

Fire Vision 2024

FIRE DO NOT CROSS

What will 21st century fire and rescue services look like in 2024?

The fire and rescue service is an emergency response service, an effective prevention service and stands at the heart of our nation's resilience capabilities. It is trusted and respected by its local communities.

We will continue to develop and broaden our role – and our partnerships – to become a response, prevention, and protection service for the 21st century.

Our emergency response role gives us a unique standing. Fire service staff are welcomed into our communities and homes and their advice carries weight with businesses and the public. This relationship will enable us to proactively offer an increasing range of interventions, building on our experience in delivering prevention work and based on local needs and risks.

We will continue to play a key role in enforcing fire safety, maintaining a sustainable fire service, recognising the need for a staff establishment sufficient to manage fire risk.

We will continue to play a key role in ensuring the country's national resilience, through the New Dimension programme.

We will recruit, retain and develop a workforce that reflects the communities it serves. The service will have an inclusive culture, in which everyone is supported to do their best, free of inappropriate or unprofessional behaviour. Our workforce will be flexible, with up-to-date skills, state-of-the-art equipment, first-class training and operating to rigorous professional standards. Taking an evidence-based approach, we will use state-of-the-art technologies to support our prevention and protection role based primarily on risk.

We will be a partner of choice, working with others to shape our places, delivering increasing value for money and exemplifying effective joint working to meet local and national risks efficiently.

As a sector we will share details of successful interventions (and, importantly, those less successful interventions) to support each other to understand and build on what works best and what is most cost-effective.

The delivery of our services will be locally-tailored, overseen by locally-accountable politicians. Our work will be informed and driven by a full understanding of local risks and using a consistent risk assessment process on which local communities will continue to be consulted. It will be overseen by a robust system of independent inspection through Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), supported by a strong sector-led peer challenge offer, delivering a culture of continuous improvement.

The pace of change that we have experienced over the last decade is unlikely to slow in the future. We will be agile in identifying and responding to new risks in our communities. We will be adaptable in engaging in activities to mitigate these risks. This vision will be reviewed and updated on a rolling three years basis, so that each edition sets a strategic direction that can be adjusted in light of the evidence experience produces.

The terrible fire at Grenfell Tower in June 2017 has raised fundamental questions about the regulation of building construction and fire safety. Inquiries into the Grenfell Tower fire are likely to significantly reshape the landscape in which we operate and will produce recommendations which we cannot prejudge. It may be necessary therefore to review this document before the scheduled three-year review period expires.

We will learn from the experience of every incident in order to continuously improve. In this respect, our service will not change.

Mission and Values

Our mission is to serve our communities by preventing harm, protecting life and property and keeping the public safe, both locally and by ensuring national resilience through a full understanding of risk. We want to be a service that reflects the communities it serves.

This mission statement is informed by the values the Fire Commission believes characterise a fire service for the twenty-first century. These are: efficiency, effectiveness, inclusivity, local accountability, national resilience, professionalism, safety, transparency, evidence-based practice and a collaborative approach. We are a team in which every member is valued.

Purpose of the Vision

The Fire Vision 2024 underpins the Government's fire reform programme. The broad parameters of that programme have been set by government, but the process of reform is led by the political and operational leaders of the 45 Fire and Rescue Authorities in England.

The local accountability of our political leaders and the operational independence of our fire service senior managers are essential components of the fire and rescue service as a whole. Politically, fire and rescue authorities in England are currently represented by the LGA's Fire Commission and the Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC) while chief fire officers are represented by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC).

The FSMC and NFCC are brought together by the Fire Reform Board, on which the Home Office is also represented.

This vision is intended to take the fire and rescue service forward and deliver a service for the twenty-first century. This vision is owned by the elected representatives on fire and rescue authorities, represented through the Local Government Association's (LGA) Fire Commission. It will be implemented by the professionals (National Fire Chiefs Council); within parameters established by central government (Home Office).

Much of the detailed work required to implement the vision will take place in the coordination committees which sit beneath the NFCC: Finance; Health; International; Operations; Prevention; Protection and Business Safety; Sector Improvement and Assurance; Sector Resources; and Workforce. These committees will establish ad hoc working groups on specific issues as necessary and Fire Commission members will sit on both the committees and the working groups as necessary.

The Fire Vision is a living document. As new challenges emerge, we will adapt to them; as circumstance change, so will we. The vision will be reviewed and updated to reflect this. The emerging work of the coordination committees will inform this approach. The vision will be reviewed on a rolling three year basis.



Why does the fire and rescue service need to change?

Every service needs to change – to meet new risks, to adapt to social change, to improve effectiveness and efficiency and to grasp the opportunities offered by technological advances.

Perhaps our greatest challenge is financial. We must maintain the ability to cope with major incidents and provide resilience at a national level, while addressing local risks. To achieve this we will need to ensure we extract maximum value from our capacity by continuing to explore the range of roles we perform and continuing to seek more efficient ways of doing so and to maximise flexibility of the funding system. We will continue to engage with our key partners in government to ensure that the funding and resource needs of the fire and rescue service are well communicated, evidenced-based and understood.

The skills our workforce need will change as technological advances and new risks are recognised, this change will include the way we do our jobs and as well as the kind of tasks we undertake.

The fire and rescue service firefighter workforce is currently 95 per cent male and 96 per cent white. This is not acceptable. The fire and rescue service must reflect the make-up of the community it serves if we are to keep up with the pace of change. We cannot afford to restrict the pool of talent from which we recruit and will build on existing work to address this issue.

Traditional barriers to efficiency must be removed and the standards to which we operate must be kept relevant to modern needs. These barriers include elements of the image and culture of our service that deters some potential applicants.

To meet these challenges, we will need to be flexible. There is already a statutory duty to collaborate with police and ambulance services where it improves efficiency and effectiveness. We will need to work in effective partnerships with a wide range of organisations, driving new initiatives to join up services and collaborate; we will need to ensure that we are at the forefront of operational and technological advances and we will need the best recruits, equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and skills, operating to high professional standards.

We are alive to the broader challenges facing our communities. Climate change and pressure to provide an increasing density of housing, including on flood plains, raise the challenge of increased flooding: our preventative role in promoting drowning prevention and our involvement in water-related rescues will continue to be important; we are already working with the police and security services to play our part in meeting the challenge of extremist terror.

In every aspect of change, we need to ensure we have an effective peer challenge process and to share best practice. This will complement the safeguards provided by the new inspection regime.

What will change and how?

Community protection

Our starting point is our experience in fire prevention and protection, emergency response and national resilience.

People must be reassured that when there is an emergency we will be there. We are seeing half the number of fires that we did a decade ago, but we must maintain our capacity to effectively respond to fires and major incidents when they occur.

Our services will be planned primarily on a clear understanding of the risks facing local areas, consistently appraised using a national definition to focus resources on activities where they will have the greatest impact on their communities.

The basis for this is the Integrated Risk Management Plan. National fire and rescue frameworks set expectations for fire and rescue services to identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue-related risks their area may face. There is however, currently no single UK-wide methodology to assess risk and reduce harm in communities.

A clear definition of risk would allow communities to hold the performance of their fire and rescue service to account. However, it is currently difficult to benchmark and compare performance between fire and rescue services given their different approaches to risk management. Working with services to ensure that community risk assessments align to a national definition of risk will allow a consistent approach to community risk management planning and enable services to focus resources on activities where they will have the greatest impact on reducing risk and vulnerability.

We will deliver a wide range of public protection and prevention services, working with a variety of partners. This will enable us to improve our response to risk, both current and new. We will continue to provide value to our communities in an age of contracting budgets. We are ideally placed to do this given our expertise in promoting prevention.

We have learned that the best way to fight fire is to prevent it. Moving away from a Home Fire Risk Check into a broader Safe and Well visit has allowed fire and rescue services to make a wider offer to support community wellbeing and address risks which contribute to vulnerability to – but go beyond – fire.

The challenge we face over the next decade is to use the skills we possess in prevention in new areas of health and community safety, while retaining and improving on our existing capabilities and expertise in fire and rescue.

We will drive down costs and improve performance by sharing services, joining up procurement and investing in technology. These partnerships will be between fire and rescue services and also with other organisations.

We will use the new HMICFRS inspection regime and the refreshed NFCC/LGA peer challenge offer to support and drive innovation and share best practice.

Our ambition is to:

- ensure that our services identify risk appropriately and consistently
- embed collaboration into the everyday experience of all frontline staff
- work in partnership with a wide range other agencies with a community or individual risk reduction focus to explore our involvement into every aspect of community safety – where this offers improved value to the public
- continue to reduce incidents of fire and to work with local businesses to improve fire safety
- seek to reduce the continuing high level of false alarms.

National resilience

We will continue to support a sector-led approach to managing and maintaining the New Dimension assets that support national resilience to ensure that it is integrated into our services everyday business. We will ensure that both control and ownership lies with those bodies charged with protecting their communities.

We will expect that the Government will continue to hold responsibility for the future provision of national resilience capability and dedicated funding.

Workforce

To achieve our aims the workforce needs to continue to develop and change. This process will also be informed by the development of professional standards.

While fighting fires remains essential, increasingly the role of the service is adapting to include new and diverse activities in addition to fighting fires. While it is essential that we maintain a staff establishment sufficient to address fire risk, it is essential that when the workforce is not engaged in fighting and preventing fires it is utilised in the most effective and efficient manner.

Fire services have always been able to respond flexibly to a range of community needs – it's a key reason why fire and rescue services are trusted by our communities, and critical to protect. This trust and confidence is a key feature of our success in engaging communities with prevention agendas.

Examples of our broadening role include:

- initiatives to respond to medical emergencies such as cardiac arrests, and visiting schools to teach CPR and other life-saving techniques
- Safe and Well visits, co-designed through discussions with local health and local authority colleagues in local areas
- making people safe in water – the fire and rescue service performs hundreds of successful rescues each year.

Standards need to be more flexible, while remaining rigorous; for example, fitness standards must be high, but only where they are relevant to the work actually undertaken.

We recognise the benefits of different duty systems. The distinctions between wholetime and on-call firefighters need to be kept under review and removed where they do not deliver benefit to the service and its employees. All firefighters have an essential role to play in the delivery of fire and rescue services and fire and rescue authorities need to be alive to specific needs and challenges of those working different duty systems.

To attract the best recruits we must select them from the broadest range of applicants. To achieve this the current level of diversity within the firefighter workforce specifically, the workforce as a whole, and among volunteers, needs to be improved significantly.

We also need to open ourselves to the wealth of external talent available to fill senior posts and to making the most of the talent we already have by ensuring diversity in promotion and development.

Diversity within the service will be founded upon the further creation of diverse teams and units within it, in line with the NFCCs five-year people strategy.

To achieve these ends we need to be, and to be seen as, an inclusive workplace.

The National Joint Council (NJC) which brings employers' and employee representatives together acts as a vehicle for progressing workforce issues including those related to reform to reflect the change in the role of the service and those who work in it.

The NJC-led Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG), which brings together employees and employers has a crucial role to play in this work. The adoption by fire and rescue services of the IFSG's evidence-based strategies is already underway and will be further encouraged and built upon.

By building a workforce that is truly representative we will enable greater trust, inclusivity and understanding with our local communities. This will support us to understand our communities better so that we can ensure our services are fully inclusive and targeted, in the most cost-effective manner, to reduce risk amongst the most vulnerable.

We recognise that to achieve a truly diverse workforce will take long term commitment, innovation, and bold action to deliver this change. We are determined to build this vital diversity by the use of a wide range of positive action within the bounds of the Equality Act 2010. This will enable us to reach out to those with diverse skills, backgrounds, experiences and aptitudes that will enhance diversity and inclusivity amongst our workforce of the future.

To ensure progress is made the fire and rescue service sector will:

- Set individual organisational goals for BAME recruitment reflective of their own communities based upon the current working population and use this data to direct and guide any positive action.
- Seek to increase the rate of female firefighter recruitment to 30 per cent nationally by 2024/5.
- Commit to addressing unseen and unconscious barriers to underrepresented groups seeking promotion and development opportunities within their organisation. We will use, as an example, the public sector duty to publish pay by gender as the key (but not only) metric to measure progress in this area.
- Publish retention figures to demonstrate progress in this area. This will be as part of the publishing of workforce data as required by the public sector duties of the Equality Act (2010).

Bullying, victimisation, discrimination and harassment will not be tolerated and there will be effective routes to report such behaviour and effective consequences for employees found to have engaged in these practices.

Our standards, our skills and our staff need to be flexible enough to adapt to the changing nature of the job.

Our ambition is that:

- by 2024/5, 30 per cent of new firefighter recruits nationally should be female; this represents a step change for the fire and rescue service and will require a cultural transformation which we are determined to achieve
- in each fire and rescue service both frontline staff and staff as a whole should reflect the ethnic diversity of the community they serve
- the diversity of senior managers mirror these developments
- the gender and ethnic balance in the workforce should not be eroded by poor retention (ie those staff five years in will not be less diverse than the cohort was when recruited)
- staff at all levels and local communities have confidence in the political and operational leadership of their service.

Technology and change

All our work will be driven by evidence-based practice.

The fire and rescue service must grasp the new opportunities offered by technological change.

We will support Fire and Rescue control rooms to embrace and effectively use the latest technology, encourage mutual support to ensure the most resilient call handling arrangements and to engage in, and subsequently implement, forthcoming improvements to the 999/112 infrastructure.

By 2024 it is likely that advances in technology will revolutionise the way we fight and prevent fires and rescue those in danger, while reducing the risk to our own personnel. We want to create a culture and environment where new technologies and data can add value to the activities of the sector and partners, provide improved services and accountability to the community, and allow outcomes to be properly evaluated against objectives.

This change must go hand in hand with more effective procurement, with a national approach, collaborative procurement and procurements aligned to the NFCCs commercial transformation all playing a significant role.

If these opportunities are to be taken we will need to constantly review the skill needs of our staff and provide training that meets those needs. The new professional standards body will be critical to this process, as will its alignment to the requirements of inspection and its relationship to NFCC.

We will seek to digitise backroom and support services wherever this increases efficiency, as well as joining up our procurement practices. Typically, we will share these functions across fire and rescue services and with partners outside the service. The precise pattern will vary between areas but the common factor will be increased efficiency. We will share information and data effectively to better target intervention, whether that is through our young firesetter schemes, Safe and Well visits or any of our other prevention work.

This will further increase the proportion of our spending directed to frontline services.

We will seek both to learn from the best international practice and to be world leaders in developing and marketing new skills and technologies.

Our ambition is to:

- proactively and flexibly seek to deliver high-impact procurements – nationally, regionally and across sectors to deliver better value for taxpayers' money
- maximise the added value and increase efficiency of digital solutions.

Accountability

We are a locally accountable service, providing community leadership and this must continue. Local areas should determine the best form of governance for their communities.

The service's political leaders and chief fire officers will work together, with the Home Office and with partners to ensure each is supported and enabled to lead in their respective fields and to ensure all services learn from the best, and move at the pace of the fastest.

Local people need to feel they own their local fire and rescue service through data and key indicator transparency.

Our ambition is that:

- the LGA and NFCC peer challenge offer will continue to support fire and rescue authorities with their improvement journey, providing a critical friend approach to drive and support change
- the HMICFRS inspection regime is embraced and issues raised through inspection are appropriately responded to
- the public must be able to find out what is being spent, what it is being spent on and what that spending is achieving.



FIRE



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