



The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives

The Independent Review of the
Fire Service December 2002

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Foreword

This report is the result of a three-month review which we have carried out into the UK Fire Service. It sets out our recommendations for how the service should change in the future to meet the demands of the twenty-first century.

The Fire Service is paid for by the public and exists to protect them from the threat of fire, accidents and other natural events. While it can be justifiably proud of many of the things it does, it is entirely appropriate that from time to time, its work should be examined by an independent body to ensure not only that it is cost-effective, but that it gives the best possible protection against an often very challenging and occasionally life-threatening set of risks.

While there have been many studies of the Fire Service in recent years, there is widespread acceptance that these have resulted in little change, and there was, therefore, general support for the work of our Review. We have carried out our work independently and objectively. Membership of the Review was put together with the co-operation of the Government, the employers' organisations and fire authorities in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as the General Secretary of the TUC.

It is unfortunate that one of the unions concerned with the Fire Service, the Fire Brigades Union, has not supported the work of the Review, but this has not prevented us from carrying out what we believe to be a thorough and objective survey of the work of the Fire Service.

We did not realise until we started this Review just how much potential for reform exists in the current Fire Service. We were surprised at the extent to which the Fire Service has fallen behind best practice in the public and private sector. While there are excellent examples of change and new working practices, regrettably they are not widespread. This has resulted from a combination of factors, including an unsatisfactory industrial relations environment, a weak management system, and a lack of any feeling of ownership by those involved in managing the Service. And if no one group can be blamed for this state of affairs, certainly everyone involved in the Fire Service must bear their share of responsibility.

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. There are major challenges to be addressed in doing so, and we do not pretend otherwise. But the prizes are also significant. Too many people still die as a result of fires in the United Kingdom. We do not compare well with other countries, and we have made little or no progress in recent years in driving down the threat of fire and other accidents. While it may be an unachievable aspiration that no one should die from fire in the future, we believe there is plenty of scope to drive down fatalities, injuries, loss of property and damage to the environment to negligible levels. This requires the combination of a focus on fire prevention rather than incident response, different working practices, and a modern, flexible, risk-based approach to allocating resources. This is not just a Fire Service responsibility; it is one for the whole community.

The prize for those who work in the Fire Service is just as great. Many fire staff feel that they have fallen behind their colleagues in the rest of the economy, trapped in a narrow career with limited opportunities to develop or broaden their work. Our vision, of a new multi-disciplinary Fire Service, with a wider range of roles based firmly in the local community, offers significant opportunities for those prepared to take them. Our recommendations too should transform the Service from an old-fashioned, white, male-dominated, manual occupation to one with decent conditions and family-friendly policies which most other occupations already take for granted.

Change is only worthwhile when the benefits exceed the costs. We are confident that, given the scope for reform, the move to a more modern Fire Service will more than pay for itself over time. In addition, we are confident that more lives will be saved, property losses will be reduced, and, most importantly, communities will feel safer as a result.


The important message is for everyone to recognise both the need for change and the gains from doing so. Staying where we are is not an option, and we believe that reform will bring greater gains for everyone. We hope that when you have read our report, you will agree. We leave you with the words of one of the members of the Fire Service who met us during one of our visits. Her message, quite simply, was 'don't let us down this time'.

Members of the Review



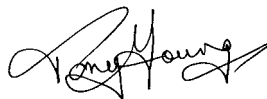
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Executive Summary

1. The Fire Service is a professional body deserving much credit for its performance. It has a well-deserved place in the nation's esteem. Localised responses to emergencies are working well, but it is a sad fact that too many people in this country die in fires and the number of fires is currently increasing each year. This cannot be right. Urgent action is required to make things better. We were aware when we began our work that there had been a number of reviews of the fire service over recent years. Most of the recommendations of these reviews have centred around the need for modernisation and flexibility. So we were not surprised to find that, in the discussions that we had with fire authorities, fire brigade staff, local authorities, government and all levels of stake-holders, the same message came through. What is required is a new approach to protecting people from the incidence of fire.

Earlier studies

2. Notwithstanding the clear recipes for change which came from earlier studies, it was equally clear that progress had been disappointingly small. There are many reasons for this, but most important is that there has been a lack of leadership throughout the service at the political, institutional and operational levels. This problem has persisted for many years.

Setting the policy for the United Kingdom

3. We therefore conclude that a fresh approach is required. This must start with a lead from the Government. There needs to be a new policy-making body, led by Ministers in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. This needs to set a framework, making clear what the Government requires from the Fire Service; the ways in which the Service should be modernised; and, critically, the way in which the Service has to reposition itself so that it concentrates its efforts on reducing and managing the risk of fire rather than responding to incidents.

New approach: community fire safety

4. A radically different approach is required. The focus at present is on fire authorities and brigades being able to react quickly to fires when they occur. And this has achieved some success, although the number of fires is still increasing. What is needed now is a system to tackle the problem before fire starts. The new emphasis must be on the prevention of fire, rather than the methods of dealing with fire after it has started. The approach should be grounded in community fire safety; the Fire Service has to engage more with the community to prevent fire.

Current arrangements out of date

5. The system for deploying the people and resources of the Fire Service was put in place decades ago; it was designed to meet different threats in different circumstances. The emphasis was on putting out fires in buildings. What is needed now is a system which deploys the resources of people and equipment so they are prepared to deal with the most likely risks of fire in the most cost-effective way, using an approach based on the management of risk which recognises that people move around. Local fire authorities must determine the most appropriate ways of managing the risks. This new approach should enable resources – people, machines and, in some cases, fire stations – to be re-deployed to best effect. And it should be possible to move more resources into fire prevention – community fire safety and fire safety enforcement. In turn, this should help reduce the existing level of fires. This new approach can be put in place immediately. But new primary legislation is also needed to put the Fire Service on a proper, modern basis.

6. There are cogent arguments in favour of moving the Fire Service onto a regional structure. New responsibilities are emerging, such as the need to deal with major terrorist incidents. These are best handled above brigade level. We do not, however, favour a major re-organisation at the moment; the Fire Service will already have a major programme of change to handle. But brigades should increasingly work together where it is clear that increased efficiencies and economies could result. Brigades should also work more closely with others in their community, for example, to provide ‘co-responder’ assistance to medical emergencies. The Service must increasingly recognise that the people and other resources are there to serve the community across a wide range of activities.

Devolved administrations

7. We have been briefed by the Fire Services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. And we have discussed with them the changes we are proposing. The three devolved administrations agree with the thrust of our proposals, although each has, understandably, its own concerns as to the pace of change and potential costs.

New institutions

8. The new structure for making policy needs to be complemented by new institutions within the Fire Service. There needs to be clarity of purpose and a culture which fosters organic change. The Fire Service College is already engaged in a major programme of reform. This must be seen through. The College should also become the focus for developing the new thinking required by the Service. The Fire Service Inspectorate should become a major engine for change, and play a critical part in driving through the reforms we propose. It will need to keep in close contact with brigades. In order that it can take on this work, it should cease the routine work of inspection. Given the pivotal role played by the Audit Commission in England and Wales (and comparable organisations in the devolved administrations) in Best Value and other work with local authorities, we believe that these bodies will be well placed to take on the work.

Chief officers

9. Individual chief officers will have weightier responsibilities under a risk-management approach to fire cover. They will need to engage closely with their fire authorities in taking the work forward. The authorities themselves will need to be prepared to give a greater degree of political support. At the strategic level, there is a need for a new forum to be engaged in policy development, bringing together chief fire officers and central and local government. Taken together, these bodies should create a powerful engine for change.

Human resource problems

10. Personnel policy, procedures and practices in the Fire Service give cause for concern. Despite clear policies from management and the FBU in favour of diversity, in practice only lip-service is paid to it. Harassment and bullying are still too prevalent. The leadership must recognise that urgent action is required. An improved programme of HR management must be put in place as a matter of priority. The work on the introduction of the new Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) gives a framework for this improvement programme. But the programme itself will not be a substitute for real effort by management at all levels to tackle the problems. There is much that is good and commendable about the Fire Service; it now needs to meet new challenges in how it organises and manages itself.

Pay

11. We have considered the pay of the Fire Service. Chapter 8 sets out the detail of our findings. We engaged the services of consultants experienced in dealing with these matters. Comparing pay with people doing jobs with similar sorts of weight in the public and private sectors, and taking into account evidence of market rates, we did not find a case for an increase in pay for firefighters and control room staff. But on the basis of large-scale changes along the lines we recommend, where new career paths are opened up and new skills are displayed, there is a case for the introduction of a new reward structure.

12. Under the new structure, average levels of pay should be higher when the programme of reform has been delivered. When substantial negotiations on reform begin, we propose a first payment of 4 per cent, backdated to November 2002; and a paybill increase of 7 per cent could be made from November 2003 provided that the total reform programme has been agreed by that date and implementation is on track as verified by an independent audit process. We believe that the cost will be more than outweighed by the savings which will result from the reforms we have proposed.

13. There needs to be a new pay structure based around IPDS to encourage and enable mobility and flexibility as key features. The system should be competence-based. As for the future, we believe it would be in the interests of all to negotiate a multi-year settlement. We recognise that employers and union may wish to agree a formal uprating mechanism based on a formula, once the reform package has been agreed and implementation is on track.

Senior staff

14. There needs to be change in the arrangements for senior staff. Officers will have increased responsibility to shoulder. They need more training in general and personnel management. They need to broaden their expertise and there should be increased use of external training. A proportion of officers should come from outside the Service.

Pensions

15. The Firefighters' Pension Scheme is inflexible. It does not accommodate a diverse workforce or working patterns. As presently managed, it encourages too many staff to leave early on medical grounds. The scheme is costly, both to employers and employees, and is poor value for money for the taxpayers. Although some short-term changes can be made, a comprehensive modernisation is required.

Conditions of service

16. Changes are also required to crewing, shift patterns and other aspects of day to day working. The 'Grey Book' which sets out conditions of service needs to be amended to contain only core conditions which must be laid down centrally. Managers should be free to manage other conditions, locally, such as flexible shift patterns, part-time working, and different crewing trends at different time of day. The Appointments and Promotion Regulations should similarly be reduced to a set of core national requirements. Discipline regulations should be replaced with a system based on the Arbitration, Conciliation and Advisory Service (ACAS) Code of Practice. The current national negotiating arrangements should be replaced.

Retained firefighters

17. The relationship between retained firefighters and their whole-time counterparts must be modernised to remove the implication of a separate second-class and to allow retained firefighters to play their full part in protecting the local community. They should be paid the same hourly rate as their whole-time colleagues and have the same medical and training standards so that they can be fully interchangeable. Whole-time firefighters should be able to undertake retained roles if they wish.

Implementing reform

18. Modernisation is long overdue. The challenge is great. Action is required to legislate for the changes; to negotiate alterations in terms and conditions of service; and to plan detailed local implementation plans and a new audit regime. The key to change will be the move to a risk-based approach to the provision of fire cover. A new body will be required to draw up a business plan to take this work forward. It will need to allocate tasks, responsibilities and timescales.

19. Taken together, the proposals for risk-based fire cover, better management of human resources, better co-operation between brigades and other economies should allow the pay award being recommended to be self-financing.

20. The programme of reform will require increased flexibility from all involved, particularly all levels of management. From the information available and discussion with chief fire officers, we believe that the changes we are recommending can be accomplished without the need for compulsory redundancies.

21. With clear vision, commitment and leadership, the programme of reform is achievable. The prizes are considerable, including a better service for the public and a more rewarding career for the men and women in the Service. Most of all, the package of reforms should **save lives**.

List of Recommendations

Our proposals are listed below, grouped by chapter. Those in bold are recommendations; others are suggestions which the main stakeholders may find useful in bringing about a modern fire service.

Risk and community fire safety

The work on risk-based fire cover should be taken forward through a series of incremental steps as follows:

- Government should give fire authorities the power to deploy resources differently from the present requirements.
 - Government should instruct each fire authority to develop a Risk Management Plan that will save more lives and provide better value for money.
 - Fire authorities should be required to consult their communities and key stakeholders in the preparation of their plans.
 - Chief officers should be empowered to implement their authority's plan.
- (paragraph 5.12)

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister should issue the necessary guidance to implement a risk-based approach to fire cover as a matter of urgency.

(paragraph 5.19)

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister should amend or remove Section 19 of the 1947 Fire Services Act as soon as possible.

(paragraph 5.20)

The Government should legislate to put the Fire Service on a new statutory basis.

(paragraph 5.23)

The Government should commit itself to submit an annual report to Parliament on the Fire Service.

(paragraph 5.23)

The Government should put in hand the work necessary to produce new options for the Fire Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) linked to the role of the future Service and its restated objectives so that a new formula can be introduced for 2006/07 and earlier if possible.

(paragraph 5.25)

The Role of central and local government

A new body should replace the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC) for England and Wales.

(paragraph 6.8)

The existing local government performance management framework should be used to set national priorities for the Fire Service, more specifically:

- National priorities for the Fire Service should reflect what it could contribute in the context of the Shared Priorities agreed with local government.
 - The national Public Service Agreement (PSA) or Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) should articulate more clearly what national government expects of all fire authorities.
 - In the light of forthcoming best value and performance improvement guidance, fire authorities should consider how Best Value reviews can help to address whether existing services are the most efficient and effective means of meeting the needs of users and the wider community.
 - Government should discuss with the Audit Commission and the Accounts Commission an assessment process for fire authorities, building on lessons from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process.
- (paragraph 6.12)

As a matter of priority, the Government should establish a strategic-level, high

capability co-ordination infrastructure to deal with New Dimension work.
(paragraph 6.16)

All fire authorities which retain separate control rooms should be required to demonstrate to the Audit Commission and the Accounts Commission that their retention is likely to be cost effective against national performance standards.
(paragraph 6.17)

Collaboration and co-operation should embrace the following topics:

- introducing common training standards and reducing training and other facilities duplicated within or across brigades;
- making more use of the facilities of local colleges of further education;
- co-ordinating procurement, including timetables, sharing and using best practice;
- developing operational policies and strategies to deal with the New Dimension;
- sharing experience in rolling out the reform agenda, particularly in human resources;
- sharing best practice in management; and
- developing local strategic partnerships.

(paragraph 6.21)

Brigades should investigate the potential for developing First Responder Partnerships.
(paragraph 6.26)

The Local Government Association and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities should take steps to develop the contribution of elected members on fire authorities and to ensure that they give stronger leadership in the future.
(paragraph 6.28)

Implementation and management policy

The Fire Service College should provide the focus for developing new thinking required for the Fire Service.
(paragraph 7.11)

In future, the Fire Service Inspectorates should concentrate on two main functions. First, the new bodies should provide the resources to support implementation of the reform programme across the UK Fire Service.

Second, as part of the ongoing process of reform, the Inspectorates should maintain close and detailed contact with individual brigades to identify best practice and any emerging implementation problems, and to ensure that local implementation remains consistent with the wider national vision.
(paragraph 7.16-7.17)

The Audit Commission, the Accounts Commission and the Northern Ireland Audit Office should be invited to take all inspection of the Fire Service.
(paragraph 7.18)

There should be a new collective body to act as a forum to discuss the practical implementation of policy changes and operational reforms.
(paragraph 7.19)

The reshaped Inspectorates should engage with brigades individually to produce a series of action plans to deliver the ODPM's targets of 7 per cent minority ethnic communities and 15 per cent women by 2009.
(paragraph 7.49)

A programme of improved human resources management including appropriate training, should be required from all brigades and be monitored regularly.
(paragraph 7.59)

To reinforce the concept of the fire brigade as a single service, we recommend that brigades review the roles of their support staff and ensure they are brought into the new IPDS structure.
(paragraph 7.62)

Pay

There should be a first payment of 4 per cent across the board, backdated to November 2002, once there is agreement to enter substantive negotiations on reform.

The paybill should increase from November 2003 by 7 per cent, provided that the total reform programme has been agreed by that date, and implementation is on track, as verified at a national and local level by the independent audit process. The paybill increase should be linked to the introduction of a new reward structure with the flexibility to offer payments for specialist skills within the overall paybill package.

The total pay increase, which should mean that average pay will rise by about 11 per cent, should be conditional on delivery of the full reform package. Given the interdependency of the reforms we have set out it is not possible to subdivide the reform package and take some measures, but not others.

Once the reform package has been agreed, and implementation is on track as verified at both national and local level, employers and unions may wish to agree to a formal uprating mechanism, based on a formula arrangement to provide for annual uplifts in subsequent years. This is a matter for the two parties. If a formula is agreed, the frequency of any payments under such an agreement will be for negotiation and should depend on how fast reform proceeds and how quickly it can produce savings to finance any further increase.

Subject to resources being available, we suggest there should also be scope for individual authorities to agree local additions to pay to address local problems which cannot be dealt with by the main pay system.
(paragraph 8.22)

Middle managers should have their own reward structure and terms and conditions, ones based on similar principles to those of the main pay group.
(paragraph 8.44)

A significant proportion of uniformed officers should come from outside the Service to help broaden the Service.
(paragraph 8.48)

Pensions

The Government should take action within the next six months on changes that can be accomplished within the existing scheme including broadening the definition of a 'regular' firefighter and strengthening the provisions for independent medical advice.
(paragraph 9.11)

The Government should address the longer-term future of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme and take early decisions to ensure that suitable arrangements are provided for the new, reformed Fire Service.
(paragraph 9.12)

The Government should investigate forms which pension provision for retained staff should take.
(paragraph 9.15)

We recommend that revised financing arrangements are implemented without delay. This would probably involve employers paying contributions assessed on the basis of a notional fund but without insulating employers from the costs of early/ill health retirements.
(paragraph 9.18)

Conditions of service

The Grey Book should be amended to simplify nationally determined conditions of service to four core areas: pay, total hours, overall ranks and basic leave.
(paragraph 10.10)

There should continue to be a disputes procedure but its scope should be more limited.
(paragraph 10.10)

The terms in which the core conditions of service are defined must allow managers to propose and seek to agree locally:

- shift patterns that fit with demand
- different crewing levels at different times of day

- mixed crewing of appliances by whole-time and retained firefighters
- arrangements for staff to move more easily between fire stations, different fire authorities, specialist areas and functions according to national and local requirements
- arrangements for overtime working
- diversity objectives and monitoring
- approval for taking second jobs
- up to date working environment
- family-friendly working practices (paragraph 10.12)

Some firefighters should be trained as ‘first on the scene co-responders’ which would give them basic life support skills including training in the use of automated defibrillators. (paragraph 10.16)

The Appointments and Promotion Regulations should be repealed and replaced with a set of core requirements which local procedures must meet. (paragraph 10.19)

The Discipline Regulations should be repealed and be replaced by a system based on modern good practice.

The ACAS Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievances Procedures would be a good basis for such a system. (paragraph 10.22)

The National Joint Council should be replaced by a smaller body, with executive authority to negotiate and the experience and skills to do so. (paragraph 10.25)

Retained firefighters

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. (paragraph 11.14)

The retained firefighters need to be properly integrated into the full-time service, including direct retained input into brigade management. This means:

- **retained firefighters should be remunerated at the same hourly rate as whole-time firefighters whether they continue under the present terms and conditions or not.**
- **they should be trained to the same standard as whole-time firefighters and have sufficient work, subject to demand, and where circumstances permit, to enable them to maintain their skills.**
- **the medical standards applied to the recruitment of retained firefighters should be the same as those applied to whole-time firefighters.**
- **they should have the opportunity to work on a more consistent part-time basis, with a fixed time commitment.**
- **senior managers should have the opportunity to create roles other than firefighting on a retained basis, such as community fire safety and control room operations.**
- **retained firefighters should be able to apply for positions above Station Officer, though we recognise that this could probably only be done on a part-time rather than traditional retained basis.**
- **whole-time firefighters should be able to undertake retained roles if they wish. (paragraph 11.18)**

Implementing reform

A body should be charged with drawing up a business plan showing which reforms are to be undertaken by whom and by what date; designing a process for tracking delivery; and reporting to Ministers. (paragraph 12.12)

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Introduction

The terms of reference of this Review require us to make recommendations on the future organisation and management of the Fire Service generally. This report is not just about pay nor is it designed to replace the pay negotiations. It is a wide-ranging remit to cover in a short time. We have been greatly assisted not only by the evidence provided directly to us but also by the large number of reviews and reports on the Fire Service over the last twenty-five years. They provided a guide not only to the issues and problems but also in many cases to the answers. We have been able to set out a comprehensive and coherent vision for the Fire Service of the future and the reforms needed to achieve it. But what will really make the difference this time is putting those reforms into practice. This is a challenge which must not be evaded again.

1.1 This Review was launched by the Government on 20 September 2002 to consider the issues facing the Fire Service. The proposal for a review was put forward by the Fire Service employers in the course of discussions at the negotiating body for Fire Service pay, the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades. The Government decided that such a review would be helpful. But this Review is not just about pay nor is it part of our role to take over pay negotiations which properly belong elsewhere.

1.2 Our Terms of Reference are as follows:

Having regard to the changing and developing role of the Fire Service in the United Kingdom, to inquire into and make recommendations on the future organisation and management of the Fire Service to:

- enable it to undertake the full range of responsibilities that are appropriate to it;
- enable it to respond effectively to all the operational demands which may be placed upon it;
- enable the responsibilities of the Fire Service to be delivered with optimum efficiency and effectiveness.

In the context of the above, such recommendations should include considerations as to:

- the pay levels and conditions of service that are appropriate taking full account of the wider context of pay arrangements, levels and their affordability across the economy;
- the most appropriate arrangements for determining future pay and conditions of service of whole-time firefighters, retained firefighters, voluntary firefighters and fire control room staff.

The final report will be published by the Review Group and will apply to the whole of the UK.

1.3 We had as our starting point the long list of reports and reviews of all or parts of the Fire Service which have been produced over the last twenty-five years. These identified many of the issues and questions that this Review would need to tackle. They even identified many of the answers. Although this review was conducted very quickly, we were able to reach some firm conclusions because of the strong body of earlier work supported by the evidence we received, most of it displaying a uniform view of the urgent need for change.

1.4 We were dismayed to find, however, that earlier reviews had not led to sustained progress towards a modern Fire Service. We have been impressed by the quality service the Fire Service gives to the community and by the readiness of individuals, local politicians, some fire authorities, officers and firefighters themselves to grasp new opportunities and to tackle overdue reforms. But improvements in the performance of the Service are being achieved despite, rather than because of, its organisation, its structure and even its underpinning legislative authority. None of these is adequate to meet the full range of demands currently placed upon the Service by the local community, let alone the demands which may emerge in future.

1.5 In this report we attempt to set out a comprehensive and coherent vision for the Fire Service of the future and the reforms that need to be made to achieve this objective. In Chapter 2 we set out how we went about our work and in Chapter 3 we describe what we found. Chapter 4 provides an overview of what we think the future Fire Service will look like and what this will mean for all those involved, from Ministers to firefighters. In Chapters 5 to 11 we examine in more detail what needs to change and which reforms can deliver that change. We turn to the issue of implementation in Chapter 12.

1.6 We believe that the service we describe will be able to meet current and future challenges flexibly; to offer challenging and well-rewarded work to a wide range of staff; and to respond to the need for continuous improvements in performance whether through working with others or spreading good practice. But the merits of our vision will count for nothing if what we propose is not put into practice.

1.7 In response to a widely expressed desire for the Review to make its views available to the pay negotiations then under way, we produced a position paper on 11 November 2002 which set out the views that we had reached at that time. It included proposals for implementation involving clear timescales and a review process to check that negotiations were leading to action. We echo these proposals in Chapter 12 of this report.

Government action will flow from the response to the consultative process. The aim is to develop a comprehensive and coherent fire policy which is fitted to our needs. We invite you to participate in that task.

Lord Belstead, then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Home Office, of the Fire Policy Review of 1980

The agenda for change is substantial and demanding. Not to take action, however, would place the service in the line of fire.

Audit Commission, 1995

1.8 We can only make recommendations; it is for others to bring them to life. That challenge has been evaded many times in the past. For the sake of the Fire Service, the firefighters who are its bedrock, the community they serve and the taxpayers, this opportunity to create a modern and effective Fire Service fit for the 21st century must now be seized.

What We Did

We did not intend this Review to be purely a desktop exercise. As well as making use of the existing reports on the Fire Service, we invited written evidence not only from the main organisations involved but from anyone with something to tell us. We discussed that evidence with some brigades, fire staff, the employers, fire service associations and government bodies. And, most importantly, we went on a series of visits to Fire Brigades around the United Kingdom to hear the views of firefighters and other Fire Service staff, and to see for ourselves the circumstances in which they work and the challenges they face locally. We were disappointed that the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) decided not to co-operate with the Review. We are grateful for all the evidence we did receive. It was catalogued and carefully considered for its relevance to the issues facing us. Any review can only be a report on the current situation, based on the best evidence available at the time. The Fire Service needs to develop its own capacity to keep itself under review.

2.1 We did not intend this Review to be purely a desktop exercise setting out the issues and revisiting past reports. We wanted to receive the views and experiences of a wide range of parties and organisations to help us develop our vision of the future of the Fire Service.

2.2 We invited written evidence from the main organisations involved in the provision of fire services in the United Kingdom, and we made a public call for information from any individual or group that wanted to have a say on the issues under review. We thought it particularly important to hear the views of firefighters and Fire Service staff in their own words and, where possible, face to face. So we arranged visits around the country.

2.3 Even before we had received written evidence or gone on our visits, we were able to make use of the large number of previous reports on aspects of the Fire Service. A bibliography is in Appendix 1.

2.4 We were disappointed that we did not receive evidence from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) which declined to co-operate with the Review. We would have liked to discuss with them their views on modernisation and to get their perspective on how they saw the service developing to meet the challenges of the future. The union's stance also inhibited some face-to-face contact with firefighters during our visits. But it did not deter more than ninety firefighters from submitting their comments, including their ideas for change, confidentially, via our website. Many of their suggestions have been included in our proposals.

The Fire Brigades Union has already informed Mr. Nick Raynsford (the Fire Service Minister) that we do not support and will therefore not get involved in an independent review of the Fire Service.

FBU Press Release
5 September 2002

Written evidence

2.5 The press release that announced the setting up of the Review included an invitation to individuals and groups, including those with no direct professional connection to the Fire Service, to submit evidence to us. An open invitation was also posted on our website, www.irfs.org.uk.

2.6 On 23 September 2002 we wrote to key stakeholders inviting them to submit written evidence to the Review by 18 October 2002. Additional evidence has been submitted as a result of contacts with Fire Service personnel made during visits and in response to the position paper.

2.7 In all, we received over two hundred written submissions, all of which have been read and considered by the Review team. A list of submissions received is at Appendix 2.

Visits

2.8 The visits to Fire Brigades and local station watches took place early on in the Review, from late September to late October. The visits were an invaluable opportunity for us to speak to individual firefighters, officers and control room staff, and to gain a perspective on how staff in different regions saw the issues under discussion. We were grateful for the frankness of the firefighters who agreed to talk to us; these individuals, whose identities will be kept confidential, were instrumental in highlighting the successes, as well as the problems, of the Fire Service. We came away from these discussions with a much better idea of what needs to be done to improve the working conditions and career prospects of fire staff.

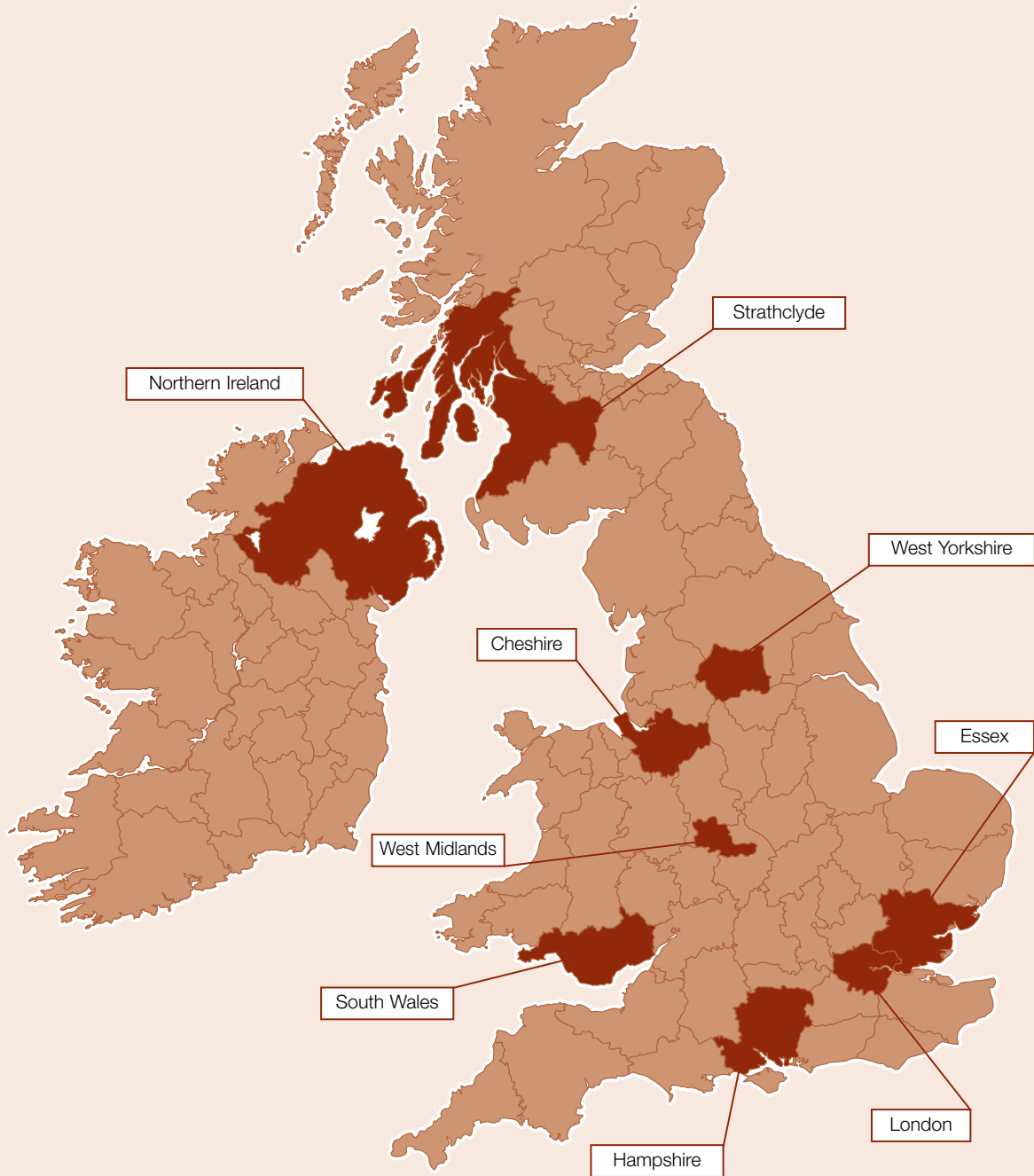
2.9 In the time available, we could not meet or visit everyone who contacted us. We decided to visit the following brigades (shown on Figure 2.1) because they represent a good cross-section of the Service in terms of size, location and the nature of the communities they serve.

Table 2.1 Fire brigades visited

Brigade	Why we visited them
Cheshire Fire Brigade	Well developed and advanced community fire safety prevention initiatives
Essex County Fire & Rescue Service	Combined fire authority with recent experience of industrial dispute
Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service	Range of capabilities for dealing with hazards and emergency response
London Fire Brigade	Large metropolitan brigade
Northern Ireland Fire Brigade	Representative of a devolved administration fire brigade
South Wales Fire Service	Provided briefing on retained firefighter staff issues
Strathclyde Fire Brigade	Regional (non-county) brigade
West Midlands Fire Service	Large metropolitan brigade with a thriving Community Fire Station
West Yorkshire Fire Service	Large area, diverse population

As we moved around the country a set of common issues began to emerge as did a strongly similar set of concerns.

Figure 2.1 Map of visits



Meetings

2.10 Meetings were held in mid-November with major stakeholders who had submitted evidence. It was an opportunity for us to discuss any further issues that had arisen since the submission of their written evidence, and to ensure that we had evidence from them on the areas the final report would need to cover. A list of these meetings is contained in Appendix 3.

Analysis

2.11 All the evidence we collected was catalogued and considered for its relevance to the issues with which we had to deal. In compiling a list of issues, we started from our terms of reference and the various earlier reviews of the Fire Service. On 8 October we published a Framework Document which set out the key questions as we saw them then; this is reproduced as Appendix 4. As the Review progressed, we were able to refine and develop our understanding of the issues.

2.12 We identified some areas where we needed expert input and commissioned specific briefings: for example, from London Fire Brigade Training and Development on the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) and from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) on the Fire Cover Review. We followed up documents cited in submissions and acknowledge the help given to us in particular by the libraries of the ODPM and the Home Office.

2.13 We received further submissions after the publication on 11 November of our position paper. This illustrates the value of a dialogue, albeit one conducted on paper. This report will, we hope, stimulate further dialogue. Inevitably, therefore, new evidence and new ideas will continue to emerge. In Chapter 5 we suggest ways in which audits and inspections should continue to track the changing role and performance of the Service.

2.14 It is important that our Review is not seen as a conclusion but rather as a report on the current situation, based on the best evidence we could assemble. It provides a coherent way forward, but the Fire Service must develop its own capacity to keep itself under review. And it must be ready to adopt best practice – wherever it comes from – when it is demonstrated that this will provide a better service to the community and to the nation as a whole.

The Fire Service today

The Fire Service is an impressive public body, deserving much credit for its performance. We were impressed by the quality of the service that it gives to the community. But it operates within a system of rigid prescriptions and restrictive practices which mean that resources are not always in the right place at the right time to respond most effectively and efficiently to the community's needs. This has been clear for many years. All the principal stake-holders – the government, employers, senior management and unions – share responsibility for this situation.

Two firefighters undertook an arduous three-hour rescue of a man trapped 35 feet down in a cramped bunker containing lime. The limited space and difficulty of removing lime dust, whilst wearing breathing apparatus, made the rescue extremely difficult. Both officers received burns to their face, neck and wrists before successfully completing the rescue and had to undergo decontamination and hospital treatment.

Chief Fire Officer's commendation

3.1 From all of the evidence, the review team drew the firm conclusion that in many ways the Fire Service is an impressive public body, deserving credit for its performance to date and its devotion to duty. Its professionalism in dealing with incidents is beyond compare and it gives a high quality of service to the community. Much of the evidence submitted to us has stressed also the high value which the public places on the Fire Service.

3.2 We have seen examples of good practice by fire brigades and their fire authorities around the country. We have found clear evidence of fire authorities promoting change and innovation against the obstacles of unhelpful legislation, and authorities funding the local Fire Service well in excess of the funding level assumed by central government. Individual Chief Officers have achieved improvements on the ground without the support they deserve. And individual firefighters and their union have conducted impressive local community campaigns to encourage better fire safety.

3.3 Nevertheless, individuals attempting to bring about change within an out-of-date and inflexible structure are facing major barriers. We found rigidities, inefficiencies and evidence that resources are being used in the wrong way if, as a nation, we want the Fire Service to be an effective, responsive community service. This chapter sets out the evidence which persuaded us that change is long overdue.

Role of the Fire Service

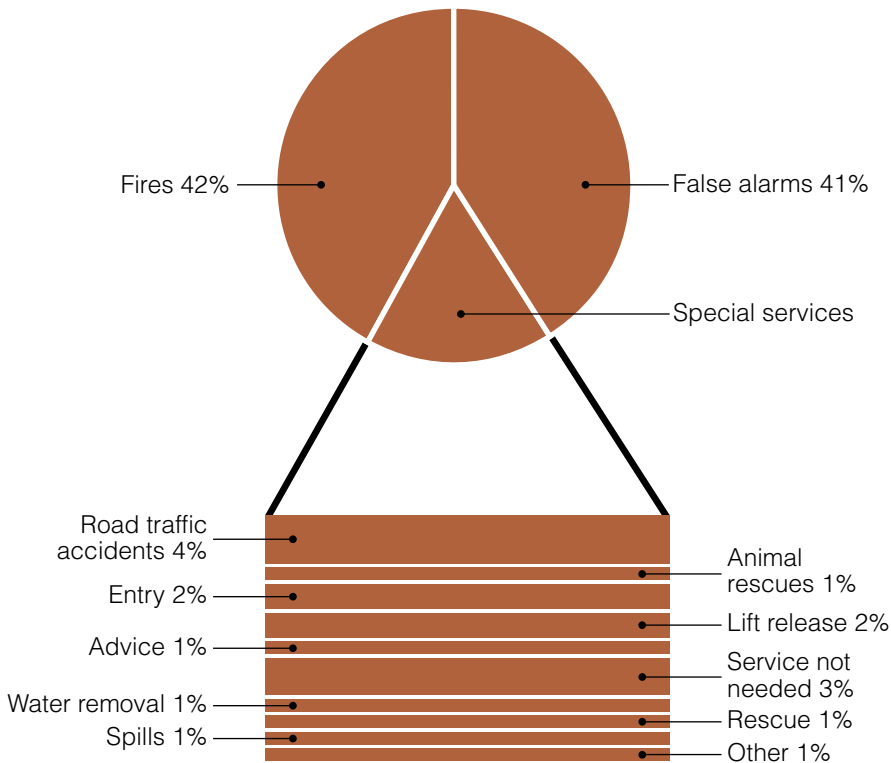
Responding to emergencies

3.4 The Fire Service responds to all 999 calls directed to it. Its primary duty, enshrined in statute, is to put out fires. The other aspect of its emergency work comprises what are termed ‘special services’. These include dealing with the consequences of:

- major transport incidents (road, rail and air);
- chemical, biological and radioactive exposures and spills;
- severe weather conditions like flooding and high winds;
- collapsed buildings; and
- rescue of trapped people, including those stuck in lifts.

Figure 3.1 shows the proportion of different emergencies to which the Fire Service responded in 2000/01, distinguishing fires, false alarms and special services, categorised by type of call.

Figure 3.1 Types of work done by the Fire Service



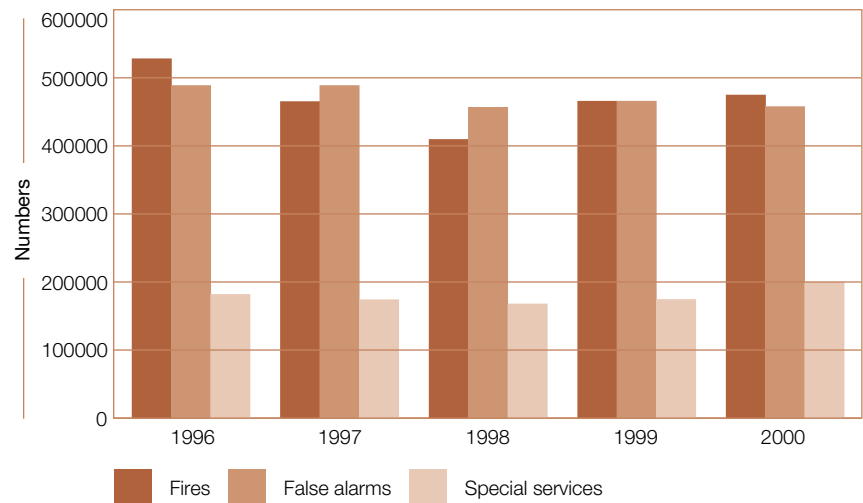
Source: ODPM Fire Statistics

3.5 The Fire Service’s workload has been growing slightly overall over recent years (see Figure 3.2). It is dealing with more incidents of a wider variety although this includes a significant number of malicious or hoax calls or those where the Fire Service is not needed.

A Control Officer counselled a young girl, who was trapped in a room in a burning house with her younger sister and friend, to stay calm and to concentrate her efforts on the children’s safety. The Control Officer built up a rapport with the frightened girl and thus was able to instruct her to place blankets under the door to prevent smoke from entering the room, and to get more precise details about the location of the house for the fire crew who were on their way.

Chief Fire Officer’s commendation

Figure 3.2 Fire Service workload, 1996-2000



Source: ODPM Fire Statistics

3.6 But its main statutory duty – to fight fires – forms a small proportion of the way that firefighters spend their time. The Cunningham Report (Home Office and Scottish Home and Health Department, 1971) calculated the time spent on fighting fires at between 3 and 10 per cent of a firefighter's total time; *In the Line of Fire* (Audit Commission, 1995) estimated it as between 5 and 10 per cent. The Review team had these estimates confirmed to them consistently when visiting fire brigades.

Preventing fires

3.7 The Fire Service has a statutory duty to inspect certain premises for fire risk under a variety of different legislation. This is known as statutory fire safety.

3.8 It also undertakes community fire safety work although this is not a statutory responsibility.

3.9 Community fire safety is a planned programme of fire safety education, outreach and intervention aimed at preventing fire-related deaths in the home, and reducing the risk, incidence and cost of fire in the wider community. It is intended to reduce the risk of fire occurring at all and not merely trying to combat it once it has happened. The majority of domestic fires are preventable with simple precautions, as the major risk factors for domestic fires are smoking, the use of chip pans and misuse of domestic appliances.

3.10 The Home Office have estimated the total cost to the economy as a result of fire for England and Wales in 1999 at approximately £7 billion. The costs associated with fires vary: on average domestic

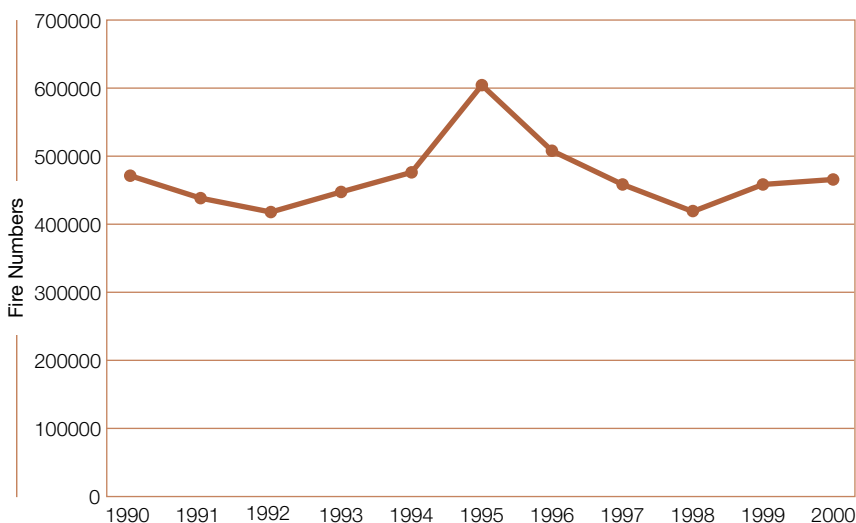
fires cost around £21,500, public sector fires £44,300, and commercial fires £63,600. These include direct costs of fire (property damage, casualties etc.), and costs in anticipation of and response to fires, such as fire protection (smoke alarms) and Fire Service response (*The economic costs of fire*, Home Office 2001b). Some of these fires are started deliberately: the Home Office estimated in their report *Safer Communities* (Home Office, 1999), that in an average week, arson costs society £25 million, including 50 injuries and 2 deaths.

3.11 The report *Safe as Houses* (Community Fire Safety Taskforce, 1997) estimated the national costs of introducing an educational campaign on community fire safety as £18 million in England and Wales, based on the well developed, existing campaign in the West Midlands. The Review team considers that updated to 2002 and applied nationally, the costs of a campaign would not be more than £30 million. This is equivalent to the costs of around 1800 domestic fires. Since, as figure 3.3 shows, there are around half a million fires in the UK each year, it does not seem unreasonable to think that well designed community fire safety work could achieve a reduction of at least that number.

Trends in fire risk and safety

3.12 Fires, (particularly domestic ones) are preventable for the most part if people take simple precautions, and damage and death can be much diminished if working smoke alarms are in place. We might expect the incidence of fires to be coming down more than it is. The incidence of fire over the last few years in the UK shows that, while there was a drop between 1995 and 1998, the occurrence of fires is climbing (see figure 3.3).

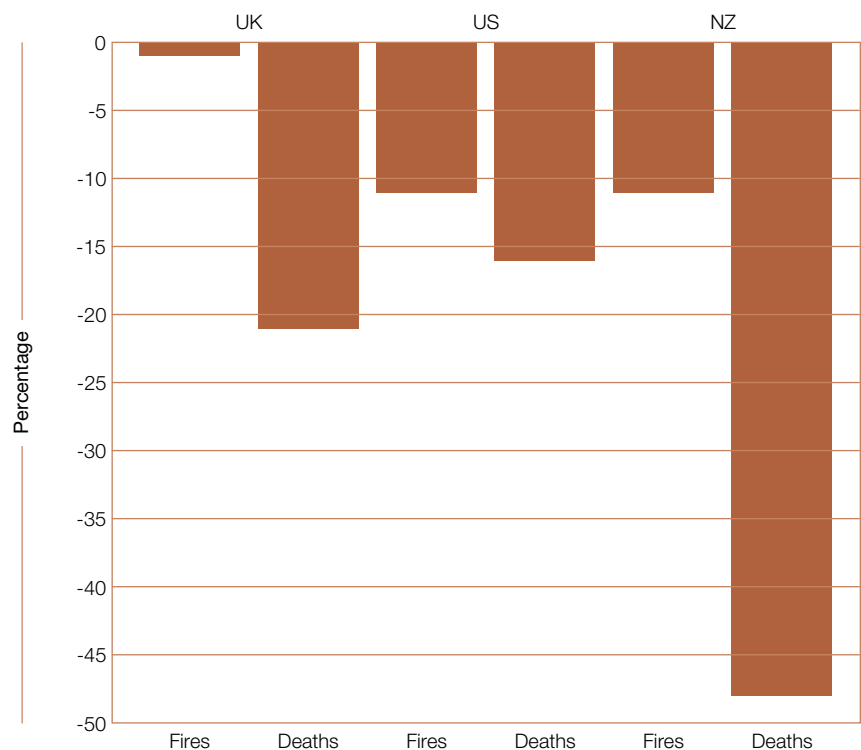
Figure 3.3 Fires in the UK, 1990-2000



Source: ODPM Fire Statistics

3.13 International comparisons are fraught with difficulty and require specific research into the reporting, recording and validation systems in each country. But the chart below shows the percentage change in incidence of dwelling fires between the UK, US and New Zealand over the past few years as an indication of the situation within each country. See figure 3.4 below.

Figure 3.4 Percentage change in incidence of fire, 1996-2000

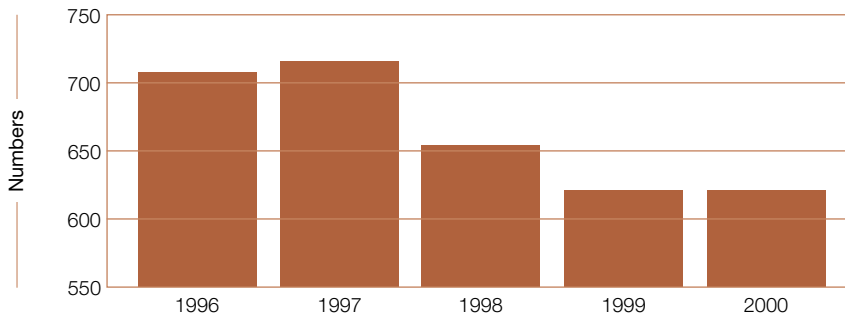


Source: UK – ODPM Fire statistics; US – US Fire Administration; NZ – New Zealand Fire Service

Notes: Along with the UK, the US and New Zealand have among the most robust recording and reporting systems in the world. However, differences between reporting, recording and definitions used mean that the figures should be used as indicative only.

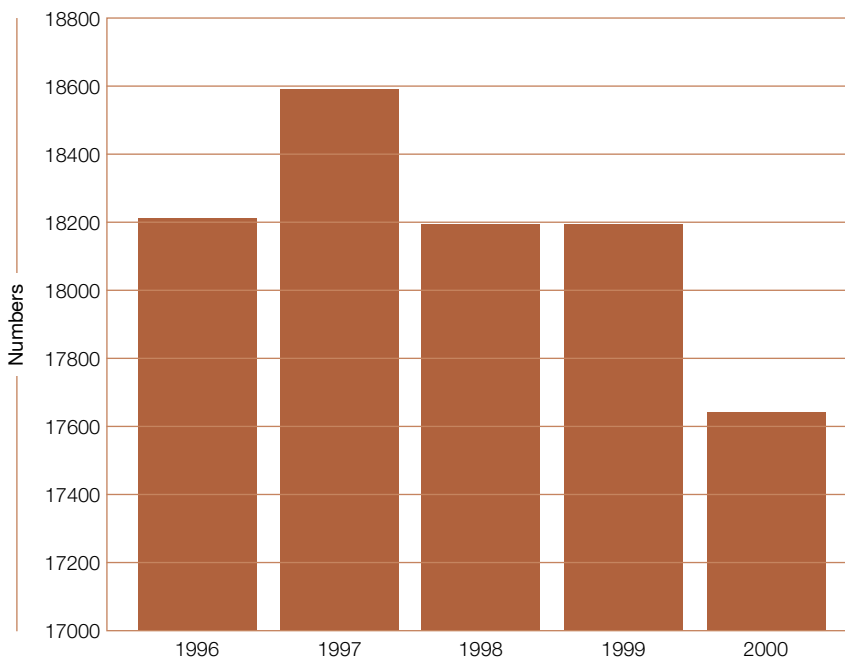
3.14 The incidence of fire does not affect all parts of society equally. The most vulnerable in society suffer disproportionately from fire and its effects. People are more likely to suffer a fire if the household has young children, if the household is in financial difficulties or the person has a disability. Deaths and injuries from fire are declining, but slowly (see Figures 3.5 and 3.6, and Table 3.1).

Figure 3.5 Deaths from fire in the UK, 1996-2000



Source: ODPM Fire Statistics

Figure 3.6 Injuries from fire in the UK, 1990-2000



3.15 Location affects the incidence of fire too. Tenants, especially those living on a council estate, are more likely to suffer a fire as are elderly householders or those with children. Table 3.1 sets out key factors affecting risk.

Table 3.1 Risk factors for fire

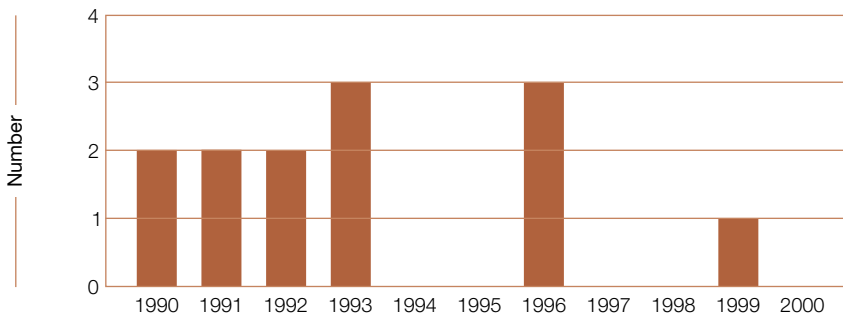
Factor	Group at risk
Household composition	The most at risk are households with children , with single parents at the greatest risk. Elderly people suffer fewer fires but comprise a greater proportion of casualties.
Smoking	Prevalence of fire in smoking households is very much higher , implying that other factors may also be in play.
Financial stability	Households saying they were in financial difficulty had the highest risks.
Tenure	Those who rent property are more at risk than owner-occupiers.
Drinking	Independent of smoking, the risk of fire was higher in households where people drank heavily .
Property condition	Homes in poor condition were more at risk.
Disability	Households where the respondent had a limiting disability were more at risk.

Source: *Safe as Houses* (Home Office, 1997c) & *British Crime Survey 2000*

3.16 Fighting fires and dealing with special services such as road traffic incidents is intrinsically dangerous, and we pay tribute to the bravery of individual firefighters in the face of multiple hazards. Thankfully, as figure 3.7 shows, the death of a firefighter on operations is rare, though the graph does not include the death earlier this year of a firefighter in Leicestershire. There has been considerable investment and effort put in by fire authorities, in consultation with the Health & Safety Executive, to develop and implement safe systems of working (including the provision of personal protective equipment) to secure the health and safety of firefighters.

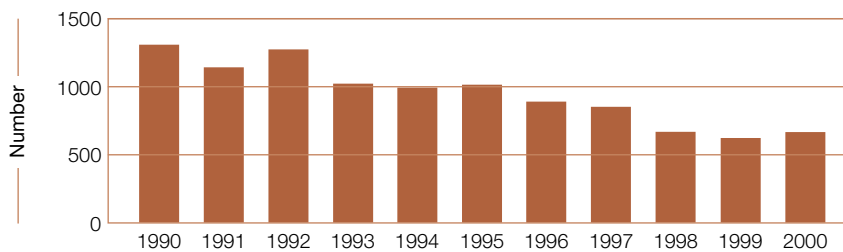
3.17 A recent article, *Hazardous occupations in Great Britain*, (Lancet, Vol. 360, pp. 543-4) comparing the most dangerous jobs in Britain concluded that firefighter was the 23rd out of 30. Fishermen had the most dangerous job in terms of mortality.

Figure 3.7 Fatalities in the course of duty, 1990-2000



Source: ODPM Fire Statistics

Figure 3.8 Non fatal casualties in the course of duty, 1990-2000



Source: ODPM Fire Statistics

3.18 But injuries to firefighters are more common as Figure 3.8 shows. The risk of death or injury is relatively low due to the management of the very real hazards firefighters face through training, proper equipment and the effective management of risk at incidents by senior officers.

National standards of fire cover

3.19 The government issues national guidance on standards of fire cover for the whole country. These have their origin in work done by the Riverdale Committee in 1936 and were designed to combat firestorms in cities caused by enemy bombing. They were updated most recently in 1985, but changes were modest.

3.20 The system is based on the characteristics of property and buildings in each area, which is assigned to one of six categories, shown in Table 3.2. These categories do not reflect the risk factors identified above nor changes in the way we live, such as the falling population in town centres and the growth of suburbs.

Table 3.2 Fire cover categories

Category of cover	Characteristics
A	Largest cities and towns, including shopping centres, entertainment complexes and high risk industrial property
B	Larger cities and towns
C	Suburbs of large towns and smaller towns with substantial built up areas
D	All other categories excluding Remote Rural
Remote Rural	Areas isolated from centres of populations with few buildings
Special Risks	Hospitals, prisons, airports, tower blocks and major petro-chemical plants

Source: Audit Commission, 1995

3.21 The national response standards (see Table 3.3) recommend that a predetermined number of fire appliances attend an incident within a predetermined time according to the category assigned to it. The greater the density of buildings in an area, the greater the firefighting resources that are provided, as Table 3.3 below shows. For a lot of the time, fire brigade resources are targeted on protecting unoccupied buildings and not protecting people.

3.22 The fire cover standards pose a particular problem with automatic fire alarms in central town, mostly commercial, locations, which require full A or B risk attendance at all times of day or night. Nearly all, 98%, turn out to be false alarms.

Table 3.3 National response standards

Risk category	Number of pumps	Time limits for attendance by pumps		
		1st	2nd	3rd
A	3	5 minutes	5 minutes	8 minutes
B	2	5 minutes	8 minutes	–
C	1	8-10 minutes	–	–
D	1	20 minutes	–	–
Remote Rural	No national recommendation set			
Special Risks	No national recommendation set			

Source: Audit Commission, 1995

3.23 Chief fire officers cannot vary the national minimum standards in their areas to provide the most effective service. Thus, to take the most extreme example we found, the population of the City of London is more than 500,000 during the day but drops to less than 5000 at night, yet the fire cover and attendance times stay at the same level. The opposite situation pertains to the London suburbs as Figure 3.9 illustrates.

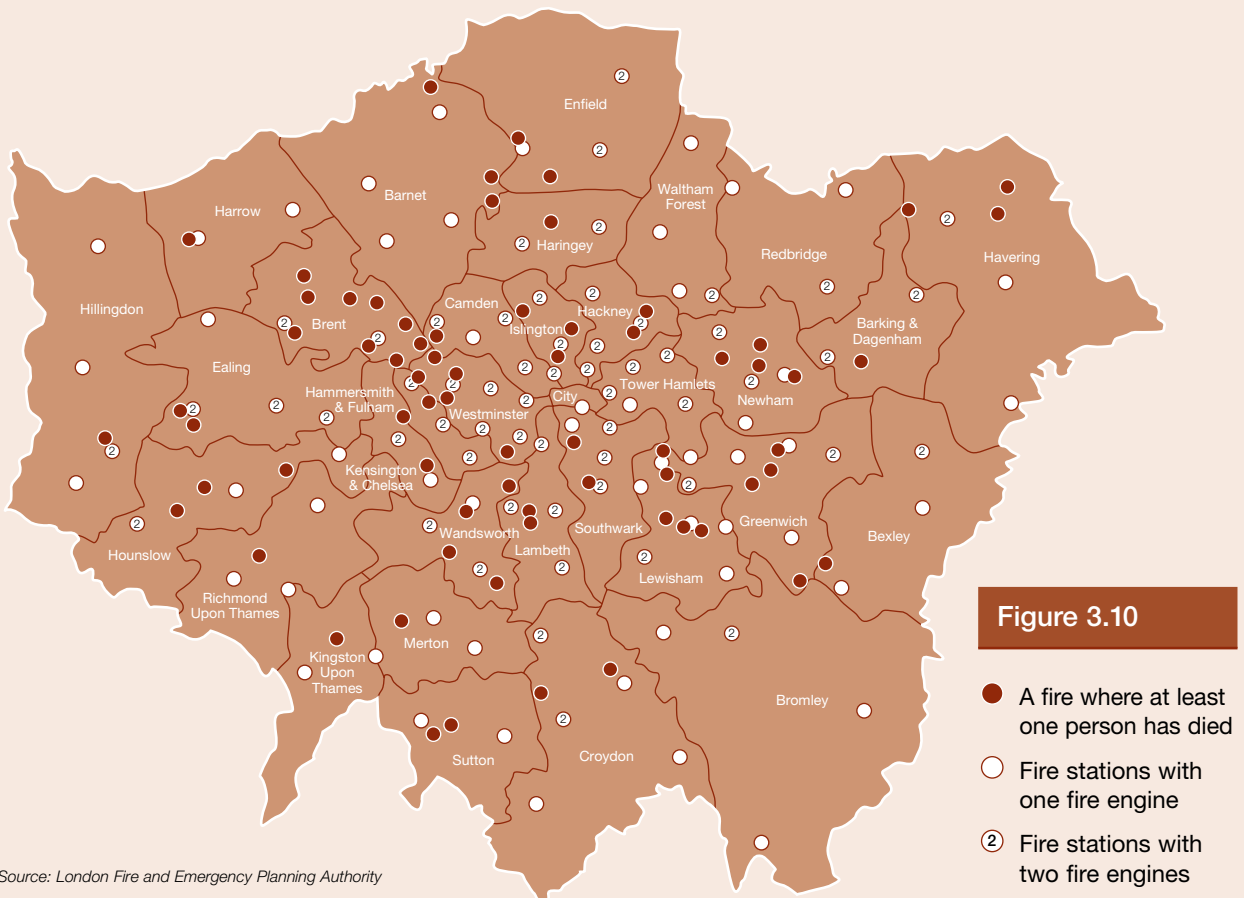
3.24 A corollary is that fire stations are not always near those areas of social deprivation in which most fires occur or near large arterial routes where most car crashes occur (see Figure 3.10).

3.25 Even where firefighting resources could be moved around within the national standards, this tends not to happen. Under section 19 of the Fire Services Act, 1947, chief officers cannot reduce their establishments, stations, appliances or staff without the approval of the Secretary of State. We were told that where the fire authority wanted to move fire appliances or open a new station to reflect the movement of populations, applications for Section 19 approval could take years.

3.26 Effectively, risk categorisation drives the location of stations and the level and distribution of operational resources based at stations. On average, these account for about 70 per cent of the costs of a brigade. Yet the existing framework of risk categorisation does not reflect known risk factors. It directs resources away from areas and population groups at most risk.

3

The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives



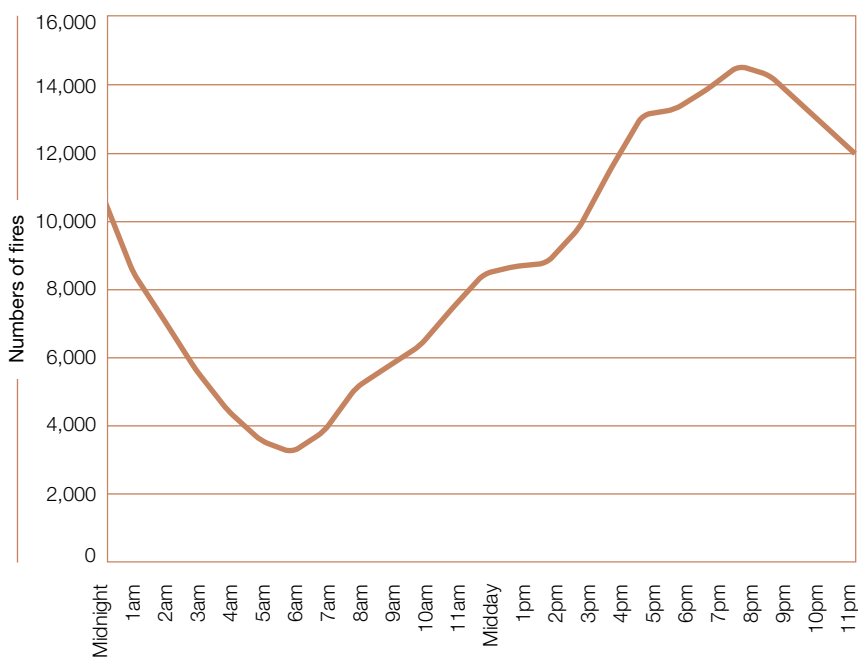
Source: London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority

Deployment of staff

Constant crewing

3.27 Fires do not occur evenly throughout the day, as Figure 3.11 shows. Fire incidence falls off dramatically after midnight and does not start rising again until the morning.

Figure 3.11 Primary fires by time of day



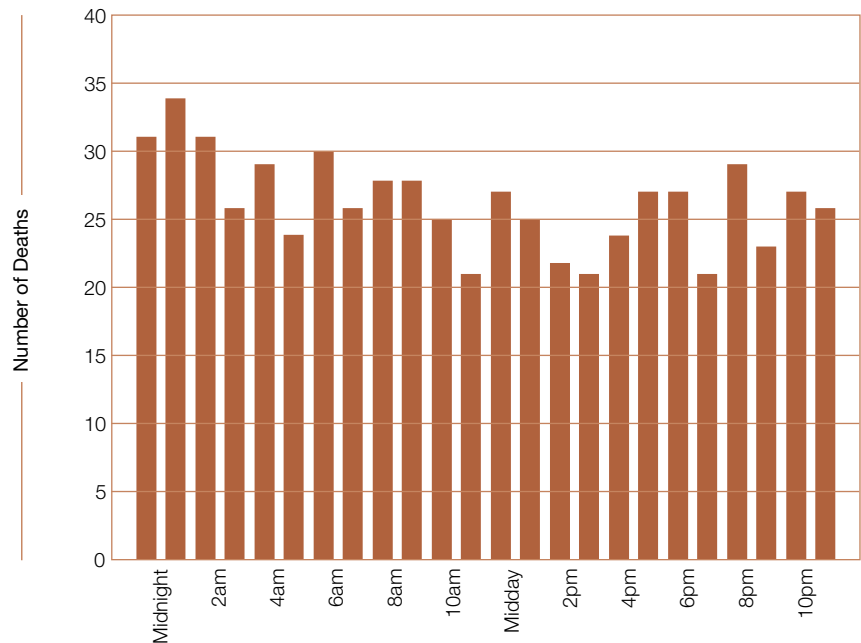
Source: ODPM Fire Statistics

3.28 The number of deaths in primary fires varies through the day and night, with slightly more occurring in general in the early hours of the morning, as figure 3.12 shows.

* Figure 3.9 Category A risk areas in London and location of serious fires

** Figure 3.10 Fire stations in London and location of serious fires

Figure 3.12 Deaths in primary fires in dwellings by time of day



Source: ODPM Fire Statistics

3.29 Fire stations are staffed under a system known as ‘constant crewing’. Staffing is not reduced at night or indeed at anytime, however low the incidence of emergency calls. Working practices state that for 75 per cent of callouts five firefighters must crew the first appliance and four the second and this cannot be varied.

Shift system

3.30 The vast majority, 95%, of whole-time firefighters work the ‘2,2,4’ shift system: 2 day shifts, 2 night shifts and then 4 days off. In detail this means: two days on the day shift working from 9am to 6pm; then the following two days on the night shift working from 6pm to 9am but with around 7 hours ‘stand down time’. The first day off starts at 9am.

3.31 The shift system is suited to maintaining constant crewing to be available to respond to any level of emergencies. It does not, however, correspond to the incidence of fire or other emergencies. The evening shift changeover happens during one of the busiest periods in the 24-hours, which means that both shifts must be staffed to cover the peak of demand.

3.32 The Equal Opportunities Commission, in their evidence to the review, have condemned this shift system as potentially disadvantageous to those with caring responsibilities although we were told that in London that some women like the current shift

pattern. Also, certain times are designated as 'stand down'. This varies amongst brigades but can include part of every night shift, Saturday afternoons, Sundays and Bank Holidays. This means that firefighters only respond to emergency calls and do not do other work. Often they are able to sleep. One senior officer told us that he reckoned on there being about 14 productive hours on a 4 day watch, beyond dealing with emergency calls. A typical firefighter's day is illustrated in Figure 3.13.

Figure 3.13 Typical day and night shifts

Day shift

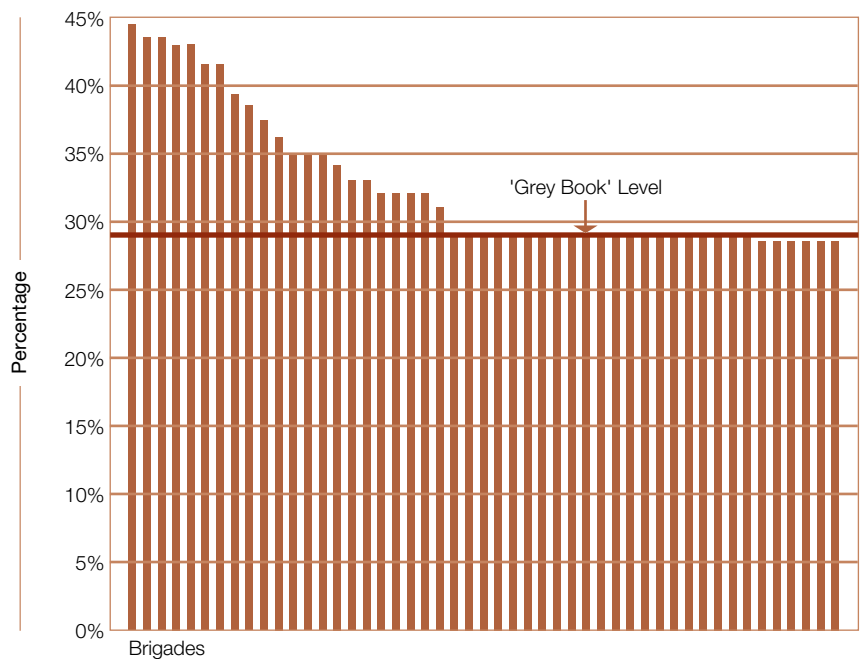
0900	–	Roll-call
0905 – 0930	–	Appliance checks
0930 – 1030	–	Physical Training
1030 – 1045	–	Tea Break
1100 – 1300	–	Training
1300 – 1400	–	Lunch
1400 – 1700	–	Community Fire Safety, Fire Service Act light indoor duties, or similar duties (including 15 min tea break)
1700 – 1730	–	Vehicle cleaning
1800 –	–	End of shift

Night shift

1800 – 1830	–	Roll-call and checks
1830 – 2030	–	Training
2000 – 2100	–	Dinner
2100 – 0000	–	Stand-Down but includes responding to emergency calls
0000 – 0640	–	Bed
0700 – 0730	–	Breakfast
0730 – 0830	–	Appliance checks
0900 –	–	End of shift

3.33 Figure 3.14 shows the percentage of time on duty which different brigades allow as stand down, compared with the 29 per cent which is the expected level set out in the Grey Book (on which see Chapter 10).

Figure 3.14 Stand down time



Source: Audit Commission 1995

3.34 There are other shift patterns allowed under the Fire Service terms and conditions of service, including a day duty system. Under this system, staff work a nine day fortnight, which means that they have one day off as well as weekends every two weeks. This system is used for specialist staff (for example, training staff). Staff are also employed on a day crewing system which provides operational cover during the day with retained cover at night. These other shift systems are not widely used.

3.35 Many firefighters have a second job which can be planned around the requirements of the 2,2,4 shift pattern. The employers said in their evidence to the review that second jobs were common and that no-one really knows how often the requirement to seek official permission is ignored.

3.36 When they are on stand down, it is difficult for firefighters to do any other, preventive work. Community fire safety work needs to be scheduled during the normal operating hours of schools, businesses or community groups. It must be also scheduled around the need to respond to emergencies. Given the 2,2,4 shift system, firefighters have less time to spare in the day and most spare time when these groups are not available.

3.37 Several firefighters have told us that they would like to come in on their days off and carry out community safety work, but the union bans voluntary pre-arranged overtime. The only overtime which is worked is when shifts are extended to cover attendance at an incident when fire crew cannot leave. Brigades give time off in lieu instead of overtime which reduces firefighters' future availability.

3.38 Retained firefighters, whose position is explained in paragraph 3.42 below, could in theory come in and carry out community fire safety work, but they are paid by call out for emergencies and for some routine tasks. They combine being a firefighter with another job, so their time is limited.

Recruitment and skills gaps

3.39 There are on average around 40 applicants for every vacancy in the Fire Service.

3.40 In theory, different people with varied skills could be recruited to carry out specialist work, including community fire safety, but this is not possible under the current Appointments and Promotion Regulations for operational staff. People with skills needed by the Fire Service cannot be recruited directly into particular jobs: the Fire Service has a single point of entry, where the only way into the Fire Service is as a recruit into the bottom rank.

3.41 Firefighters are not a diverse group. The service is 98.3 per cent male and 98.5 per cent white. Of all the public services, its profile is the most skewed in this regard. The Fire Service is failing to draw on the wider pool of talent in the population at large. It is also failing to match the demands of community fire safety work (where the Fire Service needs to work with local communities of all kinds) to the characteristics of those it recruits.

3.42 Even if the right people were recruited, their skills and experience are lost to the Fire Service at a relatively early age, with 43% of firefighters retiring early on ill-health grounds in 2000/01. This is a significant reduction from the oft-quoted figure of around 70% which prevailed around 1992. In some brigades the figure has fallen to around 30%.

Retained and volunteer firefighters

3.43 As well as whole-time firefighters working mainly 2,2,4 shifts, the Fire Service employs retained firefighters, who are paid a retainer and a call-out fee and respond to emergencies when required. Retained services provide fire cover for around 60 per cent of the UK's land area, mainly in rural areas. They have to live and work close to their fire stations. The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) rules will not allow a full-time firefighter to work as retained on their four days off although ironically, they can do any other kind of work.

3.44 Also, where stations have both whole-time and retained staff, union rules say that appliances must be crewed separately. The Review team were told on their visits that this means that, where there are two appliances on a station but not enough full-time firefighters to crew the second, the appliance will not be crewed and will therefore not go out on an incident even if there is a retained firefighter available. This is the case in most brigades but in some, whole-time and retained work together well. The various restrictions on the use of the retained service mean that it is not used as effectively as it could be.

3.45 Although whole-time and retained firefighters make up the majority of the Fire Service, there are also a few volunteer and auxiliary stations, made up of entirely unpaid individuals who maintain basic fire cover for the good of their community. Most of these volunteer stations are on the West Coast or in the Highlands of Scotland, where they provide a cost-effective service. In addition, in England, North Yorkshire and Cambridgeshire have some volunteer Fire Services.

Co-operation and partnership

3.46 In response to the demands for joined-up government and customer-focused services, some brigades are actively working with other agencies. But in most brigades, joint working has not been so successful. For instance, in 1996, what are termed 'co-responder schemes' were set up, which mean that the Fire Service would respond jointly with the ambulance service to attend victims of cardiac arrest. It is a joint response in that the two services manage the response jointly when the Ambulance Service determine that the Fire Service can respond more promptly to provide a fast response. The ambulance crew will arrive later, if required. The speedier the

response, the more likely a person will survive a heart attack, and the Ambulance Service were finding it difficult to meet their attendance targets. Thus the proposal was made that fire engines would carry defibrillators and firefighters be trained to use them. FBU national policy is opposed to co-responding and the schemes only work in a few areas, including West Yorkshire and Devon.

3.47 Generally speaking, each fire brigade has its own control room which is separate from those of other emergency services. With the introduction of new technology, economies of scale and lower costs can be obtained by reducing the number of brigade control rooms, and have bigger brigades absorb the calls of smaller ones.

3.48 A report on Fire Service control rooms (Mott MacDonald, 2000) suggested that a typical rural brigade control room would have four staff on duty at all times. Yet they would deal with only two calls an hour during the busy time of the day and only one call every two hours at night. As a consequence, the control room staff cost of handling an incident would be about £50, compared with £18 for the London Fire Brigade, which has one large control room for the whole of the London area.

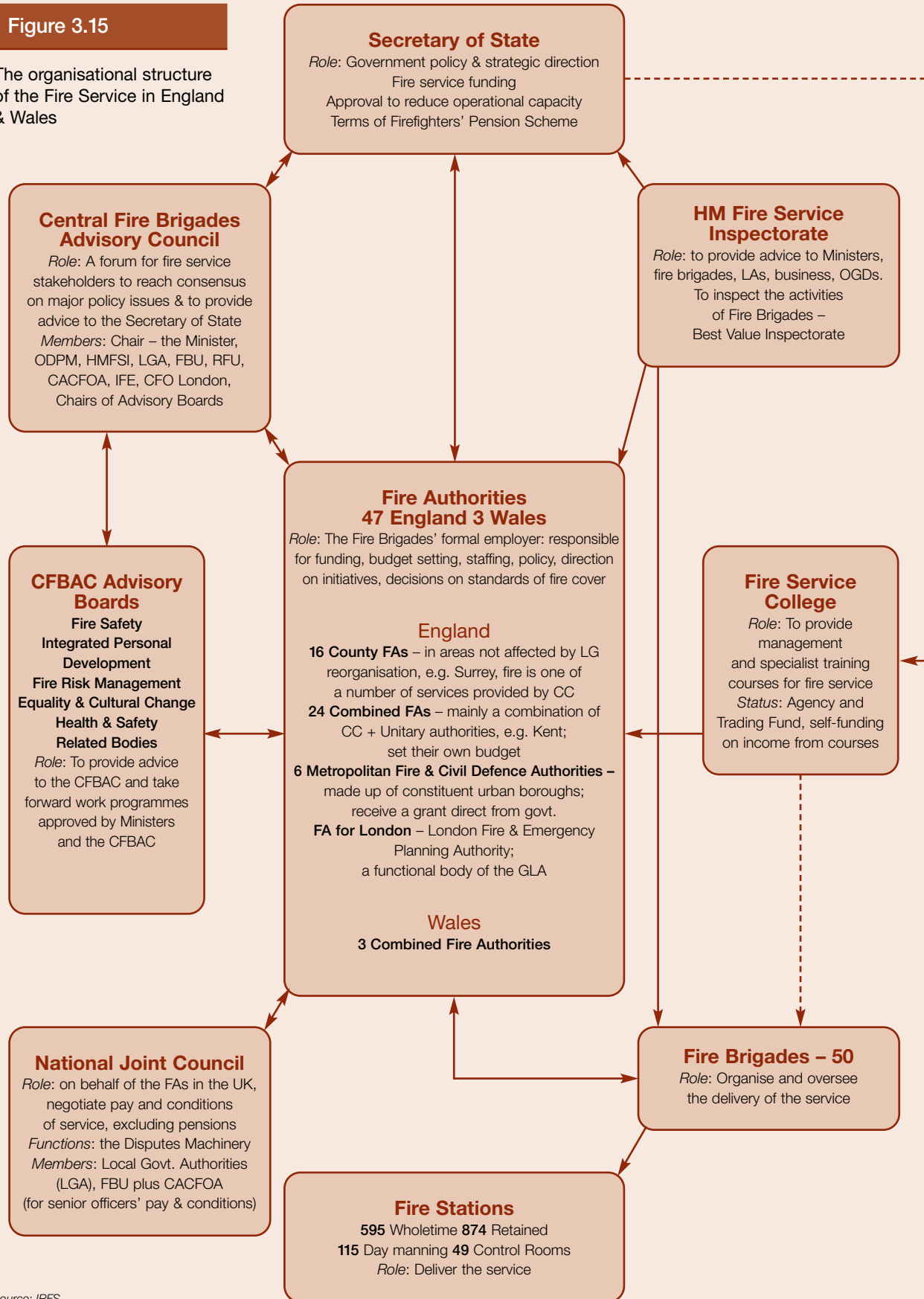
3.49 A further step on from fewer fire control rooms is the development of joint emergency control rooms. Three pilot schemes for joint control rooms have been set up using funds from the Invest to Save Budget in Cleveland, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. The formal evaluation of these projects is due in April 2005. But all have encountered institutional barriers. The Fire Service involvement in the project in Cleveland has stopped completely. The project team told us that the local workforce of the fire brigade objected to the project for a shared control room and said 'the FBU ran the dispute in Cleveland in such a way that they managed to antagonise frontline staff in both ambulance and police services. It will take some time to repair the relationship and this [antagonism] can only be to the detriment of the public.'

Structure and management of the Fire Service

3.50 The structure of the service is complicated as can be seen from the organisation chart in Figure 3.15. The complex nature of the relationships and the interdependencies have made change difficult. No one part of the structure owns the agenda for change.

Figure 3.15

The organisational structure of the Fire Service in England & Wales



Source: IRFS

3.51 Deficiencies in legislation have not been tackled. The Audit Commission report of 1995 has not yet been implemented fully, some seven years after publication. There is no clearly articulated vision and policy for the Fire Service at national level.

3.52 The Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC) and its related advisory boards form a group akin to a national policy forum on the Fire Service. But the council and its advisory boards do not have clearly defined roles; are too big to advise or make decisions effectively; and tend to be bureaucratic, slow and consensus driven. For example, the CFBAC was given the task of developing risk-based fire cover following the Audit Commission's report, but seven years on it is still not ready to implement.

3.53 HM Fire Service Inspectorate inspects fire authorities against the national standards of fire cover and statutory fire safety legislation, and reports on efficiency of the use of resources to the Secretary of State. Using the national standards of fire cover as a benchmark has reinforced the status quo.

3.54 Chief officers' operational freedom is constrained by the inflexible national fire cover standards, crewing arrangements and shift patterns. Chief officers are accountable to their local fire authority and do not always have the operational independence they need.

3.55 Direction and leadership at local level has been lacking too, partly due to the disparate nature of local employers. There are 50 fire authorities in England and Wales, eight in Scotland and one in Northern Ireland. Among these fire authorities, there are eight organisational models, with different powers and different ways of raising revenue.

3.56 Some fire authorities have tried to pursue better and more efficient services locally and their commitment to the Fire Service is shown by the fact that on average they fund the service above what the government proposes in the Standard Spending Assessment. As a national group, however, they have not been able to bring about change. This is because they have had no leverage. The automatic application of the pay formula has left the employers with nothing to bargain with to gain changes in national terms and conditions. Thus stability has led to inertia.

Conclusion

3.57 As this chapter shows, the physical resources of the Fire Service – its stations and appliances – are not situated according to the risks run by the people who live locally. Gains in terms of lives saved and injury avoided could be better achieved from community fire safety than from fire suppression alone. The fact that community fire safety is not backed by statute and is not funded specifically means that its implementation has been patchy with some forces doing a lot and some a little. At the moment, we do not have the right resources in the right places at the right time.

3.58 There are many inflexibilities in the way that the current terms and conditions operate which prevent managers from deploying their staff according to risk and getting them to carry out community fire safety. Managers are not free to manage: they are squeezed between national standards of fire cover which no longer protect people adequately, and national terms and conditions designed for working conditions of a generation ago. The lack of joint working and collaboration makes the Fire Service less efficient and effective than it should be.

3.59 There is much that is good about the Fire Service but there is much that needs fundamental change. In the next chapter we describe what the Fire Service of the future could look like.

The Fire Service tomorrow

A Service fit for the future needs statutory backing for all its functions, not just responding to fires, and a funding regime which matches the demands upon it. The emphasis should be on prevention as well as intervention and decisions about using staff and other resources must reflect that. The resources devoted to intervention should be allocated flexibly according to a reasoned risk assessment not a rigid prescription. Firefighters will have an increasingly varied role and opportunities to specialise and to work different shift patterns which suit them. Many of them will have more responsible, wide-ranging jobs which can be better paid. There needs to be a clear national policy for the Service but also stronger local management, as well as co-operation between brigades and with other emergency services and partners where this gives a more effective and efficient service to the community.

4.1 In this chapter, we describe what the Fire Service of the future should look like and what the job of the firefighter should be. We also explain the kind of roles Ministers, their advisers and fire authorities need to play. What we describe is a new system. It must be flexible: to local circumstances, to individuals and to new challenges, whether national or local. This will mean change for everyone.

4.2 Much of what we describe in this chapter and discuss in more detail in those that follow is not original thinking. It derives from the good work we saw on our visits and the good ideas we were told about in written and other submissions. Much of it is learning from the best practice that already exists in places and spreading it more widely. Chapter 3 showed how we are using the resources of the Fire Service in the wrong way. This chapter shows how the future of the service would look if it put the right resources into the right functions at the right time.

Role of the Service

4.3 The aim of the Fire Service is simply put in the Government's spending plans: a reduction in the loss of life, injury, economic and social cost arising from fires and other hazards. We think this is a good basis for defining the role of the Service in future.

4.4 It will have a wide ranging role as it does now in improving all relevant aspects of community safety. It will also have to respond to new challenges drawing on core skills, such as its understanding of dangers in built structures. It needs appropriate statutory powers which recognise what it already does and are flexible enough to cope with what might arise in future, not the limited powers it has now.

Achievement of the employers' modernisation agenda will make the service more responsive and adaptable, in terms of reducing the risk of fire and responding to incidents.

Local Government Association
evidence

Until such time as the role [of the Fire Service] is properly and adequately determined any review has the potential to leave the Fire Service in limbo.

Association of Professional Fire Officers evidence

4.5 Under current statutory and fire cover requirements, the Fire Service is organised around the need to respond to fire incidents. This makes up no more than 5-10 per cent of its total activity and so it is not now and will not in future be the dominant activity. Instead, the Fire Service should have specific responsibilities for:

- risk reduction and risk management in relation to fires and some other types of hazard or emergency;
- community fire safety and education;
- fire safety enforcement;
- emergency response to fires and other emergencies where it is best fitted to act as the primary agency responsible for the rescue of people including road traffic accidents, chemical spillages and other large-scale incidents such as transport accidents; and
- emergency preparedness coupled with the capacity and resilience to respond to major incidents of terrorism and other chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear threats.

4.6 There must be a funding system which recognises and supports the full range of what the Fire Service does for the community. Despite complaints about the inadequacy and perverse incentives of the current funding arrangements, we believe that the existing local government finance system is capable of delivering this. But first there needs to be a proper statement of the purpose of the Fire Service. This will provide a basis for detailed work on the full cost of meeting specified national standards, relative costs across the country and how funds should be distributed.

4.7 We think that the Government should also consider changing the name of the Service to reflect its new roles and responsibilities and to include a reference to its wider role, in particular the precautionary role now expected of the Service.

4.8 It will be a national service protecting local communities, as it is now. There will be national principles, standards and expectations – though fewer than there are now – but these will be coupled with sensitivity to local circumstances. In carrying out their responsibilities, fire authorities will develop a risk management plan which can then be audited as part of the approach advocated in Chapter 5.

The Service will:

- apply a risk-based approach to fire cover and to all its activities in deciding how best to use firefighters and other resources;
- focus on reducing the level of fire and other emergencies (i.e. prevention rather than intervention);
- develop and maintain effective partnerships with a range of agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors where these can deliver cost-effective improvements in community safety;

- adopt safe systems of working to secure the health and safety of both its staff and the general public; and
- minimise the impact of the incidents it attends and of its response at those incidents on the environment.

4.9 These functions will require a wider range of skills and competences than in the past. Many in the Service have already responded to these new needs. Removing or reducing the rigid national prescriptions, such as those about fire cover or the level of staffing through the day ('constant crewing'), will make it possible to match the level and disposition of resources to meet local needs without having to seek any central approval. This flexibility will mean managers must be ready and equipped to take decisions about priorities and who does what, when and where. This will present significant challenges for them as well as for staff.

Working arrangements

4.10 Those employed in the Fire Service, as now, will be doing essential work protecting the public. Firefighters will continue to be part of a service rooted in the local community and responding to the needs of that community. The loyalty of firefighters to the area in which they work and the respect of the community for firefighters are valuable assets which we must not lose.

4.11 Firefighters will be protecting and rescuing the community from a wide range of dangers. The Service will need a correspondingly wide range of skills and competences to meet these demands. It will no longer be the case that a single role, that of 'firefighter', can fulfil them all. Even the term is no longer appropriate to convey what they really do, though it is difficult to find a concise alternative.

4.12 A more diverse range of people will need to be recruited and they may enter at a range of levels, depending on their relevant skills and experience. There should be no distinction between the value of whole-time and retained firefighters to the Service or between them and control room staff or between uniformed and non-uniformed staff. All groups should be trained to a consistent professional standard. All groups should be offered a range of roles and opportunities. Their skills and commitment should be used effectively for the benefit of the community.

4.13 In future the Service will have a culture which welcomes this diverse range of people and offers a family-friendly environment. It will offer a range of shift patterns for staff and fit in with the need for cover, based on local risk assessments which reflect when and where incidents take place. That will likely mean a more varied working day with more time spent out of the fire station on community fire safety work.

If the cultural change necessary to modernise is not supported by a clear vision about the type of service the government wishes to see, the barriers to change will be almost insurmountable.

Somerset County Council evidence

4.14 Having a more diverse workforce, with less time spent in the fire station as part of a watch, will change the 'watch culture'. But it will be important not to lose entirely the trust and loyalty which we recognise are one of the benefits of that culture. Instead the Service will need to encourage loyalty to a wider, more diverse team.

4.15 Firefighters may choose to specialise and will have a variety of options for career paths. They may want to move out of a front line role towards the end of their career and will have more options to do so than at present. Pay will be determined within a national framework but will reward individual competencies and skills.

4.16 One result is that the more responsible and wide ranging jobs which will be available as a result of all these changes can be better paid. Individuals will be able to increase their income by moving into new areas in the course of their careers without arbitrary restrictions and by learning new valuable skills.

Direction and management

4.17 The Service will have clear and accountable lines of direction and management. It will remain a national service and needs a clear statement of what the nation expects of it. Ministers must take responsibility for laying down national policy.

4.18 Ministers will need better sources of advice from both their civil servants and others with expertise to offer. This will separate policy direction from operational management and from the national negotiating machinery.

4.19 The new Service will require appropriate institutions to co-ordinate policy at national level and to conduct negotiations around a new and more appropriate reward structure. For the future, there must be clearer national leadership from the employers' side, with better demarcation of those issues which can be determined locally and those which need to be tackled nationally. Similarly, while it will be important to maintain the partnership between employers and unions, which has been a feature of the Fire Service arrangements in the past, there must be a clear demarcation of the management role from that of representing members of the service.

4.20 A service delivery organisation like the Fire Service cannot be run as a central function. Local management and delivery remain essential. But the development of more sophisticated roles and functions will also mean that brigades will need to work together in more and more areas. Operationally, the development of programmes like New Dimension, which looks at the response to major incidents, will require a regional or sub-regional co-ordination of fire resources.

There also needs to be co-operation on more basic management functions, for example sharing training facilities, procurement, higher level human resource services and best practice.

4.21 Ministers, employers, managers and staff need good back up in terms of research, good practice advice and training. The Fire Service College and Inspectorate need reform with new remits which include the promotion of best practice and the delivery of a wider vision of an effective service.

Conclusion

4.22 What this chapter shows is that moving to the Fire Service of the future means changing just about every system and institution. This will offer greater flexibility in nearly every area of operations and personnel, with a move away from rigid rules applied fixedly to every individual or situation. In some ways it will be a development of changes that have been happening already. In future they must happen across the board, coherently and with proper statutory and organisational backing. But all of this change will require stronger direction and management, from the national policy framework, which only Ministers can set, through to the local application of risk-based approaches to fire cover.

4.23 In the following chapters we set out in more detail the reforms which are needed to achieve the new Fire Service and, wherever possible, how soon we think they could be in place. We start in chapter 5 with the changes needed to allow the Fire Service to take a new approach to managing risk more flexibly. Chapter 6 describes the role for central government and Chapter 7 the implications for main Fire Service organisations and for management. Chapter 8 looks at pay levels and a reward structure suitable for a Fire Service of the future and Chapter 9 suggests reform to the firefighters pension scheme. Chapter 10 sets out how conditions of service need to change, with Chapter 11 describing the future position of retained firefighters. We conclude in Chapter 12 with our recommendations about implementing the significant programme of reform which this report advocates. As we say elsewhere, the new Fire Service can only emerge as a result of action by all those involved in central and local government, in fire authorities and in the Fire Service itself.

Risk and community fire safety

A new approach is required to planning and providing fire cover. A model based on risk assessment is being developed by the professional advisers in the Fire Service. The work of the Fire Service needs to be grounded more firmly in the community; education and partnership programmes have an increasing role to play. A risk-based approach focuses more clearly on saving lives rather than providing fire cover in line with outdated, rigid statutes. Fire authorities should start work to implement this approach as a priority. Existing powers can be used to make the change, but new primary legislation is required to provide a modern framework.

5.1 At present, the resources of the Fire Service are principally deployed in order to be able to react to fires in buildings at whatever time of day they occur and whether or not there are any people in the buildings. The Review team has been told on numerous occasions of the absurdities that this system produces. Chapter 3 gives some examples. It is worth summarising the main points. The current approach is inflexible, based upon property rather than people, takes no account of whether a building is occupied, cannot plan for greater cover in areas of social deprivation (where risk is higher), takes no account of fire safety measures already being taken, and, perhaps most importantly, takes intervention by firefighters and fire appliances as the main way of reducing fire risk. Risks move with people: the Fire Service must be able to move its protection accordingly. This chapter considers a new approach to managing fire risk.

5.2 The objectives of a modern Fire Service can be summarised as:

- to reduce loss of life, loss and injury and property damage from fires and other emergencies;
- to reduce the number of fires breaking out;
- to minimise the impact on the environment of fires and other emergencies, and the techniques used to fight them;
- to secure safe systems of work at all times;
- to improve community safety by providing assistance at non-fire emergencies;
- to demonstrate that the Service delivers best value, providing high quality services while demonstrating value for money; and
- to develop partnerships with a range of agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors to support the achievement of these objectives.

The development of an integrated risk-based approach is central to the development of a modern Fire Service and delivery of these objectives. It will provide a more effective service and save lives.

Statutory fire safety

5.3 The inspection of public and commercial buildings has been an integral part of Fire Service work for many years. It has, until recently, been governed by rigid criteria as laid out in the Fire Precautions Act 1971, as amended. Recent innovations through the Workplace (Fire) Regulations 1997, as amended, have enabled the fire service to adopt a more risk-based approach to this part of their service delivery. Its introduction has, however, left an overlap between these two pieces of legislation. Fire safety also appears in numerous other pieces of legislation and the Government is working toward simplifying this approach and enhancing a risk-based approach to statutory fire safety under a Regulatory Reform Order. Statutory fire safety, along with community fire safety, will provide the preventative side of an integrated risk-based approach to Fire Service operations.

Community fire safety

5.4 As we explain in Chapter 3, a principal component of community fire safety is educating the groups at risk from fire and increasing fire safety measures by, for example, removing hazards. Because it involves close engagement with individuals and communities, it has to be done at a time, and often at a place, which suits them rather than the Fire Service.

5.5 The amount of involvement in community fire safety varies across the country but can include the following:

- educating those most at risk of fire death and injury (the elderly, the young and the socially excluded);
- working with young people, including training programmes for disaffected youth;
- investigating suspicious fires; and
- partnership working with other agencies, including local businesses, local strategic partnerships and crime and disorder partnerships.

Some of the most impressive work we saw when we visited the London Fire Brigade was in educating disaffected youth and one scheme in Tower Hamlets is described below.

Local Intervention Fire Education Project, Tower Hamlets

Tower Hamlets experiences many residential fires and other types of incident together with a high level of youth-related crime. Male unemployment is high and a lower than average proportion of the school population gains educational qualifications.

Local firefighting crews have suffered physical and verbal abuse when carrying out their duties.

Bangladeshi pupils make up 55 per cent of the school population with 33 per cent of pupils speaking Bengali/Sylheti as a mother tongue. The London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) employs very few Asian firefighters which makes engagement with the local community particularly difficult.

In order to help deal with these issues, resources have been directed into community engagement to reduce fires, fire deaths and fire-related injuries; to attract and recruit young men and women from the local community; and to improve relations between fire crews and the local community.

Local fire officers set up a training course (based on one developed in Leicester) for disaffected young people covering team building, basic health and safety and first aid, consequences of fire setting, basic fire-fighting skills and a pass-out drill demonstration. Nine out of ten of those who started the first course finished it. An external evaluation concluded, 'the course can only be a positive for the young people, Fire Service and local communities.' Relations with the local community are improving and recruitment is up also.

Fire officers in Tower Hamlets have made a successful bid to the single regeneration budget challenge fund to run ten more courses next year.

5.6 At present this close engagement is difficult in many areas. Most firefighters are constrained by the rigidities of the shift system from being able to make themselves available for this work. The Fire Brigades Union ban on prearranged overtime prevents some from being able to do fire safety work when they would like to do so. This must not be allowed to continue; the prevention of deaths from fire through increased community fire safety measures must be among the highest priorities of the Fire Service. Also, the resources made available by the changes in fire cover we recommend should allow significant extra effort to go into community fire safety. And the Fire Service must organise staff so as to be able to deploy people with the appropriate skills do the work.

5.7 Brigades working on fire prevention have been hampered by another ‘perverse’ incentive. Until the local government finance settlement announced on 5 December this year, only a miniscule element of the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) formula was linked to fire safety in any form. So there is no encouragement to invest in fire safety; quite the reverse, since fire authorities got no extra money for reducing fires.

5.8 This general approach must change. The aim must be for the Fire Service to move from a predominant culture of responding to fires to one of preventing their occurrence. Over time, the need for intervention should come to be seen as a failure and this will not happen unless there are changes to the existing legislative and regulatory frameworks.

5.9 Full development and implementation of a new approach within the Fire Service will take some time, but it is possible to make some rapid initial changes which would demonstrate commitment to modernise the Service, and show the practical benefits which such modernisation can deliver. Specifically, what is required is for fire authorities to:

- put in place now the basic framework for an integrated risk-based approach;
- allow for the continuous development and improvement of that approach, and the systems which underpin it, to deliver a fully developed system in the medium term; and
- deliver in the short term, where practicable, rapid improvements in community protection as well as more efficient ways of providing that service.

A new approach to fire cover

5.10 A new approach is required to plan the use of Fire Service resources to reduce loss of life in fires and accidents, and provide better value for money. The way to achieve this is by focusing Fire Service planning and activities more on saving lives, rather than on providing specified types of cover for particular types of incident.

5.11 Introducing such a risk-based approach will generally lead to:

- reducing emergency fire cover where there is little scope to save lives;
- increasing cover where there is more scope to save lives; and
- increasing fire service involvement in preventive and protective work, as well as in providing emergency cover which will save lives.

5.12 In moving forward in this way, care must be taken to ensure that sweeping changes are not made which put lives at risk and fail to meet the objective of improving community safety. What is needed are incremental, low-risk moves toward things that are ‘clearly better’ than they are now. **We therefore recommend that the work should be taken forward through a series of incremental steps as follows:**

- **Government should give fire authorities the power to deploy resources differently from the present requirements.**
- **Government should instruct each fire authority to develop a Risk Management Plan that will save more lives and provide better value for money.**
- **Fire authorities should be required to consult their communities and key stakeholders in the preparation of their plans.**
- **Chief officers should be empowered to implement their authority’s plan.**

5.13 Fire authority Risk Management Plans must identify the best ways of reducing and managing risks, using the whole range of approaches available, including community or statutory fire safety, and any new ideas which emerge. This new approach should benefit the country as a whole.

5.14 Work has already been conducted into a risk-based strategies as part of the current Fire Cover Review. One particular part of the work – the Pathfinder trials study – has gained notoriety since early findings, later shown to be unreliable, seemed to indicate that a move to a risk-based approach would require significantly larger numbers of firefighters. We have looked into this. Chief fire officers who we have consulted tell us that Pathfinder work was directed only to fire cover. The need is for an integrated risk-based policy, including community fire safety and statutory fire safety measures. The work should be taken forward on this basis.

5.15 The experience of providing fire cover during the recent strikes, where a risk management approach was adopted, has demonstrated that it works well. There was a total of twelve deaths in fire-related incidents, the same as an expected eight-day figure for November, despite much lower resources. The experience of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) confirmed that more incidents occur during the twelve-hour period from twelve noon until midnight. The MOD concluded that it would be right to review shift patterns to ensure that the availability of fire cover corresponded more closely to the incidence of fire. This is, of course, not the final word on the matter, but it is a significant lesson.

5.16 We expect the business community, including smaller and medium companies and larger corporate bodies to welcome this new risk based approach and the move to a more precautionary

approach. A move to a risk-based approach does not mean that commercial buildings will be neglected. Instead, they will receive the appropriate cover which recognises companies' investment in sprinklers, night security staff and other precautions. There needs to be early discussion with national and local business organisations to ensure that they understand the new approach and are confident that their interests have been taken into account.

5.17 We believe there is a compelling case to move to a risk-based approach and to do so now. It should be for the fire authorities to identify the risks and the best means of handling them. For the reasons we have set out, however, we believe that the fire authorities should, in consultation with chief fire officers, move ahead as quickly as they can.

5.18 The new approach – by deploying effort and resources with the aim of managing and reducing the risk of fire, and then containing fire when it occurs – offers a real prospect of reducing the incidence of fire, and deaths from fire. Too many people have died as a result of fire over recent years. Experience in other European countries and elsewhere, where risk management techniques have been used, has shown that real reductions in the incidence of fire and lives lost can be achieved. Urgent action is required in the UK.

5.19 We are told by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) that a move to allocate resources according to risk does not require legislation. The statutory requirement under Section 1 of the 1947 Fire Services Act is for authorities to provide 'efficient' fire services. The efficiency of fire services is currently judged against minimum national standards of fire cover promulgated by circular. These standards can be changed by the issue of replacement guidance. **We therefore recommend that ODPM issue the necessary guidance to implement a risk-based approach to fire cover as a matter of urgency.**

5.20 We have been told by many that if the full efficiency gains unlocked by the use of the new model of fire cover are to be delivered, the Government must repeal Section 19 of the 1947 Act. Under this provision, a fire authority in Great Britain may not close a fire station or reduce the number of fire appliances or firefighting posts without the consent of the Secretary of State. This is not consistent with the principles of delegation of responsibility and effective management. The local authorities, fire authorities, the Fire Service Inspectorates and the ODPM all believe that it should be repealed. We agree that this should be done as a matter of urgency. Unless it is repealed, the sorts of efficiency improvements we are looking for as a result of a move to the new system will not be realised. We are told by ODPM that repeal is possible. **We therefore recommend that ODPM amends or removes Section 19 of the 1947 Fire Services Act as soon as possible.**

There is a range of constraints which currently inhibit fire authorities' efforts to provide effective, efficient and responsive services. Modernisation of the service requires these constraints to be swept away.

London Fire and Emergency
Planning Authority

5.21 In their evidence to us, ODPM have pointed out that the 1947 Act also allows fire authorities to use fire brigades for purposes other than dealing with fires, such as assisting at road accidents. But we note that there is no significant funding for this activity. Fire authorities have the power to charge for the use of brigade assets in certain circumstances such as road traffic accidents when fire is not involved. But they cannot currently charge for attendance at automatic fire alarms following the Court of Appeal decision *Thorn v Sackville* (1992).

5.22 The Fire Service is currently under no obligation to carry out community fire safety. Statutory fire safety is governed by the Fire Precautions Act 1971 and Workplace (Fire) Regulations 1997. In addition, fire safety advice can be given under Section 1 of the Fire Services Act 1947. We have been told that this effectively means that Fire Service gives advice to major commercial interests for free and that there should be the ability to charge. The statutory fire safety regime and the statutory power for community fire safety are due to change under the Regulatory Reform Order due in 2004. We support this approach.

5.23 We therefore recommend the Government legislates to put the Fire Service on a new statutory basis. A new Fire Services Act is required which sets out the common core of functions which should be provided by fire authorities and fire brigades, including work on community fire safety. Clear central standards should be laid down, but with local fire authorities being given authority to provide services appropriate to local needs. **We further recommend that the Government commits itself to submit an annual report to Parliament on the Fire Service.**

5.24 In our position paper of 11 November, we drew attention to the absurdity of the mechanism under which fire authorities receive funding in accordance with the number of call-outs responded to rather than work done to reduce the incidence of fire. On 5 December 2002 the Government announced a new formula for distributing funding for the Fire Service. The new formula improves the previous position by:

- removing the perverse incentive of the calls indicator, whereby authorities lost out if they were successful in reducing the number of fire calls they receive;
- taking account of the widening role of the Service as a fire and rescue service;
- giving better recognition to actual fire risk, including taking account of the importance of deprivation as an indicator of fire risk; and
- increasing the share of funding for community fire safety.

5.25 The Government's plan is to freeze the formulae for a further two years, 2004/05 and 2005/06. This seems a long time. But ODPM tell us that producing a new formula which is simple to understand and yet reflects what the Service actually does may require fresh research into specific activity costs and the factors that drive variations in those costs. This will take time to get right and can only follow from a proper restatement of the purposes of the service.

We recommend that the Government puts in hand the work necessary to produce new options for the Fire Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) linked to the role of the future Service and its restated objectives so that a new formula can be introduced for 2006/07 and earlier if possible.

The New Approach: what it means

In our position paper of 11 November, we said that the Fire Service needed to put more effort into fire prevention, using risk reduction and risk management techniques across all its activities. The emphasis should be on prevention rather than intervention or emergency response. The type and number of calls to the Fire Service are not constant throughout the day; neither is the risk as, for example, people move to and from work. One of the consequences of this is that the current rigid rules for fire cover mean that the vast majority of the fire service resources cannot be adjusted to meet the changing risk. The number of incidents dramatically reduces at certain times of the day (see Figure 3.11) and, therefore, there is a strong argument for reducing cover at these times.

This is a major reform and we need to explain the thinking behind our proposals in more detail. The objective is to ensure that the large resources available to the Fire Service – the people, the fire engines and the body of expert knowledge – are being deployed and managed to the best effect. Previous work by the Audit Commission, and our discussions with chief fire officers, fire authorities, central government and individual fire service staff, have all confirmed our view that the present rigid system of providing fire cover should be changed. Simply put, it is focused on responding to fires and other emergencies rather than working to prevent these incidents happening. It is also a constant and inflexible form of cover that cannot respond to changing risk across both time of day and geographic location.

The current fire cover arrangements take no account of the type of incident. For example, the attendance to an automatic fire alarm is the same as that to a confirmed fire throughout the day. We know already that in parts of the country 98 percent of these calls turn

The New Approach: what it means continued

out to be false alarms and tie up Fire Service resources unnecessarily. Just reducing attendance to these types of incident or making a simple phone call to confirm the need for attendance would save resources.

The second issue is the number of calls received at different times of the day. As Figures 3.11 and 3.12 show, while the number of incidents drop off through the night, the number of fire-related deaths stays fairly constant. However, the current level of cover takes no account of the probable location of these incidents. Neither does it take account of issues such as the prevailing traffic conditions and the effect this may have on the time it takes for the Fire Service to attend. In addition, the calls to fires where people die often come at a later stage of the fire, particularly at night. If people are asleep, the fire can be more advanced by the time it wakes them and they raise the alarm. If they are asleep there is also a greater risk that they will be killed by smoke without waking up and before the alarm is even raised. The Fire Service performs well once it attends, but this is of no use if it is called too late.

To offer greater protection from fire the Fire Service needs to put much greater emphasis on fire prevention, that is, community fire safety. This concentrates on three basic messages: the prevention of fire, the detection of fire, and safe escape should a fire occur. The best way to reduce fires and fire related deaths and injuries is to educate people to prevent fires; to have a working smoke alarm to warn them should a fire occur; and to then have an escape plan which will enable them to get out and call the Fire Service earlier.

Relying on the current rigid standards of fire cover to provide emergency intervention will not reduce the number of deaths and injuries. The Fire Service has the resources to do this but only if they are re-focused according to risk so that more effort is directed to prevention, backed up with a reasonable emergency response.

There have been some local community fire safety campaigns for more than a decade but these have been under resourced and not consistently focused. These campaigns need to be stepped up and targeted through better use of existing Fire Service resources, including re-focusing staff from fire stations. Using risk assessment techniques, it will be possible to determine the best way of reducing fire risk in an area. Undoubtedly, more concentration on prevention rather than a constant, inflexible approach to fire cover is a better way forward.

Conclusion

5.26 The new approach based on risk gives the Fire Service the opportunity to re-position itself within the community. The emphasis must be on engaging with the community by education and preventative measures to prevent fire occurring rather than concentrating on dealing with fire after it happens. Resources should be re-deployed accordingly. The result should be a reduction in the risk of fire and the incidence of fire.

Role of central and local government

The arrangements for policy on fire have been unsatisfactory for many years. Clarity is required. Ministers must set the policy clearly. The most appropriate means to translate policy into action is the framework for local government set by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). Fire authorities need to meet the challenge of implementing the new risk-based approach. Co-operation and collaboration between brigades needs to increase in light of the developing agenda and the requirement to demonstrate value for money. At local level, there should be more collaboration between brigades and other service providers.

The Fire Service of the United Kingdom now stands at a crossroads, with a decision that will affect its future forever -which way will it turn?

Chief and Assistant Fire Chief
Officers Association

6.1 A constant theme running through the written and oral evidence we have taken is that central government does not give adequate guidance or leadership on fire policy. As a consequence, while some fire authorities promote change and innovation at the local level, there has been no real change at the national level for many years. In this chapter, we propose new arrangements for making national policy and translating that into action at local level. We also review policy developments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and how these fit with our recommendations for the UK as a whole.

Policy-making in central government

6.2 We agree that successive governments and government departments with responsibility for fire have not provided the leadership required, and have not addressed the obvious deficiencies in the legislation and the structural constraints identified in the Audit Commission's 1995 report. And frequent changes in Ministerial and departmental responsibilities have, however unwittingly, sent a clear message to the management and staff in the Fire Service that it has been low on the agenda of the present government.

6.3 The current arrangements for central government to give advice and instructions to the Fire Service are complex and cumbersome. At present, the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC), the Scottish CFBAC, and the sub-committees on fire safety, fire risk management, equalities and cultural change, health and safety, and integrated personal development – in which membership is a mix of officials and stakeholders are intended to be advisory panels to the Minister. The Fire Service Implementation Group (FSIG) is another subordinate body tasked with national co-ordination of the work of the fire authorities to implement policy directions.

6.4 Over the years, the CFBAC has become more and more involved in the national co-ordination of the work of the fire authorities, as opposed to its intended role of advising the Minister. The Council spends too much time on stakeholder business to the detriment of progressing national strategic issues. The employers' main concerns are with conditions of service, since pay is determined by a formula (see Chapter 8). This takes a major tool out of the hands of management. Archaic regulations prevent employers doing more than making marginal or local changes. The Fire Service Inspectorate has become mechanistic in its approach to inspection and fails to fill the policy vacuum. Whilst the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has adopted a positive attitude towards, for example, health and safety and community fire safety, it has been less co-operative towards other areas of essential reform.

6.5 At the same time, most of the principal parties in the current arrangements – government, local authorities, inspectorates, professional bodies, unions, and CFBAC – believe that the responsibility for this lack of progress lies elsewhere. The existing machinery is clearly not working.

6.6 There must be greater clarity in the roles and responsibilities of the organisations involved in the delivery of the Fire Service. Reform of the existing organisations is essential to ensure everyone is pointed in the same direction.

Advising Ministers

6.7 Ministers must take responsibility for laying down national policy. There needs to be a clear focus of policy formulation in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The roles and responsibilities of the staff in ODPM dealing with fire policy need to be defined clearly and understood by all stakeholders, particularly the employers. It is for central government to set the Fire Service's strategic priorities and to provide a clear lead on policy development.

6.8 We think there should be a new approach to advising the Minister with responsibility for fire matters. **The CFBAC should be replaced.** The new body should draw on the widest range of expertise relevant to helping the Minister decide upon the strategic principles under which the Fire Service should be operated, and the future direction of policy. There are many models but one which might promote change and best practice is the 'sounding board' approach. Members would be appointed on the basis of their personal experience and expertise, not as a representative of their organisation. The board would not be concerned about consensus building. It will be important to ensure that part of the membership is completely independent of the Fire Service. The membership of such an advisory body should cover at least the following competences:

HR, strategic planning, fire policy and best practice, local government, central government, health and safety. The body should be supported by officials in the ODPM. The need for other bodies, such as the existing Fire Safety Advisory Board, to continue can be decided in the light of decisions on our other recommendations on structure, which we give later.

6.9 The agreed Ministerial policy has to be translated into action at national and local level. Responsibilities for outcomes must be defined clearly. This is a challenging task, which is already met with varying degrees of success across the range of local authority services.

Translating policy into action

6.10 For England and Wales, ODPM have put in place a framework intended to allow Ministers to set national priorities for local government without intervening unduly in local decision making. As part of the implementation of the measures set out in the local government White Paper 'Strong Local Leadership – Quality Public Services', central and local government have agreed a list of Shared Priorities, which represent national expectations of local government which they accept as expressions of legitimate national interest in local services. There is also the national Public Service Agreement for local government, agreed as part of the Spending Review (SR2002), which sets targets for some services local authorities deliver.

6.11 In meeting their duties as best value authorities, fire authorities are required to secure continuous improvement in the way in which their functions are exercised. Authorities' performance is also assessed each year against a range of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) published by ODPM. Like other best value authorities, the performance of fire authorities is subject to independent external scrutiny. Current arrangements are that HM Fire Service Inspectorates ensure that fire authorities are complying with the requirements of best value, and that the Audit Commission audits their annual performance plans. The Accounts Commission supplies the same service in Scotland. More recently, and also in response to the local government White Paper, the Audit Commission has led the introduction of Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPAs) for county and single-tier authorities, with assessment work beginning early in 2003 for district councils. CPA looks at performance across the board and assesses authorities as excellent, good, fair, weak or poor. Better performance leads to greater flexibilities and freedoms for the authorities.

6.12 It would make no sense to construct an alternative framework for the Fire Service. **We recommend, therefore, that the existing performance management framework should be used to set national priorities for the Fire Service and more specifically that:**

- **National priorities for the Fire Service should reflect what it could contribute in the context of the Shared Priorities agreed with local government.**
- **The national Public Service Agreement (PSA) or Service Delivery Agreement (SDA) should articulate more clearly what national government expects of all fire authorities.**
- **In the light of forthcoming best value and performance improvement guidance, fire authorities should consider how best value reviews can help to address whether existing services are the most efficient and effective means of meeting the needs of users and the wider community.**
- **Discussions should be pursued with the Audit Commission and the Accounts Commission about an assessment process for fire authorities, building on lessons from the CPA process.**

6.13 This will require ODPM Ministers to agree with the Audit Commission (and the Scottish Executive Ministers with the Accounts Commission, and the Northern Ireland Office with the Northern Ireland Audit Office) an approach to assessing performance and a definition of what a ‘good fire authority’ would look like. We believe this would be a helpful way to turn the statutory expression of a wider purpose for the Fire Service, which we propose in Chapter 5, into an operational model.

The national dimension

6.14 The Fire Service is a national service delivered locally. But recent developments in the wider world, such as terrorism, mean that the roles that the Fire Service can play in the life of the nation take on increased importance. Some of these activities are beyond the capacity of all but the largest brigades and authorities to support. ‘New Dimension’ is the term given to the programme of work put in hand following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001. The aim is to ensure that the Fire Service is sufficiently trained and equipped to respond to a range of large-scale attacks. In particular, it must be able to deal with major chemical, nuclear, biological and conventional terrorist attacks on a national scale. The Fire Service has historically been recognised as an emergency service that can provide the largest trained response to an incident in the shortest timescale. The Fire Service will be expected to provide the primary emergency containment response in the aftermath of any attack. This will include the management of public mass decontamination in the event of biological, chemical or radioactive contaminants.

6.15 New Dimension planning envisages that the response to large-scale incidents will be organised on a regional basis. But some local authorities are reluctant to commit resources to emergencies outside their areas of responsibility. We understand that some funding has been made available from central government for the production of equipment and training in mass decontamination. Further substantial funds will be required to deal with the need for search and rescue.

6.16 There is no statutory or operational structure to ensure the delivery of a coherent national response. This gap must be addressed. **We therefore recommend that, as a matter of priority, the Government should establish a strategic-level, high capability co-ordination infrastructure to deal with New Dimension work.** The Fire Service should work in partnership with other emergency services in its creation.

6.17 As part of the Best Value Programme, brigades have been required to examine the possibility of sharing control rooms with their neighbours. All have done so, and reported their results to the Fire Service Inspectorate. None has decided to merge. This is very disappointing. There has been an attempt – in Cleveland – to merge the fire, police and ambulance control rooms, for which central funding has been made available. The project is not making progress because of the reluctance of the FBU to allow its members to take part. There have been similar cases in Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. We are confirmed in this view by the report of the Cabinet Office on the success of Joint Control Centres (JOCCs) in handling the industrial action by the FBU from 22-30 November showed what JOCCs between the Armed Forces (acting as firefighters), senior fire officers and police could achieve. In particular, JOCCs at local level were organised to prioritise calls and filter out false alarms which amount for over 40 per cent of total 999 calls to the Fire Service during normal operations. This approach, another sort of risk management, clearly makes sense and the Fire Service should learn from the lesson. But recent history suggests that brigades and fire authorities will be unwilling to do so. **We therefore recommend that all fire authorities which retain separate control rooms should be required to demonstrate to the Audit Commission and the Accounts Commission that their retention is likely to be cost effective against national performance standards.** We deal below with other aspects of co-operation and collaboration.

The regional dimension

6.18 Fire brigades face increasingly complex problems. Issues such as those raised by the New Dimension mean that work will often be done more effectively if it is done at a level of management above that of a brigade. Areas where supra-brigade co-ordination can provide increased efficiencies include joint personnel procedures, including recruitment, joint training including the sharing of training facilities and an increased emphasis on joint procurement. Several submissions to us have argued in favour of the creation of a regional structure for the Fire Service in England and Wales to make it better able to handle these issues. It is suggested that they should be based on the English regions as described in recent white papers on local government.

6.19 We can see the power of these arguments, but also recognise the countervailing view that it is essential that the Fire Service be firmly rooted in the community where work on fire safety is based. A number of submissions to us, including some by shire counties, have stressed the importance they attach to this point. We agree that, whatever the high-level structure, the Fire Service should be managed by people with good understanding of the local issues. And experience with local authority reorganisation indicates that amalgamations have not produced the large economies that were expected.

6.20 The point has also been made that a move to a regional structure for the Fire Service, if it is to be coherent with other strands of the government's regional policy, should follow the establishment of the new structure rather than precede it. If new, directly elected, regional assemblies are created, it would make sense for regional fire authorities to be responsible to them. This is some way off; we therefore conclude that the benefits to be gained from increased co-operation and collaboration should be pursued within the current organisational structure, with amalgamation between authorities if appropriate or by mutual collaboration on a case-by-case basis.

6.21 We further believe that collaboration and co-operation should be encouraged and strengthened. We have already made our recommendations on shared control centres in paragraph 6.17. This can be done within the existing structure. The work should also embrace other topics including the following:

- introducing common training standards and reducing training and other facilities duplicated within or across brigades;
- making more use of the facilities of local colleges of further education;
- co-ordinating procurement, including timetables, sharing and using best practice;

- developing operational policies and strategies to deal with the New Dimension;
- sharing experience in rolling out the reform agenda, particularly in human resources;
- sharing best practice in management; and
- developing local strategic partnerships.

The reformed Fire Service Inspectorates will have a crucial part to play in monitoring the progress of this work.

6.22 It will be difficult to get people's minds attuned to the idea of more collaboration. But we believe that fire authorities and senior managers in the Fire Service must constantly be reminded of the need to consider which activities they can deliver themselves and which would be better handled collaboratively. We therefore suggest that these topics should form part of the Comprehensive Performance Assessments of fire authorities which will be part of the new performance reporting framework established by the Audit Commission.

6.23 Fire authorities and brigades have made progress in other forms of co-operation. The Environment Agency is well placed to help in the development of thinking on fire prevention. A working protocol has been developed to help reduce the impact on the environment of the Fire Service's activities, particularly those relating to environmental law. A national training programme on environmental issues for Fire Service personnel has been developed at the National Fire Service College.

6.24 The need for Government to act in a co-ordinated way is also relevant in other areas. 'Co-responder' schemes were introduced in 1996 as a result of work which showed that ambulances were only able to meet life-threatening calls within eight minutes in 75 per cent of cases; if the response times could be improved to 90 per cent, 3,200 people suffering cardiac arrest could be saved each year and a further 300,000 patients with life-threatening conditions would receive a primary response within the critical time period. We recommend in Chapter 10 that some firefighters should be trained as 'first on the scene co-responders'.

6.25 There is further scope for joint working with the Ambulance Service in developing 'First Responder' schemes. First Responders are trained to provide high standards of care in the event of time-critical emergencies, to administer life saving basic life support until advanced medical care arrives. These schemes are particularly effective in rural communities. Devon Fire and Rescue Service currently has a total of twelve stations operating First Responder schemes.

6.26 The benefits to the public of First Responder schemes are immediate, direct and obvious. **We recommend brigades investigate the potential for developing First Responder partnerships.**

6.27 It is important to be clear that ‘co-response’ work does not involve Fire Service personnel seeking to carry out the roles of paramedics and other clinical roles. The role of the latter is distinctly more complex, and specialist training is required.

Local leadership

6.28 We have been told by many – including some politicians – that the leadership and general input from local politicians to fire authorities is poor. This is disappointing. If only because of the spotlight that has now been shone on the Service, it must be clear to all that good leadership and management have been lacking in many respects. We believe that the quality of membership and commitment of local fire authorities should be improved.

We recommend that the Local Government Association and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities take steps to develop the contribution of elected members on fire authorities and to ensure that they give stronger leadership in the future.

Devolved administrations

Scotland

6.29 The Scottish Executive has recently consulted on its paper *The Scottish Fire Service of the Future*. It concluded that the existing structure of eight fire authorities and brigades worked well and should be retained. But it also highlighted areas for further work to ensure that the Fire Service was accountable and responsive to the needs of communities across Scotland.

6.30 The Executive identified six key drivers for change:

- the need for a much stronger fire prevention ethos with a focus on developing community fire safety;
- the need to review the current Fire Services Acts which date back to 1947 and 1959 respectively;
- a shared sense of direction among those who work within the Fire Service and those who are responsible for it;
- the importance of working partnerships between the Fire Service, its stake-holders, and the communities it serves;
- the need to enhance the role of the authorities and strengthen community safety planning, an example of which is described below; and
- the Executive’s commitment to a modernising agenda across all the public services combined with a requirement to deliver best value.

Dumfries and Galloway community planning

Dumfries and Galloway Fire Brigade is a committed key partner within a comprehensive community planning process managed across the whole of its area and is supported by the local council, the Health Board and the Local Enterprise Agency. The effectiveness of the partnership is maximised by having all key partners within co-terminous boundaries and is particularly important in a rural area of 2500 square miles. The community planning process has three principal themes: Enterprise and Learning Communities, Inclusive Communities and Safe and Healthy Communities.

The importance of having the Fire Service involved is demonstrated within the Safe and Healthy Communities programme which has adopted an integrated risk management model for securing community safety and health improvements (based on the Prevention, Protection and Intervention Framework utilised by the Fire Service). This framework enables the brigade to contribute to health improvement initiatives, such as accident reduction, while maximising community fire safety effectiveness through the support of health partnerships within rural communities. A particular focus has been a reduction in deaths and injuries through domestic fires and also a seasonal campaign on the safe use of fireworks.

6.31 The importance of a stronger fire prevention ethos, community fire safety and the need for legislation to enhance both, coincide with the Review's judgements. The Executive's believes it should act in a way complementary to the overall position of the UK Fire Service. For this reason, it did not consider pay and conditions of service for firefighters, which are seen as part of a wider UK perspective rather than as having a distinctive Scottish dimension.

6.32 During the consultative phase of policy formation, there was widespread support for the change to community fire safety and the need for legislation. Another key area of the strategy generally endorsed by respondents, was the policy thrust to assist the use of part-time staff. Many areas of Scotland rely heavily on retained, rural or volunteer firefighters for their emergency cover, and respondents welcomed further consideration of how these individuals could be better recruited, supported and retained.

6.33 Likewise, there was a wide consensus that special services should be included in any new legislation, provided adequate training and resources were put in place for what many saw as consolidation of the Fire Service's current role.

6.34 The Executive is now considering how best to take forward its proposed strategies. Scottish Ministers told us that they envisage change coming about by sharing best practice and pooling activities such as procurement. They do not envisage major change to the structure; the emphases are on community fire safety, collaboration between forces, and value for money. Changes in legislation will be required to reflect the changing role of the firefighter.

6.35 We have been pleased to see the emphases on prevention and safety in *The Scottish Fire Service of the Future*. We support the reforms needed to bring about a modernised Fire Service when they are combined with the implementation of the proposals on terms and conditions of service in this report. We note that there is no intention to change numbers of brigades. We believe that the need for greater co-operation and collaboration on grounds of cost-effectiveness will in time probably force further mergers.

Wales

6.36 Reorganisation of local government in Wales gave the opportunity for a reappraisal of fire arrangements. On grounds of quality, effectiveness, responsiveness and local factors, it was decided to reduce from eight to three fire authorities. They are relatively small by comparison with England.

6.37 There was some resistance to change from local authorities, and it took time for the new organisation to bed down. But there is now general acceptance that the change has been for the better. It has led to more effective delivery of services, and valuable longer-term efficiency savings are being made in areas such as procurement and common services. The re-organisation has also acted as a major driver for change within the Service.

6.38 Unlike the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly Government does not have policy or full funding responsibility for the three Welsh fire authorities. ODPM has policy responsibility for the Fire Service in Wales, but fire brigade officers have also contributed to the Assembly's policies in areas such as regeneration, housing and transport. Responsibility for funding the Service is split between the Welsh Assembly Government, which is responsible for the revenue funding, and ODPM which provides the capital funding.

6.39 There has been close and productive working between the Assembly and the Welsh fire authorities through the Partnership Council, the Wales Fire Forum and through joint working groups on a range of policy issues relating to community fire safety, including an arson programme and developing an integrated response to emergency planning.

6.40 There are good relations and joint working between the Assembly and fire authorities. There is strong support within Welsh fire authorities at member and officer level for the Assembly to be given the responsibility for the Fire Service. The Review team endorses the proposal that the Welsh Assembly be given policy and funding responsibility for the Fire Service in Wales. The present split in policy responsibility for the Fire Service, and capital and revenue funding between the Welsh Assembly Government and ODPM provides scope for confusion, delay, uncertainty and tension. It militates against the effective planning of the Fire Service.

6.41 In view of the relatively small size of the Welsh Fire Service, however, we believe that the national inspection and pay bargaining arrangements, and terms and conditions for the Fire Service should continue to be determined on an England and Wales basis. This will necessitate Welsh representation on the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council for England and Wales and its successor body. The Review's recommendations will apply to the Fire Service in Wales as well as England. We would particularly argue for the closest possible collaboration between fire authorities.

Northern Ireland

6.42 The Fire Authority for Northern Ireland has recently submitted a report on fire cover requirements in Northern Ireland, the first since 1984, which clearly demonstrates the need for greater flexibility in the deployment of resources. As in Great Britain, pay increases for Fire Service staff need to be linked to a modernisation programme that provides increased flexibility and the more effective and efficient use of equipment and personnel.

6.43 In Northern Ireland there are three immediately pressing issues on which the Fire Authority needs to make quick progress: whether a special allowance to take account of increased risk should continue; standardisation of crewing levels on appliances with practice in Great Britain; and the question of additional leave entitlements. As regards the modernisation agenda, the Fire Service of Northern Ireland believes there is real potential, by using the skills of non-uniformed personnel, to allow uniformed personnel to be released to concentrate on those areas of work where their specialised expertise can be fully used.

6.44 We recognise that there are particularly difficult issues facing the Northern Ireland Fire Authority and Brigade. As with the rest of the UK, these must be matters for senior management to resolve locally with the new, more flexible arrangements we are proposing. We believe, however, that the new approaches, particularly in risk management and working practices – we recommend for the remainder of the United Kingdom – should be adopted in Northern Ireland. There should be resulting savings in life.

Conclusion

6.45 We conclude that the government needs to accept the challenges posed by the need for a change in the policy and practices which have governed most of the activities of the Fire Service for many years. The main levers for making the changes are available at national and local level. They should be used now. Our proposals are equally relevant to the devolved administrations.

6.46 Fire authorities face major challenges. Leadership will be required from them and chief fire officers. The need for regional co-operation between neighbouring authorities will increase. Greater co-operation should be encouraged at local and institutional level. We therefore turn now to the changes in the institutions which will be required to lead and manage the Fire Service in the future.

Implementation and management policy

Fire Service management is diffuse. The several parts of the system do not work together to a common agenda. There needs to be a fresh start with a newly formed set of structures. The Fire Service College and Inspectorate have important roles to play in the reform agenda; they should be re-modelled. A new policy implementation body is required, built on existing structures if possible. Practices and procedures for management of personnel give rise to major concerns. A programme of remedial action is required. For the future, the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) should form the cornerstone of personal development work.

7.1 In Chapter 6 we have described the requirements for a new policy-forming body for the Fire Service, and the frameworks which can be used to translate policy into action by fire authorities. We have drawn attention to the pressing need for fire authorities and brigades to work together. We now consider the changes needed to modernise the Fire Service organisations.

Effective organisation

7.2 The diffuse management system within the Fire Service has made it difficult for any one component in the institutional process to achieve reform by itself. Unless all the institutional arrangements are pointing in the same direction, any one of them has the power to block or at least slow down changes to existing arrangements. This then provides an alibi for managers to avoid change until they receive clear instructions and support.

7.3 The new arrangements for the Fire Service will, therefore, need to achieve at least the following two objectives: first, a clear articulation of roles so that each body, committee or institution has a clear relationship to the others, a well-defined responsibility for delivering particular aspects of reform, and accountability for its performance; and second, an organic change process which allows ideas and developments to occur at any time without the need for even minor details to be agreed centrally. Not only must local innovation be encouraged, but there must be some process for building on local best practice to achieve wider reform.

7.4 There will always be a need to balance local flexibility against nationally-defined objectives, but the current system is too rigid and stifles the innovation and enthusiasm of existing staff. Managers must be allowed to manage, and the role of the central institutions is to provide them with the necessary support to deliver their responsibilities and objectives as efficiently and effectively as possible.

7.5 Based on work with other public-sector bodies, we believe that there are four critical roles which need to be defined in delivering organic change. First, the Fire Service requires a body of expertise on technical matters and business processes which can indulge in theoretical and applied research on new ways of delivering the Service's objectives. It might also have a role in defining appropriate standards for delivery, especially in areas such as interoperability, where significant progress is required. Just as important, there must be somewhere where managers come together to refine their thinking on how fire services should be delivered. This would involve the development of concepts of operations and broader doctrines to help give the service its coherence and ensure that it works effectively as a whole. Some organisations such as the armed forces have taken the development of doctrine to advanced levels. Others such as the police and health service are only just beginning to think in this way. The Fire Service needs to take account of this experience and build it into its own requirements.

7.6 Second, the Fire Service will always be delivered at a regional or local level. An agent is required to provide co-ordinating links between the individual organisations, to spread best practice and to advise them on how central thinking is developing. This agent will also have an important role in explaining the vision for reform, providing expert support and ensuring that local developments are consistent with the overall vision for the Fire Service.

7.7 Third, there must be a process under which new ideas are brought forward and reviewed for their implications and cost-effectiveness. There needs to be a new body to bring together practitioners to consider common issues concerning the management of change. It would also have an important role in ensuring that new ideas are practical and capable of being implemented effectively within a reasonable timescale.

7.8 Last, implementation will fall to the fire authorities and the managers who serve them, but it will be very important to have a source of external advice and 'reality checks' to ensure that the process is conducted effectively. The views of the end customer must also be reflected and fed back so that the change process can adapt to experience on the ground and learn from this as implementation proceeds.

7.9 The process will need to be developed further to ensure that it contains the appropriate checks and balances so that views are properly represented but that reform is not blocked by an absence of agreement. We think that a model for change set out above can be delivered by modifying the existing Fire Service institutions, as set out below.

Fire Service College

7.10 The Fire Service College (FSC) provides facilitated-learning opportunities within the context of the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) which is discussed later in this chapter. It also supports community fire safety policies by offering consultancy in fire-risk assessment, fire-safety audit and so on. As an institution, the college has ensured that officers in particular grades have completed particular courses, rather than designing training to circumstances or training people for new positions, and so has not fostered reform.

7.11 The FSC is already going through a major programme of reform to update its approach to training and to reflect the introduction of the IPDS framework. In addition, we believe that the College is the right place to provide the technical and business expertise referred to in paragraph 7.5. **We recommend that the College should provide the focus for developing new thinking required for the Fire Service**, much as the Police College at Bramshill now provides the National Centre for Policing Excellence. This would require the College to develop a new capability in technical and management reform, and would require it to recruit younger, existing officers for a period of secondment to carry out the analysis and planning required. The College might also inherit some of the functions traditionally carried out by the Inspectorate in this area.

7.12 We do not believe that the College should regard itself as having a monopoly in the training and development of Fire Service staff. Local Institutes of Education can provide development assistance. For senior officers, we believe that broadly-based management training should be an essential part of their development. Resources already available in the public and private sectors should be considered.

7.13 The training programme of the College should be supervised by a Board, including people from outside the service to bring a broader perspective.

HM Fire Service Inspectorate

7.14 HM Fire Inspectorate (FSI) inspects fire authorities against the national standards of fire cover and reports on efficiency of the use of resources to the Secretary of State. It also provides advice and guidance on technical matters. There is a separate Inspectorate in Scotland.

7.15 Using the national standards of fire cover as a benchmark for inspection has reinforced the status quo rather than brought about change. Furthermore, we do not believe that the traditional role of inspection adds sufficient value to the service in accordance with the views expressed in the report into the Role of External Review

produced by the Public Service Productivity Panel in 2001. This identified a number of requirements for independent inspectorates, including the need for close links between the review process and those responsible for delivering change; the risk of dilution of responsibility to deliver best value; the need to review the performance of the whole organisation rather than just a single deliverable in isolation; and the importance of liaison and learning from other inspectorates in similar areas. As the majority of fire authorities are concerned with a single delivery service, it will not be possible for the Fire Service Inspectorates, even with substantial reform, effectively to fulfil these requirements.

7.16 We therefore recommend that in future the Inspectorates should concentrate on two main functions. First, the new bodies should provide the resources to support implementation of the reform programme across the UK Fire Service. To do this, the Inspectorates should be composed of secondees from the UK brigades. These should be high-flying officers with chief officer potential, who will join the Inspectorate for a period of two to three years to manage the reform programme and to provide sensitivity to local circumstances. At the conclusion of their period of secondment, they will then go back to a UK brigade to manage and deliver the changes that they themselves have developed and implemented. This will give them a strong incentive to carry through the reforms and build a strong link between local delivery and central policy-making. This cohort should be augmented by other secondees with appropriate technical skills, including economists, accountants, auditors and private-sector management.

7.17 Second, as part of the ongoing process of reform, the Inspectorates should maintain close and detailed contact with individual brigades to identify best practice and any emerging implementation problems, and to ensure that local implementation remains consistent with the wider national vision. We would see some aspects of this role being conducted in close conjunction with the Fire Service College. While the two roles must be kept distinct, there clearly needs to be close co-operation in the development of new ideas between them.

7.18 The Fire Service claims that it is over-inspected. We share that view and consider that the Audit Commission (and in Scotland the Accounts Commission) is best placed to combine inspection with its existing audit responsibilities and in future take on all inspection activities relating to the Fire Service. The Audit Commission has experience of inspection of local authority services and has been very effective in developing technical expertise and providing advice to local organisations in the delivery of services. In publishing *In the Line of Fire* (Audit Commission 1995) it has demonstrated its ability to identify the weaknesses of the Fire Service. With appropriate technical

assistance and resourcing, we see no reason why it could not build up a similar body of expertise in connection with the Fire Service.

We recommend that the Audit Commission, the Accounts Commission and the Northern Ireland Audit Office should be invited to take on all inspection of the Fire Service.

A new body to consider change implementation

7.19 In addition to the existing organisations we also see a need for a body to provide the functions set out in paragraphs 7.7 and 7.8, to review new ideas and consider common issues. **We recommend that there should be a new collective body to act as a forum to discuss the practical implementation of policy changes and operational reforms.** In the short term this would play an important role in carrying forward the reform programme and in the longer term it would ensure that the Service continues to develop new ways of delivering its objectives and adapts its agenda in the light of experience.

7.20 This is a practitioner body and its membership will therefore be made up of those involved in delivering the Fire Service. Chief officers and other senior managers will play an important part but to be effective the forum should also include representatives from central government who are involved with the Fire Service and perhaps members of other emergency services. It should also include HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services. The central governing body might be quite small, perhaps ten to twenty strong.

7.21 The 'New Fire Service Forum' will have a number of roles. It will be responsible for developing new doctrines and concepts in conjunction with the reformed Fire Service College and Inspectorates. It will be in a good position to encourage the take-up of new technologies and business methods. It will help to ensure a focus on the core Fire Service roles and provide guidance on priorities for change. And it will be well placed to advise on national policies such as the New Dimension programme and the introduction of the Firelink national communications system.

7.22 In order to allow it to carry out this function, effectively we suggest that central government provide grant funding for the new body. We believe it would also be mutually beneficial for it to be supported by secondees from the civil service and the private sector, perhaps with a small secretariat based in the Fire Service College or Inspectorate. The head of the new body should be drawn from among the practitioners themselves with the Chief Inspector also playing a leading role in aligning the work programme with government priorities.

7.23 Local implementation of change will remain the responsibility of the individual fire authority and the chief officer.

Relationship between the institutions

7.24 The role and remit for each of the organisations described must be very clear, so that there is a clear relationship between them, and with other institutions (such as central government, individual fire authorities, and the Audit Commission). Their political accountability must also be clear and unambiguous.

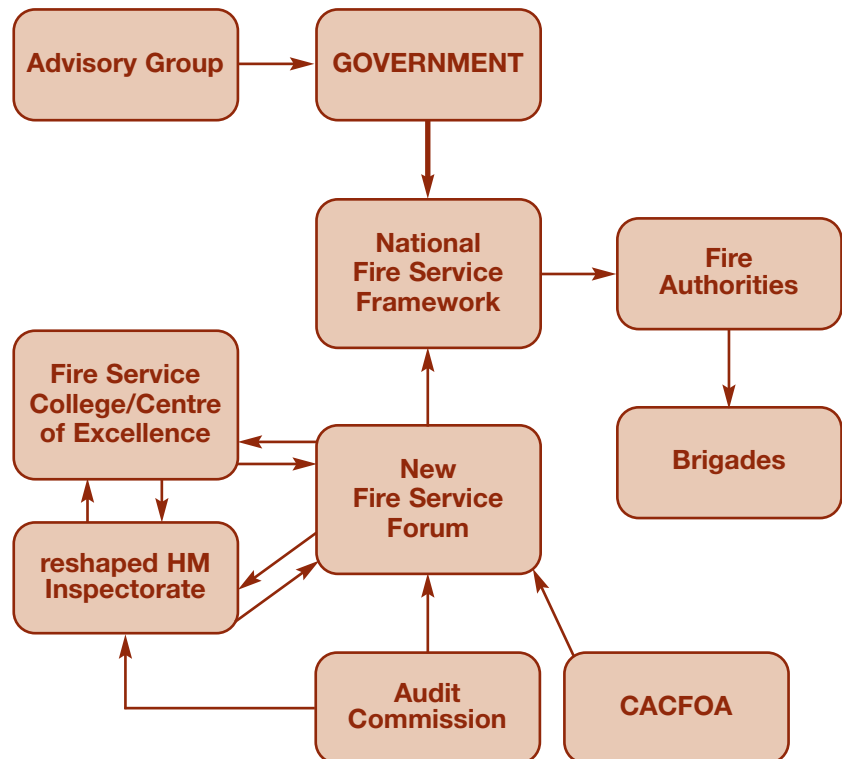
7.25 For most of the organisations described, the lines of accountability are very clear. The Fire Service College and HM Inspectorate are central government bodies as is the Advisory Body described in Chapter 6. Brigades themselves are directly accountable to their fire authorities who receive their policy guidance from central government. The Audit Commission is an independent body, which publishes its reports to local authority bodies, in this case the individual fire authorities.

7.26 The new forum will provide practitioner input into policy development. It must not be a substitute for the management role of the individual authority or confuse the clear line of accountability, which runs from the brigade to the authority and, simultaneously, from the authority to its local community and to central government. It will, however, need to work co-operatively with all these organisations. The forum should conduct discussions with the Fire Service College, the Inspectorate, Audit Commission and even the new Advisory Body to come up with new ideas and concepts and develop them to the point where they can become tangible proposals. Government itself may task the forum to develop new concepts or tackle issues, which the Advisory Group has identified as important to future policy development.

7.27 Government for its part needs to set out a clear framework for implementing policy across fire authorities and taking forward major change programmes. The new forum will contribute to development of such a framework to ensure that policy reforms are realistic and practicable. Ownership of the policy and framework clearly lie with government. We believe that there may also be benefit in developing this concept further and for the government to publish an explicit National Fire Service Framework, perhaps as part of its annual report to Parliament. This would serve as a guide for work of the individual fire authorities, particularly in the context of implementing our recommended reform programme.

7.28 Figure 7.1 illustrates the relationship between the new Fire Service Forum and the other institutions in schematic form.

Figure 7.1 Relationships between Fire Service institutions



Effective management

7.29 We believe that the institution and arrangements we have detailed will provide an ‘engine’ for dynamic change, and be able to play their part in driving forward the new agenda. In addition there must be a commitment to delivery of change, coherence and management skills. The task will not be easy.

7.30 We now turn to the sorts of changes required in the way the Fire Service manages itself and its people. Senior leaders of exceptional quality will be required to carry them through.

New role for chief officers

7.31 Individual senior managers must provide leadership for the service and see themselves in that position. They need to give direction and support to those beneath them, and represent the collective views of the service in policy discussions and dealings with central government. This collective role could be fulfilled by CACFOA if it is able to speak with a collective voice. Senior managers will need to do this while managing the inevitable conflicts which arise between requirements and resources and the difficult decisions on relative priorities. They need to be the right sort of people, with the training, background and confidence to carry out this role.

7.32 It maybe helpful in this regard to look at some aspects of the arrangements for senior officers in the police force. The fire service and the police force are very different organisations, with different structures, requirements and constitutions. The chief constable is part of a tripartite relationship consisting of the chief constable, the police authority and the Home Secretary. The main difference between the chief constable and the chief fire officer is that the former is appointed under the Crown and traditionally has the powers of operational independence to deploy his resources to best effect.

7.33 The Fire Service cannot be organised like the police and we do not recommend that chief fire officers should be given the same powers as chief constables. The Fire Service is a different organisation with different aims and law and order has a national as well as local dimension. Nevertheless, there are similarities which could be used to provide pointers as to how the roles and responsibilities of service management of the Fire Service could be developed in the future. Of critical importance is the relationship between the chief fire officer and the fire authority, together with the relationships between the fire authority and central government.

7.34 We believe that fire authorities will need to examine their working relationships with their chief officers in the light of the new approach to managing risk we have recommended. They will need to support management of the new approach and provide the political direction required. This will be new territory for both. We see no need to specify the details of this relationship centrally but we suggest that the success of the new working methods should be reviewed in, perhaps, two years' time to ensure that an effective relationship exists.

Managing people

7.35 The new Fire Service will need excellent leaders, able to tackle poor management and to inspire ambitious performance. In turn, they will need to be given good support. The service of the future needs to make the best possible use of new technology and to adopt the streamlined structure, flexible skills and sophisticated management systems found elsewhere in the public and private sectors.

7.36 In 2001 HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services published a study, *Bridging the Gap: Managing a Modernised Fire Service* (HM FSI 2001a), which was critical of the management of the Fire Service. It described the means of developing future Fire Service leaders as deficient, and suggested re-visiting the practice of single-tier entry, particularly given that firefighters, on entry, require no educational qualifications. It noted that in the absence of fast-stream career development, there were few incentives for graduates or other groups aspiring to full careers to enter the Service.

7.37 This confirms our own concerns about the insularity of the training and development structures in the Service, and the failure adequately to tackle the over-riding culture. Particular difficulties surround issues of equality of fairness. The Inspectorate commented that resistance to modernisation and change was evident at all levels by people who often have neither the background nor the proper training to acquire the necessary skills. This again coincides with our findings.

7.38 New leadership and management styles are required. Brigades in general need to improve their human resources (HR) procedures and practices. External advice will probably be needed in some cases. The Inspectorate in its new form and the College will have critical roles to play. A start could be made by these central bodies identifying a set of core values for the Service as a whole and a programme to develop methods of encouraging ownership of them.

7.39 Brigades should then examine their current working practices to identify the changes required to support a fundamental shift in culture. Experience in other organisations, public and private, could provide pointers, particularly to ways of improving work-life balance and focussing on service delivery and outputs.

Creating a culture within the fire service that enables its workforce to work safely and whose composition reflects the diverse communities it serves. The ending of harassment and bullying and fundamental changes in management are required to achieve this.

FBU Position Statement. Nov 2002

Diversity

7.40 We have been, frankly, appalled at some of the stories we have heard of bullying and harassment. The harassment has been both racial and sexual, even given the very small numbers of non-white and female personnel in the service. Such behaviour is illegal as well as being morally repugnant; it is also not in the best interests of the Fire Service. Many brigades have produced clear policy and the FBU has acted to promote diversity and an inclusive work culture.

7.41 However, in practice these have not restrained the behaviour of staff. The report of the Inspectorate in 1999 (*Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service*, Home Office, 1999) said:

‘There were reports of sexual harassment in all the brigades visited by the Inspectorate. This ranged from ‘routine’ harassment such as men urinating over the floor and toilet rolls in the women’s toilets or the display of pornographic videos at fire stations to more serious harassment in some brigades. These included exposure, touching and assault that had catastrophic effects on the women concerned.’

‘Members of the Black and Ethnic Minority Members Group of the Fire Brigades Union told the Inspectorate of the real difficulty faced by many of their members, as a result of the conscious and unconscious actions of white male colleagues. Inappropriate humour and language also caused offence.’

7.42 The watch system is one of the barriers to progress in increasing diversity. The watch is a closed culture which, as the Inspectorate says in its report *Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service* (HMFSI, 1999) “takes on the character of a family rather than a team.” The watch eats, sleeps and works together. The emphasis in the culture is on fitting in, not on tolerating diversity.

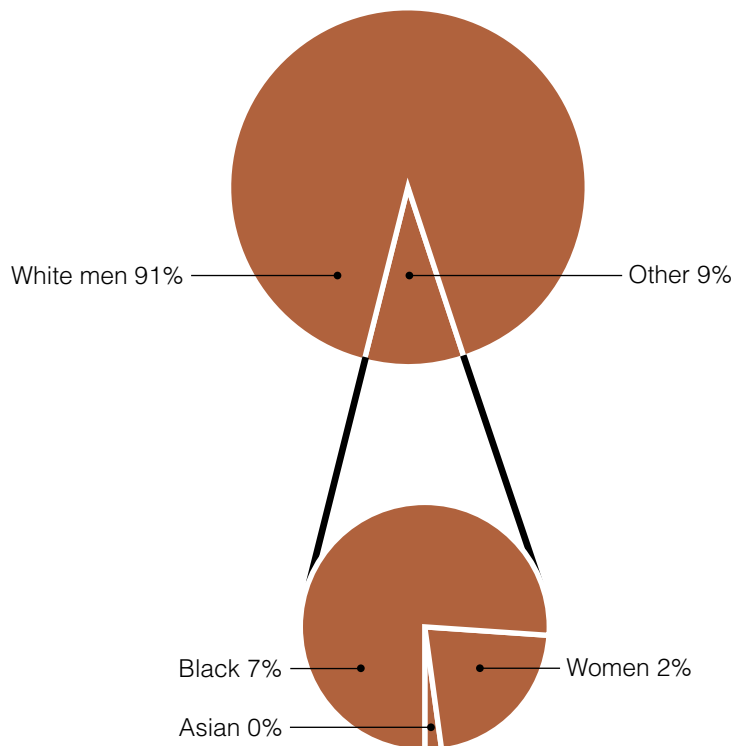
7.43 Recruitment is run locally in the 58 brigades and it was not possible for the Inspectorate to conclude that the procedures are equality proofed. Also the sheer volume of applicants makes it difficult for brigades to ensure that they are applying absolute standards to give everyone equality of opportunity. Absolute levels of fitness, not minima, are set. This means that, unlike, for example, the army, people have to be physically ready to be firefighters before they start. This inhibits people who do not fit the stereotype, especially women, joining.

7.44 The fire brigade leadership must recognise that urgent work is required to bring about real improvements. And they must recognise that they need to make these improvements in order to increase the effectiveness of the Service, not because of a requirement to meet externally imposed targets.

7.45 We have already drawn attention in Chapter 3 to the lack of diversity in the Fire Service. In its new roles where more time is spent engaged with local communities face to face, there is simply no chance of real progress being made unless the Fire Service becomes more diverse. It needs to engage with the local community through members of the service who are rooted in local communities.

7.46 Nationally, only 1.7 per cent of firefighters are women and 1.5 per cent are not white. Figure 7.2 shows the proportions of women and non white firefighters in the London Fire Brigade, which is more successful than most in its diversity work.

Figure 7.2 Diversity in the London Fire Brigade



Source: London Fire Brigade

Notes: Figures contain 10 women who are non-white and counted twice. There are so few Asian men that they register as zero in percentage terms.

7.47 There are, of course, exceptions and brigades that have made positive steps deserve all due credit. But the sad fact is that the culture of the service has not moved with the times. We believe that all brigades need urgently to examine their HR practices and procedures. Improving diversity and broadening the culture of the new Fire Service will depend on two things: a range of improvements in HR practices to improve the flexibility, inclusivity and family-friendly nature of the service; and active management to attract diverse applicants and keep them. 'Performance in managing equality' should be included in assessment and appraisal procedures. The two case studies overleaf were given to us by brigades which have invested time and effort in diversity and community engagement.

Equality & diversity in the Northern Ireland Fire Brigade

The Fire Authority for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Fire Brigade have made great strides towards greater diversity in the brigade's workforce. The Brigade has an Equality Unit and two members of staff are dedicated to equality monitoring.

Their success has been due to:

Monitoring:

Since 1989, the brigade has been under a legal requirement to monitor the diversity of their workforce. Every vacancy is monitored to see how particular groups have performed at each stage from expression of interest to employment. Categories monitored include gender and perceived religious affiliation. The most important part of the monitoring is *applicant flow*, since if people are not coming forward for application, then the balance of the workforce will not alter. Applicant flow is compared to census data for the relevant catchment area to assess the degree of success in attracting applications from under-represented groups.

Outreach programme

Under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the brigade will shortly be carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment on the standards of entry to the Service, including the Retained Service. This will enable the brigade to identify any bias in the current recruitment procedure for Whole-time and Retained Firefighters.

In 1998 the brigade entered into a formal Voluntary Undertaking with the Fair Employment Commission relating to affirmative action towards an increase in the flow of applicants from Catholics.

This produced effective outreach measures to ensure that equal opportunity is offered to the whole community. These have been successful.

There are also outreach and affirmative action programmes for women and these include Open Days to allow women to try out the equipment used for the entry tests. All the outreach programmes are accompanied by very high profile media coverage, including radio and television.

In all job advertisements, a "welcoming statement" is included encouraging under-represented communities to apply. Progress is encouraging, especially in applicant flow.

Community engagement in West Yorkshire

West Yorkshire Fire Service have taken several initiatives in order to engage more closely with their local communities, particularly following the riots in some Northern towns in 2001. The Fire Brigade, with its widespread support and unique and trusted position in the local community, is ideally placed to help engender good relations within the local community.

Three Officers for Community Liaison, initially funded by the Home Office, work specifically within the ethnic minority population of the county. Over a period of time they helped reduce fires, deaths and injuries among the ethnic community to the average level for the county. The Fire Authority now fully funds these posts.

A Community Outreach Worker who has close ties with, and the confidence of, the ethnic minority community provides fire safety education and advice to difficult-to-reach sections of the community.

An Equal Opportunities Worker who develops and maintains links with minority ethnic communities provides information and guidance on career opportunities within the service. Recruitment from ethnic minorities is increasing.

Working directly with specific communities: for example, the Muslim community in Bradford asked for Fire Service involvement in an ongoing regeneration project in Bradford. This project involves the siting of a new fire station in an ethnically diverse area and includes the integral provision of community facilities. It is proposed that work with disadvantaged youths will also take place on the station.

Working with Asylum Seekers Community Safety Officers advise and give guidance to asylum seekers, and work closely with external organisations to ensure that local accommodation for asylum seekers is safe.

7.48 Many of the improvements in HR practices discussed elsewhere in this report (particularly in Chapter 10 on conditions of service) will help to encourage diversity. But one of the more important changes required will be a move to more flexible shift patterns and a move away from single-tier entry. Recruitment practices will also need to change to attract more women applicants and people from ethnic minorities. For example, South Wales has recently improved its recruitment of minorities significantly, through the use of targeted advertising and assessment centres.

7.49 There is also a need for active management to ensure that the improvement is substantial. **We recommend that the reshaped Inspectorates should therefore engage with brigades individually to produce a series of action plans to deliver the ODPM's targets of 7 per cent minority ethnic communities and 15 per cent women by 2009.** Close monitoring, perhaps on a quarterly basis, should be put in place. There is need for encouragement, guidance and inspection from both parties.

The Integrated Personal Development System

7.50 We believe that the new Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) has a fundamental role to play in modernising HR practices across the Fire Service. Provided it is properly resourced and supported, its introduction will have a profound and beneficial effect on the jobs of fire staff, their training, management and career prospects.

7.51 IPDS has been developed for the Fire Service over the past two years. It originated in 1992 after the deaths of two firefighters which showed that there was no systematic way of reducing risk in the fire service and that there were no occupational standards of performance. The syllabuses for training were not aligned and did not support what the fire service was supposed to do. There were wide variances in standards across the service.

7.52 IPDS has therefore been created as a national framework of skills and competences, mapped to roles, that encompasses all aspects of an individual firefighter's service career from attraction, selection, training, development and progression through to retirement. It applies equally to non-uniformed as well as whole-time, retained and part-time fire service personnel. A competency framework will effectively remove barriers to mixed crewing as it ensures common standards of competence across all firefighters. It is designed to assist individuals to develop, demonstrate and maintain competence against the requirements of their role. Under IPDS, competence is not simply a measurement of how skilled an individual is; it is a measurement of how that individual applies their skills in the context of their work.

7.53 A key component of IPDS is the grouping of competences into a hierarchical role structure. There are currently seven defined roles: firefighter, crew manager, watch manager, station manager, group manager, area manager, and brigade manager.

7.54 In due course similar roles will need to be defined for other specialisms like fire control and community safety. Each role is defined in terms of skills, competences and responsibilities. At the core of IPDS is the principle that roles are essentially the same throughout the Fire Service and that many of the skills are transferable when placed in a different context. Progression will depend upon the individual's acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding, levels of which can be mapped to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). IPDS will also highlight the increase in responsibility between roles and reward those who undertake development to more senior roles within the service. At every level, training and a demonstration of the ability to acquire the requisite skills will be precursors to consideration for promotion. This has implications for the current appointment and promotion system (see Chapter 10).

7.55 A developmental approach also means that instead of paying firefighters for time served, in future they can be paid for the specialist skills they acquire. For example, the current firefighters' pay scale would be replaced by a three phase approach.

Table 7.1 Competences in IPDS

Phase I	Trainee: Acquisition of basic skills Training and continuous assessment as part of a firefighter development programme.
Phase II	Competent firefighter: Demonstration of application of skills competence in the workplace (acquisition of NVQ level 3).
Phase III	Specialist firefighter: Acquisition and application of specialist skills – driving, first responder, community fire safety, specialist appliances, and maintenance of competence against role.

7.56 Successful delivery of IPDS will require the establishment of appropriate mechanisms to support both the people undergoing development and the managers who will assess and facilitate the activity. Under the current single-tier entry system, it will not be possible to produce sufficient numbers of high quality skilled managers to meet Fire Service needs. The identification and development of a specialist HR function at divisional level or equivalent will be required in all brigades to facilitate the introduction and management of IPDS.

7.57 IPDS will require staff to be supported in the transition to their new roles as well as in achieving and maintaining competence. Line managers must assist individuals to establish their training needs to meet their own aspirations and the brigade's requirements and ensure it is delivered at the appropriate time at central, regional and local establishments compliant with IPDS principles. It will also involve the regular assessment and recording of personal performance. Line managers may also be called upon to offer advice to personnel on their career path, as more choices within the service become available (e.g. community fire safety, specialisms in driving, risk assessment or advanced First Aid skills). This will be a considerable change in the traditional role of Fire Service line managers, and below we make recommendations for increased training to allow them to undertake this role.

7.58 It is important to recognise that the introduction of IPDS is not simply the replacement of an hierarchical grading structure with a role-based one. Whilst IPDS provides a national framework, its implementation within brigades needs to be undertaken with an intelligent and informed regard for the roles and requirements of the brigade; otherwise, it will become over-prescriptive and the benefits will be lost. The Fire Service College, as a centre of excellence for IPDS, will provide central support to the brigades and brigade HR in the form of advice, training and consultancy. This co-ordination role will ensure standards are developed and maintained nationally.

7.59 The implementation of IPDS will involve the Fire Service in substantial change, but it should also be seen as the key tool to make change happen. We have already recommended that more effort should go into the HR activities of brigades; the introduction of IPDS is an essential element in the production of a modern human resource management system. In the light of these concerns, **we recommend that a programme of improved HR management, including appropriate training, be required from all brigades and be monitored regularly.**

Support staff

7.60 The changes taking place will affect not only the uniformed and control room staff but also the support staff. Currently many of the specialist functions within brigades are run by support staff and they play an integral part in the operation of the service. It is impossible to imagine a modernised fire service without these specialist support staff who deliver a wide range of services including: property management, information and communications technology, vehicle maintenance, health & safety, procurement, HR management, public relations and media, and legal.

7.61 They are often highly qualified specialists in their field managed by fire officers who in many cases have no professional qualifications for the role. They should receive proper recognition for their role in the service and be brought into IPDS with its recognition of skills and competences. This will also provide a career structure to bring them into line with similar roles in other areas of local government.

7.62 To reinforce the concept of the fire brigade as a single service we recommend brigades review the roles of their support staff and ensure they are brought into the new IPDS structure.

Conclusion

7.63 In this chapter have reviewed the existing organisation for the management of the Fire Service. We believe that a number of changes are required in the management structures in order that there is clarity about the roles and responsibilities of the major contributors to the development and execution of policy. We propose major changes to the roles and functions of the Inspectorate and the College and the creation of a new collective body as a forum for policy change and reform. These institutions will be critical to the success of the Fire Service in its new roles. They have to be better engaged in the community in order that the policies they produce will actually deliver the results the community requires.

7.64 There must be a radical overhaul of the personnel practices and procedures. Some of the behaviours we have been told about are unacceptable. Leadership at all levels in the Fire Service has cause to be alarmed and, in some cases, ashamed. Urgent action is required. We believe that an expanded Inspectorate, bringing in serving staff from brigades, with a different title and a different role, should take matters forward urgently.

Pay

Recruitment is not currently a problem in the Fire Service and should not become one in the foreseeable future. Our findings from pay comparability studies indicate that there is no case for significant increases in pay based on the existing pay system. But there is a strong case for a radical overhaul of the whole pay system and other features of the reward package. Subject to the delivery of the total reform package set out in the Report, average pay could rise by 11 per cent. In the longer term, employers and the union may wish to agree a formula arrangement to provide for annual uplifts, although we believe this should wait until the reform programme has been implemented. Any pay award which has not already been provided for must be paid for by reform. Middle and senior managers' pay should be dealt with separately and there should be a new pay system for middle ranking officers. There must also be improvements in training and support to allow this group to fulfil its role in implementing change and managing the reformed Fire Service.

8.1 Our terms of reference invite us to consider the pay levels and conditions of service that are appropriate for the Fire Service, taking account of the wider context of pay arrangements, levels and their affordability across the economy. We were also asked to make recommendations on the right reward structure to attract staff and equip them with the right skills for the future.

8.2 This chapter considers pay and what pay structure would be appropriate for a new, reformed Fire Service where individuals have broader responsibilities. In approaching the task, we have first examined the current levels of pay and compared them with relevant sectors in the economy. We explain the need for a new pay structure to support the modernisation programme. We report our findings on the implications for pay and give our recommendations as to the essential ingredients of any new system for determining pay. Finally we consider the position of middle ranking officers and the senior managers.

Pay levels

8.3 In considering appropriate pay levels we have examined whether current pay rates are attracting and retaining the necessary staff to the Fire Service. Problems in this area could point to a need for higher pay. We have also compared the pay of Fire Service employees with other groups to see whether an increase is needed to bring Fire Service pay into line.

Recruitment and retention

8.4 Unlike many other parts of the public services, recruitment and retention of whole-time firefighters has not been reported as an issue anywhere in the UK. Applications for whole-time firefighter posts far outweigh the number of posts becoming available, as indicated by the figures in Appendix 5. Even allowing for those who are unsuitable, it seems there are more than enough applicants to fill the posts that become available. This suggests that firefighters' pay is sufficiently competitive.

8.5 Inevitably, we have received evidence of some local issues. It was reported that there was reluctance among firefighters in some areas to take on the responsibility of driving appliances. This is a difficult task: drivers can be personally liable if something goes wrong and there have been suggestions that management support is weak. We believe that taking on the extra responsibility of driving is a special responsibility which should be rewarded and that a new reward system should provide for it. But these are management rather than recruitment problems.

8.6 There are also shortages of broad management and leadership skills further up the line. Unlike the police, where graduates now make up 25 per cent of the intake, the figure in the Fire Service is less than 2 per cent. While the Fire Service has increased its own graduate level training in recent years, many chief officers have told us that the Service is not attracting sufficient high quality applicants to fill the more senior roles. Single-tier entry, the long rank structure which slows progression, and narrow jobs with relatively little freedom to operate independently, all make the Fire Service unattractive to high fliers compared with other organisations such as the police. Again, this does not appear to be a pay problem.

8.7 There are also some reported localised shortages of retained firefighters, particularly in the more remote and sparsely populated areas. The issues associated with retained firefighters are discussed in Chapter 11.

8.8 Looking ahead, there may be some reductions in the need for staff as a result of utilising them more efficiently. The need for recruitment will depend on the detail of reforms and the numbers lost through natural wastage. A move away from single entry will also be desirable in order to recruit a more diverse workforce and a wider range of skills, and to provide a more flexible service.

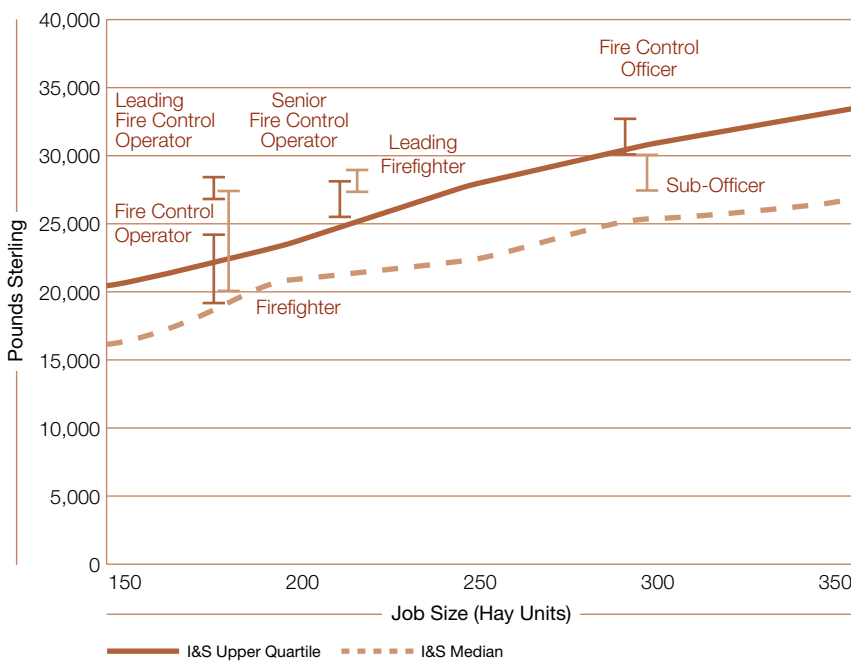
8.9 We conclude, therefore, that recruitment is not currently a problem and should not become one in the foreseeable future.

Comparability

8.10 We commissioned two comparability studies, from Hay Group and DLA MCG Consulting, to inform our considerations. Hay Group compared pay for Fire Service roles with pay for jobs of similar weight elsewhere in the economy using their standard systems. They also compared Fire Service pay with public sector pay generally. DLA MCG Consulting undertook a tailored study and compared Fire Service roles and their pay with other public sector jobs, hazardous industry jobs, and other firefighting and control jobs. They also looked at some of the wider features affecting pay. Both studies were based on up-to-date role descriptions, and so took account of any changes in firefighter jobs since 1977/78.

8.11 The comparisons by Hay Group revealed that the basic pay of representative roles up to sub-officer and fire control officer was generous by comparison with other roles of similar weight both in the public sector and in industry and services as a whole. The Fire Service advantage was even greater when holiday and pension benefits were taken into account.

Figure 8.1 Fire Service total remuneration compared with the industry and service market (July 2002)



Source: Hay Group

8.12 Figure 8.1 illustrates how Fire Service remuneration for grades up to sub-officer compares with industry and services as a whole. It shows the range of pay for each Fire Service role against the median and upper quartile for UK industry and services as a whole. It indicates that the Fire Service employees are remunerated above the median for jobs of a similar size, and those at the upper end of the pay range are remunerated around or above the upper quartile.

8.13 The emphasis and direction of the DLA MCG study was somewhat different. It found that Fire Service staff were well paid in comparison with comparable jobs in the ambulance service and nursing, particularly when holidays and pension schemes are taken into account. Fire Service staff up to station officer/watch commander are paid a little less than comparable prison service staff, but their relatively generous holidays and pension scheme more than make up for this. Police pay is higher but jobs are also assessed as larger at all levels. It also needs to be borne in mind that prison staff and police have no right to strike and have less scope for holding second jobs on a regular basis.

8.14 Comparison with a sample of broadly matched jobs in hazardous occupations drawn from construction, the chemical and oil sector, manufacturing, mining and quarrying, and the transport sector provided a more mixed picture. In overview, this analysis also suggests that firefighters and leading firefighters are competitively paid against the market. Middle management appear less well remunerated, but the responsibilities of Fire Service managers are relatively narrow when compared to their peers elsewhere. By comparison they also operate within tightly defined parameters, suggesting that any increase in pay towards the levels identified elsewhere should be dependent on the way responsibilities are devolved and services are delivered in future.

8.15 Firefighting jobs outside the Fire Service provide the closest match to Fire Service jobs, although there are differences and the numbers are rather small as a basis for comparison. Firefighters in the private sector usually earn more than those in the Fire Service. But there are marked differences in the working cultures; there is an expectation that employees of companies in, for example, the oil sector, will work flexibly and embrace change whenever and wherever it is required. This suggests that if Fire Service staff are to realise the pay of their private sector counterparts, any uplift should be accompanied by changes in operational practices.

8.16 In their evidence the employers and government asked us to look at pay relativities between control room staff and firefighters, given the Fire Brigade Union's (FBU's) bid for parity between the two groups. The analyses suggested that typically control room jobs were less demanding than those of firefighters because of the absence of physical demands and the danger element. The overall level of knowledge and skills required by control staff also did not quite match that of firefighters, although fire control staff had a greater requirement for interpersonal skills. Control room jobs do, however, vary considerably across the UK and in busy control rooms the roles could be fairly close to that of firefighter.

8.17 Fire control operators are paid 92 per cent of firefighters' rates. In addition, they are eligible for the Local Government Pension Scheme rather than the more generous firefighters' scheme. But fire control pay rates compare well with the outside market. A more detailed description of these studies and their findings is at Appendix 8.

8.18 Our findings make it difficult to justify pay increases for firefighters and control staff on the basis of comparability and market evidence. There is, however, a need to end the current stark distinction between fire control and firefighter roles and in future to see them as only two of many specialisms within the Fire Service, with a new reward structure which provides a choice of career outlets, and allows fire control staff to progress into other roles within the Service.

Pay proposals

8.19 Our findings indicate that there is no case for significant increases in pay based on the existing pay system. We believe, however, there is a strong case for a radical overhaul of the whole pay system and the other features of the reward package. The Fire Service needs a new reward structure to complement the reform package: one which is fair to both its employees and the wider public who pay for it. A new reward structure should give firefighters a choice of career paths and the opportunity to grow their earnings over time by developing accredited, productive skills and competences. It should give the public a flexible and affordable structure within which the Service can pursue the modernisation agenda, including more flexible working, broader management roles and new opportunities for Fire Service staff.

8.20 We believe average levels of pay should be higher under this new reward structure as a result of the reforms. But pay can only increase through delivery of the long outstanding modernisation agenda. Pay increases must follow reform, not the other way around. Given past failures to deliver, there must be a commitment by all parties not just to the principles of reform but also to the implementation of measurable deliverables.

8.21 Our position paper published on 11 November made a recommendation on the level of pay increase that might be appropriate as a result of the reforms we have proposed and the move to a new pay system. Since the position paper was published, there have been negotiations between the parties on the substance of any pay award and we have developed our thinking on the whole reform package. Providing the whole package is agreed and implemented quickly, we continue to believe that the paybill increases set out below are both appropriate and deliverable. However, any increase above the level of the local authority finance settlement (and the equivalent in Scotland) can only be funded through the savings generated by reform and are dependent on the pace and scale of change.

8.22 Taking these into account, the key features of our recommendations are as follows:

- i **We recommend that there should be a first payment of 4 per cent across the board, backdated to November 2002, once there is agreement to enter substantive negotiations on reform.**
- ii **We recommend that the paybill should increase from November 2003 by 7 per cent, provided that the total reform programme has been agreed by that date, implementation is on track, as verified at a national and local level by the independent audit process (set out in Chapter 12). The paybill increase should be linked to introduction of a new reward structure with the flexibility to offer payments for specialist skills within the overall paybill package. Our proposals on the reward structure are addressed in more detail in paragraphs 8.25 to 8.32 below.**
- iii **We recommend that the total pay increase, which should mean that average pay will rise by about 11 per cent, should be conditional on delivery of the full reform package. Given the interdependency of the reforms we have set out, it is not possible to subdivide the reform package and take some measures, but not others.**

- iv Once the reform package has been agreed, and implementation is on track as verified at both national and local level, we recognise that employers and unions may wish to agree to a formal uprating mechanism, based on a formula arrangement to provide for annual uplifts in subsequent years. Although we have reservations about the use of a formula, which we set out in paragraphs 8.33 to 8.41, this is a matter for the two parties. If a formula is agreed, the frequency of any payments under such an agreement will be for negotiation and should depend on how fast reform proceeds and how quickly it can produce savings to finance any further increase.
- v Subject to resources being available, we suggest there should also be scope for individual authorities to agree local additions to pay to address local problems which cannot be dealt with by the main pay system. For example these might include payments in recognition of particular additional responsibilities. There is also a separate London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority offer to increase London weighting by £1,137 to £4,308, an increase of 4.4 per cent on the pay of an experienced firefighter.

8.23 The Deputy Prime Minister wrote to the Chairman of the Local Government Association on 28 November to make it clear that any pay award not affordable within existing public expenditure provision must be paid for by modernisation and that any agreement must set out clearly and in detail how the costs of any additional pay will be met by savings.

8.24 This report makes recommendations on pay but it must be for the Fire Service employers to make a pay offer, reach an agreement and satisfy the Government's requirement. It is incumbent upon us, however, to make sure that our recommendations are achievable against a reasonable interpretation of likely costs and benefits. We are confident that the savings generated by our recommendations in this report will more than outweigh the cost of our pay proposals over a period of three to five years. We set out our assessment in detail in Chapter 12.

A new pay structure

8.25 The current Fire Service pay system, in common with many reward systems that were developed more than twenty years ago, is not suitable for a modern, flexible service. For example, it recognises an individual's contribution according to length of service and experience in a particular rank, and promotion is the only means to reward someone doing well in their current role. The large number of ranks has compressed differentials and reduced the job sizes: each rank is cramped by those above and below it. Although some brigades have reduced the number of ranks in use, this alleviates rather than removes the problem. The lack of allowances and flexibility on top of basic earnings makes it difficult to respond to local circumstances, to encourage training in scarce skills and to accommodate new activities. One size fits all.

8.26 The new, broader and more sophisticated Fire Service described in this report will need a new reward structure. This reward structure must be more flexible and offer greater variety than that built around the existing single-tier entry point. It will need to accommodate multiple entry at different points in the Service, recognising different types of qualification. It must accommodate flexible working conditions and shift systems to attract a more diverse range of applicants, to make it easier for those from a different career background to join the Service if they have the necessary skills and competences. We believe this will be very beneficial in terms of broadening experience and perspectives, and recruiting new skills which will be required in the future.

8.27 The reward structure will also need to contain some flexibility to take account of particular local circumstances. Local pay flexibility may be used to support the efficient delivery of services – notably to address particular local recruitment, skill shortage and retention issues. It could provide for better targetting of pay according to local needs and priorities and local market conditions. It could take the form of geographical differentiation, for example to persuade people to work in a particularly unattractive area, or skill based differentiation, for example to attract particular skills which are in short supply.

8.28 The Service has already made significant progress in developing a competence-based framework – the Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) – which is modern and forward-looking, and will substantially reduce the large number of ranks to seven broader roles. We believe that IPDS has the potential to provide a good basis for a new, competence-based reward structure, with the added advantage that it would ensure the pay system was

compatible with training and other personnel systems. Properly developed, we are confident that a new reward structure will encourage the acquisition of experience, skills and competences to enhance performance and outputs, take account of market forces, and offer a variety of different career paths for new entrants.

8.29 The new pay structure should not have fixed increments as a major element. Instead, a reward structure based around IPDS should offer a variety of career paths for new entrants, and the scope for others to develop their earnings potential by the acquisition of new accredited skills and competences. Traditionally, the firefighters' pay system has been based on a vertical set of increments where the only way to grow one's salary is to serve one's time or to achieve promotion. Increasingly, individual firefighters will be able to proceed laterally, increasing their income by moving into new areas in the course of their career. Mobility and flexibility will be key.

8.30 It is important that a new reward structure is designed properly to meet the circumstances of the new Service. In particular, care will be needed to avoid some of the potential pitfalls commonly associated with skill and competence-based systems. Competence pay should not become an opportunity to increase pay by collecting skills or competences which do not contribute to higher output (the "scout-badge" problem). But neither should the system fail to reward those who invest in new skills in good faith which are not then utilised by management. Skills and competences therefore need to be linked carefully to roles required to deliver the service. IPDS already does this for firefighter jobs but needs to be broadened to develop similar role "families" for other activities, including control room staff and community fire safety work.

8.31 We asked the Hay Group to review current work on IPDS to confirm whether or not it would provide a suitable basis for a new, competence based, reward structure. They have confirmed that IPDS could provide a good basis for a new reward structure, provided it is properly developed and supported. They have produced a paper on the steps needed to introduce a new reward structure which can be found on our website at www.irfs.org.uk.

8.32 Developing a new reward structure will take time. Before a new pay structure can be introduced, the Fire Service will need to agree a clear vision of its role and will need to translate this into strategic objectives for the Service. It will then need to consider what staff resources it needs in order to deliver its objectives, including the range of skills that need to be available. The reward strategy will need to be designed with a view to ensuring that it supports the position of the

appropriate numbers of staff with the right mix of skills and competences. It will then be necessary for staff to migrate to the new pay structures. No-one's pay should be reduced as a result, and some will gain. Our pay proposals above are intended to encompass the costs involved.

Future pay increases

8.33 The previous Fire Service pay agreement included a formula to set annual pay increases, based on linking firefighter pay to the upper quartile of male manual earnings. This has delivered a quarter of a century of relative stability, but the lack of scope to negotiate around the annual uprating has reinforced the status quo and discouraged innovation. Employers have been left without negotiating leverage and Fire Service employees have benefitted from increases in earnings elsewhere which reflect modernisation of working practices without committing to modernisation themselves. The formula has also failed to reflect trends in pay policy, such as the progressive linking of pay reward to delivery of service.

8.34 The position paper published on 11 November indicated that the Review would be giving further consideration to the development of a formula-based mechanism as part of the new reward structure for the Fire Service. We do not believe that other formal pay mechanisms, such as a pay review body, are appropriate for the Fire Service, given the more flexible pay system we are proposing.

8.35 Formal pay determination mechanisms have some advantages. These include: convenience where large numbers of staff are involved; separating decisions on pay from other decisions on affordability and budgets, reducing the likelihood of disputes; and security and predictability for staff in their pay arrangements in the face of weak or non-existent market forces or where there are restrictions on the right to take industrial action.

8.36 But there are also some disadvantages to formal mechanisms. They generally leave less flexibility than free bargaining, for example, to address changes in the makeup of the staff group concerned or wider trends in the economy. They do not work well during periods of major change or when an organisation is undergoing major reform; they tend to focus on average increases and fail to accommodate development of more flexible pay systems where reward is tailored more to individual circumstances. They cannot easily take account of local circumstances; and they cannot evolve and become increasingly outdated.

8.37 Over the short term, while the Service is going through a period of transition and introducing major reforms, we believe that it would be better for the parties concerned to negotiate a single pay settlement to cover multiple years. For the longer term, we suggest consideration is given to an arrangement involving biennial settlements.

8.38 We remain unconvinced that a formal pay determination mechanism, such as one based on a formula, is the right approach for the Fire Service. In any case, one should not be introduced before a new reform structure has stabilised. We recognise, however, the importance of a formula-based approach in the Fire Service culture which we want to change. If the parties concerned wish to retain a formula to inform a biennial uplift, this should not be ruled out.

8.39 In our view, any new formula should not be based on earnings as this would be too inflexible in a modern economy with flexible pay systems. Rather, in the right circumstances, a formula based on settlement levels, which informs negotiations, might have a useful role. Properly used it could increase the confidence of the Fire Service staff in the pay determination arrangements and provide a starting point for subsequent negotiations.

8.37 The choice of the comparator group is, in our view, of less importance. But in making a choice, attention must be given to both the robustness and the relevance of the comparator information. Using the proposed associate professional and technical group of the New Earnings Survey has been suggested in negotiations between the FBU and the employers. Before an informed decision on this can be made, an assessment is needed of such things as the sample size, the distribution of earnings within the group, and the variability (and any bias) in the resulting figures. Even quite small year to year variability can introduce undue volatility into the pay uplift process. A decision on its use should therefore be delayed until sufficient information is available to allow a full assessment. Other considerations which should be taken into account in considering the use of a formula are discussed further in Appendix 6.

8.41 Finally, any formula should be subject to regular review of its continued relevance after each full business cycle.

Senior staff

8.42 Currently, the pay of officers up to the Senior Divisional Officer rank (up to £42,168 plus a flexible duty allowance of 20 per cent) is negotiated as part of the overall pay settlement for firefighters and their terms and conditions are the same, governed by the Grey Book. Pay of more senior officers – assistant chief officers and above – is negotiated separately and is governed by the Gold Book which sets out their terms and conditions. There are five separate pay bands.

Table 8.1 Salaries for Chief Fire Officers from June 1st 2002

	Population Band	Minimum Salary
1	up to 500,000	£74,382
2	500,001 to 1,000,000	£78,408
3	1,000,001 to 1,500,000	£87,816
4	1,500,000 and above (except London)	£96,597
5	London	£106,257

Source: NJC for principal fire officers, circular 23 May 2002

8.43 These are minimum rates of pay and scales only. The national agreement does not set an upper limit for the salary of any chief fire officer in any band. The calculations take account of population levels, any additional responsibilities held, the nature of the problems facing the authority and any additional responsibilities or functions not commonly undertaken by all fire authorities. Actual rates in payment are significantly above these minimum figures. Deputy chief fire officers are paid not less than 80 per cent of the salary of the chief fire officer, and assistant chief fire officers not less than 75 per cent.

8.44 Middle and senior officers are an essential component of fundamental change. It is they who must take the decisions on how to implement change on the ground and how change can be applied to improve services to the end customer. **We believe the time has come to address them as a separate staff group and for middle managers (ie those ranks above Station Commander up to Senior Divisional Officer) to have their own reward structure and terms and conditions, ones based on similar principles to those of the main pay group.**

8.45 The problems we have described in Chapter 3 and Chapter 7, such as the lack of flexibility of the Service and the staff, and in particular the very real problems of poor management of people, mean that managers are facing major challenges. In designing and operating a new reward system for senior staff, particular importance will need to be paid to their role in leading and managing change.

8.46 There should be more cross training with the police, military and civil service. More senior officers should attend the civil service Top Management Programme or equivalent senior executive programmes. Separate from this, there needs to be significant improvement in human resource (HR) skills, both to improve the management of Fire Service staff but also to support the much more sophisticated requirements of IPDS. In future, officers will be required to provide advice on career paths and coaching for their staff, in a way which does not occur under the current system.

8.47 Support structures must be improved. Senior managers must meet their juniors regularly, there must be clear communication on policy issues and support for those taking difficult decisions or subject to opposition for implementing change. External counselling and mentoring should be available. There should be central career planning for high fliers.

8.48 In our position paper, we suggested that it would help to broaden the base of the Service to recruit a significant proportion of uniformed officers from outside the Service. Implementation of IPDS will define management roles in terms of skills and competences and make it easier to accept those from outside the Service who meet the requirements. Officers must have clear objectives to deliver, authority to deliver them and accountability for their success or failure. They should be given due credit for their achievements. In due course, a means to measure and develop as well as manage performance will be required.

8.49 None of these measures would be considered radical in commercial enterprises or, today, in most of the public sector. In return, officers should expect to receive competitive rates of pay, which recognise their roles and responsibilities and the conditions in which they work. At present, middle and senior ranks are well paid in comparison with their peers, partly because of the pressures from below. We have surveyed the pay of the top ranks and compared them to the market rates. This suggests that they are well placed with regard to other public sector jobs at a similar level and, like their more junior colleagues, the relatively narrow span of responsibility

distinguishes them from other groups, such as senior police officers, who are relatively better remunerated. As with their junior colleagues, the answer is to broaden the span of management responsibility to provide better quality, more rewarding and, in due course, better remunerated roles. The IPDS framework with its reduction of seven ranks to seven broader roles, will be a step forward in this respect.

8.50 For the future, further work is required to develop an appropriate reward system. We see no reason why, in due course, this should not include a performance-related element. As with fire staff at other levels, it will take time to develop the reward structure and put in place the output-based, customer-focused objectives required to support a sophisticated middle management pay system. There is no reason, however, why improvements should not be made immediately. We propose that all officers should have agreed a job description with their line manager by 1 July 2003 and that by November 2003 they should have agreed objectives and deliverables for which they have responsibility, within an overall implementation plan for the wide reform package.

Conclusion

8.51 Our analysis of pay and rewards provides no significant case for increases in pay related to the existing system. There is, however, a strong case for reforming the reward system as part of wider modernisation. This will take time. The Fire Service has made a good start with its development of IPDS, which will provide a firm foundation for a new reward structure, but it now needs to be implemented, supported and developed. Pay and personnel support for middle ranking officers needs to be developed separately but as part of this overall strategy. Pay is not the only component of remuneration and in the next chapter we look at pensions.

Pensions

The Firefighters' Pension Scheme is part of a set of structures that reinforce current inflexibilities. The Scheme is not designed to accommodate a diverse workforce or flexible working patterns and includes some perverse incentive. It includes some generous benefits but the cost of the accruing liabilities is high among public service pension schemes both to the employees, at 11 per cent of pensionable pay, and to employers whose implied contribution probably amounts to about an extra 25 per cent on top of firefighters' basic pay rates. The Scheme does not provide best value to the employer, and many members might find an alternative package more attractive. Some changes can be accomplished within the existing scheme but in the longer term, the Scheme requires more wholesale modernisation.

The arrangements by which Fire Authorities meet the cost of pensions in payment creates unnecessary difficulties for employers and fails to give the right signals about the current costs of the Service. We recommend that revised financing arrangements are implemented without delay.

We recommend that investigating the forms which pension provision for retained staff should take be a component of the way forward.

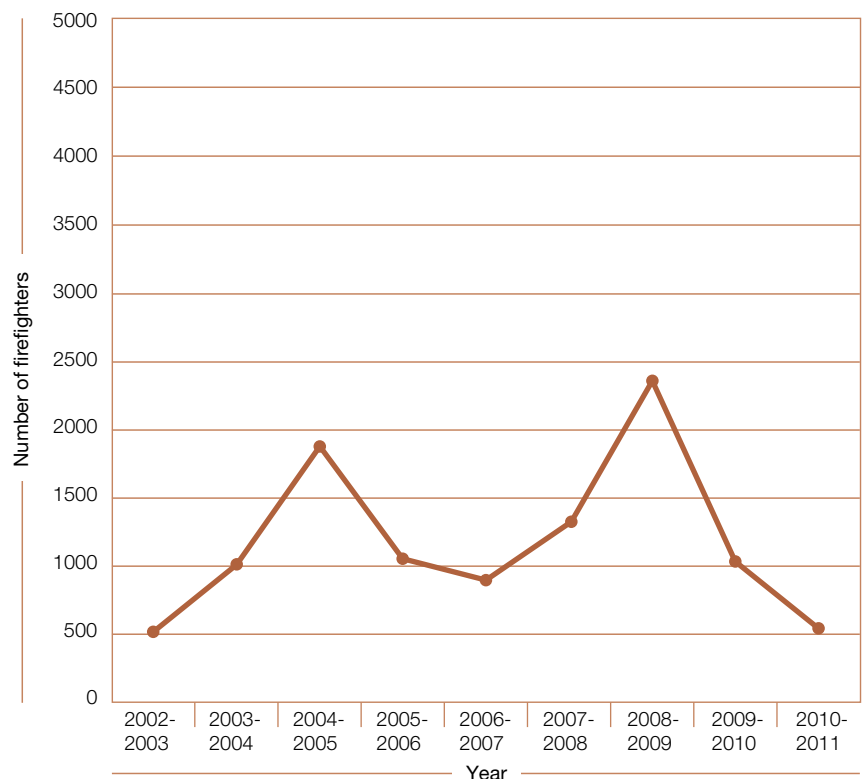
9.1 This chapter considers the way the Firefighters' Pension Scheme works and how it needs to change to support the reforms we outline elsewhere in this report. We look separately at pension arrangements for retained firefighters. Finally we consider the financing of pensions.

Firefighters' Pension Scheme

9.2 The design of the present Firefighters' Pension Scheme essentially dates from 1948 when conditions were very different; firefighters did not, for example, have sophisticated breathing apparatus and were more likely to develop serious health problems.

9.3 The Firefighters Scheme provides for pension to be paid without reduction at a minimum age of fifty and with a minimum of twenty-five years service, while for a maximum pension (two-thirds of pay, with the option to commute up to a quarter of this to a lump sum) the member must be over fifty and have thirty years of service. Pension entitlement related to length of service builds up twice as fast after the first twenty years. The compulsory age for retirement is age fifty-five for station officers and sixty for more senior ranks. Figure 9.1 shows when firefighters in active service at 1 April 2001 would complete thirty years of service and could take retirement on full pension. Even if everyone works to the full 30 years, in total over 20 per cent of the existing workforce could choose to retire in the next six years.

Figure 9.1 Number of firefighters completing 30 years of employment, 2002/03-2010/11



Source: ODPM – based on returns submitted by fire authorities

9.4 The scheme also provides good ill-health retirement benefits (maximum pension after twenty-six and a half years' service). Firefighters who are no longer physically fit for full operational duties are able to retire rather than be redeployed, and ill health has been interpreted widely. A high proportion of firefighter retirements are on ill-health grounds – 43 per cent for 2000/01. This, although a significant reduction on previous years, is still relatively high. The figure for the best brigades is less than 30 per cent.

9.5 Employees who have accrued maximum benefits continue to contribute 11 per cent of pay to the pension scheme (there is still a pensions benefit from pay increases). As a result the scheme tends to encourage retirement at a relatively young age and to discourage working much beyond the age of fifty. Also, firefighters who are no longer physically fit for full operational duties often have no incentive to remain in the service carrying out other duties. In both cases this means people are taking retirement when they still have much to offer.

9.6 Moreover, the current pension design was not established with a diverse workforce in mind, including women firefighters, people joining or rejoining at any age, for example after career breaks, or people working part-time. The existing two-tier accrual arrangement, with fast accrual after 20 years' service, is unsuitable for this more diverse workforce. It does not easily accommodate late entrants and those who have career breaks.

9.7 As noted above, the scheme includes provision for retirement from age fifty, ill-health benefits which have been widely obtainable and fast accrual of pension after twenty years' service. These are generous provisions but costly to both employees and employer. The employee contributes 11 per cent of pensionable pay, that is a deduction from pay of about £45 or over £1 an hour for a newly qualified firefighter. The accruing cost of pension liabilities to the employer probably amounts to an extra 25 per cent on top of firefighters' basic pay rates which is high among public service schemes. The value of the employer contribution is not at present made explicit.

Other fire service pensions

9.8 It should be noted that all firefighters (other than retained) are eligible for the firefighters' pension Scheme. Control room staff and some non-uniformed staff are eligible for the Local Government Pension Scheme, and retained firefighters are currently not eligible for either scheme. The main features of both the firefighters' scheme and the local government scheme are summarised in Appendix 7.

Key issues

9.9 Following from this description of the Fire Service pension arrangements, three key areas of concern can be distinguished: modernisation, pensions for retained firefighters and financing of pensions.

Modernisation

9.10 The existing firefighters scheme is part of a structure that discourages modernisation and reform. It is badly in need of reform to better meet the needs of the workforce and management, and to reflect developments in the Fire Service and society at large. We would still expect to see a good pension scheme available for firefighters. But the basic design should cater better for groups such as those joining the Fire Service later in their working lifetimes, women or men who wish to take career breaks, and those whose roles go well beyond fighting fires. We would also expect to see greater encouragement for those who are still able to contribute effectively to the Fire Service and willing to work throughout their fifties or even later. Some might take their pension and be re-employed. Others might continue to build up pension rights while perhaps, in some cases, taking part of those rights in advance of final retirement. There could be other changes to reflect social developments such as the increasing proportion of those with unmarried partners, and to provide greater incentives for the rehabilitation of those who have become ill or have been injured on duty.

9.11 Some of these changes could be accomplished within the existing pension scheme. For example, the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council has already agreed to broadening the definition of a “regular” firefighter to cover roles wider than operational firefighting and to strengthen the provision of independent medical advice and the qualifications required in providing that advice. **We recommend that action should be taken on the existing draft proposals within the next six months.**

9.12 However, the pension scheme needs more wholesale modernisation. **The Government should address the longer term future of the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme and take early decisions to ensure that suitable arrangements are provided for the new, reformed Fire Service.** To the extent that a more modern pension design would be more cost-effective than the present arrangements, cost savings could be passed back to firefighters (increasing take home pay) and to employers.

9.13 The actual details of modernised pension arrangements would be for employers, staff representatives and the Government to discuss, but the imperative is to make rapid progress on modernisation so that within a year or two the Fire Service has a pension scheme to meet twenty-first century needs. The office of the Deputy Prime Minister should lead in taking this forward promptly.

Pensions for retained firefighters

9.14 According to evidence by the Retained Firefighters Union (RFU), the delay in implementing a pension scheme generally for retained firefighters is regarded as the single major injustice suffered by them. The issue has a long history. They are not eligible to join the Fire Service Pension Scheme (although “Bounty” payments are made after ten years’ service and every five years’ thereafter). A recent test employment tribunal case found that this did not amount to less favourable treatment of part-time workers. The applicant retained firefighters have appealed the decision to the Employment Appeal Tribunal and the respondents have cross-appealed. The RFU notes that fifteen brigades have introduced voluntary retained retirement pension schemes, some with an employer contribution, but not all.

9.15 It is clearly in line with Government policy that retained firefighters should make adequate pension provision to provide for their old age. Moreover it is essential that pension provision is taken into account if overall parity with wholetime firefighters is to be achieved. **We recommend further investigation of the forms which pension provision for retained staff should take.** Accommodating them within a revised scheme may be one option. But some type of stakeholder pension may generally better suit a group many of whom have other main occupations. Such investigation is beyond the scope of our review, but should be included as a component of the way forward.

Financing of pensions

9.16 The arrangements for financing firefighters' pensions are also in need of urgent improvement. Fire authorities meet the cost of pensions in payment to retired firefighters. While this is partly offset by employee contributions it is higher than the employers' share of the cost of accruing pension liabilities for currently employed firefighters. It has been estimated that the burden of net pension costs will absorb 25 per cent of Fire Service expenditure by 2007. This is taken into account in assessments of Government grant. Fire authorities generally agree on the problems with this, including:

- volatility in pensions expenditure arising from the uneven incidence of lump sum retirement payments;
- some uncertainty about how the rising burden of pensions expenditure will be financed;
- uneven treatment between authorities; and
- a lack of transparency, with headline figures for increases in expenditure not representing the change in resources available for operational work.

9.17 In contrast, for staff in the funded Local Government Scheme (including fire control staff), the employer (and employee) contributions meet the accruing costs; these are invested and pensions in payment are met out of the fund. Other public service schemes (NHS, teachers, civil service and armed forces) are unfunded, but employers are charged accruing superannuation liability contributions (aslcs), pension payments being borne centrally and separately from employer budgets.

9.18 We understand the Government hopes to bring forward proposals in the near future for a revised financing regime, probably based on a system of employer contributions, reviewed periodically using a notional fund. The employer contributions would be charged to fire authority budgets, which would be eligible for grant support in the normal way. Central government would meet the full cost of ordinary retirements, but without insulating authorities from meeting the costs of ill-health retirements, so that they would continue to have financial incentives to improve the management of sickness and ill-health retirements. This should meet the main concerns of authorities outlined above and **we recommend that it is implemented without delay.**

Conclusion

9.19 This chapter sets out the current pension arrangements for Fire Service staff and identifies the main areas of concern. Action is needed to reform the existing Firefighters' Pension Scheme, to cater for a more diverse workforce and more flexible working patterns. Early action should be taken to implement proposals which already exist to tackle some retirement related issues. The Government also needs to consider the longer term future of the scheme and ensure changes are made to provide a scheme appropriate to the new modernised Fire Service. Action is required to investigate the most appropriate arrangements for providing pensions for retained firefighters and to take account of the differing requirements among this group. Finally, the Government should bring forward its proposals to reform the financing arrangement for Fire Service pensions, given that the costs make up such a larger and growing proportion of current fire authority budgets.

9.20 Pay and pensions are probably the most important parts of a firefighter's terms and conditions, but they are not the only components. In the next chapter we turn our attention to their other conditions of service along with other related issues including the right to strike and the pay negotiating arrangements.

Conditions of Service

Making better use of the resources of the Fire Service to meet the needs of the community will require not just changes to legislation and national fire cover standards but also to crewing, shift patterns and other aspects of day-to-day working. At the moment, the way the Grey Book is interpreted prescribes at national level virtually every aspect of how individuals should work. It permits any locally proposed change to be challenged and then channelled into the disputes procedures, thus ensuring that few local initiatives for change succeed.

The Grey Book needs to be amended so that it contains only the necessary core conditions, leaving managers free to agree other matters locally, such as more flexible shift patterns, part-time working, different crewing levels at different times of day and so on.

The Appointments and Promotion Regulations should also be replaced with a set of core national requirements and the Discipline Regulations should be replaced by a system based on the ACAS Code of Practice. We consider that the negotiating machinery should be replaced and clarified. We comment on the question of restriction on the rights of fire staff to strike but believe that any decision about the removal of a basic human right is one for Government not the Review to make.

10.1 In Chapter 3 we described how current working practices combine to prevent personnel and other resources being used efficiently in the right place at the right time. In Chapter 5 we make recommendations about revising the approach to fire cover, in particular doing away with the current national prescriptions which drive so much of the disposition of fire stations, appliances and staff.

10.2 Those changes are necessary but not sufficient to deliver a more flexible Service which can respond to the pattern of demand. There also need to be changes, for example, to the crewing arrangements and shift patterns. In this chapter we examine the obstacles to change and how they can be overcome. We set out some of the ways we would expect managers to use the greater flexibilities and freedoms we think they should have.

10.3 As we explained in Chapter 3, the traditional 2,2,4 shift pattern does not allow managers to match the routine working hours of staff to the pattern of demand in all situations. Chief officers need to be able to vary start and finish times; the length of day and night shift rotas; the level of crewing through the day and night; and the location of appliances and staff. Ultimately they also need to be able to vary the location of stations and control rooms, though this would inevitably have a longer lead-in time.

10.4 None of this would seem exceptionable in other parts of the public sector or in the private sector. Fire Service employers and senior staff need to take into account the expectations and wishes of staff. Consultation and negotiation are part of good management practice. But in the end, employers and managers need to be able to make decisions in the best interests of the community to deliver the service it needs. In the Fire Service, the way terms and conditions of service are laid down or have been interpreted does not allow such flexibility or management discretion.

Grey Book

10.5 The conditions of service for staff up to and including senior divisional officer in fire brigades, including rank and responsibilities of brigade members, duty systems and hours of duty, annual and sick leave entitlements, pay and allowance entitlements for full-time and part-time staff and grievance procedures, are set out in the so-called Grey Book (*The National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades Scheme of Conditions of Service 1998*).

The content, which is the product of agreement by the National Joint Council (NJC), constitutes a detailed prescription which applies nationally. Membership of the NJC is split roughly equally between the employers and the employees.

10.6 The Grey Book has no statutory underpinning other than being a collective agreement within the terms of Section 178 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. Although it does not have statutory force, the national agreement is contractually binding since all fire authorities incorporate it into all relevant contracts of employment. Some very limited regional variations have been agreed, but in the main there is no local variation of the national conditions.

10.7 In principle, a chief officer can propose a change to working hours or practices which would constitute a variation of the terms and conditions in the Grey Book. Any such change must, however, be negotiated locally and, in practice, is subject to the disputes procedures in the Grey Book. The breadth and detail of the Grey Book means that almost any proposal from employers, even policy matters such as establishing joint or shared control rooms, could be challenged under its terms.

Disputes machinery

10.8 The Fire Service disputes machinery was reformed following a report commissioned by the Home Office and the Local Government Association in 1999 from Professor Frank Burchill of Keele University (*Inquiry into the Machinery for determining Firefighters' Conditions of Service*, Home Office, 2000), Essentially, under this machinery any aspect of firefighting which has an impact on terms and conditions, including policy issues, is subject to negotiation.

It now works as follows:

Figure 10.1 Disputes machinery

Stage of machinery	Action	Informative notes
First step	Referral of matter to the Joint Secretaries of the NJC.	If a majority of both sides of the Joint Secretaries agrees, a decision is easily arrived at.
Referral upwards	If the membership can not reach agreement, the matter is referred to the NJC Disputes Committee.	
Second step	Both sides get the opportunity to put their case and the Committee tries to reach a decision under the watch of the Independent Chair.	The NJC Disputes Committee is similar to the Joint Secretaries in that it is a small sub-committee – three members apiece from the employers and the employees. An Independent Chair appointed by the NJC oversees proceedings; this post is currently held by Professor William Brown.
Referral upwards	Referral to the next meeting of the full NJC.	
Third step	If not resolved by the full NJC the only avenue left is ultimate referral to the Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)	The Grey Book (section 10.3) says “in such circumstances it follows that both parties have voluntarily agreed to take part in the arbitration process when it is invoked and have agreed in advance to be bound by the arbitrator’s decisions.”

10.9 The problem with the disputes machinery is that matters can be elevated to too high a level too quickly. We believe that this machinery is too complex. What has been designed as a means of facilitating good management and industrial relations has been turned into a tool used to frustrate management. Our judgement, is that the system should be amended and simplified.

New core conditions of service

10.10 We recommend that the Grey Book be amended to simplify nationally determined conditions of service to four core areas: pay, total hours, overall ranks and basic leave.

There should continue to be a disputes procedure but, if the Grey Book is amended as we recommend, its scope will be more limited. The following suggestions relate to Grey Book matters and other rigidities which we found locally.

10.11 In a paper entitled *Position Statement on the True Modernisation of the UK Fire Service*, which they sent to the Deputy Prime Minister on 19 November, the FBU set out a range of matters on which they would wish to see change. Many of them, such as a new legislative framework which puts prevention at the core of the work of the Service, are matters on which we make similar recommendations in this report. They also call for more modern conditions of employment, including some which are directed at making the Service more diverse and more family friendly. We echo some of these in our remarks in the next paragraph.

10.12 An important theme in this report is that managers must be free to manage. The terms in which the core conditions of service are defined must allow managers to propose and seek to agree locally the following:

- i Shift patterns that fit with demand. The traditional 2,2,4 shift system might be retained where it is an appropriate way of delivering the more traditional rescue-based services, particularly in the busy metropolitan areas with significant numbers of callouts round the clock. But other shift patterns may work better in many areas and for other types of work. Managers also need to be able to offer new recruits greater choice of working hours and times, including part-time work, if they are to attract more diverse staff.
- ii Different crewing levels at different times of day.
- iii Mixed crewing of appliances by whole-time and retained firefighters. Sensible rules of thumb, such as whole-timers not having to wait for a retained firefighter to arrive before an appliance can leave, should not turn into absolute rules which get in the way of effective working.

- iv Arrangements for staff to move more easily between fire stations, different fire authorities, specialist areas and functions according to national and local requirements.
- v Arrangements for overtime working. Some overtime is an economic and sensible way to meet unforeseen or exceptional demands. In the light of concerns about the implications for individuals of overtime, we want to make it clear that we are not recommending blanket forced overtime which would take total hours worked to an unacceptable level. We mean that firefighters should be free to work voluntary overtime, often on a planned basis, and always within the constraints on hours rightly imposed by legislation and by health and safety considerations. It could also be used to compensate individuals participating in community activities on what would otherwise be their days off.
- vi Diversity objectives and monitoring. The increased flexibilities we recommend throughout this report will make the Fire Service more attractive to a wider range of people. It will still be important to set targets relevant to local circumstances and to progress towards them.
- vii Approval for taking second jobs. Any other employment must be consistent with the needs of the Service.
- viii An up-to-date working environment in fire stations, control rooms and other premises, with better showers etc and separate facilities for women.
- ix Provision for maternity leave, paternity leave and adoption leave, in line with best practice on family-friendly working practices.

Co-responder

10.13 IPDS will require brigades to select the specialist services that they wish to support and train for. We see no need to specify arrangements for this centrally. The thrust of our argument is after all for local discretion. We do however want to comment on one issue which attracted a great deal of comment to the Review: the training of firefighters in clinical skills to provide at-the-scene assistance.

10.14 In our position paper of 11 November we recommended that firefighters who so wished should be trained as paramedics to fulfil the role of first responder. In the light of comments and advice we received, we have considered carefully what clinical training would be appropriate for fire fighters and how their role relates to that of health service staff.

10.15 We are satisfied that it would neither be cost effective nor appropriate to train firefighters in full paramedic skills. The training is lengthy and maintaining the required level of expertise would compromise the firefighter's main role. Furthermore, the demands placed on firefighters in attending incidents are unlikely to require more than a small percentage of a paramedic's range of skills.

10.16 In cases of accident the emphasis in the first few minutes is on basic trauma care and airway management. For patients suffering a cardiac arrest, good resuscitation and the use of an automated defibrillator are required. While falling far short of full paramedic skills, these do go beyond the basic first aid training given to fire staff.

We therefore recommend that some firefighters are trained as ‘first on the scene co-responders’ which would give them basic life support skills including training in the use of automated defibrillators. Currently there is no central guidance on or standards developed for co-responders. Rather than develop prescriptive central guidance, we suggest brigades will need to agree with their local Ambulance Service and NHS Trust what is expected and how appropriate training can best be provided.

Appointments and promotion regulations

10.17 Currently, the Fire Service has a single point of entry. All recruits, regardless of background or experience, start at the bottom of the firefighters’ scale and work their way up through the rank structure. This ensures a strong, shared set of experience and traditions which has helped to build the Fire Service into the cohesive organisation it is today. Officers gain authority because they have gone through the same recruitment, induction and training as the firefighters.

10.18 But single-tier entry has a number of disadvantages which mean that the Fire Service is not recruiting the workforce it needs in terms of diversity and different skill sets. It is difficult to bring in those with different, but relevant, sets of skills. We were told that firefighters moving from other brigades can find it difficult to gain credit for their experience. Single-tier entry at a level which demands few educational qualifications is not an approach adopted by most sectors. It discourages those with the ambition and ability to reach the highest levels. The Fire Service needs to be concerned with recruiting and developing chief fire officers of the future as well as firefighters.

10.19 **We recommend that the Appointments and Promotion Regulations should be repealed and replaced with a set of core requirements which the locally determined recruitment and promotion procedures of each brigade must meet.** We suggest that these core requirements should identify appropriate entry qualifications for different roles, in order to ensure the correct relationship between roles is maintained and to increase the mobility of staff. They should also provide the basis of recruitment and for promotion assessments, such as practical tests and interviews.

Discipline arrangements

10.20 The Discipline Regulations are quasi-militaristic and underpin an approach to management which is out of date in comparison to the culture of the modern workplace. The Review was told on its visits to

brigades that the regulations are deficient in various ways, in particular that they define only certain specific actions as misconduct such as disobedience to orders. There are no offences of harassment or bullying and we were told that their absence can make it difficult for managers to tackle these issues in the workplace. The Inspectorate's report *Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service* (HMFSI, 1999) makes this point forcefully.

10.21 The regulations are also cumbersome. They contain provision for an appeal against dismissal, requirement to resign or reduction in rank to the Secretary of State – a level of appeal which no other public sector workforce has and one which to us seems disproportionate given that it is in addition to the normal rights of a worker to go to an employment tribunal. The current system means that efforts to remove ineffective staff can take years and can be reversed at the last minute by a successful appeal to the Secretary of State. Taking this long to resolve disciplinary cases is also unfair to individuals. Justice delayed is justice denied.

10.22 We recommend that the Discipline Regulations should be repealed and be replaced by a system based on modern good practice. We suggest that the ACAS Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievances Procedures would be a good basis for such a system.

Negotiating machinery

10.23 The current strike seems to demonstrate that the negotiating machinery is ineffective. And during the course of this Review, the evidence we have seen and the discussions we have had have confirmed this view.

10.24 Its ineffectiveness can be attributed to a number of factors, including its unwieldy size and its lack of any clear relationship with central government and the policy-making process.

10.25 We recommend that the NJC should be replaced by a smaller body, with executive authority to negotiate and the experience and skills to do so. It should include working parties to pursue individual issues, reporting back to the main body, or even standing sub-committees. There should be clear links with Ministers and the policy-making process so that pay and conditions of service fit into context of wider modernisation. There should be an Independent chair and secretariat, but they should be actively involved rather than judicial (“independent but engaged”); and should play a mediating role (“to promote agreement”) as well as conduct negotiations.

10.26 The new body must include independent members to counterbalance either the employers or union side. The employers' side should include government, the Local Government Association (LGA), the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), and senior management, and on the union side the Fire Brigades' Union,

the Retained Firefighters Union, the Fire Officers Association, the Association of Professional Fire Officers and Unison.

10.27 The remit of the body must be sufficiently wide to allow it to address the whole range of issues involved in fundamental reform. There would be provision for arbitration but it would be a last resort, so that parties did not use this as a long stop and fail to negotiate effectively.

10.28 We suggest that the negotiating process might be as follows:

- Government lays down the policy framework for the Fire Service. This could include annual evidence on pay policy (just like evidence to the Pay Review Bodies).
- The independent chair and secretariat turn these into principles to inform negotiations.
- Both sides can bring forward proposals, offers or demands to change anything within the scope of the body. This would include pay offers, perhaps informed by a formula.
- The independent chair is responsible for ensuring that proposals and discussions are consistent with the overall policy.
- If they are, the parties can reach agreement bilaterally. This may involve setting up working parties or using a standing committee framework.
- If the parties cannot agree, or if the discussions go outside the policy framework, the chair calls the issue back for resolution by the full body, including independent members.
- If disagreement continues, the chair adopts a conciliation role to find common ground. If necessary, the chair could go back to ministers to inform them that agreement is not possible. Government takes decision on whether to impose (assuming it has legal right to do so), or to modify policy.

10.29 Government has no legal power to direct employers or to conduct negotiations with staff who are not central government employees. ODPM have confirmed that any change would require primary legislation. It would be possible, however, for local authority bodies, the individual fire authorities, unions and government to come together in a voluntary agreement to put in place a new negotiating structure. This could be made statutory in due course.

Restriction on the right to strike

10.30 Several submissions to the Review have raised the question of whether there should be some restriction on the rights of fire staff to take industrial action, given their responsibility for providing an essential emergency service for which there is no ready alternative source of supply. The Review has, therefore, considered this matter.

10.31 In the UK, the legal position on strike action is complex. Under the European Convention on Human Rights, the ability to take industrial action is seen as an important element of the freedom to associate, which is a basic human right alongside free speech. Under common law, however, by going on strike or taking other forms of industrial action, an employee is essentially breaching his or her contract of employment. Inducing someone to break a contract, interfering with the performance of a contract by unlawful means and threatening to do either is unlawful. Statutory immunities have therefore been introduced into legislation in order to protect the overall right to strike. Essentially, industrial action can be taken but only in response to a trade dispute, and following a properly conducted ballot, with notice having been given to the employer and when picketing is carried out at the place of work in a peaceful manner.

10.32 The legislation can be regarded as setting the general boundaries of rights and responsibilities. There is no general statutory provision for any minimum level of emergency cover in the event of a strike in essential services. Only three groups of public sector workers have their right to strike restricted. The Armed Forces and the police are both prohibited by statute from taking strike action. For prison officers, it is unlawful to call upon them to take industrial action.

10.33 We think that it must be for the Government rather than this Review to weigh this issue given that it involves taking away a basic right. The Government must consider not only the best way to ensure that essential public services are provided at all times but whether any restriction on the right to strike would in fact be enforceable.

10.34 These are issues which need to be considered carefully and not against the background of the pay dispute. In any changed arrangements, there must be a commitment to exhaust the negotiating process before contemplating industrial action. And in the event of such action, there must be protocols about the provision of emergency cover – which does not rest on the goodwill of individuals – and on the use of fire stations, appliances and other equipment.

Conclusion

10.35 This chapter has set out what needs to change to provide the Fire Service with conditions of service and working practices which are flexible and responsive to local circumstances and will avoid protracted and often fruitless negotiation on matters which should be within the remit of managers. The changes we recommend will provide a more flexible working life for staff, including many aspects of modern conditions which have long been the norm elsewhere. These new conditions of service should apply to all staff but in the next chapter we turn to the special position of retained firefighters.

Retained Firefighters

The relationship between retained firefighters and their whole-time counterparts must be modernised to remove the implication of a second class service and to allow retained firefighters to play their full part in providing the service local communities need. Retained fire staff should be paid the same hourly rate as their whole-time colleagues and have the same medical and training standards so that they can be fully interchangeable. Whole-time firefighters should be able to undertake retained roles if they wish.

11.1 This chapter considers the position of the large number of retained firefighters who provide 30 per cent of total manpower. Many of the issues which affect the way they work and whether the Service is making best use of their commitment, time and skills, such as the impact of fire cover standards, are similar to those which apply to whole-time firefighters. But there are other issues which apply only to retained firefighters. In this chapter we look at the terms on which they are currently retained, the problems to which those give rise and how they could be overcome in a way which would offer a more attractive future for part-time firefighters.

11.2 The Review team took evidence from the Retained Firefighters Union (RFU) and discussed the issues affecting the retained service on their visits, especially to South Wales Fire Brigade and Northern Ireland Fire Brigade, where retained firefighters form more than half of the brigade's operational staff. The Review also drew on a useful report from the Scottish Fire Service Inspectorate entitled *Retained, Auxiliary and Volunteer firefighters in the Scottish Fire Service* (Scottish Executive, 2002b).

Position of retained firefighters

11.3 The retained Fire Service is a part-time force. Retained firefighters have to live and/or work in close proximity to their fire station so that they can respond promptly. They generally have another job. The Grey Book requires them to attend promptly and the expectation is that they will attend within about five minutes so that national standards for attendance of an appliance, or in urban areas a second appliance, can be met. Their duties will vary from brigade to brigade but in the main they do operational firefighting etc and not community fire safety work.

11.4 The strength of the retained service is their links with the local community and their commitment to the service. In the UK, around 60 per cent of appliances are crewed by retained firefighters and they predominate in rural areas in England, and in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

11.5 Retained firefighters are paid an annual retaining fee, currently around £1800 per annum, and a fee of between £13 and £20, depending on rank, for every call out that they attend. The turn out fee is paid if they ride the appliance. As compensation they get an attendance fee of between £7 and £9 if they go to the fire station but do not turn out to the incident either because the appliance is fully crewed or the turn out is aborted. Their hourly rate is currently 40 per cent less than that of a full-time firefighter. A long service bounty is paid at five yearly intervals from ten years service. It is a loyalty reward and was originally introduced because there was no pension.

11.6 Retained firefighters need an understanding employer and family. Retained service personnel have to be committed to serving as a firefighter: their on-call commitment cuts into work and leisure time in a way that can diminish their career prospects in their main job and affect their family life.

11.7 Retained firefighters may belong to the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) or the Retained Firefighters Union; some do not have a union affiliation. The RFU was formed after the strike in 1977/78 of personnel who disagreed with the FBU line on industrial action. The RFU has around 4,500 members out of 18,000 retained firefighters. It is recognised formally by twenty-two brigades.

Problems affecting retained firefighters

11.8 The major problem is recruitment. The retained service is nationally around 20 per cent short of complement and finds it hard to attract recruits unlike the full-time service. One of the reasons it has trouble recruiting is the fact that it has such a low profile; few people are aware of what the retained service is and what it does. Another reason is societal change with villages and small towns having less local labour. The Northern Ireland Fire Brigade is having particular difficulty in recruiting retained firefighters in rural areas due to the small size of the communities and the need for crews to be within five minutes travelling time of their stations. The RFU told us that Devon and Wiltshire have pioneered initiatives to improve this position, one of which is described below. If these prove effective, we would expect other brigades to adopt similar approaches. There may also be a need for a national recruitment campaign. Chief officers have discretion to reduce slightly visual standards on entry for retained firefighters where recruitment difficulties exist and we suggest this is used more actively.

Recruiting retained firefighters in Wiltshire

In Wiltshire the problem of recruiting and retaining retained firefighters became so bad that by 1999 the previous three years had seen more retained firefighters leave than join. The availability of retained appliances was being seriously affected by the decline in retained numbers.

In April 2000, Wiltshire appointed a retained recruitment officer. The retained recruitment officer set about a publicity campaign to raise awareness of the need for retained firefighters. Fifty thousand leaflets were delivered to households and businesses, and large numbers of banners, posters and signs were displayed. In addition, the local press was used to spread the word, and an Open Evening was held at the fire station.

Increased public awareness of the retained firefighter role gained Wiltshire over two hundred interested applications. Wiltshire's experience is that there were simply too many public misconceptions surrounding the work of retained firefighters: the public assumed that their local fire station was crewed by full-time staff only; the job was unpaid; they were not strong enough; and there was no provision for leave arrangements. Two other major deterrents had been that the people were reluctant to walk into their fire station and enquire about a job, and that people had little understanding of how the system of availability worked.

11.9 The pay system creates anomalies and demoralization.

The balance between the retainer and the call out fee is such that there is an incentive to attend call-outs. The South Wales Brigade told us that when crew are alerted, the number of personnel available to attend varies between four and fifteen. Only the number required will crew the appliance, leaving the remaining personnel on station. Naturally, personnel living nearer the station will most often ride the appliance; those living longer distances from the station rarely do and are thus denied experience and 'on job training.' Some staff take risks when responding in an effort to guarantee a place on the crew. Those who do not catch many, if any, calls become despondent and subsequently leave the Service. To mitigate this, brigades make standby payments to the personnel not riding the appliance which is wasteful.

11.10 There is no pension scheme for the retained service which could well be a factor in its recruitment difficulties. The question of a pension scheme for the retained has been under discussion for the past twenty-two years and its absence is felt as an injustice by staff, according to the RFU. We consider this issue in Chapter 9 on pay and pensions.

11.11 The Scottish Inspectorate detailed the issues which affect motivation of the retained service as pay rates, the hours of cover which they are required to provide, some aspects of training, their equipment and the appreciation of their commitment and professionalism by the brigades. The cumulative effect of these was to give rise to a feeling among rural and retained firefighters that brigades do not value them.

11.12 The RFU does not have any representation on the National Joint Council: all 27 seats are taken by the FBU. They do sit on the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council. Rightly or wrongly, the retained service is reported to feel that their issues are submerged under those of the whole-time service.

11.13 Even in areas where there are no recruitment or retention problems, retained firefighters may not be used to their full potential for the benefit of the community. The FBU will not allow mixed crewing of appliances in all circumstances and in all areas where stations are mixed whole-time and retained. The Review team were told on their visits what happens where mixed crewing is not allowed. If there are two appliances on a station but not enough full-time firefighters to crew the second, even if there is a retained firefighter available, the appliance will not be crewed and will therefore not go out on an incident. The FBU will not allow whole-time firefighters to serve as retained on their days off, despite FBU recognition that there is a shortage of retained firefighters. Firefighters who defy this rule face hostility and loss of union membership.

11.14 The introduction of IPDS will mean that training will be designed for the individual and to meet National Occupational Standards for the roles of firefighters. There is to be a pilot scheme in Norfolk to look at how retained firefighters could be included in IPDS, particular difficulties arise due to their lack of availability for training. We would hope that this pilot scheme will be used not just to identify but also to resolve any problems and thus ensure that IPDS can be extended to retained firefighters. For if it is not, retained firefighters will not be trained to the same standard as whole-time personnel and it will be even more difficult to integrate them seamlessly into the work of the Service than it is now. **We recommend that 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.**

South Wales experiment

11.15 The South Wales Brigade has taken a new approach to retained firefighters which the box below documents.

South Wales Pilot Project with the retained Service

The South Wales Fire Brigade set up a project designed to reverse a steady decline in recruitment and retention of retained firefighters. The pilot project, which is still under way, involves seven retained stations and is due to last 6 months.

Under the project, retained crew have their maximum number of hours reduced to eighty four per week. This is achieved by increasing the watch strength and setting up a rota system so that only the number of personnel required to crew the appliance actually attend when the alert is sounded. The hourly rate is now the same as the whole-time equivalent.

Personnel are now rewarded for their commitment and not for attendance. They get a regular monthly wage and they know they will get opportunities to attend incidents, providing on-the-job training and opportunities to maintain or increase their skills.

The pilot has been running fully for 3 months and has been very well received by those stations participating. All issues relating to legal, contractual, financial and representative bodies have been satisfied.

South Wales intend their Scheme will provide a fast track for entry into the whole-time service, which will be attractive to many retained personnel, and will aid retained recruitment.

11.16 The effect of a scheme like this is to create a proper part-time firefighter role, where the individual is committed to an agreed time commitment in return for a fixed payment and a guarantee of a certain level of work. This could be attractive to individuals not only financially but also in terms of being able to make a recognised contribution without having to be a full-time firefighter, and being able to work enough to maintain their skills at the right level. It would reduce the level of disruption to their work and personal lives. It could also be attractive to managers as it would enable them to make realistic but less wasteful plans to use this important part-time resource. They could also ensure that a reasonable degree of parity in skills and experience is maintained between whole-time and part-time firefighters.

11.17 We recognise that such a role would be quite different from the current retained position. Some retained firefighters might not wish to change. And some chief fire officers might wish to keep some retained firefighters on the current model. It is clear that one size will not fit all and there will need to be local variations, according to local circumstances. But the South Wales experiment deserves watching by government and employers to see whether it should be rolled out to other brigades.

An integrated Fire Service

11.18 The retained Fire Service is not being used to its full effectiveness due to out-of-date organisation and restrictive practices exercised locally. To release their potential, retained firefighters need to be properly integrated into the full time service.

We recommend that :

- i Retained firefighters should be remunerated at the same hourly rate as whole-time firefighters whether they continue under the present terms and conditions or not.**
- ii They should be trained to the same standard as whole-time firefighters and have sufficient work, subject to demand, to enable them to maintain their skills.**
- iii The medical standards applied to the recruitment of retained firefighters should be the same as those applied to whole-time firefighters.**
- iv They should have the opportunity to work on a more consistent part-time basis, with a fixed time commitment.**
- v Senior managers should have the opportunity to create roles other than firefighting on a retained basis, such as community fire safety and control room operations.**
- vi Retained firefighters should be able to apply for positions above Station Officer, though we recognise that this could probably only be done on a part-time rather than traditional retained basis.**
- vii Whole-time firefighters should be able to undertake retained roles if they wish.**

11.19 We make other recommendations relevant to retained firefighters in Chapter 8 on pay, Chapter 9 on pensions, and in Chapter 10 on conditions of service.

Conclusion

11.20 Although our detailed recommendations on retained firefighters are different from some of those applying to whole-time firefighters, their main aim is the same: to create a fire service which can operate flexibly, making the best use of its staff for the benefit of the community. If retained firefighters are to be integrated into the Fire Service as a whole, they must be trained to the same levels and offered the right experience. This may mean a more planned, regular engagement than in the past, but that need not mean the loss of the ethos of the retained service which serves so many parts of the country well.

Implementing reform

A wide-ranging programme of change will be required. The new approach to fire cover based on risk management needs to be put in place. Changes are required to terms and conditions of Fire Service personnel. There needs to be a system to audit and verify that progress has been made before new pay awards are released. New primary legislation is required to put the Fire Service on a proper statutory basis. A project team needs to lead the task of reform, using programme and project management techniques. Additional management resources will be required. There will be major opportunities for the Fire Service to deliver a better and more cost-effective service. Implementation will require strong leadership at all levels, clearly agreed and understood goals and first-class communications. The prospect is of a better Service providing a more responsive service to the public.

12.1 In this report we have set out what needs to change, why and how. The challenge of modernisation is great. It cannot be achieved instantly, but given the lack of progress in implementing previous recommendations for reform, it must start now.

12.2 This is a task that falls to others. In this chapter we make some suggestions about how they might proceed. Whether they adopt our suggestions or not, we are clear that a plan is required to identify tasks and timescales and to link pay increases above the basic 4 per cent to verified delivery of change. Without this, the Fire Service will once again sink back into outmoded working practices which do not give the public the protection they need and deserve at reasonable cost. We hope we will be the last Review to say this.

Implementation plan

12.3 Different elements of reform can proceed at different speeds. Many measures can be introduced quickly if the will and trust are there. Others require the completion of existing policy work. Some may depend on legislation and must be considered as longer-term objectives.

12.4 No one can predict exactly how far and how fast reforms will extend and what the end result will be. Hence, we do not want to constrain the change process artificially. It should develop its own dynamic and flexibility so long as it is directed towards the overall aim of using the resources of the Service efficiently to protect the public.

12.5 Following publication of the report, action will be needed in the following areas to take forward the recommendations:

- **legislative**, regulatory and standards changes;
- **negotiation** of changes in terms and conditions and staged pay awards;
- **implementation** at local level, including the use of new flexibilities and risk based fire cover; and
- **a verification and audit regime** to monitor implementation at national and local level before stages of the pay award can be released.

Legislation

12.6 We have made specific recommendations for legislative and regulatory changes and we have placed firm obligations on government to act quickly to provide the right legal framework to allow reform to proceed. Responsibility lies with government, and our report is clear about what is required. Timing is for Ministers to decide but at a minimum we would expect to see our recommendations in Chapter 5 taken forward to deliver:

- immediate administrative action to suspend Section 19 of the 1947 Fire Services Act;
- a commitment to a White Paper by Easter; and
- commitment to primary legislation on a new Fire Service Act in the next session.

12.7 We recognise that legislative reform will need to take account of the differing positions of the Devolved Administrations.

Negotiation

12.8 Our position paper has already set out an agenda for negotiation and a process to take it forward. We believe that a plan for negotiating reform should be structured around four separate strands of discussion. The parties will need to set up special arrangements to allow them to meet continuously to negotiate the new arrangements.

12.9 Negotiations on the full range of issues required to achieve reform would commence at the same time but be completed over different time periods:

- Strand one would include those subjects on which immediate agreement is possible and could be concluded within a period of four to eight weeks from the start of negotiations.
- Strand two would contain those issues on which continued policy work is required – in particular IPDS and a new reward structure – but is expected to conclude within six months.

- Strand three would address those issues which require organisational reform and could be expected to conclude in time for next year's pay award.
- Strand four will contain those subjects which do not of themselves affect terms and conditions of service or require negotiation, but require action on the part of central and local government.

12.10 In addition there will need to be action to follow up our recommendation in chapter 10 for new negotiating machinery for the Fire Service.

Local implementation

12.11 Local implementation will be in the hands of individual fire authorities and chief officers. We have not proposed specific measures for implementation and have restricted ourselves to setting the principles, leaving those on the ground to decide on the best way to implement them to deliver a better Fire Service. We have also suggested some ways of helping individual brigades, through better use of the Inspectorate and augmentation of financial and human resources management. We believe this will be important to help local managers with preparation and implementation of their risk management plans.

12.12 Delivery of a modern Fire Service for the twenty-first century requires a process which recognises the interdependence of many of the reforms and maintains their coherence. **We recommend that a body should be charged with drawing up a business plan showing which reforms are to be undertaken by whom and by what date; designing a process for tracking delivery; and reporting to Ministers.** It may also be appropriate to set targets for savings as part of this remit.

12.13 This is a task which ODPM, the Devolved Administrations, and the fire authorities should share. They are the parties which will lead most of the reforms and they will need to discuss the effect and cost of any departures from the plan. We suggest this body is led by an individual who is personally charged with delivering reform, to give the necessary leadership and focus.

Auditing delivery of reform

12.14 There must be a clearly understood method of verifying that the planned reforms have been delivered before the associated pay rises are given. This process needs to verify not only that the letter of the reforms has been delivered – for example, simplification of the Grey Book – but that the reforms are making a difference to the service delivered to the public – through changes to working practices.

12.15 Verification of this kind must be done locally as well as at a national level. The Audit Commission, through the District Auditor, would be an obvious candidate for the job in England and Wales and its equivalent, the Accounts Commission in Scotland. In Chapter 6, we suggest that the Audit Commission and the Accounts Commission might take on the inspection and audit role for the Fire Service generally; and that the Comprehensive Performance Assessments undertaken by the Commission should be extended to fire authorities in England and Wales. Taken together, these functions would enable the Audit Commission and the Accounts Commission to build up a body of knowledge about the Service so that it could act not only as an auditor but also as a source of good practice.

12.16 Local verification will be important in demonstrating the link between the reforms, and the benefits which result and allowing individual fire authorities to satisfy their communities that the pay increases are affordable within local budgets. This should not however obscure the most important objective of the reform process, which is to improve the way the Fire Service works and to deliver a better service to the public.

Resources

12.17 Two recommendations in Chapters 6 and 7 would support brigades in their efforts to deliver reform. An Inspectorate with the revised remit we propose would act at national level to help brigades plan and implement reform in line with the overall vision, as well as providing a cadre of managers and officers committed to pursuing reform in their future careers. We also propose additional HR managers in each fire authority, to help them with the increased management load they will face, especially in the short term. The new policy implementation body described in Chapter 7 will also have an important role to play in implementing reform.

12.18 These two recommendations by themselves will provide a potential force of 100-150 individuals to assist with implementation. This should be more than sufficient, provided they are properly led, adequately briefed and have a clear plan to follow. Decisions are required on responsibility for giving these teams direction and support, funding and managing them.

Lessons from the current dispute

12.19 Lessons have already been learned from the experience of providing alternative emergency cover during the firefighters' strikes. Although that experience does not replicate 'normal' operating conditions – for instance, it is likely that the public do take extra care during a strike which reduces the number of call-outs, we believe that it still shows what can be achieved by applying a risk assessment approach, rather than blanket prescriptions, and by using more flexible crewing and shifts.

12.20 For instance, those staffing the joint control rooms were able to make decisions about the appropriate level of response based on information about each incident and the experience and judgement of senior fire staff. Departing from the national fire cover standards did not appear to put people at additional risk. We are encouraged, and we think firefighters and their managers should be too, that different approaches can be managed successfully and do not mean less protection for the public.

Costs and benefits of reform

12.21 We believe that our proposals for the Fire Service should produce a more efficient and effective Service which focuses on prevention rather than intervention and meets demand flexibly. The starting point must be for good quality managers at all levels, including chief fire officers, to be given the opportunity to manage, to deploy their resources – staff, appliances and stations – as they see fit.

12.22 We are confident that, within the foreseeable future, benefits will more than exceed additional costs, including those of the pay increases we propose. We should also take account of benefits which will not give rise to cash savings. For example there is a large and obvious benefit from reducing the number of fires in the UK and in saving more lives through increased use of defibrillators, but they will not necessarily lead to budgetary savings for the Fire Service.

12.23 Our calculations below are based on figures emerging from discussions with the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). It should be borne in mind that estimating future savings is uncertain and particularly so when trying to predict the effect of the far-reaching reform programme which we are proposing. Nevertheless, in our discussions we have reached consensus on the broad magnitude of the potential savings from individual measures discussed below, though not in each case on the timing. The following sections set out the additional costs to the service of our proposals (including pay), potential cash savings which could flow from the reforms and, lastly, wider benefits to the community from changes which we are recommending.

Additional costs of our proposals

12.24 Although many of the recommendations contained in our report will lead to additional expenditure, much of this like the additional costs of training occasioned by IPDS has already been included in the funding baseline to take account of existing reform proposals.

12.25 There are two areas however, where we think it is reasonable to suppose that there will be additional cost. The first is for training all firefighters to use automatic defibrillators as part of co-responder and first responder schemes and for providing the equipment to be carried on fire appliances.

12.26 The other area of increased cost is to provide for recruitment of additional human resources (HR) staff at brigade level to improve management overall, especially of areas like the management of sickness. (There could, however, be off setting savings in posts from not using uniformed staff in these roles.) Together with the medical training in paragraph 12.25, the additional costs are estimated at £15 million over the three years to 2005/06.

12.27 There may also be some net additional costs for overtime resulting from a move to a more flexible crewing system before the new system beds in. We estimate that these might amount to £22 million in total.

12.28 Additional paybill costs will amount to around £140 million over three years on the basis of the figures set out in Chapter 8.

Potential cash savings

12.29 Once reform is underway, there are likely to be many opportunities for making savings by doing things differently. For the purposes of demonstrating the case for change, however, we believe that substantial savings are likely to be delivered in several areas.

Risk-based fire cover

12.30 Implementation of the reforms offers huge potential for savings by matching the location of stations and crew, the level of crewing and the shift patterns to the actual incidence of demand. It is worth rehearsing again briefly the effect of the current national standards of fire cover combined with the local inflexibilities in the way that firefighters are deployed. We are currently paying firefighters to protect empty buildings for much of the time; they work to an inflexible shift pattern which means that for around 30 per cent of their time they respond only to emergencies and to rigidly enforced crewing standards which take no account of incidence.

12.31 As we recommend above, we should move to a system of fire cover based on assessing and mitigating risks to people rather than buildings, using prevention of fire as well as emergency response. This will mean in some areas fewer stations, lower staffing or shorter shifts, with cover being provided by using firefighters working voluntary overtime and without paying people simply to do nothing on a planned basis.

12.32 The cost savings are dependent on the removal of current inflexibilities very quickly. These include the repeal of Section 19, removing the Grey Book restrictions including constant crewing and the ban on voluntary pre-planned overtime amongst others. Also, the current national standards of fire cover will need to be lifted and replaced with a simpler and less restrictive system based on principles of risk management.

12.33 Yearly, natural wastage in the Fire Service runs at 4 to 5 per cent; savings on this basis assume that half of all posts would be filled and also assumes that overtime would run at 0.75 to 0.5 per cent of pay bills locally. This will allow firefighters to boost their earnings and provide a more efficient service with better use of resources as well. Both of these assumptions we consider to be cautious and savings could well be higher.

12.34 We have seen estimates that implementation of the new regime might save well over £100 million over 3 years. Over time we expect this to be even larger. It is worth noting the metropolitan brigades will gain the biggest savings. On the basis of the assumptions set out in paragraph 12.33, we have included a figure of £115 million for savings over the next three years.

Savings from better health management

12.35 The Fire Service's people are its most valuable asset. They should be managed better and more effectively. The Inspectorate has produced significant proposals as to how the unacceptable rate of sickness and early retirement on medical grounds should be reduced. Estimates suggest that by means of better targeted and managed occupational health provision, efficiency gains of some £20m over 3 years could be achieved. If brigades manage to reduce the percentage of staff who retire on grounds of ill health (currently 43 per cent – a very high proportion compared with other parts of the public sector), savings would accrue here too.

Savings from collaboration between brigades

12.36 There are four areas where previous studies by the Audit Commission, the Inspectorate and the Home Office have made clear that significant improvements in efficiency could be achieved if brigades joined together to pool requirements and expertise. These are amalgamation of fire control rooms; better procurement; outsourcing or collaboration arrangements for vehicle maintenance and rationalisation of management and support costs. These changes will impact more on the non-uniformed side of the Service. Increased collaboration between brigades is essential in order both to meet the requirements of the New Dimension programme and to provide a cost-effective service. Estimates suggest that annual savings reaching £42m over 3 years could be achieved.

12.37 We consider that although in part cautious, somewhat tentative and dependent upon changes being made quickly to current arrangements, the figures sketched out above are sufficient to demonstrate that the pay awards we recommend could be self-funding within three years, and yield positive savings in subsequent years.

Potential income generation

12.38 Looking at the other side of the coin from cost savings, there may also be scope for fire authorities to levy charges. There are several areas in which brigades could charge, including charging insurance companies for the costs associated with road traffic accidents as the NHS does, charging commercial operators for fire safety advice and charging for false alarms from automatic fire alarms (an increasing source of call outs for brigades). This would provide an incentive for people to ensure that they are not calling out the Fire Service unnecessarily as well. The potential for cost recovery will depend on the services offered by brigades. These might amount to £100m or so over the next three years, though there may be legislative and other restrictions to be overcome both in capturing these, and on the use to which the resulting savings could be put.

12.39 Some charges would depend on legislative change. These estimates of income have an element of uncertainty but nevertheless, there is no reason in principle why some services should not attract a charge. We see no reason why the revenue gained in this way should not be used to fund some aspects of the reform programme.

Wider benefits

12.40 It is notoriously difficult to estimate the financial value of improvements in human welfare. The ODPM told us that if we take the marginal cost of one domestic fire in the UK (£16,500) and assume that the Service will meet the target of reducing the number of fires by 20 per cent by 2004, this should save approximately £600m a year to society as a whole.

12.41 In addition, there should be benefits arising out of an increase in co-responder schemes. The NHS has estimated that if cases where life threatening calls receive a response within eight minutes from 75 per cent to 90 per cent, this would affect around 300,000 patients and save the economy £3.6 billion through the reduction in lives lost.

12.42 The Fire Service can make a significant contribution to achieving both these targets. We quote these examples not to claim them as a consequence of reform, but as an illustration of the substantial non-cash benefits of what we propose.

12.43 Table 12.1 summarises the figures from the paragraphs above.

Table 12.1 Costs and benefits

	2002/3 £ million	2003/4 £ million	2004/5 £ million	2005/6 £ million
Net pay costs over and above provision already in the baseline	–	29	54	54
Additional medical training and HR management	–	5	6	4
Additional overtime	–	8	8	6
TOTAL COSTS	–	42	68	64
Allocation of resources by risk	–	(12)	(38)	(65)
HR management	–	–	(8)	(14)
Better collaboration	–	(5)	(18)	(19)
NET COST/(SAVING)	–	25	4	(34)

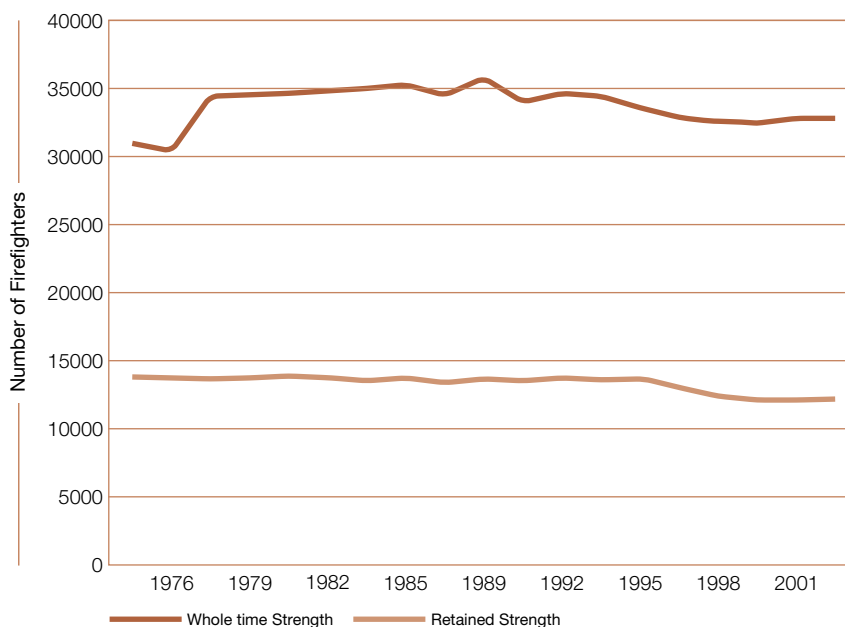
Source: LGA and refined in discussion with ODPM and Review

Staff numbers

12.44 Figure 12.1 below illustrates that the staffing of the Fire Service has been static over many years. As we have discussed elsewhere in this report, the effect of the national standards of fire cover, constant crewing and the basic 2,2,4 shift pattern is to create a rigid system of deployment of resources. It is not surprising that establishments have remained constant. There has been little reason to change.

12.45 But with reform, there will be change. Resources will need to be matched to risk and an appropriate response. In some brigades establishments may need to rise, in others to fall. In some brigades, the overall establishment may not change much but within that there could be significant change in the location of jobs or in different types of jobs. Many brigades will therefore be recruiting staff at the same time as they are reducing jobs in certain areas or at certain times.

Figure 12.1 Number of Firefighters in England and Wales, 1976–2001



Source: ODFM

12.46 The Fire Service has never needed to make compulsory redundancies among firefighters. Given the number of firefighters nearing the normal retirement age in the next 5 years, we see no reason why compulsory redundancies should be needed. The Service should be able to manage the move to more flexible roles and working practices by making use of the expected level of outflow and inflow.

Implementation and after

12.47 We have recommended a substantial reform programme. Successful delivery will depend upon the effective application of traditional change management principles and particular emphasis on the following components:

- **Strong leadership:** Ministers, the employers' organisations, fire authorities and senior management in the fire service need to own the reform agenda and commit themselves to delivering it. Change cannot be imposed from outside; it will only happen if those in positions of influence are prepared to make it happen.
- **Clear goals:** This report sets out a vision for the future Fire Service, which needs to be endorsed by government, employers and fire authorities and translated into tangible goals at both local and national level. While change may proceed at different rates in different areas, it will be important to keep the end point in sight so that everyone, at all levels in the service, knows what they are trying to achieve and can work towards it.
- **Communications:** Follow up to the report will need a comprehensive communications exercise to explain it to the public, to national and local politicians, management and individual Fire Service staff. Everyone, at all levels must know what is happening and why. This will require comprehensive and effective communications strategies at national and local level and considerable coordination among the employer organisations to ensure that they deliver consistent messages to staff. Government and employers will need to decide which of them should own the responsibility for communicating the vision for reform, answering queries, and perhaps conducting a debate on the detailed implementation, and how it should be managed.

12.48 Above all, implementation requires commitment. Fundamental change is not going to be delivered through a continuation of the current management arrangements. All those in positions of responsibility, from Ministers down to fire staff, must commit themselves to reform and want it to happen.

12.49 The prizes are considerable in terms of a better service for the public and a better and more rewarding career for the men and women who make up the service. Reform will unlock the individual's potential and give them the opportunity to demonstrate what they can offer. There will be new and exciting career paths, more suited to personal aspirations and circumstances, which enable the individual to take control of their own circumstances and develop in ways which suit them and their families. Coupled with this will be greater respect for personal and cultural differences, a more diverse mixture of people employed by the Fire Service, on a range of family-friendly and flexible working patterns. And, over time, as everyone develops their own

careers and skills and embraces change, the higher performance which results will bring higher salaries. Over all of this the professionalism of the Fire Service will continue as before, with even closer links to local communities and the continued high esteem of the general public and partner organisations.

12.50 If the recommendations in this report are accepted and put into effect, we also expect to see a Service which will have the capacity and the will to continue to reform itself in response both to the Government's drive to improve public services generally and to the needs of local communities.

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Citizen Firefighter

Appendix 2: Submissions of Evidence

Ambulance Service Association	Dorset Fire Authority
Association of Principal Fire Officers (APFO)	Dumfries and Galloway Fire Authority
Audit Commission	East Sussex Fire Authority
Avon Fire Authority	Equal Opportunities Commission
British Paramedic Association	Fire Authority for Northern Ireland
Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority	Fire Cover Review
Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council Health & Safety Board	Fire Employers (i.e. Employers' Side of the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades)
Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association (CACFOA)	Fire Magazine
Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association (CACFOA Scotland)	Fire Officers' Association
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Fire Authority	Fire Research & Training Unit, Cambridge
Cheshire Fire Authority	Fire Safety Advisory Board
Cleveland Fire Authority	Fire Service College
Conservative Group of the London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority and The Greater London Authority & Conservative London Borough Leaders	Fire Service Research Unit
Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)	Grampian Fire Board
Cornwall Fire Authority	Greater Manchester County Fire Service
Cumbria County Council	Greater Manchester Fire Authority
Dawsons International Fire Safety Engineering Consultancy – Independent Member of Kent Police Authority	Hertfordshire County Council
Denbighshire County Council	HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services
Derbyshire Fire Authority	HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services, Scotland
	Institute of Fire Engineers
	Integrated Personal Development Advisory Board
	Kent & Medway Towns Fire Authority
	Liberal Democrats

Local Government Association (LGA)
London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority
Lothian Fire Authority
Marconi
McCall, John, Chief Fire Officer, North East Strategic Partnership
McGuirk, Tony, Chief Fire Officer, Merseyside Fire Authority
Merseyside Fire & Civil Defence Authority
Mid & West Wales Fire Authority
Nisbet, Michael, Director, Michael Nisbet Associates
North Wales Fire Authority
North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Authority
Nottinghamshire & City of Nottingham Fire Authority
O'Connell, R, Commander, South Wales Fire Authority
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Oxfordshire County Council
Oxfordshire County Council Fire & Rescue Service
Platt, Baroness
Principal Fire Officers of Devon Fire & Rescue Service
Retained Firefighters Union (RFU)
Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service
Scottish Executive
Somerset County Council
Staney, Paul, Ex-Labour Leader, County Fire Authority, Buckinghamshire
Surrey Fire Authority

Tyne & Wear Fire & Civil Defence Authority
University of Hertfordshire
National Assembly for Wales
West Yorkshire Fire Authority
Woods, Paul, Chief Fire Officer, Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service
Young, Paul, Chief Fire Officer, Devon
In addition, we received more than 120 submissions from individuals whom we do not think it is appropriate to name.

Appendix 3: Evidence Meetings

1. The following Fire Service Authorities and Brigades were visited during the review:

- Cheshire Fire Authority
- Essex County Rescue & Fire Service
- Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service
- London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority
- Northern Ireland Fire Brigade
- South Wales Fire Service
- Strathclyde Fire Brigade
- West Midlands Fire Service
- West Yorkshire Fire Service

2. Other organisations the review team met during its information and evidence gathering phase include:

Employers

- Employers' side of the National Joint Council for Local Government
- Local Government Association

Associations

- Association of Professional Fire Officers
- Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association
- Fire Service College
- Retained Firefighters' Union

Government

- Deputy Prime Minister, the Rt Hon John Prescott MP
- Minister of State, Local Government and the Regions, the Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP
- Parliamentary Under Secretary, ODPM, Chris Leslie MP
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Fire Services
- National Assembly for Wales (Local Government & Modernisation Division)
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
- Scottish Executive
- HM Treasury

Appendix 4: Text of the Framework Document Published on 8 October 2002

Introduction

1. This document sets out the framework for the work of the Independent Review of the Fire Service (IRFS). The review is independent of Government and is reviewing the current issues surrounding the fire service fairly and objectively. The review will report by Christmas 2002.

2. The framework document sets out the following:

- The terms of reference for the Review
- The key questions which the Review will consider
- The approach the Review will take
- The timetable for the Review
- How people can submit information and contributions to the Review.

Background to the current pay dispute

3. Since the national firefighters' strike of 1977-78, firefighters' pay increases have been determined by a formula linking the pay of a fully qualified firefighter to the earnings of the top quarter of adult male manual workers. Pay is negotiated between local authority employers and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) for the UK as a whole, covering around 50,000 whole-time (full-time) and retained (on-call) firefighters and control room staff.

4. On 28 May, the FBU tabled a pay claim of £30,000 per annum for firefighters and control room staff to the negotiating body for fire service pay, the National Joint Council. This claim translates as an increase of 39% for firefighters

and 51% for control room staff. At a full meeting of the National Joint Council on 2 September, the employers offered the FBU:

- a 4% interim pay rise and backdating of any increases agreed subsequently;
- in future, a formula that would link fire service pay with average settlements in the economy;
- support for an independent inquiry into the future of the Fire Service.

The FBU felt that this offer would not meet their members' aspirations.

5. On 20 September, Professor Sir George Bain, Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast, announced the launch of an independent review of the Fire Service at the request of Government. The review is independent of all parties and will consider all of the issues facing the Fire Service including modernisation and pay.

6. The review group comprises Sir Michael Lyons and Sir Anthony Young together with Sir George Bain. The review is supported by a small Secretariat.

7. Sir George Bain has been President and Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University Belfast since January 1998. He was Chairman of the Low Pay Commission between 1997 and 2002, and Chairman of the Department of Trade and Industry's Work and Parents Taskforce.

8. Sir Michael Lyons has long experience of local government and was formerly Chief Executive of Birmingham City Council, Nottinghamshire County Council and Wolverhampton Borough Council, and is currently Director of INLOGOV and Professor of Public Policy at Birmingham University.

9. Sir Anthony Young was this year's TUC President and was the Senior Deputy General Secretary of the Communication Workers Union and a member of the TUC General Council from 1989 to 2002.

Terms of reference

10. The terms of reference for the Review are as follows:

Having regard to the changing and developing role of the Fire Service in the United Kingdom, to inquire into and make recommendations on the future organisation and management of the Fire Service to:

- enable it to undertake the full range of responsibilities that are appropriate to it;
- enable it to respond effectively to all the operational demands which may be placed upon it;
- enable the responsibilities of the Fire Service to be delivered with optimum efficiency and effectiveness.

In the context of the above, such recommendations should include considerations as to:

- the pay levels and conditions of service that are appropriate taking full account of the wider context of pay arrangements, levels and their affordability across the economy;
- the most appropriate arrangements for determining future pay and conditions of service of whole-time firefighters, retained firefighters, voluntary firefighters and fire control room staff.

The final report will be published by the Review Group and will apply to the whole of the UK.

Key questions

11. The Review welcomes contributions from everyone with an interest in the future of the fire service. People and organisations can comment

on any issue they wish to, but there are also a number of general questions to which the Review would be interested in receiving responses. These are as follows:

The Fire Service

- What roles and responsibilities does the Fire Service currently fulfil? Are there other demands which it should also carry out? How has the fire service changed since 1977 and how should it change for the future?
- What relationship should the fire service have with other agencies and is the current division of responsibility between the various emergency services currently the best possible?
- What sort of people are required by today's Fire Service? What values do they hold and what motivates them?
- Does the current training structure develop staff with the right attributes for a modern service?
- Should there be a wider range of jobs and grades within the Fire Service with different skills and backgrounds?
- What background is required in terms of qualifications, experience, physical skills and so on and what personal characteristics and competencies?
- How can the Fire Service best increase the diversity of its workforce?

Structure and Organisation

- How should the Fire Service best be organised? What should the balance be between national, regional and local functions and structures?
- In what ways and to whom should the Fire Service be accountable for its performance?
- How should performance standards be set, monitored and reported upon? How much flexibility should there be locally?

- What role should the Fire Service Inspectorate play?
- What is the right reward structure to attract staff and equip them with the right skills for the future?
- How should pay reflect qualifications, experience, competencies and frontline experience? How can affordability and fairness to other public sector workers, those in the private sector, and taxpayers in general be ensured?
- How much local flexibility is necessary?

Timetable

12. The Review intends to complete its work within 3 months and expects to present its final report to the Government by Christmas 2002. It intends to work to the following timetable:

20 September 2002	Formal start of Review, including launch of Review website.
September – October 2002	Programme of visits and meetings, information gathering and submission of views from interested parties.
18 October 2002	Closing date for receipt of evidence, comments and information to the Review.
October – November 2002	Analysis of comments and information received. Further meetings, if necessary.
December 2002	Review programme of work completed.
Christmas 2002	Final report presented to the Government and other interested parties.

Overall approach

13. The Review is completely independent of Government. Its purpose is to review objectively the situation within the Fire Service and to make recommendations accordingly. Evidence will not be published by the Review and hearings will be held in private.

Gathering views and evidence

14. The Review has already received a substantial body of evidence from a number of different sources including recent reports on the Fire Service by the Audit Commission, Fire Service Inspectorate and others. The Review has also written to key parties involved in the delivery of the Fire Service in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, seeking their views. Once the evidence has been submitted, the Review will be seeking a series of meetings with the main organisations involved during October and November. The Review hopes that all those with an interest in the future of the Fire Service will take the opportunity to submit their views. People are invited to submit comments to the Review via e-mail or, if they do not have access to the Internet, in writing.

Visits

15. The Review Group intends to make a series of visits to examine different aspects of the Fire Services in the United Kingdom. A visits programme will be published on the Review website and updated regularly.

Contact details

16. Comments via e-mail should be sent to:

fireservicereview@irfs.org.uk

Written comments should be sent to:

The Secretary
Independent Review of the Fire Service
Room 509
1 Northumberland Avenue
London WC2N 5BW

The closing date for receipt of information is
Friday 18 October 2002.

The Inquiry website can be found at:
www.irfs.org.uk

Appendix 5: Recruitment and Pay Data

1. The table below shows the number of applicants per vacancy by brigade.

Table A5.1 Recruitment: applicants per vacancy

Brigade	Year	Applicants	Vacancies	Applicants per vacancy
Avon	2001/2	1029	17	61
Bedfordshire	2002	679	20	34
Berkshire	2002	263	54	5
Buckinghamshire				25
Cambridgeshire	2001	483	20	24
Central Scotland	2002/3			29
Cheshire		1600	25	64
Cornwall	2001/2	365	10	37
Cumbria	2002/3	707	7	101
Derbyshire	2002			73
Devon	2000	700	49	14
Dorset	2001	1384	14	99
Dumfries & Galloway	2001/2			183
East Sussex	2002	360	40	9
Essex	2001/2	1126	45	25
Fife	2002			28
Gloucestershire	2002			27
Grampian	2000	279	35	8
Greater Manchester		7000	100	70

Table A5.1 continued

Brigade	Year	Applicants	Vacancies	Applicants per vacancy
Hampshire	2002	1058	96	11
Hereford & Worcester	2001/2	746	14	53
Hertfordshire	2001	301	30	10
Highlands & Islands	2002/3	200	6	33
Isle of Wight	2002	128	6	21
Kent	2002			42
Lancashire	1999/2002	1180	59	20
Leicester	2002	681	22	31
Lincolnshire	2001			50
London	2001/2	20000	450	44
Lothian & Borders	2001/2	1208	40	30
Merseyside		2824	80	35
Mid & West Wales	2001/2	1798	20	90
Norfolk	2000/1	432	10	43
North Wales	2002	797	20	40
N Yorkshire	2001/2			22
Northamptonshire	2002	336	40	8
Northern Ireland	2001/2	2202	54	41
Nottinghamshire	2002	811	28	29
Oxfordshire	2002	455	10	46
Shropshire	2002	279	16	17
Somerset	2000			9
South Wales	2000	1805	45	40
South Yorks	2002	792	60	13
Staffordshire	2002			30

Table A5.1 continued

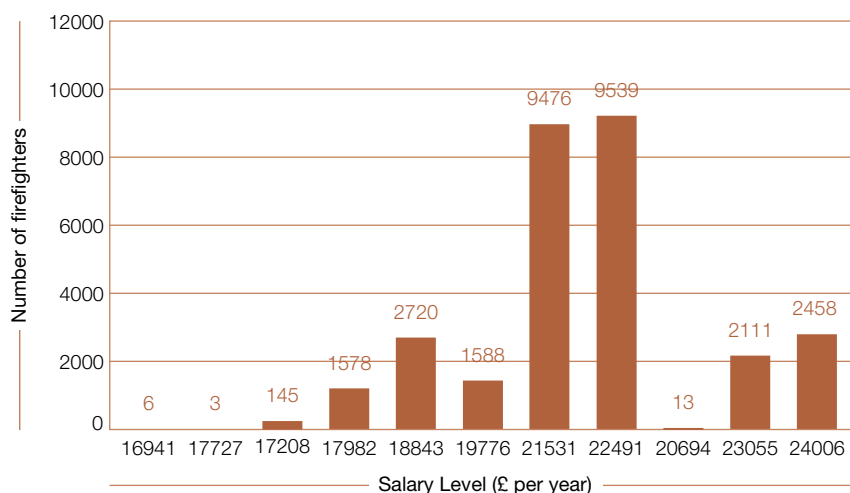
Brigade	Year	Applicants	Vacancies	Applicants per vacancy
Strathclyde	2001/2	402	68	6
Suffolk	2002	680	30	23
Surrey	2002	805	57	14
Tayside	2002	674	23	29
Warwickshire	2002	25	8	3
West Midlands	2002			80
West Sussex	2002	568	24	24
West Yorkshire	2002/3	6956	116	60
Wiltshire				50
Regional Recruitment*		3698	90	41
Average**				38

* Cleveland, Co Durham & Darlington, Humberside, Northumberland and Tyne & Wear operate recruitment as a region.

** Figures rounded to the nearest whole number.

Source: Fire Employers' Evidence

Figure A5.1 Number of firefighters at each salary level



Source: Employers' Organisation for Local Government, based on Fire Authorities returns survey 2002 (2001 figures for five authorities).

2. The tables below illustrate the potential implications for gross and net pay of the average offer of: 4% from November 2002 plus a further 7% from November 2003 (an 11.28% compound increase) plus an increase in London weighting of £1,137pa from £3,171 to £4,308.

Table A5.2 Gross and net pay – Firefighter (during 5th year)

		Annual basic pay	Gross hourly pay	Take home pay
Single person	Now	£21,531	£9.83	£6.62
	+ say 11.28%	£23,960	£10.94	£7.28
Married person, wife not working, no children	Now	£21,531	£9.83	£6.62
	+ say 11.28%	£23,960	£10.94	£7.28
Married person, wife not working, 2 young children	Now	£21,531	£9.83	£6.87
	+ say 11.28%	£23,960	£10.94	£7.52

Table A5.3 Gross and net pay – Firefighter (with 15 years service)

		Annual basic pay	Gross hourly pay	Take home pay
Single person	Now	£22,491	£10.27	£6.88
	+ say 11.28%	£25,028	£11.42	£7.58
Married person, wife not working, no children	Now	£22,491	£10.27	£6.88
	+ say 11.28%	£25,028	£11.42	£7.58
Married person, wife not working, 2 young children	Now	£22,491	£10.27	£7.13
	+ say 11.28%	£25,028	£11.42	£7.82

Table A5.4 Gross and net pay – Lead Firefighter (with 15 years service)

		Annual basic pay	Gross hourly pay	Take home pay
Single person	Now	£24,006	£10.96	£7.30
	+ say 11.28%	£26,714	£12.19	£8.02
Married person, wife not working, no children	Now	£24,006	£10.96	£7.30
	+ say 11.28%	£26,714	£12.19	£8.02
Married person, wife not working, 2 young children	Now	£24,006	£10.96	£7.54
	+ say 11.28%	£26,714	£12.19	£8.27

Table A5.5 Gross and net pay – London Firefighter (with 15 years service)

		Annual basic pay +London weightg	Gross hourly pay	Take home pay
Single person	Now	£25,662	£11.71	£7.74
	With incr 14.3%*	£29,336	£13.39	£8.74
Married person, wife not working, no children	Now	£25,662	£11.71	£7.74
	With incr *	£29,336	£13.39	£8.74
Married person, wife not working, 2 young children	Now	£25,662	£11.71	£7.98
	With incr *	£29,336	£13.39	£8.98

* Includes 11.28% on basic pay, plus London weighting increase of £1137pa

Notes: Take home pay is after deduction of income tax, national insurance and employees pensions contribution. An increase of 11.28% is equivalent to 4% plus 7% on the new figure eg $100 \times 1.04 = 104 \times 1.07 = 111.28$, an increase of 11.28.

- An experienced firefighter currently has a basic annual salary of £22,491. The average proposed increase of 11.28% would raise this to over £25,000 a year (£11.42 hourly).
- An experienced firefighter in London currently has an annual salary of £25,662. The average proposed increase of 11.28% on basic pay together with the proposed increase in London weighting of £1,137 would raise this to approaching £30,000 a year (£13.39 hourly).
- A newly qualified firefighter currently has a basic annual salary of £21,531. The average proposed increase of 11.28% would raise this to over £23,960 a year (£10.94 hourly). A further cost of living increase could put the pay of all qualified firefighters above £25,000.

Appendix 6: The Use of Formulae in Pay Negotiations

1. The following notes outline some issues which should be taken into account in considering or choosing a formula for use in pay negotiations.

Long term impact of pay formulae

2. There is some academic work suggesting that over the course of a number of business cycles, different general pay formulae will produce broadly similar increases. More specific comparator groups will reflect gradual changes in their relative position against other occupations or segments of the labour market. For example, indices based on male earnings often show a lower level of increase over the last 15 years compared to those for all staff, simply because there has been a general trend to increase female pay as part of a move towards equal opportunities. The movement of more precise comparator groups can be less predictable and runs the risk of generating long term increases significantly out of line with movements in earnings in the economy as a whole. Since one of the main benefits of a formal pay determination mechanism is to provide an element of stability and predictability, this argues strongly that formulae should be based on the broadest possible comparator group.

Rates or levels

3. A formula can be used to compare actual pay rates, eg the upper quartile of male manual earnings, or simply to determine the rate of change, ie the annual increase. The former will give a precise figure which will maintain an exact position in the sample range: firefighters are currently paid the upper quartile rate for male manual earnings just as they were back in 1979.

Using a formula to determine the rate of increase means that while the position of that particular occupation is likely to remain fairly stable in relation to the median of pay rates, small changes are likely to creep in which, over time, could result in some difference.

Earnings or settlements

4. There is also a choice to be made between basing a formula on earnings data or on settlement levels. Earnings comparisons present a particular problem, which has been experienced by the firefighters formula. They will severely restrict the flexibility of a pay system because any changes in the components of pay of the group in question (eg to reflect regional circumstances, increased hours, bonuses or overtime) will need to be included in the earnings figure being compared with the comparator group, and therefore will only serve to depress the level of any pay increase. In addition, earnings figures leave little scope for employers to negotiate reform because of this restriction on increasing earnings.

5. Basing a formula on settlements can avoid these problems to a certain extent. As pay systems become more flexible, however, and particularly as the level of bonus and other performance-related payments increases, the difference between settlements and earnings has increased significantly over the last ten years. Two different groups, each using the same settlement figure to inform their pay increases, might therefore end up with significantly different levels of earnings.

Status

- 6.** Pay formulae can be used either to inform or to constrain a set of pay negotiations. The use of formula data to inform pay negotiations simply provides a starting point – a benchmark for subsequent negotiation. This is a flexible approach which allows both parties to argue for particular special circumstances, and for the eventual figure to be higher or lower than the output of the formula.
- 7.** A formula which constrains the pay settlement may provide either a floor or a ceiling to the settlement in which case it will be biased in a particular direction or it may set the pay increase. Again, this reduces flexibility.

Medians compared with means

- 8.** Using the earnings figures for a sample of individuals, the mean is calculated by adding up the earnings of all the individuals and dividing by the number of individuals. The median is the level of earnings of the individual in the middle of the earnings distribution (with half of the individuals in the sample earning more and half less). In any pay formula based on earnings, the median estimates are likely to be more stable than the mean, largely because of the long tail in the earnings distribution at the top end.

Appendix 7: Pension Schemes

1. The main features of the Firefighters' and Local Government Pension Schemes are outlined in the table below. These schemes are subject to complex Regulations. The following information is indicative only and does not cover the Regulations in full.

Table A7.1 Main features of the Firefighters' and Local Government Pension Schemes

	Firefighters' Pension Scheme	Local Government Pension Scheme
Eligibility	Wholetime regular fire-fighters in GB. Similar scheme covering N Ireland. GB active membership estimated at 39,000	All employees of local government and a number of associated employers; includes Fire Service control room staff. Active GB membership approximately 1½ million
Type of scheme	Statutory final salary	Statutory final salary
Funded or unfunded	Unfunded	Funded
Actuarial assessed total cost of scheme benefits as % of pensionable pay (a)	34.75% of pensionable pay	17% of pensionable pay
Of which employees' contribution	11%	6% (5% for manual workers with right to pay at lower rate on 31/3/98)
Implied employers' contribution (a)	23.75%	11% -12% (see above) (b)
Pension age: latest normal retirement age	Compulsory at 55 for ranks up to and including station officer, 60 for assistant divisional officers & above. Exceptionally can be postponed.	65
Earliest normal retirement age	Ranks below Chief Fire Officer may retire on unreduced pension from age 50 with 25 years service	May retire on unreduced pension from age 60 if the sum of their service and age is at least 85 years

Table A7.1 Main features of the Firefighters' and Local Government Pension Schemes *cont.*

	Firefighters' Pension Scheme	Local Government Pension Scheme
Rate at which pension accrues	1/60 for each of first 20 years, 2/60 each year for up to 10 additional years	1/80 for each year of service up to 40 years
Final pensionable pay (FPP) on which awards are based	Pensionable pay in best of last 3 years	Pensionable pay in final year
No of years' service for maximum pension	30 years, maximum pension 2/3 of FPP	40 years, maximum pension 1/2 of FPP
Lump sum	By commuting up to 1/4 of pension.	3/80 of FPP for each year of service
Death in service gratuity	2 x pensionable pay	2 x pensionable pay
Injury benefits (payable to members who are retired because of permanent injury sustained on duty) (c)	Lump sum gratuity – size related to degree of disablement; and injury pension calculated to give minimum income guarantee	-
Enhancements for ill-health retirement	With over 13 years service, enhanced by up to 7/60 of FPP (so maximum ill-health pension of 40/60 can be achieved after 26 1/2 years); with 10-13 years, pension enhanced to 20/60 of FPP; With 5-10 years, service doubled; under 5 years, no enhancement	With over 13 2/3 years service enhanced by up to 6 2/3 years service (subject to maximum service of 40 years in total); with 10-13 2/3 years, service enhanced to 20 years; with 5-10 years, service doubled; under 5 years, no enhancement.
Widow/er's pension	1/2 of member's pension (before commutation)	1/2 of member's pension
Pensions increase	Increased annually in line with RPI (but members' normal pensions are not increased before age 55 – from when increase covers any period since retirement)	Increased annually in line with RPI (but members' normal pensions are not increased before age 55 – from when increase covers any period since retirement)

Notes

(a) Government Actuary's Department's estimates of the value of benefits expressed as a level percentage of payroll payable throughout the career of a typical new entrant, taken from the Fire Service Pensions Review Consultation Document (Home Office, 1998). For both schemes, the cost to employers is likely to have increased since these figures were produced, mainly because of increased longevity, by 2 per cent to 3 per cent of pay.

(b) Actual rate of contribution paid by the different employers to the various funds administered under the LGPS will vary from time to time depending on the assumptions made and the experience of the fund – for example, because of surpluses and deficits arising. The actual contributions are re-assessed every 3 years.

(c) Payable in addition to other benefits, but partially abated for certain benefits awarded in respect of the same injury.

Appendix 8: Pay and Benefits Comparability Studies

1. There is no single method which is accepted as best practice when undertaking comparability studies. All methods involve making comparisons between the groups of concern and appropriate comparator groups. Inevitably all have strengths and limitations and all involve a degree of judgement. Bearing this in mind, we commissioned two complementary comparability studies – from Hay Group and DLA/MCG Consulting – to provide an analysis, which we could use to inform our consideration of the appropriate pay levels for Fire Service employees. This appendix describes both studies and outlines their findings.

2. We believe the information provided by these studies provides a reasonable basis for assessing the competitiveness of firefighter and control room pay compared to other groups. The conclusions reached should not be regarded as precise calculations, but rather as broad judgements. While individual conclusions may be subject to debate, we are satisfied that overall the studies are sufficiently robust to justify their conclusions, particularly as these are borne out by other evidence (eg on recruitment and retention).

3. Both studies involved taking specifications of the Fire Service roles to be compared and making comparisons with other groups. The job profiles used in both studies were produced by DLA/MCG Consulting. They were able to get a good understanding of the jobs from talking to senior staff in different brigades and to the Fire Service Inspectorate and reviewing documentation including IPDS role maps. Ten Fire Service roles were chosen as benchmarks, representing six core front-line operational jobs and four fire control jobs at different organisational levels. The job profiles used for firefighters and control operators are included at the end of this appendix.

The Hay Group comparability study

4. The Hay Group approach involves assigning job sizes, measured in units, to each role. The pay of the role in question is then compared to roles of a similar size elsewhere. The information for the latter roles is held on a database built for the purpose of establishing pay market comparability. The database holds information on a large number of organisations in industry and services – including public services – and is updated regularly.

5. In assigning job sizes, three primary factors, relevant to all roles, are taken into account: accountability, know how and problem solving. These cover, for example, the amount of freedom to act, and the nature and impact of the job; the range and depth of technical knowledge required, the knowledge needed to co-ordinate and manage activities and the skills needed to communicate with and influence people; and the nature of the problem-solving and environment (for example, organisation structure and guidelines and procedures) and the complexity of problems encountered.

6. Additional factors were not taken into account in this study. There are, however, elements of roles which are not covered by primary factors such as working conditions and potential danger, which are relevant to firefighters and some comparator roles and these were examined closely in the second, tailored study. Hay Group note that factors such as potential danger may be recognised through allowances rather than basic job evaluation.

7. Fire Service roles were evaluated and job sizes ascribed on the principle that any individuals would be able to meet the full requirements of the role to a fully satisfactory level.

Role comparisons

8. The firefighter role was assessed as equivalent in size to an ambulance technician, prison officer or the old ‘State Enrolled Nurse’ type nursing role and smaller than a police constable. In the private sector it was similar in size to many “craft roles” such as motor mechanic and many roles in building and construction. The lead firefighter role was still smaller than police constable. In overall terms it equated broadly to a paramedic or a corporal in the military. Watch commander (or sub-officer) was viewed as a full supervisory role with responsibilities for a watch and operation command in some circumstances. It equated to many shift supervisors or team leaders in industry and many sergeant (Warrant Officer II) roles in the military.

9. The fire control operator/leading fire control operator role was assessed at the higher level as equivalent to communications officers in the police. In less demanding environments the role was smaller than the firefighter; in busier offices the role could approach a similar level to the firefighter role but without the physical demands and danger. Senior control operator roles were at least as demanding as firefighter. In busier, high workload environments the role could be larger – approaching leading firefighter level. In broad terms control commander was equivalent to watch commander. The principal control officer role was equivalent to that of station commander, and could be larger in the busiest offices, and there were equivalents in the private sector among call centre managers.

10. For nine operational ranks of station commander (station officer) and above, it was found that the roles were carried out at different and overlapping levels; for example, with different levels of responsibility depending on the size of the station and associated resources (both staff and equipment). In the resulting multi-layered organisation, rank responsibilities were hard to define clearly. Hay Group recommended a review of the rank structure. The structure proposed under IPDS should provide the basis for addressing this.

Pay comparisons

11. The pay comparisons were undertaken using, firstly, base salaries (including regional allowances and the Fire Service flexible duty allowance where relevant) and, secondly, total remuneration (which includes base salaries, variable bonuses, insurable benefits and benefits in kind). The last takes account of pension benefits and holiday entitlements. The comparisons take no account of shift premia or overtime, but these were looked at separately.

12. Fire Services roles were compared with equivalent roles in the public sector and with industry and services as a whole (including the public sector). The following tables summarise the Hay Group comparisons, covering ranks up to sub officer.

Table A8.1 – Comparison for Firefighter

	Minimum (£)	Maximum (£)	% of Industry and Service Median		% of Public Sector Median	
			Min	Max	Min	Max
National						
Base Salary	16,887	22,418	95%	126%	102%	135%
Total Remuneration	19,927	26,454	109%	145%	106%	140%
London						
Base Salary	20,057	25,588	98%	125%	107%	137%

13. The base salary of firefighters is very competitive in relation to both the industry and service and the public sector markets. Against industry and service, the base salary ranges from below median to above upper quartile for both the national and London markets. The minimum

base salary of a firefighter is above the public sector median. The maximum total remuneration is very competitive; the maximum level is 45 per cent above the industry and service median and 40 per cent above the public sector median.

Table A8.2 – Comparison for Leading Firefighter

	Minimum (£)	Maximum (£)	% of Industry and Service Median		% of Public Sector Median	
			Min	Max	Min	Max
National						
Base Salary	22,980	23,929	117%	122%	123%	128%
Total Remuneration	27,117	28,237	127%	132%	132%	138%
London						
Base Salary	26,150	27,099	118%	123%	125%	129%

14. The remuneration of the Leading Firefighters is also competitive. The minimum levels of

remuneration are at or above the upper quartile (not shown) of all markets.

Table A8.3 – Comparison for Sub Officers

	Minimum (£)	Maximum (£)	% of Industry and Service Median		% of Public Sector Median	
			Min	Max	Min	Max
National						
Base Salary	23,567	25,421	95%	103%	101%	108%
Total Remuneration	27,810	29,998	111%	119%	113%	122%
London						
Base Salary	26,737	28,591	98%	105%	103%	110%

15. The minimum level of base salary of sub officers is above the public sector market median in all cases. In relation to the industry and service market, the minimum level of base salary is slightly below median. Maximum levels

of base salary are above median in relation to all markets. Total remuneration of sub officers is above the median of both the industry and service and the public sector markets.

Table A8.4 – Comparison for Fire Control Operator

	Minimum (£)	Maximum (£)	% of Industry and Service Median		% of Public Sector Median	
			Min	Max	Min	Max
National						
Base Salary	15,538	20,615	98%	130%	104%	138%
Total Remuneration	18,423	24,443	115%	153%	105%	140%
London						
Base Salary	18,708	23,785	101%	128%	104%	132%

16. Hay Group included two levels of fire control officer. It is a reasonably broad role where the level depends on the complexity and the demands placed on the operator. The two markets illustrated above and opposite (top

reflect the different levels of contribution. The lower level jobs are more competitive in relation to both the industrial and service and the public sector markets.

Table A8.5 – Comparison for Fire Control Operator

	Minimum (£)	Maximum (£)	% of Industry and Service Median		% of Public Sector Median	
			Min	Max	Min	Max
National						
Base Salary	15,538	20,615	87%	115%	94%	124%
Total Remuneration	18,423	24,443	101%	134%	98%	130%
London						
Base Salary	18,708	23,785	91%	116%	100%	127%

17. The minimum base salary and total remuneration of leading fire control operators is above the upper quartile of the national and London industry and service and public sector market.

Table A8.6 – Comparison for Leading Fire Control Operator

	Minimum (£)	Maximum (£)	% of Industry and Service Median		% of Public Sector Median	
			Min	Max	Min	Max
National						
Base Salary	21,156	22,000	119%	123%	127%	132%
Total Remuneration	25,723	26,749	141%	146%	136%	142%
London						
Base Salary	24,326	25,170	119%	123%	130%	135%

Table A8.7 – Comparison for Senior Fire Control Operator

	Minimum (£)	Maximum (£)	% of Industry and Service Median		% of Public Sector Median	
			Min	Max	Min	Max
National						
Base Salary	21,680	23,639	110%	120%	116%	127%
Total Remuneration	25,706	28,029	120%	131%	125%	137%
London						
Base Salary	24,850	26,809	112%	121%	119%	128%

18. The table illustrates that senior fire control operators are, at minimum, paid above median

in all areas in comparison to both the industry and service and the public sector markets.

Table A8.8 – Comparison for Fire Control Officer

	Minimum (£)	Maximum (£)	% of Industry and Service Median		% of Public Sector Median	
			Min	Max	Min	Max
National						
Base Salary	25,248	27,198	102%	110%	108%	116%
Total Remuneration	29,937	32,249	119%	128%	122%	131%
London						
Base Salary	28,418	30,368	104%	111%	109%	117%

19. The remuneration of the fire control officers ranges from above median to above upper quartile in relation to both the industry and service and the public sector market.

20. In summary the Hay Group comparability analysis provided no justification for any general increase in pay for fire service staff up to sub-officer level.

The DLA MCG Consulting comparability study

21. DLA MCG Consulting compared the Fire Service job profiles with other jobs by analysing traditional factors related to the knowledge and skills needed to do the work and the responsibilities carried. They also looked at 'environmental' factors, although in the private sector they took these into consideration in the choice of comparator jobs. Environmental factors include, for example, risk, emotional demands, unsocial working hours and difficult working conditions, which are outside the control of the jobholder. The application of these factors and the weight to be accorded to them are necessarily matters of considerable judgement. But they have a bearing in considering the value of a job for the purposes of reward.

22. Their results are summarised under four headings: public sector comparisons, comparison with hazardous industry jobs (excluding firefighting jobs outside the fire service), comparison with firefighting jobs outside the fire service and comparison with control jobs outside the fire service.

Public Sector Comparisons

23. Within the public sector, DLA MCG Consulting compared the Fire Service roles with jobs in the police, prison service, ambulance service and NHS acute care trusts. They focused on these four areas since all involve shift working and require the ability to respond rapidly to emergency situations as part or all of the role. Some other comparisons were considered less relevant; for example teachers, who require a significantly higher level of entry qualifications. They made comparisons up to and including station commander level.

24. In comparing public sector pay and benefits, they noted that:

- The Fire Service's 42 hour contractual working week is higher than in any of the comparison

organisations. They therefore compared hourly as well as annual rates of pay.

- Shift pay is included in Fire Service basic pay, as it is in the police and prison services. However, nurses receive substantial extra payments for night and weekend working. They took these into account in the comparisons.
- Very little overtime is worked in the Fire Service because of the FBU overtime ban. Although they noted average levels of overtime earnings in different groups separately in the report, where data was available, overtime was not included in the pay comparisons.
- Fire Service staff receive generous holidays compared with other organisations. They calculated a salary value for the differences and included it in their overall comparisons of the value of total reward.
- Fire Service staff also have a generous pension scheme. It is essential to place some value on the worth of the scheme compared with others. There is no single easy and accepted way of doing so. It was agreed with the review team, following advice from the Government Actuary's Department, that the basis for comparison with the public sector schemes should be the difference between the assessed contributions of employers as a percentage of pensionable pay.

25. The key conclusions from their comparisons were :

- In general Fire Service staff are well paid compared with comparable jobs in the ambulance service and in Nursing. Once holidays and pensions are taken into account their overall reward package considerably exceeds these groups.
- Fire Service staff are less well paid than comparable prison service staff at levels up to watch commander (sub-officer) but these differences are in general more than compensated for by their pension and holiday package.

- Police pay and total reward is well in excess of Fire Service rates at all levels but police roles are larger at all levels.
- Overall their analysis of public sector job and reward comparisons did not support a case for a substantial upwards adjustment in Fire Service pay for the roles discussed, either before or after benefits are taken into account.

Hazardous Industry Jobs

26. DLA MCG Consulting looked at the particular characteristics of fire fighting work to identify key features which could be matched by jobs in parts of the private sector. They took particular account of the environmental conditions, including the potentially hazardous nature of firefighting. They concluded that, subject to certain caveats, there are comparisons to be drawn with jobs in construction, the chemical and oil sector, manufacturing, mining and quarrying, and the transport sector.

27. DLA MCG Consulting contacted leading companies operating in these sectors to identify the closest comparator jobs to the benchmark jobs within the Fire Service. Having identified the posts, they collected and collated data on reward levels and compared them with Fire Service levels of pay. Comparisons were made both including and excluding oil companies and their associated off-shore operations. The oil sector is acknowledged to be amongst the highest paying globally, placing considerable demands on its employees in return.

28. As a matched comparator group was selected, using median rates of pay is the appropriate basis for comparison. The picture which emerged varied somewhat between benchmark jobs.

Table A8.9 – Comparison with hazardous industry jobs, including off-shore sector

MEDIANS

Basic Plus Shift After 5 Years

	Fire Service	Market	% Differential
Fire Fighter	21,531	20,485	+ 4.9
Lead Fire Fighter	23,055	24,389	- 5.8
Watch Commander	25,503	29,439	- 15.4
Station Commander	28,638	33,095	- 15.6
Station Commander *	34,366	33,095	+ 3.7
Group Commander *	38,689	38,250	+ 1.1
Area Commander *	49,482	48,483	+ 2.0

* Includes Flexible Duty Allowance

Table A8.10 – Comparison with hazardous industry jobs, excluding off-shore sector

MEDIANS**Basic Plus Shift After 5 Years**

	Fire Service	Market	% Differential
Fire Fighter	21,531	20,235	+ 6.0
Lead Fire Fighter	23,055	21,490	+ 6.8
Watch Commander	25,503	27,500	- 7.8
Station Commander	28,638	32,862	- 14.7
Station Commander *	34,366	32,862	+ 4.4
Group Commander *	38,689	37,500	+ 3.1
Area Commander *	49,482	48,483	+ 2.0

* Includes Flexible Duty Allowance

29. However, based on a comparison of the pay (which includes Flexible Duty Allowance where appropriate) of Fire Service staff after 5 years service with the median level of basic pay plus shift allowance for the comparator group, there was little evidence that Fire Service staff are paid below market levels.

Other Firefighting Jobs

30. There were in excess of 3,000 firefighting jobs based outside the Fire Service, the majority within the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces. DLAMCG found that, although there were differences in the roles examined and the numbers are relatively small, firefighting jobs outside the Fire Service probably provided the closest matches in the entire working population with jobs within the Fire Service and should therefore be considered.

Table A8.11 – Comparison with other firefighting jobs

MEDIANS**Pay level for 5 Years' service**

	Fire Service	Other Fire Fighters (Median)	% Differential
Fire Fighter	21,531	23,355	- 8.5
Lead Fire Fighter	23,055	25,077	- 8.8
Watch Commander	25,503	30,573	- 19.9
Station Commander	28,638	33,360	- 16.5
Station Commander *	34,366	33,360	+ 2.9

* Includes Flexible Duty Allowance

31. Their findings were as follows:

- The fact that fire fighters and lead fire fighters in the Fire Service are paid between 8 and 9 percent below their market counterparts might suggest that there is scope to increase firefighting pay by a similar amount (plus whatever is allowed for cost of living). But there are caveats.
- The comparator population is small and it is therefore arguable that it does not form a sufficient basis on which to make a comparison. However, even if the comparison is accepted, there are differences in working arrangements.
- Within most oil companies, for example, all employees are expected to embrace change wherever and whenever it is required. Staff are paid to do the job that management needs to be carried out at the time, and it can be argued that any higher rate of pay reflects this fact.
- Even MoD fire fighters, who are paid on rates linked to those with the Fire Service, have accepted the need for change, and throughout the last 12 years, a number of modernisation initiatives have been implemented. These include more flexible shift

patterns, reductions in personnel and equipment requirements through increased efficiency, more effective use of overtime to meet manpower shortages. Furthermore, a recent MoD study of its fire services, carried out with the active involvement and support of the Trade Unions, includes quite radical additional proposals for an overhaul of the way fire cover is provided to the MoD in the future.

- If Fire Service staff are to realise the pay of their private sector counterparts, it could be argued that a change in operational practices should accompany any uplift in pay.

Control Jobs

32. In view of the FBU's claim for parity between fire control and firefighting staff DLA MCG Consulting considered how the roles and rewards of firefighters and control staff compare. Their conclusion is that the knowledge and skills needed are reasonably comparable, but that they would expect to see some recognition of environmental factors, including the degree of risk, reflected in relative pay.

Table A8.12

Market Comparison for fire control operator

	Fire Service	Market	% Differential
Starting Pay			
Median	13,776	13,000	+ 5.6
Upper Quartile	13,776	16,640	- 20.8
Pay After 5 Years			
Median	17,220	16,219	+ 5.8
Upper Quartile	17,220	17,647	- 1.5

33. Such a differential cannot be calculated formulaically, but the current relationship in pay does, in their view, make recognition of the different environmental aspects of the jobs.

34. DLA MCG Consulting also drew a comparison of the post of control operator with external organisations. They assessed the appropriateness of comparisons with jobs in call centres, but concluded that comparisons with other emergency control rooms is a fairer reflection of the particular demands of the job.

35. The number of organisations operating emergency control rooms is relatively small. Most, such as the ambulance service and police, are in the public sector, but there are also some organisations in the private sector with similar operations. DLA MCG Consulting brought together the available data.

36. The results demonstrated that at the median level, Fire Service control staff are competitively paid against the market. Their pay seems less competitive at the upper quartile level for new starters. However, the market upper quartile includes figures from organisations which only take on staff with some comparable existing

experience. There is a much smaller differential at the upper quartile level for experienced control room operators.

DLA MCG Consulting Conclusion

37. Having examined Fire Service pay levels with the pay of comparable posts in the public and private sectors, DLA MCG Consulting concluded that the pattern of results differed across different sectors and between different jobs. Nevertheless, in overall terms, Fire Service staff were generally competitively remunerated in comparison with their market counterparts.

38. One area where their pay fell below the market was in a comparison with the small number of fire fighting staff, employed outside the Fire Service. However, the working practices of some of these organisations are different, and if Fire Service pay was to be increased to these levels, DLA MCG Consulting would expect to see it accompanied by a flexible approach towards operational change.

Job Profile – Firefighter

Purpose

To protect and save people and property from fire and other hazards.

Key Responsibilities

- Respond immediately to all emergencies calls and requests for assistance
- Stabilise incident area using cutting or other equipment as necessary
- Control and fight fires
- Attend special services as necessary, e.g. road traffic accident, shut in lift, chemical emergency, flooding
- Administer first aid at incident
- Carry out damage control
- Carry out regular maintenance and checks on appliances and equipment
- Take part in regular drills and training
- Maintain familiarity with geography, facilities and special risks in local area
- where required assist with community fire safety work.

Some firefighters

- Drive and manoeuvre fire service vehicles, including operating aerial appliances and other special equipment.

Expertise

No formal qualifications needed but must pass medical and physical fitness tests plus verbal and numerical reasoning tests. 16-20 weeks off the job practical skills and knowledge training followed by one year on the job development programme. Further training and experience with regular assessment to achieve Qualified Firefighter status after 4 years (though in

practice some may be promoted before this). Can now achieve S/NVQ Level 3.

Needs knowledge of fire regulations and procedures to deal with fire and a range of other situations including chemical hazards, road traffic accidents, lift rescues, etc. Must be able to use breathing apparatus and a range of special cutting and other equipment. Needs a basic first aid certificate. Must understand and adhere to equality and health and safety policies. Must maintain skills and learn new techniques as necessary.

Drivers must have HGV licence and complete special course on driving fire service vehicles.

Teamwork

Essential to work in close and harmonious partnership with colleagues whose safety may depend on the jobholder's actions.

Leadership

Normally no requirement to lead others but experienced firefighters may lead a breathing apparatus crew into a fire.

Communications

Needs clear and effective oral communication to work with colleagues. May have some communication with members of other emergency services or the public at an incident. Basic writing skills required to complete standard forms.

Decision-Making and Accountability

Normally works under close supervision and within well-defined procedures but may need to take on the spot decisions on own initiative to deal with an operational situation in an incident if back up not immediately available. Could be involved in a major incident – including terrorist attack which may include CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear)

Planning and Implementation

Not required to undertake planning but must understand the way in which the watch team as a whole operates and their part in that.

Physical Skills and Demands

Must pass regular fitness, strength and stamina tests and be able to operate in situations that can sometimes be very physically demanding. In some brigades only demonstrate fitness level every three years from age 40. Needs to perform regular drills but frequency of demands for physical skills otherwise depends on call outs and is necessarily irregular.

Working Conditions

May have to work, when called out, in any weather condition, in cramped, dark, noisy, flooded or otherwise hazardous conditions. Need to wear protective clothing and carry breathing apparatus.

Emotional Demands

When called out, is under pressure to resolve incidents as quickly as possible, as lives may depend on it. May be exposed to situations involving serious injuries or deaths and have to deal with relatives, friends or other onlookers at the scene. However, exposure to significant emotional demands is irregular.

Risk

When called out, is liable to be exposed to a range of hazards including fire, smoke, gas, chemical or other hazardous substances, unstable buildings, road traffic etc. Risk of injury from falls, heavy lifting. However, exposure to significant hazards is irregular and training, equipment, procedures and supervision are all in place to minimise risks.

Job Profile – Control Operator

Purpose

To respond to emergency telephone calls for assistance and mobilise appropriate resources to meet needs speedily and effectively

Key Responsibilities

- Respond to emergency calls, identify the nature and location of the incident and the type of assistance needed
- Validate address details and access points
- Key information into mobilising computer system, check and action system recommendations for dispatching resources (may override or supplement system recommendations if aware of changed local circumstances)
- Confirm that station(s) have responded
- Pass on additional information about the incident to relevant people as necessary
- Contact other emergency services and agencies as necessary
- Receive messages from the incident by radio or other means and pass on information or take the action requested.
- Deal calmly and sympathetically but firmly and where necessary assertively with callers exhibiting a range of emotions
- Give first line safety advice to callers who are at risk
- Call for assistance from colleagues or supervisor where necessary and keep supervising officer informed
- Deal tactfully but firmly with inappropriate requests for assistance
- Carry out routine tests on mobilising system and communication equipment

- May also deal with regular switchboard calls to Fire Service
- May also pass be responsible for passing on public safety information and press releases

Expertise

No formal qualifications needed but must pass interview and a range of aptitude tests on entry including tests of verbal and numerical reasoning, of ability to check data accurately and of keyboard dexterity. 8 weeks initial training with a mixture of classroom instruction and practical work using a control centre simulation. Then posted to a watch and initially shadows an experienced operator before going live. One year probationary period, with test and interview after 6 and then 12 months.

Must know Brigade organisation and resources, resource availability requirements, the detailed control and response procedures, the geography and topography of, and the main risks in, the area served, and the role and availability of support from other services and agencies. Must have complete familiarity with how to use the mobilising computer system and radio and telephone communications equipment and how to access databases of supporting information, e.g. on chemical hazards. Needs the knowledge to give initial advice about safety measures to be taken by callers at risk.

Teamwork

Works as part of a team on a watch and must be alert to colleagues' need for support and willing and able to supply it.

Leadership

No requirement to lead others.

Communications

Must have the skills to communicate effectively on the telephone under pressure with callers who may be extremely distressed, injured, at imminent risk, angry, or confused. Also needs to deal courteously but firmly with callers for whom the Fire Service cannot provide assistance and direct them to other sources of help. This may require considerable patience.

Decision Making and Accountability

Works within well-defined procedures but is accountable for ensuring appropriate response is made to a call. The mobilising computer system provides recommendations for action that can be accepted in the majority of cases but the operator must check these and can override if, for example, he/she has other information about local circumstances to suggest additional resources are needed. Needs to decide when to call other services. Can refer to supervisor for decision or advice where necessary.

Planning and Implementation

Not required to undertake planning within the control team but must understand the way in which the watch team as a whole operates.

Physical Skills and Demands

Needs dexterity for keyboard work. Needs to be able to speak, key in information and interrogate databases as part of the same operation.

Working Conditions

Works in an office environment. Has to concentrate on VDU screens for long periods.

Emotional Demands

Dealing with callers who are distressed or at risk can be very stressful, as can dealing with callers who are angry and abusive. Needs the mental stamina to sustain concentration for long periods. Relatively quiet periods can be followed by periods of intense activity if there are many calls and/or major incidents.

Risk

Not normally subject to any special hazards.

Abbreviations

ACAS	Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
APFO	Association of Principal Fire Officers
CACFOA	Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association
CFBAC	Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council
COSLA	Convention of Scottish Local Authority
CPA	Comprehensive Performance Assessment
FBU	Fire Brigades Union
FOA	Fire Officers Association
FSAB	Fire Safety Advisory Board
FSC	Fire Service College
FSI	Fire Service Inspectorate, properly Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate
FSIG	Fire Service Implementation Group
HMFSI	See FSI
HR	Human resources
IPDS	Integrated Personal Development System
LFEPA	London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
LGA	Local Government Association
NHS	National Health Service
NJC	National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades
ODPM	Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
RFU	Retained Firefighters Union
SSA	Standard Spending Assessment
TUC	Trades Union Congress

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