

A new performance management regime for Fire and Rescue Services.

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Abstract

In May 2008 the previous government developed and implemented the “Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-2011”, which contained, *inter alia*, the performance management regime for the 46 Fire and Rescue Services in England and Wales. After the last general election the new coalition government announced that “an overly bureaucratic system had developed” with “too much central government prescription based on national standards and targets” and that there was “significant scope to find efficiencies in the way the Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) operate”. It therefore proposed a strategic review of the National Framework (DCLG 2010).

At last years’ PAC conference the authors presented the first draft of this paper which attempted to assess the various parts of the previous performance management regime for FRS. The paper suggested a new sector specific and sector led performance assessment regime, an approach that was later reflected in evidence submitted by both the Local Government Association (LGA 2011) and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA 2011) to the DCLG Select Committee in January.

The purpose of this paper is to review the position of our previous paper and present a response to the governments recently published proposals for public sector reform (Cabinet Office 2011) from the perspective of the Fire and Rescue Services in order to contribute to the on-going reassessment and strategic review and replacement of the National Framework.

Key Words Fire and Rescue Services, National Framework, Public Sector Reform, Performance Management.

Introduction and Background

In May 2008 the previous government developed and implemented the “Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-2011”, which contained, *inter alia*, the performance management regime for the 46 Fire and Rescue Services in England and Wales

“The Audit Commission has responsibility for performance assessment of Fire and Rescue Authorities. The Commission will base their performance expectations on the priorities and objectives set out in this Framework and will assess to what extent individual authorities are delivering against them as well as progress against the indicators and the effectiveness of Fire and Rescue Authorities’ contributions to priorities set through Local Area Agreements”. (DCLG 2008 p8).

Shortly after the general election however, the new coalition government announced that “an overly bureaucratic system had developed” with “too much central government prescription based on national standards and targets”. The Fire Minister therefore challenged Fire and Rescue Services collectively to take responsibility for their sector, come up with radical solutions and join him in a strategic review of the sector as there was “significant scope to find efficiencies in the way FRS operate” (DCLG 2010).

This was despite the fact that Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) had demonstrably improved their services and operations under the previous performance management regime of Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA) (Audit Commission 2008, 2009, Andrews 2010) and appeared to be improving further under Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA) (Audit Commission 2010). However, the Coalition Government subsequently announced the abolition of CAA, the Audit Commission and the Local Area Agreements that were central to the CAAs (DCLG 2010, Cabinet Office 2011).

At the 2010 PAC conference and subsequently at the Fire Research and Development Conference, the authors presented initial drafts of this paper which attempted to assess the various parts of the previous performance management regimes for FRS and other local public service delivery organisations. It identified which parts of these regimes had demonstrably been successful and suggested their inclusion and/or adaptation within a new regime for the F&R sector. It reviewed potential elements of a new regime against the coalition governments stated intentions (at that time) and suggested which elements should

form part of a new regime in the future (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2010, 2010a, 2011). The paper proposed a new sector specific and sector led performance assessment regime, an approach that was later reflected in the Fire Futures Reports (DCLG2010b) and evidence submitted to the House of Commons DCLG Select Committee by both the Local Government Association (LGA 2011) and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA 2011) in January 2011.

Subsequently at the Local Government Association Annual Fire Conference in March 2011 entitled "The future of fire", the Fire Minister concentrated on the financial imperatives following the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) settlement but announced that Government would soon publish the delayed White Paper setting out its approach to public service reform, "putting in place principles that will signal the end of the top-down, take-what-you're-given model of public services, dismantling Big Government and building the Big Society in its place" (DCLG 2011). After months of waiting and repeated delays the "Open Public Services White Paper" (Cabinet Office 2011) was finally published by the Cabinet Office in July.

The purpose of this paper is to review the position of our previous paper, examine the coalition governments' proposals for public sector reform, in so far as they affect the Fire and Rescue Services, and contribute to the debate about the strategic review and replacement of the National Framework with an update of our original proposal for a new performance management regime for the service.

The paper will therefore seek to

- Explain the historical context and development of the performance management regime for Fire and Rescue Services (FRS);
- Identify emerging policy from the new coalition government as it relates to FRS
- Set out some initial research findings and lessons from past experience
- Identify the key components and tests for any new regime
- Suggest which organisations nationally and locally should be responsible for developing and implementing the various parts of the new framework
- Identify areas for further research or detailed policy and methodological development

Methodological approach

The literature review for this paper concentrated on two areas. The first is the official documents published by the government, the Audit Commission (AC) and other interested parties as part of the development and assessment of the various post 1999 performance management regimes from the introduction of Best Value to the CAA. This includes both original consultation documents and responses to these consultations, particularly those from the local delivery organisations such as Fire and Rescue Services, Local Authorities (collectively and individually), Primary Care Trusts and Criminal Justice organisations. The coalition governments' position has then been distilled from policy papers and formal speeches delivered by ministers since May 2010, culminating in the recently published "Open Public Services White Paper" (Cabinet Office 2011).

Our research to date has focussed on the assessment of previous performance management regimes supplemented by formal and informal surveys and interviews with Fire and Rescue Services, academics and other interested parties from both the Fire and Rescue Services community and practitioners and policy makers from other parts of the public services sector. This is therefore primarily operational research using secondary information for the purposes it was originally collected. All information used are from sources, reports, statistics and assessments that are in the public domain or were previously published in the public domain – although some of the earlier reports may now have been removed from official websites to the national archives.

The historical development of the performance management regime for Fire and Rescue Services in England from Best Value to CAA.

Over the last 10, years since the passing of the 1999 Local Government (Best Value) Act, the local government performance management regime has generally been one of the most

powerful levers for change within local public services (Martin and Bovaird 2005, AC 2009). The next part of the paper therefore attempts to provide an overview of the emergence and development of the performance management regime for Fire and Rescue Services in England and its relationship with the performance management regime for local authorities since it is the latter regime that has formed the context for its development to date.

Fire and Rescue Services were designated Best Value organisations by the 1999 Act and this has formed a key part of the statutory basis for Best Value, CPA, CAA and all of the subsequent performance management regimes for those authorities and services identified as BV organisations across health, local government and criminal justice sectors in England. All of these public service sectors have been subject to successive “generations” of performance management regimes following the Comprehensive Spending Reviews (CSR) and associated Public Service Agreements (PSA) of 2000, 2002, 2005, and 2007. The development of the first and successive generations of CPA and its’ replacement with CAA ultimately resulted from these successive CSRs and PSAs.

In 2008 the government, the Audit Commission, and the other regulators of local public services, collectively published the arrangements for the generation of performance management regimes for health services, local government and the criminal justice system focussed around the new Comprehensive Area Assessments (AC 2008). This required the assessment of the performance of public services across a local administrative area. Area assessments, based around the delivery of Local area Agreements and other collaborative partnerships were complemented by organisational assessments of specific services such as the Fire and Rescue Service.

The CSR for 2009, originally scheduled for July 2009 and then 2010 was postponed by the last government due to the forthcoming election. The 2010 CSR from the new coalition government (HMT 2010), covers a four year period and was published in October 2010, although the recent Public Sector Reform White Paper from the government proposes to abandon the associated system of PSA targets (Cabinet Office 2011).

In 2010 shortly after taking office the government announced the termination of CAA (DCLG 2010a) and area inspections have been discontinued. It has also recently confirmed abolition of the Audit Commission, with the transfer its external audit responsibilities to the National Audit Office and private sector auditors (DCLG 2011b), and the discontinuance of PSA and LAA targets (Cabinet Office 2011).

The next part of this paper will consider the development of this performance management regime for Fire and Rescue Services within the following 4 generally chronological but overlapping phases of development: while later in the paper we will consider which elements should be considered for retention and/or improvement and what should be omitted and/or replaced.

1. The period before the second national fire dispute - a period of Home Office responsibility for the service which was characterised by institutional inertia.
2. The national fire dispute, fire service “modernisation” and the first assessments of Fire and Rescue Services in 2005 - a period of sectoral upheaval dominated by the national dispute and its aftermath.
3. From 2006 to 2010, under the last government - the period when the later iterations of the CPA and CAA performance management regimes were implemented; and
4. The most recent period, following the election of the Coalition Government, the financial crises, the emergency budget and the CSR 2010, with the new governments proposals for Localism and public service reform.

1947 – 2000 the national fire dispute and the commissioning of the “Bain” report.

In the period between the Second World War and the turn of the century, when the fire service was the responsibility of the Home Office, there was little reform of the fire service despite frequent complaints that it needed structural and financial reorganisation (Ewan 2004, p.7). This was exacerbated after 1976 as the perceived needs of the national economy were reflected in ever more onerous restrictions on the expenditure of local authorities and other public service providers (Jones and Stewart 1983).

Although the Audit Commission was established in 1983, prior to the turn of the century, it only produced two national reports on the cost effectiveness of the fire service in 1986 and in 1995 (AC 1986 and 1995). Similarly although Fire Services have been included in annual performance indicator returns since they commenced in 1995 (AC 1995a) these did not have the impact on the Fire Service that they had elsewhere in the public services and local government in particular (Campbell-Smith 2008, AC 2009b). The 1997 Crime and Disorder Act, which re-introduced multiple and several responsibility into public service legislation and included Fire Services within Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, had little impact on their operational performance (AC 2002). The new duty of Best Value introduced in the 1999 Local Government (Best Value) Act resulted in few significant service reviews within the 46 Fire Services in England (AC 2002) and, as the independent "Burchill" Review of the machinery for determining the conditions of service in the Fire Service reported in 2000

"There has been an almost total lack of real political engagement in the Fire Service since the last firefighters' strike in 1977. The 1947 Act is hopelessly outdated. Local Authority employers of fire brigades have in general shown a lack of leadership and purpose especially when acting together to negotiate pay and conditions. The Fire Brigades Union, while professing its enthusiasm for change, has shown no real commitment to making it happen from the centre and in many parts of the service has mounted sustained and energetic opposition to change. The senior management of the Fire Service has shown a collective lack of leadership". (Burchill 2000, p.3)

The national fire dispute, local government modernisation and the first assessments of fire and rescue services 2000- 2005.

If the post war period can be characterized as a period of sectoral inertia for the fire and rescue services, the period between 2000 and 2005 must be seen as a period of major sectoral upheaval. The "Bain" review (Bain *et al* 2002) which was announced in September and published in December 2002 resulted directly from the national fire dispute of 1998-2003. This dispute was essentially fuelled by the requirements of the 1999 Best Value Act, the governments desire to "modernise" and regionalize the service and the government and local authority employers desire to introduce new arrangements for national negotiations over pay and conditions. It was originally sparked in July 1998, when the national employer's representatives sent a letter to the employee's side secretary to inform them that the employers were seeking a more flexible negotiating framework at national level (Burchill 2004), on the same day as the publication of the Local Government White Paper, "Modern Local Government: in touch with the people".

The dispute essentially revolved around, not only pay and conditions of service, but the general principle of devolved determination of pay and conditions. For a long time within the fire service, this dispute became synonymous with "modernisation" and eventually resulted in new national negotiating machinery. The dispute which effectively started in July 1998 was only formally resolved in June 2003, nearly five years later. During this time, in 2001, the responsibility for the Fire Service was transferred from the Home Office to the short lived Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions in May 2001 and thence to the more powerful Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in May 2002. By the time that "Bain" reported in December 2002, the Best Value regime in local government was also about to be supplanted by the more robust Comprehensive Performance Assessments, although the first

iteration of CPA did not include assessments for the (newly renamed) Fire and Rescue Services¹.

The Bain report, as Burchill before it, pulled no punches about the need for the service to change

“We did not realize until we started this Review just how much potential for reform exists in the current Fire Service. We were surprised at the extent to which the Fire Service has fallen behind best practice in the public and private sector. ...The Fire Service needs to be changed from top to bottom and every aspect of its work reformed to bring it into line with best practice at the start of the twenty-first century”. (Bain 2002, p ii)

Between 1998 and 2004 the wider local government modernisation agenda, including the introduction of national performance indicators, the Best Value regime and the Comprehensive Performance Assessments were very significant drivers of change across local government in general. However in Fire and Rescue Services the “distraction” of the long running fire dispute, the strength of the services organisational culture together with the partial and weak application of the new performance management regime, particularly in the “Fire Service Assessments” meant that its impact was much less influential than in the rest of local government.

Outside of the service, it is not widely appreciated that the first CPA methodology did not address the operational parts of the service but only assessed the performance of the “back office” non-operational parts of Fire Services although it is widely acknowledged that the key parts of the service and the dominant organisational culture within the service derives from the uniformed or operational parts of the service (figure 1).

- 1) A Service Appraisal (rather than a corporate appraisal) of back office functions (not operational services or emergency preparedness).
- 2) The Methodology
 - A self assessment
 - A peer challenge (with peers and inspectors on the challenge panel)
 - National Indicators, benchmarks and standards
 - Audit Commission Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE)
 - 5 detailed diagnostics against which to collect evidence.

Figure 1 Fire Service Assessment: Description and Methodology.

The national dispute dominated this period and even after its resolution in 2003 it was immediately followed by the introduction of the new Integrated Personal Development System for the staff and the introduction of Regional Management Boards and Integrated Risk Management Planning for the services. These initiatives tended to dominate the post-dispute “modernisation” agenda at the personal and organisational levels rather than the need for continuous improvements under best value or the other parts of the performance management agenda.

Within the operational parts of the services the relative ambivalence to the performance indicators was further compounded by the fact that in 1999 the Home Office had set (later acknowledged) but demonstrably “arbitrary” targets for some of its key Performance Indicators such as the target of 15% of all operational firefighters to be women by 2009 which was universally regarded as unrealistic (ODPM 2004).

Finally, in practice, there was also a greater delay in the post inspection publication of Fire Service reports by the Audit Commission, both in the first and subsequent rounds of CPA

¹ The Fire Services were re-designated Fire and Rescue Services by the 2004 Fire and Rescue Services Act to reflect their wider responsibilities such as community safety and fire prevention as well as fire protection.

than has been the case for its other reports. This tended to further diminish the impact of their publication because fire services were afforded greater time to both respond to any findings in the reports and argue that any criticisms within the reports were “historical” and/or diminished by the passage of time. The engagement or intervention by central government with poorly performing services was also noticeably less antagonistic than the intervention in failing local authorities or police forces.

2006 to 2010, Fire and Rescue CPA and Comprehensive Area Assessments

Comprehensive Performance Assessments

By 2004/05 there was general agreement between central and local government, the local government regulators and inspectorates that a radical review and updating of the local government CPA regime was required. Unlike the introduction of Best Value and the first iterations of CPA's the general principle and desirability of a new version was relatively uncontested. By 2005 it was generally accepted, albeit grudgingly, that CPA had generated substantial quantitative and qualitative improvements across local government services as well as significant efficiencies in their running costs (Martin and Bovaird 2005). Nevertheless all parties considered that it could be significantly improved and there were clearly lessons to be learned from the implementation of the County Council and Single Tier CPA; from the District CPA and from the previous round of Fire Assessments as well as from performance management regimes in other sectors such as the police, education and health. The Office of Public Service Reform had produced a report on “Inspecting for Improvement” (OPSR 2003) and the 2005 Comprehensive Spending Review, and associated Public Service Agreements for Whitehall spending departments, had signaled a move to a new set of national objectives for the public sector focused on outcomes within communities rather than inputs or output measures for individual public services. It had also highlighted growing inequality in the benefits delivered by improved public services.

At this time, there was no real debate as to which organisation would develop the new methodology, albeit within very firm parameters established by the government (ODPM 2005). The Audit Commission would be responsible for delivering the new regime, albeit in a new altogether more collaborative and consultative modus operandi working closely with both central government and local government, in a process later characterized as co-production or co-design of policy and delivery. Thus in 2005, “CPA the harder test” was published (AC 2005) which included within its new methodology a specific service assessment for the Fire and Rescue Services. (See figures 2 and 3 below)

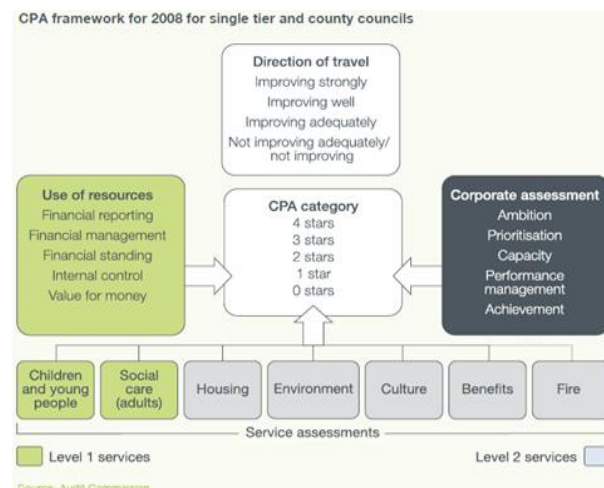
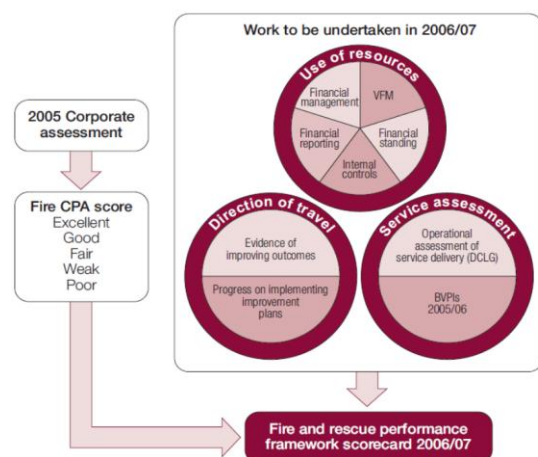


Figure 2 CPA “The Harder Test” Methodology 2006

It was also clear from the new methodology that, unlike some of their predecessors, such as the Fire Services Assessments, these new assessments would be assessments of the whole services, and in the case of Fire and Rescue would therefore included operational services. From 2006 a Fire and Rescue Service Assessment was included in the overall framework for

CPA for those 13 councils with sole responsibility for Fire and Rescue Service in their area. The same methodology was also applied to the (then) 32 other “combined” Fire and Rescue Services and to the London Fire and Rescue Service (Figure 3).



Source: Audit Commission

Figure 3 Fire and Rescue Methodology 2006

CPA for fire and rescue services was essentially built on the principles and processes in place for CPA in local government but also addressed some issues specific to fire and rescue authorities. The overall CPA category was determined by a corporate assessment which comprised self-assessment, peer challenge and a standard set of “key lines of enquiry”; supported by detailed diagnostics based on national standards and benchmarks, and key performance indicators for the service, that were then combined to enable judgments’ to be made.

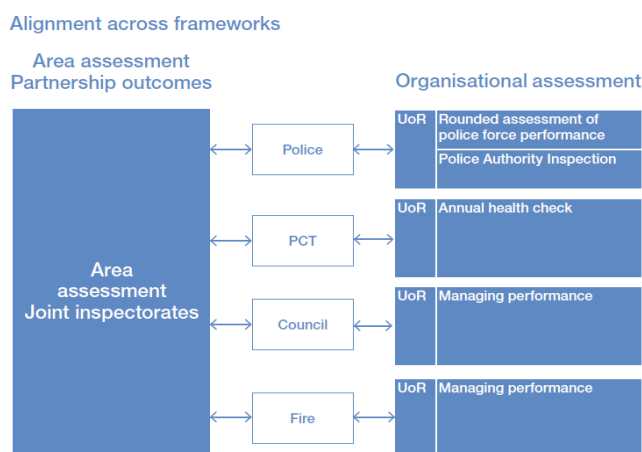
The corporate assessment was made up of three overall questions which were subdivided into nine themes and five diagnostic or assessment frameworks were used to assemble the necessary evidence and test performance against these themes. Finally the appointed external auditors provided an opinion on the annual accounts and assessed the arrangements for the financial aspects of corporate governance in a manner similar to the system applied to local authorities and NHS Trusts (AC 2008a).

Comprehensive Area Assessments

Between 2001 and 2006 an increasingly important part of the local public services delivery system was the Local Public Service Agreements (LPSA) and their successors the Local Area Agreements (LAA). These were formal agreements between central government and local delivery partnerships led by local authorities to deliver specific targets in exchange for financial and other rewards. The original principle was introduced in LPSAs and extended in the LAA pilots and the first generation of LAAs. The second generation of LAAs were accompanied by a statutory duty to cooperate and deliver the LAAs targets that had been placed on key local public service delivery organisations like the FRS by the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act. They were to become a core element of the CAA.

In 2006 the white paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities (DCLG 2006), announced that Comprehensive Area Assessments would replace the CPA in 2009 although a new methodology and common assessment framework for the “Use of Resources” element would be developed and implemented from April 2008. This latter framework would be the same for all key partners from the Local Strategic Partnerships delivering the LAA, namely Local Authorities, Primary Care Trusts, Police Authorities and Fire and rescue Services and Authorities.

The two elements of the CAA consisted of an area assessment of the impact or outcomes being achieved collectively by public services in the geographical area of the local authority; and an individual organisational assessment of the key local public service providers delivering the LAA as defined by the 2007 Act. This group included the FRS and specific organisational assessments were developed by the Audit Commission for use in 2009/10 based upon two equally weighted assessments, the second of which had 3 sub elements (Figure 4)



- 1 Managing Performance Appraisal (a corporate appraisal) of all functions
- 2 Use of Resources (which consisted of)
 - Managing Finances
 - Governing the Business
 - Managing Resources.

Figure 4 CAA Methodology and Framework.

CAA was implemented in 2009/10 and organisational assessments were carried out on the 45 FRS with the results published on the Audit Commissions dedicated "One Place" website (AC 2010). However after only one year this system was discontinued by the new coalition government, although the Use of Resources methodology remained in place.

The Coalition Government and a new National Framework for FRS

The next part of this paper therefore examines the new coalition governments' objectives and intentions for public service reform in general and for FRS in particular. It will identify the parameters being established by the new government as well as the key aspects of what is necessary and appropriate to quality assure the delivery of FRS and encourage their continuous performance. It will identify what needs to be assessed in any new performance framework before determining how it should be done and who should be responsible for which parts of the new system.

The coalition government has issued a number of policy papers and formal speeches the most relevant delivered by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (DCLG 2010b) and the Fire Minister Bob Neill (DCLG 2010a) since the general election in May 2010. It has also published the Localism Bill (DCLG 2010) the cross Whitehall "Young" report on Health and Safety (Cabinet Office 2010) and the Open Public Services White Paper (Cabinet Office 2011) as well as its response to the DCLG select committee report relating to Audit and Inspection and the abolition of the Audit Commission (DCLG 2011a).

The first key speech on the future of the national framework was delivered by the Fire Ministers to the FRS conference in Harrogate in June 2010 in which he invited the assembled FRSs to join him in a Strategic Review of the National Framework for FRS.

“I am asking my department to seek out the sectors best ideas, your new thinking and your experience to join me in a strategic review of the sector, governments role in it and the future of the service, including whether or not we need a National Framework ... to what extent does central government have to be involved directly in the running of the service ...to be clear about what needs to be done at the national level ...does centrally handled mean centrally driven?” (DCLG 2010).

At that stage the minister also established some other parameters and general principles for the review. He made it clear that central government would have to provide assurance over the response to national emergencies and national and local resilience arrangements. The Integrated Risk Management Planning process, the Retained Firefighters System and the fire prevention and community safety initiatives would remain. However he also made it clear that the government expected FRS to do “more for less....stopping activity that no longer needs to be done” and he announced the abandonment of the national diversity targets and the end of national guidance on recruitment and development. He promised greater financial autonomy for both local authorities and FRS and this was subsequently delivered in the CSR 2010 (HMT 2010), and the Localism Bill (DCLG 2010c) and a greater role for Social Enterprises, Businesses and the Voluntary sector, although despite the subsequent publication of Modernising Commissioning (Cabinet Office 2010a) and the Open Public Services White Paper (Cabinet Office 2011) there is still no indication of what this might mean. Following the outcry at the proposed abolition of the Audit Commission the government made it clear that although the commission would disappear the annual external auditing of public accounts would continue.

In order to develop the new performance regime it is necessary to review the current position of the development of some key components of any regime. The key questions are:-

- a) Are their clear aims and objectives to determine what the service is trying to achieve?
- b) Is there a comprehensive robust and accessible evidential base to facilitate evaluation of performance or can one be reasonably assembled or developed within a reasonable timescale?
- c) Are there robust analytical tools and assessment techniques available to ensure effective appraisals? and
- d) Have we clearly identified roles and responsibilities for individuals and agencies; are these roles realistic and the people or organisations designated to perform them capable and credible?

a) The Governments Aims and Objectives

In addition to Ministerial statements and speeches the main sources for this analysis are the emergency budget of July 2010, the CSR of October 2010 the Local Government Financial Settlement of December 2010 now supplemented by the recent Open Public Services White Paper. The authors original analysis drawn from early policy statements differentiated 3 groups of public services (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2010) as follows:-

Services where there is **likely to be clear or strong “guidance” from central government as to what it expects from delivery organisations** contained within new national frameworks or regimes. These services, which include the NHS, Safeguarding Services, Education and the Police have seen their independent external regulators and inspectors strengthened or given a higher profile. Thus the role and powers of the Care Quality Commission and Monitor have been increased and supplemented by Healthwatch in the NHS; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and the Independent Police Complaints Commission in Criminal Justice and Ofsted in Education. These were the local public services that tended to be relatively “protected” in the CSR 2010 from the harshest budget reductions in their whitehall parent departments (HMT 2010).

Services provided on behalf of central government that have some statutory elements but are largely locally delivered where **a mixed performance management landscape** of some national indicators and measures will exist in parallel with other elements which will be left to local discretion. Examples of these services include the Courts, Probation, Prisons, Welfare

Payments and Benefits, and Regulatory Services such as Health and Safety, Building Control, Trading Standards Environmental Health.

Services provided at local discretion with little or no statutory obligations or services which the coalition government have indicated will be subject to a much looser central government control and/or much greater local discretion. Examples of these services include Culture and Leisure Services, Town and Country Planning Waste, Transport and Housing.

The recent Open Public Services White Paper identifies 5 principles that underpins the coalition governments approach to reforming public services but then draws a different distinction between (coincidentally) 3 alternative types of public services and the governments' intentions towards them.

Individual Services or personal services used by people on an individual basis. In these areas funding will follow individual choices and individuals will be given direct control over the public money spent on their behalf. The examples cited include early education, further, higher and special education, in health and social care examples include palliative care, primary care, and mental health and in Housing they include housing for vulnerable and the introduction of the universal credit.

Neighbourhood Services are services defined as being provided very locally on a collective rather than an individual basis such as maintenance of public open spaces, leisure facilities, parking, local libraries, art galleries, museums some licensing and community safety. The government want to give people direct control over these services, either by transferring ownership directly to communities and neighbourhoods or by giving neighbourhood groups direct democratic control.

Commissioned Services, whether commissioned by central or local government, are services that the government believe cannot be devolved to individuals or communities such as tax collection, prisons or emergency healthcare. The White Paper claims that this is because they are either natural monopolies such as tax and benefit administration; are security related such as the courts system; are quasi-judicial such as the planning system or are being provided for people who are not able to make the appropriate decisions themselves such as drug rehabilitation. In these services the government will look to separate purchasers from providers; will introduce open commissioning and will establish credible independent accreditation bodies. Commissioners will be held to account by users and citizens while providers will be held to account through a combination of mutually reinforcing choice, voice and transparency mechanisms depending on the service being provided. External audit and inspection will ensure that commissioners and providers meet any relevant standards and have the necessary financial controls in place.

Core public services will continue to be funded and regulated by the state, accountable to citizens through choice, community involvement and representative democracy, although the white paper states that the government "will systematically apply the principles to each category of service addressing all public services over the life of the Parliament". FRS are not specifically mentioned in the white paper but it seems likely that they will be treated as a commissioned service.

b) Creating and maintaining the evidential base.

The authors have previously identified the morphology of data and information development and data use in maturing performance management regimes (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2010). This identifies 4 stages of development which are summarised in the table below

Stage	Descriptor	Characteristics
1	Data Poor	Ad hoc or no data Lack of comparability Poor Quality Assurance No overall or national perspective

2	Data Rich	Quantitative and Qualitative Data Subjective and Objective measurements Absolute and relative indicators and measures Differentiation of input, output and outcome indicators Operationally focused
3	Intelligent Data	Real time and remote access to web based data bases Standards based absolute and objective metrics Robust and sophisticated investigative tools freely available Detailed "trend" and comparative data available
4	Self-Regulation	Facilitates independent academic and operational research Identifies and disseminates good practice and innovation Facilitates robust international comparisons Independent quality assured open transparent "Host" for all data

Table 1 The 4 stage development of performance data

The Open Public Services White Paper contains numerous proposals for improving the collection, development and accessibility of public service performance data and these are discussed later in this paper but examples of databases that are equivalent to the two mature stages outlined above include the Department of Works and Pensions website research and statistics service (DWP 2011) the CIPFA local government financial statistics (IPF 2011) at national level; the Regional Public Health Observatories (APHO 2011) at regional level, and the Nottingham Insight shared evidence base for the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (Nottingham Insight 2011) at local authority level.

The previous performance framework for FRS captured performance data for 5 diagnostic tools supplemented by two further assessments:-

- 1) Community Fire Safety which relates to long term preventative work
- 2) Equality and Diversity which basically relates to human resources and recruitment but is an assessment of inputs
- 3) The Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS) which again measures inputs but also is an indicator related to the potential capacity for service improvement and organizational development
- 4) Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) which is an efficiency and effectiveness assessment of the deployment of resources
- 5) Partnership Working which was a measure of the effectiveness of local collaborations

These were supplemented by an assessment of the efficiency with which services use public money and assets (the Use of Resources Assessment), and an assessment of whether and how quickly organisations were improving and had potential to improve further (this included assessment of the quality of leadership of the FRS and the Fire Authority and their commitment to the IPDS Process.

When the Fire Minister stated "It is time to step up and take the responsibility for your sector" (DCLG 2010 p.12) he presumably believed that there is a comprehensive robust and accessible evidential base to facilitate evaluation of performance or that one could be reasonably assembled or developed within a reasonable timescale. An assumption that appears to be reflected in the Ministers launch of the Fire Futures workstreams in July 2010 (DCLG 2010b) and subsequently reflected in the Open Public Services White Paper.

c) Analytical tools and assessment techniques

The third requirement is for a set of analytical tools and techniques assembled into a performance assessment regime that is fit for purpose, economic and efficient to implement and commands the confidence of all key stakeholders. Our previous papers had reached a series of interim conclusions on the adequacy of the analytical tools and techniques available to assess FRS performance drawn from both previous performance management regimes for FRS and from the regimes applied to other public services such as Primary Care Trusts, Local Authorities, Criminal Justice Organisations and the National Parks (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2010, 2011). We had therefore assembled them into a proposed bundle.

In summary our initial research concluded that the performance management regime in Fire and Rescue Services was introduced and developed later than other parts of the public sector but learnt from the implementation of these earlier initiatives. The principles and key components used within the latest FRS national framework were however widely supported but it was the details and the application of the framework in practise that tended to generate some opposition from within the sector and (more widely) from politicians. Our own research, and discussions with senior officers, both prior to our previous paper and since, tends to support the view that the publicly voiced opposition to local performance management regimes, such as CPA, CAA and Fire CPA generally exceeded the private opinions of its costs amongst senior officers, while benefits tend to exceed public perceptions.

The conclusions of our earlier research have generally been confirmed rather than contradicted by experience and research over the last year, although some of our recommendations have had to be refined or updated in the light of recent policy and/or organizational changes such as the abolition of the Audit Commission and the creation of the Local Government Improvement and Development Agency (LGID) from previous organisations such as the former IDeA.

The key tools and techniques which we now contend should be deployed are summarized below (See details in Appendix 1)

- An online system for Self-Assessment and submission of evidence, similar to the systems used for the World Class Commissioning and proposed for the new Clinical Commissioning Groups of the NHS as the most economic and effective way of capturing basic localized information (DoH 2011).
- Analysis of key documents such as Integrated Risk Management Planning documents, Strategic and Improvement Plans; assessment of governance and management performance and assessment of the transparency and public access and engagement arrangements.
- Performance against national and local indicators, drawn from quality assured, robust and accredited standards and benchmarks. (These would be lodged with a central independent “host” such as the Fire Service College and would be publically accessible).
- Bi-annual or 3 yearly on-site Peer Review, Inspection and Challenge by an independent team involving key stakeholder representatives.
- A revised and updated Use of Resources appraisal based on the model produced for Comprehensive Area Assessments carried out by the newly appointed external auditors.
- An annual public reporting system, independent of government, organized by the external host institution with pre-defined reporting dates.
- Delivery of assessments, challenges and support for improvement and organisational development organized through the Local Government Improvement and Development Agency and the Fire Service College.
- An independent research and evaluation function should be established (based on the national Reports model of the Audit Commission), to commission and publish academic and operational research into the efficiency and effectiveness of the regime and to capture and disseminate innovation and good practice.

For any appraisal system to create and maintain credibility within the FRS, the appraisals will have to assess all aspects of the FRS including operational and non-operational functions, control room efficiency and effectiveness and key partnerships and collaborations. It will also have to include evaluation of both the FRS and the Fire Authority.

e) Roles and Responsibilities

The final key requirement is for clearly defined roles and responsibilities for key stakeholders, so that they can take ownership of the appropriate parts of the new regime and can be fairly and robustly held to account for the efficient effective and economic delivery of the new regime. Again our previous papers reached a series of interim conclusions and suggestions

on the appropriate distribution of roles responsibilities that have largely stood the test of time but have had to be refined or updated in the light of recent policy and/or organizational changes

- A dedicated co-ordination and assessment unit, based at the FSC but sponsored by DCLG/CFOA/IFE/LGA/NAO with a multi agency strategic steering group at the FSC drawn from the respective organisations but reporting to the Fire Service College Board should be ultimately responsible for coordinating and delivering the new regime.
- The F&R Sector collectively, (including the new Fire Service Unit and the Local Government Improvement and Development Agency) should be responsible for organizing and accrediting the Peer Review and the external challenge elements of the regime.
- The creation and collection of all self-assessment and other documentation, the accreditation of standards and benchmarks, the maintenance of a dedicated website and the public reporting of all evidence and judgments should be the collective responsibility of all key stakeholders but should be delivered through the Multi Agency Steering Group and the FSC.
- The dissemination of good practice, the encouragement of innovation and improvement and the publication of guidance and advice should be the joint responsibility of the LGID, FSC, CFOA, Institute of Fire Engineers and the LGA. The challenging of underperformance should similarly be the collective responsibility of these agencies guided by the principles outlined under paragraphs 6.23 to 6.26 of the White Paper entitled “Intervening in the case of Institutional Failure” (Cabinet Office 2011).
- The Annual Audit and the Use of Resources Assessments shall be the responsibility of the National Audit Office in collaboration with appointed external auditors
- Central Government should make it clear how it intends to assure itself of National and Local resilience and emergency planning and how this can be easily and effectively integrated into the new regime. It should also indicate whether it intends to designate or oversee any core standards or entitlements as proposed under paragraph 1.25 of the Open Public Services White Paper.

The organisational infrastructure necessary for delivering continuous improvement in all FRS requires effective mechanisms for capturing and disseminating good practise and innovation; support and capacity building initiatives for services that are performing at or around average levels; and efficient and effective intervention in poorly performing services. It also requires the testing and/or pathfinding of all new policy initiatives innovations or delivery proposals across all types of organisations performing to all three levels.

Conclusions

Previous research has found that between 2001 and 2005 (Andrews 2010) and 2005 and 2009 (AC 2008, 2009, Murphy and Greenhalgh 2010) Fire and Rescue Services significantly improved their performance as a result of the CPA regime, but that there remained potential to improve services and make further productivity and efficiency gains. In contrast to some other sectors, in the Fire and Rescue Services the general principles and key components of the previous national performance framework were widely supported but it was their detailed application, and their delivery in practise that generated opposition.

We have previously contended that a new performance management regime can be delivered, with the burden on F&R Services reduced, whilst the “quality assurance” offered to the government and the public improved. This new regime could be built on and incorporate proven effective elements from past regimes (both F&R services and other services) rather than creating wholesale new mechanisms. The constituent parts and mechanisms for a new regime have been largely developed but the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders need clear articulation, commitment and leadership from both the government and the service and there are a number of tools, techniques, standards and benchmarks that need revising and updating.

The Open Public Services White Paper reasserts that public services should be accountable to users and taxpayers and that “in practise a combination of specific mechanisms – such as choice transparency and voice – can be applied to create accountable organisations, although the particular instruments used will be based on the characteristics of a particular public service” (para 1.21). “To make informed choices and to hold people to account people need good information, so we will ensure key data about public services, user satisfaction and the performance of all providers from all sectors is in the public domain in an accessible form” (para 3.4). “The primary purpose of open data in public services is to give people the information they need to make informed decisions and to *drive up standards*” (3.17). “we expect that in public services there will be an increase in web based services that allow consumers of individual public services to share opinions and to compare performance data....Providers of public services from all sectors will need to publish information on performance and user satisfaction” (3.18). The government have already announced plans to create a Public Data Corporation and Government Digital Services and are asking local authorities to champion direct democracy and transparency of public data.

The current paper has examined the emerging policy and objectives of the new coalition government for public service reform in general and the FRS in particular. It has also looked at organisational and technical changes within the public sector over the last year, as well as innovations and developments within current public management regimes. Although the recommendations contained in this paper include amendments and refinements of our previous recommendations for a new performance management regime or national framework for FRS (Murphy and Greenhalgh 2010 and 2010a), they do not significantly alter our recommendations about the key parts of an appropriate sector led delivery model that need to be put in place for the FRS if it is to deliver the coalition governments objectives and provide appropriate assurance to the public.

Following the listening exercise announced for the White Paper, the authors believe the analytical tools and assessment techniques; the evidential base and the roles and responsibilities outlined in this paper need to be put into place so that FRS can meet the challenges of continuously improving their services while delivering open government.

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Appendix 1 Details of proposed key components of new regime

a) On-line self assessment and submission of evidence similar to the Department of Health previous arrangements for World Class Commissioning and emerging proposals for appraising the proposed new “Clinical Commissioning Groups” of the NHS.

- Single independent organization for the return and co-ordination of data country
- All evidence available in “real time” and available for in-putting and review well in advance of any on-site review or inspection.
- Evidence to be a mixture of compulsory reports and plans (such as the IRMP) and discretionary – all compulsory documents to be existing requirements with no “new” documents arising from this exercise.
- Evidence required to cover all aspects of FRS including operational, back office, emergency preparedness, preventative and collaborative work.
- Strict limit on number of both Compulsory and discretionary documents to be submitted – with no more than 4 compulsory and 4 discretionary being sufficient, (examples could include Strategic Plan, ISRM, Annual Audit/Use of Resources documents or assessments).
- Clear guidance published in advanced as to what is to be assessed and any standards to be applied.
- Use of dedicated electronic submission system with on-line simple proforma to assist submission of evidence.

b) Peer Review Challenge and Inspection

- Panel to include a Chief Fire Officer; a Chairman or senior member of a Fire Authority; a member of another emergency service; an inspector with recent FRS operational experience and an independent expert:
- This panel to be advised and supported by a coordinator; a technical analyst who assesses data/information submitted prior to panel meeting and an organizational development expert (preferably from FRS or FSC background – to be registered with LGID and FSC) to capture and assist the inspected FRS with post-panel organizational development
- LGID/FSC to provide panel members accreditation and training.
- Panel day to require attendance of a team to include CFO and Chair and members of authority (with limits on numbers appearing).
- Panel members to be required to be involved in at least 3 other panels to facilitate moderation and consistency between assessments.

c) Annual Auditing and Use of Resources Assessment

- Based on the definitions and methodology used in the latest version of Use of Resources

d) Delivery, Co-ordination, Reporting and Organisational Development and Support

- FSC website to be repository for all reports – and national co-ordination of reporting.
- Revised reporting arrangements to require FRS and Fire Authority to make results available to the public, placed on website and archived appropriately.
- The final report to the individual FRS should include assessment areas for improvement and suggested sources of assistance and good practice (although the use of any particular source or technique should not be compulsory).