



Fire Futures Reports
Government response



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Introduction by the Minister for the Fire and Rescue Service, Bob Neill MP

Today's Fire and Rescue Service has evolved from its historic roots in fire fighting to become central to UK public safety through its roles in prevention and protection as well as in responding to emergencies of all kinds. The Service is rightly held in high regard by the public. It is at the heart of all of our communities working with other front line services to protect the vulnerable.

The Fire Futures review has provided those working within the fire sector with an exceptional opportunity to influence thinking about the future. Contributors provided a wide range of ideas and proposals on behalf of the sector and participants included the fire safety industry, building control bodies, design specialists, architects, professional bodies, insurance, British Standards Institution, testing and research organisations. I am very grateful to all who took part and those who led the process, and I was impressed by the determination of contributors to respond positively to the Government's public service reform agenda.

The Fire and Rescue Service has been distracted from a primary focus on local communities by the previous Government's:

- management from the centre
- agenda to regionalise the Service
- confusion instead of clarity in central and local roles and in national resilience.

The Coalition Government intends to address this through:

- restoring a focus on local communities instead of national targets and monitoring
- ensuring local decision making on local services
- letting the Service and the wider sector – not Whitehall - manage its cross-sector functions collaboratively
- providing clarity on national and local roles in resilience and ensuring the right structure and funding is there to support it.

Some of the thinking in the Fire Futures reports reflects an expectation that the former Government's culture of control and direction over the way Fire and Rescue Services are delivered might continue. This Government does not intend to do this. The majority of Fire Futures proposals provide an ideas bank which can be drawn upon by Fire and Rescue Authorities and the wider sector individually and collectively to help deliver more accountable, effective and cost efficient services. Government will focus on enabling, facilitating and removing barriers.

These are the principles that have shaped the Government response to the Fire Futures reports and how we intend to do this is discussed in more detail in the relevant sections of the response document.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Neill', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Bob Neill MP
Minister for the Fire and Rescue Service

The context

1. Fire deaths have halved since the 1980s. The work of the Fire and Rescue Service and the wider fire sector has been significant in driving change in individual and community behaviour, in product design and the built environment that have reduced risks to the public and helped achieve this outcome. The current environment in which the Service functions will be influenced over time by factors such as changing demographics and the need to meet risks arising from climate change and terrorist threat. Equally developments in areas like new technology will bring positive benefits and provide new solutions.
2. The Fire and Rescue Service needs to be able to adapt to meet the demands of a continually evolving delivery environment; it needs to respond to the challenges of greater expectations from citizens of public services and to do so with reduced public funding. To meet these challenges the Service needs strong local leadership and the ability to work effectively in collaboration at different spatial levels and with a wide range of other public services.
3. Decision making in local services needs to deliver better and more responsive services to local people, and local leaders must be able to put the right structures in place for this to happen. In a public spending climate where savings must be made this will include involving communities in tough decisions on priorities and change in the way things have been done in the past.
4. The Department for Communities and Local Government is committed to working with the whole fire sector to enable and to remove barriers to delivering these objectives. The Department's business plan underlines its commitment and leading role within government to ensure the right structures are in place to deliver localism and accountability, de-centralisation, transparency and the Big Society. The Government's de-centralisation commitment will likewise inform decision making for the residual elements of the FiReControl,¹ Firelink and New Dimension projects through the current work with the sector.

¹ See FiReControl consultation at:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/fireandrescuecontrolservices>

5. The annex to this document indicates how the Government considered each of the Fire Futures options and proposals and where it believes further follow-up action would most appropriately lie. In a small minority of cases the Government has ruled out taking forward options put forward in the reports and these are listed in the annex ²

² See press release at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/fire/1804267>

A community focussed Fire and Rescue Service

6. If this is to be achieved it will be essential to reverse a 14 year culture in which accounting to central government was the priority and instead ensure the Service is truly locally accountable to the communities they serve. Sector public surveys³ have underlined this by identifying that while the public attaches great importance to rapid and effective fire response services, they have low awareness and understanding of (a) what the Service spends money on; and (b) of the prevention, protection and wider roles the Service undertakes.
7. The sector has already started to address this and the Local Government Group has already made a commitment on driving service improvement. The sector's ownership of its own improvement agenda will be key to making de-centralisation a reality for the Fire and Rescue Service and enabling it to play an effective role in building the Big Society. At the heart of the drive to ensure services are focused on the needs of communities is a re-setting of the relationship between central Government and the Fire and Rescue Service and between the Service and local citizens.
8. To preface this change in relationship we will build on some of the thinking in Fire Futures to consider with the sector how best to reflect what the public should expect of its Fire and Rescue Service in a new National Framework to give this relationship structure. These citizen rights and expectations might, among other issues, encompass the role of citizens in decision making and the Service committing to the provision of transparency and assurance information to local communities.
9. The Fire and Rescue Service will have complete freedom to develop the tools to deliver against these expectations and demonstrate to their communities that they are doing so.

³ e.g. Public perceptions of the Fire and Rescue Service and home fire safety issues regional graphical report Prepared by Opinion Research Services for the South East Fire Improvement Partnership June 2009.

Local decision making

10. It is vital that decisions on priorities and spending are made locally with institutions providing as strong a level of democratic accountability in the decision making process as possible.
11. The Government will consider how the overall funding mechanisms for the Fire and Rescue Service can most effectively support local decision making, and look at the appropriate basis for national resilience functions to be funded. The Government will also consider the associated governance structures.
12. These changes will be considered in the context of the Local Government Resource Review. The Review is considering wider reforms of the local government finance system which aim to help set free many local councils from dependency on central funding, and provide incentives, through the business rates system, for them to promote economic growth.
13. The Efficiency, Effectiveness and Productivity report included a series of areas which it recommended should be explored by the sector. This report rightly focuses on the scope for Fire and Rescue Authorities to deliver public spending savings at a local level but also on the importance of collaborative action at various spatial levels. The sector must rise to this challenge to avoid the trap of silo thinking. The report encompassed the seven areas identified in the Fire Minister's letter to authorities on the Spending Review outcome⁴ which indicated where we consider potential savings could be achieved:
 - flexible staffing arrangements
 - improved sickness management
 - pay restraint and recruitment freezes
 - shared services/back office functions
 - improved procurement
 - sharing Chief Officers and other senior staff
 - voluntary amalgamations between Fire and Rescue Authorities.

⁴ Letter from Bob Neill MP to Fire and Rescue Authorities, sent 20 October 2010, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/1746318.pdf>

14. It also considered others as diverse as utilising staff resource to take on other local service roles, better asset management, the use of volunteers and developing a value for money benchmarking and peer review model.
15. Some of the proposals within Fire Futures would require Government to impose national re-organisation. We do not intend to do this but will support the development of local alternatives which improve efficiency and value for money to taxpayers. This includes developing the range of service providers, of competition and commissioning in service delivery, and the development of mutuals by Fire and Rescue Service staff.
16. Local services may wish to explore and develop their own models for more collaborative working with others, such as the Ambulance Service, which can deliver joint benefits and cost savings. There is a new opportunity for Fire and Rescue Authorities themselves to seek opportunities and to deliver solutions suitable for local circumstances and responding to the needs and views of communities.

Cross-sector collaboration

17. Reflecting the public trust in the Service it is right that sector professionals should take on delivery of functions it believes are required at a higher than local level, or at a national level, wherever possible. Central Government has already stopped delivering functions that the sector is better able to deliver for itself, either locally at authority level, or collectively, for example developing the skills and role of firefighters and on setting its safety standards. Fire Futures showed that there is a clear appetite for this work, and central Government will take further steps to end its direct involvement in other functions that the sector is better placed to deliver for itself.
18. The sector has already begun to show leadership in this area and can build on initiatives such as:
 - the new Fire Community Partnership, which is taking on a national role on the built environment and knowledge management
 - the work undertaken by the Chief Fire Officers' Association and the Local Government Association on national functions
 - the work of the Fire Risk Assessment Competency Council which is developing an agreed competency standard for those offering commercial fire risk assessment services.

19. There will however be areas where it is right for the sector to lead but where government will have a strong interest in the outcomes. These include:
- the development by the sector of appropriate processes to provide assurance to local communities on performance and to provide mutual learning/good practice and performance support (building on the work already undertaken by the Local Government Association and the Chief Fire Officers' Association)
 - measures to address serious service failure
 - the maintenance and development of interoperability capabilities
 - the development and interaction between local and national risk
 - the development of operational guidance
 - research
 - national safety campaigns.

The Fire Service College

20. We recognise that the provision of high quality training and development for Fire and Rescue Service staff is vital to ensure that the Service can respond effectively to the needs of their local communities and to major incidents like floods and chemical spillages.
21. We have noted with interest the sector view that there is no appetite within the Fire Service to lose the resource that is the Fire Service College – a fact borne out by the recent formation of a Local Government Group cross party action group to help secure the future of the College by considering, amongst other things, its current ownership and management structure. We very much welcome the leadership and commitment they are showing.
22. The strong value of a national college for Fire and Rescue Service training is recognised. The Fire Service College has unique facilities especially in relation to national resilience, multi agency and interoperability training and development. However, we believe that the College can only achieve its full potential if there is greater involvement from other sectors (whether private, public or voluntary) in its ownership, operation and governance. We will explore with the sector and other organisations options to secure the future of the College.

Local and national resilience

23. Securing national resilience and ensuring public safety against identified national risks is the primary focus of central Government in its ongoing relationship with the Fire and Rescue Service.
24. The appropriate basis for national resilience functions to be funded will be considered in the context of the Local Government Resource Review.
25. We will also work with the sector to properly define national and local resilience roles, including issues arising in the context of cross-border working, intraoperability, and multi-agency interoperability, and reflect them in a new National Framework. It may be that national resilience could, for example, be taken to encompass those functions and resources required to meet the national risk assessment that are above and beyond those properly covered by local Integrated Risk Management Plans. These might include response and operational guidance, over and above that within mutual aid agreements, to hazards and threats such as:
 - large scale natural disasters (or local with a national impact)
 - events with potential large scale casualty implications or requiring large scale response or specialist capability e.g. building collapse, aircraft crashes, terrorist activity etc
 - chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or explosive incidents.
26. The definition might also include ensuring a national communications capability and standards for data exchange. We will work with the sector to take this forward.
27. A further consideration is the assurance mechanism for national resilience. We will undertake work with the sector to consider how best to expand the current sector role to appropriately cover the management and assurance of national resilience.

Conclusion

28. The majority of proposals within the Fire Futures reports are for the sector to consider individually and collectively in responding to the public service reform agenda, focussing on increasing their accountability to local citizens and contributing to the delivery of reductions in public spending.
29. The primary focus for government is above all ensuring the safety of citizens and the delivery of national resilience. Secondly it is to ensure the legislative, financial and accountability frameworks are in place to re-set its relationship with the Service and enable authorities to create a new connection with their communities through the reform agenda.

Next steps

- We will work with the sector to develop and consult on a new National Framework that re-sets the relationship, enhances accountability, sets out citizens rights and expectations to be in place for 2012
- Where required we will work with the sector on barrier-busting to support the delivery of the public service reform agenda and improved cost effectiveness in service delivery
- We will work with the sector to define roles in resilience and in developing appropriate resilience assurance mechanisms, reflecting these in a new National Framework
- We will undertake a review of the funding mechanisms for the Fire and Rescue Service in the context of the local government resource review
- Central government will withdraw from functions that the sector is better able to deliver for itself
- We will explore with the sector and other organisations their views about and interest in taking a greater stake in the ownership and/or running of the Fire Service College, in ways which would secure the most advantageous delivery of the College's training mission.

Annex

Summary of Fire Futures Ideas

Introduction

The purpose of this annex is to summarise how the ideas put forward in the Fire Futures reports have been considered. It is intended to be read as a supplement to the formal government response to the review.

The ideas listed here are drawn from and in the language used in the Fire Futures reports. However, some have been amalgamated or summarised for greater clarity.

As highlighted in the Government response, our vision for fire and rescue provision in England is shaped by four principles:

- restoring a focus on local communities instead of national targets and monitoring
- ensuring local decision making on local services
- letting the Service and the wider sector – not Whitehall – manage its cross-sector functions collaboratively
- providing clarity on national and local roles in resilience and ensuring the right structure and funding is there to support it.

The ideas are presented in four categories.

Category A

“Ideas bank” the sector may want to draw on

The majority of the ideas offered in the Fire Futures reports provide an “ideas bank” which can be drawn upon by Fire and Rescue Services and the wider sector to help deliver more accountable, effective and cost efficient structures. The ideas in this section are not necessarily endorsed by government.

Category B

National Resilience – sector in the lead, supported by government

We believe sector partners should take the lead to develop ideas that will secure strong national resilience capacity, and we will work to help them achieve this aim.

Category C

Government action to free the sector

There are some ideas that need government action to implement. In the Government response we commit to progress some. For others, where there is an appetite for change, we will work with sector partners to consider how these ideas can be taken forward.

Category D

Ideas government has ruled out

Some ideas have been ruled out by government as they do not meet the public service reform agenda.

Category A

Ideas bank the sector may want to draw on

The majority of the ideas offered in the Fire Futures reports provide an “ideas bank” which can be drawn upon by Fire and Rescue Services and the wider sector to help deliver more accountable, effective and cost efficient structures.

Partners may choose to consider how these ideas meet with local needs and test them locally with partners where appropriate. If there is a compelling case for change but partners tell us they are constrained by barriers, we will consider whether government enabling action is appropriate. The ideas in this section are not necessarily endorsed by government.

Ideas which come under this category are as follows:

Localism, de-centralisation and the Big Society

- A.1 The Retained Duty System model exemplifies Big Society objectives and has significant potential for expansion, including within an urban environment and in providing, for example, night time cover
- A.2 To secure and expand the willingness of employers to allow their staff to participate [in the Retained Duty System], the Service must build stronger links with the business community both locally and collectively on a national basis
- A.3 There are issues which need to be addressed in the Service's reliance on the Retained Duty System in some localities [including staffing costs, recruitment/retention and managerial overheads]
- A.4 Options for expanding the role of volunteers within the Fire and Rescue Service should be pursued, on functions such as after the fire support. This should be done through building on existing good practice and effectively managing the risks involved
- A.5 Change driven through the desire of local communities for greater control over their fire and rescue services and by the ability of individuals to form their own mutuals to provide that service
- A.6 Governance arrangements of Fire and Rescue Authorities should be changed to strengthen the role of its members
- A.7 Citizen panels are a mechanism available to assist all forms of governing body structures

- A.8 Improve local democratic accountability of Fire and Rescue Authorities, e.g. enhance citizen participation in governance arrangements or spending decisions
- A.9 Strengthen local democratic accountability of Fire and Rescue Authorities - option 1: locally driven change
- A.10 Strengthen local democratic accountability of Fire and Rescue Authorities - option 2: supported locally driven change
- A.11 Further sector-led work to address the practical implications of decentralisation and the support needed to achieve the goal
- A.12 Integrated Risk Management Plans could be developed to become a core planning tool used in collective local public service planning to engage with local citizens and develop a 'place map' of community risks, aims and priorities. Could potentially incorporate/recognise specific rights for citizens and include service level agreements with communities
- A.13 The Service must consult with communities, potentially collectively with other public services, to consider the current nature of provision and determine whether it is still possible/desirable to offer the services they currently provide
- A.14 Engage local people by encouraging them to think beyond the provision of emergency response and how to reconcile what they want with what they need in an iterative process of engagement that facilitates public awareness of Fire and Rescue Service functions in a way that goes beyond passive consultation exercises
- A.15 Some portions of funding could be delegated to a locality or even station level with communities directly involved in decisions on its use
- A.16 Service delivery should consider what the public can reasonably expect – this means matching the roles of public safety organisations with community risks. Starting point for any change would be an understanding of public expectations about the service that is delivered to them
- A.17 Development of mutuals as an option for the Fire and Rescue Service
- A.18 Fire and Rescue Authorities should be required to consider commissioning their fire and rescue service from other providers
- A.19 Local Integrated Risk Management Plans should provide local users of services with an assurance that those services are equipped to address the range of risks

Local and national resilience and national functions

- A.20 A second stage of work should be undertaken by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the national interest workstream together with contributors to the Fire Futures National Framework Review. This will build upon the work to date and will develop further the extent and content of the next National Framework
- A.21 Maintenance of occupational standards and the development of a qualification framework, specifically focusing on risk critical activities
- A.22 A sector-led national training review should be undertaken encompassing efficient provision and options to ensure effective interoperability
- A.23 A unified scheme of accreditation and registration of Fire Risk Assessors
- A.24 Serious further consideration needs to be given within the Fire Futures review of the opportunity to recognise the need for effective sector funded national structures and arrangements that support Fire and Rescue Service improvement and delivery and the potential that exists to secure them
- A.25 Fire and Rescue Authorities should work together at an appropriate spatial level to deliver some savings and to maintain interoperability
- A.26 Revitalise Integrated Risk Management Plan process, including the contribution to national resilience requirements and the wider local community safety agenda
- A.27 High level committee to be formed, possibly based on the Integrated Risk Management Plan Steering Group, to link national to local risks
- A.28 Revised Integrated Risk Management Plan Steering Group could ensure national benchmarking, share and disseminate best practice and provide a gateway for the oversight and coordination of proposals to mitigate effects of national risks and threats. It would be essential to have a strategic presence from the Cabinet Office on this Group
- A.29 By expanding the role of the Fire and Rescue Service sector within a national Integrated Risk Management Plan Steering Group, there should also be greater scope to ensure local plans capture critical and cross border issues, risks and ensure effective tie-in of national risks to Integrated Risk Management Plans
- A.30 Integrated Risk Management Plans must be intelligence-based and led, and have appropriate mechanisms capturing national risks through better links to the Civil Contingencies Secretariat and Local Risk Assessment Guidance

- A.31 Local Integrated Risk Management Plans must recognise national threats and consideration must be given to the links between Local Resilience Forums and Integrated Risk Management Plans
- A.32 A national level body, led and funded by the sector, which interfaces with central government should be established to be responsible for the consistent delivery of the recommended set of national functions
- A.33 Set of national functions should be developed and provided nationally by an appropriate body for the collective benefit of not only all Fire and Rescue Services but other external partners
- A.34 In financing such an arrangement, funding issues need to be further evaluated/developed including establishment of private/public sector (joint ventures) commissioned functions
- A.35 There needs to be better collaborative working for connected fire safety from design to occupation of the building
- A.36 A national overview of the built environment is essential, translated to the local level through Integrated Risk Management Plans
- A.37 A national model should be developed for assessing premises risk
- A.38 In relation to reducing fire risk through the built environment, improvements can be made through better application of what is already known, and a better understanding of fire behaviour and building response to fire is required
- A.39 In relation to reducing risk through the built environment, there needs to be improved compliance with regulation, legislation and industry driven best practice
- A.40 Industry could take on responsibility for awareness of fire safety amongst building designers, constructors, owners and occupiers
- A.41 The Fire and Rescue Service continue to enforce the Fire Safety Order but may wish to delegate some aspects to private sector experts in the longer term
- A.42 Industry associations are ideally placed through their contacts with members to act as watchdogs on progress/problems in enforcement of Fire Safety Order regulations
- A.43 Building control should take a proactive co-ordinating role involving the Fire and Rescue Service. To facilitate that agreement it may be appropriate for a representative building control body to form a cooperative agreement with the Chief Fire Officers' Association
- A.44 Sector should lead on application of knowledge linked to competency, certification, data sharing and awareness programmes

- A.45 The sector should continue to disseminate information promoting awareness, education, training and competency accreditation programmes
- A.46 Critical to the sector knowledge base is to have a much better database
- A.47 Role for industry-endorsed third party certification schemes in the built environment, but they must be fit for stated purpose and properly accredited
- A.48 Programmed review of Approved Document B (Building Regulations 200 – Fire Safety) should continue, but with a view on new and emerging practices, as well as broader community needs and the wider dimensions of fire which are likely to become more prominent
- A.49 Absence of a national methodology and template for assessing premises risk and visits under 7(2)(d) of Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 is a key risk. Such a model should be developed as a priority for any new national policy group created and should operate in a similar way to the model established for the Regulatory Reform Order
- A.50 To address issues with guidance/expertise, sector has already committed to resource, review, codify, rewrite and where required publish guidance supporting existing legislation but encompassing the entire process from building design to end use; use its own resources and expertise to train, educate and disseminate its knowledge; committed to work directly with Fire and Rescue Services to support training and qualifications without the need to publicly fund intermediary Sector Skills Councils; provide a sector-led Independent Research Panel; and to provide a Fire Knowledge website
- A.51 A wider view on the impacts of fire in line with requirements to lower the costs of fire damage taking account of community needs is needed
- A.52 Take a holistic view of value for money and evaluate the cost to society of fires and emergency events to develop a better business case and improve fire protection to buildings and infrastructure
- A.53 Co-ordinated access to Integrated Risk Management Plans
- A.54 A working group should explore the scope for a sector led research panel and develop proposals for a shared work programme
- A.55 A working group should be set up to review the scope for setting up a national data function and review the feasibility of placing all Integrated Risk Management Plans online
- A.56 A sector-led Research Panel (not restricted to Fire and Rescue Services) should prioritise research
- A.57 Production and dissemination of operational doctrine should be co-ordinated by an appropriate organisation

- A.58 Technical and operational guidance should be written by experts in the Fire and Rescue Service
- A.59 Collectively, the Chief Fire Officers' Association, the Fire Service College, the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser as well as partners in the fire industry might be able to provide a more effective lead in developing national operational doctrine as well as other functions as part of a national hub
- A.60 The most appropriate central point for a national hub would be the Fire Service College
- A.61 The Institute of Fire Engineers should provide the academic qualification and accreditation mechanism to support the role of the national hub and the wider training agenda
- A.62 Formation of a sector led hub for the dissemination of sector knowledge
- A.63 Partnership arrangement between government, private sector and third sector should be established with a view to sharing data and research
- A.64 Fire industry needs to come together and engage in better dialogue, in particular with those outside the core specialist fire safety sector who are not fire specialists but in practice are responsible for delivering fire safety
- A.65 Government should allow districts and boroughs to form their own Fire and Rescue Authorities subject to whatever safeguards the Secretary of State wishes to put in place
- A.66 The Department for Communities and Local Government may wish to consider putting pilots in place with willing district or borough councils. It will be important to ensure that the appropriate funding architecture is put in place to support this
- A.67 Build on the Local Government Group/Chief Fire Officers' Association sector-led framework for assurance and transparency
- A.68 Role for consumer based involvement in the assurance process, similar to HealthWatch
- A.69 National Performance Measures to deliver transparency in the costs and outcomes of Fire and Rescue Services should be an integral part of the sector-led transparency/assurance framework and should be high level, drive outcomes and be adaptable to local context
- A.70 Develop and apply mechanisms to robustly identify and support those at risk of failure in meeting local community and national expectations. A model of assurance would also need to provide appropriate assurance on resilience capabilities, interoperability and value for money in functions where this is best served through collective action at a spatial level above that of an individual Fire and Rescue Authority

A.71 Assurance mechanisms should be in place for full range of Fire and Rescue Service roles

Fire and Rescue Service role, funding and efficiency

A.72 Districts or boroughs should have a greater say in funding and other decision making in the provision of local Fire and Rescue Services

A.73 Full scale, structured collaboration between Fire and Rescue Authorities can drive out much of the duplication that exists currently whilst maintaining local identity and democratic control

A.74 There are a range of activities that should be examined by individual Fire and Rescue Authorities with neighbouring authorities in considering scope for local savings, including streamlining management teams and training

A.75 Other support functions such as finance, human resources and IT could also be shared or sourced externally

A.76 Sector should develop new and effective collaborative mechanisms to deliver objectives better without central government direction and to reshape political institutions/engagement processes wherever necessary

A.77 Sector should develop collective structures to look at making some of the changes to drive out existing inefficiency and duplication that exists across the Service, principally through looking at meaningful collaboration locally. An overarching approach to delivering work that would be much better done collectively (but are not necessarily national functions) should be considered

A.78 There is a strong case that research and development capacity would be better delivered on a collective basis

A.79 The Service's principle constituent bodies, supported by government, must generate the will and create the necessary structures for the Service to act together when it needs to do so

A.80 Incentivise more consistent/larger scale change by addressing issues cooperatively with partners and by addressing issues collectively at a national level

A.81 Those for whom the Spending Review outcome is less challenging must be incentivised to act collectively

A.82 A sector-owned joint procurement process should be developed. Fire and Rescue Authorities will need to act together effectively to agree common specifications and new joint procurement mechanisms

- A.83 A catalyst [for a sector-owned joint procurement process] could well be the collective development of operational procedures
- A.84 Service itself owning the agenda to incentivise change
- A.85 Service should develop a value for money benchmarking and peer review model drawing on existing examples in other local government services
- A.86 Peer review model should offer challenge in the area of adoption of the leaner staffing models which are already tested within the Service
- A.87 The Fire and Rescue Service should fully engage with the Local Government Group Productivity Programme
- A.88 The latent resource capacity of the Fire and Rescue Service should be maximised and used to extend the productivity of the Service - either through local models or enabling national change. Latent resource capability could potentially be expanded to facilitate new roles by better evaluation of current activities and alternative approaches to provision of prevention/protection services
- A.89 Greater accuracy and commonality in costing as a first step in developing a robust model for benchmarking of costs and outcomes which can be used within a peer review process
- A.90 Investment in new stations could be looked at cross service and from a locality perspective
- A.91 New types of vehicles, in particular combined aerial/pumping appliances can enable the Service to operate with a smaller workforce. There is significant scope for more sharing of specialist vehicles and to utilise smaller, bespoke vehicles to address specific risks and to harness new technology
- A.92 Each Fire and Rescue Authority should ensure an Asset Management Strategy is clearly defined in the strategic responsibility of the authority and in principle management
- A.93 Asset Management Strategies should draw appropriately on private sector expertise
- A.94 The Fire and Rescue Service should ensure all fixed assets are included in wider strategic cross service reviews
- A.95 Fire stations provide in many instances a valuable community asset that could be used more widely. Properly developed asset management strategies are needed to support this

- A.96 A further sector-led study should be undertaken to assess how well the Fire and Rescue Service meets the principles suggested by Sir Michael Lyons in 2004 and in Audit Commission reports, and the potential benefit of encouraging a cross border, more collaborative view of property and other assets
- A.97 The Fire and Rescue Service should actively use the Office of Government Commerce Benchmarking Tool and establish some norms on building performance
- A.98 Opportunities for Fire and Rescue Authorities to extend trading activities should be explored more fully with the wider sector. This should be done in a way which carefully manages risks around conflict of interest and the possibility of unfair competitive advantage
- A.99 A collective funding mechanism for the work of the Skills for Justice programme should be retained
- A.100 Change in the current National Joint Council mechanism would most appropriately be driven by change in the way Fire and Rescue Authorities function
- A.101 National Joint Council to adopt a framework approach to conditions that can be adapted to fit the needs of local Integrated Risk Management Plans and to industrial relations
- A.102 An invest to save fund for the Fire and Rescue Service should be considered
- A.103 For fire and rescue services to receive funding directly they need to have the functions transferred to them, which can be achieved under the Sustainable Communities Act 2007
- A.104 Attendance at flood and water rescue incidents should be a statutory duty of the Fire and Rescue Services, funded through New Burdens; and the Fire and Rescue Service should be granted statutory power to control the inner cordon at these events
- A.105 Break the link between commissioning and service delivery
- A.106 Review legislative and other barriers to local cost-saving solutions, including through integration or merger to ensure all potential barriers/obstacles to local solutions are removed
- A.107 Alternatives in direct delivery of Fire and Rescue Service local services should be explored further
- A.108 Subject to local choice, local integration and/or shared services between Fire and Rescue Service and the Emergency Ambulance Service

- A.109 In the short term, the extension of existing co-responding schemes is an obvious first step to Fire and Rescue Service/Emergency Medical Service integration
- A.110 Need for close working between Fire and Rescue Service and Emergency Medical Service at all levels, and a thorough mutual understanding of operational procedures
- A.111 Better use should be made of commercial support options for deployment
- A.112 Greater scope exists to involve private sector suppliers in the provision of logistics support to Fire and Rescue Services
- A.113 Implications of area based funding should be fully explored for fully or part funding local Fire and Rescue Services in the longer term. Some funding could be pooled into area based funding streams; the level of pooled funding could be set by local engagement.

Category B

National Resilience – sector in the lead, supported by government

Securing national resilience and ensuring public safety against identified national risks is the primary focus of central government in its ongoing relationship with the Fire and Rescue Service and the wider sector. We believe sector partners should take the lead to develop ideas that will secure strong national resilience capacity, and we will work to help them achieve this aim.

Local and national resilience and national functions

- B.1 The links between risk at every level and resulting resolution capabilities should be entirely transparent and demonstrable to the public
- B.2 What is currently delivered to ministers by the National Resilience Board should be sought for all aspects of interoperability
- B.3 Government will need to maintain an independent light touch assurance mechanism, particularly in relation to interoperability and national resilience, and the ability to intervene in the case of service failure. Would make sense to have this placed with the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, supported by a regime of self assessment and peer review led by the sector
- B.4 Some headline assurance levels should be established to ensure interoperability throughout the UK
- B.5 Development of the National Risk Assessment process, underpinned by National Framework requirements. To take forward, it is recommended should be a common risk assessment protocol applied to national, local and generic risks
- B.6 Integrated Risk Management Plan Committee should look at the feasibility of creating a national Integrated Risk Management Plan based on national risks
- B.7 National plan will be created by lifting the most relevant and critical elements of Integrated Risk Management Plans relating to national threats and risks and holding such information centrally.

Category C

Government action to free the sector

There are some ideas that need government action to implement. In the Government response we commit to progress some. For others, where there is an appetite for change, we will work with sector partners to consider how these ideas can be taken forward.

Localism, de-centralisation and the Big Society

- C1 Give governmental power to lowest possible level through elimination of central targets and heavy touch central control mechanisms, cutting back on reporting requirements/inspection and eliminating direct intervention in all but the most exceptional circumstances
- C2 Government should dismantle the components of a centrally controlled performance management system for the Fire and Rescue Service and remove legislative or other obstacles to local innovation and delivery

The drive of government policy is away from top down performance management systems. Measures within the Localism Bill will de-centralise power, free Fire and Rescue Authorities from constraints and provide any new powers required.

- C3 Alternative mechanisms for appointing members to a new governing body are worthy of consideration, for example directly elected bodies or commissioners
- C4 Strengthen local democratic accountability of Fire and Rescue Authorities – option 3 (from Localism and Accountability Report), new structural parameters

The Government does not intend to impose reorganisation of the Fire and Rescue Service within a single governance model. However, if authorities indicate there are barriers to delivering alternative mechanisms they wish to adopt locally we will seek to enable change where it is appropriate to do so.

- C5 In decentralising power from Whitehall to local councils, it is imperative to clearly define the respective roles of central government and local Fire and Rescue Authorities

We strongly support this approach, and will work with sector partners to clearly define national and local roles in the new National Framework.

Local and national resilience and national functions

- C6 Lack of reliable or consistent data is a limitation on developing the funding formula as a mirror image of the risk assessment process. There may be scope to develop the Fire Service Emergency Cover model in this direction

This will be considered in the context of the Local Government Resource Review.

- C7 A new National Framework should be developed which removes prescribed tasks, determines the physical contribution to national responsibilities/services undertaken by Fire and Rescue Authorities and sets out unequivocal government expectations on interoperability
- C8 Strong case for retaining the National Framework and the national and government roles should be more about enabling public accountability through better local leadership, well designed public engagement and integration of effort with other local public services and the private sector

A new National Framework will be developed with the sector.

- C9 Government should clarify its expectations of what local services should do to ensure the security and resilience of the UK, and ensure the appropriate mechanisms for national resilience are maintained
- C10 Establish a time-limited working group to look at interoperability issues, including feasibility of Fire and Rescue Authorities drawing more easily upon military resources
- C11 Mechanism by which the sector itself can redirect resources in support of the national interest

We will work with the sector to define national and local resilience roles and reflect them in the new National Framework.

- C12 A national risk assessment, looking at risks facing the nation but not providing a national standard for emergency cover might provide the basis for a review of aggregate funding provision, from which authorities could then build local services through local choice

This will be considered in the context of the Local Government Resource Review.

- C13 Government should have a role working with the sector to identify signs of service failure, working with the sector to intervene only as required

We will work with the sector as it develops local performance assurance and transparency measures, and to consider how best to expand the current sector role to appropriately cover the management and assurance of all aspects of national resilience.

- C14 Government should set in train an immediate assessment of the potential of the Fire Service College with a view to ensuring its long term survival and stability by means of a joint venture arrangement. If there were a demonstrable success with this joint venture, this would facilitate consideration of whether the model was applicable elsewhere in the sector
- C15 Greater commercial freedom of manoeuvre would be of significant benefit whilst transforming the Fire Service College's operation
- C16 The footprint of the Fire Service College could be potentially reduced and the sale of some of its assets could improve its financial viability. Large capital investment facilities such as real fire training units and other specialist training could be provided by the private sector
- C17 There may be a greater role for the Fire and Rescue Services in facilitating joint operability with other services and the College could be developed to fulfil this function

We will explore with the sector and other organisations their views about and interest in taking a greater stake in the ownership and/or running of the Fire Service College, in ways which would secure the most advantageous delivery of the College's training mission.

- C18 Power of General Competence (currently restricted to county council Fire and Rescue Authorities) be extended to all Fire and Rescue Authorities

The Government has proposed within the Localism Bill an appropriate equivalent power.

Fire and Rescue Service role, funding and efficiency

- C19 Review of funding architecture for Fire and Rescue Authorities to place fairness and choice at the heart of commissioning services that meet the needs of all communities
- C20 Some further explicit linkage to Fire and Rescue Service funding through business rates could be explored
- C21 Funding sources to be transparent so local communities aware of where it comes from and how it can be used

This will be considered in the context of the Local Government Resource Review.

- C22 The Department for Communities and Local Government must be prepared to fully share the Incident Recording System data sets. There is also the potential to allow public access to some of the data (subject to data protection issues)

As part of the Government's Transparency agenda, we are working to make all data as widely available as possible, within the bounds of data protection and security.

Category D

Ideas government has ruled out

Some of the ideas within Fire Futures would require Government to impose national re-organisation. We do not intend to do this but will support the development of local alternatives which improve efficiency and value for money to taxpayers. Others have been ruled out by Government as they do not meet the needs of the public service reform agenda.

Local and national resilience and national functions

- D1 Responsibility for Operational Doctrine should remain with the Government

Operational Doctrine should be determined by the sector, although government will retain a central role in relation to national resilience and interoperability.

Fire and Rescue Service role, funding and efficiency

- D2 Evaluate merits of applying charging in areas such as response to road traffic collisions
- D3 The potential of revenue raising through a levy on home and/or motor insurance should be explored more fully
- D4 Enable differential precepting as an option open to Fire and Rescue Authorities

In the news release of 20 December 2010, ministers signalled that these ideas do not reflect the views of ministers and will not be taken forward.⁵

⁵ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/fire/1804267>

- D5 Fire and Rescue Services be granted the power to request direct military assistance

The implications of this proposal will remove power and responsibility from Fire and Rescue Authorities, and run counter to the localism agenda. There are existing mechanisms for Fire and Rescue Authorities (and other public bodies) to seek assistance in some circumstances from the Ministry of Defence via a central government department.

- D6 An alternative for all types of Fire and Rescue Authorities would be to create a single form of governance within which they can work together in the national interest whilst also meeting the localism agenda. This could incorporate better representation of all tiers of local government and the private, third sector and even service management or the representative bodies
- D7 Potential dissolution of existing ambulance trusts in order to enable (for example) a Community Protection Authority to be set up

The Government does not intend to impose reorganisation of the Fire and Rescue Service within a single governance model.

- D8 Adaptation of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat to adopt a role similar to that of Federal Emergency Management Agency in the USA

We do not envisage the Civil Contingencies Secretariat adopting an operational role, which would be a prerequisite for them to adopt a role similar to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

- D9 Government should endorse the sector lead on application of knowledge and ask the sector for a formal plan of action

The application of knowledge should be a matter determined by the sector, not one driven by government.