

# Rising to the challenge

Improving fire service efficiency



**Community safety**

**National report**

December 2008

 **audit  
commission**

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# Summary

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## **We spent over £2 billion on the 46 fire services in England in 2007/08**

- The total cost of fire to the economy was estimated at over £7 billion in 2004.
- Fire service funding has risen from £1.3 billion to £2.1 billion in the last decade; a 25 per cent increase in real terms.
- Most fire services will see much smaller increases in funding in the next three years; some will experience real terms reductions.
- Fire services have achieved £185 million in annual efficiency savings since 2004.

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## **The best fire services have shown how efficiency savings worth up to £200 million can be achieved**

- Fire services have a target to save £110 million by 2011. This is equivalent to 5 per cent of their 2007/08 expenditure.
- But they could save up to £200 million a year if all fire services adopted good practice from pioneering fire services.
- Eight fire services have achieved above average reductions in the number of fires with below average increases in expenditure.
- Most of the savings have come from making changes to crewing and shift arrangements, often in the face of local resistance, but without compromising public or firefighter safety.
- Good examples include making better use of the retained duty system (RDS), and reviewing crewing arrangements where risks are low.

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## **Most of the gains in efficiency and performance to date have been made by a few fire services**

- Four fire services account for nearly half of all the efficiency savings achieved.
- Five fire services have made efficiency savings in excess of 15 per cent of their spend; but ten have found savings worth less than 5 per cent.
- While five fire services have saved over £4,000 per wholetime firefighter from shift and crewing improvements since 2004, ten have saved less than £1,000, including three that have saved nothing at all.
- Audit Commission assessments show that the best fire services are improving at the fastest rate.

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## **Fire services have contributed to a declining risk of fire**

- Accidental fires in the home have fallen by a fifth in the last decade.
- Fewer than 200 people died in accidental fires in the home in England in 2006/07, compared to nearly 400 a decade ago.
- Deliberate vehicle fires have almost halved since 2000/01.

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# Summary

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## **The fire service's role is now about much more than just putting out fires**

- Successive reports have encouraged the fire service to focus more on community fire safety (CFS), leading to a 50 per cent expenditure increase since 2004/05.
- Fire services have conducted 2 million home fire safety checks (HFSCs) since 2004 and fitted 2.4 million smoke alarms; both help to reduce deaths and serious injuries in fires.
- Fire services contribute to a variety of projects in their communities, for example improving road safety and reducing anti-social behaviour; their contribution and can-do attitude is widely praised.
- But better strategy and evaluation are required to ensure that fire services are getting value for money from their community work.

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## **The fire service could be more efficient and effective if it improved regional and local collaboration**

- Fire services already support one another across borders.
- They could save more by sharing good practice and collaborating on training, procurement and other back office services.
- National and regional governance arrangements have at times inhibited local collaboration and need to be reconsidered.
- Formal regional management boards (RMBs) have not driven effective regional collaboration; government and fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) need to reform them or abandon them.

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## **Fire services need a more diverse workforce**

- To play fire and community safety roles well, fire services need to reflect the communities they serve.
- Fire services aspire to improving diversity in the workforce, and some have recruited more women and people from minority ethnic groups.
- But it will take a long time and changes in culture before the fire service workforce is representative of the communities it serves.

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## **Fire services need to continue to adapt to changing circumstances**

- The context in which fire services operate, and their roles and responsibilities, have changed dramatically over the last 40 years.
- Successive reviews of the fire service in that time have encouraged an increased emphasis on prevention, changes in duty systems and standards of fire cover in the interests of efficiency.
- While some fire services have led the way in modernising and improving efficiency, not all have followed.
- Strong leadership from FRA members and chief fire officers (CFOs) is needed to overcome resistance to change.

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# Recommendations

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## **Fire and rescue authorities should:**

- challenge themselves and their CFOs to improve efficiency as well as performance;
- lead their communities by taking hard decisions affecting staffing levels and deployment in the interests of efficiency;
- ensure that they have the right information to justify those decisions;
- defend decisions publicly once they have been made;
- challenge their CFOs to improve the diversity of their workforce;
- define their objectives for RMBs, and participate beyond where required to in RMBs only where there is a good business case for doing so; and
- provide leadership on equality and diversity issues, supporting and encouraging effective culture change within the fire service.

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## **Chief fire officers should:**

- aim to meet or beat government savings targets by improving operational efficiency;
- continue to use those savings to invest in CFS;
- identify the benefits of initiatives for the wider community and invest in them in proportion to their value;
- adopt good ideas for improving efficiency from other fire services, or adapt them to their own circumstances;
- systematically explore the available options for working with neighbouring fire services and pursue those that deliver the biggest efficiency savings;
- improve strategic planning and performance management of partnership working;
- improve the ability of managers at all levels to manage change; and
- provide leadership on equality and diversity issues, taking a lead in challenging behaviour that does not promote equality and diversity.

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### **Central government should:**

- actively publicise those fire services delivering all elements of modernisation, including efficiency, and encourage those with the furthest to travel;
- implement agreed proposals for developing operational guidance with the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser (CFRA) and other stakeholders;
- review the role of RMBs and their place in the improvement infrastructure; then define and communicate its expectations of them and their potential value to FRAs;
- advocate the role the fire service can play in achieving broader community outcomes to other public services;
- publish data on efficiency savings by fire services; and
- provide leadership and guidance on equality and diversity issues and the development of an organisational culture that embraces equality and diversity.

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### **The Audit Commission will:**

- continue to challenge fire services to deliver value for money as part of the new use of resources assessment;
- ensure that Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) assesses fire services' performance across their expanding portfolio of activities; and
- provide a tool to allow fire services to use the data in this report to benchmark their own performance.

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# Questions for fire services to ask

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- How well are we performing? How do we compare with similar fire services? Do we know why? How far have we reduced the risk to our communities?
  - What has worked in improving our performance? What can we learn from what others have done?
  - What impact has our CFS work had so far? Should we devote more resources to this work?
  - How are we targeting our prevention, protection and community safety work? Has it reduced the risk in the target areas? If so, have we reflected that in our planning?
  - Where have we made the majority of our savings so far? How do we compare to similar fire services?
  - How will we meet our share of the £110 million efficiency savings required? Can we beat our target? What priorities would the savings allow us to resource?
  - Can we save money by changing crewing or shift arrangements?
    - Can shift arrangements be changed?
    - Can any wholetime stations be converted to day crewed?
    - Can some cover currently provided by wholetime crews be covered by crews on the RDS?
    - Can smaller vehicles and crews be deployed to deal with smaller incidents?
    - What have other fire services like ours done?
  - Do we match cover and resources to risks?
    - Do we know which areas have highest and lowest risk?
    - Can cover be safely reduced in low risk areas, for example during off-peak periods?
    - What have other fire services done in similar areas?

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- How well do we engage with the public?
    - How well do we make the case for efficiencies?
    - How well do we explain the wider roles of the fire service?
  - Can we work better with our neighbours?
    - What options for working together have we considered?
    - What benefits could we secure from each of these?
    - Do we share our good practice with other fire services?
    - When have we borrowed good ideas from others?
    - How can the RMBs help us deliver better collaboration?
  - What activities are we engaged in with local partners? Which provide good value to the community for the time and money we spend? Have we prioritised those that support our objectives cost-effectively?
  - How will we increase the numbers of women and people from minority ethnic communities in our workforce? How are we increasing the representativeness of senior management? What have we learned from other fire services or other public services? How are we monitoring progress on the requirements set out in the equality and diversity strategy?
  - Is our fire service an organisation women and people from minority ethnic communities want to work for? What could we do to achieve that?
  - What is our level of sickness absence? How does that compare with other fire services? How are we planning to reduce it even further?
  - What is our level of ill health retirements? How does that compare with other fire services? How are we planning to reduce it even further?

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# 1 | Introduction

- 1 The fire service in England attends around 2,300 incidents every day.<sup>I</sup> We all hope that we will never be involved in one of these incidents, but they do happen; and we expect the fire service to be there when they do. Firefighters attending the most serious of these incidents expose themselves to risks that most of us will never face.
- 2 There are 46 fire services in England.<sup>II</sup> Fifteen (including the Isle of Wight) are provided by county councils. The remaining 31 are provided by separate statutory bodies, comprising 24 combined fire services, six metropolitan fire services and the London Fire Brigade. Each service is accountable to an FRA of locally elected councillors. The London Fire Brigade is the only regional service, and is accountable to the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA).
- 3 The service employs around 55,500 staff in total, comprising 30,800 wholetime firefighters, 14,200 firefighters in the RDS, 1,600 control room staff and 9,000 fire service staff.<sup>III</sup>
- 4 The Audit Commission's focus is on the £2 billion of public money spent on the fire service in England. We conduct annual performance assessments of English fire services. These, and our national studies, of which this is one, encourage fire services to improve value for money.
- 5 In 1995, the Audit Commission national study, *In the Line of Fire*, identified a number of areas where the fire service could improve efficiency and effectiveness, including:
  - maximising the use of duty time within the existing shift system;
  - managing absences more effectively;
  - reducing early retirements; and
  - extending the use of non-firefighting staff. (Ref. 1)
- 6 Its key recommendation was that the fire service should shift its emphasis from cure to prevention. In 2002, the Bain review reiterated the need for this shift. It also recognised that a more risk-based approach to dealing with fires would require radical changes to the way the fire service deployed its resources:

<sup>I</sup> National data referred to in this report relate to England unless otherwise stated.

<sup>II</sup> References in this report to 'fire services' mean fire and rescue services in England and their responsible fire and rescue authority or the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority.

<sup>III</sup> We use the following terms in this report: firefighters (includes wholetime and firefighters in the RDS); operational staff (firefighters and fire control room staff); and fire service staff (all staff who are not firefighters or control room staff). When we refer to non-firefighter staff we mean fire control and fire service staff. Figures quoted in Paragraph 3 are for 2007/08 and are headcounts.

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**‘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 people move around.’ (Ref. 2)**

**7** The Bain review and the national pay agreement, negotiated following the 2002 national strike, set the context for a period of rapid change in the fire service. It has changed the way it approaches fire safety and taken on an increasingly broad role in the community. It has also taken on additional responsibility for dealing with natural and human disasters, such as flooding and terrorist incidents.

**8** Since the Bain review, the number of incidents attended by the fire service has fallen. The three-year average has fallen by 11 per cent, from 954,000 incidents per year in the three years to 2002/03 to 851,000 per year in the three years to 2006/07. The three-year average for primary fires has fallen by 23 per cent, and for injuries in primary fires has fallen by 17 per cent.<sup>I</sup> The three-year averages for secondary and chimney fires and false alarms have fallen by 11 and 8 per cent respectively (Figure 1).

**I** Primary fires are fires in buildings, vehicles or other outdoor structures, and any fires involving casualties or rescues. Secondary fires are outdoor fires, including grassland and refuse fires, unless they involve casualties or rescues, or property loss. The number of secondary fires is largely affected by the weather, increasing in years with hot, dry summers.

**II** Specialservice incidents are any non-fire related incidents attended by the fire service, including road traffic accidents, flooding and lift rescues.

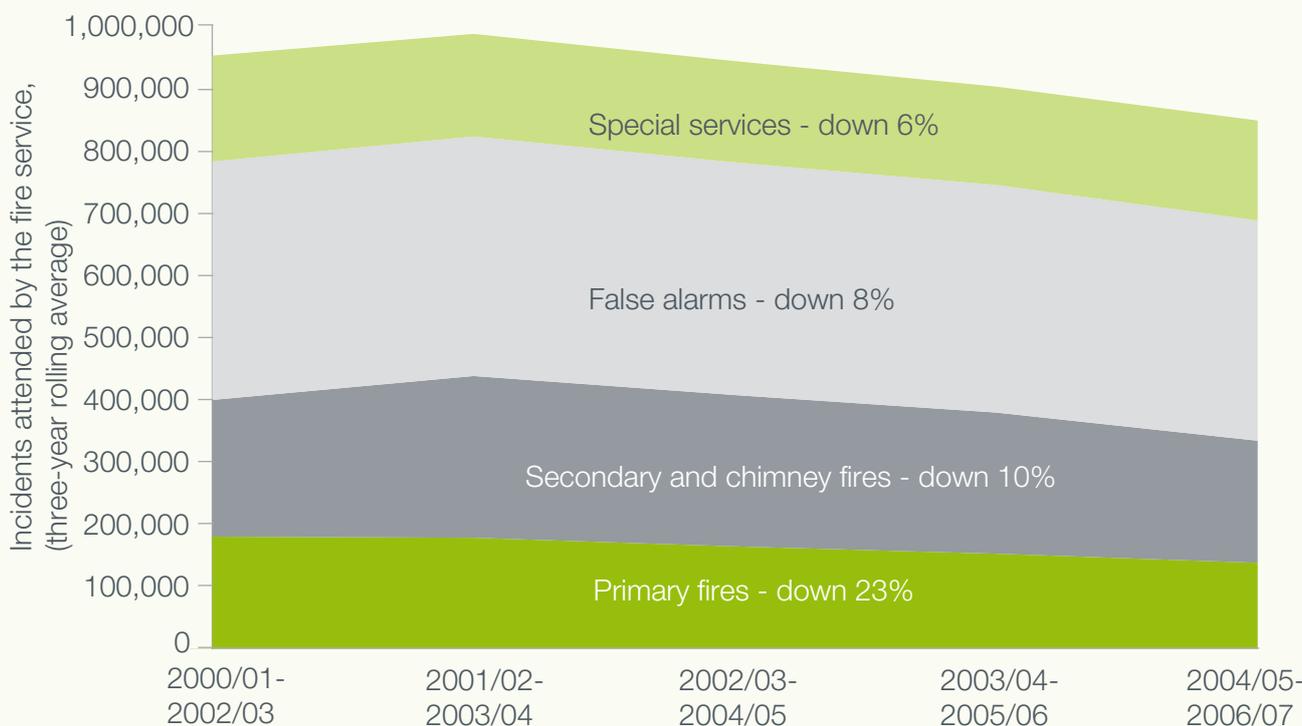
**III** The fire deaths figure is provisional.

**9** The fire service does not just deal with fires. The Bain review recognised that responding to fires now makes up no more than 5 to 10 per cent of fire service activity. The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 placed a statutory duty on fire services to rescue people from road traffic accidents. The three-year average for special service incidents attended by the fire service has fallen by 6 per cent since the Bain review; but there has been a 10 per cent increase in responses to road traffic accidents.<sup>II</sup> Fire services now place great emphasis on promoting road safety, as the Audit Commission has recognised in previous studies (Ref. 3). More than 2,500 people died on the roads in England in 2007 (Ref. 4), compared to 355 in fires (Ref. 5).<sup>III</sup>

**10** During the flooding in June and July 2007, fire services carried out over 2,000 rescues, assisted by other services such as the police, RNLI, Air Sea Rescue and voluntary organisations (Ref. 6). This is despite the fact that fire services have no statutory duty to carry out such rescues.

# Introduction

**Figure 1**  
Incidents attended by the fire service have fallen since the Bain review



Source: CLG

**11** The fire service also carries out a great deal of prevention work. Between 2004 and 2008, every fire service was allocated additional funding from a £25 million grant to deliver HFSCs. During this period they have collectively conducted 2 million HFSCs and fitted 2.4 million smoke alarms (Ref. 7).<sup>1</sup>

**12** The fire service has undergone a major programme of modernisation to enable it to deal with these changing risks, roles and responsibilities (Box 1).

**13** The Fire and Rescue National Framework sets out the current expectations for the fire service (Box 2). The National Framework does not prescribe how fire services should deliver their service. Rather, it sets out a series of activities that each fire service must undertake to deliver the objectives set out in the framework.

<sup>1</sup> This figure only covers HFSCs carried out by fire services themselves. Some HFSCs are carried out by partner organisations. This figure is therefore an underestimate of the total number carried out.

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## Box 1

### The modernisation programme

Under the modernisation programme, the government has:

- instigated a resilience programme to improve the fire service's capacity to deal with major emergencies. This comprises three projects:
  - equipment and training to deal with major terrorist incidents or natural disasters (New Dimensions);
  - a new national radio system (Firelink); and
  - regional control centres (FiReControl);
- set a new national framework that sets out the expectations and requirements of the fire service while leaving much operational practice to local discretion;
- at the same time, removed national standards of fire cover and replaced them with local integrated risk management planning (IRMP) – a risk-based approach to determining appropriate levels of preventative activity and reactive capacity at a local level;
- placed a duty on fire services to make provision for rescuing persons from road traffic accidents and for dealing with the aftermath of such accidents;
- under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, laid down duties for fire services as specified Category 1 responders to assess, plan for and advise on emergencies;
- under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, given those responsible for fire safety a legal duty to carry out fire risk assessments and put in place the necessary fire precautions to reduce or control the risk;
- attempted to improve the diversity of the fire service workforce, enhance training, and improve the recruitment and retention of firefighters in the RDS; and
- established RMBs to improve fire service cooperation.

# Introduction

## Box 2

### Expectations of the fire service

Current expectations of the fire service are set out in the *Fire and Rescue National Framework 2008-11* (Ref. 8). The three main priorities are:

- to deliver an enhanced resilience capability;
- for FRAs to take ownership of and successfully implement the Equality and Diversity Strategy; and
- to meet public expectations of a modern, efficient and effective public service in a tighter fiscal climate.

The Framework also covers the 'core business' of fire services: prevention, protection and response. The activities each fire service must undertake to deliver the objectives include:

- producing a publicly-available, three-year IRMP;
- having in place effective arrangements for gathering risk information;
- having in place a plan to deal with major emergencies;
- making preparations for the move to regional control and supporting the roll out of Firelink;
- ensuring they have in place role-related training and development to maintain the competence of staff;
- working with local partners to identify areas where they may contribute most effectively to targets within the local area agreement (LAA); and
- implementing the requirements of the Equality and Diversity Strategy.

The Framework also sets out specific expectations of the core business of RMBs:

- integrating common and specialist services;
- introducing regional personnel and human resource functions;
- developing a regional approach to training; and
- introducing regional procurement within the context of the National Improvement Strategy for the Fire and Rescue Service.

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The *Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008-2018* (Ref. 9) sets out a vision for the fire service that makes fairness and inclusion fundamental to all fire service activity. With a view to achieving this vision, Communities and Local Government (CLG) has set out recruitment and retention targets for the fire service in the Strategy. By 2013:

- a minimum of 15 per cent of new entrants to the operational sector should be women;
- recruitment of minority ethnic staff across the whole organisation should be at the same percentage as the minority ethnic representation of the local working population;<sup>1</sup> and
- there should be parity in rates of retention and progression between minority ethnic and white employees, and between men and women.

To encourage fire services to strive for more rapid improvement in the diversity of their workforce, CLG has agreed to allocate an additional capital grant payment to those fire services that commit to the achievement of higher recruitment targets. Those higher targets will be 18 per cent for women in the operational sector and between 2 and 5 per cent above the local working age population for minority ethnic staff across all sections of the fire service.

These targets have been set with a long-term aim of changing the composition of the fire service workforce so that the proportion of minority ethnic employees is the same as in the local working age population and 15 per cent of operational roles are occupied by women.

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<sup>1</sup> Fireservices with very low minority ethnic working age populations and low recruitment requirements may set targets based on individuals recruited.

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# Introduction

- 14** A further strand of the modernisation programme has involved changing the performance assessment framework. The Audit Commission has responsibility for the performance assessment and audit of the 46 fire services in England, and is the body charged with providing explicit assurance that they meet the requirements of the National Framework. In 2004, the Commission published two progress reports on the modernisation programme. It undertook its first Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of fire services in 2005, and has provided annual Direction of Travel and Use of Resources Assessments since then.
- 15** This national study combines the insights developed from the Commission's work with the fire service since 2004; detailed analysis of operational, financial and incident data; and further research in ten sites. It assesses the current level of efficiency and performance in the fire service. It also draws out lessons for the future, both for fire services and the Commission, in advance of the transition from CPA to CAA in April 2009.
- 16** This report is designed primarily for FRA members and CFOs. It challenges them to consider those areas where they might improve efficiency and effectiveness further, in light of a tight funding settlement to 2011 and current economic difficulties. It offers some potential solutions they might consider applying and adapting according to local circumstances.
- 17** Chapter 2 sets out the financial context. Chapter 3 looks at where, and how, further improvements could be made to efficiency and effectiveness through more flexible deployment of resources. Chapter 4 considers fire service performance over the last decade. Chapter 5 looks at partnership working. Chapter 6 considers workforce issues. Chapter 7 comments on the ability of the fire service to meet future challenges. Chapter 8 draws conclusions.
- 18** Alongside this report, we will publish a tool to allow fire services to interrogate the data used and to compare themselves with their neighbouring or similar fire services.

# 2 | The cost of the fire service

**19** Fire cost the economy in England and Wales an estimated £7 billion in 2004 (Ref. 10).<sup>I</sup> The largest cost is that of human casualties, property loss and business disruption – estimated at £2.5 billion.

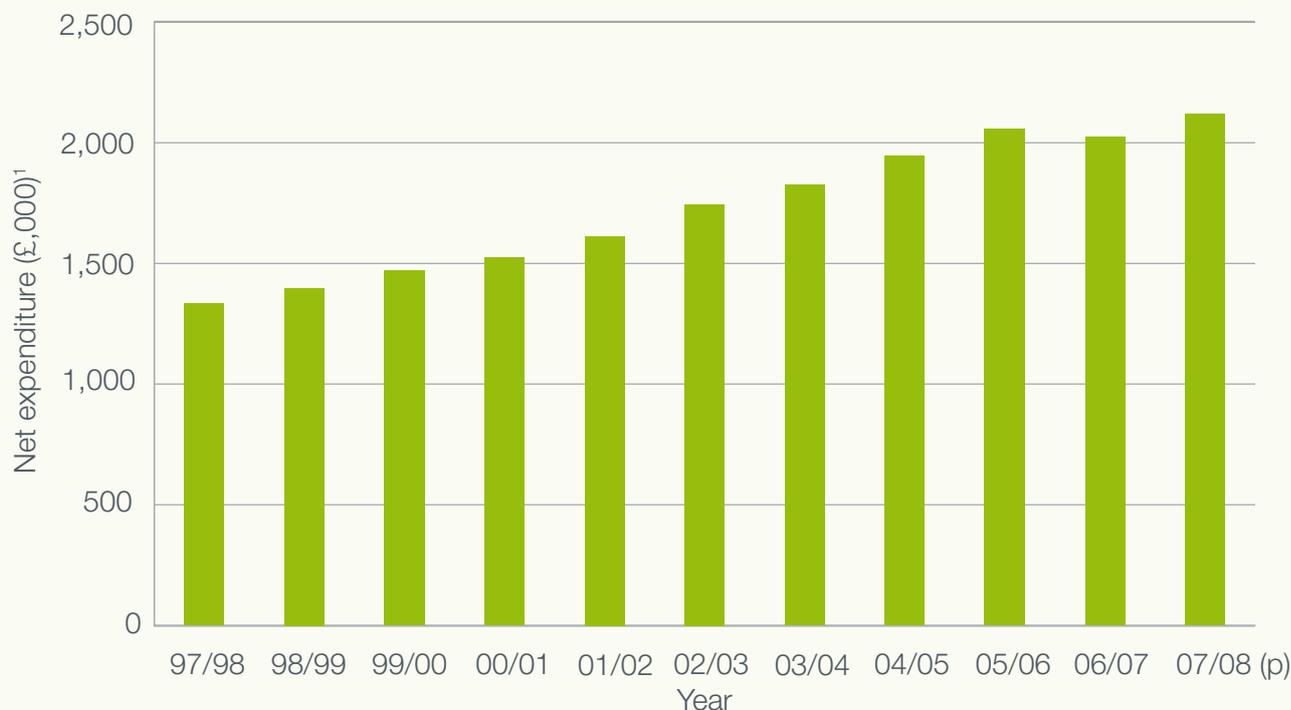
**20** Overall expenditure<sup>II</sup> on the fire service in England has risen from £1.3 to £2.1 billion between 1997/98 and 2007/08; a 25 per cent rise in real terms (Figure 2).<sup>III</sup>

This is in line with the real terms rise in expenditure on the police service over the same period (28 per cent).<sup>IV</sup>

**21** The apparent fall between 2005/06 and 2006/07 is largely the result of a change to pension funding arrangements. The government set up a new firefighters' pension fund in April 2006, paid for from employee contributions and a new employer's contribution. The fund is

**Figure 2**

**Fire service expenditure has risen by 25 per cent in real terms since 1997/98**



<sup>1</sup> Excluding capital charges  
(p) denotes provisional data

Source: CIPFA

**I** Only combined data are available.

**II** Net expenditure (excluding capital charges).

**III** 2007/08 figures are provisional; final figures were not available at time of writing.

**IV** Total net requirement.

# The cost of the fire service

**Figure 3**  
There is variation in expenditure



<sup>1</sup> Excluding capital charges  
(p) denotes provisional data  
Source: CIPFA

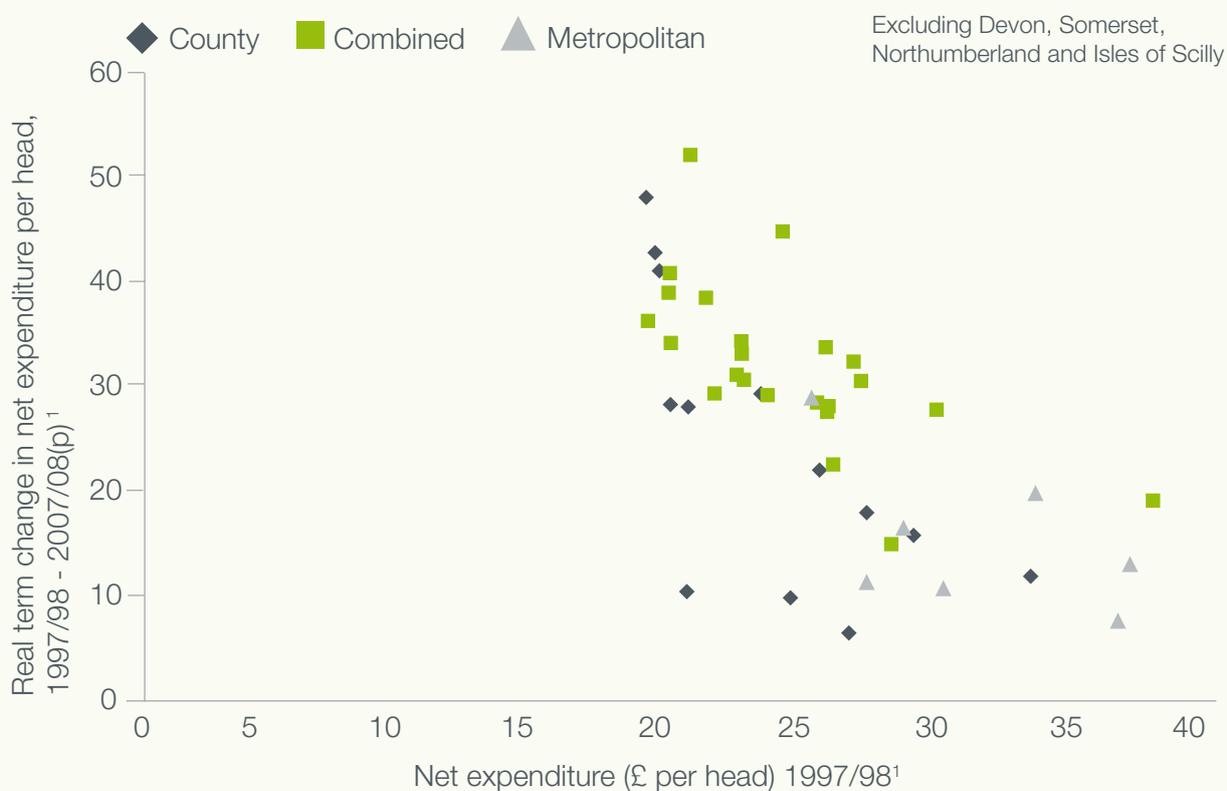
topped up by government grant if the contributions do not meet the cost of pension payments (Ref. 11). A like-for-like comparison shows a 2.3 per cent real terms rise between 2005/06 and 2006/07.

**22** In 2007/08, expenditure by individual fire services in England varied from just under £30 per head of population to just

under £60 per head (Figure 3). Further details on how fire services are funded can be found in Appendix B.

**23** Since 1997/98, nine fire services have seen real terms increases in expenditure of less than 15 per cent, while 17 have seen real terms increases of over 30 per cent. There has been some equalisation in expenditure levels during this period,

**Figure 4**  
**Those fire services spending less in 1997/98 have tended to see larger increases in expenditure**



<sup>1</sup> Excluding capital charges; (p) denotes provisional data; real terms data adjusted using September 2008 GDP deflator

Source: CIPFA

with those fire services spending least in 1997/98 tending to see larger increases (Figure 4).

**24** Between 2003/04 and 2007/08, net expenditure increased by 16 per cent (5 per cent in real terms). Most of this additional expenditure has funded the 16 per cent pay increase that firefighters received as part of the modernisation programme.

**25** Fire services have also received additional funding from central government to cover the cost of taking on additional responsibility for dealing with major terrorist incidents and natural disasters. This includes £330 million to date for the New Dimensions programme (Ref. 12), with continued funding to support the New Dimension capabilities for the period 2008/09 to 2010/11 (£24.5 million in 2010/11).

# The cost of the fire service

**Figure 5**

**Almost half of the efficiency savings have been made from revising shift patterns and crewing arrangements**



<sup>1</sup> Efficiency savings defined as total cumulative annually recurring efficiency gain

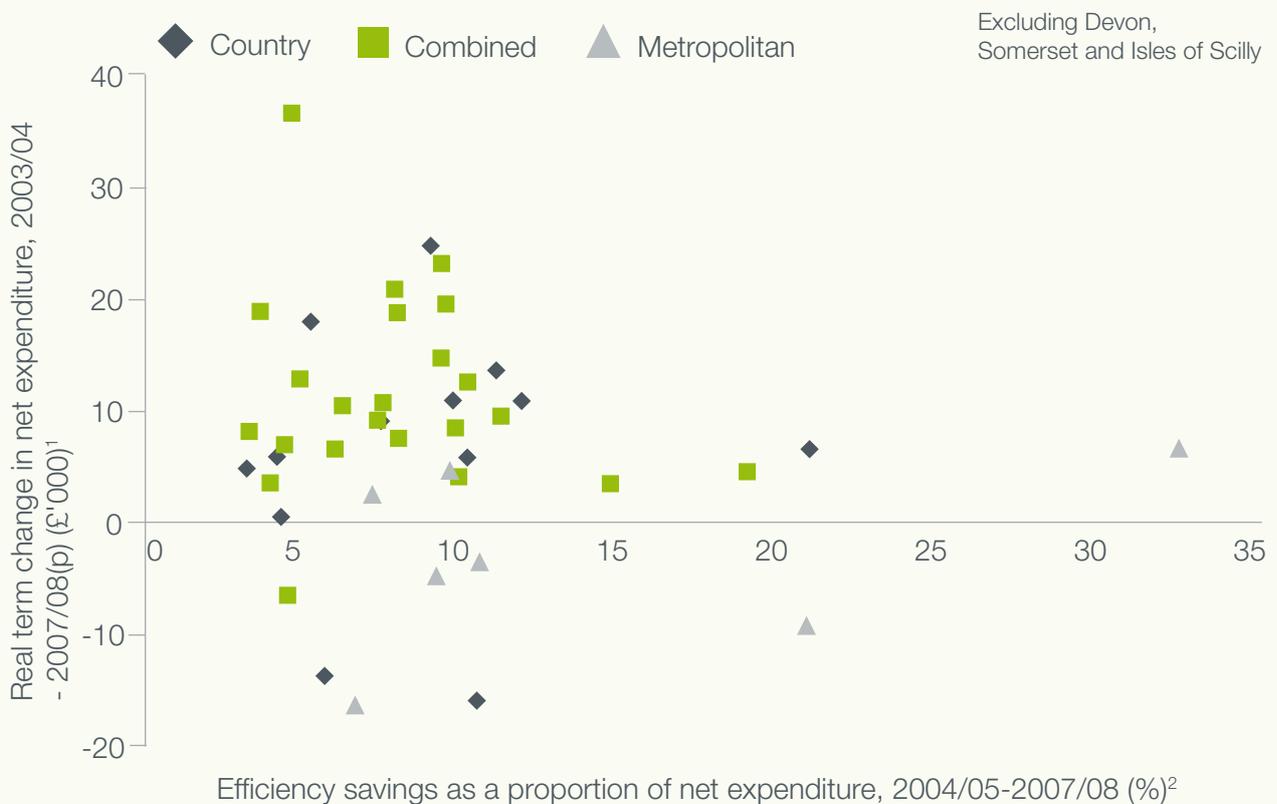
Source: CLG

**26** Alongside this additional funding, the fire service as a whole has reported £185 million of cumulative, annually recurring, cashable efficiency savings. This equates to 9 per cent of total expenditure in 2007/08, and is much higher than the original target of £105 million annually recurring savings from 2005/06 to 2007/08. Almost half of these savings has been made from revising shift patterns and crewing arrangements (Figure 5).

**27** Despite making these significant efficiencies, all but seven fire services are now spending more in real terms than they were at the beginning of the previous spending review period (Figure 6).

**Figure 6**

**Despite significant efficiency savings being reported over the last spending review period, almost all fire services are also spending more in real terms**



<sup>1</sup> Excluding capital charges; (p) denotes provisional data; data adjusted using September 2008 GDP deflator

<sup>2</sup> Efficiency savings defined as total cumulative annually recurring efficiency gain; net expenditure baseline from 2003/04, excluding capital charges

Source: CIPFA, CLG

**28** However, the financial environment is now much tougher. The period of real-terms increases has come to an end. The average central government grant increase for combined and metropolitan fire services in 2008/09 was 2.4 per cent. The average increase in 2009/10 and 2010/11 is 1.4 per cent. At current levels of inflation, this would be a real-terms cut. Increases vary, ranging from just 1 per cent to almost 9 per cent in 2008/09.

In 2009/10 and 2010/11 no fire services will receive an annual increase of more than 5 per cent; and nine will receive annual increases of just 0.5 per cent.

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# The cost of the fire service

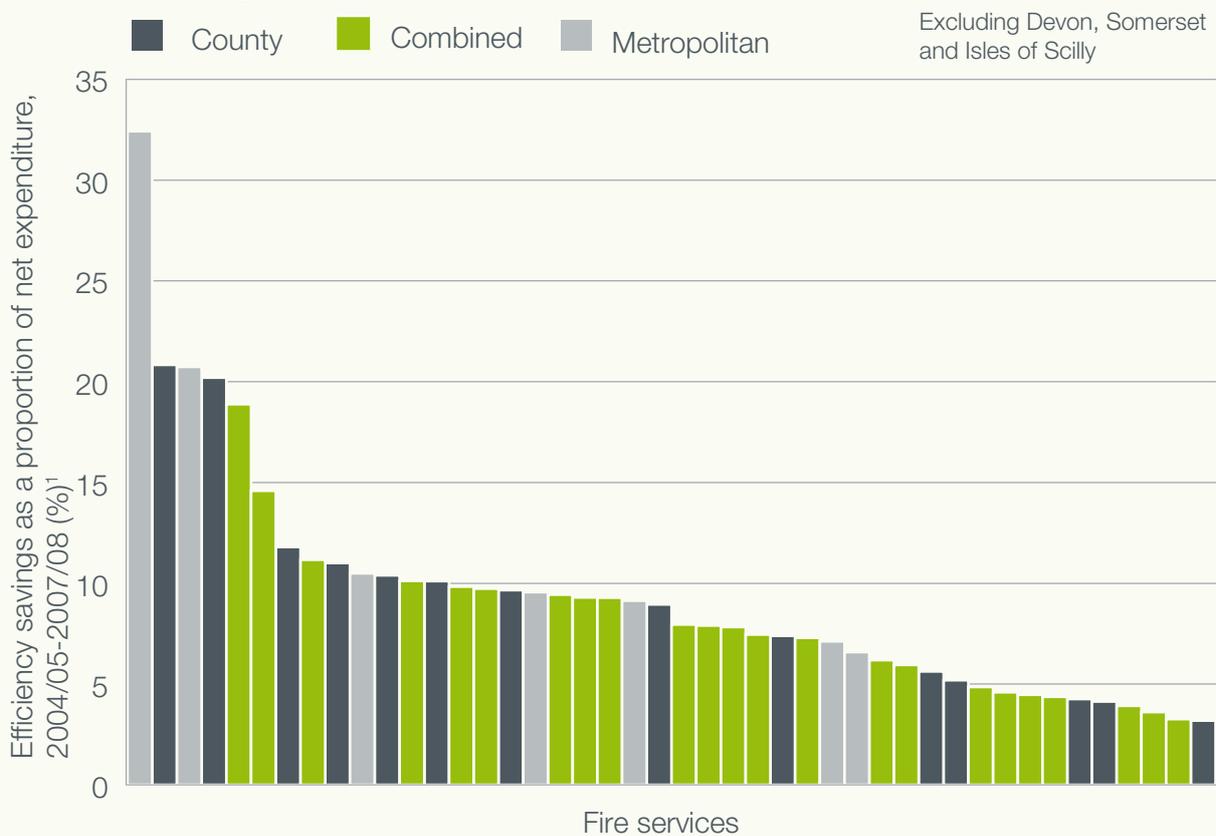
- 29** The more difficult economic circumstances will limit fire services' ability to raise additional funds through local taxation. They are also required to find further annual cash-releasing savings of £110 million by 2011, equivalent to 5 per cent of provisional expenditure figures for 2007/08 (Ref. 13).
- 30** This places greater emphasis on finding savings without compromising service delivery in the coming years, particularly for those fire services receiving the lowest increases in funding.

# 3 | The efficiency challenge

**31** Chapter 2 showed that fire services have received a significant amount of additional funding over the last decade. This additional resource, combined with the significant efficiency savings made since 2003/04, has enabled them to take on the new roles and responsibilities. It also indicated that fire services' financial circumstances will be more difficult in coming years.

**32** However, there remains significant scope to improve economy and efficiency in the fire service further without increasing risk to the public or firefighters. While overall efficiency savings targets have been exceeded, just four fire services, accounting for around a third of expenditure, have contributed nearly half of all the savings achieved to date. Five fire services (Greater Manchester, Isle of Wight, Merseyside, Northumberland

**Figure 7**  
The level of savings reported by fire services varies greatly



<sup>1</sup> Efficiency savings defined as total cumulative annually recurring efficiency gain; net expenditure baseline from 2003/04, excluding capital charges

Source: CLG

# The efficiency challenge

and Cleveland) have reported efficiency savings equivalent to more than 15 per cent of their total expenditure in 2003/04; while four have found savings equivalent to less than 4 per cent (Warwickshire, Berkshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire) (Figure 7).

- 33** Our work indicates that if those fire services that have made least savings followed the examples of the best, the service as a whole would be able to meet, and beat, its efficiency target.

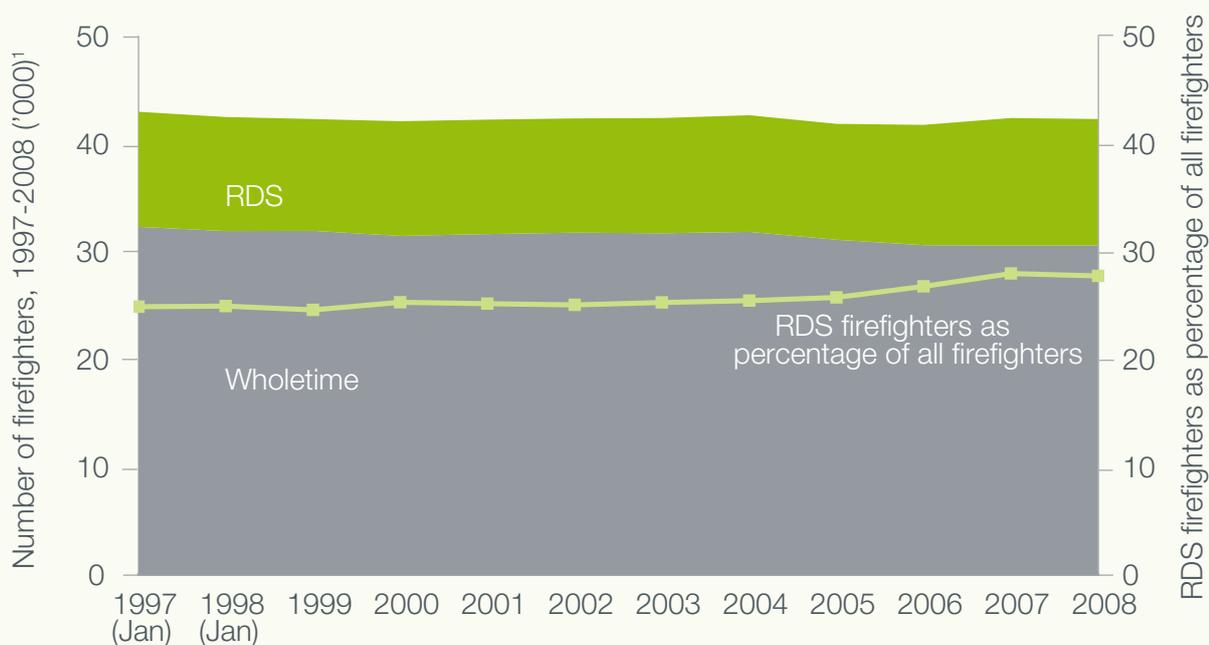
Up to £200 million could be saved. This chapter describes how; a full breakdown is set out in Appendix A.

## The scope for savings

- 34** How might those efficiencies be made? By providing cover with fewer people, stations or appliances; or by changing shift patterns and crewing arrangements to match more closely that cover to the time when it is needed.

**Figure 8**

**The number of firefighters has remained static, though the proportion of RDS firefighters has increased**

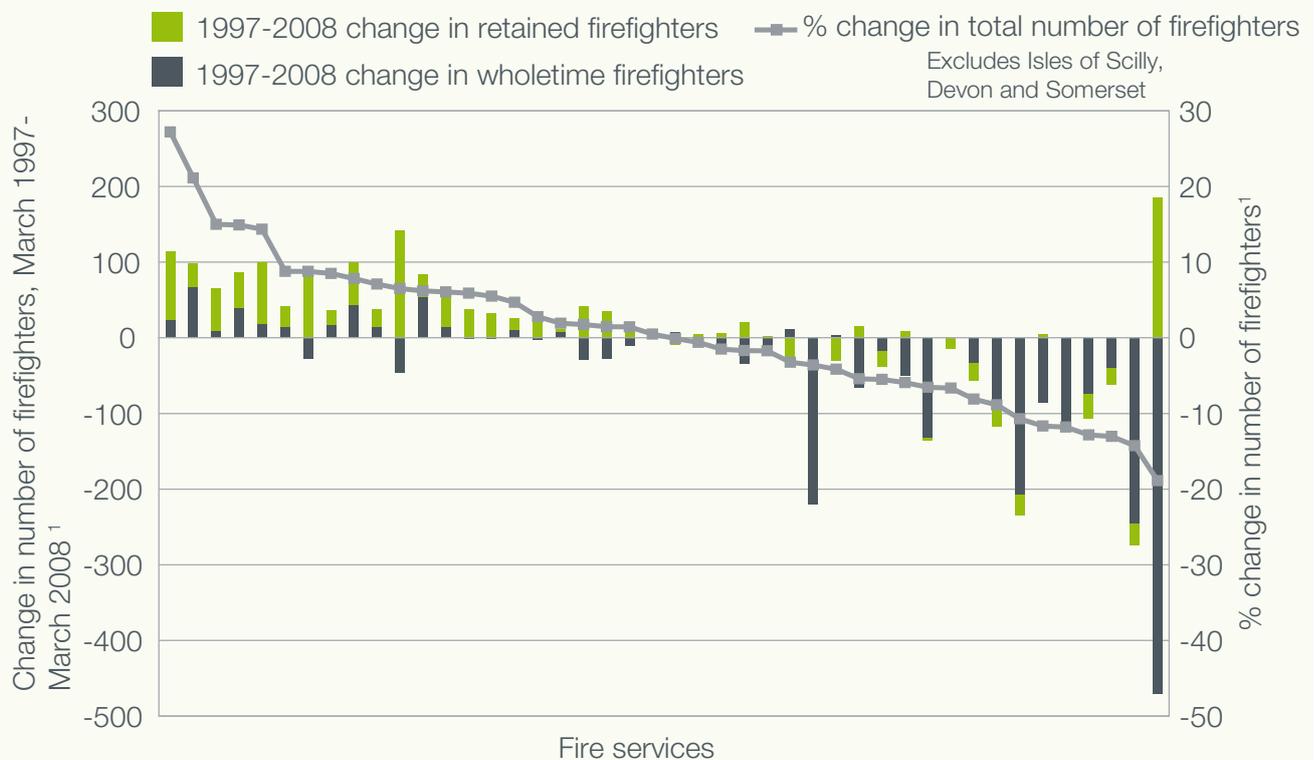


<sup>1</sup> Figures taken at March, unless otherwise stated

Source: CLG

**35** The total number of firefighters in the fire service has remained constant since 1997, though the mix of wholetime firefighters and firefighters in the RDS has changed (Figure 8). While the number of wholetime firefighters fell by 5 per cent, from 32,300 in 1997 to 30,600 in 2008, the number of firefighters in the RDS rose by 10 per cent, from 10,700 to 11,700.<sup>1</sup> This change in mix will have created efficiency savings.

**Figure 9**  
**Significant variation in the change in number of firefighters across fire services**



<sup>1</sup> Wholetime firefighters measured as FTE, RDS firefighters measured as 24-hour units of cover

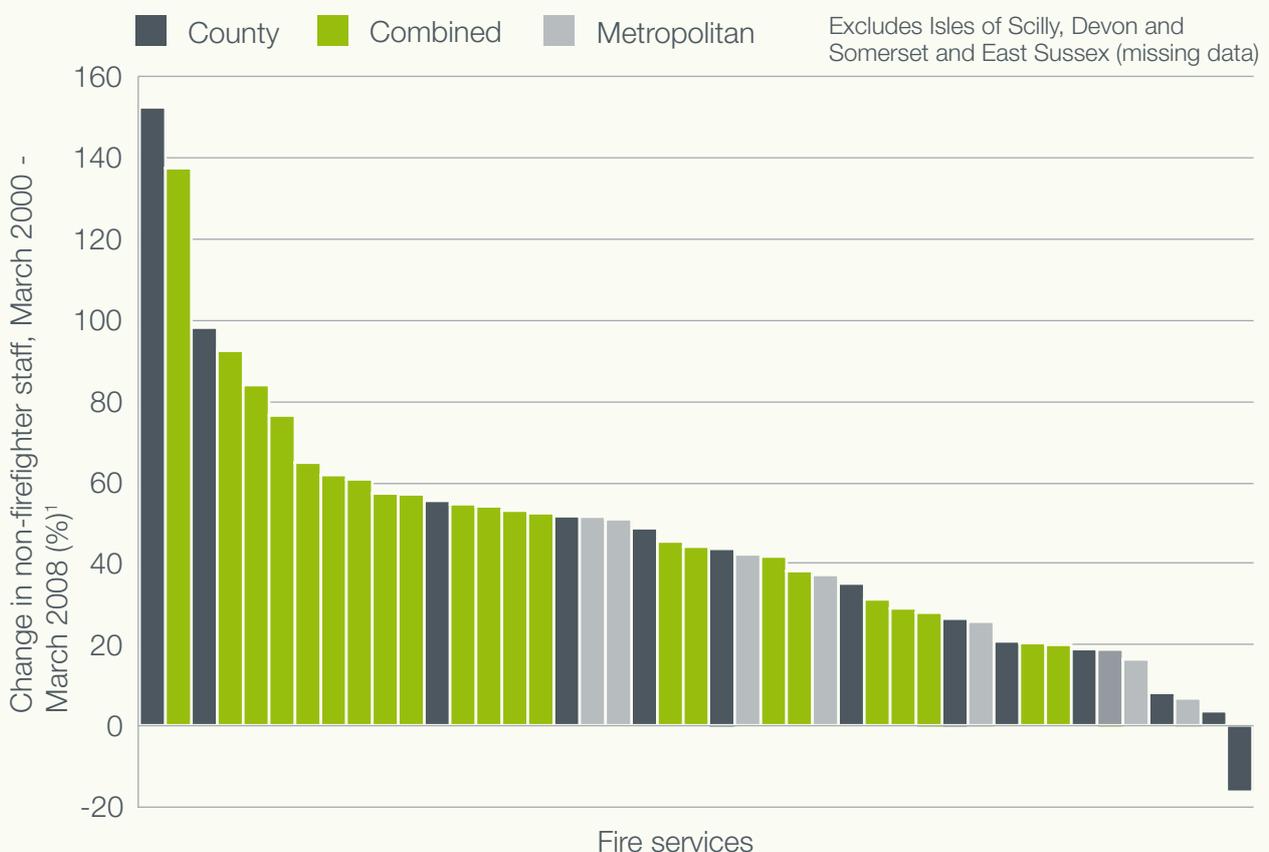
Source: CLG

**I** Data on wholetime firefighters and non-firefighting staff members are in full-time equivalents in this chapter, unless otherwise stated. Data on firefighters in the RDS are in 24-hour units of cover.

# The efficiency challenge

**Figure 10**

**Most fire services have increased the number of non-firefighter staff**



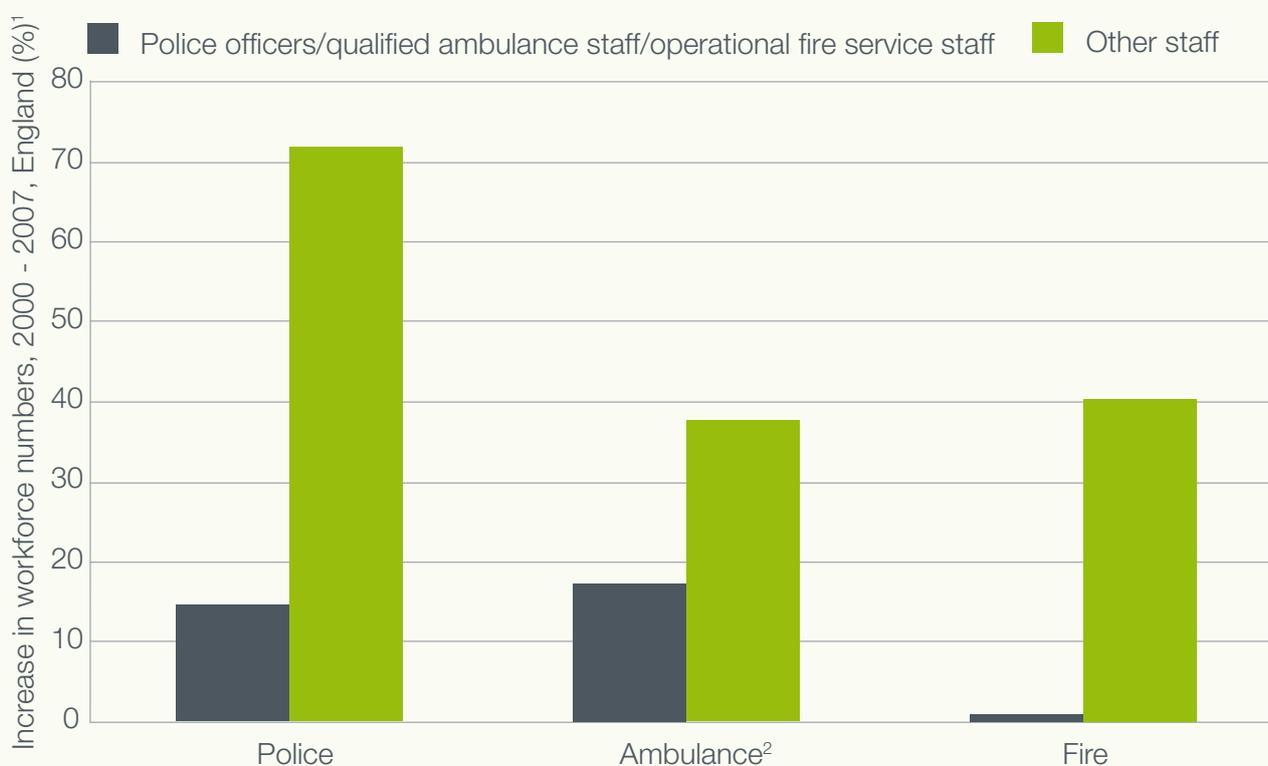
<sup>1</sup> Non-firefighters measured as FTE  
Source: CLG

**36** The overall figures disguise some considerable changes by individual fire services. Seven have reduced their total number of firefighters by over 10 per cent; while five have increased their total by over 10 per cent. Sixteen fire services have reduced their wholetime firefighters while increasing firefighters in the RDS; although most of the changes were small in scale. Fourteen fire

services have increased both wholetime firefighters and firefighters in the RDS. Ten have decreased both (Figure 9).

**37** In 2008 there were around 9,300 non-firefighting members of staff, up 35 per cent from 2000. All but one fire service has increased the number of non-firefighting staff; though, again, there is significant variation (Figure 10).

**Figure 11**  
**Change in fire service staff compared with other emergency services**



<sup>1</sup> Staff taken as FTE; data taken at March for police and fire services; at September for ambulance service

<sup>2</sup> Ambulance figures only available to September 2007

Source: Home Office, Department of Health, CLG

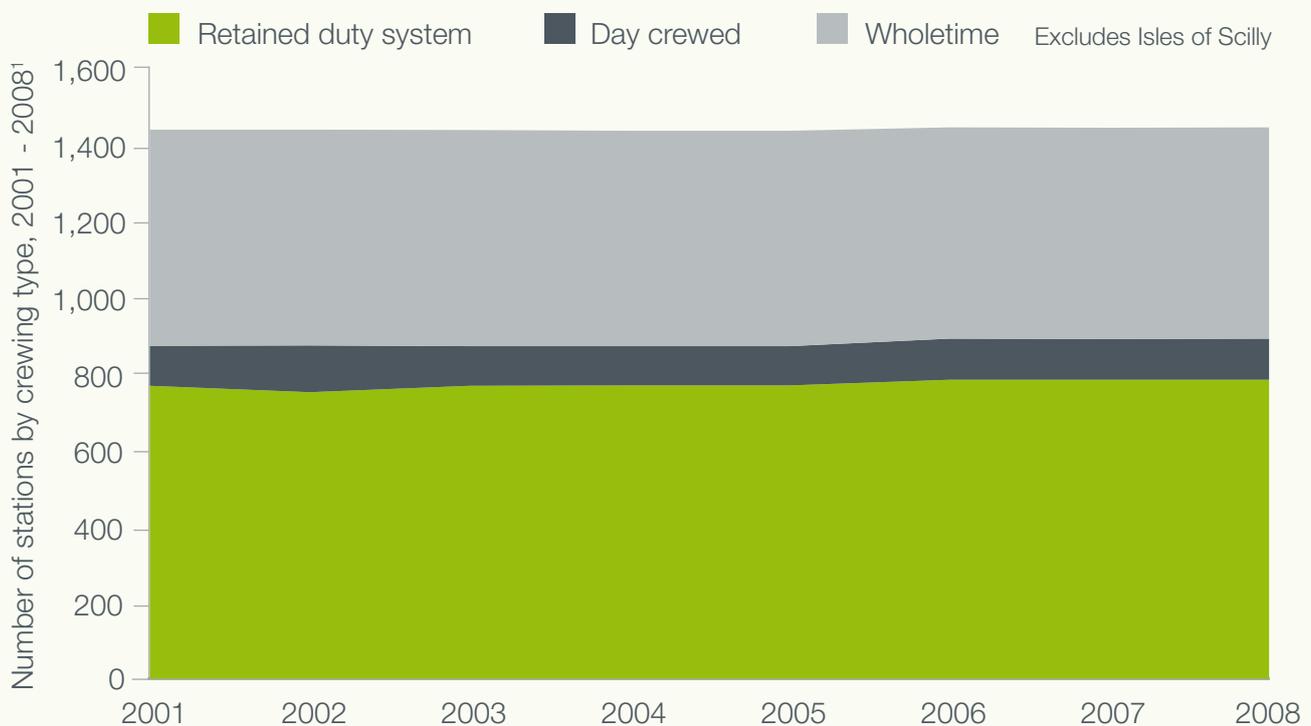
**38** The police and ambulance services have seen larger increases in staff numbers (Figure 11). The large rise in non-officer staff in the police service is in part due to the introduction of community support officers (CSOs) in 2003. There are now 15,800 CSOs in England; they account for 15 per cent of non-officer staff in the police service and a third of the increase in non-officer staff since 2000. It is not possible to determine what proportion of

non-firefighting staff in the fire service are delivering community safety work.

**39** The number and type of stations has also remained fairly constant (Figure 12). FRA members explained to us that closing or changing the status of stations is extremely difficult financially, operationally and politically, particularly in the face of public and union opposition. However, some stations have changed

# The efficiency challenge

**Figure 12**  
The number of stations has not changed



<sup>1</sup> Figures taken at March

Source: CIPFA

status, been modernised or moved. The government has invested around £500 million in PFI credits for fire service projects, and is making £78 million in capital grants available in the 2007 spending review period.

**40** With a declining number of incidents, higher expenditure and largely unchanged numbers of firefighters, stations and appliance, it has been argued that fire service productivity is declining. As the Atkinson review

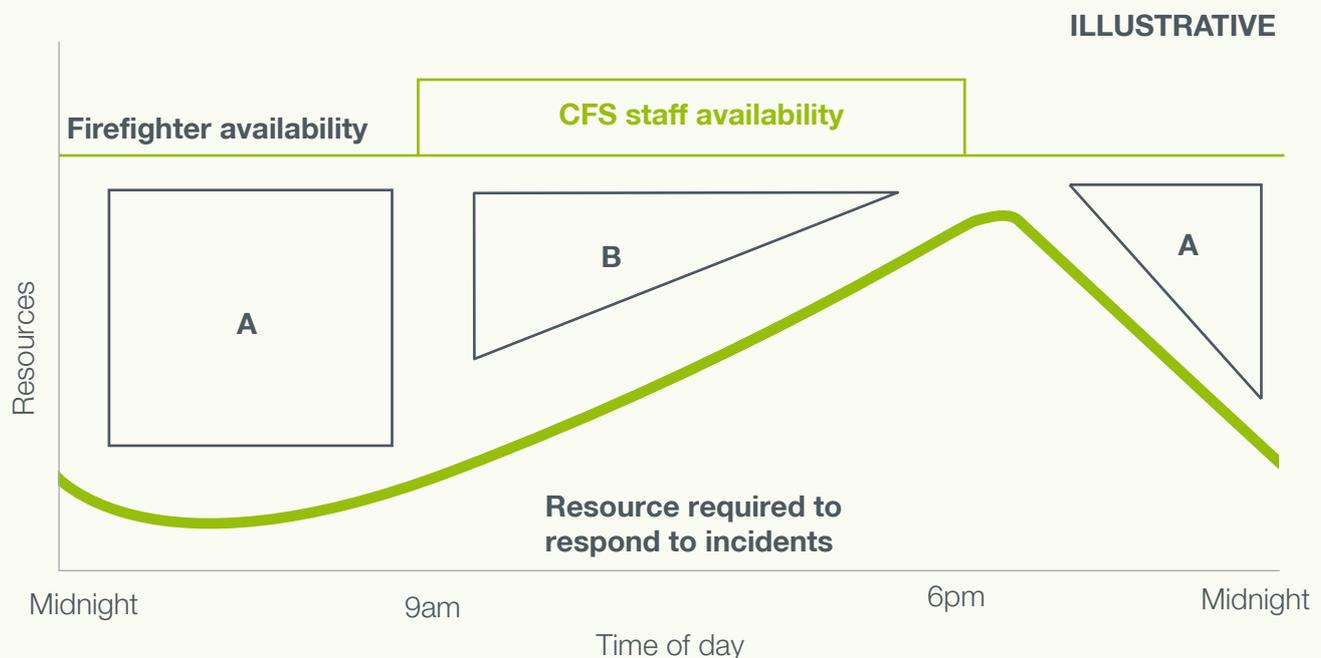
(Ref. 14) noted, fire service productivity cannot be measured solely in terms of the number of incidents attended, as one of the service's aims is to reduce the level of such incidents. Nevertheless, as risks change, fire services do need to consider whether they have the right amount and type of stations, equipment and people, in the right place, at the right time, to deal most effectively with those risks.

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- 41** Under old national standards of fire cover, levels of response were determined principally by the locations of the incidents, categorised by the property type and density. IRMP has allowed fire services to determine appropriate local responses to risk. Fire services are not required to set standards, but they are required to report performance. Response standards now vary; many fire services now differentiate between life threatening and non-life threatening incidents. This change to more risk-based response is welcome. However, the extent to which this has led to changes in stations, appliances or firefighters varies across fire services.
- 42** The number of incidents varies throughout the day, with fewer overnight and in the morning, and more in the evening. This pattern is consistent over time and across fire services. As a result, fire services are often faced with a mismatch between firefighter availability and requirement. Fire services with a high proportion of firefighters in the RDS can more closely match availability to requirement, as RDS firefighters turn out when required. However, it is more of a challenge for fire services with mainly wholetime firefighters. Under most current crewing models, fire services have the same number of wholetime firefighters on duty throughout a 24-hour period. This produces a mismatch, where capacity substantially exceeds the likely call on it: the areas marked A in the illustrative example set out in Figure 13. In these cases, fire services may have scope to provide appropriate levels of
- cover more efficiently by, for example, converting some wholetime stations to day crewed status, or by taking certain appliances off duty at night.
- 43** The area marked B in Figure 13 relates to firefighter resource potentially available during the daytime. Fire services should consider whether they can use this resource more efficiently, to invest further in CFS, or undertake broader community work, where the benefits of those activities to the community are clear.
- 44** In 2004, the Audit Commission expressed concern about the relatively slow progress that most fire services were making to introduce more flexible duty systems following the review of pay and conditions of service (Ref. 15). In our 2007 performance assessment, we noted that fire services are now changing traditional working practices to free up resources for CFS work. But, in many fire services, the scope of these changes is fairly limited. Fire services can do more to reconcile the mismatch between the availability of resources and the time when those resources are required.

# The efficiency challenge

**Figure 13**

Fire services may want to consider whether they have a staff availability/utilisation mismatch, and if so what action to take



## Where can fire services make savings?

**45** Annual efficiency statements show that fire services have collectively made over £80 million of recurring efficiency savings from changes to the way in which they deploy firefighters. But, while some fire services have made very large savings, many have not. Five have saved over £4,000 per wholetime firefighter as a result of such changes since April

2004. The metropolitan fire service with the highest level of savings was Merseyside, the combined fire service with the highest level of savings was Nottinghamshire, and the county with the highest level of savings was Norfolk. But ten have saved less than £1,000 per wholetime firefighter, including three (Dorset, Northumberland and Warwickshire) that have saved nothing at all (Figure 14).

**Figure 14**

**Some fire services have made significant savings, while others have saved relatively little by changing crewing and shift patterns**



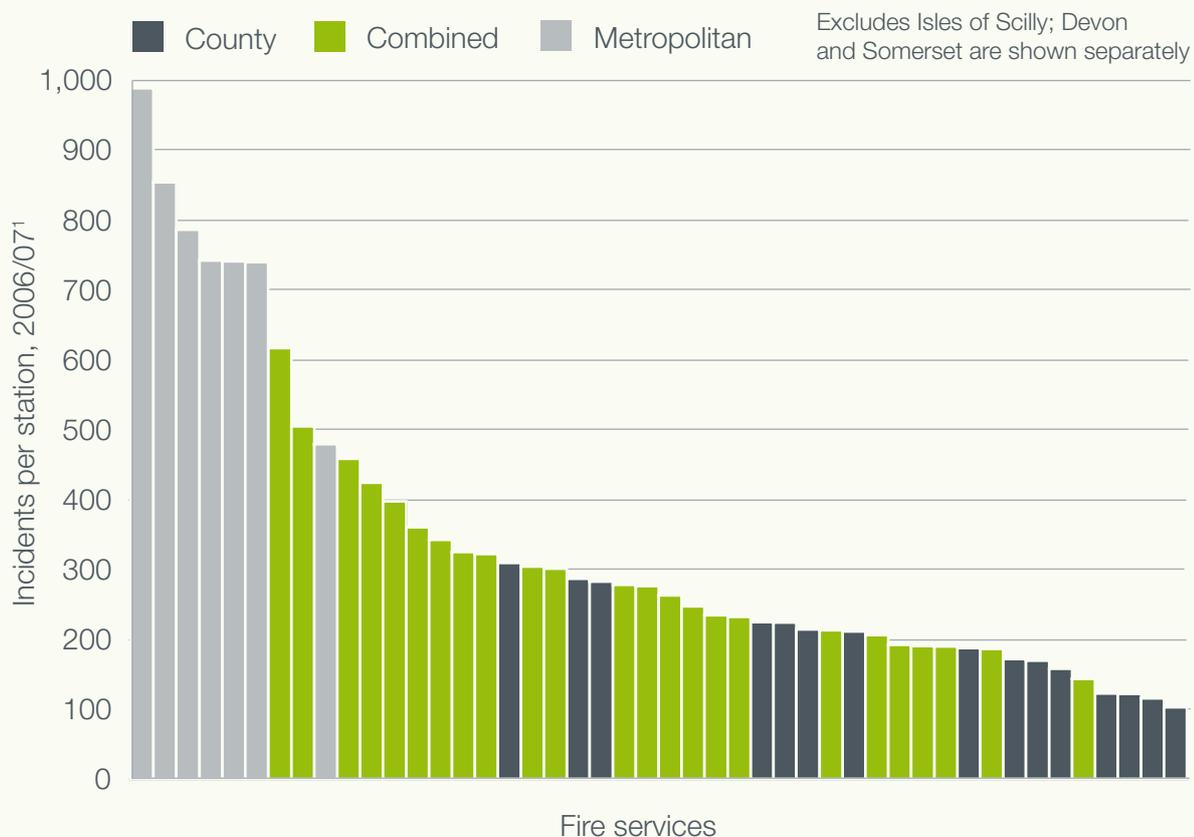
<sup>1</sup> Efficiency savings defined as total cumulative annually recurring efficiency gain from revised shift systems/crewing arrangements; per FTE wholetime firefighter at March 2003

Source: CLG

- 46 To ensure they meet new efficiency targets, fire services will need to consider further whether they have the right number of stations and appliances, and the right crewing arrangements.

# The efficiency challenge

**Figure 15**  
**Station utilisation varies**



<sup>1</sup> Incident numbers exclude false alarms; station numbers taken at March 2007

Source: CLG

**47** There is significant variation in the average number of incidents attended by each station, and by each appliance, in different fire services (Figure 15 and Figure 16). Metropolitan fire services and some combined fire services can cover more densely populated areas with relatively few stations, compared to rural areas or coastal towns. But the variation is not completely explained by geography or population density.

Attendance rates in 2006/07 varied from 122 to 225 per station in large county fire services; and from 479 to 988 per station in metropolitan fire services.

**Figure 16**  
**Appliance utilisation varies**



<sup>1</sup> Incident numbers exclude false alarms; appliance numbers taken at March 2007, measured as pumps, aerials and specialist, and excluding reserves.

Source: CLG

- 48** In a more detailed analysis of local incident data<sup>1</sup> from 17 fire services we found:
- Seven fire services with at least one single-pump RDS station attending fewer than 25 incidents a year. The busiest single-pump RDS stations attend over 175 incidents a year, making the least busy stations seven times more expensive per incident to maintain.

- Four fire services with at least one single-pump wholetime station attending fewer than 300 incidents per year. The busiest single-pump wholetime stations attend over 850 incidents a year, making the least busy stations almost three times more expensive per incident to maintain.

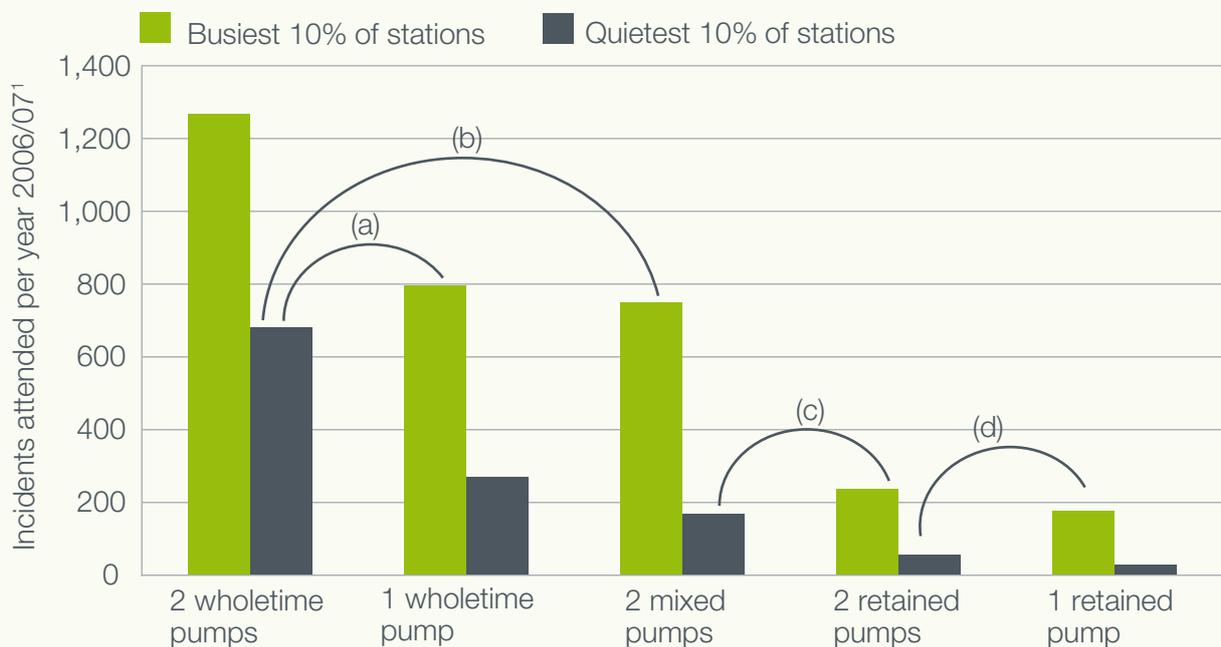
- 49** These patterns appear to be consistent over time.

**I** Excluding false alarms.

# The efficiency challenge

**Figure 17**

**Some single-pump stations are busier than some double-pump stations**



Based on a sample of 17 fire services

<sup>1</sup> Incident numbers exclude false alarms. Data from one fire service is from 2005/06; data from two fire services is from 2006, data from one fire service is from 2007; and data from one fire service is from 2007/08.

Source: Audit Commission

**50** Fire services should review cover arrangements on some less busy stations. Figure 17 shows that: **(a)** some single-pump wholtime stations attend more incidents than some two-pump wholtime stations; **(b)** some stations with a mixture of wholtime and RDS pumps attend more incidents than some two-pump wholtime stations; **(c)** some wholly RDS stations attend more incidents than some with a mixture of wholtime and RDS pumps; and **(d)** some single-pump RDS stations attend more incidents than some two-pump RDS stations.

**51** There are valid operational reasons why some relatively quiet stations require a wholtime crew, or more than one pump, for example to provide cover in coastal areas that do not benefit from cross border back-up, or for major industrial facilities. However, the level of discrepancy in attendance rates by stations of the same type demonstrates that some fire services could provide fire cover more cost-effectively.

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## How can fire services make savings?

**52** The case studies below demonstrate the potential for more efficient service provision that all fire services might consider in some form. We are aware that some fire services have made similar changes, but present these case studies as examples for others to consider. Case study 1 is drawn from a combined fire service, while case studies 2 and 3 are drawn from metropolitan fire services. Fire services will need to adopt and adapt the approaches to suit local geographic and demographic circumstances. However, some common considerations have emerged from our research on more efficient approaches to deployment. They are set out in the questions to fire services at the beginning of this report.

# The efficiency challenge

## Case study 1 Cheshire

### Targeted response vehicles

An estimated 40 per cent of all fires are relatively minor – yet traditionally they are dealt with by a full fire appliance and crew. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) has introduced targeted response vehicles (TRVs) to provide a more effective and efficient way of dealing with such incidents. TRVs are smaller appliances that can be crewed by between two and four riders, according to circumstances, yet they carry virtually the same kit as a main appliance. Using TRVs means that main appliances are more likely to be available to tackle life-threatening emergencies.

CFRS has installed TRVs as extra appliances at two single-pump retained duty stations. As well as ensuring that staff and appliances can be used more flexibly, the TRVs can also provide support at incidents requiring a second pump back-up. Previously this cover would have been provided by a neighbouring wholetime station. Those crews can now devote more time to their own station area and have extra time for training and CFS work.

A further two TRVs have replaced old, standard appliances at two stations that operate on a day crewing system. Here the TRVs can be sent either as back-up to large incidents, or as the single appliance to smaller incidents at night. The two standard appliances have now been transferred to a strategic reserve of six fully-kitted appliances available during major emergencies when cover is provided on a retained basis.

The vehicles are also considered a service-wide resource, and can be moved around to deal with specific events or initiatives, such as the bonfire season.

At present, there are no plans to reduce the number of firefighters on the basis of introducing TRVs. Instead, they are being deployed primarily to free up wholetime firefighter time for additional community safety activity.

There are cashable and environmental benefits. Initial purchase costs are approximately a third less, and running costs are less than half those of a standard appliance. They also emit far less CO<sub>2</sub>. There are also some minor cost savings when TRVs attend minor incidents with crews of two to three, instead of four on a standard appliance, thus reducing the number of disturbance fees paid to retained duty firefighters. The table below sets out the total cost savings.

**Table 1**  
**Cost comparisons for TRVs and standard appliances**

Cost	TRV	Standard appliance	Saving
Initial capital cost	£100,000	£150,000	£50,000
Anticipated ten-year life costs (fuel plus maintenance)	£60,000	£143,000	£83,000
Annual CO <sub>2</sub> emissions	60,000 tonnes	180,000 tonnes	120,000 tonnes

### Changes to day crewing arrangements

CFRS has also amended contracts for firefighters on day crewed stations. Day crewing requires a pool of firefighters to provide cover on a wholetime basis during the day, and on a retained basis at night from homes adjacent to the station provided by the Service. The system operates in areas of fairly low activity and ensures that the resources available are in line with local risks.

Firefighters operating on the system are usually paid a wholetime wage, together with a standard retainer and disturbance fees. They operate on two watches rather than the traditional four watches on wholetime stations. The system offers significant savings over full-time cover while still providing a high level of cover for local communities.

A new collective agreement for the day crewing system was agreed and launched on 1 January 2008. This has simplified and harmonised existing terms and conditions. Under the new arrangement, firefighters are required to work an average of 42 hours per week (31 hours on station and 11 hours on standby); a 50 per cent increase in the number of productive hours per firefighter.

These and other changes to rent and allowances were phased in to allow staff time to adapt to any lifestyle changes required.

# The efficiency challenge

## Case study 2 Merseyside

### Flexible working arrangements

In order to meet the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework, and in light of challenging budget settlements, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS) has introduced more flexible working arrangements that have enabled it to provide existing standards of cover with fewer wholetime firefighters. MFRS operates one-pump stations with 24 firefighters (six per watch on four watches) and two-pump stations with 40 firefighters (ten per watch) compared to standard crewing levels of 28 and 52 respectively. This arrangement is sufficient to provide a default level of four riders per appliance at an incident; a level agreed by the Fire and Rescue Authority following an extensive risk assessment.

Cutting back firefighters on the watch increases the risk that appliances have to be taken off the run, as there is a minimum number of crew members required to operate appliances safely. However, MFRS has established a number of safeguards to mitigate this risk. Firstly, it has undertaken extensive incident analysis and identified a dynamic reserve of appliances that can be called upon if required, for example where personnel are sick. In these circumstances, the default staffing level of four riders prevails; in the event that the staffing level is below four riders the remaining firefighters staffing the appliance are re-deployed to other stations for the shift, and the appliance reverts to dynamic reserve status. In addition, a Reinforcement and Resilience Team, drawn from a central pool of managers, can be called upon to cover any shortfalls at crew or watch manager level, and additional support during busy periods. Overtime is used very selectively as a last resort.

The changes made have no impact on the capacity to deal with major emergencies, as the changes made are just about crewing appliances more efficiently. Crews attending training in MFRS's central training facility (considered as a strategic reserve) can also be called upon in major emergencies – this has only been necessary twice in four years.

### Low level activity and risk (LLAR) stations

MFRS recognised that, if starting from scratch, it would not have the number and type of stations it does. However, it knew that closing stations was very difficult and unpopular. In order to deal with over capacity without closing stations, it has turned its five least busy one-pump wholetime stations into LLAR stations, with retained cover at night. To determine suitability for LLAR status, MFRS considered the number and type of emergency calls within each station area, alongside other known risk factors, such as proximity to industrial sites.

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The mobilisation standard during the period of retained cover is set at 1.9 minutes – this is the average time between alert to mobilisation of wholetime appliances between 00.00hrs and 07.00hrs. The first three stations chosen to implement the new system during 2006/07 had on average fewer than 300 calls a year during the five years to March 2002. On average, just one incident a week was a primary fire. Calls have continued to fall since. They were also in areas of low inherent risk, in other words, areas of relatively low deprivation with no major industrial or chemical sites nearby.

The LLAR crewing system operates using a pool of wholetime firefighters on flexible contracts who self roster to provide sufficient cover across the five LLAR stations, on a wholetime basis during the day and a retained basis at night. They are paid retainers of 15 per cent, instead of the usual 10 per cent, to compensate them for the additional inconvenience of having to stay on or near the station premises overnight. They can sleep, read, eat or study, but do not have to perform any non-operational duties. This compares to the usual retained contract, where firefighters are based at home overnight. LLAR stations are a third cheaper to run than standard wholetime stations (£640,000 compared to £1 million per year).

FRA members supported the introduction of LLAR. MFRS ensured that the public was informed that the level of emergency response had not changed; rather, it was how the stations were crewed to provide that response.

Performance by the LLAR stations is good. Response times have improved and sickness absence has fallen. This suggests morale is good among the LLAR crews, who have volunteered for the new arrangements. Increases in CFS activity are in line with the increases in non-LLAR stations.

In 2007/08 two more stations converted to the LLAR system. This followed careful evaluation of response times, accommodation, staffing systems and firefighter feedback from the first three stations. MFRS is now considering how the principles may be applied in stations with medium levels of activity and risk.

# The efficiency challenge

## Case study 3 Greater Manchester

In 2003, faced with a significant budget shortfall, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS) identified a way to make more efficient use of resources, by matching the availability of its people to the demand and risk profile of the community. In order to achieve flexible deployment of resources, it was necessary to introduce much more flexibility into employment contracts and duty systems. Research had identified best practice in the private retail sector. This research was utilised when developing rostering for duty and flexible operational resource deployment (FORD).

The FRA was consulted at the very early stages of strategy development and supported the CFO and chief executive throughout the implementation. In addition, Fire Brigade Union officials worked with the management team to secure benefits for their members through constructive negotiations.

Rostering for duty has delivered approximately £1.2 million of annual efficiency savings and improved performance standards (the number of firefighters on fire engines attending incidents). The initial phase of FORD generated a further £1.7 million of annual efficiency; extending FORD in a second phase has increased total annual savings to over £3 million per year.

### Rostering for duty

In January 2006 GMFRS introduced a new duty system, incorporating significant changes in working practice, for all wholetime operational staff. There is now a wide range of flexible duty patterns enabling a better match of firefighter availability to risk and demand. It has introduced a five-watch system, which requires 87 fewer firefighters (out of a total of nearly 1,800 wholetime operational personnel) to provide existing levels of cover.

The usual wholetime pattern now has each firefighter carrying out a tour of duty every eight days. A tour of duty involves two day shifts consisting of nine hours each and two night shifts consisting of 15 hours each. After seven tours of duty a firefighter has a break of 18 days before returning to work. These fixed shifts are only part of the firefighter shift pattern and a number of flexible shifts are also included, involving on average 340 hours of the yearly total.

Rostering for duty is constantly reviewed to ensure continuous improvement and refinement and to take account of the concerns of staff. The roster planning cycle will be aligned with the financial year rather than the calendar year. A new overtime policy involving volunteers for pre-arranged overtime has recently been introduced on a trial basis, as there have been

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some challenges meeting the variation in demand placed on the system caused by employee absences (due to floating leave, sickness, training and so on) and overtime is the best method for addressing some of these occasional shortages.

The new flexible way of deploying staff allowed GMFRS to introduce FORD.

### **Flexible operational resource deployment**

The flexibility of the new shift arrangements has enabled GMFRS to take five appliances off the run at night from stations across its service area. Four appliances are stood down from 17 of GMFRS's 23 two-pump stations each night on a rotating basis according to risk. The selection of the pumps concerned involved combining results from analysis using standard fire service risk modelling software and other specialist software on workload patterns. The two-pump stations in the highest risk and highest workload areas are excluded from the rotation. A further appliance is taken off the run every night from the least busy single-pump station in GMFRS's area. Cover for the five pumps taken off the run is provided from neighbouring stations.

From April 2008 FORD was extended to include other less busy daytime periods, such as weekends and bank holidays.

Service delivery and attendance times have not been adversely affected, while the equivalent of 36 firefighter posts has been released for other activities.

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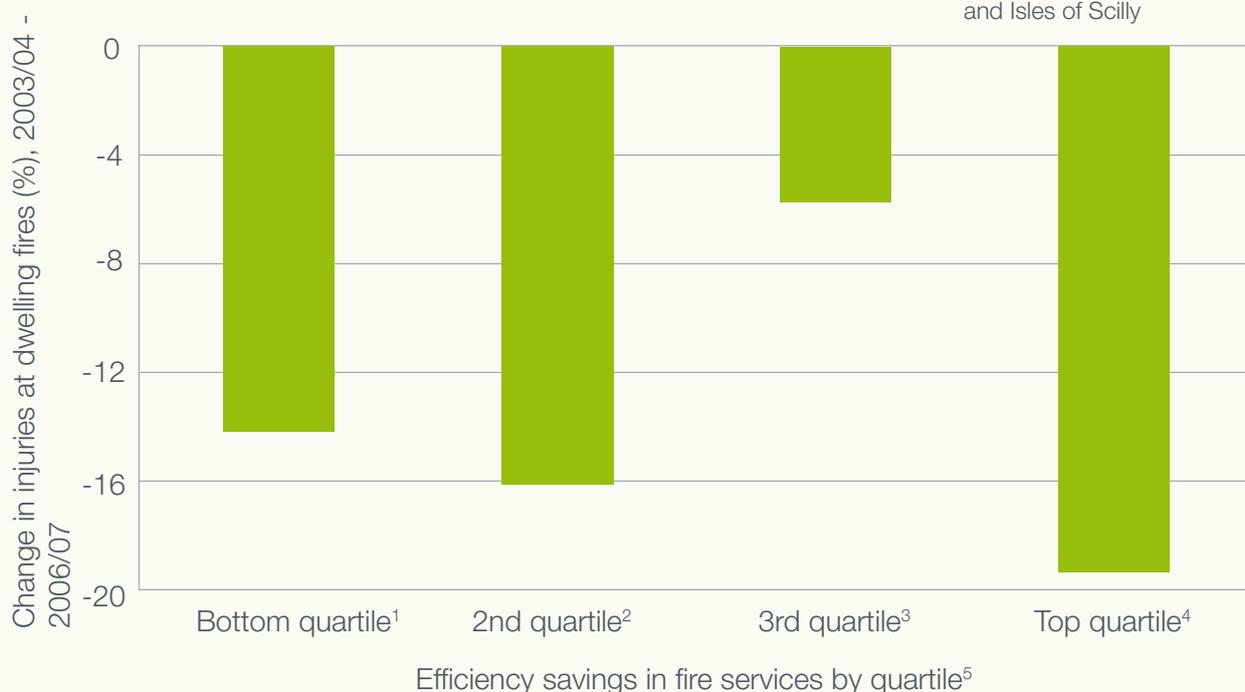
# The efficiency challenge

- 53** Options for change will depend on local circumstances. For example, a metropolitan fire service might be able to operate with fewer firefighters per pump on a permanent basis because if insufficient crew members are available to crew a particular pump, it can redistribute crew members that are available and provide adequate cover from nearby wholetime stations. Therefore the necessary number of firefighters can still be deployed even where efficiencies have been made.
- 54** A large county or combined fire service with just one or two wholetime pumps covering a large town cannot afford to take a pump off the run in the way described in Case study 3 without severely reducing cover. However, it could consider other options, such as introducing day crewing type arrangements, changing shift times, or deploying smaller vehicles and crews to deal with smaller incidents.
- 55** All fire services could also look at how they use firefighters in the RDS. The RDS is an efficient and effective way of providing cover – it is sometimes referred to as a pay as you go service, with firefighters responding to incidents when required. The 2005 review of the RDS acknowledged the significant role that firefighters in the RDS could play in fire service modernisation (Ref. 16). It set out 51 recommendations aimed at improving recruitment and retention and more fully integrating the RDS into service delivery. Although recruitment and retention has improved, there was still an 11 per cent shortfall in the required number of RDS firefighters in March 2007. The Task and Finish Group set up to monitor progress on the recommendations has recently noted that the quality of service provided and availability of cover remains inconsistent across the country (Ref. 17). It recognised that much more work needs to be done to deliver the vision set out in the 2005 review.
- 56** Fire services often face considerable opposition to changes in fire cover, from both the public and staff representatives. As a result, some changes have been introduced more quickly than others. Yet, as the case studies show, some fire services have overcome those difficulties, and tackled that opposition to make changes they thought necessary. Others can follow suit.
- 57** There is no evidence that making savings has adversely affected safety. Changes in the number of injuries in fires in the home, and injuries to firefighters, in those fire services that have made the biggest savings are comparable to changes in other fire services (Figure 18 and Figure 19).

**Figure 18**

**Fire services making the largest savings have not done so at the cost of more injuries to the public...**

Excluding Devon, Somerset and Isles of Scilly



<sup>1</sup> From 2.3% to 4.2% (4 County, 7 Combined)

<sup>2</sup> From 4.2% to 6.1% (5 County, 5 Combined, 1 Metropolitan)

<sup>3</sup> From 6.1% to 8.3% (2 County, 6 Combined, 3 Metropolitan)

<sup>4</sup> From 8.3% to 20.7% (3 County, 5 Combined, 3 Metropolitan)

<sup>5</sup> Efficiency savings defined as total cumulative annually recurring efficiency gain 2004/05 - 2007/08 as a percentage of net expenditure 2003/04, excluding capital charges.

Source: CLG

# The efficiency challenge

**Figure 19**  
**...or firefighters**



<sup>1</sup> from 2.3% to 4.2% (4 County, 7 Combined)

<sup>2</sup> from 4.2% to 6.1% (5 County, 5 Combined, 1 Metropolitan)

<sup>3</sup> from 6.1% to 8.3% (2 County, 6 Combined, 3 Metropolitan)

<sup>4</sup> from 8.3% to 20.7% (3 County, 5 Combined, 3 Metropolitan)

<sup>5</sup> Efficiency savings defined as total cumulative annually recurring efficiency gain 2004/05 - 2007/08 as a percentage of net expenditure 2003/04, excluding capital charges.

Source: CLG

**58** One further area where all fire services can make further efficiencies is in reducing, and amending responses to, false alarms. Although false alarms have fallen by 14 per cent in the last decade, they still account for over 40 per cent of all mobilisations. Recent research commissioned by CLG set out how more risk-based approaches to responding to likely false alarms can yield cost savings of between £12 million and £15 million per year (Ref. 18).<sup>1</sup>

**59** Appendix A presents the potential savings that could be made in England, if the measures outlined above, and in other areas of the report, were replicated by all those fire services where each measure is applicable. Each fire service should assess how, and how quickly, it might apply those measures in its own local circumstances.

<sup>1</sup> Based on a baseline three-pump response strategy for false alarms.

# 4 | The performance challenge

**60** This chapter considers fire service performance since 1997/98. It draws on data from a variety of sources, including: CIPFA returns on expenditure; CLG returns on operational performance; Audit Commission performance assessments; and best value performance indicators. It does not represent an analysis of individual fire service performance, but does address variation in performance. It also considers the key drivers of performance and the impact of fire service activity on outcomes.

**61** The performance picture is similar to that for efficiency. Overall, outcomes are good but there is significant variation in those outcomes between fire services. All fire services need to determine what drives good performance, then focus their resources on those activities that have the greatest impact.

## Overall, performance is strong but variable

**62** The fire service is well on course to meet its public service agreement (PSA) target of reducing deaths in accidental fires in the home by 20 per cent by 2010.

**Figure 20**

**The fire service is on course to meet its PSA target on reducing deaths from accidental fires in the home**



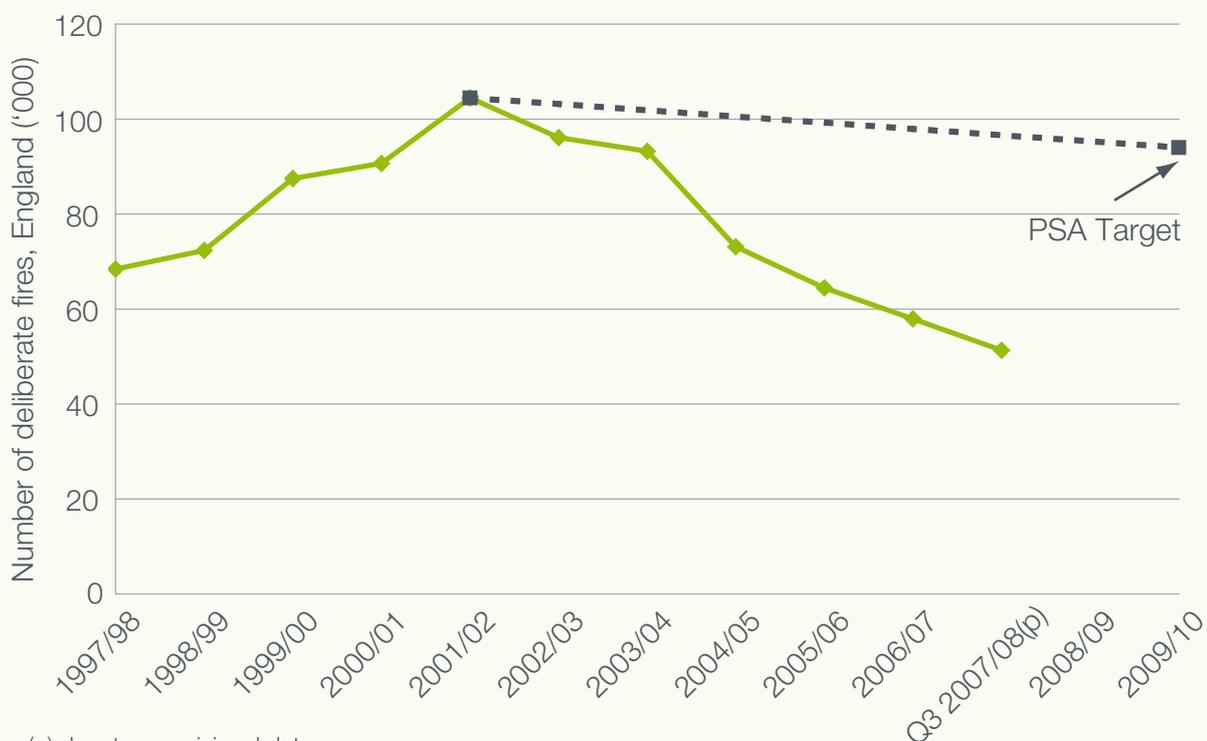
(p) denotes provisional data

Source: CLG

# The performance challenge

**Figure 21**

The fire service is on course to meet its PSA target on reducing deliberate fires



(p) denotes provisional data

Source: CLG

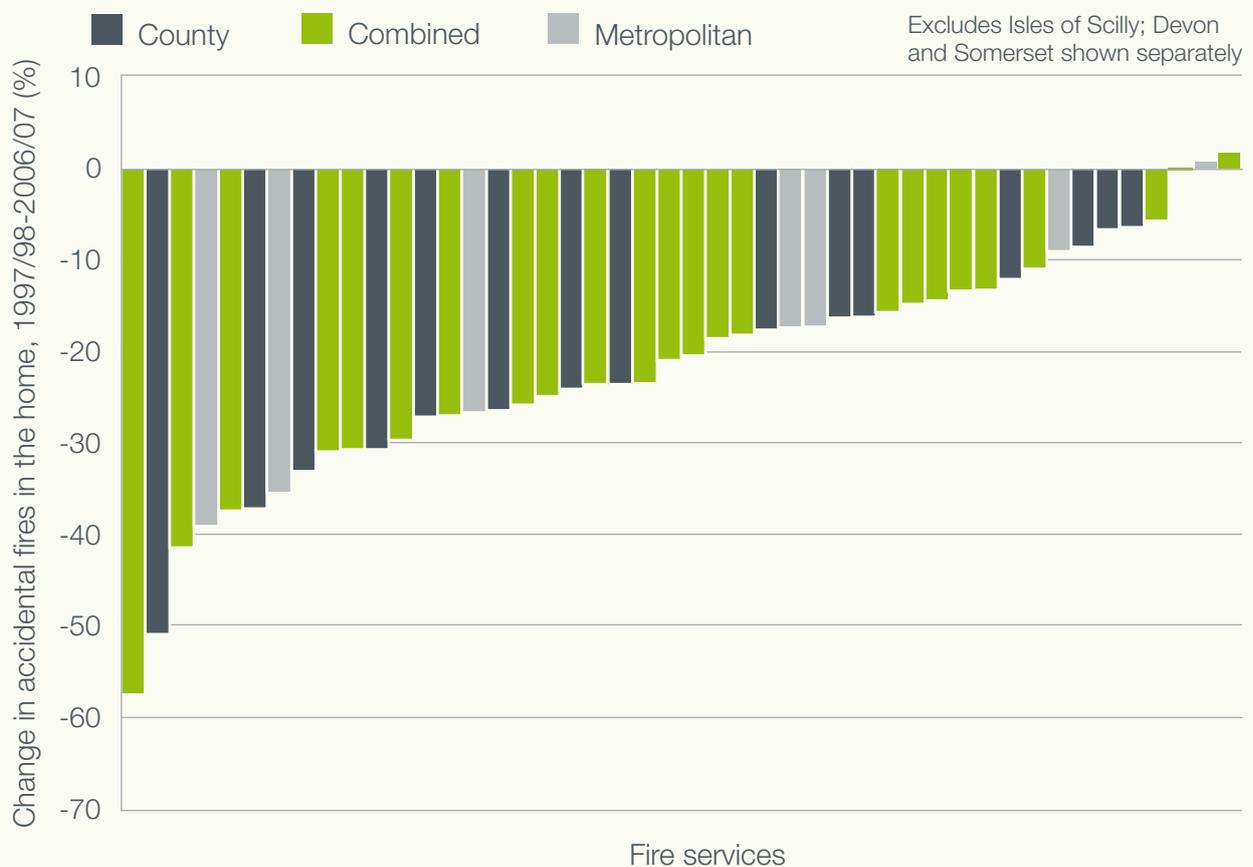
**63** It is also on course to meet its PSA target to reduce deliberate fires by 10 per cent by March 2010 from the 2001/02 baseline. This would require there to be fewer than 94,000 deliberate fires; the figure for 2006/07 was 57,900 (Figure 21).

**64** The number of primary fires attended by the fire service has fallen by 22 per cent since 1997/98. This is not wholly attributable to fire service activity; other factors, such as the state of the economy, play their part. But there

is evidence that the fire service has contributed significantly, as explained later in this chapter. And the largest falls in fires have been in those areas where the fire service has concentrated much of its CFS work. Accidental fires in the home have fallen by 22 per cent since 1997/98; and related injuries have fallen by 28 per cent. Deliberate vehicle fires have fallen 7 per cent, from 36,000 in 1997/98 to 33,500 in 2006/07; the 2006/07 figure is almost half that of the 2000/01 peak of 68,600.

**Figure 22**

**Performance in reducing accidental fires in the home is variable...**



Source: CLG

**65** Although good overall, performance is extremely variable. Changes in primary fires since 1997/98 range from a 40 per cent fall in West Midlands to a 1 per cent rise in Humberside. Similarly, changes in accidental fires in the home range from a 58 per cent fall in Cleveland to a 2 per cent rise in Dorset (Figure 22). Five fire services (Leicestershire, West Midlands,

Bedfordshire, East Sussex and Northumberland) have seen deliberate vehicle fires fall by over 30 per cent; while four (Northamptonshire, Cheshire, Suffolk and Wiltshire) have seen them rise by over 50 per cent (Figure 23).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Excluding Isle of Wight due to the low number of deliberate vehicle fires it experiences per year.

# The performance challenge

**Figure 23**  
... as is performance in reducing deliberate vehicle fires



Source: CLG

**66** The analysis above compares just two points in time. Year-on-year fluctuations make it difficult to gauge true levels of performance by individual fire services. Comparing incident levels over each of the three years to 2006/07 with average levels since 1997/98 suggests: 34 fire services have seen a statistically significant reduction in primary fires; 24 have seen a statistically significant reduction in accidental fires in the

home; and 14 have seen a statistically significant reduction in deliberate vehicle fires. No fire services have seen statistically significant increases in any of these types of fire over the same period.

**Figure 24**

**Some fire services have embraced the HFSC initiative more than others**



Source: CLG, CIPFA

**67** The fire service, as a whole, has performed well in other areas too. Collectively, fire services have conducted 2 million HFSCs and fitted 2.4 million smoke alarms since 2004 (Ref. 7).<sup>1</sup> Some fire services are also working with local partners to extend their HFSC capacity (see Chapter 5).

<sup>1</sup> This figure only covers HFSCs carried out by fire services themselves. Some HFSCs are carried out by partners. This figure is therefore an underestimate of the total carried out.

# The performance challenge

**68** Clearly, the effectiveness of the initiative will depend on how well HFSCs are targeted at those most at risk, rather than just the volume delivered. Nevertheless, some fire services have embraced the initiative far more strongly than others. While three have conducted HFSCs in over 30 per cent of the domestic properties in their area,

18 have covered fewer than 5 per cent (Figure 24). Some of the variation is explained by the proportion of properties that fire services feel are at risk; and some is explained by the volume delivered by partners. However, given the extent of the variation, it is unlikely to be explained entirely by these factors.

**Figure 25**  
Public satisfaction with the fire service varies



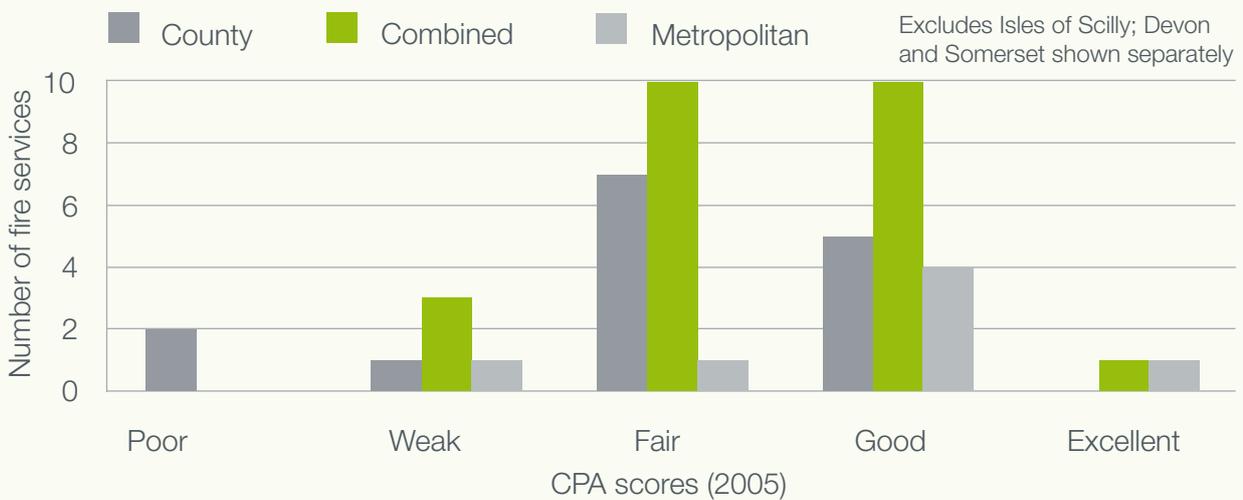
Source: Audit Commission

- 
- 69** Public satisfaction with the fire service is higher than with councils. The average satisfaction score for fire services was 59 per cent in 2006/07, compared to 53 per cent for councils. Figures for other public services are only available from separate surveys, and therefore are not strictly comparable. In 2007/08, 53 per cent of people thought the local police were doing an excellent or good job (Ref. 19). But satisfaction with fire services varied from 43 per cent to 76 per cent in 2006/07. Satisfaction was at 75 per cent or higher in Merseyside, Kent and Medway and West Midlands (Figure 25).
- 70** In our 2007 use of resources assessment, we found 80 per cent of fire services performing well; while 60 per cent were either improving well or strongly in the direction of travel assessment (Ref. 20). In particular, we noted strong progress being made in CFS, partnership working and business planning. However we also reported that those fire services with higher CPA scores tended to be improving at a faster rate. We also noted the significant variation in the improvement across the range of national performance indicators. Analysis for this study also shows that performance varies significantly.

# The performance challenge

**Figure 26**

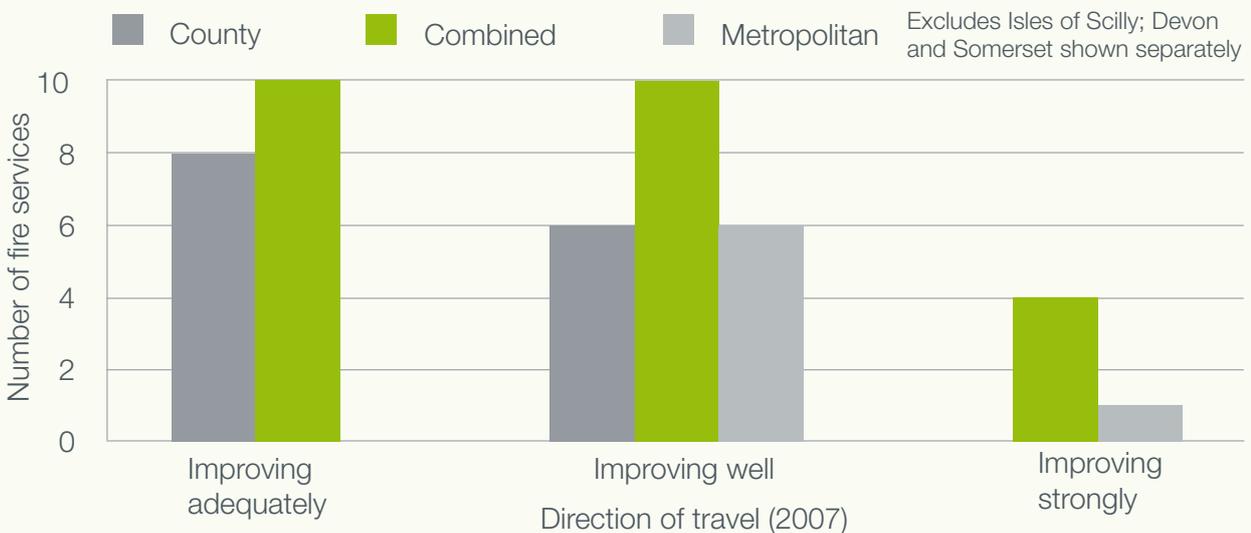
**Different fire service types were represented across the range of CPA scores...**



Source: Audit Commission

**Figure 27**

**...but county fire services are not improving as strongly**



Source: Audit Commission

- 
- 71** Different fire service types were represented across the range of CPA scores in 2005; however, no county fire services were improving strongly in our 2007 performance assessment (Figure 26 and Figure 27).
- 72** We found no clear relationship between fire service type and performance across a range of individual indicators. Overall, we found relatively good and relatively poor fire services of all types. We also looked at how far fire services had improved against baseline levels of performance across a range of outcome measures. We found no significant correlation between baseline performance and levels of improvement; in other words those that have improved the most did not necessarily have the furthest to improve (Appendix C).
- 73** However, our performance assessment shows that some fire services are performing to a consistently high standard. Two received a score of excellent in the 2005 CPA (Kent and Medway and Merseyside), and five (Cheshire, Kent and Medway, Lancashire, London and Shropshire and Wrekin) were improving strongly in our 2007 assessment of direction of travel.

# The performance challenge

## The impact of fire service prevention work

**74** The fire service has strongly embraced the CFS agenda in recent years. CFS expenditure<sup>1</sup> has risen by over 50 per cent since 2004/05 and now accounts for 13 per cent of total expenditure (Figure 28).

**75** However, both senior managers and firefighters expressed a range of views on the future of CFS activity. Some felt that a greater focus was required; others questioned whether the focus may have gone too far. The debate is fuelled by the difficulty in attributing performance improvement to fire service inputs. For example, there is no clear link between changes in fire service expenditure and reductions in primary fires (Figure 29). This relationship will be affected by both how well fire services convert inputs

**Figure 28**  
Expenditure on CFS has increased since 2004/05



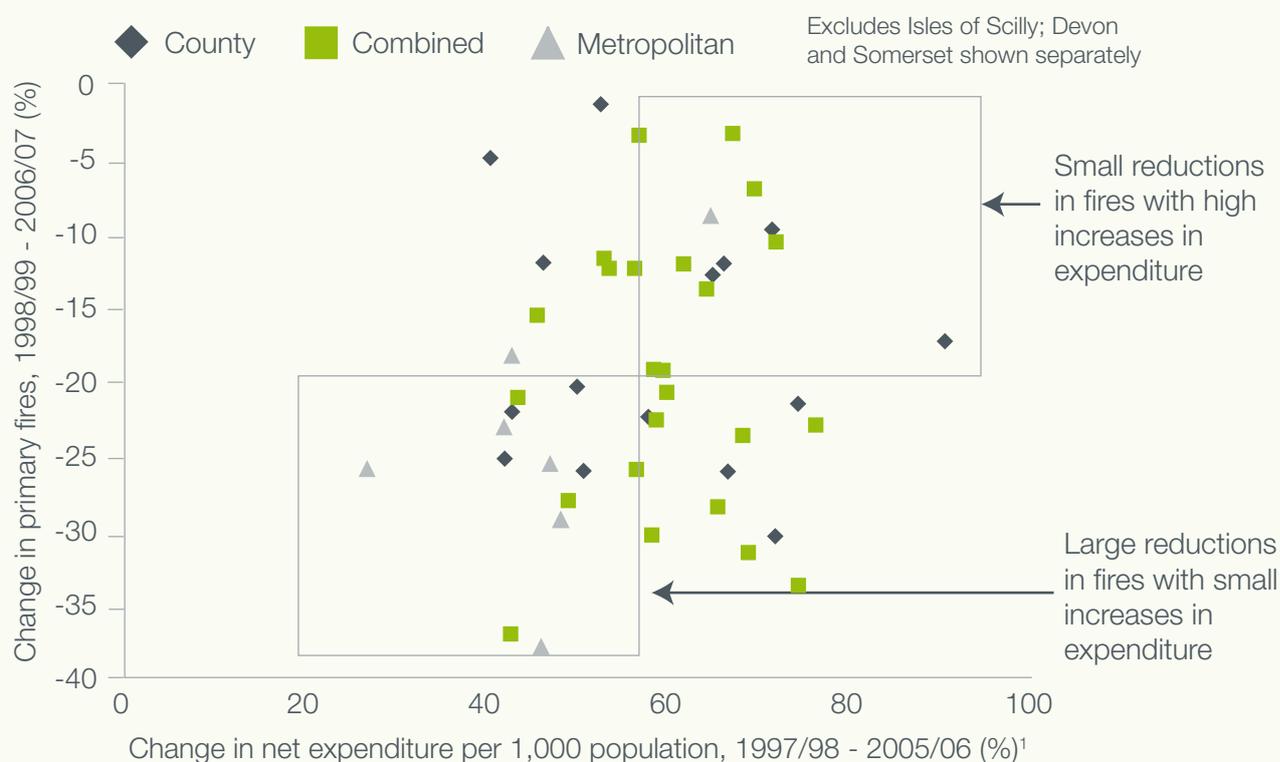
<sup>1</sup> Including capital charges  
(p) denotes provisional data

Source: CIPFA

**I** The data cover spending on prevention and education, and also statutory inspection and certification. The scope of this study did not include statutory inspection and certification work.

**Figure 29**

**There is no clear pattern between expenditure and reductions in primary fires**



<sup>1</sup> Excluding capital charges

Source: CIPFA, CLG

(in other words, funding) into outputs (for example, prevention work), and how well those outputs drive outcomes (reductions in fires).

**76** Determining the impact of fire service outputs on outcomes is difficult because many other external factors affect rates of fire. Some evidence suggests fire services' CFS work is having a positive impact; but other research suggests that much of the recent reduction in fires and related casualties is the result of

legislative, regulatory, and environmental change outside fire services' direct control.

**77** The evaluation of Arson Control Forum's new projects initiative found almost all fire service interventions to be cost beneficial (Ref. 21). The initiative comprised a range of interventions including: capacity building for arson reduction schemes; awareness raising; diversion programmes for those at risk of committing arson; and target hardening (for example, removing

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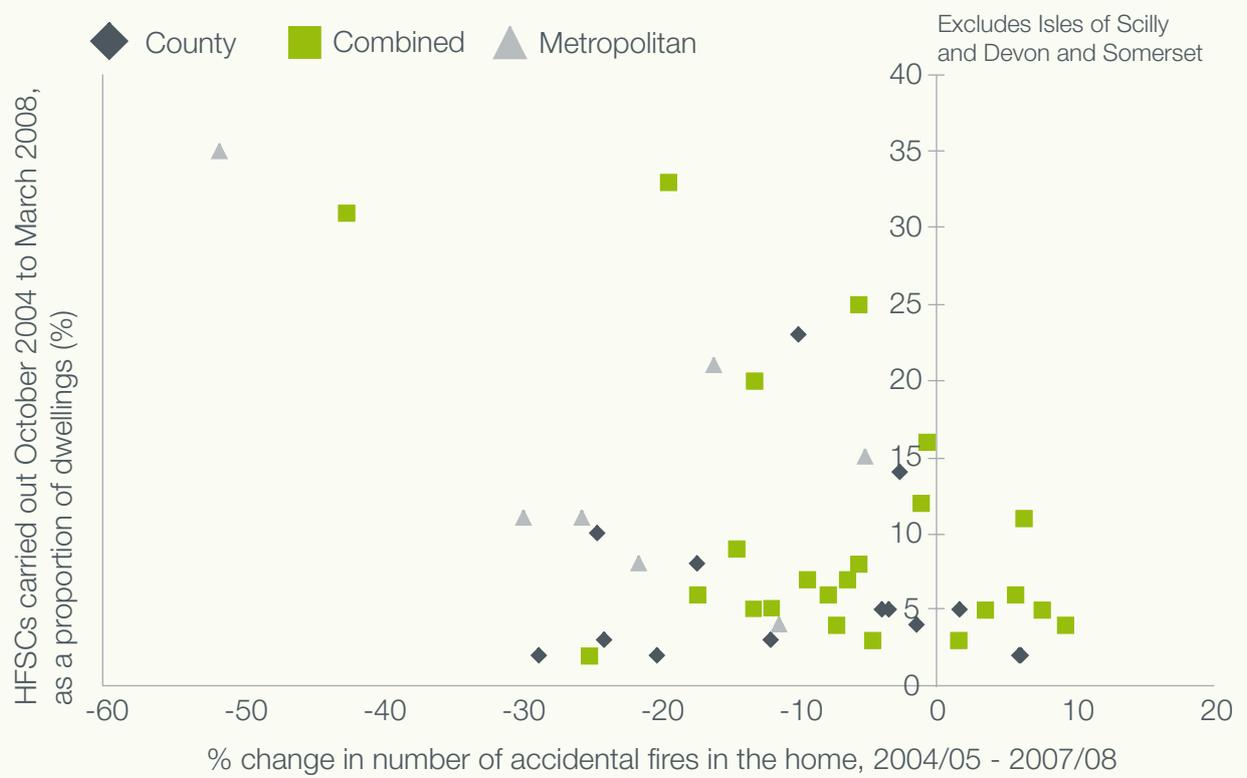
# The performance challenge

abandoned vehicles). Twenty-two of the 24 projects evaluated were deemed to have reduced deliberate fires.

- 78** However, other research suggests that recent reductions in vehicle arson are largely attributable to changes in legislation concerning the disposal of vehicles and the rising price of scrap steel (Ref. 22). These changes have significantly reduced the number of abandoned vehicles, a prime source of material for arson. Of course, any falls in steel price during periods of economic decline may lead to an increase in the number of abandoned vehicles.
- 79** Other research suggests that much of the fall in casualties in domestic fires over the last 20 years is attributable to the increasing prevalence of fire retardant household goods (especially foam filled furniture) and smoke alarms. It estimates there have been over 4,000 fewer deaths and almost 40,000 fewer injuries in fires since 1988, when new furniture regulations came into force; with an associated saving to the economy of over £9 billion (Ref. 23).
- 80** UK fire statistics show that the fatality rate in domestic fires is three times lower where a smoke alarm is present and operates correctly. According to national surveys, smoke alarm ownership has risen from less than 25 per cent to over 80 per cent since 1998, although it must be noted that a smoke alarm was present and activated in only two-fifths of the domestic fires attended by the fire service in 2006/07 (Ref. 24).
- 81** The fire service has made a significant, direct contribution to increasing smoke alarm ownership by fitting 2.4 million smoke alarms since 2004. But ownership levels will have been affected by other factors, such as legislation requiring newly-built properties to be fitted with smoke alarms. This makes it difficult to determine the direct impact of fire service activity. The full impact of the HFSC initiative will take some time to appear. Nevertheless, early evidence suggests it is having a positive impact. Fire services that have covered the highest proportion of domestic properties in their area have seen greater reductions in accidental fires in the home in recent years (Figure 30).
- 82** However, HFSCs should not be conducted indiscriminately. Fire services that target their activity at those most at risk are likely to see the best value for money.
- 83** Chapter 3 shows that most fire services have resources they could devote to CFS, if they matched the resources required to respond to incidents more closely to the likely occurrence of those incidents. If they do divert these resources to CFS activity, they should focus on those aspects where there is a demonstrable link to reduced risk; for example installing smoke alarms and removing abandoned vehicles. They must also consider where, and how best, to devote further resources to their broader community work, such as improving road safety and reducing anti-social behaviour.

**Figure 30**

**There is some suggestion that HFSCs are having a positive impact**



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# The performance challenge

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## Case study 4 Cleveland

Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) is one of the best performing fire services in the country for HFSCs. It carries out over 20,000 visits annually and by November 2008 had covered 40 per cent of households in its area. It has completed over 107,000 HFSCs; installed over 149,000 smoke alarms; and replaced 30,000 batteries in existing smoke alarms. The fire service undertakes over 1,000 home fire safety visits per wholetime pump per year on average.

The visits are mainly targeted at deprived areas, such as their community safety action zones where local schools, homes and other institutions will all be visited for concentrated safety improvement activities in conjunction with other partners. Other partnerships with housing associations enable at-risk estates to be targeted. Other agencies will also refer vulnerable individuals such as drug users or domestic violence victims, who are visited as a priority.

The results have been encouraging, with dramatic falls in accidental dwelling fires (ADFs). An evaluation of the programme in September 2007 demonstrated a 46 per cent fall in ADFs since the 2003/04 baseline year, with a steady year-on-year decrease. The most common causes of ADFs are cooking-related (fat catching fire or burning food) and these are one of the areas targeted during HFSCs; ADFs from these causes have fallen by over 50 per cent.

CFRS believes its substantial investment in targeted CFS activities (an estimated £9 million to September 2007 in firefighter time plus smoke alarm costs, of which under £150,000 was from government grant) has been justified by the greatest reduction in ADFs of all fire services. The reduction in property and life loss has produced an estimated saving of over £20 million.

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**84** Fire services also need to concentrate their efforts on those at greatest risk. Our analysis suggests that deprivation explains over half the variation in primary fire rates between fire services. This echoes recent analysis commissioned by CLG, which found that factors associated with deprivation explained almost 70 per cent of the variation in domestic fire rates between fire services (Ref. 25). National survey data have consistently highlighted deprivation as increasing the risk of experiencing a domestic fire (Ref. 26).

**85** Successful CFS work to prevent fires can reduce risk and therefore produce efficiency savings. The CLG Select Committee report noted the virtuous circle that prevention work can deliver:

**‘If successful, prevention may lead to further efficiency savings as fewer fires would need to be attended.’ (Ref. 27)**

**86** However, additional CFS activity may yield increasingly diminishing returns, when, for example, main targets are exhausted. Fire services must continuously monitor the impact of their CFS activity to ensure it delivers value for money.

# 5 | Working in partnership

**87** Fire services can improve efficiency and effectiveness further by working more effectively in partnership, both with each other and with other agencies.

## Collaboration between fire services

**88** Effective collaboration can improve operational effectiveness and efficiency. Mutual aid is a well-established example of collaboration in the fire service. For example, neighbouring fire services will provide cover when a major incident, requiring significant resources, takes place in one fire service. All English fire services have signed up to the

current Mutual Aid Agreement. The West Midlands memorandum of understanding is a good example of such cross-border integration arrangements.

**89** However, tensions exist between the need to collaborate nationally and regionally and the need to maintain local flexibility. This manifests itself in a number of areas, including operational coordination, procurement, and governance.

### Case study 5

#### West Midlands memorandum of understanding

The five fire services in the West Midlands region have signed a memorandum of understanding, and are working towards common operational procedures and equipment within the next 18 months to improve service delivery, effectiveness and efficiency.

Using risk management techniques to take account of the areas around its borders, West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service (WMFRS) identified opportunities to increase the use of Section 16 cross-border agreements. For example, WMFRS has agreements with neighbouring Hereford and Worcester fire service that it will provide first and second response cover in Rubery, where one of the WMFRS wholetime crews can respond faster than a retained crew from Hereford and Worcester fire service.

Fire services in the region also collaborate on specialist services: Shropshire fire service provides a large animal rescue service for WMFRS, as WMFRS does not have a large enough rural area to make it worthwhile providing the service in house; while WMFRS provides fire investigation services to neighbouring fire services. All five fire services in the region share a website for documents and policies to remove duplication of effort.

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## Operational coordination

**90** The CLG Select Committee noted the inherent paradox between the need to determine the appropriate response to risk at a local level, through the integrated IRMP, and the need to consider regional and sub-regional collaboration when dealing with major emergencies. The National Framework encourages FRAs to address these issues collaboratively including through a formal requirement to:

**‘review the effectiveness of cross-border integration arrangements, with neighbouring authorities and set these out appropriately in their IRMPs. Such reviews may best be carried out jointly and RMBs provide a potential forum for this to be taken forward.’ (Ref. 8)**

**91** But governance structures need to accommodate cross-border working both within and across administrative boundaries. For example, senior officers in Gloucestershire, in the South West region, pointed out that they need to work closely with Oxfordshire, in the South East region, and Hereford and Worcester, in the West Midlands region, to provide a coordinated response to flooding.

## Procurement

**92** Many fire services also told us that their attempts to procure on a regional or sub-regional basis were hampered by the compulsion to use national Firebuy contracts. The recent review

of the original national fire service procurement strategy acknowledged the need to reform Firebuy in order to improve procurement arrangements (Ref. 27). While there is a role for national procurement, fire services should have the facility to procure collectively outside of national arrangements, if there is a good case for doing so. The procurement strategy review acknowledged that any national procurement function needs to be deployed flexibly.

**93** Collaborative procurement arrangements also need to take account of differences between fire services. For example, county fire services are often tied into county council procurement arrangements, making it difficult and potentially inefficient to enter into regional or national fire service-specific arrangements.

**94** One recent example highlights both the potential for collaborative procurement to generate savings, and some of the problems that fire services can face when attempting to procure collaboratively.

**95** A group of nine fire services across the country recently collaborated through Firebuy to set up a mutual insurance scheme. By providing insurance cover and risk management processes specifically tailored to the needs of FRAs, there was potential to reduce significantly insurance premium costs. The Fire and Rescue Authorities Mutual Limited

# Working in partnership

(FRAML) was established in September 2007 and offered immediate savings of around 15 per cent, worth £350,000 per year. The savings resulted from the fact that, as a mutual, expenses and the profit demanded were lower than those required by a commercial insurer.

- 96** However, the recent decision of *R (on the application of Risk Management Partners Ltd) v Brent London Borough Council and others* called into question the legal powers of local authorities to operate an insurance mutual under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972. Because all of FRAML's participating members are combined fire authorities, they do not benefit from the wider powers of well-being under Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000, under which a mutual might lawfully operate. For this reason FRAML decided to cease underwriting insurance from the date of the judgement.
- 97** The judgement is the subject of an appeal. In the meantime, the participating fire services have established a purchasing consortium through Firebuy, and recently placed their insurances in the commercial market for the next two years. This collective arrangement has again significantly reduced the cost of insurance for those services. The Chairman of FRAML believes this is due, in part, to the competition created by the establishment of the mutual in the first place.

## Governance

- 98** RMBs were established to improve fire service cooperation and collaboration in areas such as procurement, training, and sharing best practice. But almost all the senior officers and members we interviewed felt that the RMBs were not driving effective regional collaboration as well as they might. One fire authority member told us

**'I don't think [the RMB] produces any real results ... Absolutely you should be working with your neighbours and partners, but I think from our point of view it shouldn't just be [in the region] ... [and] I think we can do it without the formality of an RMB.'**

- 99** In 2006 the CLG Select Committee commented that:

**'RMBs... are a confusing addition to the already complex governance and structural arrangements for the fire service.'** (Ref. 28)

- 100** Much of the RMBs' efforts to date have been focused on implementing regional control centres (RCCs). Responsibility for the RCCs will transfer to local authority controlled companies over the next few years. RMBs should therefore have more time to devote to other aspects of regional collaboration.

- 101** It is therefore an appropriate time to take stock of the role and powers of RMBs. Many senior officers and members argued that effective collaboration at regional or sub-regional level could take

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place without a formal regional body. Others argued that RMBs functions on, for example, procurement, could be subsumed within existing regional bodies such as regional improvement and efficiency partnerships. The government could helpfully clarify its expectations of what RMBs could or must do. Most importantly, fire services need to consider what role RMBs can usefully perform for them. Where there is no good business case for their continuation, RMBs should be dismantled.

**102** Collaboration is often made more difficult by complex governance and service delivery arrangements. Figure 31 shows an example of the large number of different stakeholders, structures and processes involved in fire service governance in the North West region. This complexity makes it difficult to determine where responsibility and accountability lie, and where collaboration can best take place.

**103** There is further scope for collaboration to generate improvement and savings. Those most often cited by the senior officers we spoke to were procurement, training, and sharing best practice. According to annual efficiency statements, collaboration has yielded just £2 million of recurring cashable efficiency savings since 2004/05; better procurement has yielded £13 million, and savings from corporate services has yielded £11 million. This equates to just 14 per cent of the total savings; and

procurement-related savings amount to just 3 to 4 per cent of the estimated non-pay spend of the fire service. This compares with local government, where back office activities contributed 28 per cent of councils' efficiency gains (Ref. 29). If all fire services were able to generate upper quartile levels of 6 per cent savings on non-pay spend, an additional £5 million to £10 million could be saved.

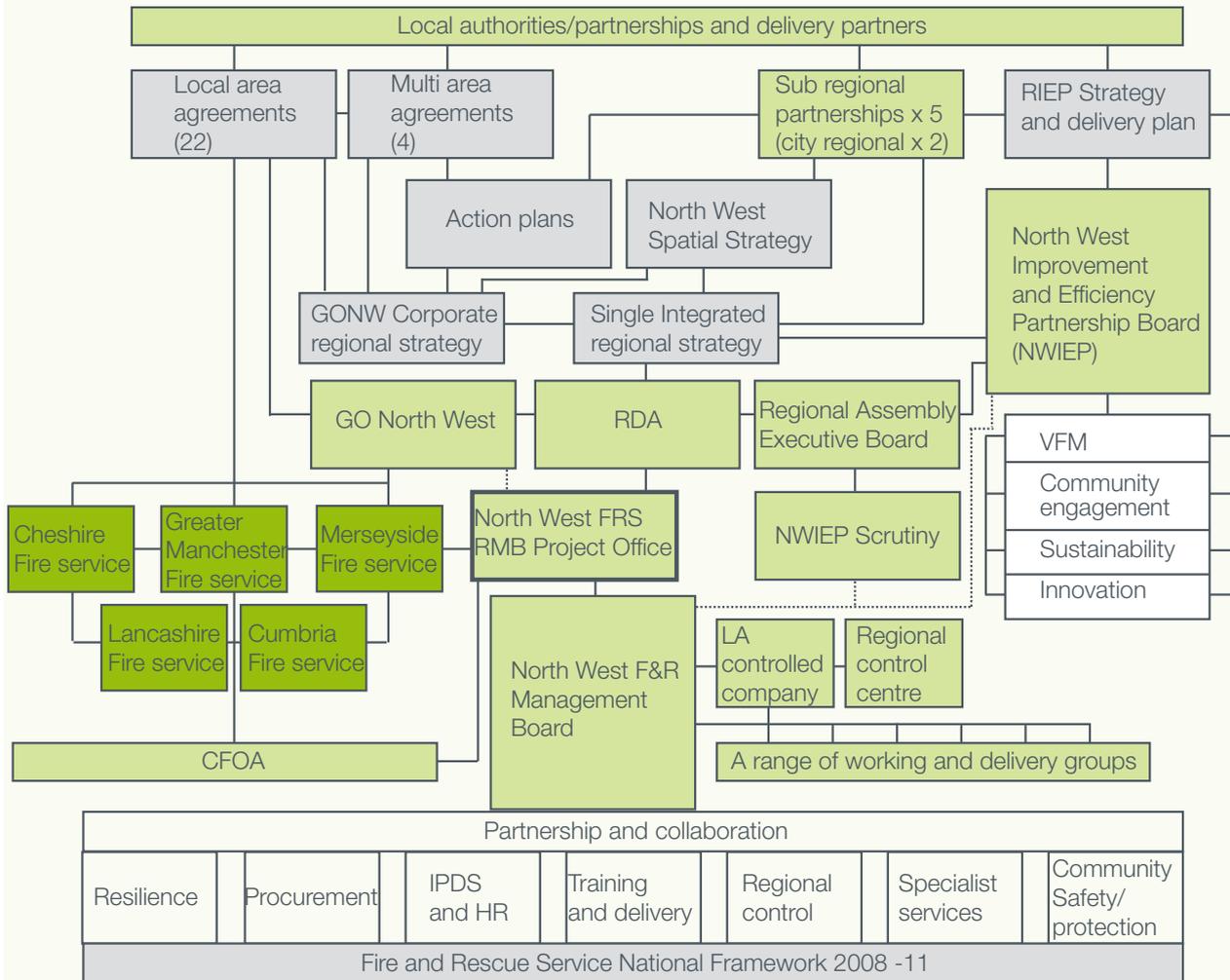
**104** One merger took place in April 2007 between Devon and Somerset fire services. The business case for the merger suggests net savings of £3.1 million over five years. This study did not examine specific cases for this or other proposed mergers, but some will clearly have a greater potential to deliver savings than others. And the scope for mergers need not be constrained by regional boundaries. Fire services in the same region can often have very little in common. Fire services should consider mergers where they make sense in operational and economic terms.

**105** Despite the difficulties inherent in collaboration, fire services should consider a range of options: from sharing of best practice through existing forums, up to, and including, formal mergers (Figure 32). There are examples of good partnership working between fire services. But they tend to be isolated and ad hoc. At the moment working in collaboration is not systematic within the fire service.

# Working in partnership

**Figure 31**

**Many stakeholders are involved in governance and delivery arrangements for fire services**



- Fire services
- Documents
- Bodies/partnerships/groups
- Processes/issues

Source: Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service

**Figure 32**

**Fire services should consider a range of options when considering collaboration**



Source: Audit Commission

## Collaboration with other agencies

**106** Fire services' can-do attitude and commitment to partnership working is rightly praised by partners. We found many examples of joined-up working that were benefiting fire services, their partners, and the public (Box 3).

**107** A 2008 Audit Commission report has highlighted the benefits of fire services' community activities. *Don't Stop Me Now* discussed Nottinghamshire's First Contact scheme for elderly people (Ref. 30). If a staff member from any of the partner agencies, such as a firefighter, police officer, or volunteer, goes into a home they will complete a checklist to find out if the older person has any other particular needs. As well as fire safety, this checklist includes a range of other aspects including security, repairs, mobility adaptations and energy saving improvements.

# Working in partnership

## Box 3

### Benefits of partnership working

#### Reducing harm

**Cheshire** Fire and Rescue Service (CFRS) has worked closely with other local agencies to target preventative activities. The Fire and Flu initiative involves joint work with PCTs to set up one-stop shops where people over 65 are invited to attend for flu jabs from nurses, and while waiting are given fire safety advice. Three outreach fire stations are used in this work and can provide a centre for the nurses to deliver the flu jabs in local areas that have no other suitable facilities.

In a joint initiative with Age Concern, home visits to the over 55s may be carried out by firefighters, by advocates, or by volunteers. Each visit uses a standard form that incorporates additional checks on physical and mental wellbeing. Residents with other needs can then be referred to other agencies as necessary. Benefits take up has increased by £2 million in Cheshire. As well as the direct benefit to the residents, there are also indirect benefits to the fire services in terms of fire safety – with their additional income, residents are more likely to heat their homes safely.

As part of this and other joint working, CFRS is now involved in an effective information-sharing protocol with other local agencies. This can enable targeted fire safety advice to be delivered when a priority need is identified by another agency. For example, the police provide information on households experiencing domestic violence, or who have received threats of arson attacks. Fire service staff visit, offer advice on prevention and escape routes, and, if necessary, fit smoke alarms and specialised fire-resistant letterboxes. In one case, such targeted advice given to a domestic violence victim led to a mother and child escaping unharmed from an arson attack only a few days later.

**London** Fire Brigade established its Local Intervention Fire Education (LIFE) project in 2002, initially in response to an increasing number of attacks on firefighters. It is an intensive five day course in which young people at risk of offending learn fire fighting skills alongside real fire-fighters. During the course, young people are given personal responsibility for managing their part of the fire station, fire engines and firefighting equipment, including their own personal protective equipment. During workshops they discuss issues such as fire safety, first aid and the consequences of making hoax calls and starting fires deliberately. The course is also designed to raise self-esteem, and improve team-working and communication skills.

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There are now nine teams across London taking referrals from most of London's boroughs. LIFE has engaged over 3,000 young people to date. Evaluation shows the project has had significant success, with reductions in:

- self-reported offending among participants;
- attacks on fire-fighters; and
- deliberate fire setting behaviour in the boroughs where the programme is operating.

The scheme produces an estimated cost saving of £1.85 for every £1 spent. It is now run by a further six fire services in the UK and as far afield as New Zealand.

In **Lincolnshire**, co-responding is working successfully at 21 of 38 stations, where firefighters have volunteered to participate. In conjunction with East Midlands Ambulance Service and Lincolnshire Integrated Voluntary Emergency Services, specially trained firefighters (usually retained) respond to selected 999 calls in their area, providing a vital first response in advance of an ambulance arriving. The scheme aims to provide emergency response to cardiac and respiratory arrest and similar life-threatening emergencies within 8 minutes of a call. During 2007/08, Lincolnshire fire service attended over 2,200 co-responder incidents, with an average attendance time of fewer than eight minutes. This helped improve survival rates following cardiac arrest by an estimated 35 per cent. The 13 stations with the most co-responder calls have been provided with cars containing dedicated medical equipment.

**South Yorkshire** Fire and Rescue Service (SYFRS) has piloted a national initiative to help the school children of the area learn about managing risk in their everyday lives. Partnership working with a number of organisations, including police and other fire services, local authorities, Network Rail and local football clubs, has been vital to this programme.

The programme includes separately targeted programmes for primary and secondary aged children, with the emphasis on personal safety (including issues such as fire in the home, internet dangers, domestic violence, road safety and so on) and accident prevention. The style of presentation is varied to suit the age group, with cartoon characters for the 7 to 11s, and a grittier soap-opera including a film of a staged road accident for teenagers.

SYFRS is one of the national lead partners, and has made the resources available to every 7 to 11 year old child within South Yorkshire. To date, 324 primary schools (88 per cent) have received training with the Miss Dorothy resources. Over 36,000 books were distributed in the 2007/08 academic year. Fourteen other fire services have visited SYFRS to see how the Miss

# Working in partnership

Dorothy resources have been integrated into existing school curricula and how the programme compliments SYFRS's existing comprehensive educational policy. Home Office and Cabinet Office evaluations have shown positive results. The programme is being rolled out across the country via a Kids Taskforce.

## Building capacity

The emergency Tri-Services centre in **Gloucestershire** was conceived in 1999 by the three Gloucestershire emergency services. It received £2.6 million in government funding under Invest to Save. When it was officially opened in May 2003, as one of three tri-service pilots nationally, it housed call centres for fire, police and ambulance emergency calls in one location. Headquarters staff also relocated to the site on the outskirts of Gloucester, close to the M5. By 2005 there were 200 police, 80 ambulance and 140 fire service staff working at the centre, of which around 20 were fire control room staff.

Our post-implementation report on the centre in 2005 commented favourably on the benefits of joint working. Although the control rooms were physically separated within the building, there were still felt to be key benefits in handling emergency calls, and further integration was a longer-term aim. Other benefits included the facility to share vehicle maintenance services, and easier joint working on community safety activities or procurement. The project was evaluated positively as a model of good practice in joint services working.

Well over half of **Greater Manchester** Fire and Rescue Service's (GMFRS's) HFSCs are delivered by partner agencies. This frees up firefighter time to undertake other community safety activity and training. In the Salford area, GMFRS estimates firefighters could deliver just 4,500 HFSCs a year; with partner agencies it is aiming to deliver 33,700 in 2008/09.

## Engaging with the community

As part of the relocation of the **West Midlands** Fire and Rescue Service headquarters, a new community safety education complex known as Safeside has recently opened. The purpose-built facility includes 16 life-size scenarios in which visitors can experience emergency situations and learn how to deal with them and how to prevent them occurring in their own lives. Volunteer guides take small groups around ten scenarios during a 2-3 hour visit, each with its own key safety messages. Initially open to daytime primary school visits, the centre will be fully open to other groups (such as vulnerable adults, the elderly, youth groups and so on) in 2009.

This is one sizeable example of multi-functional community safety centres that many fire services have developed, representing the trend away from the traditional fire station.

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- 108** Some senior officers expressed concern about their ability to influence partnership agendas. The two most frequently cited reasons for this lack of influence were the relatively small amount of funding that fire services brought to the partnership, and the fact that most fire services serve a number of local strategic partnerships (LSPs). For example, Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service serves ten LSPs. It recently adopted a borough command structure that is aligned to the local authority areas it serves. As a result, each LSP now has a unique single point of contact, which officers feel has improved relationships between the fire service and the LSPs.
- 109** LSPs have chosen targets for their area through the LAA process. Two of the indicators to choose from focused on fire: arson reduction (NI33), chosen by 16 LSPs as a target (and by 11 as a local target); and primary fire reduction (NI49) chosen by 13 LSPs (and by 6 as a local target).<sup>1</sup> Clearly the inclusion of these indicators as an LAA target will depend on local priorities. But it is interesting to note that the number of fires does not seem to be the rationale for inclusion of these indicators as targets. Figure 33 shows that just two areas in the worst performing quartile for primary fires have chosen to include the primary fire target; while four areas in the best performing quartile have also chosen it.
- 110** Regardless of whether fire-specific targets are included in a LAA, fire services will have a significant role to play in achieving other targets, such as reducing anti-social behaviour and road traffic accidents.
- 111** Many firefighters and some senior officers that we spoke to were concerned that fire services were putting far more into partnerships than they were getting in return. The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has also expressed concern that fire services are taking on broader partnership activity at the expense of response capabilities. But all fire services that we spoke to said that their commitment to partnership working would not lead them to take on activity that had no benefit to the fire services themselves. The wide range of broader community work underway in fire services demonstrates that spare capacity is being utilised. We have seen no evidence that the degree of broader community work is diminishing response capabilities – rather it uses the spare capacity available.

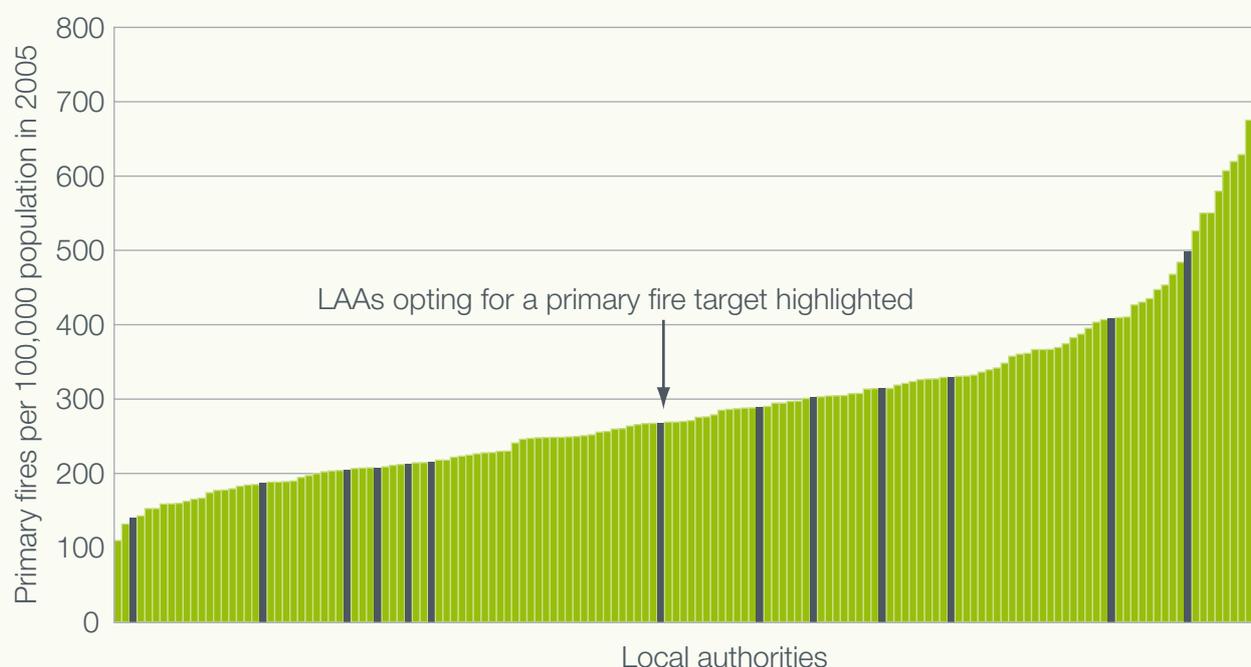
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<sup>1</sup> Source: IDeA LAA tracker.

# Working in partnership

**Figure 33**

**The number of primary fires does not seem to be the rationale for inclusion in LAA targets**



Source: CLG

**112** However, fire services could improve the strategic planning and performance management of their partnership working. This will ensure they are involved in the right partnerships at the right time, and that they deliver maximum benefit for the resources devoted to those partnerships. In most of the fire services we visited there was no clear sense about why fire services were involved in all the partnerships they were; many seemed to be the result of historical legacy or personal endeavour on the part of individuals.

**113** The 2007 performance assessment highlighted weak performance management of partnership arrangements as an issue. This study found that it remains an issue. Three fire services we visited were involved in over 200 partnership initiatives. Initiatives include awareness raising; HFSCs; youth diversion schemes; road safety schemes; arson reduction; and community cohesion projects. These are all legitimate activities for fire services to be involved in. But none had systematically identified the costs and

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benefits of their involvement to determine when resources should be prioritised. All fire services need to prove the value of their activities, particularly at a time where resources are limited. Our report on anti-social behaviour will provide an example of the robust evaluation of community safety activity required by London Fire Brigade for their LIFE project.<sup>1</sup>

**114** Fire services that wish to continue to expand their role in the community, under the auspices of LAAs, will need to work ever more closely in partnership with other local agencies. They will need to:

- decide the extent to which they wish to engage in broader community work;
- engage and influence partners;
- prioritise their community work effectively; and
- if appropriate, divert efficiencies identified elsewhere in the report into their community work.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to be published early in 2009.

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# 6 | Managing people

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## Equality and diversity

**115** As fire services consider building up their CFS work and taking on an increasingly broad role in the community, there is an operational need for them to reflect the community they serve. Many of the examples of good partnership working cited in Chapter 5 highlight the role of the fire service in engaging effectively with those most at risk in their different communities. Clearly, a diverse staff will help with that role. At the same time, there is no evidence to suggest that increasing the diversity of firefighters has a negative impact on response capabilities. There is a clear moral case too.

**116** All stakeholders show a commitment to improving equality and diversity in the fire service. For example, the FBU has a clear statement on the right of every worker to be treated with respect in the workplace, and has policies and structures in place to ensure that concerns are addressed (Ref. 31).

**117** In 2002, the Bain review acknowledged that fire services needed to improve workforce diversity in order to fulfil their CFS remit. However, it also noted that:

**‘Despite clear policies from management and the FBU in favour of diversity, in practice only lip service is paid to it.’**  
(Ref. 2)

**118** Some progress has been made since then. Previous research commissioned by CLG set out a series of examples of good practice in tackling bullying and harassment; promoting respect for religious customs and beliefs; and recruiting female, minority ethnic and disabled staff (Ref. 32). The recent fire service Equality and Diversity Awards also highlighted innovative practice in improving the diversity of the workforce (Ref. 33). The Audit Commission study on workforce issues, *Tomorrow’s People*, highlighted the good work done by the London Fire Brigade to improve recruitment of female and minority ethnic firefighters (Ref. 34).<sup>1</sup>

**119** But, despite these pockets of good practice, the positive attitude of those responsible for promoting equality whom we spoke to for this study, and the clear commitment to equality and diversity shown by CLG, the Local Government Association, the Chief Fire Officer’s Association (CFOA) and the unions, progress remains slow. The FBU has stated that:

**‘There is still some way to go before we achieve a fire service whose composition reflects that of the communities we serve.’**  
(Ref. 31)

**120** Our 2007 performance assessment found no fire service consistently demonstrating good practice in its approach to equality and diversity. We stated:

<sup>1</sup> Details of the case study can be found on the Audit Commission website at: [http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/workforce/cs\\_FireLondon.asp](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/workforce/cs_FireLondon.asp)

**Figure 34**

**The fire service has made limited progress on improving diversity, and remains behind the police**



<sup>1</sup> Figures taken at March; staff measured as FTE  
Source: CLG, Home Office

‘While awareness of equality and diversity is improving in all fire services, the lack of a diverse workforce remains a major issue, because it significantly reduces the service’s ability to reach and educate communities about the risks from fire. It also reduces the accessibility of the service to minority communities.’ (Ref. 20)

**121** Even though the proportions of female staff and staff from minority ethnic communities are increasing, fire services still do not reflect the communities they serve. In 2008 just 3 per cent of all fire service staff were from minority ethnic communities. In the police 5 per cent of all staff were from minority ethnic communities. Females made up just 14 per cent of all fire service staff and 3 per cent of firefighters. In the police 37 per cent of all staff and 24 per cent of officers were female.

# Managing people

**Figure 35**

**In all but one fire service, minority ethnic groups are under-represented among operational staff compared to the local minority ethnic population**



<sup>1</sup> Figures taken at March; operational staff measured as headcount.

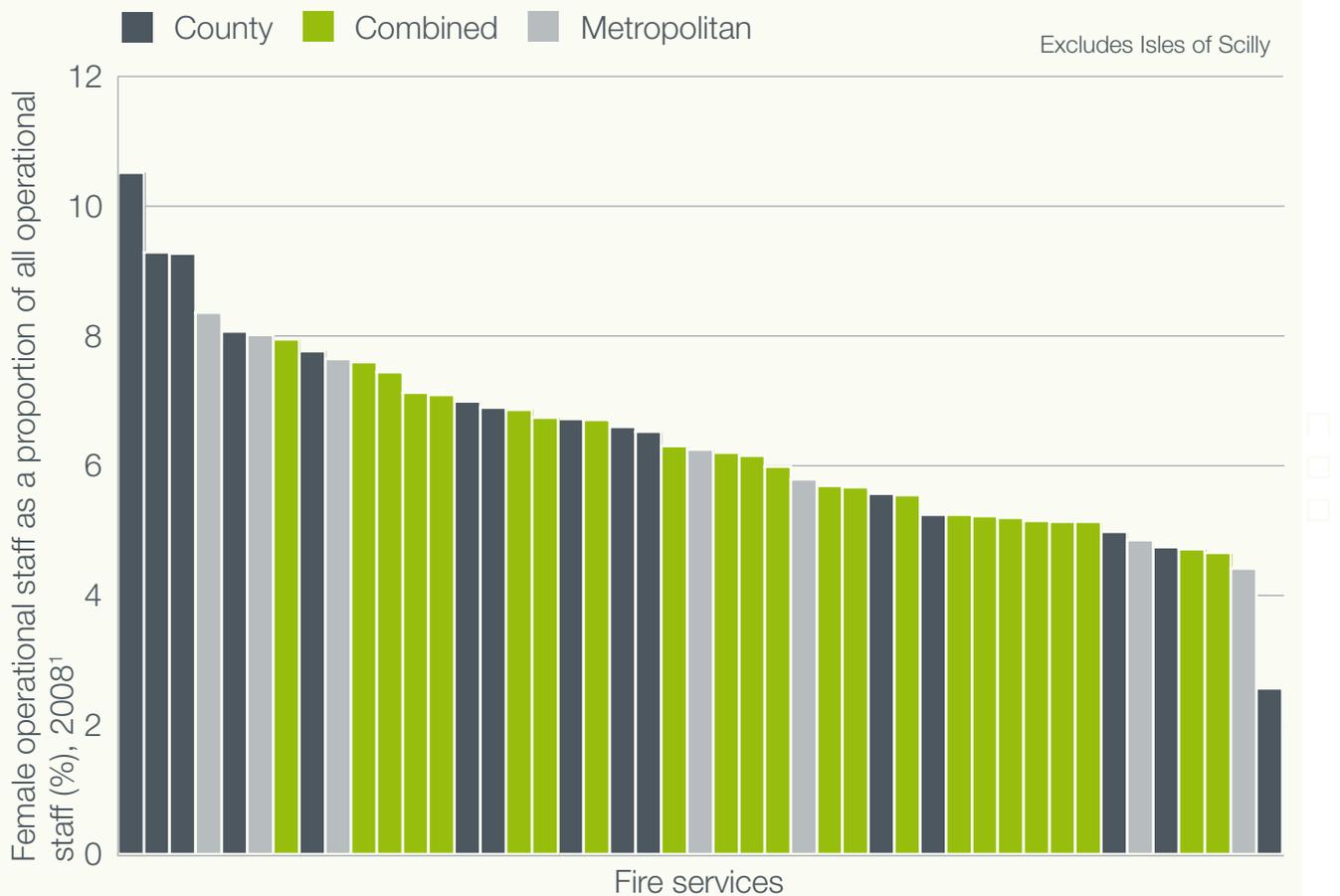
Source: CLG

**122** Recruitment is the only lever for increasing the diversity of the workforce. In 2007/08, 10 per cent of recruits to wholetime firefighter posts and 9 per cent of recruits to RDS firefighter posts were female; while 6 per cent of recruits to wholetime posts and just 1 per cent of recruits to RDS posts were from minority ethnic communities. Even if these

recruitment rates were to improve substantially, recruitment can only work slowly to improve diversity because of the low level of staff turnover in the fire service. In 2007/08, turnover across the fire service was less than 7 per cent. This is half the median level of annual employee turnover in English councils in 2005/06 (14 per cent) (Ref. 34).

**Figure 36**

**In all but one fire service, less than 10 per cent of operational staff are female**



# Managing people

**124** The current equality and diversity strategy for the fire service has set recruitment targets in an attempt to drive up the diversity of the workforce. While the shift in focus away from the number of staff to levels of recruitment was welcomed, many of those we spoke to who were responsible for improving equality and diversity in their fire services suggested that the targets were unhelpful as an improvement mechanism. They regarded it as an issue of culture that needed to be dealt with rather than a matter of numbers.

**125** Those responsible for equality and diversity strategies in fire services also suggested that changes to recruitment procedures were often seen by existing firefighters as a means to lower standards and make it easier for minority ethnic groups and women to enter the service. This makes it more difficult for those responsible for driving change to get buy-in to changes, and places new female or minority ethnic recruits in a difficult position with existing staff.

**126** Equality and diversity leads also felt that the targets distracted attention away from more fundamental issues, such as ensuring that recruitment processes are fair, and that operating systems, kit and stations were suitable for all. According to the recent firefighter survey for CLG, female firefighters responding said that

only half of all stations had separate changing facilities for women. Efforts have been made to design personal protective equipment for females, but the survey found that only 45 per cent felt that personal protective equipment being used by females had been designed to be suitable for females (Ref. 35). Estates and premises strategies must take account of such equality and diversity requirements.

**127** In 2007/08, 12 fire services had met Level 3 or above of the equality standard for local government, including one (London) at level 5.<sup>I</sup> This is up from eight in 2006/07. Around two-thirds were at Level 2. Twenty-six per cent of councils were at Level 3 or above, and 47 per cent were at Level 2 in 2006/07.

**128** Senior management currently reflects the operational workforce: as at March 2008, only 8 per cent of the top 5 per cent of earners in the fire service were female; and only 2 per cent were from the minority ethnic population. Two thirds of the top-earning minority ethnic firefighters are in just one fire service – London. There is only one female CFO and no minority ethnic CFOs.<sup>II</sup> Improving diversity at senior levels will go some way in helping to drive change throughout the fire service. But it will take time – most, but not all, senior officers are career firefighters.

<sup>I</sup> The Equality Standard for Local Government was developed to enable local authorities to mainstream age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation into council policy and practice at all levels. Councils report what level of the standard they have reached from five levels. Level 5 is the highest.

<sup>II</sup> Permanently appointed.

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**129** One major barrier to improving equality and diversity appears to be cultural attitudes. A large proportion of respondents in a recent firefighter survey stated they had witnessed a variety of unacceptable behaviour in the previous 12 months, including:

- verbal (58 per cent) and physical (11 per cent) assault
- bullying and harassment (51 per cent); and
- age (23 per cent), gender (21 per cent) or race (13 per cent) discrimination. (Ref. 35)

**130** Over half reported experiencing unacceptable behaviour; while a third reported being bullied or harassed. In most cases, women and other under-represented groups were more likely to witness or experience these behaviours. Different survey questions and techniques make it hard to compare fairly with other organisations. But, in a 2006 survey 22 per cent of public sector employees reported that they had experienced some form of bullying or harassment in the previous two years (Ref. 36).

**131** Cultural change in any organisation is inevitably a slow process, particularly in organisations with a relatively low staff turnover. To date, efforts to improve equality and diversity have concentrated on attracting a new set of more diverse recruits. The risk is that these efforts might be undermined unless further attempts are made to tackle attitudes to diversity and inappropriate behaviour.

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## Sickness absence

**132** In 2007/08, fire services lost an average of 7.7 shifts/days per wholetime firefighter to sickness. This equates to approximately 5 per cent of working time. This is down from 9.7 shifts in 2001/02 and compares with the current local government average of 11 days (approximately 4 per cent of working time) lost to sickness per year. In the police, data are collected in hours per officer, as police officers and staff do not work a conventional day and are employed on differing shift patterns. In 2006/07 the average number of hours lost to sickness was 69.7 hours for police officers (or 3.9 per cent of time) and 74.8 hours for police staff (or 4.6 per cent) (Ref. 37). The fire service may want to consider whether collecting data on the proportion of working hours lost would provide a better way of comparing across different fire services.

**133** If all fire services with wholetime firefighter sickness absence levels above the lower quartile figure of 6.5 shifts/days reduced absences to that level, there would be over 41,500 fewer sick days/shifts (equivalent to approximately 300 wholetime firefighter posts). A cost saving of over £10 million could be made.

**134** The average sickness absence level among non-uniformed staff in 2007/08 was ten days. It is interesting to note that this level of sickness absence is higher than that for uniformed staff. If fire services with non-uniformed sickness absence levels above the

# Managing people

**Figure 37**

**There is scope for many fire services to reduce sickness absence further**



<sup>1</sup> Figures taken at March; wholetime firefighters measured as FTE  
Source: CLG

lower quartile figure of 8.8 shifts/days reduced absences to that level, another 13,000 shifts/days would be saved. This equates to an estimated, additional cost saving of almost £1.5 million.

**135** Many of the fire services we visited reported that improving the analysis of management information was the key to managing sickness absence more effectively. They were also moving away from regarding absence management

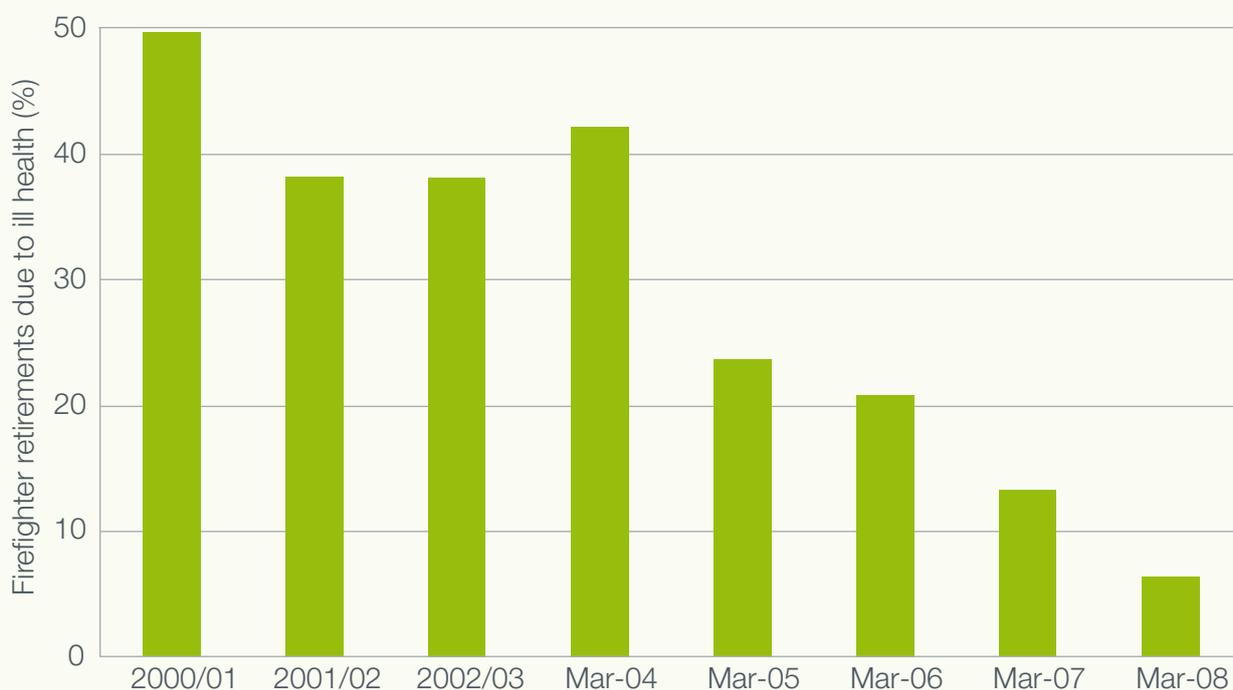
as a disciplinary procedure. A more enabling approach was helping to reduce absence levels.

**136** These findings are echoed in a recent report by the Health and Safety Executive on managing sickness absence in the fire service (Ref.38). It found that the main factors for successful attendance management were:

- effective use of performance management information;

**Figure 38**

**The proportion of retirements due to ill health has fallen significantly**



Source: CLG

- strategic prioritisation of attendance management; and
- devolution of responsibility for attendance management to supervisory levels.

2005, shown in Figure 38, was related to changes to the pension scheme in 2004. Annual efficiency statement returns suggest reductions in ill health retirements have enabled fire services to save over £20 million in total.

**137** Significant progress has been made in reducing retirements due to ill health. Sixty-five firefighters retired due to ill health in 2007/08, compared to 633 in 2000/01, when half of all firefighter retirements were due to ill health; by 2007/08 that had fallen to just 6 per cent. The large drop from 2004 to

**138** We have treated national terms and conditions of service as out of scope for this study.

# 7 Meeting future challenges

**139** Many of the issues and areas for improvement identified in this report have been highlighted in various reviews of the fire service since 1970 (Figure 39).

**140** The context within which the fire service operates, and its roles and responsibilities, have changed significantly since the Holroyd Review in 1970. Fire services have made changes to the way they operate. But adaptation is a continual process. Some fire services have adapted, and continue to adapt, more quickly than others. Further changes will be required to ensure that fire services can meet future challenges within increasingly tight financial constraints.

**141** Some fire services have taken up the modernisation challenge; they have made significant changes to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their service. However, few have taken up the challenge as strongly as they might. The relatively limited progress made in some areas was variously attributed by those we interviewed in fire services to union resistance, limited political will and the lack of a financial imperative.

**142** That financial imperative is now there. Fire services are facing a period of potentially real-terms decreases in funding; at the same time they are being asked to make further efficiency gains.

**Figure 39**

**Many reviews of the fire service have drawn similar conclusions**

Common recommendations	Holroyd review (1970)	Home Office (1980)	Audit Commission (1986)	Audit Commission (1995)	Bain review (2002)	Audit Commission (2008)
More emphasis on prevention	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Better use of duty system	✓			✓	✓	✓
Exploit economies of scale	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Review conditions of service			✓	✓	✓	
Review standards of fire cover		✓		✓	✓	✓
Improve equality and diversity					✓	✓

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**143** The fire services' responsibility for dealing with natural and human disasters means that they have to have the capacity to respond to unfamiliar threats. For example, reports considering the flooding of 2007 by Sir Michael Pitt and Sir Ken Knight (the government's CFRA) identify significant challenges for government, services and particularly the fire service, during such events. Those who have improved efficiency retain the capability to respond to threats, as they do to the more traditional demands on them.

**144** Change has not been, and will not be, easy. The examples cited in this report have often been implemented by fire service staff, FRA members and CFOs, sometimes at significant personal cost in the face of public, political, staff and staff representative opposition. The common factor in making changes is strong leadership by FRA members and CFOs in taking difficult decisions and engaging with communities to explain those decisions.

**145** Implementing change, particularly in those fire services that have most progress to make, requires strong management. It also requires a supportive infrastructure. This has implications for all those responsible for fire service delivery.

### **Central government**

**146** The move from national to local determination of risk and response has been welcomed by all fire services.

Senior officers we spoke to welcomed the lack of detailed prescription in the national framework, as it allows individual fire services to tailor services according to local circumstance. However, many of them also expressed concern over the level of coordination and guidance from central government on issues that are best dealt with on a national basis. Some saw a lack of clarity about relative roles and responsibilities. They also spoke of difficulties reconciling local activities with national programmes. They also felt that CLG could provide a stronger sense of direction for the fire services.

**147** Many CFOs also expressed concern over a lack of central coordination of operational guidance since the demise of Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate. Some fire services have attempted to fill this vacuum by developing or updating operating procedures at a local or regional level. It is understandable that individual fire services feel the need to fill the vacuum. But it is inefficient for the fire service as a whole. One fire service has already spent £280,000 on preparing its own risk manuals, and suspected that there were other fire services duplicating effort. It is also potentially a problem for inter-operability, if different fire services adopt different operating procedures. The work of the Office of the CFRA, appointed in 2007, includes the commissioning, quality assurance and publication of operational guidance. As this implies, while operational guidance need not be produced centrally its production should at least

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# Meeting future challenges

be coordinated centrally to reduce inefficiency and ensure consistency. Both CFOA and the FBU have supported the need for clarity. The CFRA has made proposals for developing operational guidance, which stakeholders have endorsed. These proposals now need to be implemented. CLG tell us that this programme of work is progressing well.

**148** Some senior officers thought CLG should play a stronger role as an advocate for the fire service. As statutory partners to LAAs, fire services have a significant contribution to make to outcomes for the area, as noted in Chapter 5. However, some questioned whether CLG was effectively selling to other local bodies and government departments the positive contribution that fire services can make to a broad range of community activity.

**149** Many senior officers also called for more support for those fire services delivering modernisation and more encouragement for those with furthest to travel.

**150** While greater central coordination would be welcomed in the areas outlined above, all fire services warned of the need to get the balance right between national and local determination. In some areas, such as procurement, we were told by the majority of people we discussed procurement with that local and regional efforts to collaborate were being hindered by the requirement to sign up to national programmes, such as Firebuy, that did not necessarily suit the circumstances of individual fire services.

## Fire services

**151** This report has highlighted the difficulties associated with significant change. Public and political opposition presents a challenge to FRA members while union and staff opposition to changes that affect their interests presents a challenge to senior management within fire and rescue services.

**152** Many FRA members spoke of the major political barriers they had to overcome when faced with tough decisions affecting pump or station levels, or firefighter levels and deployment. Members need the right information to justify those decisions, and to engage with the community to explain decisions. And they need to support one another once those decisions have been made.

**153** CFOs underlined the importance of FRA members, once the decision is made, providing effective political leadership and working alongside CFOs and their teams to secure implementation.

**154** Many firefighters we spoke to were positive about the changes that were taking place. However, we found some firefighters' views on various aspects of modernisation, such as the level of involvement in CFS work, were often not aligned with managers' views in the same fire service. While these concerns were by no means universal, getting staff to buy-in to change remains one of the biggest challenges for senior management within fire services. Senior

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managers may benefit from additional training and peer support to deal with this challenge.

- 155** Improvements in performance management will also help those senior managers to understand and deal with these challenges.

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### Case study 6

Having achieved an 'excellent' rating in the 2005 CPA, **Kent** Fire and Rescue Service (KFRS) was exempted from the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery in 2006/07. The fire service instead adopted a peer review process for its own model of operational assurance that was based on the key lines of enquiry in the national toolkit. It undertook a self-assessment to explore ten specific areas, including a common theme of audit and review. To achieve external scrutiny, the self-assessment was peer reviewed by a team which included representatives from an external consultancy, a local authority and another fire service. Areas identified in need of improvement were incorporated into an action plan.

Learning from the success of this operational self-assessment and peer review and recognising the growing importance of organisations undertaking their own reviews, KFRS has agreed a three-year programme of peer-reviewed performance assessments across the service.

Using knowledge shared by the Kent Police on their operational review process, and taking a risk-based approach, the fire service created a flexible performance management model to identify areas for improvement and a pilot review was carried out on its North Division. The outcomes of this process fed into the KFRS business plan; a key outcome was identifying a number of examples of good practice to share across the service.

Reflections on the process revealed that clearer guidance and training for the self-assessment team was required. Those involved in the review also felt that a narrative approach would improve the value of future reviews. A number of benefits of this approach were identified. They included: the fire service taking responsibility for performance reviews, allowing greater flexibility over their application; emphasising a process of continuous improvement; creating staff self-awareness and buy-in to fostering improvement; and building internal capacity to evaluate performance and identify good practice.

# Meeting future challenges

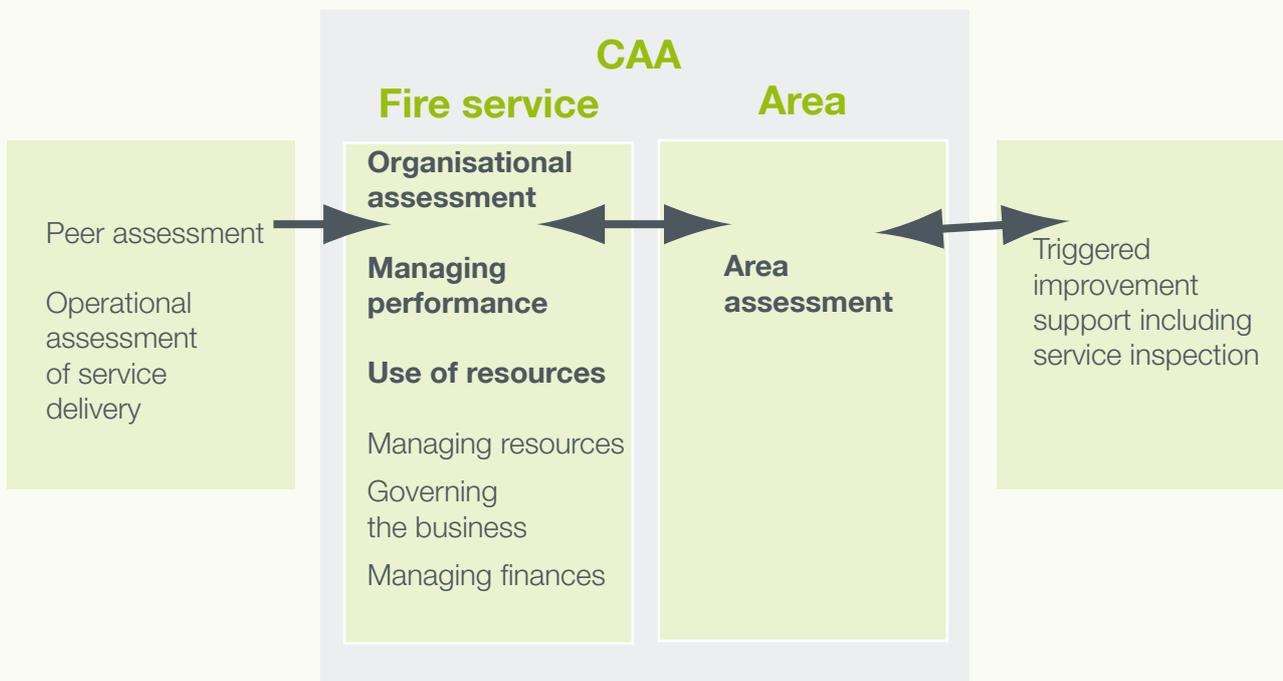
## Comprehensive Area Assessment

**156** From April 2009 CAA will provide a joint assessment of outcomes for people in an area and a forward look at prospects for sustainable improvement. The findings from this study are advising the development of the CAA assessment methodology. We are reviewing the outcome of the consultation on CAA published in July 2008 and the final model will be published in February 2009.

**157** For fire services, all audit and inspection activity will be undertaken within the context of the CAA framework. CAA will have two main elements:

- an area assessment; and
- an organisational assessment (Figure 40).

**Figure 40**  
**Proposed model for fire assessment**



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**158** The area assessment will focus on the outcomes and the prospects for future improvement in an area and the contribution of partners. We will be interested in the contribution that the fire and rescue service is making to the partnership and how that is translating into improved local service outcomes. This will include:

- engaging effectively with local communities to build up a comprehensive risk profile for the area;
- involving local communities in developing fire prevention and protection priorities;
- engaging effectively with partners that are engaged in civil contingency and local resilience;
- delivering any fire-specific priorities within the LAA; and
- contributing to broader local priorities, like tackling anti-social behaviour.

**159** The organisational assessment, which has evolved from the CPA framework, will reflect how well the service is delivering against the National Framework. The organisational assessment will comprise:

- a use of resources theme assessing how well the service delivers value for money in terms of managing finances, governing the business and managing resources; and

- a managing performance theme assessing how well the fire and rescue service is delivering its local services, outcomes and improvements, and whether the organisation has the leadership, capacity and capability to deliver in the future.

**160** The use of resources assessment will consider: longer term financial planning and forecasting; engaging communities and stakeholders in financial planning; data quality; managing risks in partnerships; and ensuring stronger ethical governance. In undertaking the managing performance assessment, we will draw on a range of evidence, including the new peer assessment of operational service delivery being led by the CFRA's team in partnership with the CFOA.

**161** In reporting the organisational assessment we will consider value for money and efficiency. We will also report on whether the organisation has the leadership, capacity and capability it needs to deliver future improvements.

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# 8 Conclusion

**162** The fire service in England has seen rapid and dramatic changes to the risks it manages and its roles and responsibilities in the last decade. As well as responding to incidents, which have declined, resources are increasingly being devoted to CFS and broader community work and to dealing with major civil emergencies.

**163** Fire services received real funding increases over the last decade. Much of the additional funding was used to fund the pay deal introduced as part of the modernisation programme. But fire services will receive more limited increases in funding in the next few years; and the ability of precepting authorities to raise additional funding through council tax will also be severely restricted in the current economic climate. In real terms, funding is likely to fall. At the same time, the fire service has been challenged to find a further £110 million annual efficiency savings; the equivalent of 5 per cent of its 2007/08 expenditure.

**164** If they are to live within those financial limits, fire services that have made least progress will need to follow the example of those that have made significant changes to the level and deployment of their assets, and saved money without comprising capability. Those fire services have faced opposition from staff representatives and sometimes the public, but have shown real leadership in overcoming them. If all fire services adopted their practices, the service overall could save up to £200 million.

Those savings could reduce the overall cost of the service; or they could be reinvested in community safety projects that are proven to be cost-effective.

**165** Much of that £200 million will come from closing the gap between the availability of resources and the times and places when those resources can be put to best use. Not all the changes that pioneering fire services have made are feasible in all local contexts. But opportunities to improve efficiency are available to all fire services. And even if the precise solutions have to be adapted to local circumstances, the principles remain valid. Those services with greater flexibility in their crewing arrangements and shift patterns will find it easier to adjust to tougher financial circumstances without threatening standards of cover.

**166** Overall fire service performance has been good. It is on track to meet its PSA targets on reducing deaths in accidental fires in the home and deliberate fires. In 2007, 80 per cent of fire services were performing well and 60 per cent were improving strongly. But there is considerable variation in outcomes between fire services, and more needs to be done to determine what drives those outcomes. CFS work appears to be having a positive impact. More resources could usefully be devoted to it. But they must be devoted to those activities having a demonstrably positive effect.

**167** Fire services can also become more efficient and more effective by building

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on existing collaboration with one another and with other local agencies. There are good examples of fire services working together. But such collaboration is not systematic within the fire service, and national and regional initiatives have not encouraged it. RMBs in particular need to be refocused or abolished. And while fire services are rightly praised for their can-do attitude as partners, few plan or assess the value of their community activity well. They need to establish what their objectives in playing a broader community role should be and evaluate their activities against them.

**168** As fire services build on their CFS work and take on a broader role in the community, they need to reflect the communities they serve. The fire service has asserted its commitment to improving the diversity of its workforce. While there are examples of good practice, notably in recruiting women and people from minority ethnic groups, progress remains slow and will remain so until some cultural attitudes and behaviours still prevalent within the fire service are tackled.

**169** Most of the findings in this report echo those of previous reviews of the fire service. Progress on many aspects of the modernisation agenda remains patchy. Some fire services have taken significant steps towards both modernisation and efficiency. Others have taken fewer and smaller steps. The latter will need to follow the lead, and display the leadership, shown by their pioneering colleagues if the fire service is

to continue to improve performance and live within financial limits.

**170** Implementing change requires strong management, but also a supportive infrastructure. Central government, in its leadership role for the fire service, should ensure there is clarity about relative roles and responsibilities and ensure that the proposals for developing operational guidance are implemented. It should promote to other public services the value fire services can add to broader community outcomes. And it should actively publicise those fire services delivering all elements of modernisation, including efficiency, and encourage those with furthest to travel.

**171** The Audit Commission will:

- continue to challenge fire services to deliver value for money as part of the new use of resources assessment;
- ensure that CAA assess fire services' performance across their expanding portfolios of activity; and
- provide a tool to allow fire services to interrogate the data used in this report and compare themselves with their peers.

**172** We welcome your feedback. If you have any comments on this report, are intending to implement any of the recommendations, or are planning to replicate any of the case studies, please do get in touch: please email [nationalstudies@audit-commission.gov.uk](mailto:nationalstudies@audit-commission.gov.uk)

# Appendix A

## Cumulative efficiency savings available

Example	If replicated across	Potential savings nationally	Notes
Reducing number of wholetime firefighters required to cover shifts	All metropolitan fire services Non-metropolitan fire services	£50-75 million £15-20 million	
LLAR (day crewing quieter one-pump wholetime stations)	All fire services	£50-55 million	Requires recruiting more firefighters in the RDS. Assumed could also be applied to quieter two-pump wholetime stations in county and combined fire services.
Taking pumps off the run at night from least busy two-pump wholetime stations	All metropolitan fire services	£10-15 million	Only applicable in metropolitan areas where cover can more easily be provided from other nearby stations.
Replacing second pumps with targeted response vehicles in two-pump day crewed stations	All fire services	£5-6 million over 10 years	Savings only achievable if TRVs replace, rather than add to, pumps.
Reducing false alarms	All fire services	£12-15 million	The research report assumed that fire services respond with three pumps (Ref 18).
Reduce sickness absence	Those below best performing quartile level	£12 million	
Collaborative procurement	Those below upper quartile level	£8 million	
Delivering CFS through partners	All fire services	Unknown	
<b>Total</b>		<b>£160-200 million</b>	

# Appendix B

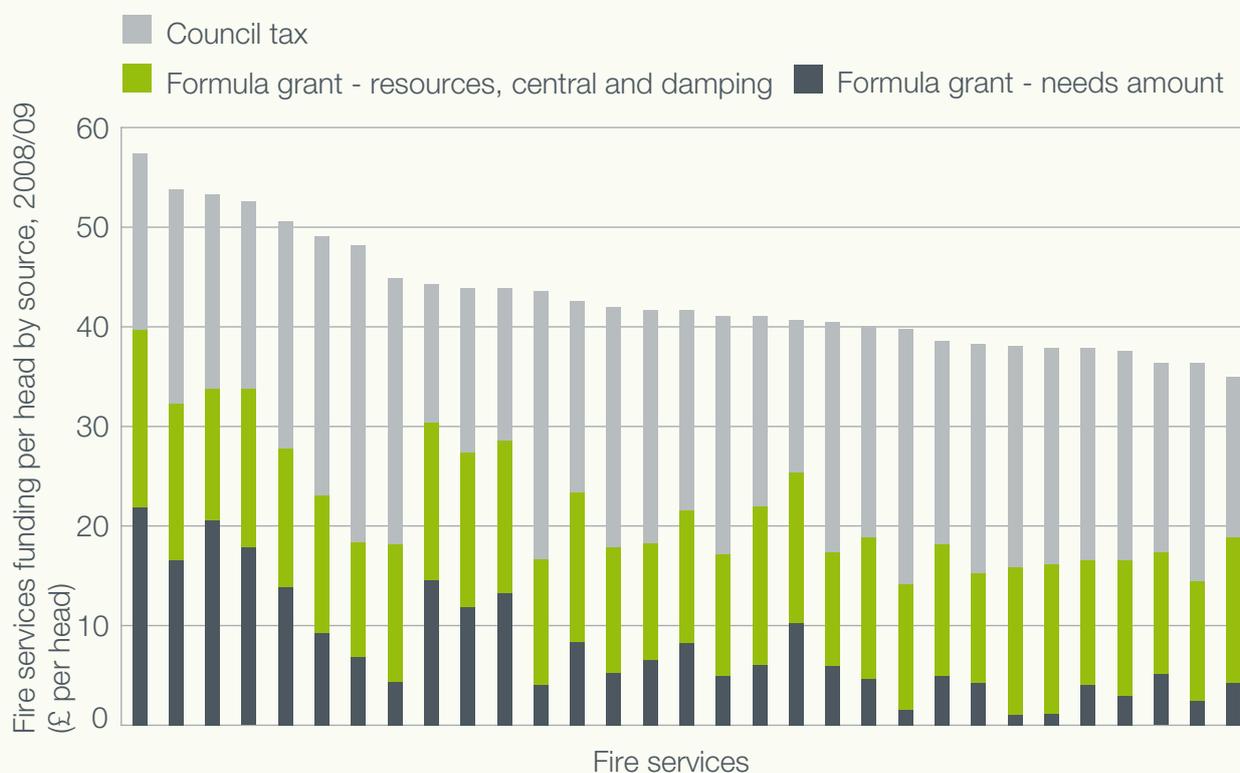
## Fire service funding

Combined and metropolitan fire services are funded through a combination of central grants and council tax precepts.<sup>1</sup> The cost of the county fire services is met by the general council budget. The county council receives a fire element as part of its own overall formula grant, but this is not separately identified in financial returns. The county council makes a local decision on the overall level of funding for the fire service. Therefore

the analysis presented here focuses on funding for combined and metropolitan fire services. The current four-block model for determining the central grant for all local authorities, including fire authorities, was introduced in 2006/07.

The balance of fire service expenditure has to be met from council tax precepts. Since 2004/05, when combined FRAs first became precepting authorities, the central grant has risen by between 3 and 4 per cent per year

**Figure 41**  
There is significant variation in funding across combined and metropolitan fire services



Source: CIPFA

<sup>1</sup> LFEPA also receive insurance premiums worth approximately £12 million a year.

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# Appendix B

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## The four-block formula grant

### Relative needs block

This block is based on an amount per head of population, adjusted by a number of top-ups to reflect factors that influence the cost of providing services locally. The top-ups which apply to fire services in the current formula are:

- coastline;
- deprivation;
- high-risk sites (for example the chemical industry);
- property and societal risk; and
- community fire safety (based on numbers of school pupils, over 65s and ACORN<sup>I</sup> categories thought to be most in need of fire safety information).

These are combined with an area cost adjustment that takes account of local factors including rateable value variations, to give an authority's share of the relative needs formula for fire for the whole country.

### Relative resource amount

This is a negative amount. It is an adjustment to account for the taxbase and hence the resource-raising capacity of all authorities. Fire services are assumed to have a 3.7 per cent share of the taxbase in their areas.

### Central allocation

This block is allocated as a fixed amount per head for each area, split between the different tiers of authority in proportion. For fire services the amount in 2008/09 is £16.68 per head of population.

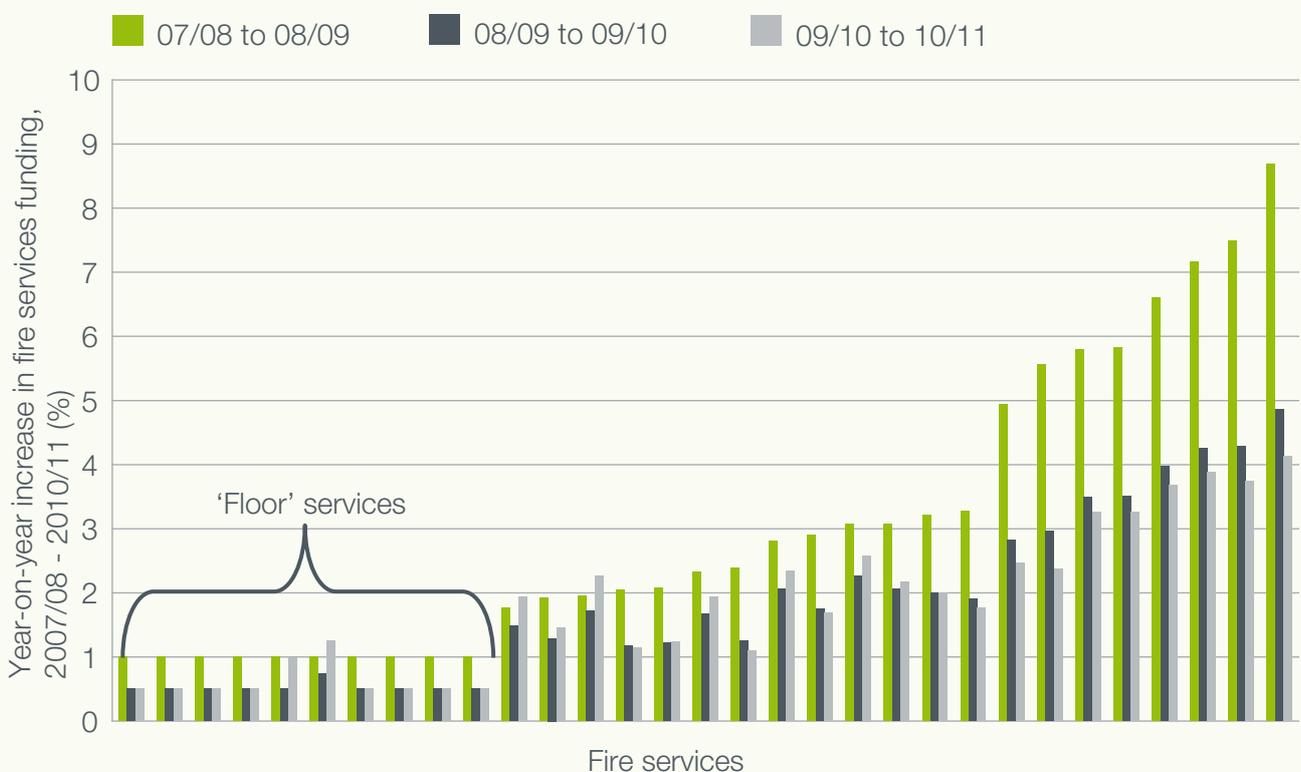
### Floor damping amount

This block ensures that all authorities receive a minimum percentage increase (the floor) in formula grant year-on-year on a like-for-like basis, in other words after adjusting for changes in funding and function. In order to pay for the cost of the floor, the formula grant above the floor is scaled back for all other authorities within the damping group. All single-service fire authorities (including London) form a single damping group. The floor level for this group was set at 1 per cent in 2008/09.

<sup>I</sup> A classification of residential neighbourhoods.

**Figure 42**

**Most combined and metropolitan fire services will receive small increases in funding over the next three years, though there is significant variation**



Source: CIPFA

on average, adjusting for various changes to the funding arrangements. Over the same period, the average annual council tax precept rise has been between 4 and 5 per cent. As a result, a slightly larger proportion of funding now comes from the local taxpayer. In 2004/05, the proportion raised from council tax ranged from 27 to 60 per cent; in 2008/09 it ranged from 31 to 64 per cent.

Council tax precepting has some levelling effect on overall funding. This is to be

expected, as local tax raising capacity is factored into the formula grant allocation. Nevertheless there remains variation in the level of funding for combined and metropolitan fire services, from just under £60 per head to around £35 per head. Generally, metropolitan fire services and combined fire services serving more deprived towns and cities receive more funding, because deprivation is a factor known to be associated with increased risk of fire (Ref. 25).

# Appendix B

The average grant increase in 2008/09 was 2.4 per cent, with average increases of 1.4 per cent set for 2009/10 and 2010/11. At current levels of inflation, this would be a real terms cut. However, increases vary, ranging from just 1 per cent for the ten floor fire services<sup>1</sup> to almost 9 per cent in 2008/09 (Figure 42). In subsequent years eight fire services remain on the floor level increase of 0.5 per cent and no fire service receives an increase of more than 5 per cent.

## International comparison

Expenditure on the fire service in the UK is broadly in line with other Western countries. Estimates from the World Fire Statistics Centre suggest it was the equivalent of 0.21 per cent of GDP between 2002 and 2004. This compares to 0.34 per cent in Japan; 0.25 per cent in the USA; 0.15 per cent in New Zealand and Sweden; and 0.08 per cent in Denmark (Figure 43). However, these comparisons should be treated with extreme caution, given the different way in which fire services are funded and administered around the world.

**Figure 43**

**Fire service expenditure in the UK is broadly in line with other Western countries**



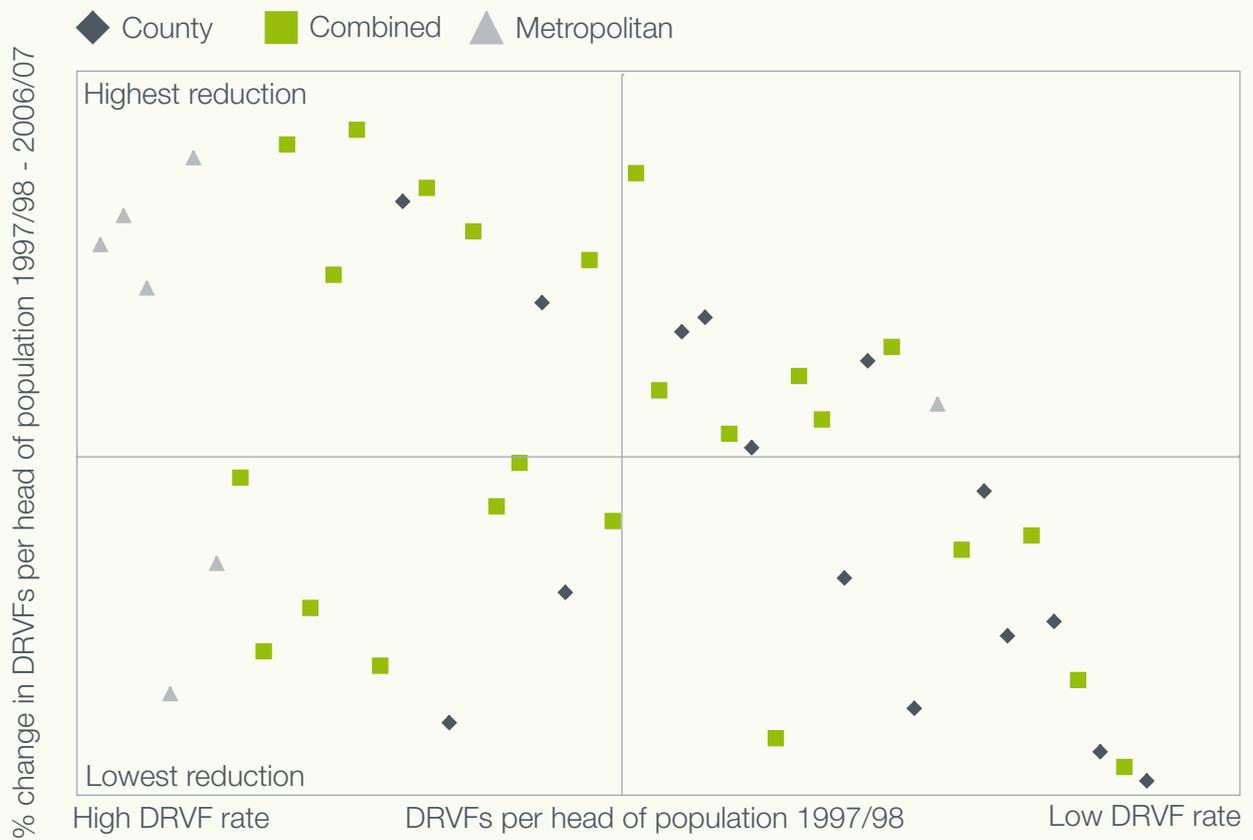
Source: World Fire Statistics Centre

<sup>1</sup> Fire services that, if the formula were applied equally to all fire services, would receive an annual increase of less than 1 per cent have been guaranteed an increase of 1 per cent in 2008/09 and 0.5 per cent in the next two years.



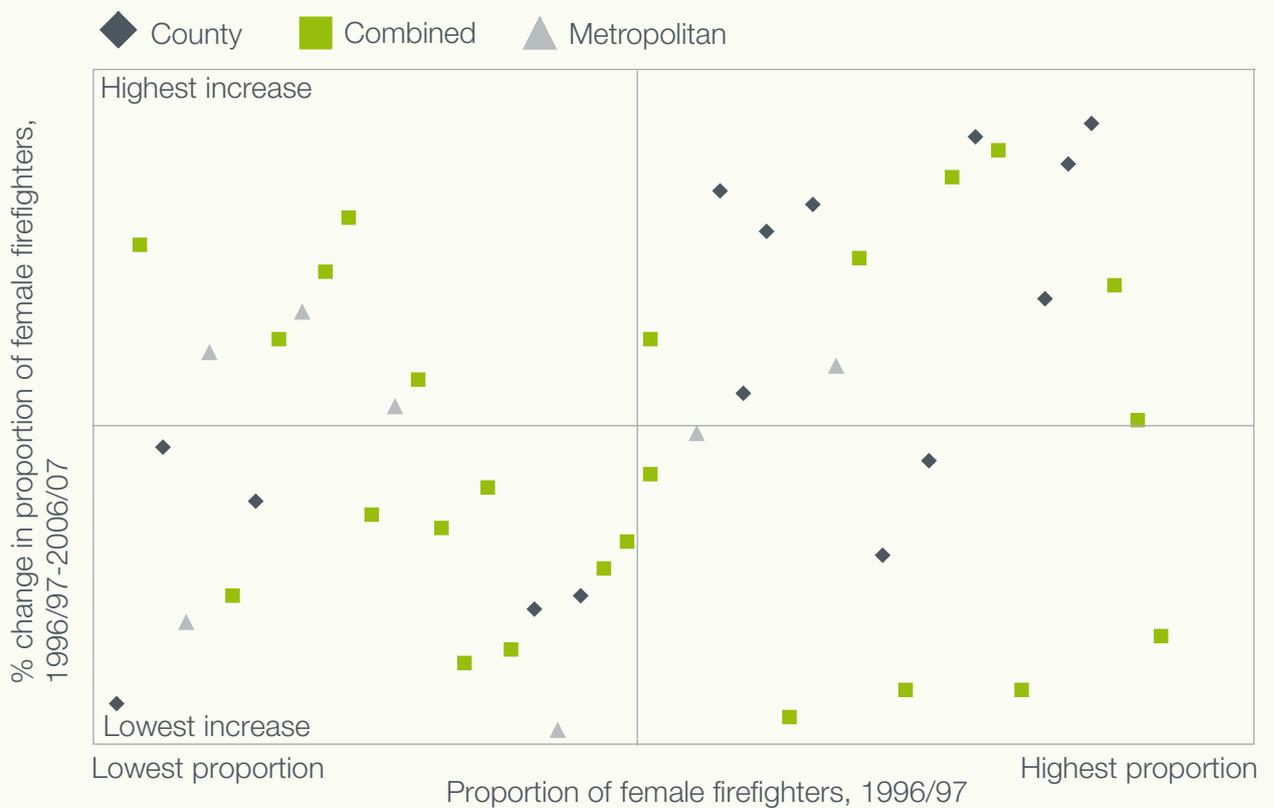
# Appendix C

**Figure 45**  
**Baseline performance versus change in rate of deliberate road vehicle fires (DRVFs)**  
**(Correlation between base rank and rank of change over time)**



Source: CLG

**Figure 46**  
**Baseline level versus change in proportion of female firefighters**  
**(Correlation between base rank and rank of change over time)**



Source: CLG

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# Methodology

The study was conducted under Section 33 of the Audit Commission Act 1998. Section 33 places a duty on the Audit Commission to undertake studies to support recommendations aimed at improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of local authority services.

The study team analysed national and local data, reviewed national and local policy and planning documents, interviewed key personnel and partners in six case study fire services (Kent and Medway, Gloucestershire, South Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, West Midlands and Cheshire) and reviewed specific notable practice in four other fire services (Merseyside, Devon and Somerset, London and Greater Manchester).

During fieldwork, we conducted 42 semi-structured interviews with:

- FRA members;
- CFOs; and
- members of fire service senior management teams.

We also held 11 focus groups with fire service staff across the six main sample sites.

Local incident data was collected from the six case study sites, and from data available from 11 other fire services on their websites.

The lead Commissioners for the study were Cllr Chris White, Dame Denise Platt and Cllr Peter Jones. The study team comprised Stuart Deaton, Vivienne Brown, Sumithra Rabindrakumar, Greville Percival, Sarah

Quartermain and Simon Mahony, and was supported by specialist expertise from an internal board. John Kirkpatrick was the project director.

The Audit Commission thanks all those who have contributed to the study, particularly fieldwork participants and those who commented on the draft report. However the views expressed in the report are those of the Audit Commission alone.

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# Glossary

**Appliance** – the term generally used to describe all firefighting vehicles, including the standard fire engine or pump (see below).

**Automatic fire alarm (AFA)**

– an emergency call generated by remote monitoring equipment in non-domestic premises.

**Community fire safety (CFS)** – the range of fire prevention activities undertaken by fire service, often in conjunction with partner agencies.

**Crew** – the firefighters required to operate an appliance at an incident.

**Formula grant** – non-ringfenced grant paid by central government to all local authorities, including an element for fire services.

**Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA)** – a committee of up to 30 elected councillors from the constituent district and unitary authorities in an area, responsible for major budgeting and strategic decision-making for their local fire service.

**Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC)** – a widely used computer modelling system for risk mapping analysis.

**Home fire safety check/assessment/visit (HFSC/ HFSA/ HFSV)** – visits by firefighters or other trained staff, often including free smoke alarm fitting and other home safety advice. They can be arranged on request, by referral from other agencies or via door-to-door contact.

**Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS)** – the fire service’s training and development framework.

**Integrated risk management planning/plan (IRMP)** – a fire service’s plan to tackle existing and potential risks to their communities through a combination of prevention work and response.

**Low level of activity and risk (LLAR)** – used by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service to describe some of its least busy fire stations.

**Operational assessment of service delivery (OASD)** – a judgement on how well fire services are delivering the roles expected of them, with a focus on prevention, practice and response.

**Precept** – the amount collected by the responsible local authority (district council or unitary council) on behalf of the FRA in their area. The term can be used for either the total amount requested by the FRA or the individual addition to council tax bills.

**Private Finance Initiative (PFI)** – the scheme by which public infrastructure investment is funded by long-term arrangements with private developers.

**Primary fires** – fires in buildings, vehicles and outdoor structures, or any fire involving casualties, rescues, or fires attended by five or more appliances.

**Pump** – fire appliances with the capacity to pump water for firefighting.

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# Glossary

**Regional control centre (RCC)** – part of a network of nine centres across England that will take calls for and mobilise all fire services. This new network replaces the individual control centres currently operated by fire services.

**Retained duty system (RDS)** – firefighters with other full-time occupations are recruited to be available on call close to their local fire station for a certain minimum number of hours per week, plus regular training. They are paid a retainer plus a call-out fee for incidents attended. The RDS is more widely used in rural areas.

**Regional management board (RMB)** – a formal structure established by central government to manage the move to RCCs and promote other regional collaboration.

**Secondary fires** – the majority of outdoor fires, including grassland and refuse fires, unless they involve casualties or rescues, property loss or five or more appliances attend.

**Special service call/ incident (SSC/SSI)** – any non-fire related incident attended by the fire service, including road traffic accidents, flooding and lift rescues.

**Targeted response vehicle (TRV)** – a smaller fire appliance that carries most of the same equipment as the standard appliance, but needing fewer crew.

**Watch** – the team of firefighters whose work rotas coincide so that they are regularly on duty together at a particular station.

**Wholetime** – the usual term for full-time firefighter contracts that generally comprise a regular rotating pattern of day shifts, night shifts and off-duty time.

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## Abbreviations

AES:	annual efficiency statement
CAA:	comprehensive area assessment
CFO:	chief fire officer
CFOA:	Chief Fire Officers' Association
CFRA:	chief fire and rescue adviser
CFS:	community fire safety
CLG:	Communities and Local Government
CSO:	community support officer
FBU:	Fire Brigades Union
FORD:	flexible operational resource deployment
FRA:	fire and rescue authority
FRAML:	Fire and Rescue Authorities Mutual Limited
HFSC:	home fire safety check
IRMP:	integrated risk management plan
LAA:	local area agreement
LFEPa:	London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
LGA:	Local Government Association
LIFE:	local intervention fire education
LLAR:	low level of activity and risk
LSP:	local strategic partnerships
OASD:	operational assessment of service delivery
PFI:	private finance initiative
PSA:	public service agreement
RCC:	regional control centres
RDS:	retained duty system
RMB:	regional management board
TRV:	targeted response vehicles

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Stock code: GNR3483

ISBN 1-86240-558-1



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