

Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11 Consultation Document – Draft Response

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact Alan Taylor, Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260201 or Steve Worrall, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, on 01743 260204.

1 Purpose of Report

This report sets out a proposed response on behalf of the Fire Authority to the recently issued Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the contents of the new Framework document (attached at Appendix A to this report); and
- b) Approve the consultation response, attached at Appendix B.

3 Background

The Fire and Rescue National Framework sets out the Government's priorities and objectives for the Fire and Rescue Service. It does this by making clear:

- The Government's expectations for the Fire and Rescue Service;
- What Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to do; and
- The support the Government will provide in helping them to meet these objectives.



The Framework is a strategic plan, which outlines the outcomes the Government expects to see delivered by Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and Regional Management Boards (RMBs) across the range of their functions. The Framework sets out the challenges and opportunities faced by the Service, its partners and the Government in support of the Service over the next three years.

The main proposed changes since the last Framework document include:

- Scaling down the narrative to key 'must/should' messages;
- Lifespan – moving to a three-year document, to run alongside the Fire and Rescue Service's financial commitments; and
- Structure – moving away from the nine to four new chapters focused on key strategic priorities:

Chapter 1 - Prevention, Protection and Response

Chapter 2 - Resilience

Chapter 3 - Diversity and Workforce

Chapter 4 - Governance and Improvement

The key priorities for FRAs set out within the Framework are ensuring that public expectations of FRAs are met and ensuring delivery of an enhanced resilience capability. The Framework also cites Equality and Diversity as a key priority, with the Government looking to see a step change in this area from FRAs over the next three years.

The Government still sees a role for RMBs and views them as essential to delivering efficiency, effectiveness and an enhanced resilience capability for FRAs. The Framework recommends that RMBs now 'take stock' of how effectively they have delivered the core functions that were set out for them in the Fire White Paper, Our Fire and Rescue Service in 2003.

4 Fire and Rescue Service National Framework Consultation Questions

The Government wishes to seek views on the new Framework and has invited responses to the following questions:

1. What are your views on the new structure of the National Framework?
2. Is the National Framework clear about the Government's objectives and priorities, what Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to deliver, and the support the Government will provide?
If not, how could it be improved?
3. Do you agree with the policies set out in each chapter?
If not why not, and what alternative policy would you wish to see instead?



4. Do you have any comments on the implementation of the policies set out that are of relevance to the National Framework?

Views are also sought on the proposed Departmental Strategic Objective:

'Ensuring safer communities by providing the framework for the Fire and Rescue Service and other agencies to prevent and respond to emergencies', which can be found in the introduction to the Framework.

The consultation period is twelve weeks, with responses to be returned by **6 February 2008**. The attached appendix sets out a proposed response on behalf of the Fire Authority.

5 Financial Implications

Financial implications arising from the Framework that have a bearing on regional working arrangements will be reported to the Fire Authority when known (circa April 2008). It is not possible at this early stage to provide an accurate assessment of the financial implications specific to this Authority in implementing the requirements of the new Framework.

6 Legal Comment

The Committee's attention is drawn to the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 that states:

Section 21: Fire and Rescue National Framework

Para 42.

This section requires the Secretary of State to consult on and prepare a Fire and Rescue National Framework ("the Framework"), to which fire and rescue authorities must have regard in carrying out their functions. The Secretary of State must keep the Framework under review and must consult on any significant revisions made to it. Parliament will have the opportunity to scrutinise the Framework before it takes effect.

7 Equality Impact Assessment

An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has previously been completed.

8 Appendices

Appendix A

Communities and Local Government
Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11 Consultation Document

Appendix B

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority Response to the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11 (Consultation Document)



9 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	*
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial		Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	*
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	*
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*



Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008– 11 Consultation



Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008–
11
Consultation

Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 4400
Website: www.communities.gov.uk

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November 2007

Product Code: 07FRD04900

Contents

Introduction	5
Chapter 1	
Prevention protection and response	11
Chapter 2	
Resilience	
18	
Chapter 3	
Diversity and Workplace	24
Chapter 4	
Governance and Improvement	32

Introduction

1. The Fire and Rescue National Framework sets out the Government's priorities and objectives for the Fire and Rescue Service. It does this by making clear:
 - the Government's expectations for the Fire and Rescue Service,
 - what Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to do; and
 - the support the Government will provide in helping them to meet these objectives.
2. The Framework is a strategic plan which outlines the outcomes the Government expects to see delivered by Fire and Rescue Authorities and Regional Management Boards across the range of their functions. It is not a national blueprint and does not provide detailed guidance on how to meet these objectives. Building on the publication of the joint vision for the Fire and Rescue Service by the LGA, CFOA and Communities and Local Government last year, this Framework sets out the challenges and opportunities faced by the Service, its partners and government in support of the Service over the next three years.
3. The Framework is a foundation on which to build local solutions. Giving Fire and Rescue Authorities the flexibility they need to meet the specific needs of their local communities remains at the heart of the government's approach. The move to local risk assessment and Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) has proved to be a success. The Fire and Rescue Service has delivered real achievements; an increase in the amount of prevention work being undertaken which is contributing to achieving the lowest level of fire deaths since 1958. The Fire and Rescue Service has flexibly deployed its resources to tackle the risks to communities and has delivered improved efficiency and value for money. To date, it has achieved the PSA target set in the 2004 Spending Review. Consolidating and building on this success will be the next challenge.
4. *The Local Government White Paper: Strong and Prosperous Communities* sets out central government's vision for local government to be more responsive and deliver better outcomes for communities and the Fire and Rescue Service has an important role to play. It will be for Fire and Rescue Authorities to shape their role in working with partners to develop Sustainable Community

Strategies and through Local Area Agreements there will be real opportunities for public services and local partners collectively to deliver community priorities. Communities and Local Government will also expect to see Fire and Rescue Authorities applying robust performance management principles, evaluating outcomes and considering Value for Money issues as they take forward this agenda. While Chapter 4 of the Framework sets out the implications of this new agenda for Fire and Rescue Authorities, working with and delivering through partners is a theme which runs throughout the document and should be considered in particular in Chapter 1 which deals with Prevention, Protection and Response.

5. The Comprehensive Spending Review reflects expectations that public services continue to deliver improved efficiency and introduces a fresh approach to target setting for central and local government. The number of Public Service Agreement targets have been substantially reduced and refocused to reflect clear priorities for central and local government to deliver together. Alongside PSA targets which are cross-cutting, each department has agreed a set of Departmental Strategic Objectives (DSO) against which its performance can be measured. Communities and Local Government's DSOs will include the objective of:

Ensuring safer communities by providing the framework for the Fire and Rescue Service and other agencies to prevent and respond to emergencies.

6. Two fire indicators are proposed which will form part of the national set of indicators to apply to local government performance agreed as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

NI 33 Arson Incidents (Deliberate Fires).

NI 49 Number of primary fires and related fatalities and non-fatal casualties, excluding precautionary checks.

The relationship between these indicators and the new performance framework for local government can be found in Chapter 4. The DSO and the full set of indicators are subject to consultation by Communities and Local Government, planned for November 2007, details of which are available on our website.

7. The DSO and the indicators are key measures on which government and Fire and Rescue Service performance will be measured in this

CSR period. However, this does not mean that they are in any sense the only outcomes against which Fire and Rescue Authority performance will be assessed. The Audit Commission has responsibility for performance assessment of Fire and Rescue Authorities. The Commission will base their performance expectations on the priorities and objectives set out in the Framework and will assess to what extent individual authorities are delivering against them as well as progress against the indicators and the effectiveness of Fire and Rescue Authorities' contributions to priorities set through Local Area Agreements. Chapter 4 provides more information on the new performance framework for the Fire and Rescue Service and on how Fire and Rescue Authorities can look to contribute more widely to the delivery of other indicators in the set.

8. Two of the key priorities for Fire and Rescue Authorities set out in this National Framework are ensuring that public expectations of Fire and Rescue Authorities are met and ensuring delivery of an enhanced resilience capability. There has been a huge expansion in resilience activity within the Fire and Rescue Service in recent years which is set to continue. In response, Communities and Local Government has made significant investment in Fire and Rescue Service resilience with a major provision of resources and training, as part of its ongoing Fire Resilience Programme. The Fire and Rescue Service has responded well to the resilience challenge thus far, as demonstrated by the effective response to recent emergencies, which included the use of New Dimension resources. The Fire and Rescue Service will need to show the same positive flexibility in addressing the future challenges of Firelink and Firecontrol implementation. To achieve this, authorities must look closely at the effectiveness of their joint working arrangements. While we remain committed to locally accountable Fire and Rescue Authorities, meeting the needs of national resilience requires effective mechanisms for co-ordination and integrated service delivery at regional and national level. Chapters 1 and 2 of this Framework sets out the balance that we believe needs to be struck between delivery at local, regional and national level.
9. Equality and Diversity is another key priority for delivery within the Framework. Fire and Rescue Authorities need to take ownership of and implement the Equality and Diversity Strategy in order to reduce the impact of fire on the diverse communities they serve, to continue to build community engagement, and to ensure an efficient and effective balance in their recruitment and deployment of a retained

and wholetime workforce. We look to see a step change in this area from Fire and Rescue Authorities over the next three years, and we will consider how professionalising the service with graduate programmes can help change the profile of the workforce.

10. We recognise that the pace of change within the Fire and Rescue Service since 2003 has been rapid and that this has been demanding for Fire and Rescue Authorities. One of the key objectives of this National Framework is to streamline our expectations of Fire and Rescue Authority performance to free up capacity to deliver FireControl and other critical priorities over the next three years. To that end we have significantly reduced the “must” and “should” requirements in this version from those in previous versions and have looked closely at the expectations reflected in the Framework and redesigned it around four key themes. Many of the messages set out in the introduction cut across these themes but the aim is to make the document more concise and more precise in the expression of the “must” and “should” requirements. We have also aimed to focus more in the document on the outcomes we want to see delivered rather than the processes we want Fire and Rescue Authorities to adopt. This has not been possible in all parts of the document but where processes are already established, such as IRMP, the Framework focuses on what we expect to see as part of an IRMP rather than on the detailed processes that Fire and Rescue Authorities need to go through to produce them.

Summary

11. The Framework is divided into four chapters:
 - **Chapter 1 – Prevention, Protection and Response** – covers the core business of Fire and Rescue Authorities in analysing risks and taking action to meet and mitigate the effect of those risks.
 - **Chapter 2 – Resilience** – covers the delivery of the key resilience programmes and the actions authorities need to take to ensure they are fully equipped to meet the demands of the resilience agenda.
 - **Chapter 3 – Diversity and Workforce** – covers the importance of mainstreaming diversity in all levels of the Fire and Rescue Service and workforce development, training and health and safety.
 - **Chapter 4 – Governance and Improvement** – covers institutions in place to support the delivery of Fire and Rescue Authority business, the new Local Government White Paper framework including Local Area Agreements, Performance Assessment and Finance.

Legislation

12. The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 provides the statutory authority for the National Framework and requires:
- The Secretary of State to prepare a National Framework for the Fire and Rescue Service.
 - The Secretary of State must consult with representatives of Fire and Rescue Authorities and their employees before making significant changes to the Framework.
 - The Secretary of State must bring the Framework and any significant revisions to it, into effect by statutory instrument subject to annulment in either of the Houses of Parliament.
 - Fire and Rescue Authorities must have regard to the Framework in exercising their functions.
13. In addition, the Act gives the Secretary of State the power to intervene if he/she considers a Fire and Rescue Authority is failing, or likely to fail to act in accordance with the Framework. While Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to make progress in all areas set out in the Framework, references to what authorities “must” or “should” do indicate those areas that Ministers consider to be most important, with “must” being stronger and more specific. Any use of the intervention powers attached to the National Framework will be in accordance with the Local Government Intervention Protocol which should be taken to be the protocol prepared by the Secretary of State in accordance with section 23 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. We envisage that these powers would only be used as a last resort.

Timescales and future frameworks

14. For the first time, this Framework has a lifespan of three years so that it reflects the Government’s plans for the whole of this Comprehensive Spending Review period. However, the Framework must continue to remain current and meaningful so the Government will review whether changes need to be made to the document after two years of the three have elapsed. We will aim, however, to leave the document in place for the whole three year lifespan if possible and consult on any changes in the autumn prior to the new Framework coming into effect.

15. The National Framework draws together existing priorities and objectives for the service into one place. As a result we do not consider that it will place extra burdens on business, charities, the voluntary or the public sector, and therefore no separate Regulatory Impact Assessment has been produced.

Scope

16. The National Framework covers England only. It does not cover Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales where the Fire and Rescue Service is fully devolved.

Chapter 1: Prevention, Protection and Response

- 1.1 Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) has successfully enabled improvement and reform in the way the Fire and Rescue Service works and has helped deliver the achievements of significantly reduced fire deaths and deliberate fires. Fire and Rescue Authorities have used the freedoms to evaluate risk to communities – risk to life, the economy, heritage and the environment – and to use their resources more flexibly in prevention, protection and response measures, to meet those challenges and deliver better outcomes for communities.
- 1.2 Going forward IRMP will provide a foundation for Fire and Rescue Authorities to deliver government's expectations for public services to meet the needs of local communities; and for Fire and Rescue Authorities working together and with other agencies to respond effectively to regional or national emergencies.
- 1.3 Leadership and good management by locally accountable elected councillors and senior officers is fundamental to a community based Fire and Rescue Service. In taking forward development of their IRMP an effective authority will seek genuine engagement with local people in shaping services; have strong working relationships with partners; and a workforce that is representative of, and able to engage effectively with, the people that it serves. Chapter 4 addresses in more detail many of these factors in the context of Local Area Agreements.
- 1.4 Recent large scale incidents have re-emphasised the importance of well integrated services across authority boundaries and the evidence for the potential gains in effectiveness and efficiency this can help deliver is clear. In taking forward development of their IRMPs, authorities need to ensure their plans and operational practices are properly integrated with their neighbours and consider the joint resources they have available to respond to incidents of every type and size. Government is supporting this process with the creation of Regional Control Centres, which will further enable the mobilisation of nearest resources across borders to deal with all types of incident. The implementation of the National Resilience programme also supports this.
- 1.5 The relationship between prevention, protection and response is fundamental to the effective and efficient delivery of functions by Fire and Rescue Authorities and how resources are used. The

appropriate balance between these three approaches within IRMPs relies on robust and up to date risk data reflecting both international, national and local research, effective information exchange with partners and thorough evaluation of outcomes delivered by programmes in each of these areas.

- 1.6 Government will continue to support Fire and Rescue Authorities in developing IRMPs. It is important that IRMPs take an appropriately strategic view of service planning and development and are properly integrated with business planning processes and any agreed Local Area Agreement objectives. Communities and Local Government will continue to maintain and develop the Fire Service Emergency Cover toolkit (FSEC) to assist authorities in identifying risk and optimising resource disposition. Risk data and algorithms from FSEC will be used to underpin risk based mobilising in Regional Control Centres. The IRMP Steering Group is developing a range of good practice guidance.

Each Fire and Rescue Authority must produce a publicly available IRMP covering at least a three-year timespan which:

- **is regularly reviewed and revised and reflects up to date risk information and evaluation of service delivery outcomes.**
- **has regard to the risk analyses completed by Local and Regional Resilience Forums including those reported in external Community Risk Registers (CRRs) and internal risk registers, to ensure that civil and terrorist contingencies are captured in their IRMP.**
- **reflects effective consultation during its development and at all review stages with representatives of all sections of the community and stakeholders.**
- **demonstrates how prevention, protection and response activities will be best used to mitigate the impact of risk on communities in a cost effective way.**
- **provides details of how Fire and Rescue Authorities deliver their objectives and meet the needs of communities through working with partners; and**
- **has undergone an effective equality impact assessment process.**

Fire and Rescue Authorities should review the effectiveness of “cross-border” integration arrangements with neighbouring

authorities and set these out appropriately in their IRMPs. Such reviews may best be carried out jointly and Regional Management Boards provide a potential forum for this to be taken forward.

Prevention

- 1.7** Fire and Rescue Authorities have delivered impressive outcomes in prevention programmes, contributing directly to the reduction in fire deaths and deliberate fires, as well as in areas such as reducing road traffic collisions (RTCs). Government has supported Fire and Rescue Authorities' transition to a statutory responsibility for fire prevention work directly by providing £36 million over four years in additional grant funding. Additionally authorities have re-invested the efficiency gains of the last three years in mainstreaming prevention programmes in their service provision. Fire and Rescue Authorities have embraced the home fire risk check initiative with great enthusiasm, completing more than 1.3 million visits to people's homes and installing 1.1 million smoke alarms by the middle of 2007. Highlighting the importance of smoke alarms in saving lives will continue to be a key role for the Service.
- 1.8** Fire prevention programmes will remain at the heart of the work of Fire and Rescue Authorities in local communities. In taking forward this work authorities will be seeking to influence the behaviour of many of the same groups within communities as other public service providers – for example the elderly, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, those living in poor quality housing, drug and alcohol users and those involved in crime and disorder. This provides clear opportunities for development of effective partnership programmes and this is discussed further in Chapter 4. Similarly evaluation of the effectiveness of prevention programmes in reducing deaths and injuries and the demands on response resources will also support local decisions on participation in programmes addressing issues such as Road Traffic Collision reduction.
- 1.9** The government will continue to develop the national Fire Kills campaign in parallel with local activity carried out by Fire and Rescue Authorities. Fire Kills campaigns, covering faith festivals and targeted weeks such as child safety have proven to be a successful way of delivering fire prevention messages and providing a focus for local programmes. Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to support the Fire Kills campaign and strategy and have regard to any guidance issued by government.

Protection

- 1.10** Fire and Rescue Authorities continue to have a key role in enforcement of fire safety regulations for non-domestic premises through audit, provision of advice and working with responsible persons to make improvements where necessary. The Regulatory

Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, which came into force in October 2006, gave those responsible for fire safety a legal duty to carry out fire risk assessments and put in place the necessary fire precautions to reduce or control the risk. Fire and Rescue Authorities should reflect appropriate programmes of inspection in their IRMP based on the level of risk premises represent. We will evaluate the impact of the RRO on enforcers in 2008 with a complementary exercise looking at the impact on business to follow. Government is committed to supporting Fire and Rescue Authorities in taking forward their enforcement role and will provide further guidance, which will be available on the Communities and Local Government website.

Fire and Rescue Authorities must have a management strategy and a risk-based inspection programme to enforce the provisions of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and this must form part of the IRMP.

- 1.11 Fire protection measures have an important role to play as part of a balanced strategy of risk reduction. Fire and Rescue Authorities have a central role to play in protecting people in their homes and communities through their expertise and influence co-ordinating and co-operating with other bodies involved in protection, such as local authorities, building control bodies and the insurance industry.
- 1.12 Fire and Rescue Authorities are ideally placed to promote a better understanding of how fire protection measures can reduce the risk to life and limit the detrimental impact of fire on the environment and the economy through their role in providing fire safety advice to the business community. A major review of the fire safety aspects of the Building Regulations (Part B) and Approved Document B (ADB) has recently been completed. These regulations affect future building work in England and Wales, such as the erection, extension or material alteration of a building. The changes, which came into force on 6 April 2007, include the provision of sprinklers in tall blocks of flats, the introduction of a maximum unsprinklered compartment size for single storey warehouses, guidance on residential care homes and changes to the provisions for fire-fighting access and facilities to reflect modern fire-fighting practice.
- 1.13 Fire and Rescue Authorities continue to be statutory consultees in the Building Control process. This provides the opportunity to advise on issues arising from the Order and on non-statutory measures that may affect building design, such as the potential for property owners and developers, in conjunction with their insurers, to install sprinklers

or other additional protective measures if they consider them to be an effective means to address fire risk. Sprinklers can have an important role to play, particularly where their provision is targeted at buildings where the occupants are most at risk from fire. However, they are not a panacea and it is important that the use of sprinklers is seen as one of a range of measures available to address fire risk. For the social housing market Fire and Rescue Authorities need to work in partnership with social housing providers to target the most vulnerable households with appropriate risk reduction strategies.

Effective response

1.14 Having effective emergency response arrangements in place is paramount for both public and fire-fighter safety. The recent Operational Assessment of Service Delivery, conducted using a CFOA/Communities and Local Government developed assessment toolkit, provides a benchmark for all Fire and Rescue Authorities from which to move forward over the next three years. Whilst overall the assessment was generally positive, there were some areas for improvement identified which were common to a number of authorities – training and development of staff, the currency and provision of risk information, the balance between prevention, protection and response and learning from experience and incident command training.

1.15 Individual Fire and Rescue Authorities will wish to address any issues identified by the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery (OASD) through their improvement planning processes. The Service collectively has an important role to play as self assessment and peer review can provide crucial support in delivering improvement and in embedding and sharing notable practice. Greater collaboration and joint working has considerable potential to improve effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of both response and prevention services. One of the key learning points from the OASD process was that **Fire and Rescue Authorities must:**

Have in place effective arrangements for gathering risk information and making it readily available to operational crews. This should include an effective audit and review system to ensure that the information is current and in the required format.

1.16 The early part of this chapter focused on areas where Fire and Rescue Authorities have statutory duties and a leading role in the provision of services. However in considering the needs of communities and opportunities to support partners effectively through joint working, Fire

and Rescue Authorities may wish to consider other operational activities, where other public services have the statutory lead, but where experience has demonstrated that the Service's participation can help improve outcomes. Equipment provided to enhance national resilience in the event of catastrophic incidents (eg terrorism) can be used for such purposes. This can range from co-responder schemes through to assisting communities during events such as flooding. Assessment of outcomes has shown that firefighters, working in partnership with their local Ambulance NHS Trusts on co-responding schemes, have had an impact in saving lives as part of local joint working arrangements. These initiatives are welcomed, but the introduction and maintenance of such schemes is a matter for Fire and Rescue Authorities, based on local needs, risk and resources and discussion with partners.

Contingency planning for emergencies

- 1.17 The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 lays down duties for specified "Category 1 responders", including Fire and Rescue Authorities, to assess, plan and advise in relation to emergencies. For a Fire and Rescue Authority, an emergency includes a period of industrial action.
- 1.18 Government has worked actively with the Local Government Association and with the Chief Fire Officers Association to support self sufficiency in emergency cover across the country. It is the responsibility of individual Fire and Rescue Authorities to keep under review the levels of emergency cover that they deem to be appropriate.

Each Fire and Rescue Authority must:

- **have in place a plan to provide such level of emergency cover as it regards as appropriate during any period of emergency, liaising as necessary with other relevant organisations, but without reliance upon support of the Armed Forces;**
- **ensure the availability of all necessary vehicles, equipment, training and support; and**
- **Have in place arrangements for heightening public awareness and vigilance in respect of safety issues during periods of emergency cover.**

Research and statistics

- 1.19 Effective research, evaluation, data collection and sharing by Fire and Rescue Authorities are essential tools in the development of

local IRMPs. Authorities will wish to avoid unnecessary duplication by drawing on others' work and sharing their own findings and plans, including through the Practitioners' Forum and the proposed Fire Research Academy. Government's research programme in support of the Fire and Rescue Service is wide ranging and includes research on:

- Economic analysis of the fire and rescue system (Fire and Rescue Services, government and others) to analyse efficiency and effectiveness.
- Risk Management, in particular the continued development of the Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) methodology and the associated toolkit to underpin consistent risk data in Regional Control Centres and IRMPs.
- Projects identified by the Building Disaster Assessment Group (BDAG) to ensure that fire and rescue service procedures and building design are compatible.
- Evaluation of Community Fire Safety, including an evaluation of the Community Fire Safety and lower cost domestic sprinkler pilots.
- Providing a toolkit to assist Fire and Rescue Authorities in setting stretching yet robust outcome targets and local indicators in the context of Local Area Agreements (see Chapter 4), and
- Science and technology to underpin the national critical infrastructure in Fire and Rescue Authorities programmes to ensure that the fire and rescue service has the capabilities and resilience to respond major disasters, including terrorist incidents.

1.20 The proposed Fire Research Academy will provide a collaborative forum for fire related research across industry, academia and government. The academy will be jointly funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, government and various stakeholders. The intention is that the academy will be based with an interim host organisation on the Fire Service College site. As well as advising on research, the academy will also seek to improve communications between sponsors of research and all those that can benefit from it. The academy will lead the development of a national research strategy which embraces the whole cycle of risk identification, prevention, mitigation and emergency response. A Centre of Excellence (CoE) if it is established (paragraph 4.25) might undertake some research and evaluation in support of Fire and Rescue Authorities' operations, which is currently carried out by Communities and Local Government or Fire and Rescue Authorities.

A Fire Research Academy advising on and brokering fire research would need to work closely with such a CoE.

- 1.21 Government will continue to collect and publish a range of Fire and Rescue related statistics to support the Service in achieving improvements in service delivery, HR issues and Equality and Diversity. We will introduce the electronic Incident Recording System, which will include all incidents attended by the FRS, improve data quality, coverage and timeliness.

Fire and Rescue Authorities must be ready to implement the electronic incident Recording System by 31st March 2009.

Chapter 2: Resilience

- 2.1 The Fire and Rescue Service has a vital role to play in providing the national resilience capability against the largest risks such as terrorist attacks, chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) incidents or major disasters including flooding.
- 2.2 Government will support the Service nationally in taking forward its role and working effectively with other agencies and this is reflected in Communities and Local Government's Departmental Strategic Objectives. Communities and Local Government will also work with the Service in taking forward government's investment in the Fire Resilience Programme which is delivering a significant increase in the operational capability of the Fire and Rescue Service in England to deal with incidents requiring local, regional or national response.

Local/regional resilience

- 2.3 The importance of effective co-ordination in planning and provision of services across Fire and Rescue Authority boundaries and with other agencies is stressed in Chapter 1 of this document. Regional and local resilience forums have a key role to play. For the purposes of dealing with the largest risks, Local and Regional Resilience Forums (RRFs) bring together representatives of local responders and central government bodies to address large-scale civil protection issues. With the exception of London, Local Resilience Forums (LRF) are based on the area which relates to each police authority. They bring together the organisations who have a duty to co-operate under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 and the purpose of the LRF process is to ensure effective delivery of those duties. Regional Resilience Forums (RRFs) bring together representatives of local responders and central government bodies to address large-scale protection issues. RRFs are particularly well placed to consider and plan for wide-area risks such as flooding and major outbreaks of disease.

Key risks identified by central government inform the work of RRFs and LRFs, and the Community Risk Registers which are the collective view at the local level of the key risks for the area. As category 1 responders under the Civil Contingencies Act, Fire and Rescue Authorities are required to work with other local responders to plan against the risks in their area. Having identified their specific role, this informs each Fire and Rescue Authorities' IRMP, as set out in Chapter 1.

Fire and Rescue Authorities must work together with partners within their LRF to address the risk profile in their area.

At the regional level Fire and Rescue Authorities should work together to ensure effective Fire and Rescue Authority representation at Regional Resilience Forums.

Fire Resilience Programme

2.4 The Fire and Resilience Programme is an integrated set of projects to enhance the nation's preparedness for emergencies and crises and consists of:

- FiReControl – this will provide an enhanced control service using a national network of nine resilient regional control centres;
- Firelink – the introduction of a common interoperable radio communications system;
- New Dimension – which has put in place a wide range of new capabilities including equipment and training to deal with a range of major incidents.

FiReControl

2.5 Implementation of the FiReControl project is integral to enhancing the capability of the Fire and Rescue Service to respond effectively to local, regional and national incidents. It is not just about improving the resilience capability of the Fire and Rescue Service but should enhance the Service's ability to respond effectively and efficiently to all types of incident.

2.6 All Fire and Rescue Authorities will need to take active steps to prepare for the implementation of FiReControl during the period covered by this Framework. The first Regional Control Centres (RCCs) will become operational within the next two years. This is by far the most complex part of the Fire Resilience Programme and a significant resource input from authorities will be required to make it work.

2.7 Communities and Local Government has produced a transition planning framework and is providing funding for transition activities under New Burdens principles. Fire and Rescue Authorities are also expected to use resources that would have been used to replace or upgrade existing control rooms to assist with the implementation of FiReControl.

- 2.8 All Fire and Rescue Authorities (apart from the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)) need to enter into a contractual arrangement with their local authority controlled company to agree respective responsibilities for the delivery of FiReControl and the running of the new control service. All Fire and Rescue Authorities need to give appropriate priority to ensuring that they make the necessary preparations to transfer their control to the RCC, that they can monitor progress and keep the Department informed of any issues which arise.
- 2.9 A review of the current national aid agreement is underway. This will consider the arrangements post implementation of FiReControl encompassing section 13 and 16 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act arrangements as appropriate.

Fire and Rescue Authorities must make preparations to move their control service to the Regional Control Centre network in line with the FiReControl transition plan and:

- **if not already a member of the RCC company in their region, become a member immediately;**
- **remain a member of the RCC company in their region and participate in its running; including nominating the requisite number of directors and ensuring that those directors fulfil their duties and functions;**
- **participate constructively in making preparations at a regional level for the transfer of the control service to the RCC;**
- **enter into an agreement with the RCC company in their region for the delivery of the control service on their behalf by the RCC, no later than 12 months before the RCC becomes operational;**
- **enter into agreements with Communities and Local Government and other Fire and Rescue Authorities to provide national co-ordination of the RCCs where necessary and to provide a flexible approach to the use of all FRS resources by 1 April 2009;**
- **enter into agreements at least six months before cutover to the new system to ensure that resources can be effectively mobilised across Fire and Rescue Authority borders;**
- **complete the tasks defined in the transition plan by the required dates;**

- **co-operate fully with the FiReControl technology supplier;**
- **report progress regularly to Communities and Local Government using the tools provided for that purpose.**

Firelink

- 2.10** Firelink will form a critical part of the communications link between control rooms and Fire and Rescue Authority vehicles. Network in Fire and Rescue Authorities and installation in all fire vehicles (radio terminals, GPS units and mobile data terminals) is scheduled to be completed by mid 2009 (Phase B). Firelink will also be providing interim connections into existing control rooms so that fire vehicles can be transferred across to Firelink prior to migration to the new Regional Control Centres.
- 2.11** The existing radio system will remain operational for each Fire and Rescue Authority until all fire appliances have been migrated across to the Firelink system prior to moving to the new Regional Control Centres (RCCs). As the RCCs become available, Firelink will install the necessary network access equipment and then assist in the migration from existing control rooms to the new RCCs.

Fire and Rescue Authorities must support the rollout of Firelink by:

- **co-operating with the suppliers by giving access to vehicles and existing control rooms, and by ensuring that training programmes are completed to timetable, providing all reasonable support.**
 - **assisting the Firelink programme with testing of the new system and migration of radio communications to the RCC.**
- 2.12** Initial training of Fire and Rescue Service trainers and specialist users, and maintenance of the system is part of the contract with the supplier of Firelink.

New Dimension

- 2.13** New Dimension resources are intended to be mainstream Fire and Rescue Authority assets, and Fire and Rescue Authorities are encouraged to use New Dimension resources in all appropriate circumstances where they will bring benefit to the response: their use should not be restricted to major emergencies.

2.14 Capital investment on the New Dimension programme is complete, including specialist equipment that has been rolled out to the Fire and Rescue Service and specialist state of the art training facilities located at the Fire Service College. The Government will continue to provide resource funding, according to New Burdens principles. The funding mechanism will move in stages from grants under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 to inclusion in the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). This will further mainstream this enhanced capability within the Fire and Rescue Service.

2.15 In 2008, it is intended that the New Dimension assets will be transferred to the Fire and Rescue Service. The Fire and Rescue Service will be responsible for maintaining these resources and ensuring their continued interoperability, and for continuing to meet the requirements for training and response. To ensure that these national assets, held at the local level, are sustained over the long term, a maintenance contract is being secured by the Department on behalf of the Fire and Rescue Service, through Firebuy.

Fire and Rescue Authorities must use the contract established by Communities and Local Government to secure the long term maintenance of the New Dimension resources for which they are responsible.

2.16 Funding will be provided for this in line with New Burdens principles. It is proposed that funding to meet this additional cost will be distributed through grants under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003 and then in the medium term through RSG.

2.17 A partnership agreement will be established between Communities and Local Government, CFOA and the LGA to ensure that the national capability as a whole is effectively maintained. This will lead to a national team operating under the umbrella of CFOA which will, among other responsibilities, provide a quality assurance function. This will give assurance to both government and the Fire and Rescue Service that national capability continues to be fit for purpose and that the equipment remains interoperable. This new role for CFOA will be supported by funding from Communities and Local Government.

2.18 The Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007 (S.I. 2007/735: 'the Emergencies Order'), which came into force on 6 April 2007, encompasses the use of New Dimension resources and cross border working during serious emergencies.

2.19 For the largest emergencies, the Department's Emergency Information Support Group (EISG) has a pivotal role in drawing together information to provide advice to the Minister and support the Fire and Rescue Service. The Group also has a role in taking an overview of national assets and, in liaison with the Fire and Rescue Service National Co-ordination Centre (FRSNCC), which monitors and co-ordinates the mobilisation of New Dimension resources, maintaining national resilience. Fire and Rescue Authorities should ensure that in the event of a significant incident they provide EISG with regular, relevant updates so that it has the most timely, accurate information.

Chapter 3: Diversity and Workforce

3.1 Fire and Rescue Authorities' most important resource is their people. In order to be able to deliver services which meet the needs of the whole community Fire and Rescue Authorities need to introduce, review and maintain effective employment policies, procedures and processes so that they can:

- recruit people with the right skills and potential;
- develop them to realise that potential, support them by ensuring they are valued, treated fairly and with respect; and
- provide them with equality of opportunity to progress.

Expectations of staff

3.2 Core Values for the Fire and Rescue Service were published in 2006. These Values, which can be found on the CFOA website, apply to Fire and Rescue Authorities as organisations, to all elected members on the Fire Authority and to all members of staff. They set out the attitudes and behaviours expected of all staff whatever their role.

3.3 In order to engender the trust and confidence of all sections of the community in the integrity of Fire and Rescue Authority employees and to meet their statutory obligations to promote equality, both in employment practices and service delivery, Fire and Rescue Authorities will need to ensure that:

- all staff and those applying to join meet the standards of honesty and integrity which the public expects.
- all staff and those applying to join are aware that membership of extremist groups is not compatible with employment in an organisation which serves the whole community.
- grievance and disciplinary processes, in particular to deal with bullying and harassment, are fair, open, transparent and timely.

Equality and diversity

3.4 The National Equality and Diversity Strategy sets out the Service's commitment to ensuring that diversity and equality are fully integrated into all aspects of the Service. It sets out the actions required on leadership, service delivery, employment practice, evaluation and dissemination of good practice, and accountability to achieve this vision.

- 3.5** The Strategy also requires Fire and Rescue Authorities to monitor their progress on equality and diversity and to provide information on progress for inclusion in a national equality and diversity report to be published annually by Communities and Local Government. Evidence on the development and implementation of policies which support and promote equality and diversity will form one measure of progress. Statistical information on service delivery and workforce diversity will provide another.
- 3.6** Improving workforce diversity through recruitment and retention is a key component of the Strategy. Previous targets for women in operational roles and ethnic minority staff have aimed to measure change in the composition of the workforce, which remains our goal. But to focus effort on factors which can be significantly changed in the short term the Strategy sets targets on recruitment, retention and progression to be met by 2013.
- 3.7** The targets are:
- parity in rates of retention and progression between minority ethnic and white employees, and between men and women, by 2013.
 - women (operational roles) to represent at least [12-18%] of recruits by 2013.
 - minority ethnic staff to reach [the same percentage as in the local working population or the percentage in the local working population plus up to 5 per cent] as a percentage of recruits by 2013.

For example, for a Fire and Rescue Authority where the minority ethnic percentage of the local working population is 10 per cent the target would be 10 per cent or up to 15 per cent, depending on which proposal is adopted following the consultation. Fire and Rescue Authorities with very low minority ethnic working age populations (eg below 2 per cent) and low recruitment requirements (eg less than 20 people a year) may set a target in terms of individuals recruited over the five year period rather than a percentage of total recruitment.

- 3.8** The aim in the long term is to change the composition of the Fire and Rescue Service workforce in England so that it includes the same percentage of minority ethnic staff as in the working age population (currently 12%) and 12 per cent of women in operational roles (as an

achievable basis for further action). New targets for the second half of the Strategy's life will need to be considered depending on progress.

- 3.9 While specific targets have not been set to measure performance on recruitment, retention and progression in relation to the other equality strands (disability, faith and belief, sexual orientation, gender identity and age) and for women in non-operational roles, monitoring of the progress in these areas will be required and the resulting statistical information will be published as part of the Communities and Local Government's annual report.

3.10 Fire and Rescue Authorities must:

- **Implement the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy;**
- **Ensure that all plans, policies, practices and procedures are effectively equality impact assessed and appropriate action is taken to remove or mitigate any adverse impact;**
- **Produce and at least annually review an action plan for implementation of the Strategy, and report to elected members on progress;**
- **Provide annually to Communities and Local Government evidence of progress on equality and diversity for publication in the Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Report including:**
 - **statistical information on recruitment, progression and retention of staff across all diversity strands, and**
 - **qualitative information on policies, procedures, practices and processes which support equality and diversity as evidence of progress made.**

- 3.11 To help and support Fire and Rescue Authorities in improving the diversity in their workforce at all levels Communities and Local Government will work with stakeholders to develop the following initiatives:

- High Potential Development Scheme
- Graduate Entry Scheme
- Awareness raising campaigns to encourage people from under represented groups to consider the Fire and Rescue Service as a career.

Workforce planning

- 3.12** As employers, Fire and Rescue Authorities need to provide for the well being of all their staff, including through a professional Human Resources function. Fire and Rescue Authorities are encouraged to develop workforce strategies to plan and review staff resources and employment practices. This will assist in meeting statutory obligations; support the needs of a diverse workforce, the delivery of IRMP objectives and improved efficiency and effectiveness.
- 3.13** In order to ensure IRMPs are inclusive, workforce strategies need to take full account of the contribution which can be made by part-time, flexible working and staff on retained duty systems. Fire and Rescue Authorities also need to ensure that they are able to redeploy operational staff to role related non-operational duties in order to meet the requirements of equality legislation. To help maintain reduced levels of sickness absence and support further reductions, Fire and Rescue Authorities are encouraged to review their sick absence management practices in the light of joint Communities and Local Government/HSE research on sickness absence policies and procedures.

Recruitment and retention

- 3.14** Most Fire and Rescue Authorities are using the National Firefighter Selection (NFS) process for the recruitment of firefighters across duty systems. The process was subject to impact assessment during its development and subsequently Communities and Local Government has commissioned research to inform the continued use of the processes. Any necessary changes will be presented to the Practitioners Forum for approval. The research will be based on the outcomes achieved in recruitment campaigns. To ensure a fair, consistent and transparent recruitment process Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to use the NFS tests as specified (see paragraph 3.13).
- 3.15** Assessment and Development Centres (ADC) have been developed to assess the potential of staff. They are part of the selection process but are not designed to select individuals for a particular post. The assessment of the wider aspects of the individual that comprise their competency for a specific role will need to be assessed after the ADC as part of a specific selection process.

- 3.16** Returns to Communities and Local Government by all Fire and Rescue Authorities indicate that 14 per cent of Retained Duty System (RDS) posts are currently vacant. Improving recruitment and retention is vital as RDS staff play an essential role in ensuring Fire and Rescue Authorities can provide emergency response, particularly in rural areas, and support national resilience. RDS recruitment can also help to deliver efficiencies and improve representation of women in operational roles.
- 3.17** Part of the shortfall is due to lack of awareness among people in work and their employers of the benefits to both sides of releasing staff for the Retained Duty System. As identified in the Retained Review Report (2005), Fire and Rescue Authorities need to work proactively with potential RDS staff and employers, building on existing good practice. It may be appropriate for Fire and Rescue Authorities to work together on programmes to raise awareness through their RMB or with their neighbours.
- 3.18** Overall the retention of wholetime fire-fighters is not an issue for Fire and Rescue Authorities. However, this can mask retention issues for some under-represented groups in the workforce. This also applies to staff in certain employment groups such as those on the Retained Duty System and those in other Fire and Rescue Authority roles.

Industrial relations

- 3.19** Healthy industrial relations are key in forming and sustaining a modern Fire and Rescue Service. They are also an important means of ensuring that all staff within Fire and Rescue Authorities are represented and feel that their voice is heard. Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to work effectively and communicate regularly with representative bodies on matters affecting their workforce. They are also expected to engage with workforce representative bodies in line with established best practice and nationally agreed protocols on industrial relations.

Workforce development

- 3.20** To improve efficiency and develop staff effectively, it is vital that all staff are recruited, developed and progressed fairly and transparently, with overall performance and competencies regularly reviewed. To ensure effective cross border working and the health and safety of operational staff there is an additional need for the consistency of national standards. The Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) supports a competency based personnel management approach using role maps underpinned by

National Occupational Standards.

Fire and Rescue Authorities must:

- **apply IPDS principles to the recruitment, development and progression of all staff;**
- **use IPDS and the national processes based on it (National Firefighter Selection Tests, subject to final validation, and Assessment and Development Centres) for all Grey and Gold Book staff.**

Managing individual performance

3.21 Performance management has been consistently identified by the Audit Commission as an area in which the Service needs to improve. One key element of effective performance management is to ensure that staff have clearly defined personal objectives, that delivery is regularly reviewed through constructive feedback, and that operational capability and safety are maintained. IPDS supports the assessment of performance against objectives using the role maps/National Occupational Standards and Personal Qualities and Attributes.

Fire and Rescue Authorities should: carry out and record individual performance reviews annually which include an assessment of performance against:

- **role map units, National Occupational Standards or job description duties as appropriate, and**
- **agreed annual objectives, including the setting and assessing of equality and diversity objectives.**

Training and development

3.22 Training and development provides Fire and Rescue Authorities with appropriately skilled staff to meet their organisational objectives and offers staff the opportunity to build up their knowledge and skills. In particular, effective role related operational training, based on up to date experience, is essential to maintaining operational capability and ensure the health and safety of staff. The recent Operational Assessment of Service Delivery identified training and development of staff and the currency and provision of risk information as a key area for improvement.

3.23 Development programmes need to take into account individual

needs, learning styles and work life balance and could include training courses as well as learning in the workplace. The Fire Service College, among other training providers, has developed an e-learning delivery platform

and online learning activities to support flexible learning. The content and delivery of all training and development will need to be effectively equality impact assessed.

- 3.24** Evidence from a RDS staff survey suggests that they do not always have the same access to training and development opportunities as their wholetime colleagues. To develop an effective, professional and inclusive organisation Fire and Rescue Authorities will wish to ensure equality of access to training and development opportunities for all staff.
- 3.25** High potential development and multi-level entry schemes are designed to identify and bring on talent through the organisation and encourage recruitment of people with diverse skills and backgrounds. A collaborative approach to implementing such initiatives is likely to produce more resource-efficient solutions. Consideration should be given to the role of Regional Management Boards in taking this forward.
- 3.26** As recognised in the Leitch Report (Prosperity for all in the Global Economy: World Class Skills published December 2006) qualifications can be a useful testimony of knowledge and understanding. For example, National Vocational Qualifications help ensure that consistency of competence is achieved through everyone working toward nationally acknowledged standards. This enables people to benefit from transferability of competence both inside and outside the service. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for the Fire and Rescue Service sets out the levels against which a qualification can be recognised in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. More information on the NQF can be found on the web site of the Qualification and Curriculum Authority.

Fire and Rescue Authorities must:

- **ensure that they have in place role related training, development and assessment arrangements to develop and maintain the competence of staff. These should be linked to the IPDS framework and National Occupational Standards across the full range of operational activities;**

- **have in place systematic arrangements to ensure incident and safety event outcomes inform the ongoing development of safe systems of work and training and development of staff. This should include the sharing of risk critical information on a regional/national basis when appropriate.**

Leadership

- 3.27 In 2006 the CLG Select Committee identified the need for Fire and Rescue Authorities to strengthen leadership at all levels and in all sectors of the organisation to meet current and future challenges. Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to ensure that those with leadership responsibilities or potential to have the opportunity and encouragement to develop their skills.
- 3.28 There are a number of providers in this field, including the Centre for Leadership which has been established at the Fire Service College (FSC) with the help of stakeholder groups including CFOA and LGA. The FSC has developed a leadership programme that provides a range of learning resources and training and development activities underpinned by the Aspire leadership model.

Quality assurance

- 3.29 Quality assurance is essential if learning and development standards across the Fire and Rescue Service are to be maintained and improved. A quality assurance framework designed specifically for the Fire and Rescue Service has been developed with stakeholders at the Fire Service College.

Fire and Rescue Authorities should: appropriately quality assure their training and development programmes, and their use of the National Fire-fighter Selection process and Assessment and Development Centres.

Chapter 4: Governance and Improvement

- 4.1 The relationship between central and local government and between local government and local communities is changing. Local government is being given more freedom to shape local services which meet the needs of their local communities and to be more effective at delivering outcomes for their communities by working with local partners.
- 4.2 Fire and Rescue Authorities are a crucial part of this agenda. Many already have effective partnerships in place that are delivering real change and which actively involve local people in a range of Community Safety initiatives. This chapter sets out the scope of the new challenges and expectations on Fire and Rescue Authorities and the Service's institutions and representative bodies in responding to this agenda. It sets out the support that can be provided by partners, institutions and the centre in delivering the benefits that this new relationship can bring to our communities.

Regional Management Boards

- 4.3 Working together remains essential to delivering efficiency, effectiveness and an enhanced resilience capability for Fire and Rescue Authorities. Regional Management Boards have been established for some time and it is now time to take stock of how effectively they have delivered the core functions that were set out for them in the Fire White Paper, Our Fire and Rescue Service in 2003.

To that end Regional Management Boards must:

- **have clear aims and objectives and where needed costed plans to deliver on their core business, which remains:**
 - **integrating common and specialist services,**
 - **putting in place effective resilience plans for large scale emergencies,**
 - **introducing regional personnel and human resource functions,**
 - **developing a regional approach to training,**
 - **introducing regional procurement within the context of the National Improvement Strategy for the Fire and Rescue Service.**

- 4.4 As Chapter 2 explained, to deliver efficiently and effectively, Fire and Rescue Authorities must work together closely. Communities and Local Government expects Regional Management Boards to undertake a review to establish any further efficiencies that can be driven out through collaborative working and sharing functions.

To that end, Fire and Rescue Authorities working through Regional Management Boards must review the opportunities to deliver greater efficiencies through closer joint working or sharing of functions at regional or sub-regional level and take action to implement those efficiencies.

- 4.5 These reviews ensure that the necessary connections between the work of authorities are made without compromising local accountability. The government continues actively to encourage Fire and Rescue Authorities to consider any appropriate joint working arrangements, collaboration or voluntary mergers, in discussion with communities, workforce and local partners, which will deliver an enhanced level of service for their communities and greater value for money. However, the government has no plans to restructure the Fire and Rescue Service in England and will only consider the use of its powers to direct the combination of Fire and Rescue Authorities where public safety concerns require urgent action or there is clear evidence from the Audit Commission's performance assessment work that a Fire and Rescue Authority is failing to meet the needs of local communities.
- 4.6 RMBs have played an active and important role in establishing Regional Control Centres and are expected to continue to work closely with RCCs after the cutover date in a range of roles, for example in considering the requirements of the RCCs within the regional HR, training and procurement strategies. However, the relationship between the RMB and the local authority controlled company and details of the role of the RMB are matters for local decision. If Fire and Rescue Authorities wish to formalise relationships between RMBs, RCC companies and Fire and Rescue Authorities, they can do so via the member's agreement of the RCC Company.

Local Area Agreements

- 4.7 Working together in effective partnerships with other local services is vital to delivering more efficient and effective local services. The Local Government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities* published in October 2006 signals a step-change in

the way local public services are expected to work together. In particular there are new requirements in the Local Government and Public Health Bill to ensure that all partners engage in and deliver on a shared agenda for their communities.

- 4.8** The Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) is the overarching strategic partnership for an area. From 2008, local authorities will have a duty to consult partner authorities, including Fire and Rescue Authorities, when compiling their sustainable community strategies. Local Authorities will have to prepare an action plan known as a Local Area Agreement (LAA), for delivering an agreed set of priorities reflecting the needs of their communities as set out in the sustainable community strategies. They will have to consult LSP partners on the preparation of the LAA which will establish an agreed set of approximately 35 priority improvement targets for the area, to be negotiated and agreed by the Government Office and to be delivered by the LSP partners. Fire and Rescue Authorities will have a duty to co-operate with the principal local authority for each LAA in setting these targets and be required to have regard to the targets selected by each LAA. These targets will be drawn from a set of 198 national indicators agreed across Whitehall as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review process. This set of 198 represents central government's national priority outcomes for local government across the range of its services. The list of 198 indicators can be found on the Communities and Local Government website at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/nationalindicator

Local partners can suggest additional local targets that should form part of the Local Area Agreement.

- 4.9** Involvement in the LSP and in LAAs offer Fire and Rescue Authorities the opportunity to engage and influence partners in the delivery of their own priorities and to assist partners more widely in the delivery of the community's priorities at a local level. This should mean that local services deliver more effectively and efficiently by working together to address common problems and by targeting the same groups.
- 4.10** It is therefore important that Fire and Rescue Authorities both promote their contribution to delivering targets suggested by the LSP partners and actively seek to influence the LSP and other partners to adopt relevant fire-related targets where appropriate and put resource into community safety work. To do this effectively, Fire and

Rescue Authorities will need to evaluate the effectiveness of existing partnership arrangements and use evidence to demonstrate the outcomes that can be delivered. To this end:

Fire and Rescue Authorities should work with local partners to identify targets, including fire targets where appropriate, that are priorities within the local area and offer appropriate contributions (time and resource) to meet those targets. To do this effectively they will need to evaluate the effectiveness of partnership arrangements, sharing evidence where appropriate.

- 4.11 It is for Fire and Rescue Authorities to determine their appropriate level of involvement in delivering LAA targets and partnership programmes. It is a matter for each Fire and Rescue Authority to consider its own priorities, those of its partners and how to deliver those priorities in a way that represents value for money for their communities.
- 4.12 To support Fire and Rescue Authorities in delivering on this challenging new agenda, Communities and Local Government is working with partners to publish a toolkit on partnership working and LAA targets. The toolkit will set out some examples of good practice in partnership working and evaluation and provide Fire and Rescue Authorities with robust approaches to target-setting and performance measurement to assist in negotiating LAA targets and demonstrating the impact of fire programmes in tackling community priorities. The toolkit will also provide other partners in the LSP with a sense of how Fire and Rescue Authorities can contribute to this agenda although it will be important for each Fire and Rescue Authority to ensure, through effective working relationships, that its partners understand what the fire and rescue service can contribute. More information about how the Fire and Rescue Service fits within the performance framework for local government can be found in the suite of narratives explaining the performance framework for each LSP partner, available on the CLG website in November.

Community engagement and involvement

- 4.13 Evidence suggests that the quality of local services is improving but that public satisfaction with those services is decreasing. The government believes that it is important to increase the influence of the citizen over the delivery of local services. Involving local communities in shaping local services and in their delivery is central to meeting the needs of all citizens within our diverse communities. This is especially important for Fire and Rescue Authorities where

changing behaviour is a key factor in preventing fires and protecting people where they occur. As many Fire and Rescue Authorities have already done, involving local people and tailoring services to meet their needs should lead to better solutions and more cost-effective outcomes. The Local Government and Public Health Bill will place a new duty on Fire and Rescue Authorities along with other Best Value Authorities to inform, consult and involve representatives of local people including the business community with regard to exercising their functions.

Fire and Rescue Authorities must:

- **have regard to any guidance issued by Communities and Local Government in how to exercise this new duty;**
- **demonstrate that they have made changes to service provision, where appropriate, to reflect the needs and views of local communities and to demonstrate that they have considered the needs and views of all communities in making these changes.**

4.14 Many authorities have established mechanisms for collecting the views of and consulting with their communities in developing their IRMPs and community fire safety programmes and these should be used as far as possible in fulfilling the new duty. Communities and Local Government guidance on exercising this duty will shortly be available on the website.

Performance assessment

4.15 A new approach to performance assessment is needed to support the delivery of LAAs. In April 2009, the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) process will come to an end for local authorities and Fire and Rescue Authorities. The Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) will be introduced by the Audit Commission to take a proportionate and risk based approach to assessing delivery of local priorities and reduce the burden of inspection.

4.16 The Audit Commission remains responsible for performance assessment of the Fire and Rescue Service. The Commission's focus is both on building the new CAA regime and continuing to support improvement and report to the public through its existing performance assessment frameworks until 2009. Performance Assessment of Fire and Rescue Authorities for 2007 and 2008 will comprise:

- **A scored Direction of Travel Assessment** which will state how well the authority has performed since the last assessment and whether it is considered that it will continue to improve.
- **A Use of Resources Judgement** which assesses a range of financial issues including the delivery of Value for Money.
- **A Service Assessment** which continues to form part of the CPA for Single Tier and County Councils and comprises a score from the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery conducted by Communities and Local Government in 2006 and a score derived from performance indicator information.

4.17 In addition, Fire and Rescue Authorities will be offered three opportunities by the Audit Commission to have their CPA category re-assessed in 2007/08 and 2008/09, before CAA is introduced, to close this cycle of assessment work. The process will involve a Corporate Assessment of those authorities selected by the Commission. The Commission has established appropriate criteria that must be met by authorities wishing to be considered for a corporate assessment and published the methodology for this work in August 2007.

4.18 From 2009 onwards, the Comprehensive Area Assessment process will apply to Fire and Rescue Authorities and their local partners. While the methodology for CAA is being developed by the Commission and other inspectorates working together, the CAA will comprise:

- A Use of Resources (UoR) judgement for all local public sector bodies including Fire and Rescue Authorities,
- A Direction of Travel (DoT) Assessment for each local authority and Fire and Rescue Authority which will deliver a judgement on the rate at which performance is improving,
- An Assessment against national and local performance indicators and publication of performance against the national indicator set,
- A joint risk assessment for the area, drawing on these judgements and other evidence (including local self-assessment) which will identify the key risks to outcomes or delivery for each area, and how well they are being managed.

4.19 The Audit Commission will be consulting extensively on the composition of these judgements in due course. However it is likely that both the Use of Resources and Direction of Travel assessments

will evolve and include elements of operational performance. The Chief Fire and Rescue Advisers Unit will work with the Audit Commission to provide advice on how to take forward the assessment of operational performance following the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery but will not itself undertake any inspection or assessment activity.

- 4.20** The new performance framework focuses on delivery of LAA targets and continued progress in securing improvements in local services through collective action. The 198 national indicators replace the current suite of Best Value Performance Indicators for Local Government and Fire and Rescue Authorities. 2007/8 will be the last year of reporting against BVPIs. Of the set of 198 indicators, two apply to Fire and Rescue Authorities and these are set out in the introduction to this document. The indicators applying to Fire and Rescue Authorities are to be reported to Communities and Local Government annually using the FDR1 return.

Improvement

- 4.21** A new strategy for providing local authorities and their LSP partners with improvement and capacity building support will be in place to support the new performance framework. The government still believes that investing in improvement and capacity support will help to secure improvement in public services but there is a need to streamline existing arrangements and promote a more devolutionary approach to the funding of improvement support into the next CSR period.
- 4.22** Local Authorities and their LSP partners will be responsible for securing their own continuous improvement and for identifying improvement priorities at local level. There will be an increased emphasis on local authorities and their partners providing support and challenge at a regional and national level through peer review and challenge.
- 4.23** The delivery of improvement and capacity support will be through new Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships (RIEPs) which bring together existing Regional Improvement Partnerships and Regional Centres of Excellence into one body. The RIEPs will work closely with all Local Authorities and their partners in each region to analyse the region's capacity and improvement needs and discuss these with Communities and Local Government. Communities and Local Government and the RIEP (in consultation with other departments where necessary) will then agree an

improvement strategy and the funding to support that for the CSR period. However, the RIEP will retain flexibility over how it uses this funding to meet the improvement priorities set out in the strategy.

- 4.24** Communities and Local Government's National Improvement Strategy will set out further details of the principles behind RIEPs and the other support available from the LGA, IDeA and other partners under the new arrangements. The LGA and IDeA have committed to providing further sector self-challenge and improvement support to augment the work of RIEPs. In addition, Communities and Local Government will continue to support the improvement of Fire and Rescue Authorities where performance or other risks to outcomes raise cause for concern through the Communities and Local Government support team until authorities are judged by the Audit Commission as having achieved appropriate improvement since fire CPA and where no other significant problems have been identified in other assessment processes.

Centre of Excellence

- 4.25** It is recognised that as providers of an emergency service delivering a challenging modernisation agenda and critical to national resilience, Fire and Rescue Authorities face a different range of challenges than other local authorities. A national body is required to deliver certain functions in order to drive up standards, to ensure consistency across authorities, and to enable the Service to respond quickly and to the highest standards in the context of rapid changes in the environment, technology, security, energy and transport.
- 4.26** Communities and Local Government is therefore consulting Fire and Rescue Authorities and other stakeholders on whether they want a Centre of Excellence (CoE) for the Fire and Rescue Service in England. A CoE will only be established if it has the support of the Fire and Rescue Service and other key stakeholders. Communities and Local Government has worked with CFOA and the LGA to develop options for a CoE. The earliest it is likely a CoE could be established would be 1 April 2009 at which time it might have the following functions:
- Operational and corporate development, including organisational development, operational doctrine, equality and diversity, health and safety, fire prevention co-ordination, and technology and research.
 - Training delivery.

4.27 If a CoE is created with these functions, some work currently carried out in Communities and Local Government and CFRAU would transfer to the CoE. In the longer term the following functions might be included in a CoE:

- Procurement
- Resilience including operational assurance, national procurement and contract management.

4.28 Full details of the options for a CoE, the functions it might carry out and how the delivery of functions in Communities and Local Government and Fire and Rescue Authorities would be affected are set out in the consultation document which can be found at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/publications/consultations/>

Chief Fire and Rescue Advisers Unit

4.29 The Chief Fire and Rescue Advisers Unit (CFRAU) will be fully established during 2007/8 following the appointment of the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser. This new body will provide fire and rescue related advice and guidance to ministers, civil servants, the Fire and Rescue Service in England and other stakeholders.

4.30 The Unit will work in a strategic and advisory capacity, providing advice on the structure, organisation and performance, including equality, of the Fire and Rescue Service. The dissemination of notable practice to Fire and Rescue Authorities, liaison with stakeholders and the provision of advice during major emergencies will also be key parts of the Unit's role. The Unit will also manage activities such as the publication of operational guidance, the Emergency Information Support Group and the National Strategic Advisory Team. With CFOA, the Unit will maintain and update the Operational Assessment of Service Delivery toolkit so that it can be used by Fire and Rescue Authorities for self assessment and peer review for assessment purposes where appropriate.

4.31 The Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser will provide broader challenge to specific policy areas where necessary, particularly on equality and diversity. He will also seek to ensure that the government is able to engage influentially in debate on Fire and Rescue Service issues and that the Service's interests are effectively represented by the Government both nationally and internationally.

Fire and Rescue Authority Finance

4.32 The overall outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review for

local Government was announced by the Chancellor in the Pre-Budget Report in October. This set the total amount of money which will be available for local government over the next three years. This money will be distributed among authorities through the local government finance settlement. The provisional local government finance settlement will be announced in early December and after consultation the final settlement is likely in early February.

- 4.33** It is clear that this will reflect a much tighter fiscal climate in terms of public sector spending overall; but we expect that Fire and Rescue Authorities will build on the substantial recent investment in modernisation. The headings below are intended to encompass the key areas where Fire and Rescue Authorities can achieve this without placing an excessive burden on the local taxpayer.

Efficiency

- 4.34** Like all public services the Fire and Rescue Service must meet the expectations of tax payers and the government of continued improvement and value for money. There is still considerable scope for authorities to look closely at the way in which they deliver services and use resources and how they could do things better and more efficiently. Some good progress has been made, during the last spending review period the whole Service was set a target to achieve £105 million in efficiency savings. Achieving these savings facilitated new investment at a local level in fire prevention and other community work without excessive rises in council tax.
- 4.35** In a tighter fiscal climate authorities will need to accelerate their efficiency agenda if they are to continue to meet public expectations for performance and to provide value for money. It is vital that authorities focus on making genuine efficiencies – achieving the same level of service with fewer resources or increasing the level of service with the same resources. This agenda is not about making cuts but about using the resources available more effectively. Communities and Local Government, the LGA and CFOA have jointly produced case studies of innovative practice, including in the delivery of efficiencies, and will look to continue to support authorities with further guidance in this area.
- 4.36** The starting point is for each Fire and Rescue Authority is to balance its own budget and deliver its business plan objectives through effective planning and performance management. However to maximise savings and performance, Fire and Rescue Authorities need to look with neighbouring authorities and their local partners at

how efficiencies can be secured collaboratively. As set out in paragraph 4.3 Regional Management Boards provide a mechanism for authorities to explore the scope for further efficiencies in areas such as joint service delivery and management and the provision of support functions. To this end:

Fire and Rescue Authorities should continue to report efficiencies on an individual authority basis; but Communities and Local Government will also provide a facility and guidance for authorities to report collectively on efficiency savings delivered through the Regional Management Board.

4.37 Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships, referred to at paragraph 4.23 above, also have an important role to play in supporting improved efficiency through identifying good practice and facilitating joint working and local initiatives with local authority partners and others. Fire and Rescue Authorities will wish to ensure that they are properly represented within the partnership's governance arrangements and that their own efficiency initiatives are appropriately linked to the work of the partnership. Authorities may wish to take this forward jointly through Regional Management Boards.

Pay

4.38 The government has made clear that it expects the public sector to control pay increases. Whilst it is for the Fire and Rescue Authorities as the employers to negotiate pay and determine the affordability of any settlement, in doing so:

Fire and Rescue Authorities should have regard to the government's public sector pay policy and equal pay legislation.

Council Tax

4.39 The government expects all Fire and Rescue Authorities to ensure that they do not set excessive council tax increases in 2008-09 and 2009-10. The government continues to be clear that it would not hesitate to use its capping powers to protect council tax payers from excessive rises in local taxation.

Asset management

4.40 In order to ensure efficient use of resources and to effectively manage their estates;

All Fire and Rescue Authorities should have an Asset Management Plan in place which reflects guidance to be issued by Communities and Local Government in due course.

National Procurement Strategy for the Fire and Rescue Service and Firebuy

4.41 Firebuy was established in March 2006 to drive forward the National Procurement Strategy for the Fire and Rescue Service. Its aim is to secure efficiencies in procurement, to advance interoperability and to improve standards of equipment. It will also assist in removing traditional barriers to recruitment and reducing environmental impacts.

4.42 A previous review¹ on Fire and Rescue Service procurement indicated that there was potential for efficiencies from the reduction of overheads through to savings from joint purchasing. The work that Firebuy Ltd is undertaking is also part of the overall agenda on Transforming Government Procurement.²

Fire and Rescue Authorities must submit a business case to Communities and Local Government to gain approval to extend existing contracts outside the National Framework Agreements arranged through FireBuy Ltd.

¹ A Uniform Approach – 2000 Audit Commission

² Transforming Government Procurement – January 2007 HM Treasury

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire Authority Response to the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11 (Consultation Document)

What are your views on the new structure of the National Framework?

A reduction from nine to four chapters within the new National Framework document appears to be a sensible and pragmatic arrangement, clarifying the key strategic areas for the Fire and Rescue Service.

The use of signposting to other documents, strategies or legislation is helpful to ensure that the Framework document is concise. The draft Framework document does, however, contain a degree of duplication from other key publications, which could be removed to reduce the size of the Framework. This would also assist in improving the clarity of the Framework document.

A large part of the Framework should be about bringing clarity to the Government's expectations of the Fire and Rescue Service. As such, it is important to draw a distinction between a general duty to respond to emergency and a statutory duty in relation to a specific incident type. This is of particular relevance in relation to flooding, where there is an inference that these two positions are interchangeable. A 'general duty' does not place specific obligations on Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) to deal with all flooding emergencies.

The three-year lifespan of the Framework is particularly welcomed, as it will undoubtedly facilitate the alignment and integration of planning to the three-year budget cycle.

Whilst it is appreciated that Communities and Local Government (CLG) have endeavoured to be less prescriptive in the structure of the new Framework, the potential disadvantage of such an approach is absence of quantifiable expected outcomes.

An area that could be strengthened within the Framework is the role of the Fire and Rescue Service in the context of the wider community, e.g. Local Area Agreements (LAAs) etc.

It is, perhaps conspicuous by its absence, unusual to note that the Framework makes no reference to environmental issues and the important role the Fire and Rescue Service has, as a prominent public service, in reducing both its direct and indirect impact on the environment.



**Is the National Framework clear about the Government's objectives and priorities, what Fire and Rescue Authorities are expected to deliver, and the support the Government will provide?
If not, how could it be improved?**

The Framework's methodology of 'Must' and 'Should' statements has the advantage of emphasising what the Government views as priority areas for the Fire and Rescue Service. However, given that the Framework has a three-year lifespan, the absence, in some areas, of time-bound objectives diminishes the level of importance, which the Government places upon certain priorities.

The Framework contains more than several statements which begin '*Fire and Rescue Authorities are encouraged to.../may wish to.../expected to...*'. Such statements are confusing, when considered alongside the 'Must' and 'Should' statements, particularly as some of them are arguably equally as important as some 'Must/Should' statements. Such statements should, therefore, be reviewed to remove any possible ambiguity.

Support to FRAs and regional management boards (RMBs) was previously aided through the appointment of Business Change Managers. The removal of these positions has created a 'knowledge void' between FRAs, RMBs and CLG regarding the interpretation and clarification of the Framework during its working life where issues arise.

**Do you agree with the policies set out in each chapter?
If not why not, and what alternative policy would you wish to see instead?**

Chapter 1: Prevention, Protection and Response

Para 1.4

It is stated that the Government is assisting in the development of integrated operational practices by creating regional Control Centres. The reality of this situation is, however, that new ways of working will have to be adopted by fire and rescue services to accommodate the Concept of Operations for the FiReControl Project. These prescribed ways of working to be imposed on FRAs are likely to have significant impacts, as the process of transition from existing operational practices to the new will require major investment across fire and rescue services.

Whilst CLG have given assurances in relation to New Burdens funding for implementation of the project transition plan, similar commitments have not been made in relation to the introduction of new operational practices (previously termed convergence products).

Without proper support to FRAs for all aspects of the National Resilience Programme implementation its success could be compromised. Financial support is paramount to the mitigation of risk and the reduction of further slippage.



Para 1.6

The scope of Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) should be extended to include specific reference to how an FRA will participate in the LAAs within its area and contribute to addressing the identified community priorities. FRAs are key public agencies with the potential to make a contribution across all LAA themes.

Consequently, this should be a prominent feature in an FRA's Integrated Risk Management Plans.

Critical to the success and effectiveness of cross-border working is joint working between FRAs to develop integrated plans via IRMPs to address joint working. The use of regional management boards to facilitate such working poses a risk of other neighbouring FRAs being excluded (in part or whole) from individual FRA IRMPs, where the statutory responsibility to address cross-border working resides. It is not the responsibility of regional management boards to review IRMPs.

Para 1.13

It is interesting to note that the Government is promoting to FRAs the value of sprinklers as part of a fire risk management plan. The arguments, which the Framework suggests should be used by FRAs, are exactly those which FRAs made to the Government in relation to fire risk management in schools, and which, until very recently, met with significant resistance. Consequently, it is hoped that the value of sprinklers will be more actively promoted across all Government Departments.

Para 1.16

Reference should be made to Local and Regional Resilience Fora, as the means by which the Fire and Rescue Service can contribute to resolving community emergencies. The recent floodings have clearly identified that no single agency can deal with incidents of such magnitude, so the statutory fora are the appropriate bodies to be charged with this responsibility.

In relation to co-responder schemes, reference should be made to local Primary Care Trusts and Ambulance Services as the agencies which should determine the need or otherwise for such initiatives. Where a need is identified, the Primary Care Trust (PCT) or Ambulance Trust should discuss how it may be addressed with their local FRA. It is not for FRAs to decide how a Health Service Trust should meet its statutory obligations or performance targets.

The Framework makes reference to flooding and co-responding, but omits to explain the expected role of the Fire and Rescue Service, when dealing with the rescue of persons from water. There is a growing public perception that Fire and Rescue Services have a responsibility for undertaking rescues from water (particularly inland waterways). The Framework should clarify the Government's expectations of the Fire and Rescue Service in this area.



Para 1.18

It is recognised by FRAs that they have a responsibility to plan for the loss of their workforce, whether through industrial action or other events, such as a flu pandemic. Whether industrial action may be defined as an 'emergency' is a matter of interpretation and to suggest that it falls within the wider responsibilities enforced through the Civil Contingencies Act is open to question. FRAs will, of course, make every effort to maintain appropriate levels of emergency cover at all times, including during periods of emergency. Significant investment has been, and continues to be, made by many, if not all, FRAs to secure this provision.

The Government cannot, however, completely divorce itself from its overarching responsibility to secure public safety. Consequently, in addition to the measures being taken by FRAs, the Government should establish its own contingency plans in the event that FRAs cannot maintain appropriate levels of emergency cover. It should be recognised that it is possible that such situations could arise as a direct consequence of Government policy, action or intervention.

Para 1.19

Details of the proposed Fire Research Academy are not clear. Further details are required indicating what the Academy would do, the value it would add to FRAs and the financial implications that arise from its establishment.

Para 1.21

The introduction of the Incident Recording System will involve additional costs for FRAs. It is assumed that these costs will be met by the Government under New Burdens principles.

Chapter 2: Resilience

Para 2.3

The Framework is ambiguous regarding the means to be adopted by FRAs, when working together at a regional level to secure representation at Regional Resilience Fora. Is it to be interpreted that this is a new role for RMBs or perhaps even the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA)?

Para 2.7

It should be noted that, owing to the significant delays (beyond the control of FRAs) in the delivery of the FiReControl Project, FRAs have already replaced, or may have to replace or upgrade, their existing control rooms, before they cut over to their respective Regional Control Centre (RCC). Clearly, where this is necessary, these resources will not be available to support transition activities.

It should not be assumed that the level of resource commitment, which individual FRAs may have utilised to replace legacy control room equipment, is comparable to the resources necessary to support the implementation of FiReControl. Evidence to date suggests that the level of expected FRA commitment to FiReControl far exceeds that which may have been deployed to replace or upgrade a local control room.



Para 2.9

The Framework stipulates that FRAs must remain members of the RCC company in their region. This, in effect, makes the RCC in the region a monopoly provider and could be seen to reduce the drive for efficiency and healthy cost competition between RCCs. With compatible systems across the country it is not clear why any FRA could not choose to leave one RCC company to join another, if that company demonstrated better value for money for tax payers.

Para 2.19

The role of Emergency Information Support Group is recognised. It should be noted, however, that the provision of information to this Group will have a priority level below that of activities directly relating to the management and command of the response to a major emergency.

Chapter 3: Diversity and Workforce

Para 3.3

The adoption of Core Values is essential to promote attitudes and behaviours that foster respect and dignity. Whilst FRAs have some authority to manage employees and screen those seeking recruitment to ensure acceptable behaviour, the ability in a democracy to prevent elected members with extremist tendencies from serving on FRAs is less obvious and requires clarification.

Para 3.4

The importance of increasing the diversity of the Fire and Rescue Service workforce is clearly articulated within the Framework. The additional emphasis and reporting proposals serve to highlight the priority placed on this issue. The 'Business Case' for diversity is not, however, as clearly stated. Providing details of the potential benefits to be achieved in terms of community outcomes would serve to engender further support for this important issue.

Para 3.20

The requirement to apply Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) principles to the recruitment, development and progression of all staff and to use IPDS and the national processes based on it is welcomed, but should be imposed as a 'Should' requirement as opposed to a 'Must', thus allowing FRAs the freedom and flexibility to develop local, pragmatic, cost-effective solutions to implement these principles.

Para 3.26

The logic of sharing risk critical information is beyond question. The approach adopted, however, must be consistent across FRAs and compatible with risk data capture methodologies to be employed by the FiReControl project.

Para 3.29

The requirement to have effective, quality-assured arrangements to ensure the maintenance of staff competence is fully supported.



Chapter 4: Governance and Improvement

Para 4.3

The requirements placed on RMBs are fully supported. Experience to date has demonstrated, however, that significant barriers exist to what would appear to be straightforward and obvious collaboration opportunities, e.g. Firefighter Pension Scheme administration. Consequently, the achievement of the potential efficiencies identified within the Framework may not be achievable without a greater degree of direction by the Government.

Para 4.4

It should be recognised that regional Fire and Rescue Service collaboration and sharing of services is not the only, or even preferred, approach in some localities. Collaboration with other public authorities and agencies in a locality also offers significant potential for efficiency gains. Pursuance of regional or sub-regional 'fire-fire' joint working or sharing of functions may, in some circumstances, be counterproductive to local collaborative initiatives with other agencies.

Paras 4.8 - 4.12

Encouragement to FRAs to engage in Local Strategic Partnerships and the development of Local Area Agreements (LAAs) is welcomed, although it does not go far enough. FRAs and their services are significant players within the public sector and many have demonstrated an ability to make a positive contribution across the community development agenda. Indeed, fire and rescue services have delivered improvements in areas that other agencies have failed to impact on for years. Consequently, any FRA that does not fully engage with LAA partners or simply seeks to have fire-related targets included in the 35 local improvement targets will deny its local communities opportunities for alternative solutions to local issues or problems far beyond those relating to fires or emergencies. It is, therefore, suggested that such engagement is included in the list of 'Must' do activities for FRAs.

Para 4.19

The Framework is unclear as to what mechanism will be adopted to assess operational performance. The previous 'desk-top' approach lacked an assessment of operational competence. This deficiency should be addressed by a suitably qualified agency/body.

Do you agree with the policies set out in each chapter?

If not why not, and what alternative policy would you wish to see instead?

Whilst the Framework represents a 'step-change' and significant improvement upon its predecessor, it does not altogether differentiate specific policies that may be linked or driven by a broader Government agenda. Consequently, it is difficult to offer further comment to that provided elsewhere within this response. Notwithstanding this, the statements contained within each chapter are, with the exception of the above, considered satisfactory.



Do you have any comments on the implementation of the policies set out that are of relevance to the National Framework?

Whilst some requirements of the Framework are supplemented with time-bound targets, the majority remain without. Given that the Framework is for the period 2008-11, the absence of target dates may represent a barrier to assessing delivery of 'policy.' Perhaps the inclusion of a 'Milestone Map' within the Framework would give impetus to the delivery of the Government's expectations for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Proposed Departmental Strategic Objective

It is believed that the proposed objective is far too narrowly focussed and lacks inspiration and aspiration.

As stated within the draft National Framework document, the Local Government White Paper: Strong and Prosperous Communities, clearly articulates central Government's vision for local government to be more responsive and deliver better outcomes for communities. LSPs and LAAs are the key features of local collaborative approaches to address identified priorities. Indeed, the Government expects all public agencies within a locality to work together to meet community needs effectively and efficiently through these statutory vehicles.

FRAs are key players within the public sector in any area and, as such, must be required to engage with LSPs and LAAs. In doing so, they will contribute to improving the wellbeing of local communities and impact on issues far beyond those that have traditionally been associated with the Fire and Rescue Service.

Consequently, it is suggested that the proposed Departmental Strategic Objective should be amended to reflect fully the contribution FRAs and, through them, CLG will make to improving local communities.

