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Communities and Local
Government Committee

Fire and Rescue Service

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Report, together with formal minutes

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Communities and Local Government Committee

The Communities and Local Government Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Communities and Local Government and its associated bodies. This report was reported to the House as the Fourth Report from the Select Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions.

On 27th June 2006, by Order of the House, the ODPM Committee was succeeded by the Communities and Local Government Committee and all proceedings of the former Committee were deemed to be proceedings of the latter.

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The following member was a member of the Committee during this inquiry.

Mr Mark Lancaster MP (*Conservative, North East Milton Keynes*)

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Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Jessica Mulley (Joint Committee Clerk), Elizabeth Hunt (Joint Committee Clerk), Charlotte Littleboy (Second Clerk), Sarah Hartwell-Naguib (Deputy Head (Pre-legislative Scrutiny) Scrutiny Unit), James Cutting (Committee Specialist), Sara Turnbull (Committee Specialist), Ian Hook (Committee Assistant), Ian Blair (Chief Office Clerk), Emma Carey (Secretary) and Laura Kibby (Select Committee Media Officer).

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1 Introduction

1. The Government set out its ambitions for reform and modernisation of the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) in the 2003 White Paper, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*.¹ These proposals were given legislative effect by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, which imposed a challenging programme of change on the FRS. Our predecessor committee produced a report, *The Fire Service*, in 2004 which examined the aims of the 2003 White Paper and how they might be achieved.² Our report examines the progress made since the White Paper and subsequent Act.

The Bain Review and the 2003 White Paper

2. The White Paper was the culmination of numerous reviews of the FRS, most notably that chaired by Sir George Bain in 2002.³ Six key themes of the White Paper were identified by the Deputy Prime Minister in a statement to the House:

- An emphasis on emergency as well as firefighting, with resources better allocated on the basis of risk;
- A more coherent regional approach to fire and rescue;
- Institutional changes to improve the management of the service;
- Improved scrutiny and inspection, in consultation with the Audit Commission, as the Bain Review advised;
- Reform of the machinery for negotiating pay and conditions, and
- Modernisation of personnel management arrangements of the service.⁴

Legislative reform

3. As our predecessor Committee noted, there had been a number of reviews and recommendations regarding the FRS since the 1970s but few resulted in any significant change.⁵ The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 finally provided a legislative basis for reform. The Act incorporated the word ‘rescue’ into the title of the service, recognising and giving statutory effect to duties already carried out by the FRS, such as assistance with road traffic incidents. Furthermore, the Act placed a duty on the FRS to promote safety and facilitated this by making provision for collaboration with partners in the local community. Statutory provision was also made for an increased FRS role in responding to terrorist threats and other major incidents, such as flooding. Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs)

¹ *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, Cm 5808, June 2003 (hereafter Cm 5808).

² *The Fire Service*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Third Report, Session 2003-04, HC 43 (hereafter HC 43).

³ *The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives* (‘the Bain Review’), 16 December 2002.

⁴ HC Deb, 30 June 2003, cols 21-24.

⁵ HC 43, para 5.

were given discretion to plan, equip and take action to meet local risks and priorities. The 2004 Act requires the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to produce an annual Fire and Rescue National Framework, which provides national strategic direction to the FRS, and has statutory force.⁶ The FRS also has new responsibilities under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

Implementation of change

4. As a result of legislation, the FRS is undergoing significant changes, especially:

- The introduction of Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) produced by all FRAs and setting out policies and plans for resource allocation based on local risk assessments;
- greater Community Fire Safety Work including initiatives such as the Home Fire Risk Check Initiative;
- the creation of Regional Management Boards (RMBs);
- the creation of regional fire control centres (FiReControl – initiated in 2004, targeted for completion in 2009);
- the FireLink project which will provide a new radio system for the whole FRS (targeted for completion in 2009);
- the closure of Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) in 2007;
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of all fire authorities conducted by the Audit Commission (from 2005 onwards);
- the establishment of the Practitioner Forum, the Business and Community Safety Forum, the IRMP Steering Group, the Central Local Partnership Fire and Rescue Service sub-group (CLP) and the Ministerial Sounding Board to provide advice to Government officials. The Practitioner Forum also advises FRAs, and the CLP acts as a vehicle for consultation and policy discussion between central and local Government;
- the New Dimension project which provides central funding to purchase equipment for major incidents;
- the establishment of FiReBuy Ltd. as the national procurement body for the FRS, and
- a review of the FRS's main negotiating body, the National Joint Council (NJC).

Terms of reference of the inquiry

5. We announced our inquiry in November 2005. We decided to exclude the substantial and controversial subject of industrial relations. Rather, our inquiry examined specifically:

⁶ The ODPM has since been succeeded by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

- the implications for citizens and the Fire and Rescue Service of:
 - the introduction of Regional Control Centres, and
 - the introduction of and implementation process for FireLink radio services;
- the progress made on Fire and Rescue Services reform since the publication of the Government's White Paper of June 2003, *Our Fire and Rescue Service*, and the Committee's own report on the topic, *The Fire Service*, of January 2004. In particular, issues such as:
 - fire prevention
 - institutional arrangements and reform, including transitional arrangements and finance, and
 - promoting diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service, and
- joint working between the Fire and Rescue Service and other emergency services.

We also had particular regard to 'civil resilience' as far as it relates to the Fire Service.

2 Governance and funding arrangements

Basic structure

6. The FRS is made up of fire stations grouped into brigades (now called services), reporting to FRAs. The governance arrangements are complex. There are 47 FRAs in England, comprising four types: county, combined, metropolitan and London. Each type of authority receives grants from government. In addition, metropolitan and combined authorities can set precepts on council tax, as can the London authority. County authorities on the other hand have their budgets set by the county council. There are also Regional Management Boards which sit between central government and the 47 FRAs. However, FRAs are the only bodies which have statutory responsibilities within the FRS. The ODPM identified two basic models of FRA accountability:

“County FRAs, where the fire and rescue service is a Department of the Council and the Authority is made up of County Councillors; and "Combined"/"Metropolitan" FRAs, which are free-standing employers and where the Authority consists of Councillors from the underlying local authorities (plus, in London, Greater London Assembly members). In all cases, the Authority consists of elected representatives only - accountable to the electorate”.⁷

Governance and institutional reform

7. Reform of the governance arrangements was set out in the White Paper, which stated that “the current arrangements for managing the service are confused and inefficient”.⁸ The White Paper noted that some FRS functions were “being carried out at an inappropriate level” and identified which functions were best carried out at local, regional and national levels.⁹ The Government also recognised in the White Paper the need, identified by the Bain Review, for better central guidance and leadership on fire policy (hence the annual Fire and Rescue National Framework).¹⁰ Evidence to our inquiry from the Chief Fire Officers’ Association (CFOA) suggested that there may be benefit in bringing greater consistency to governance arrangements across the service and that the size of fire and rescue services should be reconsidered.¹¹

Regionalisation

8. The Bain Review recommended greater collaboration between fire brigades on cross-cutting issues such as civil resilience, but it recommended against major reorganisation.¹² The White Paper went much further in suggesting major restructuring and stated that

⁷ Ev 10 Vol I

⁸ Cm 5808, paras 4.2-4.4.

⁹ Cm 5808, para 4.10.

¹⁰ Cm 5808, para 4.11.

¹¹ Q 354

¹² *The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives* (‘the Bain Review’), 16 December 2002, paragraph 6.20.

“larger units are required to run the new fire and rescue service”.¹³ It referred directly to regionalisation and announced that, where regional assemblies were established, regional fire authorities would be created, constituted on similar lines to the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA).¹⁴ In the White Paper, the Government proposed the creation of Regional Management Boards where regional assemblies were not established, warning that “if these arrangements do not deliver modernisation quickly, we will use our powers to require combinations of fire authorities, in order to establish regional fire and rescue authorities”.¹⁵ The FiReControl project also adds to a perception of a regional agenda.

Change so far

Regional Management Boards

9. The ODPM set out the role and powers of Regional Management Boards, as follows:

“Regional Management Boards (RMBs) were established to take forward the six areas identified in the June 2003 White Paper as best delivered through regional collaboration - resilience, control centres, procurement, human resources, training and common/specialist services such as fire investigation[...]They are joint committees established under local government legislation in accordance with guidance issued by the Local Government Association. It is for FRAs themselves to ensure the constitutional arrangements they agree for their own RMB enable them to deliver the objectives of the six workstreams as set out in the Fire and Rescue National Framework”.¹⁶

RMBs were established in each of the eight English regions outside London prior to April 2004. RMBs have not replaced FRAs but instead are an intermediary, regional tier between local FRAs and national Government.

10. Some of our witnesses have questioned the value of RMBs on a number of grounds, including:

- inadequate influence;
- duplication of effort;
- lack of control over resources, and
- unnecessary uniformity.

The CFOA is concerned that, in relation to the duty to deliver regional collaboration projects, it is “not realistic to expect that RMBs will have the ability, capacity or resources to meet Government expectations in delivering these projects”.¹⁷ This is an understandable

¹³ Cm 5808, 4.14.

¹⁴ Cm 5808, 4.15.

¹⁵ Cm 5808, 4.18.

¹⁶ Ev 10 Vol I. See also Ev 157

¹⁷ Ev 133

concern as some RMBs have themselves expressed doubts about the projects concerned (as we discuss below in Chapter 3).¹⁸ North Yorkshire FRA questioned the role of RMBs in resilience planning.¹⁹ West Sussex FRA told us:

“We are concerned about the way in which Regional Management Boards (RMBs) are changing from a co-ordinating entity to one which is developing wider financial responsibilities and, potentially, a further tier of Government. RMBs must complement existing fire authorities and not place a sometimes conflicting political pressure on constituent authorities”.²⁰

North Yorkshire FRA said:

“Regional Management Boards (RMB) have been formed to provide strategic direction and a coordinated approach in six key areas. However, individual Fire Authorities are responsible for service delivery in their local area and must operate in a manner that ensures “Best Value”...The added benefit to be gained through the current performance management measures, powers and Governance arrangements relating to RMBs is unclear and needs to be re-assessed”.²¹

Kent and Medway RMB questioned “why a single model for RMBs has to apply across the country, without regard to the locality”, emphasising the complexity of “the mix of combined fire authorities and county-based fire services, where the support systems, such as finance, and procedures are tied to the host authority”.²²

Her Majesty’s Fire Service Inspectorate

11. HMFSI monitors the performance of the FRS and provides advisory services to the Government and the FRS in respect of technical (e.g. fire safety standards and guidance) and professional (e.g. best practice, management, service delivery) development. The vision of the reformed FRS outlined in the Bain Review and the 2003 White Paper included a greater role for the Audit Commission in the management of the performance and the White Paper stated that HMFSI’s responsibilities would be honed to make it a more efficient body.²³ Since then, the Audit Commission has taken over many of HMFSI’s inspection functions and carries out an annual Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) for each FRS, as it does for every local authority.²⁴ This was done for the first time in 2005 and the overarching CPA report was published in January 2006 (see Chapter 9 below).²⁵ Staffing levels of the HMFSI have been reduced by about fifty per cent, reflecting the fact that it is no longer involved in inspection. Remaining staff work in an advisory

¹⁸ See, for example, Ev 191.

¹⁹ Ev 98

²⁰ Ev 102

²¹ Ev 226-227

²² Ev 124

²³ Cm 5808, 5.15.

²⁴ Q 4

²⁵ Each FRA had a separate CPA, resulting in a series of Reports. The report published in January 2006 was an overview of these. Audit Commission, *Fire and Rescue – National Report*, January 2006.

capacity.²⁶ None of our witnesses raised concerns about the planned closure of HMFSI, although there was some concern over the transitional arrangements, the timescale for closure and the interim provision of guidance.²⁷

Further regionalisation?

12. Some FRAs, the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and others who submitted evidence are convinced that there are plans for further regionalisation of the FRS. In support of this view, they variously cite the Government rhetoric that accompanied the 2003 White Paper, and recent moves to restructure the police and ambulance services on regional lines, as well as wider health service restructuring. As mentioned above, the Bain Review and the White Paper did envisage a more regional approach to increase resilience and efficiency. The CFOA agreed that the FRS needed to be reformed, but its Vice President stressed “that does not necessarily mean that you immediately leap to regionalisation and nine Fire and Rescue Authorities throughout the country”.²⁸ A report from HMFSI, published five months after the White Paper, suggested that there was little willingness by fire brigades to collaborate with one another.²⁹ Most of our evidence did not favour further regionalisation of the FRS.³⁰ Many of the reasons for this opposition are specific to the current regionalisation of fire control rooms and are discussed below (see paragraph 45). The main objections are that: resources would be allocated at regional level, rather than county level as at present; and local knowledge would be lost, with a negative impact on local risk management and ultimately the ability of the FRS to respond to emergencies. We are looking at the Government’s regional policy in a separate inquiry and will make recommendations in due course.

13. The ODPM stated in written evidence that there are “no plans to regionalise the service”.³¹ ODPM officials told us that in the event of “any joining up, unification, of Fire and Rescue Service, Ministers are adamant that will only be on a voluntary basis”.³² On the subject of the relationship between the reorganisation of other emergency services on regional lines, Phil Woolas MP, Minister of State for Local Government, stated:

“The Government’s policy as far as possible is to achieve coterminosity on geographical boundaries at upper tier, local authority level. Where there are exceptions to that, it is to pass three tests. The first is to ensure that there is strategic capacity. The police authorities that are discussing merger will fall under that category. The second is where one can see tangible value for money efficiency gains. The third, which I personally believe is the most important, is to deliver the neighbourhood service[...]The discussions between the various departments about how we can best achieve coterminosity are of course also driven by the local area agreement financing arrangements in the local strategic partnerships. The

²⁶ Q 8

²⁷ Qq 316 [Ms Winters], 363-4

²⁸ Q 354

²⁹ HM Fire Service Inspectorate, *Analysis of Best Value Reviews of Control and Communications*, November 2003.

³⁰ Ev 102, 127, 170, 194, QQ 158, 264-6

³¹ Ev 157

³² Q 2

Department's White Paper, which will be published in June, for local authorities will be part of that process. In short, that means by summer it will all become clear!"³³

Some, in particular the FBU, are not convinced by statements made by the ODPM.³⁴ Given the apparent contradiction between recent statements from the ODPM, including those made in oral evidence to us, and the White Paper proposals carried forward through the creation of RMBs and the planned regionalisation of fire control rooms, this is understandable.

14. Regional Management Boards, in the absence of the previously planned regional assemblies, are a confusing addition to the already complex governance and structural arrangements for the FRS. The FRS needs certainty over its future. The mixed messages from the ODPM on regionalisation, and the lack of consistency between its policy and those of the Departments responsible for the other emergency services, are fertile ground for those fearful of a hidden agenda. Further regionalisation of the FRS should not take place without full consultation with the relevant stakeholders and clear justification for its aims.

Funding

15. The ODPM provided some additional funding to support modernisation. The Fire Minister, Jim Fitzpatrick MP, provided examples:

"New Dimensions shows some clear examples and we paid: £188 million for equipment and crewing; we announced an investment to fund regional fire controls and FireLink projects; we made £25 million available for home fire safety checks for the 1.25 million most vulnerable households in the country through fitting smoke detectors or other systems to protect the most vulnerable in our community; we announced £11.4 million last month in revenue costs for additional fire safety activities in the community[...]There is also the additional normal investment through the local government financial settlements".³⁵

While this additional, short-term funding was not disputed in our evidence, there was some concern that FRAs would have to meet additional, long-term costs arising from new fire prevention and resilience duties and the move to regional control centres (RCCs).³⁶ There were also some concerns about changes in the way that FRAs are allocating resources in connection with Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs), as increased spending on fire prevention has reduced the money available for other things, most notably, recruitment.³⁷ We discuss this in Chapter 5 below.³⁸ **We recommend that the Government fund fully from central resources any additional burdens on FRAs**

³³ Q 434. See also later discussion on coterminosity in Chapter 9 of this report.

³⁴ Q 263

³⁵ Q 425

³⁶ Discussed in paragraph 38 below.

³⁷ Ev 69, 71, 83, 138, 162, 198, Q289

³⁸ See paragraph 71.

imposed as a result of the modernisation agenda which cannot be met through greater efficiency and other savings.

Procurement

16. Increasing efficiency has been one of the themes of FRS modernisation, for example through implementation of the national procurement system, FiReBuy. FiReBuy Ltd. will negotiate contracts for major FRS spending on vehicles, clothing and respiratory protective equipment. Total procurement costs for the FRS prior to FiReBuy are unknown, making it impossible to quantify potential savings. However, the Fire Minister outlined the estimated benefits:

“the Audit Commission’s estimates show an immediate saving of £5.5 million through a reduction in procurement overheads, so that 47 different brigades are not all going off and doing 47 different things, and more efficient procurement of commodities such as fuel, energy and clothing. On smoke detectors, there is a saving of 43 pence per smoke detector, and we purchase 1.25 million of those”.³⁹

The Government also assured us that national procurement would not result in FRAs paying more than they had in the past through locally negotiated procurement arrangements: “If there are procurement examples that do not meet efficiencies by doing it through that mechanism, then they will not do it”.⁴⁰

17. In the absence of historical data on procurement expenditure, it is hard to see how the claims that FiReBuy will result in savings can be substantiated. **We recommend that the Government set a baseline against which the future performance of FiReBuy can be measured, drawing on international comparisons as appropriate. The sources for any data used should be clearly stated. Without such basic information, the Government’s assertion that FiReBuy will result in savings on procurement will remain untested.**

³⁹ Q 431

⁴⁰ Q 429

3 FiReControl: Regional Control Centres

18. England currently has 47 fire and rescue control rooms, one for each local fire service. These handle emergency calls and dispatch fire engines accordingly. FiReControl is an ODPM-led project to replace the existing fire control rooms with eight amalgamated Regional Control Centres (RCCs), mirroring the existing regional administrative structure of the Government Offices for the Regions. The London region amalgamated its three control rooms into one in 1990 and has in part been used as a model for the wider restructuring project.⁴¹ The FiReControl project will also introduce new technology which is intended to harmonise the way in which control rooms operate. The project, which will cost £986 million over fifteen years, was initiated in 2004 and is targeted for completion in 2009.⁴² FiReControl is being co-ordinated with the ODPM FireLink Project, which will deliver a new digital radio system to all FRAs.⁴³

Project aims

19. The Government's main motivation behind the amalgamation of fire control centres is to increase "resilience" by enabling the FRS to handle large-scale incidents better, from environmental disaster to a terrorist attack. RCCs will coordinate services in a region from one central point and will have the capability to coordinate with other RCCs across the country, providing fallback support should any RCC cease to be operational. The ODPM saw the existing differences in the way that control rooms operate as hindering their ability to offer "a common national response capability" and therefore FiReControl is intended to standardise areas such as brigade management, operational protocols, shift patterns, resource availability, conditions of service and financing.⁴⁴ Efficiency savings are also envisaged. The ODPM claimed it will be "cost effective" and will "ensure efficient and effective deployment of FRS capabilities".⁴⁵

Opposition to FiReControl

20. Many of our witnesses' evidence raised concerns about the FiReControl project.⁴⁶ CFOA, which represents the managers of the FRS, supports the underlying objectives of increased civil resilience and efficiency, but has "a number of outstanding concerns with regard to the Full Business Case, the discharge of legal responsibilities, clarification on governance arrangements and the ultimate accountability for the service".⁴⁷ Many bodies managing or representing the FRS also support the project's principles but have specific concerns over funding, governance, technology and other project risks.⁴⁸ The FBU is

⁴¹ Ev 1 Vol I

⁴² Q 21

⁴³ See chapter 4 of this report.

⁴⁴ See www.firecontrol.dclg.gov.uk/. See also *The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives ('the Bain review')*, 16 December 2002, paragraph 6.21.

⁴⁵ Ev 156

⁴⁶ See, for example, Ev 68, 70, 78, 82, 87, 92, 99, 109, 120, 133, 148, 150, 160, 169, 177, 183, 184, 200, 229, 252

⁴⁷ Ev 133

⁴⁸ See, for example, Ev 82, 87, 92, 94, 99, 122, 125, 133, 150, 167, 187, 191, 195, 225

particularly opposed to the project. It stated “we do not believe FiReControl improves the resilience of the fire service, and that its potential risks – both operationally and financially – greatly outweigh any potential rewards”.⁴⁹ The FBU commissioned a survey of a sample of its members which indicated that 95% of them (47% of these being officer/managers) do not think the RCC project will improve firefighter safety or FRS response to incidents, and that 94% believe that the Government should not continue with the RCC project.⁵⁰ Specific concerns about the project include:

- Whether the project will indeed enhance resilience;
- Potential impact on frontline services;
- The location of RCCs;
- Whether the project will enhance efficiency;
- The technology;
- The funding arrangements, and
- The governance arrangements.

Two other issues are also having an effect on FRS attitudes towards the project: a lack of information, and the perception that this is part of an agenda of further regionalisation.

Increased resilience

21. Several witnesses accepted that the new structure would increase resilience as it will enable the regional coordination that may be required in the event of a major incident.⁵¹ Others questioned the need for RCCs given that recent major incidents had been well managed within the existing structure. The General Secretary of the FBU pointed out that “the local emergency fire control coped perfectly adequately with the Buncefield incident: large numbers of calls coming in, the emergency fire control coped; large numbers of calls being dealt with in other fire authorities, again the current system coped with that”.⁵² In contrast Ministers argued that the recent fire at Buncefield Oil Depot demonstrated how a RCC structure could provide increased regional capacity.⁵³ In fact, this incident was co-ordinated by an Interim National Coordination Centre, which quickly mobilised high volume pumping. The fact that the Buncefield incident was well-managed without RCCs suggests that the existing resilience arrangements are potentially effective. **We recommend that the Government clarify the future role of the Interim National Coordination Centre, in particular in relation to RCCs.**

⁴⁹ Ev 252

⁵⁰ Qq 271, 273 and Unprinted paper (FRS 63 (II)).

⁵¹ See, for example, Q 185 and Ev 81.

⁵² Q 283 [Mr Wrack]. A fire at the Buncefield oil depot in Hertfordshire on 11 December 2005 injured 43 people. It was described as the largest incident of its kind in peacetime Europe, see http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/december/11/newsid_4972000/4972524.stm

⁵³ Q 464

22. Some witnesses argued that the RCCs' structure will have a negative impact on delivery of frontline services which in turn would undermine resilience.⁵⁴ They pointed to: the overall reduction in the number of staff in control rooms and the loss of locally managed services which can respond to incidents quickly using local knowledge. McCartney Associates highlighted concerns over a "lack of guarantees of improvements in services locally. In fact, some FRAs are now arguing that standards of service will actually get worse within a RCC set-up."⁵⁵

Reduction in staff numbers

23. The reduction in the number of control rooms will also result in fewer staff. The ODPM estimated a drop of 500 staff, from 1,500 to 1,000.⁵⁶ Some FRAs argue that such a reduction in staff numbers will inevitably undermine service delivery. However, a reduction in the overall number of staff may not mean a reduction in the number of staff on duty at any one time; instead, the pattern of shifts could be altered to make more effective use of staff, as was the case when London amalgamated its call centres.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the ability of RCCs to provide fallback to one another should mean that if staff in one RCC cannot cope with the volume of calls, it will be dealt with by another RCC.

Loss of local knowledge

24. Many of the submissions we received were concerned that local knowledge, useful in handling emergency calls, would be lost with the move to RCCs.⁵⁸ Local knowledge of an area can help to identify the location of an incident, particularly if a caller is not at the incident site (thus reducing the benefit of caller identification/location functions of the planned RCC technology).⁵⁹ The President of the FBU highlighted how important local knowledge had been in the organisation of the response to the Buncefield Oil Depot fire, particularly as the initial emergency call did not link the explosion to the oil depot. The Bain Review stressed the importance of local knowledge and Cornwall County Fire Brigade highlighted "the importance of the role Fire Control staff play in assisting, managing and resolving incidents where their local knowledge is a key influence".⁶⁰ This has been supported by evidence from other emergency services. The Association of Chief Police Officers, for instance, stressed the benefits of local knowledge:

"It is also important to emphasise that, wherever possible, 'local knowledge' must be maintained within any migration to regional call centre systems. Failure to do so is likely to impact on the effectiveness of the Fire and Rescue Service to provide an informed and "intelligence led" response to emergencies".⁶¹

⁵⁴ See, for example, Ev 91, 253

⁵⁵ Ev 78

⁵⁶ Q 58

⁵⁷ Ev 1 Vol I

⁵⁸ Ev 67, 68, 82, 89, 90, 181, 188, 229

⁵⁹ See Ev 68

⁶⁰ Ev 90. See also *The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives ('the Bain review')*, 16 December 2002, 6.18-19.

⁶¹ Ev 229

The FBU stated that the move to RCCs would be detrimental as local services were core to the operations of a locally accountable fire and rescue service.⁶²

25. Cheshire FRA was more optimistic:

“The Service and Authority also acknowledge public concern over the potential loss of local knowledge involved in setting up a new control centre in a new location. We believe however, that this will not be borne out in reality, as the enhanced technology supporting the centre will automatically identify the nearest available fire appliance, when a call is received. Modern GIS systems and mapping technology also means that locations are more easily and quickly determined than ever before, removing the need to rely on local knowledge”.⁶³

We agree that FireControl may help callers to identify the location of an incident. Nevertheless, FRSs should take steps to ensure that their operational capacity is not compromised by any loss of local knowledge.

26. We were concerned that working across areas as large as a region would cause operational problems and impact upon delivery of services. Devon FRA said:

“you are talking of literally hundreds of miles from one end of the region to the other; hundreds of miles, a very, very large geographical area with very, very sparsely populated rural communities, with certain urban areas as well, such as Bristol and Plymouth. There are some practical problems in day-to-day management, in trying to maintain a relationship with staff, in trying to give a sense of identity with the organisation to local communities who want to have a sense of identity with their local Fire Service”.⁶⁴

The Retained Firefighters Union (RFU) told us that it did not anticipate any geographic obstacles arising from the amalgamation of RCCs.⁶⁵ **The new technology that will be provided by FiReControl should allow operators to mobilise the fire-engine closest to the incident regardless of which brigade or service it is from, thus mitigating the risks of coordination across larger areas.**

Impact on frontline services

27. The ODPM stated that FiReControl will improve frontline services, and has the potential to improve response times:

“The FiReControl project has undertaken that mobilisation times will be the same or better under RCCs, in accordance with the requirements of pre-determined attendances set in local IRMPs. However, we expect that a side benefit of FiReControl will be to help improve response times. There are two principal reasons for this:

⁶² Q 264 [Ms Winters]

⁶³ Ev 82

⁶⁴ Q 160 [Mr Young]

⁶⁵ Q 121

- The benefits of a national network, which means that the centres will be able to provide each other with immediate back-up in the event of one centre being out of action, facing peak demand or dealing with a particularly large incident. At the moment if a fire control room with only five staff on duty receive ten simultaneous calls, five of those callers have to wait. With the national network, all ten would be answered and dealt with immediately[...].⁶⁶

28. Some witnesses were concerned that the creation of RCCs would have an adverse affect on service delivery and response times.⁶⁷ Devon FRA, while accepting that there was no evidence that response times would worsen, sought further reassurance: “our view is that we desperately need, from a service delivery standpoint, confidence that we are going to get at least as good a service from the Regional Control Centre as we are able to deliver ourselves”.⁶⁸ When we asked about the evidence for the Government’s assumptions we were told anticipated improvements had been calculated on the basis of “response times at the moment plus capability of technology in particular areas compared with the response times and the known capability of the technology we are developing”.⁶⁹ **We are unconvinced that the Government can offer the assurance of maintained or improved service quality resulting from the FiReControl project and there is clearly widespread doubt across the FRS. If it can, we recommend it does so, and provides the evidence, immediately.**

Location of RCCs

29. The Fire Minister has stated that “in the post-September 11 world our emergency control centres need to be resilient against attack or natural disaster”.⁷⁰ The FBU stated:

“We are not convinced that the location of many of the proposed controls are as resilient as claimed. Controls which are based in a mixture of retail and business parks, in some cases close to childcare nurseries or major retail outlets, some on known flood plains (while asserting they will deal with major flooding) and some very close to airports (post 9/11) do not, in our view, constitute an improvement in resilience. The proposed locations have the hallmarks of being chosen for cheapness and ease of gaining planning consent rather than the truly resilient locations they are claimed to be”.⁷¹

Other evidence raised similar concerns about the proposed location of RCCs.⁷² **We recommend that the Government ensure that the location of each RCC meets strict criteria on resilience.**

⁶⁶ Ev 10 Vol I

⁶⁷ Ev 225, QQ291 - 96, Q139, Ev 109, 122-3, 191

⁶⁸ Qq 142, 139

⁶⁹ Q 68 [Mr Evans]

⁷⁰ HC Deb, 8 June 2005, Col 1234

⁷¹ Ev 253

⁷² See, for example, Ev 171, 91, 106 and Q 282

Increased efficiency

30. The Fire Minister told us that “after the final control centre goes live, there will be annual savings of over £20 million (30 per cent. reduction in annual running costs)”.⁷³ The amalgamation of London control rooms did produce savings: in this example there was a reduction from 189 to 96 shift based-staff and cost savings of 45 per cent.⁷⁴ Several of our witnesses questioned the scale of potential saving and were concerned that any savings achieved would be outweighed by the costs of implementation.⁷⁵ Lancashire Combined Fire Authority stated that it does not “see any financial benefit to a regional control, because of the amount it is costing now and the amount it will cost in the future”.⁷⁶ The South East RMB said it was:

“supportive in principle [of the rationalisation of Fire Control centres]. We remain however unconvinced, that the current Project will deliver the savings described by the ODPM and are fearful that additional costs will have to be borne by local council taxpayers. We seek assurances that the enhanced service delivery outcomes articulated by the ODPM will be achieved”.⁷⁷

ODPM’s assertions about future efficiency savings as a result of FiReControl rest partly on the reduced long-term running costs because of the reduction in the overall number of control rooms and control room staff, and partly on the removal of some duties from control rooms, and on the best way of providing upgraded technology to control rooms.

‘Out of scope’ duties

31. There are duties which control room staff carry out in ‘slack’ time between calls. That such activities are carried out by control room staff has been identified as a waste of skills, money and time by the ODPM, which has classified them as being outside the scope of control room activity.⁷⁸ Some witnesses raised concern about the transfer of ‘out of scope’ functions. West Sussex FRA stated:

“The ODPM believes that the project will deliver nationally average savings of 30% but it is difficult to have confidence in this given the lack of definition of the project at this stage. In addition, there is little recognition of the hidden costs for fire authorities who will now need to manage ‘out of scope’ issues and the impacts this will have on other services within the Fire and Rescue Service or other local authority services. Current estimates for these, admittedly based upon an incomplete picture of how the RCC will operate, vary between £170,000 and £575,000 per annum per FRS (depending on size of service). For the South East as a whole, this could mean

⁷³ See also 2nd December 2005, Col 797W

⁷⁴ Ev 1 Vol I

⁷⁵ See, for example, Ev 70, 91, 94, 98-9

⁷⁶ Q 225

⁷⁷ Ev 191

⁷⁸ Ev 6 Vol I

additional costs of up to £3m. Clearly these will make achievement of 30% savings an impossibility”.⁷⁹

The FBU suggested a lack of forethought and understanding of control room functions on the part of the ODPM, citing a questionnaire circulated recently by ODPM officials – after the ODPM had announced the sites of the proposed new regional controls- seeking to find out what work current fire control centres actually do.⁸⁰ The FBU also highlighted a letter from South East RMB to the ODPM of 9th May 2005. In the letter the RMB stated:

“Many of these key activities must be maintained to ensure operational viability and yet have not been considered as part of any reliable cost comparison...What is not yet clear is the scope of work to be undertaken by the RCC, and what will be residual i.e. what will remain for Fire & Rescue Authorities to continue to undertake”.⁸¹

32. We asked the ODPM for clarification on what duties were defined as out of scope, and what the cost implications were of conducting these duties outside of control rooms. The ODPM gave two examples of ‘out of scope’ activities: “handling out of hours calls relating to social services or other council departments, e.g. for abandoned vehicles”, and “renewing library books”.⁸² It further stated that:

“Our initial analysis of the information provided by the FRS indicates that there is scope for modernisation of FRS business processes and consequent efficiency savings. When the analysis is complete we will be in a position to revisit cost assumptions in the business case, clarify the business processes for the new control arrangements, and help FRAs plan transition to new delivery arrangements”.⁸³

33. We are disappointed that the Government is unable to provide fuller details of duties that have been defined as out of scope. Removing some operations from control rooms should clearly result in savings in control room costs, but it is not clear where these operations will be transferred to, nor how the costs of the transfer and future operations will be met. There is no evidence to suggest any overall saving. As a result we, like many within the FRS, do not have full confidence in the Government’s claim that FiReControl will achieve enhanced efficiency. We recommend that the Government complete its analysis of control room functions immediately and certainly before making further progress with the FiReControl project.

Technology

34. The technology that will be brought in by the FiReControl project, such as automatic vehicle location, will represent an upgrade for many FRAs.⁸⁴ The ODPM stressed that many individual FRAs would not be able to afford such an upgrade without a central government project such as FiReControl, although some have state of the art technology

⁷⁹ Ev 100

⁸⁰ HC Deb, 14 October 2005, Col 609W, and Ev 254

⁸¹ Ev 254

⁸² Ev 18 Vol I

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Q 320

already.⁸⁵ We raised the question of whether such a technological update could be achieved locally, without an amalgamation of control rooms. As the CFOA indicated, although this would be possible, it would not be cost effective.⁸⁶ The Minister told us that FiReControl was the most cost-effective way to upgrade the technology of control centres:

“Our choice is either to upgrade the existing ones or form the new regional ones. That is where the financial comparison really kicks in. From all the evidence and advice we have on the new scheme, although obviously you will push us for specific figures which we are not able to give because the negotiations are in the process and tendering is going on, we are more than confident that that is the better financial option compared to the upgrading of the existing centres”.⁸⁷

35. While the FRS welcomes the new technology that FiReControl will bring, many of those who submitted evidence raised concerns about failures in the technology, particularly during the transition period.⁸⁸ Cornwall County Fire Brigade was worried about dependence on “untried and untested” technology.⁸⁹ West Sussex FRA stated “a linked configuration of nine identical systems introduces the possibility of total national computer failure, which in the current set-up of 47 varied and unconnected systems is small”.⁹⁰ A number of examples were cited:

“it is well known from major events such as the major BT Southampton Exchange failure, fires involving other BT exchange causing national connectivity problems, and connectivity problems with networks resulting from 7 July, that communications infrastructure will and does fail at the optimum time for its usage”.⁹¹

36. A number of witnesses were concerned about the risk of costs for IT projects spiralling out of control – as has been the case with some government-led IT projects in the past.⁹² Indeed, the Government’s outline business case itself identified a risk of total project failure. Although the ODPM claimed that this was a general project risk, the FBU have provided us with an extract from the outline business case showing risks identified that specifically related to the FiReControl project.⁹³ The outline business case states that:

“there is one risk category above the risk threshold which indicates that immediate action and particular care must be taken in managing the risk: Governance and management capacity (A): the recent history of delivering IT/change projects in the public sector has demonstrated a less than 50% success rate. There is therefore a risk

⁸⁵ Q 450

⁸⁶ Q 340

⁸⁷ Q 441

⁸⁸ See Ev 100, 89

⁸⁹ Ev 90

⁹⁰ Ev 100

⁹¹ Ev 183

⁹² Ev 91, 170-1, 253

⁹³ Q 34

of unsuccessful delivery of the infrastructure and change components of regional controls, which could result in delay or even total project failure”.⁹⁴

The Minister of State for Local Government sought to provide reassurance, stating:

“we are confident in the technology. I hear what you say about the record not just of government IT projects but IT projects across commerce and public services and other projects. We can say to the committee that we are very confident in the technology, obviously, as to the way we are going. We will not go live with FiReControl until it has been thoroughly tested from end to end. Of course reliability will be part of the contract that we have”.⁹⁵

37. We recommend that the ‘end to end’ testing of the technology include assessments of the likelihood of total systems failure nationwide. We further recommend that a resilient disaster recovery plan which addresses systems failure should be put in place.

Funding

38. Many FRAs are concerned about the additional costs that they may have to meet as a result of the move to regional control centres. In particular, FRAs are unclear as to whether all the costs of the move to regional control centres will be met by central government.⁹⁶ Under the doctrine of “New Burdens”, the Government is committed to meeting the cost of new burdens falling on local authorities. The ODPM stated on its website that a:

“new burden is defined as any new policy or initiative which increases the cost of providing local authority services. The new burden need not necessarily arise as a result of a proposed statutory duty. For example, guidance to act can result in additional costs falling on local authorities, putting pressure on council tax”.⁹⁷

Witnesses have emphasised that this definition is not clear-cut. For example, the Director of Support Services for Lancashire Fire Authority told us:

“the concept of New Burdens is something that is quite easy to trot out, that these will be the benefits and this will be picked up if it is a New Burden. Defining New Burdens is more complicated. A full business case was never presented: it would be very helpful to be able to say we are now totally clear on which costs are ours, which costs are theirs. New Burdens seem to be allocated more on a piece-meal case-by-case basis, rather than strategically, exactly defining who picks up what and when”.⁹⁸

39. We agree that it is difficult for FRAs to have certainty regarding the financial implications of the move to Regional Control Centres without a full business case which includes information on what costs will be borne by whom over what timescale. We recommend that Government provide a full breakdown of the costs implicit in the

⁹⁴ Ev 16 Vol I

⁹⁵ Q 446

⁹⁶ Ev 69, 70, 87, 94, 98, 109, 127, 133, 148, 150, 161, 168, 169, 177, 188, 196

⁹⁷ See www.dclg.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1161824, as accessed on 30 June 2006. See also Ev 158

⁹⁸ Q 229

FiReControl project and identify which of these will be met by central Government and which it expects local authorities and FRSS to meet. Any cost over-run should be met by central Government.

Governance

40. Many of our witnesses called for greater clarity in the governance arrangements for RCCs.⁹⁹ A consultation on these arrangements is underway.¹⁰⁰ Two key issues were raised within our inquiry: first, how RCCs would be governed in the absence of regional fire authorities, and what the role of RMBs would be; secondly, how RCCs would manage and co-ordinate the FRSSs within a region in light of different policies on mobilisation etc. contained in IRMPs.

41. The CFOA told us that there was a range of opinion among RMBs as to what the governance arrangements for RCCs would be.¹⁰¹ It summarised what it understood to be the proposed governance arrangements: “in terms of their accountability, the statutory duties will remain with the local fire authority. The day-to-day management of the new facilities will be through a newly created entity, currently proposed to be some kind of local authority arms’ length company”.¹⁰² However, as Oxfordshire FRA said:

“there remains the issue of the transfer of legal liabilities of operational failure at the regional level to the constituent fire authorities who individually appear to have little direct control over the regional entity. There is, as yet, little statutory basis for the regional management board or the local government company limited by guarantee. Clarity of legal responsibilities is essential”.¹⁰³

The FBU has also pointed out that the FRAs are currently the only bodies with statutory responsibilities.¹⁰⁴ It seems that for each RCC several local fire authorities will be accountable through a board made up of members of each, presumably the RMB.¹⁰⁵ Whatever the final arrangement both the FBU and the CFOA have called for local accountability. The CFOA told us:

“we want to see responsibility for the Fire and Rescue Service remaining embedded within the local community but there are advantages to be gained by looking at wider involvement of that community sitting alongside our elected members who we say we recognise do a very good job, but to look at attracting people from business and commerce alongside our politicians”.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ Q 326. See also, for example, Ev 70, 92, 99

¹⁰⁰ The FiReControl governance consultation was sent out to consultation on 20 March 2006, and responses were due back on 14 June 2006. The first regional entity is due to be formed by 1 August 2006.

¹⁰¹ Q 327

¹⁰² Q 355

¹⁰³ Ev 179

¹⁰⁴ Q 282 [Ms Winters]

¹⁰⁵ Q 358

¹⁰⁶ Q 351

42. The RCCs will have a role co-ordinating fire authorities, directing FRSs to incidents across the region and co-ordinating them in the event of a major incident. The FBU were concerned that RCCs would have difficulty carrying out these roles because each FRA area was subject to its own, locally-specific IRMP:

“London has a single integrated risk management plan to deal with whereas the South West proposed regional control would have a number of integrated risk management plans to coordinate emergency responses and those policies may differ between each individual fire and rescue service. The regional control centre may have different mobilising procedures to operate for the different local fire authorities”.¹⁰⁷

We note that the Government is consulting on the governance arrangements for RCCs and recommend that the final outcome, while seeking to achieve consensus among stakeholders, gives clarity on how FRAs are to retain their legal responsibilities within a framework giving clear direction to the RCC.

Absence of full information about FiReControl

43. Much of the opposition to FiReControl within the FRS stems from the absence of clear information. A key criticism is the lack of a fully developed business case.¹⁰⁸ The ODPM produced such a document but has not made it available for fear that it will compromise its negotiations on the delivery and implementation of the project.¹⁰⁹ The bodies that represent the FRS are therefore unable to give unqualified support to the project as they cannot be sure of the benefits.¹¹⁰ As the Association of Principal Fire Officers (APFO) said:

“we are not opposed in principle to a reduction in the number of existing Fire Control Centres, rather we wish to articulate a professional view that prior to embarking upon a project of this magnitude, the full business case including details of the revenue and capital costs and apportionment would have been made available for all key stakeholders to consider alongside the clearly stated service effectiveness”.¹¹¹

The Minister told us:

“You ask a fair question: how can we be confident of support from the authorities for the business case until it is finalised? Until we are confident of the business case, we will not sign the contracts. That is life. That is how you have to proceed in this business”.¹¹²

44. The ODPM submitted its full business case to the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) during its gateway review (3a) of the FireControl project. However this has not

¹⁰⁷ Qq 266 [Mr Wrack]

¹⁰⁸ For example, QQ 27 [Mr Evans], 317, 329

¹⁰⁹ Q 27. See also Ev 5 Vol I

¹¹⁰ Q 329, Ev 187, 229

¹¹¹ Ev 188

¹¹² Q 449

been consulted on or even provided to key FRS stakeholders, seemingly because the outline business case that was provided was leaked.¹¹³ However, withholding detailed information from stakeholders is at odds with gaining stakeholder support for, and input into, the project. Indeed the OCG's 'Manager's Checklist', a project management best-practice document, sets out key questions to be considered in developing the business case, including "do we have internal/external authority and stakeholder support for the project?" and "have the critical success factors and benefits been agreed with key stakeholders?".¹¹⁴ In the case of FiReControl the answer to these questions is no. **The Government should provide the FRS with all the non-commercial information of the latest full business case for FiReControl immediately. Information on the full business case should follow as soon as possible consistent with commercial considerations. This will ensure that the final decision is informed by the knowledge of those expected to operate within the new structure and help to build confidence in the new arrangements.**

Prospect of further regionalisation

45. The opposition to FiReControl is also based, in part, on a fear of further regionalisation and a view that service delivery would be affected by the regionalisation of fire control centres.¹¹⁵ The ODPM framed the move to RCCs as part of broader modernisation and reform based on the Bain and Mott MacDonald recommendations.¹¹⁶ The FBU have highlighted the fact that the Bain Review did not propose re-organisation along the lines of FiReControl.¹¹⁷ Bain concluded that greater collaboration should be pursued within the existing organisational structure but stressed that those fire authorities which maintained separate control rooms should demonstrate their cost effectiveness to the Audit Commission.¹¹⁸ But the 2003 update of the Mott MacDonald report, which specifically examined the operation of control centres, did suggest a re-organisation along the lines of the existing government offices in the regions.¹¹⁹ Thus a more regional approach was part of independent and Government visions of a modernised FRS. We have considered above whether the regional model at the heart of the FiReControl project will bring about the resilience and efficiency that Bain, Mott MacDonald and Government's White paper, envisaged (see paragraphs 21-33).

Alternative models

46. RCCs have been partly based on the existing model for London, which has demonstrated resilience in its response to the attacks on London in July 2005 and efficiency

¹¹³ Ev 5 Vol I

¹¹⁴ *A manager's checklist*, OGC, page 16. See www.ogc.gov.uk/sdtoolkit/seniormanagement/gatewayprocess/

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Ev 252

¹¹⁶ *The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives ('the Bain Review')*, 16 December 2002. *The Future of Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales*, 2003 Update, Mott MacDonald (published by ODPM).

¹¹⁷ Qq 265 - 266

¹¹⁸ *The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives ('the Bain Review')*, 16 December 2002, para 6.20, 6.17.

¹¹⁹ *The Future of Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales*, 2003 Update, Mott MacDonald (published by ODPM). Executive summary conclusions.

in its operation.¹²⁰ The FBU raised questions about the relevance of this model to the regional scenario as an RCC outside London would cover a much larger geographical area, and would be operating across the boundaries of FRAs and of the other emergency services.¹²¹

47. The FBU have also put forward an alternative model to RCCs:

“what we suggested in our resilience documents is that you could actually address the resilience issues raised by the ODPM using current local emergency fire controls. What we have suggested in there is that within each of the ODPM regions you would have one of those local emergency fire controls designated as a resilience control; that that resilience control would then be able to take responsibility for dealing with New Dimensions-type incidents within the region, and we suggest also that that plan could then be adopted by the jurisdictions – by Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland – and you end up with an integrated UK-wide plan which addresses all of those New Dimensions and resilience-type issues”.¹²²

The ODPM said the following in response to the FBU proposal:

“the FBU’s proposals to create ‘resilience controls’ would be even more costly, would be overly complex in terms of command structures and providing a communications infrastructure linked into all control rooms in the country, and would not provide as resilient a service as the regional control centres. The process of co-ordinating large incidents while mobilising from different control rooms would introduce risk and unnecessarily complicate and slow down the response to regional and national incidents”.¹²³

The London experience can provide valuable lessons but in some cases it is not an appropriate model.

48. Many of our submissions referred to the model of a tri-service control centre used by all three emergency services. Gloucester already has a tri-service control centre, where the controls of the FRS and police and ambulance services operate separately but with some shared accommodation, technology and information. The model has been praised by the Audit Commission, the Local Government Association, other emergency services and the FRS itself for both cost effectiveness and compliance with the Mott MacDonald recommendations for fire control rooms.¹²⁴ It also fits in well with the Gold Command structure, in that a major emergency with the police service in the lead could be speedily addressed, and police easily dispatched with the FRS as needed, when the situation is risky for personnel.¹²⁵ Gloucestershire FRA claims that the tri-service model is delivering the following:

¹²⁰ Discussed above in para 30

¹²¹ Q 266

¹²² Q 270. See also QQ 269, 277, 280.

¹²³ ODPM Statement in Response to FBU proposals for Fire and Rescue Control Centres, 25 January 2006.

¹²⁴ Ev 74. See also Q 465-6

¹²⁵ This is a long standing policy agreed between the emergency services whereby the police take the lead in major incidents. It was formalised under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

- “— a multi agency approach for safer and stronger communities;
- improved resilience and ability to link up with national or regional infrastructures;
 - multi agency command facilities with maximum operational flexibility;
 - proven improvement in quality of response to emergency incidents;
 - rapid information sharing, and
 - the needs of the Civil Contingencies Act”.¹²⁶

The Minister was dismissive of the Gloucester tri-centre model: “in the area that you describe, the tri-service centre in Gloucester, that is not a joint centre – it is just three services sharing the same building; they are not sharing the same services”.¹²⁷

49. Gloucestershire FRS estimates that £6 million of public money will be wasted as a result of abandoning, rather than incorporating, the newly established tri-centre.¹²⁸ As Gloucester FRA stated “It will be a sad day if this benchmark of excellence is allowed to die simply for the sake of uniformity, especially when there are clear opportunities to incorporate TriService within a regional control structure—the best of both worlds”.¹²⁹ That the FRS will have to withdraw from the Gloucester tri-centre when its RCC is established does seem to be a backward step in the overall modernisation project for the FRS. **We consider that achieving a common location for command controls for the three emergency services would facilitate greater collaboration in responding to incidents. It is disappointing that the Government has missed the opportunity to further increase resilience through co-location of control rooms as part of the FiReControl project.**

50. **The fact that the FRS has not been given enough information about the detail, particularly the financial detail, of FiReControl, is at the heart of the opposition to the project. The absence of information means that fire authorities and representative bodies cannot give unqualified support as they are unconvinced that the aims of enhanced resilience and efficiency will be achieved. There are considerable risks associated with the project, identified in our evidence and in the ODPM’s own business case. We consider the greatest of these to be the opposition to the project from the FRS itself. For FiReControl to have any hope of success, the Government should obtain greater support from the FRS. This can only be achieved through provision of greater information on both the project specifics and long-term plans for the structure of the FRS. The Government should also better communicate to the FRS that the FiReControl project is based on the findings of past reviews of the FRS, notably the 2003 Mott MacDonald Report.**

¹²⁶ Ev 72

¹²⁷ Q 438

¹²⁸ Ev 73

¹²⁹ Ev 75

4 FireLink

Background

51. FireLink is a project to introduce a new nationwide digital radio service allowing voice and data transmissions between fire and rescue services, and to and from radio systems used by the police and ambulance service.¹³⁰ It is intended to enhance the capability of the FRS to deal with major incidents such as flooding or terrorist attacks. FireLink will cost £500 million over ten years. The contract for provision of FireLink was awarded to the telecommunications company 02 Airwave Ltd in November 2005 and the project is due to be rolled out across the FRS by 2009.¹³¹ The technology involved is already being used by some fire services and its national application is broadly supported by the FRS, though there is concern over transitional arrangements.

52. A number of witnesses criticised the lack of integration between FireLink and FiReControl. Cheshire FRA said that “slow progress in assembling the FireControl project and the FireLink project into a single programme of change; given the vital requirement that both projects require a high level of interoperability and are implemented in a complementary way”.¹³² According to the South West RMB:

“the successful implementation of the FiReControl Project is totally dependent on the success of FireLink (the National Radio Replacement Project). Currently the two projects are being run separately, which causes conflict and inefficiency due to the different management and governance structures in place. This causes operational difficulties for the staff responsible for the implementation of both projects”.¹³³

53. The reason that the two projects have been separate is mainly historical. FireLink dates back to the days when the FRS was under the remit of the Home Office.¹³⁴ The ODPM’s Director of the recently merged Fire and Resilience Directorate stressed that attempts were being made to integrate the projects:

“what we have done is unified the two projects under one senior manager, i.e. me, we have brought together one level of governance for both projects reporting to me. When we get to the stage of roll-out, we will have one unified testing system so that the system is tested end-to-end from the radio system to the control room and we are looking at other ways of unifying the two projects”.¹³⁵

West Yorkshire FRA approved of the amalgamation of the Fire and Resilience Directorates within the ODPM under the leadership of one senior officer.¹³⁶ **We welcome the attempts**

¹³⁰ Q 53 and “New multi-million pound radio system for the Fire and Rescue Service”, ODPM News Release 2005/0231, 11 November 2005.

¹³¹ ODPM News Release 2005/0231

¹³² Ev 81

¹³³ Ev 103

¹³⁴ Q 15

¹³⁵ Q 15

¹³⁶ Ev 95

made by the Government to integrate FiReControl and FireLink, but also note that integration of the two projects will mean that FireLink will be subject to the same risks as FireControl.

Project risks

54. The most serious risk mentioned by witnesses was that of delays to the project and the consequent financial implications. Devon FRA pointed out that “there has already been slippage with the FireLink project and part of that was to bring FireLink together with the FiReControl project, so both have been subject to slippage”.¹³⁷ In Devon, for example, project slippage would be expensive. The authority currently shares a radio system with the neighbouring fire authority and with the local police force, but is due to migrate to FireLink in 2008. FireLink was originally planned for implementation in Devon in 2004. The delay has required Devon FRA to extend contracts on the existing sites and links, use of which is shortly to be discontinued by the police and neighbouring fire service. This will “result in extra costs [to Devon FRA] of £214,000 pa as well as potentially increasing disposal costs”.¹³⁸ Any further project slippage will have further financial implications. This situation is not unique to Devon. The LFEPa told us that it had already contingency plans to maintain its existing analogue system in the event of further delay, but that this would inevitably have cost implications.¹³⁹ In relation to slippage in the FireLink project Ministers said “we are covering the costs referred to and about which you have asked”.¹⁴⁰ **We recommend that the Government communicate to the FRS the assurance that it gave us, namely that any additional costs incurred by the FRS as a result of slippage on the FireLink project will be met by central Government.**

55. Most of our evidence suggested that the technology behind FireLink had been tried and tested and the benefits to the FRS were not disputed. West Yorkshire FRA stated that FireLink was “constructed on technology that is proven and the network is already built and designed to meet the demands of public safety users.”¹⁴¹ Lancashire Fire Authority is already using the technology on which FireLink is based. Although it experienced some initial teething problems, it reported that the technology works “extremely well”.¹⁴² This is at odds with concerns that the FBU raised about “the technologies”.¹⁴³

56. Lancashire Fire Authority however was worried that moving to FireLink would result in the loss of some functionality during the transition from one system to another, or because of the project specifications:

“we are concerned more about the transitional period, that we might lose the enhanced functionality that we have enjoyed over these last three years and indeed we have developed the system. We are going to have to move slightly; we are still

¹³⁷ Q 152

¹³⁸ Ev 87

¹³⁹ Qq 202-05

¹⁴⁰ Q 45

¹⁴¹ Ev 94

¹⁴² Qq 243-4

¹⁴³ Q 297

going to have Airwave, but there is going to be a transition onto a new model of radio and that potentially could cause us to lose some operational functions within the system”.¹⁴⁴

57. It is essential that the Government learn from the experience of both the FRAs and other emergency services that have already migrated to the new technology. This will help to avoid repetition of difficulties involving technical teething problems and project specifications.

Fireground technology

58. Many who submitted evidence emphasised the need to update “fire-ground technology” which is used by firefighters to communicate with each other at an incident.¹⁴⁵ Several witnesses felt that this should have been included within the FireLink project.¹⁴⁶ For example, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Authority said:

“we also feel it necessary to highlight the fact that fireground radios and handheld communications have not been considered as part of either of these two national projects [FireLink and FiReControl], which means that there are important implications for the effectiveness of both. We stress the importance of the ability of all communications to be compatible and therefore, this is a vital issue with implications for resilience and future effectiveness of both FireControl and FireLink”.¹⁴⁷

The FBU told us:

“neither Project adequately tackles the desperate need for more up-to-date Fireground communications to replace the current antiquated radio systems used by individual firefighters. Next to nothing has been done to address what is a genuine and pressing issue of how to instantly communicate with personnel at small and large incidents, a central lesson of 9/11. Even if billions are spent on FiReControl and FireLink, firefighters at incidents will still be left with a whistle to signal the need to carry out an emergency evacuation rather than all being simultaneously sent a radio message”.¹⁴⁸

59. The Chief Fire Officer of Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service made a plea for the inclusion of handheld radios within the FireLink project: “the handheld radios which we use on what we call the fire ground, when we are at an incident, are not part of the FireLink project at the moment and from an interoperability point of view, it is essential that they are brought within the FireLink project for the future”.¹⁴⁹ **We recommend that the Government address the need for upgraded fire-ground technology to enhance**

¹⁴⁴ Q 239

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, Ev 81, 253

¹⁴⁶ Ev 101, 133, 149, 151, 187, 191, 195

¹⁴⁷ Ev 82

¹⁴⁸ Ev 253

¹⁴⁹ Q 242

resilience and the safety of fire-fighters. This should be done as part of the FireLink project.

5 Prevention and risk assessment

60. The 2003 White Paper marked a shift in emphasis of the work of the FRS towards preventing fires, rather than simply responding to them. The concentration on prevention is also linked to a more general shift in the approach to safety based on risk assessment and management.¹⁵⁰ The Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004 legislated for this shift in FRS responsibility and activity. The CFOA has pointed out that the move to prevention extends beyond preventing fires and includes managing non-fire risks such as transport incidents and civil emergencies.¹⁵¹ The ODPM claimed that the prevention culture is now ‘embedded’, highlighting the introduction of IRMPs and Community Fire Safety initiatives.¹⁵²

Integrated Risk Management Plans

61. Since April 2003 every FRA has been required to produce an IRMP. FRAs are in their third year of IRMP planning and are now consulting on plans covering 2006-07.¹⁵³ IRMPs are intended to be a vehicle for locally-specific risk assessment and planning, increasing the ability of FRAs to better match resources to need.¹⁵⁴ The ODPM stated:

“Fire and Rescue Authorities are required by the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework to have in place and maintain an IRMP which reflects local need and sets out plans to tackle effectively both existing and potential risks to communities. An IRMP must set out an authority’s assessment of local risk and, in line with that analysis, how it is going to deploy its resources to tackle those risks and improve the safety of all sections of society. It is, therefore, for each Fire & Rescue Authority to determine appropriate fire cover in its area”.¹⁵⁵

The CFOA saw the introduction of IRMPs as a positive development in the approach to risk management. It did not agree with the point raised by the FBU and some FRAs that the allocation of resources through the IRMP process had resulted in funding for some things (such as recruitment) being reduced.¹⁵⁶ It told us IRMPs

“are going very well indeed actually. It is true to say that it was new ground for the Fire and Rescue Service when we moved forward and it was a dramatic change[...] it is not about cuts by the back door, it is about having to grapple with a new way of thinking where the understanding of the risk and how you deploy an emergency response to handle the risk may well be different from the different types of risk we had to deal with in the past but at the same time reducing that not just through community safety but through the new Fire Safety Enforcement and Regulatory

¹⁵⁰ *Fire Safety: regulatory reform overview 2006*, House of Commons Library, Standard Note, January 2005.

¹⁵¹ Ev 134

¹⁵² Ev 156

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Q 381

¹⁵⁵ Ev 13 Vol I

¹⁵⁶ Ev 69, 71, 83, 138, 162, 198, Q 289

Reform Order that hopefully will be on the statute books later on. It is a complete holistic package of prevention, detection and enforcement of legislation and an emergency response when all else fails”.¹⁵⁷

The Audit Commission’s view is that “developing IRMPs, as part of a balanced strategy, is a prominent strength for most fire and rescue authorities...[but]...significant changes to service provision from implementing integrated approaches to risk management are not widespread and further progress can clearly be made”.¹⁵⁸

62. We asked the ODPM what assessment it had made of IRMPs. It said, somewhat obliquely,

“the IRMP Operational Risk Management Support Team has provided advice, guidance and encouragement to Fire and Rescue Authority members and Principal Officers in the development and promotion of robust IRMPs and subsequent action plans. In addition, the reconvened IRMP Steering Group is considering the future development of IRMPs with the aim of producing consistent and high quality IRMPs”.¹⁵⁹

Whilst the CPA process conducted by the Audit Commission will necessarily involve consideration of an FRA’s IRMP (as part of examining its management and resource allocation), no nationwide review of the impact of IRMPs has occurred, or is planned. **We recommend that the impact and adequacy of Integrated Risk Management Plans is assessed on a nationwide basis.**

63. While the general assessment of the IRMP process by our witnesses was positive, some identified potential deficiencies such as whether IRMPs include planning for major incidents.¹⁶⁰ There is however an inherent paradox. An IRMP is specific to the area covered by the FRA that produced it. As Hampshire FRA noted, “on one hand government welcomes ‘the initiative taken by some authorities to re-examine their mobilising and resourcing policies in a regional context’ (Draft National Framework 2006–08 p11) and yet exhort authorities to maintain IRMPs to reflect local needs”.¹⁶¹ While IRMPs can be consistent in certain areas (e.g. the type of information they contain), they are inherently inconsistent (because they are locally specific). **We recommend that the Government provide guidance to the FRS on priorities between local and regional planning and stipulates clearly how IRMPs should reflect those priorities.**

64. The National Framework for the FRS provides strategic direction to FRAs and should inform the IRMP planning process. The LGA told us of potential problems relating to the timing of its publication. The LGA stated:

“the timing of the publication of the National Framework does, however, present some problems for authorities. We understand that ODPM’s intention had been to

¹⁵⁷ Q 376

¹⁵⁸ *Learning from the CPA for the Fire and Rescue Services in England 2005*, Audit Commission, January 2006, page 21.

¹⁵⁹ Ev 13 Vol I

¹⁶⁰ Ev 135

¹⁶¹ Ev 201

publish the draft Framework each September to allow authorities to consider the implications in their own IRMP consultation documents. This year, however, the draft framework was not issued until November, with a closing date for consultation of 18 February 2006. For many authorities, this year's IRMP consultation period will have now closed, or will be closing shortly, and budgets must be agreed in February. The late publication of the draft framework means, therefore, that they will not now be able to consult on how its implications should be reflected in their IRMPs, and will severely limit the extent to which they can be considered in the budget setting process".¹⁶²

We recommend that the Government ensure that, in future, publication of the National Framework is co-ordinated with FRAs' planning processes.

Community Fire Safety

65. The FRS has a duty under the 2004 Fire and Rescue Act to promote Community Fire Safety (CFS). The ODPM outlined the funding it has provided for this:

"Government has invested heavily in initiatives such as the provision of £4.5 million (funding until March 2006) under the Community Fire Safety Innovation Fund. This is in addition to the £11.3 million we have made available over the same period as part of the Arson Control Forum's Implementation Fund to support local arson prevention projects".¹⁶³

There is consensus on the widespread benefits of CFS work. For example, Bedford and Luton FRA said:

"there is no doubt that the expansion of our fire prevention role to include a wide range of community safety initiatives is already paying dividends. Reduction in fire deaths and injuries, primary fires and arson are very good indications of this, as are increases in smoke detector ownership and the prominence of the service working in our community with youth and road accident reduction".¹⁶⁴

It was, however, worried about long-term funding, as were a number of other authorities.¹⁶⁵ £11.4 million grant funding was announced in January 2006 to support prevention work over the period April 2006 to March 2008.¹⁶⁶ These grants will replace the grants paid to some authorities under the Community Fire Safety Innovation Fund and the Arson Control Forum Implementation Fund in 2003–06, and provide revenue to complement the capital grants paid to all fire and rescue authorities under the Home Fire Risk Check Initiative in 2004–08. We discuss the ODPM's performance in reaching its fire safety and prevention targets in paragraphs 113–4. **We welcome the recent announcement**

¹⁶² Ev 172

¹⁶³ Ev 156

¹⁶⁴ Ev 164

¹⁶⁵ Ev 115, 143, 146

¹⁶⁶ HC Deb, 23 January 2006, Col 44WS

that the Government will continue to provide grant funding to support prevention work until 2008.

The Fire Safety Order 2006

66. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2006 will come into force in October 2006. The Order will provide a single fire safety regime applying to all workplaces and non-domestic premises. Fire certificates (previously issued by the FRS) will be replaced by a system of responsibilities on a 'responsible person', which will include a duty to carry out a risk assessment. The date of commencement has been moved back from April 2006 to allow business and enforcers (for the most part that is 'inspectors' from within the FRS with some exceptions where other enforcers such as the Health and Safety Executive, are specifically named) more time for preparation.¹⁶⁷ The Order is broadly supported by the FRS.¹⁶⁸ However, the Fire Protection Association warned that:

“this shift of focus [toward risk-assessment] should not be undertaken at the expense of the traditional fire prevention work that has been so successful in ensuring that the UK workplace has become one of the most fire-safe environments in the world in recent years”.¹⁶⁹

The South East RMB told us:

“whilst we welcome the introduction of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order, and support the drawing together of the myriad of legislation that relates to fire safety in places of work and public buildings, we are concerned that placing responsibility for such matters entirely on the premises occupier or owner, may see a reduction in the high standards now found in places of work and public buildings, with regard to fire safety. We believe that the professional expertise of the Fire and Rescue Service in supporting the business community through an appropriate mixture of education, encouragement and enforcement, should be retained, and that it would be beneficial to carefully review the introduction of the Order to ensure its implementation meets its stated aims and objectives”.¹⁷⁰

The CFOA said that the Fire Safety Order will:

“nearly double the number of premises subject to detailed regulation. FRAs are planning to deal with expansion within current resources by adopting a risk-based inspection regime where the frequency of visits to check premises reflects the assessed fire risk in those buildings, however the resource implications will need continual review as the new regime develops”.¹⁷¹

67. The ODPM recognised that this shift will require “FRS personnel to adjust to risk assessment-based fire precautions and adopt the role of checking compliance rather than

¹⁶⁷ See Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Subordinate Provisions Order 2006 (SI 2006/484)

¹⁶⁸ Ev 189

¹⁶⁹ Ev 238

¹⁷⁰ Ev 193

¹⁷¹ Ev 135

setting the standards”. This process began in 1997 and therefore the ODPM believes the FRS is adequately prepared for its role as an enforcer of the new Fire Safety Regime.¹⁷² **We welcome the postponement of the commencement of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2006 as a sensible precaution to allow thorough preparation. We recommend that the Government monitor the implementation of the Order, and assess its impact on a regular basis.**

Sprinklers in schools – the review of building regulations on fire safety

68. Numerous submissions raised the issue of sprinklers in schools. The case for installation of sprinklers in schools is based on the high risk of arson attacks on school buildings and the potential offsetting of installation costs against reduced insurance premiums paid by schools. The CFOA stated:

“the installation of life-safety sprinklers systems used in a variety of contexts will without question, result in immediate and sustainable improvement in the medium-term in the number of lives saved, as well as a reduction both in injuries and the cost of fire in our communities...The likelihood of school fires remains very high due to a combination of social factors and the potential consequences of such fires are disastrous...It is our unequivocal view that every new school and major refurbishment to a school building must include the installation of sprinklers...We believe the business case for legislative support in this area is overwhelming”.¹⁷³

The APFO told us:

“APFO members continue to witness the damage caused to school buildings and our young people’s education, through malicious and deliberate fire setting in schools. This Association lends our full support to the installation of automatic sprinkler systems in all new school buildings and major refurbishment schemes in school premises”.¹⁷⁴

The ODPM told us that this was quite clearly a matter for the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) and assured us that the matter was being taken seriously there.¹⁷⁵ In 2005 the Secretary of State for Education and Skills said:

“we believe that the decision on whether to install sprinklers is best taken locally. For example, in our Managing School Facilities guide 6, ‘Fire Safety’, we give the example of a school in an area of high arson risk as being a suitable candidate for having sprinklers installed. However, we are mindful of the need to provide more detailed advice than before. Liaising with ODPM, we have therefore produced new draft guidance on fire safety—Building Bulletin (BB) 100, ‘Designing and Managing Against the Risk of Fire in Schools’. It stresses the value of using risk assessments to

¹⁷² Ev 13

¹⁷³ Ev 134-5

¹⁷⁴ Ev 89

¹⁷⁵ Q 473

determine what sort of fire detection and alarm systems should be used in each school, and whether or not sprinklers should be installed”.¹⁷⁶

69. Many of our witnesses, however, felt that there should be a requirement for new and refurbished schools to be fitted with sprinklers rather than leaving it as a matter of local discretion. The Business and Community Safety Forum stated its wish to see “the installation of sprinklers or equivalent fire suppression systems in all schools, as standard, not on a risk assessment basis”.¹⁷⁷ The LGA is strongly of the view that sprinklers must be “fitted in new and altered premises-including schools and high risk domestic dwellings-where people are considered to be most vulnerable”.¹⁷⁸ Although the DfES has almost completed its analysis of the responses to its consultation on Building Bulletin 100 ‘Designing and Managing Against the Risk of Fire in Schools’, it has given us no indication that it intends to make the installation of sprinklers in schools a requirement.¹⁷⁹ **We strongly recommend that the DfES require sprinkler systems in all new and renovated schools.**

The impact of the shift towards prevention

70. There is little doubt that the emphasis on prevention is promoting fire safety: the numbers both of fires and accidental deaths continue to fall. In the 12 month period up to 30 June 2005 the number of ‘primary’ fires (that is fires involving property, vehicles and/or casualties) fell by 13 per cent compared with the previous year, with fires in the home falling by 7 per cent.¹⁸⁰ Fire related deaths fell by 16 per cent over the same period while deaths from accidental dwelling fires fell by 21per cent. The CFOA highlighted this point, stating “In real terms we can claim that at least 78 more people are walking our streets today as a result of our fire safety initiatives”.¹⁸¹

71. The FBU was concerned however that emphasis on prevention might shift attention and resources away from the FRS’s primary role of fighting, and rescuing people from, fires: “frontline fire service, frontline intervention, should not be sidelined by community fire safety or any other preventative measures. They should be worked alongside each other...figures show, in terms of the people rescued, that intervention is still one of the heights of the fire service’s uses”.¹⁸² It is the case that many FRAs have frozen recruitment. In part this may be to release funds for other activities, including prevention. Such decisions about resource allocation have been however based on local risk assessments and have been consulted upon as part of the IRMP process.¹⁸³ Furthermore, while freezes or

¹⁷⁶ HC Deb, 6 July 2005, Col 442W

¹⁷⁷ Ev 86

¹⁷⁸ Ev 175

¹⁷⁹ Ev 17

¹⁸⁰ “Fire deaths continue to fall”, ODPM News Release 2006/0031, 28 February 2006. See also *The Fire Statistics Monitor*, 2nd Quarter 2005: <http://www.dclg.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1163879>

¹⁸¹ Ev 134

¹⁸² Q 289

¹⁸³ IRMP Guidance Note 2 provides a list of the organisations that FRAs will be expected to have consulted. These include the general public (council tax payers, households etc), Community organisations (including specific community groups, such as ethnic minority and other often excluded groups), Public representatives (e.g. Members of Parliament), Business organisations, Local authorities (public agencies and other emergency services), Employees

reductions in staffing levels would inevitably have an impact on the FRS capability to deal with “protracted incidents”, as the FBU claims, it does not necessarily mean a loss of frontline services as staff may be being used more efficiently.¹⁸⁴ The rescue statistics bear out the assertion that the rescue function of the FRS has not suffered. Even if the number of rescues were to fall, this might be because increased prevention was reducing the number of fires and fire deaths. **There is no evidence to suggest that the rescue role of the FRS function has been compromised by increased emphasis on prevention and risk assessment. If successful, prevention may lead to further efficiency savings as fewer fires would need to be attended. We recommend that the Government monitor the impact of diverting resources to fire prevention on FRS activity in other areas.**

(uniformed and non-uniformed) and their representatives, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and any other interested parties.

¹⁸⁴ Ev 257

6 Civil resilience

Background: new duties for the FRS

72. Civil resilience means preparedness for terrorism, civil disorder, environmental disaster and other major incidents. Under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 the FRS was given new duties as a ‘category one responder’, putting it on a similar footing with the other emergency services. These additional duties include:

- Assessment of local risks;
- Emergency planning;
- Business continuity planning;
- Provision of warnings, information and advice to the public on civil protection and emergencies;
- Sharing information with other local responders;
- Co-operating and coordinating delivery of services with other responders to increase efficiency, and
- Providing assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity planning.¹⁸⁵

The ODPM cited FiReControl, FireLink and New Dimension as the three main projects aimed at enhancing the ability of the FRS to deal with major incidents.¹⁸⁶ New Dimension is a centrally funded project to provide equipment, training and procedures to “deliver enhanced capabilities to respond to incidents requiring the mass decontamination of the public, the rescue of the public from collapsed structures and flooding”.¹⁸⁷ There is also a planned Emergencies Order (due to come into force in spring 2007) which will replace the existing *power* of the FRS to respond to non-fire emergencies with a *duty* to do so.¹⁸⁸

Planning

73. As well as the requirement for FRAs to prepare IRMPs, ‘category one responders’ are required to prepare Community Risk Registers (CRRs), which include an assessment of perceived risks over a five-year timeframe in a specific area. In each area there is a Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and there are also Regional Resilience Fora (RRF). LRFs are multi-agency groups, bringing together local authorities, emergency services and others such as the Environment Agency and Health Protection Agency. They are chaired by the police, local authority or other partners, meet at least every six months and have a key role in the

¹⁸⁵ House of Commons Library filenote, ‘Emergency Preparedness’, October 2005.

¹⁸⁶ Ev 156

¹⁸⁷ Ev 156

¹⁸⁸ The draft Emergencies Order has yet to be laid before Parliament. ODPM ran a consultation on a Draft Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2004 between September and December 2004. Details are available at <http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1162910>, as accessed on 30 June 2006.

production of CRRs. RRFs have many of the same type of representatives—but look at wider area issues. They meet quarterly and are run and chaired by the Government Offices (except in London, where the Chair is the ODPM Minister). They have a central role in the production of Regional Risk Assessments. For each risk identified in the CRR, a statement should be made of whether the risk would require a national as well as a local response; or a local response only. Similarly, certain threats, such as terrorist attacks, may require a national as well as a local response.¹⁸⁹ The CRR should also include a statement of the capability required to meet that risk or threat. CRRs are kept, maintained and updated by local authorities in readiness for emergencies. Part of the cycle to maintain the emergency plan is to check resource lists and integrate all the plans with those of the emergency services.

74. As mentioned in Chapter 5, there was some concern that IRMPs do not include plans for major incidents. The ODPM said:

“it is the task of the Regional Resilience Fora and the Local Resilience Fora (on which FRS is represented) to analyse the risk profile of the national threats and hazards to their region or locality, respectively. At a local level this takes the form of a Community Risk Register (CRR). Multi-agency co-operation in maintaining a Community Risk Register is also a statutory duty under the CCA [Civil Contingencies Act]. The FRS can thus consult the CRR to ensure that the major catastrophic incident risks captured on their IRMP are consistent with the national risks, and in reverse the CCR can consult the IRMP to ensure that the local risk profile for catastrophic incidents benefits from the local knowledge of the FRS”.¹⁹⁰

While this clearly explains the process, it gives no information about the extent to which the cross-referencing between IRMPs and CRRs actually takes place. Both the Greater Manchester FRS and the CFOA told us that there was a separation between the planning done by FRAs as part of the IRMP process, and the planning for major incidents done by Resilience Fora.¹⁹¹ The FBU was concerned that FRAs’ ability to initiate staff cuts as part of the IRMP process created a “central fault line in current national resilience planning”, as personnel levels impacted on the FRS’s overall capacity to respond to a series of protracted major incidents.¹⁹² If IRMPs were well-integrated with wider resilience planning, issues such as overall FRS staffing levels would be more likely to be adequately considered. **We recommend that the Government give urgent consideration as to how the Integrated Risk Management Plans may be better linked to planning for major catastrophic incidents.**

Funding

75. The purchase of much of the resilience-related equipment, and initial training to use it, is meant to be funded centrally through projects such as New Dimension. However, there

¹⁸⁹ Emergency Preparedness: Guidance on Part 1 of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004, its associated regulations and non-statutory instruments, HMG 2005.

¹⁹⁰ Ev 13

¹⁹¹ Ev 135, 142. See also Q 379-80

¹⁹² Ev 257

is evidence that some FRAs are using parts of their own budgets to meet resilience costs. For example, the LFEPA has already acquired “ten fire rescue units for the London resilience programme, which were not part of the New Dimension” and has allocated money from its forthcoming budget for six more.¹⁹³ McCartney Associates was concerned about the potential impact of long-term resilience resourcing on local services:

“individual FRAs are not being guaranteed additional resources over the longer-term to maintain the competence of its workforce in these services—or to maintain and replace the equipment—despite the Emergency Order (due to come into force in Spring 2007) making such work a statutory duty of FRAs”.¹⁹⁴

Recent experiences

76. In 2005 the FRS was involved in a number of major incidents which tested its civil resilience capacity. These revealed that resilience is important in both urban and rural areas. The Fire and Resilience Director told us:

“rural areas have just as much threat, if not possibly more, from natural disaster, floods and things like that. If you look at the experience of the last 18 months, we had the Boscastle floods in the summer of 2004, the Carlisle floods in 2005, we had 7/7 in the summer and we had Buncefield. Three of those were outside of Central London and one was in Central London”.¹⁹⁵

Witnesses agreed that the FRS had responded well to all of these incidents and its actions were commended by Ministers. But the incidents also drew attention to areas where improvements could be made, notably in the provision of specialist equipment.

Equipment

77. The LFEPA told us that the July 2005 attacks on London had demonstrated that the exercises and training conducted before the incident (for example the Osiris exercise carried out at Bank underground station in September 2003) were extremely valuable and that in the event the FRS had worked well with other emergency services.¹⁹⁶ In light of recent experiences however, the LFEPA had a better understanding of the threats it faced and had reassessed its equipment requirements:

“where we were found wanting, and we have highlighted this to the Fire Authority, was that although we recognised we had taken delivery of ten fire rescue units for the London resilience programme, which are not part of the New Dimension programme, we advised the authority that a further six would be required in order to maintain the appropriate level for an escalating level of attack”.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Q 215

¹⁹⁴ Ev 78

¹⁹⁵ Q 82

¹⁹⁶ Q215

¹⁹⁷ Q 215

This is obviously a major concern. It also has implications for FRAs outside London. The FBU raised a key question: “if London needs a total of 16 Incident Response Units (plus the associated support crews of 40 firefighters per Unit) how many may the rest of the UK now need?”.¹⁹⁸ **We recommend that the Government conduct a review of civil resilience equipment requirements across England in light of the experience of the July 2005 attacks on London.**

Integrated Risk Management Plans

78. We have noted that there is room to improve links between IRMPs and major incident planning. However there is some evidence that the IRMP process has led FRAs to think about positioning resources and equipment in a way that enhances civil resilience. For example, the LFEPA noted that their integrated risk management planning, which involved moving some high-volume pumping appliances from central London (where they had been positioned in accordance with the old wartime policy of resource allocation) to some outer London areas, proved its worth as these newly positioned pumps were used in the response to the Buncefield Oil Depot fire on Sunday 11 December 2005.¹⁹⁹ However, the FBU have pointed out that Hertfordshire, where Buncefield lies, has an IRMP which prescribes staff cuts in the county with the result that “two of the retained stations who attended in the first 20 minutes of that incident are going to be closed and disappear”.²⁰⁰ This underlines the importance of local IRMPs being linked to major incident planning.

Operational factors

79. Two other issues discussed earlier are relevant to resilience. The first is fireground communications discussed in Chapter 4. Numerous witnesses told us that the absence of any plan to update the technology used for communication between firefighters at the site of an incident endangered not only the safety of firefighters but also resilience.²⁰¹ This reinforces our conclusion that plans should be made by the Government for updating this technology, ideally as part of the existing FireLink project. The second point relates to the tri-service model of fire control rooms which Gloucestershire FRS claims is “the ultimate solution for national resilience, as set out in the Mott MacDonald report”.²⁰² As we discuss in the final chapter of this report, greater collaboration between emergency services is crucial to enhancing civil resilience. **The failure of Government to include an element of collaboration, or at least co-location, in its model of Regional Control Centres represents a missed opportunity for civil resilience.**

Mutual aid agreements

80. Under the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004, fire and rescue services are able to make mutual aid agreements with other fire and rescue services that provide and set protocols for

¹⁹⁸ Ev 256

¹⁹⁹ Q 215

²⁰⁰ Q 283

²⁰¹ Ev 189

²⁰² Ev 75

cooperation in time of need.²⁰³ West Yorkshire warned that these were not sufficiently used:

“In practice, this predominantly happens with immediate neighbours and only rarely with brigades further a field. This was understandable given the nature and extent of the expected operational challenge pre-9/11. Now, however, there is a need for a wider [use]”.²⁰⁴

Mutual aid agreements are likely to be important to the success of regional and national cooperation in the event of a major incident, in particular allowing shared use of specialist equipment. **We recommend that the Government encourage greater use of mutual aid agreements by FRAs to further enhance resilience.**

²⁰³ Ev 113

²⁰⁴ Ev 97-98

7 People management

Background

81. The FRS has a poor track record in managing its personnel. This was highlighted by the 2002 Bain Review which stated:

“personnel policy, procedures and practices in the Fire Service give cause for concern. Despite clear policies from management and the FBU in favour of diversity, in practice only lip-service is paid to it. Harassment and bullying are still too prevalent. The leadership must recognise that urgent action is required. An improved programme of HR management must be put in place as a matter of priority”.²⁰⁵

In response to this, the Government’s White Paper on the Fire and Rescue Services identified human resources as a key theme for modernisation. The Report of our predecessor Committee considered diversity within the FRS and its management of retained fire-fighters, concluding that in order to make progress on these issues, a change in the culture, attitude and behaviour within the service was required.²⁰⁶ Our inquiry concentrated on progress made on diversity and the management of retained firefighters.

Diversity

82. It has been recognised for some time that diversity in the FRS needs improvement. The ODPM said that “the government has had concerns about the performance on the Fire and Rescue Services on issues of equality and diversity for a number of years” and in its 2003 White Paper pledged to “take action, working with employers and the unions, to promote a more diverse culture...the service must better reflect the community it serves”.²⁰⁷

Targets

83. The ODPM’s latest national diversity targets for the FRS were set under the 2000 Spending Review. The FRS was set a target to achieve 9 per cent of uniformed operational staff being women and 3.6 per cent of uniformed and non-uniformed combined being ethnic minorities by 31 March 2004. None of these targets were met, as only 2.4 per cent of the workforce were women and 2.6 per cent were from ethnic minorities by the 2004 deadline.²⁰⁸ Based on a Home Office legacy target from 1999/2000, the FRS is expected to increase the percentage of female uniformed operational staff to 15 per cent and ethnic minority staff to 7 per cent by 2009.²⁰⁹ The ODPM has said however that it is unlikely that the FRS will meet these diversity targets by 2009 due to slow progress.²¹⁰ FRAs also have

²⁰⁵ *The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives (‘the Bain Review’)*, 16 December 2002, Executive Summary, Para 10.

²⁰⁶ HC 43

²⁰⁷ Ev 5 Vol I

²⁰⁸ *Annual Report 2005*, ODPM, Cm 6526, June 2005, page 105.

²⁰⁹ A target from when the FRS was the responsibility of the Home Office.

²¹⁰ Ev 9 Vol I

diversity related Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) to meet, which help the ODPM to monitor local performance and to aid performance assessment.²¹¹

Reasons for poor performance

Setting the right targets

84. One reason for the poor performance could be that the targets are simply too difficult to achieve. Devon Fire and Rescue Authority said of the target relating to women “[the] ODPM should recognise that the target of 15% by 2009 is simply unachievable”.²¹² Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire FRA recognise that targets should be challenging, but consider the current ones unrealistic.²¹³ West Yorkshire FRA called for the targets to be “revised and expanded”.²¹⁴ The ODPM told us that they are currently reviewing the targets with stakeholders as they “want a target that will stretch but will be achievable”.²¹⁵

85. The ODPM has not set targets to increase women in the non-operational workforce because it says that women are well represented here.²¹⁶ The local BVPIs for 2005-06 focus on ethnic minorities who are uniformed staff (whole-time, retained and control personnel) rather than the entire workforce. This discrepancy between local BVPIs and national targets for ethnic minorities may mean that some FRAs think that they should be concentrating on recruiting ethnic minority people only for uniformed positions; in written evidence, several FRAs and the CFOA called for performance targets to be expanded to cover the entire workforce.²¹⁷ Lancashire Combined FRA told us that “current diversity targets should not be restricted to uniformed operational staff but should expand to include all uniformed staff engaged in service delivery, whether those staff fulfil an operational role or not”.²¹⁸ This is despite the fact that the national target for ethnic minority representation already covers the entire workforce.

86. UNISON told us of its unhappiness that the ODPM’s diversity strategy concentrates on employees who work in firefighting and fire control rather than the entire workforce. Also, it believes that the distinction between uniformed and non-uniformed staff implies that non-uniformed staff “are in some way inferior to the majority of the workforce”.²¹⁹ **However, we consider that it is necessary to make a distinction between uniformed and non-uniformed staff as the need to increase diversity amongst non-uniformed staff is less pressing. A diversity target covering the entire workforce could take the pressure off FRAs to increase diversity amongst uniformed staff.**

²¹¹ The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework, ODPM, December 2004.

²¹² Ev 88

²¹³ Ev 93

²¹⁴ Ev 96

²¹⁵ Q 99

²¹⁶ Ev 6 Vol I

²¹⁷ Ev 71, 93, 96, 125, 138

²¹⁸ Ev 69

²¹⁹ Ev 152

87. It is important that the Government set both national targets and Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) which are consistent, making it clear exactly what is required of FRAs. The Government needs to reiterate that the national target for ethnic minorities relates to the entire fire service workforce, not just operational uniformed staff. The national target should be supported by separate BVPIs which distinguish between uniformed, non-uniformed, operational and non-operational staff. While it is important that the Government does not devalue, or appear to devalue, any particular section of the workforce and that its diversity strategies and targets apply to every area within the Fire and Rescue Service, the distinction between uniformed and non-uniformed staff needs to be retained in order to focus the attention and activity of FRAs.

Recruitment freezes

88. The CFOA told us that “some of the attention and scrutiny on diversity issues has been diluted by other major initiatives such as modernisation and civil resilience”.²²⁰ Other evidence supports this position. Although community safety work has provided some opportunities to employ staff from under-represented groups, some FRAs argued that the shift in emphasis towards fire prevention had also served to undermine progress on diversity: in some cases allocating resources to prevention had resulted in recruitment freezes for operational staff. Lancashire Combined Fire Authority told us “the effect of this [recruitment freeze] is that the Authority is unable to make any real impact with respect to increasing diversity among its operation workforce”.²²¹

Impact of regional control centres on diversity

89. Women account for some two-thirds of the workforce in existing control centres. Redundancies arising from the move to regional control centres are likely, as the ODPM accepted, to have a greater effect on women and therefore further erode their representation with the FRS workforce. The Government says that this is “an opportunity for FRSs to take more active steps to actively promote diversity within their organisation”. **We recommend that redundancies should not be contemplated until every avenue for re-deployment has been explored.**

Diversity and the CPA

90. Both UNISON and the CRE were critical of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process for the low priority accorded to diversity issues.²²² This is a concern which we share. Addressing the poor performance on diversity over recent years should become a key issue for the FRS. **We recommend that in future, a Fire Authority should not receive a Comprehensive Performance Assessment rating higher than good unless it can demonstrate that significant progress, in line with any revised**

²²⁰ Ev 138

²²¹ Ev 69

²²² Ev 244

Government targets, has been made on diversity issues generally and within the workforce in particular.

Lack of leadership

91. The CRE criticised the ODPM for its lack of leadership on diversity issues.²²³ Other evidence validates this criticism. In its original submission to our inquiry, the Department paid scant attention to diversity within the FRS despite our raising it as an area of concern. When pressed, more information was forthcoming. The ODPM told us of a number of practical steps it had taken to promote cultural awareness such as multi-faith seminars and the fire safety campaigns of recent years, which the CRE heralded as models of good practice. These good initiatives have, however, been undermined by an apparent lack of commitment in other areas. In 2004 the ODPM established the Diversity Happens forum: the support groups for this forum have still not been established. A national equality and diversity adviser was appointed in 2004 but their term ended a year later. A project to bring in new national fire-fighter selection tests, intended to reduce discrimination, was launched in 2001 yet the new tests have not yet been implemented. In 1999 the HMFSI made 38 recommendations regarding diversity, equality and fairness in the FRS. These recommendations are still waiting to be reviewed by the Government, despite a recommendation to that effect from our predecessor Committee in 2004. The Fire Officers' Association told us that many of the Government initiatives had an "exclusive approach".²²⁴ This is borne out by evidence from the FBU who told us that its minority representatives had been excluded from the Diversity Happens forum despite their acknowledged expertise and effective advocacy.²²⁵

92. We are disappointed and dismayed at the lack of progress that has been made on diversity within the FRS and particularly at the Government's half-hearted and ineffective leadership on the issue. We recommend that the Government immediately (i) establish support groups for the Diversity Happens forum; (ii) re-appoint a national adviser of equality and diversity for the FRS; and (iii) implement the long-promised new selection tests for fire-fighters. We further recommend that the Government conduct a thorough review of its diversity policy and initiatives relating to the Fire and Rescue Service, reporting within the next 18 months. We also recommend that the Government, within two years, publish and promulgate a nationwide strategy for promoting diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service that takes into account the experiences and expertise of all stakeholders.

Retained fire service

93. Retained firefighters, working on the Retained Duty System (RDS), are part-time staff who turn out at short notice to participate as professional fire-fighters alongside the regular fire service. Retained firefighters live or work close to their stations and are on call to respond to incidents. Most have other full-time jobs in a wide range of trades and

²²³ Ev 244

²²⁴ Ev 230

²²⁵ Ev 260

professions. The Retained Firefighters Union (RFU) explained “there are just over 18,000 RDS personnel covering 60% of fire stations, but they provide fire and rescue cover for over 95% of the landmass of the UK”.²²⁶ Much of the service provided by retained firefighters is in rural areas. The Bain Review, our predecessor Committee’s recommendations and a recent government review have all addressed issues specifically relating to the retained service.²²⁷ These have included recruitment (particularly in rural areas), a pay system that creates anomalies and is demoralising, lack of a pension scheme, lack of training, poor relations with full-time personnel, and a lack of representation on the key negotiating institution, the National Joint Council (on which the FBU holds all 27 seats).

94. The RFU told us that there has been little or no progress in implementing the recommendations of any of the above-mentioned reports: “Since the publication of the previous report of the Committee in 2004, there has been a failure to implement its recommendations in respect of the Retained Duty System (RDS). There has also been a failure by fire and rescue authorities to progress the findings of several other high profile reports on the RDS”.²²⁸ The RFU highlighted the following as key areas of concern:

- Failure to reform the NJC and industrial relations;
- Lack of progress on the recommendations of the Retained Review;
- IRMPs that fail to take advantage of the flexible and efficient working arrangements of the RDS;
- The expectation that the addition of operational assessment to the Audit Commission’s CPA process will fail to provide for a RDS perspective;
- Failure to implement IPDS for RDS and downgrading of RDS under IPDS implementation of Rank to Role;
- Lack of RDS input to local and national strategic development;
- Bullying and harassment of RDS personnel, especially during industrial disputes, and
- Delayed introduction of flexible pension arrangements.²²⁹

95. As our predecessor Committee noted, the retained fire service has felt undervalued for some time, and evidence from the RFU emphasised that many in the retained service continue to feel like “second class citizens”.²³⁰ This is largely because of a lack of understanding of the retained service by whole-time firefighters, who occupy the majority of managerial positions within the FRS. As the President of the RFU told us:

²²⁶ Ev 209

²²⁷ *The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives* (‘the Bain Review’), 16 December 2002.

²²⁸ Ev 269

²²⁹ Ev 212

²³⁰ Ev 209

“where you have a management structure that is primarily based on whole time employees, where your chief officers and senior management work their way up through the ranks from firefighters and they have all been whole time, they have got a very limited understanding of the needs and capabilities of the retained service. We continually find that policy has been developed which works very well for whole time employees but when that is just bolted on to the retained service it does not work as well or it is very difficult to work”.²³¹

The retained review recommended the appointment of Retained Liaison Officers to help facilitate better communication and understanding between the retained and whole-time service. It seems that in some cases however, liaison officers that have been appointed have a limited capacity to carry out this role. The RFU cited a recent example.²³² It makes sense for Retained Liaison Officers (RLOs) to be whole-time firefighters so that they have an understanding of the culture and views of that part of the service. However, **if Retained Liaison Officers (RLOs) are to have any effect, they must be given adequate information and training and should consult with colleagues in the retained service.**

Recruitment

96. Cumbria FRA told us:

“Cumbria, as many other rural fire and rescue services, are experiencing real difficulties in recruiting and retaining retained fire-fighters. Increasing levels of commitment required to meet training and health and safety requirements of a modern emergency service, a changing culture away from intervention to prevention are placing significant demands upon our part time workforce and their conditions of service have not kept pace with the reform agenda”.²³³

ODPM officials recognised the problem, stating: “one of the issues is recruitment of retained [firefighters] and it is a big challenge to make sure we keep up the level of recruitment because it has become increasingly difficult to encourage people in some areas into the Retained Service”.²³⁴

Inclusion: community fire safety, diversity and risk planning

97. The RFU notes the reduction of fire-related deaths as a result of an increased emphasis on prevention through Community Safety Work.²³⁵ However, while retained fire fighters are usually based within the local community, the RFU states that they are rarely used for community fire safety work. In rural areas this is a particular issue as the alternative is to send full-time officers long distances to local communities. The benefits of existing links between retained firefighters and the local community are also lost. The RFU has suggested greater use of existing rural stations as community fire stations in rural and semi-rural

²³¹ Q 114

²³² Q 115

²³³ Ev 162

²³⁴ Q 97

²³⁵ Ev 210

areas.²³⁶ The RFU also suggested that retained firefighters are well placed to help recruit minorities as they are based within the local community.²³⁷

98. The RFU also told us that it felt that the retained service was not adequately involved in planning or decision-making processes and that IRMPs did not make full use of the retained service.²³⁸ The retained service offers a highly flexible and efficient means of service delivery for the FRS but it seems that this is not always reflected in IRMP planning. The RFU told us that there are many opportunities for greater use of retained firefighters, who are often used to maintain service delivery during industrial disputes (most recently in Suffolk). The RFU argued that IRMPs should reflect this “major opportunity for making a more effective and efficient Fire Service outside the metropolitan areas”.²³⁹ The RFU highlighted an example in Norfolk where use of retained stations would enhance efficiency and provide an ideal alternative to station closures.²⁴⁰

99. Not all witnesses agreed with the RFU’s assertion that there was a “lack of involvement [of the retained service] at strategic level”. A representative of Devon FRA said

“I would not agree that the retained service is less involved. The integrated risk management plan is about the service as a whole and in Devon, for example, retained firefighters and retained fire stations are an essential and a fully integrated part of the organisation. They feature within our integrated risk management plan completely”.²⁴¹

Nevertheless, we emphasise the importance of including the retained service both in the production of IRMPs and as a resource within them. It seems to us that the key obstacle to this is communication, as identified by the RFU:

“there are difficulties for brigades in communicating correctly and thoroughly with the retained because they do not have the experience of doing the job in the first place in many instances. That gives them a communication problem about how to involve them and drive something through to make change for the better”.²⁴²

100. We recommend the Government ensure that retained firefighters are recognised as a vital bridge between the FRS and the communities they serve; their status should be enhanced by greater involvement in planning systems, for example with seats on the National Joint Council, and a clear role in fire planning, particularly in rural areas.

Lack of progress on reform

101. We are disappointed with the lack of progress on the issues identified by the retained review and our predecessor Committee. Part of the reason for this may be the absence of a

²³⁶ Ev 210-11. See also QQ 92, 93, 97, 102

²³⁷ Ev 213

²³⁸ QQ 111-4

²³⁹ Q 111

²⁴⁰ Q 112

²⁴¹ Q 135, 166

²⁴² Q 115

clear allocation of responsibility for implementing reform. The RFU seemed to think that this was the responsibility of the CFOA.²⁴³ The CFOA explained that it “is not the employer, nor is it the Employers Organisation, and so the practical ability to implement many of the recommendations lies with other stakeholders - not least individual fire and rescue authorities”.²⁴⁴ ODPM officials told us that

“We did have a major review of the Retained Service which reported in January 2004 and that is now with the Chief Fire Officers Association and ourselves to drive forward. I would like to echo that, I think the retained are an absolutely vital part of the service for the future and how we develop that from the community safety perspective is one of the key challenges over the next year or two”.²⁴⁵

The ODPM told us that CFOA were preparing a report prioritising the recommendations of the retained review and that an action plan for implementation would then be developed. “Real developments” were expected within two months.²⁴⁶ **We recommend that the Government provide a clear indication of the reforms it intends to be implemented affecting the Retained Service, including target dates for key benchmarks and completion.**

Other issues: leadership and staff development

102. The ODPM stated that there is a need to improve leadership within the FRS and told us that “another key issue for staff development is leadership”.²⁴⁷ The CFOA told us that “there is no doubt that much has been achieved through the leadership of professional fire officers and fire authority members”.²⁴⁸ On matters such as diversity, there have been pockets of good practice, demonstrated by leaders within the FRS. UNISON told us its members “believe [this] has helped to create a working environment which will attract and support diversity”.²⁴⁹ However, this is certainly not the case across the FRS, and UNISON emphasised that “in some cases, UNISON is seeing the re-introduction of some militaristic practices”.²⁵⁰ The Audit Commission said that “on the whole, fire and rescue authorities have good managerial leadership” but at a higher level “some senior managers have not adapted [to]the cultural change required by a modern fire and rescue service”.²⁵¹ The leaders within the Fire and Rescue Service will be instrumental in ensuring that the modernisation programme succeeds. **The Government will be consulting on introducing initiatives to improve the quality of leadership; this should be done sooner rather than later.**²⁵²

²⁴³ Q 102, Ev 212

²⁴⁴ Ev 4, Vol I

²⁴⁵ Q 93

²⁴⁶ QQ 96-7

²⁴⁷ Ev 158

²⁴⁸ Ev 132

²⁴⁹ Ev 153

²⁵⁰ Ev 153

²⁵¹ Audit Commission, *Learning from the CPA for the Fire and Rescue Services in England 2005*, January 2006, paragraph 41 (hereafter *Learning from the CPA*).

²⁵² Ev 158

103. In addition to needing strong leadership, the training and development of staff is a key issue for the FRS. As part of modernisation, the ODPM introduced a new Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) which applies to all staff (uniformed and non-uniformed) and aims to use a competency-based approach to target individual needs of the workforce.²⁵³ The West Sussex FRA supports the IPDS but is concerned that “it is becoming too bureaucratic and costly to the point that it has the potential of affecting the proper delivery of the Fire and Rescue Service”.²⁵⁴ **We recommend that the Government regularly review the FRAs’ attitude toward the Integrated Personnel Development System scheme to ensure that it is not viewed as merely a bureaucratic and burdensome exercise.**

²⁵³ See the DCLG’s website: <http://www.dclg.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1124260>

²⁵⁴ Ev 103

8 Performance measurement and management

The Comprehensive Performance Assessment process

104. The 2002 Bain review suggested that the “Government should discuss with the Audit Commission and Accounts Commission an assessment for fire authorities, building on lessons from the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process”.²⁵⁵ The Government announced in its 2003 White Paper that “there will be independent, rigorous quality assurance of the fire and rescue service”.²⁵⁶ As a result, the Audit Commission was invited to introduce a new inspection regime based on the CPA process used for local government. The aim of the CPA is to examine how fire authorities are being run, assess their performance against local and national priorities and reflect how authorities respond to local challenges. The first round of the CPA process rated 47 per cent of authorities as either good or excellent.²⁵⁷

105. Generally, there has been a positive response towards the new CPA arrangements, even though only one full round of inspections has been completed. Lancashire FRA found the new CPA process “extremely helpful in focussing our efforts towards modernising the service”.²⁵⁸ Devon said that “we really felt as though we had been assessed at the end of the process”.²⁵⁹ The RFU and UNISON also welcomed the change to the CPA arrangements.²⁶⁰

The audit burden and cost

106. With the move to the CPA process, the ODPM believed that it had lifted “the burden of inspection”.²⁶¹ The Government, rather than FRAs, is required to pay the Audit Commission for the CPA. The CPA process however takes up a significant amount of the fire authorities’ time. Lancashire Fire Authority estimated that the CPA process took 203 days of staff time, amounting to £52,000.²⁶² Devon Fire Authority quoted a figure of around £48,000.²⁶³ The ODPM told us:

“In 2001-2, ODPM spent £1.85 million on HMFSA’s inspections of the Fire and Rescue Service...the figure solely relates to the direct costs of inspection activity during that financial year. ODPM provided the Audit Commission with a total of £4.3 million of grant for their work on developing and implementing Fire CPA over

²⁵⁵ *The Future of the Fire Service: reducing risk, saving lives (‘the Bain Review’)*, 16 December 2002, list of recommendations, page vii.

²⁵⁶ Cm 5808, Chapter 6

²⁵⁷ *Learning from the CPA*.

²⁵⁸ Q 261

²⁵⁹ Q 176

²⁶⁰ Q 131

²⁶¹ Q 13

²⁶² Unprinted paper (FRS 05(i))

²⁶³ Unprinted paper (FRS 11(a))

the two financial years, 2003-4 and 2004-5. This figure includes Audit Commission expenditure on recruiting, training and retaining staff to take forward work on FRS performance assessment and the costs of developing, consulting on and piloting the CPA methodology. It also includes the costs of supporting self assessment, employing peer reviewers and the direct costs of inspection activity to deliver the CPA judgements. The £4.3 million covers all the Audit Commission's costs for two financial years and there was no other inspection activity during this period".²⁶⁴

The results of the first full CPA process

107. FRAs received an overall score of excellent, good, fair, weak or poor. This overall score is based on the authorities' performance against nine themes relating to what the authority is trying to achieve, how the authority delivers its priorities and what the authority has achieved to date. According to the Audit Commission, 22 out of 47 fire authorities were good or excellent, though only two received a score of excellent. 67 per cent of the metropolitan authorities which serve larger populations were good or excellent. This compares to only 31 per cent of the county authorities, serving smaller populations.²⁶⁵ The Audit Commission concluded that, with fewer staff and smaller budgets, economies of scale and capacity are more of an issue for county fire and rescue authorities, which clearly impacts on their CPA assessment.²⁶⁶

108. None of the FRAs that submitted evidence challenged the score that they had received under the CPA process. The CFOA did express some disappointment because "despite the fact that almost half [of the fire and rescue authorities' scores] were good or excellent,[...] [the CPA report] really homed in on a lot of negative areas".²⁶⁷ The CPA highlighted performance management, managing staff skills and capacity as well as diversity and equality as areas of weakness.²⁶⁸ **We welcome the introduction of Comprehensive Performance Assessment for the FRS. We note its usefulness in highlighting areas where improvements are required.**

Assessing the operational activities of the FRS

109. A recurring criticism of the CPA process concerned the lack of any assessment of the FRS operational performance or capability. The FBU and the CFOA mentioned the need for an operational review of fire authorities.²⁶⁹ Similarly, North Yorkshire FRA said that such assessments were needed to "enhance the operational capability of individual FRs".²⁷⁰ Greater Manchester FRA said that an independent operational review would help to reassure the public and it should be carried out by the Audit Commission as part of future CPA reviews.²⁷¹ **We welcome the plans for the independent operational**

²⁶⁴ Ev 19 Vol I

²⁶⁵ *Learning from the CPA*, paragraph 27

²⁶⁶ *ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Q360

²⁶⁸ *Learning from the CPA*, pages 2 and 3.

²⁶⁹ Ev 139, QQ 314, 360

²⁷⁰ Ev 227

²⁷¹ Ev 144

assessment of fire authorities to be carried out next summer. The proposed assessment should be conducted by the Audit Commission and combined with the current CPA to minimise the audit burden on FRAs.

Targets and performance indicators – are they the right ones?

110. Under the 2004 Spending Review, the ODPM had to meet a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target specifically relating to the Fire and Rescue Services. PSA 3 sets targets for reducing accidental fire-related deaths in the home and the number of deliberate fires by 10 per cent. Linked to this, FRAs have been given national Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs). The ODPM drew up the 2005-06 BVPIs with the help of a working group which included the Audit Commission, Local Government Association, Chief Fire Officers' Association and representatives from individual authorities. The BVPIs were tested with individual fire authorities and a full consultation exercise was carried out.²⁷² Some of the national BVPIs are specifically matched to the national fire PSA, encouraging fire authorities to contribute to the achievement of the ODPM's target. FRAs also set local performance indicators which are incorporated into the Integrated Risk Management Plans.

111. The ODPM considers effective national BVPIs as ones that measure outcomes rather than activity. The ODPM does not consider national targets such as response times to be appropriate because local risks and events outside the FRS's control will have too much of an impact. This is to avoid introducing "perverse incentives".²⁷³ We support this approach to setting targets. There must be, however, a link between the BVPIs and the ODPM's national targets to ensure that the ODPM meets its PSA targets. The BVPIs do not cover the full range of activities carried out by fire and rescue authorities, for example, rescues related to road traffic accidents and flooding are not covered. The Audit Commission highlighted this in their CPA report, noting that most Chief Fire Officers and Chairs of FRAs were unhappy with the current BVPIs as measures supporting CPA.²⁷⁴ It will be difficult for the ODPM to carry out an operational assessment of the fire authorities without having performance indicators which cover all of the FRAs' operational activities. **We recommend that the Government ensure the CPA inspection process covers all the activities of the Fire and Rescue Authorities.**

Number of deliberate fires

112. PSA 3 states that by 31 March 2010 the ODPM should reduce the number of deliberate fires by 10 per cent. We were encouraged that the ODPM has made good progress against this target. For the year to 30 June 2005, the number of deliberate fires had fallen by 16 per cent from the previous year. In its Autumn Performance Report, the ODPM attributed this fall mainly to the reduction in the number of deliberate road vehicle fires, which has fallen by 24 per cent; according to the ODPM, the reasons for this

²⁷² Ev 14 Vol I

²⁷³ Ev 14 Vol I

²⁷⁴ *Learning from the CPA*, paragraph 124.

reduction included improvements in vehicle licensing, vehicle removal schemes (some funded by the Arson Control Forum) and the increasing price of scrap metal (making cars worth more at the end of their useful life).

113. As part of the requirement to reduce deliberate fires, the ODPM's National Framework expects FRAs to be more proactive about community fire safety work. The Audit Commission reported that, whilst FRAs are making progress on community fire safety work, improvements are needed in the way that the impact of this work is measured, with the introduction of meaningful performance indicators.²⁷⁵ As a result, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the ODPM is meeting its PSA target relating to the work of the FRS. **We recommend that the Government introduce performance indicators on community fire safety.**

Number of accidental deaths

114. PSA 3 states that by 31 March 2010 the ODPM should reduce the number of accidental fire-related deaths in the home by 20 per cent and requires that no FRA has a fatality rate from accidental fires in the home that is more than 1.25 times the national average. This is another area where progress is being made.²⁷⁶ In order to help achieve this target, the FRAs have a supporting BVPI for the number of deaths. In its Autumn Performance Report, the ODPM stated that its monthly figures indicated that deaths were falling. In a February 2006 press release the ODPM announced that the total number of fire-related deaths had fallen and was at its lowest since 1958. Over the 12 month period to June 2005, the ODPM stated that across the UK accidental fires in dwellings fell by 16 per cent.²⁷⁷ This demonstrates that there have been successes in reducing deaths in the home. The CFOA has also cited fire prevention work as a key reason for the reduction in deaths.²⁷⁸ However, the ODPM said that it does not have information on the factors that influence this target so is considering how to capture this information.²⁷⁹ **We congratulate the FRS on meeting the PSA target on accidental deaths. This is clear evidence that the shift to fire prevention is having a positive impact. The Government should ensure that it identifies the factors which have an impact on the number of accidental deaths (for example ethnic and socio-economic background) so that resources can be appropriately targeted in future.**

Number of rescues

115. We received some evidence which indicated that the ODPM should consider the rescue activities of the FRAs. The FBU was concerned that the prevention agenda detracts from the rescue and intervention role of the FRS, stating that there should be more emphasis on the service intervening to deal with fires.²⁸⁰ The CFOA also said that, although

²⁷⁵ *Learning from the CPA*, paragraph 107.

²⁷⁶ Ev 155

²⁷⁷ 'Fire deaths continue to fall', DCLG press release 2006/0031, 28 February 2006.

²⁷⁸ Ev 134

²⁷⁹ Cm 6722, page 25

²⁸⁰ Q 285

the FRS has achieved much under fire prevention initiatives,²⁸¹ its “primary [role] responding agency to civil emergencies[...]must be fully recognised, understood and properly resourced”.²⁸² But neither CFOA nor the FBU suggested introducing a target for rescues. **We agree that the first duty of the FRS should remain providing a response to fires and civil emergencies. The introduction of a target directly relating to rescues would not, however, serve a useful purpose. Measuring performance in such a way could prove misleading because the number of rescues could decline as a result of earlier warning, avoiding the need for rescue at all, or, perversely, could increase as a result of effective fire safety initiatives, such as smoke alarms.**

²⁸¹ Ev 134

²⁸² Ev 134

9 Joint working with other emergency services

116. The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 laid duties on the emergency services to work together in planning for, and responding to, major incidents. This Act, together with the Control of Major Accident-Hazards Regulations 1999, provides a statutory framework for joint working between the emergency services at a strategic and operational level.²⁸³ There are also examples of joint working between emergency services in other key areas of FRS activity, including community safety, response to non-major incidents and procurement. Joint working has clear potential to deliver efficiency savings and improved service, whilst also enhancing civil resilience. Joint working practice is highly variable across the country, and there is scope for improvement. As the CFOA stated: “there are economies of scale to be realised...[there are] examples of good practice around the country but[...]there are still more tangible benefits yet to be realised in saving lives.”²⁸⁴

Resilience planning and response

117. The FRS is represented both on the Regional and Local Resilience Fora. These “analyse the risk profile of the national threats and hazard in their region or locality” on the basis of risks identified by the Cabinet Office’s National Risk Assessment.²⁸⁵ The ACPO told us that participation in these fora ensures close co-operation between the police and fire service (amongst others) in planning for a wide range of emergencies.²⁸⁶ The ACPO also cited examples of ongoing collaboration between the FRS and the Police including:

- “Home Office Model Response Plan for CBRN [Chemical, Biological, Radiological, or Nuclear] incidents.
- The National CBRN Training Centre at Winterbourne Gunner, which is jointly staffed by representatives from the ‘blue light’ services.
- CFOA representation on the ACPO Emergency Procedures Portfolio (strategic forum within ACPO to develop policy and guidance for the Police Service in relation to the response to emergencies and major disasters)”.²⁸⁷

Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire FRA told us:

“In Staffordshire, we have a good record of effective liaison, with all responding agencies being committed to the Staffordshire Integrated Emergency Planning (SIEP) arrangements, that have now been transformed into the Local Resilience Forum following the introduction of the Civil Contingencies Act. A revised Staffordshire Resilience Forum/Civil Contingency Unit has been established and is

²⁸³ Ev 229, see also Planning (Control of Major-Accident Hazards) Regulations 1999 (SI 1999/ 981).

²⁸⁴ Ev 132

²⁸⁵ Ev 13

²⁸⁶ Ev 229

²⁸⁷ Ev 229

collaboratively resourced, demonstrating a real commitment by all Staffordshire [Category] 1 Organisations to improve resilience across the County”.²⁸⁸

Operational collaboration: co-responding

118. Direct operational collaboration between the FRS and other emergency services is relatively infrequent and is generally in relation to serious road traffic accidents, fires, chemical incidents, entrapments and major emergencies. The Ambulance Service Association told us that this type of incident represents “only about 2% of the incidents responded to by ambulance services”.²⁸⁹ However, the ambulance service uses co-responder schemes to help ensure a very fast response to certain types of emergency:

“To increase the chances of survival from immediately life-threatening conditions such as cardiac arrest, the ambulance service prioritises calls aiming to respond to the most urgent within eight minutes[...]One of the tools used to achieve this level of performance has been the recruitment and training of local first- and co-responders who may be able to get immediate life support to patients faster than the closest available ambulance. Individuals participating in responder schemes include members of the public as well as members of the other emergency services, particularly retained firefighters, or the armed services”.²⁹⁰

The LGA outlined the practice of FRS involvement in co-responding schemes:

“Under a ‘co-responder’ scheme firefighters, when first to arrive at an incident, can administer first aid in the absence of a paramedic. This entails training of firefighters in basic life-support skills, including use of automated defibrillators. An ambulance is still dispatched to every co-responder call. As such, the role and workload of ambulance staff is in no way affected by the scheme, but patient care is greatly improved and lives can be saved by the rapid availability of first-aid (particularly the use of defibrillators for victims of heart attacks)”.²⁹¹

The ODPM’s draft National Framework for 2006–08 states that “Fire and Rescue Authorities should actively review the opportunities for improving community safety by implementing co-responder schemes in partnership with other agencies”.²⁹² A recent CFOA survey indicated that “37% of Fire and Rescue Authorities in England had initiated co-responder schemes, and that 80% of those who had not done so planned to initiate a scheme at some point in the future”.²⁹³

119. The life-saving benefit of these schemes is widely recognised.²⁹⁴ Mr Adrian Hughes, Vice-President of the RFU, a serving Retained Fire Officer in Charge, told us:

²⁸⁸ Ev 93

²⁸⁹ Ev 232

²⁹⁰ Ev 232

²⁹¹ Ev 174

²⁹² See Ev 174

²⁹³ Ev 174

²⁹⁴ See, for example, Ev 93, 138.

“My own station has been carrying out co-responder duties since 1998 and it has been tremendously successful. There are widespread benefits to the community, to the Fire Service and to members of the crew on each station in doing that. My own service, Mid and West Wales, now operates 14 co-respondent stations. It is a partnership with the Ambulance Service. We have a greater understanding, the Ambulance Service have a greater understanding and the Fire Service directly, because of co-responder. It is very difficult to quantify success but I think it is reasonably safe to say that each co-responder station saves between five and ten lives a year”.²⁹⁵

North Yorkshire FRA emphasised that there was particular benefit from the schemes in rural areas.²⁹⁶

120. The role of the FRS in co-responding schemes has however been seen as problematic by some in the FRS, most notably the FBU:

“There is a big difference between cooperation and collaboration and taking on the work of other emergency services as demonstrated by the different variations of ‘co-responding’. Co-responding in practice places the fire & rescue service in a position where it is taking over the role of the ambulance service in attending what are major medical emergencies. In practice it is often driven by the inability of ambulance services (some of them regional ambulance services) to hit target response times for major emergencies. In those areas where co-responding does take place or is being piloted, the fire & rescue service is sometimes sent alone and the incidents can involve anything from serious medical emergencies to members of the public who have collapsed drunk in the street”.²⁹⁷

This concern over FRS involvement seems to be largely linked to an alleged misuse of co-response which may lie partly in the fact that the FRS has a quicker response time than the ambulance service.²⁹⁸ The FBU told us that its opposition centred on training, insurance and “the impact on the fire service of attending ambulance calls when other fire service calls come in”.²⁹⁹ It also reported that:

“We have examples again from our experience of firefighters attending ambulance calls and waiting for 20 to 30 minutes for ambulances to turn up dealing with a whole range of incidents which were never part of the original protocol. Normally the co-responding scheme is aimed at dealing with victims of heart attacks and so on, but what actually happens on the ground is a whole number of category A ambulance calls – they can include people being drunk in the street, people under the influence of drugs, trauma, penetrating injuries to the head and trunk, obstetric

²⁹⁵ Q 132

²⁹⁶ Ev 228.

²⁹⁷ Ev 260

²⁹⁸ The FRS average response time was 6.8 seconds in 2004. The Ambulance Service responds to 75% of calls within 8 minutes (See Ev 232).

²⁹⁹ Q 300

haemorrhage – a whole range of incidents which firefighters simply have not got the training to deal with”.³⁰⁰

121. Co-responding schemes are not intended to replace an ambulance service response with an FRS one, and, while the FRS may be first on the scene, they should always be supported by a paramedic as quickly as possible. The Ambulance Service Association emphasised that co-responder schemes should not and cannot mean that firefighters act as paramedics, a role for which they are not trained:

“firefighters qualified as paramedics would find it very difficult to undertake the volume of clinical activity necessary to retain the skill levels required by the Health Professions Council, which is a legal requirement to practice as paramedic in the UK[...]there is a strong case, that wherever practical and subject to the wishes of the local fire and ambulance services, firefighters should be trained to administer CPR, operate a defibrillator and administer other basic life support skills to sustain life until ambulance clinicians arrive at the scene. The use of these skills can either be used in situations where the fire service is first-on-scene, e.g. at a road traffic accident, or in a situation where the firefighter(s) is dispatched to a medical emergency by the ambulance service because their response time will be less than the closest available ambulance resource”.³⁰¹

Funding and the absence of a national framework

122. North Yorkshire FRA told us: “Although progress [in co-response] has been made at a local level it has been a slow process and would benefit from a clear central policy that prioritises the initiative and provides a joint approach”.³⁰² The call for a national framework was also made by both the CFOA and the FBU.³⁰³ The CFOA stated:

“There is no doubt that the introduction of co-responding schemes and/or the use of defibrillators has benefits for the public. CFOA believe that if the FRS are to extend this role more formally, the ODPM and Department of Health should agree a Memorandum of Understanding on behalf of the FRS for a co-responding protocol”.³⁰⁴

123. With regard to funding, there is currently no single financial framework to fund co-responder schemes. Apportionment of funding is entirely dependent upon local arrangements between fire services and ambulance services. In some areas the ambulance service reimburses the costs incurred by the FRS, in other areas it does not.³⁰⁵ As Devon FRA suggested, in light of the ODPM’s support for FRS involvement in co-response set out in the draft National Framework (2006-08), it should discuss funding arrangements with the Department of Health.³⁰⁶ **We are convinced of the life-saving benefit of co-response**

³⁰⁰ Q 302

³⁰¹ Ev 232-3

³⁰² Ev 228

³⁰³ Ev 260

³⁰⁴ Ev 138

³⁰⁵ Q 165

³⁰⁶ Q 165

schemes and are concerned at the reluctance of some in the FRS to participate in them. We recommend that the Government, in conjunction with the Department of Health, develop a national co-response protocol which includes guidance on how co-response should be paid for.

Community safety

124. Our evidence highlighted a number of examples of joint-working between emergency services on community safety. East Sussex FRS told us:

“We have seen much success from the results of programmes such as the LIFE project and work with the Prince’s Trust in supporting young people, particularly the socially excluded and those referred to the Fire and Rescue Service through Youth Offending Teams[...]Such programmes...are seen as key components of improving social cohesion and community well being”.³⁰⁷

North Yorkshire FRA and the FBU also drew attention to this aspect of FRS activity.³⁰⁸ But the sustainability of such projects in the absence of adequate funding or central guidance was questioned. North Yorkshire FRA told us:

“some of the mechanisms that are in place to encourage such work rely on the individual Services choosing to go beyond the minimum level of engagement. This can prove difficult due to competing priorities, different governance models, funding arrangements and a lack of central/joint policies at Government level”.³⁰⁹

East Sussex FRA stated:

“we would wish to continue supporting such initiatives. However, we are concerned at the continuing impact on existing resources of supporting such programmes and would urge that consideration be given to providing specific grant funding to support and resource what we consider to be significantly beneficial community partnership programmes”.³¹⁰

Coterminosity and the impact of wider regionalisation

125. Several witnesses were worried about the negative impact police and potential ambulance service re-structuring may have on joint working.³¹¹ Some stressed that coterminosity, the sharing of administrative boundaries between authorities or agencies, was an essential feature of effective joint working and collaboration.³¹² The CFOA stated that

³⁰⁷ Ev 199

³⁰⁸ Ev 260, 228

³⁰⁹ Ev 228

³¹⁰ Ev 199

³¹¹ Ev 71, 88, 125, 163

³¹² Ev 93

“the main barrier to joint working is the lack of coterminosity between services, the different governance models, the different funding mechanisms and financial regulations and, more importantly, the lack of joint policies at governmental level”.³¹³

Given the worries about the impact of possible boundary changes, we recommend that the Government commission research into the relationship between coterminosity and the likely workings of Regional Control Centres.

³¹³ Ev 138

10 Conclusion

126. The Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) is experiencing change that is unprecedented in its history. Its 'modernisation' has included a shift from simply reacting to incidents towards preventing them and planning for them, using a risk-based approach. We see this shift in emphasis as a positive change, and one that is already proving its worth as evidenced by continuing reductions in fire-related deaths. Part of modernisation has involved the FRS assessing risks locally to enable it to provide locally responsive services (through the IRMP process). Recent steps toward a regional approach run the risk of reversing this element of modernisation. We have not given detailed consideration to the advantages and disadvantages of further regionalisation of the FRS, but note that restructuring of the police, and possibly the ambulance services, has implications for the FRS, in particular the extent to which it is coterminous with other emergency services. The ODPM claimed it has no plans to force the FRS to regionalise, whilst simultaneously stating that coterminosity is Government policy. The lack of coherence in policy on regionalisation within the ODPM, and across the Government Departments responsible for the emergency services, has understandably left some in the FRS confused and concerned.

127. During our inquiry, we found the most controversial of the current changes facing the FRS to be FiReControl, the project to create nine Regional Control Centres. It is intended to increase resilience and efficiency in the way the FRS manages its emergency response, but has faced significant opposition from within the FRS. Whilst there is agreement on the aims, many FRAs and FRS representative bodies have not been able to give their unqualified support to the project as the best way of achieving those aims. Whilst there are valid alternative models for control centres, we accept the ODPM's position that the FiReControl model is based on the findings of the 2003 Mott MacDonald report, and is a cost-effective way of achieving a necessary upgrade of control room technology. But the ODPM has not provided sufficient information, by way of a full business case or other document, to convince and reassure the FRS that the project will indeed produce enhanced resilience and efficiency. Whilst we understand that certain commercial information may have to be kept confidential, the absence of information about project specifics, and in particular, the long term financial implications for FRAs is in our view unacceptable.

128. As with any technological project, FiReControl carries some high risks. However, we consider the lack of genuine support from the FRS to be a high risk, and one which the ODPM is not taking seriously. We are disappointed that the ODPM has not taken the opportunity, as part of this major re-structuring of Fire Control Rooms, to further enhance resilience by co-locating fire control centres with those of the other emergency services. Furthermore, we are disappointed that the technological upgrade to be provided by the associated FireLink project does not currently include an upgrade of fire-ground technology, crucial to both fire-fighter safety and civil resilience. We urge the Government to address this gap immediately. This should not however, further delay the implementation of FireLink, delays to which have already had major financial implications for some FRAs, particularly in the South West.

129. Whilst its role and function has changed, the FRS has been expected to manage its performance effectively, demonstrate value for money, and enhance the management and development of its staff. The introduction of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment

(CPA) process should help the FRS to manage its performance more effectively. In developing an operational assessment to measure how well the FRS carries out its functions (as opposed to how well it plans and manages itself) for the CPA it is crucial that the full range of FRS activity is assessed. This should also be reflected in the ODPM performance targets, some of which should be revised. Progress in effective management, particularly relating to diversity and management of the retained service, has been worryingly slow. The Government must lead by example by making diversity and retained issues a high priority.

130. We considered whether there is a risk that the new duties imposed on the FRS relating to fire prevention and civil resilience, detract from its primary role in fighting fires. We did not find this to be the case. Although there is some evidence that resources are being allocated to fire prevention at the expense of recruitment, the proven benefit of prevention activity demonstrates that these resource decisions are justified. Nevertheless, the Government should closely monitor the impact of resource allocation through IRMPs, to ensure that the FRS can maintain and improve its operational capacity for emergency response. The Government should strengthen the emphasis on prevention by ensuring that the Building Regulations provide for adequate fire safety measures. In particular, it should ensure that guidance relating to new and refurbished schools includes a requirement for sprinkler systems to be fitted in all cases, not just those where there is particularly high risk. The potential life-saving benefits far outweigh the cost of fitting sprinkler systems. We conclude that, despite the changes the FRS is undergoing, the public can continue to have confidence in the FRS's capability to respond quickly to incidents.

Conclusions and recommendations

Governance and funding arrangements

1. Regional Management Boards, in the absence of the previously planned regional assemblies, are a confusing addition to the already complex governance and structural arrangements for the FRS. The FRS needs certainty over its future. The mixed messages from the ODPM on regionalisation, and the lack of consistency between its policy and those of the Departments responsible for the other emergency services, are fertile ground for those fearful of a hidden agenda. Further regionalisation of the FRS should not take place without full consultation with the relevant stakeholders and clear justification for its aims. (Paragraph 14)
2. We recommend that the Government fund fully from central resources any additional burdens on FRAs imposed as a result of the modernisation agenda which cannot be met through greater efficiency and other savings. (Paragraph 15)
3. We recommend that the Government set a baseline against which the future performance of FiReBuy can be measured, drawing on international comparisons as appropriate. The sources for any data used should be clearly stated. Without such basic information, the Government's assertion that FiReBuy will result in savings on procurement will remain untested. (Paragraph 17)

FiReControl: Regional Control Centres

4. We recommend that the Government clarify the future role of the Interim National Coordination Centre, in particular in relation to RCCs. (Paragraph 21)
5. The new technology that will be provided by FiReControl should allow operators to mobilise the fire-engine closest to the incident regardless of which brigade or service it is from, thus mitigating the risks of coordination across larger areas. (Paragraph 26)
6. We are unconvinced that the Government can offer the assurance of maintained or improved service quality resulting from the FiReControl project and there is clearly widespread doubt across the FRS. If it can, we recommend it does so, and provides the evidence, immediately. (Paragraph 28)
7. We recommend that the Government ensure that the location of each RCC meets strict criteria on resilience. (Paragraph 29)
8. We are disappointed that the Government is unable to provide fuller details of duties that have been defined as out of scope. Removing some operations from control rooms should clearly result in savings in control room costs, but it is not clear where these operations will be transferred to, nor how the costs of the transfer and future operations will be met. There is no evidence to suggest any overall saving. As a result we, like many within the FRS, do not have full confidence in the Government's claim that FiReControl will achieve enhanced efficiency. We recommend that the Government complete its analysis of control room functions immediately and

certainly before making further progress with the FiReControl project. (Paragraph 33)

9. We recommend that the 'end to end' testing of the technology include assessments of the likelihood of total systems failure nationwide. We further recommend that a resilient disaster recovery plan which addresses systems failure should be put in place. (Paragraph 37)
10. We agree that it is difficult for FRAs to have certainty regarding the financial implications of the move to Regional Control Centres without a full business case which includes information on what costs will be borne by whom over what timescale. We recommend that Government provide a full breakdown of the costs implicit in the FiReControl project and identify which of these will be met by central Government and which it expects local authorities and FRSs to meet. Any cost over-run should be met by central Government. (Paragraph 39)
11. We note that the Government is consulting on the governance arrangements for RCCs and recommend that the final outcome, while seeking to achieve consensus among stakeholders, gives clarity on how FRAs are to retain their legal responsibilities within a framework giving clear direction to the RCC. (Paragraph 42)
12. The Government should provide the FRS with all the non-commercial information of the latest full business case for FiReControl immediately. Information on the full business case should follow as soon as possible consistent with commercial considerations. This will ensure that the final decision is informed by the knowledge of those expected to operate within the new structure and help to build confidence in the new arrangements. (Paragraph 44)
13. We consider that achieving a common location for command controls for the three emergency services would facilitate greater collaboration in responding to incidents. It is disappointing that the Government has missed the opportunity to further increase resilience through co-location of control rooms as part of the FiReControl project. (Paragraph 49)
14. The fact that the FRS has not been given enough information about the detail, particularly the financial detail, of FiReControl, is at the heart of the opposition to the project. The absence of information means that fire authorities and representative bodies cannot give unqualified support as they are unconvinced that the aims of enhanced resilience and efficiency will be achieved. There are considerable risks associated with the project, identified in our evidence and in the ODPM's own business case. We consider the greatest of these to be the opposition to the project from the FRS itself. For FiReControl to have any hope of success, the Government should obtain greater support from the FRS. This can only be achieved through provision of greater information on both the project specifics and long-term plans for the structure of the FRS. The Government should also better communicate to the FRS that the FiReControl project is based on the findings of past reviews of the FRS, notably the 2003 Mott MacDonald Report. (Paragraph 50)

FireLink

15. We welcome the attempts made by the Government to integrate FiReControl and FireLink, but also note that integration of the two projects will mean that FireLink will be subject to the same risks as FireControl. (Paragraph 53)
16. We recommend that the Government communicate to the FRS the assurance that it gave us, namely that any additional costs incurred by the FRS as a result of slippage on the FireLink project will be met by central Government. (Paragraph 54)
17. It is essential that the Government learn from the experience of both the FRAs and other emergency services that have already migrated to the new technology. This will help to avoid repetition of difficulties involving technical teething problems and project specifications. (Paragraph 57)
18. We recommend that the Government address the need for upgraded fire-ground technology to enhance resilience and the safety of fire-fighters. This should be done as part of the FireLink project. (Paragraph 59)

Prevention and risk assessment

19. We recommend that the impact and adequacy of Integrated Risk Management Plans is assessed on a nationwide basis. (Paragraph 62)
20. We recommend that the Government provide guidance to the FRS on priorities between local and regional planning and stipulates clearly how IRMPs should reflect those priorities. (Paragraph 63)
21. We recommend that the Government ensure that, in future, publication of the National Framework is co-ordinated with FRAs' planning processes. (Paragraph 64)
22. We welcome the recent announcement that the Government will continue to provide grant funding to support prevention work until 2008. (Paragraph 65)
23. We welcome the postponement of the commencement of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2006 as a sensible precaution to allow thorough preparation. We recommend that the Government monitor the implementation of the Order, and assess its impact on a regular basis. (Paragraph 67)
24. We strongly recommend that the DfES require sprinkler systems in all new and renovated schools. (Paragraph 69)
25. There is no evidence to suggest that the rescue role of the FRS function has been compromised by increased emphasis on prevention and risk assessment. If successful, prevention may lead to further efficiency savings as fewer fires would need to be attended. We recommend that the Government monitor the impact of diverting resources to fire prevention on FRS activity in other areas. (Paragraph 71)

Civil resilience

26. We recommend that the Government give urgent consideration as to how the Integrated Risk Management Plans may be better linked to planning for major catastrophic incidents. (Paragraph 74)
27. We recommend that the Government conduct a review of civil resilience equipment requirements across England in light of the experience of the July 2005 attacks on London. (Paragraph 77)
28. The failure of Government to include an element of collaboration, or at least co-location, in its model of Regional Control Centres represents a missed opportunity for civil resilience. (Paragraph 79)
29. We recommend that the Government encourage greater use of mutual aid agreements by FRAs to further enhance resilience. (Paragraph 80)

People management

30. We consider that it is necessary to make a distinction between uniformed and non-uniformed staff as the need to increase diversity amongst non-uniformed staff is less pressing. A diversity target covering the entire workforce could take the pressure off FRAs to increase diversity amongst uniformed staff. (Paragraph 86)
31. It is important that the Government set both national targets and Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) which are consistent, making it clear exactly what is required of FRAs. The Government needs to reiterate that the national target for ethnic minorities relates to the entire fire service workforce, not just operational uniformed staff. The national target should be supported by separate BVPIs which distinguish between uniformed, non-uniformed, operational and non-operational staff. While it is important that the Government does not devalue, or appear to devalue, any particular section of the workforce and that its diversity strategies and targets apply to every area within the Fire and Rescue Service, the distinction between uniformed and non-uniformed staff needs to be retained in order to focus the attention and activity of FRAs. (Paragraph 87)
32. We recommend that redundancies should not be contemplated until every avenue for re-deployment has been explored. (Paragraph 89)
33. We recommend that in future, a Fire Authority should not receive a Comprehensive Performance Assessment rating higher than good unless it can demonstrate that significant progress, in line with any revised Government targets, has been made on diversity issues generally and within the workforce in particular. (Paragraph 90)
34. We are disappointed and dismayed at the lack of progress that has been made on diversity within the FRS and particularly at the Government's half-hearted and ineffective leadership on the issue. We recommend that the Government immediately (i) establish support groups for the Diversity Happens forum; (ii) re-appoint a national adviser of equality and diversity for the FRS; and (iii) implement the long-promised new selection tests for fire-fighters. We further recommend that

the Government conduct a thorough review of its diversity policy and initiatives relating to the Fire and Rescue Service, reporting within the next 18 months. We also recommend that the Government, within two years, publish and promulgate a nationwide strategy for promoting diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service that takes into account the experiences and expertise of all stakeholders. (Paragraph 92)

35. If Retained Liaison Officers (RLOs) are to have any effect, they must be given adequate information and training and should consult with colleagues in the retained service. (Paragraph 95)
36. We recommend the Government ensure that retained firefighters are recognised as a vital bridge between the FRS and the communities they serve; their status should be enhanced by greater involvement in planning systems, for example with seats on the National Joint Council, and a clear role in fire planning, particularly in rural areas. (Paragraph 100)
37. We recommend that the Government provide a clear indication of the reforms it intends to be implemented affecting the Retained Service, including target dates for key benchmarks and completion. (Paragraph 101)
38. The Government will be consulting on introducing initiatives to improve the quality of leadership; this should be done sooner rather than later. (Paragraph 102)
39. We recommend that the Government regularly review the FRAs' attitude toward the Integrated Personnel Development System scheme to ensure that it is not viewed as merely a bureaucratic and burdensome exercise. (Paragraph 103)

Performance measurement and management

40. We welcome the introduction of Comprehensive Performance Assessment for the FRS. We note its usefulness in highlighting areas where improvements are required. (Paragraph 108)
41. We welcome the plans for the independent operational assessment of fire authorities to be carried out next summer. The proposed assessment should be conducted by the Audit Commission and combined with the current CPA to minimise the audit burden on FRAs. (Paragraph 109)
42. We recommend that the Government ensure the CPA inspection process covers all the activities of the Fire and Rescue Authorities. (Paragraph 111)
43. We recommend that the Government introduce performance indicators on community fire safety. (Paragraph 113)
44. We congratulate the FRS on meeting the PSA target on accidental deaths. This is clear evidence that the shift to fire prevention is having a positive impact. The Government should ensure that it identifies the factors which have an impact on the number of accidental deaths (for example ethnic and socio-economic background) so that resources can be appropriately targeted in future. (Paragraph 114)

45. We agree that the first duty of the FRS should remain providing a response to fires and civil emergencies. The introduction of a target directly relating to rescues would not, however, serve a useful purpose. Measuring performance in such a way could prove misleading because the number of rescues could decline as a result of earlier warning, avoiding the need for rescue at all, or, perversely, could increase as a result of effective fire safety initiatives, such as smoke alarms. (Paragraph 115)

Joint working with other emergency services

46. We are convinced of the life-saving benefit of co-response schemes and are concerned at the reluctance of some in the FRS to participate in them. We recommend that the Government, in conjunction with the Department of Health, develop a national co-response protocol which includes guidance on how co-response should be paid for. (Paragraph 123)
47. Given the worries about the impact of possible boundary changes, we recommend that the Government commission research into the relationship between coterminosity and the likely workings of Regional Control Centres. (Paragraph 125)

Witnesses

The transcripts of the oral evidence sessions listed below were published as *The Fire and Rescue Service: Oral and Written Evidence*, HC 872-II, Session 2005-06

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

Ev 1

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

Ev 11

Tuesday 31 January 2006

Mr Paul Young, Chief Fire Officer, **Councillor David Browne**, and **Mrs Sue Smith**, Deputy Chief Officer, Devon Fire and Rescue Service

Ev 17

Ms Val Shawcross, Chair, **Mr Ken Knight**, Commissioner for London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, and **Mr Ron Dobson**, Acting Deputy Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)

Ev 22

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

Ev 28

Monday 6 February 2006

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

Ev 33

Mr Tom Carroll, President of CFOA and Chief Fire Officer Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, **Mr Phil Toase**, Vice President CFOA and Chief Fire officer West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, and **Mr Steve McGuirk**, Vice President Elect of CFOA and Chief Fire Officer Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service, Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA)

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Ms Judy Foster , Union Convenor, UNISON representative on the Practitioners Forum, UNISON	Ev 51
Mr Phil Woolas , a Member of the House, Minister for Local Government, and Jim Fitzpatrick , a Member of the House, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	Ev 54

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Fire Brigades Union (FBU) (FRS 63)	Ev 252
Colin Ive MBA (FRS 64)	Ev 260
Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (FRS 65)	Ev 261
Tyco Fire & Integrated Solutions (FRS 66)	Ev 266

Supplementary written evidence

The following written submissions were received after the publication of *The Fire and Rescue Service: Oral and Written Evidence*, HC 872-II, Session 2005-06. They are reproduced in the back pages of this Report.

Supplementary Memorandum by the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) (FRS 21(a))	Ev 1
Supplementary Memorandum by the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) (FRS 27(a))	Ev 3
Supplementary Memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FRS 31(b))	Ev 5
Supplementary Memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FRS 31(c))	Ev 6
Supplementary Memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FRS 31(d))	Ev 7
Supplementary Memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FRS 31(e))	Ev 10
Supplementary Memorandum by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) (FRS 63(m))	Ev 16
Memorandum by W F Hickin (FRS 67)	Ev 16
Memorandum by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (FRS 68)	Ev 17
Supplementary Memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FRS 31(f))	Ev 18

List of unprinted written evidence

Additional papers have been received from the following and have been reported to the House but to save printing costs they have not been printed and copies have been placed in the House of Commons library where they may be inspected by Members. Other copies are in the Record Office, House of Lords and are available to the public for inspection. Requests for inspection should be addressed to the Record Office, House of Lords, London SW1 (Tel 020 7219 3074). Hours of inspection are from 9:30am to 5:00pm on Mondays to Fridays.

Background paper submitted by Lancashire Combined Fire Authority (FRS 05):

FRS 05(i) - Estimation of cost of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)

Background paper submitted by Devon Fire and Rescue Authority (FRS 11):

FRS 11(a) - Letter to Clerk of the Committee re: estimation of CPA costs

Background papers submitted by the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) (FRS 27):

FRS 27(b) - Supplementary information on School Fires (dvd included)

FRS 27(i) - Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association (CACFOA) Submission to the Independent Review of the Fire Service – Communities at Risk (Oct 2002)

FRS 27(ii) - CACFOA Submission to the ODPM Committee inquiry on the Fire and Rescue Service White Paper (17 Sept 2003)

FRS 27(iii) - CFOA Annual Report 2004-05

Background papers submitted by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FRS 31):
FRS 31(h) - Statement in response to FBU Proposals for Fire and Rescue Control Centres.
FRS 31(i) - Published information on website re: 'New Burdens Doctrine'

Background papers submitted by Jagtar Singh OBE and Wayne McCollin (FRS 49):
FRS 49(i) - '*Making a difference*' – a study of under-representation in UK and USA Fire Services. Jagtar Singh, Feb 2003.
FRS 49(ii) - '*Changing the Balance*' – a study of under representation in UK and USA Fire Services, March 2003.
FRS 49(iii) - Executive Summary of Fireworks Project, 2003-05, Anglia Ruskin University.

Background papers submitted by the FireWorks Project (FRS 62):

FRS 62(i) - Executive Summary of the FireWorks Project

FRS 62(ii) - Synopsis: Equality and Diversity – The Practitioners Role

Background papers submitted by The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) (FRS 63):

FRS 63(a) - Annexe 1 – Independent Review of the Fire Service 2002, Extracts and Comments

FRS 63(b) - Annexe 2 – Regional Control: National Resilience – FBU document

FRS 63(c) - Annexe 3 – FiReControl Project: IT Background Analysis, FBU Report 2005

FRS 63(d) - Annexe 4a – Control Project Sounding Board, meeting notes, June 05

FRS 63(e) - Annexe 4b – Control Project Sounding Board report to practitioners forum

FRS 63(f) - Annexe 4c – Letter to ODPM from South East Regional Management Board, 2005

FRS 63(g) - Annexe 5 – New Dimension, FBU Document, 2006

FRS 63(h) - Annexe 6 - Fire Prevention, FBU document, 2006

FRS 63(i) - Annexe 7 - ACAS Report: Rita Donaghy (Chair): Recommended revisions to NJC Constitution, 2004

FRS 63(j) - Annexe 8a – Equality: Sexual Minorities, FBU document, 2006

FRS 63(k) - Annexe 8b – Equality: Black & Ethnic Minorities, FBU document, 2006

FRS 63(l) - Annexe 8c – Equality: Women, FBU document, 2006

FRS 63(i) - The National Document. Integrated Risk Management Planning. FBU, 2004 (on disk only)

FRS 63(ii) - YouGov Survey

FRS 63(iii) - Note on internal union discipline proceedings concerning Merseyside members

FRS B/P 01 – Audit Commission: Comprehensive Performance Assessment. Fire and Rescue National Report. January 2006 and summary.

FRS B/P 02 - Fire and Rescue Comprehensive Performance Assessment: Devon Fire and Rescue Authority, Audit Commission CPA Report, July 2005

FRS B/P 03 - Initial Performance Assessment: London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, Audit Commission Assessment Report, November 2004

FRS B/P 04 - Fire and Rescue Comprehensive Performance Assessment: Lancashire Fire Authority, Audit Commission CPA Report, July 2005

FRS B/P 05 - Letter from FBU Merseyside addressed to Stephen Hesford MP and forwarded to Dr Starkey MP. [Regarding the submission from Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority (MF&CDA) on co-responders].

FRS B/P 06 – Copy of letter and attached information sent to Jim Fitzpatrick MP from Paul Lawless re: the FBU.

FRS B/P 07 - Letter from FBU Merseyside addressed to Robert Wareing MP and forwarded to Dr Starkey MP. [Regarding the submission from Merseyside Fire and Civil Defence Authority (MF&CDA) on co-responders].

FRS B/P 08 – Office of Government Commerce, 'A Manager's checklist'

Formal Minutes

The following Declarations of Interest were made:

Mr Mark Lancaster recorded a non-pecuniary interest in relation to civil resilience, as a bomb disposal officer.

Monday 5th June 2006

Members present:

Dr Phyllis Starkey, in the Chair

Clive Betts
John Cummings

Mr Bill Olnier
Alison Seabeck

The Fire and Rescue Service

Draft Report (*The Fire and Rescue Service*), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 130 read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

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

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Several Papers were ordered to be appended to the Minutes of Evidence.

Ordered, That Appendices to the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee be reported to the House.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 7th June at half-past Three o'clock.]

Reports from the Communities and Local Government Committee since 2004

The following reports have been produced by the Committee since 2004. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

On 27th June 2006, by Order of the House, the ODPM Committee was succeeded by the Communities and Local Government Committee and all proceedings of the former Committee were deemed to be proceedings of the latter.

Session 2005-06

First Report	ODPM Annual Report and Accounts	HC 559 (<i>HC 1072</i>)
Second Report	Re-licensing	HC 606 (<i>CM 6788</i>)
Third Report	Affordability and the Supply of Housing	HC 703-I
First Special Report	Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2004-05, on the ODPM Annual Report and Accounts 2004	HC 407
Second Special Report	Government Response to the Committee's Eleventh Report of Session 2004-05, on the Role and Effectiveness of The Local Government Ombudsmen for England	HC 605
Third Special Report	Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2004-05, on the Role and Effectiveness of the Standards Board for England	HC 988
Fourth Special Report	Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2005-06, on the ODPM Annual Report and Accounts 2005.	HC 1072

Session 2004-05

First Report	The Draft Regional Assemblies Bill	HC 62-I (<i>HC 459</i>)
Second Report	Annual Report to the Liaison Committee	HC 149
Third Report	Homelessness	HC 61-I (<i>CM 6490</i>)
Fourth Report	ODPM Annual Report and Accounts	HC 58 (<i>HC 407</i>)
Fifth Report	The Role and Effectiveness of CAGE	HC 59 (<i>CM 6509</i>)
Sixth Report	Electoral Registration (Joint inquiry with the Constitutional Affairs Committee, First Joint Report of Session 2004-05)	HC 243-I (<i>CM 6647</i>)
Seventh Report	The Role and Effectiveness of the Standards Board for England	HC 60-I (<i>HC 988</i>)
Eighth Report	Empty Homes and Low-demand Pathfinder	HC 295-I (<i>CM 6651</i>)
Ninth Report	Ward Boundaries	HC 315 (<i>CM 6634</i>)
Tenth Report	Local Government Consultation	HC 316-I
Eleventh Report	The Role and Effectiveness of the Local Government Ombudsmen for England	HC 458 (<i>HC 605</i>)

Written evidence

Supplementary memorandum by the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) (FRS 21(a))

I welcomed the opportunity to provide oral evidence to the Select Committee on 31 January as part of their inquiry into the fire and rescue service.

A number of issues were covered by the Committee, and I thought it may be helpful to write again to clarify a few points and provide the additional information requested by the Committee.

FIRE CONTROL PROJECT

London moved from three separate fire controls to a single control room (plus fallback arrangements) in 1990. Subsequently a best value review looked at the staffing arrangements in the single control and identified scope for significant efficiency savings (which could not have been delivered on this scale without a regional control for London).

Overall we reduced staffing in our fire control from 189 in 1989 to 96 shift based staff, plus two managers, four technical support officers and three trainers (that is 105 in total). This represents a saving in staff of some 45%.

We carried out a best value review in this area in 2001, as part of which we looked at comparative information collected by CACFOA (now CFOA) on the operation of call handling. You may find the following information helpful (please note all these costs are at 2000 prices). We believe this illustrates the economies of scale from a regional control for London.

Cost per emergency call comparison with other UK Fire Services

<i>CACFOA Benchmarking 2000</i>	<i>London Fire Brigade Cost</i>	<i>Average Metropolitan Fire Brigade Cost</i>	<i>Average UK Fire Brigade Cost</i>
Gross cost per call	£19.10	£28.30	£53.60
Cost per incident	£26.40	£45.50	£86.60
Cost per control room operators	£12.20	£15.60	£28.30
Cost per other staff	£1.10	£1.70	£3.60

FIRELINK

The main risk to this Authority is the ability to maintain an aging system which we were planning to replace at the time the ODPM FireLink programme was initiated halting our own procurement. However there is nothing currently to suggest that this risk is great and we are taking all necessary steps to maintain the current system to ensure that it can continue to function until the FireLink roll out is complete within London.

CAPITAL CITY COSTS

The Committee asked a number of questions about the additional costs which arise in London as the capital city.

The case for investment in London was set out in the Mayor of London's "Case for London"—his submission to the 2004 spending review. This report is available on the GLA website (www.london.gov.uk).

This report makes the point that:

“Quite properly, London pays more in taxation than it receives in public expenditure (often called the capital's tax export to the rest of the UK). Estimates suggest that this tax export from London in 2001 was in the range of £9–£15 billion. Increasing spending and investment in London will not necessarily reduce this contribution. Rather it will provide the support the capital needs to continue to generate the output and activity that provides this tax export to the rest of the UK”.

As specific examples of additional costs which we have to bear I highlight the following:

- the Committee itself discussed resilience and new dimension issues. There is no doubt that London is a prime target for terrorist attack (as the events in July 2005 tragically demonstrated). The Government's investment, via the new dimensions programme, in improving preparedness to respond to a catastrophic incident, is welcomed and reflects the fact that London faces particular risks. However as indicated in our original submission, investment by the Government amounted to some £2.5 million in 2004–05, whereas this Authority (with support from the Mayor and London Assembly) has identified the need to spend some £11.6 million in total in 2004–05 to improve resilience. In addition, following our review of the bombings last year, we have decided

(again with support from the Mayor and London Assembly) to invest a further £3.8 million in 2006–07 rising to some £11 million in subsequent years. The need for this expenditure arises directly from the higher risks faced by London because it is the capital city. In passing I would note that the level of investment in London meant that we were able to provide a variety of resources to support Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service in successfully dealing with the major fire at Buncefield Oil Terminal (including pumping appliances, high volume pumps, hose laying vehicles, specialist foam units, bulk foam provision, major lighting units, command units and officers);

- London, as the capital city, hosts some 30 million tourists a year, as well as the large number of workers who commute into the city daily. Public services like London's fire & rescue service must plan to make sure that these people are safe. This is an additional burden which currently falls on London's council tax and business rate payers; and
- the additional costs of employing people in London are well known. Given the higher costs of living and travelling in and round London (especially in central London) many employers (including both this Authority the Government itself) pay staff a London Weighting allowance, which represents a direct additional cost arising from operating in the capital city.

EQUALITIES

I welcome the Committee's focus on equalities and diversity issues, which remains a key priority for this Authority.

The Committee noted, rightly, that it has proved harder to develop a workforce which is representative of the communities it serves among the uniformed operational staff. This partly reflects the very low historical base from which we have started. However the speed with which the proportion of Black and Minority Ethnic and women firefighters can be increased is limited by the overall number of trainees joining the service each year. There are low turnover rates among firefighters. When this is taken together with any opportunities identified as part of modernisation to improve efficiency by reducing the number of operational firefighters, the current targets become extremely difficult to achieve.

For example, in London we estimate that in order to meet the target for 25% Black and Minority Ethnic firefighters (BME) by 2009, it would be necessary to ensure that at least 40% of those recruited in every campaign since 2000 were BME candidates. To achieve this over representation among those actually recruited, while still complying with anti-discrimination legislation is extremely challenging.

So far as targets for women are concerned, the 15% target reflects the fact that a lower percentage of women than men will be able to meet the minimum physical fitness standards needed to become a firefighter. Great care has been taken to review these standards to make sure that they do reflect the genuine requirements of the job, but a certain level of physical fitness remains essential. However the 15% figure (rather than 10% or 25%) is not based on any empirical evidence, and we have argued for some time that further research is needed to produce some evidence about the proportion of women who could be expected to meet these physical requirements, on which a meaningful target could be set.

For this reason we would prefer to see a target based on the proportion of those actually being recruited reflecting the working population in the area.

As I reported to the Committee for London a challenging yet more realistic target would be an average of 25% BME and 12% women joiners by 2009. I also mentioned at the Select Committee that targets should be more sophisticated with a range of indicators measuring different part of the recruitment and retention process covering the numbers applying to become a firefighter, and those eliminated at the various stages of the selection process as well as those actually recruited eg:

- Attraction
- Enquiries for employment
- Retention
- Applications for career development
- Progression
- Training
- Secondments
- Applications for special projects
- Special projects
- Exit

We have made good progress in London, though we accept that more needs to be done. The number of Black and Minority Ethnic firefighters has increased 88% since LEEPA was established in 2000, and the number of women firefighters has increased by 145% over the same period. In recent campaigns some 24% of applicants have been from BME communities, and about 15% of those actually appointed.

This has been achieved through a varied programme of action, including:

- targeted advertising for recruitment campaigns;
- award winning awareness raising campaigns;
- open days for black and minority ethnic and women applicants;
- fitness clinics for women;
- an active and extensive outreach programme using both a core team and volunteers from among our staff;
- activities such as attending recruitment fairs, and community events such as the Notting Hill Carnival or Asian Melas;
- focussed outreach work for particular groups (for example the Asian community, lesbian gay bisexual and transgender community, and women); and
- making sure that any inappropriate adverse impacts are eradicated from our selection processes.

The Committee rightly recognised the frustratingly slow progress on equality and diversity issues in the Fire and Rescue Service, despite some pockets of good practice. In order to make a step-change there is a strong argument for encompassing the equality and diversity agenda within the strategic leadership work now taking shape at the Fire Service College.

K J Knight

Commissioner, London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority

Supplementary memorandum by the Chief Fire Officer's Association (CFOA) (FRS 27(a))

THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER'S ASSOCIATION (CFOA)

CFOA is the professional organisation for principal fire officers in the UK. The Association was formed in 1974 following local government re-organisation to allow principal fire officers the ability to meet and discuss fire related or government influenced matters. Membership of the Association comprises almost all the senior management of fire and rescue services in the United Kingdom.

It is important for the Select Committee to understand that CFOA acts as an independent association and not as an extension of government. We are in fact a registered charity and our funding comes from the subscriptions of our members an other income generation as well as some grant from ODPM to undertake project work on behalf of the service.

Although CFOA provides technical, professional advice and support to a wide range of stakeholders, including ODPM, it does not directly manage key technical projects such as FireControl. CFOA works to ensure that the right level of technical expertise is available to any of the FRS stakeholders who request—or need—assistance and professional advice. This would also include other government departments given the cross cutting nature of the work of modern Fire and Rescue Services. It is not CFOA's remit to take the lead in acting as unequivocal advocates of an ODPM project, although we will obviously intrude our views at the appropriate time during any relevant formative and consultation period, and we will also provide officers to support projects on an ongoing basis. Essentially, we are seeking to ensure complex change issues—and the projects that support them—are well managed in an inclusive manner, but in doing so, seeking to retain our independence and objectivity.

Following the Independent review of the Service (subject to the last Committee Enquiry) the opportunity existed to change the structure of the Service and to give CFOA the authoritative and determining role—in a governance sense—the Select Committee seemed to believe we already hold—certainly that was the view seemingly portrayed during questioning of the CFOA Presidential team. The opportunity to reform the structure more fundamentally was not taken. Instead, Government elected to retain the structure of fire authorities and the multiple governance arrangements that prevail, but also to create a new level of regional co-ordination (Regional Management Boards) and maintain a strong sense of central direction and control through the Service Improvement Team of the ODPM and publication of the National Frameworks.

During the hearing we repeatedly emphasised we were supportive of the principle of Regional Control Centres from a number of perspectives; notably the national and regional resilience and regional co-operation and efficiency perspectives. We also emphasised, however, that there remain a number of questions that need to be answered before CFOA could fully endorse this important project. Not least of this apprehension is the absence of a comprehensive and transparent Business Case. Our assumption and position here, though, is that the parameters of the Business Case have fundamentally shifted. This is not now a project designed to deliver savings, per se, although we still consider savings are almost certain, rather it is a project to secure national resilience in light of the changed risks faced by our communities. Accordingly, Government has accepted its responsibility to fund that dimension, and the evidence provided to the Committee by the relevant ODPM officials underlines this planning assumption.

RETAINED REVIEW

The subject of retained firefighters was raised during the course of a number of the hearings and CFOA wishes to update the Committee on how we see the current status of the Retained Review work being carried out as part of the Practitioners Forum activities. CFOA see staff conditioned to the Retained Duty system as a vital part of the FRS and we are working hard to progress the key issues to enable greater integration. However, CFOA is not the employer, nor is it the Employers Organisation, and so the practical ability to implement many of the recommendations lies with other stakeholders—not least individual fire and rescue authorities.

During early 2005 a Practitioners Forum, Task & Finish Group led by the CFO from South Wales, produced a report and an action plan proposing the establishment of a small management team to drive the recommendations forward. The Task and Finish Group report was first presented to the Practitioners Forum in March 2005, with the resolution that CFOA would discuss with ODPM the possibility of CFOA employing a project manager to oversee the process of implementation. This discussion was initiated by CFOA in May 2005 and an indication of the costs was provided. The position was again discussed in September 2005 and has been the subject of further discussion in recent months.

The most recent Practitioners Forum held on 24 January 2006 was given an update on the Task and Finish Group report. This highlighted that the key to realising a meaningful way forward is to understand that the 51 recommendations of the ODPM Retained Review (February 2005) are not the exclusive domain of any one stakeholder, and that a properly resourced project management team was still the best solution to take the work forward. The Forum decided that the recommendations from the original ODPM report should be prioritised into a smaller number of critical issues (probably a “top 10”) having also taken into account recent developments with the Retained Duty System. A robust business case is now to be produced to establish the resources required to move this important matter forwards.

ODPM, CFOA, the RFU and other key stakeholders have all agreed to develop the business case as a Practitioners Forum activity and report progress at the next Forum to be held on 7 March 2006. Even when this achieved though, it will still be a matter for local employers to implement and for Government to determine public policy in consultation with stakeholders.

CO-RESPONDING

CFOA recognises the enormous benefit to the public of the introduction of co-responder schemes and the associated use of defibrillators and oxygen therapy units. It is clear that there is a willingness within the FRS to extend these schemes beyond the current limited-coverage that is mainly supported through the retained duty system. CFOA carried out a survey of the FRS in August 2005 indicating that only 37% of the FRS has so far initiated co-responder schemes and only 48% have either procured or issued defibrillators. The stumbling block would appear to be resistance from the FBU to accept that the operation of this equipment is part and parcel of their existing role as a firefighter. Indeed two FRAs (Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire) are now taking High Court action against the FBU to gain a ruling on co-responding as part of the firefighter role map and contained within the parameters of the June 2003 pay agreement.

There is a distinct feeling of frustration within the FRS. The great results achieved from such a limited deployment, with 18 lives saved (at the FRS point of intervention) during the course of one year; contrasts starkly with the fact that the scheme is still resisted by the FBU.

HMFSI

The Committee were advised of the transition of HMFSI to a smaller advisory group which is scheduled to deliver by April 2007. CFOA wish to ensure that in any revised structure to make available professional advice to both ministers and within the ODPM, that, this advice is provided by either a senior serving officer or one who has recently retired.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Although we were not asked specifically about equality and diversity, we note that others such as CRE (FRS 60), Anglia Ruskin University (FRS 65) and Jagtar Singh (FRS 49) had provided evidence to the Select Committee. All of these submissions freely referenced the work carried out by CFOA in the dissertation by Stephen McGuirk, “*Are We Serious*”—*A Strategic Approach to Long term Equality and Diversity in the UK Fire Service (2002)*.

Colleagues in the FBU also referenced this work in their submission (Annex 8).

It is important to recognise that this work underpins the commitment within CFOA to promote equality and diversity, both in service delivery and within fire authorities and fire and rescue services. It is also important to illustrate that CFOA has a good understanding of the challenges faced in advancing this issue—many of which continue to stem from the need to change culture, which of itself is very much shaped by the outdated working practices we are working hard to change.

It is also worth commenting that the key stakeholders including the CRE have been established as founding members of the Practitioners Forum, through which they could reasonably be expected to contribute to these important issues within the FRS.

Supplementary memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FRS 31(b))

DRAFT OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE SUMMARY

1. The draft Outline Business Case (OBC) for the FiReControl project was sent to Chairs of FRAs and Regional Project Directors early November 2004 to enable them to comment on the principles and arguments set out. The document circulation was restricted because of potential commercial sensitivity. However, it was leaked and generated some media coverage. In the light of this, it was decided to publish the document on the FiReControl website, www.firecontrol.odpm.gov.uk, along with a supporting statement by the (then) Fire and Rescue Service (F&RS) Minister, Nick Raynsford (4 January 2004).

2. The draft OBC provides a robust argument for proceeding with Regional Control Centres in England. It shows that there are sound reasons to maintain the considerable progress made, and that the proposed solution will:

- Provide a modern, state of the art, system to replace the current varied and outdated technologies.
- It will be a resilient system, back up by other Regional Control Centres (RCCs).
- It will be much more efficient—thereby freeing up more resources for other Fire and Rescue Services and so saving more lives.

3. The published, headline costs and savings were as follows:

	<i>Current position</i>	<i>Regional controls position</i>	<i>Net saving</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Total cash cost (£M)	1,017.7	937.8	– 79.9	8%
Net Present Value (£M)	796.7	754.5	– 42.3	5%
Annual cost (£M)	75.6	53.0	– 22.6	30%
Unit cost (£)	1,529.2	1,071.6	– 457.6	30%

Notes for table:

- i. The current position is a forecast provided by individual FRAs based on their spending plans. It assumes at least one infrastructure refresh/upgrade cycle during the period under consideration.
- ii. The regional controls position is a forecast developed by the project team to establish and operate a fully networked, resilient solution for the nine regions in England, including London. The solution includes procurement of a national infrastructure prime contractor, and new, regional, control centre buildings under a Private Developer Scheme. Migration costs for systems outside the FiReControl scope are excluded. As are requirements for New Dimension.
- iii. All figures are based on 2004 prices. The period under consideration is from the project start (first quarter FY2004/05) to the expected exit from the infrastructure contract (final quarter FY2017/18).
- iv. The total cash cost is the forecast cash flow during the period under consideration. It excludes accounting treatment and notional costs, such as depreciation and the cost of capital.
- v. The net present value is the discounted cash flow, where the discount rate is the same as the time cost of money (3.5%).
- vi. The annual cost is the average annual cost or saving under steady state operating conditions. For the current position this is FY2004/05 to 2006/07. For regional controls this is FY2011/12 to 2013/14.
- vii. The unit cost is calculated by dividing the annual cost of providing national control services, under steady state operating conditions, by the population served (in 1000s). This is consistent with the Fire Formula Spending Share and the recommendations of the Funding Working Group.

4. The cost estimates were prepared by the national project team, which contained a mixture of consultants, civil servants and secondees. They had between them considerable experience in this area, through working on supplier and client sides of similar projects using similar technologies.

5. The commercial deals sought had a largely beneficial impact on the cost of ownership for accommodation and the ICT infrastructure:

- The total cash cost and discounted cash flow were improved by £21 million and £34 million respectively during the period under consideration; this ensured that the project remained broadly cost neutral when optimism bias was applied.
- The payback period was reduced by more than two years.
- The cash flow was smoothed considerably during transition to the new arrangements.
- The commercial deal transfers a significant level of risk from the public to the private sector.

6. These advantages were offset against a forecast increase in the cost of acquiring accommodation over the (then) anticipated lease term (NPV 3.5 £23 million), compared to the estimated one-off capital cost of acquiring the site and building and fitting out the accommodation.

7. The team followed best practice guidance on the estimation of the costs, which included the Treasury Supplementary Green Book guidance on optimism bias. This requires that the business case presents explicit, empirically based adjustments to the estimates of a project's costs, benefits and duration to mitigate the systematic tendency for project appraisers to be overly optimistic. In line with this guidance it calculated an "optimism bias" for the national ICT infrastructure and accommodation procurements and reported how it affected project cash cost, net present value and duration.

	<i>Base case Cost/saving</i>	<i>Increased cost Cost/saving</i>
Total Costs and savings (£M)	- 79.9	- 2.3
Net present value (£M)	- 42.3	21.3
Steady state annual savings (£M)	- 22.6	- 19.6
Unit cost (£)	- 457.6	- 395.7

Notes for table:

1. The increased cost is derived from an analysis of project risk factors and lies between the upper and lower limits set out in HMT guidelines.

1. Taking the optimism bias analysis at face value, there would be an expected delay in delivering new control arrangements of six months. Alternatively, a doubling of infrastructure development costs and other increases in the cost of delivery would render the project broadly cost neutral during the period under consideration. However, regional controls would still result in annual savings of £19.6 million per year under steady state operating conditions.

2. The figures from earlier studies, including the FiReControl Strategic Outline Business Case (SOBC), are not directly comparable with the Outline Business Case. The figures presented in earlier studies were based on deviations from a nominal baseline, whereas the figures in this business case were based on the difference between detailed forecasts for the current position (ie an accurate base line) and the implementation of regional controls. In addition, the period under consideration is different, reflecting a refined understanding of project timescales and the commercial deal sought.

3. A Full Business Case (first edition) was developed to support the OGC Gateway Review 3a (accommodation procurement) in March 2005. It built upon the Outline Business Case and the feedback about it which has been received from FRAs and other stakeholders.

Supplementary memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FRS 31(c))

MATERIAL ON "OUT OF SCOPE" WORK FOR SELECT COMMITTEE

Current fire control rooms have a number of additional administrative functions on top of the core work of managing emergency incidents. These are known as out-of-scope activities.

All control staff carry out some out-of-scope activities to fill the time when they are unoccupied between calls. The type of activity and the amount of time spent in those activities varies between control rooms. Less time is spent on these activities in larger and busier control rooms, where more staff are more focussed on core activity.

The FiReControl business case includes informed assumptions about the costs of out-of-scope activities. The project recently requested more detailed information through an out-of-scope questionnaire sent to all FRs to refine these figures. Analysis of the returns is underway so that we can support FRs in finding appropriate solutions to manage out-of-scope activity. However, preliminary assessment has confirmed our assumption that most out-of-scope activities do not require 24/7 activity.

Using control staff to undertake out of scope activities during slack periods is an effective use of resources under the current system. However, it does not represent the most efficient way of accomplishing these tasks for the following reasons:

- (a) waste of skills: highly trained staff with specialist skills are performing routine administrative tasks;
- (b) waste of money: in recognition of those specialist skills, control staff are paid at 95% of fire-fighter wages; and
- (c) waste of staff time: control staff work round the clock, but most tasks do not require 24/7 cover.

The introduction of regional control centres, means that administrative tasks will be moved out of control rooms and will be performed by administrative staff, leaving control staff to concentrate on core activity.

Through a more accurate matching of staffing levels to demand in regional control centres, slack time between calls will be reduced considerably. In 2003–04, the average time between calls for each operator was approximately 70 minutes nationally with half of all controls having at least 90 minutes between calls per operator. Regional controls are expected to reduce this to 30 minutes, in line with the pattern of calls in the existing London regional control centre.

Supplementary memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FRS 31(d))

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Government has had concerns about the performance on the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) on issues of equality and diversity for a number of years. These concerns led to the first thematic review carried out by Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate. The report "Equality and Fairness in the Fire Service", published in 1999, identified significant deficiencies in the way FRSs were tackling the key issues of equality, diversity and fairness. The report made a total of 38 recommendations aimed at improving policies, practices and performance and effecting cultural change.

To support the Thematic Review's recommendations, and help FRSs to assess and develop their own effective policies and procedures, the Government supported the development, by FRS stakeholders, of successive National Equality and Diversity Action Plans, entitled "Toward Diversity" published in 2000 and 2001. The aim of the action plans was to provide FRSs with a clear steer on the responsibility for delivery against the recommendations and guidance on how improvements could be achieved, including the provision of good practice examples.

Concurrent with the Thematic Review, the Home Office was considering the recommendations of the McPherson report on the Steven Lawrence enquiry. One of the outcomes was the decision to agree race employment targets for the service areas for which the Home Office then had responsibility, including Fire. The aim in introducing a target strategy was to provide both the impetus and goals to encourage fire and rescue services to review their recruitment, retention and progression procedures, creating an organisational culture that values diversity and does not discriminate unfairly against anyone on any grounds, supporting the achievement of greater diversity in the workforce, encouraging and enhancing culture change and providing a more effective service to the wider community.

At the time the targets were set, minority ethnic communities comprised 7% of the working population while their representation in the FRS was 1.2%.

The ethnic minority employment targets strategy sought to redress the imbalance in the make up of the FRS workforce, setting a ten year modernisation programme aimed to achieve:

- minority ethnic representation across the FRS by 2009 in line with the minority ethnic working population, with each FRS having its own local targets, in both uniformed and non-uniformed sectors, with milestones at April 2002 and 2004 and with final targets set for 2009. In addition to local targets, national targets for representation within the workforce were set against which the progress made across the FRS as a whole could be evaluated. The national targets were 2.5% by 2002, 4% by 2004 and 7% by 2009;
- an equal ratio of resignations and dismissals between minority ethnic and white employees; and
- parity in rates of career progression between minority ethnic and white employees.

In 2000 a joint proposal from the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) that targets for the recruitment, retention and progression of women should also be set was agreed. The targets for women (set purely for the operational sector as women are well represented in other sectors of the Service) were based on the same principles as those for minority ethnic staff, however, whilst parity in the ratio of resignations and dismissals between men and women and in the rates of career progression were sought, there was no local adjustment of the workforce representation target which was set at one national level, ie 4% by April 2002, 9% by April 2004 and 15% by April 2009.

The Government also took practical steps to help the FRS overcome some of the barriers to the recruitment and retention of under represented groups including:

- The provision of £10 million in supplementary credit approvals for use between 2001 and 2003 to support capital projects aimed at promoting equality and diversity. The projects funded ranged from facilities for women and accommodation for religious observance on fire stations to the improvement of disabled access.
- A major project was launched in 2001 to develop national, job relevant, fair and transparent recruitment tests for the role of firefighter. These were designed and developed to replace the varying recruitment practices in use across the country which often had the effect of acting as de-selectors, with a disproportionate effect on women in particular. The new tests have undergone a rigorous validation process and will be available for use across the Service by Spring 2006.

- Two national conferences in 2003 aimed at HR practitioners and focussing on recruitment and selection good practice, exploring the need for, and benefits of, positive action.
- National career and recruitment literature, published in 2001 and 2004, designed to raise the profile of the FRS among currently under-represented groups, to provide information on the range of employment choices available in the service and encourage a more diverse range of applicants.
- A web based recruitment toolkit, launched in 2004, designed to provide information on legislative requirements and good practice with a forum for exchanging ideas and sharing good practice on initiatives across the service. The toolkit has been designed to be a living document, which the ODPM updates regularly to reflect changes and developments.
- A medical evidence document to support FRSs in the application of good practice with regard to the employment of staff with disabilities. This is used by the service in conjunction with a practical guide for managers on disability issues produced jointly by the Disability Rights Commission and the Chief Fire Officers' Association, (CFOA) with the ODPM's support.

The ODPM has also been continuously active in undertaking or supporting a range of activities aimed at increasing cultural awareness within the service, highlighting the business case for diversity and the crucial need for policies, procedures and practices which support equality and fairness within the workplace and beyond. These have included:

- *Collaboration with the service on development of the second Multi Faith Seminar in 2004*
The aim of the initiative was to enable a proactive approach to be taken to providing information on faith issues; to increase understanding and respect between different ethnic groups and, as a result, avoid tensions escalating either within the workforce or the communities they served. The work commenced with a drive to engage with different faith communities via their respective faith organisations. By engaging with different faith groups, FRSs could equip those involved with the skills (eg on the installation of smoke detectors) and information to take messages into their communities, to reach those at particular risk (for example where language barriers may limit the effective communication of fire safety messages, or where cultural practices, such as cooking methods or the use of candles, can increase fire risk).
The first multi-faith seminar was progressed with the support of CFOA and focused on Islam and Sikhism. The 2004 seminar focused on Hinduism and Buddhism.
- *Development of fire safety campaigns for Diwali in 2004, Eid ul Adha, Diwali and Eid ul Fitr in 2005 and Eid ul Adha and Chinese New Year in 2006*
ODPM appointed a specialist Asian media and marketing agency to help support the National Community Fire Safety Centre's ethnic minority fire safety campaigns. Although the focus of these campaigns is fire safety, the Service can also use the opportunity to engage with targeted communities and communicate information about the FRS as a career option.
(We are pleased to note that the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) has highlighted the NCFSC's Faith fire safety campaign as an example of good practice in their submission to the ODPM Select Committee on Fire.)
- *Support To Encourage Further Cultural Change Within The Service*
However, despite these measures and more general support through the Equal Opportunities Task Group and its successor the Equality and Cultural Change Advisory Board, FRS stakeholder groups supported and facilitated by central Government, it is clear that the Service, apart from some notable areas of good practice, is struggling both to change internal cultures which predicate against an acceptance of diversity, and to attract, recruit and retain people from currently under-represented groups.

The need for greater progress on equality and diversity was clearly identified in the Report of the Independent Review of the Fire Service by Professor Sir George Bain. To move these issues forward the ODPM undertook to facilitate and chair a national Equality and Diversity Programme Board, Diversity Happens!, and also appointed the service's first National Equality and Diversity Advisor.

Diversity Happens! was set up in 2004. It was a successor to the Equal Opportunities Task Group (1998–2002) and the Equality and Cultural Change Advisory Board (2002–03). Like both of these it is a stakeholder forum not an ODPM body, although the ODPM provides the secretariat, policy advice and chair (Sir Graham Meldrum HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services).

Diversity Happens' remit is to work with FRSs to enable them to integrate and embed equality and diversity within their organisations. Its Key Objectives are to:

- Provide advice and guidance to the Practitioners' Forum.
- Provide advice and guidance to the FRS.
- Manage the delivery of agreed projects on equality and diversity on behalf of the Practitioners' Forum.
- Enable best practice sharing across the FRS.
- To be a key consultee for Government on FRS equality and diversity issues.

- Commission and manage research on diversity for the FRS.
- Champion diversity for the FRS.
- Provide leadership.

Because the Programme Board is a strategic body the practical work on delivery (ie development of tools, processes, procedures, guidance documentation etc) will be undertaken by task groups. The support structure for the Programme Board is still under development. However, it is proposed that the membership for these task groups will be drawn from three key groups:

- An *equality professionals* group. Sponsored and supported by CFOA, this group is comprised of equality professionals employed by fire and rescue services. The group contains a representative from each region. Much of the technical equalities products and guidance developed for Diversity Happens have to date been produced and tested by this group (eg a Race Equality Scheme Action Plan template).
- The *stakeholder group*. This group is still in the process of formation but it is proposed that membership will be drawn from the representative bodies (eg FBU, RFU Unison) and minority representation groups (eg BEAMM and Networking Women). The chair of this group will sit on the Diversity Happens Board.
- *Consultants*. Where necessary, Diversity Happens will engage consultants to undertake development work.

Diversity Happens has progressed a number of key issues since its inception, at both strategic and practical levels. Most notable among these is the development and dissemination in 2004–05 of Core Values for the Fire and Rescue Service. The development was sponsored and guided by CFOA and the Core Values now form part of the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework.

To support the work of Diversity Happens and to provide advice and guidance to ODPM, and more widely to the FRS, Mr Jagtar Singh (Deputy Chief Fire Officer for Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service) was appointed in May 2004 as National Equality and Diversity Advisor. He undertook this role on secondment to ODPM until July 2005 and during that period was instrumental in either taking forward or supporting many of the equality and diversity initiatives detailed earlier in this evidence.

REVIEW OF THE EMPLOYMENT TARGETS STRATEGIES

As mentioned earlier, progress against the recruitment targets to date has been very slow. The table below shows the national picture:

Workforce Representation (targets shown in brackets)

	2002	2004	2009
Minority Ethnic Staff (across all sectors)	1.6% (2.5%)	2.6% (4%)	? (7%)
Women (in the operational sector)	1.7% (4%)	2.4% (9%)	? (15%)

The current targets strategies have been effective in focusing the FRS on the need to improve the diversity with the workforce but it has been a fairly blunt and unsophisticated tool, with the majority of attention nationally on uniformed roles and overall workforce percentages. In developing the targets strategies the Government acknowledged the need to review their effectiveness. This review has now taken place and proposals are being developed for a new target strategy which would better reflect the advances being made by the service in attraction and recruitment rates across a wide range of roles.

Much of the 1999–2000 work on targets remains relevant. However, it is clear that some changes are necessary to take account of current realities, such as the slowing/changing pattern of FRS recruitment and changes to the legislative framework. The existing strategies were designed at a time when the key concerns focused on race and gender and the Government is aware that other issues, particularly surrounding sexual orientation and disability, have not previously been given a sufficiently high profile. The Government also recognises that the scope of equalities legislation has significantly broadened in recent years, and will continue to do so, and the proposals will seek to embrace this wider remit.

These proposals for the new employment targets strategy are due to be considered by ODPM Ministers later this month with the intention of undertaking consultation in the early spring.

ONGOING CENTRAL SUPPORT

The ODPM remains strongly committed to supporting the FRS in its efforts to develop into an organisation which values equality and diversity and is reflective of the community it serves. For example, in response to an identified need for national awareness raising advertising, a campaign designed to inform women of firefighter career opportunities is being developed by this Office to support local FRS campaigns.

Consultants have also been engaged to help FRS stakeholders develop the “Business Case for Diversity” for the Service, the need for which has been identified both within and outside the Service. This project, which is being sponsored by the ODPM on behalf of Diversity Happens, has been commissioned to raise awareness and understanding across the service of the need for, and benefits of, diversity in delivering its core business, saving lives. A report is due to be prepared by the consultants in April and will then be circulated for consultation purposes during the Spring.

The ODPM acknowledges the many challenges faced by the FRS in achieving progress in equality and diversity. The Office remains committed to provide the Service with support, advice and practical help in order to achieve this shared aim.

Supplementary memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FRS 31(e))

GOVERNANCE

1. *Some evidence to the Committee has highlighted the inconsistency and confusing nature of governance arrangements for the Fire and Rescue Services (eg QQ354). Can you provide an overview of the governance and accountability structures?*

There are essentially two models of Fire and Rescue Authority—County FRAs, where the fire and rescue service is a Department of the Council and the Authority is made up of County Councillors; and “Combined”/“Metropolitan” FRAs, which are free-standing employers and where the Authority consists of Councillors from the underlying local authorities (plus, in London, Greater London Assembly members). In all cases, the Authority consists of elected representatives only—accountable to the electorate.

The Bain report expressed concern about the quality of local leadership but proposed only that the LGA (and COSLA) should work to improve it. The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 allows the Secretary of State to make non-Councillor appointments to any newly created FRA, but this is intended for use only in compulsory combinations where existing leadership is seen to have failed—and even then, local Councillors would remain the majority. The current proposals to allow the London Mayor to appoint up to four members of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority would similarly leave elected representatives as the overwhelming majority.

It flows from the local nature of the service that ODPM has not sought to prescribe a minimum size of Authority—nor will it seek to impose structures unless the need for urgent public safety or a demonstrable failure to achieve economy, efficiency and effectiveness required it (see also our response to Q3 on Performance Management).

2. *What are the role and powers of Regional Management Boards? (See QQ162)*

Regional Management Boards (RMBs) were established to take forward the six areas identified in the June 2003 White Paper as best delivered through regional collaboration—resilience, control centres, procurement, human resources, training and common/specialist services such as fire investigation.

They are joint committees established under local government legislation in accordance with guidance issued by the Local Government Association. It is for FRAs themselves to ensure the constitutional arrangements they agree for their own RMB enable them to deliver the objectives of the six workstreams as set out in the Fire and Rescue National Framework. The LGA’s own evidence to the Select Committee states “ODPM’s clarification of the role of RMBs is welcome”.

Individual FRAs remain separate employers responsible for firefighting and fire safety in accordance with their own Integrated Risk management Plans.

REGIONAL CONTROL CENTRES

3. *Is the move to RCCs intended to improve response times? If so, what evidence is this assumption based on? (see QQ295) What assessment has been made of the impact on response times of the loss of local knowledge if FRS teams have to work outside their county in an unfamiliar area?*

The FiReControl project has undertaken that mobilisation times will be the same or better under RCCs, in accordance with the requirements of pre-determined attendances set in local IRMPs. However, we expect that a side benefit of FiReControl will be to help improve response times. There are two principal reasons for this:

- The benefits of a national network, which means that the centres will be able to provide each other with immediate back-up in the event of one centre being out of action, facing peak demand or dealing with a particularly large incident. At the moment if a fire control room with only five staff on duty receive ten simultaneous calls, five of those callers have to wait. With the national network, all 10 would be answered and dealt with immediately.

- An increased ability to mobilise the nearest vehicle to an incident because the RCC will be able to track all FRS vehicles via the automatic vehicle location system (AVLS). This means that vehicles that are already out on the road can be sent, instead of just those at the station. There will be enhanced ability to mobilise as necessary directly across FRA and regional borders.

Regional Control Centres will use the following elements to determine incident locations:

- Immediate identification of calls from landlines or from mobile phones.
- Well-trained staff who can elicit information from distressed callers, and confirm the incident location using proper call handling procedures.
- Automatic Vehicle Location System (AVLS) which will show the nearest appropriate fire and rescue appliances (using the pre-determined attendances set in the local IRMP), whether this is on station or not.
- Local information stored in a database, with cross-referencing, so that it is accessible to all operators at all times.

This will ensure that all the information is in place to send the most rapid and appropriate response to an incident as determined by the local IRMP.

4. How does the Department intend to ensure that the scepticism over its reform agenda and the move to regional control centres does not (a) cause the FiReControl project to fail, (b) undermine public confidence in the FRS, and its ability to respond swiftly and appropriately to emergencies?

We have a range of communications activities already in place to convey the benefit of the project to stakeholders and public alike. We will continue to provide opportunities for key stakeholders to raise concerns about FiReControl as the project progresses and addressing these concerns as they arise.

We are working with stakeholder groups to ensure that they are listened to, that their input is taken on board and that they remain fully involved in the preparation for and implementation of the project. A range of approaches are adopted across the stakeholder groups to achieve this. The support of the Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA) support is critical to persuading operational staff of the benefits of FiReControl, as is that of the Local Government Association (LGA) for persuading elected members.

We are also strengthening the management of the project. Amongst other changes, a senior professional manager with expertise in change management projects with a strong IT component will be brought in to head the technical implementation and delivery work of the project as it moves into implementation phase. The Firelink and FiReControl projects will be integrated at regional and local level.

When the project is further advanced we will be able to demonstrate the operational benefits prior to rollout during the testing phase. This will show clearly that the system works and is better than current systems before it is rolled out across the fire and rescue service.

5. How are you communicating information about the FiReControl project to those involved/affected? What attempts are being made allay concerns and persuade key players of the benefits?

Communication has been a key element in the development and delivery of the FiReControl project from the outset. This has focused on the information needs of stakeholders such as members of the fire and rescue service at all levels and fire authority members, but it has also been important to provide information and assurance, through local media, to wider community stakeholders and members of the public.

There is a comprehensive FiReControl website which has documented the background and progress of the project, and which is linked to other fire modernisation resources. For specific announcements, such as the location of the new regional control centres, full briefing packs were produced with detailed information in hard copy and CD-Rom. The latter included computer animations showing the proposed design concepts and a "fly-through" to show the work place accommodation from the point of view of members of staff.

Face-to-face briefings and seminars have been arranged for key stakeholders and these have included ministerial briefings for regional MPs in December 2005. A programme of regional seminars for elected members, which was due to take place in February and March 2006, will be re-arranged in consultation with LGA and CFOA to allow time for the publication and consideration of the Governance Consultation Paper. The FiReControl Project team has attended major stakeholder events such as the FIRE and Local Government Association conferences. These are not one-off events, rather they are part of an ongoing programme of engagement with all our stakeholders.

We also engage our stakeholders through subject specific groups. There are groups covering Operations, Implementation, Finance, Legal and HR matters. All of these groups have representatives from each region and most also have CFOA and LGA members. These groups are used to provide advice and guidance to the project board and to inform the practical implementation of the project.

DIVERSITY

6. *Why was UNISON not involved in the “Bridging the Gap” consultation on Leadership? (FRS30, 4)*

The “Bridging the Gap” scoping study examining leadership needs for managing the modernised fire service recognised the important contribution of “non-uniformed” staff to the successful management of fire services. The report acknowledges that, “it would have been desirable to spend some time in discussion with Unison, the trade union representing the majority of non uniformed staff. However, time and opportunities, did not present themselves, though, as this work progresses, this important aspect will need to feature more prominently than has hitherto been the case”.

There was a tight deadline set for the publication of this report due to the date of the impending election. Had more time been available then UNISON would have been consulted as the findings started to be developed, but they were overtaken by Bain and the White Paper, on both of which UNISON were consulted.

Many of the recommendations in this study were picked up by the national review of fire service effectiveness by professor Sir George Bain in 2002. These included the introduction of new national institutions which have provided UNISON with representation at the highest forum dealing with fire and rescue service management issues.

7. *Are you on track to meet the Home Office Legacy Targets on diversity by 2009? How can this target be met when many fire authorities are facing reducing or frozen recruitment?*

Fire and rescue services are unlikely at the current rate of progress to meet either the employment targets set for minority ethnic staff or women by 2009. The progress against the recruitment targets (set in 1999 and 2000) to date has been very slow. The table below shows the national picture:

Workforce Representation (targets shown in brackets)

	2002	2004	2009
Minority Ethnic Staff (across all sectors)	1.6% (2.5%)	2.6% (4%)	? (7%)
Women (in the operational sector)	1.7% (4%)	2.4% (9%)	? (15%)

The current targets strategies have been effective in focusing FRSs on the need to improve the diversity with their workforce but it has been an unsophisticated tool with the majority of attention nationally on uniformed roles and overall workforce percentages. In developing the targets strategies the Government acknowledged the need to review their effectiveness. Proposals are being developed for a new strategy which is more reflective of the advances being made in attraction and recruitment rates across a wide range of roles.

Much of the 1999–2000 work remains relevant although other changes are necessary to take account of current realities, such as, the changing pattern of recruitment and changes to the legislative framework. The current strategies were designed at a time when the key concerns focused on race and gender and the Government is aware that other issues particularly surrounding sexuality and disability have not previously been given sufficiently high profile.

These proposals for the new employment targets strategy are due to be considered by ODPM Ministers later this month with the intention of undertaking consultation in the early spring.

Recruitment is an issue for Fire and Rescue Authorities as the employing bodies. Whether recruitment is carried out within a particular FRS will be dependant on their staffing requirements as identified within their Integrated Risk Management Plans. Government does not have any direct involvement in this process. A number of FRSs are recruiting but there are others who have no need to recruit currently. This will affect an FRS’s ability to increase the diversity in their workforce through direct recruitment in the short term but should not have an effect on their ability to meet retention and progression targets.

8. *What will be the impact of the move to regional control centres on diversity? Is it likely that redundancies will mainly affect female staff in control rooms?*

The majority of current control staff are women. This is likely to remain the case with the move to regional control rooms as many existing staff are expected to fill the new posts. However, the impact of any redundancies within control rooms is likely to impact on significantly more women than men purely because of their high representation in this role. We value the skill and experience of current staff and we hope that those who do not choose to move to the new control centres will apply their experience in other specialist roles in the FRS. This presents an opportunity for FRSs to take more active steps to actively promote diversity within their organisation.

FIRE PREVENTION

9. *Have you assessed the quality of IRMPs? If so, has this included comparison between the IRMPs of different fire authorities? Do IRMPs consider all applicable risks and risk reduction measures available, ie prevention, protection and emergency response? (see FRS63, 2. ii) 9)*

The IRMP Operational Risk Management Support Team has provided advice, guidance and encouragement to Fire and Rescue Authority members and Principal Officers in the development and promotion of robust IRMPs and subsequent action plans. In addition, the reconvened IRMP Steering Group is considering the future development of IRMPs with the aim of producing consistent and high quality IRMPs.

Fire and Rescue Authorities are required by the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework to have in place and maintain an IRMP which reflects local need and sets out plans to tackle effectively both existing and potential risks to communities. An IRMP must set out an authority's assessment of local risk and, in line with that analysis, how it is going to deploy its resources to tackle those risks and improve the safety of all sections of society. It is, therefore, for each Fire & Rescue Authority to determine appropriate fire cover in its area.

10. *The Committee has heard that Integrated Risk Management Plans are not truly integrated as they do not include planning for major catastrophic incidents? Do you plan to rectify this anomaly? (eg QQ283) How well are IRMPs integrated with local authority owned CRRs (Community Risk Registers)?*

The Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) places a duty on all Category 1 responders to carry out a risk assessment. For the FRS this is their IRMP. The IRMPs have a local focus assessing those risks that are present within Fire and Rescue Authorities' boundaries. This allows the Authority to balance investment and resources accordingly to meet their local risks.

A National Risk Assessment is conducted on an annual basis by the Cabinet Office, which captures and assesses the likelihood and impact of those threats and hazards which could cause a major catastrophic incident. The likelihood and impact of these national risks will vary depending on the regional and local conditions. It is the task of the Regional Resilience Fora and the Local Resilience Fora (on which is FRS is represented) to analyse the risk profile of the national threats and hazards to their region or locality, respectively. At a local level this takes the form of a Community Risk Register (CRR). Multi-agency co-operation in maintaining a Community Risk Register is also a statutory duty under the CCA. The FRS can thus consult the CRR to ensure that the major catastrophic incident risks captured on their IRMP are consistent with the national risks, and in reverse the CCR can consult the IRMP to ensure that the local risk profile for catastrophic incidents benefits from the local knowledge of the FRS.

The ODPM's New Dimension programme, in conjunction with Chief Fire Officers' Association and the FRS, has been procuring substantial amounts of equipment in order to deliver a national resilience capability for the FRS, based on both the national and local risk profiles. The amount and type of New Dimension capability procured for the FRS, and the subsequent strategic positioning of this capability, is sufficient to meet the operational targets for response to severe, high, and low risks areas identified through the national and local risk assessments. This capability is also sufficient so that the FRS can discharge its duties under the FRS Act.

Although the New Dimension capability is not accommodated in every FRA, under mutual assistance agreements all FRAs can request these resources to respond to a major catastrophic emergency within their boundaries should such an incident occur. The FRS is also represented on Regional Resilience Fora and takes an active role in the regional risk assessment process.

11. *What are the implications of the forthcoming Fire Safety Order 2006 for the FRS as an enforcing authority? Have FRS staff had sufficient training to cope with the move from fire certificates to a risk assessment approach? What are the implications for the business community? Are sufficient transitional arrangements in place while the system switches over?*

The need for FRS personnel to adjust to risk assessment-based fire precautions and adopt the role of checking compliance rather than setting the standards was recognised during the passage of the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997. Additional funding was provided over three years from 1997 to account for this. Thereafter training in this area has formed part form part of the normal training provided by each FRS.

For the business community, the fire safety order will see the end of overlapping legislation and enforcement by multiple authorities. This overlap was recognised in 1996 as a significant burden on business.

To facilitate the move to the new regime (which is based on existing duties), we have developed, in conjunction with stakeholders, a publicity campaign to promote the new Fire Safety Regime. That started on 12 January with a series of seminars for business and others. Further publicity will be undertaken during the year and will involve press and radio advertising, direct mailing to business and web based material—as well as the publication of a suite of guidance documents targeted at different uses of premises.

In addition, the fire and rescue services, taking into account their statutory duties, are working with business to move to the new regime. As part of that the Chief Fire Officers Association's advice to FRS is for applications for new fire certificates to be dealt with but by use of existing risk based law so that fire precautions are brought to the necessary levels on a risk assessment basis. Physical issue of a fire certificate (for which a fee is charged) is recommended as taking place only where the applicant requests it in full knowledge that the certificate will shortly be replaced by the new regime. Businesses which choose not to have the certificate issued will be in compliance with the law.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

12. *What are the most appropriate performance measures/indicators for the FRS (eg response times, numbers of rescues, number of fires)? What evidence do you have that these are the best measures of performance?*

Performance indicators (PIs) provide essential outcome data and context information to support performance management and external performance assessment work. They comprise both nationally set BVPIs, on which all authorities must report, and local PIs which will be incorporated in IRMPs and are intended to monitor against locally set targets.

ODPM established a working group which re-examined the BVPIs for the fire and rescue service in the light of the service expectations set out in the White Paper, and subsequently the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004, and significant changes such as the introduction of IRMPs and the end of national standards of fire cover. The working group included the LGA, the Audit Commission, CFOA and a range of practitioners from individual authorities. The revised BVPIs, reflecting the outcomes of this work, were trialled with volunteer authorities and then subject to full consultation with stakeholders before being given statutory force and then published in the National Framework. BVPI 143 records the number of accidental dwelling fire deaths and injuries for each Fire and Rescue Authority while BVPI 206 records the number of deliberate fires. Data is also collected nationally on the number of accidental fire related deaths in the home and the number of deliberate fires to support ODPM's PSA 3 target. Latest figures show that there was a sharp decline in the number of accidental fire deaths in the home and in the number of deliberate fires in 2004-05. Fire deaths showed a decline of 19% and the number of deliberate fires decreased by 22%.

An effective national BVPI must assess outcomes, rather than be a measure of activity, and encompass issues where a Fire and Rescue Authority's performance will be the primary influence on the outcomes. For example there is a BVPI on the number of deaths and injuries sustained which provides evidence on whether a Fire and Rescue Authority is effective in its operational role. Other BVPIs indicate through outcomes, a Fire and Rescue Authority's effectiveness in community fire safety work. BVPI 208 is intended to measure the success of measures in equipping people with the knowledge to escape unharmed from their home if they should experience a fire. However a national PI would not be appropriate on issues like response times, which are determined locally reflecting local risk or, for example road traffic accidents, where many factors affecting outcomes are outside the control of the Fire and Rescue Authority. A national PI in these areas would therefore risk introducing perverse incentives to change local response measures in ways which would nothing to do with local risk or public safety.

13. *ODPM officials told the Committee that next year's CPA will focus more on service delivery. What information do you have from the Audit Commission regarding how exactly the CPA framework is being developed to include a more operational assessment? Would ODPM like to see the CPA include assessments of response times and numbers of rescues? (QQ13)*

The Audit Commission has written to Fire and Rescue Authorities setting out a package of performance assessment measures to take place in 2006 to follow-up Fire CPA which took place in 2005. The package will comprise a Direction of Travel Statement, a Use of Resources judgement and a service assessment. The latter, for County Fire and Rescue Authorities, will form part of the County Council's overall CPA assessment; and, for other types of authority, will be a stand alone, scored assessment. The service assessment will comprise two elements—an assessment of operational service delivery, and BVPI and other PI data. The Audit Commission has asked ODPM to provide this performance evidence with the operational service delivery element provided through a team of secondees from the fire and rescue service.

The operational assessment they carry out will be based on an operational toolkit developed by CFOA and the HMFSI in ODPM. Fire and Rescue Authorities will be asked to carry out a self-assessment against the toolkit and ODPM's team of secondees will visit them to verify the information they have given in the self assessment. The Audit Commission will use this information and the BVPI data to come to an overall judgement on service delivery performance for each Fire and Rescue Authority. ODPM will be consulting on the toolkit and self-assessment process shortly and the Audit Commission will be consulting separately on their wider package of measures to follow-up Fire and Rescue CPA in the spring.

ODPM's operational assessment will look at the process the Fire and Rescue Authority has used to arrive at its response times and whether the risk assessments undertaken are robust. Performance Indicator data will be used to provide the outcome data within the service assessment.

14. *What information do you have from the Audit Commission regarding whether next year's CPA will constitute a move away from national standards? The CPA published this year indicates that there are regional inconsistencies in performance. What is being done to address this?*

Fire CPA in 2005 did not examine how Fire and Rescue Authorities met the old national standards of fire cover. It looked instead how Fire and Rescue Authorities assess risk and how their IRMPs are developed and fit in with their other strategic documents. As explained above, the performance assessment work planned for Fire and Rescue Authorities in 2006 will not examine how national standards are met but will consider how Fire and Rescue Authorities have arrived at the decisions made on fire cover and response times.

While there are differences in performance (for example, all FRAs in the West Midlands are rated Good while all in the North East are Fair), the Commission does not comment on this. Instead it focuses on the differences between size and type of Authority. While suggesting that the evidence points to "bigger being generally better", the report nonetheless also notes that "some smaller Fire and Rescue Authorities have achieved good performance despite capacity constraints". In the light of this, the Commission it does not conclude that there is an "optimum" size for a Fire and Rescue Authority—rather it suggests further work be undertaken.

While Fire CPA evidence does suggest that bigger is generally better it also notes that "some smaller Fire and Rescue Authorities have achieved good performance despite capacity constraints". The ODPM sees this being addressed through the improvement planning programme already underway in the wake of the 2005 CPA round. Where Fire and Rescue Authorities see voluntary merger as a way to tackle capacity constraints—and a robust business case underpins it—ODPM will support them. But the government has made clear it will only use its statutory powers to combine Authorities if the needs of urgent public safety require it or there is a failure through existing mechanisms (including joint working through their Regional Management Boards) to achieve economy, efficiency and effectiveness and supports those Fire and Rescue Authorities who have decided to consider voluntary merger where there is a robust business case for doing so. However, the Government has no plans to take further action to combine Fire and Rescue Authorities.

RETAINED FIREFIGHTERS

15. *Do you now have the Chief Fire Officers Association's report on prioritising the recommendations that came out of the recent review of the retained service? What are the key priorities for reform? How will you ensure that these are addressed rather than being left on the shelf as has seemingly been the case to date?*

The CFOA report is still awaited. It is expected to be presented to the Practitioner's Forum shortly. We understand the report will highlight the key priorities for reform and proposals on how they should be progressed. ODPM will work with the FRS to ensure these key issues are addressed and is already working proactively with business and public sector stakeholders such as CBI, the Federation of Small Business and the Department for Work and Pensions to move many of the more national issues forward whilst encouraging FRSs to take steps to address these important issues at a local level.

16. *Your officials identified recruitment as a key priority for the retained service. How is this being addressed? What will be short-term and long-term implications if it are not addressed quickly? (QQ97)*

Recruitment is a key priority and the Retained Review Report (which was a FRS stakeholder report supported and facilitated by ODPM) identified a number of issues which needed to be addressed to help meet the current challenges. ODPM is striving to tackle some of the national issues by working with employers' organisations, voluntary and public sector organisations and other government departments to raise the profile of Retained Duty System (RDS) work with employers, create partnerships with other sectors and organisations to promote and encourage RDS membership and to look at possible incentives both for staff and employers. ODPM is also encouraging and facilitating the development of local networks between employers and the FRS to tackle many of the issues which affect recruitment and retention.

17. *How have the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (SI 5, 2006) affected FRS procurement? Are there likely to be any issues in procuring equipment quickly under the new regulations?*

Overall the new regulations will not significantly impact upon the length of time taken to procure equipment. There is also the opportunity to promote environmental awareness through efficient procurement.

Supplementary memorandum by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) (FRS 63(m))

OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE OF THE FIRE CONTROL PROJECT

I refer to the uncorrected evidence in relation to the contents of the Outline Business Case of the FireControl project. The relevant exchange is as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The ODPM Civil Servants appear to be contesting a very important part of the evidence. While we do not suggest the Committee is being deliberately misled as to what the Outline Business Case said with regards to risk, the effect may be that you are left with entirely the wrong impression.

I attach pages 51,52 and 53 of the Outline Business Case in order to clear up any wrong impression which may have inadvertently been given by ODPM Civil Servants on this important issue and also that you may be aware of the facts.

At page 51 the OBC refers to “Project Risks” and at paragraph 140 “Appendix F FireControl Risks . . . the results are summarized as the following risk profile.”

This is summarized in the chart at the top of page 52 which lists 1 area assessed as high risk/very high impact and four areas as high risk/high impact.

Paragraph 141 on page 52 refers explicitly with the high risk/high impact of “unsuccessful delivery of the infrastructure and change components of regional controls”. Paragraph 142 on page 53— “the new RCCs” also explicitly refers to regional controls.

In our view it is clear and certain the risk profile is FireControl Project specific and not some general discussion of risk run by all projects. We are also clear our evidence in relation to this point is entirely accurate and fair.

Matt Wrack
General Secretary

Memorandum by W F Hickin (FRS 67)

Whilst Government legal recognition of the Fire Service Modernisation agenda was long overdue, including the statutory duties of communal fire safety and the wider service concept of prevention, protection and response plus other civil emergency intervention, most was in fact already being implemented with subsequent changes largely regularising the existing situation or simply changing the terminology.

However, the fundamental exception is the withdrawal of the Fire Service Appointment & Promotion Regulations, whereby non-uniformed applicants with no fire service background are now eligible for middle and senior posts, hitherto seen as the preserve of experienced career uniformed officers. Historically, non-uniformed personnel have been valued members of the service, appropriately undertaking the common-service administrative/managerial or specialist support roles working together with uniformed officers. However, this new policy raises a number of basic questions about the future of the fire service and there seems to have been little debate on this change, one which doesn’t seem to have been thought through. What training will such non-uniformed senior entrants receive? Will they be expected to take charge at incidents and operate on the flexible duty system? How are they likely to be regarded by experienced uniformed personnel?

It is reassuring to note that in practice most of the recent chief and senior officer appointments have still gone to uniformed officers but what is the long-term vision or intent of this policy change? Is it to eventually replace a large percentage of senior career uniformed officers as they retire with non-uniformed managers? If so, it is not clear why the need hitherto for the experience and knowledge of uniformed professional officers is apparently no longer essential in managing the fire service, despite the Audit Commission only a few years ago reporting how well it was run.

Now whilst it is desirable-and overdue-to recruit into the service at graduate level, surely a more acceptable means would be direct uniformed officer entry? This appears to work well in the French and German Fire Services, allowing a young career officer entrant to undergo a full training course and subsequently learn the profession from the bottom up. The abolition of written promotion examinations is also questionable. Whilst exams have their limitations and the IPDS concept, in developing practical competence, is to be welcomed, written exams instil study discipline and provide wider professional knowledge. The examination system of the Institution of Fire Engineers will presumably have to fill this gap for those who consider written examinations still have a place in career development.

Despite current plans to have a standard uniform giving a distinctive national image for the fire & rescue service, an interested observer could be forgiven for thinking that the Government's underlying agenda seems designed to "semi-civilianise" the service over the coming years, ultimately leading to a service where the majority of uniformed personnel could find themselves largely confined to the lower grades or roles, dealing with operational incidents and fire safety but being managed to a large extent by non-uniformed managers. Seemingly, non-uniformed applicants are even seen as possibly suitable for Station Commander/Manager posts, so is it at least theoretically possible that the highest rank or role most current uniformed entrants could aspire to would be Sub Officer/Station Officer/Watch Manager?

The recent trend in some brigades whereby rank markings are no longer worn on uniforms reinforces an impression of gradual civilianisation. The fire service developed as a quasi-military uniformed civilian service-complete with rank titles-and this form of organisation is the norm throughout the world and a source of pride, reflecting the distinct and unique character of the fire service and fostering a sense of esprit de corps. In the British fire & rescue service there now seems to be a sense of playing down this heritage. Replacing the term officer by manager reinforces this and seems designed to accommodate a non-uniformed-even commercial-culture. According to the 2000-01 HMFSI Annual Report even Inspectors have been instructed not to wear uniform except where there is a specific need to do so. The impression conveyed by the role map illustrations in the IPDS booklet "It's All About You" would seem to offer further confirmation, as only one individual is depicted in uniform-at Crew Manager level.

Is the Government, in pursuing its reform agenda, going to extend the logic of open senior managerial recruitment to other uniformed services with which the fire service has historically been compared? Will, for example, middle to senior police and military officers be similarly replaced or has the fire & rescue service been singled out for some form of experiment? Hopefully, these questions will remain just a piece of devil's advocacy but, as a former member of the fire service, I sincerely hope those who care about the future of the fire & rescue service seriously reconsider this fundamental element of the modernisation agenda, which is arguably a modernisation too far and could lead to the senior uniformed career fire officer becoming an endangered species.

Memorandum by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (FRS 68)

Thank you for your letter of 16 February 2006 regarding the Committee's inquiry into the Fire and Rescue Service and, in particular, fire safety and the issue of fitting sprinklers in schools.

As you would expect, the Departments primary concern is for the safety of pupils, teachers and other users of schools. Regulation 17 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 requires that every part of a school building, and of the land provided for a school, shall be such that the safe escape of the occupants in case of fire is reasonably assured. Schools are also covered by the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and by subsequent related regulations. These include aspects of fire safety.

Since April 2001, all new building work at schools has been subject to the Building Regulations. As you are aware, these regulations do not currently require the installation of sprinklers in schools, but that does not prohibit local authorities from specifying their use. We believe that the decision on whether to install sprinklers is best taken locally. In our Managing School Facilities Guide 6, *Fire Safety*, we give the example of a school in an area of high arson risk as being a suitable candidate for having sprinklers installed (see www.teachernet.gov.uk/fire). However, we recognised the need to provide more detailed guidance than before.

We work closely with colleagues in ODPM and, liaising with them, we produced new draft guidance on fire safety—Building Bulletin (BB) 100, *Designing and Managing Against the Risk of Fire in Schools*. It stresses the value of using risk assessments to determine what sort of fire detection and alarm systems should be used in each school, and whether or not sprinklers should be installed. While saying that a building designed in accordance with Approved Document B (ADB) will achieve a satisfactory standard of fire

safety, it also suggests ways of improving property protection. This is because a major school fire can seriously disrupt children's education through loss of coursework, use of temporary buildings and impact on morale.

Public consultation on the draft BB 100 was completed in November last year, to the same timeframe as ODPM's consultation on its review of the fire safety aspects of the Building Regulations. An analysis of the responses is almost complete and we hope to publish the final version around September this year.

In your letter you mention advice from insurance companies that the costs of sprinklers can be recouped in seven to eight years. We also liaise with insurance companies and understand that this payback period only applies to schools within PFI contracts, where facilities management companies arrange insurance, and to academies that arrange their own insurance. Most schools are included in local authority wide insurance, where installing sprinklers in one or two schools will make little difference to the overall risk and therefore to the premiums charged.

More fires are occurring during the school day, but with buildings meeting ADB this should not pose a serious threat to life. Moreover, such fires should not go undetected long. Typically, the larger fires still occur out of hours when the school is unoccupied, and the fire seller can work undisturbed and there may be a delay in discovery. We also recognise that sprinklers are not a universal measure. For example, many fires are started externally and sprinklers would not extinguish these. BB 100 therefore also stresses the need for improving security through design, using appropriate security measures and good housekeeping.

Ministers in DfES and ODPM liaise regularly on fire safety in schools. They have endorsed the risk based approach to the selection of automatic detection and alarm systems, and the possible use of fire suppression and smoke control systems. They have also agreed that, subject to the outcome of the recent public consultations, a revised ADB could refer to BB 100 as the schools' fire safety guide.

Mukund Patel
Head of Schools Capital/Assets

Supplementary memorandum by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (FRS 31(f))

FURTHER SELECT COMMITTEE QUESTIONS—FiReControl

1. *What are the administrative duties that have been defined as "out of scope"? Please provide an example of an "out of scope" duty. What are the cost implications of these duties being conducted outside Regional Control Centres (ie wages, training and office accommodation for those who will conduct these duties in the future)? How do those costs compare with costs incurred through highly skilled staff conducting these duties during "slack time" in a control room?*

"Out of scope activity" is a phrase applied to work presently undertaken in control rooms, which will not be undertaken inside the new regional control centres.

Examples of such activities are:

- Handling out of hours calls relating to social services or other council departments, eg for abandoned vehicles.
- Renewing library books.

Our initial analysis of the information provided by the FRS indicates that there is scope for modernisation of FRS business processes and consequent efficiency savings. When the analysis is complete we will be in a position to revisit cost assumptions in the business case, clarify the business processes for the new control arrangements, and help FRAs plan transition to new delivery arrangements.

2. *Is the "Full Business Case (first edition) developed to support the OGC Gateway Review 3a" the most recent finalised business case? Has it, in full or in part, been made available to FRA Chairs and Regional Project Directors? Is this a separate document from the business case that is currently being finalised (Q449)?*

The draft Full Business Case (first edition) supplied to the OGC gateway review team is the most recent "finalised" version of the business case. There was a well publicised leak of the Outline Business Case, which had been supplied to FRA chairs and Regional Project Directors for review and comment. Commercial negotiations with ICT suppliers are currently taking place. These negotiations could be seriously compromised if information in the Business Case was made public. We have therefore decided not to release a further version until these negotiations are concluded. The full business case (second edition) will be published on the FiReControl web site after the contract has been awarded.

3. *What was the cost to the ODPM of the HMFSI inspections and the Fire CPA process?*

In 2001–02, ODPM spent £1.85 million on HMFSI’s inspections of the Fire and Rescue Service. This figure does not include the costs of maintaining HMFSI to perform other functions, the figure solely relates to the direct costs of inspection activity during that financial year.

ODPM provided the Audit Commission with a total of £4.3 million of grant for their work on developing and implementing Fire CPA over the two financial years, 2003–04 and 2004–05. This figure includes Audit Commission expenditure on recruiting, training and retaining staff to take forward work on FRS performance assessment and the costs of developing, consulting on and piloting the CPA methodology. It also includes the costs of supporting self assessment, employing peer reviewers and the direct costs of inspection activity to deliver the CPA judgements. The £4.3 million covers all the Audit Commission’s costs for two financial years and there was no other inspection activity during this period.

Fire and Rescue Authorities were not charged Inspection Fees either for HMFSI inspections or for CPA inspections. The costs of each exercise were borne by ODPM.
