

# Fire and rescue services in England

A guide for police and crime panel members

# Contents

Foreword	3
The legislative framework	5
Governance and funding arrangements	8
Organisational structures and conditions of service	11
Performance assurance and improvement	13
The evolving fire and rescue service delivery model	15
The Home Office Fire Reform Programme	16
Appendix A – Map of English fire authorities	19



**Greston**  
Associates

This document was produced for the LGA  
by Greston Associates  
[www.greston.co.uk](http://www.greston.co.uk)

# Foreword

As Chairs of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board and Fire Services Management Committee, we are pleased to introduce this short guide about the fire and rescue service in England. The Local Government Association (LGA) has produced the document with Police and Crime Panel (PCP) members in mind as its primary audience, but we hope it will also be of use to others who have an interest in developing their knowledge of how this essential public service is structured and governed, as well as how it goes about delivering services to communities.

The Government's clear intention through the Policing and Crime Act 2017 is to see closer collaboration across the emergency services in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness in public safety, and to deliver better outcomes for communities as a result. The Act introduced a statutory duty for police, fire and ambulance services to collaborate. It also created two distinct routes enabling Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) to have a direct role in the governance of fire and rescue services – either by becoming one of two forms of new 'PCC-style' fire authority, or by being allocated a voting seat on existing fire authorities.

The LGA believes that local areas are best placed to work together to agree the right governance approach for improving efficiency and effectiveness in public services. But whether PCCs become more involved in the work of the fire and rescue service by either of the above governance changes being introduced, or seek to realise the benefits associated with police and fire collaboration by less formal means, the PCPs that hold PCCs to account will need to develop a sound understanding of the fire and rescue

sector, if they are to discharge their wider role effectively.

The LGA is keen to support panel members in this endeavour. This guide has therefore been prepared by the LGA as an early step in the process of supporting PCP members to build their knowledge of the fire and rescue service, so that they can continue to apply their skills and experience from a necessarily well-informed position.

We very much hope you find the document both interesting and informative, and thank you for taking the time to read it.



**Councillor Simon Blackburn**  
Chair, LGA Safer and Stronger  
Communities Board



**Councillor Ian Stephens**  
Chair, LGA Fire Services Management  
Committee

# The legislative framework

Like all public-sector bodies, fire and rescue authorities and the fire and rescue services for which they are responsible, are required to operate in accordance with a wide range of legislation. Much of the legislation in question applies across all public services, but there are some aspects of the legislative landscape that are particularly relevant to the fire and rescue service. This section of the guide provides an overview of each, concentrating particularly on the provisions that are most likely to be of interest to PCP members.

## The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004<sup>1</sup>

This is the main piece of legislation under which fire and rescue services (FRSs) operate. The 2004 Act provides the legal basis establishing fire and rescue authorities (FRAs), the political bodies responsible for overseeing the work of fire and rescue services. It also sets out details of the statutory community safety-orientated duties that fire authorities have. These are referred to as 'core functions' and can be summarised as follows:

- promoting fire safety
- extinguishing fires, and protecting life and property when fires do occur
- minimising damage to property arising from firefighting operations
- rescuing people involved in road traffic collisions
- dealing with other types of emergencies, as specified by the Secretary of State in Statutory Instruments (Orders). Currently,

a single Order<sup>2</sup> has been issued, requiring fire authorities to make provision to attend the following types of incident:

- chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear emergencies
- emergencies involving the collapse of a building or other structure
- emergencies involving trains, trams or aircraft
- ensuring the provision of the resources necessary to meet all normal requirements (the 2004 Act does not define what constitutes 'normal', it is a matter for local determination)
- ensuring necessary training for firefighters
- ensuring that (999) calls for assistance can be dealt with effectively
- obtaining information needed to respond safely and effectively to emergencies.

As well as the duties outlined above, the 2004 Act provides FRAs with a power to exercise their discretion in responding to other emergencies that constitute a risk to life and/or the environment. It is under this power, for example, that fire and rescue services respond to flooding emergencies.

Beyond legislating for the duties and powers of fire and rescue authorities, the 2004 Act also introduced the Fire and Rescue National Framework<sup>3</sup>. The national framework sets out Government's expectations and requirements for FRAs in England. The Secretary of State must keep the document under review, and reports to parliament every two years on the extent to which it is being complied with.

<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/contents)

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/735/article/1/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2007/735/article/1/made)

<sup>3</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-and-rescue-national-framework-for-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fire-and-rescue-national-framework-for-england)

The framework is currently undergoing a substantial review to ensure it takes account of the significant changes taking place in the fire and rescue sector – particularly those associated with the Home Office fire reform programme (see Section 7 of this guide for details).

Whilst there is no absolute legal requirement to adhere to the contents of the framework, the legislation states that FRAs ‘must have regard’ to it in carrying out their functions. In practice, this means that a compelling case would need to be made to justify any departure from the requirements laid out in the framework.

The three priorities specified for FRAs in the current version of the national framework are to:

- identify and assess the full range of foreseeable fire and rescue related risks their areas face, and make provision for delivering services to minimise the risks in question
- work in partnership with their communities and a wide range of partners locally and nationally to deliver their service
- be accountable to communities for the service they provide.

In terms of how FRAs are expected to address these priorities, there are two mechanisms incorporated in the national framework that are central to the process of their doing so. The first is integrated risk management planning (IRMP), and the second involves the preparation of an annual Statement of Assurance.

### **Integrated risk management planning**

Integrated risk management planning is a cyclical process that involves assessing community risk; deciding on steps that need to be taken to manage it efficiently and effectively; implementing the steps in question; and then reviewing their impact before commencing the cycle again. Details associated with each element of this process are required to be published by FRAs in an Integrated Risk Management Plan.

The term ‘integrated’ is used to reflect the fact that community risk is managed by balancing service delivery interventions across three disciplines:

- **prevention** – the practice of trying to prevent emergencies from happening in the first place
- **protection** – the practice of ensuring that fire safety standards in buildings are appropriate
- **response** – the practice of minimising the impact of emergencies through well-trained, well-equipped firefighters responding to them quickly and effectively.

Where the IRMP process leads FRAs to contemplate making material changes to prevention, protection and/or response service provision, there is a requirement to undertake a public consultation on options. FRA members must then ‘conscientiously consider’ consultation responses before deciding on any changes that will be made.

### **Statements of Assurance**

Statements of Assurance<sup>4</sup> are produced annually by FRAs, and published after having been subject to the authority’s scrutiny arrangements. In accordance with the national framework, the statements “...must provide assurance [to government, members of the public and other stakeholders] on financial, governance and operational matters”.

## **The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005<sup>5</sup>**

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (the ‘RRO’ or ‘FSO’) is the legislation under which fire safety standards in almost all buildings are controlled. ‘Single private dwellings’, ie people’s homes, are specifically excluded, although the common areas (access corridors, staircases etc) in blocks of flats do fall within the scope of the RRO.

4 [www.gov.uk/government/publications/statements-of-assurance-for-fire-and-rescue-authorities-in-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statements-of-assurance-for-fire-and-rescue-authorities-in-england)

5 [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2005/1541/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukSI/2005/1541/contents/made)

The RRO replaced previous legislative fire safety requirements with a 'self-compliant' regime. This is based on the principle that those responsible for the day-to-day management of buildings should also be responsible for ensuring that necessary fire safety arrangements are in place. The 'responsible person' is required to undertake a fire risk assessment. They must then use the findings from the assessment to decide on the steps necessary to manage fire risk down to a reasonable level.

FRAs are responsible for enforcing the RRO, and do so by undertaking risk-based inspection programmes. These involve carrying out audits of fire safety arrangements in premises that fire officers consider to present the greatest risk.

## The Policing and Crime Act 2017<sup>6</sup>

The Policing and Crime Act 2017 sets out a number of provisions that will impact on the way in which FRSs operate and are governed. The 2017 Act introduced a statutory requirement for fire, police and ambulance services to collaborate if it is in the interests of each of their efficiency and effectiveness to do so. Where a collaboration agreement would negatively impact efficiency, effectiveness or public safety, the duty to enter into it is set aside.

The Policing and Crime Act also established distinct routes by which Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) can become directly involved in the governance of FRS:

1. By making a business case demonstrating that it would be in the interests of economy, efficiency and effectiveness, or public safety, for a PCC to replace an existing fire authority as a 'PCC-style FRA.' These PCC-style FRAs can be constituted using either a 'governance model' (where employment responsibility for FRS and police employees remains separate), or a 'single employer model'.

6 [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/3/contents/enacted](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/3/contents/enacted)

(where employment responsibility for all employees is combined). Such changes in governance require approval of the Home Secretary, and would lead to PCCs being re-designated as Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners. The PCPs that hold them to account would be similarly re-designated as Police, Fire and Crime Panels.

2. By PCCs being appointed as voting members of existing fire authorities. Such appointments will be subject to agreement by fire authority members, in response to a formal request from a PCC.

The LGA has produced a specific guidance note<sup>7</sup> outlining the key changes introduced by the 2017 Act in terms of changes to the role of PCCs and PCPs and how these may be introduced, which PCPs may wish to refer to alongside this document.

## The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (CDA)<sup>8</sup>

Fire and rescue authorities are designated as 'responsible authorities' under the CDA. This means that they are required to work alongside other responsible authorities (police, local authorities, the probation service, and clinical commissioning groups) on community safety partnerships (CSPs). CSPs are defined as "an alliance of organisations which generate strategies and policies, and implement actions and interventions concerning crime and disorder within their partnership area". In this capacity, they hold a collective, statutory responsibility for reducing crime and disorder, substance misuse and re-offending in each local authority area.

In exercising their functions under the CDA, responsible authorities must have regard to the police and crime objectives set out in the police and crime plan for the police area which comprises, or includes, that local government area.

7 [www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/policing-and-crime-act-2017-implications-police-and-crime-panels](http://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/policing-and-crime-act-2017-implications-police-and-crime-panels)

8 [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/contents)

# The Civil Contingencies Act 2004<sup>9</sup>

The Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) was introduced to establish a coherent framework within which organisations would work together to plan for dealing effectively with major emergencies.

Under the CCA, fire and rescue authorities are designated as 'category 1 responders'. As such, they are members of multi-agency groups known as local resilience forums (LRFs). These LRFs – which cover geographical areas matching the boundaries of police forces – are required to collaborate in undertaking a range of functions:

- assessing the risk of emergencies occurring, and using this risk assessment to compile a community risk register, and inform contingency planning activity
- putting in place emergency plans
- putting in place business continuity management arrangements
- putting in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection matters, and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency
- sharing information with other local responders to enhance coordination
- co-operating with other local responders to enhance coordination and efficiency
- providing advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management (this applies to local authorities only).

---

9 [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/36/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/36/contents)



# Governance and funding arrangements

All fire and rescue services are overseen by fire and rescue authorities (FRAs). There are currently 45 FRAs in England (see map in Appendix A).

## Fire and rescue authority structures

Where fire and rescue services share a boundary with a single upper tier council, the council is the fire authority. In this scenario, the FRS is an integral part of that council, alongside other services such as social care, education, public health and highways. There are currently 15 FRAs of this type in England (13 county councils, the unitary authority in Cornwall, and the Council of the Isles of Scilly).

In non-metropolitan areas where the fire and rescue service's boundary incorporates more than one upper tier council, a stand-alone combined fire authority (CFA) is responsible for its governance. CFAs are comprised of elected councillors appointed by the leaders of each constituent council, with the number of members from each being based on relative population size. The requirement to reflect this, and the need to achieve political balance, informs a calculation on the overall size of CFAs, with the largest having around 25 members. There are currently 23 CFAs in England.

In metropolitan areas (with the exception of London and Manchester), arrangements are similar to those in areas where CFAs exist, with members being appointed from constituent metropolitan councils. Five FRAs of this type currently exist in England.

London has a unique governance structure in comparison to other fire and rescue authorities. Currently the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) is the fire and rescue authority responsible for exercising the fire function in London, while the mayor is accountable for setting the annual budget.

However, the existing arrangements are being reformed in 2018 when overall responsibility for London Fire and Rescue is due to switch from LFEPA to the mayor. The London Fire Commissioner will then fulfil the statutory role of the fire and rescue authority and be the functional body for fire in the Greater London Authority.

Greater Manchester fire service also now comes under the control of a mayor, although unlike in London the mayor is the fire and rescue authority. The mayor is responsible for discharging the duties of the fire and rescue authority, and is supported in this role by a Fire Committee, comprising 15 members – all of whom are appointed from the ten local authorities in the Greater Manchester area.

The above summary provides a snapshot of the FRA governance arrangements in place or due to be commenced at the time of drafting this guide. These are certain to change over time, as PCCs and combined authority mayors replace existing fire authorities in some areas, and the changes in London come into effect. They may also change as a result of fire authorities voluntarily deciding to merge, as was recently the case in Dorset and Wiltshire.



# The governance role of fire and rescue authorities

The governance role of FRAs generally reflects that found in local authorities.

Essentially, FRA members are responsible – with support from their officer colleagues – for determining the policy direction of their FRS; setting a budget to fund delivery of that policy direction; and undertaking scrutiny to ensure that intended outcomes are being achieved economically, efficiently, effectively and in accordance with statutory requirements.

In contrast to the police service, where both chief constables and PCCs can be responsible for employing staff, FRAs are employing authorities that employ all FRS staff – both uniformed (operational staff) and non-uniformed (support staff). Another material difference in the relationship between employees and the employing body is that, in the FRS, there is no requirement for the chief fire officer and firefighters to retain operational independence.

In practice, many of the FRAs' legal responsibilities and other functions are assigned to sub-committees of the authority, or to senior officers via formal schemes of delegation.

FRAs must appoint the following statutory officers, who, in combination, are required to ensure that the authority conducts its affairs appropriately:

- A head of paid service, who is responsible for:
  - overall corporate management and operational activity of the FRS
  - provision of professional advice to the FRA and its committees
  - ensuring a system for recording and reporting FRA decisions, together with the monitoring officer.
- A chief finance officer, who is responsible for:
  - establishing a framework for the proper administration of the FRA's financial affairs

- setting and monitoring compliance with financial management standards
  - establishing an adequate and effective system of internal audit
  - advising on the corporate financial position, and key controls necessary for sound financial management
  - giving accurate, impartial advice and information on financial issues to the FRA, and the FRS's senior management team.
- A monitoring officer, who is responsible for:
    - standards of conduct for members of the FRA
    - maintaining the FRA's constitution
    - ensuring a system for recording and reporting FRA decisions, together with the head of paid service
    - together with the chief finance officer, advising the FRA when their decisions are not in accordance with the policy and budget framework
    - ensuring that no action of the FRA contravenes any legislation or code of practice, or may lead to a charge of maladministration
    - preparing a formal report for the FRA, after consultation with the head of paid service and chief finance officer, where they consider that any proposal, decision or omission will give rise to unlawfulness or maladministration.

Where PCC-style FRAs are formed in the future, in accordance with provisions contained in the Policing and Crime Act 2017, PCCs will also be required to appoint individuals into each of the above statutory roles; however they can be shared between the PCC style FRA and PCC's office.

## Handling of complaints

Whilst the number of complaints received about FRAs and the FRSs for which they are responsible are, relatively, very low, they do occur and are handled using internal complaints procedures. The procedures in question include levels of appeal that can be pursued by complainants who are dissatisfied with an initial response. They can also refer their complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman<sup>10</sup>, if they remain dissatisfied, having exhausted all levels of appeal in the FRA/FRS's complaints procedure. There is currently no equivalent to the Independent Police Complaints Commission<sup>11</sup> in the fire and rescue sector.

## National leadership and representation for fire and rescue authorities

The LGA plays a central role in coordinating the efforts of, and providing representation for, FRAs in England. The LGA's Fire Commission<sup>12</sup> provides a forum to discuss and develop policy positions on matters of common interest and concern to fire authorities. The Fire Commission has a Fire Services Management Committee (FSMC)<sup>13</sup> which acts on behalf of the commission.

Members of the FSMC also represent their Fire Commission colleagues on a recently-formed Fire Reform Board (England). This board brings these political leaders from the LGA together with representatives from the Home Office, and the National Fire Chiefs Council<sup>14</sup> (the fire service equivalent of the National Police Chiefs Council, formerly known as the Chief Fire Officers' Association) to collectively and strategically shape the national FRS reform agenda.

## Funding arrangements

The vast majority of the financial resources available to FRAs are provided by a combination of council tax and funding from central government. Government funding is provided through the local government finance settlement in the form of revenue support grant (a general grant to meet revenue costs) and business rate retention. Other ring-fenced grants are also provided for specific purposes.

Beyond these main sources of funding, FRAs raise funds through charging for some non-emergency services, and a number also generate income from commercial trading activities.

Where, in the future, PCCs become PCC-style fire authorities, they will receive funding in the same way. In doing so, they will be required to establish and maintain a fire fund – mirroring the existing arrangements for PCCs in relation to their police fund. The intention of this arrangement is to ensure that two separate budgets for police and fire will be operated in order to provide clarity and transparency in funding.

<sup>10</sup> [www.lgo.org.uk/](http://www.lgo.org.uk/)

<sup>11</sup> [www.ipcc.gov.uk/](http://www.ipcc.gov.uk/)

<sup>12</sup> <http://lga.moderngov.co.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=171>

<sup>13</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Fire%20Services%20Management%20Committee%20Member.pdf](http://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Fire%20Services%20Management%20Committee%20Member.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/About](http://www.nationalfirechiefs.org.uk/About)

# Organisational structures and conditions of service

## Organisational structures

The organisational structures found in FRSs are similar to those that exist in police forces. Typically, a senior executive officer will have overall responsibility for the leadership and management of the organisation. This overall responsibility is then delegated through other senior officers who lead different directorates/ departments that provide a variety of service delivery and service support functions.

Uniformed officers in FRSs work in a number of roles that broadly match police service ranks, in terms of the levels of managerial responsibility that they are assigned:

Fire and rescue service	Police service
Chief fire officer/ commissioner*	Chief constable/ commissioner
Deputy chief fire officer/deputy commissioner	Deputy chief constable/deputy commissioner
Assistant chief fire officer/ assistant commissioner	Assistant chief constable/ assistant commissioner
Area manager	Chief superintendent
Group manager	Superintendent
Station manager	Chief inspector
Watch manager	Inspector
Crew manager	Sergeant
Firefighter	Constable

\*Unlike chief constables, chief fire officers are not always the most senior executives in fire and rescue services. In county council FRSs (see Section 3), for example, chief fire officers typically report to a chief executive who has cross-functional responsibility for all council service areas.

## Conditions of service

In general terms, conditions of service for the vast majority of staff working in FRSs are determined by national negotiating bodies, with some variations to these being put in place via agreements negotiated locally between FRAs and trade unions.

For FRS staff in uniformed roles from firefighter to area manager-level, national conditions of service are negotiated by the National Joint Council (NJC) for local authority fire and rescue services. This NJC is chaired by an independent person and comprised of employer and employee representatives, who are largely drawn from FRAs and trade unions, respectively. It also includes a middle managers' negotiating body to handle any issues relating to employees in middle management roles only. The NJC is a UK-wide body and the LGA is the majority stakeholder on the employers' side. The conditions of service negotiated by the NJC are published in a scheme of conditions of service document, referred to as the 'Grey Book' (this is currently being updated).

A separate NJC exists for uniformed officers in the role of assistant chief fire officer, deputy chief fire officer and chief fire officer, or equivalent (collectively referred to as brigade managers), the National Joint Council for Brigade Managers of Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services. Again, this NJC is a UK-wide body comprising employer and employee representatives and, from an English perspective, the majority stakeholder on the employers' side is the LGA. It is chaired by a member elected from the membership of the council, rather than an independent person.

The conditions agreed by this body are published in a document referred to as the 'Gold Book'. Approximately 80 per cent of all FRAs choose to apply Gold Book conditions for senior uniformed staff. Of those who do not, some (mainly county council FRSs) apply conditions put in place by the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for Chief Officers of Local Authorities<sup>15</sup>. The remaining FRAs apply conditions that are negotiated locally.

As far as senior non-uniformed staff are concerned (ie those at a level equivalent to brigade Managers), FRAs either employ such staff under JNC terms and conditions, or terms that are subject to local negotiation.

Conditions of service for non-uniformed staff below senior management levels tend to be aligned to those of workers in local government. For the majority of these staff, therefore, the conditions in question are negotiated by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services and published in a document referred to as the 'Green Book'.

---

<sup>15</sup> [www.emcouncils.gov.uk/write/JNC%20for%20Chief%20Officers%20handbook.pdf](http://www.emcouncils.gov.uk/write/JNC%20for%20Chief%20Officers%20handbook.pdf)

# Performance improvement and assurance

As is the case with all public-sector organisations, FRAs are accountable for their performance – both in terms of actively seeking opportunities to maximise it, and providing assurance to government, the public and other stakeholders that they are performing economically, efficiently, effectively and in accordance with the law.

Historically, the regime for driving improvement and providing assurance about the performance of FRAs incorporated independent inspection bodies. Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate undertook this function for many years. In 2004, it was dissolved and replaced in its role by the Audit Commission. The Commission carried out performance inspections using a methodology known as comprehensive performance assessment, which evolved into comprehensive area assessment.

In 2010, the Coalition Government decided to close down the Audit Commission. This decision heralded the abolition of independent inspection and regulation in the fire and rescue sector, and the introduction of sector-led performance improvement and assurance.

## Sector-led performance improvement

In this deregulated performance improvement environment, it became crucial for FRAs to oversee the development and implementation of extremely robust performance management systems. In aggregate, these systems need to ensure that an FRA's policy agenda is fit-for-purpose, and that it is being delivered efficiently, effectively and in accordance with the law and industry

good practice. As public bodies that are, essentially, self-policing, FRAs must also operate a highly-effective scrutiny function to have in place the critical friendship and challenge that is central to the process of driving performance improvement and ensuring compliance.

In developing and operating these performance management systems, FRA members draw extensively on the internal experience and expertise of their FRS officer colleagues. In addition, they are required and able to engage expert external opinion in three particular areas of activity:

1. **Financial management** – FRAs are required to publish the financial results of their activities for the year. This statement of accounts needs to provide a true and fair view of the financial position and transactions of the authority, and must be formally signed off and published. Prior to sign off by the FRA, the financial accounts that inform the statement must be audited and commented upon by independent and suitably qualified auditors.
2. **Governance** – FRAs are also required to prepare and publish annual governance statements, in support of their statements of accounts. These governance statements are an expression of the measures taken by the authority to ensure appropriate business practice, high standards of conduct and sound governance. Again, FRAs are required to engage independent auditors to support the process of preparing governance statements that provide a “true and fair” view of the way in which FRAs are conducting their affairs.

3. **Operational performance** – FRAs have the option to commission a process known as Operational Assessment and Fire Peer Challenge<sup>16</sup>. The process – which is facilitated by the LGA – begins with officers undertaking a self-assessment of the FRS's operational service delivery arrangements. This self-assessment then provides the focus of a peer challenge. The peer challenge element involves a team, comprising officers from other FRSs and an elected member from another FRA, independently evaluating particular aspects of the self-assessment. The aspects selected as focus-areas for the peer challenge are determined by the FRA, based on what the self-assessment 'tells' them about where their performance improvement efforts should be concentrated. Following a peer challenge, the lead peer (a chief Fire officer/chief executive/commissioner) will prepare a report for the 'host' FRA, summarising their team's view of operational performance in the areas that formed the basis of the challenge. The FRA is then expected to feed outputs from the peer challenge into its performance improvement systems, and also has the option of publishing the report. In practice, all FRAs have taken the option to undergo peer challenges, and typically do so every three years.

## Performance assurance

The fire and rescue national framework states that "FRAs must provide annual assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and show how they have had due regard to the expectations set out in their integrated risk management plan and the requirements included in the framework. To provide assurance, FRAs must publish an annual statement of assurance." In essence, this requirement places a duty on FRAs to make a public declaration about the adequacy of their arrangements in connection with financial management, governance and operational service delivery.

<sup>16</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/access-new-operational-as-c7f.pdf](http://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/access-new-operational-as-c7f.pdf)

Guidance on the production of statements of assurance<sup>17</sup> confirms that the financial and governance elements of them are likely to be satisfied by publishing the FRA's statement of accounts and annual governance statement, respectively – both of which have been informed by independent audit. The position with the operational element is materially different, however, in that it is informed by advice from officers and should be subject to internal scrutiny, but does not undergo any form of independent audit. The only independent 'feed' into this aspect of the annual statement of assurance is peer challenge – a process that, typically, happens every three years, and is confined to focusing on areas of service delivery that are determined in advance by the FRA.

## The future of inspection

The current government has made it quite clear that they do not consider the 'self-regulatory' performance management regime that is currently in place to be suitable or sufficient. Ministers have expressed particular concern about the lack of independent scrutiny of operational service delivery arrangements, although they do see potential value in a reformed peer challenge process, as a sector led improvement tool.

In order to address these concerns, the Policing and Fire Minister recently announced that the remit of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary would be extended to the inspection of fire and rescue services in England. To reflect its broader role, the organisation has changed its name to HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services.

In response to the decision to reintroduce independent inspection, the LGA and National Fire Chiefs Council have commenced a joint review of the current peer challenge process. The intention of the review is to determine whether and how peer challenge needs to be reconfigured, so that it can continue to add performance improvement value, alongside the incoming programme of independent inspection.

<sup>17</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/statements-of-assurance-for-fire-and-rescue-authorities-in-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statements-of-assurance-for-fire-and-rescue-authorities-in-england)



# The evolving fire and rescue service delivery model

The early 21st century has seen something of a transformation in the way fire and rescue services work to deliver excellent outcomes for, and with, communities. A number of trends have been central to this transformation, with perhaps the most significant involving:

- **De-centralisation** – the decision to abolish national standards of fire cover, and replace them with integrated risk management planning, enabled local FRAs to carefully analyse community risk in the specific areas for which they are responsible, and then tailor fire and rescue services to address that risk. In doing so, the targeted approach used now involves balancing risk management activities across three disciplines: prevention, protection and emergency response.
- **A shift from emergency response to prevention** – the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 introduced a statutory duty to promote fire safety. This, combined with removal of a perverse funding arrangement (where the more fires that were attended one year, the more funding FRAs received from government the next), shifted thinking on how to manage community risk. Rather than doing so, primarily, by firefighters attending and mitigating the impact of fires and other emergencies, the focus shifted towards working to prevent emergencies from happening in the first place. This move towards prevention in favour of emergency response was key to reducing the number of emergencies attended by two-thirds, and halving annual fire death figures in less than fifteen years.
- **Greater collaboration** – collaboration has become an increasingly important feature of the fire and rescue service's work. It has, firstly, been used as a means of reducing costs in an environment of shrinking financial resources and, secondly, to improve outcomes for communities by aligning and/or integrating its frontline services with those of other organisations. Within the context of collaborative service delivery, the fire and rescue service has found its respected, trusted and inspiring brand to be of particular value in engaging vulnerable people and supporting them to lead safe and fulfilling lives. Some examples of the collaborative work in which fire and rescue services are involved with the other emergency services can be found in a National Overview 2016<sup>18</sup> document produced by the Emergency Services Collaboration Working Group. Beyond this 'blue-light' collaboration, the FRS is engaged in a wealth of other collaborative work with local government, the NHS and other public, private and voluntary sector organisations.

In combination, the above trends have seen the fire and rescue service in England evolve from being a relatively narrowly focused emergency service, into a community risk management organisation that also contributes significantly to a much broader safety, health and wellbeing agenda. The LGA's Beyond Fighting Fires<sup>19</sup> publication highlights some of the work that fire services have achieved through this agenda.

<sup>18</sup> <https://aace.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/National-overview-v13-WEB.pdf>

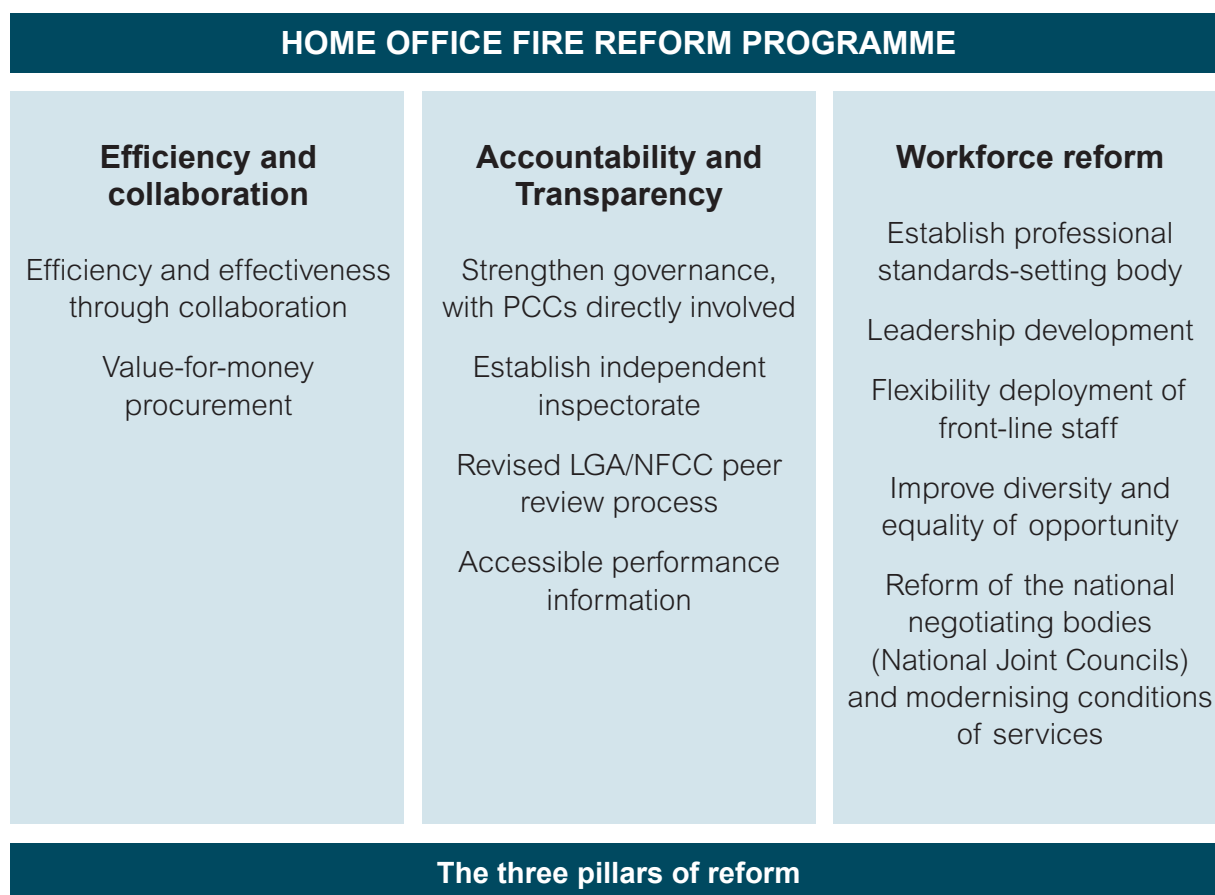
<sup>19</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/beyond-fighting-fires-2](http://www.local.gov.uk/beyond-fighting-fires-2)



# The Home Office Fire Reform Programme

Essentially, this guide has been prepared to provide a snapshot of the English fire and rescue service in mid-2017. Clearly, the service will continue to evolve and, in terms of its direction of travel, perhaps the most significant influencing factor will be the reform programme that has emerged since policy responsibility for the fire and rescue service transferred from the Department for Communities and Local Government back to the Home Office in 2015.

The narrative in support of the fire reform programme – as articulated by the Home Secretary and Policing and Fire Minister – has, in summary, been that “...the fire and rescue service has made good progress but that reform now needs to go further and faster”. The programme itself is structured under three headings, described as ‘pillars’, with each comprising a number of workstreams, as illustrated in the diagram below:



## Pillar one – efficiency and collaboration

The Government believes that, whilst FRAs have already secured significant financial savings, more can be achieved without compromising the quality of frontline service delivery. In particular, ministers point to the potential for further efficiency savings through greater collaboration and improved procurement practice.

On the issue of collaboration, the Government has legislated through the Policing and Crime Act 2017 to introduce a statutory responsibility for the fire, police and ambulance services to collaborate in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness. Ministers also recognise the potential benefits of collaboration beyond the ‘blue-light’ service arena, but have stated that such collaboration must not take place at the expense of an FRS’s core, statutory functions.

As far as procurement is concerned, the Government has made clear that it expects to see significant financial savings achieved through improved practice in this area. In response, FRSs will be working to combine their efforts – both in terms of shaping markets through a centralised research and development function, and using joint procurement to secure better deals by leveraging additional spending power.

## Pillar two – accountability and transparency

In the Government’s view, accountability for the FRS can be increased by enabling PCCs to bring “...the same direct democratic mandate to oversight of fire and rescue as already exists in policing”. This is the backdrop to the potential governance changes introduced by the Policing and Crime Act 2017 summarised in the LGA’s briefing document<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/policing-and-crime-act-2017-implications-police-and-crime-panels](http://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/policing-and-crime-act-2017-implications-police-and-crime-panels)

Another strand of the Government’s agenda to increase accountability of FRSs has seen the re-introduction of an independent inspectorate. Responsibility for inspection in the fire and rescue sector now rests with the recently-expanded HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS). The Inspectorate will assess and report upon the efficiency, effectiveness and leadership of FRSs, and is expected to commence consultation on its inspection programme shortly.

Against this background of independent inspection being reintroduced, the Government has asked the LGA to bring forward proposals for revising the peer challenge process that has been used by FRAs as a performance improvement tool since 2009 (see Section 5). The intention of this revision is to ensure that the peer challenge process complements the work of the inspectorate, and continues to add value as a sector-led improvement process.

As a means of increasing transparency, the Government has committed to the introduction of a website that will mirror for the FRS what can be seen on [www.police.uk](http://www.police.uk). The website – which will be operational by late 2017 – will hold a range of information to help the public and other stakeholders assess the performance of their local FRS, as well as information about chief officer pay, expenditure, accounts, efficiency plans, workforce composition and operational activity.

## Pillar three – workforce reform

The Government considers workforce reform to be of central importance to the process of achieving positive change in the fire and rescue service. In order to deliver necessary reform across the FRS workforce, ministers have identified a number of issues that require particular attention.

Firstly, the Government has made a commitment to establish a body which will set professional standards in the fire and rescue sector. It is considered that, by establishing such a body, FRS staff will increasingly think of themselves as one profession with common goals and standards, "...rather than individuals working for 45 separate services". The new standards body will work with all the organisations that are currently devising standards to develop and test new ones, and to consider the effectiveness of the ones that already exist.

It is expected that HMICFRS will also inspect against the standards this body sets and, in turn, that the standards body will carefully consider the inspectorate's findings when setting its standards.

At the time of writing this guide, a working group led by a chief fire officer is developing proposals for funding the standards body, as well as those associated with its scope and remit. The proposals in question are due to be brought forward in September 2017, and it is anticipated that the new body will be operational by the end of the year. Once established, it will either be affiliated to the College of Policing, or be part of a fully combined College of Policing and Fire.

In identifying other priority areas for workforce reform, the Home Office has drawn heavily on the findings and recommendations set out in a report<sup>21</sup> produced by Adrian Thomas, which was published in 2016. The report in question was commissioned by the Government to review the conditions of service for fire and rescue staff. It explored a broad range of issues and made forty-five associated recommendations (described as 'key findings').

Of these, a number related to issues that the Government has selected as key focus areas for its FRS reform programme:

- the need to develop strong, capable leadership
- the need to introduce flexible employment practices, to support flexible approaches to service delivery
- an imperative to increase diversity and equality of opportunity in the service
- the need to review the structure and role of the National Joint Council, to ensure that it enables workforce reform.

## The Fire Reform Board (England)

In order to ensure that the political and professional leadership of the fire and rescue service is engaged in the process of shaping details of the Home Office fire reform programme, a Fire Reform Board (England) has been formed. As explained in Section 3, the board brings political leaders from the LGA together with representatives from the Home Office, as well those from the National Fire Chiefs Council (the fire service equivalent of the National Police Chiefs Council), to collectively and strategically shape the national FRS reform agenda in England. Further information is available on the LGA website<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/conditions-of-service-for-fire-and-rescue-staff-independent-review](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/conditions-of-service-for-fire-and-rescue-staff-independent-review)

<sup>22</sup> [www.local.gov.uk/fire-reform-board-england](http://www.local.gov.uk/fire-reform-board-england)

# Map of English fire and rescue authorities



- Metropolitan fire and rescue authorities, the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority, and 'mayoral' fire authority in Manchester.
- Combined fire and rescue authorities
- County council fire and rescue authorities



**Local Government Association**

Local Government House  
Smith Square  
London SW1P 3HZ

Telephone 020 7664 3000  
Fax 020 7664 3030  
Email [info@local.gov.uk](mailto:info@local.gov.uk)  
[www.local.gov.uk](http://www.local.gov.uk)

© Local Government Association, September 2017

For a copy in Braille, larger print or audio,  
please contact us on 020 7664 3000.  
We consider requests on an individual basis.

REF 10.8