



Fire Brigades Union
The professional voice of your firefighters

FBU Submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review 2015

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Fire Brigades Union
Bradley House
68 Coombe Road
Kingston upon Thames
Surrey
KT2 7AE

020 8541 1765
www.fbu.org.uk

Foreword

by Matt Wrack, general secretary, Fire Brigades Union

In the last parliament government cut 30% of its central funding to the fire and rescue service. As a result of that nearly 7,000 firefighters jobs went and more than 40 stations closed. Equipment and appliances were also cut.

We have seen unprecedented cuts, and last year was the worst single year for firefighter job cuts in the UK. The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) is clear that these cuts cannot continue. Emergency response times are slowing, emergency response is increasingly under-resourced and public safety is being put at risk.

Government ministers are now planning further cuts of anything between 25% and 40% across government departments. Cuts on this scale would decimate the fire and rescue service as we know it. This document is the FBU submission to the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), where we explain why it would be ludicrous and dangerous to continue with the austerity agenda in the fire and rescue service.

We have been discussing with fire service employers through the National Joint Council about the future of our profession and our service. These discussions have been prompted by a desire to assess what new work firefighters are already doing and what new risks the fire and rescue service should consider addressing. This dialogue has taken place through five key work streams looking at: emergency medical response; multi agency response (to terrorism or other wide-scale threats); environmental challenges; youth and other social engagement work; and inspection and enforcement. All of these work areas have the potential to transform the work that firefighters do and the potential to make a valuable contribution to improving public safety. It would be ludicrous to make further cuts to fire service funding at the very time when the fire service is discussing broadening its role. The risks to our communities are constantly evolving. We have seen the drastic effect of extreme weather and the role that firefighters have played in protecting our communities from these threats. Firefighters rescued 2,000 people during the 2013-14 winter floods. In past decades we have seen firefighters respond to the 7/7 bombing and the civil disturbances in 2011. Firefighters play a vast, diverse and ever expanding role in our communities.

Recent research found that firefighters rescued nearly 38,000 people last year. However only 10% of these rescues were at fires. Firefighters respond to a wide range of incidents including road traffic accidents, industrial disasters, flooding and lift rescues, as well as major incidents.

The Comprehensive Spending Review must take into account the vital role firefighters play in our communities. There are clearly debates ongoing about the structure of the service and the work that firefighters do. The fire and rescue service provides outstanding value for money to local communities as well as offering a wider national structure for emergency response in a range of situations. Give us the tools and resources and we'll do the job!



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Introduction

This is the Fire Brigades Union's submission to the Treasury's Spending Review, announced on 16 July 2015. The FBU is the authoritative, professional voice of firefighters across the UK. The union represents the majority of 50,000 firefighters in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, including wholetime (full-time) and retained (part-time, on-call) operational firefighters and control staff. The fire and rescue service is an indispensable public service, a public good held in high esteem by the taxpayers who fund it and who receive a first-class service. The FBU wants the fire and rescue service to thrive as the economy recovers and is determined to enlist government financial support for our irreplaceable work.

Firefighters' wide-ranging contribution

The Treasury document, 'A country that lives within its means: Spending Review 2015', states that the government is committed to putting Britain's security first.¹ Although the paper understandably refers to the economy, it implicitly assumes that the role of the state is to ensure the UK is resilient in the face of a range of threats, now and in the foreseeable future.

Earlier this year, the previous government published the latest edition of the 'National Risk Register of Civil Emergencies', the unclassified version of the National Risk Assessment.² The register covers a range of civil emergencies that threaten serious damage to our welfare, the environment and security. A striking number of these threats are matters dealt with by the fire and rescue service:

- Terrorist attacks
- Coastal and inland flooding
- Storms and gales, low temperatures and heavy snow
- Heatwaves and severe wildfires
- Public disorder (such as the civil disturbances in 2011)
- Pandemic influenza and related outbreaks of disease
- Major industrial and transport accidents

Firefighters plan, prepare and train for these kind of emergencies. Some of the risks posed by these events have increased in recent years. With climate change, many of the risks are likely to increase in the foreseeable future. Others events are highly uncertain and difficult to quantify, with multiple events a real possibility to plan for. All assume that the fire and rescue service is prepared, equipped and staffed to meet every challenge thrown at it. The government's planning for these risks assumes there are sufficient firefighters available to tackle these emergencies and that the fire and rescue service is resilient in the face of these threats. The FBU believes that, worryingly, this is no longer the case.

Modernising the fire and rescue service

The fire and rescue service has evolved since it was fully constituted after the Second World War. Firefighters have never simply dealt with fires: floods, car accidents, chemical hazards and a wide range of other emergencies have long been part of the service's rescue repertoire. Currently, the FBU along with our employers are engaged through the National Joint Council (NJC), the negotiating body that sets firefighters pay and conditions, to implement an ambitious modernisation programme for the fire and rescue service. Working constructively through the National Joint Council with representatives of the fire service national employers, the FBU is participating in five central workstreams that will transform the service firefighters provided to the public. The workstreams are:

- Emergency medical response
- Multi agency emergency response to terrorism
- Environmental challenges
- Youth and other social engagement work
- Inspections and enforcement.

In addition, the FBU is engaged in the Joint Working Group on Firefighter Fitness, set up by the previous fire minister and convened by the chief fire and rescue advisor in England. The group has made substantial progress with resolving issues arising from the new firefighters' pension scheme, and should result in a common fitness standard, mandatory standardised fitness testing and non-punitive rehabilitation and retirement arrangements.

Investment in the fire and rescue service

The fire and rescue service is embarking on a substantial agenda of change, potentially supported by all major stakeholders including the FBU. However this agenda would be at risk from deep spending cuts over the next two years. The FBU is alarmed by media reports that ministers are discussing further 25% or even 40% of cuts outside protected areas over the next five years and the inevitable risks to public safety that will ensue should they go ahead.

The contribution made by firefighters stretches across a range of government departments. Although formally located within the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), there is clear overlap with the Cabinet Office on civil contingencies, with the Department of Health for emergency medical response, Defra on flooding, the Ministry of Defence on terrorism, the Department for Education for our youth programmes and even to the Department for International Development with our overseas urban search and rescue work. Firefighters contribute to all these areas, adding value and expertise.

The Treasury states that Spending Review 2015 is “an opportunity to review the role of government, ensure that public spending is sustainable for future generations, and deliver public services in a modern way that meets people’s expectations about decisions that affect them and their communities”. For the fire and rescue service it is a unique time when spending decisions can contribute to service improvement. The government says it will “ensure that spending on key services is prioritised and delivers value for money for the taxpayer”.

The Treasury says the Spending Review will prioritise spending according to some core outcomes:

- promoting innovation and greater collaboration in public services
- promoting growth and productivity, including through radical devolution of powers to local areas in England
- delivering high-quality public services, such as the NHS
- promoting choice and competition
- driving efficiency and value for money across the public sector

The FBU believes our programme for progressive change will deliver these objectives. We have organised our submission around these headings to demonstrate to the Treasury that the fire and rescue service can make a substantial contribution, while avoiding the mistaken blind alleys. But the government must invest in the fire and rescue service if it is genuinely committed to promoting these changes.

Priorities for Spending Review 2015

1. Promoting innovation and greater collaboration in public services

The Treasury's first stated objective is to promote innovation and greater collaboration in public services. Firefighters contribute to a wide range of other public services, including those with protected budgets. Firefighters already work collaboratively with the ambulance service and the NHS, with plans in place to deepen this work in the near future (see below). Firefighters have been recognised by the Prime Minister's Big Society awards for our work with young people in schools and on crime reduction. Firefighters have a proud record of international solidarity through our urban search and rescue (USAR) teams and other specialist teams, who assisted rescue efforts most recently in Nepal and Bosnia.

Within the fire and rescue service, the FBU is working with our employers on five central workstreams to transform the service firefighters provide to the public. Unions and employers met regularly between December 2014 and May 2015. The National Joint Council accepted reports in June and agreed a second phase of this work, including planning the detailed implementation of the outcomes. These workstreams are:

- Emergency medical response
- Multi agency emergency response to terrorism
- Environmental challenges
- Youth and other social engagement work
- Inspections and enforcement.

Emergency medical response

Emergency medical response is probably the greatest contribution firefighters might make to promoting innovation and greater collaboration in public services at present. The government intends to implement a 24/7 National Health Service and Simon Stevens, chief executive of the NHS told a Local Government Association conference in July 2014 that firefighters should make pensioners' homes safe in a bid to ease the numbers of elderly people being treated in hospitals for falls.³



The FBU raised a range of operational concerns a decade ago when the government of the day tried to impose co-responding on firefighters. The FBU has long supported good quality first aid training for firefighters and the presence of defibrillators on fire engines. Although fire service co-responding currently involves very few mostly retained firefighters spread thinly across 20 brigades, firefighters work alongside our colleagues in the ambulance service on a daily basis. In recent years there have been some efforts to address operational concerns through memoranda of understanding, legal protection, equipment and training to ensure fire cover is not adversely affected.

The FBU conference in May 2015 decided to open negotiations with our employers on emergency medical response. The union now believes that it is in the best interests of the public, the fire and rescue service and firefighters themselves to be involved with emergency medical response. This means for the first time FBU members will be involved in a range of pilots to expand the role of the fire and rescue service in medical care. This will help the ambulance service prioritise its own response while ensuring the public receive professional care from trained staff in cases where previously they would have to wait much longer to be seen. This process of negotiation is ongoing, but the FBU is confident a robust scheme can be developed, providing the right funding and guarantees are provided.

The potential for this kind of work is clear from a range of examples identified by the Local Government Association and the New Local Government Network. Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service is piloting innovative new Community Risk Intervention Teams (CRIT), responding to low level, high volume calls such as those involving falls and mental health issues.⁴ West Midlands Fire Service is providing targeted interventions for vulnerable people with issues such as frailty, mental health issues and terminal illness, delivering full needs assessments and tailored packages of care.⁵ The Royal Society for Public Health argues that the fire and rescue service has been “hugely proactive in introducing a new public health focus and demonstrating the potential to tackle the wider determinants of health, offer brief health advice and relieve the workload of other services”.⁶

The FBU believes that the integration of firefighters into the health agenda represents a win-win outcome for both services and more importantly, a qualitative improvement in services to the public. The union has seen examples internationally, such as in some cities in the United States, where this system works well for both those who need medical services and the workforce that provides it. The government has to ensure that both services are properly funded, proper training is provided and that transitional arrangements are factored in.

Multi agency emergency response to terrorism

The recent tenth anniversary of the 7/7 bombings in London were a reminder of the ongoing terrorist threat. Firefighters who took part in the rescue operation that day, when they helped over 700 people, are adamant that the fire and rescue service needs to be better prepared to deal with these kinds of attacks and others such as Glasgow airport, where firefighters intervened. After the Mumbai attacks in 2008, the government highlighted the risks of marauding terrorist and firearms activity (MTFA) and the need to prepare for such eventualities in the UK. The FBU has engaged in negotiations on this matter, given the expectation that firefighters would respond if an attack took place. Regrettably, the FBU has been alarmed at the lack of consistency on these issues between different fire and rescue services. There is a need for proper negotiations, agreements and standards at national level.

Given the enormous threats to firefighters' lives by such incidents, the FBU has sought assurances that risk assessments, safety control measures and standard operating procedures are in place and are fit for purpose. If politicians expect a professional response to every type

of incident conceivable, then they need to ensure that appropriate funding is made available to provide the necessary resources and proper operational systems to make this work as safe as possible. The FBU also seeks proper indemnity and compensation arrangements to protect firefighters expected to deliver these high risk areas of work.

The FBU has strongly supported a national solution to these issues. Over the last two years thousands of FBU members have taken part constructively in Joint Emergency Services Interoperability Principles (JESIP) training to improve their readiness to tackle major incidents. The union wrote to the new fire minister Mark Francois in July 2015 to kick start discussions with a view to resolving these matters. Given the level of ongoing terrorist threats, it is vital that the negotiations are prioritised by all concerned and that a consistent, resilient national framework is established so firefighters can take their place alongside other professionals to tackle any incidents that might occur. There is no lack of willingness on the part of the FBU to implement a robust approach, but government must ensure safeguards are in place.

Environmental challenges

Around one million people living in over half a million properties in the UK are currently at risk from flooding, either from the sea, rivers or surface water flooding during heavy downpours. Around one-in-six homes are at risk from flooding – and these risks are increasing due to increased population, building on flood plains and climate change.



Firefighters responded magnificently to the winter 2013-14 floods, the largest deployment by the fire and rescue services since Second World War.⁷ Across the UK over the three months from December 2013 to February 2014, firefighters responded to nearly seven thousand incidents. Firefighters also effected a large number of rescues recorded by fire and rescue services – almost two thousand across the UK. Although these figures are significant, they appear to underestimate the number of incidents and rescues carried out.

The FBU has been fully engaged over the past decade developing flood policy. Since the 2007 floods, the union has supported implementing a statutory duty on the fire and rescue service to respond to major flooding. Scotland and Northern Ireland already have a duty in place, but

England and Wales do not at present. Such a duty on all fire and rescue services, backed by funding, would meet a number of key government objectives. The FBU, many chief officers and other stakeholders support statutory duty, which was proposed by the Pitt Review. Defra officials have suggested it as an option. DCLG already has a draft Order.

The public rightly expects firefighters, as highly-trained professionals, to respond to flooding. Statutory duty would help make the UK more resilient to flooding. Failure to manage flooding, including emergency response, carries huge financial and individual costs, impacts on productivity and other aspects of the economy. The Civil Contingencies Act and Fire and Rescue Services Act cover a range of emergencies, but a specific duty would ensure the necessary resources would be available to tackle floods. There are particular industrial issues with regard to flooding that need to be resolved within the fire and rescue service, including funding, IRMPs, training, PPE, equipment, welfare provision, health concerns, pay and other matters. The FBU believes that more resources are needed for the fire and rescue service to respond to flooding and other environmental matters, so that firefighters have the tools to respond professionally to these emergencies.

Youth and other social engagement work

Arson reduction – work with ‘at-risk-of-offending’ youth groups – is another area where the fire and rescue service is promoting innovation and greater collaboration. It was FBU members and local FBU representatives who pioneered youth engagement projects and other efforts with different sectors of the community, particularly disaffected young people, who have taken out their ire with society through attacks on firefighters as uniformed authority figures.

The Phoenix Project, set up in 2000 in Tyne and Wear, provides an intensive five-day work experience course specifically targeted at young people who are known to be offending or are at risk of offending. The LIFE (Local Intervention Fire Education) programme in London was introduced after two firefighters were attacked and hospitalised on bonfire night in 2001. The Firefly project was run by Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service with the aim of educating young people about fire safety in their communities and reducing anti-social behaviour. The Beacon Project run by Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service engages with young people who have been or are at risk of exclusion from mainstream education.

West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service and the East Moor Secure Children’s Centre in Leeds developed a four day course that assists particularly vulnerable young people who are known to be involved in deliberate fire setting or who have been convicted of arson, anti-social behaviour or car crime. The ARC Achievement, Respect and Confidence (ARK) scheme in South Yorkshire is a similar course designed to reduce anti-social behaviour and re-engage young people with society. West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service organised the Aurora Programme designed to encourage young people to cease offending.⁸

These schemes and others continue to develop and widen their scope. For example Essex Fire and Rescue Service runs a ‘Fire Break’ scheme for 10-24 year olds aiming to reduce the risky lifestyle choices of some young people and raise awareness of the consequences of fire, fire setting and hoax calls, breaking the cycle of negativity. The scheme has been successfully used as a confidence building tool for those with a history of youth offending, school exclusion, or associated disruptive behaviour.⁹

Firefighters have also developed this approach (of community engagement and education) into other areas. This includes addressing the specific needs of the elderly and the demands of an ageing population and targeting other specific groups within local communities. The preventative, educational and community engagement work of firefighters over the past fifteen years has been among the most innovative in any area of public services.

This valuable work by fire and rescue services has been widely praised across government and by other public services. Prevention work of this kind not only improves the lives of people within communities and makes their communities more inhabitable, it also saves enormous sums of money because it reduces the burden on other public services tackling anti-social behaviour, health and other matters of importance to public policy. Such work is threatened by ongoing cuts to central funding, with rebound and spill over effects if these services are run down.

Inspections and enforcement

The final strand of plans for innovation and collaboration concerns national standards and accountability over the fire and rescue service. Ken Knight's efficiencies report commissioned by the last government pointed out that the fire and rescue service is unique, in England at least, by not having an inspectorate to monitor its work. As public bodies, fire and rescue authorities are financially audited, "but an inspectorate would look more widely at the operational performance and effectiveness of the service".¹⁰ Confidence and assurance in the service provided are significantly assisted by an independent regulator and inspectorate setting the standards and holding the providers to account. The absence of such a body for fire and rescue in England is a serious anomaly.



One of the FBU's principal criticisms of the so-called "modernisation" agenda of previous governments is the fragmentation of the service, brought about by scrapping national standards and some national oversight bodies such as the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC) and the fire inspectorate. These trends continued under the last government, which scrapped the Practitioners' Forum. This has led to substantial gaps in vital operational guidance as well as to the deterioration in the speed and weight of emergency response needed to deal efficiently with an expanding range of incident types. There is a pressing need for a high-level advisory body, with a wider remit and more resources than the chief fire and rescue advisors, and would include senior elected FBU officials to oversee the production of operational guidance throughout the service. The FBU wants a national fire and rescue service inspectorate, with a wide remit to help assess and audit national standards.

The fire and rescue service plays an essential role in providing advice, inspection and enforcement in relation to the safety of buildings. These areas of work have ensured that workplaces and public building in the UK are generally far safer than they were and are an essential part of the work of making communities safer and keeping them so. These activities have been central to reducing the incidence of fire and fire related death and injury in workplaces and public building. This workstream has begun to address the challenges in this area of work and the skills and resources needed to develop this work in the 21st century.

The five workstreams taken together constitute a demanding programme of collaboration and innovation, which will transform the way the fire and rescue service performs for the public. The government can assist this process by providing the service with a financial settlement for 2016-17 and 2017-18 that recognises these efforts at modernisation and its wider spill-over effects on other public services. Further austerity cuts will put this transformational work in jeopardy.

2 Promoting growth and productivity, through radical devolution of powers to local areas in England

The FBU does not believe the current status quo in local government or the fire and rescue service is viable in the long term. There are currently 46 fire and rescue services at present in England, although this will soon become 45 when Dorset and Wiltshire merge. This arrangement is arbitrary and unplanned, often the result of accidents from history. A more coherent approach is required, although the FBU is not convinced that a move towards a single national service in England is the answer either.

Devolution

There has been considerable political capital expended over the last year on a range of devolution matters, which may have implications for the structure of the fire and rescue service. Although the most visible driver has been the political situation in Scotland, politicians at Westminster have advocated devolution for England on its own merits. Another related trend has been the advocacy of city-regions as drivers of economic growth, known as 'metrocentralisation'. The work of the City Growth Commission on 'devo-met' and the Core Cities 'Modern Charter for Local Freedom' suggest growing momentum for devolving tax and spending powers.¹¹ The Treasury's support for a Northern powerhouse and other devolution matters can be understood in the light of these trends.

These developments, if they come to fruition, will have substantial implications for the fire and rescue service. It is conceivable that metropolitan areas (and indeed larger combined county areas) might want total control over their fire and rescue services. If devolution went this far, it might mean that the revenue for local fire and rescue services was raised locally, with little or no input from central grants. This would throw up implications for governance and would still require common standards for training, equipment and other matters. There is a legitimate fear that some forms of devolution involve a cruel deception: devolving cuts to spending, but not the power to do anything to stop or reverse them.

The FBU is not advocating any 'metro' or devolved model. However we believe these proposals are worth exploring, with full costings and with full transparency for the workforce. No proposals have so far been outlined for the governance of the service. If an elected fire authority remains under the elected mayor (as it does in London), then existing democratic safeguards remain in place. The key issues are the safety of the public and the number of professional firefighters trained and fully prepared to meet the full range of 21st century hazards and emergencies.

Fire and rescue mergers

The FBU is not opposed to mergers or changes of governance within the fire and rescue, taking each case on its merits according to the impact on the service to the public and on firefighters, as well the implications for democratic control and local accountability. FBU officials engaged constructively with Tobias Ellwood's integration agenda during the last parliament.¹² The union supported the merger of eight fire and rescue services into a single service in Scotland, but we have opposed mergers in the south west of England.

By far the biggest recent institutional change within the fire and rescue service has been the creation of the single service in Scotland in April 2013. Any balance sheet on the impact of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is necessarily provisional, after only two years in operation. The single service now claims it has made £22 million in efficiency savings in its initial two years. However the original decision arose because of expected cuts after the financial crash in 2007-08. In autumn 2010 Scottish political leaders began to advocate a single service to free up resources for the frontline.

A preliminary evaluation of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service would identify certain visible advantages and disadvantages. One positive point is a more coherent overall structure, rather than eight separate boards and eight separate management structures. One significant potential advantage lies with the standardisation of equipment, BA sets, equipment, PPE, standard operating procedures and training notes. Such measures would improve health and safety.

However there have also been considerable costs. Sadly the single service has not protected firefighter jobs. Over 400 frontline firefighter jobs (5%) were cut in the first two years of the single service, between 2013 and 2015. These cuts were significantly worse than the previous two years, when 44 jobs were cut. Overall, Scotland has lost one-in-sixteen frontline firefighters since 2011. All roles and duty systems have been affected by these cuts. Wholetime firefighter jobs have been hardest hit, both absolutely and relative to other firefighter jobs. There are now fewer retained firefighters in Scotland than there were five years ago. Control firefighters in Scotland have also fallen. Although some temporary control appointments were made last year, the planned closure of five control rooms puts many jobs in jeopardy in the year ahead.



Firefighter job cuts in Scotland have been some of the worst in the UK in absolute terms. Scotland has fared better on average than the UK as a whole, but no better than some brigades in England, only slightly better than Wales and worse than Northern Ireland. Firefighters fear the financial outlook ahead. A recent Audit Scotland report estimated a potential funding gap of £43 million by the end of this decade.¹³ This will wipe out a hefty chunk of the perceived savings from consolidating the service and threaten more frontline firefighter jobs.

There are other concerns from the single service that merit attention. The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service is governed by an appointed board. This is less democratic and less accountable than the previous arrangements, when elected councillors sat on boards. Whilst there is clearly some political oversight, these governance arrangements are distant from local electors. Unseating these appointees if they are not doing their jobs is significantly more difficult than in other areas of local government or public service, where elections take place and ultimately those representatives are held to account at the ballot box.

The FBU has been a strong supporter of devolution for decades. However the cuts coupled with the new governance model do not augur well for further devolution or fiscal autonomy in

Scotland. Firefighters will understandably judge politicians on their ability to deliver the funding the service needs to remain resilient. Clearly firefighters recognise that some reserved powers limit the freedom of the Scottish government to tax and spend according to priorities set in Scotland. However the fire and rescue service has been devolved for a considerable time and its internal arrangements are largely free to be determined in Scotland.

There is little recent experience of mergers in the fire and rescue service in England. The merger of Devon and Somerset fire and rescue services in 2007 is the most significant in England over the last decade. The merger has not staved off austerity cuts in the combined service. Between 2007 and 2014, some 19% of wholetime jobs and a quarter of control jobs were cut, while retained jobs over that period increased by less than 1%.

The job cuts have largely been implemented since 2010. Some 90% of wholetime job losses in Devon and Somerset have taken place since then. Both retained and control jobs rose up to 2010, but have fallen since then. Middle managers have been hardest hit, with a third or more of all roles from station manager and above being cut. Therefore although the merger itself did not immediately lead to job cuts, over the period some 7% of all wholetime, retained and control jobs have been cut. This compares with around 10% across England as a whole over the same period. Local mergers are very clearly not a panacea for fending off cuts and job losses in the fire and rescue service.¹⁴

Police and Crime Commissioners

During the last government there was much speculation about Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) taking control of merged “blue light” emergency services. A number of PCCs have sought to associate themselves with the fire and rescue service, notably in Northamptonshire, Humberside and Warwickshire. If these kind of parochial, maverick-driven schemes get the go-ahead, it will further fragment the fire and rescue service, and inevitably put public safety at risk.



The FBU agrees with the report by Lord Stevens, which called the PCC model “systemically flawed as a method of democratic governance” and recommended they should be discontinued at the end of the term of office of the serving PCCs. This is due to poor elections and turnout; poor composition (only six women, none from a visible ethnic minority, eight recently serving police officers); invisibility; appointment of staff (16 PCCs are believed to have appointed their

own friends as deputies on salaries up to £65,000); relationships between the PCCs and chief constables and scope of role/size of 'constituency'.¹⁵

The FBU is fundamentally opposed to police and crime commissioners taking over the governance of local fire and rescue services. PCCs have no democratic mandate to administer the fire and rescue service, nor the expertise or resources to improve our service. We believe the efforts of PCCs to buy legitimacy and popularity by associating with the fire and rescue service cuts across and interferes with far more significant efforts to devolve powers to local people. It would be a gross mistake for the government to impose the failed PCC model on the fire and rescue service, particularly when there are more democratic devolved models under discussion.

Firefighters want to retain our neutrality as a humanitarian service. Firefighting is about saving lives, not enforcing the law. Public perceptions of firefighters – and the trust given as a result – would be compromised by close associations with the police. Much of the prevention work firefighters do, which entails entering the homes of vulnerable and often hard to reach people, depends upon this clear demarcation. Similarly, the valuable youth work firefighters undertake should not be muddled with law enforcement, even when successful programmes do help these young people avoid anti-social and criminal behavior.

The FBU also opposes the Mayor of London's efforts to substitute an unelected board like the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) for the existing fire authority (LFEPA) composed of elected councillors and assembly members. The mayor's proposals would mean that parts of London will have no voice and no influence over the affairs of a central, critical decision-making organisation. The proposals also weaken the mechanism of checks and balances over the mayor's decisions. They are a brazen attempt to gerrymander LFEPA so that it dances to the mayor's tune. Those appointed through the patronage of the mayor are inevitably less likely to scrutinise or challenge his decisions.

3. Delivering high-quality public services

Firefighters are highly committed professionals who take great pride in our high-quality service to the public. The FBU regards itself not only as the professional voice of firefighters, but as the key advocate for the fire and rescue service itself.

Public perceptions of firefighters

Firefighters rightly receive plaudits for the invaluable work we do. The public expects firefighters to respond in an emergency and deliver unparalleled assistance in the most dreadful circumstances imaginable. Public support for the firefighters is exceptionally high. A recent YouGov survey commissioned by the FBU in 2015 found that firefighters are ranked third most esteemed among a list of professions. And among those contributing most substantially to society's well-being.

Some 95% believed the fire and rescue service was providing a good service, with only 1% describing it as "fairly bad". Two out of three thought the service was very good – a glowing tribute to the work firefighters do on a daily basis. Four out of five members of the public (82%) were satisfied with their local fire and rescue service, while only 2% were dissatisfied.

There is no mandate for the government to cut the fire and rescue service today. Some 84% said they opposed plans to cut funding to the fire and rescue service as a whole. Some 43% said they favoured maintaining the current level of staffing across the UK, with another 43% wanting more firefighters.

Almost nine out of ten people (88%) said the fire and rescue service was good value for money. An overwhelming majority of people (95%) said that rapid response to an emergency call is a priority for them as householders and for local businesses. A swift response with adequate resources remains crucial to providing a first-class service.¹⁶

Politicians are quick to praise firefighters for their bravery, dedication and contribution. This recognition is welcome. However it is no good grabbing a fine photo-opportunity, only to ignore the legitimate concerns firefighters express about the state of the service and the way it is being run down. Firefighters are proud public servants, but we will not remain silent when politicians tell us one day how valuable we are, and on the next cut our service to pieces.

Rescues

One of the best measures of the quality of our emergency service is the number of rescues carried out. DCLG does not publish rescue figures systematically and has not done so since the turn of the century. Neither does the Welsh Assembly or the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Scottish government does publish rescue figures for fires, but not for other incidents.

New FBU research reveals an impressive level of rescues carried out by firefighters every day, reinforcing the vital role of emergency intervention. The data, obtained from individual fire and rescue services by the Labour Research Department (LRD), indicates that over 38,000 people were rescued by firefighters in the UK between April 2014 and March 2015 – over one-hundred rescues a day. In England, over 32,000 were rescued by firefighters during that period.

There are a huge number of rescues from non-fire incidents – including flooding, road traffic collisions, hazardous chemicals and lift rescues. For the UK as a whole, firefighters carried out over 34,000 rescues at non-fire incidents in 2014-15. In England, there were over 29,000 rescues carried out at non-fire incidents between April 2014 and March 2015. There were over nine times more rescues at non-fire incidents than at fires, reflecting the wider range of activities now undertaken by firefighters, indicating the irreplaceable response to a huge range of emergencies.

Firefighters still make a significant intervention at fires, which is well appreciated by members of the public. For the UK as a whole, firefighters rescued over 3,700 people from fires in the last year. There were some issues of concern with the returns from some individual fire and rescue services, including how some incidents are recorded. A basement flood and a flooded high street are both recorded as a single incident, masking very different resource requirements. It is possible some brigades have not recorded all incidents, underestimating the real extent of rescue activity carried out by firefighters. Nevertheless, the figures underline the contribution firefighters make to improving people's lives.

The importance of emergency intervention at fires

Fires devastate people's lives, ruin their homes and wreck businesses. The prime minister and the chancellor visited Eastbourne after the pier fire in July 2014 and were shown by firefighters the extent of the damage. No-one should underestimate the need to provide an emergency service for such incidents.

UK firefighters have much to be proud of. The fire and rescue service is a real success story when provided with sufficient personnel and the resources to do the job of preventing, protecting and responding to emergencies. In Britain over the last decade:

- The total number of fires is down by almost a half
- Building fires are down by a quarter
- Total fire deaths are down by a third
- Non-fatal casualties have also been cut by nearly a third

Some politicians and commentators argue that the downward trend in fires and fire deaths justifies making further cuts to the fire and rescue service. The FBU rejects this conclusion. Firefighters have been active agents in bringing about the progress made through successful fire prevention and protection. There is still a long way to go. It is irresponsible to decimate the active force that has catalysed these improvements. The FBU rejects the flawed notion of determining levels of fire and rescue service resources based on cost rather than risk.

Response times

Another key measure of quality in the fire and rescue service is the time it takes firefighters to reach an incident, known as the response time. DCLG figures estimate that average response times to dwelling fires in England slowed over the past decade from 6.1 minutes in 2003-04 to a peak of 7.4 minutes in 2013-14. Although dwelling fire response times for a first appliance appear unchanged in the last four years, they are still a long way from the norm when there were national standards. The average response time to dwelling fires in England is now almost two minutes slower than two decades ago. Responses times to other building fires, including workplaces and businesses have also fallen substantially.¹⁷

DCLG previously attributed the slowing of response times to increased traffic levels.¹⁸ However traffic levels peaked in 2007, while attendance times continued to increase. The FBU believes that the effects of cuts are the central reason for the slowdown in response times. Fewer firefighters, fewer fire stations and fewer appliances have led to a worsening of the speed and necessary weight of emergency response.

Another factor is a shortage of staff, which has meant that appliances and crews are taken off the run due to staff shortages, for training or to deliver community fire safety. Sadly, DCLG does not consider the impact of cuts. Instead worsening response times are blamed on control staff for longer call handling times, policies on "drive to arrive" and firefighters for time spent putting on personal protective equipment.

In contrast to the political rhetoric and crude justification for cuts, the independent consultants Greenstreet Berman suggest that by 2020 slower response times will mean:

- Between 14 and 41 additional deaths at dwelling fires
- Between 33 and 91 additional deaths at road traffic collisions
- Between 42 and 57 additional deaths at water incidents
- Between 98 and 212 additional deaths at special service incidents overall.¹⁹

Further cuts will have a massive impact on the real response times to 999 emergencies occurring in local communities. With fewer firefighters, fewer appliances and fewer fire stations the quality of service will worsen. With slower response times, more people, property and workplaces are put at increased risk.

4. Promoting choice and competition

The Spending Review document suggests that it is the government's fundamental responsibility to ensure that core services like schools and the NHS are adequately funded. This list should include the fire and rescue service, an essential service which we believe should be publicly owned and controlled and free at the point of use. Many services need to be provided or commissioned by government – either central or local. This is either because they are natural monopolies, security-related, quasi-judicial or because they are being provided for people who are not able to make the appropriate choices themselves.²⁰ The FBU believes the fire and rescue service falls into this category.

It is widely recognised even in mainstream economics that fire protection contains many of the elements of a “public good” and therefore should be provided by the state. For example Baumol and Blinder argue that “national defence, public health, police and fire protection and research are among services governments provide because they offer beneficial externalities or are public goods”.²¹ Public goods are those that, if they were provided privately, some people would not pay for them, even though they would be able to use them. To avoid this ‘free rider problem’, these goods and services are paid for out of general taxation.

The issue has been summed up by Joseph Stiglitz:

Many goods are not pure public goods but have one or the other property (non-rivalrousness or non-excludability) to some degree. Fire protection is like a private good in that exclusion is relatively easy – individuals who refuse to contribute to the fire department could simply not be helped in the event of a fire.

But fire protection is like a public good in that the marginal cost of covering an additional person is low. Most of the time, firefighters are not engaged in fighting fires but are waiting for calls. Protecting an additional individual has little extra cost. Only in that rare event when two fires break out simultaneously will there be a significant cost to extending fire protection to an additional person. But even here, matters are more complicated: if we want to protect the building next door which has paid for fire protection, it may be necessary to put out the fire in the building which has not paid for protection – exclusion may not really be feasible.²²

Private ownership and control of the fire and rescue service makes no sense. Profits would be hard to make from those putting out fires in remote farmhouses rather than in large supermarkets. Social solidarity means that local people collectively contribute to protecting themselves and others from the shared risk. In addition, equity and social justice require some parity of provision. The FBU also believes that market alternatives often fail to provide what is required for all citizens and at reasonable cost.

There is overwhelmingly public support for keeping the fire and rescue service in public hands and out of the reach of private profiteers. A recent YouGov survey found almost four out of five people (78%) do not want private firms managing the fire and rescue service, six times the number who would support such a proposal.

The experience of private sector involvement

The recent experience of private sector involvement in the fire and rescue service reinforces our scepticism about further moves. The worst case has been AssetCo. In 2001, the London Fire Brigade signed a 20 year public finance initiative (PFI) contract with AssetCo, which covers its fire engines and some 50,000 pieces of equipment. A similar contract was signed with Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service in 2006.

AssetCo became a by-word for mismanagement and greed, which has ended in a trail of over £100m of debt and near insolvency for the company itself. In and out of court, replete with internal scandal, its share price suspended, AssetCo is a terrible advertisement for what can and does go wrong when private providers enter public services. What is particularly disturbing is that public authorities lack control over this private company and have been left as helpless spectators watching this catastrophe unfold. At one point, London's fire engines and equipment were owned by Lloyds Bank, in part as credit for loans made to AssetCo.

A further example is the FiReControl project, which aimed to close 46 fire control rooms in England and replace them with nine regional control centres. Around half a billion pounds of taxpayers' money was wasted on this project, and much of that went on private sector providers. The taxpayer is still paying £50,000 a day in rent for some of these empty buildings, built under the private finance initiative (PFI). As the National Audit Office report put it, "The implementation of FiReControl was heavily reliant on consultants and interim staff, who contributed around half the Department's project team at a cost of £68.6 million, over three-quarters of the total spend on the national team supporting the project. PA Consulting was contracted to provide consultancy services at a cost of £42 million to the end of March 2011". In addition, the EADS private firm failed to deliver the technology necessary to allow the new control rooms to communicate effectively beyond a few square miles.²³ The project was rightly dubbed by the Public Accounts Committee as "one of the worst cases of project failure" they had seen in many years.²⁴ The last government was right to close this project – although it failed to tackle the aftermath of its closure.

No to mutualisation

Firefighters are alarmed by the prospect that the fire and rescue service will be subjected to privatisation. In January 2013, the fire minister wrote to the Regulatory Reform Committee at Westminster seeking views on new laws to "enable fire and rescue authorities in England to contract out their full range of services to a suitable provider". This was rightly interpreted by MPs as a backdoor effort to change the law to allow mutualisation and privatisation.

Cleveland Fire Brigade has created a community interest company to attract "alternative" funding. It promised to secure large contracts delivering risk management services to local industry, without much success. In 2012, chief fire officer Ian Hayton wrote to Cleveland firefighters about his plans to turn the fire and rescue service into an "employee-owned social enterprise", a form of mutual organisation like the retailer John Lewis. Such a move would take Cleveland out of the current arrangements for every other fire and rescue service in the UK and effectively outside the public sector. Despite an overwhelming 97% rejection of these proposals in an FBU survey in September 2013, principal managers continue to promote the plans.

Politicians need to be clear: the fire and rescue service is not for sale. Privatisation and related forms such as mutualisation, contracting out and other private deals are not acceptable to the professionals who work in the fire and rescue service. There is no support for them within the fire and rescue service. Such experiments will cut across efforts to devolve power and resources to local 'powerhouses', for example in the north East of England. They are the wrong road – a regression to the dreadful days of Victorian insurance brigades, unfit for a 21st century economy.

5. Driving efficiency and value for money across the public sector

Firefighters provide an all-hazards emergency service, putting themselves on the line to rescue people in their hour of need. An efficient fire and rescue service is one that has the right resources – principally firefighters – to meet all the risks and threats faced by the public. Fewer firefighters mean increased risks to the public who pay for the service and are entitled to professional help when they need it. With fewer firefighters, the ability to intervene diminishes. Cuts cannot continue without putting people's lives at risk.

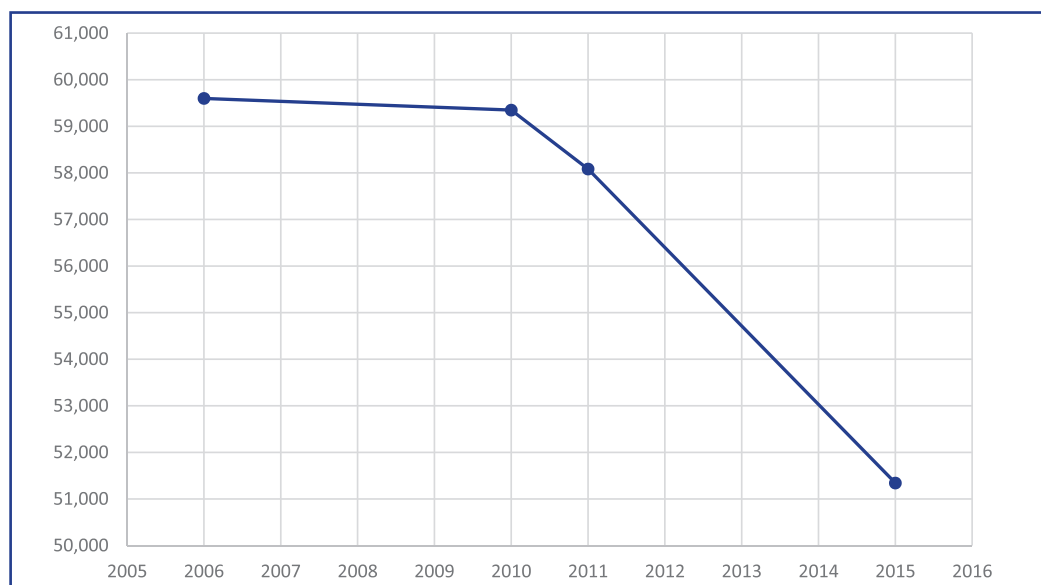
Politicians say that there are now fewer fires and fire deaths, so we don't need as many firefighters as before. There are fewer fires and fire deaths, primarily because of the remarkable fire safety education and prevention work carried out by firefighters, helping vulnerable people in their communities. But firefighters still carry out very high levels of rescues – around 100 rescues every day.

Since 2010, almost one third of central funding to fire and rescue services has been reduced – around half of the total fire and rescue budget comes from this source. However local council tax, the other source of funds, has also been frozen. This has meant devastating cuts to firefighter jobs, making the country less resilient and more exposed to risk.

Firefighter job cuts in perspective

The last five years have seen sharp reductions in the number of firefighters across the UK. Over 6,700 frontline firefighter jobs were cut between 2011 and 2015, nearly one-in-eight (12%) of the total firefighting force over this period. Over 4,300 of those cuts are to wholetime firefighters, while nearly 2,000 retained firefighters have also been cut. Almost one fifth of control staff have been lost.

Figure 1: Firefighter jobs over the last decade



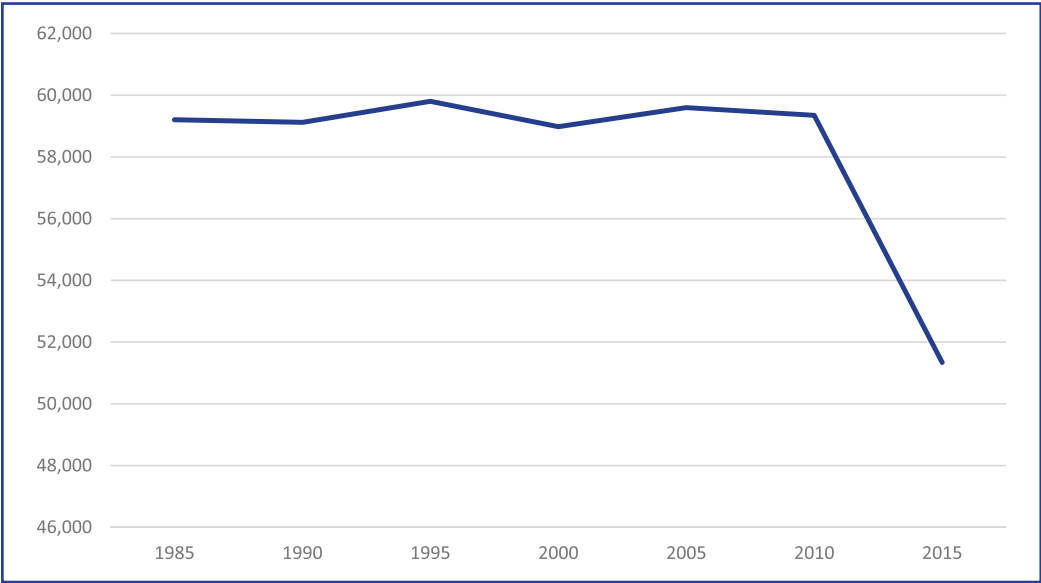
Sources: DCLG; Scottish government, CIPFA; FoI

Last year, over 1,800 frontline firefighter jobs were cut – the worst single year of job cuts in the history of the modern fire and rescue service. Firefighter jobs have been reduced by almost 4%, hitting a vital emergency service.

For decades, the fire and rescue service had resilient levels of staffing – frontline firefighters able to

respond in minutes to every kind of emergency. Since 2005, Over 8,000 firefighter jobs have been cut, around one-in-seven (14%) of all firefighters working ten years ago. Metropolitan brigades have been hard hit, but combined and county services have also suffered.

Figure 2: Firefighter jobs over three decades



Sources: HMCIFS; ODPM; DCLG; Scottish government, CIPFA; FoI

The value of the fire and rescue service

Annual UK fire and rescue service expenditure for 2014-15 was £2.7bn – a tiny fraction of central government expenditure on public services.²⁵ This spending equates to less than £50 for every man, woman and child in the UK per year – extraordinary value for money considering the wide range of protection offered and activities undertaken. It compares very favourably with private sector providers of their version of “emergency response”.

The financial costs of fire are no longer published by the Westminster government. The last report published by DCLG, on the cost of fire in England for 2008, put the total estimate at £8.3bn.²⁶ The costs in anticipation include prevention or protective measures such as sprinklers and insurance. The costs as a consequence of fires, includes damage to properties, loss of business, and the costs of human injury and death. Response costs are the expenditure on fire and rescue services. Firefighters play an important role in all these activities. Community fire safety work with vulnerable people helps prevent scores of deaths and injuries, while a rapid response can limit losses to property as well as life.

Table 1: Estimates for the total cost of fire (2008)				
	Anticipation (£m)	Consequence (£m)	Response (£m)	Total (£m)
England	£3,185	£3,285	£1,807	£8,277

There are good reasons to believe that at least some of these costs have risen since 2008. The most recent figures published by the Association of British Insurers (ABI) indicate that the insured cost of fires in 2008 was £1.3 billion, a 16% increase on the previous year. Between 2002 and 2008 the cost of the average fire claim for both commercial and domestic fires doubled, to £21,000 and £8,000 respectively. The ABI suggested that if this trend continues, the UK could stand to lose as much as £10 billion as a result of commercial and industrial fires by 2020.

Some fire and rescue services have carried out their own cost-benefit analysis to quantify the value of the contribution of their service to the communities they serve. For example, Greater Manchester fire and rescue service has estimated this year that for every £1 the service costs to respond to incidents, there is an £18 saving in terms of life and property. This estimate refers only to fires and does not include other areas of work such as responses to road traffic collisions and other types of rescue.²⁷

Other recent estimates have underlined rising costs to households and businesses. The financial and economic impacts of blazes in warehouses without sprinkler systems in England and Wales add up to over £1bn over the last five years, according to a report published by the Centre for Economics and Business Research. These warehouse fires cause a direct financial loss to business of £230m per year, £190m per year in productivity and impacts to the supply chain, approximately 1,000 jobs lost through disruption and business failure and £160m in tax receipts lost to the Treasury over five years.²⁸

The fire and rescue service has reduced the costs of fires, deaths and injuries over the last decade. The cost to the economy of a single fire death is £1.65 million and the estimated average consequential cost of a domestic fire is £44,000 – never mind the harm done to families and communities by fires. The fire and rescue saves the economy billions of pounds every year. On this basis alone, the fire and rescue service merits investment, not cuts. The FBU believes the value of the service is even greater, with many other benefits to society from firefighters' work.

The social value of the fire and rescue service is immense. Every day firefighters around the UK work with the young and the old, with offenders and the unemployed, as well as businesses of all sizes and with vulnerable households. Fire and rescue services make a direct contribution to a number of other public agencies through their wider work in communities.²⁹ Firefighters reduce the costs of:

- Traffic congestion
- Road traffic collisions
- Youth unemployment
- Anti-social behaviour
- School exclusion
- Slips, trips and falls in the home
- Reoffending
- Troubled families.

There is some recognition of these additional benefits delivered by the fire and rescue service, although this has not translated into more funding. Last year the UK fire and rescue service won the Big Society award for its ground-breaking work with young people to educate them about fire prevention and tackling anti-social behaviour. The fire and rescue service's education programmes have allowed over 10,000 young people to learn essential safety information and gain wider social skills. Activities ranging from primary school visits, sports coaching and interventions to reduce anti-social behaviour by disaffected young people are recognised to add enormous value to society, helping to reduce the social and economic costs of crime.

Firefighters bring unique value and experience to such work, which is built upon their emergency response role. It is precisely because of the hazards we face and the humanitarian role we play that firefighters can have such a significant impact in other areas of public engagement, with young people and others within the community. There are also numerous possibilities going forward for the fire and rescue service to add value to other social programmes. However the FBU fears that these programmes are threatened by continual cuts in firefighter numbers and the closure of community fire stations. The union believes central government needs to come clean about the value of firefighters and the service we provide, and fund our service to reflect the value added.

Bogus efficiency

The FBU believes that recent drives for efficiency in the fire and rescue service have been ill-considered. For example Ken Knight's report made suggestions for 'savings' that simply do not add up when subjected to close examination. Knight suggested that the majority of savings could be found if fire and rescue authorities made "best use of on-call staff". He claimed that "increasing the use of on-call staff by just 10% could [save] up to £123 million per year."³⁰

The FBU represents the majority of retained firefighters in the UK, and it is a misnomer to regard them as "on-call", since this implies a permanent and continuous availability that simply does not exist. Retained firefighters do an outstanding job in providing fire cover for communities throughout the UK. However there are a number of significant barriers to substituting retained firefighters for wholetime posts.

First, response times for retained firefighters are generally significantly slower than for wholetime crews, simply because retained firefighters are mobilised from home or their place of main employment, and have to travel from these places to the fire station before proceeding to an incident. By contrast, the wholetime crews available at fire stations 24/7 can be mobilised immediately. In a job where every second counts, the continued need for wholetime crewing remains as robust as ever.

A second practical problem lies with the recruitment of retained firefighters. This is partly related to the fact that in most cases firefighting is a second job for retained firefighters and they have other employment commitments alongside domestic and leisure activities in their lives. In large parts of the UK, fire and rescue authorities have problems recruiting retained firefighters. The FBU has a great deal of anecdotal evidence of this. For example the union is aware that in one fire and rescue service, there are 120 vacancies for retained firefighter posts.

Many working age people in small rural communities have to travel away from their home to find work. Consequently, their availability to become retained firefighters is severely limited. This was confirmed in a survey conducted across England and Wales in 2006 where it was found that 48% of all retained firefighters travel six or more miles to their primary employment making it impossible for them to be on-call from their fire station.

These factors have also contributed to a further concern for fire and rescue services. Large numbers of fire appliances crewed by retained firefighters are frequently unavailable for emergencies due to the unavailability of staff. An increasing number of services have drawn attention to this area of concern. In fact, many fire and rescue services rely on deploying wholetime firefighters - one way or another - to plug gaps in retained cover and maintain the operational availability of fire appliances at retained fire stations. This reality is not addressed by the Knight review.

At the very least, efforts to expand the number of retained firefighters at the expense of wholetime will have an adverse effect on the service provided, but it is in all-likelihood impractical to implement. Several thousand wholetime firefighters also work a retained contract either in their own or an adjacent brigade. Cutting wholetime firefighters would be self-defeating not only for the primary job but would hit retained provision as well.

Another areas of bogus efficiency is well illustrated by the situation in fire control rooms since the FiReControl project was scrapped. The FBU was the most consistent opponent of the FiReControl project and warned it was a costly, poorly managed venture long before other watchdogs condemned it. It was eventually recognised as a huge failure. The last government was right to close the project - but it made a mess of the transition away from it. Control rooms have closed in Suffolk, Isle of Wight, Staffordshire and West Sussex. The North West regional control room in Warrington (incorporating Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Cheshire and Cumbria) has gone live. This amounts to a 15% reduction in control rooms in just four years. After the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service was formed in April 2013, plans have been made to close five control rooms. The Mid & West Wales fire and rescue authority plan to close Carmarthen fire control room, while Somerset and Dorset controls are also threatened. New supposedly 'state of the art' mobilising systems have failed repeatedly – in Essex for example, where mobilising times have increased, staffing and supervision levels are below safety critical levels and this has led to a deterioration in control performance.

The extent of waste and bureaucracy within the fire and rescue service should not be exaggerated. Firefighters do not want to see public money wasted on empire-building projects by principal officers or on their inflated salaries. However the service has been cut to the bone in the past five years. Under the guise of efficiency, there is a real threat to the effectiveness of future fire and rescue services. An example in August this year bears out the point: it took North Wales fire and rescue service almost 20 minutes to attend a chip shop fire due to cuts, while a fire engine was stationed at an unstaffed fire station in the town, close to the scene.

Recommendations

The government says it will use the Spending Review to “invest in its priorities, and deliver ambitious reforms to modernise and localise public services to achieve better outcomes for citizens”. To achieve these objectives in the fire and rescue service, the government must listen to the FBU.

1. The fire and rescue service has suffered unprecedented cuts to central and local funding in the last decade. The FBU wants investment, not cuts to the service.
2. The reduction of firefighter numbers is already below resilient levels for normal and serious incidents, putting public and firefighter safety at risk. The FBU wants a new generation of firefighters recruited to complement the existing professional workforce.
3. Fire station closures and fewer pumping appliances damage the service to the public. The FBU wants a moratorium on reduced crewing levels on pumping appliances, and on fire station closures. We want national standards for appliances and equipment, to cut down on waste and duplication, and to enhance cross-border cooperation.
4. Response times to calls have slowed drastically in the last decade, partly driven by cuts, leading to a postcode lottery when people call for help. This is literally playing Russian roulette with people's lives. Speed and weight of response matter. The FBU wants consistent national standards, including a minimum 5-minute response time standard for higher-risk areas, and steps to improve response times to all calls. There should be a key target for all fire services to *improve* their emergency response times in relation to attendance and number of appliances.
5. The UK faces increased risks and uncertainty, now and in the future from climate change, the aging population and the housing crisis, as well as other hazards and threats. The need for an effective emergency response capability will increase alongside these risks. The FBU wants a national risk assessment that includes fire and rescue service capability to plan for and respond to any emergency now and in the future.
6. Continued austerity, further fragmentation and privatisation in all its insidious forms are undermining our service, leading to slower responses times, poorly staffed and equipped appliances, and massive problems tackling major incidents. The FBU wants a triple lock guarantee against privatisation of the fire and rescue service, an end to efforts to outsource and mutualise local fire and rescue services and the return of the Fire Service College to public ownership and control.
7. Firefighters have the right to expect high standards of pay and good conditions of work and the right to decent quality pensions which reflect the nature of the work we do. Firefighters expect employers and governments to engage constructively with our elected representatives at local and national level and through agreed collective bargaining arrangements. Governments must respect the professionals.
8. Firefighters are among a select group of public servants who earn and maintain the trust and confidence of the public. The continued high level of rescues, rendering assistance to people at their time of greatest need, is testament to the ongoing importance of emergency intervention. Firefighters provide an all-round emergency rescue service. The FBU wants the government to value firefighters and invest in the fire and rescue service.
9. The value of the fire and rescue service far exceeds simply cost-benefit calculations. For £50 per person per year, firefighters tackle a wide range of emergencies, providing expertise and reassurance at crucial times for individuals and governments. Firefighters also contribute to wider social goals, such as inclusion, education, reducing anti-social behaviour and helping vulnerable people. The FBU wants governments to recognise this wider contribution and fund the service accordingly.

10. Fires and fire deaths have been reduced with the active intervention of firefighters, better regulation, and societal changes. But the risks are still there and are still high, as firefighters' can testify. Emergency intervention remains an absolute necessity. The FBU wants fire risks to be fully assessed, fire and rescue services to be adequately resourced and firefighters properly trained and equipped to tackle fires.
11. Firefighters have responded magnificently to major floods in recent years, as the public rightly expects. Flood risk has increased and will continue to do so with climate change. Flood defences alone are not sufficient to protect communities – an emergency response is a vital complement. The FBU wants a statutory duty on the fire and rescue service to respond to major flooding, providing the necessary powers and resources to carry out this work safely and professionally.
12. Firefighters already respond to some medical incidents, alongside our colleagues in the ambulance service. The FBU has concerns about expanding the role firefighters could play at category A incidents, including legal liability, training and the impact on fire cover. The union is willing to discuss serious proposals put forward by the government and employers.
13. Firefighters have been rightly praised for interventions at terrorist incidents such as 7/7 and in other civil contingencies, such as the riots in 2011. The FBU wants adequate risk assessments of these incidents, as well as resources and sufficient staffing levels to respond professionally.
14. The FBU wants a democratically run fire and rescue service. The union is opposed to integration with the police, including joint control rooms that simultaneously mobilise firefighters and other blue light services. The FBU opposes Police and Crime Commissioners taking over the governance of local fire and rescue services.
15. The FBU is willing to discuss serious proposals for reorganising the fire and rescue service, including devolution, as long as they will improve public and firefighter safety, and protect democratic accountability.
16. The fire and rescue service is unique – in England at least – by not having an inspectorate to monitor its work. The FBU wants a national fire and rescue service inspectorate, with a wide remit to help assess and audit national standards.
17. The fire and rescue service also needs a national oversight body responsible for the development of national standards, codes of practice, guidance and standard operating procedures to raise standards across the country.
18. The FBU will campaign for our right to independent trade unionism in the fire and rescue service and wider society, which should not be restricted by the type of work firefighters carry out. The union will campaign to defend existing national negotiating structures on pay and conditions, and vigorously defend our officials' right to facility time, time off for trade union duties and other workplace rights.

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