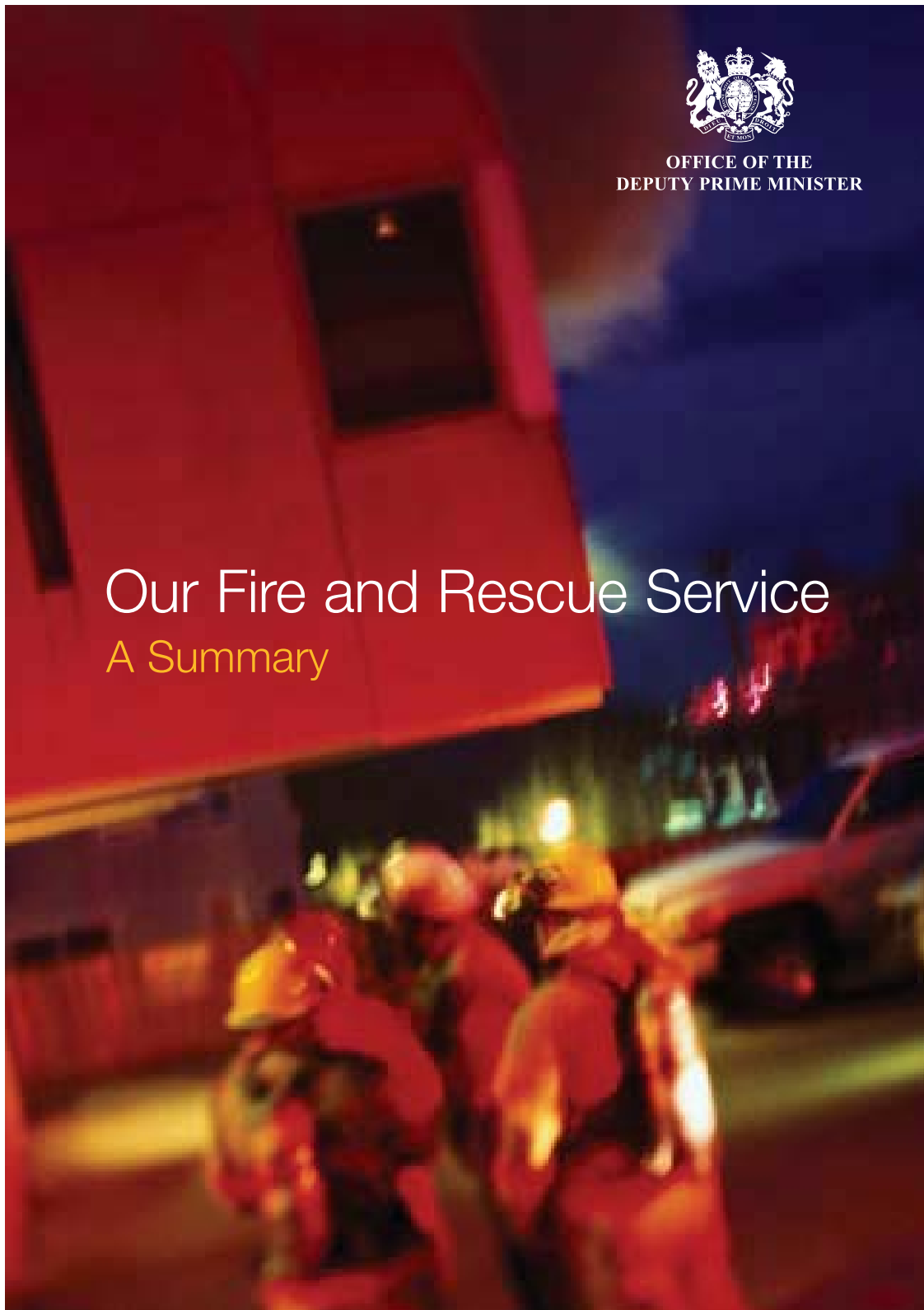




OFFICE OF THE  
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

# Our Fire and Rescue Service

A Summary



Photography by South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service (page 5) and  
West Yorkshire Fire and Civil Defence Authority (page 7).

# Our Fire and Rescue Service: A Summary

**1.** Fire kills. Preventing fires saves lives and reduces injuries. So it makes sense to protect people and to prevent fires from happening in the first place. It also makes sense to ensure that we fight fires as efficiently as possible. We must also plan for our wider response to other emergencies, such as environmental disasters and the growing threat of terrorism.

**2.** The White Paper *Our Fire and Rescue Service* sets out our vision for the future and our strategy for achieving that vision in England and Wales. This document summarises the White Paper.

**3.** We have a fire service that can be proud of what it has achieved in the past, but it must extend its role in the future in order to serve even better the communities it is there to protect. We will rename the service 'The Fire and Rescue Service', as that best describes its role. It will have a much broader role in preventing fire, responding to a wide range of threats and hazards, and rescuing people from whatever dangers they may face, thereby helping to create safer communities for all.

**4.** The White Paper describes fundamental changes to the way in which the service is structured and run. Together, these changes form a major

Our vision is for a public sector fire and rescue service that:

- is proactive in preventing fires and other risks, rather than simply reacting to fires;
- acts in support of the Government's wider agenda of social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal and crime reduction;
- has effective institutions that support its role and purpose;
- is well-managed and effective; and
- is committed to developing and adapting to changing circumstances, including the growing threat of terrorism.

challenge to everyone working in the fire and rescue service. It must become a service which can better account for itself to the public it serves. It must focus more on prevention. And it must be better managed and more efficient. That is what the changes we propose can bring about.

The role of the fire service has expanded over the years. Although the number of deaths from fire has decreased, the number of injuries has increased. The fire and rescue service has been hampered by:

- an outdated legislative framework;
- an outdated structure;
- weak institutional support;
- an insufficient focus on risk prevention; and
- poor human resources systems.

**5.** The largest single cause of deaths and injuries from fire is accidental fires in the home. There is a growing trend in deliberate fires, up by over 25% since 1996. Those most likely to be at risk from fire, whether accidental or deliberately set, are the poorest in our society. They are more likely to have a fire in the home, and are less likely to be insured.

**6.** The Government's *prevention* strategy rests on three main strands:

- designing fire safety into our homes, offices and other buildings through the Building Regulations;
- maintaining a safe environment, through fire safety and other legislation, which sets out

employers' and commercial property owners' responsibilities; and

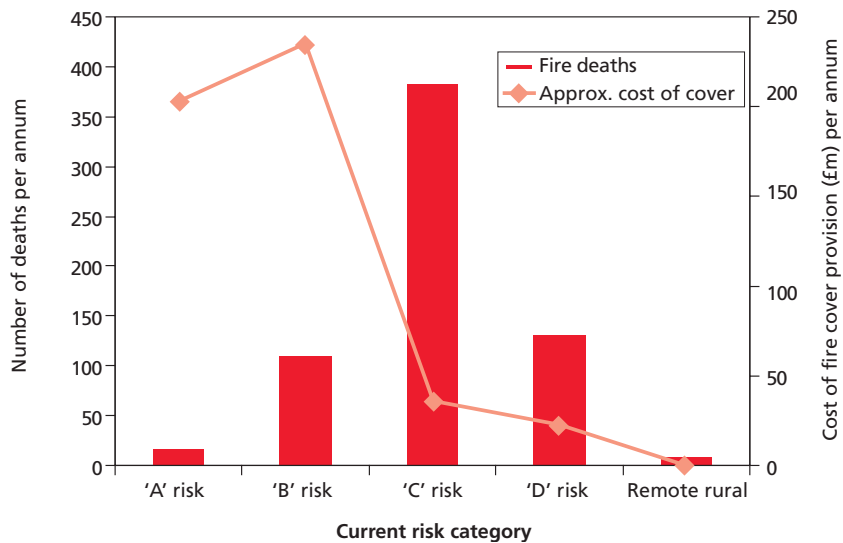
- promoting community fire safety to encourage safe behaviour and to reduce the incidence of arson.

**7.** The fire service has had a key role in this strategy, but its focus until now has been on fire suppression. Traditionally, the fire service has organised its staffing levels and the location of fire fighters, stations and appliances to match nationally prescribed fire cover standards, originally set in the 1930s. The graph opposite shows how inappropriate that allocation of resources is. We will change that focus. In future, the fire and rescue service will plan for, and respond to, emergencies on the basis of risk assessment and management. These new requirements will be brought together in the Integrated Risk Management Plans that each fire authority will be required to produce. They will consult their local communities on these plans, and the fire and rescue service will work with the other emergency services to implement them.

- To create a safer community we will:
- review the Building Regulations to ensure that they address changing trends and new developments in building design;
  - rationalise the existing law on fire safety legislation to facilitate compliance;
  - invest more in community fire safety and arson reduction; and
  - set a new legislative framework, introducing fire cover based upon risk through integrated risk management planning.

8. Implementing our vision for the fire and rescue service in England and Wales will demand new approaches to the overall management of the service. We will set the national strategic direction for the service and ensure that vision is underpinned by a structure that can deliver that strategy. Fire and rescue authorities will be responsible for managing the service at regional and local level. In order to secure the step change that the modernisation agenda requires, and looking ahead to the establishment of elected regional assemblies, we will introduce regional management boards which will lead to greater operational

**Current allocation of resources to risk**



A risk = normally in the largest cities and towns, and including main shopping, business, entertainment or industrial centres

B risk = normally in the larger cities and towns

C risk = normally in the suburbs of the larger towns and in the built-up areas of smaller towns

D risk = all risks other than remote rural

Source: ODPM

efficiency. This will ensure that the new approach to emergency cover can be implemented effectively, which will lead to increased safety for the community, improved protection of property and the environment, and a reduction in deaths and injuries. It will assure increased resilience to emergencies, especially potential chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attack.

**9.** At local level, the fire and rescue service will still appear to local people much as it does now. But local people will benefit from the better use of resources, increased expertise, and good practice sharing that the regional approach will encourage.

**10.** The fire service is currently overseen by a range of institutions. This includes statutory bodies, government bodies and joint employer/employee bodies. Although, when originally set up, they each had a clear role and purpose, over recent years they have not served us well. The role of, and the demands on, the fire and rescue service have expanded, putting a strain on the machinery that it was ill-designed to withstand. Roles and responsibilities have become blurred. The performance of the institutions has been variable. A radical overhaul of those institutions is now well overdue, building on existing bodies where they work well.

In place of the old institutions, we will set up the following:

- an **Advisory Group** to offer the Government advice on the development of strategy for the fire and rescue service;
- a **Service Improvement Team**, comprising government officials, to oversee the programme of change and to ensure that the reforms set out in the White Paper are carried through;
- a **Practitioners' Forum**, comprising fire service employers and employees, to provide practical input to policy making, including the highlighting of best practice; and
- a **Business and Community Safety Forum** to ensure the engagement of the wider stakeholder community – this will be based on the current Fire Safety Advisory Board. We will discuss with the Independent Chairman how the Board can be developed to take on this role.

**11.** The new institutions we propose are shown in the box above. We will look to the Audit Commission and Fire Service Inspectors to provide assurance on the performance of the fire and rescue service. Policy development will be supported by research and

the Fire Service College, which will be enhanced so that it can serve as a 'centre for excellence'.

**12.** The fire service has a long tradition as a locally based service, responsible to the local communities whose areas it serves. That model has existed for many years. While, in some respects, the service continues to perform well in terms of speed of reaction and response to fires, there is much that could be done to improve its performance in preventing fires, enhancing community safety and collaborating more widely.

**13.** A new external inspection regime will be introduced by the Audit Commission to help support improvement and provide the building blocks towards the introduction

of a comprehensive performance assessment. In future, the level of inspection for each fire and rescue authority will reflect its performance. We will work with the Audit Commission to develop this new regime.

**14.** Fire authorities will remain employers of the fire and rescue service locally. But, they will have less involvement in operational affairs. In future, the fire and rescue authorities will set policy and will be accountable for the overall direction and performance of the service, while senior service managers will have operational responsibility to run the service in accordance with those policies.



The reforms in this White Paper will lead to the following changes in the relationship between employers and the fire service:

- fire and rescue authorities will set policy and will be accountable for the overall direction and performance of the service. They will have less involvement in operational affairs;
- senior service managers will be required to use the resources of the service to deliver what the authority has set out in its plans. They will have more operational independence; and
- there will be smaller, more focused negotiating bodies for senior managers, middle managers, fire fighters and control room staff.

**15.** The fire and rescue service is a very attractive place to work, with, on average, some 40 applicants for every post. Applicants to the operational service can only join as trainee fire-fighters and work their way up the ranks – of which there are 12. No qualifications are required to join and there is no process whereby the best performers can progress quickly to senior positions. This acts as a disincentive to graduates or other, ambitious, talented people to join the

service. Only 2% of those employed in the fire service are graduates, compared to 25% in the police.

**16.** The service does not represent the community it serves. Women and ethnic minorities each account for less than 2% of the operational workforce. The pension scheme is expensive – both for fire fighters and the fire authorities – and it is inflexible. At present, those who are no longer fit to carry out the full range of fire-fighting duties are forced to retire. Yet much of the work of the fire and rescue service which is critical for reducing the risk of fire, such as community fire-safety work, does not involve fighting fires. The arrangements for managing discipline are out of date, and the disputes machinery is not effective. And although there is no problem recruiting for ‘wholetime’ fire-fighters, there is a 20% shortage of retained or ‘on-call’ fire-fighters.

**17.** This year the Government, the employers and the unions have approved a new system of training and development, based on national standards and on a framework of skills and competencies – the ‘integrated personal development system’ or IPDS. It will apply to all members of the fire and rescue service, including control room staff, non-uniformed staff, and retained and part-time personnel. It will cover all aspects of activity from initial recruitment, selection, training, in-service development and progression through to retirement.

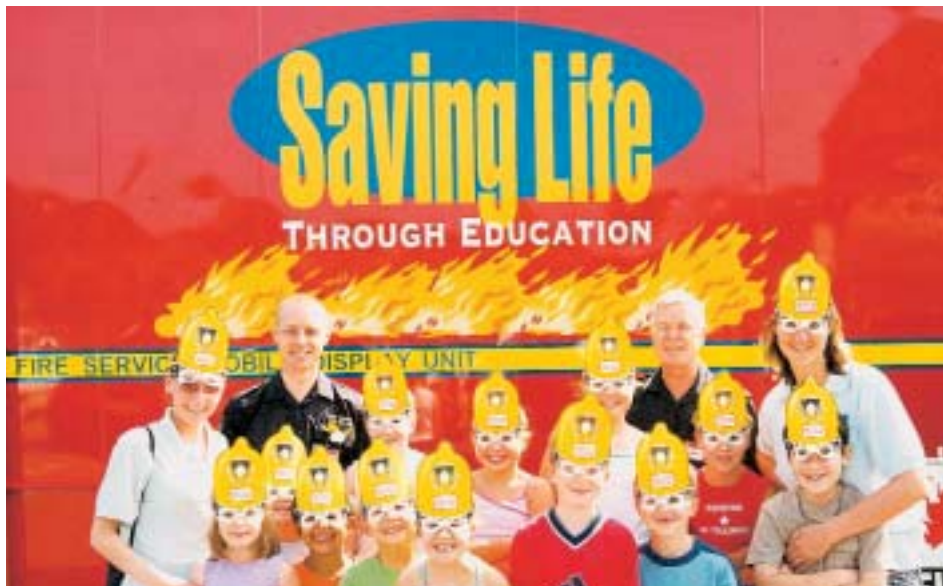


With the introduction of IPDS we intend to:

- replace the 12 ranks of the fire and rescue service with seven 'roles', which reflect the work that fire fighters and other staff actually do;
- introduce multi-level entry, so that people can enter the fire and rescue service at a level appropriate to their qualifications and experience, including the most senior levels; and
- introduce accelerated promotion and development schemes for those staff who have been identified as having the potential to progress quickly.

**18.** The introduction of IPDS, together with opening up recruitment to those with the skills and qualifications to fulfil a role – rather than a rank – should go some way towards tackling the lack of diversity in the service and should offer more opportunities for development and promotion.

**19.** The introduction of more flexible shift patterns should also be attractive to those with family responsibilities. Although popular with many current fire-fighters, the present inflexible shift pattern does not necessarily suit the needs either of the service or of the community it is meant to serve. We will introduce more flexibility to set shift patterns according to need. Those patterns will be consistent with health and safety standards — and management will set them so that they



can be more attractive to a diverse workforce. Fire and rescue service staff will be consulted before variations to local shift systems are introduced. Most changes to the shift system need not be fundamental. A majority of staff would face no immediate change.

**20.** We will introduce a new pension scheme more suited to the service of the future, which will tackle the high cost and inflexibility of the current scheme. We will broaden the definition of the term 'fire fighter' to allow a wider range of those employed in the service to remain in the pension scheme. We will place an obligation on fire and rescue authorities to use independent medical assessment before approving applications for early retirement on ill-health grounds. And we will introduce alternative arrangements for local authority funding of service pensions, in consultation with the fire and rescue service authorities.

**21.** Finally, we will take action to tackle the serious shortage in the numbers of retained fire-fighters. We will look to introduce better pay arrangements and we will introduce an appropriate pension scheme for the retained, recognising the variety of personal circumstances involved. They will have more opportunities for training, development and promotion.

The fire and rescue service is an attractive place to work, but it lacks diversity and there are problems recruiting retained fire-fighters. To tackle this we will:

- introduce the IPDS to improve the recruitment, training and development of staff;
- reform the pension scheme so that it is more attractive to a diverse workforce;
- introduce modern discipline and disputes procedures, based on best practice; and
- improve the employment conditions of retained fire-fighters.

**22.** The changes described in the White Paper will have benefits for everyone:

- **The public** will have the assurance that fire and rescue service resources will be deployed so as to tackle the areas of greatest risk, and the assurance that resources are being deployed efficiently as well as effectively.
- **Business** will have a more manageable framework for fire safety legislation.

- **Fire and rescue authorities** will benefit from a clear framework of accountability.
- **Senior fire and rescue service management** will have greater operational freedom.
- **Fire and rescue staff** will have more opportunities for development and advancement, working practices will be more family friendly and inclusive, and there will be a reward structure that is fair to staff and fair to the public.

**23.** This is a massive agenda for change but it is a necessary one. For too long we have all avoided taking action on these critical issues. The fire and rescue service has a long

and proud tradition. It is regarded well by the public who it serves. But that does not mean it should be immune from change or that the inherent inefficiencies and weaknesses of the system should not be tackled.

They should be and they will be. The Independent Review of the Fire Service last year recommended a programme for change. In the White Paper we set out the way in which such a programme will be implemented. We will reform and transform the fire and rescue service into a service focused on prevention and on its wider new remit. A service that is well managed and efficient. In doing so, we will ensure that our vision of a modern, effective and efficient service for the twenty-first century is delivered.

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