delivering a generic programme for the police, fire, prison and revenue and customs service and all three wings of the military. These links and the flexibility that Anglia Ruskin provides in its efforts to serve the emergency services means that the Public Service Degree is well placed to support and teach resilience. This year the Public Service Degree completed a very successfully audit by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA 2005) and in 2006 will also be delivered online.

11. A WILLINGNESS TO HELP

It is difficult to fully do justice to the considerable contribution that the FSRTU, the Public Service Degree and the growing body of expertise on public services at Anglia Ruskin University has and will make toward fire and rescue service modernisation, resilience and diversity. Our expertise, particularly about the resistance coming from the complicated cultural arrangements operating in the fire and rescue service is probably unparalleled in the UK. We offer academic integrity and rigor that has been developed from my 12 years in academia and an ability to ground this understanding through my previous career of over 30 years as a firefighter.

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Memorandum by the Association of Principal Fire Officers (APFO) (FRS 44)

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1.1 The Association of Principal Fire Officers (APFO) is a body formally constituted to represent approximately 200 of the most senior managers in the Fire & Rescue Service, specifically with regard to pay matters and conditions of service. In our response to the new Inquiry into the Fire & Rescue Service, APFO has confined its response to those matters most pertinent to our Association and its Members.

1.1.2 Whilst remaining supportive of the principal drive of the FiReControl Project to deliver a more efficient, cost effective and resilient service, we are concerned that the full business case and the evidence to support the financial consequences of the Project is not available for scrutiny. It is the members of our Association who are currently leading and managing the FiReControl Project, still with many questions unanswered.

1.1.3 The eventual outcome may be one that meets all the aims and aspirations of the project; conversely a less successful outcome will fall upon our members to rectify and make good. Future sustainability of the Fire and Rescue Service is in many ways dependent upon successful delivery of the FiReControl Project.

1.1.4 Our Association believes that FireLink will significantly improve operational and incident ground communications providing both the scope and opportunity to increase the effectiveness of the Service. We believe now is an opportune time to revisit the original specification for FireLink and examine the benefits of including both hand held communication for the incident ground and alerting systems for retained Fire Stations within the scope of the Project.

1.1.5 Institutional reform is a priority for the Service at all levels. We believe the current overly bureaucratic processes do not aid effective industrial relations. APFO are both keen and willing to engage in meaningful discussions with the NJC and others to promote and foster a more conducive climate for the future of industrial relations within the Fire & Rescue Service.

1.1.6 Promoting diversity within the Fire & Rescue Service is key to developing the Service both as an employer of first choice and one that is seen by the public as being at the heart of community safety. Notwithstanding all our efforts to reduce deaths and serious injuries through fire and other emergencies and promoting a community well-being agenda embracing a diverse workforce, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Fire & Rescue Service is critical to the future resilience of this country.

1.1.7 Recent events including the terrorist bombing of London, the floods in Carlisle and the major fire at an oil refinery in Buncefield, Hertfordshire, provide unequivocal evidence that the nation must have readily available, a competent, well trained, appropriately equipped and effectively led Fire & Rescue Service to respond to such emergencies. Our members who are the senior leaders of the Fire & Rescue Service need to be competent in all aspects of incident command in order to effectively lead and manage a dynamic and complex operational environment.

1.1.8 Whilst we fully recognise the benefits of opening the Fire & Rescue Service to multi-tier entry, we believe that ensuring the competence of our incident commanders at all levels is crucial to maintaining our world class reputation as an emergency response agency. Our ability and expertise in all aspects of critical incident operations must be preserved.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTION 1A

2.1 *Regional Control Centres*

2.1.1 The Association of Principal Fire Officers (APFO) are not fully convinced that a robust business case has been made to support the creation of nine Regional Control Centres. Our members have concerns as to the potential revenue costs of the FiReControl Project which may eventually fall upon local tax payers and the consequential responsibility for that will lie with the senior managers of the Service to drive through the project and manage the eventual outcomes.

2.1.2 We have previously stated that we would support a project that clearly delivers enhanced resilience, greater interoperability between Fire & Rescue Services, enhanced operational effectiveness including call handling, provides for better operational working with other partners in particular Police Forces and Ambulances Services, and delivers better value for money for local taxpayers. APFO continue to lend our support to a project that is designed to deliver improvements to a key aspect of the Critical National Infrastructure.

2.1.3 We are not opposed in principle to a reduction in the number of existing Fire Control Centres, rather we wish to articulate a professional view that prior to embarking upon a project of this magnitude, the full business case including details of the revenue and capital costs and apportionment would have been made available for all key stakeholders to consider alongside the clearly stated service effectiveness outcomes.

2.1.4 Our Association has raised what we believe to be quite legitimate questions regarding the potential additional costs, which we consider may fall upon local Fire Authorities as an outcome of the FiReControl Project, as well as seeking assurances with regard to governance arrangements for the new Fire Control Centres including legal accountabilities and responsibilities with regard to the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004. Whilst we have received some general responses from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), we await clarification on the matters we have raised in our earlier discussions with ODPM representatives.

2.1.5 APFO recognise and understand the need for Government to have in place effective arrangements to protect the security and infrastructure of the country, and can understand there is merit within the case put forward for larger Fire Control Centres. Indeed our members have already agreed to support cross-border working and have given a commitment to respond nationwide to maintain and ensure effective incident command arrangements.

2.1.6 However as a professional Association we believe it is our responsibility to ask for reassurances with regard to future costs and governance arrangements including legal liability, as these are matters which fall within the corporate accountability of our members.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTION 1B

3.1 *FireLink*

3.1.1 APFO fully support the introduction of FireLink to replace the existing main scheme radio, and recognise the ODPMs resource and funding support in moving this project forward. At the time of the initial specification for FireLink, the issue of hand-held communication on the incident ground fell outside the scope and remit of the project, as did the provision of alerting for retained fire stations.

3.1.2 We believe that in light of the evolving role of Fire Authorities in supporting the civil resilience agenda as well as the increasing role the Service now plays in responding to a wider range of civil emergencies, it would be prudent to re-visit the initial specification with a view to including hand-held incident ground communication facilities (Hand-held radios) and to re-consider extending the scope of FireLink to including alerting systems for retained fire stations.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTIONS 2A

4.1 *Fire Prevention*

4.1.1 APFO would wish to lend their support to the proposed introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order, emphasising the need to ensure the considerable body of knowledge and professional expertise on fire safety and fire engineering matters currently residing in the Service, is not diluted. The Fire and Rescue Service has for many years played a significant role in fire safety in the built environment; our Association believes this role should continue.

4.1.2 One further matter we would want to comment on is that of automatic fire sprinkler systems. APFO members continue to witness the damage caused to school buildings and our young people's education, through malicious and deliberate fire setting in schools. This Association lends our full support to the installation of automatic sprinkler systems in all new school buildings and major refurbishment schemes in school premises. We also extend our support to the case for domestic sprinkler systems in all new house building programmes. The opportunity to leave a legacy for future generations, providing a home environment protected from fire, should not be missed.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTIONS 2B

5.1 *Institutional Arrangements and Reform, Including Transitional Arrangements and Finance*

5.1.1 Almost every aspect of the Service is now in the process of change with that change either refocusing resources to better address risk in our communities, be that risk from the Service's traditional focus/adversary of fire, or deal with threats from transportation accidents, hazardous materials, infrastructure failure, terrorist activity or climate change.

5.1.2 Many of the current elements of modernisation assist Fire Authorities in using their resources more flexibly, including taking a more entrepreneurial approach to preventing emergencies and protecting people and property, as well as tailoring our operational response more closely to evidence based demand.

5.1.3 Ironically, the one area which has failed to respond to these changes, and yet in many ways was instrumental in precipitating the industrial disputes of 2002–03, is the national negotiating arrangements. Currently two NJCs exist. The first and largest of these negotiating fora is euphemistically entitled "NJC for firefighters", although it actually accommodates all roles from firefighter to Area Manager.

5.1.4 A smaller NJC for Principal Fire Officers operates for the most senior members of the Service, those who lead industry and manage the considerable changes, with the vast majority being members of APFO. The Association do not believe the current arrangements serve our industry well. They are overly bureaucratic, process driven and reinforce an industrial relations culture of conflict rather than co-operation. Reliance on constitutional arrangements rather than mediation and resolution has led to industrial relations characterised by long periods of stalemate and then dramatic change, often precipitated by damaging industrial action.

5.1.5 Whilst this has been the pattern for the NJC for firefighters, that for Principal Fire Officers, although somewhat less turbulent, is nonetheless equally moribund. Its operation, structures and methods of working hark back to an era long gone elsewhere in either the public or private sector, yet still remain the principle structure for driving change at a national level.

5.1.6 APFO members, both as employees and as managers of the Service, have grown frustrated and increasingly disillusioned with the present arrangements. In our view they need wholesale reform, both to widen representation of employee groups and more importantly, to introduce greater objectivity centered upon a partnership approach to problem solving.

5.1.7 The NJC has been tasked with transforming itself; this in our view has not come about. We do not believe it is able to change itself as it is an entity which reinforces the status quo, rather than facilitating transformation. It is therefore time to overhaul the mechanism for national negotiation and agreement and to promote more constructive labour relations that are focussed less on process and more on clear outcomes.

6 TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTIONS 2C

6.1 *Promoting Diversity Within the Fire and Rescue Service*

6.1.1 The wholesale drive to modernise the Fire and Rescue Service has the Association believes, created a view amongst some key stakeholders that what went before had not delivered what was expected of a public funded service, and was therefore in need of complete reform and re-design. We believe that it is important we remind ourselves that the Fire & Rescue Service is not, and has never been, a failing Service. Room for improvement yes, in need of some reform we agree, but far from sub standard.

6.1.2 Notwithstanding the undoubted successes of the Service, a belief appears to have emerged in some quarters that those officers who presently lead the Service are not able to take forward the progressive change agenda or are not suitably “managerially” qualified and that “managers” from outside must be brought in to inject expertise and bring a fresh perspective to the Service. In some ways this approach has been justified by suggesting that it brings diversity to the Service.

6.1.3 APFO refute entirely the assertion held by some influential parties that Principal Fire Officers are not best placed to lead the Service. The majority of our members hold academic qualifications at First and Masters Degree level and have led the Service through extremely challenging and difficult times, not only in the area of strategic organisational leadership, but crucially in the absolutely vital role of command at operational incidents.

6.1.4 As a reminder, the recently witnessed major floods in Carlisle, terrorist bombs in London and oil terminal fire in Hemel Hempstead demonstrate the fundamental importance of the command and leadership role of Fire and Rescue Service Officers, including Principal Fire Officers, at the scene of operational incidents.

6.1.5 APFO has been quite clear that opening up the Service to talent from outside is to be welcomed. We recognise that whilst principal managers are performing well, they have no monopoly on innovation and managerial expertise. However, those entrants who join the Service need to be developed to take on the significant operational command role the public quite rightly expect from a primary emergency service. Operational command at tactical and strategic level can be developed through training and experience, but takes time and resources to guarantee high performance.

6.1.6 Unfortunately the haste to repeal the existing Appointment and Promotion Regulations that had once ensured those placed in command roles had the requisite expertise, has resulted in a lack of accredited training programmes being made available for new talent. The development of accredited training programmes is fundamental if the Service is to support and enable those persons who enter the Service at a junior, middle or strategic management level, to acquire the competence necessary to safely and properly undertake the complete range of functions within the role of a Fire and Rescue Service Manager, particularly where it includes operational command.

6.1.7 Unfortunately there appears to be a belief in some quarters that as operational command occupies such a relatively small proportion of an officers’ time, it is unimportant. The fundamental flaw in this thinking was dramatically exposed by the terrorist attacks of 7 July 2005. The simple fact is that the Commissioners of both the London Fire Brigade and the Metropolitan Police Service spend comparatively little time undertaking operational command in their present roles. However, when they do take command it is vital that they have the requisite knowledge as well as being both competent and experienced to enable them to effectively meet those enormous challenges.

6.1.8 There is now a real vulnerability, most obviously at strategic level, but also throughout the whole Service as new entrants are invited and encouraged to join, with as yet no proper programmes in place to ensure that this new pool of potential leaders are properly trained and developed to meet the operational challenges they are to face.

6.1.9 The public, and other emergency service colleagues, have a right to expect proper levels of experience and competence throughout all roles within the Service and need an assurance that those leading this key emergency service are indeed capable of effectively undertaking their full range of duties.

7. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTIONS 3

7.1 *Joint Working Between the Fire and Rescue Service and Other Emergency Services*

7.1.1 A major thrust of reform in the Fire and Rescue Service is close collaboration between Services and other partner agencies. The motivation for such partnerships can be varied, ranging from capitalising on individual strengths, sharing fixed costs, greater economies of scale and better use of resources.

7.1.2 Whilst central Government appears to have abandoned its desire for regional Fire and Rescue Services, it appears now to have moved to a more covert position whereby it seeks to encourage voluntary collaboration and merger. The Association recognises the potential benefits this may bring, both in terms of some aspects of service delivery and easing pressures on the public purse, but would argue that a “one size” solution is not necessarily in the best interests of the Service and more importantly nor is it in the best interests of service delivery to the public.

7.1.3 We would also argue that whilst a cursory examination of the evidence may suggest that larger Fire Authorities appear to perform better, close scrutiny will reveal that many smaller Fire Authorities are high performing, particularly in indicators such as cost per head of population.

7.1.4 Inevitably, examples of closer collaboration has led to a number of Services sharing officers to provide strategic operational cover across the partner authority areas. A sensible and pragmatic approach at a local level, this may be. Unfortunately were this trend to continue unabated, the lack of a regional or national perspective will create a considerable vulnerability in resilience.

7.1.5 Individual authorities not surprisingly are considering local needs when making their own arrangements, but are not assessing the wider implications for national and regional resourcing of major civil emergencies. With the response to terrorist attacks and major climatic events being predicated at least on a regional basis, the minimum number and availability of principal officers across the UK needs to be properly assessed and maintained. At present, this assessment is not being undertaken and the lack of overview and co-ordination is allowing a vulnerability to grow in terms of national resilience.

Memorandum by the South East Regional Management Board (SE RMB) (FRS 45)

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1.1 The South East Regional Management Board (SE RMB) are a joint committee established under sections 101 and 102 of the Local Government Act 1972 and comprise the following Fire Authorities: Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes, East Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent and Medway Towns, Oxfordshire, Royal Berkshire, Surrey and West Sussex. Collectively the Fire Authorities in the south east employ approximately 8,700 people and serve a population of over 8 million, making it the largest region in England in terms of employees and population.

1.1.2 In crafting our response to the Inquiry, the South East RMB would wish to reiterate their commitment to the modernisation of the Fire and Rescue Service which should lead to continuing improvements in community safety, further reductions in fire deaths and fire related injuries and a reduction in the damage caused to property and the environment through fire. We are pleased to see the statutory role of Fire Authorities extended within the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004, and await further deliberations on the broader emergency response role currently being considered.

1.1.3 The SE RMB believe there is scope and potential for the Fire and Rescue Service to play an increasing role in the broader civil protection and community safety agenda and we believe Government should now give further consideration to the benefits of extending the role of the Fire and Rescue Service into one that encompasses a wider range of civil protection and emergency planning duties.

1.1.4 Whilst we are of a view that the potential for extending the role of the Service is worthy of further consideration, and indeed the recent consultation on an Emergencies Order for Fire and Rescue Services indicates the Government do indeed support such a move, further funding will be required to provide the capacity and resources that will enable Fire and Rescue Services to effectively discharge those additional responsibilities.

1.1.5 In looking at the specific matters described in the Inquiry and being considered by the Select Committee, the SE RMB would wish to emphasise the following points.

- *FiReControl Project*. The SE RMB whilst being cognisant of the case put forward for a rationalisation of the number of Fire Control Centres, is supportive in principle of a Project that delivers increased resilience, enhanced service effectiveness and inter-operability with other emergency services, better working between Fire Control Centres and delivers greater value for money for local tax payers.

We remain however unconvinced, that the current Project will deliver the savings described by the ODPM and are fearful that additional costs will have to be borne by local council taxpayers. We seek assurances that the enhanced service delivery outcomes articulated by the ODPM will be achieved.

- *FireLink*. The SE RMB is supportive of the replacement project for main scheme radio and will work alongside ODPM to ensure FireLink is successfully implemented. We do however seek assurances that there will be no additional revenue costs falling upon South East Fire Authorities once FireLink replaces the existing main scheme radio. Further we believe that it would be appropriate to review the original specification to bring within the scope of the FireLink Project, hand held radios for the incident ground and alerting systems for retained Fire Stations.

- *Fire Prevention.* The introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order in the spring of 2006 should provide a clearer and more focused legislative framework for fire safety in the built environment. We remain however, cognisant of the concerns expressed by the business community that a reduction in bureaucracy whilst welcome in many quarters could lead to a potential reduction in fire safety in places of work and other occupied buildings.

The Fire and Rescue Service has significant professional expertise and experience in fire safety matters and we would want to continue supporting the business community in developing and maintaining safety in the built environment. The SE RMB would also wish to make the strongest possible representations that all new school buildings or any major refurbishments to school buildings are constructed with fire sprinkler systems. We believe the wanton damage to the fabric of our school buildings and the damaging cost to our children's education should not be allowed to continue.

In extending our support for fire sprinkler systems, we would also argue that any new residential premises constructed have installed at build stage, domestic sprinkler systems. We find it difficult to comprehend that with the announcement by the Deputy Prime Minister of a massive house building programme over the next 20 years, 500,000 alone in the south east, the protection of future occupants from the danger of fire, has not been at the fore front of strategic thinking. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to leave a legacy of safety for future generations, and is an opportunity that must not be allowed to pass by.

- *NJC and financing arrangements.* The SE RMB believe that a partnership approach with responsible trade unions is in the best interests of the Fire Authority, our employees and those communities we serve. The industrial tensions over the last few years have a number of causes. We believe that leaders and managers of change are crucial to improving the Fire and Rescue Service and achieving the efficiencies and effectiveness expected by local taxpayers.

In seeking to move the Service forward, we believe it is crucial that our middle and senior managers have a credible voice and that creating a specific NJC for those managers will be a significant step forward. In considering financing of Fire and Rescue Services, we remain unconvinced that the existing funding mechanism is properly reflective of the demands on the Service. We believe that the amount local council tax payers have to pay towards the Fire and Rescue Service is disproportionate and hold a firm view that central Government should contribute a greater proportion of the overall funding provision of the Fire and Rescue Service.

Across the South East region, our Fire Authorities are responsible for providing a range of preventative, protective and intervention services in densely populated urban areas and large rural tracts of the country, interspersed with many small towns and villages. In addition, the South East has a considerable coastal area that attracts many visitors, with the inherent increased risk seasonal rises in population bring. We believe we are disadvantaged in grant in comparison to many other Fire and Rescue Authorities including the Metropolitan Authorities. Redistribution of grant is key to ensuring that all Fire Authorities are treated fairly.

2 TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTION 1A

2.1 *Regional Control Centres*

2.1.1 The South East Regional Management Board (SE RMB), whilst remaining unconvinced of the business case for establishing one Regional Control Centre in the south east, and specifically having concerns regarding the potential revenue costs which may fall on local tax payers, have stated their support in principle for a project that delivers enhanced resilience, greater interoperability between Fire & Rescue Services, enhanced operational effectiveness including call handling, provides for better operational working with other partners in particular Police Forces and Ambulances Services, and delivers better value for money for local taxpayers

2.1.2 We are disappointed that the full business case is not yet available to Fire Authorities and we are informed that this document will now not be available until the summer of 2006. Previously we have raised questions regarding additional costs, which we consider may fall upon local taxpayers, as well as seeking assurances with regard to governance arrangements for the new Regional Fire Control Centres including legal accountabilities and responsibilities stemming out of the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004.

2.1.3 Whilst we have received some general responses from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), we await clarification on the matters we have raised, and in particular with regard to the on-going pressures on revenue budgets, seek absolute assurances that our local tax payers will not have to bear the burden of any additional costs arising out of the FiReControl project.

2.1.4 The SE RMB, recognise and understand the need for Government to have in place effective arrangements to secure the Critical National Infrastructure of the country, and are mindful that there can be made an argument for larger Fire Control Centres. However we are concerned at the large geographical area and population to be served by one Fire Control Centre for the south east and believe there are sound reasons to consider whether one Fire Control Centre is sufficient to serve our region.

2.1.5 One further crucial matter is the work currently undertaken by the existing Fire Controls that will not be provided as part of the arrangements for Regional Control Centres. This is known as “out of scope” work and will remain as a legacy and cost for individual Fire Authorities. We do not believe this has been fully taken into account by the ODPM when they first published their findings on the merits of moving to Regional Control Centres, leading to their conclusions on savings to be achieved within the context of the FiReControl Project.

2.1.6 The SE RMB believe the anticipated savings are questionable, and again reiterate their request to receive assurances that local tax payers will not have to meet the additional costs that will arise from implementing an ODPM instigated project.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTION 1B

3.1 *FireLink*

3.1.1 The SE RMB fully support the introduction of FireLink to replace the existing main scheme radio, and recognise the ODPMs resource and funding support in moving this project forward. At the time of specification for FireLink, the issue of hand-held communication on the incident ground fell outside the initial specification, as did the provision of alerting for retained fire stations.

3.1.2 We believe that in light of the evolving role of Fire Authorities in supporting the civil resilience agenda as well as the increasing role the Service now plays in responding to a wider range of civil emergencies, it would be prudent to re-visit the initial specification with a view to including hand-held incident ground communication facilities (Hand-held radios) and to re-consider extending the scope of FireLink to include alerting systems for retained fire stations.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTIONS 2A

4.1 *Fire Prevention*

4.1.1 Since the enactment of the Fire Precautions Act in 1971, we have seen a significant improvement in fire safety and fire precautions in the built environment. Fire and Rescue Services over the past 34 years have built up considerable professional expertise in fire safety and fire engineering which we believe has served the business community extremely well.

4.1.2 Whilst we welcome the introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order, and support the drawing together of the myriad of legislation that relates to fire safety in places of work and public buildings, we are concerned that placing responsibility for such matters entirely on the premises occupier or owner, may see a reduction in the high standards now found in places of work and public buildings, with regard to fire safety.

4.1.3 We believe that the professional expertise of the Fire and Rescue Service in supporting the business community through an appropriate mixture of education, encouragement and enforcement, should be retained, and that it would be beneficial to carefully review the introduction of the Order to ensure its implementation meets its stated aims and objectives. Failure to maintain necessary standards in publicly accessed buildings will in our view, inevitably result over a period of time, in an increase in fires and fire casualties. It is important that we maintain safety with regard to fire and means of escape in these building types, whilst seeking to improve fire safety and means of escape in those premises deemed to be high or higher risk.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTIONS 2B

5.1 *Institutional Arrangements and Reform, Including Transitional Arrangements and Finance*

5.1.1 We have considered the matter of institutional reform and have been supportive of the intention to review the National Joint Council with a view to considering the establishment of effective representative arrangements between employees and their Fire Authorities.

5.1.2 The SE RMB are not convinced that the current constitutional arrangements which have led to the vast majority of the uniformed workforce being represented by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), are necessarily the most effective way of progressing the modernisation of the Fire and Rescue Service. The current arrangements which result in many of the uniformed managers in the Service being represented by the FBU, is in our view not appropriate for a modern public sector organisation and is not necessarily the most effective mechanism for consulting and negotiating conditions of service matters with our middle and senior managers, and perhaps does not best serve the needs of those staff.

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

5.1.4 In turning to matters of finance, we would direct the Select Committee to the 2003 report by Professor Sir George Bain, who considered the potential for Fire Authorities to make savings to support the modernisation agenda, concluding that the scope for savings was likely to be different across Fire Authorities.

5.1.5 We would argue that the scope for such savings, particularly with regard to the suggested reductions in staff numbers amongst the SE Fire Authorities is minimal, and that the re-distribution of grant mentioned in the Bain Report has not materialised. All the SE Fire Authorities have a substantial mix of wholetime and retained duty system fire fighters and cover large rural areas as well as heavily populated city areas including Brighton, Southampton and the rapidly expanding city of Milton Keynes. Collectively we are responsible for providing an emergency response to the Channel Tunnel, Gatwick Airport and other smaller regional airports along with providing an operational response to one of the busiest shipping highways in the world.

5.1.6 The south east has a large coastal area with inherent associated costs. We would argue strongly that re-distribution of grant is a matter of considerable importance and that South East Fire Authorities should be primary beneficiaries from any grant re-distribution.

6. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTIONS 2C

6.1 *Promoting Diversity Within the Fire and Rescue Service*

6.1.1 For many years, the SE Fire Authorities have been at the forefront of supporting a diversity agenda in the Service, recognising the benefits that would accrue from having a workforce that was truly representative of the communities we serve. There are however a number of challenges to overcome, in particular positioning the Service as a career option rather than simply as a job. There needs in our view to be a concerted and joined up advertising campaign, not unlike that undertaken on behalf of the Armed Forces, to bring to the attention of prospective job applicants, the opportunities now available in a modern Fire and Rescue Service.

6.1.2 Such a campaign would need to be co-ordinated and funded through the ODPM to ensure it was of the quality and sophistication necessary to put across a strong message that raised the profile of the Fire and Rescue Service as being an employer of choice for those seeking dynamic, challenging and wide ranging career opportunities.

6.1.3 Co-terminus to any advertising campaign, there needs to be a joined up approach across all relevant Government Departments, in particular the DfES and the Department of Work and Pensions, to ensure young people are aware through schools career programmes, of the opportunities now available to them, and that those who may have left education and are now seeking other career opportunities are also aware of the career open to them in the Fire and Rescue Service.

7. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTIONS 3

7.1 *Joint Working Between the Fire and Rescue Service and Other Emergency Services*

7.1.1 The SE RMB value the partnership working between the Fire and Rescue Service and other emergency services, in particular in matters related to civil resilience. We believe such partnership working must continue if we are to provide an effective response to emergency incidents and support joint exercises between the emergency services. However we are mindful of the recent debates relating to reform of Police and Ambulance structures and would suggest that it would be prudent to await the outcome of any structural reform of those Services, before considering options for the Fire and Rescue Service.

7.1.2 We are clear in our view that we do not believe there is any benefit or merit in regionalisation of the Fire and Rescue Service and are pleased that the Fire Minister Jim Fitzpatrick has recently stated that it is not the Government's intention to regionalise Fire Authorities nor is it Government's intention to pursue amalgamations of Fire Authorities. We agree wholeheartedly with the Minister.

8. CIVIL RESILIENCE

8.1.1 As the work of the Fire and Rescue Service has evolved in recent years to encompass a wider civil emergency response, we have been grateful for the Governments' support of the New Dimension agenda. We would hope that Government continue to support the on-going training of this additional work, which is crucial to the continuing effectiveness of the Critical National Infrastructure.

8.1.2 In addition, we believe that the issue of co-responding is one which the Fire and Rescue Service should engage in through partnerships with the Ambulance Services. We are aware of the FBUs opposition to co-responder schemes, but cannot agree with their view and will continue to explore all opportunities to enhance the delivery of life safety services to local communities, including co-responder schemes. The SE RMB would be pleased to engage further with Government to consider whether it is necessary to put into place additional arrangements to support Fire Authorities in implementing co-responder schemes where there is an identified community need.

Memorandum by the East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (FRS 46)

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1.1 East Sussex Fire Authority are responsible for providing, administering and managing the Fire and Rescue Service in the county of East Sussex and the city of Brighton and Hove. In crafting our response to the Inquiry, East Sussex Fire Authority would wish to reiterate their commitment to the modernisation of the Fire and Rescue Service which should lead to continuing improvements in community safety, further reductions in fire deaths and fire related injuries and a reduction in the damage caused to property and the environment through fire.

1.1.2 We are pleased to see the statutory role of Fire Authorities extended within the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, and await further deliberations on the broader emergency response role currently being considered. As an Authority committed to supporting the needs of our local citizens, we believe the Fire and Rescue Service can play an increasing role in the broader civil protection and community safety agenda and believe Government should now give further consideration to extending the role of the Fire and Rescue Service into one that encompasses a wider range of civil protection and emergency planning duties.

1.1.3 In looking at the specific matters described in the Inquiry and being considered by the Select Committee, East Sussex Fire Authority would wish to emphasise the following points.

- **FiReControl Project.** This Authority whilst being cognisant of the case put forward for a rationalisation of the number of Fire Control Centres, is supportive in principle of a Project that delivers increased resilience, enhanced service effectiveness and inter-operability with other emergency services, better working between Fire Control Centres and delivers greater value for money for local tax payers.

We remain however, unconvinced that the current Project will deliver the savings described by the ODPM and are fearful that additional costs will have to be borne by local council taxpayers. We seek assurances that the enhanced service delivery outcomes articulated by the ODPM will be achieved.

- **FireLink.** This Authority is supportive of the replacement project for main scheme radio and will work alongside ODPM to ensure FireLink is successfully implemented. We do however seek assurances that there will be no additional revenue costs falling upon Fire Authorities once FireLink replaces the existing main scheme radio.

Further we believe that it would be appropriate to review the original specification to bring within the scope of the FireLink Project, hand held radios for the incident ground and alerting systems for retained Fire Stations.

- **Fire Prevention.** The introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order in the spring of 2006 should provide a clearer and more focused legislative framework for fire safety in the built environment. East Sussex Fire Authority are however cognisant of the concerns expressed by the business community that a reduction in bureaucracy whilst welcome in many quarters, could lead to a potential reduction in fire safety in places of work and other occupied buildings.

The Fire and Rescue Service has significant professional expertise and experience in fire safety matters and we would want to continue supporting the business community in developing and maintaining safety in the built environment. This Authority would also wish to make the strongest possible representations that all new school buildings or any major refurbishments to school buildings are constructed with fire sprinkler systems. We believe the wanton damage to the fabric of our school buildings and the damaging cost to our children's education should not be allowed to continue.

In extending our support for fire sprinkler systems, we would also argue that any new residential and domestic dwellings constructed have installed at build stage, domestic sprinkler systems. We find it difficult to comprehend that with the announcement by the Deputy Prime Minister of a massive house building programme over the next 20 years, 500,000 new homes alone in the south east, the protection of future occupants from the danger of fire, has not been at the fore front of strategic thinking. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to leave a legacy of safety for future generations, and is an opportunity that must not be allowed to pass by.

- NJC and financing arrangements. East Sussex Fire Authority believe that a partnership approach with responsible trade unions is in the interest of the Fire Authority, our employees and those communities we serve. The industrial tensions over the last few years have a number of causes.

We believe that leaders and managers of change are crucial to improving the Fire and Rescue Service and achieving the efficiencies and effectiveness expected by local taxpayers. In seeking to move the Service forward, we believe it is crucial that our middle and senior managers have a credible voice and that creating a specific NJC for those managers will be a significant step forward.

In considering financing of Fire and Rescue Services, we remain unconvinced that the existing funding mechanism is properly reflective of the demands on the Service. We believe that the amount local council tax payers have to pay towards the Fire and Rescue Service is disproportionate and hold a firm view that central Government should contribute a greater amount of the overall funding provision of the Fire and Rescue Service.

As a combined Fire Authority responsible for densely populated urban areas, a large rural county with many small towns and villages, and a coastline in excess of 80 km, we believe we are disadvantaged in grant in comparison to many other Fire and Rescue Authorities including the Metropolitan Authorities. Redistribution of grant is key to ensuring that all Fire Authorities are treated fairly.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 East Sussex Fire Authority welcomes the opportunity to review the progress that has been made in modernising the Fire and Rescue Service since 2003. Whilst much has been achieved, there still remain many opportunities to reduce fire deaths and injuries and fire related property damage alongside the evolution of the role of the Fire and Rescue Service in areas of civil resilience and civil protection.

2.1.2 There is much evidence of progress particularly in the areas of reducing fire related deaths and injuries, with the Service now engaging more with key stakeholders to reduce the damaging impact to society of road traffic collisions.

2.1.3 There is one major safety development which needs Government commitment now. East Sussex Fire Authority has, for sometime, advocated the installation of sprinkler systems in public buildings, particularly schools, and actively supports the growing lobby arguing for the installation of domestic sprinkler systems in new homes. There is much evidence from other countries, particularly New Zealand and the USA, that shows clear benefit arising from the installation of domestic sprinkler systems and we urge the Government to grasp this initiative in line with their significant new house building programme that is scheduled to take place over the next 15 to 20 years.

2.1.4 The modernisation and reform agenda for the Fire and Rescue Service has faced many hurdles including in a number of instances, resistance to change from the Fire Brigades' Union. Aspects of the role of the Fire and Rescue Service particularly in relation to civil resilience and co-responding have frequently been resisted by the Fire Brigades' Union, which has led to a slower realisation of the benefits expected from reform. In addition, necessary changes to the national negotiating machinery has seen little progress and until these matters are effectively resolved, the direction and speed of progress is likely to be limited.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTION 1A

3.1 *Regional control centres*

3.1.1 While East Sussex Fire Authority remains unconvinced of the rationale for the FiReControl Project to build nine fire control centres based on the existing Government regions, we continue to lend our support to a project that delivers successful outcomes that provide a better, more effective and resilient service leading to greater value for money gains.

3.1.2 To be successful the FiReControl Project must:

- (a) deliver increased resilience, enhanced interoperability and support between Fire and Rescue Service Control Centres, more effective working with other emergency service partners, in particular the Police Service and Ambulance Service, greater operational effectiveness in terms of call handling and incident response; and
- (b) provide greater value for money for local tax payers than the current system which works satisfactorily at the moment.

We remain disappointed that the full business case is still not available to Fire Authorities.

3.1.3 East Sussex Fire Authority continue to seek confirmation from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister that the benefits described above will be delivered through the FiReControl project and a reassurance that local taxpayers in East Sussex and the City of Brighton and Hove will not have to contribute more council tax to support the project outcomes.

3.1.4 In addition, an absolute clarification is sought on the Government's constitutional arrangements for the Regional Fire Control Centres alongside a clear and unequivocal statement on the legal issues surrounding statutory responsibilities and liability for responding to emergency calls. Finally, we seek clarity on the VAT arrangements for the new Regional Control Centres.

4 TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTION 1B

4.1 *FireLink*

4.1.1 East Sussex Fire Authority supports the introduction and implementation of the FireLink Project recognising that the existing main scheme radio system is now obsolete. We welcome the support of the ODPM in progressing the FireLink Project, but again raise the issue of future revenue costs. Whilst there has been some detail provided on the infrastructure and hardware revenue costs of the system with agreement that this is paid for by the ODPM, the continuing ongoing revenue maintenance and support costs for the system are still unclear.

4.1.2 In addition, we believe it would be appropriate now to review the original specification for FireLink, which at the time of its crafting omitted both the provision of handheld communication at the incident ground and an alerter system for retained fire stations with related mobilising arrangements.

4.1.3 East Sussex Fire Authority believes that with the increasing role the Fire and Rescue Service now plays in responding to other emergencies, particularly those relating to the civil resilience and civil protection agenda, it is crucial that handheld communication on the operational incident ground is provided and that this should be built into the FireLink Project. We would therefore, ask that the Select Committee consider this matter in some detail.

5 TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTIONS 2A

5.1 *Fire prevention*

5.1.1 East Sussex Fire Authority has supported the revision of fire precautions and fire safety legislation and welcomes the drawing together of a range of statutes within the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order. We understand the Order is to become effective from April 2006 and we believe there is now an opportunity to ensure that fire safety and fire precautions in the built environment continues the improvements we have seen in fire safety matters since the enactment of the Fire Precautions Act in 1971.

5.1.2 We understand fully, the need to remove unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy from the business sector and place on the responsible owner/operator of premises, proper accountabilities. We also believe, however, that the Fire Precautions Act 1971 has played, and continues to play, an important part in securing fire safety measures in occupied buildings and places of work.

5.1.3 In discussions with our local business community, we conclude that a balance has to be struck between what we believe to be a necessary bureaucratic fire certification scheme and the move within a modern and dynamic business environment to place proper accountabilities and responsibilities on premises owners. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order will see the role of the Fire and Rescue Service move from being an enabling and facilitative body to that of a primary enforcement agency.

5.1.4 There is in our view, a potential for fire safety measures in occupied buildings and places of work to decline, resulting in a greater risk to those persons who work in or visit such buildings. Any greater risk of fire in occupied buildings and places of work will result in an increased workload for the Fire and Rescue Service and potentially a greater risk for our firefighters.

5.1.5 It is not our intention to scaremonger or suggest that the built environment will immediately become a less safe place. Nevertheless, we believe that since 1971, the built environment has become much safer. This is due in some part to the role played by the Fire and Rescue Service and the professionalism of fire safety inspecting officers who have advised on fire safety and related measures in such buildings and have supported the maintenance of a fire certification regime through regular inspections.

5.1.6 We suggest therefore, that the impact of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order is closely monitored and regularly reviewed to ensure that fire safety measures in the built environment do not decline following the move to a new legislative regime.

6 TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTIONS 2B

6.1 *Institutional arrangements and reform, including transitional arrangements and finance*

6.1.1 Financial Provision for the Fire and Rescue Service both at a national and local level does give some cause for concern. The earlier review of the Fire and Rescue Service indicated that there were savings to be made through organisational efficiencies.

6.1.2 In East Sussex, we are changing the way we do things—most importantly resources have moved from the traditional areas of response and intervention towards prevention. We will continue to adjust our working practices and the deployment of resources, but there is limited scope for further savings without the overall operational efficiency of the organisation being harmed.

6.1.3 Further, it is becoming increasingly clear that the evolving role of the Fire and Rescue Service, particularly in support of the civil resilience and civil protection agenda, has placed additional financial burdens on the Service, including the provision of ongoing training and the maintenance of equipment and plant.

6.1.4 Whilst we recognise and acknowledge the support of the ODPM in providing initial plant, equipment and accommodation to support the New Dimension programme, the additional responsibilities on the Service as Category One Responders through the Civil Contingencies Bill and the work associated with emergency planning is difficult to absorb within existing revenue budgets.

6.1.5 In the earlier White Paper, it was acknowledged that not all fire authorities would have the same capacity to make savings and that a redistribution mechanism would have to be found to ensure that those authorities that had little or no opportunity to find savings would be supported through a re-distribution of grant. To date, we have seen no evidence of any grant redistribution.

6.1.6 East Sussex Fire Authority would also raise its concern with regard to the impact of the modernisation agenda on those Services who have a high proportion of their staff working the retained duty system. Whilst the outcome of the 2003 industrial action was predicated on a self-funded pay award, it is important to remember that this was looking at the national position as a whole. The result has been that those Fire Authorities who have significant numbers of retained duty personnel proportional to their wholetime personnel have seen their revenue costs rise sharply. The issue of revenue grant redistribution is therefore, critical to the future sustainability of Fire and Rescue Authorities.

7 TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTIONS 2C

7.1 *Promoting diversity within the fire and rescue service*

7.1.1 East Sussex Fire Authority fully supports the agenda to promote diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service and is committed to the principle of its local service reflecting and representing the people it serves. We believe it is important however, for Government to strategically support this agenda and recognise that to promote the Fire and Rescue Service as an employer of the first choice and as a worthwhile career option, we must have in place effective relationships with the Department of Education and Science to promote a career in the Fire and Rescue Service in all schools and colleges and through careers fairs. The Department of Work and Pensions must also recognise and promote the Fire and Rescue Service as a career choice.

7.1.2 We applaud the advertising campaigns of the Armed Forces in nationally promoting their Services through the medium of television in highly sophisticated and well-marketed advertising campaigns. The same approach should be considered as a matter of priority for the Fire and Rescue Service supported and marketed through the ODPM.

7.1.3 As an authority determined to secure the most able and competent staff to manage and lead our Service, we also welcome the opportunity to open the Service to a much wider field of applicants through removing artificial barriers to entry and a single tier entry system. However, we also believe it is fundamental to the success of the Service to ensure that the critical incident command skills of officers are not diluted and that entry into the Service at all levels is only available to those competent to undertake the requirements of the role.

7.1.4 We recognise the challenges this poses those persons who would wish to enter the Service at a higher level and do not have the necessary critical incident command skills. Therefore we believe it is important that the Service has in place robust and accredited training programmes to ensure that those who come into the Service at a multi-entry stage route, are able to gain the necessary skills and competencies to undertake their role.

8 TERMS OF REFERENCE—QUESTIONS 3

8.1 *Joint working between the fire and rescue service and other emergency services*

8.1.1 We support fully, increasing partnership working between the Fire and Rescue Service and other emergency services particularly in the areas of community safety and working with young people. We have seen much success from the results of programmes such as the LIFE project and work with the Prince's Trust in supporting young people, particularly the socially excluded and those referred to the Fire and Rescue Service through Youth Offending Teams.

8.1.2 Such programmes, often supported through Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), are seen as key components of improving social cohesion and community well being. As such, we would wish to continue supporting such initiatives. However, we are concerned at the continuing impact on existing resources of supporting such programmes and would urge that consideration be given to providing specific grant funding to support and resource what we consider to be significantly beneficial community partnership programmes.

9 CIVIL RESILIENCE

9.1.1 East Sussex Fire Authority fully supports the engagement of the Fire and Rescue Service in the civil resilience agenda. We have previously recommended that the Fire and Rescue Service take on a greater civil protection role particularly in light of our experiences of major flooding in 1998 and in 2000. We believe that not only can the Fire and Rescue Service provide a professional and supportive emergency response to such incidents, but also that our local communities both expect and demand such a provision from the public emergency services.

9.1.2 The Fire and Rescue Service in our view, is best placed to support, provide and undertake such a role and we would argue that along with this enhanced role and consequential responsibilities, there should be an increased level of funding.

9.1.3 We believe it would be opportune now to review the role of the Fire and Rescue Service alongside the Section 9 and 11 provisions within the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to look specifically the other emergencies in which Fire and Rescue Services are likely to be required or indeed may wish to engage, in order to meet local circumstances and community needs. The outcome must be on the one hand, that local communities and central Government can be assured of a professional and effective response to civil emergencies and on the other, that local tax payers are not unnecessarily burdened.

9.1.4 In addition and in support of the broader public safety agenda, East Sussex Fire Authority see considerable benefit in the introduction of co-responder schemes between local Ambulance Services and the Fire and Rescue Service. We believe that where there is an identified need, the Fire and Rescue Service should use its resources to support life safety and life preservation in engaging in co-responder schemes. We are disappointed that at a national level, the Fire Brigades Union has stated its opposition to such schemes, which seems at odds with the aims and ideals of a publicly funded emergency service.

Memorandum by Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service (FRS 47)

INTRODUCTION

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority is a Combined Fire Authority serving the administrative areas of: Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth City Council and Southampton City Council. The Fire and Rescue Service provided by the Authority protects over 1.6 million residents and covers an area of 3,770 km².

1(a) *The implications for citizens and the Fire and Rescue Service of the introduction of Regional Control Centres*

1a.1 The national project to establish regional control centres, together with the Firelink Radio Scheme, represents one of the largest single projects undertaken by the fire and rescue service.

1a.2 This project encompasses a radical new way of delivering the logistical deployment of fire service resources. The considerable back office processes involved means that the project is much more extensive than might be envisaged. It will involve the convergence of the constituent authorities' individual working protocols and operational procedures. Therefore, the project represents considerable risks during the process of transition and early implementation.

1a.3 Hampshire, like many other authorities, is justifiably proud of the quality of the service its local control provides. It has committed to the project on the basis that it ultimately provides at least as good a service to its communities and many other fire authorities take a similar stance.

1a.4 As the project is ostensibly run centrally by the ODPM, with the regional working groups often confined to narrow technical consultation, there is a growing sense of detachment from the decision making. This situation is exacerbated by the continuing absence of a full business case and the previous restriction of financial information under the premise of commercial sensitivity.

1a.5 Hampshire's own corporate risk assessment illustrates the predicament for authorities of being unable to adequately assess the considerable financial, legal and business continuity risks. We are obliged to place faith in the central project team that matters will be resolved, but mindful that it is ultimately the individual fire authorities that will bear the liability from project failure, overspend and service discontinuity.

1a.6 The project needs greater transparency and ownership by fire authorities if it is to be robust and earn the confidence of the public.

1(b) The implications for citizens and the Fire and Rescue Service of the introduction of and implementation process for FireLink radio services

The Authority is extremely frustrated that it is unable to properly plan for the implementation of FireLink. This is due to uncertainties over timescales for its rollout and, specifically, about the lack of information available on the financial implications for the Authority—both during initial installation and more importantly for the ongoing maintenance of the system. If the financial impact is anything like that experienced by the Hampshire Police Authority, the Select Committee will appreciate our concerns. When the O2 Airwave system was implemented, we understand that maintained costs for Hampshire Police increased four-fold: from £0.75 million to £3 million per year. All local authorities are expected to produce medium-term financial plans and to anticipate future spending needs; but, the lack of timely information on a major project such as FireLink—compounded by the similar lack of information for the implementation the new Regional Control Centres—makes it very difficult indeed to operate sound and meaningful forward planning processes.

2(a) Fire Prevention

2a.1 Part of the existing framework document refers to the expectations placed on fire and rescue services to engage with the Crown Premises Inspection Group with the aim of enhancing the risk management of Crown premises. There is currently no mention however of the MOD Fire Service who are responsible for risk management activities at MOD establishments. Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service has a significant number of MOD establishments, many of which are of considerable strategic importance and should therefore feature in our Integrated Risk Management Plan process. We consider that the future National Framework should introduce an additional expectation that fire services, where necessary as part of the local IRMP, should engage with the MOD Fire Service. Our recommendation aims to empower all fire authorities with the ability to identify risks in all types of Crown premises and engage in positive risk management activities with the appropriate Crown authority.

2(b) Institutional arrangements and reform, including transitional arrangements and finance

2b.1 There are few institutions within the industry which remain untouched by the modernisation programme and most are currently in a process of transition to meet new requirements and roles. This is not true of the national negotiating machinery, whose failure was at least a contributory factor to the industrial unrest of 2002–03.

2b.2 The present arrangements are predicated on a adversarial approach, that remains driven by constitutional processes, rather than focussing on solutions and co-operation. It remains bi-polar rather than pluralist and would benefit greatly from the independence and objectivity that a neutral third party could bring to the proceedings.

2b.3 It would be of considerable disappointment and irony if the one institution that remained unaltered by the modernisation was the very body that should be driving improvement in industrial relations across the fire service generally.

2b.4 A fundamental element of providing a more tailored approach to communities is the local IRMP. Previously Fire and Rescue Authorities faced with central prescription are now at liberty to structure their prevention, protection and response resources to best meet the specific risks and demographics of that community.

2b.5 The IRMP is proving to be a vehicle for creativity and performance improvement as it focuses on the needs of local communities. This therefore creates considerable tensions when set against the government thrust towards collaboration at a regional level.

2b.6 On the grounds of gaining economies of scale, there is increasing emphasis on a regional model for Service provision, including procurement, training and human resourcing. This in many ways militates against the localist approach. This will represent a major challenge for fire authorities to reconcile both the local targeting of resources and wider area service delivery

2b.7 The regional control centres are probably the starkest example of this tension. Where on one hand government welcomes “the initiative taken by some authorities to re-examine their mobilising and resourcing policies in a regional context” (Draft National Framework 2006–08 p11) and yet exhort authorities to maintain IRMPs to reflect local needs.

2(c) *Promoting diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service*

No comment.

3. *Joint working between the Fire and Rescue Service and other emergency services*

3.1 In Hampshire, as elsewhere, the co-operation with our partner emergency services and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency is extensive and well developed. New responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act will, in many cases, only formalise the operational co-operation which has existed for some time. Services know that inter agency co-ordination is essential to deliver an effective response to complex and larger emergencies.

3.2 The Civil Contingencies Act has, however, created new burdens for the Service, something which has been recognised by Government for local authorities by way of a 113% increase in the emergency planning grant, but not for combined fire authorities who, by their nature, stand alone from local authorities. Despite lobbying, neither the ODPM or Civil Contingencies Secretariat have conceded what is sauce for the goose needs to be sauce for the gander.

3.3 *Co-terminosity*

There is no question that the government thrust for greater inter-service co-operation will be undermined by the current intention of separate government departments to reduce the number of police forces and the ambulance trusts.

3.4 Most worrying is not the difficulties created by mismatched boundaries and disproportion sizes, but the lack of clarity in government thinking. At a time when greater collaboration and interagency co-ordination is extolled, it is manifestly lacking between the Department of Health, the Home Office and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

3.5 Clearly the Government’s thinking for the Ambulance and Police Services is larger than county entities, however, this is not mirrored by the ODPM. Here the thrust appears to be no longer “regionalisation” but closer collaboration or voluntary merger. As such, we are likely to see a patchwork of emergency service organisation, none of which share geographic borders.

Memorandum by the World Fire Statistics Centre (FRS 48)

1. The Centre’s main object is to persuade governments to adopt coherent national fire safety strategies aimed at reducing fire costs, and in support of this aim it collects and publishes, under United Nations auspices, statistics on national fire costs from over 20 leading countries worldwide, including the UK.

2. During the past three years the Government has been faced with two separate but inter-related challenges (i) the reform of the Fire Service, and (ii) the development of a comprehensive fire safety strategy. Rapid progress has been made on the first, but progress on the second has been more patchy and, because of this, some of the decisions made regarding Fire Service operations are open to question.

3. A contrasting example of how to proceed is available from Scotland, where the Scottish Executive undertook wide consultation on every major issue concerning fire safety policy and the role of the Scottish Fire Service, the outcome being published in Fire and Rescue Framework for Scotland 2005 (November 2005).

4. In its evidence to the Committee’s previous enquiry, the Centre regretted that the opportunity had not been taken in the White Paper proposals for the reformed Fire Service in England to make a specific extension of the aims of the Service to include the protection of property as well as life. Scotland now provides an example. As in England, the Scottish Framework puts prevention, rather than emergency response, at the forefront, but makes it clear that the new approach is not just about saving lives but also “ensuring that commercial and industrial property will receive appropriate protection” (Paragraph 22). English fire safety policy would benefit from a similar clear statement. That this is not just an academic point is demonstrated by the recent disastrous explosion and fire at the Buncefield oil depot. This suggests that in preparing their integrated risk management plans, individual Fire & Rescue Services need to take account not merely of recent experience of fire deaths, injuries and property losses, but also of major industrial hazards within their areas of responsibility, which give rise to the potential for extremely serious (if only very occasional) fire incidents

5. In England, reform of the Fire Service followed rapidly on the publication of the report of the Independent Review of the Fire Service (Chairman, Professor Sir George Bain) in December 2002, and in several cases followed or adapted the report's recommendations with little or no prior consultation. Particular examples, in all of which a different outcome has been reached (or is still being considered) in Scotland, are:

- (a) the adoption of Regional Control Rooms, which will force the abandonment of the alternative model of joint fire/police/ambulance control rooms, strongly advocated by those Forces which have already moved in that direction;
- (b) the removal of inspection duties from the Fire Service Inspectorate, which may be the precursor to its complete abolition; and
- (c) the abolition of the well-regarded Fire Safety Advisory Board, and its replacement by two separate fora, with no overlap between their membership.

6. Apart from the Bain Review, it is also relevant to look back at the Audit Commission report, *In the Line of Fire* (1995). Although its recommendations were largely ignored at the time, many of them were repeated in the Bain Review and are now being implemented. The main exception, in the context of the shift in emphasis from firefighting to fire prevention, is the proposal that the Government should "encourage multi-agency efforts to improve fire safety, involving the insurance industry and others". Evidence that this has been happening in any meaningful way is sparse, and this is particularly worrying with the imminent arrival of a completely new approach to workplace fire safety based on risk assessment by the responsible building occupant. In this area the contribution of fire insurers could have been of great importance, particularly with regard to the tens of thousands of small businesses which have little or no awareness of their new responsibilities.

7. Building regulation forms another important part of the overall fire prevention effort, and it was encouraging when this function was at long last brought within the same Ministry as fire safety policy. However, under the latest reshuffle of Departmental responsibilities, it has now emerged that there will be no direct contact whatever between ODPM staff concerned with fire safety and those with building regulation below the office of the Deputy Prime Minister himself. This is a matter of considerable concern, particularly as on issues such as compartmentation and the installation of sprinklers the introduction of stricter standards in England is already lagging behind those thought necessary in Scotland.

**Memorandum by Jagtar Singh OBE, MA, BA Hons, MiFireE. and Wayne McCollin BA Ed, DipHRD
(FRS 49)**

PERSONAL SUBMISSION

As officers, each of 28 years fire service experience, we wish to make a submission with regard to Diversity in the Fire and Rescue Service in England.

BRIEF PROFILES FOR YOUR REFERENCE

Jagtar Singh joined the fire service in 1977 and worked his way through the ranks to Deputy Chief Fire Officer in Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service. He was the national advisor to the service on diversity for 14 months; a post that was funded for a limited amount of time. The manner in which the post was disestablished is currently being reviewed, however this is another indicator of the lack of commitment and focus of the service on diversity matters.

Wayne McCollin is currently the Assistant Chief Fire Officer with Lothian and Borders FRS having begun service in 1978 with West Midlands Fire Service. He has been active in diversity matters since 1984 and has a number of related forums including the Equal Opportunities Working Group at the Fire Service College.

As black officers who have worked at the highest levels of the service, we wish to offer ourselves either individually or together to the Select Committee to give provide oral evidence if required.

A number of attachments are provided for additional evidence.

For clarity and brevity we will keep this submission short and focused.

1. Research

The Fire and Rescue Service is not short of research into matters of diversity as they relate or recommendations or action plans for development.

In 1994 Tom Burke issues a report under the Home Office. The Service whilst still under the Home Office was subject to a thematic review in 1999 and furthermore professor Bain also made comment on the state of diversity in 2001. All are referenced in the appendix of this submission. In addition we also recommend

the committee look at Jagtar Singh's report "Making A Difference" and the FireWorks report recommendations and findings which along with other reports which provide additional and supporting information are also referenced in Appendix 1.

All the research reports point to the Service's poor performance as being one of the poorest in the public sector. All provide excellent guidance and route maps for integrated diversity as a key issue. Few have made a significant impact.

We very much support the select committees review and hope this will provide a driver for changes.

2. Leadership

This is a recurring theme in the submission. The Service has little understanding of how leadership within diversity should manifest itself. The Fire and Rescue Service has failed to offer up true champions of diversity at any level. A public body such as the fire service should be able to identify and demonstrated achievement by its champions. Many Chief Fire Officers will claim they have the role of leadership but more often than not this is mere rhetoric and not matched by performance or outcomes.

We hope that the select committee will support our view and place the role leadership and diversity champions high on its recommendations.

3. Policy and procedures

The Service has responded to the recommendations made in early reports that are referenced in Appendix 1. This has been done well in some Fire and Rescue Authorities, however many have just copied policies from other FRAs or public bodies and these have either been applied inappropriately or remained just policies, it is our view that these have had little impact if any on diversity within many fire services. Many unitary Authorities rely on the generic County policies for compliance and these also fail to address the key and specific issues.

The requirements of the Race Relations Amendment Act have proven to be particularly poorly addressed by FRAs and compliance we believe in all the duties cannot be found in many Services. Until recent times an embarrassingly high number of Fire and Rescue Authorities did not even have Race Equality Schemes. In 2005 up to 60% of FRAs were found to have no race impact assessment completed. One FRA, following an intervention the CRE, is now demonstrating what it is possible to achieve and what managers are capable of and prepared to do if challenged.

We believe a in-depth study/audit should be carried out similar to that carried out by the CRE on the police service in 2004.

4. Review and Monitoring

The FRS has been criticised by many including the Audit Commission for not applying best practice in performance management in general. For diversity this is particularly true. Little evidence exists that a systematic approach is adopted to managing diversity or for evaluating initiatives. The FireWorks research supports this view. The ODPM and the CPA have not placed diversity sufficiently high in its priorities for monitoring or audit. The recent Audit Commission CPA for the FRS even with a diversity diagnostic tool failed to make any significant comments in the reports of any individual FRA. A FRA reviewed and reported as excellent did not even have a strategy on diversity.

The ODPM should have carried out a follow up thematic in 2003, this still has not been done and in the 2004–05 Framework document a number of recommendations were made that would have supported this area but again to date none has been carried out. These were:

- Review of training.
- Review of equality officer role.
- Developed a peer assessment tool.
- Develop a bespoke tool to support the local government agenda.

In the 2005–06 Draft Framework document all have disappeared.

One can only conclude that the failure to carry out the reviews and not to carry them forward as was expected means that the Service no longer believes this issue to be important.

We believe that the framework document is a key driver in England and this should have clear guidance as to what ODPM, RMB and fire authorities are expected to deliver on diversity. We will be making a submission to the ODPM during the consultation period of the Framework document.

5. *Culture*

The culture of the fire service in spite of all the work that has been carried out, is still one that is white male, macho and bullying that is not capable of sustaining or supporting diversity. In the current climate it is not surprising to find the FRS falling to meet the government's and its own agenda on diversity. Culture is often used as an excuse for poor achievement.

It is our view that the leadership does not understand the component parts of the cultural web that exists in the Service and does not know what impacts on it. They have failed to identify the critical success factors for changing the culture and more importantly what the role of Members of fire authorities and Chief Fire Officers is in changing the culture. ODPM needs to give clear indications on the what type of culture the service should be aiming for and how it should be training its staff to achieve the change. ODPM and fire authorities need to consider how this is to be monitored and audited. The time is right for a full cultural audit to be carried out and the development of clear short and medium term plans to bring about real cultural change.

We believe the cultural audit tool that has been developed by ODPM and CFOA has the potential to provide the springboard for the change, However this is not the whole answer as discussed above.

6. *The Business Case (Service Case)*

The FRS has no clear business case for diversity. Much of the research has highlighted this as an issue. The ODPM will be leading in the New Year to develop a Business Case for Diversity or Service Case. This should then provide one of the key building blocks for the Service to understand and tackle the many issues relating to diversity it currently faces.

7. *Recruitment*

The FRS has probably the worst figures in the public sector on the representation of black and minority ethnic staff in uniformed post. Currently the Service has less than 2.4 % staffs that are black and ethnic minorities and similar figures for women. These figures are appalling and cannot be condoned by government or accepted by the public. Drastic action is needed if the Service is to match the changes seen in the police force, prison service and the ambulance service over the last 10 years.

We can only conclude that this is linked to the earlier heading of leadership. Where the Service sees a need, in our experience, it can and has made the change. The manner in which the culture of health and safety and community safety have changed in our service time are clear indicators where leadership is found on a theme, achievement is matched by the energy, commitment and resources.

We understand that the ODPM will be issuing a new target strategy on recruitment, retention and promotion. We support this however are cautious in our optimism as this is likely to water down the current targets and alone will have little impact unless supported by other initiatives and is also supported with robust monitoring and audit.

We are more optimistic that the development of the Service Case will have an impact on this. A better understanding of why the Service should reflect the community can only lead to more within the service committing to the agenda and making a contribution.

The Service has had a excellent beacon of best practice on this issue in the outreach team of London. London have in our view achieved some fantastic results in the numbers of women and black and minority ethnic staff despite the organisational and political environment they have to work in.

We strongly recommend that a national outreach team set up and is charged with supporting local and regional recruitment. The model of best practice in London and the manner in which the National Fire Safety Centre has integrated faith issues should be used to develop the approach.

8. *Training*

No clear training strategy exists in the service in spite of the reviews that have reported this to be an issue. The recent FireWorks project reported this to be a major issue and a barrier to achievement. The service has no clear needs analysis on diversity or vision as to what it is attempting to achieve via training. The training in FRS varies from a few hours to a comprehensive training programme. No measurement is made against objectives.

The service needs to adopt the principles that the FireWorks team have recommended and the ODPM should provide clearer guidance as to what is expected.

No training courses have been developed nationally to support specialist officers or the leadership of the service. In addition we are unaware of any training on diversity that is provided across the service for members of fire authorities who have a critical role on diversity. It is not surprising that in this vacuum we have such poor understanding at the very top of the service.

9. *Support Groups*

The service has many support groups and some like the Networking Women in the Fire Service are working at a strategic level and making a difference. Others such as the groups under the Fire Brigade Union are still tied very close to the trade union and are not making the impact at strategic level that similar groups such as the Black Police Association are in the police service.

Support groups in the fire service are not as well supported as their counterparts in both police and the prison service, where national officers have full time paid post. These officers are then able to make a much better and consistent contribution to the diversity agenda. In the FRS this is left to willing volunteers or to paid union officials who are tasked with supporting national trade unions objectives which on occasional can be in direct conflict with the very people they represent.

We believe that government should determine what best practice in the public sector and disseminate this to all. We believe that by forming strong and visible support groups supported by government the diversity issues can be integrated in all services more quickly and support can be provided for those in need.

10. *Good Practice*

We have previously provided some examples of good practice. A fuller list is proposed below and more will be available when the ODPM commissioned report Diversity matters is published hopefully by the end of the year.

NATIONAL CHAMPION

The service clearly needs a focal point of contact and a national champion. The benefits of taking this approach have already been iterated. The Health Service and the Cabinet Office have national champions working at the strategic level and they are having an impact.

Nearly all the referenced reports in Appendix 1 support this recommendation. In addition we believe that the secondment of Jagtar Singh in 2004–05 has provided sufficient auditable evidence to support this view.

DIVERSITY MATTERS

ODPM have commissioned a report to highlight best practice. This has not yet been published but should be available to the Select Committee during the period of this work. We believe that this is an excellent example of what can be done if resources are allocated to this task. This should be a regular activity of the ODPM.

MULTI-FAITH

The Fire Service has carried out some pioneering work in this field and a section of the diversity matters report is attached in Appendix 2. The recent national fire safety strategy we believe to be best practice in the public sector as are the CFOA conferences on this topic.

OUTREACH

Clearly outreach in London Fire Brigade is working and making a difference, this should be used as a model by Regional Management Boards for regional application where that is appropriate. The ODPM should show some leadership and use the national fire safety model and the Army recruitment model to support this work.

INTEGRATED PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Although we have some concern around quality assurance we believe that this is again is an important cog in the changing of the culture of the service. All the role maps have a diversity element and no person may move on to a new role until competence in diversity is demonstrated. This is a positive development.

NATIONAL POINT OF ENTRY TEST

The new tests will support the agenda. Any divergence from the national standard will have an adverse impact. We support these role related test however have concerns that application may be diluted by stakeholders who do not apply them as they are intended.

CORE VALUES AND THE DIVERSITY CASE

The ODPM and CFOA have demonstrated leadership in championing the need for these and the model adopted for the recently issued core values will be a good platform for the development of the service case.

SUMMARY

In spite of the comments above we believe the Fire and Rescue Service has come a long way since we joined the service in the late 70s when bullying and harassment were the norm and racist behaviour was openly tolerated. Women were particularly badly treated in the 70s and 80s. The changes in this area are to be supported. We have the opportunity to move the agenda forward but this will not happen if the service continues to wring its hands and dither over what to do.

We have much best practice that is not fully shared across the fire service and also we believe we can learn from the examples of best practice existing in the public sector. It takes a good champion of diversity and leaders to bring about change and sharing and communicating of best practice. We hope this submission will help this process.

If the service was to take a strategic approach under the 10 headings above and an action plan was to be developed with a clear audit and reporting line to ODPM and ministers, the momentum on diversity would increase placing it back on the Service radar screen and then the Fire and Rescue Service could become the beacon of best practice it aspires to.

APPENDIX 1

REFERENCES

- Bucke, T. (1994) *Equal Opportunities and the Fire Service*. Home Office Research and Planning Unit, paper 85, London, Home Office Publications.
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APPENDIX 2

CASE STUDY: INCREASING UNDERSTANDING OF FAITH ISSUES IN THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

BACKGROUND TO THE WORK WITH FAITH COMMUNITIES

In 2002 work began on engaging with and increasing understanding of faith communities in the Fire and Rescue Service. The commenced under the aegis of the National Diversity Group run by the Chief Fire Officers Association but a dedicated working group was subsequently set up to oversee the initiative. It was made up of a number of people who had been working on faith issues in their individual fire and rescue services or related organisations and who had identified the need for a more co-ordinated action.

The stimulus for the national work was the extensive media coverage of the events that took place in America on 11 September 2001. Particularly in those fire and rescue services serving populations with a high proportion of people from black and minority ethnic groups there developed a concern that the this coverage and the negative attention it was drawing to Islamic issues could lead both to tensions within fire and rescue services and within the communities that they serve.

THE AIMS OF THE INITIATIVE

The aim of the initiative was to enable a proactive approach to be taken to providing information on faith issues to increase understanding and respect between different ethnic groups and, as a result, avoid tensions escalating. Given that bullying and harassment have been an endemic part of the culture of some fire and rescue services, the possibility of workplace tensions was seen as being a real threat and there were also concerns that tensions in the community could detract from the good work that fire and rescue services had already started to do to engage with black and minority ethnic groups. The concern was that if fire officers were to go out into communities where tensions were running high without the requisite understanding, they might exacerbate already difficult community relations.

Once the working group was established and work commenced, the aims of the initiative were extended. Rather than taking a defensive approach of seeking to avoid an escalation of tensions, a view was reached that a more positive stance could be taken with extending understanding of faith issues being seen as a means for improving the effectiveness of fire and rescue services and enabling them to meet their community fire safety objectives, ie a “business case”. The focus of attention therefore became that of:

- Increasing understanding and respect for different faith groups to improve the recruitment and retention of employees of the service from a range of communities so that fire and rescue services were able to draw on a larger pool of talent and employ people with insights in different communities.
- Giving fire and rescue services the skills and understanding to engage more effectively with black and ethnic minority groups so that fire safety messages could be better communicated and to enable relevant and sensitive community fire safety initiatives.
- Improving the profile of the fire and rescue service in under-represented communities.

From its inception the initiative has been an ambitious one with an emphasis being placed on achieving long term and sustainable change rather than looking for short-term “quick wins”.

ABOUT THE WORK

The work commenced with a drive to engage with different faith communities via their respective faith organisations. The thinking was that those involved in faith organisations have objectives that are similar to and compatible with those of public services, including the fire and rescue service, namely to serve the community. It was envisaged that by engaging with different faith groups, the fire and rescue service could equip those involved with the skills (eg on the installation of smoke detectors) and information to take messages to the communities they represented to reach those at particular risk, for example where language barriers may limit effective the communication of fire safety messages, or where cultural practices, such as cooking methods or the use of candles, can increase fire risk.

It was agreed that the work would focus on a different faith group and that the conferences would run every two years. In 2002 the main attention was on the issues relating to and engagement with Sikh and Islamic communities, in 2004 the focus would be on Hinduism and Buddhism and in 2006 the focus would be on Christianity, Judaism and other religions. During each year a national conference would be held to disseminate information and learning and to engage with community fire safety practitioners to encourage further action by fire and rescue services. The hope was that the showcasing of good practice would lead to the mainstreaming of demonstration projects across the Fire and Rescue Service so that faith issues would become an integral part of the work of the National Community Fire Safety Centre as well as local community fire safety strategies.

The work carried out nationally has also included:

- The production of materials on how fire and rescue services can engage with faith communities.
- Mounting national campaigns linked to religious festivals, such as the Minority Ethnic Faith Fire Safety Awareness Campaigns to raise awareness of key fire safety messages during the 2005 religious festivals of Diwali and Eid ul-Fitr which were led from the National Community Fire Safety Centre (NCFSC) within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
- The appointment of specialist agency to raise awareness of fire safety amongst ethnic minority audiences (eg faith related greeting cards, advertising on ethnic radio stations).
- Regional workshops on community engagement.
- Ensuring that faith issues are covered in all national community fire safety initiatives.
- Organised visits to places of worship for different faith groups (eg mosques and temples).
- The production of a booklet on understanding different faith communities.
- Developing champions to take forward the work locally.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED

Over the three years that the initiative has been underway there has been a gradual progression from small scale local initiatives to national initiatives and the gradual spread of work across the Fire and Rescue Service. At the outset just a few fire and rescue services were giving attention to faith issues whereas they are now on the agenda for most.

Although there has not yet been any systematic evaluation of the impact of the faith work, attendance at the national conferences that have taken place has been monitored and the conferences have been used to gather anecdotal information on how work on faith issues is being rolled out and on how well it is being mainstreamed. Other information of progress had also been gathered from discussions held with relevant stakeholder groups, such as the Chief Fire Officers Association.

More locally, members of faith groups recruited to work in fire and rescue services are now reporting that they feel welcomed and that they have a contribution to make. Faith groups are starting to be organised and make their impact felt. For example, the newly formed Asian Fire Service Association in London has organised cultural awareness days that have been innovative and well supported by staff from in all roles. The increased visibility of fire service staff from different faith groups is giving a momentum to new recruitment drives.

LEARNING

The main learning that has accrued from the work on increasing understanding of faith issues in the Fire and Rescue Service is:

- The importance of commitment from the top. The work has been given a great deal of support by the Chief Fire Officers Association.
- The need for resources to be allocated to support initiatives. The work gained more momentum and a much higher profile when the senior fire officer who had been spearheading the activities on a part time basis on behalf of the Chief Fire Officers Association was seconded full time to ODPM to take the work forward.
- The importance of integrating diversity issues into mainstream activities has been clearly demonstrated by the NCFSC.
- Change is likely to be more sustainable if it comes from within rather than being imposed by external bodies. The initiative has been funded (the secondment of a senior fire officer), led (see above) from within the Fire and Rescue Service and rolled out locally by people from within the FRS (the local champions mentioned above).
- Those involved in diversity initiatives must have real passion for what they are doing rather than seeing it as a mere “tick box” exercise.

GOOD PRACTICE

As a result of the work carried out on faith communities, the FRS now has much good practice in this field to share with other public sector organisation and within the service including:

- The leadership shown by the NCFSC at the ODPM in disseminating a national strategy supported by external consultants and in sharing generic material for the service and the way in which it has made faith issues a part of mainstream strategies.
- The early work of Bedfordshire in developing this concept and supporting the national work which has been widely commended, particularly the work of the Brigade Chaplin in delivering faith related seminars.
- The pioneering work of Shropshire in producing a cultural awareness booklet that has now been widely adopted by many other brigades.
- The employment by a number of fire and rescue services of outreach workers who have an understanding of faith communities (eg the community advocates employed by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service) and who are making a significant difference to safety in targeted communities.
- The Diva campaign in Leicestershire, which has won number of national awards.

NEXT STEPS

To date information on the impact of the work has largely been anecdotal (see above). There is now a need for the initiative to be more systematically evaluated to inform future developments. However, pending that systematic evaluation, it is intended that the next big push will be on retention. Fire officers from different faith groups are entering the Fire and Rescue Service but little attention has yet to be given to

relevant initiatives to aid their retention. For example issues of fasting and pray facilities are still not fully understood or taken account of. Much also still needs to be achieved in other areas, such as procurement and service delivery.

The recent national multi faith community fire safety strategy should prove more detailed evaluation and help to drive forward this area of the work in the Fire and Rescue Service.

UNPRINTED PAPERS

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

FRS 49(i)—“Making a difference”—a study of under-representation in UK and USA Fire Services. Jagtar Singh, Feb 2003.

FRS 49(ii)—“Changing the Balance”—a study of under representation in UK and USA Fire Services, March 2003.

FRS 49(iii)—Executive Summary of Fireworks Project, 2003–05, Anglia Ruskin University.

Memorandum by the Retained Firefighters Union (RFU) (FRS 50)

REFORM—A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

SUMMARY

(i) The RFU is grateful for the opportunity to make this second submission to the Committee. Since the publication of the previous report of the Committee in 2004, there has been a failure to implement its recommendations in respect of the Retained Duty System (RDS). There has also been a failure by fire and rescue authorities to progress the findings of several other high profile reports on the RDS.

(ii) Annex A provides an Audit of the commitments made to reform of the Retained Duty System during the past three years, and the progress actually made.

(iii) This shows there is a continuing inability on the part of several stakeholders to recognise that RDS personnel are an essential part of fire and rescue cover in the UK. There are just over 18,000 RDS personnel covering 60% of fire stations, but they provide fire and rescue cover for over 95% of the landmass of the UK.

(iv) Despite publication of these various reports, RDS personnel are still second class members of the F&RS, which tends to focus on personnel on wholtime duty systems.

(v) RDS personnel are restricted from providing the best service to their local communities due to continuation of widespread restrictive practices and the domination of the Service by vested interests.

(vi) There is clear evidence from recent strikes by the FBU that RDS personnel could be the keystone of the drive for more effective, efficient and economic response in many parts of the UK, but this is not happening.

(vii) There is also a failure to develop personnel on the RDS through the Integrated Personnel Development System (IPDS), and to make effective use of personnel through the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) process.

(viii) Part of the reason for these failings is due to lack of advocacy for RDS, and a failure to progress many commitments to reform, including a new National Joint Council. There is also a need to tackle the wider reform of industrial relations to provide a more stable environment for modernisation of the Service.

(ix) RDS personnel have demonstrated throughout two national FBU strikes, when up to two-thirds of RDS personnel continued to respond, that they have more to offer the fire and rescue service by way of efficiency and effectiveness.

(x) The same lesson emerges from a number of local strikes, the latest being Suffolk, when RFU members provided cover for the whole of this large county during 22 strikes by FBU members, without recourse to armed forces support.

(xi) The RFU understands the dilemma for the Government; voluntary change by all partners in the fire and rescue service has to be given sufficient time to work. But, in the meantime opportunities are being lost, money is being wasted and those who embrace change are having their patience stretched. At the same time, policing of voluntary change is inadequate when the fire and rescue service knows that the Government are reluctant to enforce change. The RFU advocates the need for a more focused independent process of checks and balances than can be provided by the Audit Commission CPA process, even though this is to be strengthened by the addition of operational assessment of service delivery.

(xii) Our experience of events, especially during the industrial disputes of the past three years, and the needs of our members who have been subjected to massive harassment and unfair treatment, is that some form of independent “Ombudsman” or “Whistleblower” arrangements needs to be introduced for the fire and rescue service.

(xiii) This would promote achievement of the Government’s determination for reform, without the need for their direct intervention, and would act as a control mechanism on other stakeholders who are not fully supporting reform.

(xiv) This should be coupled with urgent action to implement the recommendations in the official reports covered by Annex A. There are some excellent examples of good practice that could help to drive change, but these are relatively few and are uncoordinated.

1. *The implications for citizens and the Fire and Rescue Service of:*

(a) The introduction of Regional Control Centres

1.1 The RFU is limiting its comments on regional controls as the location of the control rooms that mobilise our members to incidents is unlikely to affect their efficiency.

1.2 The regrettable feature of this whole control centre restructuring is the failure of all partners to engage in the process. This has not been in the best interests of the personnel who serve in the present control structure.

(b) The introduction of and implementation process for FireLink radio services

1.3 We believe the Government has made the case for improved resilience and inter-operability through the development of the FireLink project. This will be beneficial for large-scale incidents and new dimension operations, and allows for new technology that individual F&RS would have struggled to resource on their own.

1.4 We support the project if it promotes closer working with other agencies, many of which have already moved to a regional structure. However, there appears to be a flaw in the resilience strategy when FireLink will apply in Scotland and Wales, but the regional control centre change will not.

2. *The progress that has been made on Fire and Rescue Service reform since the publication of the Government’s White Paper of June 2003, Our Fire and Rescue Service, and the Committee’s own report on the topic, The Fire Service, of January 2004, with particular regard to:*

(a) Fire Prevention

2.1 The latest Government statistics show a significant reduction in fire deaths, a fact that ought to motivate the priorities of all partners in the fire and rescue service. There is clearly a strong link between the recent increased commitment to Community Fire Safety (CFS) and the reduction in injuries and deaths.

2.2 However, there has been only limited involvement of RDS personnel in CFS. Many F&RS’s have yet to use RDS personnel to deliver the benefits of an integrated community focused approach to public safety. In some cases, the communities served by RDS personnel are missing out on the CFS message altogether; in other areas, the input is made by full-time personnel, which is not always an effective use of resources.

2.3 RDS personnel have always been community-based firefighters, living and working in their local community, and have for many years successfully delivered the fire prevention message through local schools and community groups.

2.4 The lack of funds is sometimes used to justify exclusion of RDS from CFS—yet in many F&RS the alternative is to send officers over relatively long distances—which is a waste of resources and opportunity.

Halstead, a rural fire station in North Essex, repeatedly asked for the opportunity to become involved in CFS, and after many months they were sent a box of fire prevention leaflets to distribute to local homes, in their own time—hardly innovative CFS.

Norfolk has advised RDS personnel there is no funding for their involvement in CFS, although they overspent £50k on senior officer selection tests, and instead of using local RDS personnel they send full time personnel long distances in a rural county to provide a service that could often be undertaken locally.

2.5 We believe the concept of a local community fire station in rural and semi-rural areas has a significant part to play in developing CFS. The fire station is often the only public building resource remaining in many rural communities, and this could become the centre for all sorts of community-based initiatives. This would

not only ensure greater utilisation of a public asset, but in making the fire station the central resource of the local community, this would be the cornerstone of CFS initiatives. This would also help RDS recruitment and retention.

We understand there is possibly EU funding available to support the establishment of community fire stations in rural areas.

2.6 There are some good examples of where RDS personnel are being used effectively to deliver the CFS message, but there is failure to develop this good practice elsewhere.

(b) Institutional arrangements and reform, including transitional arrangements and finance

2.7 There does seem to be a quiet optimism in many quarters that reform of the fire and rescue service is progressing and is on track. Clearly, there have been beneficial changes in respect of a number of issues, including:

- the reduction in fire deaths;
- legislative changes that provide for a reformed fire and rescue service;
- legislation that affects fire safety;
- a start on risk management planning;
- a commitment to diversity;
- a renaissance of the Fire Service College;
- reform of control rooms and radio communications;
- resilience through new dimensions;
- progress on regional management boards; and
- FiReBuy.

2.8 However, these reforms have had a very limited effect, if any, on RDS personnel and the communities they serve. The attached Annex A is an audit of the commitments starting with the Bain Review, that RDS second-class status will end and they will be integrated into the fire and rescue service as valued and full participants.

2.9 There have been three other significant reports since Bain that promised major reform of the RDS, starting with the White Paper, “Our Fire and Rescue Service” in June 2003, and including the report of your Committee’s findings in January 2004, culminating in a major review of the RDS, and published by the Government in February 2005. All of these recognised that there were immense opportunities for developing the RDS and for this to provide for a more effective use of RDS personnel as part of a more efficient use of resources to meet the new emphasis on risk management and community safety.

A particular fire station that is crewed by full time personnel on five days a week, and by RDS personnel at all other times (as well as the second appliance) has for some time been short of full time personnel. When a call comes in during the day cover, the first appliance is often delayed waiting for the RDS personnel to be called in to supplement the crew. In November 2005, a member of the RDS was sent on a driving course for week, but the full time instructor went sick after one day. As the RDS member had taken a week off work he could not return to his primary employment, and the fire and rescue service had to employ him for the rest of the week.

He asked if he could make up the deficient crew at his home station, but was sent home on the second day, and then used for the rest of the week to chauffeur the station manager. He progressed his complaint up to Deputy Chief Officer level, but was told he would not be used to make up the deficient crew, because the DCFO “was more concerned about industrial relations with the FBU than running an efficient, effective fire service”.

2.10 The Audit shows that despite the bigger reforms referred to earlier there has been a failure to deliver as far as RDS personnel is concerned. The RFU’s view is this failure arises from:

- a lack of leadership at fire and rescue service level;
- the continuing negative influence of the FBU;
- the failure of local authority organisations to fully engage in the reform process;
- the continuing focus on the full-time service—for example, all retained liaison officers are full time personnel;
- a lack of advocacy for RDS personnel; and
- the Government’s unwillingness to intervene directly until CFA and the local authority organisations have been given the chance to make reforms happen.

A fundamental recommendation of the Retained Review is that RDS staff should be appointed to Retained Liaison Officer posts to provide advocacy and an input into brigade strategy. So far, all Liaison officers have been appointed from full-time staff and their commitment to reform is sometimes questionable.

2.11 The review of the NJC has not yet happened, despite the various commitments over the past three years—see Annex B. The RFU has now met with the national employers on a few occasions, and they have granted the RFU consultation rights, but this still excludes RDS personnel from the negotiating table. This will not happen until the RFU has full negotiating rights, and we do not see any signs of this occurring voluntarily, as predicted in the 2003 White Paper (Paragraph 7.13).

In Devon the RFU has been supporting the development by the Service over the past year of a new flexible duty and contractual arrangement, only to have this undermined at the last minute by the FBU using their national bargaining and disputes procedure.

2.12 The RFU believes the Government wants local authorities to either negotiate or impose reform on the NJC, but the local authorities find it difficult to impose the change on even their own members, let alone the FBU. Local authorities would rather this difficult decision was removed from their hands, by the Government using their reserve powers under Section 32 of the Act.

2.13 RDS personnel are becoming increasingly frustrated at this lack of progress, not least because many see a shuffling of a few seats at the NJC as not resolving the bigger issue of the necessary reform of industrial relations in the F&RS. Continuing strikes, the pursuit of narrow self-interests and the failure of all partners to engage in the reform of the service, for the benefit of the public we serve, has to be tackled urgently.

2.14 RDS personnel had high hopes of an urgent commitment to reform when the previous Minister set up the Retained Review in December 2002. The RFU played a prominent part as a member of the Review Team, and the report, published in February 2005, contains many recommendations that would:

- provide measures to deal with the 20% recruitment shortfall;
- engage with the private sector in support of the release of employees for RDS duties;
- develop IRMP's that made more effective use of RDS personnel;
- provide a wider role for RDS personnel;
- develop new flexible duty systems;
- make better use of RDS personnel in CFS;
- remove restrictive practices and introduce new flexible ways of working with appropriate reward arrangements;
- use IPDS to promote wider opportunities for the employment of RDS personnel;
- take the opportunity for these changes to attract a more diverse workforce in to the RDS; and
- provide for a RDS input into strategy at local and national level.

The Retained Review recommended that there should be greater flexibility to appoint RDS personnel to higher management posts. This has not happened, despite the appointment of non-fire service personnel to a CFO and a Deputy post. A number of non-uniformed staff have also been appointed to principal officer posts.

2.15 Committee members will see from the Government's response to their previous report that the Retained Review was expected to deliver many of the changes arising from the Committee's recommendations. So far, these have failed to materialise. The Practitioners' Forum accepted the final recommendation of the Review Report to implement its recommendations, but this has not happened. As far as we can ascertain, this seems to be because the issue of how the Review is progressed seems to have become bogged down in a dispute between CFOA and the ODPM, over funding of the former by the latter.

Nottinghamshire has pioneered the temporary deployment of RDS personnel to fill short-term vacancies on the wholetime duty system and Leicestershire is working on a protocol for the transfer of RDS personnel onto the wholetime duty system.

2.16 The continuing dissatisfaction of RDS personnel over the lack of reform centres on the following main issues:

- failure to reform the NJC and industrial relations;
- lack of progress on the recommendation of the Retained Review;
- IRMP's that fail to take advantage of the flexible working arrangements of the RDS;
- a concern that IRMP's have protected the (expensive) status quo, and reduced more efficient retained cover, and are inadequately policed;
- the expectation that the addition of operational assessment to the Audit Commission's CPA process will fail to provide for a RDS perspective;
- a failure to implement IPDS for RDS, and this is/will be used to downgrade RDS cover under IRMP's;
- downgrading of RDS, especially officers in charge under IPDS implementation of Rank to Role—see Annex D;
- lack of RDS input to local and national strategic development;
- continued bullying and harassment of RDS personnel, especially during industrial disputes—which is condoned by the employers in the end of dispute agreements; and

- delayed introduction of flexible pension arrangements.

Many RDS appliances are “off the run” especially during the day, due to the continuing 20% shortfall in recruits and the 10% annual turnover. Failure to implement the Retained Review recommendations for dealing with these issues continues to allow IRMP’s to preserve the status quo in respect of fire cover arrangements that could be made more efficient.

2.17 These failings should be seen against a background of a continuing expectation that RDS personnel will step into the breach whenever the FBU decides to go on strike. In fact, events in recent industrial disputes in Suffolk and elsewhere prove conclusively that RDS personnel could be used much more effectively under risk management plans. There is clear proof that:

- RDS personnel can provide fire and rescue cover during periods of high risk—and not just during strikes.
- Flexible RDS crewing and duty arrangements can be an economic alternative to some more expensive cover.
- RDS personnel can be a more effective resource for crewing some special and New Dimension appliances.
- Restrictive practices continue to exist, for example, in mixed and minimum crewing arrangements.
- More effective deployment of RDS personnel would overcome availability constraints for IPDS development.
- More flexible crewing would promote opportunities for RDS involvement in CFS.
- The development of new contractual and remuneration arrangements would attract under-represented groups.
- RDS input to strategy would contribute to the more effective use of resources.

RDS personnel on the Isle of Wight crew the turntable ladder, operate the sky lift hydraulic platform, the rescue tender and the instant response unit. In many other areas, these appliances continue to be crewed by full time personnel, often primary crewed by dedicated full time personnel. In Suffolk this prompted a strike by the FBU in defence of management proposals to end the arrangement. Although the dispute has been ended, with the turntable ladder no longer crewed permanently by full time personnel, the retained crew on the same station are not going to be trained on the appliance

2.18 RDS personnel have little faith that future IRMP’s will develop these options. Clearly, the events in recent months mean that the report of the Retained Review is already out of date, even though it has not yet been implemented. We would suggest that the Review should be reconvened, with a remit to:

- build in the flexible options arising from the experiences in Suffolk and elsewhere;
- to take advantage of good practice; and
- set up a process to ensure the revised Review is implemented as soon as possible.

(c) Promoting diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service

2.19 There has been some limited success in promoting diversity, largely on a planning level that has yet to see real progress. The fire and rescue service has still got a long way to go before it can claim to be an organisation that values every member of society, especially when it continues to treat one-third of its own staff as second class citizens, and fails to grasp the opportunities to remedy this situation.

2.20 At the same time, bullying and harassment in the fire and rescue service is still rife—see the many examples in the RFU’s Legal Report—see Annex C.

2.21 The RFU believes the RDS could play a significant part in breaking down the barriers and promoting greater diversity as retained personnel operate in their own local communities. There are clearly opportunities for bringing in previously excluded groups to the RDS, by developing new duty and cover arrangements.

A few fire and rescue services, led by South Wales, have developed new contractual and remuneration systems for RDS personnel which remove the uncertainty over the commitment expected of personnel, and the rewards they may expect. This is expected to make it easier to attract recruits from groups who have not been seen by the Service, or by the individuals concerned, as potential recruits.

3. *Joint Working between the Fire and Rescue Service and other emergency services*

3.1 There has been some progress in joint working, for example in the wider development of co-responder arrangements. However, these have been largely confined to RDS areas because of the failure of all stakeholders to engage in the development of what has conclusively been shown to be of benefit to local communities. Failure to expand co-responder schemes is very frustrating to many RDS personnel.

3.2 At the time of submitting this memorandum it is unclear whether co-responder duties can be enforced under existing contractual arrangements, although many RDS personnel are happily undertaking these duties without worrying about such semantics.

3.3 We believe there are possibilities for joint working options with many other emergency services and other agencies, for example, through the development of community fire stations in rural areas. The concept of the “community fire station” as the central resource for use by everyone in the community is one that has been shown to work in a few areas. It deserves to be more fully developed.

3.4 On a more cautionary note, the RFU continues to be concerned about the extra resources that are required of every stakeholder in order to service the varying needs of the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This frequently requires separate responses to four consultation documents on the same subject. At the same time, allowing Wales to revert to the old time-based standards of fire cover are not helpful to fire authorities in other parts of the UK. There is also a less than joined up approach to regional controls.

Annex A

AUDIT OF VARIOUS REPORTS AND THEIR RECOMMENDATIONS IN RELATION TO THE RETAINED DUTY SYSTEM

RFU Response bold

1. BAIN REVIEW—DECEMBER 2002

(i) retained firefighters should be included in IPDS: they should be trained to the same standard so that they provide a resource interchangeable with that of whole-time firefighters

- **very little integration of RDS into IPDS; and**
- **being used in some F&RS's to downgrade role of RDS and defend over-provision of resources, largely through IRMP's.**

(ii) Retained firefighters need to be properly integrated into the full-time service, including direct input into brigade management

- (a) **RDS personnel not integrated—see IPDS.**
- (b) **Movement largely one way—wholetime undertaking RDS duties.**
- (c) **No progress on direct input into brigade management.**

(iii) Retained firefighters should be remunerated at the same hourly rate
Completed.

(iv) The medical standards applied to recruitment should be the same as for wholetime
National F/F Selection Standards—approved by Practitioners' Forum 13 December 2005, but a number of F&RS's have said they will not comply as there are insufficient applicants to meet this standard.

(v) They should have the opportunity to work on a more consistent part-time basis, with a fixed time commitment

Some limited trials ongoing—but good practice not being developed.

(vi) Opportunities should be taken to create roles other than firefighting on a part-time basis
Very limited involvement of RDS in community safety, but good practice not being developed.

(vii) Retained firefighters should be able to apply for positions above station officer
No progress.

(viii) Wholetime firefighters should be able to undertake retained duties
Widely adopted—but RDS tend to see this as one-sided, as very few opportunities developed for RDS to become wholetime.

(ix) There should be mixed crewing of appliances by wholetime and retained firefighters
More mixed crewing exists, but still many restrictive practices.

(x) Some firefighters should be trained as first responders
Considerable development of RDS personnel in co-responding, but against a background of great opposition from the FBU—which means some FRS are not prepared to become involved.

(xi) Shift patterns should fit with demand
Suffolk showed that more flexible use of RDS personnel to cover the risk could provide more efficient and economic response. This would also overcome problems of insufficient availability for IPDS training and development, flexibility to undertake CFS and the development of new conditions of service that would attract under-represented groups.

- (xii) There should be different crewing levels at different times of day
Primary crewing of appliances by RDS personnel during periods of high risk could provide optimum use of resources.
- (xiii) The Government should investigate forms which pension provision for retained staff should take
Unfortunately, the proposals for reform of fire service pensions provide for a “bolt on” approach where pension provisions for wholetime personnel are minimally adapted for RDS personnel. This approach lacks flexibility and innovation, and does not necessarily meet the special circumstances that apply to many RDS personnel.
- (xiv) A new NJC should include the RFU
This has not happened.

2. OUR FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE—JUNE 2003

- (i) A new negotiating body should involve representatives of the RFU. . . We see no prospect of such changes being made by agreement. That is why we intend to specify who should be involved
This has not happened yet.
- (ii) The parties have agreed that by 30 November 2003 a working party of representative of fire service stakeholders will propose revisions to the Constitution of the NJC
No working party was established.
- (iii) They have not been allowed to apply for senior management positions
There are no RDS personnel undertaking a senior manager role, and RDS personnel have been rejected when applying for more junior positions.
- (iv) There is a lack of a regular income from firefighting
This continues; the June 2003 pay agreement actually reduced the pay of many RDS personnel. The few experiments in new remuneration systems have not been widely developed as a “good Practice”.
- (v) A major problem is the recruitment of retained firefighters
The 20% shortfall continues; the implementation of the Report of the Retained Review has yet to happen.
- (vi) The system of flexible local fire cover needs to attract a new pool of applicants who would not have considered the opportunity previously
Apart from a handful of trials, this has not happened.
- (vii) 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
These problems continue unresolved.
- (viii) Commitment to considering the case for alternative pay arrangements linked to wholetime pay
Trials have not been developed widely under good practice.
- (ix) Introduction of an appropriate pension scheme
Not yet happened—proposals are inflexible.
- (x) Within IPDS, provide a harmonised training platform so that retained can be used more flexibly
There is widespread lack of development of IPDS for RDS personnel. This is leading to the propping up of the over-provision of resources.
- (xi) Encourage a variety of flexible working patterns using a flexible roster approach
This has not happened—despite Suffolk showing the potential.

3. SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT—JANUARY 2004

Government’s Response in italics

RFU response bold

- (i) “An undervalued Service” was the conclusion of the Committee’s earlier report in 2004.
This is still largely the case.

- (ii) Immediate changes pending publication of the report on the Retained Review (see below), as follows:
- introduction of a more flexible retirement age
issue of guidance on existing provisions for 6 month extension of service lifting of compulsory retirement age, with effect from November 2005, as part of the modernisation of pension arrangements
Did not occur “immediately”, but the flexible retirement age has now been introduced.
 - a national recruitment campaign along the lines of that used for the TA
to be examined by Retained Review
No progress.
 - faster processing of applications
consultants engaged to develop standardised point of entry tests
stakeholder group established to oversee progress
(RFU not invited to participate).
New point of entry tests adopted by Practitioners’ Forum 13/12/05. Tests adopted likely to reduce number of successful RDS applicants, and several F&RS’s expected not to adopt new standard
No evidence that new tests were designed to, or will, speed up the application process
 - Government and public sector to set positive example by encouraging staff to undertake RDS duties
Retained Review will examine
No progress.
- (iii) Review Job Seeker guidelines in relation to RDS personnel
Government committed to discuss with Dept. for Work and Pensions
No progress.
- (iv) Consider extending paid leave for magistrates, councillors and school governors to RDS personnel
Retained Review will examine
No progress.
- (v) Bonus payments for meeting CFS targets
Retained Review will examine
No progress.
- (vi) Use the B&CSF to investigate why few businesses support the release of employees to undertake RDS duties
Retained Review will examine
No progress.
- (vii) Target employers and explain the benefits of employing RDS personnel
Retained Review will examine
No progress.
- (viii) Review recognition and incentives for businesses to employ RDS personnel
Retained Review will examine
No progress
- (ix) The Retained Review should investigate alternative pay arrangements that are not based on attendance and consider the lessons of recent trials
Retained Review will examine
Some small progress—but good practice not being progressed.
- (x) RDS personnel to be consulted on alternative pay arrangements
Retained Review will examine
Some little progress—but NJC arrangements allow FBU to undermine—eg Devon.
- (xi) All RDS personnel should be adequately trained
IPDS should provide opportunities for RDS personnel to develop
Retained Review will examine options for developing RDS personnel
Very little progress.
- (xii) Welcome the proposals in the White Paper for changes to the negotiating framework
See 2 above
No progress.

4. REPORT OF THE RETAINED REVIEW TEAM—FEBRUARY 2005

(i) This report was:

- Commissioned by the Minister in December 2003.
- Presented to the Practitioners' Forum in September 2004.
- Published by the Minister in February 2005.

(ii) There are 51 recommendations, of which the last was

The Practitioners' Forum should examine the most effective means of addressing the recommendations of the RRT report.

(iii) There has been little progress. The Practitioners' Forum on 13 December 2005 was advised this matter would be the subject of a report to the January meeting.

(iv) At a meeting on 14th December, the RFU was advised by the Chief Executive of CFOA that he was trying to arrange an urgent meeting between himself, CFO Fraser and the RFU to progress.

5. OTHER STUDIES AND REPORTS—REFERRED TO BY THE RETAINED REVIEW TEAM REPORT

(i) Retaining the Retained (1997)—CFOA

Little progress on recommendations

(ii) Retained Recruitment and Retention (1997)—FBU

(iii) Recruitment and Retention of Retained Firefighters (1998)—CFBAC

Little progress on recommendations

(iv) Retained, Auxiliary and Volunteer Firefighters in the Scottish Fire Service (2002) Scottish Executive

(v) Retained Fire Service Issues (2002) HMFSI

(vi) Part-Time Firefighters (2003) George Street Research

(vii) A Survey of Retained firefighters in England and Wales (2003) APU

Annex B

STATEMENTS ON THE REVIEW OF THE NJC

We recommend that the NJC should be replaced by a smaller body . . . There should be an independent chair and secretariat . . . the union side should include the Retained Firefighters Union. The Bain Review, December 2002

. . . We also agree with the Independent Review that a new negotiating body should involve representatives of the Retained Firefighters Union . . . We see no prospect of such changes being made by agreement. That is why we intend to specify who should be involved.

The parties have agreed that by “30 November 2003 a working group representative of fire service stakeholders will propose revisions to the Constitution of the NJC. The report of this working group will be presented to the appropriate fire service stakeholders for ratification during December 2003”. We expect that what we say about how the NJC might work better will be taken into account in this work. The White Paper “Our Fire and Rescue Service”, June 2003.

By 30 November 2003 a working group representative of fire service stakeholders will propose revisions to the Constitution of the NJC. The report of this working group will be presented to the appropriate fire service stakeholders for ratification during December 2003. NJC Circular 01/03—Fire Service Pay and Conditions Agreement, 13 June 2003

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 . . . 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. The Commons Select Committee Report, January 2004

The current negotiating machinery, which is under discussion by the parties, is crucial to the modernisation of the fire and rescue service.

Following consultation, regulations will be drawn up setting out how places on the negotiating body will be allocated. Although the general principle of proportionality is reasonable, there may well be exceptions. In the first place, a strict adoption of the principle of proportionality might result in pressure for a very large negotiating body. Alternatively if it were kept to a more manageable size, which was one of the strong recommendations of the Bain review, with which we concur, that might mean excluding some of the minority interests. Neither outcome, in our view, would be desirable.

... we have made it absolutely clear that we want representatives of retained firefighters to be involved. Some are represented by the Fire Brigades Union and some are represented by the Retained Firefighters Union, but we believe that both representative bodies should be able to play a full part in the negotiating machinery, and we have made that quite clear. Nick Raynsford, Minister of State for Local and Regional Government—Standing Committee on Fire and Rescue Services Bill, 26 February 2004

The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision for the establishment of one or more bodies of persons (negotiating bodies) for the purpose of negotiating the conditions of service of employees of fire and rescue authorities.

Regulations under this section must provide for a negotiating body established by the regulation to be composed of persons representing the interests of some or all employees of fire and rescue authorities. Clause 32 of the Fire and Rescue Services Bill.

The recent pay dispute and subsequent industrial action highlighted the weaknesses of the existing fire service national joint council. Indeed the need for change was accepted by both the Fire Brigades Union and the employers in the June 2003 pay agreement. The White Paper made it clear that the review must deliver more effective negotiating machinery that recognises the changing roles and structure of the service and is more inclusive of the representatives of all fire and rescue staff. Nick Raynsford—Hansard 26 January 2004.

Subsection (2)(b) will ensure that employee representatives will be included on the negotiating body. Although the general principle of proportionality is reasonable, there may well be exceptions. In the first place, a strict adoption of proportionality might result in pressure for a very large negotiating body. Alternatively, if it were kept to a more manageable size, which was one of the strong recommendations of the Bain review, with which we concur, that might mean excluding some of the minority interests. Neither outcome, in our view, would be desirable. I will quote from the Bain review and the White Paper to make our objectives absolutely clear. Paragraph 10.26 of the Bain review talks about the new NJC, which is envisaged as replacing current arrangements, and states that on the union side it should represent

“the Fire Brigades union, the Retained Firefighters Union, the Fire Officers Association and the Association of Principal Fire Officers and Unison”

In our White Paper, which responded to that, we said:

“We also agree with the Independent Review that a new negotiating body should involve representatives of the Retained firefighters Union . . .

Nick Raynsford, *Hansard*, 26 February 2004

We spelt this out very clearly in the White Paper when we agreed that a new negotiating body should involve representatives of the Retained Firefighters Union. We meant what we said then, and that remains the position; that is what will happen. Lord Rooker, Hansard, 12 July 2004.

Bain also made it clear that membership of the body (NJC) should include the Retained Firefighters Union, whose members, like those of other unions, have a keen interest in the new clause and a very strong interest in effective negotiating machinery. Phil Hope, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, during third reading of the Fire and Rescue Service Bill on 15 March 2004.

*We note the Committee’s support for the White Paper position on the negotiating framework. At present, Government is awaiting the outcome of the review of voluntary arrangements, which is being chaired by ACAS. We hope that this review will lead to improved arrangements—in which case there will be no need for Government to introduce further changes. If appropriate voluntary improvements are not made, however, we would seek to use the powers set out in *The Fire and Rescue Service Bill*. Government Response to the Select Committee, March 2004.*

The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision for the establishment of one or more bodies of persons (negotiating bodies) for the purpose of negotiating the conditions of service of employees of fire and rescue authorities. Extract Section 32 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

Another major element we must have in place to support progress is a more effective negotiating machinery for the Fire and Rescue Service. Naturally smaller organisations like the RFU and FOA have an important and distinctive part to play in the service. They are also entitled to be recognised and play their part in national negotiations, as well as continuing to make their valuable contribution to public safety on the ground. Our preference is for voluntary reform. We have given our commitment on that. But let me make it clear, I hope and want to see progress on this issue very soon. NJC reform remains an important strand of the modernisation programme. Jim Fitzpatrick, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, speech to Fire Conference, Manchester, 3 November 2005.

EXTRACTS FROM—RFU LEGAL REPORT 2005—WHILE YOU ARE PROTECTING YOUR COMMUNITY, WHO IS PROTECTING YOU?

CASE HISTORY—2

Our member was attacked by a full time firefighter whilst out socially. The attack was totally unprovoked but led to our member sustaining damage to his teeth.

An application was made to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and an award made of £2,750.00.

The full time firefighter had been prosecuted by the police and had admitted to the assault and accordingly, it was thought that our member would have a very good chance of obtaining a judgment against the full time firefighter if civil proceedings were issued. However, it was decided not to pursue such an action in light of the full time firefighter's probable inability to meet any judgment outright. In addition, the £2,750.00 received from the CICA would have to be repaid from any damages.

CASE HISTORY—3

This Sub Officer in charge of a RDS station found two letters that had been left by his supervisory officer in which he was admonished for administrative failings on his station. There had been no discussions between the two about these matters and no attempt to understand the reasons for the perceived failings or how the OIC might be helped to resolve them. The RDS Sub Officer became totally demoralised and demotivated by this high-handed treatment, until we pointed out that these letters were in breach of discipline procedures and the fundamentals of natural justice.

An RFU representative worked with a senior manager to facilitate better communications between the officer and the OIC, which resulted in the letters being withdrawn and a more supportive attitude to resolution of the original issues. Until that point the RDS sub officer had suffered a considerable loss of commitment, due to his treatment and had been on the point of resigning from the Service.

“Managers must realise that as well as being employees. RDS personnel are volunteers, and need to be managed accordingly”.

CASE HISTORY—8

Two RFU members, one a JO with 15+ years' experience, the other a probationary fire-fighter served at this station which was a hotbed of militancy with a long history of trouble, often described as a “running sore”.

The station had at one time been day crewed and then downgraded to nucleus crewing. Over a period of time the unwillingness of the W/T to attend the station on any other than when contractually obligated had provided the brigade with data to suggest that the station was meeting the standards of fire cover as a retained unit. A review showed that the station could meet the new standards and was therefore reduced to a two pump retained station.

The problems which then arose for our members were purely as a result of them wishing to make the most of the new status of the station. They were keen to carry out community education and visits to schools etc, they also embraced the need to carry out maintenance and administration duties which had previously been carried out by the nucleus W/T crew.

The station was a militant stronghold with many of the former personnel who still lived in the town pulling the strings and manipulating their retained members at the station to carry out a war of attrition with the brigade. Their ultimate goal was to prove that the station could never function as a stand alone retained station and anyone who contributed to its success as such was now considered the enemy.

Harassment and bullying reared its ugly head with our members raising this through the chain of command, which failed to support them.

The supervisory officer for the station did little to try to resolve the issues, this at a time when the situation was crying out for local managerial action. Evidence of appeasement of the protagonists for fear of upsetting the militants was there from the start. On our advice our members used the county council's bullying and harassment procedures to try and address the problems and get back to work as they were by now both on sick leave with stress related illness. The brigade also failed to provide counselling of any sort and they were left to seek help via their own GPs.

The council sought the services of a mediation consultant to try to find a way forward. Our members were fully prepared to use this route and co-operated fully with the plan of action, but the remaining personnel were advised not to co-operate. As a result the mediation exercise collapsed.

The next step was to use an external team of investigators to carry out an investigation with a view to determine who was at fault. Again, a lack of co-operation saw to it that the rest closed ranks and no evidence was forthcoming. The brigade then waited until the two had been on sick leave for a year and sought to dismiss them under frustration of contract because they had not returned to work.

It is interesting that throughout their period of sick leave, the Brigade Medical adviser had consistently stated that the pair were unfit to return. He described in a letter that this was a management problem and our members were unfit to do so until the brigade had taken action to deal with the problems at the station.

The issue was eventually concluded by lengthy legal intervention and correspondence and the inevitable expense when a package was negotiated, which at least recognised that the brigade had a case to answer by making a payment to them both upon leaving the service.

“There is little prospect of real change when the fire and rescue service can cover up their failings by buying their victims off to avoid these matters coming into the public domain”.

CASE HISTORY—21

Our member, having completed more than 28 years’ service, was bullied and harassed by a number of his colleagues for a lengthy period. Despite making official complaints to the Fire Brigade, these incidents were not properly investigated. Consequently, our member was diagnosed as suffering from work-related stress, which resulted in his absence from work for some months. During this period, despite the fact that his illness was caused by his work, the Brigade refused to pay him any sick pay whatsoever.

Howes Percival wrote to the Brigade on the member’s behalf to highlight the problems that our member had experienced and their failure to deal with these issues. However, the Brigade neither addressed the shortcomings in their procedures and the way in which they had dealt with the member nor tried to reach agreement to compensate the member for the way in which he had been treated.

Our member was forced to resign from his position as a Retained Firefighter and Howes Percival advised him in relation to his claim for constructive dismissal which was submitted to the Employment Tribunal earlier this year. Howes Percival has represented the Applicant in the negotiations that have taken place since his Application was lodged with the Tribunal. The Brigade made an initial offer of £20,000 but Howes Percival negotiated with them to increase this figure and achieved a settlement of £25,000.

“If retained firefighter was a Religion, Gender, Disability or Ethnic Group, it would have been unlawful to treat me in this way”.

CASE HISTORY—28

Due to changes in the Grey Book, the brigade had to implement payment of a full retaining fee for 120 hours cover. RDS personnel were asked to provide details of availability on a week by week basis. On receipt of our member’s availability sheet the brigade questioned as to why the total cover provided was less than that stated on his original application on joining the service, some 12 years ago.

When asked why a change of circumstance form had not been filled in our member stated that he was not made aware that he needed to complete one. It was also noted that nobody on station had completed a change of circumstance form prior to the implementation of the new policy.

Our member was then told that the reduction in hours was not of benefit to the station and not a satisfactory change from his original commitment and he was dismissed from the Fire Service.

On requesting the services of his union we made our own investigations into the matter and initially pursued an informal process with the brigade, unfortunately to no avail. This led to a more formal approach instigating the brigade’s own procedures. After review, the brigade confirmed that they did act correctly and in accordance with their own policy.

It was not until we made preparations to submit an appeal to the fire authority that the brigade reversed their original decision and reinstated our member with full back-pay.

Interestingly enough during the time our member had been dismissed from the fire service, the station had faced more time off the run than it was available. The brigade's initial inflexible stance actually reduced fire cover in the area.

It's perhaps amazing that anybody would want to resume their service after such treatment-in another case, where a member was re-instated after appeal, he decided he no longer wanted to work for an employer that treated him in this way

CASE HISTORY—31

Our member was dismissed by the brigade for infringing the brigade's policy of Fairness and Equality. At a hearing the union was able to prove that the Retained section of the brigade had not received any training on Fairness and Equality, only wholetime personnel. Our member was reinstated and is now acting up as an LFF.

CASE HISTORY—33

This member had been an employee of the brigade for 19 years, and the problems he has faced arose during the dispute of 2002. He and his colleagues at this particular station suffered threats and abusive behaviour for continuing to work.

At one particular incident his crew came under attack from striking firefighters including senior officers and as a result the police were called. Our member made a full statement of the facts backed up by witnesses and reported this to the CFO. To this date in spite of the police involvement at the incident, the events have never been investigated by the brigade.

He became aware of both overt and covert intimidation in the form of abusive telephone calls at all hours of the day and night. He was also subject to other forms of incitement to hatred, intimidation and blatant abuse against him.

He attempted to pursue the matter with the brigade and due to the fact that a number of those involved in the events were in his chain of command felt that any complaint would be suppressed within the system. "Coincidentally" he was then advised that complaints had been made against him as revenge for his actions in the dispute and for complaining about them to the CFO.

The previous months began to take their toll on both him and his family and he was advised by his GP that he was unfit for duty due to work related stress in the fire service. A lengthy period of absence followed. His wholetime senior officer gave an instruction that he should be paid for missed calls and fees during this period, but he has to date never received payment for his losses. Eventually the brigade organised and paid for a lengthy period of counselling and after a period of time he returned to work.

With all of these factors in mind, the brigade then refused to accept that his sickness absence constituted work related stress and continued to refuse to pay him for his loss of earnings even though they had organised the counselling he received.

The RFU's solicitors became involved and eventually our member was paid compensation for his lost income.

"I no longer expect fair treatment and support from my managers, as it is them who are bullying and harassing me".

CASE HISTORY—34

Our member became subjected to unprecedented harassment and bullying for the sole reason that he did not go on strike. He was told by the local brigade official who served on the same station, that he had "better get himself some protection". Days later he was arrested by police for alleged offences. A thorough police investigation found no case to answer. The complainant was related to the partner of a striking firefighter.

Our member was suspended pending the outcome of the investigation, suffered severe strain. He was self employed but because of the time he was off sick with depression he lost his main income as well as that from the fire service.

The RFU is now resolving his loss of earnings from the service. This case could have been resolved many months before, but indifference by the management has seen it continue. Only now after meetings and robust correspondence have matters proceeded toward a successful conclusion.

"How can we be expected to play our part in fighting discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, etc when we have been subject to discrimination on the grounds of our duty system for the past 60 years?"

RANK TO ROLE ASSIMILATION IN THE FRS

RFU RESEARCH HAS RESULTED IN FEEDBACK FROM A NUMBER OF BRIGADES AS TO PROGRESS MADE

	<i>SubO (1 pump stn)</i>	<i>SubO (2 pump stn)</i>	<i>Retained Stn Officer</i>	<i>SubO (WDS)</i>
Buckinghamshire	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress
Cambridgeshire	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress
Cornwall	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress
Cumbria	Watch Manager A	Crew Manager	Watch Manager B	Watch Manager A
Derbyshire	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress
Devon	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress
Hampshire	Watch Manager A	Watch Manager A	Watch Manager B	Watch Manager B
Norfolk	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress
Northern Ireland	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress
Somerset	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress
Staffordshire	Watch Manager B	Watch Manager B	Station Manager A or B	Watch Manager A
West Sussex	Watch Manager B	Watch Manager A	SM A (admin) WM B (ops)	unknown
Strathclyde	Watch Manager A	Crew Manager	Watch Manager B	Watch Manager B
Highlands and Islands	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress	No Progress

Memorandum by Lynne Harding (FRS 51)

My place of work is Essex County Fire and Rescue Service SHQ, where I am a Group Manager (Control)/ Group Fire Control Officer, as a member of the Operational Control Management Team, responsible in the main for Operational Training, Control Database Management and Operational Flexi Cover for Control.

I am pleased to see that a new inquiry has been set up to examine the effects of the passing of the Fire and Rescue Services Act in 2004, in particular the reference to Regional Controls.

First let me say that I am proud to be a member of the British Fire and Rescue Service, and have had a very long career in ECFRS, and am certainly no stranger to being both proactive and reactive to the needs for change to make progress in the service according to circumstances at the time, however I fail to see where we as a service, have not managed to keep abreast of upgrades and trends in the mobilising and communication equipment, procedures and policies, as they have either been planned for or occurred year on year. The manner in which each authority has operated, has always been within the Local Authority, Central Government and Service, financial and operational constraints, which would be a guiding factor in any organisation. The facts of the business case usually have to be proven beyond any doubt, before they occur, and the assets of any organisation would or should include the expertise of those who have been running an efficient service.

In response to the: “The committee has agreed to undertake an inquiry to examine

1. The implications for Citizens and the Fire and Rescue Service of (a) the introduction of Regional Control Centres.”

1. The move forward is the high profiling of the “Community Fire and Rescue Service”, with the involvement of all, Operational Control has always been the central point, the first point of contact in an emergency when the call is handled. Although this may not change, it most certainly would not be Community-based.

2. The teamwork between the Operational Firefighters at Station, the Flexi Officers, and Support Services will not be community based, which will undo all of the excellent working practices, rapport and expertise built up with regard to Fire Safety, Fire Investigation, Community-based activities, Community based integrated Operational Training Exercises for Risk-Based Premises, such as Oil Refineries, Airports, Docks and named risks, and scenario incidents such as a Nuclear transport incidents, major incidents will all be lost.

3. The Operational Control in each Service being a focal point, for familiarisation visits for members of organisations, such as Rotary Clubs, Scouts and Guides, Children and Juveniles who attend as part of a Probation Officers programme, or as part of a Duke Of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme, or Education Programme, to name but a few, plus Operational training visits from the Officers and Station Personnel in order for them to be up-to-date on the latest functionality of Operational Control will no longer be available.

4. The work that is currently carried out by Control Staff, such as compilation of data, updating and verifying of accurate information to be placed on the Operational Control Database, or in handover, hardcopy or updating of Service Information files in Operational Control will require some other department or personnel to centralise the information for operational use in the service. I am very aware that the level of this will vary from the size and structure of the service. In fact this is the very reason that

the costing of the incident handling in each Fire Service is not worked out on a level playing field, as the present Operational Controls fall into three categories, with higher or lower levels of other work to be carried out besides the call taking.

5. The Operational Control in each Fire and Rescue Service will no longer have a central point of contact, or communication centre and will have to make other arrangements, for varying levels of service, from accepting out of hours defects to appliances, sending out messages from the CFO or Officers to the stations, or giving out fire safety advice over the telephone etc.

6. As your committee must well be aware, the morale in Operational Controls across the Country is very low, as Control Staff are still uncertain of their future, I have not yet met a member of Control who is enthusiastic about a Regionalised Control, and the majority are actively seeking other employment or working out how best to move on after Regionalisation. They feel very let down, and are not prepared to talk about the subject, although they are able to update themselves either by the website, or hard copy information in the Control. The situation is most certainly not as described in the Parliamentary debate on Emergency Services (Regionalisation), 12th October 2005, when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, stated “We know that the majority of posts will be maintained, and we are confident that most control room staff will want to avail themselves of the new opportunities for better career paths in the new control rooms”. This most certainly is not the case. How could there possibly be better career paths, when 46 Control Rooms are being reduced to 9, running on a third less staff. without the recognised rank/role structure that we operate with now.

7. With regard to the introduction of and implementation process for FireLink radio services no-one in Control would disagree with compatible systems working across the UK Fire Service provided the resilience of individual Fire Service Operations were not compromised by cross contamination of software or hardware failings.

8. With regard to promoting diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service the fact that approximately two thirds of the workforce in Operational Controls are women and the fact that their careers are now compromised and jeopardised has left them completely demoralised and only the fact that the vast majority came into the Fire Service to perform a public service keeps them in their present positions. Notwithstanding this, as I have previously stated the vast majority have no intention of relocating. The question the enquiry should be looking at is how a second to none Service is being allowed to lose such professional expertise. There may even be a case to answer under sex discrimination with regard to constructive dismissal in an organisation.

There are so many issues and questions to be answered with regards to the Regional Control Centres being a viable business case and a better proposition to each Fire and Rescue Service having its own Operational Control which is integrated into the Incident Command System of the Service that I very much would welcome the opportunity to speak to the Select Committee direct.

Even as I submit this response I would remind you that like myself all Operational Control Officers in the UK already have extensive workloads and take the future of the Service to the Public very seriously. The standards that we have and are improving upon have only come about by dedication and hard work of those involved. We have responded to every dictate of the Government of the day in order to progress the service that we provide.

I would ask that the cost and on cost of the consultancy work carried out over the last decades with regard to Operational Fire Controls be taken into account, also that the recommendations of the majority of individual Officers in the Service for status quo to be maintained and cross border collaboration between other Fire Services and Emergency Services be continued as much work involving resilience and best practice is being continually improved and should not be lost.

Memorandum by Ann Rosemarie Everton, Emeritus Professor, University of Central Lancashire (FRS 52)

1. PRELIMINARIES

I would point out that the views I express are purely personal.

And further, I would acknowledge the particularity of the content of my submission. It relates to fire prevention and, in that context, solely to the forthcoming Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (2005), (hereinafter “the Order”).¹⁵ I note, though, that Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary, ODPM, regards the Order as “. . . underpinning the prevention agenda . . .”,¹⁶ and I am thereby encouraged to think that you might find my observations relevant to the Inquiry.

¹⁵ S.I. 2005 No 1541.

¹⁶ He refers to it in a Keynote speech to the FSDG, at the November Parliamentary Seminar.

2. OBSERVATIONS

I would like to make observations regarding two matters, the first is enforcement of the Order, the second is the on-going debate over the relationship of the new Order's régime and the Fire Precautions (Sub-surface Railway Stations) Regulations, 1989¹⁷ (hereinafter the "Underground Regulations").

(i) *Enforcement of the Order*

The perspective of enforcement which I would like to raise is that of the *level* to which enforcement might be carried out, this being a subject which has attracted much attention.¹⁸ Despite the undoubted efforts of the Civil Service and the great commitment of the Fire Service, I regret that my fears for its adequacy in the context of higher risk premises are only partly allayed.

In consequence, I would draw to your attention a paper on the issue entitled "Fire Safety Enforcement—a hostage to fortune"¹⁹, in which its author, Mr Glyn Evans²⁰ addresses his long felt concern for the future of enforcement. He adverts to reasons given by Mr Phil Hope MP (the then Minister) for the latter's contentment with the managerial pressures built in to the associated machinery, and responds thereto. I share Mr Evans' stance, and submit to you my espousal of the same.²¹

In this connection, I would make a tentative suggestion. To the forefront of the facets of doubt as to the sufficiency of the machinery's robustness is the lack of recommendation in the relevant Guidance as to the frequency of inspections. It has occurred to me that it might be assistful if it were to become the case that, in the development of risk-based inspection programmes, the Fire and Rescue Authorities ("FRAs") should not have so much discretion in the determination of the periodicity of inspections. Could there not be expressly included in Fire Service legislation a statutory presumption that a given minimum percentage of higher risk premises should be reviewed every given maximum number of years? In the light of financial constraints, it could be no more than a presumption (and, as such, rebuttable),²² but at least it would mean this critical feature were left less "at large".

(ii) *The relationship of the new Order's régime and the "Underground Regulations"*

In the course of the development of the Order, this relationship has yielded significant debate and understandably so in the light of the Regulations' tragic provenance. At the heart of the exchanges has been the question whether they should be retained or removed and replaced with Guidance.

A view has been held that their removal in favour of a risk-based approach could lead to a compromising of safety standards. Against this, there has been set the view that they could be replaced with Guidance, and such Guidance, when linked with other legislation such as the Railways (Safety Case) Regulations, 2000,²³ would result in the maintenance of the necessary protection.

From the statement laid by the ODPM in accordance with Section 6 of the Regulatory Reform Act, 2001, it appears that the latter stance is prevailing, and that the Regulations are to be retained until Guidance is produced.

Thus it would seem that the latter view has both gained the ascendancy and is being furthered. I wonder whether this approach will fully accommodate the position for the long term, and if the following suggestion might aid a better resolution: Rather than introduce what might be termed "simple" Guidance, would it be worthwhile to introduce Guidance which possessed some statutory "potency", such as is for example possessed by approved codes of practice under the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974?²⁴ To take such a step might more effectively fill any gap perceived to be left by the loss of the Regulations, while at the same time acknowledge the trend of current thinking.

¹⁷ S.I. 1989 No 1401 (as amended).

¹⁸ I would refer to the airing of the subject by the House of Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee, the House of Commons Regulatory Reform Committee and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister ("ODPM"). [See respectively, HL Paper 153, HC 684 and the Statement laid before Parliament in accordance with Section 6 of the Regulatory Reform Act, 2001. I would add that I am grateful for the chance afforded me to make a modest contribution to the debate.]

¹⁹ Fire, August 2005, Vol 9, No 1202, pp 29–30.

²⁰ Fire Safety Adviser to the FBU.

²¹ In short, Mr Evans' anxieties stem from the lack of recommendation in the relevant Guidance (Circular 29) as to the frequency of inspections, the lack of accountability targets specifically aimed at measuring the effectiveness of Fire and Rescue Authority fire safety enforcement programmes, and the paucity of attention paid to fire safety enforcement in the National Framework.

²² The grounds for rebuttal would have to be so established as to make the presumption meaningful but, at the same time, acknowledge the scarceness of funding.

²³ S.I. 2000 No 2688.

²⁴ I would enlarge upon this suggestion by quoting *The law of Health and Safety at Work*, by Frank B. Wright (Sweet and Maxwell, 1997) at p 107:

"Section 16 of the 1974 Act provides for the issue and approval of codes of practice 'for the purposes of providing practical guidance' in relation to the requirements of sections 2–7, or health and safety regulations under the Act. By virtue of section 17, a failure on the part of any person to observe any provision of an approved code of practice does not itself render that person liable to civil or criminal proceedings. Whilst such a code does not have direct effect, any provision in such a code which appears to a court to be relevant to an alleged contravention of a requirement or prohibition is admissible in evidence. If it is proved that there was, at any material time, a failure to observe any provision of a code which the court considers to be relevant for the prosecution to prove in order to establish a contravention of a requirement or prohibition, that matter will be taken as proved unless the court is satisfied that the requirement or prohibition was, in respect of that matter, complied with otherwise than by way of observance of that provision of the code."

Memorandum by North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority (NYFRA) (FRS 53)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Fire and Rescue Service has responded positively to the modernisation agenda set out in the Government's White Paper of 2003 and the subsequent Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. However, it is recognised that such fundamental change to an operating environment will need to be supported and reviewed to ensure maximum public benefit is gained from the process. Clearly progress has been made and changes embedded that are delivering higher levels of public safety and service delivery. However, North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority (NYFRA) supports the need for an Inquiry that will assess the level of progress made and assist in taking forward those measures that will enable the Service to build on the benefits gained to date and maximise service delivery opportunities.

1.2 In compiling this document NYFRA were keen not to duplicate evidence and unnecessarily complicate the Inquiry process. Therefore, it used the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) draft Inquiry submission as the basis of a discussion document to stimulate debate on the issues contained within the Inquiry Team terms of reference. Although the CFOA submission highlights key issues that need to be considered, NYFRA considered the Inquiry would benefit from a separate submission that captures a more local perspective. Therefore, the information provided in this document builds on the CFOA evidence submission and outlines the viewpoint of NYFRA on the key issues considered pertinent to the Inquiry in relation to the Authority's perspective.

1.3 The perspective put forward relates to the organisation's specific operating environment, which is worth outlining to put the submission in context. The Service provides operational cover across the largest county in England which has within its boundaries a range of risks, including a number of densely populated urban areas, numerous rural communities, some high risk industrial sites, heritage buildings, national park land and a wide range of military facilities. To meet the unique challenges faced within such a large county the Service makes use of wholtime staff, retained personnel and volunteer units.

1.4 The service delivery needs of such a complex environment necessitates an innovative and flexible approach and the new freedoms coming from the changes to legislation and conditions of service have been welcomed. However, to make full use of those freedoms and to maximise public benefit the Government must support local FRSs through governance systems and mechanisms that positively encourage stakeholder participation. In addition, the systems that reward and encourage change need to be used effectively and managed in a way that supports diverse communities and local service delivery needs. This includes the use of specific funding arrangements, management freedoms, and reward schemes linked to the achievement and not merely the acceptance of a change agenda. Without appropriate Government support the modernisation agenda may not be fully achieved as the risk to individual Authorities will outweigh the benefits.

1.5 The first substantive assessment of the Fire and Rescue Service in recent times is the CPA process which resulted in this Authority being awarded a "Good" rating. This is encouraging despite the fact that this Authority, although serving the largest county in England, has the second lowest population density and a lower than average size population (0.75 million). This demonstrates that medium/smaller Authorities can and do perform as well as larger ones.

2. REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES

2.1 NYFRA supports any initiative that will improve service delivery and maximise the use of resources. The Authority understands the potential benefits that a Regional Control Centre may provide but is concerned with the lack of detail in relation to the Full Business Case. This is seen as a fundamental weakness in terms of gaining local support for the initiative and undermines the ability of the Authority to outline the local benefits of the system. Specifically, NYFRA would welcome further detail at the earliest opportunity in respect of the Governance arrangements, statutory responsibilities, operating costs, local performance management improvements and benefits. In addition, information is sought on those residual activities which will not be transferred to the new Regional Control Centre but which are currently performed by our Control Staff (because it represents the most efficient use of our available resources) and which will remain necessary to be carried out elsewhere within this organisation.

2.2 Only once the above detailed information becomes available can a true comparison of the costs and benefits be made of the new arrangement as it impacts the communities of North Yorkshire and the City of York and thereby address concerns and assist in the medium term financial and operational planning of the local Service.

3. FIRELINK PROJECT

3.1 Similar local concerns to those highlighted in regard to the Regional Control Centre Project exist with this project. NYFRA would welcome a business case that sets out the financial implications, ongoing resource needs and governance issues.

4. FIRE PREVENTION

4.1 NYFRA believes that this item in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference may result in a failure to appreciate the full scope of FRS work being undertaken under the protection and prevention banner. NYFRS, in addition to meeting its statutory fire safety education and protection responsibilities, is heavily involved in a range of prevention and education initiatives surrounding Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) because our IRMP community risk profiling identified this as a significant area of risk. NYFRA would respectfully request that the Inquiry Team examines progress beyond that which falls within the strict Fire Prevention heading and considers the progress made by FRSs across the full spectrum of community safety in order to obtain a more accurate reflection of the wider and evolving role which this and other FRAs currently perform.

4.2 NYFRA believes the Service has responded positively to the change in emphasis and the need to channel resources into community safety. The Service has been very successful in delivering a wider range of services which have impacted positively on public safety. However, the opportunity should not be missed to build on those successes by ensuring the Service is recognised as a key partner that can support wider community initiatives and as such should be involved in the development, planning and delivery of Local Area Agreements (see also Para 5.4 below).

4.3 The successes gained through the delivery of a broader community safety remit has required a wider engagement of the public through various partnerships and necessitated changes to basic working practices. This extended remit has clearly impacted on service delivery and changed the workload balance in relation to the Service's overall capacity.

4.4 Although working practices are now more effective the Service must recognise and respond to new and competing priorities including the workload burdens associated with the introduction of the Regulatory Reform Order, New Dimensions, Civil Contingencies Act, Operational Assurance Standards and extended duties relating to Special Services, Water Rescue and Road Traffic Collisions. All of which have resource requirements that need accommodating if public safety standards are to be met. The difficulty NYFRA and other FRAs are facing is balancing the growth in workloads against challenging efficiency savings as set out in the Gershon targets and public sector funding constraints, which in reality necessitate reductions in staff numbers, given that at least 80% of FRA budgets are staff related.

4.5 The Fire Prevention legislative change to be introduced in April 2006 brings into force the Regulatory Reform Order and is of particular significance to the Service, as this shifts the responsibility for fire safety on to owners and occupiers and brings with it the risk of reduced standards that could adversely affect public safety. To accommodate this change the Service is having to re-train staff, invest in new software systems and expand its enforcement capabilities to cover all premises. This is a major workload and the danger of overloading the Service cannot be ignored when one sets that particular issue alongside the need to deliver a more efficient Service, an expanded operational remit and the immediate need to develop a more resilient and operationally capable service that can deal with terrorism events, environmental disasters and major incidents.

4.6 The challenging operational environment in which we now operate necessitates higher operational safety standards and more training time to enable front line staff to prove and maintain competence across a wide skill range. It requires the development of contingency plans that provide the highest level of assurance and preparedness. This work is essential and not yet complete and also competes with the delivery of community safety initiatives and the new priorities relating to and partnership working.

4.7 It has to be recognised that Fire Prevention is a single strand of the overall working environment and cannot be viewed in isolation. The competing pressures, as outlined, have created a very fluid change management environment and the Service is adapting to manage each of the areas noted but it needs supporting through this period with transitional arrangements and funding that assist Fire Authorities to embed change and meet the expectations of the public.

5. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

5.1 NYFRA is fully supportive of the modernisation agenda and has developed a comprehensive change management programme which is currently being delivered. However, progress is being hampered by Governance systems that do not proactively support this process.

5.2 Although NYFRA recognises the Retained Firefighters Union (RFU) and UNISON for consultation purposes (there is currently limited membership of Fire Officers Association with this Authority), the National Joint Council (NJC) only recognises the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) for negotiation purposes. This is despite the Retained Fire-fighters Union and the Fire Officers Association having a legitimate interest in terms and conditions. This monopoly position afforded the FBU for negotiation purposes stifles debate, change and undermines the ability of the NJC to operate in a fair and inclusive manner.

5.3 Regional Management Boards (RMB) have been formed to provide strategic direction and a coordinated approach in six key areas. However, individual Fire Authorities are responsible for service delivery in their local area and must operate in a manner that ensures "Best Value". As evidenced by the

Comprehensive Performance Assessment NYFRA is a strong performer, effectively collaborating with partner agencies and delivering “Best Value” by fulfilling the needs of a diverse and complex community. The added benefit to be gained through the current performance management measures, powers and Governance arrangements relating to RMBs is unclear and needs to be re-assessed.

5.4 NYFRA is gaining advantage from being an active partner in various local forums. The Service is well placed to support a wide range of community activities and safety measures and as a respected community service, has been able to actively engage with hard to reach groups. The ability to deliver results through its position of respect and trust needs to be recognised and the Service should be seen as a key figure within the Government’s Partnership Strategy. It needs to be involved in the development, planning and delivery of Local Area Agreements and recognition given to its ability to deliver a broader range of services. NYFRA believes there is a potential that FRAs may not be recognised as a full partner at the strategic level in LAAs in much the same way as experienced following the inception of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships; it was only as a consequence of the subsequent Police Reform Act 2002 that FRAs were formally recognised by some CDRPs as legitimate members. NYFRA, therefore, would welcome Government support towards securing FRA involvement at all levels within LAAs. The risk otherwise is that FRAs may expend time and effort arguing the case to become a full member of a Local Area Agreement rather than being able, as an accepted member of the LAA, to get on with actually delivering improvements to local services.

5.5 Although operational assurance and standards is a central concern of this Authority and the Government it has not been externally validated for some time and does not form part of the CPA review process. It is considered essential that some form of external validation process is provided which ensures annual action plans associated with Integrated Risk Management Planning process maintain and enhance the operational capability of individual FRs and provide the necessary assurances to all stakeholders. Various options need to be considered, including the use of peer assessments, the potential for the development of a Centre of Excellence, or the provision of a suitable toolkit and external audit process.

6. PROMOTING DIVERSITY

6.1 NYFRA is fully committed to providing a service that represents its community and developing a working environment that values diversity and encourages positive action. A vital element of the NYFRA modernisation programme is cultural change and this authority is forging ahead with transformational leadership and cultural diagnostics in support of continuous personal and organisational development. Those people in the community that may consider the FRS as a career need to be encouraged to come forward. This requires a positive image to be created, the development of flexible working conditions and a clear career path that shows prospective candidates the variety of opportunities that are available within the Service, together with the positive societal impact that a career in the FRS is able to offer.

6.2 The creation of a positive image and culture requires a clear communication strategy that engages with a broad cross section of the community and provides a better understanding of the role of a fire-fighter beyond what might be considered the more traditional stereotype. The skills and professional standards required to be a fire-fighter need to be clearly articulated and the wider community role evidenced. In support of the work conducted by Fire Authorities in this area, central attraction, recruitment and information campaigns should be used to reinforce this message and provide support for local campaigns through the use of mainstream media facilities and arrangements.

6.3 NYFRA recognises the need to develop a variety of employment opportunities that enable part time working, job share, flexible working patterns and multi tier entry. This approach creates a more flexible, work-life balanced organisation and encourages diversity due to the choice of working patterns. However, not all stakeholders are supportive of the changes to terms and conditions that will create this environment and there needs to be a more robust negotiation framework to support Authorities that are faced with a resistance to change, as noted in paragraphs 1.4 and 5.2.

6.4 In support of the above measures a clear development system needs to be embedded in the Service that starts with the national firefighter selection (point of entry) standards and evidences the various management tiers within the Service and is aligned to externally recognised standards. This will have various benefits, it will ensure the skills base of the service is recognised throughout industry, it will support multi tier entry and provide recognisable professional standards that will enhance the image of the service and encourage a more diverse range of prospective applicants to the Service. In support of that approach there needs to be a development path to accredit each management tier with the core function of critical incident management. Multi tier entry will provide advantages to the diversity needs of the Service but will be undermined if such entrants cannot fulfil the full role.

6.5 An important driver in this regard is the Human Resources Strategy for the Fire and Rescue Service, the resolution of which should be expedited in order to support much of the excellent work being undertaken in terms of organisational development and continuous improvement.

7. EMERGENCY SERVICES JOINT WORKING

7.1 NYFRA is working proactively with other emergency services and developing partnership arrangements that are proving to be a driving force for change and improved community safety. However, some of the mechanisms that are in place to encourage such work rely on the individual Services choosing to go beyond the minimum level of engagement. This can prove difficult due to competing priorities, different governance models, funding arrangements and a lack of central/joint policies at Government level.

7.2 An example of this is the funding arrangements for the Civil Contingencies Act; the Fire and Rescue Service is a Category 1 responder and has clear duties under the Act. To fulfil its responsibilities, NYFRA is an active partner in the Local Resilience Forum and is putting significant resources into the development of appropriate systems and control measures. However, the funding stream supporting this process has not recognised the burden on individual Authorities such as NYFRA.

7.3 Another example is the benefits to be gained from co-responding schemes, which support communities, especially large rural Counties such as North Yorkshire. Although progress has been made at a local level it has been a slow process and would benefit from a clear central policy that prioritises the initiative and provides a joint approach.

8. CONCLUSION

8.1 This Authority has already made significant progress towards the modernisation agenda and achieved, in large part, the Gershon targets through changes in crewing arrangements. However, whilst there is some further scope for improvement, we should not underestimate the potential for industrial action which could, if protracted, cancel out those gains made to date. Further improvements therefore need to be achieved within a realistic timescale and in a manner which would secure further benefit without provoking industrial action.

8.2 In order to realise the full potential of partnership working for example Local Area Agreements greater clarity surrounding governance arrangements and accountabilities need to be set out. Failure to do this might result in partnership performance falling short of expectation.

Memorandum by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) (FRS 54)

ACPO

1. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) was set up over 50 years ago so that work in developing policing policies could be undertaken in one place, on behalf of the Service as a whole, rather than in 44 forces separately.

2. ACPO's members are police officers who hold the rank of Chief Constable, Deputy Chief Constable or Assistant Chief Constable, or their equivalents, in the forty-four forces of England, Wales and Northern Ireland, national police agencies and certain other forces in the UK, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands, and certain senior non-police staff. There are presently 280 members of ACPO.

INTRODUCTION

3. The Police Service has a long history of working closely with the Fire and Rescue Service in responding to a wide range of emergencies and disasters. In addition the Police Service has performed a key role in supporting contingency arrangements that have been implemented during industrial disputes within the Fire and Rescue Service. Recent legislation, including the Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) Regulations 1999 and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, has reinforced the importance of a close working relationship between the two services; both at strategic and operational level.

ACPO RESPONSE

4. In response to the specific terms of reference agreed by this Inquiry; ACPO only makes comment on areas we consider have a direct impact on policing and are within our knowledge and experience.

Item 1 The implications for citizens for and the Fire and Rescue Service of

(a) The introduction of Regional Control Centres.

5. This may have an impact on the effectiveness of the response by the police and others in the event of an industrial dispute within the Fire and Rescue Service (in recent disputes some police forces provided temporary joint control rooms). These issues can be resolved however by effective contingency planning arrangements, which recognise that any temporary arrangements must be capable of reflecting regional control structures.

6. It is also important to emphasise that, wherever possible, “local knowledge” must be maintained within any migration to regional call centre systems. Failure to do so is likely to impact on the effectiveness of the Fire and Rescue Service to provide an informed and “intelligence led” response to emergencies. In addition to the retention of personnel with the requisite knowledge, the use of technological solutions such as sophisticated mapping software should be fully exploited.

(b) The introduction of and implementation process for Firelink radio services.

7. ACPO continues to work closely with CFOA and other emergency responders in developing interoperable communication systems. The role of 02 Airwave is crucial to delivering success in this area, through their provision of secure digital communications to both the Police and Fire and Rescue Service. An effective, integrated system is essential to ensure a professional and ‘joined up’ response to any emergency.

Item 3. Joint working between the Fire and Rescue Service and other emergency services

8. Legislation and actual events have forged an even closer working relationship between the police and fire service in recent years than ever before. Both COMAH and the Civil Contingencies Act provide a statutory framework for joint working at both strategic and operational level. In particular, the work of the Regional and Local Resilience Forums ensures close co-operation between the police and fire service (amongst others) in planning for a wide range of emergencies.

9. Other examples of joint working between the Police and Fire and Rescue Service include:

- Home Office Model Response Plan for CBRN incidents.
- The National CBRN Training Centre at Winterbourne Gunner, which is jointly staffed by representatives from the “blue light” services.
- CFOA representation on the ACPO Emergency Procedures Portfolio (strategic forum within ACPO to develop policy and guidance for the Police Service in relation to the response to emergencies and major disasters).

10. The above examples illustrate that the two services continue to work closely together, at the strategic and operational level, with a shared commitment to enhance community safety in their day to day work and to deliver professional services of the highest quality at times of crisis. This joint working is particularly evidenced in the area of civil contingency planning, where both services seek to ensure an inclusive, consultative approach to developing national guidance, local policy and operational resilience, through joint training and exercising.

DCC Alan Goodwin,
ACPO Emergency Procedures Committee.

Memorandum by the Fire Officers’ Association (FOA) (FRS 55)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Fire Officers’ Association is a registered independent trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. The Association was formed in 1994 for the purpose of providing representation predominantly for middle ranking officers in the UK Fire & Rescue service. As such, the Association believes it is ideally placed to offer this Committee information relevant to its Inquiry from the perspective of those “middle managers” who bear the most critical role in the implementation of the modernisation agenda.

2. REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES

Our position when this concept was first proposed was that we would not oppose it in principle but would need to be convinced that decisions were made based on sound evidence and that the outcomes were in the wider public interest with particular regard to resilience issues. Over the period of time that has elapsed we have not been convinced by any of the arguments made in opposition to the project. In recognising the advanced state of progress and considerable financial investment already committed, we see little prospect of any argument emerging that would be sufficiently convincing to support abandonment of the project. Indeed reported potential advances in technology in areas such as the European Satellite Navigation project improve our confidence for a successful outcome.

As a trade union we are however becoming increasingly concerned by the apparent lack of understanding for the group of employees who will be tremendously affected by the eventual implementation of the new arrangements, ie Fire and Rescue Control Staff. It is totally unfair and unreasonable that anyone should be left in the position of not knowing what their employment prospects may, or may not, be. The disruption to individual’s lives through the stress of uncertainty is not acceptable in a modern caring society, and there needs to be urgent action to address the situation on an employee by employee basis. Bland generalised

statements such as “redeployment opportunities may exist” are simply not acceptable. People are entitled to be able to plan their lives and be reasonably treated by their employers and those elected to represent their interests.

3. FIRELINK RADIO SERVICES

FireLink marks a major advance in resolving one particular national resilience issue. It appears to be a good example of “joined up” working across the UK administrations and we have no particular concerns regarding progress of the project.

4. FIRE PREVENTION

We are supportive of proposals to rationalise Fire Safety Legislation in that they broaden the scope of the service to achieve and enforce a high standard of safety in premises to which people resort.

We also support the approach where occupiers of premises become more responsible for securing an environment safe from fire. However, we have some reservations in relation to the concept of “reducing burdens on business” in that greater emphasis on self regulation, could reduced standards through misinterpretation or deliberate disregard for relevant guidance, particularly in lower risk properties not scheduled for regular inspection. Guidance must emphasise the importance of fully complying with fire safety regulations and requirements. They should also accord with all other Health and Safety Statutory Guidance by having the status of an approved Code of Practice. It must also be made clear that any material failure to apply the Guidance or achieve an acceptable equivalent standard of fire safety will be taken into account during enforcement procedures by both enforcing Authorities and the Courts.

We also have concerns that the new approach could become a “consultant’s charter” by undermining and understating the statutory fire safety advisory role of the fire and rescue service clearly defined by the Holdroyd Royal Commission. Extending the range of advisory sources may blur existing lines of primacy by redefining not only established custom and practice, but also weakening the advisory and enforcement role of the fire and rescue service.

5. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND REFORM

This is the one area of modernisation where we are particularly disappointed. Reform of industrial relations is just not happening and we are witnessing an increasing number of localised industrial disputes, some developing into strike action. Far from reforming industrial relations, the service was merely tasked with reforming the National Joint Council arrangements and, to date, it has failed to do even that. The involvement of ACAS failed to produce a satisfactory solution and over two years later we are still in the same position. We have discussed the situation in detail with the Employers who have, to their credit, improved the situation by affording us recognition for Consultation purposes, but managers need to see that their contribution is valued and respected. As things stand at present, that message is not there.

Consequently our assessment of morale amongst managers at present is “poor to low”. This is further compounded by the introduction of the move from “rank” to “role”. Our members have no problem with this in principal; it reflects modern society. What we do have a problem with is the way it is being implemented. A discredited and disowned leadership of another trade union poorly negotiated the method. It has led to variations in approach by different fire and rescue services and many managers feeling undervalued and have a perception that in their new role they have been demoted. In some authorities it has all the hallmarks of a money saving exercise. As if all this were not enough, members are faced with all the uncertainties of the proposed changes to their pension scheme. We feel obliged to state publicly that unless there is some radical rethinking surrounding these proposals there is the potential for industrial action in the fire and rescue service on a scale that it has never before seen.

With regard to other institutional reforms it is fair to say that progress has been made. In particular the Practitioners’ Forum made a promising start. However, many members are acutely aware that it must not be allowed to degenerate so as to replicate the discredited arrangement it replaced. We feel it would benefit from an injection of enthusiasm and confidence that work carried out under its auspices is actually going to be implemented. For example, a great deal of work was put into the Retained Review and there is still no apparent move to begin implementing it. Also, “Task and Finish” groups are taking too long to commence work and equally too long to report; exactly the fault which befell the CFBAC.

6. PROMOTING DIVERSITY WITHIN THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Some progress is being made, but in relation to the passage of time it is disappointing. There is still a lack of inclusion of all stakeholders in developing new initiatives. Indeed there appears to be an exclusive approach towards development of diversity issues, eg only a limited number of stakeholders were invited to participate in the development of Core Values for the service, and the Stonewall Diversity Champions

initiative in October last year was restricted to CFOA, FBU and ODPM with no opportunity to contribute or even offer support by other organisations. With no flow of information from the Project Board—“Diversity Happens”—we are unsure as to how it is going to.

7. JOINT WORKING

There has been a marked increase in joint working between Fire and Rescue Services particularly because of the advent of the Regional Management Boards, the benefits of which have yet to be largely seen. However, we are of the opinion there they will be benefits, and support their development. We are also aware of the study being carried out by Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Services which may result in a recommendation to combine. We await the results with interest, not least because of the implications for other areas. What is of concern however, is whether Government policy with regard to the size of Police Authorities is to be mirrored to the Fire & Rescue Service in the foreseeable future. One way or the other it would be beneficial for the service to know.

Memorandum by the Ambulance Service Association (FRS 56)

1. ABOUT THE AMBULANCE SERVICE ASSOCIATION

1.1 The Ambulance Service Association is the representative body for the 33 NHS Ambulance Trusts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Its members also include the public ambulance services in the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and Gibraltar which use the same training and clinical guidelines as, but are not part of, the NHS.

2. THE NHS AMBULANCE SERVICE IN CONTEXT

2.1 The ambulance service is the emergency arm of the NHS. Its partnerships are increasingly with colleagues from the health service complementing its relationships with the other blue light emergency services. The traditional role of the ambulance service is changing to one in which an increasing proportion of its work is in primary care as set out in the Department of Health report *Taking Healthcare to the Patient* published in June 2005.

2.2 The NHS ambulance services in the UK employ about 38,000 staff, of whom approximately 30,000 are ambulance clinicians holding posts as paramedics, emergency medical technicians or ambulance care assistants. Across the UK, the NHS Ambulance Service receives over six million 999 calls each year, of which five million result in an emergency response with about four million patients being transported to hospital. The service also responds to about one million urgent calls each year made by GPs who making home visits determine that their patient require urgent admission to hospital. The third element of the service provides about 16 million non-emergency journeys for patients with transport or mobility difficulties to attend out-patient departments. Figures published by the Department of Health show that the service in England cost about £1.25 billion to run in 2004–05.

2.3 The service has seen a sustained growth in demand over a period of more than 10 years. The number of 999 calls received has more than doubled over the last decade, though more effective assessment and increased levels of clinical skill has meant that the growth in the numbers of emergency responses and patients transported, while still substantial, has grown at a slower rate.

Table 1

AMBULANCE SERVICE 999 DEMAND IN ENGLAND 1994–95 to 2004–05

	<i>1994–95 (million)</i>	<i>2004–05 (million)</i>	<i>percentage increase</i>
999 calls received	2.61	5.62	115
999 responses	2.61	4.53	74
Patients transported	2.27	3.47	53

Source: Ambulance Services, England: 2004–05. DH 2005.

2.4 The NHS Ambulance Service has made, and will continue, a journey of rapid modernisation in recent years. The traditional role of the service of transporting patients to treatment has been replaced by one in which increasingly skilled clinicians are able to administer treatment at the scene of an incident or on route, dramatically enhancing patient outcomes and experiences and increasingly removing the need to take patients with less serious conditions to hospital. Further changes, announced in the Department of Health Report *Taking Healthcare to the Patient*, are expected to reduce the number of patients transported to

hospital by a further one million per annum. At the time the service will be making an increasing contribution to primary care assisting patients with long-term conditions to manage their health at home or within their local communities.

2.5 To increase the chances of survival from immediately life-threatening conditions such as cardiac arrest, the ambulance service prioritises calls aiming to respond to the most urgent within eight minutes. The Department of Health has set a national standard for the eight minute response to be achieved in 75% of cases. Such calls are currently running at about 34,000 each week, equivalent to about 1.75 million annually. In the year to date the 75% standard has been met across the country. One of the tools used to achieve this level of performance has been the recruitment and training of local first- and co-responders who may be able to get immediate life support to patients faster than the closest available ambulance. Individuals participating in responder schemes include members of the public as well as members of the other emergency services, particularly retained firefighters, or the armed services.

3. WORKING WITH THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

3.1 The level of joint working between the Ambulance and Fire services varies across the country but is generally very good. In some locations premises are shared for historic reasons and the Committee will be aware that Gloucestershire and Wiltshire recent initiatives have created joint headquarters (also shared with the police service) and other shared services.

3.2 Operationally contact is far less frequent. The vast majority of incidents attended by the ambulance services are purely clinical. Although there is a joint response to serious road traffic accidents, fires, chemical incidents, entrapments and major emergencies, these calls, although resource intensive and likely to result in more casualties, represent only about 2% of the incidents responded to by ambulance services.

4. SHARED CALL AND CONTROL CENTRES

4.1 In recent years there have been proposals for shared call and control centres to handle all 999 calls received by the emergency services. The ASA believes there may be circumstances in which shared buildings bring benefits but it strongly believes that the volume and specialist nature of emergency medical calls make them inappropriate for dealing with by multi-service call takers, once the initial filter has been made by the BT operator, or dispatchers.

4.2 Ambulance call takers undertake patient assessments to determine the degree of urgency that should be given to each call, collect key medical information for passing to the responding ambulance clinician and often provide life-saving advice on resuscitation or management of injuries to the caller whilst the responder is travelling to scene.

4.3 The current proposals to create regional fire control centres, together with the likely rationalisation of ambulance controls once ambulance reconfiguration has been completed, make it less likely that shared controls would be an effective option in the future.

5. COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

5.1 The NHS is in the process of implementing a new digital radio network for use by NHS ambulance services in England, Scotland and Wales. The system has been procured from O₂ Airwave. The first ambulance services should be using the new network by late 2006 with coverage across the country by 2008. A requirement of the contract is interoperable communication between the fire, police and ambulance services. The ambulance service foresees limited use of this facility under normal working conditions but welcomes its availability for use at major incidents and special circumstances.

5.2 To ensure capability and resilience in the interim, the ambulance service is pleased that a satellite system, which will be managed by the police service, has been made available.

6. FIRE-FIGHTERS AS CO-RESPONDERS

6.1 As recorded under paragraph 2, the ambulance service relies on first- and co-responders for support in areas and at times when resources are poorly located to get a responder able to offer resuscitation quickly to a patient with a life-threatening condition in which seconds may mean the difference between life and death.

6.2 The ambulance service is keen to work with the fire service to provide fire-fighters with the skills and equipment to fulfil these roles. At the time of the Bain Review into the future of the fire service there were proposals that fire-fighters should be trained as paramedics. The ASA argued at the time that this was misguided as it would involve lengthy and costly training to provide skills that would be rarely used. Furthermore firefighters qualified as paramedics would find it very difficult to undertake the volume of clinical activity necessary to retain the skill levels required by the Health Professions Council, which is a legal requirement to practice as paramedic in the UK.

6.3 However there is a strong case, that wherever practical and subject to the wishes of the local fire and ambulance services, firefighters should be trained to administer CPR, operate a defibrillator and administer other basic life support skills to sustain life until ambulance clinicians arrive at the scene. The use of these skills can either be used in situations where the fire service is first-on-scene, eg at a road traffic accident, or in a situation where the firefighter(s) is dispatched to a medical emergency by the ambulance service because their response time will be less than the closest available ambulance resource.

6.4 These arrangements are already in place in a number of areas, particularly using retained fire-fighters. There are a range of issues that need to be addressed if these arrangements are to become adopted more widely. These include:

Funding for training, equipment and deployment

Provision of initial, and refresher, training and equipment can be costly. National protocols need to be agreed on how the funding is provided. Differing arrangement currently apply to meeting the costs of deployment. Ideally they should be standardised.

Clinical governance and audit

The NHS operates to strict standards of clinical governance to ensure that the highest standards of service and safety are given to all patients at all times. All healthcare professionals have to abide by these standards and they should also be met by those who provide the service on a delegated basis.

Criminal Records Bureau checks

Concerns about the dangers to vulnerable patients have led to the requirement for all ambulance clinicians to have up-to-date CRB checks. These are required by individuals from the community acting as lay first-responders and should also be made on fire-fighters acting as co-responders. ASA understands that most firefighters are not CRB-checked by their employers as matter of course.

7. EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

7.1 The ambulance service has an emerging role in providing leadership and co-ordination for the NHS in health emergency situations.

7.2 The NHS ambulance service and fire and rescue services have worked together over many years to ensure an effective response to civil emergencies. Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 they are both category one responders and are required to work together, and with other designated responders, to ensure that they are fully prepared to deal with incidents such as major accidents, natural disasters and terrorist attacks.

7.3 At senior level the services meet through the auspices of the Cabinet Office Civil Contingency Secretariat which holds regular meetings for the ASA, CFOA and ACPO. The three associations also hold bi- and tri-lateral meetings as the need arises.

7.4 Joint training at all levels of command is now undertaken regularly, for example Gold/Silver Command courses run by the Police National CBRN Centre at Winterbourne Gunner, to which both ambulance and fire service staff are seconded as specialist advisers and trainers.

7.5 At the local and regional level, joint training is organised in both table-top and mock incident exercises. The services also meet regularly through the local and regional resilience forums set up by the Government Offices for the Regions. Bi-lateral meeting are also held to discuss issues of mutual concern.

8. DECONTAMINATION

8.1 The NHS, through the ambulance service, has operational lead for the decontamination of people as a result of CBRN or hazmat incidents. NHS ambulance services each have the equipment and staff trained, to manage this process for a reasonable number of people. The maximum that can be dealt with by ambulance services will depend on the circumstances of each incident. Where the requirement for decontamination is beyond the capacity of the ambulance service, the mass decontamination units provided to the fire service under the New Dimensions Programme will be used under the direction of the ambulance service. Non-ambulant casualties would continue to be decontaminated by the ambulance service.

8.2 The ambulance service does not have responsibility for routine decontamination of other emergency workers, unless those workers are injured or fall sick, during the either the response or recovery phase of an incident. Generally the ambulance service would withdraw from the scene of an incident once all casualties have been attended to, but limited facilities would remain available in case of incidents to those involved in recovery.

8.3 The Department of Health and the ODPM are currently updating the Memorandum of Understanding which governs the arrangements for decontamination of casualties.

9. WORKING IN THE “HOT ZONE” AT CBRN INCIDENTS

9.1 Until now NHS policy has been that clinical staff, including ambulance personnel, do not enter the hot zone to assist with either treatment or recovery of casualties. The fire and rescue service has had responsibility for recovery of casualties to a place of relative safety at which staff can offer medical aid. Experience from exercises and evidence from overseas has suggested that more casualties would survive at major incidents if ambulance staff are available within the hot zone to help identify those whose rescue is of the greatest clinical urgency, and where appropriate administer treatment to casualties. Procedures to enable this to policy to be introduced are being developed jointly by the Department of Health, the ASA and other stakeholders with a view to trialling the procedure in London later this year.

10. RECONFIGURATION OF AMBULANCE TRUSTS

10.1 The Committee will be aware that there are currently more fire services than ambulance services, with co-terminosity in only a minority of services. The NHS ambulance service in England is currently being re-configured with the Government’s preferred option of 11 services, one in each of the Government Office Regions except for south-east and south-west each of which has two, out to consultation at present. The new ambulance services are likely to become operational from mid-2006. If the proposals are implemented only the fire services in London and Northern Ireland will be co-terminus with ambulance trusts.

10.2 There will, therefore, be issues later this year involving the development of new relationships between the services at senior management level, though it is hoped that at the county and sub-regional level most of the staff from the ambulance service with whom fire service staff work would remain unchanged.

Memorandum by Networking Women in the Fire Service (NWFS) (FRS 57)

The NWFS was established, as a self help group in 1993 for women in the Fire Service. Initially aimed at supporting female firefighters the NWFS quickly realised that support was needed for all women irrespective of their role or function within the Service.

The purpose of the network is primarily to support women; however this naturally extends to working with other partners in the Service. The NWFS aims quite simply to contribute to making the Service a place where women and men can work together harmoniously and professionally. In order to support these aims the NWFS arranges conferences and events to bring women together for training, development and contact, offers confidential advice and guidance on a range of issues which affect women in the work place and produces frequent newsletters to inform and communicate.

The NWFS also manages the highly popular mentoring scheme²⁵ which has resulted thus far in over 40 mentors who are now actively working with mentees in the Fire Service. This programme assists people in understanding the relationship between the mentee and the line manager, its relationship to the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS). It also supports our fundamental aim of providing support and encouragement for women as they progress (either through advancement in roles or through changes in function)

The NWFS submission concentrates only on point 2.c of the terms of reference; “promoting diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service”. We have submitted as part of this memorandum three case studies to exemplify our points.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NWFS is pleased to note that promoting diversity is part of the terms of reference for this inquiry. We commented in our earlier submission²⁶ that mainstreaming the principles of equality and fairness into the heart of the system is the way forward. However, we also commented that this needed significant changes in attitude and behaviour from everyone in the Service, not least of which the major stakeholders. Sadly this still remains a relevant statement in 2005.

²⁵ In conjunction with our strategic partner Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge.

²⁶ ODPM: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee. The Fire Service Inquiry. Evidence 36. 2002–03.

Whilst we are pleased to note that significant progress has been made in the policy development areas (see case study 1), we remain troubled and concerned about policy implementation and interpretation by some managers in the Service, (see case study 2) and the inability of the Service to make any progress on its targets for the recruitment of women into the Service.

We expressed our concerns to the Government²⁷ that the overall modernisation implementation programme should be given a more thoughtful and planned approach. A comprehensive and complex change management programme for a Service which cannot close down whilst it re-organises, places intolerable pressure for all involved. Whilst we do not condone managers who for whatever reason choose not to implement policies appropriately, we do recognise that managing the variety of initiatives is demanding at best.

Finally we are seriously troubled and concerned about inappropriate behaviour on fire stations. Our sense is that this sadly, rather than improving, over the past two to three years, it has worsened and is affecting women who work on fire stations (operational and support staff). Our case study 3 reflects these concerns. We sincerely hope that this is the last time we have to report on this unacceptable part of the Service culture; however we are not optimistic about this.

1. *Policy development*

Overall our view is that equality and diversity is being taken seriously at strategic and policy development level. Greater consideration is being given in how a diverse organisation looks after its people and delivers an emergency service to a diverse and changing society. We welcome the legislative requirement and need to impact assess policies and would ask that Services are given a clear directive to impact assess for all areas of difference. Our view is that impact assessments will be a key driver in ensuring that equality and diversity become mainstreamed into the way the Service conducts its business.

The NWFS feels that the “Diversity Happens” project board could be the driver for such future policy development and we look forward to it realising its potential in this arena.

2. *Policy implementation*

Our earlier submission referred to our view that the traditional management style of many managers is remote, impersonal and conducted at arms length. This transactional style of management still largely pervades the Service although whilst we recognise the value of the IPDS in bringing about a more modern style of management, this will take time before the new breed of managers find their way into appropriate roles. Our statement that change within the service will require deep personal change for some individuals still holds true at all levels within the Service and regrettably with some elected members in Fire Authorities. This in turn affects how managers implement and interpret policy and how our members are treated or seen to be treated in the workplace. We cannot overstate how important it is that this is recognised and an interim strategy be developed to assist Services in managing this change. Without such consideration and attention a legacy is already being developed which will pervade the culture for many years to come. This is particularly true for where reasonable adjustments (whether in the legal or moral sense) are made. Managers need to understand and be involved in the process so that they properly manage and deal with situations which occur on fire stations.

3. *Recruitment and progression*

The FRS is struggling with recruiting more females or BME operational staff despite numerous positive action events. The main barrier to this success is the perception of the public themselves about who can be a fire fighter and this is certainly not helped by the media’s constant portrayal of “firemen”. Where Services are working with local media to challenge the perception of local communities, our view is that this will help better prepare for future positive action events. Also the issue of the targets themselves is seen by many to be “quotas” or “positive discrimination” and it is against this back drop that both equalities and HR officers have to recruit and into which environment any recruit arrives. Also this has provoked disquiet amongst non operational staff that may be female and or BME who feel as they are not counted then they are not important. We realise targets are very important but equally bring with them their own challenges.

The NWFS calls upon the ODPM to find resources to support a national advertisement campaign (similar to those for the Armed Forces and the Police). A single Fire and Rescue Service simply cannot afford to access high-impact media—even if the finances did allow, it would in effect be advertising on behalf of other Services, since most high-impact media are national and people usually apply to their local service. Simply it’s nonsense and a waste of public money for us all to be promoting the Service Individually. Recruitment for firefighters on the retained duty system continues to be a major issue for Services and increasing the

²⁷ NWFS response to Rt Hon Nick Raynsford, MP Local Government Minister on the first draft national framework—March 2004.

national profile would undoubtedly be beneficial. Given that most of the public don't even know of the existence of the Retained service, we absolutely need the ODPM to sponsor an advertising campaign for both Retained and under-represented groups.

4. *Workplace culture*

Without active promotion and implementation of equality and diversity policies, dignity and fair treatment will remain an elusive part of the culture.

We are hopeful that new processes for implementing performance management, the new discipline and grievance procedure and assessment and development centres when fully in place and operating correcting will assist in making the much needed changes to the workplace culture.

In the meantime we re-state our strongly held views that additional resources are found to provide training to build the skills of managers and supervisors so that they can set and maintain appropriate standards and be able to identify early warning signs and respond to them. Harassment and bullying affect people emotionally and more rigorous attention needs to be given by management to ensure injured staff are not only supported and protected but feel that they are.

Case Study 1

This region has pledged its commitment by recently appointing a regional diversity manager²⁸ to work with all four services to achieve governmental objectives, legislative requirements and high standards of good practice. Work streams are directed within and without the organisation in order to meet both the needs of staff and the local populations. Work is undertaken across the whole spectrum of diversity issues as all issues are seen to be of equal importance. Commitment is also demonstrated by the fact that the region is members of Opportunity Now, Equality Exchange, Employer's Forum on Age and individual members of Stonewall. Progress is being made towards achieving objectives and it is hoped that the soon to be finalised Regional Diversity "Strategy into action" will help us achieve success. Many community safety teams have been awarded recognition for the excellent work they have done with the local BME community especially asylum seekers. The bottom line is this region is very committed and is doing all they can to support, promote and achieve equality and diversity.

Case Study 2

An increasing number of women are securing promotion in the Service and this is both long overdue and welcomed. However we remain concerned about how women are being treated in assessment and development centres particularly when they are pregnant or on maternity leave. In one case it has been reported that questions during an interview focused on operational procedures which had come into effect whilst the individual was away from the Service on maternity leave. We find it difficult to understand an approach which would appear to be assessing knowledge as opposed to potential and concerned that this indirect discrimination affected an individual's opportunity to be considered for advancement.

Another example of this is the Key Worker Housing scheme. We are aware of differences in policy implementation for Control staff. It would appear that in some Services members of control are not deemed to be operational staff, whilst in others they are. This distinction is significant in that this denies access to an important funding stream which assists people in gaining access to the housing market. This becomes a problem as services try and recruit younger people and given that Controls are predominantly staffed by women could indirectly and directly affect more women.

Case Study 3

Some recent examples of behaviour of fire station include (and please don't discount them just because they may be outside of your own personal and professional experiences):

- A woman firefighter who reported that her dormitory was being slept in by male firefighters when she was not on duty and she regularly found pornographic magazines in there and used tissues that appeared to have been masturbated on. Management took no action and she resigned.
- Equally the amount of workplaces where it is still deemed to be acceptable for firefighters to watch or read pornographic material including Sky TV.
- Where there are women's dedicated facilities then they are regularly used by men and left in an unacceptable state for the women to deal with.

²⁸ HMIFS made an explicit recommendation that FRS should have a dedicated full time equality and diversity adviser (in part time in the case of smaller FRS). We consider that this recommendation still holds true and whilst regional coordination should make better use of resources, equality and diversity is not sufficiently mainstreamed for resources to be totally re-deployed.

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- It appears to us that elected members do not appreciate the message they send to women employees when they re-instate people who were sacked for harassment or bullying.
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Memorandum by the Fire Protection Association (FPA) (FRS 59)

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Founded by the insurance industry in 1946 to act as the UK's national fire safety organisation, the Fire Protection Association (FPA) is a not for profit company whose members (owners) include the Association of British Insurers (ABI), the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), the Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE) and the Fire Industry Confederation (FIC). FPA is a member of the Business and Community Fire Safety Forum and the Arson Control Forum and we have, provided the chairs of two of the joint working groups with the Practitioners Forum. The FPA does not usually comment on the operational processes of fire and rescue services except where these impact on fire prevention, we do not therefore wish to comment on diversity or joint working arrangements with other emergency services.

2. REGIONAL CONTROLS AND FIRE LINK

FPA supports the proposals for the introduction of Regional Control Centres and the implementation process for Firelink radio services. In common with other stakeholders we have endorsed the need for robust project and budget management tools being in place for both initiatives to ensure that they are delivered on time and to budget. We fully expect that when complete the new systems will provide appropriate enhancements to the current arrangements. We are particularly looking forward to seeing the improvements in respect of the systems for data gathering which we believe to be so crucial to the process of developing the models for Integrated Risk Management Planning.

2.1 Regional Control and response to calls from automatic fire alarms

FPA shares the concerns expressed by other stakeholders that the new variable response arrangements in respect of calls emanating from automatic fire alarm systems may cause problems in regional control rooms. FPA fully accepts that false alarms have grown enormously in recent years and that they represent an unnecessary and unacceptable drain on fire brigade resources. However, the situation that has emerged since the withdrawal of the national standards of fire cover has presented a confused national and regional picture. We are concerned that in some circumstances this is beginning to have a detrimental effect on fire safety. It is our belief that the more extreme measures that have been adopted by some fire and rescue authorities appear to be driven more by cost saving rather than by robust risk analysis.

2.2 We are aware of one major commercial company that has decided not to install a fire alarm system, following the decision by the local fire and rescue service to only respond to confirmed alarms. The premises in question was one that was extremely well protected in respect of its risk to property, however, the presence of a fire alarm would have undoubtedly improved life safety measures and we are concerned that this decision will be repeated by others, particularly where the need for such a system is considered marginal. We fail to see how such actions are likely to improve the risk profile in areas where such policies have been adopted. We are also concerned that following many years of advising occupiers of commercial premises to evacuate and then call the brigade, the advice in some brigade areas now appears to be that occupiers should return to a building to investigate whether there is actually a fire.

2.3 We understand that Ministers have no desire to re-introduce prescriptive standards for fire and rescue services. However, the Chief Fire Officers' Association recognised that there was a need for national guidance in respect of response to automatic fire alarms and has produced a policy that has broad stakeholder support which includes minimum recommended attendance levels. We were therefore disappointed that the advisory notes that were issued by the ODPM in respect of automatic fire alarm policy and integrated risk management planning did not go far enough in support of the CFOA policy for response arrangements for this type of call. We would like to have seen a system adopted that, where alternative arrangements were proposed, that they had been benchmarked against the CFOA policy and that any variations were fully justified by robust risk analysis. We remain concerned that neighbouring authorities now have differing policies in respect of their response to this type of call and that this may lead to confusion when mobilising through regional controls.

3. FIRE PREVENTION

3.1 *Community safety*

There can be little doubt that the introduction of a statutory duty and the availability of funding for community fire safety have greatly assisted in refocusing fire and rescue service activities to prevention work and the FPA has been heartened by the decrease in deaths and injuries that have been recorded in recent years. However, we remain concerned that this shift of focus should not be undertaken at the expense of the traditional fire prevention work that has been so successful in ensuring that the UK workplace has become one of the most fire-safe environments in the world in recent years.

3.2 *Fire safety*

The period since the Bain review has been seen as transitional by many in the fire industry as we have awaited the change in fire safety legislation, recently confirmed by the Regulatory Reform Order. The transitional arrangements by fire and rescue authorities in moving from the existing prescriptive regime to a system based on risk assessment has in our experience been variable, with some continuing to issue fire certificates and others not. As the transitional period has now taken so long we are concerned that a number of “poorly managed” risks will not have received visits or inspections for some time.

3.3 The principles behind Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) appear to require that overall community risk should be reduced over time and this should include commercial property—even during periods when the buildings maybe unoccupied—as a fire in these premises will have an impact on the local economy. The guidance produced by the ODPM for fire and rescue services in support of the initial IRMP’s has assumed a “massive investment” in inbuilt fire protection systems for commercial buildings. Recent work undertaken by the passive fire protection industry tends to suggest that where such protection exists that it has frequently been breached, is often poorly maintained and may not perform as it was designed. It is therefore vital, in our view, that these assumptions have been properly validated prior to changes being planned in either operational response or in the frequency of inspection.

3.4 *Inspection and monitoring*

We are concerned that in some fire and rescue services the move to community fire safety may have been at the expense of some of the traditional “statutory fire safety activity” and this needs to be appropriately monitored in the future. We believe that advising and monitoring fire prevention activity was an important area of activity of the Inspectorate prior to the Bain review. Given the emphasis that now exists on prevention and risk-reduction; this work will now need to be performed by others to reassure both the public and ministers that the activity remains effectively undertaken by fire and rescue services. We understand that it is intended to broaden the role of the Audit Commission to include elements of operational assurance in its future work. Careful consideration will need to be given in defining the scope of such work and care will be needed to ensure that it has the relevant experience to undertake its tasks effectively. We very much welcome the creation of the IRMP steering group by the ODPM and assume that it will provide the point of stakeholder contact in finalising the terms of reference for the Audit Commission in respect of this aspect of its future scope.

3.5 *Charging*

The FPA, in common with other stakeholders have expressed our concerns regarding Fire and Rescue Services charging for services and in particular the affect this may have on fire prevention. FPA chaired a task and finish group of the Business and Community Safety Forum on charging and a copy of its final report is included as Appendix A to this submission. The following extract from Appendix A highlights our concerns regarding the charging for fire prevention advice:

“To summarise our views on any proposals to allow fire authorities to charge for fire safety advice; it is generally felt that if this avenue were to be pursued:

- *It will act as a disincentive for businesses to seek any advice at a time when they will need it most;*
- *Setting the level at which to charge will be problematic and will lead to discrepancies between fire authorities;*
- *A full understanding of fire engineering is required by fire brigades in discharging their statutory duties in fire fighting and should be restricted to enforcement advice anyway;*
- *Any move to charge for fire safety activities would put the service in direct competition with private sector providers and that the Office of Fair Trading should be consulted before any such moves were undertaken.*
- *The creation of independent companies and the potential of actions for negligence or in appropriate advice given by fire authorities acting as consultancies appear to be over complicated and unworkable.”*

It is acknowledged that the charging powers under the Fire and Rescue Services Act are no wider than those that existed in previous legislation, however, it has been noted that the range and volume of services that are being charged for have been increasing in recent years. These issues have been raised with ODPM and a recommendation has been made by the Business and Community Safety Forum that Fire and Rescue Services should receive updated guidance in respect of charging. We have yet to see the content of such guidance, but believe that it is urgently needed.

4. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

4.1 As we have stated FPA is a member of the Business and Community Safety Forum and was an active member of the Fire Safety Advisory Board. We understood and fully supported the proposal to disband the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council and we accepted and agreed with the criticism of its structure and mechanisms and record on delivery.

4.2 One of the major advantages of the Fire Safety Advisory Board was the mutual understanding that was being developed of the views and concerns of the represented stakeholders. This we felt was extremely important in the development of what has become the Regulatory Reform Order particularly in terms of the way the new regime will be enforced and how the guidance was developed for end users. To be effective FPA believes that the changes proposed by the White Paper and the Fire and Rescue Services Act would have benefited from a similar forum being established; particularly in relation to the changes and flexibility introduced by the withdrawal of the national standards of fire cover and the introduction of Integrated Risk Management Planning and the partnerships that need to be established.

4.3 The Business and Community Safety Forum has undoubtedly introduced many of the Community Groups who were not adequately represented on the Fire Safety Advisory Board and this must be welcomed. However, it has become clear that a number of these groups have encountered problems with engaging with the agenda of the BCSF due to their lack of knowledge of the detailed work of the fire and rescue services and this may have contributed in some cases to their lack of attendance and in others to a relatively sterile debate on certain issues. We believe that the contribution that community groups could make to the BCSF would be greatly enhanced if this barrier could be overcome in the future. We would also wish to see a formal “coming together” of the BCSF and the Practitioners Forums to enhance the understanding of the various stakeholders priorities and agendas.

APPENDIX A

Charging by Fire Authorities—A response to the ODPM Consultation Document by the Business & Community Safety Forum

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper has been produced by the Task & Finish Group, established by the Business & Community Safety Forum to produce a response to the ODPM consultation on Charging by Fire Authorities. All members of the Business & Community Safety Forum were invited to nominate representatives of the group and/or to submit comments and it was agreed that the Association of British Insurers, the Federation of Small Businesses and Professor Rosemarie Everton, Chair of Fire Law from the University of Central Lancashire should also be invited to attend and/or produce comments. Jonathan O’Neill of the Fire Protection Association acted as Chair of the Group, which because of the short timescale before the closing date for consultation met only twice to consider comments. This paper is the result of the submissions and the discussions within the Group and will be tabled at the fourth meeting of the BCSF as its formal response.

1.1 *Membership of the Group*

- The Fire Protection Association (FPA)
- Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
- Fire Industry Confederation (FIC)
- Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)
- Association of British Insurers (ABI)
- Chair of Fire Law (University of Central Lancashire)

2. GENERAL COMMENTS

2.1 *The Role of the Fire & Rescue Service*

2.1.1 The Group welcomed the clear vision that the government had produced for the fire service in the White Paper and the recently published Framework document. However it was felt that the service's priority must be in the provision of a first class response to its core activities of fire prevention and fire fighting. It was felt that at a time of such enormous change in the fire service that any deviation from this activity would be an unnecessary distraction.

2.1.2 Whilst it is understood that fire brigades have become involved in the provision a number of non-core emergency and rescue activities, it is questioned why they continue to be involved in the provision of a range of services that are perceived as being more appropriately provided by the private sector such as; loan and hiring of crews for special events; removal of dangerous structures such as trees and television aerials; lift rescues and dry riser testing. The group recognised that in emergency situations it maybe necessary for the fire service to become involved in these activities, but it was generally felt that there are already a number of private sector and non-governmental organisations that provided (or may be better placed to provide) such services and that fire service involvement should only be necessary as the "provider of last resort".

2.1.3 It is felt that in a number of areas, particularly fire safety (including training) that any expansion of chargeable services would lead to unfair competition from the fire service to private sector suppliers of similar services. There is concern that as the fire service was looking for "cost recovery only" that this would undercut private sector providers This is not seen as a desirable outcome particularly as it is taxpayers and local ratepayers who have funded the capital investment in terms of facilities, infrastructure and training of fire brigade personnel. Concern has been expressed that it would therefore be extremely difficult to determine "real costs" rather than marginal costs for the fire service and that a number of services would in effect be subsidized. It is questioned whether this is the most appropriate role for the fire service of the future and whether it is most appropriate use of public funding. The Group would like clarification as to whether the Office of Fair Trading had been consulted on these proposals and if so, what conclusions have been reached and what safeguards are proposed to ensure that fire authorities are not allowed to hold an unfair trading position in the market.

2.1.4 Before considering an expansion in chargeable services, brigades must consider the costs involved in setting up the mechanism to charge and to chase payment, which could be considerable. Thought also needs to be given to the problems of late/non-payers and the cost of recovery. As these costs would inevitably have to be recovered as part of any charging strategy, the charges themselves would have to rise and would be subject to quite wide regional variations and may not cover the charges themselves. The net benefits to brigades would therefore become negligible.

2.1.5 To summarise our views on the role of the fire service, the group felt that:

- The role and expectations of the fire service had been quite clearly expressed in the White Paper and the new framework document and that the service should now focus on its core activities; prevention and emergency intervention.
- Many of the non-core activities referred to in the consultation document could (and should) be provided by the private sector, with the fire service only being required to respond in emergency situations.
- Any move to charge for fire safety activities would put the service in direct (and possibly unfair) competition with private sector providers and that the Office of Fair Trading should be consulted before any such moves were undertaken.
- The costs of administrating chargeable services would make any net benefits to fire authorities negligible.

2.2 *Funding of the fire service*

2.2.1 All members of the task group expressed the view that they saw the fire service as a public service that should be funded from taxation and local rates. They recognised the comments made by Bain, that much of the service was only deployed on intervention activities for a relatively short period of any working day and fully supported the proposals that increasing preventative work to assist in further driving down the incidence of fire.

2.2.2 There was concern expressed however that in times of pressure on public funding expanding fee earning activities could become more important for some brigades than non-fee earning preventative activity such as Community Fire Safety. In fact if all restrictions were taken from fire authorities for fee-earning, some fire authorities could become so driven in pursuit of income generation that a perverse incentive could be created, where driving down non-emergency calls may be discouraged as they would have an adverse effect of fire authority finances.

2.2.3 Business Groups expressed concern that if the scope of fire authority funding were in anyway expanded, their members were effectively being asked to pay twice for brigade services, which was felt to be extremely difficult to justify.

2.2.4 To summarise our views on fire service funding the group felt that:

- As an emergency service the fire service should be funded from the public purse.
- Any moves to diversify income generation for the fire service could lead to resources being moved away from preventative activity such as Community Fire Safety.
- New perverse incentives could be created.
- Business would in effect be asked to pay twice.

2.3 *The Principle of Charging*

2.3.1 It is understood that the consultation paper that has been produced by the ODPM is a result of the comments made in respect of fire brigade charging by the Independent Review of the Fire Service (Bain) and the Fire & Rescue Authorities Bill that is currently progressing through the parliamentary process.

2.3.2 Concern was expressed by members of the Task & Finish Group (the Group) that any increase in charging by fire authorities would be result in an increased burden on their members and their member's customers. It was felt that the Fire & Rescue Bill would outline the statutory duties and powers of the service, which as a public emergency service should be funded publicly by taxation and rates.

2.3.3 Whilst recognising that the 1947 Fire Services Act did allow for an element of cost recovery for special service calls, there was concern expressed that in practice the number of brigades who currently levied any payment and the amounts and range of services for which charges were raised lacked any consistency of approach. Any proposals to increase the range of discretionary chargeable services would further cause further confusion adding to what was described as a “postcode lottery” in service provision. The Group did not have access to the aggregate amounts recovered by fire authorities for attendance at special service calls but it was felt that were probably relatively insignificant, which given the costs involved with administration would currently give little or no net benefit to brigades.

2.3.4 The Group recognised, although did not support, that charging was part of a general trend in the provision of local government services, but felt strongly that it was inappropriate for the fire service as an emergency service to become involved in income generation.

2.3.5 It was agreed that any increase in scope of the provision of chargeable services should be accompanied by a full and comprehensive Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). Several members of the group expressed concern that previous RIA's in respect of fire had tended to underestimate the full costs to industry and commerce and it was suggested that prior to commissioning any assessment in respect of charging; that the BCSF should be consulted to advice on its the scope and extent.

2.3.6 To summarise our comments on the principle of fire authorities charging, the group felt that:

- The role, duties and powers of this emergency service were defined by Statute and that the funding of the service should from the public purse.
- Any proposal to increase in the power or scope to charge for services would inevitably lead to an increase in burden on industry, commerce and community groups and should be accompanied by a comprehensive RIA.

3. SPECIFIC PROPOSALS AND COMMENTS

3.1 *Fire Safety Advice*

3.1.1 It is strongly felt that in moving the fire service from primarily to preventative activity, the provision of fire safety advice would be a key component of the role. It is recognised that the fire service will inevitably concentrate its activities into the targets of reduction of deaths and injuries in the home, but is strongly felt that business forms an important part of the community and that the effect of an important local employer having its business destroyed by fire could have a devastating effect on the local economy.

3.1.2 Although the forthcoming Regulatory Reform Order is in many ways simply reinforcing the existing (Places of Work) Workplace Regulations, recent surveys have suggested that a large number of businesses have little knowledge of their current obligations in this respect. A move away from fire certification to employers undertaking their own risk assessments is a considerable change for a large number of businesses who will inevitably require a great deal of assistance in adopting the new approach.

3.1.3 It is felt that if fire authorities start to charge for fire safety advice, this will send out the wrong messages, particularly to small businesses, who may simply not bother to seek any assistance at all, which it is felt will have a detrimental effect on levels of commercial fire safety. This would appear to be contrary to the need to move the service into the prevention activity, which was at the heart of Bain, the White Paper and the current Fire & Rescue Services Bill.

3.1.4 Setting the level of advice to charge for, and what should be available “free of charge” was also felt to be problematic and could lead to quite different interpretations by fire authorities. This would lead regional variation in policy and price and would cause further problems, particularly for organisations with branches throughout the country.

3.1.5 Whilst there was some sympathy with the examples set out in the consultation document for the amount of brigade resource that was being allocated for landmark projects, such as the Channel Tunnel and Terminal 5 at Heathrow, and it was recognised that some consultants and contractors were using fire brigade resource in lieu of hiring their own fire engineering consultants. It was strongly argued that advice on this type of project should be restricted to statutory compliance only. There was however, a view expressed that if the fire engineering on these projects was complex, it was in the brigade's interest to have a full understanding of how these buildings were likely to react and perform in real fire scenarios as part of their life safety and fire fighting roles.

3.1.6 The issue of appropriate skilling also arose, as there was general agreement that there was a difference in skills and service required for a charging consultancy service, than one that looked only at statutory compliance.

3.1.7 A question of liability also arises. If the fire brigade are to charge for the advice that they give on a consultancy basis, where would responsibility and liability lie? Presumably brigades that wish to go down this route would have to establish their own limited liability companies, with the necessary professional indemnity insurance as is required by similar organisations in the private sector. The group was concerned whether insurance cover was available for a company owned by a fire authority having an action against it by the fire authority itself.

3.1.8 As the new Regulatory Reform Order will allow actions to be taken by the fire authority against negligent contractors and consultants, extremely complex Chinese walls will need to be created by fire authorities in the separation of their consultancy and enforcement activities. Would actions by a fire authority against the consulting arm of a fire authority be acceptable or even possible?

3.1.9 To summarise our views on any proposals to allow fire authorities to charge for fire safety advice; it is generally felt that if this avenue were to be pursued:

- It will act as a disincentive for businesses to seek any advice at a time when they will need it most;
- Setting the level at which to charge will be problematic and will lead to discrepancies between fire authorities;
- A full understanding of fire engineering is required by fire brigades in discharging their statutory duties in fire fighting and should be restricted to enforcement advice anyway;
- Any move to charge for fire safety activities would put the service in direct competition with private sector providers and that the Office of Fair Trading should be consulted before any such moves were undertaken.
- The creation of independent companies and the potential of actions for negligence or in appropriate advice given by fire authorities acting as consultancies appear to be over complicated and unworkable.

3.2 *Automatic Fire Alarms*

3.2.1 There is a great deal of concern surrounding the comments made in the Bain review regarding the use of charging as a route to reducing the number of false activations of automatic fire alarms. It was felt that should this be allowed in the future, a perverse incentive would be created as brigades may become reluctant to actively pursue reductions in the attendance to AFA's if this meant a corresponding drop in income. It was argued that some of the worst offenders would be tempted to simply switch their alarms off rather than risk incurring a charge from the fire authority for attendance at a false activation and this would in turn have a detrimental effect of the levels of commercial fire safety.

3.2.2 It is estimated that only 10% of businesses have a persistent problem with automatic fire alarms and it is argued that a more effective strategy would be to educate this group on installation standards, maintenance and ensuring that they had the most appropriate system for their own risks. It was felt that the current ODPM initiative in supporting an education process by the production of leaflets was a good first step in this processes.

3.2.3 The proposed CACFOA policy for dealing with alarms linked to central stations was similarly acknowledged as being important in the process. The policy does allow for the charging of Unique Reference Numbers for alarms, it was however felt that a URN should only be required for the worst offenders, and not for organisations that never caused the brigade a problem, it was felt however, that sight of the final CACFOA policy would be required before formal endorsement could be reached.

3.2.4 There was general concern regarding the current confusion surrounding AFA strategies. It was recognised that as part of the process in developing IRMP's differing response options were probably inevitable over time. However, it was felt that the IRMP guidance that was issued by the ODPM made it clear to fire authorities that any changes to response were required to be evidence-led. It was felt that the variety of different options now emerging for AFA response, were not sufficiently evidenced by increases in preventative measures or improvements in AFA performance and so and were difficult to justify. It was agreed that until full local evidence emerged a national policy on AFA response should be established and agreed upon by all affected stakeholder groups.

3.2.5 To summarise our views on proposals to charge for attendance at AFA's the group felt that:

- A new perverse incentive would be created with brigades being rewarded for false activations.
- Some of the worst offenders would be tempted to simply switch off or disconnect their alarms.
- A national policy such as amended CACFOA policy is required, until there is firm evidence that local initiatives are seeing significant enough improvements in AFA performance to allow for any deviation.

3.3 *Attendance at Road Traffic Accidents*

3.3.1 Bain also considered the possibility of brigades charging for attendance at RTA's, which is acknowledged as being an important (currently non statutory) role for brigades. It was felt that should this be pursued there would be significant implications, which would need to be considered in any corresponding Regulatory Impact Assessment.

3.3.2 There was no enthusiasm or support from the group for any moves in the direction of charging for general attendance at Road Traffic Accidents as it was felt that it would be difficult and costly to administer, that the insured market would inevitably end up paying for non-insured drivers and that the move would do nothing to reduce the level of road accidents.

3.4 *Other Special Service Calls*

It was suggested that one area where charging maybe justified was in dealing with spillages where costs had been incurred for remediation or minimising the environmental consequences of the spillage. This would seem to follow the general principle of "the polluter pays", however as a number of other agencies could also be involved in clean-up operation there would need to be clear demarcation between fire brigade and other relevant agency costs.

4. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

We have tried as requested to produce a balanced response to the consultation document, however for the reasons stated above there was little enthusiasm to the proposals in Bain or the recommendations from the ODPM Select Committee. The overriding feeling of the Task & Finish Group was that the fire service had a new role outlined in the White Paper and the framework document and that the service should concentrate on preventative activity and emergency response. We have considered the questions posed in the consultation document and this paper reflects our considered opinion to the issues that have been raised. We ask the Business & Community Fire Safety Forum to endorse this paper as its response.

Memorandum by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) (FRS 60)

1. BACKGROUND

The Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) is not short of research findings on equality and diversity issues or consequential recommendations or action plans.

In 1994 the Home Office published a report by Tom Burke. The FRS whilst still under the Home Office was subject to a thematic review in 1999. Following that, Professor Bain in his independent review published in 2001 also made adverse comments on the state of equality and diversity. All are referenced in the appendix of this submission. In addition the appendix includes other reports that are drawn to the Committee's attention containing additional and supporting information.

All the research reports point to the Service's performance as being one of the poorest in the public sector in respect of equality and diversity. All provide excellent guidance and route maps for integrating equality and diversity as a key issue. Few have had any far-reaching impact. As often as not the FRS appears to resent the exposure their findings have generated.

The CRE strongly supports the Committee's decision to review and focus on diversity. This memorandum relates to paragraph 2c of the inquiry's terms of reference. The CRE would be pleased to work with the Committee and provide additional evidence if needed.

The memorandum sets out some of the key respects in which the FRS shows persistent poor performance on equality and diversity, and race equality in particular. It indicates some measures that we consider important and notes some of the good practice initiatives that have been developed recently but argues that these must be integrated into a coherent overall strategic approach.

2. LEADERSHIP

This is a recurring theme in many investigations and research reports on diversity in the FRS. We are concerned that the fire service has little understanding of how leadership within diversity should manifest itself. The FRS has largely failed to recognise true champions of diversity at any level. A public body such as the fire service should be able to identify and demonstrated achievement by its champions. Many Chief Fire Officers will claim they have the role of leadership but all too often this is more rhetoric than reality and not matched by performance or outcomes.

The CRE expects public organisations such as the FRS to at least be able to demonstrate positive leadership and commitment. The basis for this is in the statutory duty, in place since 2001, requiring public bodies to take pro-active steps to promote racial equality. Committed leadership is crucial in demonstrating the legitimacy and credibility of equality and diversity both externally to private and community and voluntary sector bodies in the locality and internally to the organisation's own people.

Leadership at central government level has also been muted. The ODPM has not sent out a clear and unequivocal signal that poor performance in the area of equality and diversity is not acceptable.

3. POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Parts of the Service have responded to the recommendations made in reports that are referenced in the appendix. This has been done well in some Fire and Rescue Authorities, but many have just copied policies from other FRAs or public bodies and these have either been applied inappropriately or remained mere paper policies, and appear to have had little impact if any on equality and diversity within many fire services. Many county authorities have simply relied on their county councils' overarching policies for compliance but these often fail to address the key and specific issues for the FRS.

The requirements of the general statutory duty to promote race equality introduced through the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 have proven to be particularly poorly addressed by FRAs and we believe that compliance with the general duty and with the specific duties cannot be found in many FRAs, and certainly not a thorough embrace of the recommendations of the statutory code of practice. Until quite recently a substantial number of FRAs did not even have Race Equality Schemes. In 2005 up to 60% of FRAs had not completed any race impact assessments. One FRA, following an intervention by the CRE based on alleged breach of duty, is now demonstrating what it is possible to achieve and what managers are capable of if challenged.

The CRE is shortly to embark on a monitoring study looking at the compliance of FRAs (among a range of other public sector bodies) with the statutory duties. We shall be putting particular emphasis on evidence that FRAs have robust arrangements for undertaking race equality impact assessments which they have effectively implemented.

4. REVIEW AND MONITORING

The FRS has been criticised by many including the Audit Commission for not applying best practice in performance management in general. For equality and diversity this is particularly true. Little evidence exists that a systematic approach is adopted to managing diversity or for evaluating initiatives. The FireWorks research supports this view. The ODPM and the CPA have not placed diversity sufficiently high in its priorities for monitoring or audit. In the first quarter of 2005 the Audit Commission carried out CPA inspections of the FRS using a methodology supported by a diagnostic tool on equality and diversity. However the references in the Commission's reports on individual FRAs in this area are patchy, often minimal, and inconsistent. One FRA reviewed and reported as excellent did not even have a strategy on diversity.

The ODPM/ Fire Service Inspectorate should have carried out a follow up thematic in 2003. This still has not been done and in the 2004–05 Framework document a number of commitments were made that would have supported this area but again to date none has been carried out. These were:

- (a) Review of training
- (b) Review of equality officer role
- (c) Develop a peer assessment tool
- (d) Develop a bespoke tool to support the local government agenda.

In the 2005–06 draft National Framework document all have disappeared, seemingly signifying that the failure to carry out the reviews and to drop rather than carry them forward means that the ODPM no longer believes these issues to be important.

We believe that the National Framework document is a key driver in England and this should have clear and reliable commitments as to what ODPM will do and what Regional Management Boards and FRAs are expected to deliver on equality and diversity. This is particularly important in the case of the boards as these bodies are not themselves listed as subject to the duty to promote race equality and unless one of more constituent FRAs provide leadership on the issue it can easily fall from the agenda. We also believe that the

framework, which is effectively a statement of policy, should be subject to a race equality impact assessment.²⁹ The CRE will be making a submission to the ODPM during formal consultation on the Framework document.

5. CULTURE

The culture of the fire service in spite of all the work that has been carried out, is still in places xenophobic, male, macho and bullying and to the extent that this is true it is not capable of sustaining or supporting equality and diversity. In the current climate it is not surprising to find the FRS failing to meet the government's and its own agenda on diversity. At the same time, culture is often used as an excuse for poor achievement.

It is our view that the leadership does not understand the component parts of the cultural web that exists in the Service and does not know what impacts on it. They have failed to identify the critical success factors for changing the culture and more importantly what the role of Members of fire authorities and Chief Fire Officers is in changing the culture. ODPM needs to give clear indications on the type of culture the service should be aiming for and how it should be training staff and elected members to achieve the change. ODPM and fire authorities need to consider how this is to be monitored and audited. The time is right for a full cultural audit to be carried out and the development of clear, short and medium term plans to bring about real cultural change.

We believe the cultural audit tool that has been developed by ODPM and CFOA has the potential to provide the springboard for change, However this is not the whole answer as discussed above.

6. THE BUSINESS OR SERVICE CASE

The FRS has no clear business/service case for equality and diversity. Much of the research has highlighted this issue. It is welcome that the ODPM will be leading work in 2006 to develop a business/service case. This should then provide one of the key building blocks for the FRS to understand and tackle the many issues relating to diversity that it currently faces.

7. RECRUITMENT AND TARGETS

The FRS has probably the worst figures in the public sector on the representation of black and minority ethnic staff in uniformed posts. Currently the Service has a workforce that is less than 2.4% ethnic minority, with a very similar proportion for women. Statistics for 2003–04 show that (excluding the “other” category) non-white, ethnic minority applicants for wholtime posts made up 11.3% of all applicants. However, only 2.7% of the ethnic minority applicants were successful compared with 6.2% of white applicants. These figures are unacceptable. They cannot be and are not condoned by government or accepted by the public. But determined action is needed if the FRS is to match the changes seen in the police force, prison service and the ambulance service over the last 10 years.

We can only conclude that this is linked to the issue of leadership referred to earlier. Where the FRS sees a need, in our experience, it can and has made the change. The manner in which the culture of health and safety and community safety have changed in the FRS in recent years are clear indicators were leadership is found on a theme, achievement is matched by energy, commitment and resources.

The targets first set in 1999 under the Home Office regime—7% of ethnic minorities in the workforce by 2009—are no longer fully owned by the FRS, though they still appear, for example, in the ODPM's public service agreement. We understand that the ODPM has undertaken a long-delayed review of targets and will issue a new strategy dealing with recruitment, retention and promotion in 2006. We support the review but are cautious in our optimism in case this should lead to a watering down of the current targets and the strategy have little impact on its own if not supported by other initiatives and also by robust monitoring, audit and inspection. The CRE will be participating in consultation on the strategy.

We are more optimistic that the development of the service case will have an impact on this. A better understanding of why the Service should reflect the community can only lead to more within the service committing to the agenda and making a contribution.

The FRS has had an excellent beacon of best practice on this issue in the outreach team of London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority. London has in our view achieved some very notable results in the numbers of women and ethnic minority staff despite the organisational and political environment they have to work in.

We strongly recommend that a national outreach team be established and charged with supporting local and regional recruitment. The model of best practice in London and the manner in which the National Fire Safety Centre has integrated faith issues (see paragraph 10 below) should be used to develop the approach.

²⁹ See the CRE website www.cre.gov.uk for a guidance tool.

8. TRAINING

No clear training strategy exists in the FRS in spite of the reviews that have reported this to be an issue. The recently concluded FireWorks project reported this to be a major issue and a barrier to achievement. The service has no clear needs analysis on diversity or vision as to what it is attempting to achieve through training. The training in FRS varies from a few hours to a comprehensive training programme. No measurement is made against objectives.

The service needs to adopt the principles that the FireWorks team have recommended and the ODPM should provide clearer guidance as to what is expected.

No training courses have been developed nationally to support specialist officers or the leadership of the service. In addition we are unaware of any training on diversity that is provided across the service for members of fire authorities who have a critical role on diversity. It is not surprising that in this vacuum we have such poor understanding at the very top of the service.

9. SUPPORT GROUPS

The FRS has many support groups and some like the Networking Women in the Fire Service are working at a strategic level and making a difference. Others such as the groups under the Fire Brigade Union are still tied very closely to the trade union and are not making the impact at strategic level that similar groups such as the Black Police Association are in the police service.

Support groups in the FRS are not as well supported as their counterparts in either the police or the prison service, where national officers have full time paid posts. These officers are then able to make a much better and more consistent contribution to the diversity agenda. In the FRS this is left to willing volunteers or to paid union officials who are tasked with supporting national trade unions objectives which on occasion can be in direct conflict with the very people they represent.

We believe that government should determine what good practice there is in the public sector and disseminate this to all. We believe that by forming strong and visible support groups with government backing the diversity issues can be integrated in all services more quickly and support can be provided for those whose treatment is unfair treatment or falls short of good practice expectations.

10. GOOD PRACTICE

We have previously provided some examples of good practice. A fuller list is proposed below and more will be available when the ODPM commissioned report *Diversity Matters* is published late 2005 or early 2006.

(i) *National Champion*

The service clearly needs a focal point of contact and a national champion. The benefits of taking this approach have already been spelled out. The National Health Service and the Cabinet Office have appointed national champions working at the strategic level and they are having an impact. Nearly all the referenced reports in the appendix support this recommendation. In addition we believe that the secondment of a senior officer to ODPM 2004-05 has shown the potential there is for a role of this kind.

(ii) *Diversity Matters*

ODPM have commissioned a report to highlight best practice. This has not yet been published but should be available to the Select Committee during the period of this inquiry. We believe that this is an excellent example of what can be done if resources are allocated to this task. This should be a regular activity of the ODPM.

(iii) *Multi-faith*

The Fire Service has carried out pioneering work in this field which will be covered in some detail in the forthcoming “diversity matters” report. There are significant outcomes not only in respect of engagement with the communities locally but also in terms of enhanced recruitment and retention. The recent National Fire Safety Centre strategy we believe to be best practice in the public sector as are the CFOA conferences on this topic.

(iv) *Outreach*

Clearly outreach in the London Fire Brigade is working and making a difference, this should be used as a model by regional management boards for regional application where that is appropriate. The ODPM should show some leadership and use the national fire safety model and the Army recruitment model to support this work.

(v) *Integrated Personal Development System*

Although we have some concern around quality assurance we believe that this is again is an important cog in the changing of the culture of the service. All the role maps have a diversity element and no person may move on to a new role until competence in diversity is demonstrated. This is a positive development.

(vi) *National Point of Entry Test*

The new tests will support the agenda. Any divergence from the national standard will have an adverse impact. We support these role related tests however have concerns that application may be diluted by stakeholders who do not apply them as they are intended.

(vii) *Core Values and the Diversity Case*

The ODPM and CFA have demonstrated leadership in championing the need for these and the model adopted for the recently issued core values will be a good platform for the development of the service case.

11. SUMMARY

Although there are many points of criticism in the above—and justifiably so we believe—nonetheless it is right to recognise that the FRS has made some significant progress over recent years. For example, bullying and harassment are now the exception rather than the norm and racist behaviour is no longer openly tolerated. The changes of this kind are to be welcomed and supported. There is now a clear opportunity to move the agenda forward and the Committee’s inquiry has the potential to accelerate change. This will not happen, however, unless the service moves to a “can do” approach to the equality and diversity agenda backed up by a national strategy that commands a consensus and integrates the contributions of all stakeholders and contains a clear commitment to organisational change rather than dithering over what to do.

There is much notable and good practice that is not yet fully shared across the fire service and the FRS can also learn from the examples of good practice existing in other parts of the public sector. The appointment of an effective champion of equality and diversity and the development of leaders capable of bringing about root and branch change as well as sharing and communicating of best practice are we think necessary conditions of real change.

If the service was to take a strategic approach under the areas set out above and an action plan was to be developed with a clear audit and reporting line to ODPM and ministers, the momentum on equality and diversity would increase and take the issues from the periphery to the heart of the modernisation agenda, and then the Fire and Rescue Service could become the beacon of best practice that it aspires to but to which it cannot presently lay claim.

APPENDIX

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Memorandum by the Fire Industry Confederation (FIC) (FRS 61)

By way of introduction, the Fire Industry Confederation represents around 90% by turnover of a £2.5 billion fire protection industry and was the catalyst for the establishment of the Fire Safety Advisory Board (FSAB) in England in 1999. Since that time, the FIC devoted considerable resource to supporting the FSAB and is one of the relatively few organisations sitting on Business and Community Safety Forum (BCSF).

The FIC comprises a number of fire trade associations including FIRESA (providers to the fire and rescue services), the BFPSA (fixed fire protection systems), FETA (portable extinguishers), BASA (sprinklers) and ICEL (emergency lighting).

We would wish to comment please on several issues, the first being *Item 1a* in the letter of invitation, *implications of the introduction of regional control centres*.

We have serious concerns in relation to the impact on the fire and rescue supply industry (as represented by FIRESA) of the FireControl project proposals as we understand them. These comments derive from those FIRESA members who would supply as sub-contractors as opposed to acting as primary contractor. FIRESA's understanding is that there is presently a short list of three primary contractors for the FireControl project and that the successful bidder will be free to select their own equipment and other providers as sub-contractors.

This circumvents any contact between the ODPM and the full range of suppliers for the FireControl project, leaving the main contractor alone as the decision maker in the selection of equipment for this key activity.

We would suggest that those responsible for the project overall are, with all respect, unlikely to be in a position which would enable them to select products on detailed technical considerations of quality, reliability, performance and functionality and with a view to providing state-of-the-art equipment which would benefit the fire and rescue services and, ultimately, the public now and in the future.

In not enabling consultation between end users and suppliers, the process as currently envisaged offers no opportunity to develop specifications and common standards which can benefit both parties and assist in achieving best value. It also carries the inherent and very real risk in the medium to longer term of stifling innovation and severely reducing competition for supply of equipment in the future.

It is striking that the FireControl methodology is in strict contrast to the principles expected to be adopted by Firebuy Ltd for other national procurement matters where on-going industry consultation is rightly regarded as a prerequisite in achieving workable solutions to fire appliances, protective clothing and other procurement issues.

Having highlighted these concerns to the Committee, we would welcome their consideration of the issues raised.

I move, if I may, generally to *Item 2 a, Fire Prevention*.

We take this opportunity to highlight the *benefits of third party certification* of services provided by the fire protection industry. The fire industry generally has for some time, and with the full support of its various association members, actively sought the increased adoption and recognition of relevant third party certification schemes pertaining to fire protection services. In doing so, it seeks to create a safer environment for all through the selection of only third party certificated products and services. Attainment of this goal will eliminate substandard workmanship and provide full confidence that the products and services specified or purchased meet the relevant criteria.

Changes in fire legislation, including the Regulatory Reform [Fire Safety] Order in England, place emphasis on the risk assessment of premises and place the onus of responsibility firmly on the employer, owner, occupier, contractor and fire safety consultant. Selecting third party certificated services undertaken by "competent persons" assists the responsible person in meeting their "duty of care" obligations and can also enable those such as building control officers and the fire and rescue services to carry out effectively their enforcement roles. These legislative changes have accelerated the very real need to secure third party certification as an accepted norm in the fire protection industry.

Competency is also clearly referenced, for example, in BS 5839 Part 1 which describes the "competent person" as having "the necessary training and experience and capable of carrying out a defined task". Again, third party certification can contribute substantially to determining competency as it applies directly to fire protection systems and, in doing so, meeting the requirements of the Standard.

There is already growing evidence of increasing recognition for third party certificated products and services in the fire protection industry of the United Kingdom eg

Chief Fire Officers Association

"CFOA positively promotes third party certification schemes as a means of demonstrating competence"

Model Agreement between Fire and Rescue Authorities and Users of Remotely Monitored Fire Alarm Systems, Chief Fire Officers Association [CFOA]

Fire Protection Association

“All fire protection products/systems shall be installed by adequately trained specialist installers. Installers shall be third party certified to install the specific product/system when an appropriate scheme is available”

Design Guide for the Fire Protection of Buildings; Essential Principles, Fire Protection Association [FPA]

Taking the BFPSA as an example, member companies engaged in systems design, installation, commissioning, handover and/or maintenance of fire detection, alarm and/or extinguishing systems from 31 November 2006 must have obtained the relevant modules of the BAFE-adopted SP 203 or LPS 1014 or LPS 1204 or equivalent. Beyond this date, all prospective new members to the association must hold this certification at the time of application. The commitment shown by BFPSA members to third party certification delivers the strongest possible message to its many current and prospective clients, as well as offering a positive response to the changing legislation which surrounds us.

The benefits which would result are:

- Assisting users in making an informed choice when selecting products and services
- Assisting owner/occupiers in meeting their legal obligations [ie duty of care responsibilities]
- Assisting mitigation in cases of alleged negligence
- Assisting building control officers and fire and rescue service officers in meeting their statutory responsibilities
- Improving the reliability of systems
- Minimising the lifetime costs of systems
- Assisting the fire and rescue services in their Integrated Risk Management Plans and associated approaches to fire safety and fire protection
- Raising levels of public safety through the elimination of sub-standard products and services
- Raising levels of competence in the fire industry and the wider fire safety community
- Assisting businesses in generating better and more efficient processes through offering products which comply with harmonised standards, and having personnel with recognised qualifications for design, installation, commissioning and maintenance.

Through its commitment to appropriate third party certification, the fire protection industry as represented by its trade associations is fully supportive of third party certification schemes. This addresses in a substantive way the legislative changes and applicable standards which demand competency and relevant third party certification. With the support of key bodies including CFOA, the FPA and insurers, we continue to seek the acceptance of third party certification as the recognised industry benchmark. This, we believe, offers enormous benefits to customers of our products and services and indeed to the spectrum of organisations which collectively hold the responsibility for fire safety in the UK. We would welcome the views of the Select Committee in considering government support for third party certification.

Also under *Item 2a*, we wish to draw to your attention the ODPM document “A Guide to Reducing the Number of False Alarms from Fire Detection and Fire Alarm Systems”, produced jointly with the Chief Fire Officers Association and the British Fire Protection Systems Association. This was compiled in response to the need to reduce the number of unwanted alarms from fire detection systems. Connected with this initiative is the *CFOA Policy document on Fire and Rescue Services Response to Remotely Monitored Fire Alarm Systems* which sets out a policy involving the issue of Unique Reference Numbers (URNs) to facilitate the monitoring of such systems and requiring registered systems to be subject to recognised standards. The methodology has already been accepted by a large number of brigades and encompasses the monitoring of the number of false alarms arising from remotely monitored systems and the measures to be applied to owners of systems which give rise to an unacceptable level of false alarms.

The Policy will play a vital role in monitoring the problem of false alarms and, very importantly, is a key means by which these incidents may be reduced. Our request to the Select Committee is that the transition to a much smaller number of regional control centres retains this initiative as it is much too important to become lost when the new regime becomes active.

Under *Item 2b*, we comment on financial arrangements, specifically *the proposal for the fire authorities to charge for what we would term non-core activities*.

We indicate very serious concerns in relation to the proposals which we are aware are echoed by the Business and Community Safety Forum and other consultees to the original consultation as it existed. Our view is that charging for a number of non-core activities places in jeopardy the high esteem and confidence of the general public in the impartiality and integrity of the brigades. Also, to encourage them to enter the arena of the commercial supply and maintenance of equipment or the provision of consultancy, for example, is a clear conflict of interest. In addition, we believe the proposals to be fatally flawed in respect of competency and unfair competition. The path envisaged would not be in the best interests of the fire services,

the fire protection industry and indeed the community and commercial beneficiaries of the fire services. The brigades should, in our view, focus on core activities while leaving other responsibilities to the private sector which continues to bring proven experience and competence in its own products and services.

Despite strong opposition from many quarters, it appears that the fire and rescue services will be able to trade in fire training, consultancy, fire extinguisher maintenance and fire systems design, installation and maintenance during a transition period if there were already doing so. Others are now allowed to trade when the transition period ends provided that they are graded as fair, good or excellent according to the Fire CPA.

This offers virtually limitless powers to the services to compete against existing fire protection, consultancy and training businesses, including SMEs. We remain unconvinced that this would result in fair competition despite the assurance that trade must be conducted through a commercial arm and that pricing must be at the market rate. There appear to be no mechanisms in place to ensure that services are offered at market rate, which is difficult to define in any case.

The FIC also contends that the services may be ill-equipped to carry out some aspects of their newly-chargeable roles, including some aspects of consultancy and offering maintenance of fire protection products and systems. Expertise in these areas is not universal across all brigades' personnel and there is a real danger that improper advice and incorrect maintenance of potentially life-saving systems may result. Such is the esteem by which the service is held that brigade personnel will be perceived as the leading authority on certain issues when, in reality, they are not.

We understand further that the brigades have an obligation to inform customers that alternative suppliers exist. Again, there is no process which can monitor adherence to this obligation and it is difficult to imagine any such process which possibly could. With due respect to the fire services, it is hard to envisage any commercial arm trading for profit which is likely to inform customers fully of the alternative suppliers available.

In cases where legal action may ensue owing to any errors or negligence, the enforcing authority would be suing its own trading operation. This clearly represents a conflict of interest which is entirely inappropriate.

We understand that the argument in favour of allowing the services to charge for non-core activities is that they have long had the power to charge under the terms of the 1947 Act and, thus, that those opposing the proposals are urging removal of existing powers. The case stated by the FIC and others, however, is sufficiently rigorous in respect of unfair competition, conflict of interest and competency that a reconsideration is, in our view, warranted and indeed necessary.

Finally on this point, we have the most serious concerns relating to the conduct of the consultation process. Since the initial consultation, there has been a clear failure to observe any on-going follow-up procedure: no published collation of comments, no ODPM responses and no further review enabled for the respondents. We understand there were time constraints but for issues of this criticality, there can be no substitute for a proper and inclusive consultation process. Again, we would welcome consideration by the Select Committee of charging by brigades for non-core activities.

Also under *Item 2b*, we wish to comment please on the *National Procurement Strategy and FireBuy Ltd*.

News in September 2005 that FiReBuy Ltd was to be officially inaugurated and a Board sought for full activity from April 2006 ended a prolonged period of uncertainty regarding whether any such body would be formed to enact the principles of national procurement. This was followed, of course, by the publication of the National Procurement Strategy which sets out proposals in detail and recognises the key role to be played by industry through FIRESA in delivering a national function which is sustainable and which is tenable for both the vendors and their customers. Notwithstanding these positive indicators, government funding for FiReBuy is finite and there remains no clear path to providing the necessary financial support to the venture after the first two full years of operation. What is more, the longer term success of FiReBuy and the NPS itself depend also on strict adherence to national procurement of designated products and services as opposed to any opt-outs which may be signalled at local authority level. There are doubts whether this is fully achievable, in which case the strategy surely is subject to collapse.

The challenge ahead is a highly significant one if FiReBuy and its partners are to achieve effective national procurement mechanisms and we believe that the strategy holds very serious potential for failure of the plans to deliver the intended outcomes.

Now absorbed into FiReBuy, the Integrated Clothing Project (ICP) has been in development for some time and has been fraught with missed deadlines and changing contract criteria. One interpretation of the proposals which may emerge is that they indicate a primary vendor to supply a large proportion of the contract with others to provide to the exact specification of the lead supplier. Additionally, such contractual arrangements may be of exceptionally lengthy duration, seven or even fifteen years being reported. We have a mechanism here which seems unworkable in practice and it would be difficult to imagine how competitors of the primary supplier would be able, both technically and commercially, to manufacture to the lead design. This would create an impasse which might only be solved by awarding the entire contract to the primary vendor and creating a monopoly which is surely to be avoided. The duration of the contract is also immensely worrying as it benefits a limited number of successful bidders over a long period and discounts

the remaining unsuccessful ones over that same period. By the end of the first contract period, the sector will run the risk of having shrunk to the extent that there would be no competitive market when eventually a new tender is issued.

If the ICP is indicative of how other national procurement processes will be conducted, which include vehicles, protective equipment and respiratory apparatus, the issues apparent for the ICP will be multiplied across the fire and rescue procurement landscape and adversely affect all sectors of the fire and rescue supply industry.

It is essential that FiReBuy retains full management control over all national procurement projects such that correct and consistent principles are applied across the board. What is rather worrying is the level of fragmentation which is already apparent and which may worsen as more aspects of the national procurement strategy become active. Having one set of criteria governing the ICP, another for the RPE project and yet more for vehicles and other key goods and services appears to be a recipe for a disjointed approach as opposed to a concerted strategy where joined-up thinking creates a genuine national position. This may be made more complex still when existing longer term contracts and management service-based agreements are taken into consideration.

While cost savings are expected to be achieved as part of the new approach to procurement, we maintain that FiReBuy should not necessarily seek the option which is the least expensive initially when procuring products and services. There is not a de facto cost saving to the manufacturers inherent in the national proposals.

In essence, therefore, we see a number of potentially fatal issues within the national procurement process which we must all seek to avoid, steering a path instead to long-term solutions which enhance rather than decimate the market. Through the design of the FiReBuy processes and accelerated by market forces which result, the potential for a monopoly to arise within each supply sub-sector is one which we suggest has to be taken very seriously. Any reliance on primary suppliers and lengthy contracts would both contribute to this eventuality, creating an imbalance between initially successful bidders and those who were unsuccessful and resulting in fewer suppliers bidding for future contracts. We are also concerned that FiReBuy has the potential to develop as a set of distinct projects having different procurement criteria applied as opposed to providing consistent governance across all sectors captured by the National Procurement Strategy. We welcome Select Committee debate on these issues.

Under *Item 2* generally, we wish to refer please to *Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) and the forthcoming Fire Safety Order*. On the former, there is concern that the various IRMPs differ markedly in their format and hence we would welcome greater consistency across all IRMPs. On the latter, the fire authorities will continue to offer advice to building control bodies on whether their proposed fire safety measures are adequate. Since the Fire Safety Order will remove the requirement for fire certificates, requirements for risk assessment and implementation of necessary measures will be enforced principally by the authorities, this including monitoring and checking that requirements are being met. There is an apparent lack of formality and control on these processes, with no structure proposed to ensure appropriate policing of the risk assessment and resulting remedial actions by suitably competent and qualified persons. There clearly needs to be a link between building control who are responsible for new build and substantial structural changes to existing buildings and the fire authorities who assume ultimate responsibility for the built environment.

In final conclusion, we welcome generally the substantial and wide-ranging changes which the fire and rescue services are undergoing but have serious concerns on a number of key issues as noted above. Also, we thank you for the opportunity to raise our concerns in this response to the Select Committee which we trust will be duly considered by that Committee.

Memorandum by the FireWorks Project (FRS 62)

The FireWorks project wishes to submit the following findings and recommendations relating to equality and diversity within the Fire & Rescue Service:

- (i) *FireWorks for Equality in the Fire Service*—Executive Summary, published for the FireWorks Final Conference, 12–13 December 2005, Homerton College Cambridge.
- (ii) *Synopsis: Equality and Diversity—The Practitioners Role*, by Judy Foster UNISON and guest researcher, Anglia Ruskin University, FireWorks.

These documents are available on request from the Committee Office.

We believe our report will be a milestone in reporting and identifying issues that face the service in meeting its and the communities' aspirations for a Fire & Rescue Service that reflects the diversity of the communities it serves.

Our report not only builds on previous reports on diversity but also provides practical tools that will support all stakeholders in making a contribution. What is needed now is ownership of the recommendations. We hope the select committee can support FireWorks in embedding the recommendations of this project.

As for many public sector bodies the McPherson inquiry was a watershed and a catalyst for change. The Fire & Rescue Service carried out its own investigation commissioning three thematic reviews in 1998 and in 1999 and a further review in 2001 Bridging the gap. These reports have been reviewed as an integral part of the literature review of the FireWorks report.

Memorandum by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) (FRS 63)

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) represents approximately 48,000 members covering all ranks and duty systems in the fire & rescue service including approximately 4,000 officers, 11,500 firefighters working the retained duty system and 1,500 firefighters (control). This represents over 85% of all uniformed operational personnel currently serving in the fire & rescue services. The FBU welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence both written and verbal to the Select Committee and this submission deals with some of the key issues. We would also welcome the opportunity to appear before the Members of the Select Committee to support our submission and to attempt to answer any questions they may have upon it.

1.a OVERVIEW

- 1.(a)1 The FBU supports measures which genuinely improve the capacity of the fire service to deal with all types of incident and maintains or builds upon the high levels of resilience currently in place. Our members have a clear vested interest in measures which add to public protection and their own health and safety.
- 1.(a)2 The fire & rescue service has undergone major change and is still undergoing further far reaching change. The FBU has played a direct and active role in the New Dimension Project and the FireLink Project. In our view, however, FiReControl is a belated attempt to re-hash and bolt-on an old idea without it being properly thought out.
- 1.(a)3 FiReControl has no grounding in the New Dimension Project, the Bain Review, (December 2002), the Government's 2003 White Paper or the HM Fire Service Inspectorate's desk-based Analysis of the Best Value Reviews of Control and Communications (November 2003). We do not believe FiReControl improves the resilience of the fire service, and that its potential risks—both operationally and financially—greatly outweigh any potential rewards. We deal in Annexe 1 with what these various reports did say.
- 1.(a)4 Two Government commissioned reports from consultants Mott MacDonald the first of which (The Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communications in England and Wales, April 2000) recommended a reduction from 49 controls to 21, the second (The Future of Fire & Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales 2003) which recommended 9 new regional controls in England, one new control to serve London. The union produced a detailed response to both reports, the most relevant now being "Out of Control", published by the FBU in May 2004.
- 1.(a)5 We believe FiReControl is also the blueprint—without any public debate—for the beginnings of regional fire services that are far closer to national Government than to local authorities. We have our own proposals for the creation of a UK-wide network of "Resilience Controls" which we supply as Annexe 2 prior its official public launch on 25 January.
- 1.(a)6 The threat of terrorism is not new although its nature and the type of attack and the level of response needed may be. The fire service has dealt with the aftermath of major terrorist attacks for many, many years including the biggest ever loss of life—Lockerbie—and the biggest bomb ever used on mainland Britain—Manchester—and assisting in rescues from bomb damaged structures—Brighton. We have also dealt with a range of major environmental challenges caused by extreme weather conditions for many, many years.
- 1.(a)7 A project described in the Fire Control Project Outline Business Case Volume 1 (Abridged Main Text) November 2004 (OBC p 52 paragraph 141) as having a "high risk" of "total project failure" with a "high impact" if it does fail could, in our view, only be given the go ahead if there were severe problems with the current arrangements alongside very high confidence any new system would be substantially and measurably better. No such problems have ever been identified and the question has to be if it ain't broke why is it being fixed so strenuously? The Government track record on technology/change projects does not suggest that it can do better than "excellent" (OBC page 11, paragraph 30). We provide at Annexe 3 FBU published in January 2004 into the Government's track record on technology/change projects.
- 1.(a)8 There has also been recent and significant criticism of the operation of national Government helplines—and Mott MacDonald used a call centre model as the basis for both reports- where there were considerable problems even answering the telephone. Emergency fire controls are far more complex than the simple helplines which national Government continue to struggle to put right.

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- 1.(a)9 The FiReControl Project is one of the most technically demanding ever attempted by Government. The well publicised outcomes of far less complex IT/change Government projects is for them to be delivered late, over-budget or not functioning as originally planned. Sometimes all three.
 - 1.(a)10 The destruction of the existing “excellent” system would be a huge gamble with large amounts of public money, with FiReControl adding little additional measurable benefit in terms of lives saved even if it did work, with any failure resulting in a severe risk to public and firefighter safety. There is a real danger that runaway costs—possible with both FiReControl and FireLink—will mean that public money which is available to the fire & rescue service (from ODPM or from fire authorities) is siphoned off to pay for a very expensive communications system. With finite financial resources—either from the general taxpayer and business or council taxpayers—this could only result in a diminished frontline operational capability.
 - 1.(a)11 Neither Project adequately tackles the desperate need for more up-to-date Fireground communications to replace the current antiquated radio systems used by individual firefighters. Next to nothing has been done to address what is a genuine and pressing issue of how to instantly communicate with personnel at small and large incidents, a central lesson of 9/11. Even if billions are spent on FiReControl and FireLink, firefighters at incidents will still be left with a whistle to signal the need to carry out an emergency evacuation rather than all being simultaneously sent a radio message.
 - 1.(a)12 This Project has already demoralised those working in Emergency Fire Controls and has already resulted in the loss of skilled and experienced personnel. A broad view is that ODPM is neither listening nor wants to address concerns of many “stakeholders”, even those whom are nominally supportive or are resigned to having to support the Project. We attach at Annexe 4 sets of notes of meetings which highlight some of these issues.
 - 1.(a)13 We are not convinced that the location of many of the proposed controls are as resilient as claimed. Controls which are based in a mixture of retail and business parks, in some cases close to childcare nurseries or major retail outlets, some on known flood plains (while asserting they will deal with major flooding) and some very close to airports (post 9/11) do not, in our view, constitute an improvement in resilience. The proposed locations have the hallmarks of being chosen for cheapness and ease of gaining planning consent rather than the truly resilient locations they are claimed to be. “Finally, in the post-September 11 world our emergency control centres need to be resilient against attack or natural disaster” (Jim Fitzpatrick, 8th June Hansard Col 1234).
 - 1.(a)14 The situation and timing of the new London control is also unclear. London appeared at one stage to have negotiated its own “opt out” because it had all of the major concerns expressed by other fire & rescue authorities (see comments contained in Annexe 4). Its position is also being mis-represented. London is a single brigade control working to a single IRMP in a brigade with a relatively homogenous fire risk in a geographical area about a third of the size of Devon. It should not be mis-represented as a model for a regional control covering up to 9 brigades each with their own individual IRMPs, with more diverse risk patterns and more diverse duty systems covering areas perhaps fifteen times the geographical size of London. If London needs its own brigade control how can every other major conurbation in the UK (some of which have been terrorist targets in the past) do without theirs?

PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND SCOPE

- 1.(a)15 Both the Mott MacDonald reports were flawed. The acceptance of the second report on which FiReControl was built meant the entire project process—and the costing and savings estimates which were at the heart of it- was fundamentally flawed from the beginning. Those who “signed up” did so, on the basis of the deeply flawed prospectus which defined the FiReControl Project from the very beginning.
- 1.(a)16 Neither Mott MacDonald reports started with a proper understanding of the wide-ranging scope of the work of fire controls. Using a call-centre model typically used by roadside emergency organisations, both Mott MacDonald reports stripped down the work of future fire controls to call-taking, dispatch and incident monitoring roles.
- 1.(a)17 In turn, this was used to justify cutting staffing numbers to levels which could manufacture the “savings” needed to underpin claims that the introduction of regional fire controls would produce savings. Cuts to staffing numbers are central to the national business case promoted by ODPM and we find it disingenuous of them to maintain that actual staffing numbers would be a matter for each control. If this were truly the case there could be no guarantee that regional controls would have sufficient staff to automatically back-up other controls and no grounds for their stated confidence that savings will be made.
- 1.(a)18 Claims of “savings” based on staff cuts are at best precarious. Work arbitrarily missed from the list of the work considered “in scope” was—perversely—counted as a saving to the project.

Everyone agrees this work still needs to be done. It is still unclear what mixture of incident-related work and core fire & rescue service related work is included beyond the basics outlined by Mott MacDonald.

- 1.(a)19 The problem of what is in scope and out of scope was accepted by Fire Minister Jim Fitzpatrick in a written answer to a Parliamentary Question: as late as 2 December 2005 in which he said: “Some of the functions currently carried out by control room staff will remain elsewhere in Fire & Rescue Services.” (Official Report, 2 December 2005, Col 797W). This lack of forethought and understanding has resulted in the recent circulation by ODPM officials—after they have announced the sites of the proposed new regional controls- of a questionnaire to find out what work their current fire controls actually do (Official Report, Written Answer 14 October Col 609W). South East RMB pointed out some of the problems in a letter to ODPM of 9th May 2005: “Many of these key activities must be maintained to ensure operational viability and yet have not been considered as part of any reliable cost comparison. What is not yet clear is the scope of work to be undertaken by the RCC, and what will be residual ie what will remain for Fire & Rescue Authorities to continue to undertake.” We include this letter as part of Annexe 4.
- 1.(a)20 A number of Fire & Rescue Authorities also have Service Level Agreements or contractual arrangements in place for work such as handling out of hours calls for other local authority providers such as Social Services Departments. These have been made on a best value procurement basis and are enthusiastically supported by all political parties as demonstrating flexibility while producing significant revenue streams for fire & rescue authorities. As a result of the ODPM’s FiReControl proposal fire & rescue authorities will have to either negotiate themselves out of these contracts and lose revenue streams, or they will have to employ other staff to undertake the work. Both options are likely cost the business and council tax payer.
- 1.(a)21 The amount of all “Out of Scope” work is difficult to quantify and cost but it is significant and substantial. Oral reports from ODPM representatives to Regional Management Board meetings suggests this work amounts to between 30% and 70% of the work currently undertaken in controls. Claims of cost savings—central to the Project—appear to be little more than cost- shifting by moving work and costs “out of scope” and hence off the Project’s books.
- 1.(a)22 The lack of understanding of the work of existing fire controls—which remained long after critical decisions had been made—has a significant effect even on the “Project Costs” estimates which are “in scope”. The significant difference between the estimates contained in the Outline Business Case and the Strategic Outline Business Case which preceded it by a matter of months illustrates the link between poor project definition and rising project costs estimates. The result is that Mott MacDonald’s original project cost estimate of £100 million had to be multiplied TENFOLD to £988 million and estimated savings have had to be HALVED from £155 million to around £80 million (written answer Official Report 27 October 2005 Column 486W).
- 1.(a)23 To put these figures into some kind of context, the cost of the new Fortek mobilising system in Merseyside Fire & Rescue Authority, one of the larger brigades which covers a population of 1.5 million, cost £690,000. This project came in under budget. The ODPM uses Merseyside as an example of best practice. The costs of the Merseyside Fortek mobilising system provide an idea as to potential costs of rolling out this system to those brigades which do not yet have access to the very latest technology. It is an option certainly worth considering with some open-minded vigour in line with our own proposals for a UK-wide network of “Resilience Controls”.

NOT TRIED AND TESTED

- 1.(a)24 Technology which can work at brigade level cannot be assumed to be “tried and tested” at a regional level, never mind as part of a national network of control centres, and there are no obvious “models” to follow. In any event, national Government’s known track record using genuinely tried and tested technology in a range of far less complex yet major IT/change projects does not fill us with confidence. As the OBC pointed out: “There is no precedent for a regional structure to deliver an operational function such as this.” (page 79, paragraph 110). The risks outlined in the OBC are project specific and significant while “existing arrangements for delivering core services (including call-taking and dispatch functions) is perceived to be excellent.” (OBC Page 11, paragraph 30). The OBC assesses the risk of “delay or even total project failure” as “high” with a “very high” impact if it does fail. The risk is so high, not simply because the project is unique, but because “the recent history of delivering IT/change projects in the public sector has demonstrated a less than 50% success rate.” (OBC page 52 paragraph 141).
- 1.(a)25 There is a high risk/high impact “that the current provisional timescales may not be achieved” which would “increase project cost”. (OBC page 52, paragraph 142). There is a high risk/high impact that Council Tax may be pushed up as a result of cost overruns. The report says: “Failure to deliver economies would reduce the resources available to further service aims and objectives, and might impact on Council Tax” (page 52 paragraph 142). ODPM claims that

there can be no financial impact on fire & rescue authorities or implications for council tax because “new burdens” funding will cover the payments are doubtful. In a letter to ODPM on 9th May 2005 the South East RMB (mentioned previously as Annexe 4) pointed out the weakness of this claim highlighting the fact there are currently additional costs which are already costs not being covered by “new burdens” funding. The costs of the Project are already beginning to bite into the funds of cash-strapped fire & rescue authorities and may have already contributed to some of the cuts in frontline services which have already taken place.

SERVICE DELIVERY

- 1.(a)26 Existing fire & rescue service controls have to comply with guidelines set out in GD92 (outlined in 1992 and evaluated a success in Specifications of a Communications Infrastructure for Fire Service Mobilising Systems GD-92/1003A/2.2, Home Office Fire Research and Development Group 1/96 and Evaluation of GD92 Framework Summary Report, CFBAC Research Report Number 73, 1997) which sets down standards of, for example, resilience and fall-back. GD92 does not specify that all control systems are identical, but rather that they all must comply with key requirements. We are not aware—in the immediate wake of 9/11 or since—of any attempt by ODPM to change or amend those guidelines to set different criteria. We are not aware of any blanket failures identified by HMFI inspections. Challenged in a Parliamentary Question, ODPM was unable to produce details of any incidents where there were any failures involving emergency fire controls at any time in the last 30 years (Official Report, 12 December 2005, Col 1722W).
- 1.(a)27 Many of the benefits claimed for the FiReControl project are supplied solely or largely by FireLink. This includes the re-establishment of interoperability with police and ambulance radio systems, Mobile Data Terminals in vehicles (for those brigades which do not already have them) and Automatic Vehicle Location (for those brigades which do not already have it). Taken on its own, there is little that FiReControl substantially adds of tangible or measurable benefit over and above that which already exists or will be provided by FireLink.
- 1.(a)28 Claims about quicker response times as a result of FiReControl are unsustainable as the current system is already so fast any possible reduction could only be a matter of seconds. The basis for these claims appears to be Automatic Caller Location, which has been available for some time. It currently only works with BT lines; with mobiles it only gives a generalised radius of location and in any event the caller’s location in most cases is not the actual location of the incident. ACL is only used for validation purposes, and in almost no circumstances as the primary source of information, and good call handling—the skill to elicit information from people who may be in panic—will still be essential.
- 1.(a)29 In a Parliamentary Answer the Fire Minister claimed the RCCs would reduce the time from call-taking to arrival of an appliance or appliances at an incident. (Official Report 21 July Col 2089W). We welcome the acknowledgment that there is a link between savings lives and speed of response. But ODPM is fully aware that many fire & rescue authorities have actually significantly extended or are considering significantly extending the time between call-taking and arriving at incidents. We must challenge ODPM to detail the faster response times of the future, what response time targets they intend to set fire & rescue authorities, and how they intend to measure how these will be met. It seems unusual that ODPM are prepared to spend huge sums of money to possibly cut response times by a few seconds while fire & rescue authorities are extending those response times by several minutes with the net result being considerably slower response times than currently exist.
- 1.(a)30 Regional and national co-operation at significant incidents has been a feature of the fire service for many, many years. The ODPM claim that FiReControl will improve firefighter safety because better information will be available to fire crews on the way to incidents is also unsustainable. Again, this is not new, and in any event this functionality will be either exclusively or largely provided by FireLink Mobile Data Terminals and not by the FiRe Control Project.
- 1.(a)31 We understand the need to develop new practices to improve national resilience. But we believe a more cohesive approach which could command widespread support is contained in Annexe 2.

1.b FIRELINK

- 1.(b)1 FireLink has always been a stand alone project and pre-dates FiReControl by many years. It is not dependent upon FiReControl although FiReControl is dependent upon FireLink. ODPM paints a picture of what regional controls will do without distinguishing between what is provided by FireLink and what will be added by FiReControl. FireLink will re-establish interoperability with police and ambulance radio systems although this appears to be restricted to “Gold” and “Silver” Command level (Written Answer, Official Report 13 October Col 553). It is unclear whether FireLink is intended to provide the facility for personnel in a fire appliance

to “speak” to officers in a police car or paramedics in an ambulance. FireLink will provide Mobile Data Terminals in vehicles (for those brigades which do not already have them) as well as Automatic Vehicle Location (for those brigades which do not already have it).

- 1.(b)2 In respect of FireLink there are two rival radio network systems; one a TETRA-based (O2) while the other is TETRAPOL-based (EADS). There are well-documented health & safety questions about TETRA based systems with the Home Office carrying out a 15-year £5 million pound research programme with the police service. We can find no documented concerns about TETRAPOL-based systems and it is of considerable concern that this issue appears to have played no part in the deliberations of the ODPM in relation to the fire & rescue service. It also needs to be established whether either or both bidders will need additional telecom masts to be added to secure sufficient radio coverage for the fire & rescue service. This is clearly an area of some public concern and may create a potential conflict of interest for ODPM in its planning role.
- 1.(b)3 Unlike FiReControl, very little is known about the estimated costs of FireLink. The estimated cost—O2 is the ODPM’s preferred bidder—has not been made public but FireLink was referred to in an ODPM press release as a “multi million” pound project. (ODPM press release 2005/0231, 11 November 2005). The charging structure is unclear; particularly what costs are “core” project costs carried by Government and what may be additional costs for airtime, data transfer, maintenance or other additional costs which may be carried by fire & rescue authorities. Any such additional costs, if borne by fire & rescue authorities, could amount to considerable revenue streams for either of the successful bidders and amount to a significant drain of fire & rescue authority funds.
- 1.(b)4 In any event the costs of FireLink are likely to be significant as the police system in England—under a PFI contract—has been costed at £2.9 billion (O2 Airwave Press Release 1 April 2005) and the ambulance service in England have signed up to a project costing £390 million. (O2 Airwave Press Release 19 July 2005). If O2 subsequently secures the contract it would lead to the creation of a monopoly provider of radio networks to the three central 999 services in England. There is also an issue of resilience. O2 has recently announced the creation of a National Fallback System for the police although, interestingly, the cost of this additional contract is not mentioned (O2 Press Release 31 October 2005). It is unclear whether this is being offered to the fire & rescue service and if so at what, if any, additional cost and whether the Government or fire & rescue authorities would foot the bill. It is also unclear what will happen if, for example, the police seek changes to the system to suit their operational or other requirements which have a knock on effect for the fire & rescue service in terms of functionality and cost.
- 1.(b)5 The lack of transparency over the cost, charging structure in the bidding and assessment process for FireLink only adds to our general concerns that the overall costs of this and FiReControl will lead to increased pressure for cuts in frontline services.

2. The FBU is currently engaged in surveying its membership seeking their views on a number of issues of interest to the Select Committee. This survey will be made available to the Select Committee as soon as it is available.

2(i) CIVIL RESILIENCE

- 2(i).1 The FBU has played an active and positive role in the change and modernisation of fire & rescue service for many years, before and since the publication of the White Paper in 2003. The Committee does have particular regard to civil resilience and we have prepared a separate Annex 5 outlining some issues which are also touched upon in Annex 2.
- 2(i).2 We have broader concerns about preparedness and planning for civil resilience and in particular whether lessons have been learned from the exercises carried out so far and from major incidents such as the 7 July London bombings and the major fire at Buncefield (where the available equipment was highly praised).
- 2(i).3 The fact that the London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority Commissioner has asked for significantly more mass-decontamination units supports our long-standing concerns about the amount of equipment available and the numbers of personnel trained to use it; both of these are very significant issues at all incidents and more so at protracted ones. If London needs a total of 16 Incident Response Units (plus the associated support crews of 40 firefighters per Unit) how many may the rest of the UK now need?
- 2(i).4 We face worse scenarios involving quite possibly several major incidents hundreds of miles apart. If we do not learn the lessons about the numbers of personnel and equipment needed for both the 7 July and the Buncefield incidents we risk being very thinly spread in dealing with the far worse scenarios which are all too foreseeable.
- 2(i).5 The public are repeatedly told of the risks now faced in the new and changed world; risks which have been transformed into reality and which have now arrived with a vengeance. We see no

signs that ODPM has moved away from the cuts-based agenda which has driven it since the dispute and we strongly believe it has to re-assess its commitments to the cuts which have already started in a service which provides the frontline response to any major incident.

- 2(i).6 A central fault line in current national resilience planning is that IRMPs allow fire & rescue authorities to “manage” their local risks and in some instances contemplate and carry out significant cuts in personnel. We see little evidence that they are assessing risk and planning their levels of personnel with any view to the national need to be capable of responding to a series of protracted major incidents. And we see little evidence that ODPM is giving sufficient, if any, guidance on this matter; guidance that is urgently needed before the collective national response capability of the service is degraded any further.

2(ii) INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLANNING (IRMP)

- 2(ii).1 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister introduced the system of local Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland effective April 2004. The Scottish Executive introduced a similar system of IRMP for Scotland effective April 2005.
- 2(ii).2 Section 62 of the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004 devolved responsibility for the fire & rescue service in Wales to the Welsh Assembly Government, which is currently consulting on proposals to introduce a system of fire & rescue authority Risk Reduction Plans (RRPs) in place of Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs). The final Welsh model is likely to focus on reducing risk rather than simply “managing” it.
- 2(ii).3 The ODPM’s 2003 White Paper set two “prevention-based” targets to drive IRMP. These targets now only apply to English brigades. Pages 26–31 of Annex 9 (the FBU’s 2004 National IRMP Document) gives further background to these targets, which are:
- 2(ii).4 “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 of 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.”
- 2(ii).5 The FBU supports the general principles of prevention, protection and intervention which underpin IRMP; however we are concerned that the primary focus for IRMP in England appears to have become a reduction in accidental fire-related deaths in the home through preventative initiatives alone.
- 2(ii).6 This preventative focus on direct life risk in the home effectively sidelines the intervention and rescue role of the service at dwelling fires, the wider emergency response and rescue role of the service at other fires and emergency incidents, and the positive effect of the protection afforded by legislative fire safety to UK businesses, their employees, the general public and the national building stock.
- 2(ii).7 Additionally the FBU is concerned at a growing trend by senior managers within fire & rescue services to re-categorise fire deaths as either being “preventable” or “not preventable”. Categorising fire deaths in this way essentially introduces a local “value judgement” into the IRMP process which is not found in any ODPM guidance on IRMP. The danger of this type of local “re-classification” is that these value judgements may then be relied upon by service managers to justify the use of resources in a particular way in a brigade.
- 2(ii).8 Currently the ODPM classifies fire deaths as being either accidental (ie the fire which led to the fire death started accidentally) or not accidental (ie the fire which led to the fire death was started deliberately). The FBU recognises that this is the only valid classification which can be made of fire deaths and believes that the ODPM should issue clear guidance to fire & rescue authorities in this respect. Pages 29 and 30 of Annex 9 refer.
- 2(ii).9 To be robust and reliable, the Integrated Risk Management Planning process must consider all applicable risks and risk reduction measures available, ie prevention, protection and emergency response.
- 2(ii).10 Whilst any reduction in fire deaths in the home which may be attributed to successful local preventative initiatives is welcomed by the FBU, the contribution of fire & rescue service emergency response to saving lives in England has been consistently demonstrated over the last 10 years.
- 2(ii).11 Successful rescues by firefighters from fires in dwellings have risen from 2,716 in 1994 to 3,868 in 2003. Successful rescues by firefighters from all fires have risen from 3,222 in 1994 to 4,341 in 2003. These figures do not include persons who escape before the arrival of the service, or those who are evacuated as a result of a fire. The full 10 year rescue statistics were revealed in a written answer to Parliamentary Question on 16 June 2005 (House of Commons Fire [1632] 16 June 2005).

2(ii).13 Jim Fitzpatrick: The number of people rescued alive from fires by fire & rescue service personnel in England are shown for each year 1994 to 2003 in the following table.

	<i>Rescued casualties</i> ⁽⁹⁾		<i>Rescued unharmed</i> ⁽¹⁰⁾		<i>All people rescued alive</i>	
	<i>All fires</i>	<i>Dwelling fires</i>	<i>All fires</i>	<i>Dwelling fires</i>	<i>All fires</i>	<i>Dwelling fires</i>
1994	2,072	1,815	1,150	901	3,222	2,716
1995	2,317	2,034	1,155	918	3,472	2,952
1996	2,442	2,138	1,022	864	3,464	3,002
1997	2,684	2,347	889	701	3,573	3,048
1998	2,545	2,300	959	811	3,504	3,111
1999	2,511	2,252	1,413	1,043	3,924	3,295
2000	2,728	2,641	2,155	1,627	4,883	4,268
2001	2,671	2,412	1,409	1,176	4,080	3,588
2002 ⁽¹¹⁾	2,829	2,580	1,763	1,589	4,592	4,169
2003 ⁽¹¹⁾	2,735	2,441	1,606	1,427	4,341	3,868

⁽⁹⁾ Based on all primary fires attended. Casualties include people who were injured or required a precautionary check-up.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Based on a grossed up 20% sample of primary fires attended.

⁽¹¹⁾ Data include estimates for incidents not recorded during periods of national industrial action in 2002 and 2003.

Source: Fire & Rescue Service FDR1 returns to ODPM.

2(ii).14 Similarly, the protection based fire safety enforcement activities of fire & rescue authorities since 1961 have led to a reduction in deaths and injuries from fires beyond the home. So much so that the significant majority of workplace injuries due to fire relate to process risks—the handling of flammable liquids or dangerous substances—which are not the responsibility of fire & rescue authorities. This success however is no reason for fire & rescue authorities to reduce their fire safety enforcement activities. The recent major incident at the Total Oil terminal in Hemel Hempstead has vividly demonstrated this.

2(ii).15 Clearer ODPM guidance on risk-based response planning is needed to ensure that brigades are adopting a common emergency response methodology under IRMP. The FBU advocates the Critical Attendance Standard (CAST) methodology (pages 32–43 of Annexe 9) in this respect; a methodology which is based on risk & task analysis. However to date the ODPM has not issued an IRMP Guidance Note on the risk-based response planning process, despite this being an integral part of IRMP as demonstrated by the ODPM's rescue statistics.

2(ii).16 The process of risk-based response planning is independent of, yet complimentary to, the use of computer risk modelling (such as the ODPM's Fire Service Emergency Cover [FSEC] model) which seeks to map areas of similar risk in brigades. The very brief reference to risk-based response planning (page 10 of ODPM document "Preparation for the FSEC Toolkit"—February 2004) must now form part of bespoke ODPM IRMP Guidance if it is Government's intention to demonstrate a real commitment to a truly integrated approach to IRMP.

2(ii).17 Risk-based response planning methodology, and the system of measurement which underpins it, should be the same throughout England to allow valid comparisons between brigades on a like-for-like basis, and to satisfy communities that like-risk will receive a like-response irrespective of location in England.

2(ii).18 Effective Integrated Risk Management Planning is potentially a detailed and complex process. A large number of apparently conflicting factors have to be taken into account. However as the IRMP process should essentially be about reducing risk, there is a simple formula that can be applied to each and every proposal in a local IRMP which will measure whether the proposed strategy increases risk or decreases risk. The FBU terms this the "Intervention Window" test. Pages 44–51 of Annexe 9 refer. The FBU commends this formula to the ODPM for a future IRMP Guidance Note to fire & rescue authorities.

2(iii) RETAINED

2(iii).1 There is a UK-wide shortage of 3,000 firefighters working the retained duty system leaving many areas with a depleted service. It is a duty system misunderstood even within the fire & rescue service which has been historically undervalued.

2(iii).2 The recruitment and retention problem must be addressed and we are disappointed that the ODPM has done little to address the problem which will get worse without long-term

investment. Making do with inadequate resources and trading on the goodwill of an already over-stretched workforce and their main employers can only be short-term. This approach creates problems with retention and recruitment to a genuinely community-based service.

- 2.(iii).3 The union was disappointed that the ODPM's negative approach to the recruitment and retention problem was to see it as an opportunity to introduce slower response times and reduced levels of response. A more positive approach would include providing incentives to employers to release staff and building better links with business and the self employed; persuading public sector employers to encourage their workforce to work the retained duty system; recruitment underpinned by equal treatment, equal pay and equal rights; ending the current practice of using surplus money from retained budgets (because of lack of recruitment) for other purposes. The provision of proper pension rights, sick leave and training would also enhance recruitment.

2.a FIRE PREVENTION

- 2.(a)1 We attach as Annexe 6 a fuller view on fire prevention. In summary we believe there needs to be a Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) underpinning a new PSA target relating to the fire protection role of the fire & rescue services based upon their statutory involvement with fire safety in non domestic buildings, the enforcement of fire safety legislation and in advising upon the fire safety elements of the design and construction of new or altered buildings.
- 2.(a)2 There needs to be clear and strong guidance on the enforcement of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO) which is due to come into force on 1 April 2006 to ensure the enforcement activities of fire & rescue authorities are properly carried out. We see little or no evidence that this will in fact be the case or that any targets are being set for them to do so. We have significant concerns over the near-ending in some brigades of the fire certification regime. The running down of this regime pre-dates even the introduction of the Order to the House.
- 2.(a)3 There needs to be a meaningful review of the stakeholder consultation process. In its haste to rid itself of the national committee structure offered by the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, the ODPM had little or no idea of what it would do to replace the functions that the CFBAC offered, including the creation of policy documents that all organisations were signed up to. The national structure no longer exists leading to disputes which are breaking out across the fire & rescue services in England.

2.b NJC

- 2.(b)1 On the 14 October 1999 the then Secretary of State to the Home Department, Jack Straw instituted, at the request of the Local Government Association, an independent inquiry into the future arrangements for determining firefighters' conditions of service. Frank Burchill, Professor of Industrial Relations, Keele University, was appointed by Mr Mike O'Brien MP on 25 November 1999 to undertake the Inquiry. His report was submitted in March 2000.
- 2.(b)2 The National Joint Council agreed to work together to act upon the recommendations contained within the report. The Fire Brigades Union played an active and constructive role in the implementation of the recommendations.
- 2.(b)3 Although there remained areas of disagreement between the Local Government Employers and the FBU, it was felt that the new machinery would assist in resolving these. The Union then tabled a claim for an increase in pay in May 2002. What resulted has been referred to as the Fire Service Pay Dispute.
- 2.(b)4 Prolonged negotiations followed, which led directly to government intervention and the Fire & Rescue Services Act 2004. This act came into force after the resolution to the dispute which was in accordance with an agreement in June 2003 between the Employers and the Employees side of the National Joint Council. This agreement included in Paragraph 7.1 "By 30 November 2003 a working group representative of fire service stakeholders will propose revision to the constitution of the NJC. The report of this working group will be presented to the appropriate fire service stakeholders for ratification during December 2003." Rita Donaghy, Chair of ACAS, was appointed to convene and chair the working party. By agreement the deadline for the completion of the report was extended to 31 January 2004.
- 2.(b)5 Rita Donaghy submitted her report in January 2004 (attached as Annexe 7). It was ratified by the Fire Brigades Union national executive at a meeting in January 2004. The Employers side of the NJC however asked to continue working with ACAS to clarify some points surrounding the proposed Middle Managers' negotiating body.
- 2.(b)6 The Employers side of the NJC agreed to consider the proposals at a meeting on 17 February 2004 at which they could not come to an agreement. Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the TUC, wrote to the Chair of the Local Government Association on 21 February in the hope that Sir Sandy Bruce Lockhart might bring some influence to bear on the Employers side to

resolve the situation. Sir Sandy Bruce Lockhart replied on 4 March stating “Employers were now making proposals which they believe will help to establish permanently the more settled relations in the service”. He concluded that it was his view that “these discussions should be pursued further within the joint machinery.”

- 2.(b)7 The FBU remains committed to the recommendations made by Rita Donaghy and have recently agreed to have further discussions with the Employers on the Constitution of the NJC. It should however be pointed out that it has taken almost 9 months for the Employers to make any formal approach to the union regarding the constitution of the NJC.
- 2.(b)4 It is our strong view that the Negotiating Machinery for Local Authority Fire Brigades should, as Sandy Bruce Lockhart previously stated, remain “within the joint machinery”.

2.c DIVERSITY

- 2.(c)1 The FBU’s women representatives, gay & lesbian representatives and black & ethnic minority representatives have each provided their own detailed submission which is included at Annexe 8. These representatives have been recognised as the most important and most effective advocates of equality and diversity within the UK fire & rescue service for many years. It is of deep regret, and appears particularly perverse, that FBU representatives have been excluded from the equality debate at the “Diversity Happens” Programme Board.

3. COOPERATION

3.1 The FBU supports greater cooperation and collaboration between the fire & rescue service and other agencies; this already occurs on a regular basis. There is significant joint-working with the police, ambulance and coastguard including joint exercises. We welcome collaboration with social services and voluntary organisations to assist in identifying vulnerable groups. There is considerable joint working with organisations which deal with young offenders and there are several LIFE projects aimed at helping young offenders break the cycle of offending and re-offending.

3.2 There is a big difference between cooperation and collaboration and taking on the work of other emergency services as demonstrated by the different variations of “co-responding”. Co-responding in practice places the fire & rescue service in a position where it is taking over the role of the ambulance service in attending what are major medical emergencies. In practice it is often driven by the inability of ambulance services (some of them regional ambulance services) to hit target response times for major emergencies. In those areas where co-responding does take place or is being piloted, the fire & rescue service is sometimes sent alone and the incidents can involve anything from serious medical emergencies to members of the public who have collapsed drunk in the street. The FBU has never been presented with any proposals at a national level on co-responding, and any that were presented would need to address our serious concerns. These would include the additional burden of significant extra work for those working the retained duty system which is currently drastically under-strength, and the overall impact on a public service which the ODPM remains firmly intent on cutting.

Memorandum by Colin Ive MBA (FRS 64)

As a Retained firefighter for the past 25 years, 23 of them as Officer in Charge of a busy single pump Retained fire station in Hampshire I’m totally dismayed by the continual discrimination poured upon us and it is this discrimination which has finally worn me down to the point where I plan to leave the service in the next few months. Despite the commitment and regular sacrifices I have seen Retained firefighters give, in particular during the time when so many tried to keep their local communities safe during the FBU dispute in 2003, all the promises of modernisation, the proposals from the Bain report and the much promised, but it seems soon forgotten, Retained Review have hardly made any impact down at the grass roots level.

As I write all the Retained Sub Officers in charge of Retained fire stations in Hampshire are to be demoted as part of the Rank to Role process, a process which seems to have been hijacked at county level with additional local “conventions” which have encouraged this demotion. This at a time when the opportunities should be being pursued to use such people more effectively in the safety of their communities by using them and their staff widely in prevention duties.

Community Fire Safety save lives reduces fires and reduces the financial losses from fires. I know, my station has been practicing this for the past six years; entirely voluntarily we have raised funds locally, over £33,000, to purchase smoke detectors, 13,272 in total, and freely distributed these as personal issue to our local school children for fitting into their bedrooms. We know this has been worthwhile, we have met the family of four one who awoke in the middle of the night to one of these sounding and alerting them to what would without doubt have been a serious and very probably fatal house fire. Yet we are now told to cease this work as it is not “service policy” and recently described by a senior officer as “amateurish”. It wasn’t thought amateurish when we started this program in 1999, it wasn’t “amateurish” last year when we were

judged as finalists in the National Fire Safety Awards, and not of course by the family one saved or by the many others who would have suffered fires had not an early warning from an alarm have altered them before any need to call 999 was required. This program was of zero cost to the service, saved lives and contributed directly to the safety of our community, yet we have been ordered to stop. True a Home Fire Safety Check for each household is being promoted by the service but this will take many years, if ever to complete. Our program would have provided free added value to the service CFS policy but has been simply thrown away.

The government identified that the Retained Fire Service is “Firefighting on the cheap” and that much needs to be done by Fire Services to improve both recruitment and retention within Retained Fire Fighting. But perhaps most poignant is the requirement that “Retained Fire fighters need to be properly valued as part of the Integrated Risk Management Process”. Hampshire’s response to this by continually discriminating against this one specific group of employees is a management failure. Such failure seems common within the British fire service served by many senior officers who clearly appear incapable of transferring their abilities to manage a fire or rescue incident into that of managing an organisation or teams of people in ways which produces a motivated, effective and efficient workforce. Retained firefighters are the most efficient firefighting workforce one could have but they are daily becoming less effective by being continually demotivated in so many ways.

Despite the rhetoric one may hear I can tell you from the coal, or fire, face that we are not valued nor is our potential recognised, we could do so much more but in so many ways we are, apart from a few notable exceptions, being motivated into doing less and less.

Our communities deserve better than this.

Memorandum by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (FRS 65)

1. INTRODUCTION

1. The Health & Safety At Work etc Act 1974 (HSWA) and relevant subordinate regulations apply to the Fire and Rescue Services (F&RS) as they do to any other work activity, with the Fire Authorities holding the duties of employers. (There are a few specific exceptions in the details of subordinate legislation recognising particular technical issues faced by FRS.) A summary of the main features of HSWA is given in Appendix A

2. The context for HSE’s work is set by the Health and Safety Commission (HSC). HSC has overall responsibility for policy on health and safety, and, uniquely among other government regulators, advises Ministers on relevant standards and regulations. The Chair and members of the Commission are appointed by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. HSE advises and assists HSC and has a statutory responsibility to make adequate arrangements for the enforcement of the Act and other relevant statutory provisions in Great Britain. HSE implements its share of the HSC work plan, itself approved by Ministers, and exercises a number of functions that HSC delegates to it.

3. HSE inspects F&RS activities locally and maintains close working relations with ODPM and national F&RS stakeholder bodies. This interaction is guided by the HSC strategy “*A Strategy for Workplace Health and Safety in Great Britain to 2010 and beyond*” and the agenda of the Ministerial Taskforce on Health, Safety and Productivity in the Public Service. Further details of the latter, along with information about another main HSE work stream with the F&RS, are described below.

4. In addition to the application of health and safety legislation to protect fire service employees themselves, HSE has enforcement responsibility for all fire precautions (including general fire precautions) in certain sectors where this is appropriate because of the nature of the work, such as offshore installations, underground mines, nuclear sites, ships under construction and repair and some construction sites. More generally, though in most workplaces the local fire authority is responsible for general fire precautions, HSE also has responsibility in relation to process fire precautions. More information is provided on these matters and relevant relations with the fire service in Appendix B.

5. In regulating major hazards we work closely with local fire services, jointly devising and exercising emergency plans. These arrangements work well and provide a coordinated service for dutyholders.

6. In particular, HSE staff work in cooperation with local and regional fire and rescue services in the assessment of emergency response plans that have been submitted for COMAH sites ie sites subject to special regulation because of the large inventories of dangerous substances kept there. They also discuss the adequacy of generic emergency arrangements for non COMAH major hazard sites. HSE operational inspectors and technical staff who attend in the event of a real major hazards incident, work in close cooperation with the onsite incident commander to assist in ensuring the rescue and emergency response is conducted appropriately.

7. HSE's Nuclear Safety Directorate (NSD) interacts extensively with the Fire & Rescue Services in connection with emergency arrangements at nuclear sites. This involves discussions and exercises at local, regional and national levels. NSD also participates with CFOA in attending DTI's Nuclear Emergency Planning Liaison Group. In the event of a nuclear incident staff from HSE's Nuclear Safety Directorate are available to give specific advice.

8. Under HSE's duties as a Category 2 responder under the Civil Contingency Act staff have been working with the Fire and services and other category 1 responders to develop local and regional resilience risk registers and associated action plans. In the event of a civil contingency event HSE staff will be available to assist fire and rescue services by providing information they have about the industrial processes involved; advice on such things as risks to workers, safe systems of work, safe systems for testing whether decontamination are successful and to assist with investigating causes/initiating events.

2. CONTACTS BETWEEN HSE AND THE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

9. Because of the varied risks that firefighters have to approach and accept as part of their work, health and safety considerations naturally permeate most F&RS operational planning, training, and equipment design and purchase. HSE is therefore very often consulted by national stakeholders and provides them with technical and legal advice.

10. To promote the application of sensible health and safety and for effective consultation over issues that affect the whole service, HSE maintains close connections with ODPM and national F&RS stakeholder bodies. In particular, HSE is represented on the Practitioners Forum, the National Health & Safety Group that reports to the Practitioners forum and the CFOA Health & Safety Committee. HSE also advises some specialist committees on health and safety considerations that may arise in their work eg the Practitioners Forum New Dimensions Sounding Board and the ODPM IRMP Steering Group.

11. These links are important as they facilitate efficient national collaboration between HSE and the F&RS on standards, technical solutions and guidance, which are then available to the individual dutyholders throughout the country. The new bodies such as the Practitioners Forum and the National Health and Safety Group have been allocated significant health and safety tasks and, as mentioned above, health and safety issues will arise in many of the other tasks they undertake. It is important that they have their own adequate access to health and safety expertise and advice so that health and safety considerations can be taken on board in their discussions and decisions in such a way as to lead to appropriate and realistic health and safety requirements/coverage in their work.

3. MAIN CURRENT HSE WORK STREAMS ON HEALTH & SAFETY IN THE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

(i) Ministerial Task Force Agenda & Sickness Absence Research Project

12. Following the publication of the Government/HSC "Revitalising" initiative in 2000 the HSC recognised that the public sector (which accounts for 20% of the workforce) needed to make a contribution, especially for days lost through work related ill health. The programme aimed to achieve a 30% reduction in the number of days lost to work related injury and ill health in the public sector by 2010.

13. In 2004, recognising that top level commitment was a key to success, the then Minister for Work (Des Browne) asked HSE to establish the Ministerial Task Force on Health, Safety and Productivity in the public sector (MTF) to provide the impetus to deliver reduced sickness absence. Further information on the MTF, on which ODPM is represented, is provided in Appendix C

14. HSE will be working with ODPM and, in the first instance, national F&RS stakeholder bodies—including the Audit Commission—to promote the MTF agenda in the fire and rescue service. As the first major work stream, HSE and ODPM have agreed to work together on a joint research project which will pick up issues raised in the Thematic Review "Fit for Duty? Seeking a healthier Fire Service," on sickness absence and ill-health retirements in the Fire Service, undertaken by HMFSI published in 2000.

15. As a starting point, the project will revisit the recommendations of "Fit for Duty" to see what has been implemented, to what effect and what further action may be appropriate, given the many changes since the review was published.

16. The project will provide the background and impetus for enhancing the uptake in the F&RS of the key elements that the Ministerial Task Force is looking to public sector employers to adopt in order to achieve its target of a 30% reduction in sickness absence. These are:

- (i) introduction and use of management systems to provide for real time recording and audit and agreed trigger points for interventions;
- (ii) integration of absence and performance management;
- (iii) training of staff managers in systems and procedures of absence management and skills to manage members of staff who are off sick; and
- (iv) providing sufficient support for managers and people on sickness absence from Human Resources and related support services, including formal access to occupational health services focused on early appropriately targeted effective interventions and early return to work.

17. ODPM collects and publishes statistics on sickness absence levels on an annual basis from all Fire & Rescue Services in England. (Scotland has always been separate, while responsibility for the F&RS in Wales has now been devolved to the Welsh Assembly). ODPM had set targets to reduce sickness absence from 9.2 shifts per person in 1998–99 to an average of 6.5 shifts per person for fire fighters and from 13.4 to 5.4 shifts per person for fire control staff by March 2005. An analysis of the statistics for the three most recent years for which data is available (2001–2004) shows that absence levels have remained static (no upward or downward trend) and that targets set by ODPM for 2005 are unlikely to be met. (It is accepted that this is set against a background of national industrial action and ongoing local disputes.)

18. HSE is working with stakeholders to develop the way forward with this project. For the first stage of this project, we are considering a qualitative approach to map what individual fire and rescue services have done to reduce sickness absence, the impact of their efforts and initiatives and the reasons behind their success or otherwise. We will also be assessing their sickness absence management systems, occupational health provision and management training for enabling and supporting the improvements necessary to achieve the MTF target. Depending on what is discovered in this first phase, pilot projects will be set up to test products and good practice strategies and approaches aimed at implementing the key elements of the MTF recommendations, as outlined above, and overcoming any barriers that may be identified.

(b) *HSE—Fire & Rescue Service Inspection Protocol*

19. HSE is keen to work with the F&RS and national stakeholders to ensure that the health and safety of both the public that the F&RS serve and that of F&RS employees themselves is preserved.

20. As an aid to clarifying and setting guidelines for the relationship between HSE and the F&RS, HSE has been negotiating the text of a “Protocol on the Inspection of Fire and Rescue Service Activities by the Health and Safety Executive” which will be signed by representatives of the fire service employers organisations in England, Scotland and Wales and relevant government bodies. The Fire Brigades Union has also been consulted about the text, which is now nearing completion.

21. The Protocol sets out guidance on HSE’s inspection and enforcement activity within the F&RS and provides background on factors taken into account when considering compliance in the F&RS with the requirements of HSWA.

22. The Protocol recognises the duties placed on F&RA’s to make provision for the core functions described in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 in Scotland) and the context set by the National Framework under which they formulate their Integrated Risk Management Plans. It discusses the application of HSWA in recognising that Fire fighters and other fire service employees respond in operational situations that might present significant risk to their health and safety. The aim is to enable the F&RS to carry out its job in an effective manner which minimises injury and ill-health.

23. The protocol explicitly recognises that the nature of F&RS work means that not all situations are predictable and that fire-fighters and other employees need to respond to the demands of rapidly changing situations and cannot always rely on adherence to set procedures. Fire fighters and other employees must be given appropriate training and made aware of hazards likely to be encountered in order to enable them to deal with situations they encounter as effectively and safely as possible.

24. HSE recognises that operational decisions may have to be taken quickly on the basis of incomplete information. If HSE needs to investigate an accident to a firefighter on the fireground, it will generally investigate the underlying causes. All investigations will be looked at on their own merits, having due regard to the circumstances of the case, and any enforcement decisions will be taken in accordance with HSE’s Enforcement Policy Statement, taking account of the Code for Crown Prosecutors. In considering the public interest, HSE will consider what information should reasonably have been known at the time, rather than applying hindsight to the detail of every individual operational decision.

25. In the light of the principles set out as above in the draft protocol and HSE’s desire to see “Sensible health and safety, sensibly applied”, HSE is keen to deal with any perception or concern that health and safety requirements may unnecessarily hinder the Fire Service in the discharge of its public service. We are planning to organise events to be associated with the signing of the Protocol at which we will seek a common and realistic understanding with stakeholders of the practical implications of HSWA for F&RS activities so that we can ensure that duty holders apply appropriate and sensible precautions without unduly inhibiting their work in training or on the fire ground.

26. HSE’s view on many of these issues was set out in “Training for Hazardous Operations—A Case Study of the Fire Service”, first published in 1984 but now out of print. This discussed the important role of realistic training in preparing firefighters for actual operations and the significance of the public utility of the service provided by fire fighters as a consideration in applying the law. This document can provide a focus for the events we are planning and interest has been expressed in updating and republishing it.

APPENDIX A

Health and Safety Legislation

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK ETC. ACT 1974

1. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HSWA) sets goals and imposes duties on employers, self-employed persons, employees, occupiers of buildings as well as suppliers of work equipment and services. The duties are expressed in general terms, so that they apply to all types of work activity and situation. The principles of safety responsibility and safe working are expressed in the general duties sections (primarily Sections 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7). They are comprehensive and designed to encourage employers and employees to take a wide ranging view of their roles and responsibilities. In some areas the general duties are supplemented by more detailed requirements laid down in regulations made under the Act.

2. Section 2 of the HSWA imposes a duty on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of their employees. The general duty is extended to include the provision and maintenance of plants and systems of work; risks to health; provision of information, instruction and training; the place of work and working environment; etc.

3. A number of the duties imposed by the HSWA and related legislation are absolute. Others are qualified by the words “so far as is reasonably practicable”. This means that the degree of risk in a particular activity or environment must be balanced against the time, the trouble, cost and physical difficulty of taking measures to avoid the risk.

4. Apart from a few specific exceptions in subordinate legislation, the HSWA legislative scheme applies to the Fire & Rescue Services as to any other employer and it is HSE’s position that this can be achieved without any undue interference with or inhibition of the Fire & Rescue Services

ENFORCEMENT

1. HSE’s decisions on enforcing health and safety legislation are taken in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors and HSC’s Enforcement Policy Statement, set by HSC after full consultation with stakeholders. Under the Policy, HSE will take enforcement action proportionate to the risk and targets its contacts on the most serious risks or where hazards are least well controlled. In order to enforce, there needs to be clear evidence of a breach of health and safety law and a demonstrable risk to the health and safety of employees or members of the public.

2. The police would normally take the lead in situations where, following a work related death, evidence indicates that a serious criminal offence, other than a health and safety offence, may have been committed eg manslaughter. A protocol has been agreed between HSE, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), British Transport Police, the Local Government Association and the Crown Prosecution Service on the principles of effective liaison between the parties in relation to work-related deaths in England and Wales.

APPENDIX B

HSE AND WORKPLACE FIRE SAFETY

In most workplaces the local Fire Authority is responsible for general fire precautions (including for example, means of detecting and giving warning in case of fire, escape routes, fire-fighting equipment, and training of staff in fire safety). HSE’s main responsibility in relation to fire safety in the workplace is for process fire precautions.

Process fire precautions are the special fire precautions required in any workplace in connection with the work process that is being carried out there (including the storage of articles, substances and materials relating to that work process). They are to prevent or reduce the likelihood of a fire breaking out and if a fire does occur, to reduce its spread and intensity. Some examples of process fire precautions are:

- Suitable storage containers for flammable substances;
- Ventilation systems to dilute or remove flammable gas or vapour;
- Selecting equipment that will not be a source of ignition;
- Extraction systems to remove combustible materials such as wood dust.

Process fire precautions are enforced by HSE or the local authority, under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and more specific health and safety legislation such as the Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002.

In workplaces covered by the Fire Certificate (Special Premises) Regulations 1976 (FC(SP)R), HSE is responsible for issuing the fire certificate for the premises and for enforcement of all fire precautions including general fire precautions. However, when the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (RRO)

comes into force in 2006, it will revoke the FC(SP)R and apply a risk assessment based regime to all workplaces. Responsibility for enforcement of general fire precautions at most workplaces currently covered by the FC(SP)R will then fall to the local fire authority.

There are certain sectors where, because of the nature of the work, HSE has enforcement responsibility for all fire precautions (including general fire precautions) such as offshore installations, underground mines, nuclear sites, ships under construction and repair and some construction sites. HSE will retain responsibility for general fire precautions in these sectors after the RRO comes into force. HSE has arrangements for quickly informing Fire Authorities where HSE inspectors encounter fire prevention issues which are the responsibility of the fire authorities to enforce (and vice versa).

LIAISON BETWEEN HSE AND ODPM

HSE worked with ODPM during the development of the new fire safety legislation by providing comment on an ongoing basis, as and when requested. We are also providing comment on the suite of guidance documents and the enforcers' guide, which ODPM is currently developing to support the Regulatory Reform Order.

HSE is currently developing an internal operational guidance document addressing liaison between HSE/LA inspectors and fire and rescue authorities, which will be agreed with ODPM.

APPENDIX C

Ministerial Task Force for Health, Safety and Productivity

BACKGROUND

Following the publication of the Government/HSC "Revitalising" initiative in 2000 the HSC recognised that the public sector (which accounts for 20% of the workforce) needed to make a contribution, especially for days lost through work related ill health. The programme aimed to achieve a 30% reduction in the number of days lost to work related injury and ill health in the public sector by 2010.

Recognising that top level commitment was a key to success, in 2004, the then Minister For Work (Des Browne) asked HSE to establish the Ministerial Task Force (MTF) to provide the impetus to deliver reduced sickness absence. Membership includes ministers from:

- HM Treasury, as a large employer and given its interest in the efficiency and delivery agendas;
- The Cabinet Office, given its interest civil service employment and delivery issues;
- The Home Office, ODPM and Department of Health in view of their sponsorship of large public sector operations such as the Police, local authorities and the NHS;
- Ministers from the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament.

In the Spending Review 2004 announcement the Chancellor asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to undertake a review of the public sector's management of long term sickness absence, and the Minister for the Cabinet Office to "consult on, and negotiate changes to, the current arrangements for self certification".

The MTF took this work forward and produced a joint review of "Managing Sickness Absence in the Public Sector" in November 2004 (accessible at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/gse/sickness.pdf>). The review was well received by stakeholders as being balanced and well thought through. It concluded that further action was needed to:

- secure sustained commitment from managers at the top level;
- deliver the right data and systems to support better attendance management; and
- provide leadership and support for line managers.

It proposed a series of pilots to explore innovative approaches to some long standing issues, and actions to address working practices and long term absence issues.

HSE provides the Ministerial Task Force secretariat, and continues to follow up the implementation of the recommendations of the review.

Lord Hunt, chairman of the MTF, regards stakeholder engagement as a priority and the MTF agreed to a strategy for stakeholder engagement across the public sector. One element of this was a summit on sickness absence management in November 2005. At the summit, The new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, John Hutton expressed his personal interest in, and support for, the work of the MTF. He also stressed the important links between this work and the Health, Work and Wellbeing agenda. Des Browne, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, emphasised the Treasury's support for the work of the MTF and welcomed its contribution to public sector efficiency and productivity.

At the summit the MTF “One Year On” report was launched (accessible at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/gse/oneyearon.pdf>), the “One Year On” report refers to a number of initiatives and, where possible, their direct impact on sickness absence. It enables experiences to be shared across the public sector, and demonstrates the improvements that can be made through partnership working with HSE.

Memorandum by Tyco Fire and Integrated Solution (FRS 66)

We have reviewed draft issued for comment dated 2006–08 and wish to present our considered views as fire engineers who have been directly involved in UK as one of the major fire safety engineering companies for the past 100 years.

We make four overarching observations as follows:

1. The document shows a number of inconsistencies with both the approach and the philosophy being adopted in Approved Document “B”.
2. The document demonstrates, in our view, a move by the Government to abdicate its responsibilities for the welfare of its citizens.
3. It fails to address the large losses annually suffered by Great Britain plc through fire.
4. The fire at the Buncefield Oil Depot serves to highlight the conceptual failings in the approach to fire safety now being proposed.

Our specific comments are as follows:

INTRODUCTION

Clause 2.

The only target set for the PSA is the reduction of deaths in the home by 20% and deliberate fire by 10%.

With direct fire losses suffered by GB plc annually now running at over £1.5 billion per annum with double that amount in consequential losses, the government appears primarily concerned with addressing press media headlines.

Clause 4:

The clause seeks to give responsibility for fire safety in local communities without any authority to ensure effective implementation.

The proposed approach runs counter to that proposed in AD “B” where there are moves to repeal local acts which address issues such as unsprinklered compartment sizes.

CHAPTER 1—FIRE PREVENTION AND RISK MANAGEMENT

Clause 1.10:

The role of the Fire and Rescue service is seemingly focused only on domestic area and all considerations of the major fire hazards and threat to life, presented by industry and commerce are ignored.

Clause 1.11:

The document rightly identified the old and financially vulnerable as being the major “at risk” groups but fails to address the reality that these groups do not, without assistance or intervention, have the means to provide effective fire protection. Without addressing the issue of cost the exercise becomes one of warm words’ only.

Clause 1.17:

We welcome the acknowledgement of the benefit and need to install automatic fire suppression system for high risk groups.

Clause 1.22:

The arson losses to society are particularly acute in schools and should be acknowledged. In tasking the Fire and Rescue Service with arson reduction strategies, there is a notable absence of measures being taken by Government with regard to its role and responsibilities to safeguard the schooling of children and the welfare of its citizens.

Clause 1.27:

Having acknowledged the economic benefits of arson mitigation, Government support is required to measures such as automatic fire suppression which provide “a fire-fighter in every room” and reduce the dependence of the Speed and level of response of the Fire and Rescue services.

Clause 1.31:

We welcome the recognition of sprinkler Systems, and other automatic fire suppression systems, but believe the document does not explain that using such systems significantly reduces loss of life, and livelihood through fire.

Clause 1.33:

Whilst we understand the desire to make property owners take responsibility for fire safety the removal of formal and competent enforcement represents an abdication of the Government's responsibilities for the safety and wellbeing of GB plc. In theory a failure by one individual or company may be their own downfall, but, as in the case of the Buncefield Oil Depot, the consequences to their neighbours lives and livelihoods can be severely impacted through no fault of their own. Holding ones hand up in horror and then washing them of the problem is not responsible government. The Buncefield site was already under a (CIMA) risk assessment scheme more rigorous than that now proposed under the RRO. The RRO is being used, in our view, as justification for a downgrading of fire safety enforcement

CHAPTER 2—WORKING TOGETHER THE REGIONAL APPROACH

Clause 2.1:

The proposal to develop local frameworks runs counter to AD “B”—which seeks to remove local frameworks in favour of an overarching national approach.

CHAPTER 7—FINANCE

Clause 7.7:

The actions of the Fire and Rescue service must remain within capped limits regardless of the need or hazard to the public and to the nation. Again Buncefield serves to illustrate that fires do not cause destruction within imposed financial constraints.

CHAPTER 9—RESEARCH

Clause 9.5:

Whilst welcoming the acknowledgement that improved collaboration on research is desirable, no constructive support appears to be on offer for a task that the Fire and Rescue service alone may not be equipped to execute. Work on innovative approaches to fire safety will extend far beyond the remit and resources of the Fire and Rescue Service and requires a more centrally supported initiative.

Annex F

Best Value Performance Indicators:

Data on Sprinkler saves and other fire suppression systems should be collected and collated as a matter of course, and should be readily available to interested parties.

We trust our comments will assist in addressing the coordinated approach needed to UK fire safety.

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