

Developing a non-prescriptive framework

In the first of a three-part series of reports on the national framework, **Pete Murphy** and **Kirsten Greenhalgh** look into the evolution of the national framework and key lines of enquiry

Nottingham Trent University's Emergency Services Research Unit have been carrying out research on the emerging new National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services ever since the former Fire Minister Bob Neill announced a strategic review of the previous framework shortly after taking office in June 2010.

Pete Murphy and Kirsten Greenhalgh, the joint directors of the project, have regularly reported their findings to the annual JUC Public Administration Conference and to the conferences on Fire-Related Research and Developments held at the Fire Services College. Their latest report was presented to the RE12 conference in November and *FIRE* invited them to bring readers up-to-date with the latest findings from the three projects that make up the programme in a series of three articles.

The NTU programme consists of three projects:

The New National Framework

The government announced the results of the national strategic review in July and accepted the new sector-led self-governing model advocated by the Local Government Association and supported in principle by CFA. It also clarified some of the outstanding national resilience issues. The next stage will focus on the implementation and delivery arrangements of the new regime, the roles for the FRS sector as a whole and for individual services, and how to mitigate risk and facilitate continuous improvement in the new era of financial austerity.

Implementing the IRMP in Local Fire and Rescue Services

Since November 2010, NTU has also been collaborating and advising Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service and the fire authority on the implementation of its Fire Cover Review (FCR). The FCR is based on the authority's IRMP and reappraised the community risk profiles and risk mapping across the authority's area, in order to inform reconfiguration of their services. As part of this project NTU also advised on the extensive public consultation exercise that was carried out as part of the process.



Nottingham Trent University – Newton Building

"We set out our own suggestions for a new sector-led regime"

National Support for Facilitating Service Improvement

The third project looks at intervention and support arrangements for individual FRS within the new framework. This project looks in general at the operation of FRSs support and intervention and compares it to similar regimes across health, local government and criminal justice. It also looks specifically at the operation of the 'Intervention Protocol', originally enshrined in Section 23 of the 2004 Act, but also confirmed as the basis for any future interventions under the new framework.

The New Fire and Rescue Framework for England

The coalition government's general approach to the performance management of locally delivered public services was, in our view, quite evident prior to the general election. After 13 years of Labour government, the Local Government Association (LGA) was overwhelmingly controlled by the Conservative Party and the LGA had, consistently, been calling for a much lighter touch, sector-led and self-governing model to replace what it saw as the top down and 'inspection heavy' approach of the previous government and the Audit Commission.

This preference had been clearly evident in their policy statements even before the publication of the 2007 Local Government Act, which itself moved the previous government towards joint production of policy and sector self-regulation of service delivery. This direction of travel was apparent in the move from Comprehensive Performance Assessments to Comprehensive Area Assessments in 2009 and in the changes from the 2004/05 first national framework for fire and rescue services to the second national framework covering 2008–2011.

The Minister's Strategic Review

In July 2010 Fire Minister Bob Neill announced that the new government intended to undertake a strategic review of the national framework and we set out our own suggestions for a new sector-led regime in presentations to the PAC 2010 and RE 2010 conferences in September and November respectively. In December 2010



Photo by Sean Vatcher:
www.firephotos.co.uk

the joint government and Fire Service project 'Fire Futures', which had been established under the previous government, also published its final reports.

More indications about the likely content

Key Lines of Enquiry – Community Safety

1. Has the FRA identified all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks and reflected these in the IRMP?
2. Has the FRA demonstrated how prevention, protection and response activities will best be used to mitigate the impact of risk on their communities?
3. Has the FRA demonstrated that they have robust business continuity arrangements in place and that they can deliver interoperability?
4. Does the FRA have the necessary capacity in place to manage the majority of risks that may face their areas, either individually or collectively, and are they contributing appropriately to collective arrangements for national resilience?

"In our latest presentations we have summarised or paraphrased these questions and invited services to self-assess their current preparedness against

of the new framework were evident when the government, the LGA, CFOA and other interested parties presented their written and oral evidence to the DCLG Select Committee in 2011. This select committee was examining the coalition government's proposals for future audit and inspection, and in particular their intention to abolish the

Key Lines of Enquiry – Accountability

1. Is the IRMP easily accessible and publicly available?
2. Has public consultation been effective throughout its development and at all review stages?
3. Does it cover at least a three-year time span and is it reviewed and revised as often as it is necessary?
4. Does it reflect up-to-date risk analyses and the evaluation of service delivery outcomes?
5. Are scrutiny and challenge arrangements fit for purpose?
6. Can the FRA demonstrate that their communities are aware of?

Audit Commission.

The select committees conclusions emerged in July 2011 to be followed, almost immediately, by the Cabinet Office’s proposals for the reform of wider public services in the Open Public Services white paper. The former confirmed the government’s preference for a sector-led approach, the latter differentiated future public services into ‘individual or personal’ public services, ‘neighbourhood’ services, or ‘commissioned’ services. It was clear to us that the latter, being national and local services that cannot be devolved to individuals or very local communities, included the vast majority of services provided by FRS and by national and local resilience forums. We duly reflected these views in our updated presentations to the 2011 PAC and RE11 conferences and at conferences on the continent.

Finally, in July 2012, after two years of waiting, the coalition government finally published the new national framework.

The New Framework and Key Lines of Enquiry

The new framework explicitly and exclusively addresses its advice and guidance to fire and rescue authorities rather than fire and rescue services or brigades. It articulates what the government expects the authorities to deliver through their services, and also what it expects them to contribute to national resilience. As anticipated, it introduces a very ‘hands off’, light touch and self-governing model for local FRAs when dealing with fire and rescue and resilience issues at local or cross-boundary scales.

‘The Framework sets out high level expectations. It does not prescribe operational matters’ (DCLG 2012, p7).

Indirectly however, the framework also articulates the key questions or what we prefer to call ‘key lines of enquiry’ (KLOE) that FRAs may need to ask themselves about the adequacy of their current services. These KLOEs may also inform the questions that any future public inquiry or judicial review might see fit to ask local FRAs (and their partners

“Finally, in July 2012, after two years of waiting, the coalition government finally published the new national framework”

in local resilience forums), in the light of any future serious emergency incident occurring on their patch.

The framework articulates and differentiates the FRAs’ responsibilities for responding to both national fire and rescue and resilience issues, and suggests proposals for ‘closing the gaps’ in capacity and preparedness. It sets out the key priorities in its introduction and then articulates and details its requirements in four chapters entitled ‘Safer communities’, ‘Accountability to communities’, ‘Assurance’ and ‘Context, timescale, scope’.

How Do Services Currently Match Up?

In our latest presentations we have summarised or paraphrased these questions and invited services to self-assess their current preparedness against these new criteria or KLOE in the first three chapters (Chapter 4 relating to support and improvement arrangements we will address in a future article).

We have also undertaken a short review of the publicly available information relating to the IRMPs in the 18 fire and rescue services clustered together in group 4 of the Cipfa ‘nearest neighbour’ model.

All of our (admittedly limited) investigations to date suggest that authorities and services have some considerable way to go before they can be confident that they are meeting their obligations under the new framework.

We have set out the relevant KLOEs in the three boxes – with headings to match those in the framework.

About the Authors:

Pete Murphy and Kirsten Greenhalgh are the Joint Practice Editors of the International Journal of Emergency Services.

Further details of the NTU Fire and Rescue Services Research Programme and all of the presentations referred to in this article can be found on the NTU website at www.ntu.ac.uk/ or directly from the authors Peter.murphy@ntu.ac.uk or Kirsten.greenhalgh@ntu.ac.uk

Table 3 Key Lines of Enquiry – Assurance

1. Are robust mechanisms in place to provide independent assurance?
2. Do these provide assurance on financial, governance and operational matters and pay due regard to the expectations set out in their IRMP and the national framework?
3. Is this readily available to the public in an annual statement?
4. Is the FRA contributing to the identification of wider national and cross border risks, specialist capacity and meeting any capacity gaps?

